

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

'ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END':  
WOMEN'S MILLENNIALIST PROPHECY 1630-1670

Carola Lyon Scott-Luckens

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ABSTRACT

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**'ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END':  
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This study looks at prophecy as a form of human behaviour that is historically and culturally determined. The prophetic texts of Eleanor Davies, Sarah Wight, Anna Trapnel, and early Quaker women are examined within a systematic reworking of issues relating to England's religious and political conflicts of 1640-1660 and rising Protestant millenarian expectations.

Published prophecies by women first appeared in quantity in England in the 1640s and 1650s. At this time women were conventionally prohibited from public speaking. Yet for a prophetess claiming to be a conduit of God's word, such a lack of social power could become an asset, entitling her to address wider audiences, including religious and secular leaders, in the shifting political fortunes of the century's middle decades.

Part I looks at the role of dissenting congregations, in which equality of membership and promotion of personal and experiential forms of spiritual witness allowed women more active roles in church affairs. Also, with the fall of censorship, the testimonies of ordinary believers could gain new authority as printed texts. A parallel survey of gender constructs of familial and governmental patriarchy, and of the operations of the print industry from the early 1640s, shows that factors relating to the pursuit of power and profit were decisive in the formation and presentation of female prophecy.

Part II investigates spoken, written, and non-verbal forms of prophetic discourse. In the century's broader movement for linguistic reform, language's ability to convey religious and secular 'truths' was widely debated. This study locates the rise of sectarian religious rhetoric of the 1640s within the larger quest for a 'plain' linguistic expression of essential or divine truth, free from the alloy of human ingenuity. Further, in the new era of visionary prophecy the 'inner voice' of the Spirit could not be confined to the agency of print. The significance of the body, and of the discourse and rituals associated with it, is therefore explored in some depth.

Part III returns to historical analysis of events of the 1650s. The early decade saw the peak of sectarian and millennialist political influence, and the emergence of Quakerism. However, a rising hostility to visionary testimony is seen to have taken shape during the same period. This survey finds that ideas of language reform, earlier used to validate prophetic utterance, now furnished the tools for its disenfranchisement. By labelling the charismatic witness of unlearned women and lay preachers as 'irrational', critics undermined their claims to transcendent truth. Under a restored monarchy and episcopacy this anti-enthusiastic backlash brought a reversal of the earlier religious freedom granted to women. But there is also clear evidence, through the 1640s to 1660s, of a persistent and deep-seated disquiet among male sectarian preachers concerning female authority to prophesy.

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### Editorial Note

Conventions for style and presentation follow the guidelines of the Modern Humanities Research Association Style Book, 4th edn, (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1991). References to primary sources include the publisher, where known, along with the place and date of publication.

## ABBREVIATIONS IN TEXT

## Primary sources

- Cry            Anna Trapnel, The Cry of a Stone (London, 1654)
- CSPD,        The Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series: 1653-1654  
and 1654 (Longmans & Co., 1879-80)
- Jessey,      Henry Jessey, The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced...In  
an Empty Nothing Creature. 6th edn (London: Henry Cripps,  
Lodowick Lloyd, and Livewell Chapman, 1652 [1647])
- Letter       Sarah Wight, A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter.  
(London: Ri. Moone, 1656)
- Legacy      Anna Trapnel, A Legacy for Saints, Being several  
Experiences of the dealings of God with Anna Trapnel.  
(London, T. Brewster, 1654)
- Leviathan   Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651), ed. by Richard Tuck,  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1991])
- Newes       Anna Trapnel, Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-  
Hall. (London: Robert Sele, 1654)
- Prose  
  Works     The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, ed. by Don W.  
              Wolfe, 8 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953-71)
- Ranter  
  Writings   A Collection of Ranter Writings from the 17th Century,  
              ed. by Nigel Smith (London: Junction Books, 1983)
- Report      Anna Trapnel, Report and Plea. (London: Thomas Brewster,  
1654)

Report,  
 Otten Pages 36-53 of Trapnel's original text reprinted in  
 English Women's Voices, 1540-1700, ed. by Charlotte Otten  
 (Miami, Fla.: Florida International University Press,  
 1992), 64-78

## Secondary sources

- Bauman Richard Bauman, Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers, (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1990 [1983])
- BDBR Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century, 3 vols. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982)
- Beginnings William C. Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism, (London: Macmillan, 1923)
- Cope, E. Esther S. Cope, Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, Never Soe Mad a Ladie (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992)
- JFHS Journal of the Friends Historical Society
- Perfection Nigel Smith, Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)
- WTUD Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution, (London: Penguin, 1972)

## PREFACE

This is a study of prophecy by women, mainly during the 1640s and 1650s, as exemplified in the texts of Eleanor Davies, Sarah Wight, Anna Trapnel, and a number of Quaker women.

Prophecies, along with other religious and political writings by women of the broader ranks of society, were first published in quantity during these 'revolutionary' decades. Gender prohibitions still conventionally denied women access to public speech, especially on matters relating to church or state. But where prophetesses claimed to be vessels conveying God's message to humanity, this lack of social authority could prove an asset, fitting them uniquely to address a wide audience including religious and secular leaders, in the shifting political fortunes of the times. Not surprisingly, prophecies became an important and popular form of women's published writing in this period.<sup>1</sup> Yet this and other aspects of women's active public agency seem largely to have been bypassed in major surveys of mid-century radicalism. Keith Thomas, Christopher Hill, and A. L. Morton are among the traditional historians whose main works portray events and ideas of that period in terms of solely male activities and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Patricia Crawford, 'The Challenges to Patriarchalism: How did the Revolution Affect Women?', in Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s, ed. by John Morrill, 112-128 (120-121); and Elaine Hobby, Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-1688 (London: Virago Press, 1988), 26-27.

perceptions. Women's participation and influence in the sectarian and millennialist politics of these decades, and in the discursive and behavioural dynamics of individual congregations, are either viewed as auxiliary to male dissent or ignored altogether.<sup>2</sup>

In theoretical studies of the development and interplay of radical religious dialogue during the middle decades, prophecy has itself only recently achieved recognition as a generic form of 'spiritualized' discourse. Here too, in the first significant attempt to create a critical model for the evaluation of prophecies by the analysis of language usage and imagery, the focus is mainly upon male figures and texts. Female-authored texts appear and are acknowledged, yet their significance within the larger prophetic survey remains undefined.<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Mack's major study of women prophets, mainly of Quaker women, has helped to inaugurate a more systematic discussion of the ways in which gender conflicts influenced the operation and framing of prophecy. And a recent work by Hilary Hinds offers some constructive feminist critical analysis, along with four complete texts by

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<sup>2</sup> In such terms, a negative view is offered of Thomas's 'Women and the Civil War Sects' and Hill's portrayal of women's roles in John Milton and the English Revolution (London and Basingstoke, 1981), in Hobby, 27 and n.3.

<sup>3</sup> Nigel Smith, Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

seventeenth-century sectarian women.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis, then, arises out of a desire to draw upon both the insights of twentieth-century feminists and the scholarship of 'masculinist' historians, in order to enrich our understanding of texts by English prophetesses of the 1630s to 1660s. As a contextual study it systematically reworks some of the political and cultural developments that closely affected the lives and experience of ordinary people of the time. Among the wider areas reviewed are gender and patriarchal relations in church and society, the effects of the growth of a popular press, and the ways in which language reform acted first to validate, then to disenfranchise, visionary prophetic utterance.

But the focus here is also upon individual discourse, in an era when the personal narrative was first extended to large numbers of women and men of the English sects and their counterparts in New England. In terms of subjectivity, prophecy offers significant access to the thoughts and feelings of women who had gained an unprecedented chance to speak out on religious and political issues of the mid-century. Further, this study is <sup>not</sup> confined by its materialist parameters to an exclusively secular scope; it seeks also to

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<sup>4</sup> Mack, Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Hinds, God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

acknowledge and explore aspects of the spiritual dimensions of prophecy. This can lead to anomalies. For example, claims by many of these prophetesses to be the passive conduits of divine discourse would, if taken to their logical extreme, effectively place their discourse outside and beyond human understanding. Where a message has no relation to its prophetic conduit, the examination of character or material context becomes fruitless. If 'genuine' prophecies occur solely by divine caprice, there can be little point in trying to plot them in terms of historical frequency, or of congenial or hostile conditions. These and other questions arising from notions of an autonomous prophetic utterance seem at one level to subvert any kind of rational conjecture. Yet, by the same token, they can serve to intensify our desire to know more about the human agency by which these phenomena were manifested. This study examines texts arising out of women's preaching or prophesying as products of a type of human behaviour, socially and culturally constructed and occurring at a particular point in human history.

Part I explores the cultural and material conditions from which published prophecies by women emerged from 1641 onwards. After an introductory look at the development of millennialist prophecy in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, Chapter One goes on to locate women's prophetic writings in relation to the nation's ecclesiastical

and political conflicts during the early reign of Charles I, the Civil War period and the 1650s. The 1640s saw the escalation of dissent against both the clerical hierarchies of traditional Anglicanism and the doctrinal rigidities of Calvinist Puritanism, by nonconformist sects which favoured forms of witness based upon personal spiritual leading, and a spiritual equality of membership. This new and more flexible congregational climate allowed women to participate more actively in church affairs as an extension of their own personal and domestic lives, and despite a relative lack of formal learning. Prophecy itself, as the passive relaying of God's word to his people, offered a congregational or public role in which conventional bans on women's expounding of God's word to his people could be circumvented. Despite the Pauline injunction on women's silence, scriptural citations were noted which seemed to indicate that base female speech could be sanctified to divine use. At the same time, through a newly-liberated popular press that was extending public comment and debate to the wider populace, these same personal testimonies by ordinary believers could gain new authority as printed texts.

Chapter One also charts the emergence of Antinomian and 'free grace' doctrines among the more radical sects, by which personal witness claimed its own veracity in terms of an inner vision. Whereas the testimonies of early figures such

as Sarah Wight were validated by their adherence to orthodox interpretations of Scripture, later prophecies were less directly biblical. Their increasing stress upon the individual's 'inner' experience of the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit can be seen as particularly favourable to the nature and conditions of women's lives. By empowering uneducated prophets of both sexes to advance a spiritual witness tutored by God rather than worldly institutions, this type of testimony arguably offered a subversive challenge to the national church, with its educated and tithed clergy, particularly at a time of rising millennialist expectations.

However, this study also considers the problems raised by twentieth-century assessments of these women prophets as representating some kind of proto-feminist agency. As concepts of self and community are historically and culturally shaped, modern constructs of gender conflict and empowerment can provide at best a partial or distorted standard by which to assess the prophesying agency of these women.<sup>5</sup> While the frustrations of female subjugation may well have supplied an underlying motivation, this study finds little evidence that in seeking to speak publicly on God's plans for leaders, churches, and the nation, they were seeking or expecting a raising of women's position in secular

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<sup>5</sup> Questions on the varying intersections of class and gender issues at different historical points, are pursued in Mack, 2-5.

society. The view advanced by most of them seems to have closely paralleled that of their male supporters: of public female visionary witness as contingent, part of the extraordinary disjunctiveness of the coming new age, by which alone the subjective and gender dislocations of such prophecies could be justified. However, the contrasting experience of male sectarian prophets, upon whom public authority devolved as a conventional adjunct to their gendered individuality, did give rise to distinctive tensions between the genders. These are examined in Chapter One, in conjunction with the arguments advanced by various published Quaker justifications of women's public prophesying, from 1654 to 1667.

Chapter Two looks more widely at the social function of gender types and at the developing public press, to show how factors relating to the pursuit of power and profit played a decisive role in prophetic development and presentation. It finds that within structures of patriarchal statecraft, ideological constructs of familial and marital relations acted to bind the nation together, to provide a set of fundamental terms by which the social political and social contests of the 1630s to 1650s could be understood and contested by those living through them. The chapter thus points to the impact of gender identities and relations upon the lives and consciousness of all: men, children, and women.

The public press played a major role in the political conflicts of the 1640s and 1650s. Chapter Two also looks at power relationships that developed from the coalition between sectarian interests and radical political elements of a rising popular and commercial print industry. It explores the ways in which associative networks between extremist political and nonconformist interests and booksellers gave women prophets a new and unique access to public audiences well beyond their particular congregations. In the face of external resistance, virtually all the subjects of this study are seen to have exploited available opportunities. A survey is made of prophetesses who accommodated their presentation to those rulers or bodies whose policies they sought to influence (including Elizabeth Poole and Eleanor Davies), and of others (such as Sarah Wight, Elizabeth Avery, and Trapnel) who cooperated with sectarian leaders backing wider radical agendas.

Part II is an investigation of verbal and non-verbal forms of prophetic discourse in the 1630s to 1650s. Chapter Three identifies the major shift over the century in perceptions of the contribution made by reason and sensory perception to overall human knowledge of the Creator and of Creation. Within this frame, language and its ability to convey religious and secular 'truth' formed a central area of debate. This chapter shows how radical sectarian religious

rhetoric of the 1640s and 1650s arose within a larger quest for a 'plain' form of language, a purer expression of God's own revelation unadulterated by human ingenuity.

But among radical sects such as the Quakers the 'inner voice' of the Spirit could not be confined to words, and Chapter Four looks at ways in which the body, and the rhetoric and rituals associated with it, played an important part in this new form of visionary prophecy. The non-verbal witness of three women (Sarah Wight, Anna Trapnel, and Eleanor Davies) is analysed, giving particular attention to sign behaviour, tropes of imprisonment, and to sensuous and erotic response as an integral part of spiritual perception.

However, the fundamental difficulty presented by the more inner-directed forms of spiritual witness outlined in Chapters Three and Four was that of verification. Unlike more conventional forms of Protestant prophecy, their validity could not be confirmed by referential adherence to Scripture. In general terms the final two chapters of the thesis are concerned with this impasse, and the increasing tendency to denigrate charismatic prophecy as illusory, subversive, and degenerate. Part III returns to the historical events of the 1650s. Chapter Five identifies the Barebones Parliament of 1653 as the peak of sectarian and millennialist political influence, and charts the contemporary development of the early Quaker movement. But alongside, it sets out the

developing reaction to visionary enthusiasm, as represented in legislation associated with the 1650 Blasphemy Act.

Burton's portrayal, in Anatomy of Melancholy, of sectarian extremism as a form of mental deviancy, is seen to have paved the way for the rise of anti-enthusiasm in the 1650s.

In terms of language, this chapter charts an apparent reversal of the position outlined in Chapter Three. The positive qualities of 'plain' speech, used formerly to justify the spiritual witness of unlearned women and lay preachers, were now appropriated by anti-enthusiasts. Charges of metaphorical duplicity and verbal excess, levelled earlier at Anglican writings and sermons, were now re-directed against extreme modes of visionary language. The chapter explores the ways in which critics, by labelling these charismatic forms of discourse as 'irrational', were able to undermine their validity as sources of a transcendent truth.

The influence of negative connotations of gender and sexuality upon historical perceptions of prophecy is more specifically considered in Chapter Six. The main focus is on the early Quakers who as a sect offered the most strong and consistent support to women as equally suitable to serve alongside men in proclaiming God's word as preachers and missionaries. Quaker arguments justifying women's public prophesying have been considered earlier; under scrutiny here are the practical realities behind the rhetoric. Evidence of

Quaker women's undeniably active roles in the movement suggests that their prophesying and itinerant preaching were subject to persistent admonitions against self-seeking. An investigation of the cases of Martha Simmonds and other 'rebel' Quaker women finds that the majority of these accepted the authority of male leaders, and customarily sought their confirmation where leadings were felt, both for public speaking and for the publication of their testimonies. As with other cases of female prophecy, the divine origin of a Quaker woman's witness had to be confirmed by her religious community. Where this acceptance was withheld, as Simmonds's experiences and testimony show, women were liable to be seen as having 'lost the spirit', and as affording a likely agency for Satan and his accomplices.

Against an overall survey of Quakerism in the latter 1650s and after 1660, the chapter looks at the changing external perceptions of female preaching in that period. As that movement spread south and became established in London, the witnessing by women which had proved so instrumental in winning converts in the early days was now a potential liability. The controversy resulting from James Nayler's 'blasphemous' ride into Bristol in 1656 is seen as proof of the increasing readiness on the part of the authorities to equate religious extremism with social deviancy and moral depravity, to condemn it as the antithesis of true sanctity

and piety. It also becomes apparent that similar doubts were being played out within various sectarian communities. A survey of Quaker records of the late 1650s and 1660s reveals growing internal pressures against zealous and forceful women who had been active in the movement's early spread and in internal contests over the nature of its organization and witness. This final chapter seeks to unravel some of the dilemmas arising from the radical Quaker experiment in social reconstruction. It traces the ways in which constructs of spiritual gender-equality based upon familial structures were modified in the face of the sect's later ties with the London bourgeoisie under a conservative post-Restoration regime.

As a case study of the changing fortunes of women's prophetic discourse after 1660, this historical analysis of Quaker women finds a close linkage between the apparent decrease in internal acceptance of their visionary discourse and the intensifying external persecution of the sect in the late 1650s and 1660s. To survive, Quakerism had gradually to relinquish its early religious and social revolutionism in favour of a specifically pacifist and philanthropic agenda. Such a climate gave strength to those Quaker critics who saw the authority granted to women as giving them an unlawful and undesirable power over men. In Quakerism and in dissenting sects generally, the visionary type of women's prophecy focused upon here was in decline by the 1660s. It remains

clear, nonetheless, that women's brief historical emergence into the nation's religious, social and political arenas -- and the enhanced degree of partnership and authority gained by women in the Quaker movement -- arose out of the intense revolutionary fervour and flux of the 1640s: at the climax of which, with the axe's having laid low the ancient tree of monarchy, a new world order seemed about to be realized.

## Chapter I.

## NEW WINE IN NEW BOTTLES

Why Prophecy? Millennialist Politics and  
'nature unnatured' in the 1640s

In the most...flourishing age of Rome, a little before the mighty Julius Caesar fell by the hands of the bloody Senators,...ther were strange and prodigious apparitions seen...but in England's Rome more frightfull visions and amazing wonders dayly shew their gastly faces to the astonishment, not only of the present, but succeeding generations...wee may behold nature unnatured, Monsters...Bodies divided, yea headlesse, and yet live, &c. These are nothing else but certaine presages of a sad Catastrophe, that as wee sowed in sorrow, so wee shall reape in teares, as wee began in blowes, so wee shall conclude in blood: For how doe calamities come rowling in like mighty waves, one upon the neck of another?

(Mercurius Melancholicus,  
25 September-2 October 1647)<sup>1</sup>

In Civil War England belief was widespread that the final events of God's design prophesied in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation were approaching. Present conflicts and sufferings were seen as signs that the final apocalyptic battle between good and evil heralding the New Age of God's triumphal thousand-year reign on earth would soon unfold in England and Europe, and the enemies of Christ would be cast into eternal hell-fire.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England 1641-1660, ed. by Joad Raymond (Gloucestershire: Windrush Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>2</sup> Convictions varied widely as to the actual imminence of Christ's return and the conclusion of historic time. See Bernard Capp, 'The Fifth Monarchists and Popular Millenarianism', in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. by J.F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 165-190; also Katherine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation England 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 204-254; Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); and William Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1660* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

From ancient times prophecy has had a potent place in human societies, giving shape and meaning to mortal vicissitudes, and effectively restoring humanity to a seemingly rightful place at the centre of the cosmos. Prophecy's rise in the troubled history of post-Reformation Europe can be seen as part of a felt need for order. Communities suffering from localized tyrannies or hardships sought evidence that their afflictions were not random, but part of a divine, omnipotent plan for humanity encompassing past and future. (This universal significance was sometimes augmented by a consoling expectation of divine retribution on their persecutors.) Evidence of God's wrath was perceived in what we would view as natural events. Disease and deaths, comets, eclipses, and the birth of monsters, were viewed as tokens of a Creator breaching his own natural laws in order to give urgent warnings to his people.

Modern historical surveys of the seventeenth century have tended to undervalue the politico-theological dimensions of prophecy. In the decades following the Weberian connection of 'Puritanism' with the advance of western capitalism, Marxist and materialist historical analyses of sectarian activity and political conflicts in England of the 1640s and 1650s have stressed the their economic and practical origins.<sup>3</sup> But shared

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1986), 165-190; also Katherine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation England 1530-1645 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 204-254; Christopher Hill, Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); and William Lamont, Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1660 (London: Macmillan, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1930) is one of many works setting out the Weberian linkage between Puritanism and progress which became a major influence in subsequent historical study of the early modern

religious beliefs also have a function: as the doctrinal and ritualistic storehouses of those values seen by a nation or community as the hallowed sources of meaning and legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the more radical elements of early modern English and continental Calvinist Protestantism saw the Reformation's cleansing of the Church as the start of a process that would lead eventually to the apocalypse or world's end envisaged in Scripture. Millennialist expectations were further sharpened by the rising political tensions of the 1630s. Anti-Catholicism was in part an inheritance of the English Reformation and the persecution of the Protestants under Mary Tudor. During the reign of Elizabeth I numerous efforts were made to purify England's Church of popish tendencies, with the vernacular Bible seen as the cornerstone of a national and essentially Protestant cultural identity. By the seventeenth century this ideological legacy had become the basis for a view of England as an 'elect nation' set apart by God to lead all peoples of the earth back to the true religion.<sup>5</sup>

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period. Usage of the term 'Puritanism' is itself problematically elastic in this context. The doctrinal and denominational strands of Puritanism in the early to middle seventeenth century, and their relative importance to the 'age of prophesying', are outlined in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> Among the various discursive communities of early modern England, the most influential sources of a collectively Protestant national identity were the Bible and John Foxe's Acts and Monuments in which believers were defined communally by suffering and resistance. This is the view of Richard Helgerson in Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also William Haller, Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> Helgerson, 249-294. Millennialism fuelled the works of Bacon, was shared by James I, and featured in works by Sir Walter Raleigh and William Chillingworth; and radical millenarianism continued to gain political momentum into the Commonwealth years. See Christopher Hill, WTUD, 95-96. The nature and extent of popular anti-Catholicism in England up to and during the revolutionary years is examined by Robin Clifton in 'The Popular Fear of

Religious prophecies of the 1640s and 1650s sprang from a volatile social and political climate. Radical sectarians and mystics looked for signs of the coming millennium in the breaking down of corrupt powers and the dissolution of political and social boundaries. Moreover, their vision was shared in some measure by more moderate Puritan factions alienated by Charles's unwillingness to pursue war against the Catholic powers of Europe. The result was a range of anti-Catholic interests which could accommodate the view that attempts at national reconstruction according to the organization and practice of the primitive Christian church were a necessary preparation for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, in England's New Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

In 1641 the aristocratic prophetess Eleanor Davies, using references to Elijah's proving of God's testimony before the false prophets of Baal [I Kings 18.35], published her warning to Parliament that biblical signs of the last days were soon to be fulfilled:

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Catholics during the English Revolution', in Rebellion, Popular Protest and the Social Order in Early Modern England, ed. by Paul Slack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 129-161. On the role of Jewish conversion to Christianity as part of the 17th-century Protestant timetable for the end of the world, see Christopher Hill, 'Till the Conversion of the Jews', in Writing and Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England: The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill, 3 vols. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985-88) II, 271-84.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, WTUD, 95-98. On the prevalence of millenarian beliefs in England and their relevance to political developments in the 1640s, see Murray Tolmie, The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 85-119; William M. Lamont, Richard Baxter and the Millennium: Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 9-26; and Paul Christianson, Reformers and Bablylon, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 244-248. Lamont in Godly Rule details the many variations of millenarianism in England of the 1640s and 1650s, along with its wider European dimension. The role of millenarianism and astrology in the growth of prophecy in western Europe from the late middle ages to the 1640s is examined in the first two chapters of B.S. Capp, The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth Century English Millenarianism (London: Faber and Faber, 1972). This work provides a general study of the Fifth Monarchy movement of the 1650s, as does Tolmie's book.

And heretofore a shew...Though the substance unmanifested....Times mistery unknown that treasure, till the Evening and fullness of time, as those Trenches filled even with Water before the fire fell... likewise the mistery of times and seasons so late revealed, made knowne for the fayling of the future. This good Wine kept till now.<sup>7</sup>

Hers was not a lone voice. Through the 1640s radical Puritan doctrine produced a generation of powerful preachers, particularly within the New Model Army, who proclaimed that the 'pouring out of the Spirit' predicted in the 'latter days' was now coming to pass. These presentiments were shared by John Milton, who in 1641 welcomed the challenge to church and state orthodoxies, observing:

...a Protestant Nation... should have throwne off these tatter'd Rudiments long agoe, after the many strivings of Gods Spirit, and our fourscore yeares vexation...since [the] Reformation began,...the present age...is to us an age of ages wherein God is manifestly come downe among us, to doe some remarkable good....<sup>8</sup>

In the same year he invoked Christ as the coming ruler of 'this great and Warlike Nation instructed and inur'd to the fervent and continuall practice of Truth and Righteousnesse', which,

casting farre from her the rags of her old vices may presse on hard to that high and happy emulation ...[of] the soberest, wisest, and most Christian People at that day when thou the Eternall and shortly-expected King shalt open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdomes of the World, and distributing Nationall Honours and Rewards to Religious and just Common-wealths, shalt put an end to all Earthly Tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and milde Monarchy through Heaven and Earth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lady Eleanor Davies, Her appeal to the high court of Parliament. London, 1641. Sig.A3<sup>v</sup>. Further references will be given in the main text.

<sup>8</sup> 'Animadversions upon The Remonstrants' (London, 1641), Prose Works, I, 661-735 (703).

<sup>9</sup> 'Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline' (London, 1641), in Prose Works, I, 519-617 (616).

Millennial references also feature in George Herbert's 'The Star', 'Sunday', and 'Christmas'. Among the wider populace utopian convictions were fostered by local quacks, cheap astrological pamphlets and English translations of the texts of Reformation mystics such as Brightman, Mede, and Alsted.<sup>10</sup>

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### 1. A 'Radical Discourse'?

This study conducts a general inquiry into women's prophecy in from 1630 to the 1660s. Its main focus is upon Eleanor Davies (1590-1652), the Independent Sarah Wight (fl. 1647-1656), the Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel (fl. 1647-1658), and a number of Quaker prophetesses from the 1650s and 1660s. Should these various prophesying women be seen in terms of a central tradition, or of historical singularity?

Prophecy in the middle seventeenth century can be seen broadly in terms of two separate if overlapping traditions. A more traditional, oracular form seems to link Reformation scriptural exegesis with older and more populist models (including astrological apocalyptic forecasts dating from medieval times). Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* refers to St. Paul's acknowledgement of the role of the vates, the heathen poets who composed inspired verse in celebration of their gods.<sup>11</sup> This ancient tradition of inspired poets foretelling future events through mythic visions was prominent in

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<sup>10</sup> See WTUD, 91-98 (96).

<sup>11</sup> Hobbes quotes from Titus 1.12 (*Leviathan*, 291).

Renaissance poetry, and its mode is apparently typified in the works of the Puritan Anglican Eleanor Davies. Of the tracts published by her between 1625 and 1652 some sixty titles survive. These prophecies are dense and convoluted, full of puns and complex images. Numerology, heraldry, anagrams, and astrological citations are cross-hatched with scriptural references to create elaborately-woven interpretations of current and future events. The presentation of these texts is also distinctive, with lavish use of italicized and capital letters to stress certain words or expressions. Phrases are strung together without subjects or verb. The narrative voice usually takes the third person, and referential content shifts abruptly from the biblical to the personal and historical.

Davies was in her middle thirties when she was called to prophesy, in an event with Annunciation-like undertones that is referred to in many of her texts. On 28 July 1625, at the family home of Englefield, she was apparently 'Awakened by a voyce from from HEAVEN' which announced to her that 'There is Ninteene yeares and a halfe to the day of Judgement, and you as the meek Virgin'.<sup>12</sup> That message confirmed Davies as the vessel by which the visionary knowledge which the prophet Daniel had been commmanded by God to seal up in a book until 'the time of the end' [Daniel 12.4] would at last be revealed to the world.

How would this 'call' have been interpreted by Davies

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<sup>12</sup> Davies, Her Appeale (London, 1641), 14. Texts with similar quotes include Her Appeal (London, 1646), 10; and The Dragons Blesphemous Charge (London, 1651), 2. See also Star to the Wise (London, 1643), 18; Samsons Legacie (London, 1643), 19; and Her Blessing, 7. A recent and welcome survey of Eleanor Davies's life has been produced by E. Cope (see Abbreviations).

herself? An Elizabethan by birth, Davies might well have become familiar during her education with the sibylline tradition.<sup>13</sup> However, the vates were conventionally associated with some form of 'possession' or bodily seizure, a characteristic which was to be more readily be associated with Wight, Trapnel, or the primitive Quakers. Davies herself seems to have refrained from trances or other outward physical display when making her prophecies.<sup>14</sup> Given the frequent allegations of madness that were made against her, it would have been imprudent to do otherwise. At her hearing before the High Commissioners in October 1633, her self-styled prophetic title 'REVEALE O DANIEL' (from Eleanor Audelie) was publicly caricatured by Sir John Lambe, Dean of the Arches, in a counter-anagram NEVER SOE MAD A LADIE (from Dame Eleanor Davies).<sup>15</sup> But Davies could temper her extravagant rhetoric to suit the occasion: in prefatory letters from many of her pamphlets, the language is clear and comprehensible. Her prophecies give evidence of her knowledge of Latin and Hebrew, together with a strong grasp of legal terminology gained from

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<sup>13</sup> See Perfection, 32.

<sup>14</sup> The exception to this was Davies's demonstration at Lichfield Cathedral in 1636, when in protest at the Laudian changes that had been made within the church she mounted the bishop's throne, declared herself primate, and poured hot tar over the altarcloth. See below, IV.4; also E. Cope, 82-85.

<sup>15</sup> E. Cope, 70. The possibility of mental imbalance in Lady Eleanor Davies is raised in Roy Porter's 'The Prophetic Body: Lady Eleanor Davies and the Meanings of Madness', Women's Writing, I, 1, (1994), 51-63. Davies and Trapnel are also cited in Alfred Cohen's 'Prophecy and Madness: Women Visionaries During the Puritan Revolution', Journal of Psychohistory, 11, 3 (Winter 1984), 411-430. For accounts of Davies's confinement on charges of madness, see below IV.4 and V.1.

her protracted property disputes.<sup>16</sup> The convoluted syntax of her prophecies was arguably deliberate, therefore, and not a symptom of mental instability.

The complex and idiosyncratic writings of Davies had at their core the idea that God's truth was contained in the complex patternings and metaphors of Scripture. The prophet had to draw these truths forth in their full meaning for the present, and to make them accessible through riddles and anagrams, enriched by complex imagery, for those with 'ears to hear'. One of her early texts describes prophecy as 'a salve to anoint and open the eyes of the blinde...a true looking-glasse, a large heure-glasse'.<sup>17</sup> Her use of anagrams, a popular device of the period, underpins the notion of prophecy as a mirror, with its reflective reversal of the outward order revealing a truth that has been obscured. In the text initiating Davies's anagrammatic title REVEALE O DANIEL the newly-crowned King Charles also receives the tribute ALL TRUTHS CESAR. By the early 1640s Davies's increasing disillusionment with the king had prompted new titles: in one text Belshazzar becomes Belchazer, which is then translated as 'Be-Charles', while the names of London and Dublin are elided with that of Babylon.<sup>18</sup> In Samson's Legacie, also of 1643, Charles's identity with Samson is strengthened anagrammatically as JAMES SON. Alternatively his name is

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<sup>16</sup> Her Latin work, Prophetia (1644), with an English translation published the same year, was almost certainly by her own labours; elsewhere her criticism of biblical scholars' translation of 'secula' is borne out by other sources. E. Cope, 10-11, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Davies, Warning to the Dragon, (1625). 'General epistle'.

<sup>18</sup> Davies, Amend, Amend, (London, 1643), Sig A2<sup>r</sup>-A2<sup>v</sup>.

reduced to RACHEL (Hebrew for sheep), giving rise to complex analogies of Samson's weakening by Delilah, and his symbolic death at the hands of the Philistines (Charles was frequently linked symbolically with Christ, both before and after his death).<sup>19</sup> But Davies's central criticism of Charles was his marriage to a Catholic queen and his failure to champion the Protestant cause in Europe; similarly, she took care to distinguish her own witness both from that of 'the primitive times' of early pagan sibylline tradition, or from 'gross ...Romish miracles' of Catholicism.<sup>20</sup>

The second category of prophecy involves a spirituality generated by the experiential and linguistic exploration of divine operations in the self and the natural world. Our knowledge of sectarian prophetesses has been deepened by recent feminist investigations of various forms of seventeenth-century women's religious writings: spiritual autobiography, instruction and counselling, confessional narratives and personal testimonials for church admission.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-century, as freedom of intersectorian debate gave rise to new forms of oral and written expression, the more public discourse of 'prophecy' had broadened to include a wide range of human discourses presumed to come from God: advice,

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, Samsons Legacie. (London, 1643), 10-11,

<sup>20</sup> Davies, Sions Lamentation, (London, 1649), 5-6. On associations of Davies and other seventeenth-century visionaries with earlier prophetic traditions, see Perfection, 29-32; and Dorothy Ludlow, '"Arise and Be Doing": English "Preaching" Women, 1640-1669' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1978), which includes Catholic and Reformation prophetesses (139-140).

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Women, ed. by Elspeth Graham et al., (London: Routledge, 1989); and Elaine Hobby, Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88 (London: Virago, 1988).

counsel, and warning, as well as sung verses and hymns, scriptural exegesis and mystical revelation.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to Davies, who did not refer to her own spiritual state, dissenting prophecies tended to dwell upon personal trials and insights. By these and other features, some kind of generic divergence can be seen between Davies's interpretations of divinely-inscribed knowledge and radical sectarian revelations.

The prophecies that emerged from the sects in the 1640s and 1650s are 'radical' more in terms of discourse than of political affiliation. They suggest a mid-century reconstruction of prophecy away from precedent into an intensely personal and experiential form of witness, a shift 'from knowledge to power, from a concern for comprehending God's intentions for mankind to a concern for God working in the self'.<sup>23</sup> While scripturally-oriented, this latter type of prophetic insight is rooted philosophically in the spiritual and occult movements of post-Reformation Europe. From the works of continental mystics such as Boehme and Niclaes, together with Neoplatonist and kabbalist thought, came a new range of concepts and vocabularies.<sup>24</sup> Dissenting sectarians

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<sup>22</sup> Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the voice, consuming the body: Women prophets of the seventeenth century' in Women, Writing, History 1640-1740 ed. by Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (London: B.T. Batsford. 1992), 139-58 (139).

<sup>23</sup> Perfection, 32, 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> All Boehme's Works were translated into English between 1644 and 1662, and influenced many radicals, including Richard Baxter, Thomas Hall, W. Erbury, and, among the Quakers, Thomas Taylor, William Smith and Benjamin Furly. The ideas of George Fox strongly parallel those of Boehme, though there is no evidence of any direct link. On the influence of Boehme and of Cambridge Platonists on radical sectaries, especially Quakers, see Nuttall, 16-18; also Perfection, 185-225, 27-29. Kabbalist traditional beliefs are outlined in Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, Kabbalah: Tradition of hidden knowledge (London: Thames and Hudson, reprinted 1995 [1979]).

were presented with fresh ways of comprehending the nature of the deity, and of achieving a self-subsuming union with that godhead.<sup>25</sup> In the resulting process of internalization

outward 'experience' was conflated with internal vision, so that literal and figurative became one. This tendency was expressed in a complex private yet communally-shared system of archetypes, in which speech, gesture, writing offered contemporary re-enactments of Old Testament prophetic behaviour.<sup>26</sup>

For many unlearned women and men the membership of a gathered church provided a direct route into various forms of divine exposition and testimony.<sup>27</sup> A contemporary report describes how in Independent churches, usually after the sermon, an invitation was extended 'to any private man of the flock, or to any stranger whom they take to be gifted, publickly to expound and apply the Scripture, to pray and blesse the people'.<sup>28</sup> In the separatist congregations of London in the 1640s large numbers of working women found a climate sympathetic to personal spiritual expression. In addition to active association with others of their sex outside the home, women also gained access to an educative

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<sup>25</sup> Perfection, 341-348.

<sup>26</sup> Perfection, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Some evidence of the educational opportunities afforded to early modern women can be gleaned from surveys such as Margaret Spufford's 'The Schooling of the Peasantry in Cambridgeshire, 1575-1700', Agricultural History Review 18, Supplement (1970), 112-147 (141); and Chapter 1 of David Cressey, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> R. Baille, Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time, 18, quoted in Nuttall, 75.

discourse through the repetition of religious language and biblical metaphors absorbed through sermons. Face-to-face orality must have been an important factor, with individual understanding of biblical texts reinforced at group level through the countless hours of group worship, or 'ordinances'. Trapnel, while literate from an early age, attests to the regurgitative power of religious orality, in that by the time she was 14, 'I had great parts, in prayer great enlargements, and in discoursing and repeating of sermons I was very forward, and did it with great delight and affection (Legacy, 1 (italics mine)).

The sects that gave women spiritual and congregational equality and encouraged their prophesying, were not necessarily those with a politically radical message. More important was their stress upon experiential inspiration over doctrinal orthodoxy, in a congregational organization that was informal rather than hierarchical.<sup>29</sup> Prophetic discourse functioned as divine celebration, advice, counsel, or warning, and was often mediated through dreams or visions.<sup>30</sup> Its tone and language varied widely, depending on the nature of the intended audience. A prophecy might be addressed to an individual ruler or leader, or a governing group such as

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<sup>29</sup> Nuttall, 87-89; also Perfection, 12-13. Women's more active roles in these egalitarian gathered congregations are attested to by John Rogers in Ohel or Beth-shemesh, A Tabernacle for the Sun. (London, 1653), 463-477. See Hobby, '"Discourse so unsavoury": Women's Published Writings of the 1650s', in Women, Writing, History 1640-1740, ed. by Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), 16-32; and Virtue, Chapters 1 and 2. See also Dagmar Freist, 'The King's Crown is the Whore of Babylon: Politics, Gender and Communication in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England', Gender & History 7, 3 (Nov 1995), 457-481.

<sup>30</sup> On dream visions, see Perfection, 73-101.

Parliament or the Council. Alternatively, the spiritual council might be more informal: a personal letter to a friend or family member, a public address such as Davies's Her blessing to her beloved daughter (1644), or a loving spiritual appeal to the anonymous reader. But the audience invoked might be designated more broadly, in terms of erring cities (as in the case of Hester Biddle), or the nation. Where the intent was to warn, prophetic language could be aggressive and adversarial; alternatively a persuasive tone would be adopted where the message was one of exhortation or a seeking of support.

A single prophet might use any or all of these approaches. In Herein is held forth (1659) the Quaker Sarah Blackborow combines a persuasive and personal message to the general reader, with a more public and severe address directed specifically to those in authority: 'unto you Rulers, Justices of Peace, Constables, and other Officers. In the fear of the Lord you are warned...'<sup>31</sup> The messages of the Quaker prophet Dorothy White (after Fell the most prolific of Quaker women pamphleteers) are usually tender and lyrical expositions of God's love for his people. But when she feels herself called to witness to those final days, her voice can become big with threat: 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me' begins her pamphlet A Lamentation (1660) in a direct echo of Isaiah 61.1, 'A GREAT and TERRIBLE DAY Approacheth, and in the Eternal Authority of the Lord God, it doth lie upon me to sound it forth...Therefore Awake, Arise up from the dead, and stand up

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<sup>31</sup> Sarah Blackborow, Herein is held forth. (London, 1659), 7.

to Judgment, for the Great and Terrible Day approacheth near you...is even coming upon you...'.<sup>32</sup> White's texts of this period strongly evoke the sense of impending cataclysm felt by those who saw current disorders as portents of the apocalyptic rolling up of time and the heavens foreseen in the book of Revelation.

God...saith, I will create new Heavens, and a new Earth, wherein shall dwell Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy; and all must know the shakings of the former Heavens at the passing away of them, with their noises, and with great trembling and fear, and astonishment of heart; for the Walls of Jerico, and the old Buildings of Babylon must be thundred down by threshing Instruments of the Lord God Almighty, whose two-edged Sword is in his hand...

Further, White links these titanic changes to the founding of God's new church within the quickened soul:

Now the Day is come, wherein our God will not be worshipped in the mountains, neither at Jerusalem, but he will be worshipped in the Spirit and in the Truth, and such Worshippers is the Lord our God seeking...<sup>33</sup>

Women had played an especially major role in the rise of the early Quaker movement, particularly in missionary work.<sup>34</sup> In the four years following its founding in 1652, the Quaker movement gave rise to approximately three hundred pamphlets,

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<sup>32</sup> Dorothy White, A Lamentation Unto this Nation; And also, A Warning. (London, 1660), 1, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy White, A Call from God out of Egypt, by His Son Christ the Light of life. (London, 1662), 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Barbour, 'Quaker Prophetesses and Mothers in Israel', in Seeking the Light, ed. by J.W. Frost and J.M. Moore (Wallingford and Haverford, Penna.: Pendle Hill Publications and the Friends' Historical Association, 1986), 41-60; also Bonnelyn Young Kunze, 'Religious Authority and Social Status in Seventeenth-Century England: The Friendship of Margaret Fell, George Fox, and William Penn', Church History, 57, 2 (1988), 170-186; and Beginnings, 158-159.

many by women.<sup>35</sup>

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## 2. Prophecy and Feminism

Arguments have been put forward for seeing seventeenth-century prophetesses as part of a long historical tradition. At Delphi, the most sacred oracle of classical Greece, the gods traditionally spoke through the ecstatic monologue of the priestess. Only when her utterances had been interpreted by priests and set into hexameter verse, were they inscribed as official oracular pronouncements.

Catholic and Protestant pre-modern prophecies, of isolated and often unknown women, were generally recorded orally or in manuscript. Because of this their influence was commonly limited to local audiences. By contrast, the rise of women's prophecies from the dissenting churches of the mid-seventeenth century coincided with the fall of press censorship.<sup>36</sup> This resulted in a dramatic increase in print

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<sup>35</sup> A breakdown of statistics on Quaker publications, is given in Kate Peters, 'Patterns of Quaker Authorship, 1652-1656', *Prose Studies* 17, 3 (Dec 1994), 6-24 (8, and n.11 and n.12). Peters indicates that these 300 early tracts were authored by just over 100 Quakers, in a movement that numbered 40,000 by 1660. More than three-quarters of the published output was the work of a few men and two women. (Not named by Peters, the latter were undoubtedly Margaret Fell and Dorothy White.)

<sup>36</sup> On the rise of women prophets within the sects, see Anne Laurence, 'A Priesthood of She-Believers: Women and Congregations in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England', in *Women in the Church*, ed. by W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 345-63; Dorothy P. Ludlow, 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations: Sectarian Women in England, 1641-1700', in *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. by Richard L. Greaves (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 93-124; Claire Cross, '"He-goats Before the Flocks": A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches', *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. by G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 195-202; and Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', in *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660*, ed. by Trevor Aston (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 317-340.

production for marketing to an increasingly literate public in London and the provinces.<sup>37</sup> This unprecedentedly free press played a vital role in the huge increase, both in numbers and relative terms, of women's published works during the 1640s and 1650s.<sup>38</sup> Most women prophets of the period were at least partially literate: virtually all prophesied from Scripture. Moreover, the importance they all placed upon publishing their testimonies, even in case of the illiterate Elinor Channel, indicates a widening recognition of the public importance of print. For the first time numbers of working women and men were enabled to address a public audience, at a historical point when religious and social fragmentation were deepening into political conflict.<sup>39</sup>

The increase in women's 'visibility' in this period has led modern scholars to assume, as did some contemporary

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<sup>37</sup> The historical importance of a clandestine and radical press in religious conflicts in England between 1587 and 1650 is outlined in Roger Pooley, English Prose of the Seventeenth Century 1590-1700 (London: Longman, 1992), 132-169. The conflicts over censorship, from the early Stuart reigns through the 1640s and 1650s, are examined by Annabel Patterson in 'Prynne's Ears; or, The Hermeneutics of Censorship', Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England, (Madison, Wisc. and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 44-119. On the importance of print in the dissemination of radical sectarian doctrines, along with the nature and price of these publications and estimates of those 'middling' social levels most directly targeted by these publications, see Perfection, 11; and Barry Reay, The Quakers and the English Revolution (London: Temple Smith, 1985), 20-31. The development and political importance of the newsbook trade in the 1640s and 1650s is examined by Nigel Smith in Literature and Revolution 1640-1660 (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994), 54-70.

<sup>38</sup> Of the female-authored texts published between 1649 and 1688, over half were prophecies: Hobby Virtue, 26. Pre-1641 female authorship formed 0.5 per cent of total published output. In the 1640s women's publications increased ten-fold. Their percentage of printed output rose by nearly 300 percent, a level of expansion sustained throughout most of the century. For statistics, see Patricia Crawford, 'The Challenges to Patriarchalism', in Revolution and Restoration, ed. by John Morrill (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), 112-128 (124-125).

<sup>39</sup> See Phyllis Mack, 'The Prophet and Her Audience: Gender and Knowledge in The World Turned Upside Down', in Reviving the English Revolution, ed. by G. Eley and W. Hunt (London: Verso, 1988), 139-152.

observers, that this activity represented a major increase in female self-confidence. By their participation in religious radicalism and public debate, it is claimed that women 'helped to make the Revolution'.<sup>40</sup> In order to prove or to modify such assertions, a survey of female prophets and radical sectarianism needs to be based upon historical analysis of religious and political events of the mid-century.<sup>41</sup> Women's socially controversial relation to public discourse in this period must also be taken into account. Early modern gender

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<sup>40</sup> Crawford, 'Challenges', 124. One of the most recent work on sectarian women's preaching and pamphleteering is Hilary Hinds, God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), which includes four complete texts by women in its appendices. Other sources associating the rise in women's prophecy with political radicalism include: Hobby, 'Discourse'; Ludlow, 'Arise'; Patricia Higgins, 'The Reactions of Women, With Special Reference to Women Petitioners', in Politics, Religion and the English Civil War ed. by Brian Manning, (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), 178-222; Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects'; Ethyn Morgan Williams, 'Women Preachers in the Civil War', Journal of Modern History 1, 3 (1929): 561-569; and Ellen MacArthur, 'Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament', English Historical Review, 24, (1909), 698-709.

<sup>41</sup> General studies of women prophets include the following: Sue Wiseman, 'Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse', in New Feminist Discourses, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 176-196; and, by Phyllis Mack, Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), and also 'Women as Prophets during the English Civil War', in The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism, ed. by M. Jacob and J. Jacob (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 214-230. See also Christine Berg and Philippa Berry, 'Spiritual Whoredom: An Essay of Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century', in 1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century, ed. by Francis Barker, et al. (Essex: University of Essex, 1981), 37-54. Studies based upon specific figures include: James Holstun, 'The Public Spiritedness of Anna Trapnel', from Ehud's Dagger; Or, Radical Praxis in Revolutionary England (forthcoming, 1996); Rosemary Kegl, 'Women's Preaching, Absolute Property and the Cruel Sufferings (For the Truths sake) of Katharine Evans & Sarah Cheevers', Women's Studies, ed. by Sharon Achinstein, 24, 1-2 (1994), 51-83; Elaine Hobby, '"Oh Oxford Thou Art Full of Filth": The Prophetic Writings of Hester Biddle, 1629[?]-1696', in Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice, ed. by Susan Sellers (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 157-164; Barbara Ritter Dailey, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London', Church History, 55, 4 (1986), 438-455; Kenneth Carroll, 'Martha Simmonds, a Quaker Enigma', JFHS, 53 (1972), 31-52; Alfred Cohen, 'The Fifth Monarchy Mind: Mary Cary and the Origins of Totalitarianism', Social Research, 31 (1964), 195-213; Champlin Burrage, 'Anna Trapnel's Prophecies', English Historical Review, 26 (1911), 526-535. On Eleanor Davies, see Cope's biography, and Porter, 'The Prophetic Body'. On the Quaker preacher Elizabeth Hooton, see P. Mack, 'Teaching About Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism', Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 9, 2 (1991), 223-237.

roles offered a range of constructs for negotiating social tensions, but we have tended to reconstruct these today in terms of male formulaic designs to control the weaker sex.<sup>42</sup> Certainly dissenting women in general were subject to very real constraints: in most sects the Pauline exclusion of women from administrative and public leadership roles was endorsed by peer pressure from both sexes. A woman's claims to prophetic authority could result in persecution and demonization for madness or witchcraft. (This was the case for Davies and Trapnel, and for Ann Hutchinson in New England.) Female preachers and prophets were also denounced in a large body of contemporary satirical and hostile literature.<sup>43</sup> While any accurate overall assessment of contemporary audience response from these texts remains difficult to chart, it is nonetheless clear that women's authority to prophesy rested (probably more than for their male counterparts) on their being part of some godly community. Virtually all women prophets whose testimonies are recorded seem to have functioned in concert with others, usually with the support of a coherent religious movement. Even Davies, who was exceptional in operating virtually alone and under constant institutional attack, liaised with local women to demonstrate

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<sup>42</sup> On the question of gender roles and social negotiation, see below, II.1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Printed attacks on women preachers include the anonymous tract A Discoverie of Six women preachers...With a relation of their names, manners, life, and doctrine, pleasant to be read, but horrid to be judged of. London, 1641; and I.H., A strange wonder or a wonder in a woman. (1642); many royalist tracts also parody female preachers and petitioners. On pamphlets attacking mid-century women petitioners, see Hobby, Virtue, 17-18 and n.26.

against Laudian alterations at Lichfield Cathedral.<sup>44</sup>

The dilemma posed by this evidence of historical female prophetic dependency has sparked a number of responses among feminist critics. One strategy has been to detach the text from any notionally unified authorial voice. Wiseman, recognizing that prophets' credibility normally rested upon their achieving some kind of recognized position within their community or gathered church, tries to distinguish these historical prophets from the autonomy of the prophetic text itself, which 'disrupt[s] the authority of any anterior "author"'.<sup>45</sup> Purkiss is also cautious about seeing seventeenth-century female texts as unequivocal representations of some historical continuum of proto-feminist and anti-patriarchal rebellion, that can be discerned and understood in terms of the precepts of modern gender politics.

...texts we recognize as feminist in our present circumstances might in their historical context represent not feminist univocality, but an awkward combination of contradictory speaking-positions such as the assumption of a negotiating stance on the terrain of politics, a subversive play with the question of gender in terms unfamiliar to modern feminism, and the production of femininity as a saleable commodity...they are texts where the metaphors used to naturalize the gender systems of early modern England are both assaulted and upheld.<sup>46</sup>

To what extent can historical prophecy be seen as operating within this kind of contradictory dynamic? During the 1640s the extension to females of the Protestant doctrine

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<sup>44</sup> Mack, Visionary, 96-99; Perfection, 51; and E. Cope, 83-85. See also below, IV.5 and V.1.

<sup>45</sup> Sue Wiseman, 'Unsilent Instruments', 188-189.

<sup>46</sup> Diane Purkiss, 'Material Girls: The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate', in Women, Texts & Histories 1575-1760, ed. by Clare Brant and D. Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 69-101 (69).

of the priesthood of every believer occurred only within some gathered churches of the separatist sects. Conditions during the Interregnum seem to have broadened, temporarily, the range of powers which women could undertake in the community. But the overall role of gender in the more charismatic forms of sectarian prophecy over this time is a difficult area to chart. Quakers allowed more freedom for women than virtually all other sects, yet this apparent flexibility was losing ground to conventional stereotype by the late 1650s, as the movement developed and sought recognition.<sup>47</sup>

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### 3. Women's Speaking Justified?

For those who argue in favour of the view of seventeenth-century female prophecy as a proto-feminist agency, the most substantial confirmation is presented by the numerous published tracts by women and men which emerged from the mid-fifties onwards, giving variously circumscribed justifications of women's public religious testimonies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> On this development, see below, VI.2-5.

<sup>48</sup> The major texts of 1654-1667 justifying women's prophecy and preaching were all Quaker-authored. The first, Richard Farnworth, A Woman forbidden to speak in the Church (London: Giles Calvert, 1653/4), advocated women's testifying in church on the grounds that they were, as the weaker vessels, better suited to support the authority of God's word. This was followed by Patricia Cotton and Mary Cole, To the Priests and People, (London, 1655), reprinted in Hinds, Appendix C, 222-226. Later works include George Fox, The Womans learning in silence, (London, 1655/6) in Works, 8 vols., (New York: AMS Press, repr. 1975 [1831]), IV, 104-110; Sarah Blackborow, The Just and Equall Balance, (London, 1660); Dorothy White, Call from God (1662). Lastly, Margaret Fell's Womens Speaking Justified, (London, 1667) is reproduced in full in the Augustan Reprint Society, No. 194 (Los Angeles: University of California, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1979); also (in part) in English Women's Voices, 1540-1700, ed. by Charlotte F. Otten (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1992), 363-378.) References to these works will be in the main text where possible. On biblical role models, and the expected millennialist abolition of the old order in favour of the low and unlearned, see Mack, 'Women as Prophets', 217-218; also Capp, 183-189.

In historical terms, this development can be seen as part of the century's wider growth in women's published works in the secular sphere. While formal printed justifications of women's speaking occurred first in terms of religious testimony, with Richard Farnworth and Priscilla Cotton/Mary Cole in the mid-1650s, the century as a whole would see the major growth in women's published works in the secular sphere. Notably, moreover, most of the published defences of women's public writing or speaking out emerged after the Restoration, when women's active prophesying and missionary work (and radical sectarianism in general) had retreated before increasing antagonism.<sup>49</sup> A careful unpicking of some of the imagery and arguments which appear to favour female prophecy might serve to shed light on this seeming paradox. On the one hand, individual or symbolic relation to the deity was commonly expressed by New England Puritans and mid-century radical English sectarians by means of a femininized terminology. Yet where roles of social empowerment were needed prophets of both sexes tended to used male biblical role models such as Daniel or John the evangelist.<sup>50</sup>

The systematic public evocation of female biblical figures reaches its apogee in Margaret Fell's 1667 defence of female preaching, Womens Speaking Justified, which features an almost unceasing head-count of 'good' biblical women favoured by God. The Old Testament Deborah, Abraham's wife Sarah, and the

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<sup>49</sup> See below, VI.5; also Patricia Crawford, Women and Religion in England 1500-1720, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 36-39.

