

A History of Early Modern Women's Writing,
ed. Patricia Phillippy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018).
Proof Copy 10/11/17

17

Prophecy, Power, and Religious Dissent

W. Scott Howard

"Triumphing Expressions": Sects, Texts, and the Temper of the Times

Every Saint in a sence, may be said to be a Prophet ... for when the Lord hath revealed himself unto the soul and discovered his secrets to it ... the soul cannot choose but declare them to others ... though some Saints can doe it farre more excellently then others, yet he that speaketh ... though with much weaknesse, doth as truly prophesie as he that hath greatest abilities.¹

By way of this passage (which cites I Corinthians 14:3), Phyllis Mack argues that "Mary Cary formulated a new, moral definition of prophecy that universalized the experience of communication with the divine" for women writers who were religious visionaries and social reformers.² There were forerunners, of course, from earlier centuries and decades, including Anne Askew, Lady Russell, Sister Joan Seller, and Alice Sutcliffe.³ However, as Mihoko Suzuki reasons, "a public did not [yet] exist in early seventeenth-century England ... for the imaginary of political equality for women."⁴ The combined influences of self-motivation, economic independence, and self-education directed toward rigorous engagements with public discourse (through speech and print) distinguished the visionary women of the Civil War and Interregnum. Mack positions Cary's defense of prophecy within and against the gendered discourse of seventeenth-century England and also in opposition to twentieth-century historical research that would trope "women's spirituality as a metaphor for something else."⁵ Numerous invaluable works in this field since the

¹ Cary, *Resurrection*, 65–7.

² Mack, *Visionary Women*, 90.

³ Anne Askew, *The latre examinacyon of Anne Askewe* (1547); Elizabeth (Cooke), Lady Russell, *A Way of Reconciliation* (1605); Sister Joan Seller, *English nun's oath of obedience* (1631); Alice Sutcliffe, *Meditations of man's mortalitie* (1634). Photographic facsimiles from and discussions of these texts may be found in Ostovich and Sauer (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women*, 138–49. On Askew, see Elaine Beilin (Chapter 7) in this volume.

⁴ Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects*, 131.

⁵ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 88.

1980s, including *Visionary Women*, have established the foundation for a more capacious and dynamic historical perspective.⁶

One of the methodological principles at work throughout the chapters in this volume concerns the quest for an “inclusive view of literate practice[s] in early modern England.”⁷ Indeed, within context of her tract, which was republished in 1653, Cary claims prophecy as a moral, universal, and transhistorical right for anyone (man or woman) who would “speak the word of exhortation, and information, to the confirming of Saints in the truth.”⁸ Cary cites Revelation 19:10 with definitional authority, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (KJV). Such rhetorical, exegetical, and millenarian principles are consistent in Cary’s other pamphlets as well as in the numerous works from her contemporary nonconformists, who also expounded the Scriptures as the basis of their search for truth. These include, for example: John Saltmarsh’s *The Smoke in the Temple* (1646); Elizabeth Avery’s *Scripture-prophecies Opened* (1647); Laurence Claxton’s *A Single Eye* (1650); John Rogers’s *Ohel, or Bethshemesh* (1653); Anna Trapnel’s *The Cry of a Stone* (1654); and Margaret Askew Fell Fox’s *Womens speaking justified* (1667), which concludes by celebrating the example of Deborah (from Judges 4 and 5) who “Preacht and sung ... glorious triumphing expressions.”⁹ These mid-century exegetical prophets used “Biblical language and allusion [in order to articulate] radical critiques of state structures and the politics of education.”¹⁰ They did not speak in conventional English, but in the language of sacred poetry because “they assumed the existence of a shared mnemonic culture, a range of symbols and stories derived from the Old and New Testaments whose meanings would be universally understood and whose power, they

⁶ See, for example; Thomas N. Corns, *A History of Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Marcus Nevitt, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England, 1640–1660* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); N. H. Keeble (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁷ Phillippy, Introduction: “Sparkling Multiplicity” in this volume.

⁸ Cary, *Resurrection*, 67.

