Prophetic Authority and the Rhetoric of Passivity in Seventeenth-Century English Women's Writing

by

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Abstract

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This project examines the rhetorical strategies employed by six prophetic women writers of the seventeenth century and aims to redefine the parameters of the history of women's authorship. Agnes Beaumont, Anna Trapnel, Anne Wentworth, Lady Eleanor Davies, Sarah Cheevers and Katharine Evans challenge nearly every level of English society, including the government, the church, and family structure through their representations of their connection to God. However, they also paradoxically depict themselves in their works as the powerless vessels of the Lord.

This study will argue that this paradox of power and passivity is a subversive rhetorical strategy. Through their representations of the spiritual marriage metaphor, spectacle, and community these women enact passive rhetorical roles in order to question, subvert, and redefine them. By drawing on the power of religious and prophetic discourse in the seventeenth century as well as on the prescribed social codes for women, these prophets craft an authorial

space in three strategic ways. They couch their religious experiences in the very language valued by the institutions that oppress them. Secondly, though they occupy the rhetorical spaces that typically dominate and silence them, it is in the occupation that they redefine them. Lastly, they renegotiate these spaces by representing the passivity and reticence they enact as a prophet's self-abnegation, not necessarily as a gendered submissiveness. Their ability to gain power through their representations of passivity and divine communication enriches the study of women's authorship, and demonstrates that an overt statement of authorship is not the only sign of authority. In these texts, silence is not the mark of submission, but a rhetorical position that allows the women to draw on the authority of internal and personal communications with the divine in the form of silent prayer, dreams, and visions. Rather than view the silence, passivity and devotion in these women's writing as proof of their acceptance of normative social roles, this study argues these women are self-conscious authors, making rhetorical decisions to enact normative social codes in order to challenge and subvert their existing positions in their families, religion, and government.

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Introduction: Dissent, Devotion, and Denial

I. The Paradox

In 1677 Anne Wentworth receives a call from God to spread his message to his people. But for eighteen years Wentworth resists her calling, not wanting to bear a prophet's burden, in part because of an abusive husband. But her husband abandons her, and her Particular Baptist community rejects her, and Wentworth finds herself with out any protection, and decides to defend herself in *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth (1677).* This text is the record of her protest: her protest of her innocence in the face of accusations of madness and whoredom, and her protest of the wrongs done to her. It is also her fervent account of her direct communication with God. Her representation of this relationship with the divine presents her as both the obedient subject, and the powerful prophet:

> I have renounced myself, and laid down my own wisdom and will in this work, and am given up to all the will of God herein, standing upon my watch, and having his power put on the whole armor of God; the shield of Faith, the breastplate of Righteousness, with my Loins girt about with Truth, and my feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace, having taken the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.[1]

[1] Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* (London, 1677), 6. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home (accessed July 26, 2005) Hereafter cited in text.

This quotation from Wentworth's text introduces the paradox at the center of this study. In the same breath that Wentworth declares she has "laid down" her "own wisdom and will in this work," she also goes on to present herself as a warrior sent by God. These two descriptions contradict one another; the first strips her of authority, and the second invests her with it. This paradoxical relationship to power appears in all of the works discussed in this study. Anna Trapnel claims in her text that "there is no self in this thing."[2] Agnes Beaumont refers to herself as the Lord's vessel in her spiritual autobiography. Lady Eleanor Davies frames her prophecy as the divine words channeled from the prophet Daniel, and Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers defend themselves during the Italian Inquisition in large part through this paradox. Each woman renounces authority while simultaneously acting with it by challenging some level of society.

These five Puritan women writers shape and publish their works at different points throughout the seventeenth century, yet there are distinct connections in the ways in which they represent their communications with God and themselves. At some point in their work all of these women make a claim to have no power over their texts. They present themselves as vessels, worms, or servants to the Lord. They are messengers, they are spokespeople, and they are channels for the word of God, but as they describe it, they are not authors. If they claim authority in the name of God, but deny it an act of self-abnegation, is there any authoritative voice to study? This project will argue that there undoubtedly is. The following chapters will demonstrate that these women enact the obedient

[2] Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 45. Hereafter cited in text.

roles that their society marks out for them as a means to greater goals. Chapter One will show how Wentworth challenges and criticizes her husband by taking Christ as her new and superior bridegroom. Chapter 2 will demonstrate how moments of spectacle are incorporated to challenge other aspects of patriarchal authority. Beaumont subverts her father's control and Trapnel and Davies protest their government using display. Chapter 3 will analyze representations of community and their connection to networks of power. Each chapter focuses on a different paradoxical claim to power. As the bride of Christ, as a spectacle, or as a member of a friendship or community, these women present themselves as lacking authority. Any power that they display is attributed to the divine. At the same time, equipped with the word and power of God, the bride, the spectacle and the friend transform a space traditionally associated with absent or shared power into a platform for launching scathing social and political diatribes. This study will argue that the paradoxical representation of reticence and authority is a subversive rhetorical strategy. By drawing on the power of religious and prophetic discourse in the seventeenth century as well as on the prescribed social codes for women, these vessels craft an authorial space in three strategic ways. To begin, they couch their religious experiences in the very language valued by the institutions that oppress them. Secondly, though they occupy the rhetorical spaces that typically dominate and silence them, it is in the occupation that they redefine them. Lastly, they renegotiate these spaces by representing the passivity and reticence they enact as a prophet's self-abnegation, not necessarily as a gendered submissiveness.

The paradox that appears in these texts is not unique to seventeenth-century prophetic women writers. What makes the works of these women significant is that in finding themselves cut off from mainstream avenues of authority by the nature of their sex, they are able to construct an authorial and authoritative voice by writing in the style of biblical prophets, and by drawing from aspects of Puritan culture that invest power in reticence and passivity (qualities also associated with proper feminine behavior) such as dreams, visions, conversion experiences, and trances. Recognizing that their work draws on rhetorical strategies valued in the seventeenth century, rather than championing them as feminine authorial anomalies prevents the establishment of false binaries of women's style and men's style. Instead this project seeks to establish a fuller picture of authorship in the period. Though these women have traditionally been on the outskirts of the literary canon, they are significant to the study of authorship in both women's literature and religious literature, as well as to the study of authorship and authority, because of the insight their work offers into alternative approaches to authorial voice.

Catherine Gallagher provides a glimpse into some of the hurdles she encountered when studying the authorship of seventeenth-century religious authors. She recalls her initial thoughts: "Their obsolete concerns, eccentric assumptions, and bizarre claims, not to mention their generally impenetrable prose, failed to inspire aesthetic, New Historicist, or feminist interest in me."[3] But in time Gallagher reconsiders her opinion largely because of her realization

[3] Catherine Gallagher, "A History of the Precedent: Rhetorics of Legitimation in Women's Writing," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 309.

that "authorship is not a stable concept."[4] By examining the work of sixteenth-century writer Margaret Tyler and eighteenth century polemicist Mary Wollstonecraft, she demonstrates that an author will always craft their approach to authorship based on current trends. In Tyler's age, when precedent was valued, Tyler relies on precedent to shape her text and authorial voice, but in Wollstonecraft's day when reason was celebrated, Wollstonecraft's claim to authority is based on rationality.[5] This implies that the "eccentric assumptions, and bizarre claims" Gallagher initially dismisses are potentially representations of a trend in authorship. This study will argue that the prophetic women writers are working within a rhetorical style that relies on self-abnegation, the word of God, and a familiarity with scriptural content and style. Understanding the trend may make the assumptions seem less eccentric and the claims less bizarre.

Gallagher's analysis of this rhetorical instability directly relates to Hilary Hinds' reflection that it is not fruitful to apply twentieth and twenty-first century notions of authorship to seventeenth-century texts, since the concept of the authority of the speaker was not crucial to the authorial voice at that moment in history.[6] This project intends to answer Hinds' call for alternate approaches to the prophetic works of seventeenth-century women writers, and to understand the modes of authority that were available to these women, even if they do not fit modern characterizations of authority. This is not to say, however, that there is no

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[4] Ibid., 311.
[5] Ibid., 311.
[6] Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 93.

relationship between the twenty-first century concept of authorship and the avenues of authority present in the works of these women prophets.

Recent studies of early modern women, like Shannon Miller's upcoming book, have begun to chip away at the notion that there is a clear division between the early modern and modern period. Through a study of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and its shared influence on and from non-canonical women writers, Miller argues, "the poem does not mark the break between the early and late seventeenth century, the ushering in of 'modernity,' but rather shows us that what we call 'modern' can still be powerfully inflected by, or layered with, traits that invoke 'premodern' ideas."[7] Miller points to the "biblical subjectivity" that exists in *Paradise Lost* and throughout seventeenth-century literature. Many early modern women writers deal with political and social issues by representing women as figures of Eve. As Miller explains, there is a "categorical treatment of women, in which they lack an individual notion of a 'self."[8] She goes on to explain that this "is the result of becoming inextricably associated with the first mother and the narrative of culpability that she has come to represent."[9] In doing so, the women authors merge the modern and the early modern. Presenting themselves as Eve not only creates a collective and symbolic identity, but it also creates a religious identity. Though this method of representation seems heavily influenced by an early modern world view, it is employed to frame political arguments, thereby linking it to modern conceptions of discourse. This coexistence of modern and

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[7] Shannon Miller, *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming), 14.
[8] Ibid., 19.
[9] Ibid., 19.

biblical subjectivity, Miller argues, exists in the seventeenth century and continues to exist into the age of modernity.[10]

Miller's study serves as a foundation for discussing the works of the women included in this study. The dissolution of self, the denial of voice, the refusal of agency, and the reliance on divine authority that are present in their works do not have to be read either as evidence of the absent authorial voice associated with the early modern period, or as a model of authority that does not meet modern standards. Before Mary Wollstonecraft employed the language of reason and romanticism to defend women's rights in her society, these prophets enlisted the power of their representations of their relationship with God to critique their churches, their country, and their countrymen.

Miller's study, like the works of Sharon Achinstein, Erica Longfellow, and Katherine Gillespie, seeks a revaluation of the prophetic and spiritual writing of women in seventeenth-century England by collapsing traditionally supported dichotomies and divisions in the approach to women's writing and to religious writing. Achinstein's work analyzes the religious rhetoric of Mary Mollineux and Elizabeth Singer Rowe to demonstrate "that choosing a voice within biblical poetry offered several rhetorical strategies with respect to personal voice and the production of sexual desire."[11] She reads the juxtaposition of religious language and sexual desire as evidence of romance being "deployed by a feminine devotional tradition precisely because it worked to accommodate erotic desires as

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[10]Ibid., 21.

[11] Sharon Achinstein, "Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England," *ELH* 69 (2002): 418.

agency."[12] Erica Longfellow also aims to recontextualize women's religious writing of the period; her work "not only collapses the dichotomy of manuscript and print but also questions the underlying assumption of the gendering of 'public' and 'private' modes of communication."[13] Katherine Gillespie, like Miller, seeks to establish a connection between the early modern women writers of the period and modern concepts of politics and public debate. She examines the ways in which "biblical discourse" merges with the domestic language of marriage and childbirth to forge liberal political discourse.[14] Each of these studies develops the context in which these women were writing their texts by recognizing that religious and secular, public and private, domestic and civic, are not neatly divided categories in seventeenth-century England, just as it can be argued that they are not neat categories in today's society. Approaching the works and strategies of these women authors with this in mind provides a fuller understanding of their place as authors and of the shifts in authorial style. They are also collapsing the physical and the spiritual, the political and the private, and they do it, in large part, by collapsing the dichotomy that will be the focus of this study: speech and silence.

This study aims to avoid the false universals and binaries that associate speech with masculinity and power, and silence with weakness and femininity. In seventeenth-century England, the sermon, the Bible, and pulpit were loci of power associated with men; however, they were not the only available avenues to power.

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[12] Ibid., 435.
[13] Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9.
[14] Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14.

The women in this study draw on the scriptural tradition, communal bonds, and metalinguistic moments of interiority including dreams, visions, silent prayer, conversion experiences and suffering to craft their authorial position. This study does not aim to draw stark divisions between speech and silence, the verbal and the non-verbal, or seventeenth-century male prophets and seventeenth-century female prophets. Rather the goal here is to show the interplay between them. The women in this study represent themselves as silent participants in their relationship with the divine just as a Biblical prophet would. In their references, allusions, and parallels to the prophets of the scripture, these women redefine their silence. It is no longer a state imposed on them by their hierarchical society, but it is a state they ask for and freely occupy. In this chosen state of silence and passivity, they gain access to the power of the divine, and channel it to criticize and undermine the institutions that try to impose silence and powerlessness onto their lives.

II. The Logos

The dichotomy of speech and silence owes much of its popularity to the weight of the Pauline injunction: "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law."[15] This biblical passage was used to silence

[15] I Corinthians 14:34 (New Revised Standard Version).

women, and largely defined their roles within the church.[16] In addition to the passage from Corinthians, conduct books directed at women in the seventeenth century also delivered the message that though women may be equal to men in the eyes of God, on earth and under law they are not. Women were considered mentally and physically weaker than men, and they were to submit to instruction from men on all things.[17] St. Paul's letters also exemplify this thinking: "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."[18]

The legal system also worked to silence women at this point in history. As Lynne A. Greenberg explains in her dissertation, the English legal system placed limitations on women at various stages throughout their lives. Particularly in marriage, women were depicted as the rivulets dissolved by the overbearing power of the river that was their husbands.[19] Greenberg is primarily interested in the representations of and challenges to the legal status of women that appear in Milton's works. She seeks to understand how the letter of the law played out in Milton's texts, and how it was affected by their publication. She aims to demonstrate that "An intersection of Milton's high-culture work with unofficial legal discourse, the low culture, popular literature of criminal biographies, broadsides, domestic tragedy and petitions to Parliament, also permits the voices and experiences of Milton's female characters to resonate with their peers and

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[16] Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 6.
[17] Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 133.
[18] I Cor. 14: 35 (NRSV).
[19] Lynne A. Greenberg, "'Masculin Births': The Reconception of Seventeenth-Century Law in Milton's Poetry" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2001), 26.

allows for an investigation of how Milton's poetry intersected with the realities of women's relationship to a legal system conceived and controlled by men."[20] Though Greenberg's work focuses mainly on the connection between women, law, and Milton, it provides context for this study because it creates a detailed picture of the world created for women by the legal system in seventeenth-century England.

The women included in this study come face to face with many of the legal injunctions Greenberg outlines, and they challenge them with God as their witness. Anne Wentworth separates from her husband when he attempts to prevent her from answering her call to God. Though her religious community chastises her for it, she publishes texts in which she presents God as sanctioning and defending her decision. Agnes Beaumont disobeys her father in favor of obedience to her God, and then relies on guidance from the divine to vindicate her while on trial for the death of her father. Anna Trapnel defiantly mocks the judges who question her on the nature of her prophecies by presenting herself as the chosen vessel of God and the judges as weak in faith. Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers also come face to face with an oppressive legal system, but their trial takes place on foreign soil during the Italian Inquisition. They too mock their Catholic oppressors with accusations of empty faith. With God on their side, these women challenge various figures of patriarchal authority, including father, husband, priest, and judge. Their representation of their interaction with the divine enables them to access and navigate channels of authority that were open

[20]Ibid., 9-10.

to them. Though they appear to work within a dominant framework, this does not necessarily signal acceptance of it. The conscious decision to generate the appearance of reticence, the display of obedience, and the performance of silence enable these women to challenge the existing figures of authority in their society and to begin to shape their own authorial voices.

With the silencing of women so prevalent in the culture, much of the scholarship on this period of women's writing has focused on the use of speech and silence in the seventeenth century. Christina Luckyj works mainly to challenge the idea that speech always represents power and that silence always represents powerlessness by examining classical models of speech and silence. She demonstrates that the history of silence is much more complex and nuanced. Silence, in addition to signifying weakness, can also be a mark of integrity, wisdom, or stoical strength. Speech, while it can signify power, can also signal deceptiveness or garrulousness. In the early modern period, speech and silence also bear the marks of gender. For a man, speech is rational and powerful, but for a woman, speech carries with it images of the scold, threatening the authority of the house and state.[21] Silence, however, did not have as clearly demarcated implications for men and women, and could be read as a positive space for both; it could be seen as a rational, proper, and measured response to unruly speech.[22] As Luckyj indicates, "Once silence has been endorsed as a strategic strength for both genders, it can no longer be held simply as a sign of submissive inferiority."[23]

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[21] Christina Luckyj, *'A Moving Rhetoricke: Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 45.
[22] Ibid., 51.
[23] Ibid., 52.

Female silence does not necessarily imply that the woman is powerless and weak. Luckyj points to depictions of the Virgin Mary as silent and wise. Yet even this strong image of silence is in some sense powerless, because without a voice, it can still be read by another. There is therefore a complication in the reading of silence, and also in the use of silence by early modern women. Is the silence proof of their inability to break free from social constraints, or is it proof of their subversion? What we encounter in these prophetic texts is not actual silence, but the representation of silence. The women are writing and publishing texts in which they describe themselves as passive, unwilling and powerless vessels for God's word, but the passivity and powerlessness seem undermined by the very creation of the work.

According to Cheryl Glenn, silence is not simply the absence of speech; it is its own rhetoric. Glenn also works to destabilize the idea that speech is powerful and dominant whereas silence is passive and powerless. The two rather act in tandem, and their relationship to each other yields meaning.[24] For example, in a conversation one participant's silence can reveal something about the other's speech. A long pause or hesitation can signal offense, shock, or lack of interest. Therefore, silence in a conversation has the potential to be revelatory. In Western culture silence often signifies submission to the speaker. According to Robert L. Scott, "To speak is to assert one's position. To remain silent is to defer to the position of another."[25] However, as Glenn points out, a skilled conversationalist

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[24] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern University Press, 2004), 7.
[25] Robert L. Scott, "Dialectical Tensions of Speaking and Silence," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 3-4.

can use silence effectively, without seeming weak or dominated.[26] With this in mind, even when the women claim to be the silent, passive participants in their conversations with God, their absence of voice still contributes to the meaning of the conversation. Like Luckyj and Glenn this project argues that silence is a rhetorical strategy that can be used and interpreted in a number of different ways depending on "the social-rhetorical context in which it occurs."[27] To that end, looking at history, the feminine realm is typically recognized as, praised for, or simply expected to be silent. Glenn cites John Bunyan as directing wives to "take heed of an idle, talking, or brangling tongue."[28] According to Glenn, silence is not inherently weak, but it comes to signify weakness and submission when it is not freely chosen. When forced into silence, a group is then constantly "adapting, mediating, and subordinating their own ideas and forms of expression to that of the dominant discourse and in the dominant idiom."[29] Therefore, if silence is the only acceptable state for a woman, then anything that she does say must be considered in someway controlled or distorted by the dominant discourse from which she is excluded, but still must use in order to communicate. The silence that women in the seventeenth century were expected to be part of was not freely chosen, but prescribed by religious and cultural practices.

But what if these women were drawing from a discourse of silence that had more to do with their beliefs than their gender? Silence and passivity are also closely connected to Biblical prophecy in the seventeenth century. Robert Wilson

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[26] Glenn, *Unspoken,* 7.
[27] Ibid., 9.
[28] Ibid., 10.
[29] Ibid., 28-9.

explains that what is considered proper prophetic behavior shifts throughout history. At different points in time prophets were expected to act in different ways to validate their claim to be speaking with God.[30] In the seventeenth century, because silence was expected from a woman, the female prophet gained authority by depicting herself as a passive receptacle for God. Much like the Biblical prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the women in this study use dreams, trances, and visions to legitimate their claims to prophecy. Trapnel and Davies in particular align themselves with the biblical prophets to stake claim to religious and political authority, just as the biblical prophets used these techniques to effect change in their communities. Silence was expected from women, but it was also expected from prophets. Therefore, a woman could exhibit silence and passivity while staking a claim to authority, creating a paradox that leads to the presentation of a proper female figure and the subversion of patriarchy through the Godly prophet.

Within the prophetic context, the works of the women in this study cannot be so easily discounted from a study of authorship because of their reticence. Such a context calls for a reevaluation of claims like Sue Wiseman's in her study of Anna Trapnel. She argues that because of the lack of a masculine authority other than God, Trapnel's work cannot be approached from a humanist feminist perspective.[31] There is no unified subject and no voice that is marked as

[30] Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 326.
[31] Ibid., 189.

feminine.[32] But the deference to God as the authorial figure that appears in Trapnel's text, and in all the texts included in this study, does not necessarily have to be read as an absence of authority on the writer's part. Trapnel does not present a unified subject, because like a biblical prophet, she is a vessel for God's word. Within this denial of self, another identity emerges, a prophet's identity, and like the prescribed woman's identity, it is based on silence and reticence, but unlike a woman's silence, it carries with it the weight of God's power.

The connection between authority, identity, and voice is a modern construct, and it is one that Kristie S. Fleckenstein critiques in her essay "Images, Words, and Narrative Epistemology." She takes issue with the consistency in the verbal metaphors that are used to describe existence.[33] When language alone is used to determine self and identity, there is a risk of letting language define who we are. Fleckenstein offers this theory as a challenge to poststructuralists, much in the same way as feminist scholars interrogate the theory that a masculine dominant discourse creates identity.[34] Fleckenstein argues that the visual can also create a sense of self or identity.[35] Her study offers a model for an alternative understanding of authority. While her study investigates the ways in which the visual can shape identity, this study will examine methods of authority in seventeenth-century devotional and prophetic texts that do not rely on the

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[32] Sue Wiseman, "Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse," in *New Feminist Discourses,* ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 186

[33] Kristie Fleckenstein, "Images, Words, and Narrative Epistemology," *College English* 58 (1996): 914. Fleckenstein cites Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Foucault, Lacan, and others as theorizing that "self" or identity is created, represented, and maintained through the spoken word.

[34] Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

[35] Fleckenstein, "Images, Words," 915.

presence of an individual, controlling voice of the narrative. If closer attention is paid to how and why women make the claim that God's voice is their voice, then another model of authorship emerges, one not based on blatant control of the narrative, but one based on prophetic models and Puritan practices concerning the relationship between human and divine and the verbal and the non-verbal.

The relationship between power and words that exists in Christianity is most clearly exemplified by the opening words of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[36] Christ, furthermore, is the physical embodiment of the word: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."[37] The divine's power is equated with and located in the verbal. God is the word, and within this word lie the central power and significance of the Christian faith. Emphasis on the word was also a large part of Puritan culture in the seventeenth century. The scripture and the sermon could be considered "the word." As Milo Kaufman explains, truth was in the word, and therefore, imaginative interpretations of the scripture were discouraged because the word itself was the authority.[38] When preachers delivered their sermons, this too was considered the word, and carried with it authoritative weight. John Calvin placed so much emphasis on the verbal that in interpreting Moses' vision of God, he read the true meaning of the revelation in the word and voice of God, and not in the vision. According to Calvin, "Those who, rejecting

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[36] John 1:1 (NRSV).
[37] John 1:14 (NRSV).
[38] Milo Kaufman, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press,1966), 22.

Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness."[39]

In a society that placed such a value on the verbal, those who found themselves unable to fully access it also found themselves unable to fully access religious and political life. Sermons, for example, were frequently used to launch political protests. Women were not permitted access to the pulpit, and therefore could not participate in politics in this manner. In seventeenth-century English Puritan culture, God is the word and women are to be kept in silence. The Word is invested with God's authority, exemplifying Derrida's notion of logocentrism, in which words or signifiers take on actual truth and meaning.[40] In Lacanian theory, the Logos becomes associated with the dominant, masculine power because the Son of God is the word. In this equation, it would seem women are denied any access to the Word and the power and authority that come with it. If God is always envisioned as masculine, there is no model of identification for a woman; there is no female embodiment of the word. There is only the masculine, which, according to Luce Irigaray, prevents the proper construction of a female identity within the culture.[41] Within this matrix of power, two avenues of authority are available for women. One is mimicry, which according to Irigaray is the deliberate assumption of the feminine role. It "means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it."[42] If a

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[39] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1599), 9:1. http://www.theologywebsite.com/etext/calvin/institutes/booki.htm (accessed October 15, 2007).
[40] Jaques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 49.
[41] Irigaray, *The Sex,* 78.
[42] Ibid., 76.

woman chooses not to use mimicry to gain access to the phallocentric logos, then the other option is "a direct feminine challenge to this condition" which "means speaking as a (masculine), 'subject', that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual difference."[43] If a woman does not mimic the proper role of woman, then she must speak with a masculine voice.

Though Irigaray makes a clear distinction between two modes of authority, mimicry on the one hand, and a direct challenge on the other, this clear distinction is not evinced in the works of these prophetic women writers. Despite the cultural privileging of the masculine Logos, Anna Trapnel, Lady Eleanor Davies, Agnes Beaumont, Anne Wentworth, Sarah Evans and Katharine Cheevers do access the power of God's word through mimicry of cultural feminine norms and direct challenges to those norms through prophetic discourse. Rhetorical choices in their works, including the descriptions of dreams, visions, and direct contact from God enable these women to use personal interaction with the divine to draw from God's authority. References to scripture, and allusions which draw parallels between their lives and the lives of the Biblical prophets shape their presentation not as weak women, but as God's chosen ones. With this authority, various levels of logocentric authority are directly challenged. Trapnel and Davies confront the law; Beaumont challenges her father and community; Wentworth undermines her husband; and Evans and Cheevers lock horns with the Italian Inquisition. But within these direct challenges also lies an element of the mimicry which Irigaray describes. While challenging authority at almost every level of society, these women also appear to undermine themselves. In

[43] Ibid., 76.

consistently referring to themselves as broken and empty vessels, they seem to renounce any of the authority to which they may aspire. But this self-abnegation does not have to be read as a denial of authority, and as proof of the hold of societal beliefs on these women. Instead these are rhetorical choices that enable the women to present themselves as silent and obedient, as socially acceptable reticent women, so that they could safely situate themselves within the cultural milieu and launch their bold attacks of government, marriage, and patriarchy. This assumed reticence is also multilayered and is not only proof of the mimicry of feminine roles, it is also the enacting of other acceptable social and literary practices, including prophetic rhetoric, communal authorship, and devotional literature. In drawing from other modes of expression in which reticence, silence, visions, dreams, and physical suffering are methods of representing and gaining authority, these women are able to shape authorial voices that challenge various levels of patriarchal authority in their society.

Working within the dominant and patriarchal Christian ideology does not necessarily mean that these women are accepting the limitations placed on them. Erin M. Henricksen's recent doctoral study, "Sacred Authorship: Scriptural Models for Early Modern Books," explores the rhetorical influence of the Bible on seventeenth-century texts, including Amelia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and the publications and translations of *Psalms*. According to Henricksen, "biblical literature was not simply a default mode of writing that mimicked the dictates of religious authority. Rather, it allowed for an investigation in print of the possibilities of authorship that regularly took its

inspiration and authority from the most controversial and intricate passages and figures in the Bible."[44] Henricksen's study demonstrates that maintaining a connection to a dominant institution and discourse, in this case Christianity and the Bible, does not necessarily have to also demonstrate complete allegiance to its authority. The Bible itself contains controversial and challenging ideas and sentiments, which in turn can be employed to question the authority of others. Henricksen's study focuses mainly on the various ways in which the Bible is used rhetorically in seventeenth-century texts, and the ways in which this connection to the Bible reshapes ideas of authorship today. She also briefly mentions prophecy's place within the discussion of the Bible and authorship.[45] Though she does not include these prophets in her work, the prophetic writers of the seventeenth century are working within the same principles of authorship that Henricksen describes.

In Anna Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone*, she narrates her communication with God after she has recovered from a serious illness and a temptation from Satan: "I desired that the Lord would give me a scripture to inform me that this was slain and should no more have the least putting forth in me" (11). In this passage, Trapnel is not only adapting a scriptural model to gain authority, she is asking for scripture, for words from God, to validate her physical and earthly experiences. Similar to the authors in Henricksen's study, Trapnel draws from scripture to shape a controversial voice. But within her prophecy, she does not

[44] Erin M. Henricksen, "Sacred Authorship: Scriptural Models for Early Modern Books" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2002), 2.
[45] Ibid., 5.

only draw from the rhetorical strategies of the Bible, rather, she employs its passages to authorize her writing. This passage continues,

> At which time opening my Bible this was given me in Job: 'Thou hast been tied in fetters and holden in chains of affliction, and it is that the Lord might show thee thy work and thy transgressions which hath exceeded in this time of thy assaults. Now he openenth thy ear to discipline, and he commandeth that thou return from iniquity' [Job 36:8-10].
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry,* 11-12)

After God fulfills Trapnel's request, she then asks for an interpretation of the scripture that is given to her. She says, 'Lord…What is my work?" Trapnel then records, "Reply was to go forth to the tempted, and whatever their temptations were, I should have to speak forth to them" (12). In this exchange with the divine, Trapnel uses God's transmission of scriptural passages to align herself with Job, the servant of God who demanded to speak with the divine, and was granted his wish. Like Job who boldly declares, "Let the Almighty answer me,"[46] Trapnel asks for proof, for scripture, and for interpretation from God and receives it all.

The passage from Job works to identify her with one of God's most beloved and devout servants, and to draw authority from this allusion. Though her inclusion of the Biblical passage works to present her as the chosen voice and prophet of God, it also presents her as the passive woman her society would have expected her to be. She does not do any of the interpretation; she does not make any assertions about her illness, or about the passage from Job; God does. This

[46] Job 31: 35 (NRSV).

reticence within her conversation with the divine enables Trapnel to make claims to authority while also enacting rhetorical passivity. While Henricksen's study explores the ways in which the imitation of biblical rhetorical strategies creates and challenges authority, she does not address the ways in which prophetic writers of the seventeenth century incorporated scripture to achieve the same goals. Like the authors included in Henricksen's study, Trapnel employs the language of the dominant discourse, in this instance, scripture, to validate her position, but this does not automatically correlate to an acceptance of submission. Instead, for Trapnel, it leads to a powerful exchange with the divine.

Julie Straight also addresses the complexity of a woman writing within a dominant discourse in her study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's religious poetry. Straight explores whether Browning is empowered or silenced by working within the Christian tradition. Straight recognizes that limiting the interpretation of Browning's position to two choices only shuts down the potential for a fuller understanding of how language and power is accessed by both men and women.[47] Straight works to rupture this binary by explaining that Barrett Browning represents the logos, the transcendental signified, as feminine, which therefore provides her with justification and authority to question and disrupt traditional hierarchies.[48] Similarly, in the works of the women writers included in this study,

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[47] Julie Straight, "'Neither keeping either under': Gender and Voice in Elizabeth Barrett's *The Seraphim,*" *Victorian Poetry* 38 (2000): 270. See Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Arnold Publishers, 1996) for discussions of how binaries limit feminist readings of texts.
[48] Ibid., 271.

the word of God is appropriated to defend and justify the positions and voices of the women writers.

Complex representations of the feminine in seventeenth-century literature do not only appear in works by women. According to H.L. Meakin, John Donne's representation of the feminine, sexuality, and gender is complex and nuanced. Using Irigaray to frame her study, Meakin explains there is a tendency to see Donne as either positively representing the feminine, or as dominating and subverting it. But as Meakin argues, a fruitful study of Donne will not try to divide Donne's relationship to the feminine into neat categories. As he explains, "Donne's representations of the feminine collide with each other" and "this creates possibilities for rescuing the masculine and the feminine from essentialism and the false universal."[49] Similarly, what is considered appropriate and inappropriate, empowering and dominating, subversive and conventional collides in these women's writing to reconfigure the "chaste, silent, and obedient"[50] woman into the rhetorically sophisticated author.

Donne's work, like Crashaw's, Southwell's, and Traherne's, includes representations of passivity. Gary Kuchar studies the ways these four poets take on the major sacramental and devotional controversies of the day, and how they also use their poetry to craft models of the ideal devotional subject.[51] Kuchar's work is only concerned with Catholic and High Church Protestant devotional literature. But in analyzing the religious tensions that were circling in

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[49] H.L. Meakin, *John Donne's Articulations of the Feminine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3.
[50] Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient*.
[51] Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburg: Duquesne Press, 2005), 2.

seventeenth-century England, and how the more established churches responded to and handled these controversies, Kuchar provides a richer context for understanding the relationship of the women in this study to the broader religious debates of seventeenth-century England, and not only to other sectarian writers. Using a Lacanian reading, he argues that the model devotional subject must become dependant upon another being; this being is God. This dependence and desire is generated by a sense of identification with a figure/Being who is like and unlike the subject. According to Kuchar, in both psychoanalysis and devotional writing, the subject is "triggered by and structured in relation to a transformative and oftentimes traumatic encounter with an Other whose desire precedes and exceeds one's own."[52] In this study, the women are confronted with the authority of the divine being that precedes and exceeds their own. They recognize it, describe it, and make it their own.

In each of his chapters, Kuchar addresses one of the four poets and examines the rhetoric of devotion and the type of devotional subject that it constructs. Of particular interest for the purposes of this study is Kuchar's chapter on Richard Crashaw. Within Crashaw's poetry, Kuchar identifies an anxiety over the masculinization of Christianity throughout England. The feminine was associated with both the body and Catholicism. In an effort to rid English Christianity of all traces of Catholicism, the feminine, including the maternal allusions to Mary, was being worked out of devotional rhetoric. In his divine epigram, "Blessed be the Paps which thou Hast sucked," Crashaw crafts a piece that is maternal, physical, and devotional. The very graphic text reads:

[52] Ibid., 28.

Suppose he had been tabled at thy teats,

Thy hunger feels not what he eats:

He'll have his teat ere long, a bloody one, -

The mother then must suck the son.

(Crashaw, "Luke 11. Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked," 1-4)

Crashaw's epigram connects the idea of worship and devotion to the carnal body and to the maternal act of nursing. The spiritual, feminine, and physical are all connected and expressed here. Kuchar reads this poem as a response to the growing concern in the seventeenth century that devotional rhetoric was creating a schism between the word and the body, rather than bringing the two together.[53]

For Kuchar, Crashaw's poem illustrates the creation of a devotional subject through the dissolution of identity. The role of mother and son is blurred and the concept of self becomes disrupted and unsettled, creating a devotional subject that is shaken from its individual identity and becomes part of a communal experience.[54] This reading of Crashaw's poem once again illustrates differences between twentieth-century and seventeenth-century conceptions of identity. The breaking and blurring of identity does not necessarily need to be read as a negative construction, or as a feminine disadvantage. The devotional subject is often depicted as being broken, shattered, or indistinct. Therefore, when reading the devotional works of women writers in this period, it is not productive or accurate to automatically dismiss any reading of identity in their works because they refer to themselves as vessels or as empty receptacles for

[53] Ibid., 114.
[54] Ibid., 115-116.

God's word. Kuchar's reading of Crashaw's poem works as a model for how to interpret and understand the identity of the devotional subject. His reading also works to illustrate how the non-verbal, in this case, the physical, can work to construct a devotional subject even in the absence of speech.

Instead of reading the self-abnegation of the women prophets in this study as a denial of an identity, or as a rejection of identity unique to a female speaker, this study aims to show how the women's rejection of self, and presentation of their relationship with God, actually aligns them with popular devotional literary practices, as well as the Biblical prophetic tradition, further solidifying their identities as voices for God, voices which wield social, political, and religious authority.

III. Authority, Reliability, and Divine Communication

Even though cultural and literary studies of the seventeenth century tend to associate Puritanism with the verbal and the scriptural, there were many aspects of Puritanism that did not draw authority solely from scripture. The conversion experience, as Marilyn J. Westerkamp points out, did wield power and did not rely exclusively on the verbal. John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* presents examples of spiritual authority that are not authorized solely by scripture. His texts trace his spiritual awakening, and represent it as a deeply personal and internal experience. Though Bunyan's text does rely heavily on scriptural passages and his interaction with them, the verbal constructs are

internalized in his mind, creating a mental language that allows him to envision various instances of spiritual bliss or torment. Bunyan delves into the darkest depths of his soul to determine whether or not he is saved. In his conversion experience, he connects with the divine and within his heart and soul he evaluates the state of his salvation. Westerkamp argues that the internalized experience of the individual's salvation and personal communication with God creates a community of believers because it establishes that the individual can experience the divine. Yet it also works to undercut the ideas of social hierarchy that are so important to the leaders of the Puritan community.[55] Man and God communicate without the aid of any earthly institutions of power, such as church, minister or king. These moments of interiority exceed the realm of the private and have broader social and political implications. The same applies to the women in this study who represent their communications with God. If they could claim they are speaking directly to God, then they are at the same time staking a claim to public religious authority, which challenges the social hierarchy of a Puritan society. Anne Wentworth, for example, presents her communication with God as testimony to her congregation to prove that she is justified in her separation from her husband. Agnes Beaumont uses her connection to Christ to vindicate her disobedience to her father.