<sup>50</sup> Mack points out that when Friends assumed publicly prominent prophetic roles it was in the terms of unreservedly masculine personae: Visionary, 163-164; 174-176. More work could usefully be done in this area.

prophetesses Hulda, Miriam, and Hannah, are followed by the New Testament prophetess Anna [Luke 2.36-38], the four prophesying daughters of Philip the evangelist, and 'one of the seven', who gave hospitality to Paul [Acts 6.3] (11-12). Significantly, Mary Magdalene appears as a redeemed female, as the person to whom Christ first appeared following his resurrection in Mark 16.9 (12; Otten, 372).<sup>51</sup> Fell points out that the words of the Virgin Mary's Magnificat have become part of the Book of Common Prayer (14; Otten, 373-374). The tone of this prophecy of Mary before her cousin Elizabeth accord broadly with Farnworth's rationale, that female 'vessels' are naturally frail and subservient, and therefore peculiarly suitable for divine testimony. The argument is reductive, in so far as the source of prophetic power remains divine: 'he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden...from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed'. Several lines further on, however, Mary's words do become suggestive of a much wider and more radical inversion: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree' [Luke 1.48,52]. But the revolutionary power of the latter lines seems to have been discounted by history. Fell's arguments appear at the very time when the Quaker movement was rechannelling the voices and activities of its female members out of public speaking and into more internal and 'feminine' administrative areas, even as

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<sup>51</sup> This is not Mary Magdalene's first such appearance, however. Over a decade earlier Fox devotes most of a paragraph to her appointment by Christ to be the first prophet to tell the disciples of his resurrection, in Woman Learning, 108-109.

nationally women's prophecies were becoming increasingly peripheral.<sup>52</sup>

From the question of 'vesselship', most printed 'justifications' of women's speech (including those of Farnworth, Cotton and Cole, Blackborow, Fell, White, and George Fox) advance to a second strategy, that of distinguishing the spiritually gifted (of either sex) from the rest of the congregation. This was done by the use of gender terms, detached from physical identity in order to be relocated as designations of spiritual gifts and access:

thou tellest the people women must not speak in a church [I Corinthians 14:34-5], whereas it is not spoke only of a female, for we are all one both male and female in Christ Jesus [Galatians 3:28], but it's weakness that is the woman by the Scriptures forbidden...Now the woman or weakness, that is man, which in his best estate or greatest wisdom is altogether vanity, that must be covered with the covering of the spirit...that its nakedness may not appear...the woman or weakness whether male or female, is forbidden to speak in the church.  
(Cotton/Cole, Priests, Hinds, 225)

In this way, such terms as 'woman' or 'female' were now understood to refer to all unsanctified church members of both sexes: these, not being 'in the spirit', were to remain silent.<sup>53</sup> Only those empowered by divine agency, whose selfhood was subsumed by the deity, were allowed to speak: these had become 'masculinized' through Christ: '[Paul] doth not say, let the Spirit of God keep silence in the Temple, but [that] that may declare where it is manifested, either in Male

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<sup>52</sup> See below, VI.4-5.

<sup>53</sup> This conceptual shift, shown above in Cotton and Cole, To the Priests, is also featured in Sarah Blackborow's Just and Equall, 13, and Dorothy White, A Call from God, 6. As these were all Quaker texts, a common preceptive source is indicated.

or Female and then it is the Man Christ that speaks in them...' (Farnworth, 5). This reiterated argument is seen by some critics today as constituting what was, for that time, a radical endorsement of female speech.<sup>54</sup> But this defence of women's voicing of God's word rested on a reconstitution of gender terms which left 'femaleness' still disadvantaged, representing those not sanctified by the holy spirit. Women who did preach or prophesy did so by means of a kind of special dispensation.<sup>55</sup> The implication of this was to leave the majority of women doubly excluded from speaking in public.

Added to this 'lack' of positive qualities, the negative and pejorative traits associated with the female sex continued as hermeneutic currency, proffered by prophets and preachers and exchanged between women and men. Fell in Justification lists the two foremost 'bad' women of scripture, Jezebel, and the Whore of Babylon, as representative of 'the false Church'. The weak and carnal 'woman', without and within, was seen as intrinsically antagonistic to God's revealed will. The need to subdue this aspect of fallen human nature remained inherent in the arguments justifying women's preaching and prophesying put forward consecutively by Farnworth, Fox, Cole and Cotton, Blackborow, and Fell.

Even the most radical of dissenting churches, while allowing female members to vote for ministers or deacons, debarred them from holding these positions themselves or

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<sup>54</sup> Hobby, Virtue, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Mack argues that it was precisely this inability to speak fully as women that ensured their lack of overall acceptance as political or moral advisers: Visionary, 99-124.

administering the sacraments. Until the scanty evidence of women's networks within some congregations is better charted, the historical lack of organizational change in these communities seems to suggest that the impact of radical sectarian female preaching and prophesying made little permanent difference to gender hierarchies.<sup>56</sup> It has been suggested that sectarian prophecy was not replacing, but merely re-endorsing those values traditionally accorded to women within Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism: as exemplar and preserver of spiritual values, or as vessels of spiritual inspiration. Prophecy might be seen then as a kind of sublimation, a displacement activity for female frustration. This view is given some endorsement by Mack, who interrogates the whole issue of spiritual possession as inevitably linked with passivity, irrationality, and general unfitness to exercise real authority.<sup>57</sup> At an individual level, prophecy may have functioned as a source of alternative identity or wider personal notoriety, as with Anna Trapnel's apparent 'copying' of the earlier prophetic fasting of Sarah Wight.<sup>58</sup> Certainly it could bestow a privileged status within the prophet's immediate social or denominational sphere: when her 1627 prediction of the death of the Duke of Buckingham was confirmed the following year Davies became a celebrity at the Caroline court.

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<sup>56</sup> Laurence, 363.

<sup>57</sup> Mack, Visionary, 119-121.

<sup>58</sup> See below, II.4-5, and III.3.

#### 4. Women and 'Mechanick' Preachers: Gender and Agency in Seventeenth-Century Prophecy

It is clear that the revolutionary decades of the seventeenth century marked a significant change in terms of those authorized to give spiritual advice and inspiration. Religious exposition was a discourse of some status, and had been traditionally associated with university learning and a degree of social prestige. The emergence in the 1640s and 1650s of sectarian preachers and prophets, usually from the lower ranks of the populace, was met by opposition ranging from derision to frank hostility. 'Is it a miracle or wonder', asked one 1646 pamphleteer,

to see saucie boyes, bold botching taylors, and other most audacious, illiterate mechanicks to run out of their shops into a pulpit? To see bold, impudent huswives to take upon them to prate an hour or more; but when I say is the extraordinary spirit poured upon them?<sup>59</sup>

Such phenomena, seen by conservatives as impertinent, socially disruptive and audacious, were symptomatic of a major change in the nature of organized religion. Dissenters of the 1640s and 1650s, seeking to re-establish the early fellowship of primitive Christianity, were strongly influenced by Paul's injunction to the Galatians, that seemed to treat hierarchical distinctions of gender and rank with equal disregard.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek...bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

(Galatians 3.27-28)

The emergence of spiritual 'teaching' by women during this period was often closely associated with male lay preaching. It could be inferred, then, that the socially

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<sup>59</sup> The Schismatics Sifted, or The Picture of the Independents, London, 1646, in George Rosen, 'Enthusiasm: "a dark lanthorn of the spirit"', Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 42, 5 (Sept-Oct 1968), 393-421 (405 and n.41).

reconstructive goal sought by these women and their male co-equals was not so much that of gender emancipation per se, as the advancement of all the unlearned elect of Christ, male and female, taught by the spirit rather than by a human-ordained priesthood. In a deeply hierarchical social system it was certainly radical that God should call workers to testify before their social superiors. Peter's pentecostal speech (Acts 2.17-21) reconfirmed the ancient prediction by Joel of the equality of gender and rank in prophesying: 'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, ...upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit' [Joel 2.28, 29]. As the fundamental seventeenth-century scriptural basis for prophecy, these verses were quoted by female sources as varied as Davies, Anne Hutchinson, Mary Cary, Trapnel, and Fell. They were also cited by male clerics such as Richard Farnworth, a supporter of women's speech, and Thomas Edwards, who was not.<sup>60</sup>

What was important was the claim by prophet or prophetess to be able in a state of trance to rise above the world of sense into a direct experience of God. At its utmost, to reach the level of prophecy was to pass beyond time itself, to a realm in which all knowledge became naked and open, and past, present, and future merged into the eternal 'now'.<sup>61</sup> Something

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<sup>60</sup> Farnworth, A Woman Forbidden (1654); Thomas Edwards, Gangraena, 3 parts (1646: i, 26 Feb.; ii, 28 May; ii, 28 Dec.).

<sup>61</sup> By this definition, prophecy becomes a paradox, since the very physicality of speech and language is a dislocation from that spiritual unity with the divine that is its source. See, for instance, Wolfgang Riehle, The Middle English Mystics, trans. by Bernard Standring (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 8-9. By his comparative study of the language and imagery of

of this sense is evoked by Davies, who in her divine-inspired role to warn rulers and nation of the coming millennium, referred to herself as 'Alpha and Omega', the first and last prophet.<sup>62</sup> Among those texts in which Davies uses this identifying linkage are Her appeal (1641) Prophesie (1644), I am the first and last (1645), and Appearance (1650).<sup>63</sup>

The emergence, from the mid-fifties, of printed 'authorizations' of women's public religious testimonies, suggests that developments of the previous decade had given rise to a need for more systematic theorization of the social restructuring required for a commonwealth or a New Jerusalem. It has already been noted that mid-century prophecy marked a shift of emphasis in the radical sects: broadly, a movement from individual professions of faith based on Scripture and doctrinal orthodoxy toward personal and experiential testimonies of the direct, inner workings of the Holy Spirit, as exemplified in the confessional narrative. As the basis of membership in the church of Christ, or of prophetic probity, the validity of this latter form of witness was potentially

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medieval English mystics Riehle attempts to provide a referential framework suited to a wide range of mystical texts.

<sup>62</sup> 'A and O', signifying in Greek 'the beginning and the end', appear frequently in radical prophecies of this period. The Ranter mystic Jacob Bauthumley uses them to contrast the timelessness of the deity and the divinity manifested in his chosen creatures, in The Light and Dark Sides of God (London, 1650), in Ranter Writings, 227-264 (233-234). For a 20th-century view of the import of this and other biblical topoi, see Clement Hawes, Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-14.

<sup>63</sup> Davies's claim of an intimate relation to the A and O figure of the divine voice was based on a coupling her family's baronage of 'Audleigh' with 'Oldfield', its alleged Saxon forename; together with the letters' successive occurrences in her two married surnames. E. Cope, 8.

more difficult for others to assess.<sup>64</sup> In this problematic area, gender connotations afforded a uniquely useful sign system by which a valid calling based on the inner workings of the spirit could be recognized. Lay sectarian clerics often portrayed themselves in a feminized role relative to Christ and to their congregational flocks. What had traditionally been the chief source of women's inferiority -- their biological and reproductive links with the sin of Eve -- now became a positive signifier of spiritual regeneration through Christ's transforming love.<sup>65</sup>

For the early modern female or male visionary professing to be able to transmit God's will to his people, gender characteristics were also important. Prophetic 'vesselship' could involve the obliteration of personal identity, so that individual subjectivity became merged into a higher persona or the godhead itself; this form of representing divine realities is seen as broadly favourable to women. In 1648 Elizabeth Avery offered her womanly weakness to justify publication of her private letters as prophecy. Her claim was that 'the power of God doth appear in it in respect of the weaknesse and contemptibleness of the instrument... it hath been his course in doing great things by weakest means,... by such foolishnesse he doth bring to nought the wisdom of the wise,

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<sup>64</sup> See 'The Discerning of Spirits' in Nuttall, 34-47.

<sup>65</sup> On the fluidity of mid-century gender concepts, see Rachel Trubowitz, 'Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England', in Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution, ed. by James Holstun, Prose Studies, 14, 3 (Dec. 1991), 112-133 (120).

that so no flesh may glory in his presence...'.<sup>66</sup>

However, where the mediatory aspect of the prophet was uppermost, as in the case of a 'strong' Old Testament prophet such as Daniel, this could give rise to connotations of a masculinized empowerment. Eleanor Davies rebelled throughout her life against many social and legal constraints applying to women of all ranks. In attempting to guide rulers and authorities to an understanding of God's will for the British nation, her use of biblical role models repeatedly crosses gender boundaries: from Daniel, Elijah, and St. John the evangelist, to the Virgin Mary, and the new Eve of Revelation. In one 1641 text Davies constructs her prophetic persona upon the youthful Joseph 'a Striplin grown of 17. yeares' whose many-coloured coat signified a divine favour which inflamed the opposition of his brothers (Appeal (1641), A2').<sup>67</sup> Additionally, this text is one of many which verify her witness within a patriarchal frame; at its close her name is appended with a flourish of titles ('ELEANOR AUDELEY, handmayden of the most high GOD of Heaven... fifthe Daughter of GEORGE, Lord of CASTLEHAVEN, Lord AUDLEY, and Tuichet. NO inferior PEERE of this Land, in Ireland the fifth EARLE...'). Her prophecy is thus grounded in the patrilineal landed aristocracy of three British kingdoms. By her second marriage in 1627 to Sir Archibald Douglas, natural elder brother to

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<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Avery, Scripture-Prophecies Opened. (London: Giles Calvert, 1647), 'To the Reader', A3'. Further citations will be given in the main text.

<sup>67</sup> Given Davies's earlier constraints, this sense of rejuvenation could well have been associated with the prospect of a newly-freed commercial press. At this point Davies was in fact middle-aged: just over a decade of life remained to her, but these were to be her most prolific years of prophesying.

Charles I, her claimed sphere of influence was extended to Scotland.<sup>68</sup>

Yet this is not to suggest that Davies was not a forthright advocate of her own sex's right to prophesy. In the General Epistle of her first work Warning to the Dragon, published in 1625, she observes that 'no age so weake, nor sex excusing: when the Lord shall send and will put his words in their Mouth'. In Star to the Wise she noted that the evangelist John had written his epistle to a woman, 'saying, He had many things to write unto her':

...Where touching or importing an inspiration; what phrase of speech more meet and proper, then that of Mouth to Mouth; That our joy may be full? for a full expression of our Lords coming to be revealed to a woman; That secret disclosed...the wind blowing where it lists... Wherefore then not to be revealed to us, [as] before other in such case: and as soon to his handmaids as his menservants...and so now, as well as then, when she had the first happy sight of him, after his rising, which was sent to tell and inform them where they should meet him first.<sup>69</sup>

Davies's prophecies make the fullest use of female emblematic figures scripturally associated with the Second Coming. The image of the New Testament Church as Christ's bride is built upon the Old Testament bride-image as symbolizing Jehovah's chosen race, that also appears in Hosea's prophecy of God's

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<sup>68</sup> The variety of Davies's names by kinship and marriage leads to classificational confusion. In March/April 1627, after the death in December of her first husband Sir John Davies (m. 1609), she married Sir Archibald Douglas, the king's natural brother. The name Davies still appears in many of her pamphlets, however, and for clarity's sake I use it as her principal name.

<sup>69</sup> Eleanor Davies, Star to the Wise. (London, 1643), 11-13.

final reconciliative gathering of the Gentiles [2.18-23].

And in that day ...I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth... I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

In Brides preparation Davies reiterates the suitability of a woman prophet, in that John's revelatory words were 'disclosed to one of that SEX'.<sup>70</sup> Written on Lady Day, 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation, the text thematically links spring and the year's beginning with its end in Christ's second coming:

With our Lady-Dayes description & of the Worlds Creation, and the things therein made in the Spring ...which quickens and revives every Creature: So unto Nothing againe disolv'd, to be at the same season ...for the quick and the dead their meeting. Even then the blessed glorious Resurrection,...the great Master-builder, saying, it is done. I am ALPHA and OMEGA, The beginning and the end; The yeare finished... (3-4).

John's vision in Revelation offers a central metaphor of female prophecy, in the 'woman clothed with the sun'.

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered...and the dragon stood before the woman ...for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

The newly-born 'man child' threatened with destruction by the dragon/Satan, symbolizes both the vulnerable and sacrificial

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<sup>70</sup> The Brides Preparation. (London, 1645), 4.

god-babe of Bethlehem and the wrathful Christ of Judgment.

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God...And the great dragon...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan...was cast out into the earth...the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ'.<sup>71</sup>

Ostensibly this reference to the woman's 'seed' is to God's elect. But, alongside the reference to the law, a spiritual or prophetic Christian 'testimony' is appended as a kind of umbilical join by which Christ's holy remnant can be sustained through wars and persecution.

The figure of the woman in Revelation, as a metaphorical fusion of the new Mary with a regenerated Eve, surfaces repeatedly in prophecies by women in the century's middle decades. In Brides preparation Davies portrays her revelatory role as the Virgin Mary-figure by whom the [second] coming of Christ will be manifested to all. In The Appearance or Presence of the Son of Man, Revelation 11 is interpreted as a reference to a female creator-deity, who will defeat the 'man' of death and hell, to bring peace and an end to oppressive religion. Davies herself takes on the role of prophetic counsellor, the 'Queen of Peace...She whose Throne heaven, earth her footstool from the uncreated, saying, I am A. and O. first and last, both beginning and ending, by whom all things were done: Not without her anything done or made'.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Revelation 12.1-5,6,9,17.

<sup>72</sup> The Appearance or Presence of the Son of Man. (London, 1650), 7.

## 5. 'Free grace' and Female Paradigms of Spiritual Healing

The gender emancipation envisaged by women prophets might have been primarily to advance God's purpose rather than a secular goal of equal opportunities. But it did enable numbers of sectarian wives and working women publicly to prophesy, preach, and publish their revelations of God's word, at a historical point when congregational politics were providing an arena for national contentions and prospects. The late 1640s saw a proliferation of sects, as working people whose local or parochial affiliations had been dislocated by civil war sought new social, factional, and religious allegiances. A complementary development was the rise of experiential autobiographical testimony, rather than adherence to an external formal standard, as the final evidence of a believer's fitness to join a congregation, or to witness to God's revealed truth. For the first time, the ordinary worshipper was free to seek salvation without the formal mediatory agency of church or clerisy.

Most advocates of 'free grace' had come to reject conservative sects' congregational reliance upon literal scriptural exegesis, arguing instead for the allegorical and analogous reading of biblical passages in terms of the spiritual 'working' within the believer. In such cases, lack of education could even prove advantageous. Since doctrinal schism arose from the reliance upon fallacious human scriptural interpretations, the 'unlettered' spiritual witness that claimed its tuition as from God rather than by human

agency offered a way to overcome the fragmentation of denominational breakdown and divisiveness that currently beset the nation.<sup>73</sup> The Quakers Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole challenged educated clerics to witness genuinely 'from that life that gave forth the Scriptures', and 'not wrest them to your own Opinions and lusts:

One saying, Loe here in Presbytery; another, Loe there in Independency; and another, in Prelacy; and another in Baptism: but the Scriptures are not divided, they agree, and hold out one thing; but you divide them...you live not in that life that gave them forth, yet you boast of your learning that you have the Hebrew and Greek, and know the Original...know you, that you...are ignorant, though you think yourselves wise. Silly men and women may see more into the mystery of Christ Jesus, than you...  
(Priests, Hinds, 223).

A year earlier the first published prophetic utterances of Trapnel had also extolled those who were 'perfected with learning from above' as 'Christ's Scholars', however they might be discounted by university-educated clergy as 'but Laymen' (Trapnel, Cry, 42).

The Old Testament Jehovah's promise of a forthcoming new covenant with Israel had been described as a casting away of outward forms: 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...and they shall be my people' [Jeremiah 31.33]. Now a similar spiritual congregation of souls was seen as the necessary sign of Christ's imminent coming in these latter days. Quoting from the above text, Trapnel envisaged the divine enlightenment of the coming New Jerusalem: '... then shall the Saints be of one mind, and one heart, and shall not need to teach one another; Saying, know

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<sup>73</sup> On the role of learning in the debate on scriptural authority taking place through the period, see Perfection, 289-299.

the Lord, for they shall all be taught of God , from the least to the greatest...then shall light break forth as at noon day'  
(Legacy, 23).

As one of 'Christ's scholars', Trapnel claimed the role of 'a Witness, a Voice, or a Mess[enger?] from God to this Nation'. Recalling that on many occasions 'the foolish things of the world [are set] to confound the wise, babes and children to bring to nothing the Scribes and Disputers..., the first to be last, and the last first', she went on to cite Daniel's interpretation of the Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Cry, Sig.A2'). The prophetic 'stone' which destroyed the image whose several substances represented the four successive earthly kingdoms [Daniel 2.31-45] was an analogy commonly used by millenarians to link the Old Testament Jews with God's saints in the coming new age. Davies had similarly likened her prophecy to 'that precious Stone, without hands cut out... set here without coulours or flowers, as for enammeling such, having none Artificiall' (appeal, (1641), Sig.A3'). But Trapnel linked the 'stone' more explicitly with her own female prophecy as untutored: 'let it be considered, if upon this stumbling stone of the Spirits freedom, the wise and the learned Ones, both in the days of Christ and of the Apostles, and in our days, have not stumbled and fallen, and been broken to pieces?' (Cry, Sig. A2'). The image was similarly used by Cotton and Cole: 'Now, fret not at this, you that live at Babylon in confusion, in divisions: for the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands, shall break Babylons idols' (Priests, Hinds, 224).

This new and less hierarchical congregational sectarian membership, anti-intellectual and resting upon felt experience rather than doctrinal rigidity, extended more readily into shared female ties and experience. Historical evidence indicates that the bonds between early modern women, particularly those of birth and motherhood, were among the most significant factors of their lives: the first of Katherine Chidley's conflicts with the authorities was her joining with other newly-delivered mothers in a general refusal to be churched.<sup>74</sup> And experientially-based religious practice allowed women the chance of creating out of past personal suffering a positive contribution within their relation to God and each other. The suicidal Sarah Wight saw disobedience to a parent as sin against God: after ten days of fasting and insensibility, she was roused to sight and hearing only by direct evidence of her mother's close and abiding love (Jessey, 24-25). 'Let not dead souls be discouraged, for there as life enough for them', Trapnel told her readers; as with Lazarus, God could bring the dead to life.

[D]ead souls...are as a tree twice dead and plucked up by the roots, dead once, and plucked up, and set again and again, and pruned and dunged, and it becomes withered, dead; [as] though sin hath killed the soul...no convictions, no legall promises...no such striving can fetch life into one dead in sin and trespasses; all struggling and striving in this case, is but like the pains which the gardner takes with dead plants...but what the skill of the Gardner cannot reach, Divine love can...Divine love lifts this dead soul, though it hath lain in the grave of sin...(Legacy, 16).

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<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Lucinda McCray Beier, Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England, (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), Chapters 8 and 9. Chidley's churching dispute took place in Shrewsbury in 1626: DNB.

Experiences of enlightenment were often bound up with bereavements, as when Trapnel found evidence for her prophetic calling in the thrice-uttered dying prayer of her mother to God to 'Double thy spirit upon my child'. Women's conversions frequently arose through the deaths of children. In an age of high infant mortality few women could avoid the loss of one or several offspring; the resultant pain could be transmuted into an avenue of spiritual affirmation, however. After suffering a deep sense of guilt and powerlessness on the deaths of three of her children, Elizabeth Avery found a new faith that enabled her to relocate them in a coming millennium in which bodily pain and mortality were no more.<sup>75</sup> After her own 'simple' son died by drowning, Eleanor Davies took a mute boy into her house who afterwards developed a spirit of prophecy.<sup>76</sup> Sions Lamentation, written years later on her grandson's untimely death, also carries resonances of the loss of her own two boys, sons without speech. The death of Susanna Parr's child caused her to leave the Independent congregation she had attended and to return to her original church: '...when I considered the breach that the Lord had made in my family, I beheld how terrible it was to make a breach in his family...the work I was engaged in, this sin of separation, appeared nakedly unto me to be no other then a wounding of Christ's body'.<sup>77</sup> Finally, on the spiritual consolations found

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<sup>75</sup> John Rogers, Ohel, 403; see also Ludlow 'Arise', 260.

<sup>76</sup> E. Cope, 21-22, 28-31.

<sup>77</sup> Susanna Parr, Susanna's Apologie against the Elders. (Oxford, 1659), 14, in Mack, Visionary, 92.

by a believer in bereavement, a letter by Sarah Wight on the recent death of a loved brother comments that the afflicted soul found

a special presence of God with it in trouble, [and] as the children in the fiery furnace, hath ample cause to bless his Name. This gracious presence hath been much with us...moderating the measure of our cross, though not in taking it away...[the Lord] hath not hitherto suffered it to be above our strength. (Letter, 3-4)

But the role of spiritual leader with direct access to God might, as with medieval female saints, lead to the rejection altogether of family ties. After her mother's death and her aunt's counsel that she 'labour to be married to Christ', Trapnel saw the freedom from husband or parent as confirming her role of visionary teacher. To the magistrate at the Truro sessions, she asserted her right to travel and visit friends: 'having no hinderance, why may I not go where I please, if the Lord so will'?<sup>78</sup> But the prophet without home or family needed the buttress of a supporting group, the counsel of a committed minister, and the closeness of personal relationships. Of the women friends who attended her in Bridewell, Trapnel makes special mention ~~that~~ one, 'Sister Ursula Adman...a friend born for the day of adversity...night and day, showed her tenderness to me and helped to bear my burden' (Report, Otten, 71).

Radical sects such as the Quakers and Fifth Monarchists acknowledged the Holy Spirit as the supreme revelation of God's will and presence in human affairs. As a radical alteration of consciousness, prophecy took a range of forms. The visionary state could involve enhanced perception and

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<sup>78</sup> Trapnel, Legacy 10, and Report, 26.

intense physical experience: the body became filled with divine essence, sometimes leading to a loss of control or consciousness, along with sickness or quaking. This might also be a trance-like indifference to physical abuse, as in the case of Trapnel (Report, 20-21). Joseph Besse records many cases of Quaker women and men's suffering 'buffeting, punching, and stoning' at the hands of mobs: 'some were knocked down, others had their Teeth beaten out, and their Faces bruised', they 'bore all patiently, as Christian Sufferers'.<sup>79</sup>

To modern readers the language of religious visionaries can seem over-elaborate, tortuous, even incoherent: its very intensity implying a degree of neurosis or hallucination.<sup>80</sup> Confessional narratives of the time attest to the psychic burdens imposed by Calvinist doctrines of predestination. Lacking negotiative priest or saints, the Puritan could neither earn pardon for sin, nor yet slacken from the quest for evidence of having escaped a just damnation.<sup>81</sup> In the seventeenth century a depressive or other experiential crisis was generally viewed as spiritual disease, God's wrath, or false leadings of the devil, against which the believer needed

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph Besse, A Collection of the Sufferings, I, 552-553, quoted in John R. Knott, Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 220. On the sufferings (and violent deaths) of early Quaker women prophets, see Beginnings, 158-159.

<sup>80</sup> Such scepticism on our part might be, at least in part, an inheritance of the major shift in cultural perceptions of prophesying that took place from the 1650s onward: see below, V.2-3.

<sup>81</sup> On the inherited paradoxes of Calvinist theology, and the burdens these imposed upon the believer, see Cynthia Garrett, 'The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England', Renaissance Quarterly, 46, 2 (Summer 1993), 328-357.

to be constantly on guard.<sup>82</sup> Prophets Sarah Wight and Mary Hatfield both endured disturbed childhoods, marked by convulsive or paralytic seizures. Strained relations with her mother aroused in Wight an overbearing sense of guilt that vented itself in blasphemous thoughts and self-destructive urges.<sup>83</sup> Trapnel was also tempted to suicide (Legacy, 2-3).

In the extremity of faith found in the midst of the refining fires of deep or prolonged trauma, anxiety, and even a kind of madness, can mutate into a divine 'sense' of the spirit. Women's prophecies of this period are often associated with physical hardships and persecution, as if these were in some way authorizational to the texts. Many, including those of Davies, Biddle, Fell, Trapnel, Cotton, White, Evans and Cheevers, were written from prison. In the preface to Scripture-Prophecies Opened, Avery declares that her new-found beliefs, arising from divinely-inspired scriptural insights, must be publicly proclaimed despite persecution or even death.

...I dare not conceal it in oblivion, but...hold it forth to the view of the whole world, ...I fear not the prison, having such enlargements in God: I fear not reproach; for I can wear it as my Crown: I fear not want in that I do enjoy all in God: and though I may be counted mad to the world, I shall speak the words of soberness...I am resolved not to contend... with carnal weapons, as by Argument, but rather I shall witness the truth of it with my Blood, if God shall call me to it.

(Scripture-Prophecies, A3<sup>r</sup>-A3<sup>v</sup>)

In terms of individual testimony, the prophetic witness arising out of Avery's experiences (and those of other similar

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<sup>82</sup> These spiritual anxieties, while associated with Calvinist theology, were not confined to congregational writings; their influence can be traced in texts by Robert Burton, John Donne, Christopher Marlowe and John Milton. See John Stachniewski, The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> Jessey, 6-8, 10-14, 127-130.

women) typically expanded from private suffering or constraint into an over-arching vision of the divine working in the family, the nation, and creation itself. Bereavement, extreme anxiety, suicidal urges, and economic or domestic restrictions gave way to a 'universalizing' view that embraced the well-being of all humanity.<sup>84</sup> As part of this advancement, the prophet might present herself as an embodiment of the afflictions of a dis-eased society and nation. Quaker women and men walked unclothed in the streets of Westmor land and Yorkshire as a warning sign of the nation's need to repent.<sup>85</sup> In The Trumpet of the Lord Hester Biddle's personal sufferings are merged into the larger construct of a society diseased and spiritually at war with itself, while Dorothy White's An Epistle of Love counters a sense of national crisis with prospects of a utopian millennium, conveyed by affirmative images of nature and healing.<sup>86</sup> Addressing Parliament, Lady Eleanor Davies described her own visionary powers as the miraculous water-to-wine portent of the Cana wedding ('This good wine kept till now'), and as oil or ointment form the sores of the nation: '...tedious to touch and fowle...Blaines and Running-Soares nothing else all over, from the Elbow unto the feete: so this annoynting commended to all, for the

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<sup>84</sup> Perfection, 343; Mack, Visionary, 8.

<sup>85</sup> On Quaker 'signs', or public demonstrations, see below VI.2,3, and 5. See Maureen Bell, 'Mary Westwood: Quaker Publisher', Publishing History, 23 (1988), 5-66 (32-34); also three works by Kenneth L. Carroll: 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked as a Sign"', Quaker History, 67 (1978), 69-87; 'Quaker Attitudes Towards Signs and Wonders', JFHS 54 (1977), 70-84; and 'Sackcloth and Ashes and Other Signs and Wonders', JFHS, 53 (1975), 314-325.

<sup>86</sup> Dorothy White, An Epistle of Love, and of consolation unto Israel. (London: Robert Wilson, 1661).

blessed Readers and Hearers both' (appeal (1641), A3<sup>v</sup>). In like fashion the early witness by Mary Cary, A Word in Season to the Kingdom of England, is presented as 'A precious CORDIAL for a distempered KINGDOM'.<sup>87</sup>

The source of healing lay always beyond the power of the prophet herself, with God. Trapnel tells how lying ill in a Bridewell cell she was told by God that she would be healed:

The Lord answered me, and said, 'I have taken away thy sickness, thou shalt be sick no more, while thou art here in Bridewell...Thy friends have provided means to take away thy ague, but the Lord hath been thy physician aforehand'; and he further said, he would take me into the mount that day for the perfect cure of my sickness.

The promise was fulfilled, and she immediately 'spake by way of prayer and singing from morning till night, and felt no sickness nor pain, nor faintness...all that day I was wrapped up, so that I could not tell, whether I was in the body or out: and yet I sung with understanding, as to the things the Lord was doing among the sons and daughters of men' (Report, Otten, 69).

This 'singing' or prophetic testifying in the form of verse was frequently used by women prophets, from Davies to Trapnel and Quaker prophets of the 1650s and post-Restoration such as Dorothy White and Anne Wentworth.<sup>88</sup> As they were often 'sung' while the prophet herself was incapacitated, either through illness or trance; the testimony had therefore to be written down by an attendant transcriber or 'testator'. To what extent can such text voice be seen as that of a prophet-

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<sup>87</sup> Cary, A Word in Season (London: Giles Calvert, 1647), T.P.

<sup>88</sup> Hobby, Virtue, 34.

author, or even of a divine source?<sup>89</sup> A search for 'authentic' authorial voices in these female prophecies needs to consider the extent to which each text could have been shaped by [usually male] mentors, friends, or hearers whose support was necessary and inevitable. We might never have had the 1654 testimony of the dumb and illiterate Elinor Channel without the aid of Arise Evans, although he published her verses as a pretext for putting forward his own royalist views.

Where surviving printed texts represent a message dictated to someone else, some distortion is inevitable. For this reason, perhaps, care was often taken to distinguish a prophet's autobiographical testimony 'written...with her own hand' from the testimony of friends and supporters (as quoted on the title page of Trapnel's Legacy: one of many instances). Further, evidence indicates that an adequate system of recording words was available to enable a faithful prophetic transcription by reporters, since at this time methods of shorthand writing were being used to record church sermons and the proceedings of the law courts.<sup>90</sup> In Trapnel's last work Voice, containing material transcribed by others, the final list of printing errors denotes the importance attached to accuracy. Other texts, too, show signs of careful authorial monitoring: a number of surviving works by Eleanor Davies carry her personal handwritten annotations.

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<sup>89</sup> Viewing the question of authorship in prophecies as part of a overall movement between orality and textuality, Wiseman suggests that such witness be dehistoricized into intertextual 'encodings' between the prophet's interior and biblical rhetoric and the reader's response: Wiseman, 177 and passim.

<sup>90</sup> Vivian Salmon, 'Language Planning in Seventeenth-Century England: Its Contexts and Aims', in In Memory of J.R. Firth, ed. by C.E. Bazell et al., (London: Longmans, 1966), 370-397 (380 and n.26).

Chapter II. EARLY MODERN GENDER AND THE PRINT REVOLUTION:  
MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL NEGOTIATION AND RESISTANCE

The discovery that one can give voice to one's experience is itself the fundamentally empowering insight behind a popular politics.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of a popular press, accessible to an increasingly literate urban population, played a major part in the intense and fluctuating national dissensions throughout the 1640s. In the crucible of civil war this newly-liberated printing industry also provided the main channel by which new forms of women's prophecy made their appearance. Apart from Eleanor Davies the subjects of this study are mainly working women from the middle to artisan social ranks, with at best only modest means or education. Their spiritual messages, however divinely inspired, relied for their disclosure upon supportive networks of religious and bookselling interests. This chapter attempts to chart the cultural pressures involved in this social and commercial shift, in a period of sustained political and religious crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> George M. Shulman, Radicalism and Reverence: The Political Thought of Gerrard Winstanley, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 249.

## 1. Female Conduct and Social Anxiety

Women who interrupted church services or preached in the streets were committing acts of provocation. Any seventeenth-century woman seeking to speak out publicly, whether orally or in print, had to counter the effect of established popular prejudice which saw such female conduct -- along with that of scolds or gossips -- as not simply 'disorderly', but a threat to society.

Local court records indicate that in England under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts social misconduct was more rigorously prosecuted and involved a wider range of offences than before or since.<sup>2</sup> New laws had criminalized beggars and vagrants, who represented the pernicious influence of a shifting and unregulated popular mass. The overthrow of institutions after years of civil war brought greater destabilization of social hierarchies, and fresh challenges to criteria of status justifying the authority of an elite to rule over the wider majority.

By contrast, conventions of gender seem to have remained relatively constant in post-Reformation England. Women's designation as the inferior and weaker sex remained backed by

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<sup>2</sup> John Stratton maintains that legal praxis and theory profoundly affected the cultural consciousness of early modern England: that its predominately adversarial model licensed social combat as a way of confirming disputed boundaries of acceptable speech and behaviour. Stratton, 'Law and the Ideology of Order: The Problem of Knowledge in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*', in *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Francis Barker et al. (Essex: University of Essex, 1981), 258-282.

inherited religious, legal, and medical traditions.<sup>3</sup> Men of all social ranks were expected to maintain authority over their wives, while women and girls were exhorted to be submissive, docile, and chaste.<sup>4</sup> Early modern culture routinely associated the garrulous female tongue with uncontrolled female libidinal desires seeking always to escape the authority of husband or father.<sup>5</sup> Evidence of this becomes visible with the post-1641 rise of the popular press, carrying traces of a pre-existing and semi-oral cultural tradition in which a complex language of the body teems with symbolism, sexual insult, and a rich variety of social and gender labels. Here the lampooning of public issues and events regularly

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<sup>3</sup> The female-subordinative aspects of the Pauline precepts inherited by Puritan tradition are set out in Margaret Olofson Thickstun, Fictions of the Feminine: Puritan Doctrine and the Representation of Women (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1-36. Conventionally and institutionally, a woman's status was defined by her relation to male kin: her husband simply replaced her father in authority over her, and his status and occupation determined her own social position. In the coverture of common law her legal identity was subsumed in his: she could not sign a contract, sue, or obtain credit without his consent. Also he gained control of any property or 'portion' brought by her to the marriage. Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England, ed. by Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker (London: UCL Press, 1994), 1-25 (6); also Amy Louise Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England (London: Routledge, 1993), 24-25. In cases of rape, the crime was seen as a theft against the husband or father, not the woman herself, according to The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights (London, 1632): Miranda Chaytor, 'Husband(ry): Narratives of Rape in the Seventeenth Century', Gender & History, 7, 3 (Nov 1995), 378-407 (395-396). On the dominance of male-thematized metaphors in contemporary understanding of women's reproductive roles and anatomy, see Mary Fissell, 'Gender and Generation: Representing Reproduction in Early Modern England', Gender & History, 7, 3 (Nov 1995), 433-456; and The Making of the Modern Body, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), especially 1-41.

<sup>4</sup> S.D. Amussen, 'Gender, Family and the Social Order', in Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, ed. by A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196-217 (216); Patricia Crawford, 'The Challenges to Patriarchalism', in Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s, ed. by John Morrill, (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), 112-128 (113, 115-116).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, ed. by Margaret Ferguson et al., (Chicago University Press, 1986), 123-144; also Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), 121-130.

denounced the apparent escalation of female vocal assertiveness as a major threat to public and social order. This widespread tendency to censure talkative and disorderly women is seen today as an assertion of patriarchal dominance in the face of social disintegration under the ingress of capitalism.<sup>6</sup>

But the universalizing simplicity of this equation tends to conceal the versatility of its actual social application. Gender models seem to have provided the coinage by which a number of complex and troubling aspects of social disruption in seventeenth-century England were negotiated. The frequent citations of sexual misconduct in court records and pamphlet literature give visible evidence of the social anxieties that lay behind attempts to police standards of behaviour. Terms such as 'whore', 'gossip', and 'scold' were freely employed by both sexes to signify the violation of cultural taboos. Ritualized public humiliation in the form of rough music processions, such as charivari or skimmingtons, targeted not only unchaste or scolding wives, but also the husbands who failed to control them.<sup>7</sup>

Distinct and well-developed concepts of the 'scold' were generally (although not exclusively) applied to women. That

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<sup>6</sup> D.E. Underdown, 'The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England', in Order and Disorder, 116-136.

<sup>7</sup> On the festive processions of charivari, used for centuries throughout Europe as shaming rituals against those seen as violating a community's sexual standards, see Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), Chapters 4 and 5. In seventeenth-century England the behavioural term 'scolding' could extend to men; also, penalties such as ducking, defiling, and pillorying were not confined to scolds. Martin Ingram, '"Scolding women cucked or washed": A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?' in Women, Crime and the Courts, 48-80 (59, 52-53).

scolding was ranked as an actual criminal offence, frequently reported in court records by official and lay participants alike, could be taken as evidence of female victimization. But deeper examination shows women as active participants on both sides of these disputes, enjoying a degree of quasi-public power as brokers of gossip, makers and breakers of reputations, and sharers in the process whereby their unruly sisters were subjected to the ducking or cucking stool.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while female subordination was enshrined in the legal precepts of the time, women and men were skilled in exploiting such inequalities for private gain. In defamation cases, for instance, female complainants commonly employed verbal sexual insult alongside legal procedures. By adopting active as well as passive postures, and blending private with public forms of discourse, their attempts at redress often were able to surmount the customary legal boundaries.<sup>9</sup> Women's freedom from prosecution was also made use of by married couples testifying before the courts: husbands blamed their wives (or wives pleaded guilty) for actions committed in the man's absence.<sup>10</sup>

Gender-related patriarchal victimization is similarly seen by some modern critics as the context for accusations of witchcraft. Yet historical descriptions of witchcraft

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'cucked', recorded alongside cases of ducking and carting, may have related more to exhibition than to actual immersion. Ingram, 63-64.

<sup>9</sup> On the uses of slander in women's language and the courts, see Laura Gowling, 'Language, Power, and the Law: Women's Slander Litigation in Early Modern London', in Women, Crime and the Courts, 26-47.

<sup>10</sup> Maureen Bell, 'Elizabeth Calvert and the "Confederates"', Publishing History, 32 (1992), 32-33.

practices can also be decoded in other, more class-related terms as part of shared rituals and vocabularies of communal misrule and inversion.<sup>11</sup> Here too, women -- as conventional possessors of specific forms of knowledge in the community -- often acted against the accused in the legal formalities of witchcraft trials: as prosecution witnesses, for instance, or as searchers for witches' marks.<sup>12</sup>

In some legal areas, however, the influence of sexual stereotypes did weigh heavily against the female sex: in accusations of slander, for instance, and where social boundaries had been breached, or wider local factionalism became involved.<sup>13</sup> Cases of overlapping class and gender hierarchies generated acute social tensions, particularly where women's rank or position was seen as giving power over men. This is indicated in the punishments meted out to Eleanor

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of the 'patriarchalist', or 'top-down' view of witch-persecution, see Elliott P. Currie, 'The Control of Witchcraft in Renaissance Europe', in The Social Organization of Law, ed. by Donald Black and Maureen Mileski (London: Seminar Press, 1973) 344-367; Kai T. Erikson, Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966); and Norman Cohen, Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witchhunt (London: Sussex University Press, 1975). General sources endorsing this view include Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, (London: Penguin reprint, 1991), 517-698; and A. Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study (London, 1970), chapters 10-16. For an alternative and somewhat more popularly-based interpretation, see Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', Past and Present, 87 (1980), 98-127. Finally, the role of the early-modern rise of print culture in the 'witch crazes' of the 15th to early 17th centuries is examined in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformation in Early-Modern Europe, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), I, 432-445.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Sharpe, 'Women, witchcraft and the legal process', in Women, Crime and the Courts, 106-124. One of the best overall social studies of witchcraft is by Christina Lerner: Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). For a more recent exposition, see Diane Purkiss: The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> All three of these aspects come together in one court case outlined by Steve Hindle in 'The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England', Continuity and Change, 9 (1994), 391-419.

Davies, who used her wealth and influence to publish prophecies critical of the king in 1633. In the social and institutional disruptions of the revolutionary decades, as numbers of women gained unprecedented access to individual and collective forms of public expression, censure of unrestricted female speech seemed to reach new heights. Pamphlet literature of all political complexions commonly employed the coarsest kinds of sexual satire and invective to vilify audacious women, along with other oppositional groups or individuals.<sup>14</sup>

A degree of relaxation in the constraints upon women's activities in this period was especially evident in the sphere of religious belief and practice. Disturbing accounts were circulated by the press, of public preaching, teaching, and prophesying by women. Anti-sectarians and heresiographers such as Thomas Edwards even accused radical sects of providing a cover for clandestine sexual activities. A characteristic example is the 1642 pamphlet purporting, in the words of its author 'I.H. Gentleman', to describe 'the true nature of most Women' along with 'a plaine discription of many mad tricks and flights lately performed by a Zealous Sister which was overcome with the Spirit'.<sup>15</sup> The opening sentence, that 'Woemen are admirable Angels, if they would not be drawne with Angells to be come Devills' (Sig A2<sup>r</sup>), is eventually expanded

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<sup>14</sup> See Sharon Achinstein, 'Women on Top in the Pamphlet Literature of the English Revolution', in Gender, Literature, and the English Revolution, ed. by Achinstein, Women's Studies, 24 (1994), 131-163. On the practical and symbolic significance of female speech in political activities of the 1640s, see Dagmar Freist, 'The King's Crown is the Whore of Babylon: Politics, Gender and Communication in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England', Gender & History, 7, 3 (Nov 1995), 457-481.

<sup>15</sup> I.H., A Strange Wonder or A Wonder in A Woman, (London, 1642).

to describe the category of female designated the 'Holy WHORE':

when she turnes up the White of her Eye, And the Blacke of her Tayle when she falls flat of her Backe, According as the Spirit moves her, The Fire of her Zeale, Kindles such a Flame, that the Divell cannot withstand her...she can fit a man with such a Cloake for her Knavery she can cover her Lust with Religion. (4)

A similar but anonymous five-paged pamphlet names six women recently reported to have sermonized publicly.<sup>16</sup> Their meetings, as described, seem to resemble small conversational gatherings of friends in private houses, with refreshments of beverages and sometimes food. While the tone of the pamphlet is self-consciously coarse and tongue-in-cheek, some features show signs of clerical authorship. The title page displays Paul's interdict on women's speaking in church [I Cor.14.34-35], and the author commences by supposing that the 'onely reason or cause' for female preachers would be 'a deficiency of good men' (1). Depictions of monstrously garrulous and bibulous women are rounded off with a final gibe at the apparent ignorance of these 'female Academyes': 'where their Vniversity is I cannot tell, but I suppose that Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for them' (5). The unknown writer ends, however, on a note of earnest anxiety:

Is it not sufficient that [women] may have the Gospell truly and sincerely Preached unto them, but that they must take their Ministers office from them?...they seemed to bee ambitious, and because they would have superiority, they would get upon a stoole, or in a tubb instead of a pulpit. At this time I have described but six of them, ere long I feare I shall relate more, I pray God I have no cause,... (5)

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<sup>16</sup> [Anon.], A Discoverie of Six women preachers...With a relation of their names, manners, life, and doctrine. ([London], 1641).

Attempts to silence prophesying women by direct attack or by denigration of the terms of their witness, were not confined to the sects and public of England. When Thomas Parker, an Independent pastor of Newbury, Massachusetts, took up his pen in November 1648 to write to his 'Loving Sister' Mrs Elizabeth Avery in England, the apparently tender opening address was followed by a lengthy and stinging rebuke to the young matron. The cause of offence was Avery's adoption of new and unorthodox religious beliefs, denying the doctrines of scriptural infallibility and the literal body of Christ. Even worse, she had publicly proclaimed her views a year earlier in a book, dismissed by her brother as 'an attempt above your gifts and Sex'.<sup>17</sup> Parker's criticism of his sister has a discernibly misogynist taint: '...your printing of a Book, beyond the custom of your Sex, doth rankly smell; but the exaltation of your self in the way of your Opinions, is above all: God will never tolerate pride... therefore I fear some afterclaps' (13).

Parker, by now in his fifties, was one of New England's foremost divines. As an eminent scholar on biblical prophecy, he confessed himself hurt and appalled by clerical reports of his sister's latter-day millennialist revelations. Nor was he prepared to mince words on what he saw as her readiness to abandon 'at the first push' the sound principles of her orthodox Puritan upbringing. The language of Parker's outburst

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<sup>17</sup> E. Avery, Scripture Prophecies Opened, Which are to be accomplished in these last times. (London: Giles Calvert, 1647). Quotes from Parker's letter are from its later published version: Thomas Parker, The Copy of a Letter...to His Sister, Mrs Elizabeth Avery. (London, 1650), 17.

is characteristic of much clerical and lay condemnation of women who made public testimony of God's revelations to them. Avery's enterprise is put down to feminine weakness: 'Let me tell you plainly, I doubt [but that] there was some grievous sin at bottom, [such] as the Pride of Women, or Spiritual Pride, or something else, that God hath suffered you so horribly to fall away' (12). Her uncharacteristic self-assertiveness is imputed to diabolical agency: 'Sister, you are a weak woman and ignorant of the wiles of Satan, and may easily be lifted up...I do hope that you had some true communion with God, yet I do believe that it was exceedingly mixed with Spiritual pride, for which God hath been angry...and hath given you up to Heresies' (15). Parker urges her to a prompt repentance and self-abasement: 'Your state requireth sharp and hasty Remedies, bear with me... that I sharpen my stile, to pull you out of the fire, wherein you are already flaming' (13).

Parker and Avery shared a staunchly nonconformist Puritan background.<sup>18</sup> Parker's censure was aroused by his sister's apparent forsaking of that submissiveness conventional to women's religious roles. Female passivity and subordination were basic tenets of Christian orthodoxy, consequent upon the fall of Eve and well endorsed by Scripture. Israel's idolatry and forsaking of Jehovah was customarily portrayed by Old Testament prophets in terms of female sexual depravity. The

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<sup>18</sup> Their deceased father Robert Parker, a notable Puritan divine, had been exiled to the Netherlands for his dissenting views; his works on the seven vials of Revelation was published in 1651. DNB; Dorothy P. Ludlow, '"Arise and Be Doing": English "Preaching" Women, 1640-1660' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1978), 260.

gender caveat is echoed in Paul's injunctions to the primitive church of Christ: 'The woman is the glory of the man' [I Cor 11.7]; 'Let women keep silence...' [I Cor.14.34; I Tim.2.11]; 'I suffer not a woman to teach' [I Tim.2.11]. The tone of Parker's remarks illustrates the way in which traditional dissenting theology in Puritan communities of England, New England, and the Netherlands, reinforced the spiritual authoritarianism of the patriarch in both families and congregations. Parker's letter can be seen as the means by which the full weight of male clerical disapproval was brought publicly to bear on Avery's apostasy. Yet this semi-official rebuke by Parker seems to have met with sustained resistance by its recipient. In the two-year period between Parker's original letter and its formal publication, there is no trace of a reply. Three years on, in 1653, Avery's apparent refusal to revoke her new-found opinions and return to mainstream nonconformity was to be confirmed by the millennialist preacher John Rogers, who published her testimony along with others of his Dublin congregation.<sup>19</sup>

Remarkably, Parker makes it clear that he has not actually seen her book: all his accusations of the 'horrid things' written by her rest upon the accounts of others, almost certainly his ministerial associates.<sup>20</sup> These brother-clerics deserve some attention in their own right. Parker's missive was but one of several sent to Avery by Independent divines on

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<sup>19</sup> J. Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, A Tabernacle for the Sun. (London: R.I. and G. and H. Everden, 1653), 402-406.

<sup>20</sup> Parker, 10.

both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>21</sup> It seems clear that Parker's purported brotherly concern was strongly mediated by a sense of professional solidarity with these colleagues. This 'networking' among the ministers, their readiness to negotiate between themselves on Avery's rejection of Puritan orthodoxy, later supplied the channel by which Parker's letter found its way into print as an official and very public expression of her exclusion from the religious community.<sup>22</sup>

A theological insistence upon patriarchal authoritarianism was the means by which early seventeenth-century Puritans sought to resolve a conflict potentially inherent in their congregational system: between equality and subordination. All forms of worship relied fundamentally upon a literal interpretation of biblical strictures, in which Old Testament precepts were reasserted in a 'limited monarchy' of neo-Christian patriarchy.

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## 2. Patriarchal Claims: Dimensions of the Marriage Tie

The very core of the seventeenth-century state was the family: Sir Thomas Smith viewed it as the seat of commonwealth: 'the first and most natural beginning and source of cities, towns, nations, kingdoms, and of all civil societies'.<sup>23</sup> Public

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Woodbridge's 'Epistle' in Parker, (A2'-A2').

<sup>22</sup> On the close links maintained between Puritan and dissenting clerics on both sides of the Atlantic, see Francis Bremer, 'Increase Mather's Friends: The Transatlantic Congregational Network of the Seventeenth Century', Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 94, 1 (1984), 59-96.

<sup>23</sup> Sir Thomas Smith, De Republica Anglorum, in Amussen, 199.

opinion broadly concurred with the Puritan William Gouge's view of the 'little commonwealth' of family as the foundation of wider society, providing 'a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned'.<sup>24</sup>

Domestic manuals of the period show the normative family household as comprised of a married couple and their children, together with unmarried servants and apprentices. This most basic economic unit of the nation is also a social model held together by an ideology of guardianship in which ties of kinship and residence are intertwined. In return for the obedience owed them, masters and mistresses were required to fulfil a parental role toward their servants no less than their children, to provide religious and practical education together with moral guidance. The fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother' thus doctrinally bound together both families and the nation itself. Each individual, of whatever rank, was socialized within a form of extended family setting, in which all were jointly subordinate to the family head. At a time when a father's physical presence in the home was part of the daily working routine, paternalism (in the roles of husband, father, and master) was the theoretical basis of all obedience to constituted authority.<sup>25</sup>

Patriarchalism as it developed in England under James I,

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<sup>24</sup> William Gouge, Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises, (3rd edn, London, 1634), in Amussen, 200; see also Gordon J. Schochet, Patriarchalism in Political Thought (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 69-73.

<sup>25</sup> A 1640 book by an Anglican divine portrayed fatherhood in terms of three basic forms: natural paternity, magistracy, and priesthood. John Swan, Redde Debitum: or, A Discourse in Defence of Three Chiefe Fatherhoods (London, 1640), in Schochet, 99.

offered a moral construct of the crowned king as ideal and practical father to his subjects, who could no more resist his rule than children could rise against their father.<sup>26</sup> Sir Robert Filmer's Patriarcha argued that the patriarchy of Adam conferred a primogenitive authority on both fathers and kings: 'I see not...how the children of Adam...can be free from subjection to their parents. And this subordination of children is the fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself. From whence it follows, that civil power...[is assigned] specifically to the eldest parent'.<sup>27</sup> Even the non-royalist Richard Baxter declared in 1673 that 'most of the mischiefs that now infest or seize upon mankind throughout the earth, consist in, or are caused by the disorders and ill-governedness of families'.<sup>28</sup>

Opponents of the king's prerogative powers sought to undermine this filial and paternal link between subjects and king. In a 1642 attack on attempts by Charles I to curb Parliament, Henry Parker replaced the concept of figurative fatherhood with a stress upon the monarch's political responsibilities to his subjects: 'in the relation betwixt King & Subject' it was more needful 'that the King should make

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<sup>26</sup> James I, The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598), and God and the King, (anon., 1615): both in Schochet, 86-90.

<sup>27</sup> Filmer, Sir Robert, Patriarcha and Other Political Works, ed. by Peter Laslett, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), 57.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Baxter, A Christian Directory (London, 1673), 514, in Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth Century English Political Thought', Western Political Quarterly, 32, 1 (1979), 79-91 (79).

happy the People, than the People make glorious the King'.<sup>29</sup> A similar case for the innate liberty of the son/subject was advanced by the Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford: that 'all men being borne free from all Civill subjection', so the father had 'no more power to resign the liberty of his children than their lives'.<sup>30</sup>

In the century prior to the Restoration, however, the political theory of patriarchy continued to underpin social order even where it was historically most under threat. During the Commonwealth years critics from both ends of the political spectrum continued to endorse patriarchal rights over the family. In Leviathan Thomas Hobbes replaced the notion of kingly absolutism with the theory of a sovereign power resting upon a prior contract arising from common principles of self-interest.<sup>31</sup> In terms of individual self-preservation, the dominion of fathers over their families had predated the establishment of an English civitas or commonwealth: Hobbes concluded that the latter was therefore but an 'Imperfect Institution', which could not interfere the father's or master's lordship over his household under the law (222, 162-163). Similarly, if from contrasting political viewpoints, Gerrard Winstanley's justification in 1650 of his defeated Digger reforms repeatedly emphasized the primacy of the family

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<sup>29</sup> [Henry Parker], Observations upon Some of His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses [London, 1642]. 18-19, in Schochet, 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Rutherford, Lex, Rex: The Law and the Prince (London, 1644), 86-87, in Schochet, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Hobbes reasoned that the sovereign was entitled to automatic obedience (Leviathan, 153), but that his powers were limited to those spheres associated with the common and public (as against private) self-interest (162).

unit, and the need to uphold paternal magistracy within the family, with verbal and corporal disciplining of children where necessary.<sup>32</sup>

This stance by Winstanley was largely in response to accusations that Digger sharing of land ownership extended also to wives. Denials of any Ranterish 'excess of female communitie' among the Diggers also feature in his earlier work, A New-yeers Gift.<sup>33</sup> This dilemma, as it was faced by Winstanley's radical communist programme, shows that alongside patriarchalism the duality of the marriage contract was another major structure of familial and national relations. However, this contract, as it was understood in the 1640s, encompassed a contradiction. The marriage union was characteristically seen as essentially hierarchical and unalterable: the husband was head and governor over his wife, and responsible for her material and moral welfare. Yet the idea of mutual consent by both parties was at the very heart of the marital relationship. The confidential nature of conjugal relations meant that simple subordination could not adequately describe the nature of a woman's relation to her husband: 'if she be thy wife', ran one comment, 'she is always too good to be thy servant, and worthy to be thy fellow'. William Gouge argued that the wife was too much a

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<sup>32</sup> G. Winstanley, The Law of Freedom. (1651), in Works, ed. by George H. Sabine (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 499-602 (536-538, 545). Like Hobbes, Winstanley perceived that the authority of the state derived from principles of common preservation, but he saw these as generated from individual/family, rather than corporate, self-interest (534-538).