⁹ Margaret Askew Fell Fox, “Womens Speaking Justified,” in Moira Ferguson (ed.), *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578–1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 126. These lines are from the “Postscript” to the 1667 second edition that is absent from the 1666 pamphlet; the latter concludes: “the Lamb and the Saints shall have the Victory, the true Speakers of Men and Women over the false Speaker” (Fox, *Womens Speaking Justified* (1666), 8).

¹⁰ Elaine Hobby, “The Politics of Women’s Prophecy in the English Revolution,” in Helen Wilcox (ed.), *Sacred and Profane: Secular and Devotional Interplay in Early Modern British Literature* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996), 295–306 at 295.

add
comma

add
comma

hoped, would be universally acknowledged.”¹¹ Cary, Avery, Rogers, and Trapnel were Fifth Monarchists. Saltmarsh was a Seeker, Claxton a Ranter, and Fell Fox a Quaker. Although these separatists embraced different principles, their distinctive beliefs and communities were intertwined, as Nigel Smith discerns:

While Seekers, Ranters, and Quakers generally looked to an inner reappearance of Christ, the Fifth Monarchist movement of the 1650s expected the bodily return of King Jesus . . . Though the Fifth Monarchists were literalists in their interpretation of the Second Coming, they still found support from some Quakers, while some Fifth Monarchists [also] believed in both an inward and an outward return.¹²

Beyond the groups already noted here, there were numerous early modern dissenting religious communities, all of which, though discretely differentiated, were united in their protest against the Church of England’s dominance and destabilizing transition from Episcopalism to Presbyterianism to Anglicanism.¹³ This transition was underscored, for example, by: successive Acts of Uniformity (1549, 1552, 1559, 1662) that enforced liturgical conformity in Books of Common Prayer; the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), which accommodated Presbyterianism to Parliamentary control; and the Westminster Assembly (1643), which was appointed by the Long Parliament to write and publish the *Directory for Public Worship* (1645) as a replacement for the Book of Common Prayer. Although the authors imagined a reformed national church, sectarians immediately rejected the *Directory* “as confining and intolerable.”¹⁴ An anonymous single-sheet broadside publication, *A catalogue of the severall sects* (1647), offers twelve engravings with accompanying poems that satirically portray members of dissenting groups (including Arminians, Familists, and Seekers). One caricature even portrays the “Divorcer” who threatens his wife with a cane: “To warrant this great Law of Separation,/And make one two, requires high aggravation.” Following the poems, a prose manifesto defends “an Ordinance for pre-

¹¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 137.

¹² Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 9–10.

¹³ Some of these dissenting groups include: Adamites, Anabaptists, Anglicans, Antinomians, Arians, Arminians, Baptists (general and particular), Barrowists, Behmenists, Brownists, Catholics, Congregationalists, Diggers, Enthusiasts, Familists, Fifth Monarchists, Grindletonians, Jesuits, Levellers, Libertines, Lollards, Methodists, Muggletonians, Pelagians, Puritans, Philadelphians, Quakers, Ranters, Sabbatarians, Seekers, and Socinians.

¹⁴ This discussion of religious and political reform draws upon the rich collection of excerpted documents in David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell (eds.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 40–195, at 186.

venting of the growing and spreading of heresie" (January 19, 1646/7).¹⁵ Although no explicit reference either to John Milton or to his five divorce tracts (1643–45) appears in this broadside per se, the sarcastic elevation of divorce to the status of a fanatical sectarian movement highlights the charged social context and rhetoric of the times with which the first edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) would have been readily associated.¹⁶ Indeed, Milton was sometimes mocked as "the spokesman" for the Divorcers.¹⁷