Even though interiorized moments of communication with the divine threaten social hierarchies, the connection between internal spiritual experiences and authority is not unequivocal. Westerkamp's study also identifies a shift in

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[55] Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Puritan Patriarchy and the Problems of Revelation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993): 572.

Puritan thought in the seventeenth century that she connects to an anxiety over women's prophetic experiences. Whereas early in the seventeenth century divine revelation is considered powerful, after the middle of the century Puritan leaders begin to place more of an emphasis on rationality and education than on the personal communications with God. A connection between the idea of private contact with the divine and madness starts to emerge, preventing women from accessing the divine in any recognized and respected way.[56] For madness, as Tom Hayes argues, loses any mystical meaning by the end of the sixteenth century. Whereas madness itself was once thought to be the sign of a holy person touched by God, by the time the women prophets of the seventeenth century are writing, it becomes "ubiquitous and mundane."[57] This transition in the interpretation of ecstatic experiences and the shift in the value placed on madness mark a cultural move toward a more contemporary definition of insanity, (or as it would be called now), hysteria, or depression. It is this clinical view of madness absent of magic and mystery that partially skews the modern eye's perspective on these women writers.

Even in their own day, Davies, Wentworth, and Trapnel faced accusations of madness for their bold declarations and their even bolder actions. Though the interpretation of divine communication begins to shift, the motives for representing it do not. The deeds and statements that yield such accusations are not the ravings of madwomen; they are rather actions and words that challenge existing systems of order. Dismissing these women as mad, whether it is in the

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[56] Tom Hayes, "Diggers, Ranters, and Women Prophets: The Discourse of Madness and the Cartesian Cogito in Seventeenth-Century England," *Clio* 26 (1996): 30.
[57] Ibid., 30.

seventeenth century or the twenty first, internalizes and isolates their experiences to such a degree that they lose all trace of political or literary significance. Modern studies of madness find that women who suffer from depression or hysteria often claim to feel alienated from language, as if it is cold, distant, or foreign.[58] The women in this study were not disconnected from language. On the contrary, they enlist the power of language to generate rhetorical strategies that enable them to position themselves as authors. They strategically distance themselves from the texts in order to get closer to the objects of their criticism. The denial of involvement could potentially protect them from the repercussions their words engender.

The methods by which these women present their experiences, their critiques, and their protests draw on Puritan ambiguities over the significance of personal and private communications with God. Like madness, silent prayer is an internal experience. Because it is a metalinguistic process that takes place in the heart, mind, and soul of the devotee, it cannot be accurately judged or evaluated. The women in this study often claim their messages and missions from God come to them in the midst of intense private prayer. Because these communications take place internally, the women's actions are free from censure; no one can refute the words God speaks to them with any degree of certainty. However, in such an unregulated method of communication, no one can truly verify the experiences either. Cynthia Garret addresses this dilemma in her study of prayer manuals and prayer theory of the seventeenth century. She recognizes that at the

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[58] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia,* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 51-3 and "A Question of Subjectivity- An Interview," *Women's Review* 12 (1986): 19-21.

heart of Puritanism is the belief in the unmediated relationship with God. At the same time, there has to be a proper way to address God in private prayer.[59] Should God be addressed with emotion or with calculated reason? Should Christians assume they are speaking with God the redeemer or God the judge? Does the person praying address the father, son, or Holy Spirit? If prayer is unmediated conversation with God, does that mean that God and man communicate in prayer as equals? Garrett finds evidence of these anxieties in her study of prayer manuals and guides of the early to mid seventeenth century. She discovers that prayer is a form of worship and communication that is more highly valued as non-verbal. Prayer, even for Calvin, was much more closely associated with the emotional than with the rational. Calvin points to the Passion of the Christ, and Christ's own impassioned responses to his sufferings as evidence of the emotional intensity that is necessary for personal communication with God.[60] But with emotion comes ambiguity. According to Calvin, "all human desires are evil…not in that they are natural, but because they are inordinate."[61] If emotions cannot be trusted or controlled, then how can private prayer be based on emotion? The question of form again surfaces, what structure does one give to prayers?

Thomas Goodwin offers a solution to this problem. He posits that all prayer, even though it seems to originate from the individual, actually belongs to and emanates from God. Using his logic, Garret argues that personal devotion is acceptable if God receives credit for generating the prayer. Otherwise, silent,

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[59] Cynthia Garret, "The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 46 (1993): 333.
[60] Ibid., 338.
[61] Calvin, *Institutes,* 3.3. 12

internal prayer becomes "threatening to God's omnipotence when it seems to issue in an individual language and style calling attention to a self distinct from God."[62] According to this theory, there is no individual self. Even personal articulations for God are not really individual; they are just an extension of God's power. This idea of the unity of the self and the spirit is particularly significant in the study of prophetic women writers of the seventeenth century. These women frequently refer to themselves as empty vessels for God's word or as lowly worms. Though this self-abnegation is often initially read as a mark of the subjugation of women, when read in conjunction with prayer theory it emerges as part of the Puritan tradition in which there is no self but what God allows. Self-abnegation is then redefined. It cannot be read simply as proof of the women's acceptance of society's construction of the obedient female. Their refusal to take credit for their work is evidence of their participation in Puritan spiritual practices. All Christians, not just women, are expected to acknowledge God as the point of origin for their devout words. Based on this logic, one could argue that the women are trading one form of domination for another. Whether it is society or God, both are denying them an identity. However, there is subversive potential within their representations of themselves as vessels for God's word. Presenting themselves as God's servants allows them to demonstrate that what they say is in line with God's will and word. In this way, they couch criticisms of every other level of authority within their texts and display them as sanctioned by the divine.

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[62] Garrett, "The Rhetoric," 347.

What both Garret and Westerkamp contribute to this study is a basis for understanding that moments of interiority create a subversive space. Both prayer and prophecy are venues for approaching the divine in ways that are not strictly verbal and thus not controllable. These methods of communication allow for the simultaneous devotion to the divine and censure of other modes of authority. The women in this study do not directly challenge their exclusion from certain primarily verbal and public modes of authority, such as the pulpit and Parliament. They do use their positioning as vessels of the Lord to redefine their place as wives, daughters, and parishioners. They navigate available channels such as prayer and devotion that do carry authority, but do not rely so heavily on authorized, public speech.

But what exactly was women's access to the verbal? Studies on literacy in the period reveal a complex answer. According to David Cressy, most people, and particularly women, were illiterate in the early modern period.[63] However, Edith Snook questions the validity of Cressy's claim, because his measure of literacy is whether or not a person can sign his/her name. As Snook points out, reading and writing literacy must be studied separately in the seventeenth century because most children learned to read before ever going to school, meaning that most people in this period could read. Writing literacy, however, which was learned at school, was much less prevalent.[64] Therefore, women in this period were not illiterate in the modern sense of the word. According to Snook, reading

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[63] David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2.
[64] Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Practices of Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 8-9.

literacy could be used in acts of subversion. If a woman could read, this would allow her access to the male dominated world of writing literacy.

But widespread reading literacy does not translate into equality of the sexes when it comes to literary production. Heidi Brayman Hackel's study of female literacy in this period sees silence and oppression in the margins of women's books. Brayman Hackel contrasts the prevalent practice of writing marginalia in the seventeenth century to the noticeable absence of such notations in the margins of books written by women. The generation of marginalia was in a way a public act, because books would be circulated throughout households, revealing the woman's thoughts to others. Brayman Hackel reads the absence of marginalia as a symptom of the silencing of women in this period.[65] Before the Civil War decades, Patricia Demers notes the silence of women in literary production, with less than 1% of printed material written by women from 1475-1640. There is a major shift during the Civil War, with 112 pamphlets published by women.[66] Demers contrasts the vocal, authoritative, logical voices of the seventeenth-century prophetesses to the silence of their sisters in preceding decades.

Literacy and silence are two concepts that in our modern twenty first century do not seem to fit together; yet the women in this study were producing at a time when reading literacy was seen as part of protestant identity,[67] and silence was considered the proper state for women. Literacy, in the form of references

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[65] Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 203-08.
[66] Patricia Demers, *Women's Writing in English: Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 23-4.
[67] Snook, *Women, Reading*, 35.

and allusions to scripture, and silence, in the form of reticence and self depreciation, fuse together in the works of prophetic women writers to create a voice that is acceptably socially and spiritually positioned, and that rebels against the widely held beliefs that shape its very inception. For example, Anne Wentworth, while denying her will to write or publish, also quotes scripture that authorizes her to rail against her country, her church, and her husband. In doing so, she demonstrates her access to literacy, enacts her prescribed role of silence, and launches a scathing social, religious, and political attack.

Chapter 1 will focus on Wentworth's mediation of her Puritan practices and her criticism of her congregation and family. The authority of Wentworth's *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* rests on her use of the spiritual marriage metaphor. She presents herself as the bride of Christ. In doing so she is working within the parameters of a normative social role. To her husband Christ, she is a dutiful and obedient wife. While occupying this very traditional space, she renegotiates it using her exemplary performance as Christ's bride to shame her earthly husband for his less than exemplary behavior. In representing submission to God she gains the power to undermine her abusive, earthly husband. Her visions, dreams, and direct communications with God interrogate and challenge the power structure of one of the most controlling social institutions of the seventeenth-century: marriage.

Just as Wentworth does, Beaumont, Trapnel, Davies, Evans and Cheevers all question some aspect of the patriarchal society in which they live. Their challenges are supported by God's words, but much of the texts also include

striking imagery as the women describe the dreams and visions that are transmitted to them from the divine. Some, like Davies, even incorporate coded language including symbols and anagrams in their texts. Because these women are each working within Puritan culture, the inclusion of visual and spectacular moments in the text may seem out of place. Iconography and extravagant display are typically associated with Catholics, while scriptural exegesis is generally connected to Puritans. But this stylistic preference is not always absolute. Before the Restoration, the outward appearance of the body was considered a reliable indicator of the inner workings of the mind and heart.[68] Developments in archaeology lead to an increased interest and trust in visual images and artifacts as accurate representations of life.[69] Greater value is also placed on the mathematical language of numbers because the symbols have concrete and pure meanings.[70] The question of whether or not language truly expresses the speaker's meaning becomes particularly significant when the speaker is attempting to relay communication with God. For example, when George Herbert works to express God's imprint on his soul in *The Temple*, "he faces the problem of transcribing it by extending the conventional boundaries of language with puns, anagrams, paradoxes, and typographical hieroglyphs."[71] Words alone are often inadequate for fully articulating devotion and divine connection.

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[68] Will Pritchard, "Masks and Faces: Female Legibility in the Restoration Era," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (2000): 31.
[69] Peter Burke, "Images as Evidence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 275, 277.
[70] For a discussion of the influence of archaeology on seventeenth century thought see Margreta De Grazia, "The Secularization of Language in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (1980): 319-329; Thomas Singer, "Hieroglyphs, Real Characters, and the Idea of Natural Language in English Seventeenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 49-70.
[71] De Grazia, "The Secularization," 323.

Perhaps the most popular example of the Puritan interest in image and text for the purpose of devotion is the emblem book. Emblem books convey meaning using both text and image. They were popular on both the continent and in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when printed books were becoming available to all social classes. The text and image are meant to inform each other, engaging the reader in two types of textual analysis, visual and verbal.[72] Facing each page of scriptural and devotional text is an image designed for meditation. For example, in Christopher Harvey's *The School of the Heart* printed in 1676, there is an excerpt from Psalms; it is chapter 119: 32, which reads, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Following the quotation from scripture is an ode exploring the idea of having God enter into one's heart. On the opposing page, there is an image of an angel giving an enlarged heart to what appears to be a grateful pilgrim. Much like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, this emblem book explores the struggle to prepare one's heart for God. The opening chapters bear such titles as "The Infection of the Heart," and "The Taking Away of the Heart," while the final chapters are entitled "The New Wine of the Heart," and "The Learning of the Heart,"[73] alluding to the purifying journey that the heart must take.

This emblem book intimates the tension between body and soul by using the physical heart as a metaphor for what is actually a spiritual process. As

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[72] For a discussion of the relationship between image and text in English Emblem books see Pennsylvania State University, "The English Emblem Book Project," http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/home.htm.; Huston Deihl, "Graven Images: Protestant Emblem Books in England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 49-66; Peter M. Daly, *The English Emblem and the Continental Tradition (*New York: AMS, 1988).

[73] Christopher Harvey, *The School of the Heart* (London: Lodowick Lloyd, 1676), 3, 7, 187, 191. http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/home.htm, June 23, 2006.

Huston Deihl explains, the prominence of emblem books in seventeenth-century England challenges the notion that Puritans had no regard for the non-verbal. Deihl concludes that emblem books, which also declined in popularity as the revolutionary years came to a close, were a medium used to "question and challenge the inherited ideas of the Latin Middle Ages."[74] Protestants juxtaposed text and image to prevent the viewer from revering the icon, as they believed Catholics might. As Deihl explains,

> By reminding the viewer of what he cannot see, the emblematic image points away from itself. When the reader sees the image, uses it properly, he sees through or beyond the material image and remembers another world. Although the image is apprehended by the eye, it stimulates men to withdraw from the senses to substitute spiritual for physical sight. In this way, Protestant emblem books reform the inherited images of Medieval Catholicism, internalizing and personalizing them, altering forever the person's relation to them.[75]

Deihl's study, and the production of emblem books in general, points to the potential of the non-verbal within Puritanism to intensify the devotional experience.

These studies on literacy and language demonstrate that though certain modes of expression like public preaching were closed to women, others, like conversion experiences, prayer, and visual media were open. Within the prophetic and devotional writings in this study, the writers display a thorough

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[74] Deihl, "Graven Images," 51.
[75] Ibid., 66.

familiarity and understanding of scripture, but they also are sure to include physical, emotional, and mental markers of their connection with God and of their authority to speak. The shifting relationship between the verbal and non-verbal demonstrates that women authors' navigation through the questions of validity circle around not only women writers, but religious writing, and language. What emerges out of this navigation is a fuller picture of how women in this period interrogated, challenged, and reformulated their roles in seventeenth-century English society, and their roles as authors. The inclusion of images, of a guiding divine voice, and of a reticent authorial voice are recontextualized, and instead of serving as proof of a lack of authority, these elements contribute to an authority grounded in Puritan and Biblical notions of devotion and prophecy. Does this then suggest that the women are simply operating within the prescribed realms of authorship available to them in seventeenth-century England? I argue the answer to that question is no. Though the women are working within systems of authority that are outside the most popular and effective venues such as Pulpit and Parliament, they are subverting the authority of the political, social, and religious institutions by using these religious and spiritual modes of discourse to critique and undermine those very institutions.

One of the major figures of subversive silence in the early modern period is Anne Askew. She was interrogated, tortured, and eventually executed as a heretic for her Protestant beliefs. The narrative of her persecutions is recorded by John Foxe. In his account, he downplays her physical suffering and emphasizes her spiritual resolve. Both Cheryl Glenn and Frances E. Dolan cite her as a model

of the power of silence because she refuses to break under interrogation, and only speaks of her faith, and nothing more. Her silence on the scaffold and in the public eye actually enables her to "speak." She is a spectacle of endurance and faith. The display of the female body is the central concern of Dolan's essay, "'Gentlemen, I have one thing more to say': Women on Scaffolds in England 1563-1680." Dolan points out that in texts dealing with the public punishment of women there is a "largely Protestant, gendered aesthetic which licenses and records women's speech while downplaying the occasions of that speech, their bodily sufferings, and death."[76] According to Dolan, Foxe's text creates a subject position for Anne Askew by depicting her death in such a way that she transcends both her body and voice, and becomes something purely spiritual.[77] Dolan explains this move on Foxe's part by analyzing sixteenth and seventeenth-century attitudes toward the female body. Public executions, as in the case of Anne Askew, create a social dilemma. A woman's body is not considered her own. She belongs to her husband or father; therefore, publicly punishing a woman's body undermines masculine authority and power. Dolan equates the executioner in this scenario to a rapist, and the audience to voyeurs.[78]

Dolan's essay is significant in two respects to a study of authority and language. Her essay examines the transgressive use of silence by a religious woman, and it examines the tensions between speech and the silence in Protestantism. As important as the verbal is, it is difficult to control when spoken

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[76] Frances E. Dolan, "'Gentleman, I Have One More Thing to Say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680," *Modern Philology* 19 (1988): 158.
[77] Ibid., 162.
[78] Ibid., 167.

from a woman's mouth; therefore, it needs to somehow be circumscribed by placing limitations not only on the woman's voice, but on her body. In order to validate a woman's place in literary and religious history she must appear to deny her feminine nature. If too much detail concerning the physical torment of Anne Askew's body would have been provided, her experience would have been tied too closely to the bodily, the impure, and the feminine. As a result, the spiritual import of her suffering would have been lost. By focusing on the nature of spectacle in public executions, Dolan draws attention to silence and display and its significance to the impact and power of language. A woman as a spectacle can challenge existing gender roles and social norms, illustrating that the non-verbal, (in this case, the physical placement and condition of the body), does wield power, does present challenges for the Puritan tradition, and does shape the context and interpretation of the spoken word.

But Anne Askew is not part of this study because there is no paradox to her story. She is not the author; Foxe is. The omission of her body from the text goes hand in hand with her omission of her voice in her suffering. This is not what takes place in the texts of the women who are included in this study. These women write their texts and choose to in someway omit themselves from the pages, thereby creating the paradox of authority. But what Askew's sufferings can offer this project is a model of one type of authority found in the works included in this study: spectacle. Askew's suffering body is placed in public so that her community can witness her pain, a technique that is in line with other types of public punishment such as the scold's bridal and cucking stool, which are

meant to shame women who challenge society in some way. In Askew's case, Foxe tames the notion of spectacle, and focuses on her spiritual plight. But in the works of the women in this study, spectacle is intentionally included. Chapter 2 of this project will analyze the role of spectacle in crafting authority in the works of Anna Trapnel, Agnes Beaumont, and Lady Eleanor Davies. Trapnel's entranced body lays on display for eleven days for pilgrims and critics alike to come and witness. It is partially her lack of response to pin pricks that verifies for the skeptics that she is in fact in a trance. Agnes Beaumont's ride through town on horseback with John Bunyan despite her father's disapproval, her willingness to have her father's corpse autopsied as proof of her innocence in murder, and her proud walk through town after her innocence is declared signify the connection between power and spectacle in her text. When Eleanor Davies desecrates the seat of the bishop of Lichfield with tar, she puts her disapproval and her anger on display as spectacle. In each text, representations of passivity transform spectacle, which is normally employed to shame and control women, into a mode of authority and social protest.

IV. Dreams and Images

Many of the prophetic women writers of the seventeenth century speak with God in their dreams. At the start of her text Beaumont explains, "And the many dreams I had, which I believe some of them was of god. I should often

dream that I was like to lose my life, and could hardly escape with it."[79] Her text includes dreams that foreshadow the death of her father. Trapnel has dreams that foretell Cromwell's fall. Davies's dreams put her into contact with the prophet Daniel. Wentworth and Evans and Cheevers are also guided in their actions and words through dreams. This is another example of the passive nature of the communication between the human and the divine. Like all dreamers, the women go to sleep and enter a state in which they cannot exercise any conscious control over their minds or bodies. But, unlike most dreamers, they receive messages and images from God. Though the representation of dreams positions the transmission of God's word as a unidirectional and hierarchical experience, the prophets do then use these messages to validate controversial statements and decisions. In drawing on their dreams for power and authority, these women once again draw from rhetorical practices of their day. Generated by the imagination, dreams, as Reid Barbour explains, were considered by Renaissance theorists as the "the mediating agent in the human system of mental apprehension."[80] This means that dreams and fancy cannot be dismissed as nonsensical and irrelevant, because they are actually part of the human thought process. The dreams then are also not as passive as they appear, since they are connected to reason. Dreams also have very little connection to speech or the public arena. Once again these female prophets draw from a mode of authority that enables them both to

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[79] Agnes Beaumont, *The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont,* ed. Vera Camden (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992), 40. Hereafter cited in text. Vera Camden edited this version of the text from Beaumont's manuscript, which accounts for inconsistencies in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

[80] Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105.

challenge their surroundings, and to present themselves as playing by the rules. Paradoxically, they are passive receptacles for dreams, but use these dreams to act as active critics of society.

But, as powerful as they might have been, dreams were actually another point of tension between the Anglican high church and nonconformists because their role and significance could not be universally agreed upon in revolutionary England. The questions of whether dreams represented authority, political upheaval, spiritual communication, or social disorder swirled around Anglican and nonconformist debates concerning fancy.[81] In his study of Anglican spiritual practices, Barbour explains that dreams were paradoxically considered dangerous and useful to both Anglicans and nonconformists. As part of his trial, Archbishop Laud is questioned by William Prynne regarding his record of all of his dreams. Laud claims the dreams are meaningless because they are the workings of fancy and are, therefore, uncontrollable. Prynne sees an angle of attack in that Laud's register of dreams seems to border on superstition. Ironically, though Prynne in this instance attacks Laud for his attention to dreams, as a nonconformist Prynne values dreams, since they are personal experiences that can bring one closer to God.[82] In this point lies the Anglican critique. If a dream is a personal experience, how can it be validated? How can it be relevant? As in prayer, and conversion experiences, does not attention to such personal, individual experiences undercut the sense of community and connection that is so important to having a unified church? More importantly for the women prophets, these

[81] Ibid., 107-8.
[82] Ibid., 103.

personal, practically unverifiable experiences undercut the social constructions that attempt to silence them.

Dreams are controversial because they are individual and uncontrollable experiences. Barbour identifies a recognition in the seventeenth century of the subversive potential of dreams. He cites Eleanor Davies as an example of a woman who uses dreams to challenge political and religious authority. Davies claims to have dreamt of the prophet Daniel who gives her the gift of prophecy. With this gift, Lady Eleanor critiques her king, and any tendencies within Anglicanism toward the whorish Roman church.[83] Furthermore, as Barbour points out, a woman claiming to have had direct contact with the divine through dreams is difficult to refute. Barbour uses the example of Anne Hutchinson in America to illustrate the popularity of a woman supposedly touched by the divine,[84] but the other English women in this study also serve as examples. The women of Milan weep for imprisoned Quakers, Sarah Cheevers and Katharine Evans. Touched by their fortitude, bravery, and spirituality, the public of Milan turn against their Catholic priests, and pity the Quaker missionaries.[85] Anna Trapnel also eventually wins the support of the public after her pious testimony at Whitehall.[86] Sympathy and support are also extended to the suffering Agnes Beaumont by her family and the community's legal authorities when she is put on trial for her father's death,

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[83] Esther S. Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies 'Never Soe Mad A Ladie"* (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1992), 12-13.
[84] Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture*, 103.
[85] Sara Cheevers and Katharine Evans, *A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings* (London, 1662), 12. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home (accessed July 26, 2005). Hereafter cited in text.
[86] Anna Trapnel, *Report and Plea* (London, 1654), 28. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home (accessed July 26, 2005). Hereafter cited in text.

because it is believed by many that she does communicate with the divine.[87] Though dreams are individual experiences that may threaten community and congregation, they are also known as powerful agents and as a result can draw a following.

With the exception of Anne Wentworth, these women include their relationships with their friends and communities, as well as their relationships to Biblical prophets, and in particular St. Paul, as a way to present themselves as representatives of a larger group and movement. Chapter 3 will examine the work of Sarah Evans and Katharine Cheevers, *A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings (1662)*, and Anna Trapnel's *Report and Plea (1654)*, to explore the representations of the Quaker and Fifth Monarchist congregations. This chapter will also focus on the women's accounts of their intimate friendships, and the ways in which these communities provide them access to the authority both to have acutely personal communications with the divine and to maintain deep rooted connections to those around them. This sense of connectivity to contemporaries and to biblical figures also contributes to the shaping of a subversive authorial voice.

Communication with God singles out an individual; the person touched by God becomes empowered by God. Many of these women claim their identities are dissolved by their communication with the divine; yet the experience enables them to challenge social and cultural practices. It is this paradoxical tension of representations of reticence coupled with attacks on existing structures of

[87] Beaumont, *The Narrative*, 81.

authority that often makes it difficult to appreciate what these seventeenth-century prophets are doing. Because historical and cultural knowledge of seventeenth-century women leads us to expect a powerless woman, when she makes the claim to be powerless on the page, there is a temptation to take the declaration at face value, and see it is an example of the domination we have come to expect. But the paradox is, she has written the page; she is denying her government, her husband, her father, or her church; she does it mainly by employing other passive modes of representation such as dreams and visions that did have authority. The powerless woman on the page is a rhetorical position that paves the way for the underlying challenge to authority.

V. Vessels of the Lord: Prophetic Voice and Tradition

Prophecy, whether it is included in the Bible or written in the seventeenth century, involves a merging of genres that affects its reception and its impact. Though it is Biblical, and therefore scriptural and textual, there are other elements to prophecy, such as dreams and images, suggesting that prophecy, like the works of the seventeenth-century women prophets under consideration here, does not draw all of its authority from the words that are communicated from the divine, but also from the ways in which they are transmitted. Pheme Perkins studies the letters of Paul and the Gnostic gospel, The Gospel of Truth, to explore the relationship between text and voice in the Jewish and Christian canon. She analyzes the focus on the written word in Paul's epistles, and the move to go

beyond written language in the Gospel of Truth. Using metaphors and cosmological images, The Gospel of Truth "demonstrates the impossibility of finding knowledge of God in the plain reading of the New Testament."[88] Perkins explores the elements of a text that are not textual, such as images and markers of voice, to illustrate that spiritual knowledge derives from more than reading the words of scripture. All metaphorical and imagistic elements must also be considered. So too must all of the seemingly passive and non-verbal elements of the seventeenth-century prophecies be read and considered in order to attain a full knowledge of the prophets' authorship and intentions.

In the Bible, Jeremiah must face a court and defend himself against accusations of heresy. He declares, "Do with me as seems good and right to you. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears."[89] According to Sheldon H. Blank, Jeremiah must reason with his accusers to justify his prophecy. Working to eliminate sources for the prophecies other than God, he claims that only a madman would speak such words of his own volition. Jeremiah makes the claim that he has no control over his voice, and that it is God that pushes these words out of his mouth. He also asserts that he is part of a Biblical tradition of prophets. Blank cites 28:8: "The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great

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[88] Pheme Perkins, "Spirit and Letter: Poking Holes in the Canon," *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1996):
322.
[89] Jer. 26: 15 (NRSV).

kingdoms." All of Jeremiah's defenses for his prophecy and for his life are "ethical, and rational, and thus comports with the nature of God."[90] Furthermore, Blank points out that all of the defenses that Jeremiah makes for his prophecies are also defenses made for the authority of scripture.[91]

Anna Trapnel uses many of the same defenses for her prophesying as Jeremiah does. She too is brought to trial for delivering the word of God, and she chooses to defend herself by telling her story, part of which involves aligning herself with the Biblical prophets. Trapnel explains how she first resists God's call to go to Cornwall, where she would receive the gift of prophecy:

> Then I mourned before the Lord, and said, I pray Father let me not go: then the Lord said, Though reasonest as Moses did when he was to go to pharaoh: he cavailled against the minde of God, and so dost thou: then that saying was given into my heart, The Lord hath purposed thy going there, and his purpose and counsel shall stand, and he will do his pleasure; it pleaseth him, the going there.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, 2)

God's censure of her reluctance links her to Moses; both are unwilling prophets. Her hesitation is not included as a mark of her weakness. Instead, it is a sign of her connection to a major Judeo-Christian prophet. That is not the only parallel that exists between Trapnel's lives and the lives of the prophets. God then compares her to Saint Paul. While having a dream vision that confirms her

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[90] Sheldon H. Blank, "Of a Truth The Lord Hath Sent Me: An Inquiry into the Source of the Prophet's Authority," *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition*, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1969), 16.
[91] Ibid., 18.

mission to go to Cornwall, a message from God is dropped in upon her mind: "That as sure as Paul in Acts 16:9. had a vision appeared in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia and prayed Paul, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us; & the Lord said, as truly do I the Lord call thee to Cornwal by this vision" (Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, 3). Then Trapnel asks God a very loaded question: "Paul was to preach there, what is that word to me? The reply was, But as sure as his was a vision from the Lord to go to Macedonia, so as sure had I a call and true vision to go to Cornwal" (3). This exchange demonstrates that Trapnel is aware that she should not be called to preach, but it also refuses either to sanction or prohibit her from doing so. Despite her protest, God insists she is like Paul, that she is like Moses, and then later on in the text, that she is like Abraham. With these comparisons, the Lord endorses her place in the Biblical tradition. Just as Jeremiah defends himself against accusations of treason by making the case that he is part of the biblical line of prophets, Trapnel authorizes her text in part through the parallels God draws between her place in religious history and that of the prophets. God says to Trapnel, "Thou shalt have the same word as I gave to my servant Abraham" (*Report and Plea,* 12), thereby connecting Trapnel to an Israelite patriarch. The words and actions of a weak woman are elevated as equal in God's eyes to those of Moses, St. Paul, and Abraham. This aligns Trapnel with the Biblical tradition, and in doing so, questions the patriarchal dominance of that tradition.

The women in this study are not only working within the Biblical tradition of prophecy, they are also working within the rhetorical traditions of prophecy

practiced by Spenser and Milton. The Book of Revelation's depiction of apocalypse impacts the poetics of these major literary figures,[92] just as it impacts the works of Trapnel, Davies, Beaumont, Wentworth, Evans and Cheevers. Prophetic writing, in addition to being a culmination of poetic styles, was a "multimedia performance."[93] Prophetic language like the Book of Revelation, merges text and image in one of two ways. A prophetic text could contain actual images, the most popular examples of this being William Blake, or a text could describe in vivid detail the images that are included in the text.[94] The second mode of picture prophecy is what is found in the writings of the women in this study. For example, Lady Eleanor Davies writes in "A Warning to the Dragon:"

> This thousand years is the great day of the Lord, to poure out his wrath and just indignation upon his Enemies; But the wise Virgins with Palmes in their hands, that have not beene deceived by the subtilty or force of flatterers, shall shine in their Robes, as the brightnesse of the Firmament, Kings Daughters attended by honorable Matrons, as Starres for ever and ever, prepared for the Bridegrooms Marriage, whose Wife the Bride and Queene, hath made her selfe ready clothed in fine Linnen cleane and white, arrayed in a Garment of Needleworks wrought with Gold of Ophier.[95]

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[92] Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr., "'A Poet Amongst Poets': Milton and the Tradition of Prophecy," *Milton and the Line of Vision*, ed. Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 97-98.
[93] Ibid., 103.
[94] Ibid., 103.
[95] Lady Eleanor Davies, "Warning to the Dragon," *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies*, ed. Esther S. Cope (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 49. Hereafter cited in text.

In this passage from Davies' prophecy, the dramatic details and description allow the reader to picture what she writes. The text creates image. Like Wentworth's depiction of the warrior woman, Davies' images craft a strong representation of women. The virgins "have not been deceived" and because of their strength of character, "shine in their robes." Davies compares them to the "brightness of the Firmament" and to the "Starres," literally elevating the image of the female. The women in Davies' passage are also preparing themselves for marriage to Christ. The image of marriage here, rather than evoking the dissolution of self that Lynne A. Greenberg describes in her work,[96] is one in which the women are to become not only brides and wives, but Queens. Though this is obviously verbal in presentation and nature, there is also a non-verbal element to it. The written word serves as a vehicle to create an image in the mind. The metaphors and images work to create a strong female image, which works to bolster Davies' position as a prophesying woman in her society.

As Wittreich explains, prophetic rhetoric merges text and image because prophecy aims to alter perception. Because the reader, or Christian believer, has to be prepared to experience something like nothing s/he has ever experienced in this world, different modes of perception are employed to push the barriers of human conception and understanding; the merging of the verbal and visual works to create this push.[97] Prophecy alters not only the reader's perception of, but also the prophet's relationship to the world. The prophet aligns him/herself with an

[96]Greenberg, "Masculin Births," 26.
[97] Wittreich, "A Poet," 103-4.

earlier line of prophets, because it is the present culture s/he seeks in some way to affect or alter.[98]

As a major work of literary prophecy, Milton's *Paradise Lost* assists in the establishment of a line of female prophets, and like the works of the women discussed here, undermines the Pauline injunction against women speaking.[99] In the final book, while Adam is taken through the course of human history with Michael as his guide, Eve sleeps. Barely mentioned in Book XII, Eve remains in a passive state of sleep until the very end of the chapter and of the epic. When Adam returns from his journey with Michael, he finds her awake, and he hears her prophetic words:

Whence thou returns't, and whither went'st,
I know;
For God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise,
Which he hath sent propitious, some great good
Presaging, since with sorrow and heart's distress
Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;…
This further consolation yet secure
I carry hence; thou all by me is lost,
Such favour I unworthy am vouchsaf't,
By mee the Promis'd seed shall all restore.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost,* XII. 609-614, 620-623)

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[98] Ibid., 104-5. See also Robert R Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 326.
[99] Joseph Wittreich, "'John, John, I blush for thee!': Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*," in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism,* ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 33-4.

Eve gains access to prophesy through the passive reception of dreams in her sleep. She receives the promise of redemption that Adam receives in his conversation with Michael. Furthermore, Eve's passive and non-verbal encounter with God gives her the authority of speech. Eve has the last word in the text. Though the narrating voice closes the poem, Adam and Eve travel together in silence after Eve delivers her promise of redemption. Her dream gives her the authority to speak, invests her with the power to prophecy, and works to establish a Miltonic vision of mankind in which there is a degree of equality between the sexes.[100] The first humans do not leave Eden with only one having access to God, prophecy, and language.

Eve, like the women in this study, gains access to power through access to prophecy. She is the first literary figure to stake claim to God's promise in Joel: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."[101] She is also like Beaumont, Davies, Trapnel, Wentworth, Evans and Cheevers in that she gains the power to speak through the passive and silent dream state. The women in this study are working within traditions of both Biblical prophecy and seventeenth-century devotional literature to craft an authorial voice that uses the rhetorical strategies valued by Puritan culture to critique many aspects of that culture. God's spirit is represented as being poured out on them in the form of dreams, visions, trances, and internal conversations with the divine, as they are presented as vessels for his will and his word. But these vessels are not only the vessels for the word of God; they are the vessels of

[100] Ibid., 35.
[101] Joel 2:28 (NRSV).

controversial and subversive challenges to the patriarchal family, government, and church. Their authorial style tests current theories of authorship which tend to privilege ready access to speech and a governing narrative voice. Instead, they draw power and authority from methods of discourse that suit their place in society, but use them to interrogate the construction of that place.

Chapter 1: "With His Battle-ax in My Hand": Anne Wentworth's Rhetorical Passivity and Social Protest

In the mid seventeenth century Anne Wentworth receives a call from God to spread his message to his people. For eighteen years Wentworth resists her calling, not wanting to bear a prophet's burden, in part because of an abusive husband. But in 1677, Wentworth can no longer keep her silence, and she begins to record her messages from God. Outraged by her boldness, apparent insanity and blasphemy, Wentworth's husband abandons her, and her Particular Baptist community rejects her. Left without any recourse to power or voice in either her public or private society, Wentworth has to find a way to defend herself. In *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* (1677) and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1679), Wentworth retaliates by promising divine retribution for all those who have wronged her. Despite the combative tone of the two texts, Wentworth surprisingly presents herself as the passive and wronged victim. The rage and resentment on the page do not belong to Wentworth. They are represented as God's wrathful words, not hers. This chapter will analyze the shifts and developments in Wentworth's descriptions of herself, her God, and her marriage. In her narratives, the verbal and the non-verbal, the divine and profane, self-abnegation and self-fashioning intersect to create spiritual and social authority. I will argue that Wentworth's texts maintain this dualistic style because she positions herself as the bride of Christ and prophet of the Lord. Her negotiation

of these two roles enables Wentworth to paradoxically condemn her husband and congregation with God-given authority while also relinquishing agency.

Wentworth's rage drives the scope of her vindication. What begins on the domestic front, as a confrontation between husband and wife, mushrooms into the rejection of Wentworth from an entire congregation, and fuels the fire for her scathing attacks not only on her husband and church, but on all of England. In *The Revelation*, she asserts, "Thus the Lord spake, and said unto me: I stand ready to execute my righteous Judgments upon England, for their abominations are great."[1] This warning to the people of England is jarring given that Wentworth's problems have developed out of her home and church. The transference of anger to the entire country suggests that Wentworth is in some sense aware that her position as persecuted victim has been socially constructed, and is therefore blaming not only husband and church, but the country that has generated the power of these forces. Her warning continues:

> And seeing they will not believe that I the Lord did send thee, they shall know with a witness, it is I the Lord that sent you to speak…and for degrading of my word, and great contempt of thee, my Messenger; and gross abuse, and great neglect of thee, whilst thou art in my service, I am risen. Their sins are so great, that my hand and rod shall be heavy upon them.
>
> (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, 4)

[1] Anne Wentworth, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London, 1679), 4. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home (accessed July 26, 2005). Hereafter cited in text.