<sup>33</sup> Winstanley, A New-yeers Gift For The Parliament and Armie. (London: Giles Calvert, 1650), reprinted in Gerrard Winstanley Selected Writings, ed. by Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1989), 63-99 (75); also in Works (Sabine ed.), 351-396 (366-367).

representative of her husband's authority for him to correct her by beating, since he would effectively be beating himself.<sup>34</sup>

Nor is it justifiable for us today to assume that women of that time were habitually unhappy with their lot as wives. Subordination within some kind of system was not simply a fact of seventeenth-century life, but essential to an individual's identity, role, and status in society. What is at issue here is not the existence, but the nature, of such ties: were they imposed from above and absolute, or did they arise from some degree of consent and negotiation between governor and governed? By means of the relational constructs viewed here, of patriarchal ties between fathers and their children and servants, and between wives and husbands, an inherent tension between absolutism and mutuality runs through the political and religious conflicts of the 1640s and 1650s.

Early modern husbands and wives were partners in a domestic productive unit which combined waged and unwaged work to meet virtually all the family's material and administrative needs.<sup>35</sup> A wife not only represented her husband in household matters; she also acted as his agent and caretaker where affairs of business or civil required his absence. During the years of civil war, when many men were away from home as the result of conflicts or imprisonment, it fell to their wives to take on the burdens of families,

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<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Leigh, The Mother's Blessing (London, 1616; William Gouge, Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises (3rd edn, London, 1634), 396: both in Amussen, 201.

<sup>35</sup> On the importance of women's domestic industry in England's pre-capitalist economy, see Alice Clark, Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1992).

of households and finances, and petitioned on behalf of their husbands and estates.<sup>36</sup> Many women also contributed in the war effort as nurses, in supplies, in espionage, or in propaganda publication and distribution.<sup>37</sup> In peace and war women of all social classes were obliged to keep their families, manage the servants, make and dispense medicines, and fill the role of healers, sometimes travelling long distances to assist at births and tend the injured, sick or dying.<sup>38</sup>

Sectarian prophecy arose out of a similarly active female agency. Those women reported as having been attacked, publicly flogged, or imprisoned for preaching or published prophecies, were at the same time burdened with secular responsibilities. They had families to rear, goods to buy and sell, property to manage. They paid taxes, tilled land, and testified in court. In fact, a degree of economic independence and of education was virtually a pre-requisite of a prophetic calling: their lack could result in suppression or distortion of a woman's

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<sup>36</sup> On dangers encountered by women undergoing pregnancy and childbirth in times of war, see Christopher Durston, The Family in the English Revolution (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 110-114. An anonymous pamphlet on behalf of midwives dwelt upon men's prolonged absence from their wives in the civil wars: the consequent deficiency of 'seed time before harvest' had resulted, said the complainant, in a major drop in their trade, 'whereby we Midwives are also undone'. The advice was given that 'wives may no longer spare their husbands to be devoured by the sword, but may keep them fast locked within their owne loving armes day and night, perfecting their embraces in such a manner as ... may be conceived by the strong fancy of any understanding woman'. The Mid-wives just Complaint (London: T.S., 1646), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Crawford, 118-119; for a broad survey of women's activities see Part Two of Antonia Fraser's The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England (London: Methuen, 1985), 181-297. On women in the book trade from 1640, see A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720, ed. by Maureen Bell, George Parfitt, and Simon Shepherd (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 287-293 and notes.

<sup>38</sup> On the continuing centrality at this time of the roles played by wives, mothers and daughters, along with female servants, in the various activities connected with healing, see Lucinda McCray Beier, Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 211-259 and notes.

testimony, as is shown in the case of Elinor Channel and her amanuensis Arise Evans. Eleanor Davies seems to have had sufficient wealth to finance her own publications, despite repeated imprisonments and the lengthy property disputes resulting from her second marriage. Anna Trapnel defended her prophetic vocation by pointing out her ability to keep herself and pay taxes after the death of her mother, a widow. Elizabeth Poole was also a propertied widow, and virtually all Quaker preachers earned their living.

Women's membership in sectarian congregations opened a path to collective loyalties outside of the ties of the domestic circle and established church.<sup>39</sup> By the 1640s and 1650s the independent congregations of England, the Netherlands, and America had diversified into a range of sects, promoting a variety of spiritual creeds and practices. But central to all these dissenting groups was a belief in the purity of the gathered and autonomous congregation, whose members felt themselves to be called by the direction of the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the 'Popish' rituals, and tithed, university-trained clergy of the established Church, the sectarian tradition of a spiritual equality shared by an elect membership of believers was expressed in lay preaching, experiential profession, and a belief in prophecy and direct revelation. To the many women who formed a major part of sectarian membership, the spiritual equality of the sexes implicit in these developments offered more active and

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<sup>39</sup> The argument that women formed the majority of sectarian membership during the revolutionary decades is advanced in Crawford, 123.

practical roles in church affairs. In some cases this extended to administration and preaching of the Word: 'It followeth necessarily that one faithful man, yea, or woman either, may as truly and effectually loose and bind, both in heaven and earth, as all the ministers of the world'.<sup>40</sup>

For women and men of the gathered churches the image of the marriage between Christ and his Bride, the Church of true believers, afforded an emblem of the transcendence of their voluntary union over the parochial claims of Anglicanism. This nuptial model of spiritual allegiance also gave women access to wider roles and opportunities. The adolescent Trapnel's initial spiritual awakening occurred when she was granted a vision of 'the marriage covenant ...between God and his spouse', during a sermon by the Independent preacher Hugh Peter on a text of Isaiah (Legacy, 32). But church membership and public prophesying by women seemed also to challenge social order, in that the married worshipper or prophetess who set her duties to her heavenly spouse Christ above those of her earthly husband risked setting Christian marriages at naught. Thomas Parker's 1648 complaint against his sister Elizabeth Avery centred first upon her refusal to attend the 'Ordinances' of public worship, and her consent to join in private prayer with her husband

only to condescend to his infirmities, for you say that you are above Ordinances, above the Word and the Sacraments, yea above the Blood of Christ himself, living as a glorified Saint, and taught immediately by the Spirit....' (Parker, 5)

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<sup>40</sup> The sectarian John Robinson, quoted in Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', in Crisis in Europe 1560-1660, ed. by Trevor Aston, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 317-340 (320).

Such a stance, Parker objected, made her 'higher then Moses and any of the Prophets, above the holy Apostles and Primitive Saints, which all were under Ordinances... higher then Christ himself, who subjected himself to Ordinances while he was upon the Earth' (5).

While on the practical level rights of husbands over wives seemed to be contested by women's active participation in the gathered congregations, so too in the political sphere the pre-eminence of the marital tie was being called into question. Parliamentarians shared with royalists a belief in women's natural inferiority and duty of wifely obedience; however, their backing of Parliament's right to rebel against royal absolutism implied a similar justification of the rights of wives against husbands. The nature of a husband's authority in marriage was examined in a variety of parliamentary pamphlets. Political arguments were advanced by John Milton through his complex and subtle interpretation of marriage: 'He who marries, intends as little to conspire his own ruine, as he that swears Allegiance: and as a whole people is in proportion to an ill Government, so is one man to an ill marriage.' Just as subjects were entitled 'by the sovereign edict of charity' to rebel 'against any authority, Covnant, or Statute' in order to 'save not only their lives, but honest liberties from unworthy bondage, as well may he against any private Covnant... redeem himself from unsupportable disturbances to honest peace, and just contentment...'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce' (London, 1643), in Prose Works, II, 222-356 (229).

The trope of the marital tie was also employed by royalists, but with an emphasis upon the divinely-sanctioned authority of kingship. They argued that just as the marriage contract, once freely entered into, forever bound wife to husband, so similarly were the bonds fixed between a ruler and his subjects. In some past state of nature men might voluntarily have agreed to limit their innate freedoms by founding a monarchy, but once the government was in place the sovereign's powers were immutable. Sir Dudley Digges saw civil government as created by 'a consent and mutual obligation... of [men] not using their natural power but only as the law shall require ...[and] not resisting that body in which the supreme power is placed'. By this submission of private strength, he maintained that the nation was 'secured by the united power of all and the whole kingdom becomes our guard'.<sup>42</sup> Neither disaffection nor violation of duties could alter the terms of the relationship: Henry Ferne expressed his opposition to Parliament's right to judge or rebel against their monarch's actions by citing Christ's dictum against divorce [Matthew 5.32]. Digges, also, pointing out that in 'a contract between Husband and Wife, the violation ...on the man's part doth not bereave him of his dominion over the woman', saw the monarch as enjoying the same privileges, restrained only by God. 'I confesse, a great obligation lyes upon Kings... And if they abuse their power, God's punishment

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<sup>42</sup> Sir Dudley Digges. The Unlawfulness of Subjects Taking up Armes against their Sovereigne. (1643), 3-4; in Shanley, 80.

will be as high as their ingratitude'.<sup>43</sup>

A somewhat more flexible construct of an marital contract between king and people is featured in a prophecy by Elizabeth Poole, a Baptist widow of Abingdon. Testifying before the General Council at Whitehall in January 1649, Poole referred to the king as having betrayed his trust and led his people astray like an errant spouse:

It is true indeed (...I appeal by the gift of God upon me) the King is your father and husband, which you were and are to obey in the Lord, and in no other way, for when he forgot his subordination to divine faithhood and headship, thinking he had begotten you a generation to his own pleasure, and taking you a wife for his own lusts, thereby is the yoke taken from your necks...<sup>44</sup>

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### 3. Orality into Print: Prophecy and Human Agency

Oral performance, whether public or private, is the most difficult aspect of prophecy to retrace historically.

Nonetheless, since direct speech acts featured significantly in radical dissent, and were the means by which individual prophets became celebrated as leaders and teachers, even the

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Ferne, Conscience Satisfied: That there is no warrant for the Armes now taken up by subjects. (Oxford, 1643), 12; and Digges, 112: both in Shanley, 81. Another trope of the relation between king and subjects, the head and body, is discussed by Hilary Hinds in God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Poole, A Vision: Wherein Is Manifested the Disease and Cure of the Kingdom, (London, 1648), 6, cited in Phyllis Mack, Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 78. Mack ascribes the vision of Charles I as husband/head to Poole's first vision. But Ludlow cites A Vision, 1, and the Clarke Papers, 152 and 165-169, to support the claim that Poole's first vision was of Parliament: Ludlow, 'Arise', 203-204.

most rudimentary attempts to reconstitute individual speech acts can help to fill the gaps in our understanding of sectarian discourse.<sup>45</sup> Untutored lay 'mechanick' preachers serving in the 1640s and early 1650s as ministers, Army chaplains, or (as in the case of many women) itinerant preachers in London streets and beyond, claimed divine inspiration as proof of their calling. As compared to a written testimony, spoken prophecy could reach only a limited audience. However, as a performative act it might occur in a variety of public places, and be publicized widely by witnesses. Furthermore, if no outright disorder were caused, the legal restrictions applying to religious meetings could be avoided. The likelihood of performative interference or suppression could be sidestepped, moreover, where oral prophecy was supplemented by published text. This practice, already common in the cases of sermons, speeches, trials, and the like, effectively reinforced the prophet's control over her message.

Licence to prophesy publicly before a ruler or Council was sometimes granted where the encounter was seen as furthering the interests of those in authority. Today we tend to identify prophetesses of this period with radical religious or political aims, yet historically their messages are not so easily pigeonholed. The Baptist Sarah Wight, for instance, was consistently modest and diffident in her calling. In personal terms, her witness was radical in its single-minded subjection

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<sup>45</sup> For example, on charismatic early Quaker discourse, body language, and social [mis]conduct, see Bauman, passim.

of her faith to the most extreme of trials. Trapnel, a more public and political figure, confirmed her Fifth Monarchist message by openly condemning extremist Vennerites, and also Quakers.<sup>46</sup> Poole, while condemning the king's misrule before the Council at Whitehall, strongly opposed his execution, and for good measure expressed her antagonism to the Levellers.<sup>47</sup> If Poole's intent was to gain personal credibility by distancing herself from extremists, the strategy appears to have worked, as Ireton later summoned her for further speech. Her message was that God allowed only the securing of the king's person in order to halt further civil war. Yet the mutually reinforcing metaphors in which it is couched are revealing of prevalent attitudes on relations between husband and wife, the head and body of the state, a ruler and his subjects:

...although this bond [of fatherhood to the country] be broken on his part; you never heard that a wife might put away her husband, as he is the head of her body; but for the Lord's sake suffereth his terror to her flesh, though she be free in the spirit to the Lord; and he being uncapable to act as her husband, she acteth in his stead...<sup>48</sup>

As the nation's erring husband, the king's hand could be restrained 'that he pierce not your bowels with a knife or sword to take your life'. But the sixth commandment prohibited

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<sup>46</sup> Champlin Burrage, 'Anna Trapnel's Prophecies', English Historical Review, 26 (1911), 526-535, notes 4 and 7.

<sup>47</sup> Another prophet was Mary Pope, a London merchant's widow who viewed Charles as guilty of acting to the nation's spiritual detriment: Dorothy P. Ludlow, 'Arise', 202-3. Poole's prophecies are mentioned by Pope in Behold, here is a word (1649), according to Diane Purkiss in 'Gender, Power and the Body: Some Figurations of Femininity in Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women's Writing', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1991), 321, n.1.

<sup>48</sup> This quotation by Poole is in Hinds, 27.

his execution

...vengeance is mine, I will repay it, saith the Lord...stretch not forth the hand against him: For know this...God excuseth not [tyranny], but judgeth; and his judgments are fallen heavy, as you see, upon Charles your Lord.<sup>49</sup>

To gain a sympathetic hearing at this critical point, Poole was no doubt conscious of the need to frame her witness carefully. She could protect herself by thus invoking traditional values in support of the distinction she drew between the Council's power to rule and its right to execute a deposed sovereign. Ireton questioned Poole extensively on the nature of her revelations, and whether a king's death could ever be lawfully obtained.<sup>50</sup>

But despite Poole's caution, this prophetic speech was soon made public, and at least one royalist pamphleteer labelled her a 'monstrous witch full of deceitful craft'.<sup>51</sup> Anti-parliamentarians lost no time in hinting that Poole's pro-monarchist intervention had been a stage-managed affair, enabling Cromwell and his council to pursue their own political ends despite Parliament. By giving the impression that the nation's rulers were carefully considering all the

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<sup>49</sup> Ludlow, 'Arise', 207; see also Fraser, 284.

<sup>50</sup> Ludlow, 'Arise', 207-212. The biblical theme of redeeming sacrifice, employed in by Davies in her Samson prophecies concerning Charles, was now being used to justify his execution: 'blood... defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it' [Numbers 35.33]. On anti-royalist portrayals of Charles as the 'Man of Blood', see Christopher Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution, (London: Penguin, 1993), Ch.15. Conversely, in texts such as Eikon Basilike (1649) royalist propaganda sanctified the king's atoning death as martyrdom. See Merritt Y. Hughes, 'Date, Occasion, and Method of Eikonoclastes', in Prose Works, III, 147-167.

<sup>51</sup> Hinds, 156; see also Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England 1641-1660, ed. by Joad Raymond (Gloucestershire: The Windrush Press, 1993), 125-126.

options, such interviews could have served to buy time for a nascent pro-regicide policy.

The king's execution prompted a cascade of printed laments, elegies, memorials, epitaphs and panegyrics. Most controversial were probably the 'Eikon' works, culminating in Milton's *Eikonoclastes*, which expose the polarities of kingship portrayal.<sup>52</sup> These outpourings could be seen historically as propagandized promotion of both royalist and regicide positions. Yet they might indicate also an undercurrent of popular ambivalence. Of the common people who had suffered in the wars, many undoubtedly blamed Charles for weakness, malignancy and crimes against his kingdom. Yet even these might still have in some measure held the royal person as sacred; perhaps some also sensed a future rebounding of blood-guilt upon regicides and nation alike. Poole and a sister-prophet Mary Pope were among those who balanced Charles's flaws as king with what Ludlow terms 'his necessary and traditional function in English psychology'.<sup>53</sup>

Oral and printed prophecies by Eleanor Davies extend from 1625 to her death in 1652, and the background and details of her life are more fully traceable today than those of other contemporary prophetesses. Davies's private struggles are interwoven with her prophecies: her pursuit of properties taken from her on the death of her first husband John Davies features alongside

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<sup>52</sup> The character of some of these works can be guessed from the tone of a surviving example, the anonymous pamphlet *The Life and Death of King Charles the Martyr, Parallel'd with our Saviour in all his Sufferings*. (London, 1649). The text of *Eikonoclastes* appears in *Prose Works*, III, 335-601. Chapters 8 and 7 of the same volume give the nature and background of this work by Milton.

<sup>53</sup> Ludlow, 'Arise', 210.

the privations of her imprisonment and the burning of her books by Laud. On both counts her fortunes are joined with the larger political upheavals of the 1630s and 1640s.

After her call to prophecy in a vision in 1625, the apparent genuineness of many of her predictions was sometimes detrimental to more friendly support.<sup>54</sup> On Charles I's accession, Davies had hailed him anagrammatically as AL TRUTHS CESAR in her earliest published prophecy Warning to the Dragon (1625). But she soon became disillusioned with the new monarch, his queen's Catholicism giving major cause for concern.<sup>55</sup> After her 1627 portent of Buckingham's death was fulfilled, Davies gradually lost favour with the king and influential members of the court. In December 1630 she was summoned to appear before the Privy Council.<sup>56</sup> Davies's unpopularity at court was probably augmented by her forceful

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<sup>54</sup> Davies's powers of foresight were not always welcome. In 1626, three days after she had foretold his end, her first husband John Davies died suddenly. In March 1629 her portent that a prematurely-born royal son 'should go to Christning and Burying in a day' also proved correct. Both instances are recorded in Davies, The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal ([London], 1646), 15, 18, and 19. Davies's refusal to attend the christening of Lady Berkshire's son was accompanied by a similarly accurate forecast of that infant's death (Her appeal (1646), 30-31). But probably she was best known for her 1627 prediction of the assassination the following year of the king's favourite, George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. In The Revelation Interpreted ([London], 1646) she depicts him as a beast of the dragon of Antichrist (7-8). See also E. Cope, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Henrietta Maria was portrayed as a Delilah, robbing the Samson-figure Charles of his strength, in Davies's Samsons Legacie ([London], 1643), 4-5. Davies later cast her as Jezebel, in The Restitution of Prophecy, ([London], 1651) 9-10.

<sup>56</sup> The cause remains unclear. But her brother Mervin, Baron Audeley and Earl of Castlehaven, was then confined in the Tower on charges of sodomy and rape. He was tried and executed soon afterward. The case was well-publicized in news sheets, and Prynne cited it in Histrion Mastix (1633) as 'a late example of a memorable act of justice on an English Peere'. See the published account of trial, The Arraignment and Conviction of Mervin Lord Audeley, Earle of Castlehaven (London, 1642); and also E. Cope, 53-56. Davies defended her late brother in later prophecies such as The Crying Charge. Ezekiel 22. ([London], 1649); and Restitution (1651), 8-9. Secondary works on the association of the Castlehaven scandal with the performance at Ludlow of Milton's Comus are listed in E. Cope, 55, n.125.

temperament and the constant litigation she pursued over property entitlements after her second marriage in 1627. But her increasing isolation contrasts markedly with the apparently more benevolent congregational support given to many sectarian prophetesses:

Unlike the religious communities...courtiers focused their attention upon obtaining material benefits for themselves from their monarch. Their lives depended upon royal favor, and they were accustomed to a system by which they expected some return for interceding on behalf of a client. Lady Eleanor had little to offer except prophecy.<sup>57</sup>

Davies's conflicts with her two husbands and the family of her son-in-law testify to her continuing personal vulnerability to patriarchal forms of control and suppression. Even a highly-born woman of strong character, if she wished to proclaim what she saw as God's commands, needed to be astute in exploiting every possible advantage. From 1633 to 1649, Davies's virulent campaign against Laud and Charles I for pursuing policies seen by her as disobedient to God's will frequently brought her into conflict with political, ecclesiastical, and legal authorities.

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#### 4. The Prophetic Text: Commercial Pressures and Radical Sectarianism

In the decade following the 1641 collapse of censorship the popular press supplied a central and accessible medium for the spread of ideas, a forum in which topics of current interest,

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<sup>57</sup> E. Cope, 53.

including anti-Laudian and anti-Catholic millenarianism, could be publicly debated among virtually all social ranks.<sup>58</sup> This unregulated and potentially radical public arena affected preaching and prophesying women in a number of ways. Almost every sectarian prophetess studied here gained access to print and a ready readership through promotion by sympathetic groups of congregational or political interests. The harmful consequences where such support was lacking can be seen in the case of Elinor Channel. This young Anglican mother from Cranley became convinced that God had entrusted her with a spiritual warning to the new Protector to cease from further bloodshed. On her husband's refusal to let her go, she suffered recurrent attacks of dumbness which finally gained his consent. On her arrival at court, however, Channel lacked the money necessary to procure the chance of a hearing. Persuaded to entrust her message to Arise Evans, a Welsh tailor and pamphleteer, the prophetess was afterwards turned out to fend for herself in the thick of London. Two months later she was seen standing 'mute for a long while' in Fleet Street, and was forcibly seized by the beadles and committed to Bridewell. On her release, she was left to wander destitute in the streets 'among the wanton mad crew, who flocked about her and abused her...what is become of her since, God knows, we hear nothing more of her'. Evans subsequently published a

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<sup>58</sup> In the 1640s and 1650s attempts to limit the dissemination and debate of ideas never approached the degree of legal restraint enforced under the early Stuarts. The 22,000 pamphlets, tracts, and broadsides which survive from these decades are but a fraction of the original press output. Pamphlet production on every subject peaked in the 1640s, but averaged three a day over two decades. Christopher Small, The Printed Word: An Instrument of Popularity, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982), 23-25; and Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1991), 149.

version of Channel's testimony in promotion of his own royalist agenda.<sup>59</sup>

The style and format of seventeenth-century prophetic texts might at first seem abstruse and unfocused to the modern reader. But most of such works feature evidence of material factors of their production: authorial expression, accreditation, or even the design or arrangement of the text, attest to the nature and degree of communal support, the access to publishing agencies, the magnitude of distribution, the audience targeted. Further, the details of a work's reception can be informative as to the degree of its imputed political subversiveness. Women's prophecies of this period seem to have attracted a wide contemporary readership, sometimes running to several editions. The huge publicity generated by Anna Trapnel's early works The Cry of a Stone and Strange and Wonderful News from Whitehall (1654) possibly shielded her from immediate reprisals for her Whitehall prophecies against Cromwell. But upon her well-publicized journey to spread her Fifth Monarchist message into Cornwall, the civil authorities finally took action, arresting and eventually imprisoning her. In similar fashion, the lengthy incarceration, book-burnings, and heavy fine (never paid) meted out to Eleanor Davies for her anti-Laudian prophecies of 1633, suggest that the government viewed her texts as a

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<sup>59</sup> Elinor Channel, A Message from God [By a Dumb woman]. ([London]: Arise Evans, 1654). The above quotes are from pages 5-7. This text is fully reprinted in Hinds, 219-221, along with a commentary (72-74).

serious threat to public order.<sup>60</sup>

The move from orality into print often involved the reshaping of a prophet's message into a different, perhaps more radical, channel. Poole, for example, published her prophecies only when the authorities refused to heed them further. Her Alarum of war (1649) lists no individual bookseller, but its selling point, Pope's Head Alley, is closely associated with Parliamentary and radical sectarian publications. Poole had been expelled from her Baptist congregation for prophesying to Cromwell, and the work is prefaced by a strong protest against this.<sup>61</sup>

The process by which prophetic performance was constructed into printed text is peculiarly well-illustrated in the example of Sarah Wight. This highly-strung fifteen-year-old daughter of a Puritan gentry widow had already suffered years of depressive illness. Strong convictions of guilt and visions of hell had driven her to frequent attempts to end her life. On 27 March 1647 the latest of these self-destructive episodes had resulted in severe head injuries. She began to refuse food, and from then until 19 May (fifty-three days) she lay with closed eyes, eating nothing and drinking small amounts of water, and part of the time without sight or hearing. From 10

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<sup>60</sup> The efficacy of prophecies as political propaganda in the 1640s is attested to in Harry Rusche, 'Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651', English Historical Review, 84 (1969), 752-770. Information and practical suggestions for modern readers approaching these 'difficult' texts, are given in Biographical Dictionary, 243-244 and 250-263.

<sup>61</sup> See Mack, 79; and Maureen Bell, 'Hannah Allen and the Development of a Puritan Publishing Business, 1646-51', Publishing History, 26 (1989), 5-66 (7). Bell suggests (n.10) that this might have been the same 'Elizabeth Poole' who reportedly housed a secret press for the radical printer Elizabeth Calvert after her husband's death in the 1660s. Given Poole's earlier moderate stance toward the king such a link would imply a significant radicalization of her political views in the interim.

April, however, she began to 'speak' of what God was imparting to her spiritually. Wight's plight, and its published account by her minister Henry Jessey, soon caused a sensation. Her religious utterances, heard or recorded, became an inspiration to many who were tormented by guilt and spiritual alienation. During her six-week fast at a private house in London, she was visited by sectarians of various persuasions, dissenting ministers, radical publishers, and members of the establishment, and even the nobility. The majority of the visitors recorded as actively seeking guidance and inspiration (as distinct from the merely curious) were female: girls suffering depression, and women afflicted by crises ranging from loss of faith to bereavement or unwanted pregnancy.<sup>62</sup> Among the visitors to Wight was Anna Trapnel, the orphaned daughter of a London shipwright and a 'godly' mother, who was then a Baptist aged about twenty-five. She may also have been one of the anonymous women whose consultation afterwards formed part of Jessey's record of the event. Was Wight's example a trigger for her own subsequent experiences? Jessey records having visited 'H.T.' [Hannah/Anna Trapnel], who was reported to have undergone a concurrent but shorter episode of trance and starvation, from 9 to 16 June 1647, and compares the conditions and various expressions exhibited by the two

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<sup>62</sup> Despite the striking features of Wight's experience, occasions of public prophecy, preaching, or 'miracles' were not uncommon, and provided venues for sectarian women to meet and share publicly the effects of political and religious events. Moreover, a figure such as Wight, over whose mind and body a public battle was apparently being waged between God and Satan, offered a living illustration of divine intervention. See Barbara Ritter Dailey, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London', *Church History*, 55 (1986), 438-455. The wide interest among sectarian congregations in accounts of such inward battles and conversions was an incentive for publication of these spiritual narratives.

women.<sup>63</sup>

One of the most singular aspects of Wight's spiritual ordeal is the mutual reinforcement between prophetic performance and the developing printed text. As the historical fast (a lengthy local event) unfolded before many witnesses, it was simultaneously being reconstructed by Jessey into ~~published narrative~~ tracts, thereby attracting further visitors to Wight's bedside. It had long been common for sectarian ministers to record the past spiritual trials of members of their congregations.<sup>64</sup> Jessey was atypical in recording Wight's sufferings from the outset. He rarely left her chamber, and carefully noted her utterances as they emerged, while the faster herself remained seemingly oblivious of any listeners. Jessey's second preface 'To the Christian Reader' states clearly that the first part of the account was printed in the expectation of the girl's imminent death. 'Divers Christian friends', hearing of Wight's experiences, had urged Jessey to publish the story, 'both for better supply to themselves, and to many others whom the Lord might be pleased to support, refresh, and enrich thereby'. But at this point the record was scarcely formed: 'no more was gathered, then what might be contained in two sheets or three. The Earthly Vessel of conveyance being then most likely to return to Earth, within a few days'. Jessey therefore padded out the resulting text with additional recollected testimonies from

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<sup>63</sup> Jessey, 139, 43. Trapnel's own account suggests that she was then living with a Mrs Harlowe, the daughter of a minister's widow (Report, 50).

<sup>64</sup> Confession narratives of New England and England are the subject of Patricia Caldwell's *The Puritan Conversion Narrative* (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

her mother and maid. In the ebb and flow of subsequent events further contingencies were resorted to:

Thus was this put to the Press, and...one day after another was occasion of enlarging it, by Conferences, &c. and of her still drawing neerer death, in outward appearance, till June 11. And before June 11, and June 25.1647...a good part thereof was printed.<sup>65</sup>

In the sequence of events surrounding Wight herself, 19 May marked a crisis in her physical state. The work's first entry in the Stationers' Register on 20 May suggests that Jessey and Henry Overton sought to go into print then because her death seemed imminent. But the latest date mentioned in the first edition of the printed narrative itself is 16 July, indicating that the final publication was postponed for at least two months.<sup>66</sup>

The manoeuvres by which Sarah Wight's extraordinary trials were turned into saleable print show the extensive efforts to which a supportive group might be prepared to go in bringing divinely-inspired testimonies to public attention. Wight herself, while agreeing to face-to-face consultations during her fast, was always self-deprecating and apparently gave no active support to the publication of her words. For seventeenth-century prophesying women, imbued with a sense of their social and personal inferiority, there existed an implicit tension between identity and sublimation. Since the prophet was undeniably a 'vessel' or conduit for divine

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<sup>65</sup> Jessey, second Preface, 'To the Christian Reader'.

<sup>66</sup> The improvisational nature of Jessey's publication arrangements is highlighted in Bell, 'Hannah Allen', 17-18. The same source furnishes my information on dates (17), as I currently lack access to a first edition copy of Exceeding Riches.

revelation, the self was more or less merged into a greater being. Yet, if the prophecies were to be published and spread abroad, some form of personal 'authorizational' identity was needed, backed by group affiliation or kinship. Shared political allegiances between congregations and individual booksellers meant that the texts of women prophets were often marketed by the bookselling networks already associated with the ministers or mentors who helped it into print.<sup>67</sup> Where a woman prophet emerged publicly on behalf of an established or dissenting political interest (in a linkage of congregation, dissenting leader(s) and bookseller), her witness gained in value relative to its capacity to endorse and publicize that cause. Trapnel and Wight are linked by intervention of the Independent/ Baptist minister Henry Jessey, who took a close interest in both prophets. Jessey had been leader of the Henry Jacob Independent congregation in Southwark since 1637, and with Walter Cradock and William Wroth had co-founded an Independent congregation in south Wales. While remaining an Independent and a pacifist, reconciled to the Protectorate regime, Jessey sympathized with some Fifth Monarchist aims, and retained close links with other General and Particular

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<sup>67</sup> Dissenting ministers's promotion of women prophets seems often to have been an extension of their publication of private testimonies by members of their congregations. Elizabeth Avery's autobiographical account was related by the Independent/Fifth Monarchist minister John Rogers in Ohel (1653); while the Baptist/Fifth Monarchist preacher John Simpson played a major role in Trapnel's spiritual development. She records her 1642 conversion under his preaching (Legacy, 8-9), and her continued 'fellowship with the Church meeting at All-hallows, (whereof Mr. John Simpson is a Member) for...about four years; I am well known to him and that whole Society...' (Cry, 3). For a modern view of seventeenth-century male testatorship as signalling a taking-control or 'ownership' of an otherwise unauthorized female text, see Hinds, 58-60.

Baptist congregations.<sup>68</sup> At Allhallows the Great in Thames Street, a centre of radical millenarian preaching during the Commonwealth, he and Cradock shared a lectureship with the future Fifth Monarchist Christopher Feake. The pastor of Allhallows, John Simpson, also held a lectureship at St. Botolph's in Aldgate.

The personal relationships between these men were linked with the cluster of radical texts published by the Allen/Chapman bookselling firm.<sup>69</sup> The first 1647 edition of Jessey's Exceeding Riches was published by Henry Overton and Hannah Allen, of Pope's Head Alley, off Lombard Street. Allen's shop was within the parish of St Stephen's of Coleman Street. Known for religious Independency and anti-royalism, this parish also supported various Baptist and other separatist congregations, and later became a major Fifth Monarchist venue.<sup>70</sup> Through these bookselling links Jessey's tie with Cradock was reinforced and extended to such other prominent religious writers as Menasseh ben Israel, the radical Welsh divine Vavasour Powell, and John Robotham, in associations that continued into the 1650s.

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<sup>68</sup> DNE; BDBR. On Jessey's promotion of Jewish readmission to England, see Ernestine G.E. van der Wall, 'A Philo-Semitic Millenarian on the Reconciliation of Jews and Christians: Henry Jessey and his "The Glory and Salvation of Jehudah and Israel" (1650)' in Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews, ed. by David S. Katz and Jonathan I. Israel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 163-166.

<sup>69</sup> See Bell, 'Hannah', 14; also Leona Rostenberg, 'Sectarianism & Revolt: Livewell Chapman, Publisher to the Fifth Monarchy', Literary, Political, Scientific, Religious & Legal Publishing, Printing & Bookselling in England, 1551-1700: Twelve Studies, 2 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1965), I, 203-236

<sup>70</sup> Overton, who published many Independent books and pamphlets in the 1640s, acted as Jessey's postal address from the early 1630s: Murray Tolmie, The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 115. See also Bell, 'Hannah', 6.

But can such facts confirm the existence of any real political agenda behind a given prophet's actual published testimony? The historical Sarah Wight is judged by one modern critic to have 'adroitly evaded theological entrapment by examining ministers' and offered no special claims to any prophetic or political message, despite the public sensation caused by her prolonged fast.<sup>71</sup> Yet evidence does suggest that (in addition to its spiritual aims) the publication of Wight's case in The Exceeding Riches, as a joint venture between Jessey, the printer Matthew Simmons, and the booksellers Henry Overton and Hannah Allen, represented a promotion of sectional interests. In the 1640s Jessey's Southwark church had suffered a series of divisions due to political pressures and internal disagreements over issues then dividing the General and the Particular Baptists. The publication of Exceeding Riches, Jessey's first venture into print, may well have been an attempt to encourage a climate of unity and cohesiveness in what was still essentially an 'open' congregation. Among the seventeen ministers listed as visitors to Wight in 1647 were the sectarian leaders Cradock, Simpson, Thomas Goodwin, and Nicholas Lockyer. Some seventy of the most eminent visitors were also named, ranging from Independents and radical dissenters like the Particular Baptist minister and army chaplain Captain Edward Harrison (later to play a major role in mustering army support for the Fifth Monarchy movement), the future regicides Hugh Peters and Sir Richard Saltonstall,

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<sup>71</sup> Dorothy Ludlow, 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations', in Triumph over Silence, ed. by Richard L. Greaves (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 93-124 (102).

Welsh Baptists and Leveller sympathizers, to Presbyterians with Independent or Baptist links, such as the city councilman and former Lord Mayor Sir John Wollaston. At a time when London's political climate was contentious and fragmented, the social and ideological diversity of gathered visitors to the Wight's bedside suggests that amid sectarian rivalries there remained some hope of cooperative effort. Jessey himself was ardently seeking to promote this mutuality to combat the polarities and divisiveness that were eventually to weaken and defeat the republican movement.<sup>72</sup> His millenarianism, his interests in 'signs' and portents, his latitudinarian type of Independency, and his geographical proximity to Fifth Monarchist meeting places in the area of Coleman Street, kept him subject to official surveillance. His sharing of a bookselling firm with Cradock and Powell was part of the close affiliation of radical millenarian Independents and Baptists that stretched from the middle 1640s to the early 1650s, a period when their interests merged and their evangelical aims seemed realizable. The alliance broke down when Powell and Feake combined in an attempt to undermine Cromwell's Protectorship, in league with the Fifth Monarchists, and

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<sup>72</sup> That Exceeding Riches was aimed at advancing this aim of unity is argued in Dailey, 452-454. Jessey's comprehensive list of Wight's visitors reveals interconnections between various radical sects and their influential supporters that apparently continued into the next decade. Lady Vermuyden and Lady Darcy attended both Wight's bedside in 1647 and Trapnel's in 1654 (see below, II.5); the latter was closely associated with early Quakers in London in 1655. Also present with Lady Darcy at Trapnel's Whitehall fast were Colonel West, a friend of Judge Fell who protected George Fox at the Lancaster assizes, and Colonel William Sydenham, who testified for James Nayler at his trial in 1656 (below VI.2). These links are highlighted in Geoffrey Nuttall, 'James Nayler: A Fresh Approach', JFHS, Supp. 26 (1954), 2-20 (11-13).

championed by Anna Trapnel.<sup>73</sup>

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## 5. A 'Legacy of experiences'? The Politicization of Female Prophecy

In the 1650s the continuing association between the promoters of radical sectarian prophecy and the printers and booksellers enabled an unprecedentedly wide distribution of religious and polemical literature through the kingdom. Giles Calvert, Thomas Simmons, and Thomas Brewster were among the leading booksellers who prospered under the Protectorate. But they also maintained sympathetic links with Quakers and other religious sects, and by their political influence were able to promote the interests of these groups.<sup>74</sup> From the late 1640s through the 1650s Calvert, Simmons and Brewster collectively accounted for the publication of most of the women's prophetic texts discussed in this study. This includes the works of the Fifth Monarchists Avery and Trapnel, numerous texts by Quaker prophetesses such as Dorothy White, Priscilla Cotton, and Margaret Fell, and even a posthumous second edition of Eleanor Davies's The Blasphemous charge, originally published in 1649.

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<sup>73</sup> Bell, 'Hannah Allen', 23. Jessey was, however, among those who signed the 1654 joint manifesto by the Fifth Monarchists accusing Cromwell of joining with Antichrist: Tolmie, 105.

<sup>74</sup> On the expansion and consolidation of book production in the 1650s see Henry Plomer, A Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers...from 1641-1667, (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1907), xix-xx. This work gives information on Brewster, Calvert, and Simmons under their respective surnames. On Calvert, see also BDBR, and Bell, 'Elizabeth Calvert', 8-9.

Trapnel's prophecies first came to public notice at the height of the violent Fifth Monarchist reaction to Cromwell's instalment as Protector on 16 December 1653. On the eve of the event, as she later related, Trapnel saw a vision of Cromwell in the image of a bull amid a large herd of cattle:

...and on a sudden there was a great shout of those that followed him, he being singled out alone...and he looking back, they bowed themselves unto him...and shewed much joy that he was become their Supream.

(Trapnel, Newes, 5)

In the dream Trapnel herself, on behalf of the Saints, was run at by the herd, but was then saved by the intercession of Christ. The cattle, meanwhile, were scattered, their horns broken, and fell into their graves. Four days later Vavasor Powell, now a fervent Fifth Monarchist, was arrested after making public speeches at Christ Church and Blackfriars against the new Protector. His remarks (that Cromwell's government could be only temporary due to Christ's imminent coming, and that 'a small matter should fetch him down with little noise') earned him a summons to Whitehall.<sup>75</sup> The detention was short, but his inquisition by the Council of State provided a dramatic backdrop for the public emergence of Anna Trapnel's prophetic visions concerning Cromwell and the coming kingdom of the Saints.

Trapnel was with others in a Whitehall antechamber awaiting Powell's return. As he emerged and made ready to leave, Trapnel was suddenly 'seized by the Lord' and 'carried forth in a Spirit of Prayer and singing from noon till night'

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<sup>75</sup> CSPD, 1653-1654, 374 (20 December 1653).

(Newes, 3). That evening she took to her bed at a lodging house near Whitehall Palace and remained there for the next twelve days; for the first five she refused all food or drink, and subsequently she accepted only scraps of toast dipped in small beer, sometimes only moistening her mouth. Through all, prophetic verses streamed from her day and night, sometimes for hours at a stretch as she lay with closed eyes.

As with Sarah Wight seven years earlier, the news of these events quickly spread, and hundreds flocked to see the Whitehall prophetess. Again (as with Wight) important visitors are named: 'Colonel Sidenham, a member of the Council, Colonel West, Mr. Chittwood, Colonel Bennet, with his wife, Colonel Bingham, Captain Langdon, Members of the late Parliament; ...Captain Bawtrey, Mr. Lee, Mr. Feak the Minister, Lady Darcy, and Lady Vermuden, with many more...'.<sup>76</sup> The insertion of these local luminaries as witnesses to her words relating to visions of horns, oaks, and cattle, is intended to show that Trapnel's prophecies were taken seriously by the establishment. Her publications were funded by the Fifth Monarchists, and their effectiveness as propaganda is palpable even at a distance of over three centuries. John Simpson (under whose preaching she had been converted in 1642) was prominent in the movement, and from 1650 she was a member of his congregation at St. Botolph's. Simpson had turned against Cromwell after the fall of the Barebones Parliament, and was among the ministers arrested and imprisoned the following

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<sup>76</sup> Trapnel, Cry, 2; a shorter list appears in Newes, 4. On connections of some of these visitors with Wight's fast, see above, II.4, n.72.

month for publicly predicting from the pulpit at Allhallows Cromwell's fall from power within six months.<sup>77</sup> The journalist Marchamont Nedham, in a private report to Cromwell, linked the frequent denunciations of his regime at Allhallows with the publicity attached to Trapnel herself. 'This meeting [at Allhallows] much diminishes your reputation among foreigners, who expect changes, because they are proclaimed from the pulpit, and great things are made of it, though it is but a confluence of silly wretches'. He goes on to warn of 'a two-fold design' concerning 'the prophetess Hannah [Trapnel], who played her part lately at Whitehall'. The first objective was 'to print her discourses and hymns, which are desperate against your person, family, children, friends, and the government'; the second was 'to send her all over England, to proclaim them viva voce'. Nedham remarked that she had many visitors, and 'does a world of mischief' because 'the vulgar dote on vain prophecies'.<sup>78</sup>

While Trapnel condemned the Vennerite wish to use force in helping to usher in the New Jerusalem, her pronouncements had from the beginning a radical and interventionist flavour. As early as November 1648, after a nine-day fast, she claimed to have seen a vision of a great host of men, with Cromwell as a latter-day Gideon defeating the enemy at the gates of the city: this was at the very time when the Army was marching on London (Cry, 5). She predicted the Cromwellian victory at Dunbar six weeks before it happened, and had several visions

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<sup>77</sup> BDBR.

<sup>78</sup> CSPD, 1652-1654, 293 (7 Feb. 1654).

about Parliament, including a portent in September of its future dismissal by Cromwell. With the latter's assumption of the Protectorship, to the detriment of Fifth Monarchist interests, her prophecies seemed to offer encouragement to those seeking to subvert the new regime. She told of an earlier prescience 'that he [Cromwell] was laid aside, ...the Lord having finished the greatest business that he would employ him in' (Cry, 10).<sup>79</sup> The newsheets were not slow to respond. While Nedham's journalistic account of April 1653 sought to dismiss her outpourings as 'Non-sensical', earlier accounts tended to lionize. The Grand Politique Post hailed her as 'a Virgin Prophetess come to White-hall, who has declared great and wonderful things touching this present government', and Severall Proceeding of State Affaires, described her actions, situation, and message at some length.<sup>80</sup>

Like her predecessor Wight, Trapnel decried any notion of seeking God outside the boundaries of her congregation. Yet in 1654 alone she authored four separate publications. The Whitehall phenomenon was publicized in Cry and more briefly in Newes. The sixty-four paged A Legacy for Saints was an expansion of her earlier writings together with added testimonials and letters; finally, Report and plea described her trip to Cornwall, her trial, and imprisonment at

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<sup>79</sup> This vision was corroborated by an eyewitness, Colonel Bingham, who remarked 'that he was glad of that Prophetie of their [Parliament's] breaking up, for he thought little good would be done by them' (Cry, 11).

<sup>80</sup> Nedham, Mercurious Politicus, 201, 13-20 April 1654; The Grand Politique Post, 127, 10-17 January 1653/4; and Severall Proceedings of State Affaires, 225, 12-19 January 1653/4: all in Making the News, 162-167.

Bridewell. Close consideration of the events surrounding the publication of these texts reveals a considerable investment on the part of certain radical political and religious interests.<sup>81</sup> The bookseller who published Trapnel's Legacy (and the later Report and plea), was Thomas Brewster, who disseminated Fifth Monarchist literature in partnership with Giles Calvert and Livewell Chapman, the latter having succeeded by marriage to Hannah Allen's bookselling business.<sup>82</sup> As Legacy went to press, Trapnel was a prisoner at Bridewell, notorious for its association with prostitutes. The choice of prison represented an attempt by the authorities to discredit the prophetess. To neutralize any shameful connotations arising from this detention, her backers sought to strengthen her credibility with both the Allhallows congregation and the wider public. Prominent in Legacy are testimonials by ministers, including John Simpson, on the genuineness of Trapnel's spiritual calling. Care is taken to distance her from 'Ranters, profane Notionists...we have not onely her word, but her practice with us, which doth best express any ones principle' (A3').

The titles of these 1654 publications signal a kind of developmental framework: 'cry' and 'news' acquire greater permanence as the 'legacy' and 'report' that Trapnel clearly

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<sup>81</sup> On the Fifth Monarchy movement's political aims to prepare for the founding of Christ's kingdom, see Tolmie, 85-119; the fall of Barebones and other events of 1653-54 are outlined in Elaine Hobby's Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1648-88, (London: Virago, 1988), 31-32. Hobby's assumption that Newes was Trapnel's first publication appears mistaken, however. Cry was published in January 1653/4. The title page of Newes is dated 1654, and Thomason purchased it on 11 March, three weeks after he bought Cry; moreover, Newes is a condensation of the former work.

<sup>82</sup> Bell, 'Hannah Allen', 41; Plomer, 32.

wishes to have kept and handed down within the community of Saints.

...it may be we are found in the Isle of Pathmos, our bodies...amongst the Babylonians, yea, and our spirits too, our communion taken away, but not our union; no doubting or questioning concerning that, though there may be much dissertation and darkness...I shall tell you God willing, he giving me life to accomplish my desire, which is to leave the Saints a Legacy of experiences, that they may read, not my works, but the spirits works, and so admire him who is most worthy, when I am gone hence, and shall be no more seen. (Legacy, 12)

Both Trapnel and Wight came originally from Independent Baptist congregations. Each achieved widespread fame in her time, but the production of their prophetic texts took very different courses. Trapnel courted the limelight, publishing in her own name in support of the religious and political aims of the Fifth Monarchists. Wight, by contrast, sought always to avoid publicity. The second text associated with her was a private letter published without her consent in 1656. Moreover, Jessey's account of her sufferings and deliverance was his first venture into print, yet Exceeding Riches was a religious and commercial success, running to many editions down the centuries.<sup>83</sup> More recently feminist scholars have led efforts to enhance our knowledge of these and other preaching and prophesying women of this period. Readily available printed editions of their texts remain scarce, however. Without these, all such efforts are likely to be in vain.

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<sup>83</sup> A transcript of the [Stationers'] registers... 1640-1708..., 3 vols. (London 1913-14), I, 271; and Tolmie, 115. A second impression was printed that year and two more in 1648. In 1652 a sixth edition was published by Henry Cripps, Lodowicke Lloyd and Livewell Chapman; further editions in Jessey's name followed in 1658 and 1666. Bell, 'Hannah', 14-18.

### Chapter III. WORD AND MEANING: LANGUAGE AND WOMEN'S PROPHECY

#### 1. Seventeenth-Century Language Reform

Finally...false appearances...are imposed upon us by words, which are framed and applied according to the conceit and capacities of the vulgar sort: and although we think we govern our words, and prescribe it well logendum ut vulgus sentiendum ut sapientes; yet certain it is that words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgement. So...it is...necessary, in all controversies and disputations, to imitate the wisdom of the mathematicians, in setting down in the very beginning the definitions of our words and terms, that others may know...whether they concur with us or no.

(Francis Bacon)<sup>1</sup>

From the latter years of Elizabeth's reign to the 1630s, national and religious identities were conjoined by the English language. Such a development could claim ancient precedents. In early biblical texts language was portrayed as both the God-given root of knowledge and a sign of the supremacy of a chosen people over enemy nations of infidels. Egypt's eventual defeat by the tribe of Judah, for instance, was prophesied by Isaiah in terms of language: 'In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts: one shall be called, The city of destruction' [19.18]. In the Genesis account humanity's loss of the primal language given by God in Eden is attributed to the sinful presumption of Adam's descendents, whose collective attempt to build a tower reaching to heaven

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<sup>1</sup> From Of the Advancement of Learning, ed. by William Aldis Wright, 5th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926 [1868]), [Book Two, XIV.11] 163.

was thwarted only when God imposed a diversity of tongues upon the people, thereby preventing any further understanding and cooperation between them [Genesis 11.1-9]. In contrast to the confusion of 'Babel', the term 'language of Canaan' became for seventeenth-century sectarians and reformers a biblical shorthand term for the lost Adamic language of unity and understanding, both of God and between nations. In The Pilgrim's Progress, Christian and Faithful, who 'naturally spoke the Language of Canaan', provoked scorn and derision among the inhabitants of Vanity Fair: 'they that kept the fair, were the men of this World: so that from one end of the fair to the other, they seemed Barbarians each to the other'.<sup>2</sup>

But notions of a nation and an established Church unified by a common language of Scripture, prayer book, and liturgy were coming under strain from political pressures and increasing factionalism. In the early Stuart reigns differences of opinion emerged on the appropriate language for the conveying of divine truth. There was a felt need to 'cleanse' the language of the pulpit, to reject the rhetorical skills of the university-trained cleric with a simpler, direct and non-scholarly speech more readily accessible to the 'ordinary' believer in the pew. The question of human art versus the 'plain' speech whose persuasive powers derive solely from God features in the religious poems and prose of John Donne. His Expostulation 19 from Meditations argues that

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<sup>2</sup> John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, ed. by G. Cruikshank, (London: Henry Milford, Oxford University Press, reprinted 1945), 111.

the deity, as the source of language, uses its eloquence to confound falsehood.

My God, my God, Thou art a direct God, may I not say, a literall God, a God that wouldst bee understood literally, and according to the plaine sense of all that thou saiest? But thou art also...a figurative, a metaphoricall God too: A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, ...Neither art thou thus a figurative, a Metaphoricall God, in thy word only, but in thy workes too. The stile of the thy works, the phrase of thine Actions, is Metaphoricall.<sup>3</sup>

Observing that the 'institution of the whole worship' under the law of the Old Testament 'was a continuall Allegory', he goes on to state that what began in the time of the prophets continued into the New Testament, as God's dealings with humanity were revealed through his Son: 'How often...doth thy Sonne call himselfe a way, and a light, and a gate, and a Vine, and bread, than the Sonne of God, or of Man'?<sup>4</sup>

The religious impetus for the reform of language into a pure and plain style reached a peak during the middle decades of the century.<sup>5</sup> For strict Puritans and sectaries the cornerstone for this initiative was to be found in Old and New Testament texts. In Zephaniah 3.9 was prophesied the coming of a 'pure language' by which all God's people might unite in his service; in II Corinthians 3.12 Paul advocates 'great

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<sup>3</sup> John Donne, 'Expostulation 19' from Meditations, in Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, ed. by Anthony Raspa, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 99-103 (99-100).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The ways in which ideological disputes became represented as contentions over the use of language are discussed in Sharon Achinstein, 'The Politics of Babel in the English Revolution', in Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution, ed. by James Holstun, Prose Studies, 14, (Dec 1991), 14-44. A more general background is given in Harold Fisch, 'The Puritans and the Reform of Prose-Style', ELH, 19, 4 (1952), 229-248.

plainness of speech' in witnessing to divine glory, and I Corinthians 2.1-2,4 explicitly disavows the use of 'enticing words of man's wisdom' in declaring the testimony of God. The influence of the Puritan drive for 'plainness' of speech features strongly in such works as the poems of the Anglican divine George Herbert's The Temple. The poet seeks to reject his rational artistry of 'sweet phrases, lovely metaphors', judging that the ornamentation of 'Lovely enchanting language, sugar cane,/ Honey of roses' will not please God half so well as the 'bleak paleness' of 'Thou art still my God'.<sup>6</sup>

As the theological ferment, exhortations and debates continued through the 1640s and 1650s, religious writings made up a large portion of the expanding numbers of printed works catering for an increasingly influential and literate bourgeois readership. Sermons, in particular, were a significant part of the drive for a new 'plain' prose tradition, in reaction to the more 'decorated' styles based on classical precedents. In a residual Protestant sectarian version of the ars moriendi tradition, deathbed testimonies before assembled witnesses were published as unique manifestations of God's grace. The widely publicized seven-week fast of Sarah Wight in 1647 was first intended as such an attestation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From 'The Forerunners'. Herbert's 'Jordan I', which begins with the line 'Who says that fictions only and false hair/ Become a verse?' is perhaps the best-known of his lyrics on linguistic 'plainness', but see also 'Jordan II'. George Herbert and Henry Vaughan ed. by Louis Martz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 160-161; 48-49; and 90 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> See above, II.4, and below, IV.1-2. Deathbed testimonies sometimes appeared in place of the conventional funeral sermon. The example is given of the Kent minister John Kayes, whose dying speeches were published by John Saltmarsh in A Voice from Heaven (1644): Perfection, 330-331.

The religious quest for a more experientially-based form of spiritual testimony broadly coincided with calls by philosophers of natural science for a clearer and more precise form of language by which to convey philosophical and empirical inquiry concerning the natural world. The writers and philosophers of the mid-seventeenth century were not uniformly hostile to the idea of prophecy. But they were becoming more critical, and many of their ideas for proof or disproof of its veracity were based upon developing theories of language structure and ways of meaning. By 1651 Hobbes was urging scepticism towards the claims of those prophetic visions currently on the increase in England. While accepting that a public speaker might be given a temporary dispensation to reveal God's will to his people, he warned that such claims were also a way of achieving power over others:

For he that pretends to teach men the way of so great felicity [to obey God according to his witness] pretends to govern them...to rule and reign over them; which is a thing, that all men naturally desire, and is therefore worthy to be suspected of Ambition and Imposture  
(Leviathan, 297-298)

Hobbes saw prophecy as standing or falling by its relation to Scripture: in its ability to transmit God's decrees or promises, in the fulfilment of those pronouncements, and most especially by its relation to Christ, the Word incarnate. 'In the time of the New Testament', he observed, 'there was no sovereign prophet, but our Saviour; who was both God that spake, and the prophet to whom he spake' (295).<sup>8</sup>

The capability of language to transmit truth, whether of

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<sup>8</sup> For Hobbes's views of the Word of God as prophecy in past and present, see Leviathan, 287-300.