Prophecy and dissent were common currency among all Independents during these tumultuous years from 1642 to 1676 – that is, roughly from the battle of Edgehill (October 1642) to the completion of the Monument to the Great Fire of London. In terms of literary history, this era includes a vast array of documents, from Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, and Jane Jackson's *A very shorte and compendious Methode of Phisicke and Chirurgery* (both published in 1642) to Anne Wentworth's *A true account of Anne Wentworths being cruelly, unjustly, and unchristianly dealt with by some of those people called Anabaptists* and Lodowick Muggleton's *A Brief and true account of the notorious principles and wicked practices of that grand impostor, Lodowick Muggleton who has the impudence to stile himself one of the two last commissioned witnesses and prophets of the Most High God Jesus Christ* (both printed in 1676). Most of the separatists, with the exception of the Baptists and Quakers, flourished sporadically at best during the 1640s and 1650s until the promise for sectarian toleration ended abruptly when King Charles II and Parliament implemented the 1662 Act of Uniformity (which mandated Anglican liturgy following the 1661 Prayer Book) and also began relentlessly persecuting nonconformists until the Toleration Act of 1689, which, despite the title, did not grant universal toleration. Those who would not "accept Anglican liturgy were permitted to worship in *unlocked* meeting houses, licensed by the bishop, provided that the minister subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles [1563] except on baptism and church government."¹⁸ The Quakers benefited from this and, in 1696, were permitted to affirm rather than take an oath.

¹⁵ Anon., *A Catalogue of the Several Sects and Opinions in England and Other Nations With a Briefe Rehearsall of Their False and Dangerous Tenents* (London: R. A., 1647).

¹⁶ van den Berg and Howard, "Milton's Divorce Tracts."

¹⁷ William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2nd ed., 1968, rev. ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 287.

¹⁸ John Cannon (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 923.

This chapter engages a robust body of religious and political writings that emerged during the Civil War and Interregnum, locating key publications by women and men within networks of devotion and dissent, prophecy and protest. Authorship, in this regard, concerns interventions into converging and diverging fields of reform, where identities and texts are shaped according to the exigencies and materials suited to forms of expression ranging from prayers and meditations to conversion narratives, true relations, and political tracts – among other modes of textual production and exchange. Writers in this diversified tradition are not only autobiographers, essayists, and poets, they are social reformers; their texts, positional catalysts imbricated in processes of religio-political and literary change. This chapter considers selected works by Eleanor Davies, Susanna Parr, Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, Margaret Askew Fell Fox, Jane Withers, and Anna Trapnel, thereby illustrating forms of individuality and interpretation that were distinctive to the prophetic experiences and texts of writers from Baptist, Quaker, and Fifth Monarchist communities. The chapter's concluding section situates, within and against that context, elegiac and prophetic self-fashioning in An Collins's *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) among other contemporary works of devotional poetry and political dissent. The publications of these representative writers illuminate their singular constructions of radical personae shaped by contingent and contrary social contracts for reform in seventeenth-century England. The chapter addresses significant works by men and women within an expansive, integrated context, thereby presenting an inclusive view of religious and political writings that embrace multiple voices and visions – a matrix of texts inseparable from their historical moments, social functions, and sectarian spirits.

“Awakened by a Voice”: The Liberty of Propheying

It hath ever been charged on the *English*, as if they always carried an old Prophesie about with them in their pockets, which they can produce at pleasure to promote their designes, though oft mistaken in the application of such equivocating Predictions.¹⁹

As Thomas Fuller observed in 1655, prophetic writings were ubiquitous during the years of the Civil War (1642–51). Their popularity continued through the Interregnum (1649–60) and into the Restoration and reign

¹⁹ Thomas Fuller, *The Church-history of Britain* (London: John Williams, 1655), book II, 396.

of Charles II (1660–85). Christopher Hill asserts that “the revolutionary decades gave wide publicity to what was almost a new profession – the prophet, whether as interpreter of the stars, or of traditional popular myths, or of the Bible.”²⁰ Within the scope of the thirty-four years covered by this chapter, several hundred ephemeral pamphlets proclaimed visionary agency, many of which were published pseudonymously or anonymously. Thomas Hobbes worried, in *Behemoth, or, An epitome of the civil wars of England* (1679), that “there is nothing that renders human counsels difficult, but the uncertainty of future time . . . prophecy being many times the principal cause of the event foretold.”²¹ There was widespread belief (from radicals to rationalists) that the end of the world was nigh. Millennialism sparked the arguments of Mary Cary and Anna Trapnel, John Milton and Sir Isaac Newton.²² Cary and Trapnel both foresaw the imminent arrival of King Jesus in the 1650s; Milton, of a rightful Protestant kingdom following upon the execution of King Charles I; Newton, of the establishment of Paradise by The Kingdom of God on Earth sometime in the twenty-first century (in either 2034 or 2060). The Fifth Monarchists predicted that the final apocalyptic battle and the destruction of the Antichrist were to take place between 1655 and 1657. William Aspinwall (an Antinomian who later embraced Fifth Monarchism) proclaimed²³ that the Millennium would begin in 1673.