Wentworth's paradoxical relationship to her protest is evident here, as she denies any involvement in the generation of the text; these are Christ's words and not hers. Yet God's only concern here is society's rejection of Anne Wentworth. Wentworth has the power and the authority of the divine on her side. God rails against the people of England, but more so for their cruel treatment of his messenger than for the deaf ear they turn to the message.

Though Wentworth distances herself from her work in both texts, the stronger denial of authorship is present in *The Revelation*. At the start of *The Revelation,* an unidentified narrator explains that Wentworth receives her prophecy from God in her sleep, and then when she wakes she must beg the Lord to remind her of what she heard in the night. In the "Advertisement" before the narrative begins, he narrator goes on to say:

> And upon her request the Lord is used to pour it upon her, as a mighty stream, that she cannot rest nor mind anything in the world, nor [unreadable text] understand what others say to her, until she have put all in writing, and so answered the mind of God. And she declares, that if it were to gain the whole World, she cannot write in Verse at any other time, but when the Lord teacheth her, and poureth down his Spirit upon her.
>
> (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, n.p.)

The authoritative voice that works to exonerate Wentworth cannot be attributed to Wentworth. The words "teacheth" and "poureth" contribute to the presentation of her authorship as the product of a passive and receptive relationship to God's will. A similar contradiction occurs in *A Vindication*, where her obedient transmission

of words challenges the power her husband has wielded over her for nearly two decades:

> And now I have done his will, my deliverer is come to make good his word, and set me free from the oppression of Man, and to bear witness against him that has wounded and oppressed me for 18 years, and more severely is his anger kindled against them who have so deeply wounded me since the time of my healing, and who have made me an Heathen and a Publican for no other cause, but obeying the word of the Lord and following him.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 12-13)

Wentworth stresses the injustice of her persecution by minimizing her transgressive actions toward her husband, and emphasizing her deference to the divine. She then goes on to say that, come New Year's Day, God will persecute all those who have wronged her. Making the claim to have no voice, skill, or words of her own, she even refers to herself as a "thing that was not in my own eyes." It is this renunciation of agency in conjunction with her rage and protest that makes Wentworth's work significant in a discussion of female authorship in the seventeenth century. In this text, Wentworth takes responsibility for publishing her works, but she denies wanting to do so:

> The things I have published and written, and which are such an offense to my husband, and indeed the cause of all the Persecutions I have suffered from others, were written sorely against my own natural mind and will; that I often beg'd of God that I might rather die, then do it…for eleven

> months together I withstood the Lord, till by an Angel from Heaven he threatened to kill me, and took away sleep from me: And then the terror of the Lord forced me to obey the command…after I was consumed with grief, sorrow, oppression of heart, and long travail in the wilderness, and brought even to the gates of Death, and when past the Cure of all men, was raised up by the immediate and mighty hand of God. And being thus healed, I was commanded to write.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 7)

Because she declares that her writing is against "her own natural mind and will," and because she includes words such as "threatened," "forced," "consumed," and "commanded," Wentworth seems to renounce all agency in the texts. In distancing herself from her work, she, in effect, silences her voice.

In the seventeenth century, authority, especially in Puritan culture, is largely drawn from verbal arenas such as the Bible and sermons,[2] but these modes of authority were not open to Wentworth. The Pauline injunction in I Corinthians 14:34, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law," carried weight in many Puritan sects in seventeenth-century England. Women were not permitted access to the pulpit, and as a result, were also barred from religious and political power. Silence was the proper state for women. Therefore, because Wentworth seems to want to be the silent character in her narrative, she seems to be accepting the social roles created for her.

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[2] Milo Kaufman, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 11.

As Christina Luckyj's study *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* and Cheryl Glenn's study *Unspoken; A Rhetoric of Silence* point out, silence can wield power. In Luckyj's work on classical models of speech and silence, she comes to see that silence could be a positive state for both men and women, depending on the context. For example, St. Paul does not recommend it only for women. I Corinthians 14:28 reads, "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." As Luckyj explains, if silence is recommended for both men and women, then it can no longer be read one dimensionally as a state of feminine domination.[3] Similarly, Glenn demonstrates that speech and silence work in tandem to create meaning for each other; she gives a basic example of silence that may occur in the middle of a conversation. This absence of speech can have many implications, ranging from an abandonment of an exhausted topic to a response to an offensive comment.[4] In Wentworth's text, she presents herself as a silent partner in a relationship with the divine. She also silences her authorial voice by giving credit for its generation to Christ. Her denial of agency has the potential to obscure any connection between her work and a study of women's authorship. But as Hillary Hinds explains, twentieth century theories of authorship, which tend to privilege the governing narrative voice of the realistic novel, do not enhance or enrich an understanding of seventeenth- century women

[3] Christina Luckyj, *'A Moving Rhetoricke: Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 51-52.
[4] Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 8-11.

writers who are operating within a different rhetorical schema.[5] This chapter will argue that Anne Wentworth's passivity and silence are assumed roles that lend credence and authority to her texts, because they enable her to fashion a representation of herself as the silent and obedient woman, while citing God as the author of her anger, resentment, and protest against nearly all hierarchical institutions. Though women did not have much authority in the seventeenth century, God did, and attributing silence to herself and speech to the divine gives voice to Wentworth's passionate protest.

Wentworth's problems grow out of a power struggle with her husband. His inability to control his wife's intellectual and spiritual activities signals a loss of control over his wife, a control his society demanded. Wentworth clearly feels he did not have this right, and in order to salvage her reputation as a wife, and to justify her decision to disobey him, she subverts the authority of her husband by replacing him with her protective, devoted, spiritual husband, Jesus Christ. This chapter will explore the ways in which Wentworth employs the mystical marriage metaphor and her role as prophet to facilitate her movement through registers of speech and silence in order to gain access to the authority to openly criticize her husband and her congregation. As Christ's wife and as his chosen prophet, she shapes a powerful identity while all the same time denying the existence of her will, her voice, and her authority.

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[5] Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 93.

I. The Marriage Metaphor

Wentworth's presentation of her marriage to Christ initially demonstrates the interplay between power and weakness that exists in her texts. Submissiveness was a normative state for women in marriage. Metaphors for marriage in the seventeenth century, according to Hinds, describe men as the rational head to the unruly female carnal body; they are the river that absorbs the tiny rivulet in matrimony; they are the riders that tame the wild horse.[6] Wentworth's earthly marriage did not fit into this schema. In going against her husband's will and publishing her prophecies, Wentworth can easily be depicted as an improper wife. She finds redemption in her marriage to Christ. As his bride, Wentworth employs a metaphor that has religious, political, and social significance.

For an author to claim to be the wife or lover to God is not an uncommon religious or literary trope. The Song of Solomon uses the metaphor of two lovers to represent the relationship between humanity and God, a theme which is carried forth in the New Testament with the church being deemed the bride of Christ. In the seventeenth century, John Donne evokes this spiritual metaphor in "Batter My Heart":

> Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
> Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe.
>
> (Donne, "Batter My Heart," 9-11)

[6] Ibid., 30.

Donne uses images of matrimony and divorce to express his devotion to God and his renunciation of evil and temptation. Therefore, in presenting herself as Christ's bride, Wentworth is working within the parameters of a common spiritual trope, but the fact that she actually is married alters the significance of the marriage metaphor in her work.

Phyllis Mack explains how differing situations can modify the meaning of a metaphor. She analyzes self-abnegating metaphors such as "vessel" and "worm" that like the marriage metaphor are common in seventeenth-century literature. Mack explains, for the male writer, the idea of being a "nothing" and a "vessel" is a symbol that expresses devotion. It does the same thing when women like Wentworth, Beaumont, and Trapnel use it, but there is an additional aspect of meaning because they are women. In this cultural moment, women were actually regarded as inferior, and as empty, so their representation of themselves as such is not purely metaphorical.[7] The same consideration applies to a reading of the marriage metaphor. Because Wentworth is actually married, the way in which she represents her marriage to Christ can be read not only as a reflection of her relationship to God, but also as a rhetorical strategy applied to comment on her relationship to her husband.

In Erica Longfellow's analysis of Trapnel's use of Song of Songs, she argues that the mystical marriage metaphor serves as a bridge between the private and the public that supports authority.[8] In Wentworth's texts, the metaphor also

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[7] Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets During the English Civil War," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 32.

[8] Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 164.

works to authorize her voice by using a private relationship to vindicate her public protest. However, the implications of Wentworth's use of the metaphor go even further since she is married to and separated from an actual man. Wentworth's condemnation of her husband and her discussion of matrimony bear social significance. Representing Christ as her spouse provides a means to gain authority, while enabling Wentworth to defend her actions as an earthly wife, and to criticize her husband's behavior in their marriage.

As a married woman utilizing the mystical marriage metaphor, Wentworth bears a stylistic resemblance to the medieval mystic Margery Kempe, who boldly refused the company of her husband on the grounds that Christ forbade it: "Sere… grawntyth me that ye schal not komn in my bed, and I grawnt yow to qwyte yowr dettys er I go to Jerusalem. And maketh my body fre to God so that ye nevyr make no chalengyng in me to asken no dett of matrimony aftyr this day whyl ye levyn."[9] Kempe, like Wentworth, challenges the social and cultural norms of her community, in part by questioning and challenging the bonds of matrimony. According to Lynn Staley, she crafts this challenge "in the conventions of medieval female sacred biography" since female saints, in their lives of celibacy, did not follow the traditional roles for women and therefore present a challenge to society.[10] As in Wentworth's text, convention and subversion are two sides to the same coin working to enable and authorize each other.

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[9] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe,* ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1996), 38.
[10] Lynn Staley, Ed. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1996), 2.

Margery Kempe, like Anne Wentworth, justifies separation from her husband on the grounds that she is married to Christ. However, there are major differences between Kempe and Wentworth. Kempe is a fifteenth-century Roman Catholic mystic and Wentworth is a seventeenth-century Baptist prophet. The difference in their faiths also affects the implications of their use of the spiritual marriage metaphor. As Richard Godbeer explains in his study of romantic representations of Christ in New England in the seventeenth century, medieval mystics tended to imagine the bond between the divine and the human as superior mainly because it was spiritual and therefore pure. The Puritans, who valued the role of sex in a harmonious earthly marriage, often included erotic imagery in their representations of the bond between man and God.[11] Though Wentworth's text does not include many sexual references to Christ, she does focus many parts of her work on Christ's involvement in her day to day life, including paying the rent and providing food. In this sense, Wentworth connects her spiritual marriage to an earthly marriage, not through sexual imagery, but through domestic references. Godbeer points out that because the spiritual marriage to God was based on the earthly model of marriage, it served as a threat to the institution of matrimony: "As pastors increasingly invoked spousal imagery, their consequent emphasis upon the inferiority of human marriage threatened to compromise, at least rhetorically, the very institution that lay at the heart of a well ordered Puritan society."[12] Because the spiritual marriage to Christ was celebrated in sermons as in some ways superior to the human bonds of matrimony, there was the possibility

[11] Richard Godbeer, "'Love Raptures': Marital, Romantic, and Erotic Images of Jesus Christ in Puritan New England, 1670-1730," *New England Quarterly* 68 (1995): 356.
[12] Ibid., 373.

that the images of spiritual marriage could lead to criticism of human marriages. As this chapter will show, Wentworth presents the cruelties of her earthly husband in almost the same breath as the blessings of her spiritual husband, thereby presenting an alternative model for matrimony. Like the pastors in New England, Wentworth presents her marriage to her husband as inferior, which according to Godbeer, can be interpreted as a critique of and threat to the institution of marriage.

Metaphorically, marriage bears religious as well as secular meaning. In the covenant theory of marriage, the bond between husband and wife is a contract, but the nature of this contract varied in seventeenth-century England. Was an agreement between the couple sufficient for a binding contract? Did a ceremony have to take place at the church door? Who had jurisdiction over a marriage, the church or the state?[13] The ambiguity surrounding the marriage contract filtered into its use as a political metaphor. As Victoria Kahn explains, during the revolutionary period in England, debate concerning the contractual agreement of marriage surfaced in its use as a metaphor for both Royalists and Parliamentarians.[14] Royalists argued marriage was an agreement entered into with consent, but after the consent was given, the husband was sovereign over his wife, much like a king is sovereign over his people. However, Parliamentarians argued that woman is made of man, like a king is made by his people, therefore creating

[13] Christine Peters, “”Gender, Sacrament, and Ritual: The Making and Meaning of Marriage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* (2000): 69-72.
[14] Victoria Kahn,“Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of the Contract,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997): 532-3.

shared power.[15] It is this model of contract theory that shapes the logic used in the execution of King Charles I; he does not fulfill his duties, and therefore the people have the right to end his reign.[16] However, this logical explanation of matrimony did not play out so smoothly. Puritans questioned whether or not it was acceptable to divorce on the basis of an unfulfilled contract.[17] Even though Puritans did not condone divorce, Johnson's and Kahn's studies of the Puritan covenant theory of marriage illustrate that there is a connection between the intimate household and the larger political sphere. Family life and civil life are governed by the same codes, and they also influence one another.[18] This connection between marriage and society is significant to a study of Wentworth, because her struggle with her husband is meant as commentary not only on her personal union, but on the state of matrimony as a whole.

Kahn's study of contract theory in marriage focuses on Margaret Cavendish's short story, *The Contract*, and the way in which Cavendish manipulates the metaphor of marriage through a tale of passion and love not only to tell an entertaining tale, but also to comment on the political situation of her day:

> Cavendish uses the language of romance both to argue for a more equitable contractual relationship between husband and wife and to present an account of political obligation that is based on love rather than

[15] Ibid., 528-9.
[16] James T. Johnson, "The Covenant Idea of Marriage and the Puritan View of Marriage," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): 115.
[17] Ibid., 116.
[18] Ibid., 107.

> filial obedience, wifely subordination, or a Hobbesian account of self-interest.[19]

Though Wentworth does not so blatantly evoke the language of contract theory, she does grapple with questions of accountability and responsibility in marriage. In using marriage as a way to represent her relationship to Christ, Wentworth employs a metaphor that speaks to issues of spirituality, politics, and community. It is a multilayered relationship that offers criticism of a woman's place in marriage, the church, and society.

Though Wentworth's revelations, visions, and prophecies can be read as a protest against marriage and patriarchy, the reader is always left with the voice that is not a voice, the voice of Anne Wentworth denying that she had anything to do with the generation and production of the texts. But in order to read seventeenth-century women authors fully, it is necessary to qualify Wentworth's reticence as a rhetorical strategy that enables her to launch her invectives; this strategy was often used by women who sought more power and authority than circumstance afforded them. About fifty years after Wentworth, an American woman writer, Elizabeth Ashbridge, found herself in a similar situation to Wentworth; she was abused by her husband and called to God. Though Ashbridge was a Quaker (and not a Baptist like Wentworth), she did something very similar to Wentworth. She wrote about herself and her experience with God. In Roxanne Harde's analysis of Ashbridge's text, she finds that Ashbridge gains authority from the exchange between herself and God; it is this exchange that

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[19] Kahn, "Margaret Cavendish," 529.

eventually shapes Ashbridge into a minister.[20] There is a two-fold significance of Harde's study of Ashbridge to this study of Wentworth. On the one hand, Harde recognizes that an author's description of dissolution of the self can be read as a rhetorical strategy that paradoxically has the potential to create identity. On the other hand, Harde also pinpoints the locus of conversion in her subjects in the heart, which is significant to her because,

> As Calvinist women in covenantal marriage, and with the heart culturally designated as the site of all sentiment, these women were meant to dedicate their hearts to their husbands. At the same time, the heart was also seen as the seat of faith…and they were meant to rest it on God. I suggest that these women write the heart, instead of the mind or the soul, as logogic site, because their conflicts were rooted in both man-woman relationships and God-human relationships.[21]

Marriage therefore becomes the ideal metaphor for negotiating power between husband and God, since the heart rightfully belongs to both. Though Wentworth does not make many explicit references to her heart, her relationship to the divine is clearly tender; it is not her husband who has bound her heart, but God. In sharing this bond with Christ, Wentworth undermines her husband's patriarchal authority. It is God and not her husband who has the right to love her, to protect her, and to possess her. In his Holy Sonnet John Donne writes:

Take me to you, imprison me, for I,

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[20] Roxanne Harde, "'I Consoled my heart': Convrsion Rhetoric and Female Subjectivity in the Personal Narratives of Elizabeth Ashbridge and Abigail Bailey," *Legacy* 21 (2004): 16.
[21] Ibid., 157.

Except you enthrall me, never shall be free

(John Donne, "Batter My Heart," 12-13)

Like Donne, Wentworth sees liberation in captivity. The freedom Donne speaks of is a freedom of the soul. Wentworth, however, gains freedom on earth from the tyranny of her husband by welcoming her complete possession by God.

Ashbridge then, like Wentworth, is not creating new registers of authority, but she is working the available registers to her advantage. With cultural practices and beliefs affording very little room for women to craft an individual identity, women who did seek to assert a degree of authority often worked within the cultural framework. For example, Lady Sarah Cowper, who lived from 1644 - 1720, kept a detailed diary from 1700-1716 in which she recorded, in addition to other aspects of her daily life, her dealings with and response to her unreasonable husband. As Anne Kugler explains, Cowper felt as if her authority as mistress of the house was usurped by a husband who insisted on running all aspects of the household. In an effort to criticize her husband, and reclaim her authority without blatantly rewriting the roles of husband and wife, Cowper quotes from and refers to conduct books for women to establish her rights as a wife.[22] Like Cowper, Wentworth situates herself within acceptable domestic parameters, but in terms of her relationship with God, and not with her earthly husband. Wentworth's husband has offended God; he has defaulted on the contract of their marriage, and as a result, she rewrites her position as wife. She is a bride of Christ, and she is obedient to her heavenly husband's will, but his will is for her to be strong.

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[22] Anne Kugler, "Constructing Wifely Identity: Prescription and Practice in the Life of Lady Sarah Cowper," *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001): 292.

II. The Warrior Bride

In her representation of herself as Christ's bride in her *Vindication,* Anne Wentworth clearly mingles convention and subversion when she writes,

> My heavenly Bridegroom is come, and has given me courage, with an humble boldness, and holy confidence to speak the truth in all faithfulness, and to fear no man…I am sensible any of these things would be too strong for me, a worm of no might or strength; but I have renounced myself, and laid down my own wisdom and will in this work, and am given up to all the will of God herein, standing upon my watch, and having his power put on the whole armor of God; the shield of Faith, the breastplate of Righteousness, with my Loins girt about with Truth, and my feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace, having taken the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 9)

Contradictory phrases like "a worm of no might and strength" and "having his power put on the whole armor of God" represent Wentworth as simultaneously weak and warrior-like. Wentworth's paradoxical description evokes Christological imagery, as Christ is both the suffering, passive spectacle as well as the Son of God who comes "not to bring peace but a sword."[23] Christ's persecution on earth paved the way for his kingdom in heaven, but Wentworth's suffering opens the door to authority on earth. In the seventeenth century a

[23] Matt 10:34 (NRSV).

husband and wife had one unified identity spiritually and legally.[24] In describing herself using Christological images of reticence and power, Wentworth draws from the authority she gains through her connection to her new bridegroom. Though she does not yield to her earthly husband's commands, she makes it clear that she has given herself to her God and her spiritual spouse. In this scenario, she is the proper obedient wife; she denies having an identity of her own; she is "the poor rivulet" that dissolves into the river that is her husband.[25] Yet it is in this relationship that she finds strength and power. With her new husband's influence she becomes a warrior; she "puts on the whole armor of God." Like her divine husband, she gains power by relinquishing it.

Though Wentworth says she is worm, and denies having any strength, the heroic military images in this passage say otherwise. In writing *The Revelation* and *A Vindication,* Wentworth questions the rule of her husband and challenges the injustice of her congregation. It is appropriate that she presents herself as a warrior since her texts place her in the midst of battle with nearly every aspect of her community. Furthermore, in using these particular images, such as "sword of the spirit" and "helmet of salvation," Wentworth makes a direct reference to Paul's letter to the Ephesians 6: 11-17. The images and words that are used to present her as a militaristic, Christological warrior are the words of the very person who is so frequently cited as denying the propriety of women's public speech. By using St. Paul's word, Wentworth not only harnesses the verbal power of the scripture but, as Puritans so frequently did, she also subverts St.

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[24]Lynne A. Greenberg, "'Masculin Births': The Reconception of Seventeenth-Century Law in Milton's Poetry" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2001), 25-6.
[25] Ibid., 26.

Paul's emphasis on female passivity by using his own words to represent herself as empowered by God. She is a chosen prophet of God, just like St. Paul.

Wentworth's warrior passage is a performance of various roles. As Terry Eagleton explains, "literary works themselves can be seen as speech acts…literature may appear to be describing the world, and sometimes actually does so, but its real function is performative: it uses language within certain conventions in order to bring about certain effects in a reader."[26] Declaring herself the bride of Christ allows her to break out of the prescribed duties and place of an earthly wife. Referring to herself as a worm connects her to the prophetic tradition which is often characterized by self-abnegation. Using the words of St. Paul allows her to place herself within this tradition while subverting its misogyny. When Wentworth asserts that she is married to God, this verbal declaration is a performance of a role that she enacts to gain access to the power, authority, and freedom that come with it.

The voice that Wentworth derives from her union with the divine is primarily used to defend herself, and to vilify her husband. In *The Revelation*, Wentworth's unidentified narrator recalls how her husband left her without anything. She says, "he took away all, not a Stool to sit upon, not a bed, nor anything else left; and afterwards sent three of her Cosins, who took her out of house by force at Midsummer 1677" (22). In describing what was done to her, Wentworth focuses the text on her husband's failings rather than on her own. He has left her unprotected and unprovided for. In contrast: "And though her

[26] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 103.

husband would let her have no household stuff, Bedding and the like; yet he, the Lord would provide her with all suitable conveniences, and Money too for her maintenance and houserent" (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, 22). Not only does God provide for her spiritually, he pays the bills. Wentworth also asserts that God will provide for her here on earth as well as in heaven when she writes,

> He has bound up my Soul in the bundle of Life and Love, and he pleads my cause, and takes my part, and has spoken by his Word, with power and authority from Heaven, saying, *I shall abide with him, and he will abide with me, and come and supp with me, and never leave me, nor forsake me:* And he bids me take no thought what I shall eat, what I shall drink, or wherewith I shall be cloathed, but cast all my care upon him.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 5)

These passages illustrate the earthly presentation of marriage that Godbeer recognizes in New England sermons; God is Wentworth's caretaker. In the passage above Christ provides for Wentworth and speaks for her, once again binding issues of authority to passivity and convention. Christ is the dutiful husband; he cares for his wife in heaven and on earth. Wentworth is the proper wife she refuses to be for her human husband; she trusts completely in the word and power of Christ. In taking on the proper wifely role, Wentworth accesses the power and authority of the divine, because in this state she will never be forsaken. Christ, unlike the husband who abandoned her, uses his power to protect and strengthen her. The passivity she demonstrates in her spiritual union creates authority for her voice in her society.

The authority Wentworth draws from her marriage to Christ is not something she conjures in her mind. The biblical passages she incorporates into her text add scriptural authority to her representation of matrimony. The "word," "power," and "authority" to which Wentworth refers are actually embedded in the text that she writes through her references to three biblical passages. The idea of being nourished and clothed by God comes directly from Christ's teachings in Matthew 25: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear."[27] The italicized portion of Wentworth's text cited above is a hybrid of two biblical passages. The notion of abiding in Christ and having him abide in you also comes from the teachings of Christ in John 15; yet the last two phrases, "never leave me, nor forsake me," come from two locations in the Bible. It first appears in Joshua1: 5, when God commands Joshua to follow his commands and call. It then appears again in Hebrews 13:4-5, included among matrimonial advice which reads, "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'" In using these scriptural citations, Wentworth paradoxically works within the dominant cultural framework, while also subverting it. In the seventeenth century marriage was characterized by coverture, meaning that the husband and wife were one legal entity.[28] When she says that Christ will provide, and that he bids her to "cast all my care upon him," she upholds a representation

[27] Mat 25: 1 (NRSV).
[28] Greenberg, "Masculin Births," 25-6.

of marriage in which the husband and wife are united, and the husband is expected to provide for his wife. But Wentworth also uses scriptural passages that emphasize the devotion husband and wife are supposed to have to one another. God has promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you." This is a promise her earthly husband was unable to keep, revealing the limitations of human marriage. Wentworth uses scriptural passages to praise her heavenly husband, while at the same time drawing attention to the shortcomings of the husband who has left her and attempted to vilify her. The connection she draws between spiritual and domestic matrimony allows her to redirect any accusations of impropriety in wedlock from herself to her husband, thereby subverting his authority.

This passage in Wentworth also positions Christ as the ideal mate, as opposed to her husband who has failed to provide for her and protect her. Wentworth transmits all of the authority her husband should have to Christ. It is Christ that "pleads my cause, and takes my part, and has spoken by his word." Wentworth represents Christ as having the power over the word, and herself as the passive participant. She describes herself, "And I am enabled in his power to role my self upon him; and my heart is fixed, trusting in him; and comforted with his word" (*A Vindication*, 5). In transmitting her husband's authority to her God, Wentworth is then able to transfer it back to herself. Wentworth does not represent herself as having authority here; she is absorbed into the divine by her heart and her trust, just as a seventeenth-century wife should be. But this is also what every Christian is expected to do. The dissolution of identity that

Wentworth describes allows her to present herself as both the ideal wife and the ideal Christian. As the bride of Christ, she will have access to the glory of his heavenly kingdom. She will be "enabled in his power." In presenting herself as passive and silent, Wentworth actually crafts a space from which she can access and harness the power of the divine.

In juxtaposing her criticism of her earthly husband with praise for her spiritual husband, Wentworth extols one model of matrimony over another. Moreover, in *The Revelation* she links her own struggle in marriage to broader commentary on the state of matrimony. Speaking for her spiritual husband, she explicitly criticizes the focus on the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife that led to her ostracism:

> The Lord shewed me why the people did not understand me, nor my work; Because they will not (saith the Lord) go to the root of the matter, but blind themselves with poring so much upon a Man and his Wife, and will look no further: but continue writing all faults in thy forehead, as delusions and disobeying of thy husband, and see none in themselves: they are so stark blind, that they can see nothing at all of what I the Lord am a doing: They will not see, how I have placed the two Spirits in a man and his Wife, to figure out Zion and Babylon.
>
> (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, 9)

In this passage, Wentworth, speaking as God's emissary, makes the claim that husband and wife are partners in a religious and spiritual journey. Unlike Wentworth and her flesh and blood husband, Wentworth and Christ have

achieved this model. He is the force that enables her to prophesy, and she is the vehicle for his words on earth. Together, they are the fulfillment of this idea of matrimony.

This spiritual marriage metaphor also undercuts the authority of the husband. Wentworth suffered at the hands of her husband, but she does not let this abuse prevent her from fulfilling her spiritual call. In her *Vindication*, she points out:

> Forasmuch as the Natural constitution of my mind and Body, being both considered, He has in his barbarous actions towards me, a many times over-done such things, as not only in the Spirit of them will be one day judged a murdering of, but had long since really proved so, if God had not wonderfully supported, and preserved me. But my natural life, through the springing up of a better, not being otherwise considerable, then as it is my duty to preserve it in a subserviency to the will and service of God, whose I am in Spirit, Soul, and Body. (4)

Even though her husband has abused and nearly killed her, she cannot yield to him; God has more power over her than her husband, and therefore she is justified in her decision to publish in spite of his opposition. She is obeying her spiritual husband, just not her earthly husband.

In this passage Wentworth describes the threat her husband poses to both her body and her soul. The man is referred to as "barbarous," and as potentially committing "the murdering" of her. However, though he is a threat to her, he

cannot truly hurt her because she does not belong to him. Wentworth continues to develop this hierarchical relationship:

> Having learnt through the mercy of God, not to be afraid of him, who can only kill the body, but can do no more. I do therefore secondly, in the fear of him who can kill both soul and body, further declare, That I was forced to fly to preserve a life more precious than this natural one, and that it was necessary to the peace of my Soul, to absent myself from my earthly Husband, in obedience to my Heavenly Bridegroom, who call'd and commanded me (in a way too terrible, to powerful to be denyed) to undertake and finish a work.
>
> (*A Vindication,* 4)

Upon first reading these passages it appears that Wentworth is simply moving from one locus of domination to another. Instead of having to live in fear of her husband, she now lives in fear of her God. Wentworth contributes to this perception with her initial representation of her encounter with the divine:

> And I have also through the tender mercies of God, the riches of an assurance, that my God who has been for so many years Emptying me from Vessel to Vessel, breaking me all to pieces in my self, and making me to become as nothing before him; and who has by many and great Tribulations been bowing my own will, and fitting me for his service, and who having taught me to tremble at his word, has thereby call'd and commanded me into this work, when I was a thing that is not in my own eyes, and pleaded with him to be excused, I have I say, the riches of an

> assurance, that this God will be with me; and however the Spirit of prophecy in a poor weak Woman shall be despised by the wise and prudent of this world, yet Wisdom is justified of her children; and that God who has commanded me to go forth in his name, will by a Divine power go before me, making way for me, and subduing the Spirits before me which I am to deal with, and will also by a Divine presence, support me in the midst of all those sufferings his work can bring me into.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 3)

A major transition takes place in Wentworth's account of her relationship with God in this passage. To begin, there are similarities in Wentworth's representation of her husband and her initial representation of God. Her husband is described as attempting to murder her body and soul, and here the description of God's interaction with her also takes on violent overtones. He has been "breaking" her, "emptying" her, and she will "tremble" at his voice. Within the first few pages of her *Vindication*, Wentworth juxtaposes two representations of violence towards her. However, the violence leads to two very different effects in each instance. Her husband's violence prevents her from fulfilling her role as God's clarion; yet, the violence at God's hands saves her. Furthermore, she flees from her earthly husband's violence, yet submits to God's breaking and shattering of her.

The parallel threats of violence from her husband and her God illustrate Wentworth's potential to be a proper wife. In her *Vindication* she addresses critics who label her a whore and a madwoman by demonstrating that she is a

dutiful, chaste, silent, and obedient wife to God. After the first few pages of *A Vindication*, Wentworth no longer refers to God as violent; from here on in God is her spouse and her support. At times, Wentworth even goes so far as to draw parallels between their experiences, presenting herself as a Christological figure. The two eventually dissolve into one another, blurring the line between Wentworth and Christ, thereby empowering and authorizing Wentworth's voice. In her circular reasoning, she once again revisits her vindication of her separation from her husband. This time, instead of justifying it by claiming Christ has more right to her soul than her husband, she vindicates herself by drawing a comparison between her experiences and the experiences of Christ. She makes the claim that she is Christ's wife in spirit, and to support her claim that the spirit of the law is more important that the letter of the law, she explains, "I beg of you all … that you will remember still how the Jews did of old, vilifie, reproach, condemn, and execute our savior, and justified themselves herein by the letter of the Law of God" (Wentworth, *A Vindication,* 5). In using this example, Wentworth employs Christ's life to speak for her; those who condemn her are equated with those who condemned Christ. Now that she has established that she is his wife, she can use him as protection, as she should have been able to do with her own husband.

The reversal of power structures is a theme that runs throughout her text. Early on in her *Vindication* she draws from the biblical passages that emphasize the ability of the weak to topple the strong: "Out of the mouths of Babes and Sucklings God has ordained strength, because of his enemies that he might quell the enemy and the Avenger (Ps. 8:2)" (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 3). Later on

she writes, "The Lord frustrateth the tokens of Liars, and maketh Diviners mad; he turneth wise men backwards, and maketh their knowledge foolish: but he confirmeth the word of his servants, and performeth the Counsel of his Messengers" (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 9). In each of these passages God sanctions the transition of power from those who currently hold it to those who have been denied it. Wentworth includes these references as justification for unseating her husband as patriarch of their household. In response to her boldness, her earthly spouse and her congregation strip her of any recourse she has to power. The only way she can gain it back is by representing herself as a servant of God. In this submission there is power. After depicting herself as a broken frame, filled and rebuilt only through the grace of God, Wentworth begins to change the direction of her self-presentation.

Once Wentworth represents herself as a warrior of God, she revisits her call to write. Again she asserts how she is nothing: "I cry'd unto him when there was none to help me, and in a deep sense of my own unworthiness and nothingness, my soul was humbled, and laid low at his foot, and my heart was lifted up to him" (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 12). Directly after this statement she once again evokes the marriage metaphor: "Then was this full communion between Christ and my Soul, the Love knot, the comely bands of Marriage; then did he espouse me unto himself forever, and enable me to follow him" (12). This moment in the text, where Wentworth binds herself to the divine, is represented as a deeply internalized and personalized experience. Though she describes it in her text, this moment of complete unification with God is not transcribed as a

conversation or prayer; this moment of communication is represented as taking place in the soul. Cynthia Garrett's point about silent prayer resonates with this moment in Wentworth's text; if it is silent, if it is private, it is also impossible to regulate. This communion and marriage that dissolve her, unlike her marriage to her actual husband, open up a space for her to be recreated that is difficult to question or refute.

After representing herself once again as the passive, silent participant in her relationship with Christ, she then shifts her position once again. She dissolves and then reemerges as the prophet. Following her account of her marriage to Christ, she claims God speaks to her, and then proceeds to quote Isaiah 51: 12: "Then did the Lord my God say unto me, I even, I am he that comforteth thee; who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass" (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 12), but she does not credit Isaiah with this passage. She presents it as a direct quotation from God. In doing this Wentworth becomes a conduit for the word of God, simultaneously removing Isaiah from the equation, while also speaking as Isaiah. This striking moment of ventriloquism is followed with Wentworth's disclaimer: "And he afterward revealed to me, (what I did not then know) that my oppression and deliverance had a public ministry and meaning wrapt up in them" (8). Wentworth claims the authority to speak publicly in the name of God, while making a point of saying that she did not know about it, thereby removing her agency from the decision. Despite her passive presentation of her call to ministry, Wentworth still claims it as her own.

III. The Prophet

As Christ's spouse, Wentworth gains the authority to criticize her earthly husband, but this is not the only role she adopts to deliver her message. As stated earlier, Wentworth receives her prophecies from God in her sleep. Wentworth's nocturnal communications with the divine are passive; she receives the dreams, and, in doing so, assumes the role of prophet laid out in Joel 2:28: "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit."[29] Because dreams are received, it is possible to read Wentworth's dreams as further evidence of her passivity. However, as Reid Barbour points out, dreams are a controversial issue in the seventeenth-century, because they were recognized by non-conformists as a vehicle for communicating with God, but because they are internal and personal, they cannot be validated.[30] Nigel Smith also asserts that radical Puritans considered dreams and visions as valid prophecies.[31] Socially and spiritually dreams carried weight in the seventeenth century. According to Weidhorn, a dream or vision was not just a literary construct; it could be used as "invective or polemic in contemporary political quarrels."[32] Therefore, even though Wentworth presents herself as a passive vessel for divine messages, her role as receiver also has subversive potential. Her

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[29] Joel 2: 28 (NRSV).
[30] Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 103.
[31] Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 73.
[32] Manfred Weidhorn, *Dreams in Seventeenth Century English Literature* (Paris, The Hague: Mouton 1970), 77.

visions can be considered beyond reproach because they are the word of God. Once again, by denying involvement in the production of her text, she gains access to authority.

The passivity demonstrated in her reception of dreams aligns Wentworth with the prophetic tradition. For example, both she and Jeremiah claimed to have no involvement in the production of their texts. They both cite a compulsion to spread God's word. Despite their reticence, both prophets also promise divine retribution to those who have wronged them. In one instance Wentworth declares, "And I do in all tenderness admonish and caution all my Enemies, and all persons whatsoever to whom these Papers shall come, that they take heed least they hurt themselves, in reproaching me" (Wentworth, *A Vindication,* 6). While on trial for heresy the prophet Jeremiah states, "it is the lord who sent me to prophesy to this house and to this city all the words which you have heard… I am in your hands; do to me as seems good and proper to you. Only, know that if you kill me you incur the guilt of spilling innocent blood…for, of a truth, the Lord hath sent me to speak in your hearing all these words."[33] Stylistically and rhetorically Wentworth draws from the biblical prophetic tradition in order to present herself as part of that tradition, and as part of its authority.