God's mind or of his creation, was at this time a central and vital question both to the validation of prophecy and to the furtherance of all forms of human knowledge.<sup>9</sup> From Plato's Cratylus onwards, philosophical inquiry into language had centred upon the question of whether words signified intrinsically or only by consensus. For Hobbes and many other commentators the Genesis account gave the true origin of language: 'The first author of Speech was God himself, that instructed Adam how to name such creatures as he presented to his sight' (Leviathan, 24). This facility of 'naming', as the primal token of Adam's earthly supremacy as well as his access to divine knowledge, was seen as the eternal and immutable source of linguistic integrity. Opinion was divided as to whether the names assigned by Adam to animals and plants were arbitrary, or whether they contained the essence or nature of these things. Orthodoxy held mainly to the latter view, of a primal, ordained understanding of the created world that had been subsequently forfeited by a sinful humanity.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of the lost Edenic language lay in its role as the medium received directly from God, by which Adam was able to bestow name and essence upon each creature and object in Creation. Protestant views of language as containing

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<sup>9</sup> Hobbes pointed out that the Greeks used the same word for reason and for language, implying that the former could not exist without the latter (Leviathan, 29).

<sup>10</sup> James Knowlson, Universal Language Schemes in England and France 1600-1800, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 12. These questions were to form the basis of the twentieth-century theorization by Ferdinand de Saussure of the relation between parole (word or speech act) and langue (the system of signs). Saussure emphasized that the word, or signifier, gains its meaning or relation to the signified, by its place in the language system. See Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, and trans. by Roy Harris, (London: Duckworth, 1983).

the essence of spiritual reality were further shaped by New Testament usage of the Greek term logos, with its associative linkage of 'word' with reason or understanding: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' [John 1.1]. Through God in Christ, the Word, and the Light became both the signifier and signified, that final and greatest 'name' by which speech and being became one, and language regained its primeval integrity. This was the ideal, but in practice linguistic hairsplittings on the designation of the deity could lead into a religious and political minefield. 'But such a name, God who is one needs not', argued John Donne in a text first published in 1651.

Names are either to avoid confusion, and distinguish particulars...; Or else, names are to instruct us, and express natures and essences. This Adam was able to do...any understanding should comprehend the essence of the thing, better then by a definition. And such a name, we who know not God's essence cannot give him....<sup>11</sup>

By the mid-century this connection of words and meaning had become part of a major quest. Religious, philosophical, and empirical inquiry would increasingly be concerned to find ways in which language might be shaped to a form more directly and universally accessible. When John Wilkins wrote in an essay published in 1668, 'It cannot be denied but that the variety of Letters is an appendix to the Curse of Babel, namely, the multitude and variety of languages', he was restating what was then an accepted truth.<sup>12</sup> Since because of their rebellion at

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<sup>11</sup> John Donne, Of the Name of God, in Essays in Divinity, (1651), ed. by E. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 23.

<sup>12</sup> John Wilkins, An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language (London, 1668), 13. Further page references will be in the main text. Excerpts from this work are published in English Science, Bacon to Newton, ed. by Brian Vickers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 184-197.

Babel men had been stricken by God with diversity of tongues, it seemed clear that this was the point when the primal unity between an object's 'essence' and the word representing it was lost. From then language had degenerated into a debased coinage -- its value no longer intrinsic -- and was therefore capable of misleading the credulous. 'For words are wise mens counters, they do but reckon by them; but they are the mony of fooles, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, ...or any other Doctor whatsoever, if but a man' (Hobbes, Leviathan, 28-29). For Hobbes plurality of language was 'an abuse of Speech' that threatened the unwary: 'when [men] use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for; [they] thereby deceive others' (26). Prophecy, by its claims to foreknowledge, constituted a special degree of deception. God was the only real prophet. 'The best Prophet naturally', or among human agency, was therefore a mere manipulator of signs, or 'the best guesser, he that is most versed and studied in the matters he guesses at: for he hath most Signes to guess by' (22).

The 'luxury and redundance of Speech' was also condemned by Royal Society chronicler Thomas Sprat, as undermining scientific endeavour: '...eloquence ought to be banish'd out of all civil Societies, as a thing fatal to Peace and good Manners'. Linguistic duplicity was on all counts to be avoided, '...nothing may be sooner obtain'd than this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, this volubility

of Tongue, which makes so great a noise in the World....<sup>13</sup>

John Wilkins also waxed eloquent on the 'defect' of language's verbal and metaphorical multiplicity:

...though the varieties of Phrases in Language may seem to contribute to the elegance and ornament of Speech; yet, like other affected ornaments they prejudice the native simplicity of it,...[in] the Present Age... this grand imposture of Phrases hath almost eaten out solid Knowledge in all professions... (An Essay, 18).<sup>14</sup>

While the Babel myth provided the referential basis for seventeenth-century philosophers of language, there were wide-ranging differences in the nature of the universal language sought as an antidote to that polyglossian curse.

From the Reformation, Protestant debate had continued concerning the fate of the lost universal lingua humana, root of all subsequent languages, and the primitive characters by which it might have been recorded by Adam's immediate descendants. Among the ancient languages examined for common roots, primitive Hebrew was considered the likeliest source; its letters, for instance, were thought by the Kabbalists and Rosicrucians to conceal divine truths.<sup>15</sup> Among the proponents of a more utilitarian approach to the improvement of language

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Sprat, The History of the Royal-Society of London, (London, 1667), 112.

<sup>14</sup> On the competing concepts and usages of language of occultists and 'rationalist' in the 17C, see Brian Vickers, 'Analogy versus identity: The rejection of occult symbolism, 1580-1680' in Occult and scientific mentalities in the Renaissance ed. by Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 95-159.

<sup>15</sup> Knowlson, 12-13. This revival of Hebrew studies, arising from the Reformation emphasis on reading God's Word in the original languages, was also a stimulus for the movement in the following century to gain readmission of the Jews to England. See David Katz 'From Readmission to Revolution', The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 107-144. Kabbalistic mystical beliefs are outlined in Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, Kabbalah: Tradition of Hidden Knowledge (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995 [1979]).

were John Wilkins, who as early as 1641 envisaged a common or universal tongue to resolve the post-Babel linguistic confusion, and Francis Lodwick, whose scheme for a common language was published in 1647.<sup>16</sup> The unifying view behind these various initiatives for language reform was that an ideal tongue would afford in the name of each thing the embodiment of its very nature or essence.<sup>17</sup>

In the second half of the seventeenth century the impetus for linguistic reform moved away from Hebrew in favour of the formulation of an entirely new language, by means of a methodical reconstruction of a pre-existing and entirely accurate a priori description of the order of reality.<sup>18</sup> From the 1650s scholars were already focusing on what they termed 'technical words', depicting the intrinsic aspects of the thing represented: this work was to lead into the formation of botanical classification and universal symbols systems.<sup>19</sup> The trend over the remainder of the century would be for simpler and clearer models of language. In a passage of intriguingly democratic resonances, Sprat in 1667 reported the Royal

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<sup>16</sup> John Wilkins, Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger (1641), 3rd edn (1707), (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, repr. 1984); Francis Lodwick, A Common Writing: Whereby Two, ... Not Understanding One the Others Language... May Communicate... (1647) facsimile reprint ed. by R.C. Alston, English Linguistics 1500-1800, No. 147 (Menston, England: The Scholar Press, 1969). See also Benjamin Demott, 'The Sources and Development of John Wilkins' Philosophical Language', Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 57, (1958), 1-13.

<sup>17</sup> Knowlson, 86. Modern scholars of early attempts at universal language divide into two camps, according to Knowlson: 'scientific' inquiry concentrates on Baconian origins of the movement; others focus on the mystical ideas of Andreae, Alsted, and Boehme. He suggests that the two branches were historically more inter-linked: occult ideas were themselves assimilations, and also translated fairly readily into philosophical concepts.

<sup>18</sup> DeMott, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Knowlson, 73-74.

Society's intended reform of its own 'excesses in Natural philosophy' by means of 'a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style',

...to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.

(History, 113)

But the final stages of seventeenth-century reform took language well beyond the goal envisaged by Bacon and other critics, of a communication system in which the validity of representational terms rested upon their relation to an ordained or external reality. In the following passage by John Wilkins the actual 'name' is no longer a primal legacy handed by God upon humankind; rather, human intellect itself, by its ability or act of naming, is seen as having the power to reorder its own world.

...if the Names of things could be so contrived...as to contain such a kind of affinity or opposition in their letters and sounds... answerable to the nature of the things which they signified; this would yet be a farther advantage...[by] helping the Memory...the Understanding likewise would be highly improved; and we should, by learning the Character and the Names of things, be instructed likewise in their Natures, the knowledge of both which ought to be conjoined...

(An Essay, 20-21)<sup>20</sup>

In terms of language reform, therefore, the mid-century marks a significant transition: namely, from Donne's position that true 'names' or words were unknowable because they contained the essence of God, to that premised by Wilkins and Sprat, in which human power possessed by right the ability to label and delineate the created world. What had started as a

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<sup>20</sup> On the issues underlying the Royal Society's quest for language reform, see Brian Vickers, 'The Royal Society and English Prose Style: A Reassessment', in Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth: Language Change in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Papers read at a Clark Library Seminar (Los Angeles, CA.: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1985), 1-76.

reaction to the semantic superfluities of language developed into the analysis of semantic function itself. The goal of radical Puritan theology had been to attain a transparency of discourse. Contrastingly, in the efforts at language-construction associated with the Royal Society, coherence was primarily internal and relational: words gained validity from the sign system of which they were part, rather than by direct connection with a transcendent reality.<sup>21</sup>

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## 2. Language and Faith: 'Interiorization' of the Word

...thy Servant is made...a sound...a voyce within a voyce, anothers voyce, even thy voyce through her.

(Trapnel, Cry, 42)

Historians of language associate the emergence of Protestantism in Europe with a progressive 'interiorization of the word', the result of which was to strip religious practice of those intermediary symbols, functionaries, and ritualism which had been interposed between the individual and the experience of God.<sup>22</sup> Walter Ong frames this dilemma within a context of tension between the rival economies of written text and oral preaching.<sup>23</sup> In pre-Reformation culture interpretational understanding was gained by means of oral and

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Clark, 'The Word of God and the Language of Man: Puritan Semiotics and the Theological and Scientific "Plain Styles" of the Seventeenth Century', Semiotic Scene, 3 (1978), 61-90 (68).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Ong, The Presence of the Word (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 176-179.

<sup>23</sup> Ong 262-86.

communal structures and activities. The Protestant Reformation brought a new stress upon the act of reading, a potentially isolationist activity fostering divisiveness.<sup>23</sup> The print revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries enabled scriptural study to be carried out amid ever-broadening cultural complexity, and by increasing numbers of people. The result was a fragmentation of consensual and unitary modes of interpretation. Ong sees the Puritan and sectarian emphasis upon the 'plain' sense of Scripture as an attempt to counter this disintegration by a return to the shared orality of the community.<sup>24</sup> Perry Miller makes a similar observation on the New World offshoots of Puritanism: 'Puritan life, in the New England theory, was centered upon a corporate and communal ceremony, upon the oral delivery of a lecture'.<sup>25</sup> The fundamentalist insistence upon the primacy of oral testimony and preaching reflected a desire for social and psychic unity within a group. Amid the proliferations of printed glosses the process of assigning meaning became itself a badge of group identity: 'truth', ascertained consensually within small, like-minded congregations, served to demarcate and reinforce social structures and boundaries.

In her analysis of 'fundamentalist' groups of autonomous dissenters, Mary Douglas sees anti-ritualism as characteristic of new movements which were alienated by conventional

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<sup>23</sup> Ong, 272.

<sup>24</sup> Ong, 274-75.

<sup>25</sup> Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 298.

values and practice.<sup>27</sup> Radical sects such as the early Quakers, Fifth Monarchists, Seekers, Familists, Muggletonians and Ranters rejected most external doctrine and rites, either as unfitted to the genuine humility of the believer, or as impeding the individual's pursuit of the spirit wherever it led.<sup>28</sup> In the face-to-face gatherings of even the more conservative Baptists and Independents, together with Familists, Seekers, Ranters, and early Quakers, standardized expression and church ritual were denigrated in favour of the exaltation of the inner experience exemplified in intuitive and instant forms of knowledge, either centred upon scriptural literalism or liberated from it. Turning from outward mediators, the believer sought to deal directly with God and with other bystanders and witnesses, to whose particular spiritual condition the internal or 'intuitive' message had to 'speak'.<sup>29</sup> The preferred discourse was oral and communally-based, therefore: geared to the public realm of religious and secular politics, and embodied in the spontaneous sermon or the prophetic 'voice within a voice'. In the discourse of these sectarian groups biblical metaphor became a means of 'merging' those realities traditionally held to be separate: by this eradication of the barrier between metaphorical and

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology (London: Cresset Press, 1970), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold Lloyd, Quaker Social History 1669-1738 (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> An example of the link between speech and spiritual 'intuition' occurs in Sarah Blackborow's autobiographical account of her own conviction by Quaker missionaries 'who declared unto me the way to life, & spake of Gods witnesse and its workings in the Creature, the same in me witnessed to them, and in that I knew that their testimony and declaration was of, in, and by the life and power of God...'. A Visit to the Spirit in Prison. (London: Thomas Simmons, 1658), 6 [mis-numbered 9].

literal realities, the representation of an entity became synonymous with the thing itself.<sup>30</sup>

Many stylistic forms used by radical Puritan and sectarian speakers were adaptations of sermon style. A short syntax, for instance, might incorporate questions addressed to the listener, while brief clauses with long lists signalled the 'plain' reliance upon Scriptural precedent. But sermon-writing could itself become a 'snare' of human reason rather than an aid to divine revelation. An experientially-based and anti-authoritarian approach to religious witness is explicit in George Fox's 1658 attack on clerical use and re-use of previous addresses by means of printed texts. Divines are likened by him to dogs devouring and casting up each others' regurgitations of unwholesome doctrines. 'From the priests to the people they are all sick...That which one spews out...in their Books & Pamphlets, that another priest he takes the same up, & he eats the book, & vomits it up again, till the whole Nation is filled with their vomit...'.<sup>31</sup> Quaker writers were among the most prolific producers and distributors of missionizing tracts, but their leaders opposed the printing of their own sermons or spontaneous oral addresses, viewed as

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Jackson I. Cope's description of the developing slide of metaphor into literalism in the language of early Quaker discourse in 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 725-54 (726-27).

<sup>31</sup> George Fox, Here is Declared the Manner of...Naming. (London, 1658), 7. Fox's contention that the sickness of the nation is caused as much by clerical spewing of false doctrines, as by the drunkenness and fornication of followers of the 'great Whore', draws on a wide biblical reference, including Isaiah 28.8; Proverbs 23.8, 26.11; Jeremiah 48; Leviticus 18; II Peter 2.22; Habakkuk 2; and I Thessalonians 5.7. This comprehensiveness is noted in Smith, Perfection (334-5); while Knowlson indicates the similarity of Fox's assertions to contemporary educated thinking on language (34-35).

direct communications from God by the prophet or preacher.<sup>32</sup>

Strict Puritans and sectarian dissenters, then, were divided in terms of whether they held to the principal purity of religious language as inherent in Scripture, or in the experiential reality of the individual believer. The two approaches could be seen as mutually antagonistic. Yet in practice they often converged, with one or the other in the ascendant. A writer might be found uncomfortably straddling both points of view. Bunyan, in his Preface to Grace Abounding, extols plainness of speech as the only fitting way to describe his experiences of divine grace, while mere skill with words is seen as a form of 'play' which compromises spiritual integrity.

I could have enlarged much in this my discourse of my temptations and troubles for sin, as also of the merciful kindness of workings of God with my Soul: I could also have stepped into a stile much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more then here I have seemed to do: but I dare not: God did not play in convincing of me; the Devil did not play in tempting of me; neither did I play when I sank as into a bottomless pit... wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was...<sup>33</sup>

Yet in the case of his later allegorical tale Pilgrim's Progress Bunyan adopts a different presentational strategy. As if anticipating criticism by fellow 'plain speech' advocates, he quotes on the work's title page from Hosea 12.10, in which

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<sup>32</sup> Strictures against the recording of sermons make it difficult to gain historical evidence of early Quaker styles of preaching or praying. Only ten examples exist of Quaker sermons recorded by listeners prior to 1687, and these are all by George Fox, according to Bauman, 73-74.

<sup>33</sup> John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (1666), ed. by R. Sharrock, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), Preface, 3-4.

God's voice is conveyed in prophecy by means of linguistic devices: 'I [God] have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets'.

In terms of language's ability to provide access to God, then, a dichotomy was developing between reliance upon a 'rational' biblical exegesis, and the more extemporaneous approach which saw human rational aids (even Scripture) as inferior to direct, experiential revelation. This latter view found expression by means of an altered rhetoric, with the more extreme and charismatic speakers often rejecting outright the grammatical usage of mainstream Puritanism, along with its stress upon human reasoning and scholarly authority. This 'anti-grammatical' tendency is manifested, for example, in the syntactic 'gaps' and over-long sentence structures which commonly feature in Quaker and Ranter public speech; the result is a perceived discontinuity of sense which the listener or reader has to remedy. Alternatively, the linguistic message might accelerate into a 'babble', or confusion of words in which the speaker's perceptions appear to outrun the expressive capacity of language. This aspect is most often found in Seeker and Ranter writings, in which the 'folly' of linguistic play, or non-sense is presented as the truest manifestation of the divine.

The recorded inspired 'songs' of Trapnel, like those of the Baptist 'singers' Katherine Seton and Susanna Bateman from the same period, feature a number of effective strategies for conveying a brief and intense message to the listener. To the

liberal use of personal pronouns, which reinforce a sense of individual authority, is added the directness of short, chanted cadences with frequent repetitions and exclamations.

And as I was waiting upon the Lord in silence, the word of the Lord came to [m]e, saying write, and again I say write, (As I have said it shall come to passe) and this was the cry, I will confound, I will confound, the devices of this people, I will make their devices to be of none Effect; I will cast out the councill of their Princes, O Earth, Earth, Earth hear the word of the Lord, and be warned before the cup of indignation of the Lords fierce anger is poured out upon you.<sup>34</sup>

This repetitious, 'incantatory' form of address is perhaps the most characteristic style of prophetic utterance, and can be found in the writings of radical visionaries as diverse as Eleanor Davies, Anna Trapnel, George Fox, and leading Ranters.<sup>35</sup> The impact of this form of rhetoric upon the listener or reader arises from its rhythmic reiteration: a cluster of words and phrases drawn from Scripture is combined and recombined to intensify the overall perception gained.<sup>36</sup> Repetition is typically anti-grammatical and elliptical, as if to make language transcend its own conventional structures in order to reveal inner truths beyond temporality or learning. In such terms a prophetic text by George Fox advances a divine

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<sup>34</sup> Dorothy White, A Diligent Search, ([London], 1659), 1.

<sup>35</sup> For Fifth Monarchist, Ranter, and Leveller examples of these rhetorical forms, see Smith, Perfection, 331-334; the major modern source of Ranter texts is Ranter Writings.

<sup>36</sup> While arguably a similar technique of repetition of Scriptural reference can also be found in the sermons of Anglican clerics under James and after the Reformation, here the exposition relies upon logical development, based upon Latinate models of scholarship. On the similarities and contrasts between Quaker 'incantatory' style and the repetitive usages of Anglicanism, see J. Cope, 733.

radical critique of language itself:

All languages are to me no more than dust, who was before languages were...and am redeemed out of languages into the power where all men shall agree...men, crying up tongues to be the original, have degenerated from the tongues which they call the original, which be not the original...For in the beginning was the word, which was before natural languages were.<sup>37</sup>

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### 3. 'Reveale O Daniel'

Lady Eleanor Davies's form of witness was based upon the idea of a tradition linking her with the Old Testament prophet Daniel. A Touchet by birth, and the youngest daughter of George, Baron Audley and earl of Castlehaven, she saw her prophetic identity as encompassing not only her sex and lineage, but also her country. In July 1625 an extraordinary personal vision had proclaimed her new role as the prophetic mediator between God and his people, authorized to proclaim the authentic revelation of the coming millennium. A sense of linkage to some kind of longstanding tradition marks Lady Eleanor out from other women visionaries such as Anna Trapnel, Mary Cary, and the Quaker preaching women of the 1650s. Moreover she was able to use her ancestry to enhance the authority and influence of her prophecies. Her personal translation of the Touchet family motto 'Je le tien' was 'Hold fast till I come': a direct reference to the apocalyptic

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<sup>37</sup> George Fox, A Battle Door (London: Robert Wilson, 1660), Preface, Sig A2", quoted in Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, 'From Shibboleth to Apocalypse: Quaker Speechways during the Puritan Revolution', in Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language, ed. by Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). 72-112 (85).

prophecies of John to the churches [Revelation 2.25].<sup>38</sup>

Anticipating the tendency of mid-century female and male prophets to cite precedents from the Old and New Testaments, Davies claimed to be a latter-day Daniel, divinely appointed to proclaim the imminent Second Coming. Her Appeal (1641) and Amend, Amend (1643) characteristically point out analogies between her own survival of imprisonment in Bedlam and the Tower under the rulership of Charles, and Daniel's preservation in the lions' den.<sup>39</sup> Like Nebuchadnezzar giving orders for his wise men to be slain [Daniel 2.12-13], Charles had consented to Strafford's execution ('not without a Cutting blow threatened forthwith, as when that hasty Decree sent forth his Proclamation for his owne Nation; those wise men to be destroyed' (Her appeal (1641), 8-9).

One of Davies's core themes, repeated and elaborated in many of her texts of the 1640s, was that of Belshazzar's feast on the night he was murdered [Daniel 5]. Here the king, princes, and their wives and concubines are portrayed profanely drinking wine from the sacred gold and silver vessels of the sacked temple at Jerusalem, whilst praising their idols of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone. The mysterious handwriting that appears on the wall cannot be interpreted by astrologers, soothsayers, or Chaldeans.<sup>40</sup> On

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<sup>38</sup> E. Cope, 130.

<sup>39</sup> Davies, [The Lady Eleanor] Her Appeal, to the High Court of Parliament. ([London], 1641), 11, 19, 20. Davies, Amend, Amend; Gods Kingdome is at Hand, (London, 1643). Further references to these works will appear in the main text. On Davies's imprisonments, see below, IV.3-4 and V.1.

<sup>40</sup> Many of these details were endowed by Davies with explicit contemporary links; the Chaldeans were translated as the Caledonians, or Scots, whose alliance with Charles she mistrusted.



the title page of Amend, Amend of 1643, Davies reiterates the encoded message, decipherable only to Daniel, which warned of the end of the king's reign (and life?) unless he repented and cleansed his kingdom of idolatry. 'Mene' (in Daniel's prophecy 'God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it'), here becomes 'Thine finished or ended'; 'Tekel' ('thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting') is 'Thou found fickle, or weak by Them'; while 'Peres' ('Thy kingdom is divided...') is intriguingly abbreviated to 'Thy Peers or Parliament Men'. These biblical warnings to Charles Stuart are expanded in the subsequent verses. Hebrew temple vessels are likened in stanza 21 to their Puritan counterpart, the Sabbath, which the king is accused of profaning by his encouragement of Sunday games and pastimes (Amend, 9). Stanza 23 alludes to his divided kingdom, while stanza 10 likens Nebuchadnezzar to Charles's own grandfather (10, 5). Notably, in stanza 5 Davies provides a detail not included in Daniel, 'His Majestie forgets to Supp' (3): this was to be an important feature in subsequent versions of the text.

The broadly similar verse renderings of Belshazzar's feast that appear in three of Davies's works, provide an example of Davies's thematic development over the 1640s. Amend, Amend of 1643 contains a basic stanzaic description, without annotations. In Given to the Elector (published immediately following the king's execution) the verses are reprinted almost verbatim, but with added marginal comments. Strange and Wonderfull Prophecies, issued in August 1649, provides a much

fuller commentary.<sup>41</sup> For example, Davies's earliest description, in stanza 3 of Amend, of the ghostly hand which writes upon the wall of the banquet room as the king drinks, is of an 'Image like of any gastly Skull'. In the early 1649 text a brief annotation has been added to signify that the judgment was written in the 'Execution place', or Banquet House (Given, 4). In Strange and Wonderfull, a more extensive and systematic annotation (possibly by another person?) points out the explicit and macabre similarities to the royal execution. The skull reference is linked specifically to the manner of death, and it is noted both that the execution took place 'on the wal of the Banquetting-house', and that the king himself drank wine shortly before being beheaded. Most acutely of all, Davies's own reference to the king's not supping has been indeed prophetic: the annotator indicates that 'The King did eate no Supper the night before he dyed' (Strange, 2). Although the two later texts add other parallels to those of the 1643 version, the more or less verbatim versions of earlier works has here become a crucial part of the prophetic mechanism. Was it assumed that the reader would know of the earlier works, and would he or she be expected to check whether such were the very words used before the fateful contemporary events?

In The Day of Judgements Modell, as in its immediately

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<sup>41</sup> Davies, Given to the Elector, (Amsterdam, 1633)/London, 1648/9); Strange and wonderfull propheties by the Lady Eleanor Audeley, (London, (Aug) 1649). Further references to these works will be given in the main text. In her list of Davies's works (xiv), E. Cope dates the reprint of Given to the Elector as 1648. But the text's references to the king's execution indicate its probable printing in the weeks after that event; it is therefore a 1649 work by modern dating.

precursor For the Blessed Feast of Easter (both of 1646), the victories of the New Model Army, 'Albion's Army', are seen as inaugurating the events leading to the Last Judgment, when 'The Time come to remove the Covering': the seals of Revelation will at last be broken. Various numerological references are combined with the traditional images from nature to signify Christ's imminent return.<sup>42</sup> Easter, with its traditional themes of resurrection and earthly renewal, becomes the forerunner of the coming marriage between Christ the Lamb and his Bride the Church. In preparation for the coming final Judgment nature blossoms white like the spotless robes of the newly baptized at Whitsun: 'at Easter Terme in May, the first Terme; Wi[t]nesse the fresh Boughes in their hands, (all in white Robes) Where the Innocent Lambe, as it were, arigned before Them' (5). The theme of white is joined up both with Charles's wearing of white at his coronation (9,12), and with Cromwell, 'Him that satt on the White HORSE, with his Albion-trayn' (12). This links with the Revelation prophecy beginning: 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war' [Revelation 19.11]. Charles, now in the custody of the Scots, is evidently 'the prisoner' to appear in the coming Judgment Day before the lay elders of the Church, as foretold in Revelation 4.4. This jury, Davies alleges, will recognize the 'Prisoner' as 'one of their owne degree: NO Common ONE,

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<sup>42</sup> Davies, The Day of Judgments Modell, (London, 1646), 4, 9-11. Further references will be given in the main text.

pleading Not guilty, neither deserving death or imprisonment: The Lamb acquits HIM here, though Condemn'd ...As goes the VERDICT: SO the sentence LORD have mercy on Them...' (6-7).

Davies's extensive use of ciphers and other confusions of conventional language systems displays a kind of sibylline emphasis upon the prophetic role as interpreter of truths that would otherwise remained veiled: a creator of sense out of non-sense. This ability to portray through language a coming apocalypse and New Jerusalem in which the outer world becomes transformed and inverted, gave an otherwise weak and vulnerable woman the authority to criticize the leaders, practices, and institutions that she considered corrupt or inept. Such a rich and varied range of reference was not available to her historical female contemporaries. The education of radical sectarian prophetesses was at best rudimentary according to conventional practice, and their writings were generally derived from extensive Scripture-readings and sermons. With the possible exception of Trapnel, the use of scriptural metaphor in their writings is more direct and utilitarian than in Davies's works.

Initially at least, there seems a strong case for linking the testimonies of women prophets of the lower social ranks with more experiential forms of witness, in which scriptural tropes and metaphors were translated in terms of divine interventions in the life of the believer. One would expect to find more direct, immediate and everyday applications of biblical texts and rhetoric in the discourses of those prophets without formal theological education. This category would include virtually

all women along with male artisans or lay mechanick preachers of the New Model Army and the charismatic sects such as the Familists, Seekers, Quakers and Ranters, which developed as the more extreme stopping places for those spiritual seekers moving outward from the established Church via the Independents and Baptists.<sup>43</sup>

With further inquiry, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep these two categories of prophetic witness so characteristically separate from each other. The two approaches, of exegesis and of direct experiential inspiration, seem interwoven in the majority of prophecies. Davies's erudite and esoteric Bible-referentiality, enriched by her inquiries into heraldry and astrology, were certainly based upon intensive and prolonged periods of scriptural study which she undertook after 1625.<sup>44</sup> But she could gain an audience for her biblical interpretations only by convincing her listeners and readers that she had been endowed with a genuinely supernatural gift for seeing into the future. Moreover, the scriptural citations of her visions were often more twisted and idiosyncratic in their application than those of even the most charismatic preacher. On the other side of the equation, many sectarian male prophets and preachers shared a strong Puritan and Calvinist background and theological training, which predisposed them similarly to find

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<sup>43</sup> On the nature and role of the Baptists in the proliferation of dissenting sects in the 1640s, see J.F. McGregor, 'The Baptists: Fount of All Heresy', in Radical Religion in the English Revolution, ed. by J.F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-62. On Baptist (or Anabaptist) links with the Levellers, see H.N. Brailsford, The Levellers and the English Revolution (London: Cresset Press, 1961), 30-35.

<sup>44</sup> E. Cope, 8-9; 12-13.

evidence of God's truth in the more painstaking forms of exegesis from biblical texts. The most extreme of preachers, such as the Ranters Salmon or Coppe, sought to depart from scriptural ordinance only after having become intellectually saturated with biblical ideas and imagery.

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#### 4. 'Ephraim, an untamed Heifer': 'Proving' Prophecy

If the prophecies of Davies exemplify a witness based upon exegesis, sectarian testimonies give evidence of the direct workings of the spirit in the individual. In terms of gender, the roles of emergent sectarian prophets such as Anna Trapnel and Sarah Wight represent an elevation and intensification of the more general public religious participation already shared by large numbers of their dissenting sisters. It has been noted previously that sectarian women participated in worship and church activities, and were required to give evidence of the course of their spiritual development.<sup>45</sup> At what point, then, did testimony pass from personal narrative, or private communion with God, to something requiring a more public audience, of the congregation and beyond?

Some clues can be found in the language and format by which the prophecy is conveyed. The 'charismatic' witness arising from individual experiential contact with the Holy Spirit found its expression in specialized discursive forms and imagery. For example, the prolonged psychosomatic ordeal

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<sup>45</sup> See above, I.

of Sarah Wight reached its crisis with a suicide attempt that left her with severe head injuries; in the resultant state of insensibility or coma she later claimed to have experienced an inexpressible communion with God and gained reassurance that her sins were forgiven. Her verbal witness began with her return to consciousness three days later, although her fasting continued, laced with briefer trances, over the next seven weeks. The narrative of her appearance, words and behaviour in this period is supplied by the Independent minister Henry Jessey, whose initial desire to publish arose from the prevailing view that the young girl was making her deathbed testimony. Changes in Wight's prophetic discourse reflect the developmental phases of her illness, as recorded by Jessey and a few godly and truthful witnesses (Jessey, 1). The early speeches (almost invariably preceded by sips of water) are exclamations and fervent allusions to Christ and his dealings with her. Her first recorded words are 'My soul thirst for the water of life, and I shall have it': this and other expressions are said to have been 'uttered in an humble manner; stop't sometimes with tears or sighs', in a voice 'very low and oft whispering', audible only to those nearest her (3). The most sustained of these early communications are rhapsodic soliloquies on her communion with Christ. These show some of the traits of radical visionary utterance mentioned above, such as a rhythmic and intensifying reiteration of scriptural words, and phrases conveyed by a directly personal testimony: 'That that I admire most is, that Christ took our nature! he took our nature. Men & Angels admire it: aye and

Devils too, if they can'.<sup>46</sup> A stress on the personal pronoun underlines the vastness of the covenantal transition between God and humanity: 'When the Lord doth any great thing, he puts his I to it: I, even I am he. I'll make a new Covenant: I'll write my Law in their hearts: I'll pardon your sins...I change not, therefore are you not consumed'. This powerful message is then sealed with the intimate language of direct confession:

Ah what a foolish Creature am I? I could not indure to hear one speak of the Devil, and I was as bad as he, in distrusting of God that dyed for me. Oh that the world knew Jesus Christ!...Christ taught Simon how to bear the Cross: he bare it first himself. I was found of them that sought me not, and to the Nation that looked not after me, I said; Behold me, behold me...

As Wight's health and lucidity increase, the quality of her utterances grows more complex and sustained. As she begins to use her experiences to counsel others, her discourse becomes layered, more self-detached and densely referential. She advises one woman tormented by a conviction of damnation:

Christ died to reconcile such souls: the Spirit ties both ends together, he ties them and Christ together, uniting them to Christ. So did he work with those Ephesians, they were dead in sins & trespasses, strangers from God, without God, far off, twain; but these had he made neer. Such doth God draw, and makes up the breaches. See the condition they were in, Ephes. 2.12 and Hosea the first & second Chapters, he said, They are not my people, and then... now they are the Children of the living God, Hos.1.12. Before...they were dead people; now they are living Children...They have life from God, that they may live to God. In Eph.2 You that were dead, hath he quickned; and by Grace Ye are save through Faith -- not of works, ...we would boast, if we did any thing in it. He works Faith and he builds up still: he builds higher and higher, till his work be finished: We are his Workmanship. (102-103)

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<sup>46</sup> This and the following quotes are from Jessey, 20. Virtually all of Wight's quotations in this and other chapters are underlined, as the author Jessey italicized all direct transcriptions of her speech.

Trapnel seems not to have emulated the prolonged abstinence of her sister-prophet. Her Whitehall fast was as spectacular for the event's public nature and her appearance of insensibility as for her meagre sustenance. Deep trances alternated with lengthy spells of prophetic singing, which poured from her at intervals for twelve days and nights, and were then recorded in two separate 1654 publications. A Cry of a Stone, an extensive account of seventy-six pages, was published in January and bought by Thomason. Two weeks later, on 11 March, he bought the eight-paged summary of the same events, Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-Hall. The sensation caused by the Whitehall episode was further heightened when in April Trapnel felt herself 'called' to Cornwall to bear witness of the kingdom of Jesus. This journey was to prove yet another very public manifestation by Trapnel of her divine authority to relate God's message to all the people of the nation, and it became impossible for the authorities to turn a blind eye. The details of her Cornwall trip, trial and eventual imprisonment, are related in two substantial 1654 publications printed by the bookseller Thomas Brewster: A Legacy for Saints and Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea.

It is notable that most of the prose in Trapnel's works (with the possible exception of the short pamphlet Newes which foregrounds her visions of Cromwell) is apparently self-authored. The material conveyed by a Relator (whose identity remains unknown) consists chiefly of the prophetess's verses and some biographical details. But Trapnel herself provides

much of the verifying evidence -- of ministerial visits, for instance -- that for Wight is supplied by Jessey. Also unlike Wight's case, Trapnel presents her own trances and physical sufferings to the reader as manifestations of her spiritual state. Her description of the onset of her first illness of 1646 is characteristic:

I lay in the strength of the fever, burning very much within but without like a clod, and my stomach being shut up, ... all that fortnight I lay and took nothing but small beer, & a little juice of cherries, or conserve of currants, I took a little sometimes for cooling of me, I did so burn in my throat and stomach; I remained thus like a dead carcase in respect of bodily strength, but filled with the Spirit....(Legacy, 27)

However, this 'dead carcase' continued to breathe forth a constant stream of verses, sometimes for hours at a stretch: 'I slept not but talked night and day, the pourings forth of the spirit...' (29). Trapnel relates her own outward state and the reactions of witnesses:

when I did slumber...then I felt my pain and weakness... sometimes my bones hath been shaken in my flesh, my joints unloosed, and sometimes great pains, as if my bones had been pulled asunder: such torture hath seized upon me, and sick fits, that the parties which watched by me hath bowed me double, to keep breath in me. (29)

She professes in these trances to be both blind and deaf, yet her accounts display a telling degree of external awareness:

... my outward man hath been so altered on a sudden, to the view of those that have been in the house, which have found me alone, and not able to speak to them for a season, so that they have been frightened, thinking me not to be in health; and they beholding the tears falling from my eyes, have wondred what I ailed; but it was because the Son of righteousness shone hot upon my spirit, which caused a melting into tears, and many Scriptures opened to me, which I spoke to them that sat by, which have been astonished to hear and see a poor creature so filled, but it was Christ in me making use of me to publish the excellency of Jesus Christ, which my soul was enamoured with.... (14)

In comparison to the exegesis of Eleanor Davies, the prophetic discourse of sectarian women is in many ways more closely bound up with visionary gesture, with bodily and sensory images. Nevertheless, these perceived truths are almost invariably grounded (implicitly or explicitly) in the authority of scriptural reference. While Wight's pronouncements were precisely catalogued biblically, Trapnel's scriptural allusions are rarely this meticulous; with sometimes only a dash where a citation was probably intended to be inserted. In her prose these biblical associations are expanded in a free-flowing and lyrical style, not only in her personal narrative of her life and intimate relationship with Christ, but also through her visions. This can be seen, for instance, in her revelation of the 'tree' as an emblem of the Trinity (and here she does cite scriptural texts: from III John 5.7, Genesis 2, Psalms 133.2, and Hosea 6).

God appeared as the Root of mans happiness... by this Root, which the Scripture calls love, the first glorious person in Trinity appearing in the second person the Tree...[The Spirit] is called a holy anynting, it is compared to Oyl...or Oyntment, so the third glorious person in Trinity is likened unto sap...the Spirit...runs from out of the Root, which is the Father through the Tree, which is the Son, into the Branches; For so the Saints are called in Scripture Branches of the Vine Christ Jesus, and as the Sap drops into the branches and twigs of a Tree, which causes them to live and appear green...the efficacy of this Sap produces fruit.. when the Sap returns into the Root, the leaves wither and fail...the Elect appear dead till the Spirit which is the sap quickneth them, and no fruit is brought forth, though they may have a profession, yet it is but as dead leaves which falls [sic] and crumbles into dust....

(Legacy, 33-34)

Additionally Trapnel likens Christ to the lion of Samson's riddle: 'out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came sweetness' [Judges 14.14].

By Lyon is meant Christ, who is called in Scripture, the Lyon of the Tribe of Juda, and by Honey is meant that sweetness that lies wrapt up in Jesus...Christ is that eater which eats up the spirits, as David said, the Zeal of thine house hath eaten me up...and out of the strong came sweetness, that is, out of the Lyon of the Tribe of Juda flows all our sweetness and raptures of joy, and as Sampson told them, Except they had plowed with his Heyfer, they could not have found out his Riddle; So the great God spake to me... and said; in believing in my son Christ, which is typed out by an Heyfer, and Plowing may signifie believing, that in believing in thy Saviour thou shalt understand my secrets...(35).

The likening of Christ's love to honey, with its overtones of the Song of Songs, is an allusion found often in Trapnel's writings. Wight also refers frequently to Christ's love as honey to her taste ('None could taste the sweetness of the Manna, by looking on it; none but they that eat of it: or of the Honey out of the Rock; The redeemed of the Lord, are a Royal Priesthood, a chosen Generation...' (Jessey, 34)).

Generally, however, Wight's narrative remains spare, ascetic, and non-political. The scent of flowers brought by a visitor to her sickbed causes her to dilate on the disparate capabilities of the Saints, as all nonetheles emanating from the 'earth', Christ (39-40). But in an almost identical instance Trapnel elaborates much further:

Christ is a very sweet fragrant smell to his friends, but to his enemies a thorn; and concerning flowers... in, the variety of smells proceeding from them, and the variety of colours, ...was held forth the variety of beauties, and sweetness flowing from my Saviour; ...in the marigold... I saw pleasures and honours, and the greatest preferments here guilded outsides, but black in the middle; so I saw the Lord Jesus glory to the Saints: but black to the wicked, even as the marygold appears like gold, in the middle black...(Legacy, 38).

Trapnel's discourse vibrates with sensory images; sight is

constantly augmented with notions of scent, taste, and sound. Christ's closeness to her is a 'melody in my heart', at other times a golden trumpet sounding 'higher and sometimes lower' (10). His love has imparted a savour even to her natural food: 'it was bitter to my tast; but oh now, every bit of bread I eat, how sweet was it to my taste! Christ sweetned every creature to me, oh how sweet was the feasts of love, that my soul was made partaker of in every creature!' (9). This enhanced vision is extended to her perceptions of all God's creation. God's nearness was to her as 'a variety of dishes' at many banquets, comforting her after her mother's death: 'my meat was sweetmeats from heaven, wine upon the lees, wines well refined, milk and hony was my ordinary dish... some days and nights I had feasts full of marrow, and visions full of glory' (13). One of these visions was of an angel, after which 'such a perfume was left in my spirits all that night', and on another occasion she speaks of the timely words of a friend as having 'left a fragrance upon my Spirit some part of the day' (14).

The shadowy networks of influence connecting dissenting women of the 1640s, a decade when sectarian boundaries were still quite fluid, are difficult to reconstruct historically. Trapnel was a probable visitor to Wight's bedside, sometime before the latter's departure to the countryside in July 1647.<sup>47</sup> There are also other indications that Trapnel was

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<sup>47</sup> Trapnel's inclusion among the visitors listed in Jessey's account of Wight's fast is mentioned by Maureen Bell in 'Hannah Allen and the Development of a Puritan Publishing Business, 1646-51', Publishing History, 26, (1988), 5-66 (16); and by Teresa Feroli in 'The Semiotics of Hunger in the Prophecies of Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel', a paper given at the History and Literature Conference at Reading University (1995). But my text of Exceeding Riches (6th

influenced by Wight's example. For example, the best-known of Trapnel's prophecies is probably the account of her Whitehall dream of the Protector Cromwell, personified as a bull in a field of cattle.

When she was at White=hall she saw as it were great darkness on the earth... and at a little distance a great company of cattel, some like Bulls, some like Oxen, and some lesser cattel, their faces and heads like men, having on either side their heads a horn: for the foremost, his countenance was perfectly like unto --- s and on a sudden there was a great shout of those that followed him, ... they bowed themselves unto him, and leaped up from the earth, and shewed much joy that he was become their Supream.

Trapnel's entry into the dream comes at this point (related in the third person). The bull runs at her as if in attack, but at the last instant, 'as he was neer to her breast with his horn' she is miraculously preserved:

...an hand and arm grasped her ground [sic], and a voice said to her, I will be thy safety; and then [the bull] run at many precious Saints that stood in his way, and that durst look boldly in his face, he gave them many pushes, scratching them with his hornes, and driving them into several houses...they were presently scattered, their horns broken, and so tumbled into graves: With that she brake forth, and sang praise, and the Lord said to her, Mark that Scripture, three horns shall arise, and a fourth shall come out different from the former, which shall be more terrible to the Saints then others that went before: though like a Lamb, as is spoken in the Revelations, in appearance a Lamb; but pushing with his horns, like a Beast: being not onely one, but many, and much strength joyned together. (Newes, 5-6)

This is usually assumed to have been an entirely unique conception by Trapnel. But it does bear striking similarities to a dream vision of Wight's, recorded as having occurred on 3 July 1647 after her partial recovery from fasting.

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edn, 1652) has no mention of Trapnel's presence at Wight's bedside. Was the reference deleted after appearing in earlier versions; and if so, why?

On Saturday night last, I was in a Dream, in great terror,...violently hurried down a very steep hill,... it was darted into me presently, that it was the Hill where the Swine that were possessed with Legion ran down violently into the Sea, that was at bottom of that steep place. And as I was thus hurrying down the same, I saw... Horses, red and white and black... running down before me. And being thus carryed down a great way... I could see no bottom of it; being overcome thereby, I cryed out to God, Lord help, I perish, I perish, I am not able, I am not able to go down it.

She relates that at this point in the dream she wept, but presently heard an answering voice, that replied 'I am able to carry thee upon Eagles wings',

And instantly, one like the appearance of a man (but the glory of him was so great...) came, and took me in his arms, and carryed me down to the bottom of the hill. And then he said to me [that] the Horses that were hurried down before me... are all thy spiritual enemies, and I have trampled them under my feet. And then he carryed me in his arms up to the top of the hill,... saying, I could have carryed thee at first to the top, and not to the bottom: but thus I did, that thou mayst prize the mercy the more, in delivering thee from the lowermost Hell, and that thou mayst prize Heaven the more...I have done it for thee.

(Jessey, 148-149)

Wight's account of her vision stresses continually her personal relation to her divine saviour. Trapnel appears by contrast a political protagonist recruited by God, very much after the manner of a biblical prophet such as Daniel or John.

But in the new discourse of experientially-based prophecy, truth-value or 'verity' could not be determined solely by means of Scripture, in traditional terms either of accuracy or of sophistication in scriptural interpretation. To validate a sectarian prophetess's testimony involved further collective and almost ritual processes. Here the two cases of Wight and Trapnel are very similar. In the manner in which they are offered, received, and represented to others, distinct phases

can be discerned, which I see as decisive in the establishment of a successful prophetic claim by an unknown woman of relatively low social standing. For instance, Wight's early weeks of trance and fasting were initially limited to those tending her, and the minister Henry Jessey. However, as Wight began to speak out of her trance state while yet continuing to fast, news of the phenomenon spread to the local community. Jessey's published record of the incident, tying it in with reports of similar incidents elsewhere, seemed to confirm that a supernatural manifestation was taking place. As visitors flocked to Wight's bedchamber, the public expectations aroused in connection with these events came to the notice of local ministers and doctors, who eventually visited Wight to see and question her on the authenticity of her claims. This trial by review or ordeal, to which both Trapnel and Wight were subjected (Trapnel's major test was before magistrates) acted to authenticate or to discount the validity of a prophetic testimony. A claimant's early physical and spiritual sufferings could be accepted as evidence of supernatural power, but often this needed corroboration by religious and/or civil interrogators.<sup>48</sup> The desirability of this was recognized by Trapnel herself: in the midst of a fast in 1646, she was aggrieved that a visiting minister Mr Simpson did not seek to

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<sup>48</sup> In the case of the Quakers, such testing was undertaken internally in the meeting, although subsequent ordeals in the field were seen as further verification of the divine source of inner leadings. On the effects and significance of such procedures, see below, V.2.

test her claims before accepting them:

I told him how greatly God had appeared to me...and as soon as he had praised and was gone, I was troubled that he did not more question me, and bring arguments against me, for trial, I know true gold is made more manifest by the touchstone, and it is more purified in the Furnace, and appears from dross. (Legacy, 32)

Where most of these stages were passed successfully, the claimant achieved the status of a recognized prophet or 'spiritual mother', to be called upon either publicly to represent the group, or for the counselling of individuals. This is part of what might be termed the 'economy' of the godly congregation, where the community that initially gave support to the needs of 'suppliants' such as Wight or Trapnel was able to make use of their spiritual capacities following their recovery.

These stages might occur consecutively or simultaneously. But essentially there seems to have been a progressive pattern of authorization, by which a successful prophetess acquired the public status of one divinely favoured, whose witness was recognized by her own church assembly and even, (as in the case of Trapnel and Quaker preachers), among a wider public and a still more sceptical audience of rulers and authorities. To expand these ideas, one needs examine more deeply the records of the initial entry into prophecy of the two leading figures, Wight and Trapnel. Wight's protracted fast and trances were in fact the climax of four years of severe spiritual turmoil and several attempts at self-destruction. Trapnel also suffered spiritual trials according to her own accounts. In 1646 and 1647 she seems to have undergone two

spells of fasting.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, this episode did not apparently make any lasting impact outside Trapnel's own congregation. For this reason, Trapnel's close involvement in the 'reception' stage of the events of Wight's remarkable ten-week fast (as a visitor to Wight's bedside) seems especially suggestive. Trapnel's own most public and sensational prophetic fast was to be seven years later, in the first year of the Protectorate, and her stream of sung visions proved far more overtly political than Wight's witness. But in many ways the testimonies of the two women display remarkable similarities.

Both Wight's lengthy 1647 fast and Trapnel's trances and fasting at Whitehall in January 1654 sparked off a great deal of local publicity within their respective communities, attracting vast numbers of visitors of high and low degree, ranging from the convinced to the frankly sceptical. Initial reports of Trapnel's fast may well have been accompanied by related news of other, similar phenomena elsewhere (whether coincidental or imitative instances), effectively linking past or recent events with the present example in an extrapolated trend or cycle of divine prophecies. In Wight's case we have the references passed to Jessey concerning the fast by Trapnel, or 'H.T.'. To provide affirmation of the genuineness of his own prodigy, he visited this individual and confirmed her story. More definitively still Trapnel seems to have duplicated in miniature the example of the younger girl, an

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<sup>49</sup> While not directly recorded, these early Trapnel fasts attracted some local attention, as is indicated in Jessey, 139 and 43. See also Trapnel, Cry, 3; and Legacy, 25-42.

exploit which itself becomes woven into Jessey's narrative of Wight:

About the same time of June beforesaid, the Relator heard of one H.T. that then had great enjoyments of God, and could not take in a crumme or sip of the creatures, for full six dayes together; yet being in bodily health. It being believed by many good people, the Relator desired to speak with the party, who is of approved godliness, and did; and was certified there by of the truth thereof, viz. from the end of June 9. till the beginning of June 16. 1647. It seemed strange to him, yet he durst not then reject it, being related in a tender modest manner, exalting God therein. (Jessey, 139)

If the Trapnel fast of June 1647 as recorded by Jessey were her first instance of sickness, it would suggest a close, even 'copy-cat' identification with Wight. But Trapnel dates her first major fasting illness as having occurred 'about the seventeenth of June 1646' (Legacy, 25). This is also mentioned by Jessey along with a similar illness of Trapnel's ending on 16 June, 1647 (Jessey, 43, 139). At the very least, such episodes suggest that for these two women the state of fasting afforded a very singular form of access to divine communion.

During their most famous and prolonged fasts both Wight and Trapnel were maintained within a largely congenial environment, supported by those broadly sympathetic to their claims to divine authority. Wight was apparently in her own bedchamber throughout her fast, attended by her mother, a maidservant Hannah Guy, and female neighbours and friends. The minister Mr Simpson called on 15 April, but she was insensible, though she had asked for him earlier in the day. Otherwise, apart from her half-brother and Jessey himself, all of her many visitors seem to have been women or girls: no other male visitor is recorded until 31 May, the end of her

second month of fasting.<sup>50</sup> In Trapnel's case the Whitehall side chamber was swiftly exchanged for nearby lodgings, where she took to her bed and was tended night and day until her recovery.<sup>51</sup>

Up to a point the success of a prophetess's testimony can be measured through evidence of the impact made on those immediately surrounding her. In the publications of the utterances of Wight in 1647 and of Trapnel in 1654, great care is taken to list the names of the more celebrated visitors to each bedside.<sup>52</sup> But eventually both women's prophetic claims are subjected to the explicit and rigorous testing of authorized clerical or civil worthies. Wight, for instance, had gained in spiritual authority within her own sectarian community by her spiritual and physical endurance, and her transformed speech and behaviour on her recovery. Yet some doubts may have lingered. On Monday 31 May, twelve days before she rose from her bed, she was visited by 'the Lady Willoughby of Parham, with Dr Cox, Physician, and Mrs Cox, and Mr and Mrs Adderly, then of the Charterhouse, &c.' (Jessey, 113). This deputation seem to have taken place largely to enable Dr Cox

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<sup>50</sup> See Jessey, 26, 28, 35, 40, 49, 51, 56, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Trapnel's privacy while in trance was not always respected, however. During her stay at Cornwall, magistrates arrived to take her into custody. She promptly fell into a trance, at which 'they made a great tumult...and some came uptairs, crying A witch, a witch'. In her chamber they 'caused my eyelids to be pulled up...One of the Justices pinched me by the nose, and caused my pillow to be pull'd from under my head, and kept pulling me, and calling me'. One person suggested that 'A whip will fetch her up'. Trapnel asserts that she 'heard none of all this stir and bustle', and that they eventually left, with their efforts unrewarded. Report, 21; also Legacy, 55.

<sup>52</sup> An extensive roster is provided by Jessey in his preface to Exceeding Grace (8-9). In Legacy she punctiliously records visits made to her by leading sympathetic ministers in her earlier illness of 1646: Mr. Greenhill of Stepney (30), two visits from Mr. Simpson (32), and 'one Captain Harris' (40). Many of Trapnel's visitors in 1654 are recorded in Cry (2) and Newes, 3-4.

to catechize Wight concerning her spiritual claims. In a lengthy interview recorded by Jessey questions were put to the afflicted girl: How do you know [your comfort] is no delusion? How do you know this working in you is the Spirit of God? How, or in what sense are you not under the Law? Whether have you sin in you? Aspersions were cast on the outward aspect of her trials, as appearing to some to be fraudulent. Wight's reply is, 'They that saw or knew me in my Terrors, when I could not be ruled, might well know, that nothing but the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, could so rule me, which was as Ephraim, an untamed heifer' (115). When asked if she could endure to be thought mad, or counterfeit she replied 'It's no more then my Lord and Master was before me: They said, he was mad, and had a devil: and the Soldiers mocked him. Let me undergo the uttermost, I do but follow his steps. And if I wil be one of Christs, I must do so' (117).

In the case of Trapnel, however, her prophetic visions were of Cromwell, thereby constituting a wider threat, coming so soon after the fall of Barebones and Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorship. When the authorities subsequently learned of her planned journey to Cornwall, possibly to stir up unrest in that part of the kingdom, a warrant was soon issued for her arrest and examination at the local Sessions. Trapnel admits that her courage nearly failed her at the prospect of hard questioning and close scrutiny of her case by local magistrates. However, after the respite of an unlooked-for delay, she spoke clearly and with confidence at the Sessions, refusing to be questioned concerning her book

printed in London, or on her reasons for coming to Cornwall (Legacy, 55-57). Her subsequent confinement in a foul cell overrun with rats in Bridewell, a gaol commonly associated with the detention of prostitutes, was an obvious administrative attempt to impugn her claims to virtue. In Legacy, published during her imprisonment, the prefatory tribute by senior churchmen points out the 'extream scandal and viciousness' implied by such an incarceration 'to all that hear thereof', but they assure their readers that 'we that know her, and the cause for which she is laid there, are not ashamed of her, or it; and hope we never shall be...' (Sig A2<sup>v</sup>-A3<sup>r</sup>).

The trials inflicted upon Wight and Trapnel were not seen by them or their supporters as random setbacks. The readiness of each to endure hardship, even death, and to adhere to her testimony in the face of scorn and sceptical cross-examination, furnished public and decisive authentication of the divine origin of her message. Evidence of their having successfully borne this kind of severe testing enabled Trapnel and Wight to pass from the ephemerality of an individual sign or wonder to the more enduring prophetic identity of one with supernatural access to God and the power to manifest his plan concerning contemporary events. In the case of each a further work was published in her name. This was intentional only in Trapnel's case, however; she authored at least five works altogether.<sup>53</sup> With public acceptance of their enhanced

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<sup>53</sup> Their last known publications were respectively Trapnel, A Voice for the King of Saints and Nations, (London, 1658); and Sarah Wight, A Wonderful Pleasant and Profitable Letter, (London: Ri. Moone, 1656). The latter work was

spiritual roles both Wight and Trapnel appear to have taken on more formal roles in their respective organizations as 'wise women', esteemed by authority and consulted by those seeking guidance and reassurance.