There were several major factors contributing to this unprecedented wave of prophetic literary production – not the least of which were the traumatizing and far-reaching influences of the trial and execution of King Charles I, decades of religious and political instability, several international wars, two major outbreaks of plague (1645 and 1665), and the Great Fire of London (1666). The demise of government control over the book trade from 1637 until the 1662 Licensing Act also energized this culture of dissent. In June of 1643, Parliament issued *An Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing*, which Milton attacked in his unlicensed

²⁰ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1972), 73.

²¹ Thomas Hobbes, “Behemoth,” in Sir William Molesworth (ed.), *The English works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, 11 vols. (London: John Bohn, 1839–45) vol. VI, 399.

²² Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom & Downfall* (London: printed for the author, 1651); Anna Trapnel, *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-Hall* (London: Robert Sele, 1654); John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649); Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733).

²³ William Aspinwall, *A Brief Description of the Fifth Monarchy or Kingdome that Shortly is to Come into the World* (London: M. Simmons, 1653), 14.

pamphlet, *Areopagitica* (1644). Although this ordinance reclaimed most of the provisions in the 1637 Star Chamber Decree, Parliament ultimately could not control the torrent of texts that swiftly generated an unregulatable trade. More works were published between 1642 and 1662 than in the entire history of English printing.²⁴ To illustrate just one of these cases, the King's Book stands out. *Eikon basilike* (i.e. royal image) (1649) invited prophetic readings after the King's death through this textual *pourtraicture of His Sacred Majestie in his solitudes and sufferings*: "Yet since providence will have it so, I am content so much of My heart . . . should be discovered to the world."²⁵ Assembled by Charles I and his defenders during the months of his captivity (March 1648–January 1649) and containing passages purportedly written by the King with his own blood, the book was released on the day of his execution (January 30), swiftly transforming him into a martyr "whose spilt blood was capable of healing the sick of scrofula and blindness."²⁶ In 1649 alone, thirty-five editions were published in England, twenty-five elsewhere in Europe. Printers were hunted down, presses and volumes, destroyed. In March, the Council of State appointed Milton to the post of Secretary of Foreign Tongues. His first assignment was to demolish the credibility of the King's Book. Milton's vituperative pamphlet, *Eikonoklastes* (i.e. image breaker), mocks prophetic interpretations of *Eikon basilike* as "the cunning drift of a factious and defeated Party."²⁷

Within this vexed and vibrant context of competing print cultures, Eleanor Davies (Lady Douglas) may have been the first Englishwoman who actively appropriated "the printing press for the public expression of her vision of herself in her world."²⁸ Lady Douglas (among the Baptists who became sympathetic toward the Fifth Monarchist cause during the 1650s) experienced a vision in 1625 that revealed a prophecy spoken to her by Daniel, which she relates in third person: "Shee awakened *by a voice from HEAVEN*, in the FIFTH moneth, the 28. of *July*, early in the Morning, the Heavenly voice uttering these words. 'There is Ninteene

²⁴ David Scott Kastan, "Print, Literary Culture and the Book Trade," in Loewenstein and Mueller (eds.), *Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, 107.

²⁵ Charles I, King of Great Britain, *Eikon basilike* (London: Thomas Paine, 1649), 190.

²⁶ Jim Daems and Holly Faith Nelson, "Introduction," in Jim Daems and Holly Faith Nelson (eds.), *Eikon Basilike with Selections from Eikonoklastes* (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2006), 15.

²⁷ Milton, *Eikonoklastes*, 2.