Wentworth, like Jeremiah and like many other prophets, also faces accusations of madness, which she reads as a connection between herself and the biblical prophets. She explains,

> I do with great chearfulness receive the reproach of this report; and all the humiliation that goes along with it; as a further measure of my conformity

[33] Jer 26: 12-15 (NRSV).

> to my Savior, and fellowship with him in his sufferings. For thus he has throughout all ages been blasphemed in his prophets, his messengers, and in himself. Thus when Elijah sent a young prophet with instructions to anoint Jehu, his Fellow-servants askt him; wherefore came this mad fellow to thee? 2 King 9. Thus we read in Mark 3 That the kindred of our Lord went out to lay hold on him, for they said, he is beside himself. And again in Job 10, many of the Jews said, he has a Devil and is mad.
>
> (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 8)

The accusation of madness is proof to her that she is God's chosen vehicle. She recognizes that madness is an allegation that her spiritual predecessors have born, and she bears it proudly.

She continues to count herself among the prophets by including biblical passages in her text that highlight the parallels between her life and the prophet's lives. In *The Revelation*, she uses Ezekiel's prophecy to respond to slanders against her within her congregation for fortunetelling, blasphemy, pride, melancholy, and heathenism. With rage she asserts,

> Therefore, let all mark, how the Lord will fall upon you, and how quickly he will begin: For your lying words have made the Lord's anger to burn hot against you; Ezek 24:27. In that day shall my mouth be opened to him, which is escaped, and I shall speak, and be no more reviled, no more abased, no more persecuted: But you shall be a sign unto all people, and they shall know, that it is the Lord, that spake by me unto you, and all the

> People of England. Ezek 24:25-26. Shall it not be, saith the Lord, in the day, when I take from them their strength.
>
> (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, 19)

Wentworth includes biblical passages from Ezekiel that resonate with her current situation. She is reviled by her community, and she uses scriptural authority to transform her persecution into a sign of her status as prophet. Her dreams, her rejection, and the accusations against her all initially seem to strip her of voice and power, but they are the very things that enable her to present herself as a prophet.

Toward the end of her *Vindication*, Wentworth includes a poignant rhetorical question, "Can you prove that God hath not spoken to her and by her" (15)? The answer of course is no. Direct communication that takes place between the prophet and the divine does not take place in plain sight. It is not public or observable, and therefore it is difficult to refute or confirm. Yet by drawing on common spiritual tropes such as the marriage metaphor, and by aligning herself with the Biblical prophetic tradition, Wentworth is able to present herself not as the madwoman and whore that her community accuses her of being, but as a vessel for God's words, power, and authority.

IV. Anne Wentworth: The Character and the Voice

In her introduction to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Lynn Staley asks the question, "how do we use this text in ways that allow us to exercise courtesy both

to its author and her agency and to our own social concerns and values?"[34] This same question applies to a reading of Anne Wentworth's texts. How do we read her texts in a way that helps us to understand her contribution to female authorship, to the genre of prophecy, to her own society? Lynn Staley suggests reading Margery Kempe as more than the creator of an autobiography, but as an author who created the character Margery.[35] Looking at the text as a literary work allows the nuances, paradoxes, and layers of meaning to mean.

Wentworth's text has been described as "circular," "self-sufficient," "all inclusive," and "allusive."[36] It can be described as such because Wentworth writes mainly about Anne Wentworth. Wentworth's style differs from some of the other authors in this study, such as Anna Trapnel. She does not focus on any particular messages that God communicates about larger spiritual or political matters. The main purpose of the divine voice within Wentworth's texts is to champion and vindicate Anne Wentworth. As the victim who is forced against her own will to speak and write, Wentworth uses her rhetorical passivity to comment on social issues, such as marriage, but it also pertains to her authority to define herself. There is, therefore, another paradox within her text; though she claims to be nothing, the entire text is about her. Elspeth Graham argues that there are two manifestations of self in Wentworth's *A Vindication*: there is the self that is broken and shattered by God, and there is the self that is called to do

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[34] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe,* 8.
[35] Ibid., 8.
[36] Elspeth Graham, *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth Century English Women* (London: Routledge, 1989), 181-2.

God's will.[37] Though these manifestations of Wentworth exist in the text, there is another dimension to the character. It is the author. There is the voice that paradoxically claims to be silent, but manages to focus the attention onto herself on nearly every page, even when she denies having any part of in the creation of the text.

Wentworth's texts are filled with rage, resentment, and revenge. The opening lines of her *Vindication* read:

> The great searcher of hearts has seen, neither is it unknown to several Christians in and about this city of London, or to the Consciences of my very Enemies, what Severe and Cruel persecutions I have sustained for the space of eighteen years, from the unspeakable Tyrannies of an Hard-hearted Task-Fellow: and since, from the bitter zeal of several eminent professors of Religion, commonly call'd Baptists, Who have most unjustly and unchristian like caused all their pretended church power to wait upon and serve the wrath of my oppressors. (1)

Her sufferings take center stage along with God's recognition of them. The first paragraph of the work stresses Wentworth's presence in the text. She does not include any scriptural passages or references in the first paragraph; she does, however, frequently use first person pronouns connected to actions. Phrases from her introductory paragraph include, "I have sustained," "I was faithful," "I might not partake," "to charge me," and "wrath of my oppressors." Wentworth's defensive tone and clear focus on herself become even clearer when compared to the first paragraph of Anna Trapnel's *Report and Plea*:

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[37] Ibid., 181-2.

> The Lord, and my Father (Courteous Reader) having put me upon this work and employment, I pray don't call it idleness, lest you would be likened to those *who call good evil and evil good, and put darkness for light, and light for darkness (Isaiah 5:20)*; against whom there is a woe pronounced from the Lord: and is it not dreadful to come under the woe of the Lord? Sure it is much better to come under men's threats, scourges, and contempt, and when for well doing too, what *shall harm you if you be followers of that which is good* (1 Pet 3:13)? Whatsoever is done to the upright in heart, it's no harm: *if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, nor be troubled*. I bless the Lord, my sufferings are for righteousness sake, and I go not about to vindicate myself, but Truth." (2) (italics and biblical citations Trapnel's)

Trapnel, another female prophet who claims to be called by God to deliver his message to the people of England, begins her textual defense in a very different way. There are three quotations from scripture, and though her first sentence asks the reader not to consider her work idleness, the focus of the paragraph is not to draw attention to how her enemies will pay for their mistreatment of her. This difference in the introductions reflects an overall difference in the goals of the two authors. Trapnel has a very clear political message concerning Oliver Cromwell and the Fifth Monarchy Men (as will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three); though Wentworth also claims to have a message for England, it is never fully articulated. What is fully articulated is her anger and resentment toward her

community and her husband, in contrast to the love and protection she finds in Christ.

While Wentworth clearly displays her emotional and psychological state in her texts, she also denies having any role in the text. She writes, "I was a thing that was not in my own eyes." If a modern theoretical framework is applied to Wentworth's work, then her writing could be said to reveal a depressed woman. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva focuses on women who are depressed to the point of being suicidal or murderous. She identifies the markers of a depressed woman's speech, many of which could apply to Wentworth: "Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed – repetitive and monotonous."[38] The words and phrases in Wentworth's texts are not repetitive and monotonous, the trajectories of the narratives are. As Graham says, the text is circular in style. On almost every page, Wentworth describes her suffering, God's anger over her suffering, and how those who made her suffer will surely pay. Kristeva also explains, "By belittling and destroying themselves, they exhaust any possibility of an object and this is also a roundabout way of preserving it."[39] In this sense, Wentworth's constant claims to be a nothing, a worm, and a "thing that is not," appear to be markers of a destruction of the self. Furthermore, Kristeva claims that a "feverish defense activity"[40] is often displayed to mask the subject's depression, which could resemble Wentworth's incessant attacks on her enemies. Psychoanalyzing Wentworth and judging her a

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[38] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 33.
[39] Ibid., 48.
[40] Ibid., 52.

depressed woman over 300 years after the publication of her work may reveal something about her mental state, but it also demonstrates how a modern theoretical approach to women's writing can limit a full understanding of seventeenth-century female authorship. The emptiness and nothingness that Wentworth describes cannot only be read as the mark of a disturbed woman; rather, they can be considered the rhetorical strategies that enable Wentworth to reinvent herself.

I argue that her denial of a self is the starting place for her new identity defined not by the misery imposed by her husband, but by her divine communication with God. Though Kristeva's theory does not open opportunities to fully understand Wentworth's work, Irigaray's discussion of silences and representations of God does offer a productive way of reading Wentworth's reticence and self-denial. As Irigaray points out, psychoanalysis like Kristeva's "cannot solve the problem of the articulation of the female sex in discourse."[41] How can the female identity be properly read in a discourse that is completely encoded by the dominant male voice? Wentworth operates within a society that permits little to no access to voice for women. Therefore, when she does make claims to authority they have to be read within this context.

As Irigaray explains, mimicry, (the deliberate assumption of the feminine role as a means to "convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it")[42] is one of the only avenues available for women to participate in the dominant discourse. In representing herself as a poor, weak vessel,

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[41] Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One* Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.
[42] Ibid., 76.

Wentworth mimics the role that she is expected to play, and from that position, she can critique the very powers that have created the role. Furthermore, not only does Wentworth mimic the proper feminine role, she also, in a sense, mimics the ultimate source of discourse – the divine. According to Irigaray, there is a similarity in the representation of woman and representations of God:

> Like God, 'woman' is diminished, constrained, limited when she is represented by language and then brought into the symbolic order. But this is not because woman is somehow immaterial or divine. Instead, it is because language, and the discourses it founds, are dominated by something entirely alientated to 'her': masculinity, the sex and gender of the male. The 'femininity that is represented within such discourse is, like God when represented by human language, a lie.[43]

Wentworth's text follows a circular logic, which revolves around the never changing subject, Anne Wentworth. She moves from one definition of herself to another. She refuses to submit to the representations of her generated by her community and her husband. Her text is a means of silencing those representations and crafting her own. She may have been nothing in her own eyes, but she also writes this text in part, because she rejects what others say she has become: a madwoman and a whore. These are the lies the dominant discourse that surrounds her creates, and she replaces it. In referring to herself as nothing, Wentworth is not describing the end product; this is the clean slate that comes before the new image. As Priest explains of Irigaray's theory of woman

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[43] Ann-Marie Priest, "Woman as God, God as Woman: Mysticism, Negative Theology, and Luce Irigaray," *The Journal of Religion* 83 (2003): 22.

and God, "In effect, she is emptying the 'content' out of the term 'woman' in the same way that the mystic empties the content out of the term 'God', thus leaving it open – as a space of the unspeakable – to the possibilities of the 'truly other.'"[44] In her text, Wentworth empties herself of meaning in order to refill herself with meaning, and that meaning is the merging of herself with God. She dissolves into Christ as a proper wife would her husband, but instead of losing any access to power through the dissolution of self, she gains the authority of the divine.

Wentworth, like other women writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, challenges the discourse of her society by working within it. Both Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft argued in favor of education and women's rights by drawing from the value their societies placed on logic and reason. Because their argumentative strategies resemble modern polemical rhetoric, they have been recognized for their contributions to the development of authorship and the women's rights movement.[45] Nearly one hundred years after the publication of Wentworth's texts Mary Wollstonecraft begins *Maria: or The Wrongs of Women* with the words: "The wrongs of woman, like the wrongs of the oppressed part of mankind, may be deemed necessary by their oppressors: but surely there are a few, who will dare to advance before the improvement of the age, and grant that my sketches are not the abortion of a distempered fancy, or the strong delineations

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[44] Ibid., 22.

[45] For an example of the scholarship on Astell and Wollstonecraft's authorial positioning see Jamie Barlowe, "Daring to Dialogue: Mary Wollstonecraft's Rhetoric of Feminist Dialogics," and Christine Mason Sutherland, "Mary Astell: Reclaiming Rhetorica in the Seventeenth Century," both in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition,* ed. Andrea A. Lundsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 93-116, 117-136.

of a wounded heart."[46] Like Wentworth, Wollstonecraft reevaluates beliefs about matrimony, while also warding off accusations of madness. Though the women have similar goals, they have very different styles. Wollstonecraft launches her critique of matrimony using the rhetoric of reason and sentiment; Wentworth uses communication with the divine to shape her narrative. Because Wentworth's rhetoric places her in a passive relationship to the divine, it might be tempting to say that she is not making any overt criticisms of her society. Wentworth describes herself as the reticent vessel of God's words and wishes, to position herself within normative social codes for women. But from this position, Wentworth challenges and questions the very codes she performs.

The paradox in Wentworth's work, and in many of the prophetic works included in this study, is that in crafting her identity as a prophet, she also seems to be destroying her identity as an author and as a person. Self-abnegation is a recurring theme in devotional literature,[47] as the dedicated subject often refers to him/herself as an unworthy supplicant before God, and Wentworth is no different. She makes it clear in her texts that she would be nothing without the voice of God flowing through her. As her narrator says of her in the "Advertisement," "And she declares, that if it were to gain the whole World, she cannot write in verse at any other time, but when the Lord teacheth her, and poureth down his Spirit upon her" (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, n.p.). But despite Wentworth's attempts to separate herself from her texts, her work is her vindication, and in *The Revelation*

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[46] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria: or The Wrongs of Women* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994), 5.
[47] Michael Shoenfeldt, "'That Spectacle of Too Much Weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 563-4.

her anger and resentment are present on almost every page. In the position of a silent nothing, Wentworth actually carves out a space for reinventing her identity as a powerful and vocal spiritual clarion.

In her relationship to the divine, she claims that God "has been for so many years Emptying me from Vessel to Vessel, breaking me all to pieces in my self, and making me to become as nothing before him" (Wentworth, *A Vindication*, 3). Though this image presents Wentworth as weak, it is as vessel that she gains the authority to deliver her message. She recreates her voice by rhetorically representing herself as the spiritual spouse of the divine, and as the prophetic vessel for his words. Her passivity and silence in the texts enable her to access the authority and power of the scripture and of the divine while maintaining the proper state of silence and obedience. She claims to be a "thing that is not" in her eyes, she also boldly declares,

> And in his strength I was by Grace enabled to stand,
> Against all my Enemies, with his Battle-ax in my hand,
> To wound, kill, amaze, put to flight, and cut them down,
> And when they are in their graves, I shall wear a Crown.
> O this God! So Great in Power! Wonderful is his Name!
>
> (Wentworth, *The Revelation*, 4)

What enables Wentworth to make the transition from a passive, silent, and reticent woman to the warrior woman we see in the passage above, is the very positioning of herself as the passive, silent, and reticent woman. What seems to work against the creation of authority actually creates authority. As the passive

wife of Christ, she gains the power to rebuke her earthly husband, and as the passive prophet, she gains spiritual power over her enemies in her congregation.

Chapter 2: Spectacles of Passivity and the Rhetoric of Authority: Agnes Beaumont, Anna Trapnel, and Eleanor Davies

On July 28th, 1625 Lady Eleanor Davies experiences a divine call to prophecy. The prophet Daniel comes to her and bestows upon her the responsibility of announcing to the world the end of days. Lady Eleanor spends the next twenty seven years publishing her prophecies in an effort to spread Daniel's message. Within her many prophetic tracts, Davies includes anagrams that lend prophetic and biblical significance to the many forms of her name, and she records the vivid dreams and visions she receives from the divine. Throughout her work, Lady Eleanor continues to affirm her role and presence in the prophecies, while also claiming they come directly from Daniel. Despite her status as a member of court, Lady Eleanor is not free from persecution, and she spends a considerable amount of time in both prison and a madhouse.

In January of 1654, Anna Trapnel, a Fifth Monarchist and a fierce critic of Oliver Cromwell, falls into a trance-like state for eleven days. From her trance, Trapnel prophesies the downfall of Cromwell's state, and warns the once beloved leader to reform or prepare to meet with the wrath of God. As she utters songs, prayers, and prophecies, an audience gathers around her nearly lifeless body to hear her words. On the fifth day, one member begins to write down what he hears. Later that same year, Trapnel publishes the prophetic work that had been recorded; it is entitled *The Cry of a Stone*. This text is the record of her visions

and prophetic songs, as well as the record of the physical changes she undergoes as she becomes a prophet.

Twenty years later, in 1674, Agnes Beaumont, an Independent and a member of John Bunyan's Bedford congregation, finds herself locked out of her father's house because she rides to a service on horseback with Bunyan. She will only be allowed back in if she promises never to attend Bunyan's services again. She eventually gives into her father, and promises to renounce the Bedford congregation. Within hours of her decision, she is filled with regret; her situation becomes even more desperate when her father dies two days after the reconciliation. The townspeople, knowing of their argument, suspect foul play; Mr. Feery, Beaumont's rejected lover, accuses her of patricide. *The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont,* a spiritual autobiography like *Grace Abounding*, is the record of her earthly persecutions and her ability to overcome them with the help of God's grace. It is not actually published until 1760.

On the surface, Eleanor Davies, Anna Trapnel and Agnes Beaumont seem to have very little in common. In addition to being part of different congregations and classes, and writing about twenty years apart, they are also each making different spiritual claims. Lady Eleanor is the handmaid of Daniel, delivering his word against papal sympathies and proclaiming his support for her prophetic career; Trapnel is a prophet taking on Cromwell's Commonwealth, and Beaumont is a country girl asserting her right to obey her heavenly instead of earthly father. But within these differences, there is a common thread; each woman is in some way framing her challenge to authority within her communication with God.

Trapnel questions her government; Beaumont defies her father; and Davies challenges king, parliament, and church. They also each pose these challenges using spectacle and display. Trapnel focuses attention onto her lifeless body, cured from illness and overcome by a trance which leaves her desiring neither food nor water. Agnes Beaumont opens her text with a defiant ride to church on horseback with John Bunyan and closes it with a triumphant walk through the town square, both gestures that signal her determination to do as she pleases. Lady Eleanor creates spectacle on two levels; the anagrams and symbols splashed throughout her texts add a visual element that in many ways challenges social norms for women, and her refusal to become a reticent vessel earns her the disapproval of her society, which in turn leads her to become a public spectacle through her trials and imprisonment.

In studying these three women together, this chapter will explore the rhetorical potential for spectacle in seventeenth-century England. Trapnel, Beaumont, and Davies each work within a system in which spectacle holds diverse social meanings, and each woman responds to this system differently. In some cases, the instances of display are a direct challenge to authority, in others they are working within the framework of socially accepted behavior for women. Even when the women display themselves in a way that seems to conform to social codes, there is also a subversive element to the spectacle. Often conventional methods of spectacle are presented in a way that requires a different reading, resulting in the generation of the prophet's authority. In each instance,

the spectacle is meant to make the audience aware of a power struggle that plays out within the text.

Spectacle takes on many forms in the works of these women. Most frequently, the spectacle is the woman herself. These textual moments include descriptions of an illness, trance, or any action in the text. But descriptions of the narrating woman are not the only modes of spectacle that are used to create or challenge authority. The text can also be manipulated to draw attention to the author's self conscious artistry with words. Lady Eleanor, unlike the other women in this study, does not describe the behavior and placement of her body. Even though she spent time in both prison and a mental institution she never describes her physical suffering. There is no self-effacing spectacle in her texts. What she does do is carefully craft her texts to include anagrams and word play. These textual moments are significant because, like Beaumont and Trapnel who describe their bodies and their actions to align themselves with the prophetic tradition and gain authority, Davies chooses to include cues in her work that are textual and visual like symbols and anagrams, that lend credence to her claim to be touched by God. For example, the anagram, "Reveale O Daniel" is a representation of her name. On the page, the anagram concludes her prophecy, "Given to the Elector," and appears like this:

{Reveale O Daniel}	anagr.	{Eleanor Audley.}

(Davies, *Prophetic Writings,* 68)

This anagram can be read as a theatrical element of the text. It is not just word play; it is written as an equation. Because the anagram and her maiden name sit

side by side in brackets with only the abbreviation for anagram in between them, it seems to suggest that one equals the other. The visual presentation of the anagram works in conjunction with the textual play to create meaning.

Finally, there are the spectacles that the women see and then choose to record. These include dreams and visions that God reveals to them. These are also moments of spectacle that are used in the shaping of authority. On the page, the women recreate the stunning visual images that God shows them because their ability to recall such extraordinary things testifies to the validity of their prophetic experience. In all of its forms, spectacle in these women's texts helps to frame their relationship to authority. Beaumont, Trapnel, and Davies shape their texts through the interplay between what is said, and the visually suggestive presentation that accompanies the words.

In Beaumont and Trapnel's texts, the type of spectacle that appears most often is the physical spectacle of the prophetess. In twentieth-century theory, displays of the body are often read as indicative of power relationships. Michael Foucault writes,

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.[1]

For Foucault, being a spectacle, being watched, means you are being controlled. The ultimate form of this control is when the subject under surveillance begins to

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[1] Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 155.

police and watch him/herself. Foucault's thinking suggests when Trapnel and Beaumont place themselves in the center of their texts as spectacles, that they are also placing themselves under the gaze of their audience, and even under their own gaze, thereby making them the ultimate controlled subjects. Susan Bordo lends further credence to this reading of spectacle when she points out the tendency to associate passivity with the feminine and activity with the masculine, and claims that the passive female body therefore often becomes the locus of oppression. It is often the victim of the gaze, and therefore loses power.[2]

As an example of this power dynamic, Bordo cites Mary Wollstonecraft's description of the constraints and limitations placed on the development of a young girl's body as early evidence of the social construction of the body.[3] The passive female body is created as, "the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands, and the sedentary life which they are condemned to live, whilst boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles and relaxes the nerves."[4] Bordo's reference to Wollstonecraft helps to create a historical timeline for the construction of the passive female body; however, slightly further back in time there is evidence Anna Trapnel, Agnes Beaumont, and Eleanor Davies resist such a passive construction through their use of spectacle.

Though they place themselves on display, and make themselves the object of the audience's gaze, they are not falling victim to the surveillance and domination Foucault describes. They are self consciously creating the gaze, and

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[2] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 27.
[3] Ibid., 18.
[4] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* ed. Carol H. Poston (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 41.

are therefore in control of its scope and focus. They place themselves in the audience's view and then redefine conventional meanings of spectacle. For Trapnel and Beaumont in particular, their texts contain moments in which the women display socially accepted and constrained versions of the female form, but do so in a way that also aligns them with the prophetic tradition. Instead of diminishing their power, it actually amplifies their authority. Though the women present themselves as the subject of the gaze, they are not being controlled by it. In fact, they gain power through their representation of themselves as passive individuals. Their bodies and their public behavior work to prove that they are touched by God, and therefore work to create their power and authority.

In order to use physical spectacle to gain authority, these women had to confront early modern beliefs about the body. According to Frances Dolan, the body was generally read as "an interference and hindrance to the soul."[5] Bordo explains that in the sixteenth century, philosophy began a trend toward the belief that the body hindered objectivity. Bordo argues people believed "the only way for the mind to comprehend things as 'they really are' is by attainment of a dis-embodied view from nowhere."[6] These theories present the body in seventeenth-century England as an obstacle to thought and as an obstacle to spirituality. Women's bodies were not only seen as obstacles, they were also seen as things to be owned. Dolan explains "understood as men's property, women's bodies played important roles in defining and securing masculine power, perpetuating genealogy and transmitting inheritance." Therefore, for female martyrs, such as

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[5] Frances E. Dolan, "'Gentlemen, I Have one thing more to say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680," *Modern Philology* 92 (1994): 165.
[6] Bordo, *Unbearable*, 4.

Anne Askew who were publicly executed, "to open and display them on the scaffold would undermine masculine authority and privilege."[7] Dolan's study of female martyrs shows how women gain access to agency in their executions by transcending the physical suffering of the body. It is because their stories are not dominated by earthly and physical suffering that their tales of martyrdom become spiritually significant, and that their voices become authoritative. The spectacle then of the execution, in Dolan's study, is not the central rhetorical signifier; it is the triumph over the spectacle that leads to the martyr's power.

Dolan's study focuses on the threats created by spectacle; yet in early modern England, spectacle could also be used as a threat or punishment. Lynda E. Boose's study analyzes the punishments commonly given to scolds in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Women who were accused of disturbing the peace were condemned as scolds and publicly humiliated by being drawn through the streets in a cart and then dunked three or four times in a body of water. According to Boose,

> Since this almost exclusively female category was defined by an exclusively male constabulary, and since the number of charges for legal disruption brought against males are, by comparison negligible, one can speculate that a scold was in essence, any woman who verbally resisted or flouted authority publicly, and stubbornly enough to challenge the underlying dictum of male rule.[8]

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[7] Dolan, "Gentlemen, I Have," 166-7.
[8] Lynda E. Boose, "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 189.

These practices demonstrate that there were acceptable and unacceptable types of women's speech. It also demonstrates that spectacle was a part of punishment for women. As in Foucault's theory, the idea of being on display was associated with shame. The public gaze on the woman forced to be a spectacle to her society was humiliating, and was a form of control in society.[9]

In seventeenth-century England, spectacle and display were often employed to humiliate and punish women. Yet, physical displays of illness, trances and suffering in Beaumont's and Trapnel's texts subvert this function of the gaze, and enable power and speech. There is a major difference between the spectacle created by an execution or public punishment and the spectacle created by the women in this study. Beaumont and Trapnel create the spectacle themselves; it is not a state inflicted by the government or judicial system. Because they make themselves the spectacle, they maintain control over it. The meaning of the display therefore differs. Trapnel and Beaumont negotiate the network of meaning surrounding women, speech, and spectacle in an attempt to create authority instead of punishing or suppressing it. There are several messages sent in the way Trapnel and Beaumont display themselves. To begin, they transcend their physicality by demonstrating how their bodies are rendered nearly lifeless. Yet they also use the body as proof. Without the display, there is no authority; they are not only transcending the body, they are properly representing it as a receptacle for God's word. Also, in placing the body on display they once again present their audience with a paradox. The entranced, sick, or suffering body is a passive spectacle, but neither Trapnel's nor

[9] Ibid., 191.

Beaumont's text is passive in nature. Both women write to interrogate some aspect of their society, suggesting that the spectacles that are in their texts can also be defined as rhetorical strategies for gaining authority.

In Robert Wilson's discussion of prophecy and ecstasy in the Old Testament, he addresses misconceptions and debates about the definition and appearance of ecstasy in the Bible by tracing the role of trance and ecstasy in anthropological studies. Wilson examines the relationship between the individual claiming to have contact with the divine/spirit world to his/her community, and identifies several factors that shape this relationship. He explains, "First, every society rigidly controls the type of public behavior which its members may exhibit...Second, members of societies which believe in spirit possession face the problem of determining when possession is actually present."[10] Seventeenth-century Protestants believed in ecstatic experiences. They believed humans were permitted access to the divine through revelatory moments. As Wilson explains, there were criteria by which to judge whether or not someone was having a genuine prophetic experience; part of these criteria had to do with the behavior of the body. For example, while Anna Trapnel is in her trance, her foot is pricked with a needle, and because she does not move or respond, her trance is verified. The separation from physicality is proper prophetic behavior. Like Biblical prophets, such as St. Paul, who did not eat or drink for three days while communicating with God,[11] these women present themselves as free from the body. They are therefore working within two systems of meaning; the passivity

[10] Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 327.
[11] Acts 9:9 (NRSV).

of the body required for women, and the passivity of the body required for prophets. While the female subdued body is the result of punishment or the affirmation of patriarchal authority, the prophetic subdued body is a gateway to authorial speech.

Trapnel and Beaumont assume the mantle of passivity and present themselves as powerless and weak. It is by displaying themselves as empty vessels that these women then gain the authority to challenge the very systems of power to which they appear to be subscribing. Moments of spectacle challenge control. But for the third figure in this chapter, Lady Eleanor Davies, spectacle is not a clever game of playing possum; it is a demonstration of the authority that she already claims to have. It is a show of her wit, her heritage, and her class, and it is this very display of authority that compromises her position in society. The rhetoric of the women in this chapter and the different outcomes created by these rhetorical strategies demonstrate how narrow the space for creating authority in seventeenth-century England actually was. It also demonstrates that the space existed, and that the spectacle of the body played a role in shaping it.

Anne Bradstreet successfully applies spiritual meanings of the body to diffuse culturally accepted beliefs about women. Infertility and illness made Bradstreet very aware of social beliefs about women's health and physiology. According to medical studies in the seventeenth century a woman's body was weak; this weakness was caused by the uterus.[12] Helkiah Crooke's 1615 medical

[12] Lutes, Jean Marie, "Negotiating Theology and Gynecology: Anne Bradstreet's Representations of the Female Body," *Signs* 22 (1997): 317.

treatise connected this source of physical frailty to mental weakness.[13] If a woman was depressed or appeared mad, this was certainly not caused by any sort of mental or emotional disorder; rather, it was symptomatic of a physical condition existing in the womb.[14] This reading of a woman's biology presents her as essentially a slave to her anatomy. The body and mind are governed mainly by the unruly uterus. Bradstreet, according to Jean Marie Lutes, reinterprets her illness and her shortcomings not as a reflection of the state of her female body, but as a reflection of the state of her Puritan soul. The suffering she endures is proof of God's love for her, because it is through this suffering that she can be aware of her sinful state, and improve the condition of her soul. This spiritual weakness is not a feminine condition caused by the uterus; it is a human condition. Much like Beaumont and Trapnel, Bradstreet responds to her physical suffering with prayer, and reads her bodily torment as a spiritual message from God: "The Lord laid his hand sore upon me and smote me with the smallpox. When I was in my affliction, I besought the Lord and confessed my pride and vanity, and He was entreated of me and again restored me."[15] In recognizing that her body is not suffering because it is a woman's body, Bradstreet "reveals that it was indeed possible for a seventeenth-century woman to forge a positive vision of self-identity through her subjectivity without denying her physical self and without stepping outside the network of spiritual and scientific beliefs her

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[13] Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia or a Description of the Body of Man, Together With the Controversies Thereto Belonging* (London, 1615), 252.
[14] Ibid., 318.
[15] Anne Bradstreet, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Jeannine Hensley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 241.

community endorsed."[16] By framing her illness as a spiritual issue, Bradstreet transforms the representation of her body from that of a weak, unreliable form to the locus of God's communication. Similarly, in the texts included in this study, though physical suffering and illness do present the body in a weakened state, their meaning is not limited to this. The prophetic women of the seventeenth century created the spectacle of weakness to demonstrate their intimacy with the divine.

The physical display of a woman's body is not the only mode of spectacle that will be discussed here. Neither is it the only mode of spectacle that was present in seventeenth-century England. Though Puritanism is generally associated with a denial of the physical and of the flesh, there are ways in which it did embrace spectacle as a devotional method. The language of theatrical spectacle, according to Belden C. Lane, was prevalent in John Calvin's work, as he envisioned the relationship between God, the world and man as a dramatic production. Calvin uses a variety of metaphors to describe the "spectacle of God's glory that is apparent in nature." He speaks of the world as a "mirror" or "living likeness' of God."[17] In the theatre of the world, God is of course the principal actor, but people also have a role to play. Within this framework, the prophetic experiences of the women in this study could be read as theatrical in nature. They are essentially the narratives of their interactions with the divine, usually including vivid descriptions of visions and dreams that present the theatre of God's creation. In the women's dreams, visions, and narratives, God functions

[16] Lutes, "Negotiating Theology," 323.
[17] Belden C. Lane, "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin and the World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Spiritus* 1 (2001): 3.

as a type of actor in a play. We are given the words, actions, and revelations of the divine as if they were dialogue and stage directions. Lane's study lends credence to the idea that the way in which God and his message are presented by the women in this study can be read in relation to spectacle.

Lane also cites song and preaching as two modes of devotion that Calvin held in high regard. Preaching is the performance of the word of God, and according to Calvin, "when the melody is added [to a word], that word pierces the heart much more strongly and enters within."[18] Calvin's thoughts on music and preaching demonstrate an acceptance of the performative nature of devotion, as well as a willingness to read the meaning of words in conjunction with their action. This is particularly significant for studying Trapnel's work, as her prophecies often take the form of song. Viewing preaching as a performative devotional act adds another level of complexity to what these women were doing. Both spectacle and preaching were arenas that were typically not acceptable for women, yet in their prophecy they are venturing out into both, using spiritual performance to challenge both social restraints.

Spectacle in the seventeenth century is not only an element of devotion and punishment, it is also an element of textual production. The pages in a book are not generally considered spectacle, yet authors can make print decisions that send a message to an audience. Though this is very different from a show in front of a crowd, it is still performative in nature. Jeffrey Masten identifies elements of performance in the writings of Margaret Cavendish. In the publication of her

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[18] John Calvin, "Letter to the Reader," *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1599), 164.

1668 volume of drama entitled *Plays, Never before Printed*, Cavendish attaches several slips of paper onto the pages of the text that she claims are comments and passages written by her husband. Masten points out that it was not unusual for slips like these to appear in a published work, but that normally such slips act as corrective notes to the text. What is unusual about Cavendish's inclusion of the slips is that instead of correcting the play, they add to it and comment on it.[19] For Masten, these slips pasted into the text raise many questions and issues about Cavendish and authorship, as "these material gestures perform contradiction, tension, and overlap."[20] In Cavendish's notes, Masten sees the formulation of an authoritative voice, but he also reads the textual aspects of Cavendish's work as a spectacle, as an element of the text that is as performative in nature as the drama that it appears in.

Part of the performance that takes place in these attachments is the exchange that plays out between Cavendish and her husband. This inclusion may suggest an attempt at a collaborative writing project, or it may have implications for the representation of voice in Cavendish's work, since she is appropriating or appearing to appropriate her husband's words. If it is a collaborative writing project, then it is a shared project between husband and wife, which Masten suggests may offer a model of marriage and literary production that includes sharing and the exchange of ideas.[21] Masten's conflation of marriage and authorship is related to the study of spectacle in these prophetic texts because he

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[19] Jeffrey Masten, "Margaret Cavendish: Paper, Performance, 'Social Virginity,'" *Modern Language Quarterly* 65 (2004): 52.
[20] Ibid., 58.
[21] Ibid., 62.

establishes that representations of production, such as descriptions or evidence of literary collaborations, may have broader social implications.

In the works of Trapnel, Beaumont, and Davies, the main collaborator is the divine. By presenting their work as generated in part by the voice of God or his prophets, these women circumvent the limitations placed on their power in society by attributing their words to the most powerful source of authority available to them: God. All three women, to some extent, claim the divine as a co-author. God's words, visions, and deeds are recorded on the pages of the texts, in many cases, as if the women were taking dictation. The addition of the divine voice works as a textual performance; without it, the meaning of the texts changes because it diminishes their prophetic authenticity. In Trapnel's text, textual collaboration also occurs when she goes into a trance, and her relator takes over the narration of the prophecies. Again, there is a performance here; she is incapable of writing them herself because the power of the visionary experience has rendered her body useless.

Just as Cavendish's inclusion of her husband's notes may suggest social commentary on marriage, the inclusion of the divine voice may also be read in connection to political, social, or religious protest. When do the women include the visions, when do they present the voice of God, when is the right time to bring in their own voice? These choices and moments of transition in the text perform and often bolster controversial views with divine authority. Masten says of Cavendish's work that her "dramatic writing has too long been handicapped by an unhelpful distinction between unperformed and unperformable plays; by reading

these play volumes not as performance manqués but as cultural performances with potential instrumentality…we can better engage the particularities of feminism in that time."[22] Once again, though these women are writing prophecies and not plays, their texts can still be read as "cultural performances." The segments of text that include the divine voice, the scriptural passage, or the graphic vision, as well as the segments that are simply the narration of the prophetess' thoughts or actions, are performances. When Trapnel, Beaumont, or Davies 'record' what God says to them, they are funneling political and social commentary through the presentation of God's words. When they incorporate scriptural passages into their prophecy, these scriptures reflect their views of their family, government, and/or communities. Their inclusion of spectacular or performative elements manipulates and redefines the value of their position in society, as well as the value placed on spectacle and speech.

The performative nature of these texts is often paradoxical. For the women in this study, the presentation of the passive body allows for the production of the bold prophetic voice. The paradox present in their authorial self-presentation provides another point of kinship between the prophetic and religious writing of the seventeenth century and the fictional and commercial writing of the eighteenth century. The authorial position these women create by navigating both the cultural codes for women and for prophets resembles the "vanishing acts" that Catherine Gallagher sees in the works of women such as Aphra Behn. Her "career was both enabled and shaped by a certain conjunction of Restoration theatrical, rhetorical, sexual, political, and economic exigencies.

[22] Ibid., 54.