An example of this role-playing occurs in Legacy, the last of Trapnel's 1654 publications. Citing the example of Isaiah, she describes her recent attempts to comfort and to exhort the Saints, in which 'the erring spirit shall come to understand, and the murmuring spirit shall learn doctrine'.

Oh friends, how did I thirst after the welfare of everyone ...I told them how sweet a thing walking in the spirit was, which will teach to intreat when we are reviled, and to be of a lamblike spirit when enemies reproach, that some might imitate that lamb which took away sin...I think hardly any came but they went away affected, both young and old... I desire it may shine forth in all my actions, for truly the work of God is marvellous in my eyes; and that Scripture of Christ telling his Disciples, that they should set upon twelve thrones, Judging the twelve Tribes of Israel, by that word twelve thrones, was much set forth to me, the great dignity of the Saints. (39)

Trapnel is here adopting the language of an authorized 'saint', within a godly congregation claiming a position of divinely-ordained political authority within the kingdom. This special status implies an entitlement to offer counsel to the highest authorities in the land. In the heightened political climate of the early weeks of the Protectorate, Trapnel's attempts to influence the Protector and his Council were backed by an influential portion of the Fifth Monarchists, a movement which had briefly come close to achieving a dominant role in government. Her increasing criticism of Cromwell is unmistakable, moreover:

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<sup>a</sup> private letter to a friend published without the writer's permission.

If [Cromwell] were not...backsliden, he would be ashamed of his great pomp and revenue, whilst the poore are ready to starve, and art thou providing great Palaces? Oh this was not Gideon of old,...tell him, Lord, thou art come down to have a controversie with him: Oh sin will lay thee flat to the earth: Oh sin will bring down a dark smoke into thy judgement, oh sin will hinder that judgement thou intendest to bring forth in the earth oh Gideon,....(Cry, 50)

In the same passage she declares to Cromwell that her criticism is not politically-motivated: 'it is neither advantage nor disadvantage to me who is set up, or who is thrown down here below, for thy servant O Lord, is for that pure interest of Jesus' (50). Yet her overt, public style of prophecy on affairs of state is markedly different from Wight's example in 1647, when Jessey and his co-presenters sought to establish Wight's position as a vessel of God's grace mainly among the sectarian interests associated with the Jessey/Simpson congregations.<sup>54</sup>

The developments cited above seem to have played a significant role in the establishment of a female prophetic vocation. In each case the success of transmission seems to have an importance almost equal to the language of the prophecy itself. If the initial prophetic event failed to arouse adequate public interest -- and was not subjected to rigorous 'testing' by a recognized authority -- its witness could collapse into obscurity. Trapnel's early fasts/trances of 1646 and 1647 obviously caused a local stir, since they were reported to Jessey. But, whatever their form and content, they were not granted the preservative of printer's ink; no ministers are recorded to have 'tried' Trapnel's testimony on

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<sup>54</sup> See above, II.4.

these occasions, nor does she appear to have gained any special recognition as a result. On the contrary, evidence suggests that she was sometimes denied the authority of a believer among the fellow members of her gathered church. After her 1642 conversion under John Simpson's preaching she had apparently sought to reprove other members for backsliding, and in Legacy she tells of God's message to her concerning this in the early stages of her sickness of 1646:

...the Lord was pleased to tell me the reason why my reproofs took so little effect on the Saints, that it was because I did not tell them of their faults in a way of love, and in the meekness of my Saviour, and he sweetly informed me, and told me for the future how I should speak to the Saints, and God carried me out all the time of my sickness to speak suitable unto persons, according to each conditions. (Legacy, 26)

Even after Trapnel's translation into public prominence, her congregational fellows sometimes failed to give her support. The final excerpt of Legacy is a letter by Trapnel to her 'Brothers and Sisters' of All Hallows Church in Thames Street. Dated 8 May 1654, it appears to be a sequel to a letter dispatched to the All Hallows congregation on 15 February while she waited to appear at the next Sessions on charges of falsehood and subversion. The earlier letter, while signed by 'Your unworthy Sister in the fellowship of the Gospel', strikes a triumphalist note in calling for the support and prayers of her fellows on what the writer saw as a dangerous mission: 'I am through divine strength, not onely willing to be bound, but to dye upon so honourable an account, as I here suffer for... expressing the Lords bounty, and rich grace to sinners...' (49-52). Trapnel's second letter to her

church adopts a more admonitory tone: 'Neither is it a little matter in my esteem, to be taken in, and reckoned one of your companions in the sweet and lovely Fellowship of the Gospel; And...Union and Communion with Christ. Which Principle you do well to look unto, that nothing take it away from you; For sure it is a Crown worth the prizing...' (61). The probable source of this reproof is apparent three pages later where the letter ends with a reminder:

I sent you a Letter from the West, in one to brother Gardner: wherein I desired your Counsel and Exhortation, but I have no Answer: I believe you do not forget me; Yet I am grieved you do not write to me now in my bonds...if I anyway offend you, tell me, that I may do no more; but if any are not perswaded concerning the extraordinary dispensation that hath been, and is still upon me: I am sorry that any should be offended at such Soul-ravishing, Sin-subduing, Creature-Crucifying, Christ-Exalting Ordinance, Loving Enjoyments...But my dear friends, if Christs eye ravisheth, I must sing; If he open the mouth, it will Pray; if the Spirit say come, the Brid[e] saith so to; and they that hear utter, come Lord Jesus, come quickly....(64)

It would appear that Trapnel's ardent spirits -- and even her success in public prophesying -- were not always uniformly welcomed by members of her congregation.

## Chapter IV. THE WORD INCARNATE: THE PROPHETIC BODY AS A SIGN

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him  
that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst  
come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of  
life freely... He which testifieth these things  
saith, Surely I come quickly.

(Revelation 22.17,20)

To our bodies turne wee then, that so  
Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;  
Loves mysteries in soules doe growe  
But yet the body is his booke.

(Donne, The Extasie, 70-74)

### 1. Spirit, Vision, and Body

Members of the gathered churches of the 1640s and 1650s sought by individual reading and communal testimony to find a personal understanding of the power and truth of God's operations within creation. The Bible located God's Word as the primary source of cosmic energy: in his will [Isaiah 55.10-11], by his act of creation [Psalms 32.53], and by that Creation's witness of its maker [Psalms 18.19]. Most centrally God's Word was incarnate in Jesus Christ, of whose earthly coming the whole of Scripture was seen as essentially a prophecy. Finally, the Word of God was embodied in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the 'breath' of God's voice in the heart.<sup>1</sup> While the written letter of the law passed judgment, the spoken utterance of the Spirit breathed

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Ong, The Presence of the Word, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 188.

life into the barren human soul. Powerful radical sectarian preachers who arose at this time believed that the 'latter days' of the 'pouring out of the Spirit' were now at hand, and that their inspiration was identical to that of the prophets.<sup>2</sup>

Hermetic mystics and radicals among Baptists and Independents, early Quakers and Seekers, deemed Scripture a mere adjunct of a print-based human authority. They saw God's truth as revealed in Christ, as extending beyond the aurality of the 'Word', to the inner source of divine truth as expressed in the visual metaphor of 'Light' [John 1.9]. Within some groups testimony involved refraining altogether from the outward carnality of speech. Silence and a deepened internal awareness were seen as sanctified signs of divine communion, comparable to the Edenic pre-language associated with the primitive church.<sup>3</sup> Early Quakers called themselves the 'Children of Light', and their meetings stressed the value of silence as a manifestation of God's word. While human language was historical and arbitrary, God's word was eternal, co-existing with silence. As the stillness following utterance was where comprehension takes place, so silence afforded its own presence, mode, and communication.<sup>4</sup>

Christianity finds a model for the formulation of human experience in human corporeality: its nature, function, and the relation of its various aspects give rise to symbols and

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), 28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Bauman, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ong, 187; Bauman, 20-29.

complex structures of meaning. The body is the locus of both the most profane features of bestial life, and of the sacred realities of a humanized god. Only by the breaking of Christ's mortal frame could humanity's sins have been expiated. This mystery of divine mortality appears centrally in the Roman Catholic eucharist, in which Christ is deemed to be physically present in the broken bread and the wine.<sup>5</sup> Reformation Protestants saw communion bread and wine as but symbols of a single sacrifice made effectual for all time. For them the true source of power and of knowledge was to be found in the printed word rather than visual iconicity.

Yet human physicality was also important in Protestantism. Where Catholics stressed Christ's passivity through his ordeals, the divine self-sacrifice of the Saviour's passion inspired Protestant worshippers to more participatory ritual forms involving active self-scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> Radical sectarian exploration of divine operations in the self and the natural world caused a blurring of boundaries between internal and external, the figurative and the literal. This was especially true of prophecy: here speech, gesture and writing became a virtual duplication of Old Testament prophetic behaviour, with

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<sup>5</sup> From medieval times the Roman Church has constantly located the miraculous entry of spiritual power into human affairs in the revelation of bodily signs, symbols, and imagery: in religious iconography and art; in the celebratory physicality evident in the hymns and poetry of the Catholic convert Richard Crashaw; in the physical extremes of ecstasy and denial shown by such saints as Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna; and in miraculous phenomena such as stigmata and holy statues which apparently shed blood or tears, or grow human hair. Caroline Walker Bynum confronts the paradoxical juxtaposing of sacred and taboo in fleshly aspects of religious worship in 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One, ed. by Michel Feher et al. (New York: Zone Press, 1989), 160-219.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Sawday, The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture (London: Routledge, 1995), 122-24.

the body as an important 'proof' of prophecy's inner message. So Sarah Wight's shaking fits and catatonic seizures prior to her major visionary fast seemed to echo the post-vision fainting and sickness of the biblical prophet Daniel, and Anna Trapnel's physical ecstasy mirrored the sweetness experienced by Ezekiel and John after swallowing heaven-sent rolls [Daniel 8; Ezekiel 3.3; Revelation 10.10]. In the mysticism that lay at the heart of radical Puritan experience, the human body became the receptacle for divine essence. Signs of external and internal 'breaking down', where death or dissolution of the old self marked a believer's passing from sinnership into a transformative state<sup>of</sup> oneness with God, offered a mirror of the constitutive process for a new covenant Church, looking to its fore-ordained union with Christ in the second coming.<sup>7</sup>

In mystical revelation the conflation of body imagery affords a means of expressing the inexpressible. The Boehmist pamphlet Theauraujohn His Aurora of Thomas Tany, for instance employs a Christianized form of kabbalism, in which Christ's virginity becomes identified with the 'womb' in which all souls are grounded. This implies an original state of perfection or 'hieroglyphicy' in which male and female become one.<sup>8</sup> The mystical writings of other male prophets saw the womb as figurative of the godhead, the associative surrounding of the 'Egge' or originary seed of Reformation, and as that eternal 'abyss' from which all life comes and to which it returns to be reunited with the deity. This same view is

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<sup>7</sup> See Perfection, 18, 86, 13-16.

<sup>8</sup> Perfection, 304

expressed in another Boehmist pamphlet, variously ascribed to Mary Penington or to Mary Pocock.<sup>9</sup> The body also featured strongly in radical visionary perceptions of the dream subject. In dream-visions both Wight and Trapnel experience a sense of physical contact with God, of being saved from a final goring or trampling, by divine intervening arms.<sup>10</sup>

Prophetic witness in the Bible is usually preceded by God's direct command, and the testimony often takes the form of action rather than words. In one case God orders the prophet Ezekiel to make and eat barley cakes mixed with human excrement, as a forecast of the defiled bread which the Israelites will be forced to eat when dispersed among the Gentiles.<sup>11</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century, prophecy as divine utterance (whether predictive or not) also frequently took the form of discursive acts. In instances of 'sign behaviour' such as Davies's protest at Lichfield Cathedral, Trapnel's court testimony in Cornwall, or 'going naked' and other types of demonstration by Quakers and other radicals, the major problem for prophet, audience, and the authorities was how to discern the true 'word of God' from the false. A further area of contention could arise where these manifestations came to be interpellated into the needs of the group, as seen in Jessey's presentation of Wight's visionary fast of 1647. If an audience failed to be convinced of the validity of a particular vision

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<sup>9</sup> M.P., The Mystery of the Deity in the Humanity, (London: Giles Calvert, 1649), 9-10; see Smith, Perfection, 211.

<sup>10</sup> See above, III.4.

<sup>11</sup> Here even the long-suffering Ezekiel protests, having always kept scrupulously to the food laws. God relents somewhat by allowing the substitution of cow dung: Ezekiel 4.12-15.

which departed from conventional modes of behaviour, style or rhetoric, divine communication might well be dismissed as solipsism, incomprehensibility, or unreason.

This chapter will focus specifically on the internal and external 'experientiality' upon which such prophetic acts based their claims to legitimacy: how it affected the nature of those acts, the dilemmas it posed for witnesses, and how successfully prophets such as Trapnel, Wight, and Davies overcame the barriers of acceptance. External factors include 'place' (the public or private physical environment in which the individual witness took place) and the 'audience', whether of the general public or of the representatives of civil and religious authority. But notice needs also be taken of the ideological structures which seem to operate in these cases.<sup>12</sup> To what extent were the 1640s and 1650s a period of breakdown or rupture of hitherto commonly held symbols systems, and what were the consequences for individual prophets?

The relation of the Christian believer and the corporate church to a three-personed male deity tended to find expression in models featuring 'female' traits. Subservience, vesselship, and nurture afforded useful ways of expressing human spiritual experience of the divine. In Paradise Lost, for instance, Adam's trance prior to Eve's being taken out of his side has been likened a kind of male 'childbirth', with God as both father and midwife to the maternal Adam (VIII.452-

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<sup>12</sup> For a working definition of ideology, see Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System' in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 218-20, (231-32).

477).<sup>13</sup> Milton further stresses the male role as 'wife' of God when Adam expresses his definitive allegiance to his creator:

Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,  
And love with fear the only God  
.....by small  
Accomplishing great things deem'd weak  
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise  
By simple meek; that suffering for Truth's sake  
Is fortitude to highest victory. (XII.561-570)

Images of pregnancy, parturition and lactation also figure strongly in sermons, as well as prophetic and mystical texts of the 1640s and 1650s, in which women and men describe their experience of divine power.

In late medieval female religious roles and discourse, divine access and merging of the personal with the deity had been supplied through images of physicality, sensual love and marriage as metaphors of union between divinity and humanity. Reformation Protestantism brought a shift of emphasis from cloistered celibacy to communities of familial households and married clergy. Catholic Mariolatry, with its several forms of female spiritual role (woman as virgin/ bride/ mother/ intermediary), was rendered down under Puritanism into the more modest terms of the domestically enclosed wife.<sup>14</sup> A new

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<sup>13</sup> In the creation of Eve, Trapnel herself suggests that Adam's was only a passive and involuntary role, in Voice for the King of Saints (London, 1658), 47. Further references from this work will be in the text. See also Fannie Pecznik, 'Milton on the Creation of Eve: Adam's Dream and the Hieroglyphic of the Rib', in A Fine Tuning: Studies of the Religious Poetry of Herbert and Milton, ed. by Mary A. Maleski (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), 249-272. For examples in Comus of Miltonic cross-gender identification (and general anxiety on the use of symbols), see Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'A Womb of his own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body', in Sexuality & Gender in Early Modern Europe, ed. by James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 266-288.

<sup>14</sup> On Roman Catholicism's development of the cult of the Virgin Mary and related female spiritual figures and icons, see Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Picador, 1985 [1976])

emphasis upon original biblical Greek and Hebrew sources transformed the Song of Songs into the epithalamium of both the relation of the Lamb to his Bride the Church (of which Puritan marriage was the earthly counterpart), and of an atoning Christ to the saved soul. Male sectarian preachers such as Thomas Shepard, Increase Mather, and John Cotton commonly appropriated and domesticated the imagery of the Canticles into a nuclear family mode. 'Breasts' and other nurturative images became tokens of their own agency in supplying the Word of God to their congregations.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, an uneasy tension ruled the Puritan views of women's spiritual powers and capacities. In God's Genesis prophecy to Satan of his Son's future coming to redeem fallen humanity and 'bruise thy head', Christ is referred as the woman's 'seed' (that is, of Eve and of Mary, with no earthly father [Genesis 3.15]). Protestant patriarchy saw feminine virtue as submissive, never seeking power or self-fulfilment. Allegories of female saintliness stressed the 'good' sanctified sexuality of enclosed femininity in the pious matron or fruitful bride, whose role reflected the union of Christ with his body the Church. Yet in her flesh each human mother was condemned to pass on anew the fallen nature tainted by Eve's transgressive disobedience. Moreover, rebellion against God was portrayed in terms of the 'bad' sexuality of unbridled female lust. As the corruptive representative of Satan upon earth, the Church of Rome was described as the

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<sup>15</sup> David Leverenz, The Language of Puritan Feeling (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 138-145.

'Mother of Harlots', the Revelation 'Scarlet Whore of Babylon'. Human nature's propensity to sin was commonly understood in terms of female sexual and physical impurity, as in Jehovah's prophetic warnings to backsliding Israel (see, for example, Hosea 2; Ezekiel 16, 22, 23).

This religious significance extended even to human body fluids, especially blood, which was powerfully associated with the complex polarities of life and death. Humanity's cleansing from sin came by the sacrificial blood of Christ, and the blood of an innocent victim was still thought to have power to accuse the slayer.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, menstrual blood was an involuntary waste product symbolic of death and pollution; thus the menstruating woman acquired particular significance as a cultural boundary marker between purity and corruption.<sup>17</sup> Seventeenth-century belief still held that such women should avoid pickling beef or salting bacon, and at least one Laudian vicar denied them communion.<sup>18</sup> The process of childbirth was another arena in which ceremonies of cleansing, separation and enclosure took particular forms, as in the survival in the established Church of the practice of 'churching', by which newly-delivered women re-entered the community after a formal

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<sup>16</sup> The first scriptural instance of this is in Genesis 4.10 after Cain's murder of Abel.

<sup>17</sup> See Leviticus 15.20; Ezekiel 18.6; Isaiah 30.22; and Lamentations 1.17. On the significance of blood, see Gail Kern Paster, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 64-112. For general historical perspectives on menstruation, see Edward Shorter, A History of Women's Bodies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 287-288; and Vieda Skultans, 'The Symbolic Significance of Menstruation and the Menopause', Man, 5 (1970), 639-651.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Penguin, 1991) 777, 43. For early modern views of menstruation, see Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England', Past & Present, 91 (May, 1981), 47-73.

period of seclusion.<sup>19</sup> Opinion today is divided on the extent to which churching was at this time purificational and penitential, and even the degree of its acceptance by the lay public.<sup>20</sup> But however strongly Puritans and dissenters may have opposed churching, they nevertheless viewed each newborn baby as the inheritor of the sin of Adam. Typical was John Cotton's gloss of Colossians 2.11-12, that 'we are borne in the goare blood of sinful defilements, and therefore God hath provided the blood of Christ, to wash and cleanse us from our Mothers womb... from the sinful nature of our flesh'.<sup>21</sup>

Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of Familism, cited Leviticus 15 and Ezekiel 22.2 to image spiritual uncleanness in terms of pollutive female physicality.<sup>22</sup> The Puritan William Crashaw, father of the poet, wrote an entire book expressly to refute the Roman Catholic doctrinal tendency to elide the merit of the Virgin's milk with that of her son's shed blood.<sup>23</sup>

In seventeenth-century England, therefore, pollution taboos and the social rituals of marginalization or change surrounding the bodily processes exclusive to women -- pregnancy, birth and menstruation -- testify to the powerful

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<sup>19</sup> On the seventeenth-century significance of churching, see Adrian Wilson, 'The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation', in Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England, ed. by Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990) 68-107, (88-93).

<sup>20</sup> As a 'cleansing' rite churching was closely aligned with Jewish law [Leviticus 12]. Radical Protestant reformers attacked the ritual as a popish relic, with its purificational symbols of veils, white sheets, and setting of the mother apart from the congregation. See Thomas, 42-3, 68-9; and David Cressey, 'Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England' Past & Present 141 (Nov 1993), 106-146 (109).

<sup>21</sup> Leverenz, 154.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, 170.

<sup>23</sup> W. [Crashaw], The Bspotted Jesuite. (London, 1641).

symbolic charge of those areas of life. Each woman featured in this study, from the aristocratic heiress Eleanor Davies to the fifteen year-old 'empty nothing creature' Sarah Wight, was thus accustomed to view her female sexual identity as carrying a peculiarly pejorative yet singular link with sinful human nature.

Prophetic acts of 'sign behaviour', theatrical and highly visible demonstrations of an inner divine imperative, ranged from fasts and trance states to bizarre public appearances. Many of these manifestations were regarded as social deviancy, often meriting separation from society by interrogative trial and/or incarceration. Yet the fasting bodies of Wight and Trapnel were presented as a signs of spiritual possession.<sup>24</sup> Fasts were symbolic intervals of personal and social vulnerability, recognized and responded to by others in terms of the same sorts of 'domestic' enclosure associated with healing rites, childbirth ceremonies, and deathbed and burial rituals. Where prophetic witness posed a challenge to the body politic, the state could impose its authority by interrogating, and punishing the offender as subversive. The effects of punitive measure such as fines and imprisonment were not dissimilar to those of fasting itself: both could

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<sup>24</sup> On fasting, see Smith, 49-50; Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century' in Women, Writing, History 1640-1740, (London: Batsford, 1992), 139-158 (143-151). More recent consideration of women's prophetic fasts is given in Hilary Hinds, God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): on their general efficacy (157), and as the emptying of the physical/linguistic sign (145). On Quaker fasting, see Kenneth Carroll, 'Quaker Attitudes Towards Signs and Wonders', JFHS, 54 (1977), 70-84 (74-76). Geoffrey Nuttall highlights the mystical significance of the fast in terms of Familist doctrine, in 'James Nayler: A Fresh Approach' JFHS (1954), Supp. 26, 2-20.

impose a ritual separation of the subject from its old status, endowing it, after a suitable period of segregation, with a new position and status in the community.<sup>25</sup> Within the temporary state of 'formlessness' imposed by enclosure, those so isolated were deprived of their personal and social autonomy. This could give rise to an inversion of normal social hierarchies: the weak might become strong, as in the case of Wight and Trapnel, or the strong weak.<sup>26</sup> At the sickbeds of Wight and Trapnel, and in the various prison cells allotted to Davies, Trapnel, and countless Quaker women, the prophet's vulnerability and reliance upon external care and protection could lead, at the farthest extreme, into a new relation to God.

At a personal level the body of the believer or the prophet frequently testified to the tie (or the want of it) between the soul and Christ: that process by which death of the 'old' self signalled soul-rebirth or entrance into the 'new rest' of Christ's second coming. The prophetic body could also represent the 'alternative' corporate form of the gathered congregation (as distinct from the indiscriminate membership of the established Church). Still further, the body might testify to the fortunes of a ruler or an entire nation. Doctrinally, the conversion process as recounted by both Wight

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. by Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin, 1991 [1977]); Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge, 1992 [1966]), 96-97.

<sup>26</sup> For example, James Holstun argues that Trapnel's incarceration by Cromwell enabled her to 'claim a masculine public voice by enclosing male Fifth Monarchists in the relatively private and feminine space of prison': 'The Public Spiritedness of Anna Trapnel', from Ehud's Dagger; Or, Radical Praxis in Revolutionary England (forthcoming, 1996), 23.

and Trapnel involved a passage from a 'hardline' Calvinistic predestination, under which many seeking souls were terrorized by the prospect of their destined exclusion from the elect, into the workings of an increasingly 'free' grace (as distinct from Antinomianism).<sup>27</sup> In this progression from a wrathful, judging father-God to a sacrificial and succouring mother-Christ, the trope of spiritual food by which the reborn infant-soul was nurtured in its new life acquired major discursive importance. Similarly, the bride of Christ was sustained by the light of his countenance, and by holy embracements of food, water and wine.

To summarize, women's historically changing social and spatial roles provided an important source of signification in female prophecy. As part of a more general embourgeoisement of society, in which private household areas for family use became set apart from the more public domestic areas, seventeenth-century Puritanism was centred both practically and ideologically upon the basic social unit of the patriarchal family.<sup>28</sup> Habermas points out, however, that the boundaries between private and public life were never entirely

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<sup>27</sup> Anna Trapnel makes the distinction clear in Legacy, 15. Antinomian doctrine held that the Christian was by faith released from the obligation of adhering to any moral law. It is thus similar to Familism but lacks the latter's mystical theology centred upon the physical world. On Antinomianism and its followers, see Owen C. Watkins, 'Conservatives and Radicals', The Puritan Experience (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 82-100 (89-90); also C.E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688, SPCK (New York and Toronto: Macmillan, 1931), 267-270.

<sup>28</sup> S.D. Amussen, 'Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560-1725', in Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, ed. by A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196-217.

rigid.<sup>29</sup> Women occupied an important place in this dynamic: their traditional role as healers within and between households effectively empowered them to move between the private and public spheres.<sup>30</sup> Beyond this there was the licensed social movement of women to and fro attending services, lectures, and other activities relating to their gathered churches: women seem to have predominated in a sectarian membership that was itself more flexible and geographically spread than the parish system. Women preached in private homes and street corners, and were condemned by conservative Puritans. Women prophets invaded public rooms and council chambers; and visionaries like Trapnel and Wight turned their private bedchamber-communions with God into an occasion for public gathering, ritual worship, or political rally.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising that they brought the wrath of church and civil authorities down on their heads. But persecution and confinement often served, not to suppress, but to underline the powers of prophecy.

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<sup>29</sup> Jurgen Habermas, 'The Bourgeois Family and the Institutionalization of a Privateness Oriented to an Audience', The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. by Thomas Burger (Great Britain: Polity Press, 1989) 43-44, 48-49.

<sup>30</sup> See Lucinda McCray Beier, Suffering and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), Chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>31</sup> See Sharon Achinstein, 'Women on Top in the Pamphlet Literature of the English Revolution', in Gender, Literature, and the English Revolution, Women's Studies 24, 1-2, (1994), 131-163; also Holstun, 49, 50 and passim.

## 2. The Broken Tabernacle: Prophetic Rebirth in the Spirit

God who is a Spirit...chuseth the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty, ...the Woman is counted the weaker Vessel, but the Lord filling that Vessel full of his Wisdom, and ruleing it by his holy Spirit... dwelling in his Temple, and declaring himself through it by his Son Jesus Christ, it is for the Praise of the glory of his Grace...that the Lord may be all in all in the Creature, making them fit Temples for his holy Spirit to dwel in, that he may speak in his Temple, in the Female as well as the Male.<sup>32</sup>

The Puritan soul seeking God saw itself as lost in a wilderness, abandoned by a just but judgmental patriarchal God, and subject to frequent assaults by Satan or demonic possession. Encouraged by biblical accounts of Christ's cure of conditions like palsy and leprosy, in which body and soul states were specifically linked [e.g. Matthew 9.1-12, Luke 5.12, 18-31], those 'under an awareness of sin' could express and work through their spiritual affliction in the very state of bodily illness. Their hope was that Christ as divine physician might apply the healing balm of his redeeming grace, termed by Trapnel a 'plaister healing the most desperate wound', a 'salve drawing out corruptions and ill humors...its cleansing physick... runneth between the marrow and the bones' (Legacy, 13). But such fasts and trances of prophecy also evoked the dangerous transitional states of human existence: birth, death, illness, even hallucination or dream-states.

Early in 1647 an anxious Sarah Wight felt her soul to be in crisis as she experienced in her body's increasing weakness

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Farnworth, A Woman forbidden to speak in the Church (London, 1654), 4. (See also I Corinthians 1.27-29, 3.16.)

a sense of corrupting sin made visible. On Tuesday 6 April, under the immediate effects of a severe, self-inflicted concussion, she went into convulsions. Her hands and feet became clenched into spasm, so that she could no longer stand. She took to her bed 'weeping, and wringing her hands', saying, 'My earthly Tabernacle is broken all to pieces, and what will the Lord do with me'?<sup>33</sup> As her hearing and sight failed, she was full of premonitions of death and hell, saying (in an echo of Job) 'If I should hang on Gibbets ...be cut in pieces, if I should die the cruellest death that ever any did, I have deserved it, I would still justify God... if he cast me to Hell' (Jessey, 14). At length she calmed, telling her mother 'I'll lie still, and hear what God will say to me: He will speak Peace, Peace; if God will speak a word of Peace at the last moment, I should be contented'. She fell into a trance, and over the following three days her prostrate figure apparently remained dumb, blind and deaf (14-15). Illness was about to become the testimonial of 'a living active Christ in a dead passive Creature, mak[ing] it act to God' (55). Years later Wight would observe,

When the Lord is pleased to make bare his holy arm for the deliverance of his people out of troubles, he first lays them very lowe, that his work may be more admirable: he many times...strips us naked and bare, and deprives us of all helps and props belowe, that we may thereby learn to make the Lord alone our stay and trust....(Letter, 3)

After three days of insensibility Wight's first recorded speech in the early hours of Saturday, 10 April was to ask for water, saying repeatedly: 'My soul thirsts for the water of

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<sup>33</sup> Jessey, 14 and 60-61.

life, and I shall have it' (Jessey, 15). Her present bodily ordeal she saw as negligible, against the spiritual reassurance which had been vouchsafed to her:

I am sore from the Crown of the head to the foot; but 'tis nothing... When Jesus Christ was in the World, he cured bodies, and not bodies only, but souls too...I desired noting but a crucified Christ, and I have him...We should be as well content to bear the Cross of Christ, as the Crown. For he was made perfect by suffering, and he had no sin: it was for us. (22)

Amid pain and serious bouts of fever in which she likened herself to Daniel in the fiery furnace (23, 29, 41-42), she remained confident that 'the good Samaritan that heal'd my soul, will heal my body to' (35). She found in her physical deterioration the inscription of God's dealings with her. 'In my misery my flesh and my bones pined, and consumed away, and I was neer to death', she testified. 'I read the Scriptures from a Child: but I understood not what I read till now, that I had the teaching of the Spirit' (43; also 69). Trapnel was similarly to testify that her moments of greatest spiritual communion were routinely accompanied by weakness, sweats and fever: 'when the sentence of death was on my earthly Tabernacle, by reason of illness, I still was filled with this joyfull song; Oh death where is thy sting? Oh grave where is thy victory?' (Legacy, 14).<sup>34</sup>

The approach of death, that most momentous of life-changes, was by custom accompanied by some form of public ritual gathering. For these occasions, the manuals which had

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<sup>34</sup> On illness and death as general tropes of Christian experience, see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 87-89.

once been sources of religious instruction on ars moriendi (the 'art' of the Christian believer's public passage through death as the gateway to eternal life), had been superseded by recorded testimonies of suffering believers approaching their end within a pious community.<sup>35</sup> The relation of body and spirit within Christian doctrine, however, served to heighten and multiply the significance of death by a paradoxical inversion in which the metaphor of prison becomes startlingly appropriate. 'O wretched man that I am'! Paul exclaims to the church in Rome, 'who shall deliver me from the body of this death?... with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin' [Romans 7.24-25]. To be born in the world was to take on the body's imprisoning bondage of temporal and spiritual death through Adam's sinful nature, which had to be broken for the soul to have freedom. (In Colossians 2.11-13 this ritual overthrow of the body's dominion is symbolized by spiritual 'circumcision'.) But for Wight the weakening of the mortal frame that heralded her spiritual deliverance into a new liberty of union and communion with her Redeemer was not death itself, but rather a symbolic death and rebirth through suffering. At one point, surfacing from her trance state to ponder the four years of spiritual suffering that had preceded the final conflict, she commented, 'so long I have been a filthy sinner. Now I have been four days in the grave, with Lazarus, & now I am risen,

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara Ritter Dailey, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London', Church History 55, 4. (1986): 438-455 (440). On ars moriendi see Philippe Aries, The Hour of Our Death (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1981]), 13, 15 and 18.

to live with Jesus Christ, for ever in glory' (27).

The prophetic body of a Trapnel or Wight, as it drew seemingly ever closer to death by extreme illness and abstinence, became a kind of spiritual battlefield of militant conflict between opposing supernatural forces, a metaphysical divide that encompassed the onlookers as well as the dying sufferer.<sup>36</sup> Wight herself, on the night of Tuesday 13 April, reportedly started from her trance with the exclamation, 'The Devil fights with me, as he did with Michael and his Angels. Do you not see him? Do you not see him?', and struck out repeatedly with the back of her hand (19). The spiritual and physical struggles of an early modern deathbed, while particular to the sufferer, could also take on the aspect of public ritual. The numbers of attendants usual to illness were, in the bedchamber of the dying person, supplemented by friends and spectators, as if to reassert the common bonds of humanity. In Wight's case, her nurses and visitors reportedly saw a young girl with bandaged eyes and hair matted with dried blood, unable to rise from her bed due to the effects of prolonged stress and the serious injuries sustained in earlier self-destructive frenzies, and yet uttering 'speeches of grace', in a voice low-toned and punctuated by tears signifying her inward sorrow and repentance (3). To other troubled souls her words had the potency of an oracular utterance from God: despite her blindness her advice was tailored to the experience of each individual (44-49).

The profound religious significance

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<sup>36</sup> See Aries, 13, 18; also Dailey, 439-440.

ascribed by Jessey to Wight's fast is indicated by his authorial preface addressed to Mrs Wight, in which he describes her daughter as 'such a Monument of the Exceeding Riches of GODS GRACE manifested to her, and uttered by her' (Sig I).

When some...shall read such unfoldings of Gospel-mysteries by a child newly comforted, before she could hear any Creature speak to her, such descantings on..choyce Scriptures, discovering the Gospels pith and marrow, that was folded up therein... some will be ready to reject all as incredible...When some shal read how... in humane reson she was unlike to live two days more; that then, and not till then the Lord should raise her up by Faith, to EAT and ARISE, and then to WALK, they will wonder. And some will come, or send to you...to enquire about it.... (Sig L)

To those who doubted the genuineness of Wight's fast, Jessey offered the evidence of Trapnel's own fast (reputed to have taken place in June 1647, during her sister-prophet's recovery), as another legitimizing example of prophetic revelation (55, 139-140). He also mentions the inadequacy of print to convey the visual impact of Wight's ordeal (28, 39). Wight herself also declares the insufficiency of words to describe either her spiritual torments or the divine restoring love which brought them to an end (41, 68).

Literary historians, in viewing Wight's condition, have perhaps not given enough attention to the purely medical aspects of her case: the convulsions and loss of sight that characterize her initial breakdown are well-recognized features of severe concussion. Wight's prophetic body, as it hovered between life and death in that spring of 1647, was briefly the contentious focus between the spiritual and the medical realms. Those attending her included a number of

practising physicians; at least two were closely connected with the recently-established College of Physicians.<sup>37</sup> Despite this company of distinguished practitioners, there is only one recorded instance of an attempt to dose Wight with a medicinal cordial, on the recommendation of a gentlewoman visitor. The mixture was prepared and put to her lips, but Wight refused, saying that 'She could not...that the smell of it made her sick' (56). She seems to have viewed such a medical intervention in the same light as her family's and friends' constant urgings that she try to eat: as an interference with her own quest for the final remedy that could heal both body and soul. On 2 May, after six weeks of fasting, she still maintained that 'God hath given me food for my soul, when my soul was well nigh starving for want of food...God hath wrought a miracle in delivering my soul. And if that he hath appointed life, he will give me strength to take in the one, as well as the other. Now I am worse when I take it...'. At the same time she added claims of a private spiritual eucharist (that is, separate from the administrative rites within the congregation) saying 'God hath given me Christ to feed upon; and his flesh is meat indeed; and his blood drink' (57). References were also made to spiritual 'manna', and 'honey out of the rock' (31, 34, 39). Trapnel, in her fast

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<sup>37</sup> These were Nathan Paget, a fellow, and Thomas Coxe, an army physician and future fellow, then with a flourishing London practice. Charles Webster, The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660 (London: Duckworth, 1975) 82, 307-308; DNB; Dailey, 445. Also present were Gerard Boate, a London practitioner, and Benjamin Worsley, an army physician, both among the Oxford experimentalists of the 'Invisible College', set up by Robert Boyle, brother to Lady Ranelagh. An association of philosophical and scientific reformers, the 'College' is sometimes seen as a precursor to the Royal Society: Webster, 57-58; also DNB. On Boate and Worsley, see Webster's index.

that June, also refused the offices of a physician urged on her by friends: ('I told them I had not faith to make use of him, and whatever is not faith is sin; and besides...I could not get down any thing...'). Instead she pressed the minister Mr Greenhill to pray with her, after which she felt an assurance that she would recover, although outwardly weaker than ever (Legacy, 30).<sup>38</sup>

The satisfaction, even satiation, experienced by each of these fasting prophetesses, nourished with the 'manna' of divine communion in the absence of virtually any outward bodily sustenance, brought their cases into conflict with those seeking scientific confirmation of the phenomenon. Jessey, a faith-healer with some medical training, was well aware of sceptics and critics of his account of Wight's healing by the spirit and restoration to active life.<sup>39</sup> At several points he systematically lists Wight's intake, and particularly what she drank. (Any inferences that the young girl's outpourings were due to alcoholic inebriation, were forestalled by assertions that 'she never having loved strong drink, nor wine, nor strong water, since she was born... (21, 56).) He carefully lists the names of respected witnesses who

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<sup>38</sup> On the symbolic significance of fasting and miracle cures in the early modern period, see Thomas, 148-150; Smith, 47-52 and 37; and Hyder E. Rollins, 'Notes in Some English Accounts of Miraculous Fasts', The Journal of American Folk-Lore 34 (1921), 357-376. On women's prophetic fasts, see Purkiss; and Dailey, on Sarah Wight. Trapnel is considered in relation to Puritan fast-days in Teresa Mary Feroli, 'Engendering the Body Politic: Women Prophets and the English Revolution, 1625-67', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> DNB; Dailey, 446.

had provided accounts of the miracle:

...many Godly Ministers and gracious Saints, that know Mistress Wight and the Maid, and this Daughter of Abraham; have ground to judg,...the Relator by conference with them, hath it from their own mouths...The power of God appearing therein wonderfully to the beholders, in upholding her full 75. days, without one crum of bread or meat, and with so little drink (55-56; Sig A1<sup>r</sup>-A1<sup>v</sup>).

Interestingly, various Old and New Testament references to acts of physical healing by spiritual means (which constitute Scriptural validation of Jessey's testimony) appear only at the very conclusion of the work (141-143).

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### 3. The Prophet as Bride: Desire Sanctified

To a woman complaining of the multiplicity of her sins, Wight had testified of her own experience of demonic possession as akin to that of the madman cured by Christ [Matthew 8]:

'Legions of Devils' she retorted, 'were within me; not before me, but within me, yet he hath clothed me, and cast out Legion' (102). When another woman described her own sense of having experienced diabolic possession in terms of smoke or brimstone entering her mouth and lodging in her belly, while the house seemed 'full of Devils' and a voice said within her 'Thou art damn'd, damn'd', Wight contributed her own similar experience. 'I could see nothing, she said, 'but Hell and wrath, I was as desperate as ever was any: I said, I cared not, whether I had mercy or no. I felt my self, soul and body in fire and brimstone already' (78). At one point she quotes Job, wishing herself to have died unborn and entombed in the

womb rather than to be existing in her present lost state (12).

A sense of sin and uncleanness seems often to have been associated with desire or sexual fears. Wight's feelings of personal guilt as a 'filthy sinner' began at about the age of twelve, probably with the onset of puberty, normally a time of great emotional and physical changes. She identifies her sinnership with that of Israel in Old Testament prophetic images: inconstant wives of God, lusting after idols [Jeremiah 2-3]: 'Judah...played the Harlot; yet God kept faith...though thou hast played the Harlot with many lovers; Return, for I am married to thee...what was Jerusalem? Her skirts were full of blood, her streets were full of blood' (17). As has been noted, blood had a powerful ritual significance.<sup>40</sup> In Jewish tradition it was the sacred source of life, not to be eaten or utilized save in holy sacrifice [Leviticus 17.10-14]). This would appear to have its origins in male terms of experience, in which blood loss is associated with injury or other threat to life.<sup>41</sup> The female experience of blood loss is an essential and largely unremarkable fact of biological life. The properties and processes of women's reproductive roles, therefore, acquired potent charges of social and religious taboo. In Old Testament prophetic texts like that glossed by Wight above, blood was connected with general (though usually

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<sup>40</sup> Douglas, 120.

<sup>41</sup> These distinctions have become explicit in Bakhtinian concepts of the classically 'closed' male, and grotesquely 'open' female, bodies. Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), 92-95.

expressed as female) sexual/moral corruption leading to the death of the tribe or nation (see also Ezekiel 16, 22, and 23; and Hosea 2).

But if the sacred/profane doubleness of blood is exploited in Old Testament imagery, it is most fully realized in the New Testament, in which the atoning blood of Christ's sacrificial death is the expiation for all the sins of humanity. Wight's earliest recorded signal to her attendants of her dawning hope that she might number among those saved by Christ was couched in these symbolic terms: 'There's a fountain open, for Judah, and for Jerusalem; for sin, and for uncleanness...not streams, but a fountain...an open fountain...' (17). On another occasion she referred to him as 'a standing River, continually to drink of' (58). The blood and water streaming from Christ's side were viewed by her as the necessary dual cure for her own evil: 'I saw myself crucified with Christ,...my sins pierced him... there came out of his side a Fountain of blood, for the guilt of sin: and not only so, but a fountain of water, to wash away the filth of sin: to wash away all my filth. There's enough in him, not only to justifie, but also to sanctifie' (53). Linked with prophetic depictions of the feminized, sinful tribe of Judah, Wight saw her polluted self as cleansed by God's/Christ's love (61). She cited the extreme self-abuse to which she had earlier been driven as evidence of the strength of her abhorrence of her own guilty state: 'I beat my head oft against the wall, and took my flesh in my teeth, and the more...I did it the less I felt it; unsuccessful suicide attempts caused her to 'beat myself for it... because it took

not effect' (115).

...if I spake any thing that was offensive to any with me, or did that I should not, when it was brought to mind afterward, then I abused my body for it most of all. And that...is the cause why I lie here...for now that he hath brought me to my self, now I feel it. He did not only bring my Soul to Hell, and brought it back again, but my body to the grave, that he might raise it up again, if he see it good. (115-116)

God the wrathful father-judge might also act the part of a mothering deity.<sup>42</sup> The preacher John Cotton observed, 'Women, if they were not Mothers, would not take such homely offices up, as to cleanse their Children from their filth; why if God were not of the like affection to us, hee would not cleanse us from our filthiness, ...so would wee even wallow in the defilements of sin, if God did not cleanse us'. For Thomas Shepherd also, the believer was a spiritual infant for God's maternal succour: 'for a God so pitiful as many times to help without cries, more than a mother with tender bowels'.<sup>43</sup> Jessey was quick to point out that it was not until Wight was stricken blind and deaf, unable to hear or read Scripture (that is, cut off from all outward means of grace), 'that then should be the time of love...a child newly comforted, before she could hear any Creature speak to her' (Jessey, Epistle). Her reduced, passive and defiled bodily state was like the outcast and polluted infant of Ezekiel [16.4-9]. This prophetic metaphor of Jehovah's redemption of the tribe of Israel effectively foreshadows the New Testament models for Christ's redemption of lost humanity: on a communal level, of

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<sup>42</sup> Leverenz, 122, 123-4.

<sup>43</sup> Cotton, A Practical Commentary...[on] John (London, 1656), 40-41; Shepard Parable, in Works, II, 583: both in Leverenz, 124 n.37.

his bride the Church; and in terms of the fallen sinner personified in the parable of the Samaritan and the beaten traveller left to die by the roadside [Luke 10.30-34]. In recounting how Christ the merciful father/ Samaritan took mercy on her afflicted self, and restored her to life, Wight elides the images of bloodied infant and traveller: 'Mine own eyes pitied not my self; and just then was the time of love. And then the good Samaritan, then Jesus Christ came, and powr'd in wine and Oyl, when I had most need' (61). The same terms are echoed by Trapnel describing her own deliverance from the terrors of the Law into grace:

Christ was that good Samaritan, that found me wounded, whom the Law nor Priest did not pittie; legall thretnings, and legall promises looked upon me, but passed by and left me wallowing in blood, and pained with wounds; and if it had not been for that tender hearted Samaritan Jesus Christ, I had perished; oh how comfortable was his oyl and wine to my wounds! great was his care for me, no tender mother like to Jesus... . (Legacy, 13)

In the sweetness of divine communion, both Trapnel and Wight felt a desire for death (Legacy 27, 28; Jessey, 34). At the point when Wight's condition reached the lowest ebb, it was divinely revealed to her that, while she greatly wished to die and be with God, she was intended to remain in the body for a long while. Having shown her that all her sins were forgiven, God requested that she rise like Paul and 'go to Damascus', to carry on her life of divine testimony (132-135). On 10 June 1647 Wight asked for and ate a broiled fish after fast of 76 days (138). Her choice of food parallels (consciously, or not?) Christ's eating of a broiled fish after his resurrection [Luke 23:41-43]. In a similarly implicit Christ-imaging, Trapnel, while in the midst of mortal illness,

was given the message that in three days she would be raised up (Legacy 27).

Human sin, in terms of its resistance to the workings of the Holy Spirit, can be seen as a blockage of the conduit by which humanity is united to God, leaving the seeker in a state of corruptive nature and an alien world.<sup>44</sup> The unblocking of that channel seems to be indicated in Wight's many references to flowing, fountaining water, and of herself as a 'vessel' of grace. During her long weeks of fasting Wight's various utterances were almost always prefaced (understandably, perhaps) by drinks of water: two, three, or even four full cups might be needed, especially after days of uninterrupted trance. Her requests were made as emblematic demonstrations to onlookers of the believer's dependence upon Christ's free grace. 'Give me a little water good people; Christ hath given you water freely...Jesus Christ when he turned water into wine, he turned not cups full, or glasses full, but firkins full. If you give a cup of cold water as to a Disciple, you shall not lose your reward' (Jessey, 21; also 23, 24, 33); [John 2.6; Matthew 10.42]. Jesus Christ, she reminded her listeners, had drunk his Cup 'to the very dregs', and now offered the water of life to all that thirsted (27, 28). Concomitantly, the letter by John Saltmarsh which prefaces Exceeding Grace, refers to the 'waters of life' as 'flowing out of the bellies of believers' (Sig A2'). Trapnel in Legacy also speaks of 'the pourings out of the Spirit' in the latter days when God's 'Sons and his Daughters shall Prophetise...as

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<sup>44</sup> Leverenz, 149.

the Scripture hath said, out of their belly shall flow Rivers of living Waters; this spake he of the Spirit which should be given after his Ascention to the Father' (23). She also mentions the fountain of free grace (13). Within these commingling images of flowing waters, Wight and Trapnel as prophets and dependent believers become tributaries of their source-fountain Christ; thematically, sustenance and carnal imagery become sanctified in the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb.

Wight expressed to those around her a deep content despite her bodily traumas: '...I have my desire; I desired nothing but a crucified Christ, & I have him... a crucified Christ, a naked Christ, ...I desired him so, and I have him so, & I have nothing else.' (Jessey, 22). [To her brother, urging her to eat]: I cannot; I have what I did desire, I have a crucified Christ: I am so full of the Creator, that I now can take in none of the Creature. I am fill'd with heavenly Manna'. (31). This sense of spiritual safety is expressed in her description of dreams (58), particularly her dream of being saved from stampeding horses (148-149).<sup>45</sup> Of Christ's saints, she declares, 'They are his Jewels...nay, they are his seal on his heart: they lie in his bosom. When you take a thing out of a mans bosom, you cannot take it, but you must touch the man (clapping her hands on her brest)' (19-20). Trapnel, seven years later, harps on the same theme: 'Christ...sticks no flower in his bosom, but that which none can snatch from him; his walks of delight, is in no garden but where he may see his

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<sup>45</sup> See above, III.4.

beloved walk before him...'. Her figurative language reverts to the Canticles to relate the ecstasy of the soul's state of union with Christ: '...the Saint that is throughly spiritual, loves dearly to walk inclosed in the arms of its Saviour, and to be imbraced by him, and kissed with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is better then wine...' (Legacy, 16).

She describes a 'sealing of the Spirit', after a period of darkness and doubt, when she was reassured of salvation.

I had the representation of a seal set upon the wax, the spirit as fire made my stony spirits pliable for it to leave its mark or impression upon, as fire fits the wax for the seal; a glorious impression and stamp was set on my spirit...I felt, saw and heard, that I never did before... (11)

Her description of the aftermath of this 'soul-sealing', the 'so great ravishings' of the Holy Spirit, has connotations of almost post-coital euphoria, the consummation of the soul's union with God:

oh how transcendently glorious is the true sealing of the Spirit! sure no tongue is able to speak it out, the pen of the readiest writer cannot write this, ...for depth, length, and breadth, who can give a full description or relation of it... Could not Paul tell what he saw in the third heavens? How then shall we declare our heavens glory, when we know not whether we are in the body or out?

She states that walking along the street her 'raptures have been such, that I minded not the ground I went upon, but divers times have been ready to fall flat on the plain ground' (11-12)..

The rapture of intense communion with the heavenly beloved is characterized by silence. When nearest to God even Trapnel's busy tongue fell still, and she became as cold as death (41). Davies, on her part, never described the 1625

vision by which God called her into prophecy. Wight on her sickbed was silent and withdrawn for much of the time, becoming distressed when pressed by others to stir and take food (Jessey, 19). The trope most expressive of this union with the divine is that of 'taking in', of being spiritually fed in a eucharist bestowed by Christ upon his beloved. Wight, when urged in the midst of her illness to take food or drink, replied 'I have Jesus Christ, I have enough, he feeds me with delights - He not only hath drops; but he flows in of himself'; and, on another occasion, 'I have wine will refined, no dregs are in it. Its pure; thats the purity of Christ. He gives me not cups full; but he hath me into his wine-cellar, & fills me with flaggons' (Jessey, 57). In 1656, following her brother Jonathan's death almost a decade after her marathon fast, Wight expressed in a letter her continuing sense of communion with Christ as her soul's lover.

In my former Creaturely seeking of the Lord...I found a vast emptyness in all things: but when God... turn'd me to himself...my hungry thirsty spirituall-starved soul was satisfied with that fulness that fills empty nothings with good things...when we seek the true God aright, we shall finde him to be a certain Light above all Lights, which no carnal eye can comprehend; and a certain Voyce ...and such a sweet perfume as Christ, which no nose of sense can attain unto: He is a certain Sweetness above all Sweetness; no perfumes, Ointments, Spices, Milk, Honey, or Manna, is comparable to this sweetness... Christs imbracing is such an imbracing, where no armes are ever pluck'd asunder...the poor soul hath thus found and enjoyed Christ in the inmost Holy Places of its new heart...this is it a soul seeks when it seeks God; this is it we love and desire... (Wight, 56-59).

After her mother's death Trapnel found Christ to be 'more tender' than her deceased parent, a 'Comforter...bringing love tokens to my soul...' (Legacy, 13). Recounting her mother's deathbed prayer for God's blessing upon her daughter, Trapnel

then explicitly links her own prophetic calling with marriage to Christ (10). Her descriptions of Christ's dealings recall the attentive bridegroom in the Song of Songs:

he was... a Comforter that hath tarried and abided with me,... revealing love, and bringing love tokens to my soul, and setting before me varieties of dishes at every banquet, for a year together my meat was sweet meats from heaven, my drink wine upon the lees, wines well refined, milk and hony was my ordinary dish...some days and nights I had feast full of marrow, and [visions] full of glory...the spirits of wine hath a great efficacy in quickning those that faint and [swoon] away, but of a stronger efficacy is divine love, it makes dead souls live... (13, 16)

In the cases of Trapnel, Wight, and others, the spiritual significance of their unnatural states of illness, fasting, and trances was authenticated by the scriptural precedents of John in Revelation, and of the Old Testament prophets. 'The Lord is building his temple', Trapnel declares of her weakened state, 'it is no time now for them to build tabernacles... they say these are convulsion fits, and sickness, and diseases that make thy handmaid to be in weakness; but oh they know not the pouring forth of thy spirit, for that makes the body to crumble, and weakens nature; in these extraordinary workings thou intendest to shew what is coming forth hereafter...' (Cry, 29).

The protracted witness of such prophetic prostration amid a local gathering could afford a means of influencing public opinion itself.<sup>46</sup> Through Jessey's own account of the prolonged ordeal of Wight's fasting and miraculous recovery,

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<sup>46</sup> See in addition the cases of Mrs. Joan Drake in George H. Williams, 'Called by Thy Name, Leave Us Not', Harvard Library Bulletin, 16 (1968), 111-128 and 278-300; also of Drake, Mrs. Jane Ratcliff and Mary Simpson in Dailey, 442-443.

(initially an ars moriendi text compiled when Wight's life seemed to be ebbing) large numbers of spectators were attracted to her bedside between April and July of 1647. Those attending included many leaders and representatives of London sectarian factionalism in the 1640s, and Jessey's relation of Wight's miraculous deliverance may well have been intended to promote greater unity through tolerance among radical sects.<sup>47</sup>

But alongside the ars moriendi model, I feel that the Exceeding Grace narrative can be understood in other terms: those of the ritual ceremonies customarily accompanying maternity. Following Natalie Zemon Davis's identification of recognizable female rites of dominance over men in early modern France, others have identified women's mutual and wide-ranging support systems in English ceremonies surrounding childbirth and 'lying-in'.<sup>48</sup> Birth, a 'rite of passage' central to the lives of nearly all early modern women, had not yet become medicalized, and was mediated physically and psychically by the practices and rituals of the 'women's world', in which customary patriarchal public and domestic hierarchies were inverted.<sup>49</sup>

As bystanders and fringe participants, men would have been familiar with these 'birthing' customs and rites, during which they were briefly marginalized. I would suggest that Jessey's

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<sup>47</sup> See above, II.4.

<sup>48</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', Society and Culture in Early Modern France (London: Duckworth, 1975): 124-151.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, 96-7 and 68-69. Cressey, while concurring with Wilson's view that childbirth rituals were primarily female-dominant, suggests that these alternative spheres were correspondent to patriarchy, rather than subversive of it (110-111).

narrative of Wight's illness adopts, consciously or unconsciously, the ceremonial format of these 'female' rites. From the onset of her illness on 6 April 1647, Wight was apparently tended only by her mother and the servant Hannah Guy. Jessey is the first male non-relative recorded as entering Wight's room during the early and severe portion of her ordeal. This pattern is similar to that followed with a mother-to-be, who from early labour was attended only by closest female relatives and friends until her recovery from her travail.<sup>50</sup> The close-curtaining which customarily shrouded the birth-room from outside light and air until well after the delivery, is strikingly paralleled in the linen bandages shielding Wight's damaged eyes from the light in the early days of her illness.<sup>51</sup> The birth process was ritually completed by the act of washing and swaddling the newly-delivered infant.<sup>52</sup> In Wight's case recovery was more protracted: while able to dress and take her first food on 11 June (138-9), she was not able to begin cleansing her injured head of encrusted blood for another fortnight (142-3).

To a newly-delivered mother, a 'lying in' period of three to four weeks allowed time to recover her strength and to shift physically and socially from seclusion back into the public space. The earliest recuperative stages were followed by the mother's 'upsitting', an altogether more social mode, with the formal reception of visitors. This corresponds to the

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<sup>50</sup> Wilson, 70.