Laments about the obnoxious material necessities of one's career of the utter prostitution of one's rivals' careers were the normal language of the Restoration author's self-representations."[23] Behn may present herself as a prostitute within her texts, but as Gallagher judges from the success of her plays and productions, this did not prevent her from drawing an audience. Then why do it? As Gallagher explains, 'The implied author of the plays is fashioned in the service of the male audience's fancy; but the implied author of the epistle claims to be Aphra Behn's unexchangeable, but also largely unrepresentable, self."[24] On the one hand, the idea of the seductive author prostituting her wares is in accordance with social prejudices about women in the marketplace, but she also creates the scenario in which the "prostitute" is only the part of her that can be seen by the world, and that there is really another, real, Behn. But who is this real person?

As Gallagher explains, through her creation of a non-persona, Behn is able to maintain a version of anonymity, or nothingness, and it is this nothingness that allows her to continue with the culturally accepted and successful masking of self. Behn, like the prophets of the seventeenth century, presents an authorial paradox. On the one hand, she is the whore that everybody can buy and sell; on the other hand, there is no real author to know. Similarly, the prophetic women writers of the seventeenth century present themselves as passive, proper women, but in doing this they also participate in prophetic rhetoric. The absence of self that they present in their texts, like the nothingness in Behn's work, is what allows for textual authority without social censure.

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[23] Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1994), 7.
[24] Ibid., 17.

Though Beaumont, Davies, and Trapnel each employ spectacle to lend authority to their words, Beaumont and Trapnel rely heavily on physical descriptions and accounts of their relationship with God, while Davies rarely describes her actions or placement. Spectacle in Lady Eleanor's work is more of a textual play. Though Davies writes before the other women, this chapter will begin with an analysis and discussion of spectacle and authority in the works of Beaumont and Trapnel, because they are working with methods of spectacle that relate to passivity and reticence, and that therefore more clearly connect with the Biblical prophetic tradition as well as seventeenth-century conventions of spectacle. Lady Eleanor is not a passive prophet, and the peculiarities of her style and rhetoric become more clearly significant when contrasted with the devotional and prophetic style of Beaumont and Trapnel.

I. Agnes Beaumont

The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont (1674) begins with an image of a house set in the middle of two trees outside of a neighboring village. Beneath the sketch, a caption reads, "The Wonderful Dealings of God with Mrs. Agnes Beaumont written by herself" (34). This picture was added to the text when Mrs. Kenwick transcribed it in what is the second version of the manuscript on record today.[25] It is the very first instance of spectacle within Beaumont's text and it encapsulates the entire drama that unfolds in her narrative.

[25] Vera Camden, ed., *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press. 1992), 7.

It is appropriate that the little house sits in the middle of the image, since it is Beaumont's household that is at the center of the story. As in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Holy War*, the drama of spiritual struggle begins to emerge in the daily happenings of a home or town. In Beaumont's text, the house is significantly set apart from the town, almost foreshadowing the persecutions and isolation Beaumont will suffer at the hands of her community.

In 1674 Beaumont sets her trials in motion when she decides to disobey her father and attend a church meeting to hear John Bunyan preach. The narrative presents her first trial as the conflict between father and daughter in which the father eventually triumphs. Yet shortly after his victory, he dies, leading a member of the community to accuse Beaumont of murder. Her persecution then extends beyond the household and into the broader community as she stands trial for patricide. With the help of God and her prayerful demeanor, she is eventually found innocent.

The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont is often read side by side with John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, mainly because Agnes Beaumont's work often appears as an appendix to Bunyan's work, along with other spiritual autobiographies.[26] It is also because Beaumont was a member of Bunyan's Bedford congregation, and the central dilemma in Beaumont's work is prompted by her interaction with Bunyan. The works also both center on a spiritual crisis; Bunyan struggles to understand whether or not he is saved, and Beaumont struggles between obedience to her biological father and her spiritual father. That

[26] John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco, ed., *Grace Abounding with Other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Beaumont's text does not focus exclusively on the state of her soul reveals that her work centers not only on spiritual anxiety but on social and familial concerns as well. The different focal points of the two texts also shape the varying uses of spectacle. In Bunyan's text, spectacles aid in spiritual reflection; in Beaumont's work, she is often the spectacle, and her placement within the text is a reflection of the state of her soul, a reflection of her level of authority, and even a challenge to existing authority. For the purposes of this study, it is useful to read Beaumont's text in conjunction with Bunyan's because the differences in their spiritual crises, the ways in which they are resolved, and the ways in which spectacle is used as a catalyst in these crises, highlight the social implications and controversial nature of Beaumont's work. Her narrative has very little to do with the conversion of the soul and everything to do with the conversion of her status in her home and community.

The beginnings of the texts demonstrate the difference in their scope. Bunyan begins by describing his work: "wherein is particularly shewed, the manner of His conversion, his fight and trouble for sin, his dreadful temptations, also how he despaired of God's mercy, and how the Lord at length thorow Christ did deliver him from all the guilt and terrour that lay upon him."[27] This account of the text represents it as an internal and spiritual journey. Bunyan's narrative will center on his struggle to defeat sin and find salvation. His life of "cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God"[28] prevents him from

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[27] John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco,
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.
[28] Ibid., 8.

fully communing with the divine. As part of this struggle, Bunyan finds himself being broken down by sin, Satan, and temptation:

> Thus, by the strange and unusual assaults of the tempter was my soul like a broken vessel driven as with the winds and tossed sometimes heading into despair; sometimes upon the covenant of works, and sometimes to wish that the new covenant and the conditions thereof might so far forth as I thought myself concerned, be turned another way, and changed. But in all these, I was but as those that jostle against the rocks, more broken, more scattered and rent.[29]

Bunyan's description of his spiritual development centers on his contemplation and doubt of his salvation. He describes himself as many of the women in this study do, and that is as a "broken vessel." But there is a key difference in his use of the metaphor. For Bunyan, the image of the broken vessel aids him in describing his trials, and demonstrates how the forces around him have shattered him, just like a bottle is beaten and weathered by the wind and rain. For the women in this study, the vessel metaphor is used to demonstrate how they are prepared for the word and works of God. Beaumont, for example, though she does not call herself a "vessel," describes her state as being an "empty praying frame" when she visits "the throne of grace" (38). She describes, "Oh, it cannot be expressed with a tongue what sweetness there is in one promise of God when he is pleased to apply it to the soul by his spirit" (38). Bunyan's soul is described as a vessel to demonstrate how shattered and destroyed it is; Beaumont's soul is prepared for the grace of God by being emptied.

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[29] Ibid., 48.

Bunyan and Beaumont also share a stylistic similarity in their presentation of their communication with God. When Bunyan's spiritual trials begin, he is in the middle of a game of cat, when "a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, 'Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to hell?"[30] Bunyan's spiritual trial is framed as a choice between two states of being. In Beaumont's text, her salvation is never in question. Even as her trial begins, and she feels herself being assaulted by Satan, she is confident that "Satan, my father hath thee in a chain; thou canst not hurt me (48). When Beaumont begins to doubt, she reflects, "'Lord, what will become of me if I should fail of thy love too? That good word darted upon my mind, 'Thy father himself loveth you.' 'Oh, blessed be God,' said I, 'then that is enough; do with me what seems good in thy sight' (49). Like Bunyan, Beaumont describes communication with God as words darting through her. Beaumont's major spiritual dilemma is captured in her reflection, "'How if I should come at last when the door is shut and Jesus Christ should say to me, 'Depart from me I know you not'" (47). Like Bunyan's Christian, Beaumont struggles with a burden. She considers that the door may be shut to her by Christ if she compromises her beliefs to have the door to her home opened by her father. But the struggles Bunyan and Beaumont represent differ in that Bunyan and Christian's choice is purely a spiritual dilemma. Though Christian and Bunyan's decisions will impact their lives, they are not faced with a social dilemma. The decision that affects Beaumont's soul also affects her status in her community. Her choice is dependent upon her choice of authority. Will she obey her father or her God?

[30] Bunyan, *Grace Abounding,* 11.

The varying struggles Bunyan and Beaumont face impact their use of spectacle within their texts. For Bunyan, the narrative exposes the shifting state of his mind and soul. When Bunyan witnesses three or four poorer women on the town streets, talking about scripture and religion, he reflects "I drew near to hear what they said; for I was now a brisk talker also myself in matters of religion: but not I may say, I heard, but I understood not."[31] With this reference to Daniel 12: 8, Bunyan explains how he learns from these women that he still has a long way to go on his spiritual journey of discovery. He sadly realizes, "for I saw in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the new birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart."[32] By watching and studying these women, Bunyan discovers something about himself. He displays his physical journey and trauma, as well as his spiritual and mental progression and anguish. In Beaumont's texts, her physical circumstance and suffering work to validate and confirm her spiritual condition. There is no spiritual movement in her text; the transition that takes place is in her family's and community's response to her. For Beaumont, the major points in her narrative are marked by four striking moments of display: her ride through town with Bunyan, her expulsion from her home, her desire to perform an autopsy on her father, and her walk through town after her trial.

Before Beaumont displays herself, she includes the spectacle that appears only to her; the dream that she has before her trials begin. She writes, "Me

[31] Bunyan, *Grace Abounding,* 14.
[32] Ibid., 14-15.

thoughts in my father's yard grew an old apple tree, and it was full of fruit. And one night, about the middle of the night, there came a very sudden storm of wind, and blew this tree up by the roots, and I was sorely troubled to see this tree so suddenly blew down" (Beaumont 40). She goes on to describe how in her dream she runs to the tree to try to turn it right, and to set it in the ground to grow again, but she cannot. In her dream, she then calls to her brother for assistance in overturning the tree, but they cannot do it either. Beaumont concludes the description of her dream: "oh, how troubled was I for this tree, and so grieved that the wind should blow that tree down and let others stand" (41). Beaumont will later interpret this dream as a premonition concerning her father's death; however, she follows the description of it with her first major trial, whether to choose faith or father. In this context, Beaumont's dream takes on additional significance. The toppling of the tree that leaves the tree not only knocked down, but upside-down may also allude to the toppling of power that is about to occur in her house.

She wants to go to a church meeting led by Bunyan at Gamlinghay, but her father does not want to permit her to go. Beaumont introduces the opposition between heavenly and earthly father: "And I found at last by experience that the only way to prevail with my father to let me go to a meeting was to pray hard to God Beforehand to make him willing" (41). The only force that can combat the will of her father is the will of God. Happily for Beaumont, her prayers are answered, and her father gives her permission to go; however, her fortunes reverse when Mr. Wilson, the pastor of the church, does not show up to take her to the meeting. When Beaumont realizes that she may not be able to attend the

meeting after all, she begins to despair. In her sorrow, she prays "that God would please to put it into the heart of somebody to come this way and carry me, and make some way or other for my going" (Beaumont, 43). As if a sign of her connection to the divine, and God's sanctioning of her journey, John Bunyan comes by on horseback. Beaumont sees her opportunity, but Bunyan is not so eager to have her as a traveling companion on the grounds that her "father would be grievous angry with me" (43). But Beaumont is more concerned with satisfying her spiritual father than her biological father, and she and her brother continue to insist that he take her. Eventually, Bunyan yields, and Beaumont sets off on horseback with him to the church meeting.

Her father, at this point, is close enough to see them ride off together, and attempts to run over and pull her off the horse. Beaumont explains that her father had heard rumors about Bunyan that made him suspicious of him. Vera Camden cites historical references that claim riding together on horseback provided men and women with an opportunity for sexual contact: "It was, in fact, not uncommon at all for folks to engage in all manner of sexual activity while riding horseback,"[33] which could also explain her father's shock at the site of them together. Her father does not get there in time, and Beaumont rides off behind Bunyan.

Like her father, Beaumont also takes this ride with Bunyan seriously, but in a very different way. She sees it not as a threat, but as a privilege. She reflects, "But to speak the truth I had not gone far behind him, but my heart was puffed up with pride, and I began to have high thoughts of myself, and proud to think I

[33] Camden, *The Narrative,* 17.

should ride behind such a man as he was; and I was pleased that anybody did look at me as I rode along" (Beaumont, 44). Soon thereafter Beaumont comments, "My pride had a fall" (44); yet she is pleased with the spectacle of herself in her community. She is proud to have an association with John Bunyan, a man she clearly admires, and this pride is intensified because people can see this association. Bordo argues that the female body, under the male gaze, is dominated; yet here, Beaumont sees herself as powerful because she is seen in public with Bunyan. However, at the same time, she also recognizes the social censure that such an action brings, as she describes the disapproval of one community member:

> So coming to the town's end, there met with us a priest one Mr. Lane who, as I remember, lived then at Bedford but was used to preach at Edworth; and he knew us both, and spoke to us, and looked of us, and as we rode along the way as if he would have stared his eyes out; and afterwards did scandalize us after a base manner, and did raise a very wicked report of us, which was altogether false, blessed be God.
>
> (Beaumont, 45)

Now the meaning of the spectacle shifts in the text. When Beaumont makes herself a spectacle in her own mind, she pictures herself as an object of admiration, and perhaps even envy, as she rides past the other people in her community. But Beaumont is also able to interpret the non-verbal communication of others. She deduces that she is not as admired in this moment as she may have thought. The look on Mr. Lane's face tells her that he disapproves, and he

disapproves because Beaumont, as an unmarried woman, was not supposed to be riding around town on a horse with a married and controversial figure. In this moment Beaumont attempts to renegotiate social codes for women. She offers an alternative reading of a woman paired with a notable community figure in public. By nature of their proximity, she understands the moment as Bunyan transmitting some of his authority to her, but unfortunately, this challenge to women's roles does not play out in the community; it is still read as scandal. In this moment, she is not presenting herself as her community would like, and as a result she suffers.

When Beaumont returns from the meeting, her father locks her out of the house on a cold winter evening. Despite her pleas for admittance, she is refused. In the beginning of Beaumont's narrative, it was her placement on Bunyan's horse that was significant, but at this moment in the text, the focus on Beaumont's situation has changed. Now the key element is that she is locked out of her father's house. Throughout her text, Beaumont's physical placement and condition indicate either her spiritual or emotional state, as well as her level of authority, or challenge to it. On Bunyan's horse Beaumont both challenges her father's authority while affirming her own to make her own decisions concerning her soul. At this second point in the text, her separation from her father denotes the power struggle that takes place between them, as well as the resistance that she exhibits. After spending a cold night in the barn, she approaches her father in the morning. She describes how she "followed him about the yard," "got hold of his arms and cried, and hung about him" (Beaumont, 50-1). On this domestic stage, while she displays her beliefs, her relationship to her father, and her

suffering, she also addresses major social and spiritual issues facing women in her community. As Camden explains, "The dissenting congregation's emphasis on the individual's obedience to his or her conscience clearly upsets the structure of authority in the home."[34]

Beaumont attempts to reason with her father with the following: "'Father', said I, 'my soul is of more worth than so, and if you could stand in my stead before God to give an account for me at the great day, than I would obey you in this as well as other things'" (50). Beaumont's logic stresses her right as an individual to make decisions that concern her own soul. She will not renounce her congregation or its leader; she stands firm in her faith even if it means denying her father. Despite her protest, the reality is that as a woman without her father's protection, she is socially vulnerable; without access to her father, she is literally out in the cold world alone. She reflects: "What will become of me? To go to service and work for my living is a new thing to me; and so young as I am too. What shall I do? ... and these words came suddenly into my mind, 'Well, I have a God to go to still" (Beaumont, 52). In displaying her suffering, Beaumont demonstrates women's vulnerability in her community, and she also identifies her only recourse to authority within such a vulnerable position, God.

Though she is without shelter or protection, Beaumont is not alone. She does not use this narrative to display a woman who is weak; she uses it to display a woman who has recourse to other avenues of authority. Her father may not speak to her or see her, but her heavenly father does not abandon her. Chapter One of this study discussed Anne Wentworth's subversion of her husband's

[34] Camden, *The Narrative,* 20.

authority through the presentation of her marriage to Christ. Unable to find protection at home, she finds refuge in the arms of her heavenly husband. Similarly, Beaumont finds it in the soothing words of her loving lord after being rejected by her father. This night in the barn works as a sign of her role as God's chosen one. During the night, the divine's "heart-ravishing visits" (Beaumont, 46) and whisperings to her heart, prevent her from feeling the cold or fear. She writes, "My heart was wonderfully drawn out in prayer, and as I was in prayer, that scripture came with mighty power upon my heart, 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trials that are to try you'" (Beaumont, 48-9). As Beaumont explains, it is this word "beloved" that provides her with the most comfort. The word "beloved" functions in the same way that "bridegroom" does in Wentworth's text; it establishes a surrogate relationship in which the woman does not feel isolated or abandoned; God serves as her protection in society when all else fails her.

But midway through the narrative, Beaumont fails God. She returns to her father's house in one last attempt to reconcile with him. Once again she tells him that he cannot answer for her sins before God, once again affirming the limits of patriarchy. But her father will not let her in the house. He tells her, "if you will promise me never to go to a meeting again, I will give you the key and you shall go in" (Beaumont, 57). Beaumont goes on to say, "So many times together [he] held the key out to me, to see if I would promise him; and I as often refused to yield to him" (58). Time and again mention is made of the key and entrance to the house, seemingly parodying the offering of the keys to heaven; Beaumont

must choose between these earthly keys, and the keys to paradise. She chooses earthly comforts and takes the keys.

As soon as Beaumont enters her house she is filled with regret. The narrative goes on to recall the mental and spiritual trials that she endures. But on one night, after she has settled her father in, and is ready to go to sleep, she decides instead to visit "the throne of grace" (Beaumont, 64), and describes, "I found my heart wonderfully drawn out in prayer for several things for which I had not found in such a violent manner for some time before." The word then "ran through" her mind, "The set time is come" (Beaumont 64). When she is done praying, she goes to sleep, but is awakened by uneasy noises coming from her father's room. He is ill, and by morning he is dead.

Shortly after her father dies, Beaumont is confronted by Mr. Feery, a man Camden thinks may have been Beaumont's jilted lover. He accuses her of foul play. He claims that she poisoned her father. Beaumont describes that on hearing this accusation her "heart sunk" (72) within her. She reflects, "But although I knew myself clear in the sight of God, yet anybody must needs think these were hard things for one so young as I to meet with" (Beaumont, 72). Beaumont recognizes that what she experiences internally cannot be perceived, and therefore does not have as much power in the tangible, physical world. She remains focused on what will be visible to the jury, and reflects, "although I knew myself clear in the sight of God, yet without an abundance of his presence, I should sink before them. Thought I, if they should see me dejected and look daunted, they would think I was guilty" (Beaumont, 75). Protestations of her innocence are not

enough; Beaumont must show it. This leads to another significant use of spectacle within her text; she tells the doctor who is involved in the case, that she would like him "to open my father" (Beaumont, 73), because, "as my innocency is known to God, so I would have it known to men" (73). Though the doctor assures her that this is not necessary, while the trial is taking place, and after she finishes her testimony, she says to the coroner who is examining her, and to the jury, "if you are not all satisfied, I am freely willing that my father should be opened. As my innocency is known to God, so I would have it known to you" (Beaumont, 80). Beaumont repeats nearly the exact same statement for the purposes of her vindication. It is her body on display on Bunyan's horse that begins the trouble for her, and she seems determined to make her father's displayed body the solution.

Beaumont's desire to put her father's body on display is in line with Bordo and Lacan's theories of spectacle. To view him is to be in control. In her father's death, Beaumont attempts to represent her father as being on her side; she tries to maintain the patriarchal protection that she was so afraid to lose at the start of the narrative. The only difference now is that Beaumont would have the control over his protection since she is the one giving the order for the autopsy. During Beaumont's first "persecution," she cannot gain access to her father because he will not let her in the house. He tauntingly holds out a key inviting her to renounce her spiritual beliefs. By offering her father's body for an autopsy, Beaumont presents herself as having unrestrained access to her father. This is the ultimate display of the tentative and temporal strength of patriarchal control. In

death, the father loses all power over earthly possessions, including his body and his daughter.

The doctor assures Beaumont that there is no need to open her father, which leaves her concerned about the outcome of her trial. But Beaumont's fears prove unfounded; after she is questioned by the coroner, she comments, "So the room, where we was, was very full of people, and it seems great observation was made of my countenance, as I heard afterwards" (81). These passages from Beaumont demonstrate her awareness of the value placed on display in her culture. How she carries herself on the witness stand can and will affect the verdict of the trial. In the end, it is Beaumont's composure and devotion that exonerate her, and she finds the charges of patricide dismissed. She put on the proper display, and peace is restored.

After the trial, Agnes finds herself free of all familial pressure, but the social pressure remains. Beaumont's account of her persecutions draws to a close as she proudly states,

> And when I came into the market, the poor people could not follow their business that they were about, but I think I may say almost all the eyes of the market were fixed upon me. Here I could see half a dozen stand together, whispering and pointing at me; and there I should see another company stand talking together. So I walked through and through the market. Thought I, "if there were a thousand more of you, I could lift up my head before you all." I was very cheerful, for I was very well in my soul that day (83).

Beaumont's text ends with an image of her as the center of her town's attention. She reads their stares and whisperings as gossip, and her reaction to it is what is most interesting about this passage. The narrative of her persecutions begins with Beaumont experiencing a prideful moment; she is on horseback with Bunyan and she feels raised up and overconfident. After the trials that result from her pride, one might think that her attitude would change at the end of the narrative, but it does not. She still proudly declares, "I could lift my head up before you all"; the difference is that this pride is caused from being well in her soul. She has been vindicated, and she walks through town with her head held high because she has no cause for shame. This passage demonstrates that Beaumont's text is unlike Bunyan's in that it is not a spiritual journey; it is a social struggle that deals with her level of freedom and authority. Her soul is in God's hands from the very start of the text; the only shift that takes place in the narrative is that by the end, there is no one to control Agnes Beaumont.

II. Anna Trapnel

While Beaumont's text begins with a picture of a home and an excerpt explaining that it is the story of a woman "Intimately acquainted with John Bunyan, and to whose meetings she went contrary to her father's wishes, he objecting to his daughter attending such" (36), Anna Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone* begins with "A relation of something spoken in Whitehall, by Anna Trapnel, being in the visions of God. Relating to the Governors, Army, Churches,

Ministry, Universities, and the whole Nation. Uttered in prayers and spiritual songs, by an inspiration extraordinary, and full of wonder in the eleventh month, called January, 1653" (1). Trapnel's intended audience and the scope of her work is not centered on the home; she is concerned with major political and spiritual issues. As a Fifth Monarchist, Trapnel's spiritual beliefs were very much connected to politics; the Fifth Monarchy Men believed Oliver Cromwell would lead in the fifth monarchy on earth, which would then lead to the second coming of Christ. Her group, however, was betrayed by Cromwell when he dissolved the Rump Parliament, removed the non-conformist stronghold on the government, and declared himself Lord Protector.[35] Her prophecy is a reflection of her political concerns, as is her use of spectacle; she focuses heavily on how she appears and acts while under the divine's influence, thereby validating her authority to participate in political, social, and religious debate.

Trapnel and Beaumont also differ in that Trapnel did not only write one text; she wrote three which were published in her lifetime, two of which will be discussed at length in this study. This chapter focuses on *The Cry of a Stone*, the record of her prophecies, because she herself is the spectacle through most of the text until she goes into her trance, and a witness to her communion with God writes down what she says. Her second work, *Report and Plea,* is the record of her trial; she was not tried for patricide like Beaumont, rather she stands trial for "aspersing the government."[36] In this text, Trapnel employs very little spectacle and instead draws on the rhetoric of scripture. This text will be discussed in the

[35] Hillary Hinds, ed., *The Cry of a Stone* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), xxxi-xxxii.
[36] Ibid., xviii.

next chapter to demonstrate how scripture and speech are also used to create authority in prophetic texts. The stark differences in the audience, purpose, and style of Trapnel's two texts exemplify her rhetorical skill.

Within *The Cry of a Stone*, Trapnel includes many different forms of spectacle. Like Beaumont, there is the spectacle of her self, presented in this text as nearly lifeless. There are also the spectacles that God shows to her while she is in her trance, and that she reproduces in her narrative. Then there is the contradictory spectacle of the woman in a trance who dictates an entire text. In all three instances of spectacle in Trapnel's work, there is a delicate balance of breaking and building her self. Though she records visions and recites prophecies that condemn politicians and religious figures in her culture based on her own set of religious and political beliefs, she does so claiming all the while that she has nothing to do with it. Trapnel appears to lose control of her narrative, and it is in part by relinquishing control that she gains it.

The delicate tension displayed in Trapnel's work between her denial of self and creation of self generates her authority. Much attention is usually paid to her declaration, "Oh Lord thy servant knows there is no self in this thing" (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 45). These are Trapnel's words as recorded by her relator while she is in a trance. Yet, the very first sentence of her work establishes who she is, thereby centering on self:

> I am Anna Trapnel, the daughter of William Trapnel, shipwright, who lived in Poplar, in Stepney parish; my father and mother living and dying in the profession of the Lord Jesus. My mother died nine years ago, the

> last words she uttered upon her death-bed, were these to the Lord for her daughter: "Lord! Double thy spirit upon my child."
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 6)

Who she is and where she comes from opens the narrative, signaling their significance to her work. Though this is not an overt moment of spectacle, it is a display of her heritage, and it is also a display of her spiritual legacy. Both of her parents were devout, and in her mother's last moments, she called down the spirit of the Lord on her daughter. This is the first moment of proof of her special relationship to God. Just as Beaumont's opening sketch of a home signals the locus of the text's drama, Trapnel's biographical opening indicates the importance of who she is to the prophecy, even if she is shattered later on.

The first eighteen pages of Trapnel's work, which are her own record before she goes into the trance, all work to demonstrate the validity of her claim to prophecy, mainly through representations of herself. After establishing her biographical background, Trapnel then goes on to affirm her position as prophet by narrating her first communication with the divine, a moment of communication which relies heavily on physical spectacle:

> Seven years ago I being visited with a fever, given over by all for dead, the Lord then gave me faith to believe from that scripture, "After two days I will revive thee, the third day I will raise thee up, and thou shalt live in my sight" [Hosea 6:2]; which two days were two weeks that I should lie in that fever, and that very time that it took me, that very hour it should leave

> me [John 4:52-53], and I should rise and walk, which was accordingly.
>
> (*The Cry*, 6)

In this passage a physical affliction is marked as a moment of communication between Trapnel and the divine. She is on the brink of death when God revives her with a passage from scripture. Trapnel puts herself on display as weak and sick, and then demonstrates her connection to God through her moment of healing.

On one level, this moment of display supports all that Dolan and Boose say about the need in early modern England to have a woman's body controlled. In order to properly present herself as a prophet, Trapnel must demonstrate how she has resigned her will to that of God's. Yet there is another dimension to this moment of spectacle in Trapnel's text; it cannot be read without the scriptural passages to which she alludes. The citation from Hosea is reproduced almost exactly as it appears in the Bible, where it reads, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hosea 6:2). The only change Trapnel makes to this passage is that she changes "we" to "thee" to focus the passage on herself rather than a larger group of people. This passage is not only a promise of healing for believers, it is also a messianic prophecy. Like Christ, Trapnel will be raised up on the third day. With this excerpt from scripture, her illness becomes not only a sign of her physical resignation to God, but also of her connection to God, Christ, and to prophecy.

While the passage from Hosea connects her to Christ's life, the passage from John makes a comment on the need for spectacle. It is an account of how

Christ healed the son of a royal official in Capernaum: "So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him'. The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'"[37] Trapnel drastically changes the wording of this passage, preserving only the idea of an illness ending when God says it will end. Why would Trapnel include the biblical citation if her version of it has very little relationship to the original? The answer may be the context of the passage from John. In the story of the man from Capernaum Christ demonstrates who he is. This chapter is the record of how Jesus reveals to his followers that he is the Messiah by doing things that include not eating and drinking. Just like Trapnel, he offers physical proof of his holiness. Two verses before the ones that Trapnel cites, Christ says to the man from Capernaum, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."[38] Christ recognizes that visual proof is essential to convincing people, and by including a reference to this section of the Bible in her own visual proof of her prophetic calling, Trapnel makes it clear that she is working to establish her authority as prophet with a combination of the scriptural and the spectacular.

Within this same chapter of John, Christ's disciples urge him to eat or drink, but Christ replies, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."[39] Part of Christ's spectacle is that he is able to survive on a different kind of substance; he is supported in spirit. Like Christ, Paul offers this physical gesture of fasting to demonstrate that man can survive on more than bread; for three days he refuses

[37] John 4: 52 (NRSV).
[38] John 4: 48 (NRSV).
[39] John 4: 32 (NRSV).

to eat or drink. In Acts 9:6 God gives Saul the instruction to go into the city to see what is being done there. This is the moment of his conversion to Paul, the saint known for spreading Christianity throughout Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, in the biblical account of Paul's conversion, it is said, "For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank."[40] Just like Trapnel, Paul's communication with God takes away his need for physical sustenance. Just like St. Paul, Trapnel spreads God's word. This alignment with St. Paul is also significant because it is St. Paul who is so often cited as the authoritative source for women not preaching. Yet Trapnel connects herself to St. Paul to achieve the authority his words are usually used to deny.

The deprivation of the body displays the strength of the soul, and like Christ and St. Paul, Trapnel also employs this strategy in her work. The narrator recalls at the start of Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone*,

> She was carried forth in a spirit of prayer and singing, from noon till night, and went down into Mr. Roberts lodging, who keeps the ordinary in Whitehall. And finding her natural strength going from her, she took her bed at eleven o'clock in the night, where she lay from that day of the month, to the nineteenth day of the same month, in all twelve days together; the first five days neither eating nor drinking anything more or less, and the rest of the time once in twenty-four hours, sometimes ate very little toast in small beer, sometimes only chewed it, and took down the moisture only, sometimes drank of the small beer, and sometimes only washed her mouth therewith, and cast it out. (4)

[40] Acts 9:9 (NRSV).

According to Hinds, the ability to go without food, water, and/or sleep was frequently associated with witchcraft,[41] but in referring to these scriptural passages, Trapnel puts her physical feats into biblical and prophetic context. Like Christ and St. Paul, Trapnel fasts to signal that she is in fact touched by God. She is fed with the words of God instead of food and drink, and this authenticates her position as prophetess, since no "normal" woman or man could go so many days without eating or drinking. In addition to this display resembling that of Christ and St. Paul, it is also reminiscent of the representation of Anne Askew. Both are women being read and interpreted by a male eye, and in that sense, the other level of meaning here is that she is transcending her womanly body. But like Bradstreet, her physicality and her weak womanly frame are no longer impediments to her role as prophet because they are rendered unimportant by her deep spiritual experience. It is as if she has escaped her body. But this spectacle cannot be read solely as a woman's body or solely as a prophet's body. Neither can it be read as a moment of pure display or as pure scriptural reference; its significance is that it is functioning on both levels. The authority of one empowers the other. Trapnel draws on many rhetorical strategies to position herself as a prophet, and she also carefully depicts herself as both a proper woman and as a proper prophet. Self-representation through spectacle allows her to gain authority as both.

Yet self-representation is not the only aspect of spectacle in Trapnel's work. Not only does the text include vivid descriptions of her placement, state, and behavior, it also includes vivid descriptions of what she sees in her mind.

[41] Hinds, *The Cry*, xx.

Trapnel sees and records her visions, and includes them in her text in an effort to convey her political and religious protests and beliefs. The spectacle of her lifeless body validates and authorizes the spectacular representations of her communications with God. Trapnel and her narrator both refer to them as powerful, and both emphasize Trapnel's role in the transmission of these images and visions. Though she is "away" physically, lying limp on a bed, not needing food or water, it is her song that carries the message and paints the picture.

On August 6, 1647, the New Model Army occupied London to "protect Independent interests in Parliament and impeach eleven Presbyterian MP's."[42] On this day, Trapnel constantly communicates with the divine. She explains, "in which day I had a glorious vision of the New Jerusalem, which melted me into rivers of tears, that I shrunk down in the room; and cried out in my heart, 'Lord, what is this?' It was answered to me, 'A discovery of the glorious state of whole Sion, in the reign of Lord Jesus, in the midst of them, and of it thou shalt have more visions hereafter'" (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 7). In this excerpt there are two levels of spectacle; there is the spectacle of Trapnel communicating with God and then there is the spectacle that is revealed to her and that she records. Before she narrates the vision, she narrates the state she is in while receiving it. At the start of this vision, Trapnel once again draws attention to the dissolution of her self. The communion with the divine causes her to "shrink down in the room," again dissolving out of the frame. The experience that she has melts her into a river of tears which paradoxically draws attention to her while at the same time removing

[42] Ibid., 86.

her from the narrative. This display of emptiness, much like the display of nobody in Gallagher's study, is what enables her to construct her authority.

Even though Trapnel goes to great lengths to describe how she is no longer involved in this communication, she continues to describe her role in their interaction; she never truly dissolves out of the text. She does not go on simply to relay God's message and the vision that he provides; instead she remains as an active participant in the conversation. In the first of a series of visions, she asks God to explain what something is, and he goes on to answer her. She "cried out in my heart, 'Lord, what is this?' It was answered me, 'A Discovery of the glorious state of whole Sion" (Trapnel, *The Cry,* 7). Throughout the day of August 6th, God provides Trapnel with a "play by play" of what is happening and why. She writes,

> Then repairing to my chamber again, I looked out at the window, where I saw a flag, at the end of the street. This word I had presently upon it, 'Thou seest that flag, the flag of defiance is with the army, the king of Salem in on their side, he marcheth before them, he is the captain of their salvation.' At the other end of the street, I, looking saw a hill (it was Blackheath); it was said to me, 'Thou seest that hill, no one but many hills rising up against Hermon Hill, they shall fall down and become valleys before it.' It was then said unto me, 'Go into the city, and see what is done there [Acts 9:6]; where I saw various things from the Lord in order to his appearance with the army.
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 7)

It is as if God is inside her mind interpreting the world around her; first she is told the meaning of the flag, then of the hill. This style of communication with the divine is very different from that of Beaumont's or Wentworth's. Beaumont would receive scriptural passages, dreams, or words of comfort that would help her to cope with what was happening in the world around her, and Wentworth would see and hear things that she may interpret or learn from, but Trapnel actually has the world decoded by the divine voice. This give and take and this direct and immediate connection to God keep Trapnel in the text even when she claims to be dissolved, empty, or shattered. There are also many instances in the text where Trapnel presents a personality very much involved in her communication with God along side a denial of self. At one point Trapnel is in despair and being tempted by Satan. As she resists her temptation, there is the following exchange between Trapnel and God, as God begins:

> Ask now what thou wilt in the height or in the depth, and see whether God will not give thee desire of thy soul. "I replied and said I would not tempt the Lord; he answered me it is not a tempting of God when he requires this of thee. I said then, "Lord, give me a humble, broken, melting frame of spirit, pour upon me a spirit of prayer and supplication," which immediately the Lord did in abundant measure.
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry,* 11)

As much as Trapnel makes the claim to be dissolved, in this passage she is carrying on a give and take exchange with God as if she were communicating with a person and not a divinity. Not only do God and Trapnel seem to converse

equally with each other, Trapnel demonstrates some degree of power in this exchange. As proof of the power of the divine, God tells her to ask for anything she desires in her soul. She asks for the "melting frame of spirit," and it is given to her. Nothing darts through her soul, nothing comes upon her suddenly; rather, she presents her relationship with God as one of mutual love and respect, not one of submission. The paradox of dissolution and inclusion of self is evident once again in this passage. She keeps asking for a broken, melted frame so that she can be in a "spirit of prayer," but it is her wish, her desire, her presence in the prayer, that brings her this close to God.

While presenting a contradictory perspective on her being in the text, Trapnel also includes the spectacle of her visions, which work to align her with the prophetic tradition. As Trapnel looks out the window on August sixth, she is given an interpretation of the world around her. Instead of being the spectacle herself, she serves as a conduit for the spectacle that is before her, and it is her communion with God that gives the scene its meaning. The spectacle of the army marching into the capital is transformed in Trapnel's work from simply a political and military act into an act that has major religious and biblical significance. This vision also allows her to take a moment in time that is public, and well known, and invest it with the specific meaning God has shown her. Unlike Beaumont, Wentworth, and Bunyan, Trapnel deals with affairs of state, not affairs of the home or soul. Trapnel establishes at the very start of her work that she is a supporter of Cromwell, by showing that God is a supporter of Cromwell; he is referred to as having "the king of Salem" or Christ, on his side. Just as Cromwell

is aligned with Christ, England is aligned with the holy land, and the proceedings of the day become an allegory for biblical events. Trapnel takes a moment of spectacle that is both public and well known, and invests it with her own, or as she presents it, God's interpretation of events.

After her vision of the city, she has another in which Cromwell appears to her as a bull:

> I saw a great darkness in the earth and a marvelous dust like a thick smoke ascending upward from the earth; and I beheld at a little distance a great company of cattle, some like bulls, and others like oxen, and so lesser, their faces and heads like men, having each of them a horn on either side of their heads. For the foremost his countenance was perfectly like unto Oliver Cromwell's.
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 15)

The bull of Cromwell then attacks Trapnel, as she simultaneously hears the words, "I will be thy safety" (15). After the bull destroys nearly everything in its path, he is also destroyed and tumbles into a grave, at which point Trapnel is told, "Mark that scripture…in appearance a lamb, but pushing like a beast" (15). This vision once again connects political events to biblical events, allowing Trapnel to question her government with God-given authority, by comparing Cromwell to one of the beasts of the apocalypse. This vision also contrasts appearance and reality to interrogate current shifts in the political power dynamic. Cromwell at first appears to be England's savior, and then the Fifth Monarchists discover he is not; the bull appears to be dangerous and powerful, but then he himself is

overthrown. This vision enacts a threat against Cromwell, and it also emphasizes how quickly power can change hands. Things are not always as they seem, and the clearest example of this is the lifeless, apparently powerless figure of Trapnel. After this vision she goes into a trance and relinquishes her voice to her relator. She further minimizes her involvement in the text, in a way silencing herself, creating the appearance of a lamb; but her words do not lose their forcefulness.

Throughout Trapnel's work, issues of power and authority are bound up with issues of language. While she is in her trance, she prophecies,

> Oh, but when shall all the sons and all the children cry for King Jesus? The reason is, because of the infirmities of the flesh, and because thine are of a stammering speech, and of a stuttering tongue, but thou hast promised that the time shall come that there shall not be a people of a deeper speech than thy people, and they shall not be of a stammering tongue [Isaiah 33:19]. Come oh all you disputants, monarchs, scribes and rabbis of the world, come forth now, and let us see what arguments you can bring forth against the spirit…oh, you shall be the men that shall be of a stammering lip, and of a stuttering tongue [Isaiah 28:11].
>
> (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 40)

In this passage, Trapnel presents a vision of the future that is a complete reversal of power. Those who are considered wise, and who are in possession of language, such as scribes, monarchs and rabbis, will be the ones who will lose the ability to speak. In presenting this passage from Isaiah in this way, Trapnel alters the meaning of the biblical context. In Isaiah, there is the promise that the

'insolent" who are of a stammering tongue will no longer be seen, but there is no mention of those who have power and speech being turned into those of a stammering tongue. Trapnel adds this detail because she recognizes that those who possess the power of speech also possess authority.

Even before Trapnel goes into her trance, she recalls a vision that once again enacts a shift in power that is governed by language:

> First I saw a great tower, and the rooms thereof were like to the council rooms at Whitehall, which I saw strawed thick with gunpowder; and at a little distance I saw a white tower, for whiteness and sparkling glory, I never saw anything to parallel with it; and looking into it, I beheld many precious saints, with their eyes fixed toward heaven, their countenances shining as the sun.
>
> (*The Cry*, 14)

She goes on to describe how around the saints there are colonels and the army chief, and they are trying to fire upon the white tower but they cannot. Trapnel then writes,

> Presently upon this, it was said to me, "Whereas thou seest this high tower whereon the gunpowder is, it is a great many men of the wise and politic, grave and judicious so called, that are drawing up together, and their wisdom, power, and policy is that gunpowder that thou seest, and the match and army men, or the chiefest part of the army that shall assent and join with that tower and gunpowder against the white tower… Presently this scripture likened them to those of the old world, that said, "Let us

> build a Babel that may reach to heaven" [Genesis 11:4], and God came down and confounded their language, so he will do by these that were rising up against the white tower, as it is written and in the Proverbs. (14)

Scripture, politics, and language are bound up together in this vision. The military is the revolutionary force that fires upon the "wise," "politic," "grave and judicious so called." In Trapnel's vision the true "wisdom, power, and policy" belong to the revolutionary military force, as it tries to destroy the seemingly unholy tower of false supremacy. What Trapnel describes here is an actual revolution, but it is also one that is a battle of the intellect. The clash between the so called wise and the army that fires with wisdom begs questions such as: who is truly wise? How should wisdom be used? And it also implies that wisdom and power go hand in hand. Trapnel dramatizes and concretizes this abstract struggle through her vision and spectacle by linking it to the tower of Babel. She elevates the current political climate to Biblical proportions and also connects the clash of wisdom to one of language. Within this larger battle, there are also the ramifications of this debate for someone like Trapnel. If the authority and power that come with wisdom and language are won by the armies at the foot of the ivory tower, then as a member of the Fifth Monarchy Men, she also becomes privy to them.

Throughout her text Trapnel continues to have visions that reflect the political climate of England, and she continues to emphasize the deprivation of the body in conjunction with the fullness of the spirit. At one point, her friends even tell her that fasting has exposed her to temptations. She, of course, asks God

if this is true, to which he answers, "No, for thou shalt every way be supplied in body and spirit" (Trapnel, *The Cry*, 8). With God's assurance, Trapnel goes on to deprive herself:

> So I remained praying, keeping many fasting days in my chamber, till six weeks before Dunbar fight; and then I had visions given me concerning that first overthrow of the Scots, where I saw myself in the fields, and beheld our army, and their general, and hearing this voice, saying, "Behold Gideon and the lapping ones with him!" (8)

Trapnel once again begins by presenting her body in the proper prophetic state; like St. Paul she overcomes the weaknesses of the body and is sustained by the spirit of the divine. She then injects herself into the spectacle that she is about to describe. Not only does she relay a description of the vision that God has given her, she also places herself within it. She is underneath her own gaze, seeing herself witnessing a vision of the political events that are about to unfold. She makes herself a witness to Gideon's, or Cromwell's, victorious triumph over the Scots, and in this way keeps herself in the prophecy. Following this vision, Trapnel once again describes the state of her body:

> Immediately I saw the Scots fall down before them, and a marvelous voice of praise I heard in our army. Then was I taken weak in my outward man, keeping my bed fourteen days, neither drinking nor eating but a draught of small beer, and a bit of toast once in twenty-four hours; and as soon as this vision was over, I broke forth to the singing of their deliverance in Scotland; in which time many resorted to me of them that were for the

> Presbyterian Government…and they related this vision to Mr. Ash the minister, who waited till they saw it accomplished, and then admired.
>
> (*The Cry,* 9)

Like Christ and the man from Capernaum, Trapnel meets with admiration, belief, and authority because the miraculous is accomplished. From her weak body comes the truth about the future. The body appears as a woman's body and as a prophet's body should, and this makes way for her powerful speech.

III. Eleanor Davies

Like Trapnel, Lady Eleanor Davies believed the end of days was near, but Davies did not believe this because of her affiliation with a religious group, as Trapnel did as part of the Fifth Monarchists. She believed it because God spoke to her and told her that in nineteen years the world would come to an end. Lady Eleanor stands apart from the other women included in this study because she was a gentlewoman. As a member of court, Lady Eleanor held much more social authority than either Trapnel or Beaumont, yet unlike Trapnel and Beaumont she spent many years in both prison and a mental hospital. Part of the reason Davies drew so much attention was because many of her prophecies came true. She foretold that her first husband would die for destroying her work, and that her second husband would pay for doing the same. Her first husband died shortly

thereafter, and her second husband went insane.[43] Her public and aristocratic status did not afford her added protection from persecution for her publications.

Lady Eleanor at first does not seem to fit in a discussion of spectacle. Within her texts, she does not go into trances, she does not suffer illnesses that are meant to prepare her for the prophetic voice, she does not write about herself standing trial (though she does appear before a court many times in her life), she does not endure any public suffering or trials within the pages of her texts. Yet her texts are often addressed to the people responsible for her suffering. Unlike Trapnel and Beaumont, she does not record the public's reaction to her. Her texts are a medium for her visions, her prophecies, and her anger against those who have persecuted her. Similar in tone to the texts by Anne Wentworth described in Chapter 1, Davies's works aggressively censure many different figures. But Davies is included in this chapter on spectacle because her texts are the record of her life and career as a prophetic spectacle to her family, community, and government. Lady Eleanor's prophetic work did not focus on her inner conversion and spiritual crisis; rather, she brings her protests and her views to King and Parliament, shaping the most public prophetic career included in this study. In this sense, her texts themselves become spectacles.

The titles of Lady Eleanor's works alone suggest how public they are in nature. She composed tracts such as, "Given to the Elector Prince Charles of the Rhyne," "The Lady Eleanor Her Appeal to the High Court of Parliament," "Great Brittains Visitation," and "To the Most honorable the High Court of Parliament

[43]Esther S. Cope, ed., *Prophetic Writing of Lady Eleanor Davies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xvi.

and Samson's Legacie." Each of these texts is aimed at either a public figure or institution, making the publications displays of her beliefs and objectives, as well as of her life and history. Though Lady Eleanor's works do not display her actions, her behavior, or her innermost thoughts, they do reveal her intellect. As Esther S. Cope explains, "Both the form and content of Lady Eleanor's tracts illustrate, in addition to her facility with language and her scholarship, her familiarity with the subject matter of a traditional education in liberal arts."[44] Lady Eleanor's familiarity with rhetoric and form make her choice of breaking with it a display. According to Cope, she compares her works to hieroglyphics, because they could only be understood by a few, and that is the way she wanted it.[45] Davies' rhetorical use of scripture, anagrams, and images within her prophecies is therefore a display of her artistic and authorial choices that are designed to enlighten those who understand, and to confuse those who are not worthy of understanding. It is in this way that Davies' work includes spectacle.

Scriptural passages are used very differently than they are in Beaumont and Trapnel's narratives. For Davies, they are not employed to show emotions or thoughts that pass through or dart through her heart and mind. Rather, Davies produces scriptural exegesis in which she retells Biblical stories in an effort to comment on current political or religious events. Her retelling of scripture is also used to frame her more personal gripes with King and Parliament. For Davies, scripture works as a teleological mirror for the present day, and in this way functions almost like the facing pages of an emblem book. She instructs her

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[44] Esther S. Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, Never Soe Mad a Ladie* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 11.
[45] Ibid., 12.

audience, whether it be King or Parliament, to look to these biblical narratives or images to learn how to deal with the present. Often, the biblical passages she chooses to retell focus on moments of spectacle, and are therefore vivid and engaging, and in some sense performative.

Her text, "Given to the Elector Prince Charles of the Rhyne" (1633), is a retelling of Daniel, chapter five, in which Belshazzar sees the hand of God writing on the wall. As Cope explains, Lady Eleanor often cited this text as one of the reasons she was called before the Court of High Commissions and then sentenced to the Gatehouse.[46] The text even begins as a play would. She establishes the setting, "A Table, Shewing what affinity between Great Babylon and Great Britain, with significant names" (Davies, 60). Davies then continues to provide a list of characters as often appears before a printed drama. The table appears as follows:

> *Daniel,* Judgment of God.
>
> *Nebuchadnezzar,* bewailing of the Kindred.
>
> *Belahazzar,* without treasure, or a searcher for treasure; he last of the Caldean Kings.
>
> *Mene,* number, &c. *Mene-Laus*, power of the people.
>
> Also *London, Babylon*, confusion signifying; and Scotland otherwise called *Caledonia: Baby-Charles* bids him beware (whose Anrgr.) *Charles be: Belchaser.*
>
> And so from *Nimrods* days unto *Nebuchadnezzars* about 1700 years, the

[46] Cope, *Prophetic Writings*, 59.

Roman Empires date out, puts into the number.

(Davies, 60)

Before Davies begins her retelling of the Biblical story, she explains who the characters are. She also connects Belshazzar to Charles, King Charles' nephew, through the anagram "Charles Be," signaling that the lesson learned by Belshazzar is the same lesson that needs to be recognized by Charles. Furthermore, as Cope explains, "In advising the elector of the dire consequences that might befall him if he did not heed God's signs, she was giving the same admonition to Charles Stuart, King of Great Britain."[47] It is as if the Bible is the instructional play that the people in current history will watch and learn from through her narrative.

After her list of characters, Davies then goes on to include more details as to the setting: "To the Palsgrave of the Rhyne, Charles, Prince Elector: The Palm of the Hand, Dan. Cap 5. The Tune to, *Who list a Soldiers life,* & c. Psal. *I will utter my grave matter on the Harp*. By the Lady *Eleanor, Anno* 1633" (61). To add to the performative nature of the text, Lady Eleanor includes the tune to which it can be sung, and as Cope adds in her footnote, "A picture of one staff of the song is printed above the first line."[48] Lady Eleanor then goes on to tell the tale of the hand of the divine that writes on the wall while Belshazzar dines. The biblical story that she chooses to recount is a tale that involves spectacle, witness, and interpretation. As she writes in her song:

Who might it read, alas, the thing,

[47] Cope, *Handmaid*, 64.
[48] Ibid., 61.

Belshazzar loud doth shout;
Calls for Magicians all with speed,
Came in, as wise went out.

(Davies, 62)

Everyone struggles to interpret the writing on the wall, until the Queen comes in and recommends that Daniel decipher it. Daniel concludes his interpretation with,

But he in whose hand rests thy life,
even breathe thy ways all,
Thou hast not glorified him
sent this wrote on the wall.
God numbered thy Kingdom hath
ended; the Hand points here,
In Ballance his weighed thee too,
the set hour drawing near.

(Davies, 66-67)

The passage that Davies chooses as instruction for Charles uses the Bible to mirror current events, but it also mirrors Davies' role within them. The text ends with Davies' inclusion of "Reveal O Daniel" in brackets; the word, "anagram" then appears next to the brackets, and in another set of brackets on the other side of the word anagram, there is the name, "Eleanor Audley" (68). The brackets and words look like mirror images, equating Davies to the prophet Daniel. Her presentation of herself as the prophet surfaces again in "Warning to the Dragon" with only the name "Daniel." Just as Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall

for Belshazzar, Lady Eleanor, acting as Daniel, interprets the world around Charles for him. This spectacle almost functions as a fantasy sequence, with Lady Eleanor imaging herself like Daniel, having the respect and trust of the court, and effecting change in the government. Unfortunately, Lady Eleanor's interpretation of the writing on the wall does not earn her a higher position at court; on the contrary, it contributes to earning her a jail sentence, illustrating the limited level of acceptance for a public, female prophet.

Lady Eleanor also uses Chapter 2 of the book of Daniel to frame her prophecy concerning the future of England in "The Lady Eleanor, her appeale to the high Court of Parliament." In this chapter of the Bible, Joseph must interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a large statue: "Though sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon the feet. That of iron, and clay, and brake them in peeces, & c." (77). Like, "Given to the Elector" it is a spectacle within a spectacle. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream, which is a spectacle, of this statue, which is another imposing spectacle. Also like 'Given to the Elector," this text has a performative aspect as Davies includes a repeating chorus, "Thou sawest, till that a stone was cut out without hands" (78, 79) that appears throughout her tract. This phrase draws the reader's attention to what has been seen. The stone cut without hands in the dream is a sign of the power and might of the divine, and Davies wants this to be recognized. The appearance and tangible evidence of the miraculous interests Davies, since all of her prophecies are meant to demonstrate and validate her call. By framing her political goals within this particular biblical story Davies reinforces her role as a prophet, and

also, once again, mirrors her relationship to her government. She is part of court in England, but she holds no real political power. Like Joseph she has access to figures of authority, such as God and the government, but does not hold any true power. But Davies uses her retelling of the Nebuchadnezzar story to attribute spiritual authority to herself. Davies does not just emulate the Biblical prophet, she is the Biblical prophet.

As she describes the large statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, she repeats her biblical chorus, and then writes, "By Thee beheld, as much to say, to read a certain Manuscript, the weighty stone become a Booke, not waiting long for Priviledge, Imprinted, howsoever soonafter" (Davies, 78). Lady Eleanor makes the claim, "Thus represented in this Mirror of former times, the present age the visage thereof" (78). Her text is presented here as a spectacle; it is a mirror; it is a visage, both visual elements that indicate that her work is a display, and a reflection of the present day. For example, Charles consents to Strafford's execution just as Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2: 12-13 orders his wise men destroyed.[49] In this sense she is using the Bible as a model for understanding present times, but something else is reflected as well, and it is Davies' role. In this mirroring, she becomes Daniel, the prophetic interpreter who can read the spectacle of the king's dream, and the biblical prophet who can influence the king's decisions. In both biblical retellings, Davies includes stories that involve the prophetic interpretation of what is initially cryptic in nature. Her work, like the messages from God, is cryptic to most, because it is a message from the

[49] Ibid., 101.

divine. Her role as prophet is to deliver the message to those who ask for clarification.

In order to meet her goal, she must in some way validate her position, but for Lady Eleanor, her narratives never center on the nature of her communication with God, only the content of it. After she likens her manuscript to the biblical text, she continues,

> Certainly, in what yeare testifying the Worlds dissolution, Manifested with a heavie one: In the yeare One thousand six hundred twentie five. That great Plague yeare, out of Darkness, when the Visions translated *of the Man*, *greatly beloved DANIELL*. For the great dayes breaking forth, cleared those clowdy Characters: As delivered not without a token, since made good, the Brittle standing of his own Kingdomes, dedicated to the King of Great Brittaine, Defendor of the Faith. And of whose making to justifie here, by whom Published; though hitherto by authority withstood. ELEANOR AUDELEY, handmayden of the most high GOD of Heaven, this booke brought forth by Her, fifth daughter of George, Lord of Castlehaven, Lord AUDLEY, and Tuitchet. No inferior PEERE of this Land, in Ireland, the fifth Earle.
>
> (Davies, 78-79)

She places this passage in the midst of her message to the government, making it seem almost like an interruption. Her description of her call to prophecy does not come first in an effort to bolster her authority as a prophet. Rather, it comes after she has already begun to work with and interpret the biblical passages from

Daniel, making her description of her call to prophecy part of the prophecy, and not the foundation for it. Lady Eleanor also does not present herself as a vessel for the prophetic word. Her identity is not dissolved to make way for a prophetic voice, rather, she is Daniel. She solidifies the notion that she is both Lady Eleanor and the prophet Daniel by including her lineage in her call to prophecy. Her bloodline stands as proof of her authority in conjunction with her contact with Daniel. As in her use of anagram at the conclusion of "Given to the Elector," one does not negate or take over the other; both are displayed within the text.

Cope explains that anagrams were prevalent in cultured society; therefore, Davies' use of them "allowed her to employ her intellect and amuse herself while accomplishing her mission."[50] In using the anagrams, Davies is displaying both her wit and her awareness of and participation in "cultured society." Davies is an educated member of the aristocracy, and rather than deny or dissolve these aspects of her life, she puts them on display within her prophecy. According to Cope, Lady Eleanor was known for "watching her printers like a hawk" and "making handwritten corrections on printed copies of her tracts," in which "she varied her spelling in order to have the letter she needed for the anagrams."[51] Lady Eleanor took the publication of her work and the presentation of her ideas very seriously. The quality and accuracy of published and public anagrams were representations and reflections of her.

Lady Eleanor's simultaneous maintenance of her own identity and her prophetic identity sets her apart from other women prophets of the seventeenth

[50] Ibid., 12.
[51] Ibid., 12.

century. It also impacts the style of her work, and her connection to her society. Like the hieroglyphics to which she compares her work, Davies' texts are cryptic and often confusing. The ambiguity in her style and content divides Davies from the public to which she has such easy access. Though Davies uses word play to participate in cultured society, and though she is a public figure and member of the aristocracy, she appears to work within her own system of meaning and therefore loses her connection to any larger audience. Megan Matchinske argues that with the exception of her tracts written to her daughter, her texts are so inwardly focused that they neither have an audience nor elicit a group response.[52] This is in part because there were different notions of subject formation for men and for women; women were increasingly being kept out of the public arena so there was no real definition for the social woman. Though Davies' use of spectacle seems to be both internal (i.e. her visions) and external (i.e. her behavior and censure), her connection to community according to Matchinske is still lacking. Matchinske instead claims that Davies is always focused on the individual. However, Cope makes the exact opposite claim. She argues that Davies, instead of focusing on inward spiritual experiences, is concerned with a broader audience. As Cope explains, "By prophesying without the permission of officials, Lady Eleanor challenged the hierarchical and patriarchal authority which was the basis of order and family and society and in church and state."[53] The disparity between Matchinske's and Cope's interpretations of Davies' relationship to her community testifies to her works' abstruse style and content.

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[52] Megan Matchinske, "Holy Hatred: Formations of the Gendered Subject in English Apocalyptic Writing, 1625-1651," *ELH* 60 (1993): 361-2.
[53] Cope, *Prophetic Writings,* xv.

Davies' complex prophesies present her audience with metaphors, images, and spectacles that are difficult to understand and interpret. In "Ezekiel the Prophet," Davies recalls her visionary experiences in the Gatehouse: "And I looked, and behold a whirl-wind came out of the north, a great cloud, &c where those winged living creatures four, & c, represented by the Tabernacle; also the Lamp, &c, as it were those Curtains, every one of one measure joyned one to another with so many loops or eyes" (221-222). Lady Eleanor continues, "Whereof Apocalyps the Fourth thus, of the aforesaid four Beasts, and the lightning proceeding out of the Throne, shews first of the Lamp; and there were Seven Lamps of fire, which are the Seven Spirits of God, &c. Caps. The Seven Spirits and Seven Eyes sent forth into all the Earth, as their Characters [ ] read through the worlds" (222). Within her description of the four beasts of the apocalypse, Lady Eleanor includes symbols. As a footnote to the brackets, Cope explains, "At this point in the tract are printed symbols: a circle with a dot in the center, and a semi-circle; they may represent an eye and horn or the sun and moon" (222). Lady Eleanor's inclusion of cryptic symbols is another example of the play that exists within her text. It is also an example of the problems in Lady Eleanor's work. Unlike the performative aspects of Beaumont's and Trapnel's texts that can be read and interpreted because they are behaviors that carry socially recognized meaning, the significance of Lady Eleanor's symbols is mainly lost because they are not operating within an established pattern of meaning. Without the communally agreed upon value of the spectacle, or symbol, there is no way to assign meaning to it.[54]

[54] Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* ed. Charles Bally and Albert Reidlinger,

Catherine Gallagher explains that during the development of fiction in the eighteenth century "each generation of writers felt called upon to reform the genre by encouraging an affective pulsation between identification with fictional characters and withdrawal from them, between emotional investment and divestment."[55] In Lady Eleanor's work we see the consequences of pure emotional divestment. By making it nearly impossible for the reader to fully identify with her, her experiences, or even her style, Lady Eleanor shuts out her audience, and also attracts social censure. Unlike Cavendish's marginal notes, which Masten reads for their potential commentary on marriage, and authorship, Lady Eleanor's symbols and marginal notations contribute to the indecipherable and hieroglyphic nature of her work.

One of the few transparent aspects of her prophecies is her choice of scriptural inspiration. The images of the writing on the wall and the four beasts both come from the Book of Daniel which was a popular apocalyptic text in the seventeenth century. According to Michael G. Ditmore, "Interest in Daniel's vision peaked in England in the 1640's and 1650's with the Fifth Monarchist agitation."[56] Ditmore's work does not focus on Davies' use of Daniel, but on American prophet Lucy Hutchinson's use of the text. Even though the women were separated by a continent, they may both use the text to establish their own authority as prophets. Daniel, like Davies, is a model of a persecuted prophet. Ditmore argues that Hutchinson's reliance on Daniel's text enables her to present

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trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 111.
[55] Gallagher, *Nobody's Story,* xvii-xviii.
[56] Michael G. Ditmore, "A Prophetess in Her Own Country: An Exegesis of Anne Hutchinson's 'Immediate Revelation," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57 (2000): 379.

herself as "the righteous prophet strict in her piety and blessed with special revelations in an alien and threatening land, her accusers are jealous, unconverted, and vengeful."[57] But the analogy presses on; God saves Daniel from the Lion's den, just as he will save Hutchinson from her persecution. Ditmore's study of Hutchinson's life suggests that Davies' inclusion of the Nebuchadnezzar tale and the apocalyptic vision of the four beasts may act as a symbol of her conflict with her society. Like Daniel she has visions of the end of time, and like him, she is tested and persecuted for her prophetic gift.

This popular text is retold by Davies with the addition of cryptic symbols and notations. Her method of drawing from the Book of Daniel does present her audience with a readable symbol. Her odd textual displays present us with an interpretive dilemma. How can a sign be read if its meaning is derived completely from the author's imagination? Trapnel and Beaumont work with spectacular moments that have meaning, and then manipulate them to generate new definitions. But Davies's word play and symbols escape definition, and reveal another rhetorical device for gaining authority: retaliation through confusion. If her society refuses to understand and accept her, then she will purposely confuse them. Just as she is tried and questioned for her words, her audience is put to the test. If they cannot read her writing on the page, then they are not worthy, and they will meet their doom. In confusing her readers she denies them access. Like the author of Revelation including cryptic codes to avoid Roman censure, Lady Eleanor prevents the peering eye of authority from

[57] Ibid., 381.

truly seeing her work. As a result, she escapes the gaze, and she maintains control.

Her creation and publication of her work is bold, and unlike the other women in this study, Lady Eleanor does not aim to display herself as a prophet would. She never makes herself passive or reticent because of her prophetic role; on the contrary, it seems to embolden her. The primary example of this is her desecration of the altar at Lichfield. Cope refers to this moment as "the only time in Lady Eleanor's life when she combined direct action with her written prophecies."[58] As Cope explains, Lady Eleanor's tract *Warning to the Dragon* (1625) spoke out against elaborately decorated altars. Having written a tract to this bishop against the ornamentation of the cathedral, and having received no answer, Lady Eleanor took action on her own. She entered the cathedral, sat on the bishop's throne "and poured hot tar and wheat paste upon the new altar hangings."[59] Cope analyzes the varying meanings of this display: in sitting on the throne Lady Eleanor makes a claim to the bishop's authority. In publicly challenging this authority she creates a prophetic sign, and in vandalizing the cathedral she carries out the physical manifestation of what she considers God's wrath.[60] Unlike the other women in this study, Lady Eleanor does not manipulate and display her personal space to make a political or religious statement; instead she goes to the public arena. For example, Trapnel's controversial behaviors take place inside a bedroom; she is in a trance; Beaumont's take place in her home, and her text traces her movement throughout her town; the focus in these

[58] Cope, *Handmaid*, 84.
[59]Ibid., 84.
[60]Ibid., 84.

instances is on the women. Lady Eleanor, as Cope explains, "Wrote to execute her responsibilities rather than to record her spiritual journey,"[61] and her use of spectacle reflects this. The eye is not focused the physical behavior of her body: is she in a trance? Is she sick? Is she eating? Is she weeping? These are not the questions that Lady Eleanor's actions evoke. Instead, one wonders, what is she doing? What does this mean? The product of her actions, including the meaning of her anagrams, the almost cryptic use of biblical passages, and her actions in the world are the focus of the reader's gaze, and in this sense, spectacle is being used in a very different way. It is not used as a way to establish and gain authority, but rather as a display of social and spiritual authority that has already been achieved.

As a result of this brazen presentation of her work at a time when there were censures on publication, Lady Eleanor is treated as no other woman in this study is. When she publishes unlicensed works, she is brought before the court and sentenced to pay three thousand pounds, and to spend time in the Gatehouse. No other person, tried for the same crime, received such a harsh punishment. Cope attributes her callous sentencing to her violation of gender order.[62] In her bold publication of and defense of her right and call to prophecy, Lady Eleanor becomes a spectacle. She is a spectacle when she stands before court and is declared mad; she is a spectacle when she is given a harsher fine and punishment than other people who have committed a similar crime.

Lady Eleanor greatly differs from the other women in this study in that she was the most forceful about getting her life and her work into the public eye.

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[61] Ibid., 85.
[62] Ibid., 73.

Despite this difference, she still shares in the similarity with the other women in that her work did not become or remain popular between the seventeenth century and now. This may bear testimony to how there was no real place for women's voices in early modern English culture regardless of the rhetorical strategies that they employed. But Lady Eleanor is significant because she, more than any of the other prophetic women writers of the seventeenth century, focused as much on the publication of her work as she did on the inspiration from the divine.

The irony here is that Lady Eleanor may have avoided making herself into the spectacle of a worm and vessel for God, but because she does not participate in these accepted and recognized displays of prophecy and woman, she becomes the spectacle, but not the spectacle who can speak with God's authority. She is the spectacle that is stripped of all class and social authority and humiliated and punished for all the world to see. Like the scolds who were dunked and bridled, Lady Eleanor is punished for her speech. Trapnel and Beaumont escape such a fate because they participate in the modes of spectacle that are acceptable, and are able to use these modes to gain authority. Examining these women, their uses of spectacle, their challenges to authority, and their various levels of publicity and success, reveal what a dangerous territory spectacle was for women in the seventeenth century. The wrong presentation could result in harsh punishment. But these women's writings also demonstrate that this territory was negotiable, and that spectacle could be transformed from a space used to control and/or punish speech, to a rhetorical mode used to authorize dissenting speech.

Chapter 3: Communities of Authority: Friendship, Prophets and Protest in the Works of Sarah Cheevers, Katharine Evans and Anna Trapnel

I. Rhetorical Communities

In 1654 Anna Trapnel publishes *Report and Plea,* her record of her trial for criticizing Cromwell's government, as well as her response to "the reproachful, vile, horrid, abusive, and scandalous reports, raised out of the bottomless pit against her, by the profane generation, prompted thereunto by Professors, and Clergy both in City and County, who have a form of godliness, but deny the power" (1). This passage comes from the title page of her narrative and exemplifies the combative and defensive tone of the text. Trapnel's goal is to justify her journey to Cornwall to prophesy, her publication of her works, and her public displays of community and protest, by presenting her version of the court room proceedings. In publishing her plea, Trapnel not only justifies these decisions and actions, she defiantly repeats them, since the text itself is an act of prophecy, publication, and communal protest. She writes it and publishes it as a Fifth Monarchist female prophet who seeks to vindicate her reputation as well as that of her congregation. Within this text, Trapnel takes on four different roles: that of the defendant, the prophet, the woman, and the Fifth Monarchist. With each of these roles comes a different venue for speech, including the court room, her chamber, the text itself, and the internalized locus of communication with the divine. Each of these places requires a different code of speech which Trapnel

either abides by or subverts. This chapter will argue that in order to navigate these varying rhetorical registers, Trapnel continually redefines and realigns her relationship to various communities throughout her narrative. The prophetic tradition, Fifth Monarchist movement, and the interiorized relationship with God, serve as communities of authority from which Trapnel draws the power to vindicate herself.

Sarah Evans and Katharine Cheevers also navigate various channels of authority in the narrative of their trials, *A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings*, published in 1662. When Evans and Cheevers travel to Malta to proselytize, they are apprehended by the officials of the Italian Inquisition after distributing Quaker literature to the people. While in captivity, Evans and Cheevers must defend themselves against attacks on their faith and on their friendship. In the face of physical and spiritual torment inflicted by the Catholic friars who imprison them, Evans and Cheevers authorize their voices by stonewalling the friars' efforts to convert them to Catholicism. To the friars and on the pages of their publication, the Quaker missionaries represent themselves as united in an impenetrable faith. Time and again they draw stark points of contrast between their beliefs and those of the friars, with the friars presented as dogs, and the suffering women represented as champions of Christ. Their faith and their friendship also hold strong, as the women draw authority from the bond between them. They are not only traveling companions, they are as bound together as husband and wife, and this essential element of community and of society acts as the rock upon which the disorganized and disjoined Catholic friars break themselves. Like Trapnel,

Evans and Cheevers create a sense of authority through representations of communities to which they belong. Also like Trapnel, the nature of their rhetoric shifts and changes depending on which community they are presenting. They too rely on the authority of the prophetic community, their congregation, their friendship, and their intimate relationship with the divine.

In both texts, the authors forge connections to a number of communities. On the one hand, they work within the tradition of major biblical figures such as Elijah, Abraham, St. Paul, and Christ himself. On the other hand, they also rally support by demonstrating that they are embraced and supported members of their respective groups: Trapnel as a Fifth Monarchist and Evans and Cheevers as Quakers. Throughout each text, the women rarely present themselves as being alone. Communal support has an obvious connection to authority. A voice in the wilderness has less of a chance of being heard and believed than a person with the backing of an entire group. But support is not the only issue at stake here. The women frame their connections to these various groups, whether it be the prophets, their fellow believers, other women, or even God, using different rhetorical strategies. It is in examining the ways in which these communities are represented, and the aspects of authority that are drawn from each community, that much can be learned about the self-conscious authorial practices of seventeenth-century prophetic women writers.

In Evans and Cheevers' text there is an additional aspect of connectivity shaping authority, which is not present in Trapnel's text to the same degree. They suffer together not only as missionaries, but as close friends, and as co-authors to

their work. This bond of friendship between them strengthens them in the face of their oppressors, and enables them to present a unified front to the Inquisitors as well as to the reading audience. Though two women's names appear on the title page, there is one message, and there is one belief. Though Trapnel does not co-author her work, her work also bears the stamp of communal approval. She is in the company of other Fifth Monarchists throughout the work. On her journey to Cornwall, on trial, and in prison, Trapnel is never alone. Her community does not abandon her, demonstrating that they have invested her with the authority to represent their sect.

It is no coincidence that community plays such a significant role in these texts. Community, like scripture, dreams, and the conversion experience, is another aspect of Christian life that Puritanism prized, and the origin of its value is St. Paul himself.[1] According to Diane Willen, Puritans could recognize the "communion of saints" surrounding them in their lives through their demonstration of intense piety.[2] This community offered spiritual strength and support, and by "resting upon a shared spirituality among its members, the godly community itself played a significant role in the emergence of alternative gender practices."[3] As Willen explains, this community of saints often begins with the patriarchal home, but she makes the case that there is evidence of it often "transcending the nuclear family,"[4] and then redefining social roles. Both Evans

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[1] Diane Willen, "'Communion of Saints': Spiritual Reciprocity and the Godly Community in Early Modern England," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned With British Studies* 27 (1995): 19.
[2] Ibid., 20.
[3] Ibid., 20-21.
[4] Ibid., 23.

and Cheever's text and Trapnel's text offer examples of this spiritual support network operating outside of the family, and in a larger social capacity. In both instances, the representations of community enable the writers to stake claims to authority where none previously existed. This reliance on community serves as another example of how religious women authors of the period subvert the mechanisms designed to limit them, in this case the patriarchal and Pauline ideal of the community of saints, while also enlisting them to gain authority.

In both texts, the women take on St. Paul on the title pages, not by confronting his injunction against women, but by describing a point of connection between their prophetic experiences and his. In order to justify her decision to travel to Cornwall to prophesy, Trapnel describes how God came to her and said, "As surely as Paul's vision called him- I call you to Cornwall" (*Report,* 6). These words from God equalize Paul and Trapnel's prophetic calling. But Trapnel does not automatically accept God's comparison, and responds with a performance of accepted social practice with the question, "Paul was to preach there, what is that word to me?" (6). God, represented as determined to see their experiences as parallel, in turn replies, "But as sure as his was a vision from the Lord to go to Macedonia, so as sure had I a call and true vision to go to Cornwall" (6). Trapnel's reference to St. Paul exemplifies the rhetorical play that is at work in her text. St. Paul is the very saint who time and time again is cited as the roadblock to women's prophecy. Yet in Trapnel's narrative, her reference to him works to validate her own journey. This validation, however, is gained through a ventriloquism of social expectations. Trapnel does not say, St. Paul preached and

therefore I may preach. Rather, God introduces the comparison to St. Paul, and Trapnel responds with what a seventeenth-century woman would be expected to say, "Paul was to preach there, what is that word to me?". Her response shows her awareness of and belief in the Pauline injunction that women should not preach. In the response from the divine that Trapnel includes, there is no mention of prophecy, either to say she should not prophecy or to say that she should. The topic is omitted, and God reaffirms that her call is as valid as St. Paul's, leaving the door to prophetic authority slightly ajar, and allowing Trapnel to establish a point of connection to the great influential prophet, initiated and supported by the divine.

St. Paul also appears as the predecessor for Evans and Cheevers. Their cruel usage in Malta is not only reminiscent of Paul's past journey, but it is worse. They write, "those that are called Christians are worse than heathens…not so when Paul suffered shipwreck there among the barbarous people" (Evans and Cheever, 1). Though Trapnel and Evans and Cheevers make reference on the early pages of their texts to St. Paul, the meanings of the references differ. Trapnel's give and take with the divine opens up a potential space for female prophecy. Evans and Cheevers' reference is much more reticent, but still significant in that it connects the women to the prophet. The mention of St. Paul and his journey draws a parallel between the path that St. Paul once took, and the path that the women are presently taking. Though the reference to the prophet is not as bold as Trapnel's, the point of the comparison is still the same. The women are walking in Paul's footsteps, and therefore their journey is invested with

authority similar to his. Their reference to Paul also works to emphasize their position as martyrs, because they suffer more greatly than he. Common to both texts is a connection to St. Paul that bolsters the authority of the women writers. But St. Paul is not the only company these women keep. Their connection to him is just one example of the communities of authority that shape their textual representation as prophets and as spokespeople of their religious groups.