<sup>51</sup> Wilson, 73. Jessey, 36, 96, 18, and 25.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, 75.

period in which Wight was sufficiently recovered to counsel selected 'troubled souls'. (These episodes commence in Jessey, 44, and probably occurred sometime after 25 April, the last previously-recorded date.) Jessey lists the various ministers who comforted Wight both before and after her 'crisis', along with the most notable of the increasing numbers of visitors following her initial recovery period (8-10). The latter weeks of a typical maternal lying-in period were a time when larger and mixed groups of visitors were increasingly welcomed, usually culminating in feasts and celebrations. In Wight's case special gatherings took place on certain occasions, usually Sundays, and on 25 April she received female friends from her own and neighbouring parishes, and further afield. On Sunday, 9 May many came to visit and talk with her 'after both Sermons' (65). In a general gathering on 26 June, those who had prayed for Wight gave thanks for her recovery. She was now out of bed, and, like a new mother undergoing a 'churching' readmission to the religious community, she chose to remain veiled at this event of thanksgiving and celebration (143-146). Four days later she made her first reappearance at Great Allhallows Church (147).

The implicit childbirth metaphors with regard to Wight are plain enough, but in this context Jessey's role as narrator takes on a competitive edge: while she wrestles within the body to be delivered of a spiritually reborn soul, he labours to give birth to her text. We as readers gain access to Wight's sickbed testimony only by Jessey's intervention: from his already privileged position as sickroom confidant and

recorder, the minister progresses to the role of scriptive midwife. As writer and producer of the printed text, he even makes a profit by his services.<sup>53</sup> Arguably, Jessey's narrative constitutes a male discursive response to the feminine 'ceremonial' surrounding Wight in her ordeals and deliverance.

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#### 4. Sequestration and Silencing by the State

Printed books can themselves become silenced prophetic bodies. Following an initial ban on her books, Davies journeyed to the Netherlands in 1633 for their publication. On returning, she presented Laud (now primate) with a handwritten version of her prophecies.<sup>54</sup> He responded by seizing her books and protesting to the king. Davies also petitioned, but Charles refused to rescue her books. His order that she be summoned before the High Commission was a betrayal which she afterwards perpetuated, reprinting the warrant along with her own petition to him, in her works published during the 1640s.<sup>55</sup> Davies's view of her books as prophetic martyrs resulted from a particular event: on 23 Oct 1633 (a date thereafter always associated by her with infamy) she was forced to witness a

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<sup>53</sup> Exceeding Grace was Jessey's first venture into print, and the numerous editions of this work produced over the following years and decades indicate that some commercial rewards must have accrued to the author.

<sup>54</sup> See Davies, Great Brittain's Visitation. ([London], 1645), 31; also her And without proving. ([London], 1648), 4. Further references to these works will be in the main text.

<sup>55</sup> See Davies, The Blasphemous charge against her. [London], 1649; and Her appeal. ([London], 1646), 31-35. Further references to these works will be given in the main text.

number of them put to the torch by Laud.<sup>56</sup> Other copies of the proscribed works were burned in the streets. In The Everlasting Gospel, Laud's mockery of her prophecies is coupled with his own downfall in 1645 (6-10).<sup>57</sup> To Davies he was the murderer who had 'ravished' and destroyed the books that were her 'childe': the prophecies that she now viewed as her legitimate (if fatherless) offspring, embodying both her lineage (in place of her two dead sons) and her prophetic authenticity. One of their many siblings is presented to its public as 'This Babe, object to their scorn, for speaking the truth... thus difficult to be fathered or licensed... without their Benediction, in these plain Swathe-bands...commended unto thy hands'.<sup>58</sup>

Davies's extracts of the court records suggest that her judges saw her inspirational claims as essentially a violation of gender order. Her claim to be 'a prophetess, falsely pretending to have receiv'd certain Revelations from God', had, they concluded, 'much unbeseemed her Sex' (Blasphemous Charge, 9). Only secondarily was she condemned for printing and importing unlicensed books. A fine of £3,000 was recommended, and an order made for her public submission and confinement to the Gatehouse. An appeal on Davies's behalf was

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<sup>56</sup> E. Cope, 66. See also Davies, Samsons Legacie. (London, 1642), 18-19; and The Star to the Wise (London, 1643), 19. Further references to the primary works will appear in the main text.

<sup>57</sup> Davies, The Everlasting Gospel. ([London], 1649). Further references will be in the main text.

<sup>58</sup> To the Reader, in Davies, The Restitution of Prophecy, ([London], 1651). (Further references will be given in the main text.) See also Cope, 68.

made by Charles's sister, the Queen of Bohemia.<sup>59</sup> In response, a letter sent from Whitehall to the English resident at the Hague gave the commission's collective view of the prophetess as

a woman too well knowne... whose devellish practizes in her pretended prophecies have drawne upon her this weeke a sever censure in the High commission court: and might have cast her into further danger there being a mixture in them of treasonable conceptions, if the judges had not thought her possessed with a frantique spirit, to be conjured out of her by restrayning her libertie and disabling her to do hurt.<sup>60</sup>

Despite her physical confinement ('Excommunicated, no Bible allowed her, or Pen and Ink, or woman Servant' (Her appeal (1646), 33), Davies refused to make a public submission of repentance. The fine also remained unpaid.<sup>61</sup>

In contrast to the harsh treatment apportioned to Davies, the authorities of the Protectorate in early 1654 took no initial steps against Trapnel after her Whitehall trances and fasting following the detention of Vavasour Powell. It has been argued that her placing of her witness so explicitly under divine authority rendered her political threat to patriarchal authority more ambiguous.<sup>62</sup> Also there was her singular practice of witnessing from borrowed chambers and households during 1654-1655: this imposition of a temporary 'domestic' enclosure upon the public space of her prophetic

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<sup>59</sup> Other highly-placed supporters of Davies included Sir Edward Dering, who was convinced of her powers of foreknowledge, and the Anglican divine Peter du Moulin. Thomas, 162-163.

<sup>60</sup> E. Cope, 71.

<sup>61</sup> E. Cope, 74-75.

<sup>62</sup> Sue Wiseman, 'Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse', New Feminist Discourses, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992) 176-196 (187).

performance might have acted to obscure the customary boundaries separating public and private spheres.<sup>63</sup> However, part of a message by Marchamont Nedham to Cromwell on 7 February 1654 shows Trapnel had been kept under surveillance since her Whitehall display in January.

There is a twofold [Fifth Monarchist] design about the prophetess Hannah [Trapnel], who played her part lately at Whitehall...one to print her discourses and hymns, which are desperate against your person, family, children, friends, and the government; the other to send her all over England, to proclaim them viva voce. She is much visited, and does a world of mischief in London, and would do so in the country. The vulgar dote on vain prophecies...<sup>64</sup>

Trapnel tells of her terrors on first learning that a warrant was out for her arrest ('I never having been called before a Ruler'), and terms herself 'a poor Shrub, one of a timorous, fearful, cowardly nature' (Legacy 54, 60). On trial at the court of sessions, she found herself 'a gazing-stock for all sorts of people: but I praise the Lord, this did not daunt me, nor a great deal more, that I suffered that day' (Report, 24). Trapnel later saw this ordeal as a fulfilment of her earlier dream of the bulls and of God's protection from 'the horns running at my breast' (57).<sup>65</sup> On 7 April 1654 orders were given for Trapnel to be taken into custody and detained at Portsmouth for passage to London, and she was sent to Bridewell on 2 June 1654.<sup>66</sup> In the following weeks A Legacy for Saints, her third work giving an account of her Cornwall

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<sup>63</sup> See Habermas, 45; and Holstun, 25.

<sup>64</sup> CSPD, 393.

<sup>65</sup> A fuller account is given above, III.4.

<sup>66</sup> CSPD, 86, 89; 134, 197, 436.

visit, with autobiographical material and letters from her while confined at Portsmouth and Bridewell, was seen through the presses by representatives of Allhallows Church, who gave ringing testimonials to the virtue of their prodigy (Sig A4<sup>v</sup>).

Thomas Hobbes was sufficiently impressed by Trapnel's reputation at this time to mention her alongside James Naylor and William Lilley in his discussion of prophecy in Behemoth:

About two years before this there appeared in Cornwall a prophetess, much famed for her dreams and visions, and hearkened to by many, whereof some were eminent officers. But she and some of her accomplices being imprisoned, we heard no more of her.<sup>67</sup>

The cell awaiting Trapnel at Bridewell proved to be ill-lit, damp, stinking, and verminous, and she suffered from fevers and other illnesses during her stay. The Matron who greeted her late-night arrival weighed her up coldly, 'looked steadfastly in my face and ...said; "there is a company of ranting sluts of which I have had some in my house, who have spoken a great many good words like you; but they had base actions"' (Report, Otten, 66).

The decision to confine her in that prison of common prostitutes, seems to have been an attempt by the authorities to blacken the character of an increasingly public figure: labels of 'whore' were standard against unruly sectarian women.<sup>68</sup> Trapnel would later redirect these accusations of sexual voraciousness in a anti-papal diatribe against her opponents, labelling them 'Baal's Priests...dressing the

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<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, Behemoth, 2nd edn, ed. by Ferdinand Tonnies (London: Frank Cass, 1969), 187.

<sup>68</sup> See above, II.1; also Holstun, 42, and Achinstein, 141-148.

Scarlet Whore in new clothes' (Report Sig A3"). But her fears were that the accusations against her would be generally believed:

...the Tempter said to me, that I should be a byword and a laughingstock while I lived, and that everyone would point at me as I went up and down the streets; when I came out they would say, "There goes a Bridewell bird," and many will gather about thee, to mock and deride thee; and... thy kindred, they will be ashamed of thee... because of Bridewell reproach (Report, Otten, 67).

As an unmarried woman, Trapnel had always to guard against allegations of promiscuity. Purity of mind and body and an unsullied reputation were her shield; without them she would lose all credibility. When, before the Court, she asked for better conditions in her cell, the hostile Matron again attacked her virtue: 'she told them that I would have men come to me, and that word went to my heart, I knowing my bashful nature, and my civil life was known to many; and I said to them, "Truly Gentlemen, my delight is not nor ever was in men's company."' Later in the she expresses her 'defiance to those that have called me whore, which language hath proceeded from Court, I hear...'. She claims her place as among the righteous of 'Christ's flock...for his use, and he keepeth them, that nothing can putrify them in that newborn state they are in' (Report, Otten, 70, 76-77). Later printed verses elaborate a verbal meditation on Christ's 'Virgin body pure', conceived and born painlessly and 'without filth' (Voice, 58).

The hardships of the 1654 Cornwall visit and subsequent incarceration do appear to have sharpened Trapnel's contempt for authority. In transit to Bridewell, she writes to Allhallows Church portraying those 'Priests and Rulers' who

perpetuated their power through perjury and other crimes: such 'abominations' were their 'horn', the sign of the Beast. 'I believe you never saw or felt than as I have done since I cam from London,...I would have been silent...but seeing its against the Priestly office, and prophetical and Kingly power of King Jesus, I must declare for him, and while I have tongue and breath it shall go forth for the fifth Monarchy-Laws teaching and practice' (Legacy, 59). After Trapnel's release her name appears twice on the title page of Report and plea; her authorial preface, defiant in tone and content, has replaced those of male 'gatekeepers'.<sup>69</sup> During her imprisonment she had refused to negotiate for her freedom by any agreement to cease prophesying, and when the order for her release was issued on 26 July, Trapnel claimed to have foreseen its arrival in a vision three weeks earlier.<sup>70</sup> Her final message was that the authorities 'shall be sure to hear from me,...for I sent letters to them, that so they might not say, they had not heard of the injustice acted under their dominion' (Report, Otten, 74).

Recovering from illness, Trapnel passed much of her seven-week confinement in singing and prayer with her women companions or 'sisters'; Ursula Adman remained with her throughout (71). By contrast, Davies's stay in the Gatehouse, from October 1633 to June 1635 was solitary and long. Her texts say little of her prison experiences. But she saw her

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<sup>69</sup> On 'gatekeepers' and women writers, see A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720, ed. by Maureen Bell, George Parfitt and Simon Shepherd (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 278-287.

<sup>70</sup> CSPD, 438.

survival of the 1633 trial and its sequel, recorded in her prophecies and the public state records, as confirming her role as a latter-day Daniel. And she never forgot the part of Laud and Charles I in those events (And without proving 4).

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## 5. A 'Divine Deviance': Prophetic Sign Behaviour

Prophetic public demonstrations, or 'sign behaviour', were non-verbal enactments designed to be conspicuous.<sup>71</sup> Testifying against sin by appearing without clothes or shoes, or in ashes and sackcloth, or other strange garb, was endorsed by Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial, and Jonah, while Revelation 11.3 put such 'signs' in the context of a coming apocalypse.<sup>72</sup> George Fox performed a 'sign' in 1651, by walking in stockinged feet through the streets of Lichfield crying 'Woe unto the bloody city'.<sup>73</sup> Such practices were an offence against highly-developed contemporary social codes on

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<sup>71</sup> W.C. Braithwaite endorses the importance of 'signs' within Quakerism, in *Beginnings*, 150-151. See also Carroll, 'Attitudes'; also by Carroll: 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked as a Sign"', *Quaker History* 67 (1978), 69-87; and 'Sackcloth and Ashes and Other Signs and Wonders', *JFHS* 53 (1975), 314-325. Such acts are viewed as performed metaphor in Bauman, 84-94. A linking of sign behaviour with language is suggested in Richard Farnworth's published argument for Quaker use of 'the proper language' of 'Thee' and 'Thou', which includes a postscript, 'Nakednesse a singe [sic] or figure', citing Old Testament prophetic precedents for going naked or in sackcloth to testify against an ungodly people: Farnworth, *The Pure Language of the Spirit*. (London: Giles Calvert, 1655), 6-7. Some acts were accompanied (or followed) by printed leaflets explaining their meaning to bystanders: see Maureen Bell, 'Mary Westwood Quaker Publisher', *Publishing History* 23 (1988), 5-66 (32-33); while Carroll points to an overall lack of such materials ('Sackcloth', 325).

<sup>72</sup> For exact biblical citations, see Carroll, 'Sackcloth', 314 n.1.

<sup>73</sup> Carroll, 'Sackcloth', 321.

the wearing of clothes.<sup>74</sup>

Another kind of 'sign' was exemplified in James Nayler's 1656 entry into Bristol with his followers spreading garments before him.<sup>75</sup> Such displays attracted notice in an age already congested with verbal religious discourse.<sup>76</sup> Laudian church reform was the subject of a destructive protest carried out in 1636 by Eleanor Davies in Lichfield Cathedral. After the Archbishop's delegate Sir Nathaniel Brent found the Church to be 'undecent', efforts were made to enrich the interior. The communion table, moved from its central position in the nave to the east end, became an altar, railed off from the congregation. A 'fairly built' bishop's throne was set up, and rearranged seating gave precedence to those of high social or clerical rank. Davies came to Lichfield that summer, and by Michaelmas was lodged in the cathedral close with Susan Walker, a clerk's wife. These two, with other local women, began a programme of collective action. On daily visits to the Cathedral they protested against the seating changes by occupying places in the choir for gentlewomen, and those next to the bishop's chair, allotted to wives of bishops, deans and canons.<sup>77</sup>

As early as 1625 Davies had declared her disgust at popish

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<sup>74</sup> On the importance of clothing in Tudor and Stuart England, see Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 129-131.

<sup>75</sup> On this event, see below, VI.2; also Beginnings, 241-277; and Emilia Fogelklou, James Nayler: The Rebel Saint, trans. by Lajla Yapp (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), 175-180 and *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> Bauman, 85-86.

<sup>77</sup> E. Cope, 82-83.

`Altars decked as a shop, shining with the light of so many Tapers and Candles'.<sup>78</sup> Later tracts described her view of the transformed interior of Lichfield Cathedral in 1636: `By them after what execrable maner Crucified the Oracles of God, their late Altars for that purpose prepared...over which a Gyant Crucifix being erected...exposed to the view of all to kneel before it: like as in Golgotha that Fridays dismal Day bowed the knee...' <sup>79</sup> She took particular offence at the altar and its covering cloth `of course purple Woollen'. The table which it covered was not only the `Lords Table', but also symbolized for her the `Tables of the Law' or Ten Commandments: a `Light of Lights' eclipsed by the hideous cloth (Bethlehem, 4). Davies had initially sent the bishop a specially-written petition, `The Appeal to the Throne', which has not survived. The request was ignored; whereupon, goaded apparently by her prophetic imperative `to light the same Court and...to awaken', and `resolved to set some mark upon their purple Covering', she entered the Cathedral one morning, poured hot tar on the altar hangings, and sat upon the bishop's throne, declaring herself primate and metropolitan (Bethlehem, 5).<sup>80</sup>

This demonstration, the only recorded case of Davies's physically acting out her prophecies, was intended as a reproof to the Laudians and a portent of divine displeasure (with some astuteness, as events were to prove). In acting

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<sup>78</sup> Davies, *A Warning to the dragon and all his angels*. (London, 1625), 34.

<sup>79</sup> Bethlehem Signifying, ([London], 1652), 3-4. Further references are given in the main text. See also Davies, *Restitution*.

<sup>80</sup> See also E. Cope, 84.

upon the iconic emblems of the altarcloth and bishop's chair, it makes deliberate points on the significance of their supposed sacred qualities. It also constitutes a collective and individual female critique of the Church clerisy. In a later account, Davies identifies the substance poured upon the altarcloth as 'a Confection made but of Tar, mixt with wheat Starch, with fair Water heated': probably prepared by the women in one of their own kitchens. Such a physical acting out of metaphors, juxtaposing elements not ordinarily brought together, subverted the boundaries between the symbolic and the literal.<sup>81</sup> Davies' self-enthronment as womanly head of England's Church, was a challenge to the clerical Anglican hierarchy: not for its gender, but for pro-Catholic tendencies which she saw as fatally weakening the true Church. The event provoked a backlash. Davies's account disposes of the episode itself in four short lines, followed by a lengthy, even sardonic description of the reaction:

Them possessing with such outrage flocking about it, some Gunpowder Treason as though: upon whose fright...a Sergeant at Arms was sent down at Candlemas to carry her up...At whose Arrival, though Higher Powers certified by the Sergeant at Arms, of such causless Panick Terror: yet said...who knows what she may do in other Mother Churches: Held it fit to commit her to the Cities Custody; [in Bedlam]...where was shut up by the space of two years.<sup>82</sup>

Davies's Lichfield protest is the only recorded instance of her having acted with other women.<sup>83</sup> These wives of the close

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<sup>81</sup> On interpreting acts of sign behaviour, see Bauman 85-87.

<sup>82</sup> Bethlehem, 5-6. This seizure is described in a later work written by Davies from Fleet prison: *Hells Destruction* (London, 1651), 6, 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> On female support systems, see *A Biographical Dictionary*, Critical Appendix 2, 250-257 (255); on Davies, see E. Cope, 50, 83-85.

now supported her against officialdom; following the 'desecration' Walker refused to force Davies to leave her house, even on the orders of the Chancellor of the Diocese, the Canon Residentiary, and the Dean. She was later heard to comment that Davies had followed her conscience, which was more than could be said of the Dean's official, Mr Latham.<sup>84</sup>

While intended to accord with the 'signs and wonders' of Old Testament prophecy, Davies's demonstration was seen as part of a Protestant iconoclasm not uncommon in places of worship since the Reformation.<sup>85</sup> In Laudian England church defacement had become so frequent that it was thought advisable to make an example of Davies. The archbishop reported to the king on Davies's 'gross abuse' at Lichfield Cathedral, ending with the request that she 'be so restrained, as she may have no more power to commit such horrible profanations'.<sup>86</sup> The Privy Council ordered Davies's committal on 17 December without a hearing; in January she entered Bethlehem hospital, where she stayed until 1640 (Bethlehem, 3). She would suffer other shorter imprisonments, the last at the Fleet in 1651-52. Common gaols of that era were not for the fainthearted. The sum of forty shillings, five a week, kept Trapnel from lying upon straw in her cell, and allowed greater privacy than for those in the neighbouring communal cells whose 'scolding' continued nightly. But the smells from her damp mattress and

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<sup>84</sup> E. Cope, 85.

<sup>85</sup> Margaret Aston, England's Iconoclasts, vol. I, Laws Against Images (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2-10.

<sup>86</sup> E. Cope, 92.

bedding mingled with that of the raw sewage channelled under her window. Rats running over her bed at night made 'a great noise, like dogs and cats in the room' (Report, Otten, 70-71).

Prison confinement was in one sense the externalization of the hardships and spiritual alienation by which a zealous visionary was set apart as a 'chosen' vessel for a divine messengership. As such it was a testing ground for prophetic authority: would the sufferer find solace and strength at the point where no other could aid? Trapnel, ill and feverish in her verminous cell, asked God 'for purging grace, that I might go out of prison more purified from the dross of corruptions than when I went into prison fire' (72-73). Where the power was given to endure, the vault could become sanctuary, affording an unprecedented closeness to God. Trapnel said of her time at Bridewell, 'The Lord ...filled me with joy unspeakable, and full of glory in believing, and many visions and Hallelujah songs I had there... more frequent...than they ever had been' (70). Prison could itself become a trope for prophetic witness. The Quaker Sarah Blackborow addresses 'Neighbours, Kindreds and People' saying that she has been 'moved to salute and to visit the spirit in prison in you all'.<sup>87</sup> Sarah Wight, whose bonds had been the outward mortal flesh and the inner devil-voice of conscience, advises a

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<sup>87</sup> A Visit to the Spirit in Prison. (London: Thomas Simmons, 1658), 7.

fellow believer struggling over rebellion against God:

I'll tell you what your state is. You are as a man,...  
 taken from his house, where there was some light; and...  
put in Ludgate...in a Dungeon, where he hath no light. If  
one comes from the King with a pardon, and to call such a  
one to the Kings Palace, where the light is greater and  
more glorious, than that he had before: how will he then  
admire it? And will you not admire it, if the great King  
shall do this with you, that are now in a dark Dungeon?  
 (Jessey, 110-111)

Davies's works contain many references to prisons. In a 1646 tract the 'keys' given Peter by Christ, symbolizing the Church's power to bind or loose from sin, are inverted into 'These keys of darknes': the ecclesiastical power to lock up 'Prisoners araignd'.<sup>88</sup> The 'Bethlehem' in the title of the work telling of her 1636 protest at Lichfield Cathedral, denotes Bethlehem Hospital, or Bedlam, where she was confined after that incident. And in Gatehouse Salutation the prison doors are flung wide open to herald the coming Marriage of the Lamb and the New Jerusalem:

Behold, I make all things new, Gates wide, new Earth...  
 as the golden Tree of life like renders its fruit, no  
 more pain, prison, strife...So Gates and Prison Doors be  
 no more shut./ The King of Glory comes, your souls lift  
 up.<sup>89</sup>

In June 1652, just days before her death, Davies proclaimed her victory over all trials and confinements. Bethlehem Signifying sets out her prophetic identity as stretching over and beyond the dominion, and symbolized by the multiple family names that reappear in her final signature: 'Audley of England from whence derives her Antiquity. Touchet of France the Paternal Name. Castlehaven in Ireland...From the Province of

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<sup>88</sup> Davies, The Day of Judgements Modell. ([London], 1646), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Eleanor [Davies], The Gatehouse Salutation. ([London], 1646), 6-7.

Wales that of Davis: and Douglas of Scotland the Doughty' (10-11). Such a prophet 'of the several Nations' could not be silenced, 'howsoever buried in the Land of Oblivion':

My hand shall hold him fast and my arm shall strengthen him, nor gates of Hell shall not prevail against her: O Hell or Fleet-Prison...where is thy Victory now. (11-12)

Chapter V. ENTHUSIASM AS A THREAT  
TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORDER

The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense...Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred.

(Hosea 9.7)

1. Madness and Prophetic 'Divine Fury' in Christendom

The original meaning of the term 'enthusiasm' and its cognates stems from the Greek word signifying 'to be possessed by a god'.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the four divine furies of Plato in the *Ion*, Ficino portrayed them as a hierarchy by which the soul was drawn from variance and disorder into unified adoration of God: from the lowest level of poetic fury, the ascent was through the mysteries and then prophecy, to the zenith of love. Prophetic fury was particularly exemplified in the Pythia, overcome by the god at Delphi.<sup>2</sup> The person so possessed was thought to have taken in (or been entered by) the spirit, knowledge, or power of a god, giving rise to the notion of 'divine inspiration'. Though not herself a sibyl, the priestess at Delphi may have been a source of inspiration

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 328.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Britnell, 'Poetic Fury and Prophetic Fury', *Renaissance Studies*, 3, 2, (1989), 106-114 (106-107).

for the sixth book of the Aeneid, which includes a flamboyant portrayal of possession by divine fury:

'Time it is to ask your destiny'

The Sibyl cried, 'for lo! The god is with me'. And speaking  
There by the threshold, her features, her colour were all at

once

Different, her hair flew wildly about, her breast was heaving,  
Her fey heart swelled in ecstasy; larger than life she seemed,  
More than mortal her utterance: the god was close and breathing  
His inspiration through her... <sup>3</sup>

'Vesselship' and divine transmission have been central themes throughout the history of female prophecy, and were particularized by such seventeenth-century figures as Eleanor Davies and the sectarian prophetesses. In the twenty-seven years of her prophetic career Davies was often accused of madness, and similar assertions are still advanced in denial of her historical claim to divine authority.<sup>4</sup>

But the powers of prophecy have long been shared by the saint and the lunatic.<sup>5</sup> Ecstatic madness and the experience of visions are themselves deeply embedded in Christian tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> Aeneid VI, trans. by C. Day Lewis, (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 11.45-51.

<sup>4</sup> Two examples are Roy Porter, 'The Prophetic Body: Lady Eleanor Davies and the Meanings of Madness', Women's Writing, 1, 1 (1994), 51-63; and Alfred Cohen, 'Prophecy and Madness: Women Visionaries During the Puritan Revolution', The Journal of Psychohistory, 11, 3 (Winter 1984), 411-430. On Davies's 1633 prophetic demonstration at Lichfield Cathedral and subsequent incarceration at Bedlam, see above, IV.4, and below, V.1.

<sup>5</sup> The role of madness in Christian tradition was mediated by classical texts as well as Islamic and Christian scholarship. For an informed discussion of the religious, intellectual, and legal significance of this inheritance in Renaissance humanism and the seventeenth century, see M.A. Screech, 'Good madness in Christendom', in The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry, ed. by W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and M. Shepherd, 3 vols. (London and New York: Tavistock, 1985), I, 25-39. George Rosen examines the further development of this association in 'Irrationality and Madness in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Europe', Madness in Society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 151-171.

Christ was frequently labelled a madman, on one occasion by his own relatives who were summoned to subdue him in the crowds of his followers [Mark 3.21]. The Pharisees declared that he cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub, and critics among his audience jeered, 'he hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him'? [Matthew 12.24; John 10.19-20]. Ranking himself and other Christians as 'fools for Christ's sake' [I Corinthians 4.10], Paul cautioned his followers against temporal prudence: 'Let no man deceive himself. If any man be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God' [I Corinthians 3.18-19].<sup>6</sup> A collective manifestation of such precepts is recorded at the first pentecostal gathering of early Christians, when participants 'began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance'. Those present were from many lands and dialects, yet 'every man heard them speak in his own language'. Bystanders ridiculed the event, saying 'These men are full of new wine' [Acts 2.1-13].<sup>7</sup> It was in denial of these accusations that Peter first resurrected the ancient, apocalyptic prophecy of Joel which, some sixteen centuries later, was to acquire new life and force for many in England:

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<sup>6</sup> During her long visionary fast in 1647, when Sarah Wight was asked to comment on accusations that she was deranged, she replied 'It's no more than my Lord and Master was before me...Let me undergo the uttermost, I do but follow his steps. And if I will be one of Christs, I must do so'. Jessey, 117.

<sup>7</sup> Erasmus, in linking this criticism of the apostles with those who mocked Christ as having a devil, likened that drunkenness which sends the sufferer into mindless ranting (*ebreitas vehemius*) to the 'raging madness' of *furor*. In his exposition of Acts 2.13, Erasmus puts forward a sustained association between drunkenness and the ecstasy induced by the Spirit. M.A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy & the Praise of Folly* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988 [1980]), 73.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And...whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. [Acts 2.17-21]

Among primitive Christians prophetic inspiration was the appointed means by which those closest to God communicated his word and will to the congregation: 'he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church' [I Corinthians 14.3-4]. In seventeenth-century England, where female powers of reason were thought to be naturally weaker than those of men, women seemed especially suited to the transmission of the 'holy revelations' that were worldly foolishness.<sup>8</sup>

But the Christian's view could typify also a kind of divine sanity in a bizarre and demented world, doomed by its own corruption. 'Tis not one Democritus will serve turne to laugh in these daies', remarked Robert Burton in 1626:

wee have now need of a Democritus to laugh at Democritus, one Jester to flout at another...For now...the whole world plaies the Foole, we have a new Theater, a new Sceane, a new Commedy of Errors,...If Democritus were alive now, he should see strange alterations, a new company of counterfeit Vizards, Whiflers, Humane Asses, Maskers, Mummers, painted Puppets...Phantasticke shadowes, Gulls, Monsters, Giddy-heads, Butter-flyes...<sup>9</sup>

'It were no hard matter to bring all the world into the

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<sup>8</sup> This claim could cut two ways, of course. Women preachers and their male lay counterparts claimed election through the direct teaching of the Holy Spirit, as against the university learning of ordained clergy.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Burton, 'Democritus to the Reader', The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), I, 37. Where possible further references will appear in the main text.

compass of a fool's cap' Thomas Adams, a Bedfordshire preacher and anti-Catholic polemicist, had commented a decade earlier in a published sermon entitled 'Mystical Bedlam; or, the World of Madmen'.<sup>10</sup> Taking its text from Ecclesiastes 9.3, 'The heart of the Sonnes of men is full of evil, and madnesse is in their heart while they live: and after that they go to the dead', the sermon focuses that state of spiritual confusion and frenzy to which Adam's fallen race are inexorably led, and for which Christ's saving power emerges as the sole remedy. Adams portrays his function as that of a physician to the soul: 'Though sin, the devil's mad dog, hath bitten thee, and thou at first beginnest to run frantic, yet apply the plaster of the blood of Christ to thy sores. This shall draw out the venom, and grace will have the mastery...be of good comfort, thou shalt not die frantic' (290). Drawing upon analogies of madness that were soon to inform the work of Burton, Adams continues:

...to discover this spiritual madness; let us conceive in man's heart...in answerable reference to those three faculties in the brain and powers of the soul... knowledge, faith, affections...The madness which I would minister to is thus caused: a defective knowledge, a faith not well informed, affections not well reformed. Ignorance, unfaithfulness, and refractory desires make a man mad. (271)

Among Adams's examples of spiritual unreason, only a glancing reference was made to 'our schismatics and separatists, -- who are truly called Protestants out of their wits, liable to the imputation of frenzy' (286).

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<sup>10</sup> Works, ed. by Thomas Smith, (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861), I, 259-293 (271, 276).

2. 'Pseudoprophets, Heretickes, and Schismaticks':  
A Melancholic Contagion

...he that shall but consider that superstition of old, those prodigious effects of it (as in its place I will shew the severall furies of our...Sibyls, Enthusiasts, Pseudoprophets, Heretickes, and Schismaticks in these our latter ages) shall instantly confesse, that all the world againe cannot afford so much matter of madnesse, so many stupend symptomes, as superstition, heresie, schisme hath brought out...[religious melancholy] alone may be parallel'd to all the former, hath a greater latitude, and more miraculous effects; that it more besots and infatuates men...workes more disquietnesse to mankinde, and hath more crucified the soules of mortall men (such hath beene the divells craft) then warres, plagues, sicknesses, dearth, famine, and all the rest.

(Burton, *Anatomy*, III, 331)

The onset of the English trend against religious enthusiasm, in terms both of an inflamed individual imagination and of a disease communicable to the body politic, is most directly associated with the works of Meric Casaubon and Henry More, backed by the intellectual rationalism of Rene Descartes and Thomas Hobbes. But their inspiration was fuelled by the ideas of Francis Bacon, who in condemning the Paracelsians' elevation of the power of imagination to the same level as that of 'miracle-working faith,' viewed imaginative powers and rites as unlawful, concluding that 'it is not know how much of them is verity, and how much vanity'.<sup>11</sup> Bacon viewed imagination as 'an agent or nuncius' between sense and reason, and between reason and voluntary motion. Yet imagination could extend beyond mere messengership. Citing Aristotle's observation that 'reason hath over the imagination that

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by William Aldis Wright, 5th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926 [1868]), 146-147 [XI.3]. Citations will be in the main text where possible.

commandment which a magistrate hath over a free citizen' to indicate the relativity by which the latter might come to rule in its own turn, Bacon concluded that:

in matters of faith and religion, we raise our Imagination above our Reason; which is the cause why Religion sought ever access to the mind by similitude, types, parables, visions, dreams. (Advancement, 147)

Nevertheless, reason was the ruling faculty: uncontrolled imagination and overcharged affections were alike 'infirmities of mind' by which reason became unseated.<sup>12</sup> French physicians such as André Du Laurens and Jean Riolan were beginning to link Protestant sectarian extremism with melancholic vapours, and in England churchmen and physicians were increasingly confronted by cases of individuals whose sense of guilt over sin led to symptoms of melancholia, despair, and even suicide.<sup>13</sup> Women and girls seem to have been especially vulnerable to such pressures.<sup>14</sup> The clergyman and melancholic Robert Burton observed that melancholia in a religious person tended to manifest itself in visions, revelations, and a personal conviction of being inspired by the Holy Ghost (Anatomy, III, 330). Enthusiastic manifestations such as

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<sup>12</sup> George Williamson, 'The Restoration Revolt Against Enthusiasm', Seventeenth Century Contexts (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 202-239 (205).

<sup>13</sup> John F. Sena, 'Melancholic Madness and the Puritans', Harvard Theological Review, 66, 3 (July 1973), 293-309 (297).

<sup>14</sup> Of the 91 cases of religious despair chronicled during the medical career of Richard Napier (1597-1634), two-thirds (72) were female. Michael MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22-23, 31, 220-222, and Appendix D; see also John Stachniewski, The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 42. On the additional pressures upon women due to the hazards of their reproductive and maternal roles, see Linda A. Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage: The Experience of Pregnancy in Early-Modern Society', in Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England, ed. by Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990), 39-67.

extreme or fanatical religious beliefs often occurred in conjunction with a collective sense of spiritual crisis in congregations, provoked by heresy or schism. A 1627 sermon by John Donne warns against mischief of 'the overbending, and super-exaltation of zeale... in the Schismatick', which, 'as it works thus to an uncharitableness in private, so doth [work] to turbulency, and sedition in the publique'.<sup>15</sup> Burton, like Napier and Donne, saw the hotheaded radical preachers who spread their contagion of extremism among a susceptible public as a menace to civil and religious order:

...we have a mad, giddy company of Precisians, Scismatics, and some Hereticks ...that out of too much zeale, in opposition to Antichrist,...Romish rites and superstitions, will quite demolish all, they will admit of no ceremonies...no fasting dayes, no Crosse in Baptisme, kneeling at Communion, no Church musick...no Bishops Courts, no Church government, raile at all our Church discipline, will not hold their tongues...Universities, all humane learning...they abhorre,...They will admit of no Holydayes, or honest recreations...no Churches, no bells some of them because Papists use them: No discipline, no ceremonies, but what they invent themselves.

(Anatomy, III, 386-87)

Not only did these 'phanaticks' seek reconstruction of church government and worship, Burton pointed out, but they sought to reinterpret God's word itself. 'No interpretations of Scriptures, no Comments of Fathers, no Counsellis' would be allowed 'but such as their owne phantasticall spirits

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<sup>15</sup> John Donne, Sermon 5 of LXXX Sermons, in Sermons ed. by E.M. Simpson and G.R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), VIII, 130-156 (135-136).

dictate...'

Some of them turne Prophets, have secret revelations, will be of privy counsell with God himself, & know all his secrets...A company of giddy-heads will take upon them to define how many shall be saved, and who damned in a parish...interpret Apocalypses...and precisely set down when the world shall come to an end, what yeare, what moneth, what day...some call God and his attributes into question,...some Princes, civill magistrates, & their authorities...will do all their own private spirit dictates, and nothing else...Brownists, Barowists, Familists, and those Amsterdamian sects & sectaries, are led all by so many private spirits. (387)

Popular tradition still tended to view mental and behavioural eccentricity as supernatural, due perhaps to witchcraft or sorcery, and to look for the remedy to mysticism and magic. Burton also allowed for this possibility, but pointed out that impulses of religious melancholy or mania seemed often to stem from psycho-medical features pointing to unreason: 'wee may say of these peculiar sects, their Religion takes away not spirits only, but wit and judgement, and deprives them of their understanding: for some of them are so far gone with their private Enthusiasmes, and revelations, that they are quite madde, out of their wits' (387).

This confiding, almost whimsical, conclusion belies the harsh treatment visited upon those officially judged to be out of their senses. In Dec. 1636, after vandalizing the altarcloth at Lichfield Cathedral, Eleanor Davies was committed to Bedlam by the Privy Council, who reported her actions to be 'of soe fowle and strange a nature that we cannot conceive them to passe from any person but one wholly distracted of understanding'. The terms she later used to describe her removal to this asylum from her previous

imprisonment were: 'The grave exchanged for Hell'.<sup>16</sup> Women were commonly confined in Bedlam throughout the century on grounds ranging from hysteria to witchcraft, but religious dissidents and visionaries of both sexes seem to have been well represented.<sup>17</sup> Among Davies's fellow inmates was Richard Farnham, a 'false prophet' and 'blasphemer' who had been transferred from Newgate, who was given liberty within the hospital after the physician had certified that he did not 'appear either by worde or jesture to be madd or lunatic'.<sup>18</sup>

From the late fourteenth century, Bethlehem Hospital, as it was then known, was the only hospice in England entirely for the care of the insane. By the time Henry VIII donated it to the city of London as a lunatic asylum, its corrupted names of Bethlem or Bedlam had become synonymous with madhouses and insanity. A few months before Davies's arrival Bedlam had been the subject of a royal visit: the king and queen, wishing 'to see the mad folks', had afterwards professed to have been 'madly entertained'.<sup>19</sup> At this time some thirty inmates of both sexes were housed and cared for in the twenty-one-roomed hospital. Davies was lodged separately from the public wing in the steward's house, and was permitted one personal servant.

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<sup>16</sup> This was in her petition to the House of Commons on 22 Sept. 1647: see E. Cope, 94 and n.62; also 86.

<sup>17</sup> Roy Porter, A Social History of Madness, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), 104-105.

<sup>18</sup> E. Cope, 90.

<sup>19</sup> E. Cope, 95. Some idea of conditions at the hospital at the time of Davies's confinement can be gained from records of an inquiry held into the misappropriation of funds by the superintendent, Helkiah Croke. An enquiry into the affairs of Bethlem Hospital, 1633, in Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry 1535-1860, ed. by Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 106-108.

But she was denied all writing materials, and was deprived by the Court of Wards of the management of her affairs and property.<sup>20</sup> Sights and sounds of the squalid and terrible existence passed by other chained and semi-naked bedlamites were probably inescapable; Davies recalled her state at this time as 'one as it were buried quick in Bedlems loathsom Prison, infected with those foul Spirits day and night Blaspheming'.<sup>21</sup> She was fortunate, however, in that her stay at the hospital lasted only eighteen months: she might have remained for life.<sup>22</sup>

Even at this early period the regime at Bedlam claimed to seek the inmates' healing as well as assisting their general welfare.<sup>23</sup> The superintendent Helkiah Crooke would no doubt have been familiar with Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy, first published in 1621 and by now into its fourth edition of nearly 500,000 words. This monumental survey was ostensibly a general compilation of past and present concepts pertaining to the condition of melancholia. As an inheritance of various classical, medieval, and renaissance concepts, the term 'melancholy' was by this time commonly seen as signifying

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<sup>20</sup> Three Hundred Years, 105, 103; see also E. Cope, 93-95.

<sup>21</sup> Eleanor Davies, Bethlehem, Signifying The House of Bread or War (London, 1652), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Davies was moved to the Tower in April 1638, remaining there until 6 September 1640. An official letter of 1639 by one Thomas Smith, concerning a recent prophecy by Davies that London was to be destroyed by fire, was written on the assumption that Davies was still at Bedlam and unlikely to be released: E. Cope, 96 and n.75.

<sup>23</sup> Such claims are disputed by Patricia Alderidge, who also offers additional historical data on this institution, in 'Bedlam: Fact or Fantasy?', in The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry, ed. by W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd, 3 vols. (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985), II, 17-33 (19-20).

both the conditions of sadness, sorrow, defection, despair, and the black bile that engendered them.<sup>24</sup>

The expansive nature of the Anatomy derived from European Renaissance humanist models of 'anatomizing' or encyclopedic surveys. The unsystematic piling up of observations seems unscientific and self-defeating by modern standards.<sup>25</sup> Yet such a project can arguably be seen as 'ground-covering': assembling for the reader most available material on its subject. By 1638, with Burton's work in the fifth of its successive and burgeoning revisions, evidence suggests that scholars of the period found it a familiar and usable form.<sup>26</sup> A significant breakthrough was Burton's use of inherited philosophic and medical concepts of melancholia as a means of

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<sup>24</sup> The word Melancholia is a Latinization of the Greek term for prolonged anxiety and depression, and the Latin term atra bilis, connoting crazed or nervous behaviour, passed into English as 'black bile'. Jackson, 4-5. The theory of the four humours or bodily constituents (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) appeared in the Hippocratic work of the fifth century BC, Nature of Man, and was endorsed in Plato's Timaeus. Truman Guy Steffan, 'The Social Arguments Against Enthusiasm (1650-1660)', Studies in English, 21 (1941), 39-63 (7-10). Aristotelian melancholia was briefly rehabilitated during the Renaissance as a character correlate of genius; John Donne was a melancholic, according to his biographer. Izaak Walton, Lives, ed. by G. Saintsbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 60.

<sup>25</sup> To impose some kind of unity over a multiplicity of vocabularies and value-systems, the tone of Burton's appointed narrator 'Democritus Junior' shifts constantly between jest, irony and repudiation. Modern critics attempting to 'make sense' of this incoherence have viewed it as mirroring the ideological shift from supernatural to psycho-medical conceptions of madness, or (together with the discourses of Bacon, Herbert, Bunyan, and Hooker) as postmodern in its endless subversion of reader value-judgments. For the former view, see Stachniewski 219-253, especially 224-227; the latter is given in Stanley E. Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 303-352.

<sup>26</sup> J.B. Bamborough, 'Introduction', to Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, I, xxiv-xxv. Hunter and Macalpine point out that Burton's work became 'the most frequently reprinted psychiatric text' as well as a literary classic (94). A recent and more ambitious view suggests that Burton's oeuvre functions historically as 'a radical experiment', that his attempt to chart the gargantuan topic of melancholia by models adapted from anatomical investigation could have laid the foundation of a humanist syncretization of all knowledge: Jonathan Sawday, 'Shapeless Elegance: Robert Burton's Anatomy of Knowledge', in History, Language, and the Politics of English Renaissance Prose, ed. by Neil Rhodes (New York and London: MRTS, 1997), 173-202.

inquiring into spiritual phenomena. Noting that his various predecessors had seen 'Love Melancholy' as dividing into 'that, whose object is women' and 'the other, whose object is God', he devoted the final section of the third partition of his work to the investigation of 'Religious Melancholy', including its physical and psychological associations with the ecstatic enthusiasm of radical sectaries and Puritans of the period. This consolidation of earlier conceptual linkages of spiritual, mental, and bodily dysfunction provided intellectual seedcorn for later clerical, magisterial and rationalist ~~attempts~~ to challenge the credibility and influence of religious enthusiasm. If the spiritual validity by which ecstatic acts and utterances had gained public attention could be called into question, such forms of discourse could be re-classified as typifying mental disorders arising from bodily and environmental conditions, and relegated into the periphery of private pathology.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid-seventeenth century the enthusiast's claim to divine authority was already under fierce attack by

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<sup>27</sup> Burton, *Anatomy*, III [3.4.1.1], 330-331; also Jackson, 334, 330. For modern views of Burton as founder of an anti-enthusiastic historical tradition see Clarence M. Webster, 'Swift and Some Early Satirists of Puritan Enthusiasm', *PMLA*, 48 (Dec 1933), 1141-1153 (1141); Stachniewski, 227-228; Jackson, 325-341; Thomas L. Canavan, 'Robert Burton, Jonathan Swift, and the tradition of anti-Puritan invective', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (Apr-Jun, 1973), 227-242; Michael Heyd, 'The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century: Towards an Integrative Approach', *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (Summer 1981), 258-280 (270-271), 275, 279 and n.88); George Rosen, 'Enthusiasm, "a dark lanthorn of the spirit"', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 42, (1968), 393-421 (412). See also Williamson, 219; *Three Hundred Years*, 99; and Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature*, (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951). On Burton's role in an English rationalist epistemology, see Lotte Mulligan, '"Reason," "Right Reason," and "Revelation" in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England' in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 375-401; and Phillip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

magistrates, clerics and rationalists who viewed with misgivings the prospect of religious and social doctrines being dictated by an irrational, ungovernable and unlearned majority. This alarming possibility seemed to be fulfilled in the rise in 1652 of the Barebones Parliament: radical sectarianism was now a dominant political and spiritual force in the land.

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### 3. Inner Vision, Outward Force: The Politics of Revelation in the 1650s

And the voice...from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel...And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it up: and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.  
(Revelation 10.8-11)

I have here offered a few things to a publique view...it hath no beautie upon it, though a gratt deal in it, which the Princes of this world cannot discern. It is indeed the foolish language of the Spirit; if you do not like it, retort it again, and I will carry it where I had it; you are like yet to have no better from me. I was once wise as well as you...I once also enjoyed my self, but I am now carried out of my wits, a fool, a mad man, besides myself; if you think me any other you are mistaken, and it is for your sakes that I am so.<sup>28</sup>

Enthusiasm had been present in Protestant England from the Reformation onwards, but in the mid-seventeenth century its modes and doctrines of divine revelation were to reach to the

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Salmon, 'Post-script' to *A Rout, A Rout* (London: G.C., 1649), in *Ranter Writings*, 189-200 (200).

highest levels of state and political power.<sup>29</sup> In 1643 the Scottish Presbyterian minister Robert Baillie noted with alarm that the growth of Independency was exceeded by the spread of Anabaptists and Antinomians, particularly in the Army: ordinary people were starting to take up the new freedom to choose their own congregation and style of worship.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Edwards's three-part Gangraena of 1646 catalogued the heretical contagion proliferating amongst sectarian congregations. A bricklayer from Hackney claimed that he himself was as much God as Christ was. Some sectaries held that they could not sin, but if they did it was Christ sinning within them. In 1647 John Trapp related that a 'female Antinomian, who when her mistress charged her for stealing her linens' maintained that 'It was not I, but sin that dwelleth in me'.<sup>31</sup> Edwards's repeated emphasis that in London these subversive radical doctrines were supported by 'young youths and wenches', roving apprentices and servants, is borne out by the testimonies of Richard Baxter and William Dell.<sup>32</sup>

Denominational boundaries were shifting and non-exclusive

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<sup>29</sup> Enthusiastic witness, in the form of millenarianism, prophecies, ecstasies, holy trances, or speaking in tongues, was traditionally associated with spiritual revivals, or reaffirmations of purity of religious belief and practice. Jackson, 328.

<sup>30</sup> An offshoot of the Baptists, the Anabaptists were dedicated to the revival of the primitive church of the Gospels. Their numbers at this time included many political Independents, including Army officers and Levellers. The Anabaptists originated with their sister sect the Family of Love as continental heretical movements of the early sixteenth century, and many of their beliefs were later to be found in Quakerism. H.N. Brailsford, The Levellers and the English Revolution, (London: Cresset Press, 1961), 31.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Baillie, Letters and Journals, I, 408, 437; Edwards, Gangraena, I, 19, 26; II, 2-3; J. Trapp, Commentary on the New Testament (1647), 501: all in Hill, WTUD, 187.

<sup>32</sup> WTUD, 189.

during this period. Far from being simply a lone and extreme impulse of protest, a believer's 'enthusiasm' was often the fruit of a prolonged search for spiritual revelation. By this quest a seeker might be led out of established Protestantism into the Baptist/ Brownist/ Independent congregations with their strong Leveller connections. Some continued into still more radical groups, such as Fifth Monarchists, the early Quakers, Ranterism, and the Muggletonians.<sup>33</sup> Equally, such extreme professions might be reversed; numbers of extreme or revolutionary professors adopted more moderate positions after the Restoration.<sup>34</sup> So enthusiasm was closely associated with socially radicalizing forces within the various strands of the sectarian community in the volatile 1640s and early 1650s.

A facet of this development was the emergence of the doctrine of free grace, in part as a reaction against the strict determinism and legalism of Calvinist doctrines. It has already been noted that among over-zealous Protestants, fears of not being among the elect and the need for constant self-examination against the effects of sin and the Devil could sometimes lead to despair, even madness or suicide.<sup>35</sup> The offer of free grace, contrastingly, involved a spiritual revelation of individual sin and guilt as wholly pardoned through Christ's redeeming sacrifice. Where supported by sect

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<sup>33</sup> See J.F. McGregor, 'The Baptists, Fount of all Heresy', in Radical Religion and the English Revolution, ed. by McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-63; especially 57-62.

<sup>34</sup> The Ranter Abiezer Coppe a was notable example of this: see BDBR.

<sup>35</sup> Owen C. Watkins, The Puritan Experience, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 183. See also MacDonald, 219-225.

regulations and scriptural precepts, this doctrine provided the believer with a secure tie to God: a refuge from the psychological pressures of predestinarianism, and a spiritual buttress in times of crisis.<sup>36</sup> Through the efforts of radical Army preachers free grace became increasingly widespread among sectarians during the Revolutionary period, numbering among its converts the future Fifth Monarchists Anna Trapnel and Elizabeth Avery.

But the setting aside of claims of ecclesiastical and scriptural authority in favour of the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit served to heighten the inherent tensions between the saint's individual liberty of conscience and the authority and cohesion of the congregation. In many sects of the early 1650s all ordinances, and even scriptural infallibility, were seen as ancillary to a mystical Christian revelation that could be understood in terms of a series of metaphors of spiritual experience. By such disclosures radical saints -- ranging from Gerrard Winstanley's utopian communists to Ranter antinomians and ecstatic early Quaker evangelists -- claimed authority to judge not only religious orthodoxy, but also political and social conventions.<sup>37</sup>

Baillie and his Presbyterian colleagues at the Westminster Assembly equated the enthusiasm of free grace with Familism and Antinomianism. The Antinomian maintained that the moral law no longer applied to Christians under the new law of grace, while Familists claimed to be raised by the Spirit into

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<sup>36</sup> McGregor, 'Baptists', 59.

<sup>37</sup> McGregor, 'Baptists', 60.

a state of oneness with God, beyond the occasion of sin.<sup>38</sup> Such beliefs constituted a type of 'inner' millennialism of the spirit. Christ's coming would not be in the flesh, but in the hearts of believers; and this event was not imminent, but current and constant. Familist believers, remarked the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, 'stick so much at the eternal Mediation of our Savior, and would have this Mediation of his performed within onely'.<sup>39</sup> Familism was closely associated with the doctrines of the Bohemian mystic Jacob Boehme, among whose English followers was John Pordage.<sup>40</sup> Boehme's influence also spread to Wales, as shown in the writings of the Welsh Independent and Fifth Monarchist Morgan Llwyd.<sup>41</sup> Many Quakers were familiar with Boehmist and Familist ideas. Henry More was convinced that 'Ranters and Quakers took their original from Behmenism and Familism'; while Richard Baxter's Quaker Catechism (1655) linked Quakers with Familists in one section,

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<sup>38</sup> The Familists, or the Family of Love, the polygamous sect founded during the sixteenth century by Hendrik Niclaes and his followers, believed that Christ's true followers had regained a prelapsarian unification with God in preparation for the coming new age. On Familists in England, see Alistair Hamilton, The Family of Love (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1981), 132-141.

<sup>39</sup> Conway Letters (London, 1930), ed. by M.H. Nicolson, 407 f., in Geoffrey Nuttall, 'James Nayler: A Fresh Approach', Journal of the Friends' Historical Society, Supp. 26 (1954), 1-20 (2).

<sup>40</sup> In 1654 Pordage lost his living after being tried at Reading Assizes for teaching 'That the Fiery Deity of Christ mingles and mixes itself with our flesh'; 'That Christ is a Type, and but a Type'; and 'That it was a weakness to be troubled for sins' (Nuttall, 5). He was defended by Mary Pocock, a follower from the late 1640s. Pocock is claimed by Nigel Smith to have been 'M.P.', the author of a tract The Mystery of the Deity in the Humanity (London: Giles Calvert, 1649) translating Pordage's Boehmist vision into 'a popular radical epistemology': see Perfection, 190 and n.28. Pordage founded his own Boehmist sect, later termed the Philadelphia society: Richard Baxter, Reliquiae Baxterianae (1697), in Nuttall, 3, n.1; and John Etherington, A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familisme (1645), 10 (Perfection, 189 and n.22).

<sup>41</sup> Perfection, 191.

and with Boehmists in another.<sup>42</sup>

But the boundaries separating free grace and Familism from Christian orthodoxy are less distinct than More and Baxter seem to suggest. Likewise the historical consequences of the two former tendencies are not easy to discern. If a believer were to be 'out of the Creature', 'totally inhabited by Christ', and 'having dependence upon none', she or he would have no need of inherited structures or rituals. While this kind of spiritual enthusiasm may have encouraged anarchic disturbances to church and civil order, such challenges were probably confined to individuals and groups outside the major inter-sectarian disputes of the 1640s over church government: extremists such as Ranters, Muggletonians or Grindletonians.<sup>43</sup> But had enthusiasm been limited to such marginal phenomena, there surely would have been little need for the swell of anti-enthusiasm which came to dominate religious and secular thought for a century or more. An alternative option is suggested in Christ's self-decreed mission to bring 'not peace on earth...but a sword', and that each of his followers must 'hate...his father, and mother...wife and children...and his own life also' [Matthew 10.34-35; Luke 14.26]. This seems close to the Weberian model of the prophet's community founded in opposition to priestly systems or clan membership.<sup>44</sup> Such

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<sup>42</sup> Henry More, Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, 1712 edition, 49; Baxter, Catechism, Preface: both in Beginnings, 40, n.4.

<sup>43</sup> J. F. McGregor, 'Seekers and Ranters', in Radical Religion, 121-139 (121).

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Max Weber, 'Property Systems and Social Groups', in General Economic History (New Brunswick, NJ.: Transaction Inc., 1981), 26-50 (45-46)). But this study differs from Weberian concepts in that it finds not one, but a number of leaders associated with the two main movements covered

terms supply a far more robust image of enthusiastic prophecy, which was to form the tap root of two of the leading sectarian movements of the century. The Fifth Monarchists and the Quakers emerged during the 1650s as separate and largely dissimilar religious movements. Their success in the political and evangelical spheres, however, threatened the stability of the established order both during and after the Cromwellian Protectorate.