Social bonds, and the ways in which they are represented, can form and articulate critiques and commentaries that reach beyond the parameters of the friendship. Authors including Katherine Philips, Anne Finch, Margaret Cavendish, and John Milton have included friendships in their poetry and in their work as a way to challenge, question, or address larger issues in society. Philips sees qualities in friendship that relate to political matters:

> We court our own captivity
> Than thrones more great and Innocent:
> 'Twere banishment to be set free,
> Since we wear fetters whose intent
> Not bondage is but ornament.
>
> (Philips, "Friendship's Mystery, To My Dearest Lucasia," 16-20)

In this stanza, words such as "court," "thrones," "banishment," "free," and "bondage" relate not only to friendship, but also to affairs of the state. In referring to friendship as something that must be crowned and restored Philips links it to the absent king.[5] This allows Philips to invest the female realm of

[5] Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 77.

friendship with the authority of the monarchy.[6] Carol Barash argues that eventually the strength of female friendship becomes a more consistent image that is even more powerful than that of the king in Philips' manuscript.

Friendship also takes on spiritual overtones in Philips' work:

Come, My Lucasia, since we see
That miracles men's faith do move,
By wonder and by prodigy
To the dull angry world let's prove
There's a religion in our love.

(Philips, "Friendship's Mystery, To My Dearest Lucasia," 1-5)

Like Evans and Cheevers, Philips elevates friendship to a religious experience. She and Lucasia prove to the world, and specifically here a man's world, that their bond is deep and powerful. The connection of spirituality, femininity, and friendship is referred to as a prodigy, something unusual and wonderful that has the capacity to move men's faith.

In the poetry of Anne Finch, the representation of friendship works as a challenge to classical models of poetic authority. Jennifer Keith cites the Finch poem, "Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia" as challenging the mimetic properties of Augustan poetry. Finch attempts to define friendship by stating, "Tis to love, as I love you." Keith points out that this definition does not provide an

[6] Ibid., 99.

objective explanation of the term, and in this way, resists objectifying the world around her.[7] Finch's definition continues,

'Tis to share all Joy and Grief;
'Tis to lend all due Relief
From the Tongue, the Heart, the Hand;
'Tis to mortgage House and Land;
For a Friend to be sold a Slave;
'Tis to die upon a Grave,
If a friend therein do lie.

(Finch, "Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia," 7-13)

Finch defines friendship through its actions. She does not attempt to define its nature or its properties. Keith interprets Finch's representation of friendship as evidence that Finch considers it unrepresentable. Finch wishes to identify with it rather than objectify it. Keith goes on to say, "While poems by Dryden and Pope extend this mimetic privilege by establishing the poet's mimetic domination over an avowedly empirical world troped as feminine, Finch's poems counter this masculinization of the poet and feminization of the object of representation by establishing the poet's identification with these objects.[8] In framing her poetic critique and style within her representation of friendship, Finch demonstrates another subversive function of depictions of friendship.

Margaret Cavendish also uses friendship to allude to more than just a bond between two people. Her utopian tale, *The Blazing World*, "not only supports a

[7] Jennifer Keith, "The Poetics of Anne Finch," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38 (1998): 468.
[8] Ibid., 468.

new (if finally problematic) paradigm of female independence, but also significantly informs the idealized treatment of women's friendship in Cavendish's fantastical utopian kingdom."[9] Within her text, Cavendish describes the connection between herself and the empress: "the Empress ['s soul] imbraced and saluted her [the Duchess's soul] with a spiritual kiss…and truly their meeting did produce such an intimate friendship between them that they became Platonick Lovers, although they were both females."[10] In this depiction of friendship, there is a meeting of souls that allows the two women to form a powerful bond. Much of Cavendish's utopia centers on the presentation of the powerful, individual woman. She represents friendship as "two perfectly matched and perfectly autonomous, self-created souls."[11] Rachael Trubowitz points out the irony created by Cavendish's ideal friendship. It is the pairing and connecting of two independent souls. How can the bond and the independence co-exist? A similar issue is present in the work of Evans and Cheevers. The women write the text as a pair, and many times refer to themselves as "we" and "us," and even use "I" without distinguishing who is talking. In addition to blending their voices, they also preserve their independent identities throughout the text. This shifting of unity and independence in female friendships is reminiscent of the bond that exists between the women and God in the prophetic texts. At times they are shattered and taken over by the divine, and at times they speak with independent voices. These connections create a dual authority; on the one hand, to merge into

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[9] Rachael Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11 (1992): 230.
[10] Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (London: A. Maxwell, 1666), 90, 93.
[11] Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment," 240.

another, or to merge into the divine fends off attacks because the point of view if difficult to identify. On the other hand, authority is also created when the individual is enabled to speak by a connection to another.

Theories of friendship and representations of it also relate to other social bonds such as marriage. Gregory Chaplin's study of marriage in Milton's literature and divorce tracts analyzes the ways in which classical and renaissance theories of friendship shaped Milton's marital ideal. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are described as "One Flesh, one Heart, one Soul," (8.499) but there are still divisions between them. Chaplin points out Eve's reflection that she is better off than Adam because she has him, but that he is at a disadvantage because "Like consort to [himself] canst nowhere find" (4.448). For Chaplin, part of what leads to the fall, and part of what Milton implicitly criticizes about the union between Adam and Eve, is that although she is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, she is not bound to him spiritually, as two souls would be bound together in classical models of friendship. Without this bond, a hierarchy is created. Chaplin asks, "Does difference mean hierarchy? If so, what kind? And 'among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight' (8.383-84)? It is this uncertainty that leads them toward the Fall."[12] For Chaplin, there is a tension in *Paradise Lost* between "the marital bond that leads to the biblical "one flesh," and the classical bond of amicitia that produces "one soul in two bodies."[13]

Chaplin's, Trubowitz's, and Keith's studies all aim to define friendship, and in particular, the companionship offered by women. In most cases, this

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[12]Gregory Chaplin, "'One Flesh, One Heart, One Soul': Renaissance Friendship and Miltonic Marriage," *Modern Philology* 99 (2001): 292.
[13] Ibid., 268-9.

connection of a man to a woman, or a woman to a woman is found inferior to the friendship that can exist between two men. In the works of Evans and Cheevers and Trapnel, there are many manifestations of relationships. There are the social relationships that exist between two women or between the women and their religious communities. There are also spiritual relationships that exist between the women and scripture and the women and their God. All of these relationships are to some degree feminocentric, because at least one party is always female. They are not represented as inferior communities lacking in depth of feeling or strength of spirit. Each of these relationships has the potential to reflect or affect broader social concerns. Philip's poetry links models of friendship to models of kingship; Finch's representation of friendship challenges literary conventions and hierarchy; Cavendish's inclusion of female friendship carves out new possibilities for female autonomy while also complicating them; Milton's representation of marriage may be bound up in different social codes concerning marriage and friendship. In this study, the central characters in each text represent themselves as being part of a close connection. Cheevers and Evans travel and suffer together as they maintain their deep devotion to God and to each other. As Trapnel moves through the English judicial system, at every step of her trial she describes herself as being amongst friends. The friendships in these texts, like the friendships in Philips, Finch, Cavendish, and Milton, are about more than the connection between two individuals. The communities of authority in these texts reveal the potential for relationships crafted and represented by women to signal authority. The studies on friendship discussed above demonstrate how depictions

of relationships can serve as vehicles for broader social commentary. In Evans and Cheevers' narrative, as in Trapnel's account of her trial, friendships, relationships and communities are represented in a way that bolsters support for the women's prophecy. This is accomplished using rhetorical strategies that either subvert cultural practices that tend to stifle their voices, or by employing linguistic practices that privilege their perspective.

One such empowering strategy is the seventeenth-century cultural practice of producing writing as part of a network. Writers such as Phillips and Donne produced their work within literary coteries. When works are produced in a social setting, the work itself is some how marked by the codes of the culture in which it is produced. As Arthur F. Marotti explains, "The coterie poems that found their way into manuscript or printed miscellanies were, to some degree, written in the culturally encoded language of the time by the occasion that generated them. Writers in particular courtly or satellite-courtly milieus adopted socially sanctioned or coterie-specific styles that marked their texts as part of a shared language."[14] Writing within a coterie allows a group with shared interests and perhaps values to evaluate a text on common ground. When an author writes as a member of a group, or for a member of a group, he/she produces work that carries marks and traces of the group's cultural and perhaps political allegiance. Trapnel, Evans, and Cheevers write as members of religious networks, and their works provide insight into their spiritual convictions. Though they are not coterie

[14] Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 13.

writers, Trapnel, Evans and Cheevers provide an earlier example of the authority that can come from presenting an individual work as a part of a larger agenda.

These studies on friendship, marriage, the puritan communion of saints, and coterie writers illustrate the various registers of community that existed in seventeenth- century England. Representations of connections and social bonds could be used to signal literary allegiances, social critiques, spiritual unions, and poetic practice. Within these discourses of friendship, Trapnel, Evans and Cheevers record the narratives of their sufferings and persecutions. But there are several languages, or codes, in which they are participating. On the one hand, they are women, traveling without the protection of husband or father; on the other, they are prophets touched by God, proclaiming to spread his word. The women must navigate two codes, one which requires a certain degree of modesty and the other that requires a certain degree of boldness. This chapter will argue that their representations of their connections to various communities enable them to participate effectively in both of these cultural languages while drawing authority from both. This will demonstrate that depictions of friendships and community are also enlisted in the seventeenth century to authorize the voice of the socially constructed chaste, silent, and obedient woman.

Three levels of community will be addressed in this chapter. There is the principle connection that exists between the prophet and the divine which bolsters the women's authority while also challenging the authority of others. There is then membership in a larger religious community that demonstrates the earthly support for the women's words. Then finally, there is the Biblical community

that the women present to their audiences that signals the spiritual support that exists for their texts and their actions. These three levels of connectivity form three overlapping communities of authority that enable Trapnel, Evans and Cheevers to shape their own authority while also challenging the authority of their oppressors. The ways in which Evans, Cheevers, and Trapnel rhetorically navigate through the social demands of each community testifies to the web of authority and approval that the women must weave in order to validate their voices.

II. "They Would Howle Like Dogs"

Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers travel into Malta on a mission to walk in the footsteps of St. Paul. Their goal is to convert the sultan, but they are never given a chance. Upon docking in Malta, they are taken into questioning for handing out their books and missionary materials. They are detained for two years under the auspices of the Italian Inquisition. During their imprisonment, they are kept in a room with a blazing fire, and no ventilation; their skin becomes leathery and they grow ill. Because of Sarah's ailing health, and also because of a desire to divide and conquer the women's spirits, they are eventually separated and interrogated individually. Despite their physical separation, the women manage to maintain their connection through secret letters and a shared strength of faith. Their story becomes public when fellow Quaker and Captain, Dan Baker, collects their letters to each other and to their loved ones in England and

brings them home to be published. Evans and Cheevers seek to expand their Quaker community through their journey, but are prevented. Instead, their text becomes the narrative of the community to which they already belong, and the ways in which the Quaker community, and the community created by their mutual suffering strengthens them in their trials.

Before the women begin the narrative of their suffering, Baker writes the preface to their work which refutes anyone who would criticize Evans' and Cheevers' missionary work on the basis of their sex: "And why should it be accounted such a foolish thing in the eyes of the wise men of this world to see the wisdom of God dispensed through a weak vessel? As is a free born woman from above, a weaker vessel than that of man" (3-4). Baker's defense of Evans and Cheevers establishes a sense of community in the text. He goes on to say, "Now tell me, oh men of understanding, what must not the spirit of Christ, the same that is begotten of God in the female as well as in the male" (Evans and Cheevers, 4). This preface begins the authorization of Evans' and Cheevers' text. It uses spiritual and scriptural arguments to support the work that they have done, and it also works within the Quaker logic concerning women in the church. At the close of his preface, Baker takes on the Pauline injunction that says a woman is to "learn in silence under her husband"; to which Baker asks, what if her husband is a drunk, what if he is not a Christian? If he is unfit in these ways, then how can he teach her? Baker's argument is in line with Quaker scriptural exegesis.

As Catherine M. Wilcox explains, the Quaker tradition has always included women in its ministry and has frequently used various interpretations of

the scriptures, including using two or three different parts of scripture together to come to a deeper understanding of women's place in the church. The passage from St. Paul that commands women to learn from their husbands at home was interpreted in several different ways. The husband in the text could be Christ and not an earthly husband. It could also mean women are only to be silent in certain circumstances, but not all. According to Wilcox, George Fox argued the injunction is "appropriate to women who were still in the state of the fall, or the state of Eve."[15] Baker's preface also tries to redefine women's relationship to prophecy and preaching. He links the missionaries to Quaker tradition through biblical interpretation, and boldly declares that the women should be permitted to travel in the name of God as missionaries. Baker's preface is the only outright reference to gendered cultural codes in the text. Evans and Cheevers never blatantly take on the criticism that may be lobbied at them because of their sex, but this does not mean they accept it. They subvert cultural beliefs about women's speech through their representations of their communities, thereby by creating an authorial place from which to speak.

Evans and Cheevers draw authority from their Quaker community by solidifying its connection to Christ. In sharp contrast, the Catholic friars who torment them are dehumanized and degraded. Though this division does not address gender hierarchies, it strengthens the women's authority by aligning them fully and undoubtedly with Christ's people. The title page and the preface of Evans' and Cheevers' text begin to draw the line in the sand between those who

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[15] Catherine M. Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism: Handmaids of the Lord* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 105-6.

are members of their community, and those who are not. They refer to themselves as "daughters of Abraham," and dedicate their work to those who "have a feeling of fellowship with them in their sufferings" (1). However, when Evans and Cheevers refer to the Catholics, they write, "those that are called Christians are worse than heathens" (1). The specific goal of much of Evans' and Cheevers' text seems to be the establishment of a clear distinction between Catholics and Quakers.

They separate themselves from any association with Catholicism through their resistance to their torture. Though the women are imprisoned under horrendous conditions, they do not falter in their faith and convictions. Frequently, the women record the debates that they have with the Friars; in one such exchange, Evans recalls,

> They would have had me to a Picture set at my beds head for a representation, I asked them if they did think I did lack a Calf to worship? And whether they did not walk by the Rule of Scripture? The Fryar said, *They did, but they had traditions too.* I said, if their tradition did derogate or dissent from the fundamentals of Christ's Doctrine, the Prophets and Apostles, I denied them in the name of the Lord. He said, *They did not*. I askt him where they had their Rule to burn them that could not join with them for Conscience? He said, *St. Paul did worse, he gave them to the Devil, and that they did judge all damned that were not of their faith.* And he askt whether we did judge them so? I said No, We had otherwise

> learned Christ. I askt him why they did bind that which the Lord did not bind? … He could not tell what to say.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 16)

In the above passage Evans out reasons the Catholic friar, rendering him speechless, and depicting him as powerless. The friar comes off as brutish in his reference to St. Paul. While the women compare themselves to St. Paul throughout the text to draw attention to their ministry and their desire to spread Christianity, the friar refers to him to soften the cruel nature of his treatment of people like Evans and Cheevers. In one such instance, Evans points out to him that it is against Christian teaching to burn one's enemies. Using St. Paul as his defense, the friar said St. Paul had done worse by condemning them to hell. Evans and Cheevers' quick tongues and biting accusations subvert cultural beliefs about speech. For Quakers, silence is normally associated with spirituality. As Richard Bauman explains, "Silence, for the Quakers, was not an end in itself, but a means to the attainment of the defining spiritual experience of early Quakerism, the direct personal experience is the spirit of God within oneself."[16] But in this instance, Evans uses silence to denote ignorance instead of spirituality. It is her speech that signals her superior understanding of her faith, and the friar's inability to respond that marks his defeat in this debate.

At this point in the narrative Evans and Cheevers have been separated. After the priest leaves Evans, he goes on to interrogate Cheevers. When the friar

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[16] Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 23.

and Sarah meet, their debate begins with each of them making claims to significant Biblical figures:

> He went to Sarah with the same temptation, and she told him also, that Abel was of our Church; He said Abel was a Catholick, and Cain and Judas were so, She said, Then the Devil was a Catholick, and she would not be one. He threatened her, and told her how many they were.
>
> She said, Daniel was but one, and if there was no more but she her self, she would not turn…So they went from one to another thinking to entangle us in our talk; but we were guided by one Spirit, and spake one and the same thing in effect.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 17)

What the friar and Sarah are doing here is debating about the members of their respective religious communities. Whoever can stake claim to Abel or Daniel is party to the righteous community, but neither wants a connection to Cain or Judas. During this discussion over which major biblical figures are Quaker and which are Catholic, the unity and connection between Evans and Cheevers surfaces. They are the constant united force that emerges in this debate over membership. The speak "one and the same thing" even though they are in separate rooms and being questioned apart from each other and at different times. Their united, calm, and focused front directly contrasts with the frustrated friars' running back and forth between them unable to defend the faith they are persecuting others to spread. While the friars think they can entrap them and entangle them in their own words, the women resist their efforts because the

words that come from their mouths are guided and authorized by the Holy Spirit.

Evans and Cheevers also reverse some of the accusations launched at Quakers and redirect them to the Catholic friars. According to Wilcox, "Early Quaker language was often baffling to those outside the movement. One opponent, John Owen, had this to say: 'Our Quakers for a long time hovered up and down like a swarm of flies, with a confused noise and humming.'"[17] In this quotation from Owen, Quakers are represented as having very little control over language. However, in Evans' and Cheevers' text, it is the Catholic friars who lack the control. Time and again the friars' speech is compared to the howling of dogs. They write, "They always came two Fryars at a time, and they would fall down and howl" (20), and then again, "They would howl like Dogs, because they could not beguile the innocent" (37), and also, "Oh the cursed noises and cryes the Sodomites did make, crying Quaker, Quaker, running about the Prison raging" (38). These excerpts from Evans and Cheevers depict the Catholic priests as lacking control over their speech. Unlike the persecuted and pious Quaker women who maintain their temperament in the face of cruel usage, and who can logically and rhetorically out-argue their persecutors, the priests are represented as wild, frustrated, and animalistic. The accusations and stereotypes typically associated with Quakers are here turned around and redirected at Catholics. Evans and Cheevers represent the Catholic priests as abusing language. In the seventeenth century this would signal a polluted heart. Christina Luckyj quotes William Perkins as stating, "The pure heart is most neccessarie, because it is the fountain of speech, and if the fountain be defiled, the streams that issue thence can

[17] Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry,* 9.

not be cleane."[18] The priests in Evans and Cheevers' narrative are clearly not producing clean and pure speech. Their words are perceived as howls, and they are referred to as Sodomites. The juxtaposition of the women's controlled and logical speech with the priests ranting signals that women are with God, and the priests are working for a different force.

The women's control of rhetoric is only one of the ways in which they signal their authority over the priests. Like Lady Eleanor Davies' cast of biblical and modern day characters in "Given to the Elector Prince Charles of the Rhyne," Evans and Cheevers equate their persecutors with Biblical figures. The consul is referred to as Judas, the Magistrate is Pilate, and they, of course, are St. Paul (Evans and Cheevers, 8). This teleological reading presents the women as having power over their oppressors. Throughout their narrative the women tell the priests that they are powerless. Evans writes, "And they had no Law to keep us there," and soon after tells the priest, "Our souls were out of the Inquisitors reach" (18-19). The confrontation between them continues as the priest tries to have Evans acknowledge the crucifix as a "representation" of Christ, to which she replies,

> It did not represent Christ, for he was the express image of his father's glory, which is Light and Life…and I askt him what Representation Daniel had in the Lyon's Den, or Jonah in the Whale's belly… He said I was like a mad woman… he was in a rage, and said, He would give me to the Devile, I bid him give his own, I am the Lords, He stood up and said, He would do by me as the Apostles did by Ananias and Saphira. He stood

[18] William Perkins, *Direction for the Government of the Tongue (London,* 1597), 2.

> up and opened his mouth, and I stood up to him and denied him in the name of the Lord, the living God, and said he had no power over me.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 18-19)

There are several aspects of this volley between Evans and the priest that are significant to the connection between community and authority. Both parties try to undermine the mental stability of their opponent. The priest calls Evans a madwoman, and then Evans makes a point of describing the priest as "in a rage," which is in direct opposition to her apparent maintenance of composure. Both the priest and Evans attempt to group themselves with figures of authority. Evans questions the priest's authority by asking him whether Jonah or Daniel had a representation of God to help them through their trials. The priest then attempts to align Evans with the Devil and himself with the Apostles, but she quickly retorts that she is speaking in the name of the Lord and that he is powerless. In these exchanges between Evans and Cheevers and the friars, there is the attempt to draw a sharp line between the Catholics and the Quakers; in recording their responses to the priests' efforts to demonize them, the women demonize the priests. What stands strong in the face of the ranting, howling priests is the connection between Evans and Cheevers.

II. Ink and Paper

Though the friendship between Evans and Cheevers is a major aspect of their narrative, it is not the sole intention of *A Short Relation* to display and

champion their intimacy. They liken themselves to Paul in the first few pages of their text, and like Paul, they write letters home relating their sufferings and the lessons learned from them. The ability to share what was happening to them was crucial for their missionary work. If they were to suffer in their cell at Malta without anyone ever knowing, what good would it do? If they could not proselytize to the people of Malta, or to the sultan, then they would have to use their sufferings to speak their message.

The friars know that the more public their tale becomes, the more sympathy and power they will gain. After only a few weeks of their inquisition word already spreads of their suffering, and the Friars relay that the women of Malta are praying for them (Evans and Cheevers, 12). It may be for this reason that the Friars first threaten the women with removal of pen and ink, and then implement it. At first, the Lord Inquisitor gives permission for the women to have writing material, but the friars prevent them from getting it. After they are separated, they continue to communicate by a "private way" (Evans and Cheevers, 21), but they are discovered. The priest asks Evans:

> Where is the paper Sarah sent? Bring it, or else I will search the trunk, and every where else. I bid him search where he would. He said I must tell what man it was that brought me the ink, or else I should be tyed with Chains presently. I told him I had done nothing but what was just and right in the sight of God, and what I did suffer would be for truth's sake, and I did not care…So the Lieutenant took my ink and threw it away, and

they were smitten as if they would have fallen to the ground.

(Evans and Cheevers, 21-22)

The idea of the women continuing to communicate despite his clear order against it enrages the friar. At this moment in the text, words exchanged between friends rob the priests of their authority over the women's bodies, souls, and minds. The friar is so infuriated by the subversion of his command, that he threatens Evans with physical violence, signaling his need to reestablish his control over her.

In his attempt to intimidate Evans, the friar behaves in much the same way as Mr. B when he threatens to search Pamela's body for her letters. In *Pamela*, such a threat emphasizes the connection between Pamela's writing and her self, and Mr. B's need to possess her entire body and being. Mr. B threatens, "O, my girl! Said he, many an innocent Person has been put to the Torture, I'll assure you. But let me know where they are, and you shall escape the Question, as they call it abroad."[19] He continues, "I never undrest a Girl in my Life; but I will now begin to strip my pretty Pamela; and hope I shall not go far, before I find them."[20] Pamela promises to surrender them, and gets a brief reprieve to bring her letters to him herself, but instead sends him a letter asking for more time. She pleads, "And most hardly do you use the Power you so wickedly have got over me."[21] This exchange between Pamela and Mr. B equates the power over an individual with power over that individual's words. That Mr. B also draws a parallel between

[19] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 234.
[20] Ibid., 235.
[21] Ibid., 235.

torture and finding her letters resonates with the priest's threat to Evans and Cheevers.

Approximately eighty years pass from the moment Evans and Cheevers are threatened with chains for their letters and the publication of *Pamela.* The parallel demonstrates why a spiritual narrative of two traveling and imprisoned Quaker women is significant to literary studies. In *Pamela*, the heroine's victory comes in the form of her marriage after the long trial of her virtue. In *A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings*, the victory comes in the continued bond between the women, their homecoming after their ordeal, and their steadfastness in the face of torture. Both are rewarded with a marriage for their persistence, but Evans and Cheevers' marriage is a bond of sisterhood and a bond in Christ. In their text the oppressor is not their future spouse, as is the case in Richardson's novel. The comparison between the two scenes demonstrates the difference in the represented avenues of authority available to women. Pamela seeks to protect her letters for fear of Mr. B's disapproval. Evans and Cheevers have no fear. They protect their writing because they are protecting themselves – their thoughts, ordeals, and spiritual experiences recorded on paper for their fellow Quakers. Though the prophetic women of the seventeenth century deny their voices, these Quaker missionaries recognize that their words will affect their community back home.

The priests understand how important their writing utensils are, and try to use them as leverage in a bribe. They attempt to convert Sarah with offers of money. She has no need for earthly treasures: "she could not take the money, but if he had a Letter for us, she should be free to receive that"; the priest tells them

they, "should have ink and paper to write" (Evans and Cheevers, 26), but neither letter, nor ink and paper are ever delivered. Even when they seem to relent, the women still find themselves denied this basic request. At one point the Magistrate sends for them and asks them if they want anything, to which they reply that they would like pen and ink. The Magistrate "bid the Scribe give us ink and paper; he said he would but was so wicked he did not" (Evans and Cheevers, 28). The pen and ink allows Evans and Cheevers to stay connected to each other and to stay connected to their Quaker community. The denial of these materials isolates the women, limits their level of influence and authority within their communities, and is intended to break down the unified front that the women have managed to maintain in spite of their imprisonment. But despite the friars' efforts, the women do write, and their letters home work to undermine Catholic authority and to celebrate their own in the face of adversity.

In a letter smuggled to their community in England by Dan Baker, the women describe the atrocities of the Catholic Church: "But oh the ways, the fashions, forms, customs, traditions, observations, and imaginations which they have drawn in by their dark divinations, to keep the poor people in blindness and ignorance, so that they perish for want of knowledge, and are corrupted because the way of truth is not made known among them" (Evans and Cheevers, 32). The priests in this passage are associated with ignorance and superstition. They are also accused of misusing their authority to oppress the less fortunate rather than help and support them. In the same letter, the women present themselves as masters of reason, and the voices of Christ. They recall how in their ignorance,

the friars have told them that their Bibles are not legitimate because they do not include Macabees. The reply is:

> I said, if any were taken from them, yet the rest might be pure; but if any were added to them, that they were corrupted. He asked me whether I did not think it meet for everyone to bow at the name of Jesus. I said Yea. He said Jesus, and bid me fall down, or bow my body. I told him, My heart and whole body was bowed under the name of Jesus, but should not stoop to his will, nor any man's else: He that departeth from iniquity, boweth to the Name of Jesus, but those that live in sin and wickedness do not stoop to the Son of God.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 32-33)

Evans and Cheevers once again are on the side of God. This letter travels to their community members at home, demonstrating how the women are able to maintain strength in the face of adversity; their letter highlights their authority.

The letter is also significant because Baker describes it as a letter from "them"; yet the pronoun in the letter is "I." There is no mention made by name of either Evans or Cheevers, so there are no clues as to who the "I" might be, suggesting that the "I" is actually the verbal representation of the complete unification of the two women. In uniting themselves into one voice, Evans and Cheevers once again champion their friendship, a friendship between two women that was not even thought to truly exist. According to Rosemary Kegl, this conjunction of the two women's voices represents more than a friendship, but an imitation of companionate marriage, in which the role of husband as head of the

household and wife as the passive helpmate are undermined and confused, because the two voices dissolve into each other, indistinguishable in the end.[22] Kegl sees the union of the women's voices as a challenge to social structures, but their conjunction of voices reaches beyond the domestic front. Evans and Cheevers are also experimenting with forms of authorship. Like the empress and the Cavendish author figure that merge into one while maintaining their individuality in *The Blazing World,*[23] these women fade in and out of the text as individuals and as a united voice.

This co-authorship enables them in one sense to relinquish authorship, since it is rarely entirely clear who is speaking, but this overlapping of voice also serves as a mark of their triumph over their enemies who have been trying to divide and conquer them from the start of the narrative. The women resist and retaliate at every attempt made to create division. In fact, they work to present their enemies as divided through the description of the priests' ranting, howling, and bickering. In merging their voices, the women may be challenging patriarchal structures, as Kegl argues, but, as Catherine Gray explains, these women's "key role in British public culture helps us understand it as … riven with political conflicts and gender tensions, shaped by interested communities that defined themselves in opposition to dominant trends in religious and governmental policies and practices."[24] Gray sees Evans' and Cheevers' text as an overlapping of public and private, domestic and national, that challenges existing

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[22] Rosemary Kegl, "Women's Preaching, Absolute Property, and the Cruel Sufferings (for the Truths sake) of Katharine Evans & Sarah Cheevers," *Women's Studies* 24 (1994): 71.
[23] Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment," 238-239.
[24] Catharine Gray, *Women Writers and the Public Debate in 17th Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 184.

social and political structures. With this in mind, it can be argued that while Evans' and Cheevers' unity of voice challenges family structures, it also challenges its enemy, the Catholic Church. The single voice telling the tale of the savage friars tormenting the pious, devoted friends acts as a beacon of triumph. The authorship here, though it may silence the individual voice, is far from silent. It is the unbreakable bond, strengthened by their faith in God, which stands as a testimony to the validation of Quaker belief. Gray argues, "The collision or collaboration between gender normative and non-normative moments in Quaker writing, that is, may produce new, even paradoxical female identities, in which women's very marginal status makes them key to oppositional or revolutionary public activity. It is this paradoxical position that guaranteed their continuing importance to the counter publics constituting the 'radical' underground."[25] In this moment in their text it is their position as authors that is paradoxical. On the one hand, their unity is clearly displayed by the conjunction of their voices. On the other, their independence shows in their personal letters home to friends and family. This authorial paradox is in part what enables them to pit one community against the other. The Catholics are the faith of chaos and haphazard superstitious beliefs, while the Quakers are so tightly connected in their beliefs and by their community that they have the power to unite their voices.

In toying with the idea of authorship, Evans and Cheevers also produce what Gray calls, "paradoxical female identities." As Wilcox explains, one of the biblical passages that Quakers grappled with in defining and understanding women's role in the church was 1 Peter 2:7, in which women are referred to as

[25] Gray, *Women Writers,* 185.

"the weaker vessel." This seeming moment of subordination translates into a moment of spiritual agency. Quakers believed that weakness was a "requirement rather than a hindrance in ministry."[26] This application of weakness appears in the texts of many seventeenth-century prophetic women writers, yet it is not prevalent in Evans' and Cheevers' text. As the friars interrogate them, Evans recalls, "I did use to tell him, My Conscience was not seared with a hot iron. I was not past feeling. At last he was so weary of coming to us, he did entreat the Inquisitor he might not come to us anymore" (Evans and Cheevers, 35). The words in this narrative are very strong, as Evans says clearly, "I did use to tell him." Although the women do attribute their strength and perseverance throughout their trials to the light of God, when they recount their interactions with the friars, the pronouns are clearly possessive. She uses the phrase, "I did use to tell" which puts her firmly in control of the language. This is a very different presentation of divine communication than expressions that appear in Beaumont's and Trapnel's works that emphasize that the words dart through their souls or drop in upon their minds. The words in this text originate with Evans and she uses them to sting the friars so severely that they retreat in fear and frustration of the two "weak" women. The friar is described as "weary," revealing his own weakness in the face of their strength. The bold declaration, "My conscience was not seared with a hot iron" presents Evans as impervious to pain, and impervious to alteration, countering two assumptions about women that derive from Eden; she is not weak, and she is not easily persuaded. The sharp distinction between her strength and his weakness then concludes with an affirmation of the

[26] Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry,* 217.

connection between the women. Evans does not write that the friar is tired of questioning her; she writes that he was tired of "coming to us." The paradox of the individual and united voice contributes to a strengthened representation of female identity. This is not a hierarchy in which one woman is stronger than the other; their united front empowers them both.

As an example, while the women are kept in the stifling hot room, Evans begins to weaken, and there is talk of moving her to a cooler location. Upon hearing this, Evans writes, "I took her [Sarah] by the arm, and said, The Lord hath joined us together, and wo be to them that should part us" (Evans and Cheevers, 13-14). This statement equates the bond between Evans and Cheevers to a marriage. Evans explains that the priests want to separate them because "we corrupted each other, and they thought when we were parted, we would have bowed to them. But they found God did fit us for every condition" (Evans and Cheevers, 13-14). This bond between Evans and Cheevers is viewed as threat. Not only is it a threat to the Catholic authorities, it is also a challenge to traditional social understandings of female friendship. Gregory Chaplin introduces the difference in conceptions of male friendship and marriage by explaining that marriage was seen in early modern England as a connection of the flesh, while Platonic friendship was seen as a merging of souls.[27] Rachel Warburton adds to this understanding of early modern friendship as she explains, "While both friendship and marriage are available to propertied, early modern men, they occupy distinct places. A woman, on the other hand, could not be both wife and friend to her husband since women's natural lack of intellect disqualified

[27] Chaplin, "'One Flesh, One Heart'," 269.

them from friendship."[28] But when Evans refers to Cheevers using the language of the marriage vow, she elevates their friendship, (a friendship that culturally was not even expected to exist,) to the level of marriage, to the spiritual bond that was thought to only exist between a man and a woman. Though this may seem to eroticize their relationship, Warburton argues that what is more significant about the friendship than its erotic undertones is "the claim that all is held in common between friends; nothing shared in the friendship belongs exclusively to either party."[29] Evans and Cheevers see themselves, their voices, and their experiences as connected, and this connection forges a new social arena for women. It is a challenge to the priests and it is a challenge to their culture. The waves of attack from the friars continue to break upon Evans' and Cheevers' commitment to each other throughout their ordeal.

The friars are unsuccessful in their attempts. Although the women may weaken in body, they remain strong in spirit. In a letter the women give to Baker to send back to England, they write:

> Then the English Fryar which was here, came up and down to us, and down to us, and would say to my Friend, She is ready to depart, send for me, and take notice what torment she will be in, a thousand devils will be about her, to fetch her soul to Hell, because she will not be a Catholic. And after we were parted, we were called to fast, so that my Friend was so weak, that she put on such linen upon her head, as she thought to lie in her

[28] Rachel Warburton, "'The Lord hath joined us together, and wo be to them that should part us': Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers as Traveling Friends," *Tulsa Studies in Literature and Language* 47 (2005): 410.
[29] Ibid., 412.

> grave: We did eat but little in a month together, when our money was almost done, till we did know the mind of the Lord what to do. Then they did run to and fro like mad men, and the Fryars did come and say, the Inquisitors sent them to tell us, we might have any thing we would eat.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 77)

Following this description of their suffering, Evans makes the paradoxical statement, "We were very weak, because the power did work so strongly" (Evans and Cheevers, 77). At the start of this description, Cheevers bears the brunt of the physical suffering. She is thought to be dying, she is preparing for her grave. At this point, the suffering is individual, it only belongs to Sarah. However, as the description continues, the suffering unites Evans and Cheevers. Pronouns like "we" and "our" are introduced into the passage, and suddenly it is no longer the suffering of one woman but two. In their deliberate weakening of the body, and through their shared fast, they gain strength. In fact, Evans describes the power as causing the weakness. And as the letter continues, they include the biblical passage, "the foolish things must confound the wise," and then go on to say, "all Friends that do understand it, will say so" (Evans and Cheevers, 81). The unification of suffering is passed on to the community in England as proof of the fulfillment of God's word.

In another reversal of power, Evans and Cheevers present themselves as strong and the priests as weak. The passages concerning their imprisonment contain their brazen retaliation to the priests, including, "He was as bloody a fiery serpent as ever was born of Woman, and did strike hard at our lives & would hold

up his hand often to strike us, but had never the power, he would quickly be cut down, that he would say, we were good women, and he would do us any good" (Evans and Cheevers, 20). In this passage, the priest is controlled by some outside force that protects the women from him. The passage reads, "He would quickly be cut down," implying that a force greater than himself made him cease his violence; the women do not even represent him as having power over himself. Even "the fiery serpent" must admit that they are good women. Their description of him alludes to the description of Satan in the Garden of Eden. The serpent friar is said to "strike hard at our lives" which is reminiscent of the passage, "He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."[30] The comparison of the priest to the satanic serpent makes their triumph over him all the more impressive and their critique of Catholicism all the more biting. It clearly marks the Society of Friends as pious and good, and Catholicism as evil. It also emphasizes their strength, fortitude, and righteousness. They not only triumph in their battle of will with the Catholics, they also triumph over Satan's villainy.

Although Evans and Cheevers present themselves as strong throughout their narrative, they represent themselves differently to serve other rhetorical demands at other points in the text. In addition to the narrative of their sufferings which makes up a large portion of the work, the text also contains letters from Evans and Cheevers to loved ones back home and to fellow Quakers. In these letters, the tone of the text dramatically shifts. For one, it becomes much easier to determine who is speaking in the letters, since many of them are clearly addressed from either Evans or Cheevers and are directed to close family members, such as

[30] Gen. 3: 14 (NRSV).

husbands and children. In one such letter to her children, Evans writes, "Oh my dear Husband and Children, how often have I poured out my soul to our Everlasting Father for you, with Rivers of Tears, night and day, that you might be kept pure and single in the sight of our God, improving your talents as wise Virgins, having Oyl in your Vessels, and your lamps burning" (Evans and Cheevers, 53). In this letter, Evans is still clearly devout and steadfast in her course, but she communicates in a much more tender tone, revealing to her family how much she cares for them. Of course, there is nothing unusual about a mother using tender words to speak to her children, but in the context of the entire work, this shift in tone works to highlight the rhetorical positioning in their description of their interaction with the priests.

When the women write home to their families, friends, and community members, they do not present themselves as the defiant women that they seem to be in the face of the friars. When writing home, they present themselves as mothers and as wives, and do not say anything that would be considered challenging to the family structure. Different rhetorical positions are made available by different social spaces. As "yokemates" untied against a common enemy, they can wield authority because the entire community wants to see the catholic community suffer, so it is acceptable for the women to assert themselves and challenge authority, because it is an authority that it is agreed upon is evil. When writing to their husbands and children, the women do not emphasize their suffering, but they do emphasize their path in light. They translate their suffering

into their role in the church as example. In a letter to her husband and children, Evans assures her family,

> I have been very sensible, dear Husband, of thine, and our Children, and many dear friends more, of your sorrowful souls, mourning hearts, grieved spirits, troubled minds for us, as being Members of one body, Christ Jesus, being our head, we must needs suffer together, that we may rejoice together; a true sorrow begets a true joy, a true Cross a true Crown. We do believe it is our heavenly Fathers will and purpose to bring us back as safe to England, as ever he brought us thence, for his own glory, though we are some of the least of Christ's flock.
>
> (Evans and Cheevers, 61)

This authority is much more passive, as Evans accepts her lot as God's will. Though the tone here is not nearly as bold as it is when Evans or Cheevers address the priests, there is still an underlying claim to authority here. Their suffering is for Christ's glory. In connecting their plight to a divine plan, Evans once again signals that God has authorized her missionary work, and her record of her sufferings.

When writing as missionaries, the women establish their authority at the expense of their Catholic oppressors. While criticizing and undermining the authority of the Catholic Church, the women also present their bonds of friendship in a way that challenges traditional concepts of gender and family. When the women write to their loved ones, they apply the normative rhetoric of wives and mothers. In this rhetorical space they cannot access the authority that

their position as missionaries affords them. Evans and Cheevers make an authorial decision to include the passive domestic voice in tandem with the defiant radical voice; they make an authorial decision that demonstrates their adroitness with style, tone, and rhetoric, and signal to their people that they can be a threat to their enemies without being a threat to the households that make up their own community. This shifting authorial position creates another subversive paradox. Even though the women do not overtly question or challenge their passive roles as wives and mothers, by placing the radical voice adjacent to its passive sister, the women present a challenge to their domestic constrictions. They signal that their reticence is a role, and that they are capable of breaking out of it without the aid or sanction of patriarchal figures.

III. Anna and St. Paul

Anna Trapnel was a member of the Fifth Monarchy Men; a sectarian group whose name seems counterintuitive, since, as Bernard Capp observes, "Women easily outnumbered men."[31] This group's name also alludes to its principle belief that the death of King Charles I signaled the end of the fourth monarchy, making way for the fifth, which is the rule of Christ on earth.[32] As a group, Fifth Monarchists also stand out in seventeenth-century history as the sect

[31] Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 82.
[32] Hillary Hinds, Ed., *The Cry of a Stone* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), xxvii.

that condones violence as a means of ridding England of Catholic influence.[33] Like other Puritan sects, Fifth Monarchists derived most of their beliefs and practices from the Bible, relying heavily on scriptural passages (primarily from the Book of Revelation and the Book of Daniel) to support and convey their message.[34] For this study the group is particularly significant because they believe that the "Fifth Monarchy would arise for the benefits of saints drawn from the marginalized and disenfranchised of society."[35] This group's inclusion of women, reliance on scripture, support for the socially dispossessed, and acceptance of violence frames their relationship to authority. As a member of this community, it is part of Trapnel's practice to claim authority where there was once none and to undermine it where it already exists. Hinds explains that knowledge of the historical circumstances in which Trapnel's texts were written is not necessary only for context, "but because it is directly productive of the text: its formal characteristics, its focus, its tone, indeed its very existence."[36] *The Cry of a Stone* hinges on the disappointment felt by all Fifth Monarchists when Oliver Cromwell, who was supposed to be one of the group's saints on earth, betrays his sectarian supporters and dissolves the Barebones Parliament, declaring himself Lord Protector. Trapnel then finds herself on trial in *Report and Plea* for the prophecies voiced and recorded in *The Cry of a Stone.*

But the utterance of *The Cry of a Stone* is not only produced by social context and history; it is also produced by a sense of community. It is no

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[33] David Loewenstein, "Scriptural Exegisis, Female Prophecy, Radical Politics in Mary Cary," *SEL* 46 (2006): 135.
[34] Ibid., 135.
[35] Hinds, "Introduction*," The Cry,* xviii.
[36]Ibid., xxi.

coincidence that Trapnel's trances begin while she is "attending the examination by the Council of State at Whitehall of Vavasor Powell, a prominent Baptist/Fifth Monarchist preacher."[37] Powell, who also criticized Cromwell for his betrayal,[38] was on trial for his political statements at the very moment Trapnel begins to launch hers. Her work in some way picks up where Powell leaves off, refusing to let the voice of the Fifth Monarchy Men be silenced. Unlike Powell, she does not publicly preach her anger at Cromwell; she voices her resentment while in a trance. Despite her semi-passive presentation of her attack on the Lord Protector, Trapnel is also arrested, and her account of her spiritual journey, capture, and trial are the focus of *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea (1654).*

In one sense, Trapnel's work is very clearly connected to community. Her public prophetic career begins in conjunction with the persecution of a fellow Fifth Monarchist, and in both *The Cry of a Stone* and *Report and Plea*, Trapnel seems very aware of her reader, and of the relationship of her words and actions to her congregation. But her inclusion of community is of a different nature than what appears in Evans' and Cheevers' text. There is no "yokemate" here; there is no Dan Baker smuggling letters home; Trapnel is on her own in her position as author. But the absence of a co-author does not mean that she is not connected to anything or anyone. Trapnel focuses on the redistribution of authority, demonstrating that she is in step with her congregation's beliefs. According to Trapnel, knowledge and power have rightful owners, and they are not Cromwell or his followers. Like Evans and Cheevers, Trapnel presents a social paradigm of

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[37]Ibid., xvii.

[38] Some of Vavasor Powell's prophecies published before his imprisonment include: *Christ Exalted: A Sermon Before Parliament, 1651; Spiritual Experiences of Sundry Believers, 1653.*

"us" against "them," in which the "us" will no longer be satisfied with limited access to authority. Much of the way Trapnel claims this authority has to do with the allegiance she presents to certain groups and ideals.

Trapnel is in some sense fighting a war on two fronts. Not only is she voicing the protest of a sectarian group that is being strong-armed out of political power. She is also voicing the protest of her sex, which has never had any sanctioned access to that power. To successfully launch this attack, she draws support from both the Bible and her fellow Fifth Monarchists. She uses this support, like Evans and Cheevers, to draw stark points of division between herself and the ruling authorities. In Trapnel's worldview, as in the Quakers', there is no concept of a shared power. Those that sit in judgment of her on earth will meet with the judgment of the divine hereafter. Though social practices may imply her voice does not bear any authority, according to Trapnel, both scripture and God say otherwise.

Just as in Evans' and Cheevers' text, Trapnel's work addresses St. Paul's sanction against women preaching by presenting herself and St. Paul as part of the same tradition. She writes, "And though I am a poor inferiour, unworthy to be compared with any of the holy men or women reported of in the Scripture; yet I can say with Paul, Through grace I am what I am; and I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I live, is by the faith of the Son of God, who died, and gave himself for a weak handmaid, as well as for a strong Paul" (Trapnel, *Report,* 3). In one sense, this quotation from Trapnel's text seems to uphold cultural constructs of gender and power; Paul is strong and she is weak. Though

she presents herself as accepting a weak role, there are aspects of this quotation that subvert this acceptance. She may make a distinction between herself and Paul based on strength, but she also crafts a significant link: Christ lives in both of them. This spiritual equalization trumps gender difference and places them both within the prophetic tradition. She subverts St. Paul's injunction against women speaking through a reference to St. Paul. Within this quotation, Trapnel refers to herself as weak, and in doing so participates in the social codes surrounding early modern women. Yet she also participates in prophetic rhetoric which often involves self-abnegation. The reference to her weakness is only one level of meaning in this complex statement. Her weakness grants her access to Christ, empowers her voice, and gives her an authoritative role in a Christian community.

The paradox of power and passivity permeates the most basic form of community in Trapnel's text: the exclusive relationship between herself and the divine. The main focus of Trapnel's *Report and Plea* is a justification of her decision to travel to Cornwall, since it for this that she is closely questioned in the courtroom. Her defense is grounded in her representation of the personal relationship she has with God. She is sure to point out that she did not want to go to Cornwall. Her friends have invited her because they feel she can serve others, but she has told them that it is too far, and that her other friends at home would not be pleased with her decision to travel. She makes a point out of her commitment not to go, once again demonstrating her reluctance to act. Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, she goes so far as to pray that God will release her from any obligation to travel. However, God will not let this cup pass

from her: "But the Lord that night persuaded my heart to pray to him for his presence in the journey to Cornwal, saying don't pray against it anymore: for there thou must go. And much perswasion was given into my heart, by the secret whisperings of the Spirit" (Trapnel, *Report,* 2). Trapnel denies having any agency in her journey, presenting herself as passive and obedient to God's will.

Within the language of this exchange there is more than passivity. Trapnel's description of her interaction with God as "whisperings" signals the significance of this spiritual communication. As Nigel Smith explains, to seventeenth-century critics of prophecy, the whisperings to the soul were only the predecessor to true prophecy, which was a revelation of the truth.[39] In Trapnel's work, her justification of her decision to travel begins with a whispering to her soul, suggesting that what comes after this metalinguistic interaction with the divine will be prophetic and true. The connection between internal whisperings and the revelation of truth again illustrates the paradoxical relationship that exists between silence and power. To whisper and to persuade suggest the exchange of words, but the locations of the discourse limit its verbal potential. This communication is internal and private, and thereby impossible for anyone else to hear or validate. Yet because the whisperings are in her heart and soul, they also serve as markers of her relationship to God, allude to the prophetic tradition, and therefore once again validate her text.

Though many of their exchanges are represented as internal and metalinguistic, Trapnel and God's moments of communication are also mediated

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[39] Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 75-6.

by scriptural passages. Puritans believed the scripture was the word of God, and could serve as a bridge between man and the deity.[40] In Trapnel's text, Biblical passages not only act as a bridge between the prophet and the divine, but they also describe the bridge. Trapnel refers to several passages to describe the nature of her communication with God. She cites Job 1:9, "The Lord thy God is with thee wherever thy goest." Then, Psalms 139:7, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from you presence?" Also Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (*Report*, 6). These three passages revolve around the same theme: connectivity. Trapnel is not alone. The verses given to her from God out of Job, Psalms, and Isaiah attest to God's continual presence in her life.

Trapnel also develops her connection to God's will and word by including references to scripture and prophecy that parallel her own experiences. She even manages to align her disobedience to God with the prophetic tradition. When she begs God not to send her on this journey to Cornwall, God responds by saying she is behaving as Moses did when he was sent to Egypt to preach. Trapnel records God as saying to her, "Thou reasonest as Moses did when he was to go to Pharaoh" (*Report*, 6). This parallel with Moses, like her earlier connection between herself and the strong Paul, stresses her reticence and reluctance. In doing so, she also renegotiates the significance of these qualities. The reluctant woman may be perceived as weak, but by connecting this "weakness" to Moses, she recontextualizes it within the prophetic tradition. She is not just a reluctant

[40] Garret, "The Rhetoric of Supplication," 354.

woman; she is a prophet, enduring a test of character just like the most influential biblical prophets.

Trapnel continues with comparisons to major biblical figures by including more references to St. Paul while defending herself on trial. Justice Lobb launches the accusation, "You prophecie against Truro." Trapnel responds, "Indeed I pray against the sins of the people of Truro, and for their souls welfares; are you angry for that?" Lobb continues, "But you must not judge Authority; but pray for them, and not speak so suspiciously of them" (*Report*, 18). Trapnel's response to this comment turns the judges' accusations on their head, linking her message to St. Paul's message and the judge to the enemies of the church:

> I will take up your word, in which you said, I was not to judge: you said well; for so saith the Scripture, Who art thou that judgeth anothers mans servant to his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand: but you have judgeth me, and never heard me speak: you have not dealt so well by me as Agrippa dealt by Paul: though Agrippa was an Heathen, and would have Paul speak before he gave in his judgment concerning him.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report,* 18)

What Trapnel exemplifies here is a complex argumentative strategy in which she uses Justice Lobb's accusation of her against him. Lobb tells her it is not her place to question authority. Instead of saying she does have authority, she wields it by saying he is right. Trapnel uses St. Paul's experiences to prove that it is wrong to judge, an assertion that calls Lobb's entire profession into question,

offering another level of social subversion. In her explanation, she is St. Paul and the judge is Agrippa the heathen. With this turn of logic, Trapnel shifts from the criminal on trial to a biblical prophetic figure, thereby undermining the entire legal process of which she is a part. Like Evans and Cheevers, Trapnel presents a reversal of power.

The comparison between her and biblical figures continues as Justice Treggle replies, "Oh, you are a dreamer!" Trapnel responds, "So they called Joseph, therefore I wonder not that you call me so" (*Report*, 18). Once again, Trapnel responds to an affront by aligning herself with an authoritative prophet. At one point in her text, she parallels her experiences while in custody to the experiences of Jonah. While she is en route to Plymouth by boat, there is a large storm that makes it difficult for the boat to make it safely to its destination. Rumors begin to circle that Trapnel has jinxed the journey. Trapnel recalls, "they cursed me there, but the Lord blessed me the more; many reproaches he helpt me to bear, and though we were beating on the waves against the wind, yet I was not sick; for the Lord had there much for me to declare to Sea men of free grace, and of the vileness of mans nature, and the excellent work of Redemption" (*Report*, 18). Trapnel's words move the men. Instead of seeing her as a jinx, "the Lord made some of them declare how the Lord refreshed them, and that they knew if I had stayed longer, much good their souls would have reaped" (*Report*, 24). This story, involving a sea journey, a storm, a disgruntled shipping crew, and a Christian, is a direct allusion to the story of Jonah and the whale. This appropriation of the Jonah story presents a comparison to Jonah that is favorable

to Trapnel. Like Jonah, she is called to journey in the name of God and does not want to go. The difference is that Jonah tries to run away, while Trapnel heeds her call. In this version of the Jonah story, the crew does not weep that the runaway prophet has brought so much misery to them. On the contrary, they are grateful for her presence, which once again vindicates her role as prophet. In this passage, not only does she align herself with the biblical prophetic tradition, she also in some ways sets herself above her biblical predecessor. It seems she is not so reticent after all.

Trapnel continues to set herself higher than the figures that have come before her in her reference to Nichodemus. She begins to draw a crowd during her trial and recalls,

> I asked them what they came to see, I was but as a reed shaken with the wind; I was a simple creature, onely divine wisdom was pleased to make use of the simple, and to call them to him, to shew them his love, to chuse such to do him service, and I said, I am a poore sorry reed, but divine power, and the wind that Christ told Nichodemus, in the 3 of John the 8 which bloweth where it lifteth, that wind said I, hath taken a silly creature, and hath made her understand its sound, that which Nichodemus a great Rabbi, could not tell what to make of.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report*, 21)

Trapnel once again expresses a paradoxical relationship to authority, asserting her power while also presenting her weakness. In the same breath that she compares herself to a "shaken reed," and refers to herself as a "simple creature" and a

"poore sorry reed," she also makes the claim that she has a deeper understanding of scripture and a closer connection to Christ than Nichodemus.

Within her text, Trapnel uses references to the scriptural and biblical community to validate her place as prophet in society, and to judge her adversaries. While on trial for being a witch, a seditious citizen, and even a madwoman, she faces rejection from her own English society. She uses these references to scripture, and these connections to prophets to create for herself and for her spectators, a community to which she can claim belonging and a community which wields more authority than the English government.

III. "…why may I not be with my friends anywhere?"

Anna Trapnel connects herself to St. Paul and to other biblical figures to demonstrate her authority as God's chosen messenger. Yet this is not the only community to which Trapnel belongs. Throughout her text, Trapnel is never on her own. She consistently narrates her experiences as involving women and other members of her Fifth Monarchist community. One of the complaints about Trapnel is that she brings a crowd with her. Justice Lobb tells her that she is a "disturbance in the town"; when Trapnel asks how that could be, he says, "by drawing so many people after" (*Report*, 28) her. The reaction of the crowd that watches her contributes to her vindication and to her authority. She writes,

> As I went in the croud, many strangers were very loving and careful to help me out of the croud: and the rude multitude said, Sure this woman is

> no witch, for she speaks many good words, which the witches could not. And thus the Lord made the rude rabble to justifie his appearance; for in all that was said by me, I was nothing, the Lord put all in my mouth and told me what I should say.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report*, 19)

The "rude multitude" is suddenly on her side. Even her enemies recognize who Trapnel is and that she has been touched by God. The inclusion of this moment in Trapnel's text demonstrates the power of language. Even the angry crowd can see her goodness and holiness after witnessing her deft facility with rhetoric and speech. In her prophetic text, *The Cry of a Stone*, Trapnel's strength is in her silence; the claim and the demonstration that her words are not coming from her are what authorize her as a prophet. In this moment in front of the crowd in *Report and Plea*, the crowd is not concerned with where her words come from. It is the fact that she speaks so many good things that verifies for them that she is not a witch; to the crowd, silence is a mark of witchcraft.[41] As Terry Eagleton explains, language is successfully performative when it is used within certain conventions.[42] Even though her speech is what vindicates her to the rabble, Trapnel is reticent, and denies having any connection to the words that she speaks; they are God's words, not hers. In this conjunction of praise for her speech and denial of her speech, Trapnel simultaneously occupies two feminine rhetorical spaces. Her speech proves she is not a witch, and her silence verifies she is a prophet. In this context and scenario, her speech is not outside of the

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[41] Hinds, "Introduction," *The Cry,* xx.
[42] Terry Eagelton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 103.

female purview, but it is exactly what is necessary to win the support of the audience.

The gathering crowd also highlights the foolishness of other organizations such as the government and the courts. In Evans' and Cheevers' text, the women of Malta are described as weeping for the Quaker captives because they are good women who should be free, if only they would convert. In Trapnel's work, "but the poor who are rich in faith, prayed for me in those parts, and some I never saw, about ten miles from the place where I was, who hearing my trouble, improved their interest with the Lord for me; their faith and prayer, did me more good than all the gold, or silver, or favours of great men could have done me" (*Report*, 21). As if in fulfillment of the text, "the foolish shall confound the wise,"[43] the poor people of the countryside are able to recognize her spirituality, while the so-called wise men of the government are not.

Trapnel's methods of communication shift throughout her text. In front of the crowd, she speaks, signaling her authority. Behind closed doors, while in the presence of friends, she falls into a trance and loses control over her words and to some extent her narrative. But it is in this state that she communes with the divine. She writes of being escorted to prison by her friends:

> My friends told me, that I was three hours on my knees, praying and praising, that I felt no pain nor wearisomnesse, though I had journeyed so far. They took me off my knees and set me in a chair, where I sat some hours after in singing and then was silent, and some women put me to bed, where I lay praying and singing the other part of that night, while

[43] I Cor 1:27 (NRSV).

> morning: and the maid that tended me said she sate in the bed, wiping away the tears from my eyes, which she said came exceeding fast, all night, as I sung and prayed.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report*, 22)

Trapnel describes herself as being surrounded by a community of caring women. In some ways, this camaraderie between the women is reminiscent of the connection between Cheevers and Evans, in that the text presents women providing care in the midst of suffering. Yet there is also a major difference in the representations. Trapnel is the only one suffering, and she is in such a state that she does not even really realize what is happening to her. While being taken to prison, she does not launch the same witty rhetorical attacks she threw in the face of the judges. In this locus, she is passive; even her narration is passive. The passage above reads, "my friends told me." Trapnel relinquishes control over her narrative at this moment, claiming that her text is based purely on second-hand information from her friends about herself. Trapnel lets others speak for her, something that is typically associated with the domination of the feminine.[44] In letting others speak for her, Trapnel returns to the passive female that she is supposed to play. Yet the twist to this representation of passivity is that her voice is appropriated by other women. In Trapnel's first text, *The Cry of a Stone*, she describes herself as "a voice within a voice, another's voice" (48). Here, that is exactly what has happened. Her voice gets funneled through another, but it is not funneled through a voice of authority or domination; it is funneled through the feminine voice. In relinquishing power over her words, she is able to present

[44] Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*, 76-8.

herself as the passive female, while also maintaining a female authorial voice. Both are accomplished through her interaction with her female religious community.

The women surrounding Trapnel not only act as her memory; they also care for her body. They set her in a chair, lift her into bed, and they wipe away the tears from her eyes; the image of women caring for a lifeless body in some way alludes to passages in the Bible in which Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Martha care for Christ during his passion. Matthew describes, "Many women were also there looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee."[45] The women in the Bible also care for Christ after his death: "Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared."[46] Like Trapnel's body, the body of Christ is watched over and cared for by women in the most trying hours demonstrating that female communities are a part of Christianity. This is another example of the subtle connections between Christ and Trapnel that permeate her narrative. The spiritual marriage to Christ and the power that comes with it is a common trope in devotional literature,[47] but in this text, Trapnel is not presenting herself as Christ's bride, she is subtly suggesting that her life parallels

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[45] Mat 27: 55-6 (NRSV).
[46] Luke 23:56, 24:1 (NRSV).
[47] For a examples of the use of the spiritual marriage metaphor in women's writing, see Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Julie Straight, "'Neither keeping either under': Gender and Voice in Elizabeth Barrett's *The Seraphim,*" *Victorian Poetry* 38 (2000): 269-288.

his Passion. Trapnel's connection to Christ confers the ultimate prophetic authority to her.

But community does not always work to Trapnel's advantage. While Trapnel's friends help her to her bed, and help her to carry out God's wishes, her enemies conspire against her. Following her description of her weak body, she explains,

> And at that time I had a vision of the Ministers wife stirring against me, calling that falsity which she understood not. And I saw the Clergie-man and the Jurors contriving an indictment against me: and I saw myself stand before them: in a vision I saw this. And I sang with much courage and told them I feared not them nor their doings, for I had not deserved such usage.

(Trapnel, *Report*, 15)

This vision is followed by another in which the Constable comes at the behest of the courts and pulls her eyelids and shakes her body to prove that she is not truly in a trance. However, Trapnel's body remains limp and unresponsive, while her mental capacities remain lively, vibrant, as well as controversial, as she envisions a unified front of priests and jurors bent on destroying her. Like Evans and Cheevers who represent Catholics and Quakers as oppositional communities, Trapnel presents the community that supports her and the community that seeks to destroy her. It is of course the community that comes to her aid that is also touched by God and that validates her journey and her words.

This silent Christ-like woman, with no voice of her own, is a powerful voice for her congregation. Toward the end of her "report and plea," Trapnel neither reports, nor pleads, but prophecies the triumph of the Fifth Monarchy Men over all those who have persecuted them. She writes:

> And the Lord's heritage must wait for their Right, till their King Jesus comes, whose right all power and Dominion is, and will take his great power and reign; who then shall gain say him? Then there shall be no mockers, nor deriders to scoffe at the Fifth Monarchy, where then shall be the table-scoffers, and the Pulpit-deriders, and such that make a sport and jeer at those that are for Christ's reign, and cry, Raze them; raze even to the ground, their persons, estates, and what ever is theirs; but the Lord laughs such enemies to scorn, and hath them in derision, and will require and recover all from them that have defrauded; a fierce people shal not overcome the Lord's anointed, fierce looks, nor deep speech gathered up and fetcht from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities shal not affright the Lord's flock, though they stammer, they shall be understood, no dark saying shall be concealed from the faithful, they shall understand fierce looks, and deep subtile speeches, though they be brought forth with a Latine tongue, and in Greek expressions, yet the wise observing spirited ones shall understand.
>
> (Trapnel, *Report*, 34)

Trapnel's discussion of her community and their relationship to people who are not part of their congregation is very much grounded in her present day and in

reality. They are also very much concerned with speech. The Fifth Monarchy Men, in the age of Christ, will not only have their material goods and their property returned to them. They will also be triumphant in terms of knowledge and understanding. The reversal of power that Trapnel envisions as a Fifth Monarchist is very much connected to rhetoric. When she says, "nor deep speech gathered up and fetched from both Cambridge and Oxford shal not affright the Lord's flock," she makes a class distinction. The educated will lose the control over language that enables them to maintain authority. This power will be redistributed. People like her, the marginalized and the powerless will take it from them. They will have the power to speak and understand language. In this passage, Trapnel presents a conflict between two communities, and makes it clear that her community will win control over speech and will win the favor of God in heaven and on earth.

But before the Fifth Monarchists can take their victory in England, Trapnel must have her day in court. While on trial, Trapnel must navigate another code of speech and silence. She fears that the magistrates will think she is a witch if she is not able to speak in court: "I would discover myself to be a witch when I came before the justices, by having never a word to answer for my self; for it used to be so among the witches, they could not speak before the magistrates, and so they said, it would be with me; but the Lord quickly defeated them herein, and caused many to be of another mind" (*Report,* 17). Instead of standing there, mute, in the court room, Trapnel thwarts any accusations of witchcraft with her rational and lively responses. Her interaction with Lobb is as follows:

> Lobb: But you have no lands, nor livings, nor acquaintances to come to in this country.
>
> Trapnel: What though? I had not I am a single person, and why may I not be with my friends anywhere?
>
> Lobb: I understand you are not married.
>
> Trapnel: Then having no hindrance, why may I not go where I please, if the Lord so will?
>
> (Trapnel, *Report*, 18)

Trapnel asserts her freedom and right to move at her own discretion and at God's will. At the moment where she is most in the public eye, and most in danger, she does not use any of the strategies that are often discussed as lending authority to a woman's voice.[48] She is not in a trance, she does not speak in scriptural passages, and she does not claim to see visions or hear voices at this moment in time. Here, Trapnel is the "unified subject…directly addressing the symbolic order from a marginal (feminine) position."[49] The sharp tone of her answers suggests that she is frustrated by the line of questioning concerning her right to travel. She also defends her freedom to move about as she pleases by pointing out her detachment from community. She makes it clear that she has "no

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[48] For example, Maria Magro analyzes the role Trapnel's physical condition plays in authorizing her text, in "Spiritual Autobiography and Radical Sectarian Women's Discourse: Anna Trapnel and the Bad Girls of the English Revolution," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 405-437. Charlotte Sussman discusses Trapnel's use of Scriptural passages to gain authority in "Reading, Praying, and Politics: Women's Private Reading and Political Action, Some Evidence 1640-1840," *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution,* ed. Nigel Smith and Timothy Morton (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 133-151. Nigel Smith explores the connection between visions, dreams, and authority in Chapter 2 of *Perfection Proclaimed*: *Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[49] Wiseman, "Unsilent Instruments," 189.

hindrance" that would prevent her from traveling as she wishes. Though Trapnel presents herself as completely independent, she does have rhetorical obligations, and must conform to linguistic parameters that prove she is not witch. Her one "hindrance" is that she must satisfy the court as to her connection to God. While prophesying, her silence and detachment demonstrate that she is a prophet, but in front of a court her inability to speak would prove her association with witchcraft. Trapnel recognizes the codes that exist in her community, and she adapts rhetorical strategies that lead to her successful participation in those codes.

In front of the court, Trapnel also makes bold assertions of ownership through her reliance on communal support. Lobb questions her about her trances and prayers, and Trapnel, who in *The Cry of a Stone* was hardly involved in the words that she spoke, answers Lobb, "why may not I pray with many people in the room…but I know not that there is anybody in the room when I pray: and if you indite one for praying, why not another? Why are you so partial in your doing?" Lobb tells her that hers is a special case because she does not "pray as others"; Trapnel feels this is a misrepresentation and says, "I pray in my chamber"; Lobb, shocked, says, "Your chamber!". Trapnel boldly responds, "Yea, that it's my chamber while I am there, though the pleasure of my friends" (*Report*, 19). As Magro explains, "What is apparent in *Report and Plea*, however, is not a dissolution of self, but a representation of the self as a product of diverse enunciative acts, memory, and writing."[50] Trapnel does not deny her role in her activities as she does in her prophecies; she does not tell the judge that she is a

[50] Maria Magro, "Spiritual Autobiography and Radical Sectarian Women's Discourse: Anna Trapnel and the Bad Girls of the English Revolution," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 417.

vessel, and an empty shell or worm that can make no claim to property. On the contrary, she makes a claim to the chamber that she prays in because her friends have invited her to stay there. At this moment, Trapnel claims authority and ownership over something that does not belong to her, and she does this through friendship. Her connection to her friends also demonstrates that she has support and that she is not standing in front of the jury unprotected. In Trapnel's work, part of what enables her to make claims to her "self" is her connection to other communities. Trapnel's relationship to God and her biblical predecessors, her connection to the community that watches her trial and her association with other Fifth Monarchists enable her to present herself as a self. She can claim that the room is hers because her friends have invited her into their house.

Trapnel's community originates with her communication with God. The initial authority for all that she does come from this connection. Before Trapnel recounts her appearance in the courtroom, she narrates the events of the day including the moment she realizes there is a warrant out for her arrest. Trapnel is not alone in this ordeal; her Lord is with her: "but the Lord seeing me not prepared to go before them, nor strong enough, he would take me first into the Mount, and give me the preparations of the Sanctuary" (*Report*, 14). This communication that is to take place between Trapnel and God is referred to in a physical sense; she will be taken to another place by God. However, Trapnel does not go anywhere with her body. It is in her mind and soul that she is transported. This metalinguistic communication continues as Trapnel describes, "Then the Lord made his rivers flow, which soon broke down the Banks of an ordinary

capacity, and extraordinarily mounted my spirits into a praying and singing frame, and so they remained till morning light, as I was told, for I was not capable of that" (*Report, 15*). The description of this encounter makes it seem as if God fills Trapnel's being to such a degree that the capacity of her mind and soul is expanded so that only praise for God emanates from her. The unified subject that is visible in the courtroom is completely absent at this moment in the text. Trapnel is so detached from this sequence of events that she cannot even attest to the verity of the occurrence; she was told about it from someone else. This denial of control sits in stark contrast to Trapnel's declarations throughout the text that it, "Commended for the justification of the truth, and satisfaction of all men, from her own hand" (*Report*, 1).

Throughout her text, Trapnel participates in several relationships; she is God's messenger, England's defendant, the Fifth Monarchist's champion, her friend's patient, and the courtroom's spectacle. Each one of these roles demands a different linguistic code. Trapnel navigates the various rhetorical expectations that surround her throughout her ordeal, exemplifying various levels of boldness and reticence, but all to the same end: to gain authority. In Trapnel's and in Evans' and Cheever's texts, there are communities of authority, including allusions to the biblical prophetic community, the religious communities to which the women belong, and the feminocentric communities that surround them. Support networks, like the ones included in these women's works, have always been known to create authority or a foundation. The communities in these texts are significant because they are shaped by rhetoric. These women choose to

include references to particular types of communities, at appropriate moments in the texts, demonstrating that the prophetic women of the seventeenth century were making rhetorical decisions and crafting their texts to maximize their access to the authority that was available to them. Evans and Cheevers send letters home to friends and family expressing their commitment to their domestic roles, during the same days that they turn Catholic priests into howling dogs. In the courtroom, Trapnel aligns herself with Paul and the prophets, but while in her prophetic ecstasy she resigns her will to the women that surround her.

Proper passivity and reticence is displayed in descriptions of one community, while defiance and boldness are enabled in representations of a different community. The women occupy passive and reticent roles, but subvert the control these roles have over their lives through their presentation of themselves as radical members of authoritative communities. They are not just women, wives, or mothers; they are missionaries and prophets chosen by the divine. As members of a community hand-selected by God, they also undermine the patriarchal nature of biblical and prophetic communities. They present female relationships as authoritative and powerful, thereby redefining their normative communal roles.

IV. Conclusion: Redefining Authority

This project concludes with a chapter on community in Trapnel's and Evans' and Cheevers' works, but this theoretical framework could be applied to

any one of the women in this study. Beaumont, Cheevers, Davies, Evans, Trapnel, and Wentworth publish their works in response to experiences that grow out of their participation in community, whether it is communities to which they belong or which they protest. The three major rhetorical strategies discussed in this project, the marriage metaphor, spectacle, and community, enable these women prophets to gain access to arenas of power and speech, even though at the core of these methods is a reliance on passivity and dissolution of self. These women challenge the meanings of these rhetorical representations, and redefine them to subvert the institutions of power they uphold. Though the women in this study did not have far reaching influence, a study of their rhetoric and their paradoxical relationship to authority extends the parameters of the study of women's writing. Participation in political and social criticism does not have to be framed as an overt political diatribe. By representing themselves as vessels of the word of God, and as participants in the prophetic tradition, these women manipulate channels of passivity and silence to subvert father, husband, church and government.

In their day these women were cast off as madwomen, whores, and blasphemers; there is even one accusation of murder. In the twenty and twenty-first centuries, their writing can easily be dismissed because of their reticent relationship to their authorship and audience. Hillary Hinds reflects on critical responses to Anna Trapnel as follows, "The maintenance of the literary canon, it seems, depends not only in the exclusion of certain texts that are deemed generically or ideologically 'inferior,' but also of those that trouble too

profoundly some of the fundamental premises of the essentialist humanist position (an essential human nature, the primacy of the self-conscious individual, a transhistorical continuity of basic human values)."[51] The prose laden with biblical references, and the women's persistent use of words such as "worm" or "vessel" to describe themselves have contributed to the response Hinds describes. But in analyzing Puritan cultural practices, seventeenth-century English social customs, and the Biblical tradition, this study generates a reading of these works that presents these women as self- conscious authors, making rhetorical decisions to enact normative social codes in order to challenge and subvert their existing roles in their families, religion, and government.

Keith Thomas has argued that the political influence of these radical women is limited because they had very little success in gaining ground for women in the political arena.[52] But Thomas holds these works to the same type of criteria Hinds describes. The lack of social change does not necessarily indicate a lack of influence. In her discussion of women's writing and women's movements, Irigaray writes,

> When women's movements challenge the forms and nature of political life, the contemporary play of power and power relations, they are in fact working toward a modification of women's status. On the other hand, when these same movements aim simply for a change in the distinction of

[51] Hinds, "Introduction," *The Cry*, xlv.
[52] Keith V. Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," *Past and Present* 13 (1958): 56.

> power, leaving intact the power structure itself, then they are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocentric order.[53]

The women in this study may not win the right to vote, they may not affect the patriarchal family structure, and they may not make it acceptable for women to preach, but they do, "challenge the forms and nature of political life" as well as those of spiritual and domestic life, and they do so by renegotiating the rhetoric of seventeenth-century Puritanism and English culture. Wentworth challenges the husband's rule over his wife; Beaumont questions a father's control over a daughter's soul; Trapnel undermines the power of the judicial system; Lady Eleanor insults the king and court; and Evans and Cheevers laugh in the face of the Italian Inquisition. Their ability to gain power through their representations of passivity and divine communication enrich the study of authorship, and demonstrate that the presence of a self-conscious and governing narrative voice is not the only sign of authority. These women may claim to have no authority and to be mere worms and vessels for the Lord's words, but their reticent performance of social expectations enables them to launch scathing attacks on all levels of patriarchal authority.

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[53] Irigaray, *The Sex,* 81.

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