...when Christian men, take not their Christian Sovereign, for Gods Prophet; they must either take their owne Dreames, for the Prophecy they mean to bee governed by, and the tumour of their own hearts for the Spirit of God; or...suffer themselves to bee lead by some strange Prince; or by some of their fellow subjects, that can bewitch them, by slaunder of the government, into rebellion...and by this means destroying all laws, both divine, and humane, reduce all Order, Government, and Society, to the first Chaos of Violence and Civill warre.<sup>45</sup>

Soon after the execution of Charles I, Thomas Hobbes, former amanuensis to Francis Bacon, made public his arguments for a commonwealth based on a market economy and a de facto rulership: Leviathan was in English bookshops by early May of 1651. The political events of late 1648 and early 1649 were among the most critical of the two decades of the English Revolution. Prior to this the monarchy and the nation's constitutional structure had withstood civil wars and conflict between king and parliament. Charles I's sovereignty over the

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here, along with others such as the Levellers. The nearest equivalent is perhaps exemplified by George Fox, but his establishment of Quakerism involved the exchange of his earlier charismatic style of prophecy for the harder practicalities of the administrator (see below, VI).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651), ed. by Richard Tuck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1991]) 299-300. Further citations will be in the main text.

three kingdoms was still recognized in law, if not in practice. The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 professed 'to preserve and defend the King's Majesty's person and authority ...[with] no thoughts or intentions to diminish his Majesty's just power and greatnes' (Leviathan, 299-300), and Parliament jealously guarded its liberties and privileges as the highest legislative authority in the nation. With the purge of the Long Parliament late in 1648, however, and the fall of the Stuart monarchy early in the following year, the tenuous constitutional links sustained through years of civil war were finally broken. The way was paved for the radical millennial experiment that was to come.

In these events Lady Eleanor Davies saw the confirmation of her many warnings of the coming Judgment. 1650 was for her the latter-day fulfilment of the Hebrew 'jubilee year': in her The New Jerusalem At Hand the replacement of a corrupt, debased monarchy by a sovereign Parliament is seen as the necessary and visible forerunner of Christ's personal rule to come.<sup>46</sup> Cromwell's victory over Charles Stuart and the Scots at the Battle of Worcester on 3 September 1651 appeared to foreshadow the final conquest of the forces of Antichrist. In October she published The Benediction, in which his initials O. and C. were likened to the eyes and horns of the lamb [Revelation 5], along with other signs of the imminent age of prophecy predicted by Joel.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Eleanor Davies, The New Jerusalem At Hand (London, 1649), 3-13; see also E. Cope, 145-146.

<sup>47</sup> E. Cope, 158.

Davies's writings up to her death in July 1652 show no evidence of the coming factional split between Fifth Monarchist radicals and Independent moderates. The goal of setting up a new government capable of ushering in Christ's kingdom on earth still apparently afforded a credible basis for political consensus between Presbyterians and leaders of the sectarian gathered churches of London and the nation. But the early 1650s also witnessed the decline of various democratizing political movements of the previous decade, of which the Levellers and Diggers are the best-known, and these forms of radicalism were transmuted into new groups. At local levels the frustration engendered by this breakdown found expression in the extreme Antinomianism of the Ranters. In the national arena, however, populist democracy was supplanted by the new political consciousness of the Fifth Monarchists. The impact of Trapnel's celebrated trances at Whitehall in 1654 testifies to the development of prophecy from the private and congregational model (as typified by Sarah Wight in 1647) into the radical millennialist Fifth Monarchist agenda of preparing for Christ's government in England and beyond, by the agency of the saints.

The movement for radical millennialism emerged from a number of separate gathered churches in London. Following the crushing of the Levellers, it gradually assumed a more socially radical agenda as a new political pressure group led by London preachers. Support came from various Congregational and Baptist churches, including Calvinists and free-willers, soldiers and civilians. Among its stated aims were the

abolition of the Rump in favour of a church-parliament drawn from the gathered churches, and modelled on the ancient Jewish Sanhedrin. Tithed clergy, the parochial system, and remaining feudal tenure would be abolished. Proposed law reforms included poor relief, civil marriage, and a cheap and local system of justice based on a concise and coherent legal code derived from Mosaic Law.<sup>48</sup> Whereas early Puritans had been mainly from the upper and middle ranks, the Fifth Monarchists were more closely linked with the poor than even the Quakers. Their artisan ranks included a strong representation of textile interests, also drawing civilian and military support from General Baptist, Particular Baptist, and Independent congregations.<sup>49</sup> Given their maximum following of about 40,000 (less than one percent of the national population) Fifth Monarchism was surprisingly influential, not just in London, but also in East Anglia and Wales. Groups existed in Dartmouth, Liverpool, Oxford, and Hull, and a rudimentary national organization was developed in the late 1650s.<sup>50</sup> The name 'Fifth Monarchy' referred to that final kingdom foreseen by the prophet Daniel, which would reign eternally

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<sup>48</sup> Bernard Capp, 'The Fifth Monarchists and Popular Millenarianism', in Radical Religion, 165-189 (170, 173). See also Austin Woolrych, Commonwealth to Protectorate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 18; and Liu, 67-75. On Major-General Thomas Harrison, who as commander-in-chief of the forces during Cromwell's invasion of Scotland consolidated the military organization of Fifth Monarchists and sectarian millennialists, see Liu, 68-70.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Capp, The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-century English Millenarianism, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 82; also James Holstun, 'The Public Spiritedness of Anna Trapnel', from Ehud's Dagger; or, Radical Praxis in Revolutionary England (forthcoming, 1996), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard Capp, 'The Fifth Monarchists and Popular Millenarianism', in Radical Religion, 165-190 (174); and Liu, 64, 68. For Fifth Monarchist aims and attempts at reform, see Capp, 'Popular Millenarianism', 173, 175-6; Holstun, 19-21; and Liu, 76-77 and 87-95.

after the fall of the four great world monarchies. The 'stone' of Trapnel's Cry of a Stone has multiple Old Testament origins. Confirmation of the prophet Habakkuk's vision of God's coming vengeance upon the Chaldeans is given in that the very 'stone shall cry out of the wall'.<sup>51</sup> A second and more major reference is from Daniel's prophecy to Nebuchadnezzar [Daniel 2.31-45] of the uncut stone that shattered the giant image of gold, silver, brass, and iron and clay, signifying the four successive historical kingdoms of the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. God's triumphant reign over earthly powers was symbolised by the uncut stone which: '...shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever'. Religious enthusiasm saw in these ancient images the blueprint for the most radical political programme of religious and political reform of the seventeenth century. To the Fifth Monarchists the imminent kingdom of Christ was the providential framework, not simply for further religious change, but for Jesus to rule the world by a government of his elect.<sup>52</sup> In the events leading up to 1653 this unifying radical agenda provided Cromwell, the Army, and the Congregational churches with an ideological basis for bypassing the nation's constitutional tradition, to set up an assembly of saints in what was to be the high-water mark of

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<sup>51</sup> The above reference from Habakkuk 2.11 is re-echoed by Christ when Pharisees who protest against the adulation of his disciples during his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey: 'I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out' [Matthew 19.40]. Trapnel's was not the first appellative use of the 'crying stone' emblem however. It appears in the title of an earlier work by a Puritan moderate: Robert Coachman, The Cry of a Stone, Or, a Treatise (London: R. Oulton and G. Dexter, 1642).

<sup>52</sup> Liu, 85, 61-65.

English Puritanism in church and state. For a brief time Cromwell and the Fifth Monarchists seem genuinely to have believed that they were about to realize a New Jerusalem on English soil. In the peace following Cromwell's defeat of the Scots at Worcester, radical millennialists looked forward to the commencement of final preparations for Christ's imminent accession to the English throne. Such a prospect was unappealing, however, to clergy, nobility, and gentry. The Rump MPs remained stubbornly moderate, while Independent and Baptist millenarians were content with liberty of worship. The fall of Barebones, at the very threshold of the 'New Jerusalem', marked the eclipse of millenarianism as a political force. Trapnel's visions at Whitehall in the following weeks marked the initiation of a Fifth Monarchist campaign of opposition to Cromwellian Protectorship.<sup>53</sup>

While Trapnel witnessed on behalf of the coming New Jerusalem, another movement was growing in the north of England with the doctrine that Christ was appearing already in the lives and hearts of his true converts. In Lancashire, Westmorland, and Cumberland, female and male seekers who had separated themselves from local churches were gathering into one movement under the missionary work of George Fox, Edward Burroughs and other campaigning men and women. Itinerant missionaries spread their message through the marketplaces, towns, and countryside throughout England, that Old Testament

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<sup>53</sup> Trapnel seems to been against outright violence, however: in further prophetic trances of 1657-58 she repudiated Fifth Monarchist extremists led by Thomas Venner who sought to overthrow the government, calling them 'rash brains': Champlin Burrage, 'Anna Trapnel's Prophecies', *EHR*, 26 (1911), 526-535 (529). On the Venner uprisings of 1657 and 1661, see Burrage, 'The Fifth Monarchy Insurrections', *EHR*, 25 (1910), 722-747.

prophecy was now re-emerging as a sign of Christ's final coming. Quakers expressed their contempt for religious and civil institutions in verbal attacks on Presbyterian and Anglican ministers, in refusal to attend services or to take part in rites of communion, baptism, marriage, or burial. They also withheld tithes and rates intended for the building or repair of 'steeple-house' churches.

Quakers defied linguistic and social custom by their adoption of 'plain language', in which conventional greetings or small talk were eschewed. Their refusal of 'hat honour' to superiors was seen as blatant social revolutionism, as was their addressing all persons by the familiar 'thee' and 'thou'.<sup>54</sup> The challenge posed by such practices to institutional authority and rank was made clear by the Quaker martyr James Parnell:

amongst the Great and Rich ones of the earth, they will either Thou or You one another, if they be equal in Degree, as they call it; but if a man of low Degree... come to speak to any of them, he must You the Rich Man, but the Rich Man will Thou him...If a poor labouring Man come before one that you call a Minister...he must You the Priest and the priest Thou him.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Levellers and Diggers had displayed a similar rejection of 'hat honour'. The social rules governing the wearing of hats during this period are discussed in Brailsford, 45-47. On the language and impact of early Quaker millenarian prophecies, see David Loewenstein, 'The War of the Lamb: George Fox and the Apocalyptic Discourse of Revolutionary Quakerism', Prose Studies, 17, 3 (1994), 25-41. Quaker use of plain language and 'the rhetoric of impoliteness' is described in Bauman, 43-62 and passim; and Jackson I. Cope, 'Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style', in Seventeenth-Century Prose: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. by Stanley E. Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 200-235.

<sup>55</sup> James Parnell, A Collection of the Several Writings, (London, 1675), 94, quoted in Hugh Barbour, The Quakers in Puritan England, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 164. The Quaker Richard Farnworth defended the sect's use of 'Thee and Thou' in The Pure Lanuage Of the Spirit of Truth. (London: Giles Calvert, 1655). George Wither called Quakers 'our Levellers new named' (though he later warmed to the movement): Wither, Vaticinia Poetica, (London: Edward Blackmore, 1666), 10, in Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, 'From Shibboleth to Apocalypse: Quaker Speechways during the Puritan Revolution', in Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language, ed. by Peter Burke and Roy

In an age of political instability Quakers' refusal to take oaths (in accordance with the Pauline injunction to 'swear not at all') was seen as a denial of the existing social order. At the Old Bailey in 1664, Judge Keeting saw this resistance as a sign of Quakers' intentions 'to carry on against the government, and therefore they will not swear subjection to it; and their end is rebellion and blood'.<sup>56</sup> Quakers were notorious for carrying out personal demonstrations or 'signs' in which the wearing of sackcloth and ashes, or the discarding of clothing to 'go naked' before the people, became prophetic testimony of the falseness of religious and civil conventions, and a sign of the coming judgment. The new faith preached equality of sex alongside that of rank. In 'The Lamb's War' of the 1650s, in which Quakerism gained converts first in northwest England, then throughout the country, Puritans noted a preponderance of women, usually travelling in pairs. What seems to have sustained Quaker women and men who suffered for their zeal was the sense of oneness with the divine which each believer was able to attain when 'in the spirit', regardless of sex or social rank, and without the intercession of church or cleric.

The term 'Quaker' was a derisive tag, first used by Gervase Bennett, a magistrate who questioned Fox and his friends at a court in Derby in October 1650. Fox averred that Justice Bennett had given him that name because Fox had bidden

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Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 72-112 (75-76 and n.9).

<sup>56</sup> Quote by John Gough in A History of the People called Quakers (Dublin, 1790), cited in Fiona Godlee, 'Aspects of Non-Conformity: Quakers and the Lunatic Fringe', in Anatomy of Madness, II, 73-85 (78).

him tremble at the name of the Lord.<sup>57</sup> Robert Barclay, however, insisted that the name came from the trembling of Friends while under the working of the Holy Ghost.<sup>58</sup> Barclay testified that in Quaker meetings 'there will be such a painful travel found in the soul, that it will even work upon the outward man, so that ...the body will be greatly shaken, and many groans sighs and tears...Sometimes the Power of God will break forth into a whole meeting ...and thereby trembling ...will be upon most...as the power of truth prevails,... pangs and groans end with the sweet sound of thanksgiving and praise'.<sup>59</sup>

'Quaking' may have been a sign of profound inner struggle for purity of heart and mind in corporeality. But to

the movement's many critics such episodes were suggestive of irrationality and delusion. A template of their attacks is supplied in John Gilpin's assertion in The Quaker Shaken, (1653) that aberrant Quaker behaviour could lead to demonic possession. A former Quaker, Gilpin now declared his ecstasy to have been insane

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<sup>57</sup> Journal, I, 58, quoted in *Beginnings*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Braithwaite observes that the term 'Quaker' first appeared in a female and non-Christian context, in 1647: 'a sect of women (they are at Southwark) come from beyond sea, called Quakers, and these swell, shiver and shake, and, when they come to themselves, -- for in this fit Mahomet's Holy Ghost hath been conversing with them -- they begin to preach what hath been delivered to them by the Spirit' (Clarendon MSS. No. 2624). He suggests that this reference was probably what Bennett had in mind in applying this label: *Beginnings*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity (London, 1678), in *Beginnings*, 36. The harrowing nature of Quaker conversion is described in Barbour, The Quakers, 94-126; on Quaker and anti-Quaker descriptions of the quaking or 'threshing' conversion process (and its incitement by the rhetoric of Quaker preachers), see Bauman, 78-83.

'imagination' aroused by Quaker preaching.<sup>60</sup> The Platonist Henry More judged 'that Sect they call Quakers' to be 'undoubtedly the most Melancholy Sect that ever was in this world'. Their quaking behaviour was to him symptomatic of social dysfunction; by the dominion of their ungoverned passions many followers of the Friends were prompted to make public addresses to 'any person of honour or worth, or to goe about some solemn or weighty performance in publick, [when] they will quake and tremble like an Aspin-leaf'. Some were struck dumb; 'others have faln down to the ground'. The aspiring and credulous believer was encouraged to see these 'natural Paroxysms' as 'extrordinary Visits of the Deity...of the holy Ghost into his Soul...Fear and Joy and Love...make such confusion in his Spirits, as to put him into a fit of trembling and quaking'. Another 'Melancholy Symptom' was the ecstatic trance, really little more than a profound form of slumber; yet on waking, the sleeper 'takes his Dreams for true Histories and real Transactions'. All such 'Epilepsies, Apoplexies, or Ecstasies' were simply manifestations of uncontrolled enthusiasm.<sup>61</sup>

More's terms of reference are echoed in John Evelyn's diary entry of July 1656, which records his having been led by 'curiosity' to visit some Quakers imprisoned at Ipswich: '...a new phanatic sect of dangerous Principles, the[y] shew no respect to any man, Magistrate or other and seeme a Melancholy

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<sup>60</sup> Charles L. Cherry, 'Enthusiasm and Madness: Anti-Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century', Quaker History, 73, 2 (1984), 1-24 (12).

<sup>61</sup> Henry More, Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, (London, 1662 edn [1656]) The Augustan Reprint Society, Publ. No. 118 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1966), 18-20. All following citations are from this edition.

proud sort of people, and exceedingly ignorant...'<sup>62</sup> Meric Casaubon also strongly condemned the 'new generation of man, that are called Quakers', for their avoidance of all ordinances save 'mentall Prayer only, with contemplation', and their emphasis upon 'certain ardors, or burnings, tremblings...and swounings' as 'sufficient tokens of grace'. Additional Quaker-associated heretical beliefs are also mentioned, that 'they might be God, visibly in their ecstasies', and that 'they can give the Holy Gost by breathing or otherwise'. Despite lack of empirical evidence of these latter charges -- 'I do not know whether all these do belong to our Quakers' -- Casaubon remained convinced of their probable verity.<sup>63</sup>

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#### 4. 'A full, but false, perswasion': The Coalition Against Enthusiasm

Divinity also hath her common principles; which though perchance they bee not of that degree of evidence as the principles of some other Sciences are, yet they are evident enough to satisfie any rationalle man.<sup>64</sup>

By the 1650s, with posthumous editions of The Anatomy continuing to emerge into print, it is reasonable to assume

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<sup>62</sup> John Evelyn, Diary, The World's Classics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 170.

<sup>63</sup> Casaubon, Treatise concerning Enthusiasme, (London, 1656, 2nd edn) facsimile reprod. ed. by Paul J. Korshin (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970), 173-175. All citations are from this edition, and will be in the main text where possible.

<sup>64</sup> Meric Casaubon, A Discourse Concerning Christ, (London: R. Mynne, 1646), 2.

that Burton's depiction of enthusiasm, as a 'hypochondriacal distemper' arising from physiological signs associated with melancholia, supplied the referential basis for a public and broadly-based counter-attack against enthusiasm in England.<sup>65</sup> As in the opposition to Fifth Monarchists and Quakerism, those who for a variety of different reasons deplored the intervention of radical Puritan and sectarian interests in the affairs of church and government were to become increasingly sceptical about the supernatural origins of prophecy and other forms of spontaneous inspiration.

The capacity of women to mistake the sensations of natural enthusiasm for spiritual zeal was a central preoccupation in Casaubon's own enquiry. His preface states that his wonder was initially stirred by a book on the supernatural visions of a Catholic nun, and endorsed by 'the Approbations of...one Bishop, one Arch-bishop, besides Sorbonists, and Doctors of Divinity, no lesse then four. On reading the account of the 'severall strange raptures and enthusiasms ...[of] a melancholic, or, if you will, a devout Maid...I could observe ...a perpetuall coherence of naturall causes, in every particular: which gave me good satisfaction'.<sup>66</sup> But he remained indignant that the results of these 'natural causes' should be pronounced genuinely supernatural, and 'not [on] the judgement of a women onely, the Author...but of men of such

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<sup>65</sup> Burton's work apparently found a willing readership. J.B. Bamborough's 'Introduction' to Burton's Anatomy, I, xxxvii-xliv, gives details of the eight editions published during the century. No edition appeared in the 1700s, but the 19th century saw no fewer than 48 separate editions (xliii and n.22).

<sup>66</sup> Casaubon gives the title as The life of Sister Katharine of Jesus; Nunne of the Order of our Lady, &c. at Paris, 1628: Treatise, A3<sup>r</sup>-A3<sup>v</sup>.

worth and eminency: this in very deed troubled me very much'.

He goes on to describe how he 'did often reason with my self, against my self', wondering whether in fact,

...it was as possible, that what I thought reason, and nature, might be but my phansy and opinion; ...that what by...so many, was judged God, and Religion, should be nothing but Nature, and Superstition...the further I read, the more I was unsatisfied & disturbed in mine own thoughts; and could have no rest...

He resolved, thereupon, '...to make it my business, so farre as I might by best inquisition, throughly to satisfie my self' (A4'). His Treatise represented his subsequent publication of those private 'inquisitions'.<sup>67</sup> His conclusion was that natural enthusiasm took the form of 'an extraordinary, transcendent, but natural fervency, or pregnancy of the soul, spirits, or brain, producing strange effects, apt to be mistaken for supernatural'.<sup>68</sup> Often 'falsely deemed supernatural', this condition was the natural result of the understanding's having been infected by the imagination, usually through the operations of melancholy. Even genuine spiritual enthusiasm was vastly inferior to rationality, since 'sound Reason and a discerning spirit is a perpetual kind of Divination'.<sup>69</sup> Other sceptics agreed that the 'inspiration, ... ravishment of the spirit, divine motion, Poetical fury' associated with enthusiasm was not so much divine revelation

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<sup>67</sup> Casaubon's further comments and arguments concerning women's visionary capacities, are given in Treatise, 93, 117-118, 157, 158-165.

<sup>68</sup> Casaubon, Treatise, 22. In succeeding chapters Casaubon examines five types of natural enthusiasm: Divinatory (II), Contemplative (III), Rhetorical (IV), Poetical (V), and Precatory or Supplicatory (VI). Casaubon cite ecstatic states as peculiar affects of Contemplative Enthusiasm, and warns against mystical theology and astrology as likely to reduce all religion into fantasy.

<sup>69</sup> Casaubon, Treatise, 51; also 42-43, 71, 87, and passim.

as the result of over-taxed and irrational imagination.<sup>70</sup> Enthusiasm was 'nothing else but a misconceit...A full, but false, perswasion in a man that he is inspired', argued More, pointing to reports 'of mad and fanaticall men, who have...firmly and immutably fancied themselves to be God the Father, the Messias, the Holy Ghost, the Angel Gabriel, the last and chieftest Prophet that God would send into the world, and the like'.<sup>71</sup>

After a decade and a half of revolutionary events, many associated with mass movements led by mechanick or Army preachers, this depiction of religious enthusiasm as a manifestation of insanity or ignorance was a serious counter-attack to the credibility of sectarian revelation. This was especially true for female prophecy, which exemplified the word as testimony to the power of the indwelling spirit. Claims by such women as Anna Trapnel or Elizabeth Hooton to transmit God's messages were based upon their spontaneous abandonment of personal will and rationality to this irresistible divine power. Quakers, in particular, emphasized women's equal fitness to preach and prophesy when 'in the Spirit'. This kind of approach was anathema to such as the Anglican divine Jeremy Taylor, who maintained that genuine transmission of God's message must be worked at. Far from being simply 'an ex tempore and inspired faculty', true prayer arose by means of 'the faculties of nature and the abilities

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<sup>70</sup> The definition is from Blount's Glossographia (1656) quoted in Williamson, 216.

<sup>71</sup> Enthusiasmus, 2,4.

of art and industry...improved and ennobled by the supervening assistance of the Spirit'.<sup>72</sup>

Casaubon complained that public audiences frequently received the enthusiast with greater eagerness than they did those employing more probing and deliberate forms of address:

...in our dayes,...a man, if he can utter any thing, which may seem to be extempore; though perchance it do but seem so, and that it be performed but very meanly; is by many, (who therefore upon that account, swallow down pure non-sense sometimes, with better content, then they will hear much better and more profitable matter, that is delivered with some studie and premeditation:) by many deemed, I say, no lesse then inspired. (Treatise, 210)

More criticized the extravagant use of rhetoric in 'manic' language:

But such bloated and high-swoln Enthusiasts, that are so big in the conceit of their own inward worth...fancy themselves either equal or superior to Christ;...they would dithrone him, and set up themselves, though they can shew no Title but an unsound kind of popular Eloquence, a Rhapsodie of flight and soft words, rowling and streaming Tautologies, which if they at any time bear any true sense with them, it is but what every ordinary Christian knew before; but what they oft insinuate ...is abominably false, as sure as Christianity it self is true.

(Enthusiasmus, 16)

For Hobbes the right use of language was grounded upon human reason. People deceived themselves by the inconstant signification of terms, and by the metaphorical uses of words were enabled to deceive others.

The Light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words...by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; Reason is the pace; Encrease of Science, the way; and the Benefit of man-kind, the end. And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like ignis fatui; and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention,...sedition, or contempt.

(Leviathan, 36)

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<sup>72</sup> From Sermon 22 in Twenty-Seven Sermons, quoted in Steffan, 57-58.

More might have contested these terms of reference. Yet such rationalizations enabled those dismayed by the apparent popular appeal of enthusiastic prophecy, to detach this type of witness from its former public and activist role, and to present it instead as the linguistic ramblings of various alienated and anti-social individuals. In the increasingly conservative political and social climate of the late 1650s and 1660s, the weight of these arguments was applied most tellingly against prophesying by women and uneducated men. By radical uses of language and rhetoric early Quakerism had sought to challenge existing social and religious hierarchical practice, and to uphold women's active and equal spiritual agency. Yet if the movement did not now adjust its parameters of inspired religious discourse to include the operations of reason and memory, it risked being deprived of a voice altogether.

The texts looked at here are vestiges of a crusade which gathered momentum in England from the 1620s to 1660s, that sought to condemn enthusiasm as irrational, immoral, and socially seditious. In general terms, this might appear as simply another instance of the perpetual and inevitable conflict between the conservatism of an established order and its opposition by individuals crusading for radical reform. But this would be to oversimplify. Most of the principal opponents of enthusiasm wished themselves to promote innovations which they saw as already breaking upon society. In their eyes it was enthusiasm's unreason which was obstructing the advance of knowledge and civilization, not

least by fatally undermining the stable social base from which such enterprises could move forward.

Evidence points to a significant clash of ideologies. In the realm of religious belief and philosophy, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were largely overshadowed by the Reformation legacy of John Calvin. Calvinist Puritanism reached its political apex in the Westminster Assembly, and its doctrinal influence extended to the next generation. Predestinational Calvinism was a closed and rigid system of belief based on the salvation of a small elite whilst the majority remained destined for hell-fire: at its core lay a logical yet paradoxical dogma that demanded of its followers faith rather than reason.<sup>73</sup> Theocratic Fifth Monarchism of the early 1650s featured a similar outlook, but invigorated with a dynamic, millennialist imperative. Moreover, for many of its adherents (such as Trapnel and Avery), doctrinal predestination was leavened by experiential free grace. Through Antinomianism and extreme visionary enthusiasm, faith could escape from the Calvinist cage. But rival anti-Calvinist methodologies were being developed among royalists and Anglicans at home and in exile, in pursuance of new and complex interpretations of nature, of human capability, and of God's divine purposes. To those who wished to promote these innovative forms of temporal and spiritual inquiry, enthusiasm's alliance to unreason was little more than a philosophical and theological blind alley. Further, the

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<sup>73</sup> H.R. McAdoo, The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965), 11-12.

social and political subversiveness of the message of enthusiasm threatened to dislocate the human community, the stable functioning of which was essential to the commerce of ideas by which innovative and intellectual development could flourish. 'Truth', remarked Casaubon, 'hath in all Ages suffered by nothing more, then by pretended Enthusiasms; ...publick Peace...hath often been disturbed by such, whether artifices, or mere mistakes' (Treatise, 165).

The liberal precepts of Richard Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, of human reason and natural law as directives implanted by God in the universe for the guidance of human congress and institutions, had strongly influence ecclesiastical and intellectual thinking throughout the century.<sup>74</sup> An informal and often internally-contentious association developed over the 1640s and 1650s between Laudian Anglicans, rationalists, natural philosophers, Oxford experimentalists, and Cambridge Platonists. By a sustained exchange of views and ideas they sought to promote a flexible approach to religious and philosophical inquiry, in which the rational pursuit of experimental and natural sciences was a more or less necessary correlative to faith.<sup>75</sup> From his study at Cambridge, Henry More maintained a personal correspondence

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<sup>74</sup> Hooker's work, designed to give a logical and philosophical basis for the Elizabethan settlement of English ecclesiastical government, was popular with James I, while Charles I recommended it to his children. Denying that Scripture was the only source of human beliefs and institutions, Hooker saw it instead as a supplement to the natural law governing the universe, which, embodying the supreme reason of God, had dominion over human reason and civil law. Hooker also emphasized that civil government required common consent, which anticipated Hobbes's emphasis on the nature of contracts. DNB.

<sup>75</sup> See Charles Webster, The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660 (London: Duckworth, 1975), 144-190; also McAdoo, 1-23, 82-85; and G.R. Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 64-65, 227, 230.

with Descartes while also experimenting with mysticism and alchemy. Like other Platonists, he began with the hope of adapting Cartesianism as a scientific buttress to theological perspectives, but he eventually rejected its materialism.<sup>76</sup> His reservations about the value of experimental science were expressed in a letter to the Baconist Samuel Hartlib, remarking that without 'the eye of faith' rational inquiry in experimental science would be unable to see the true nature of things: men would 'dig and droyle like blinde molewarpes in the earth', unable to see beyond their own piling up of data 'in a heap and rabble of slibber sauce experimentes'.<sup>77</sup>

More and other Cambridge Platonists differed from their Oxford colleagues (along with later Latitudinarians and other proponents of the new philosophy), in viewing reason as itself a faculty of divine inspiration.<sup>78</sup> Human rationality involved the discernment, not just of material reality, but of the nature and infinite variety of God's workings in the universe. Experimental philosophy could distract this faculty from its proper channel, leading inquirers such as the Paracelsians into the perilous error of enthusiasm. The mistake of the enthusiastic seeker after truth, he insisted, was not simply

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<sup>76</sup> Confounding traditional views of the heart as the principal seat of the affects, Descartes's dualistic construct of soul and body located the physiological cause of the passions in the movements of the animal spirits of the nervous system, particularly the pineal gland which mediated between soul and body. In Cartesian theory the passions were thus related to physiological factors, although experienced by the soul. Charles Webster, Instauration, 148-150; Steffan, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from More to Hartlib, 11 December 1648, in Charles Webster, Instauration, 147.

<sup>78</sup> On Platonists' views of Cartesianism, see J. E. Saveson, 'Differing Reactions to Descartes among the Cambridge Platonists', Journal of the History of Ideas, 21 (1960), 560-567.

in forsaking reason, but in having a false notion of what it meant:

For assuredly that Spirit of illumination which resides in the souls of the faithful, is a Principle of the purest Reason that is communicable to humane Nature ...[which is] from Christ...the all-comprehending Wisdome and Reason of God, wherein he sees through all the Natures and Ideas of all things, with all their respects of Dependency and Independency, Congruity and Incongruity, or whatever Habitude they have one to another, with one continued glance... Whatever of Intellectual light is communicated to us, is derived from hence...nor is there any thing the holy Spirit did ever suggest to any man but it was agreeable to...what we call Reason.<sup>79</sup>

Like More, Casaubon, Glanvill and others disagreed with enthusiastic claims for supernaturalism, not study or reason, as the means of divine revelation.<sup>80</sup> Hobbes's view was more even-handed: that while the 'most ordinary immediate cause of our beleef, concerning any point of Christian Faith, is, that wee beleieve the Bible to be the Word of God', that it was misleading to act 'as if Beleeving and Knowing were all one'. Since surety was not possible -- 'Christian men doe not know, but onely beleieve the Scripture to be the Word of God' -- the faith that enabled Christian to live by their beliefs had initially to come by 'the way of Nature', from teaching and

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<sup>79</sup> More, Enthusiasmus, 39. See also McAdoo, 81-120.

<sup>80</sup> On the evolution of the views of Joseph Glanvill, see The Vanity of Dogmatizing: The 3 Versions, ed. by Stephen Medcalf, Harvester Renaissance Library vol. I, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1970).

precedent:

...while one side ground their Knowledge upon the Infallibility of the Church, and the other side, on the Testimony of the Private Spirit, neither side concludeth what it pretends. For how shall a man know the Infallibility of the Church, but by knowing first the Infallibility of the Scripture? Or how shall a man know his own Private spirit to be other than a beleef, grounded upon the Authority, and Arguments of his Teachers; or upon a Presumption of his own Gifts?

In similarly pragmatic terms Hobbes also advanced the notion of training and example as a necessary part of religious sanctity (Leviathan, 224).

A primary question here was exactly who should be deemed fit for the bestowal of 'grace' itself; who was best qualified to provide access to God? Not only were enthusiastic manifestations of grace at best irrational and unnatural, but the enthusiast's bypassing of clerical mediation in order to claim direct access to God constituted a defiance of institutional authority. Casaubon urged the superiority of patristic tradition: that it was 'safer to err with authority than through singularity'; the Anglican Jeremy Taylor likened claims of a singular grace to 'a glow-worm that shall challenge to outshine the lantern of God's word'.<sup>81</sup> Taylor's tracts of the 1640s and his Apology of 1651, continued to advocate grace by ordination, through the apostolic succession, available to believers through clerically-administered sacraments. In contrast to Calvinist predestination, Taylor's arguments followed the tradition of Hooker and Aquinas in seeing grace as available to all, by the sanctity of 'holy living': in ethics rather than in doctrine.

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<sup>81</sup> Steffan, 56.

Hobbes also viewed grace as most likely to be found in the believer with a 'spirit inclined to godliness'. He saw no evidence of such piety in the disturbances engendered by the sectarians, and judged their enthusiastic visions to be but an internal and self-deceiving artifice created by psycho-physical causes (Leviathan, 34-35). More observed that even the zeal of martyrs could be attributed to the effects of overwrought imagination.

Their Willingness also to suffer or Patience in suffering may seem to give an extraordinary Testimony to some Enthusiasts, as if there were something Divine or Supernatural in them...[the enthusiast's] very Complexion makes him stiff, inflexible and unyielding,...[and] the strong conceit he has of being inspired, and consequently of his Cause being infallibly good...tends naturally to the making of him invincible in his Sufferings, he being conscious to himself both of the firm goodness of his Cause...and of the indispensableness of his duty in adhering thereto, ...[and] the certain expectation of future glory and happiness for his Martyrdome. So plain it is that there is nothing supernatural or miraculous in the case. (Enthusiasmus, 41-42)

Such portrayals sought to undermine the cults of martyrdom built around such apparently 'miraculous' phenomena as the prophetic fast and trance of a Wight or Trapnel, the endurance by radical leaders and prophets (including Trapnel and large numbers of Quaker women) of public trial, punishments, or imprisonments. Such manifestations were not simply dismissed as irrational; their very claims to arise from paranormal, rather than 'normal' human experience, argued their defectiveness as guides to religious doctrine and conduct. Spiritual experience could not be allowed to withdraw into remoteness, but must concern itself with the wider welfare of the human community. From the late 1650s society was

increasingly in favour of forms of religion which placed ethics over theology.

Above all, opponents of a theology based upon mystical revelation were united by their unease at the prospect of religious and social doctrine being dictated by an ungoverned majority moved by emotion rather than reason: 'I tremble', said Casaubon, 'when I think that one Mad man is enough to infect a whole Province' (Treatise, 173). Rationalists and churchmen sought to stress the spiritual gullibility of the enthusiast who, like More's melancholic, 'enclines ...very strongly and peremptorily to either believe or misbelieve a thing...'. .

this Complexion is the most Religious complexion that is, and will be as naturally tampering with Divine matters (though in no better light then that of her own) as Apes and Monkeys will be imitating the actions and manners of Men...such a Melancholist as this must be very highly puffed up, and not onely fancy himself inspired, but believe himself such a special piece of Light and Holiness that God has sent into the world, that he will take upon him to reform, or rather annull, the very Law and Religion he is born under, and make himself not at all inferiour to either Moses or Christ, though he have neither any sound Season nor visible Miracle to extort belief. (Enthusiasmus, 10-11)

The enthusiast's fundamentally wrong-headed construction of the relation between humans and God endangered standards of conduct and civil order. The common belief of anti-enthusiasts -- from Donne, Burton, Casaubon, and More, to Hobbes, Wilkins, and Glanvill -- was that such mania was as disruptive to the constitution of the state as of the individual: a contagion which could spread through the social organism, and lead inexorably into social anarchy. 'For they will clamour, fight against, and destroy those by whom...they have been protected,

and secured from injury. And if this be Madnesse in the multitude', Hobbes asserted, 'it is the same in every particular man':

wee perceive no great unquietnesse, in one, or two men; yet we may be well assured, that their singular Passions, are parts of the Seditious roaring of a troubled Nation. And if there were nothing else that bewrayed their madnesse; yet that very arrogating such inspiration to themselves, is argument enough. (Leviathan, 55)

Both 'enthusiasm' and anti-enthusiasm arose broadly out of an increasing fragmentation of political and religious authority between 1645 and 1655. With the fall of both the monarchy and the national Church, there ceased to be a single comprehensive state or religious ideology to unite the nation. By the Restoration temporal and spiritual leaders were increasingly looking to human reason as a bulwark against disorders caused by 'superstition'. 'It became a common topic of discourse', asserted Gilbert Burnet, later Bishop of Salisbury, 'to treat all mysteries in religion as the contrivances of priests to bring the world into blind submission to them'. In 1652 Robert Boyle declared that the 'multiplicity of religions' among 'the giddy multitude will end in none at all', and Walter Charleton said that England was at present more overrun with 'atheistical monsters' than any other nation or age.<sup>82</sup>

Against such chaotic prospects anti-enthusiasts offered a

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<sup>82</sup> WTUD 179-180. Of course, a more general 'atheism', in the sense of godlessness or hostility to religion, can be traced in England from the 1570s onwards: see Michael Hunter, 'The Problems of "Atheism" in Early Modern England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, 35 (1985) 135-57. On popularly-based rejection of Puritan Protestant orthodoxy up to the 1640s and 1650s, see Christopher Hill, 'Irreligion in the "Puritan" Revolution', in Radical Religion, 191-211; and G.E. Aylmer, 'Unbelief in Seventeenth-Century England', in Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History presented to Christopher Hill, ed. by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 22-46.

range of strategies for religious and political stability.<sup>83</sup> Their collective case was immeasurably strengthened by the fall of the Barebones Parliament. With the saints and sectarian enthusiasts having demonstrated their inability to lead society or reach consensus, their opponents were justified in mistrusting any claim on the part of factions or individuals to a divine calling. Hobbes argued that forms of spiritual revelation arising from singularity of witness, which were not 'conformable to the Holy Scriptures', were fundamentally incommunicable. Miracles having now ceased, 'we have no sign left, whereby to acknowledge the pretended Revelation, or Inspirations of any private man; nor obligation to give ear to any Doctrine, farther than it is conformable to the Holy Scriptures' (259). It could not be proven that the enthusiast's claim to divine communion was anything but a sham adopted for ulterior motives, or a symptom of disordered imagination.

Alexander Ross was a former chaplain to Charles I and an opponent of Hobbes, but his View of All Religions of the World (1655) took a similarly anti-enthusiastic line. Lengthy accounts were given of bizarre practices by enthusiastic sects seen as currently disturbing the stability of England and Europe: included were Anabaptists, Familists, Adamites, Antinomians, Socinians, Brownists, Ranters (termed 'anarchists'), Independents, and Quakers.<sup>84</sup> The portrayal of

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<sup>83</sup> MacDonald sees Henry More's Enthusiasmus Triumphatus as the start of a campaign by Anglican pamphleteers that effectively reconstructed Burton's arguments on religious pathology into a 'ruling class shibboleth' (225).

<sup>84</sup> Steffan, 39.

radical sectarians as victims and agents of a imaginative pathology, whose seductive appeal to an unlearned populace constituted a social and moral threat to the nation, was gaining legitimacy.<sup>85</sup> With the benefit of Foucauldian hindsight, it becomes possible to recognize this emergent view of religious enthusiasm as a social and/or mental deviancy, requiring confinement away from the rest of society, as a portent of the future birth of psychiatry.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Attacks on enthusiasm redoubled with the Restoration. In 1661 Samuel Butler's Hudibras advocated the empirical assessment of human behaviour; while Joseph Glanvill in The Vanity of Dogmatizing saw rationality as the true basis of science and religion, over enthusiastic sectarianism and scientific alchemy or occultism. The Anglican royalist Samuel Parker voiced his opinion that 'what pestilential influence the genius of enthusiasm or opinionated zeal has upon the public peace is so evident from experience that it needs not be prov'd from reason' (A Free and Impartial Censure of the Platonick Philosophie (Oxford, 1666), 72-73, quoted in Steffan, 42). Thomas Sprat's History (1667) also attacked enthusiastic rhetoric as the language of Platonism. Through the rest of the century the idea of enthusiasm as a social peril was to become enshrined in penal law. Dryden opposed penal persecution, and the poem The Hind and the Panther makes clear his belief in a rational religion. In one passage he nonetheless stresses the close alliance of Protestant extremism with democracy in setting a kingdom in tumult (First Part, ll.154-234): in Works, ed. by H.T. Swedenberg Jr, 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969-89), 119-200 (127-130).

<sup>86</sup> Porter, History of Madness, 17; Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. by Richard Howard, (London: Routledge, 1991).

Chapter VI. A 'SOULE BIRD-LIME OF IMPURE LUSTS':  
THE DEMONIZATION OF PROPHECY

Thus saith the Lord, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last; and now the last is reaching the first, and the end the beginning. All things are returning to their Original, where all parables, dark sayings, all languages, and all hidden things, are known, unfolded, and interpreted.<sup>1</sup>

...in the last days...men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient...unthankful, unholy,...having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

(II Timothy 3.1-7)

1. The Wine of the New Kingdom:  
Liberty and Libertinism in the 1650s

The Commonwealth years saw a new concern with blasphemy, arising from a decline of religious and cultural consensus. Anti-enthusiasts saw a co-relation between immoral living and blasphemous utterances. 'Atheism and Enthusiasm', declared Henry More, 'though they seem so extremely opposite one to another, yet in many things they do very nearly agree...

For the Atheist's pretence to Wit and natural Reason... makes the Enthusiast secure that Reason is no guide to God: And the Enthusiast's boldly dictating the careless ravings of his own tumultuous Phansy for undeniable Principles of Divine knowledge, confirms the Atheist that the whole business of Religion and Notion of a God is nothing but a troublesome fit of over-curious Melancholy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abiezer Coppe, 'An Additional and Preambular Hint' to Richard Coppin's Divine Teachings, (London, 1649), reprinted in Ranter Writings, 73-79.

<sup>2</sup> Henry More, Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, (London, 1662 edn [1656]), The Augustan Reprint Society, Publ. No. 118 (Los Angeles, CA.: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1966), 1-2. Further references will be to this edition and in the main text where possible.

Anti-enthusiasts saw 'false zeal', an effect of lower humours acting upon imagination, as the seductive source of enthusiastic rhetoric: 'that it is a mere naturall flatuuous and spirituous temper' asserted Henry More, 'with a proportionable Dosis of Sanguine added to their Melancholy, not the pure Spirit of God, that inacts [enthusiasts], is plainly to be discovered',

not onely in their language, which is very sweet and melting, as if sugar-plums lay under their tongue, but from notorious circumstances of their lives...that Pride and tumour of mind whereby they are so confidently carried out to profess...so highly of themselves, that no lesse Title must serve their turns then that of God, the Holy Ghost...the Messias, the last and chieftest Prophet, the Judge of the quick and the dead...all this comes from Melancholy...a lower kind of working of that Complexion.  
(15)

For Meric Casaubon enthusiasm was a delusive fervour which 'powerfull Orators found in themselves...in conceiving and composing their speeches...that Heat, that fervent Heat, that Fire, hath been the ignis fatuus ...that hath infatuated many speakers into that opinion of divine inspiration.<sup>3</sup> The carnal origins of enthusiastic speech were further detailed by More:

The Spirit then that wings the Enthusiast...is nothing else but the Flatulency which is in the Melancholy complexion, and rises out of the Hypochondriacal humour upon some occasional heat, as Winde out of an Aeolipila ...Which fume mounting into the Head, being...refined by the warmth of the Heart, fills the Mind with variety of Imagination, and so quickens and enlarges Invention, that it makes the Enthusiast to admiration fluent and eloquent,...as it were drunk with new wine drawn from that Cellar of his own that lies in the lowest region of his Body, though he...takes it to be pure Nectar, and those waters of life that spring from above.  
(Enthusiasmus, 12)

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<sup>3</sup> Meric Casaubon, A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme (London, 1656, 2nd edn), Facsimile version ed. by Paul Korshin (Gainsville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970), 215-216. All citations are from this edition, and will be in the main text where possible.

More noted also that the passions of melancholy were not unlike those aroused by drink: 'the sense of Love at large is eminently comprehended in the temper of the Melancholist, Melancholy and Wine being of so near a nature one to the other...a man in wine will kisse such persons as a sober man would scarce touch with a pair of tongs'.

...And assuredly it was the fumes of Melancholy that infatuated the fancie of a late new fangled Religionist, when he sat so kindly by a Gipsie under an hedge, and put his hand into her bosome in a fit of devotion, and vaunted afterwards of it as if it had been a very pious and meritorious action. (13-14)<sup>4</sup>

More reasoned that even in its 'highest workings', the devotion of the enthusiast 'is but in effect a Natural Complexion, as very often Religious Zeal in general is discovered to be'.

...tumultuous Anabaptists in Germany...contended for...a freedome to have many Wives. So...for the most part this Religious heat in men, as it arises merely from Nature, is like Aurum fulminans, which though it flie upward somewhat, the greatest force when it is fired is found to goe downward. This made that religious Sect of the Beguardi conceit that it was a sin to kiss a woman, but none at all to lie with her.(17)

The close association of religious fanaticism with sexual licence was widely disseminated in Anglican tracts into the next century. Jonathan Swift in 'History of Fanaticism' satirized enthusiasm as inspired by Eros rather than the Holy Ghost. His 'Mechanical Operations of the Spirit', an epistolary essay at the close of his miscellany volume A Tale

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<sup>4</sup> This reference was almost certainly to Abiezer Coppe, whose A Second Fiery Flying Roll, (London, 1649) tells how he ate and drank on the ground with gipsies, and 'clip't, hug'd and kiss'd' the women, 'putting my hand in their bosomes, loving the she-Gipsies dearly' as an illustration of God's sanction of the apparently base in order to confound 'things that ARE': Ranter Writings, 98-116 (106-107).

of a Tub (1704), claimed to trace the origins of enthusiasm among 'the numerous sects of heretics ...from Simon Magus and his followers to those of Eutyches'. Through 'infinite reading' he declared himself convinced that these fanatical groups and their successors displayed a characteristic fixity of focus: 'even in their wildest ravings...there is one fundamental point wherein they are sure to meet, as lines in a centre, and that is the community of women...'.<sup>5</sup>

I am apt to imagine that the seed or principle which has ever put men upon visions in things invisible, is of a corporeal nature; for the profounder chemists inform us that the strongest spirits may be extracted from human flesh...the spinal marrow...[being] a continuation of the brain, must needs create a very free communication between the superior faculties and those below: and thus the thorn in the flesh serves for a spur to the spirit... A very eminent member of the faculty assured me that when the Quakers first appeared, he seldom was without some female patients among them for the furor [Uterinus].<sup>5</sup>

Swift's satire is generally read as a pro-rationalist indictment of the various manifestation of religious fanaticism from ancient to contemporary times. Some modern criticism goes further to argue that Swiftian manipulation of the 'jouissance' of enthusiastic language and imagery is not simply an embellishment, but rather a parodic overstatement of anti-fanatical diatribes by religious and scientific

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Swift, 'The Mechanical Operations of the Spirit', in A Tale of a Tub and Other Works, ed. by Angus Ross and David Woolley, The World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 127-141 (140). Hugh Ormsby-Lennon considers Swift's use of late 17th-century cant, in which 'spirit' signifies semen, in 'Raising Swift's Spirit: Das Dong-an-sich', Swift Studies 3 (1988), 9-78. See also J. R. Crider, 'Dissenting Sex: Swift's "History of Fanaticism"', Studies in English Literature, 18 (1978), 491-508 (492-493 and n.4).

orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup>

The Blasphemy Act, passed in August 1650, outlawed 'Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions' along with sodomy and murder. It proscribed the use of divine inspiration to justify swearing and drunkenness, or to repudiate the reality of sin, heaven, or hell. The wording of the Blasphemy Act was soon extended to various other enthusiastic groups including Quakers, and to individuals claiming to be popular prophets or messiahs.<sup>7</sup> But its particular target was Ranterism. Although they themselves did not use the term, Ranters might be recognized by their denial of the authority of Scripture, ministry, and ordinances; their open indifference to the material world; and their assertions that the Christ of the Gospel was but a figure or type of the new dispensation. Professing the Antinomian creed that all authority rose from within, they claimed to be filled with a divine and justifying spirit, so that for them to be defiled by any act, however carnal, would be as though God himself were sinning. Outward acts of sin were thus analogous to pure holiness: 'I affirm, that a man as man hath no more power or freedom of will to do evill than he hath to do good'; 'the act that thou apprehendest [as] sin is not in God, nor simply in

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<sup>6</sup> The pro-rationalist approach is taken in Clarence Webster's 'Swift and Some Earlier Satirists of Puritan Enthusiasm', *PMLA*, 48 (Dec 1933), 1141-1153. For the latter view, see Clement Hawes, Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> For examples, see J.F. McGregor, 'Seekers and Ranters', in Radical Religion in the English Revolution, ed. by J.F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 121-139 (133-134). The Quaker George Fox was an early victim of the Act, taken into custody with two Friends on 30 October 1650 after publicly addressing an assembly on 'the truth, and the Day of the Lord, and the light within them, and the Spirit to teach and lead them to God'. The three were later charged and convicted of blasphemy. Beginnings, 53.

thyself: for indeed sin hath its conception only in the imagination'.<sup>8</sup>

In the political landscape, contemporary depictions of Ranters as highly seditious and heretical enthusiasts give the group a peculiar historical significance.<sup>9</sup> They first appeared after the final defeat of the Levellers by Cromwell at Burford. Most of their writings show a degree of concern for the poor and outcast, and London Ranters were among those sectarians who resorted to local taverns and alehouses as meeting-places.<sup>10</sup> Like the Diggers they were prepared to take the concept of levelling literally. But A.L. Morton describes their 'primitive biblical communism' as 'more menacing and urban than that of Winstanley and the Diggers', while Nigel Smith calls attention to 'obsessive images of violence and carnage' in Ranter texts.<sup>11</sup> Gerrard Winstanley upheld many of the precepts attributed to Ranters, including the idea that the Fall was not an event of history, but rather one that was

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Bauthumley, The Light and Dark Sides of God, (London, 1650 (from The Lost Sheep Found, 1660)), and Laurence Clarkson, A Single Eye All Light, no Darkness, (1650): both reprinted in Ranter Writings, respectively on pages 227-264 (244-245); and 161-175 (169). On the mystical origins of early Ranterism, see Ranter Writings, 10; WTUD, 184-186; and A.L. Morton, The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of contemporary propaganda against Familists and Ranters, including the categorized denunciations of the 1650 tract The Ranter's Bible, see C.E. Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688, (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 272-288.

<sup>10</sup> Levellers (and later Quakers) also met in taverns, and Baptists frequented inns. On historical linkage of alehouse culture with popular irreligion, see Peter Clark, 'The Alehouse and the Alternative Society', in Puritans and Revolutionaries, ed. by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 47-72. The by now common use of tobacco as a stimulant was associated with drunkenness, and in the rites of 'the good creature' some saw some kind of illicit parody of holy communion: WTUD 199-201.

<sup>11</sup> Morton, 71; Ranter Writings, 21.

re-enacted in each individual life in the midst of a corrupt, propertied society. God in the aspect of human reason redeemed each mortal from the only true hell: that perdition they created for each other on earth.<sup>12</sup> But for the Ranter, God, not human might, was to be the great Leveller.

Thus saith the Lord, I inform you, that I overturn, overturn, overturn. And as the Bishops, Charles, and the Lords, have had their turn, overturn, so your turn shall be next (ye surviving great ones) by what Name or Title soever dignified or distinguished) who ever you are, that oppose me, the Eternall God, who am UNIVERSALL Love, and whose service is perfect freedom, and pure Libertinisme.<sup>13</sup>

Ranter writings made use of the Canticles as the source for a rhetoric of bodily desire which offered a medium for the 'levelling' of head/ body hierarchies in general.

Dear Sister,...I know you are a Vessel of the Lords House, filled with heavenly liquor, and I see your love, -- The Fathers love, in the sweet returnes of your (I meane) his sweets to me. I love the vessell well, but the Wine better, even that Wine, which we are drinking New, in the Kingdome...yea, drinke abundantly oh Beloved! ...I know that Male and Female are all one in Christ, and they are all one to me. I had as live heare a daughter, as a sonne prophesie. And I know, that women, who Stay at Home, divide the spoyle -- <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Winstanley's views on hell are clearly stated in The New Law of Righteousness, published in January 1648/9. 'If you look for heaven, or for manifestation of the Fathers love in you in any place, but within your selves, you are deceived...And further, if you look for any other hell or for sorrows in any other place, than what shall be made manifest within the bottomless pit, your very fleshly self, you are deceived, and you shall find that when this bottomless pit is opened to your view, it will be a torment sufficient'. Gerrard Winstanley, Works, ed. by George H. Sabine, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 149-244 (216). Diggers and Ranters shared communist ideals, and Lawrence Clarkson is thought to have had personal contact with Winstanley, possibly through Ranter disturbances on St. George's Hill: see Clarkson, BDBR.

<sup>13</sup> Abiezer Coppe, A Fiery Flying Roll. (London, 1649), in Ranter Writings, 80-97 (86).

<sup>14</sup> Abiezer Coppe, Epistle V of Some Sweet Sips of...Spiritual Wine, (London: Giles Calvert, 1649), reprinted in Ranter Writings, 41-79 (66). See Clement Hawes, '"Man is the Woman": Levelling and the Gendered Body Politic in Enthusiastic Rhetoric', Prose Studies, 18, 1 (April 1995), 36-58. A relation is drawn between the revolutionary energy of Ranters' use of sexual imagery and Milton's radicalism in Noam Flinker, 'Milton and the Ranters on

Under the Blasphemy Act magistrates were required to prosecute those claiming equality with God, 'or that the true God... dwells in the Creature and no where else'.<sup>15</sup> The Act served to underscore the pejorative public view of enthusiasm as irreligion or sexual licentiousness posing as the 'power of the spirit'. 'And though the Familists, Libertines and Anabaptists stand in opposition to Baptists', pronounced one critic, 'yet the great fowler of souls catcheth them all with the same soule bird-lime of impure lusts'.<sup>16</sup> Enthusiasm was condemned as much as for its inversion or travesty of social order as for its true or false representation of the supernatural. Offenders under the Act were classed with beggars and vagrants, petty thieves and prostitutes: a first offence warranted six months imprisonment; further convictions could result in transportation or death.<sup>17</sup>

Historically, Ranter boundaries were so permeable and shifting that any contemporary estimate of its numbers tells us less about the faction itself than of those social and political categories considered most discreditable at any

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Canticles', in A Fine Tuning: Studies of the Religious Poetry of Herbert and Milton, ed. by Mary A Maleski (Binghamton, New York: Medical & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), 273-290. Ranter rhetoric is discussed in Perfection, 335-338.

<sup>15</sup> McGregor, 'Seekers', 132.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Featly, The Dippers Dipt (7th edn 1660 [1645]), 246, in Webster, 1143. Featly's tract also makes a pejorative reference to Milton's divorce pamphlets: 'in which the bonds of marriage are let loose to inordinate lust, and putting away wives for many other causes... [save] Adultery'. See Geoffrey M. Ridden, 'Harmony and Harsh Horns: Music in "Lycidas" and The Dippers Dipt', Notes and Queries, 229 (Sept 1984), 322-323.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Clarkson and Abiezer Coppe were both itinerant Ranter preachers, who acted out their antinomian convictions with some consistency: the former as an adulterer, the latter as a notorious swearer and fornicator. Clarkson, with fellow Ranters Joseph Salmon and Jacob Bauthumley, left the Army ranks in 1649-1650: BDBR.

given point, and of the groups most anxious to avoid that opprobrium.<sup>18</sup> In the mid-forties to early fifties Ranter appeal was strongest among Baptists; from 1655 the Quaker movement would provide a rallying point for disaffected fringe enthusiasts.<sup>19</sup> In the 1650s news reports and parodies gave rise to popular associations of Ranterism with licentiousness, drunkenness, and blasphemy.<sup>20</sup>

Such notoriety threatened to give all sectarian 'enthusiasm' a bad name. In the thickening religious controversies of the post-revolutionary years, the 'Ranter' label became a kind of politico-religious football, a pejorative tag by which various partisan religious groups strengthened their own position by accusing their opponents of irreligion and error. Puritan divines blamed Baptists for Ranterism; the Baptists reassigned the label to Seekers and Familists. Ranterism was satirized by Royalist propagandists as proof of a world turned topsy-turvy by revolution; Richard Baxter saw it as a symptom of the inner chaos of melancholia.<sup>21</sup>

From 1655, as Quakerism gained a foothold in the southern counties, it acquired a reputation for being 'Ranterish in its

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<sup>18</sup> For arguments that historically Ranterism was little more than a myth or bogey, a projection of the fears of mid-seventeenth-century authorities that modern scholars have misread, see J.C. Davis, Fear, Myth And History: The Ranters and the Historians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> See J.F. McGregor, 'The Baptists: Fount of all Heresy', in Radical Religion, 23-63.

<sup>20</sup> Examples from June-August 1650 are given in McGregor, 'Seekers', 130; see also Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England 1641-1660, ed. by Joad Raymond (Gloucestershire: The Windrush Press, 1993), 124, 158-9, 382, 400, 401-4.

<sup>21</sup> McGregor, 'Seekers', 131.

expressions and implications'.<sup>22</sup> Critics held that Quakers were simply Ranters cloaking anarchic religious beliefs with an outward form of legal holiness. Richard Sherlock's A Discourse of the Holy Spirit (1654) accused Quakers of abusing liberty of conscience to 'enshrine and idolize their owne fond, vain, and lying imagination'. The devil, the author insisted, knew how to 'insinuate his Lyes and Errors into mindes unsettled'; by infecting Christ's Church with their pretensions to divine inspiration, Quakers were defaming the sanctuary by acts of 'spiritual fornication'.<sup>23</sup> As growing public fears of Quaker 'contamination' of the nation were voiced in newsbooks throughout the 1650s, Fox and other Quaker leaders became increasingly anxious to distance their movement from connotations of immorality.<sup>24</sup> The writings of Fox use the concept of Ranterism indiscriminately to differentiate the precepts of the Society of Friends from oppositional practices on both sides of the political divide, from Puritan orthodoxy to extreme sectarian radicalism. By portraying Quakerism as a bastion against popular 'Ranter' tendencies such as 'wantonness and drunkenness, and cursed speaking, sporting yourselves in the daytime, following oaths and swearing', along with 'singing, dancing, and whistling', Fox

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<sup>22</sup> Some Quakers joined the Ranters, and evidence suggests some movement in the opposite direction. Crider, 505 and n. 64.

<sup>23</sup> Charles L. Cherry, 'Enthusiasm and Madness: Anti-Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century', Quaker History, 73, 2 (1984), 1-24 (11).

<sup>24</sup> On anti-Quaker journalism, see Making the News, 382-383.

created a more respectable image for the movement.<sup>25</sup>

Superstitions and rumours about Quakers and their practices abounded. On joining the Quakers in 1652, James Nayler was excommunicated from his Independent church at Woodkirk by the minister Christopher Marshall. Trained in New England under John Cotton, Marshall believed that George Fox had supernatural powers, carried a bottle that bewitched people into following him, and rode a great black horse that could carry him threescore miles in a moment.<sup>26</sup> The range of contemporary invectives against Quakerism and the trouble taken by the movement's leaders to refute them publicly are indicated in Fox's Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded (1659).<sup>27</sup> Looking back to the early years of the Quaker movement, and in response to Lady Conway's assurances in 1675 that the Friends under Fox had never been 'infected with what you call Familisme', Henry More offered the comment: 'Methinkes that your Ladiship is over sure in that point...that the Quakers from the beginning had nothing to do with Familisme. The carriage of James Naylour, who was then at

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<sup>25</sup> The historically close association between Ranters and Quakers is one instance of the need for caution in applying doctrinal labels to sectarian controversies of the revolutionary period. See J.F. McGregor, 'Ranterism and the Development of Early Quakerism', Journal of Religious History, 9 (1977), 349-363.

<sup>26</sup> Braithwaite, Beginnings, 62-63, 67. For information on James Nayler's background and joining of the Quakers, see Emilia Fogelklou, James Nayler: The Rebel Saint 1618-1660, trans. by Lajla Yapp (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), 35-76; Braithwaite, Beginnings, 61-67, 243; Barry Reay, The Quakers and the English Revolution (London: Temple Smith, 1985), 18-19; and Christopher Hill, The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries, (London: Bookmarks, 1994 [1984]), 132-137.

<sup>27</sup> Cherry, 10-11. Joseph Smith's Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana (London, 1873) lists several hundred references to attacks on Quakers, along with their published responses. Hugh Barbour, in The Quakers in Puritan England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 53-54, notes that of the 150 anti-Quaker works published 1653-1660, only six went without a specific reply.

least equall with Fox, is to me a demonstration how much at least many of them were tinctured with Familisme...'.<sup>28</sup>

The events referred to by More first reached public notice on 24 October 1656, when James Nayler, newly released with some other Friends from Exeter prison, entered Bristol one afternoon in the pouring rain astride a donkey. He was escorted by a group of followers walking knee-deep in mud, laying garments before him and singing 'Holy, Holy, Holy Hosannah'.<sup>29</sup> This apparent imitation by Nayler of Christ's entry into Jerusalem prompted immediate and harsh measures by the magistrates.<sup>30</sup> An onslaught of anti-Quaker publicity followed, with the result that Nayler and his followers were denounced by Fox, his co-leaders, and eventually the movement as a whole.

## 2. Familist Heresy and the Nayler Crisis

Women played an especially decisive role in the Nayler incident. Much of its adverse publicity revolved around Nayler's association with his supporter and promoter Martha Simmonds. Together with a number of other Quaker women,

<sup>28</sup> From Conway Letters, quoted in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 'James Nayler: A Fresh Approach', JFHS, Supp. 26 (1954), 1-20 (1-2).

<sup>29</sup> The most detailed contemporary account of Nayler's 'blasphemous' entry into Bristol is from a letter by George Bishop to Margaret Fell, Oct. 27, 1656, in Early Quaker Writings 1650-1700, ed. by Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 481-485. See also Beginnings, 251-253; and Fogelklou, 175-180.

<sup>30</sup> On the deep hostility of Bristol authority towards Quakers at this period, see Maryann Feola-Castelucci, '"Warringe with ye worlde": Fox's Relationship with Nayler', Quaker History, 81, 2 (1992), 63-72.

Simmonds had come to be in dispute with the male London leadership over the issue of women's right to speak publicly 'in the spirit'.

Simmonds was born Martha Calvert in Somerset in the winter of 1623/4. Her older brother Giles Calvert [1612-1663], as a leading bookseller of early Quaker writings, published several of her works. By the early 1640s she was living in London as the wife of Thomas Simmonds, who was also destined to be a prolific publisher of Quaker works.<sup>31</sup> For some seven years she remained a Seeker, attending various churches, private meetings and congregations,

inquiring of those that had the Image of honesty in their countenance, where I might finde an honest Minister; for I saw my soul in death, and I was in the first nature...all this time I durst not meddle with any thing of God, nor scarce take his Name in my mouth, because I knew him not...groaning for deliverance...<sup>32</sup>

By 1654 she had joined the Quakers, and as an itinerant preacher was imprisoned several times at Colchester. James Parnell, the early Quaker martyr, refers to her in a letter in December 1655 to William Dewsbury as 'Our tender sister Martha Simmondses'. She was then, he said,

in Bondes in the Town prison; she was put in the last evening for speakeing to a priest; she hath beene in twice before this within a weeke but they had not power to keepe her in & I believe now they will be Tormented. The Lord hath shown his power much by her since she came here, she is A faythful heart in her measure.

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<sup>31</sup> Further information on Giles Calvert and Thomas Simmonds is given in Maureen Bell, 'Mary Westwood Quaker Publisher', Publishing History 23 (1988), 5-66; and Kenneth Carroll, 'Martha Simmonds, A Quaker Enigma', JFHS, 53 (1972), 31-52 (31 and notes 2 and 3).

<sup>32</sup> This is from her autobiographical account in A Lamentation for the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel (1655, 1656), in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 31-32.

The letter also mentions that Martha had walked barefoot through Colchester in frosty weather wearing sackcloth and ashes 'to the astonishment of many'.<sup>33</sup>

But by early 1656 a breach had developed between a number of London Quaker women and the ministers Francis Howgill and Edward Burrough. The conflict, which most accounts attribute to hysteria or witchcraft, seems to have centred upon women's right to speak publicly 'in the spirit' at meetings. This was a point of controversy even within Quakerism. The women's protest was directed at the newly-arrived and northern-based leadership, who were apparently unsympathetic on this issue. Simmonds and some other women, including Dorcas Erbury and Judy and Mildred Crouch, pressed their cause among the community of Friends by employing Quaker tactics internally, disrupting meetings by singing or talking down official speakers. Simmonds was singled out by Howgill for speaking out at a meeting 'in her will' rather than in the Spirit. William Dewsbury wrote in rebuke: 'Martha Simons, thou hast departed from the Counsell of God, & in the evil imaginations of thy heart, thou is run forth to utter wordes without knowledge... the righteous seed is burthened with thee, who hath in thy deceitful practice opened the mouth of the Enemies of god to blaspheme his name'. Accusing her of having 'abused the simplicity' of the meeting 'through thy sorcery...which to thy charge will be laid, in the day when the Lord will be

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<sup>33</sup> This evidence from Carroll, 'Simmonds', 34, contradicts Braithwaite's assertion that Simmonds's witness was opposed by many Friends from the start (Beginnings, 244).

glorified', he called on her to repent.<sup>34</sup>

Burrough was similarly hostile in a letter of early June:

This is the truth from the Lord God concerning thee Martha Simons: thou and [those] whoe followes thy spirit; you are out of the truth, out of the way, out of the power, out of the wisdom, & out of the Life of God; For you are Turned from the Light of Christ Jesus...& doth disobey it'.

He accused her of following 'a Lying spirit' which was 'not the spirit of god, But the voice of the stranger'. Simmonds and her supporters are described as having 'become Goats, rough & hairey...though some of you have prophesied in the name of Christ yet now are you workers of iniquity'.<sup>35</sup> This depiction of Simmonds and her followers, with its overt reference to the biblical Esau, seems also to imply connotations of sexual misconduct and a misogynist fear of the 'grotesque' female body. Burrough's letter was read out publicly in a meeting by Simmonds. 'I was moved to declare to the world,' Simmonds later testified of that period, 'and often they would judge me exceedingly, that I was too forward to run before I was sent,...but I was moved by the power, I could not stay tho they sometimes denied me, yet I was moved to go, and my word did prosper...'.<sup>36</sup>

To examine in more depth the claims put forward by Simmonds and the other women, it is necessary to look back to the earliest days of Quakerism in London. John Camm and Howgill are usually credited with having introduced the sect

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<sup>34</sup> Carroll, 'Simmonds', 41.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Burroughs to Simmonds, quoted in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 40-41.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll, 'Simmonds', 41, n.1; quote from R. Farmer Sathan Inthron'd in his Chair of Pestilence (London, 1657), in Fogelklou, 307.

to the capital, on their first visit to call upon Cromwell in the spring of 1654. But prior to this, records suggest that meetings of Friends were already springing up in Watling Street and Moorfields under the ministry of two northern women, one of whom was Isabel Buttery (formerly of James Nayler's household).<sup>37</sup> At about this time a London master is said to have admonished his apprentice for frequenting a meeting where the only preachers were two women.<sup>38</sup> One of the most powerful ministers among these early groups was Ann Downer; other women leaders would include Sarah Blackborow, who began the meeting at Hammersmith, Ann Gould, who campaigned in Ireland and Essex, and Rebecca Travers, a convert of Nayler.<sup>39</sup> Quakerism's earliest establishment in London appears to have been manifested in small and local gatherings of friends and acquaintances at domestic or business premises: conditions which might have favoured an active female management. But by 1655, under the intervention of northern male leaders Howgill, Burrough, and Nayler, these local meetings seem to have been superseded by larger and more centralized meetings. Private Quaker-only congregations met in the houses of wealthy converts such as the Woodcocks, and regular venues for public meetings were established in large

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<sup>37</sup> Fogelklou, 128-129; the lapse of time between female initiation and male takeover is just perceptible in Beginnings, 157.

<sup>38</sup> Fogelklou, 140.

<sup>39</sup> Fogelklou, 141; Beginnings, 376.

taverns or other public spaces.<sup>40</sup> While more useful for purposes of publicity, the environment of these latter venues might have proved more hostile to women's taking positions of authority or speaking out publicly, especially in criticism against male leaders.

Additionally there might have been a clash of policy concerning modes of discourse. Some inexperienced female members, for example, might have employed an ejaculatory and emotional form of speech, in seeking the inner light. Could this have provoked some degree of irritation among male leaders more used to the keeping of a decorous silence when no definite leadings were felt?<sup>41</sup> As early as 1653 Dewsbury and Fox, seeking to ensure that the allowance of spontaneous utterance did not compromise the proprieties of the meeting, advised:

...such as are tender, if they should be moved to bubble forth a few words, and speak in the seed and Lamb's power, suffer and bear that, -- that is the tender. And if they should go beyond their measure, bear it in the meeting for peace, and order's sake, ... But when the meeting is done, then if any be moved to speak to them, between you and them, ...do it in the love and wisdom that is pure and gentle from above... which doth edify and bear all things, and suffers long and doth fulfil the law.<sup>42</sup>

The unfavourable reports of women preachers, culminating in the reaction to the Naylor episode, point to the essential

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<sup>40</sup> Some major meetings had specially-installed printers and full-time assistants. Giles Calvert stayed for several days at the 1655 meeting in Swannington, Leicestershire, then set out for London with up to 'two or three quires of paper' for the presses: Fogelklou, 127. For a fuller record of the locations of early Quaker meetings, see Beginnings, 377-380.

<sup>41</sup> This is suggested in Fogelklou, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Beginnings, 310.

precariousness of the female ministry even within Quakerism. Women's right to speak rested upon the Quaker adoption of the model of Christ's first [male and female] followers, in which all were linked in a fellowship of spiritual equality.<sup>43</sup> But co-existent with this was the need for all to be obedient to Christ as master and for the sake of all. These two dimensions, of friendship among equals and obedience to group authority, were to be continuously and variously interwoven throughout the history of early Quakerism. The co-equal dynamic is succinctly expressed in Fox's 1656 justification of female Quaker prophecy, which repeatedly stipulates that 'the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets': that the prophets themselves are to uphold and regulate women's authority to prophesy, 'and this was order, and not confusion, in all the churches of the saints, which is disorder and confusion in the churches of the world, who cannot endure a daughter to prophesy...'.<sup>44</sup> In its radical campaign against worldly hierarchies and values of 1652-1655, Quaker organization had translated primitive Christian models into a language and framework of family relations. All Friends were kindred, calling each other brother and sister, and readily affording mutual support, material and emotional. In the same way Christian marriage, as a visible sign of the bond between Christ and his church, could be a companionate linking of

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<sup>43</sup> On Quaker negotiation of seventeenth-century notions of friendship, see Barbara Ritter Dailey, 'The Husbands of Margaret Fell', Seventeenth Century, 2, 1 (1987), 55-71 (56-57).

<sup>44</sup> George Fox, The Woman Learning in Silence (London, 1656), in Works, 8 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1975), IV, 104-110, (107).

partners in love, in which the sexes realized a pre-lapsarian equality. As spiritually-inspired prophets women were thus enabled to preach, to rebuke secular leaders, to offer counsel to others, and even to challenge Quaker leaders.

But that power was subject to constraints. The right of women to witness publicly as equals with men was weakened by the female 'vesselship' dispensation: if their message found a hostile reception, they were liable to accusations of disobedience, hysteria, or self-conceit, and were subject to chastizement and exclusion by authorities within the community. Where a woman continued to press her own case, as in the case of Simmonds and other dissenting Quaker women, she risked being downgraded into negative stereotypes of gender and social position.<sup>45</sup> By this time, moreover, Quakers' efforts to gain recognition as a movement were giving rise to a greater emphasis upon organizational structure. In accordance with the more hierarchical aspects of the familial model, Friends were encouraged to render obedience to their 'parents' George Fox and Margaret Fell, along with their constituted representatives. Similarly, wives and sisters were enjoined to recognize the authority of men as brothers or husbands.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout early 1656 the London women dissidents pressed their case against Howgill and Burrough, who had denied them a hearing and were busy promoting the authority of Fox, whose

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<sup>45</sup> Phyllis Mack, Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 207.

<sup>46</sup> On the genderized nature of Quaker relations, see Dailey, 55-56 and passim.

leadership in the movement would increasingly be likened to that of Cromwell in the government.<sup>47</sup> In July Simmonds sought support from James Nayler, a Yorkshire farmer and former Army quartermaster, and a leading Quaker speaker. Initially he refused to judge his fellows, condemned her for seeking dominion in the movement, and bade her go home and tend her housework. Simmonds gives her version of events:

I was moved of the Lord to go to James Nailer, and tell him I wanted Justice, and he being harsh to me, at length these words came to me to speak... How are the mighty men fallen, I came to Jerusalem and behold a cry, and behold an oppression, which pierced and struck him down with tears from that day...Then they all concluded that I had bewitched him, when...I was as innocent as a child, and they...all set upon me...

She relates that Nayler 'lay from that day in exceeding sorrow for about three daies, and all that while the power arose in me, which I did not expect'.

But after three daies he came to me, and confessed I had been clear in service to the Lord, and that he had wronged me, and should have done Justice, but did not do it. And then he lay at my house three daies.<sup>48</sup>

From that time Simmonds seemed to gain an ascendancy over Nayler, and Nayler's increasingly close association with the dissidents of both sexes who made up Simmonds's group, set in train events which would culminate in an apparent power-bid for overall leadership.

It is understandable that Simmonds should have sought the support of Nayler, who had applied himself unstintingly to the Quaker cause since his arrival in London in 1655. In the face

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<sup>47</sup> Fogelklou, 145.

<sup>48</sup> Farmer, in Fogelklou, 307.

of considerable local anti-Quaker feeling, he had proved skilful in handling public religious discussion and disputes, and with Howgill and Burrough temporarily absent he became the chief Quaker minister in London.<sup>49</sup> He appears also to have

inspired loyalty among women and men alienated by internal conflicts, and is the only male Quaker leader of that time whose works included prefaces by women.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to those who urged Simmonds and other women to be silent, he seems also to have placed special emphasis on the capacity of both men and women to become vessels of Christ.

It was this last, salient feature that after Nayler's downfall would cause critics like Henry More to link him with Boehmist or Familist tendencies. The potential crossing of taboo boundaries inherent in Familist ideas is aptly shown in the subsequent confusion over the meaning of the Bristol incident itself. Nayler always insisted that he had not claimed to be Christ himself, but only 'Christ in man': a sign of Christ's coming.<sup>51</sup> Many of his followers, including Simmonds, the Strangers, and Erbury, had begun with the belief that Nayler had an extra portion of that divine presence that was in every saint. But by 1656 Simmonds had already published

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<sup>49</sup> In contrast to Fox, Nayler's utility as an a Quaker ambassador in London was fortified by his past service as a former Army officer, by which he gained access to high-ranking London society. Fogelklou, 135-136; Beginnings, 241-242 and Chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> Mack, 201, n.103. Among the contributors were Rebecca Travers (1658) and her sister Mary Booth (1661). On Travers, see also Fogelklou 134-135.

<sup>51</sup> This belief in an indwelling spirituality is particularly significant in terms of the elasticity of its interpretation by others. Bell maintains that Nayler's ride was meant as simply another instance of Quaker 'sign behaviour' (Bell, 32); conversely, Christopher Hill examines Nayler's beliefs as testified by him at his trial, to highlight their similarity to Ranter Familist doctrines: Defeat, 136.

her own views of the indwelling spirit:

Why should it seem a strange thing to you to see Christ reigne in his Saints...make our bodies fit for himself to dwell in, seeing our hearts are ready to bow to his Will?...this Vessel is as precious to me as that which was tortured at Jerusalem, seeing the Father hath prepared them both, and the same graces springs from both according to its time of working, which now is finisht in sufferings.<sup>52</sup>

Her claim that a prophet had ordained Nayler as the 'King of Israel' might have been blasphemy, or simply a biblical encoding of Nayler's destiny as leader of the 'Israel' of the London Friends. But Simmonds's assertion that 'by much tribulation, anguish of Spirit, and sufferings of the flesh, hath [Christ] now fitted a bodie for himself...so perfect... that he can lay down his life for his enemies, not opening his mouth to defend himself' strongly suggests that she and her supporters had come to see in Nayler the actual messiah of the new coming; they reportedly titled him 'the everlasting sone of Righteousness', the 'Lord of Righteousness and prince of peace'.<sup>53</sup>

At Nayler's trial in November 1656, the parliamentary committee of fifty-five met to consider Nayler's evidence and final statement denying that any worship or honour was done to James Nayler, but all was intended to pertain 'to the appearance of God in him, as to a sign of Christ's second

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<sup>52</sup> Simmonds, O England;thy time is come, (London, 1656), 5, in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 37-38.

<sup>53</sup> Fogelklou, 145; Farmer, 116, in Carroll, 'Simmonds' 46. Such adulation gave rise to other questionable stories. At Nayler's trial a witness from Bristol testified that during his arrest the women had laid their heads on his knee, and that he had moaned and crossed his hands over their heads. When Martha was questioned as to whether her fellow-supporters had accused her of incontinence, she replied 'Not carnally, but spiritually'. See Carroll, 'Simmonds', 47; and Fogelklou, 186.

coming and being revealed in His saints, the great mystery that hath been hid from ages...'. In reporting to Parliament on December 5, the Committee chose to ignore Nayler's careful distinction between Christ in the creature and the creature itself, and stated that the prisoner had 'assumed the gesture, words, honour, worship, and miracles of our blessed Saviour, and His names, incommunicable attributes and titles'.<sup>54</sup> Parliament, assuming an unauthorized judicial authority, avoided the death penalty in favour of a sentence that was exceptionally harsh. On 18 December, after being pilloried for two hours in the Palace Yard of Westminster, Nayler was drawn at the cart-tail through the streets to the Old Exchange. Along the way he was given three hundred lashes; the bailiffs riding alongside crushed him against the cart, and allowed their horses to trample his feet, but he made no outcry. On 27 December, he was again pilloried, his tongue was bored through with a hot iron, and the letter 'B' branded on his forehead. On being unbound, he embraced the executioner. Three weeks later Nayler was returned to Bristol, to be led mounted barebacked and backwards through the city gates, and then whipped through the streets. The procession was accompanied by his supporters, Quaker women and men riding bareheaded alongside and singing 'Holy, holy, holy', until they were dispersed. Finally the prisoner was returned to solitary confinement in the 'hole' at Bridewell, and he remained in prison until September 1659.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Beginnings, 255-258.

<sup>55</sup> Fogelklou, 191-213, 218-221, 224-227; Beginnings, 262-267.

Until Nayler's death in 1660, women remained prominent among his supporters. These included not only those directly involved in the Bristol entry (Simmonds, Erbury, and Hannah Stranger), but also a more 'respectable' faction, including such figures as Sarah Blackborow and Rebecca Travers, active leaders in London Quaker circles.<sup>56</sup> Travers tended Nayler's wounds following his punishment, and publicly though unsuccessfully appealed to Parliament for the remission of the rest of his sentence.<sup>57</sup> Sarah Blackborow, a future leader in the organization of the London women's meetings, arranged the publication of a Nayler tract following the crisis, prefaced by her own endorsement: 'This came to my hand, and having its witness in me, finding the same spirit sealing to it, a necessity was laid upon me to put it in print, that so it might do it service, and have unity with its own'.<sup>58</sup>

Nayler's brutal punishment shows the extent to which the authorities viewed the Bristol ride of Nayler and his supporters as a politically provocative act.<sup>59</sup> In the summer and autumn of 1656 London had been full of rumours and apocalyptic expectations, with Baptists and Fifth Monarchists proclaiming Christ's imminent coming. After the armed Fifth

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<sup>56</sup> On Nayler's male supporters, such as Samuel Cater, Timothy Wedlock, and Robert Crab, see Beginnings, 269; on Robert Rich, see Fogelklou, 217-221 and passim.

<sup>57</sup> Bell, 30-31; Beginnings, 263; Fogelklou 141, 142.

<sup>58</sup> Mack, 200; Fogelklou, 238.

<sup>59</sup> After London, Bristol was England's leading city, and incidents such as the Nayler entry were normally dealt with locally. William G. Bittle argues convincingly that the Bristol magistrates (whose anti-Quakerism was well-known), deliberately referred Nayler's case to Parliament in order to spur that body to act against the sectaries, and so represented a retrograde step in the development of religious toleration. Bittle, 'The Trial of James Nayler and Religious Toleration in England', Quaker History, 73, 1 (1984), 29-33.

Monarchist uprising under Vavasour Powell in the following year, opinion was widespread that such revolts were promoted by Quakers and Baptists.<sup>60</sup>

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### 3. 'Vaine glory & fleshly liberty was their overthrow'

Thus having in a great Measure lost my own Guide, and Darkness being come upon me, I sought a Place where I might have been alone, to weep and cry before the Lord...But then my Adversary who had long waited his Opportunity had got in...and so letting go that little of the true Light which I had yet remaining in my self, I gave up myself wholly to be led by others...<sup>61</sup>

Although Fox and others were cleared of complicity in Nayler's misbehaviour, the incident left a deep public impression of the dangerous tendencies of Quaker doctrine. For the Quakers, Nayler's misconduct had caused a public scandal, a grave setback to a movement attempting to establish its credentials as a serious denomination. Members were discouraged and confused, and fears arose that factionalism would split the Society of Friends altogether. Writing to Margaret Fell at the time of Nayler's ride Richard Roper likened London Friends to the early Christian church at Corinth, one saying, 'I am of James'; another, 'I am of Francis [Howgill] and Edward [Burroughs]'.<sup>62</sup>

From its earliest beginnings Quakerism had been dogged by internal dissent. In Nottinghamshire and Kendal, the regional

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<sup>60</sup> Carroll 'Simmonds', 32-33, 38; Fogelklou 233.

<sup>61</sup> From James Nayler's later account of Bristol episode, in A Collection, (London, 1716), xlii-xliv, quoted in Fogelklou, 153; also in Beginnings, 251.

<sup>62</sup> Beginnings, 248.

seedbeds of the early movement, various factions and local splinter groups were to remain.<sup>63</sup> Female converts, moreover, had featured prominently among the 'Children of Light' (the name adopted by early Quakers in the north).<sup>64</sup> Likewise, women were involved also in many of the flare-ups over longstanding differences within the movement. The factionalist Jane Holmes, accused in 1653 of forming a rival group among Quakers imprisoned at York, denounced her examiner Richard Farnworth as giving voice to the whore or the devil. In 1655 Isabel Garnett and the Quaker minister John Camm organized a group of dissident Friends in Westmorland in 1655.<sup>65</sup> In that year also Elizabeth Morgan of Chester was reported to have 'bred dissension' among Friends at Bristol, and to have 'led George Bishop astray for a time'. She often witnessed publicly at Gloucester meetings, in circumstances that were apparently unorthodox:

And after some time, the powe[r] of God came u[p]on some Friends, which was very strange to the people, and some began to stand up and to go to see what was happened... Elizabeth Morgan stood before some of them and said, 'Ephraim is a heifer unaccustomed to the yoke', and so went on with much boldness in the authority of God's power to the end of the meeting...

Such a disturbance was seen as injurious to the Quaker cause.

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<sup>63</sup> From Fox's early community in Nottinghamshire the Quaker Rice Jones later departed with his followers to become 'Proud Quakers'. The Kendal area, from which had come several Quaker leaders in 1652, continued as a Seeker stronghold; and in 1656 some local Quakers charged newly-arrived itinerant ministers with impeding the power that had been among Kendal Friends before their arrival. Beginnings, 45-46, 344-345.

<sup>64</sup> From Kendal in June 1652 came Ann Blaykling; Ann Audland, who went on to work in Durham in early 1654; Jane and Dorothy Waugh, serving maids at John Camm's; Elizabeth Fletcher; and Elizabeth Leavens, who later married Thomas Holme. Beginnings, 115 and n.4, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Mack, 203.

...after this meeting there was a great noise in the city about the Quaker[s], and... such false scandalous reports they sent abroad... So afterwards we found the people generally incensed against us, and the rude sort would abuse us and throw stones...with scoffing and deriding of us, as we went along the streets.<sup>66</sup>

The major effect of Nayler's Bristol ride, and the severe parliamentary sentence passed upon him, was to bring all radical sectarians into disrepute, and Quakers in particular. Against this offensive, Quaker leaders sought to uphold the validity of their own cause by focusing on Nayler's female supporters as the source of his 'taint'. On 25 November, having visited Nayler during his trial, Richard Hubberthorne reported to Fell that the prisoner was still consorting with Simmonds, whose party appeared to be gathering support:

the women are exceeding filthy in Acting in Imitations & singing, And that power of darkenesse in them rules over him...many people come dayly to them, both of the world and also such as are Convinced, And wonders at the Imitation which is Acted Among them as often they will kneel before him &c. James speakes pretty much to Friends as in Justifieing all their Actings to be in Innocency.<sup>67</sup>

After his sentence Nayler was not allowed visitors at Bridewell. Yet Hubberthorne reported in February that women still came, and that 'when they will not let them in to him they fall down & knealls before the wall'.

Through Hubberthorne we know that a number of these followers held their own meetings in the most public parts of the City, at the Exchange and places where Nayler had suffered, had even been sent to Bridewell, and altogether

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<sup>66</sup> Beginnings, 389; see also 388 and n. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Carroll, 'Simmonds', 47.

constituted 'A great offence to the way of Truth here for the present'.<sup>68</sup> Among their disturbances of London meetings, Hubberthorne describes the arrival of a dozen women and men, including Simmonds, at a Sunday meeting at the Bull and Mouth, with hundreds present. 'And they began to sing and to make A noise to stop the Truth from the people & they grew very Impudent & filthy'. Their aim seems to have included the experimental introduction of singing and a type of communion: non-Quaker forms of worship.

And Mar[tha] took A bible and read A psalme, And they sang it after her, as they doe in the steeplehouses, but I keeping clear in Innocency, & ministering in the power of Truth as I was moved to the people their singing was Confounded. And after that shee took a chapter in Ezek: which speake to the Rebellious children. And she said that the lord had sent that chapter to be read unto us, and commanded me to be silent and hear it read, but when she saw the Truth prevaile over all their deceipt & gainesayinges, then she cryed out to the people, that we denyed the scriptures; And after that she said, who would have thought that the Quakers would tell people there Teacher is within them And thou hast taught this three houres...

The group 'met again...after wee were gone And they broke bread & drunk drinke, & gave to the rude multitude, that would take any ... And they said that was to manifest that they had Love to the wicked'.<sup>69</sup> Another young woman who spoke out regularly at the Bull and Mouth and Worcester House meetings, saying that 'she was above the apostles', was apparently

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<sup>68</sup> Both quotes are from Hubberthorne's letter of 10 February 1657, to Margaret Fell, in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 48.

<sup>69</sup> Carroll, 'Simmonds', 48-49; see also Mack, 199-200. These disturbances occurred while Simmonds and her followers were in nominal custody, but with some freedom of movement. On 22 February they made a required public attendance at services at Westminster Abbey, apparently with dignity and restraint: Fogelklou, 228. A public comment was made in *Mercurious Politicus*, No. 350, (quoted in 'Simmonds', 49).

Mildred Crouch. She and Judy Crouch repeatedly staged disruptions in these two venues and a third in the Strand in the spring of 1657, preventing ministers from speaking. In one March meeting Hubberthorne was contested by Mildred in a prolonged trial of nerves, later described to Fox: 'I having spoken something in the living power of the lord to the people she...told the people that they should not hear a word from me... for she intended to speak as long as they stayed...'. The confrontation continued many hours, but by midnight Mildred was flagging in her efforts to control the meeting. 'All her natural parts was spent', Hubberthorne alleges, 'and her senses distracted, [so] that she was even really mad...yet she said that the next meeting she would come in more power & we should not speak a word'.<sup>70</sup>

During the remainder of Nayler's imprisonment dissenters continued to challenge the authority of leaders in meetings of London Friends. Braithwaite claims that these were actually Ranters and other 'wild and turbulent spirits', who seized the chance of disrupting meetings under cover of Nayler's name.<sup>71</sup> George Whitehead told how 'Persons of a loose ranting spirit got up, and frequently disturbed our Friends' meetings in London,...crying out against divers of our faithful ministers and their testimonies... [saying] "you have lost the power, you have lost the power"'. Opponents of Fox stated that 'a higher thing was come out, and in standing against it the Quakers were as bad as the priests'. Divisions appeared among

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<sup>70</sup> Mack, 199 and n.100.

<sup>71</sup> Beginnings, 262.

Cardiff Friends. In one attempt to stop the work of Thomas Holme, people at the meeting were singing and falling to the floor, and some were dressed in ashes and haircloth. As far away as Barbados Robert Rich was disturbing Quaker meetings with noisy singing.<sup>72</sup>

On 10 April 1657, as Fox, Burrough and other Quaker leaders were meeting in London, reports came from John Perrot, Humphrey Norton, and William Shaw who were witnessing in Ireland, that 'The Agents of JN have come creeping on their Bellies':

Martha their Miserable Mother, this day hath been [at?] us, & all her witchery and filthy Enchantments is set at Naught, they are left for Miserable Examples, unto all that feare god, Pride & Vaine glory, & fleshly liberty was their Overthrow.<sup>73</sup>

In August 1657 Quakers around Salisbury were reported to have 'received some hurt by some of Martha Simmonds company which came there about to dwell; but the Lord hath given us dominion over them'.<sup>74</sup>

Contention between the Fox camp and the Simmonds faction spread to the printing presses. In 1657 George Bishop's The Throne of Truth Exalted over the Powers of Darkness was launched in counter-attack to Ralph Farmer's Sathan Inthron'd. Simmonds was 'that Woman and her company, with all ther filthiness in their deceit', and 'that Woman through whom

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<sup>72</sup> Beginnings, 270.

<sup>73</sup> Letter to William and Margaret Blanch of Waterford, in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 50.

<sup>74</sup> Braithwaite attributes this letter to Thomas Briggs (Beginnings 269 and n.1); in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 50, the words are said to be those of John Braithwaite.

this hour came'. Bishop declared that 'that spirit which darkened him [Nayler], was then denyed by them [Friends], and also the Woman from whom it had entred him, and the other two with her, and all their Filth'.<sup>75</sup> Simmonds herself, after her release from custody over the Bristol incident, evidently travelled widely. Her subsequent calls for repentance address the nation as a whole.<sup>76</sup> By the autumn of 1657, Hubberthorne reported to Fell that 'Martha Simmonds & that Company is quiet', and further observed that 'there is something of God stirring in her'.

Nayler gained renewed support after his release from prison in September 1659, and some leaders felt that he had a significant contribution to make in London.<sup>77</sup> In the face of this, Fox's insistence the following year on Nayler's return to the north suggests resentment at the latter's continued popularity. Nayler died on this journey.<sup>78</sup> No more is heard of Simmonds, although she is attacked in a pamphlet of about 1659

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<sup>75</sup> Bishop, The Throne of Truth, quoted in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 50. After the Nayler episode Calvert's publishing of Quaker writings fell off sharply, and Thomas Simmon[d]s became the chief publisher for the Society of Friends. The changeover may have due to Quaker opprobrium toward Giles Calvert's sister Martha Simmonds during this period, yet is surprising nonetheless, in that Thomas Simmons was Martha's husband (Bell, 31).

<sup>76</sup> Simmonds, A Lamentation, 1; also Carroll, 35-36. Her four-month imprisonment in Essex, and in the 'Moot Hall' at Colchester in 1657, are reportedly mentioned in Simmonds et al., O England; thy time is come (London, 1656), 1-2; Joseph Besse, Sufferings (London, 1753), I, 292; and The First Publishers of Truth, ed. by Norman Penney (London, 1907), 97: these sources are from Carroll, 'Simmonds', 35, notes 2-5.

<sup>77</sup> Beginnings, 274; see also Fogelklou, 280 for a report by Hubberthorne of the successful meetings at the Woodcocks' house.

<sup>78</sup> He was buried at King's Ripton on 21 October 1660 in the graveyard of the Quaker doctor Thomas Parnell who had tended him in his last hours. Fogelklou 280-282; Beginnings, 274-275;

as an advocate of going naked for a sign.<sup>79</sup> She is recorded as having died in April 1665 on the way to Maryland.<sup>80</sup>

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#### 4. New Roles for Quaker Women

After the abortive Venner uprising of 1657, the following year brought the death of Cromwell, broadly a supporter of Quaker interests, and also of Judge Fell, whose legal influence had bolstered the affairs of Friends in the North since 1652. These events made Quakerism increasingly vulnerable as a radical movement: by September 1658 some one hundred and fifteen Friends were in prison. Implication in the bloody Venner uprising of January 1661, and the failure of the campaign for toleration in the early 1660s, led to heavy loss of life among Quakers in English gaols. By 1666 virtually all the movement's early leaders were dead in or before their prime, including Nayler, Camm, Howgill, Burrough, Hubberthorne, and Farnworth. Quakerism hereafter becomes increasingly identified with Fox, its surviving patriarch.<sup>81</sup> From the earliest days Fox's authority within the movement,

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Blome, Questions...to George Whitehead and George Fox, 6, in Carroll, 'Simmonds', 51.

<sup>80</sup> Beginnings, 269. A Martha Simmonds is also recorded in the burial records of the London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting; her death and burial in Southwark took place on September 27, 1665. Carroll suggest that this might have been Martha and Thomas Simmonds' daughter: 'Simmonds', 51-52; and 52 n.4.

<sup>81</sup> Of male Quaker pioneers only Whitehead and Dewsbury survived, and neither they nor the second generation of leaders sought to challenge Fox's primacy. See Barbour, Quakers, 227-229; and Hill, Experience, 160-161.

based upon his strong convictions of direct spiritual revelation, had been challenged by no other leader except possibly Nayler. During the unrest and negative publicity of the late 1650s, Fox established his leadership by gradually disassociating Quakerism from its early anarchic 'Ranter' elements, and strengthening its pacifist and philanthropic tendencies.<sup>82</sup> As this formerly rural and northern-based charismatic spiritual movement sought to evolve into a national, even global, organization based on metropolitan mercantile interests, its foremost need was of respectability and toleration by the authorities of a restored monarchy. Earlier stress upon spiritual and social revolution now gave way to the requirements of organization and public relations.<sup>83</sup>

For the second generation of saints raised or born within the expanding London-based Society of Friends, a system of eldership was increasingly important, with precedence often linked to social status.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the bureaucracy required by Fox's ideal community was a genderized one. Matters of business, together with the ministry and its organization, censorship of publications and records, and debates with non-Quakers, were now the responsibility of the men. But social offices and

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<sup>82</sup> Braithwaite's opinion is that the Nayler incident 'effectually warned the Quaker leaders of the perils attending the over-emphasis which they had laid on the infallibility of the life possessed by the Spirit of Christ. Henceforth they walked more carefully, heedful of the special temptations which beset the path of spiritual enthusiasm'. *Beginnings*, 271.

<sup>83</sup> By 1660 Quaker numbers in London are estimated at eight to ten thousand, or 1.5 per cent of the population; and at Bristol one thousand, or 5.6 per cent of inhabitants. For geographic data on Quaker numbers in this period, see Reay, *The Quakers*, 26-31.

<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, Bonnelyn Young Kunze, 'Religious Authority and Social Status in Seventeenth-Century England: The Friendship of Margaret Fell, George Fox, and William Penn', *Church History*, 57, 2 (1988), 170-186.

charitable work in and outside the movement offered new scope for women of ability, and these duties were administered through a system of women-only meetings.<sup>85</sup> As participants in Women's Meetings, female Quakers acquired a sphere of rights and duties that encompassed the provision of material relief to poor Friends, prison visits, the placing of female apprentices, and estimating the characters of those seeking to wed.<sup>86</sup> This last duty was clearly to protect the integrity of the movement: 'And dear sisters it is duely Incumbent upon us to look into our families, and to prevent our Children of running into the world for husbands, or for wives...'. In their regulation of marriage concerns, women were given power to discipline and instruct male relatives and neighbours.

And if there be any that goes out to Marry,...or joineth in Marriage with the world, and does not obey the order of the Gospell as it is established amongst friends. then [it is] for the womens monthly meeting to send to them, to reprove them, and to bear their testimony against their acting Contrary to the truth...<sup>87</sup>

Building on Fox's observation that 'there were mothers in Israel as well as fathers', the record books of meetings now

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<sup>85</sup> By 1659 the weekly 'Box Meeting' and 'Two Weeks Meeting' were established for women only. Ten years later Fell's northern 'Kendal Fund' was replaced by the 'Meetings for Sufferings', which gathered data and distributed funds to all needy or imprisoned Quakers: Hugh Barbour, 'Quaker Prophetesses and Mothers in Israel', in Seeking the Light: Essays in Quaker History, ed. by J.W. Frost and J.M. Moore (Wallingford, PA.: Pendle Hill Publications & Friends Historical Association, 1986), 41-60 (51). The Women's Meetings are often claimed as Fox's initiative, but evidence suggests that credit belongs primarily to Sarah Blackborow and her associates, concerned about the physical needs of Friends in prison or poverty. Fox, Journal II, 342-343; and Elaine Hobby, 'Handmaids of the Lord and Mothers in Israel: Early Vindications of Women's Prophecy', Prose Studies, 17, 3 (Dec 1994), 88-98, n.9; see also Beginnings, 341.

<sup>86</sup> Mack, 286-293; Hobby, 89.

<sup>87</sup> From the Epistle sent from the Lancashire Meeting to 'Womens Meetings every where', c.1675-1680, transcribed by Milton D. Speizman and Jane C. Kronick in 'A Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1, 1 (1975), 231-245 (241-242).

supplied a formalized adaptation of early Quakerism's neo-family ties. The spontaneous support systems of itinerant female prophecy were replaced by an authorized female eldership.<sup>88</sup>

In this wisdom you may treat the elder men as fathers, and the elder women as mothers, and the younger men as brethren, and the younger sisters in all purity; so that all may be arrayed with a meek and quiet spirit...and so that there may no harshness, nor fierceness, or wilfulness appear in your meetings.<sup>89</sup>

Individual women members were encouraged to teach and prophesy at meetings only within a socially subordinate position: 'If any have a moving to speak the truth, obey; and then when you have done return to your places again with speed'.<sup>90</sup>

Women's roles within the church were presented as companionate, using the powers within their own sphere as helpmeets alongside men: 'And so here in the power and spirit, of the lord God, women comes to be coheires, and fellow labourers, in the Gospell'. Yet at the same time church government hierarchy placed senior, wealthy, and educated women in positions of authority over community members of both

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<sup>88</sup> On the development of Quakerism from its early charismatic stages to the more regulated organization, see Reay, 103-122; and W. C. Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism, 2nd edn, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961). On the impact of such changes upon women, see Mabel Brailsford, Quaker Women 1650-1760 (London: Duckworth, 1915); Mack, 265-412; Christine Trevett, Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century (York: The Ebor Press, 1991); and Bonnelyn Young Kunze, Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism (London: Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>89</sup> George Fox to Friends of the Six Weeks Meeting and others [n.d.], in Mack, 288.

<sup>90</sup> George Fox, 'The Word of the Lord God to all Families, Masters, and Servants' [n.d.], in Mack, 287.

sexes, a practice they justified from Pauline injunctions:

And in Titus: 2.3: the Aged women likewise [are exhorted] that they...teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, Chast, keepers at home, Good, Obedient to their own husbands; that the word of God be not Blasphemed. So here was womens meetings, and womens teachings, of one another, so that this is no new thing, as some raw unseasoned spirits would seem to make it.<sup>91</sup>

In 1675 the subject of female seniority in church government became the basis of a challenge to the London leadership by dissenters headed by two Westmorland Quakers. John Wilkinson and John Story mounted an attack on policies established by Fox, Fell and their co-leaders. In particular they opposed the establishment of nationwide autonomous women's meetings superintending such matters as the approval and regulation of marriage contracts, conferring a degree of authority over men. Variations of the dispute were played out among groups throughout the country.<sup>92</sup> The women's meetings, and the powers that stemmed from them, could be justified in terms of the principle consistently advanced by Fox and other leaders, that women's right to preach was above the law. But internal dissenters countered that the women's meeting was undeniably a political institution.<sup>93</sup> These schismatic elements continually stressed the superiority of a locally-based egalitarianism and 'consensus' ideal over the

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<sup>91</sup> Both the above quotes are from the Epistle from the Lancashire Meeting to 'Women's Meetings every where', 244.

<sup>92</sup> Mack, 293-302.

<sup>93</sup> For the position of those opposing women's government in monthly meetings see the 1694 published testimony of William Mather, a supporter of John Perrot, in Mack, 296-297.

hierarchical model which had evolved under Fox, Fell, and their associates. The Wilkinson/Story coalition sought a fellowship in which spiritual authority emerged on the basis of communal, rather than singular, revelation. The unity of the Spirit relied upon 'sense of the meeting', in which decisions were grounded in the loving relations between believers in spiritual unity with God and each other. This unity could exist only when both sexes acted only by the prompting of the Inner Light. In fact both models of church order were present in Quakerism, as has been indicated above. A consensual ideal was expressed in the more radical aspects of Quaker social and political theory, and was certainly responsible for the freedom of early Quaker women to act and speak out in public. But the hierarchical imperative was always present: in times of stress, the spiritual authority of leaders was vital to the movement's unity; furthermore, it was this authoritarian aspect that licensed the women's meetings.<sup>94</sup>

Of the sects which arose during England's revolutionary decades Quakerism sustained the strongest, most continuous, and most well-recorded identification with female spiritual ministry. While the findings of this study broadly support the premise that women's overall authority to prophesy declined in association with the general downfall of enthusiastic or charismatic separatism, we still need to understand more fully the reasons and circumstances behind this development. This

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<sup>94</sup> In 1674 the Quaker theologian Robert Barclay demonstrated the interrelatedness of the two concepts in terms of corporality and the body politic. See Kunze, 'Religious Authority', 184.

brief account of the evolution of Quakerism illustrates the ways in which women's religious roles became subject over time to anti-democratic modification by institutional and social hierarchies. Among the Friends (as in most revolutionary movements which survive), the powers accorded to females came gradually to be vested in an elite group of highly placed women qualified by virtue of their position within society as a whole. For the majority of female members, consensual 'equality of the spirit' was apparently available as an internal option only.

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#### 5. 'An unclean spirit': Historical Erasure of Female Prophecy

The Nayler scandal was certainly a major factor in an increased resistance to women as religious leaders in many areas of the country. But pamphlets on the subject by Farnworth, Fox, and Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole suggest that women's speaking was provoking controversy by 1655. In July 1656 the movement's use of female preachers was questioned by William Caton in conversation with Fox, who apparently 'said little to it, that some of them might cease, yet he said they would be glad of women or any in these parts', ie. Cornwall and Devon. By November 1656, as Parliament debated over the fate of Nayler, Arthur Cotton of Plymouth wrote to Fox that in those two counties 'they do not care...to hear any women Friends'.<sup>95</sup> Ann Blaykling, active in

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<sup>95</sup> Beginnings, 238; Bell, 38 and n.120.

southern England and imprisoned in Cambridge and Suffolk, was accused by Fox in 1657 of gathering her own group of followers.<sup>96</sup> In March 1658 Hubberthorne reported to Fox that Mary Howgill, having ministered six months in the eastern counties, was now opposed by Friends who refused to appoint meetings for her; and Burrough disparaged the efforts of an unnamed 'little short maid' working around Bedfordshire, as better suited to a servant than a preacher.<sup>97</sup>

There is evidence of a considerable shift in the Quaker movement over time on the subject of women's religious roles. Female preachers were given major status and support during its early pioneering stages, but there is a noticeable falling off of their numbers from the late 1650s. For instance, of Quaker missionaries to Massachusetts before 1660, women were in the majority (twelve out of twenty-two). Yet of the sixty-eight recorded over the next forty years, all but fourteen were men; and this female/male proportion of one to five remains generally constant in records from both Philadelphia and Wales.<sup>98</sup> From the mid-sixties reports of demonstrations or 'signs' by Quaker women and men become less frequent, or are less often acknowledged by the more 'respectable' element of the movement, and hell-fire denunciations by prophets of both sexes seem similarly to have come under increasing

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<sup>96</sup> Braithwaite, Second Period, 345-346.

<sup>97</sup> Beginnings, 345-346.

<sup>98</sup> Hugh Barbour, 'Prophetesses', 44 and n. 13.

disfavour.<sup>99</sup> Yet over the years some Quaker women continued to rebel. Mary Powel was censured by John Perrot in a letter to Fox; in a public debate the 'hasty and rash' Katherine Crooke declared that she would have known God without Scripture, and Esther Corker was censured for speaking out too much at meetings.<sup>100</sup>

In the decades following the conflicts and persecution of the 1650s and 1660s, as Fox, Fell, and others undertook the responsibility of chronicling the movement's early history, there was a certain amount of modification of records and events (including deletions of Nayler's name from Quaker historical records).<sup>101</sup> By taking up a more conservative stance on female unsuitability for public authority, Quaker leaders could 'reconstruct' the credibility of the sect within the rapidly-shifting political climate of post-Restoration London.<sup>102</sup> Their campaign has had its effect upon modern views of the movement. While the Quaker historian Braithwaite firmly dismisses Simmonds as 'a woman of much enthusiasm and little judgment', Bell notes that even where scholars such as Carroll

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<sup>99</sup> Kenneth Carroll, 'Sackcloth and Ashes and Other Signs and Wonders, JFHS, 53 (1975), 314-325 (318); also Bell, 34-35.

<sup>100</sup> Mack, 200, n.101.

<sup>101</sup> Nayler was a leader of Quakerism alongside Fox, yet none of his works was published in Fox's lifetime, the first edition appearing only in 1716. His name is absent from the writings of Fell and early Quaker leaders who worked closely with him in the 1650s, and in some letters his initials are visibly crossed out: Fogelklou, 284-285; instances are given in 285 n.1.

<sup>102</sup> Ellwood's edition of Fox's posthumously published Journal (London, 1694) mentions none of the major writings of Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, yet dilates at length on Fox's role in securing their release from prison in Malta (II, 3). Hobby notes that while William Sewell's Quaker History (London, 1722) records conventional defences of women's speaking (II, 416-417), it remains silent on Hester Biddle, Dewans Morey, and Dorothy White. White was after Fell the most prolific female writer, producing 19 pamphlets between 1659 and 1684. Hobby, 89 and n. 5.

and Fogelklou seek to adopt a more sympathetic view of women's roles in the Nayler episode, they often end by re-adopting the terms of earlier accounts, of 'emotional' or 'impulsive' women who lured 'poor Nayler' into folly.<sup>103</sup>

For continuing to press their case until after Nayler's death, the women who had sought his earlier support became pariahs, and were excluded from the company until they submitted once again. Simmonds herself was demonized both within and outside Quakerism as the sorceress who led astray godly male leaders and their followers. While in prison Nayler eventually denounced his female followers as 'those ranting wild spirits which then gathered about me in the time of darkness and [by] all their wild actions and wicked works... darkness came over me...so the adversary got advantage'. The readiness of Quaker leaders to pillory women for the Nayler public relations disaster, along with their extreme reactions to figures like Simmonds and Ann Gargill, suggests some kind of deep-seated misogynist suspicion of female energies. Even in Ralph Farmer's Sathan Inthron'd (1657), which includes extracts by Simmonds, she is identified alongside Stranger and Erbury 'and all their filth' as the origin of 'that spirit which darkened [Nayler]' and which Friends were moved to exorcise. After Gargill's disruption of an Amsterdam meeting Caton wrote Fell that she was 'an unclean spirit', but insisted that his 'garments' were not 'spotted or stained by this muck and filth, nay though I walk through it, it doth not

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<sup>103</sup> Beginnings, 244. Bell, 31 n.95; for examples of this condemnation of Simmonds see Carroll, 'Simmonds', 38-39; Fogelklou 161.

so much as defile my feet'. Months later he reported that Gargill had 'become loathsome and odious even to all that knows her malignity...She hath made a young man almost weary of his life, who can by no means get quit of her'.<sup>104</sup> To summarize, the evidence of this chapter indicates that from about the mid-1650s, religious and political pressures drove dissenting communities increasingly to elevate respectable religious women of visible grace and piety, and to downgrade or condemn those more charismatic prophetesses claiming a miraculous and extraordinary divine revelation. The covertly sexual invective present in such denunciations of visionary prophetesses as those noted above is viewed by at least one feminist critic as evidence of a profound denial of the sensuality of spiritual experience. In taking this route, it is suggested, these and other dissenting ministers 'risked their own intimacy with God', and 'sacrificed the potential transcendence and ecstasy of divine communion to the surer, safer rewards of patriarchal power'.<sup>105</sup>

However, opposition to even the modified types of active roles by women continued among reformed Quakers. In 1678 Fox was publicly charged by Hereford Friends with having advocated the setting up of 'a woman High Sherriff'.<sup>106</sup> Three years later in The Christian Quaker, the separatist William Rogers accused Fox of indulging that appetite for female veneration

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<sup>104</sup> Mack, 205-206; Carroll, 'Simmonds', 50.

<sup>105</sup> Marilyn J. Westerkamp, 'Puritan Patriarchy and the Problem of Revelation', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, XXIII, 3 (Winter 1993), 571-595 (595).

<sup>106</sup> Mack, 297.

which had brought Nayler to grief. 'Hast thou forgotten how thou hast testified against James Nayler's spirit, whose great fall was his owning, or at least not reprovng the women, when they cried with a carnal tongue Hosanna to him'. Rogers suggested that Fox's setting up of women's meetings for poor relief was in reality a blind for erecting their unlawful jurisdiction over unsuspecting Quaker men, who found themselves unable to enter into wedlock without first gaining the consent of a female eldership.

And therefore Friends, who in simplicity assented to the...meetings, as supposing women in some cases fitter to pry into the necessities of the power, than men...did at length begin to be jealous, that the words of the prophet Isaiah...were again fulfilled in our age, As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them... [Friends are worried] lest instead of being servants to the poor for truth's sake, and taking the weight and burden of that care from the men, they should become rulers over both men and women.<sup>107</sup>

'Can there be greater imposers in the world', protested William Mather in 1694, 'than those that judge all people, not to be of God, for not submitting to female government in marriage? A thing never heard of...except [under] the government of the Amazons...'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Mack, 297-298.

<sup>108</sup> A Novelty; Or, a Government of Women, Distinct from Men, Erected among Some...Quakers (London, 1694), in Mack, 296.



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