²⁸ Beth Nelson, "Lady Elinor Davies: The Prophet as Publisher," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 8 (1985), 403.

yeares and a halfe to the day of *Judgement*.”²⁹ Davies believed in an unbroken legacy of prophecy from the Old Testament to her own day in which she directly participated; in fact, she accurately predicted a series of future events, including: the death of her first husband, Sir John Davies (1626); the assassination of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham in 1628; the 1639 London fires; and the executions of Archbishop Laud (1645) and of Charles I (1649). Arrested and imprisoned (1633–35) for her political writings, and later committed to the asylum of Bedlam (1637–39) for her protests against Church government in Lichfield, Davies “spent the rest of her life composing apocalyptic, antigovernment tracts that were handed personally to members of Parliament, which she may have visited almost daily during the 1640s.”³⁰ Lady Eleanor died in 1652 and was honorably buried in her family’s chapel.

In her manuscripts and printed works, Davies constructs a complex, cross-gender identity by imbricating multiple subjectivities, intertextual references, personal experiences, and deft allusions to the Scriptures. She identified many of her publications as her *Babes*. In “Bathe Daughter of Baby London” (c. 1630), for example, Davies aligns verses from the book of Revelation with local details, such as: “And I heard the Angell of the waters saye Lord &/And the fourthe angell powred his vial out/ on the sunn &” (16:1–19); and “some notable/Judgement observed &c/ then/a drye summer & c . . . By her Beware/before too Late/repent.”³¹ The manuscript ends with the signature of “Elea Tichet” that playfully signifies Tuchet or Touchet, which was her family name. Davies frequently puns, in her many pamphlets, “on the other surnames that she claimed: Audley (her father’s barony), Davies (her first husband, the jurist and poet Sir John Davies); and Douglas (her second husband, Sir Archibald Douglas).”³² Esther Cope arranges Davies’s publications into three phases: court prophecies (1625–33), years in the Netherlands (1633–40), and apocalyptic works (1640–52).³³ Between 1642 and 1652, Davies published at least fifty works, including *The star to the wise* (1643), and *The benediction* (1651), which she addressed to Oliver Cromwell. The title page cites

²⁹ Eleanor Davies (Lady Douglas), *The Lady Eleanor, her appeale to the high court of Parliament* (S. I., [s. n.], 1641), 14.

³⁰ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 16–17.

³¹ Eleanor Davies (Lady Douglas), “Bathe Daughter of Baby London,” in Ostovich and Sauer (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women*, 142.

³² Mark Houlihan, “Commentary,” in Ostovich and Sauers (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women*, 144.

³³ Eleanor Davies (Lady Douglas), *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies*, Esther S. Cope (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

2 Kings 9:5, *I have an Errand to thee O: Captain*. This two-page apocalyptic pamphlet uses anagrams, initials, and symbols to associate Cromwell with the sun and moon, eyes and horn of the lamb of Revelation: “*as much to say, O: Cromwell, Renowned, be Victorious so long as Sun Moon continues or livever.*”³⁴ Davies often coded her prophecies within anagrams, and she ciphered her own name, Eleanor Audelie, as *Reveale O Daniel*.

These rhetorical, political, and hermeneutic strategies – combinations of hybrid subjectivities, intertextuality, autobiographical vignettes, Scriptural citations, and prophetic revelations – were common in works of prose and poetry among Baptists, Quakers, and Fifth Monarchists during the 1640s and 1650s. The activities of these groups converged until Cromwell’s expulsion of the Rump Parliament on April 20, 1653 and the subsequent dissolution of Praise-God Barebone’s Parliament on December 12, 1653 – after which the Fifth Monarchists never fully recovered. The first English Baptists were dissenters from the English Separatist church in Amsterdam who had adopted the belief (under the influence of the Mennonites) that because Christ had died for all, not just an elect number, universal redemption was a prevenient gift symbolically confirmed through baptism. These so-called General Baptists established their first community in London in 1612, and their movement gathered momentum but also division from within. A Calvinist faction (led by Henry Jacob’s Independent church in Southwark) opposed the practice of infant baptism, emphasizing instead more strident beliefs in restricted atonement, voluntary baptism, and salvation for the elect – hence, the emergence of the Anabaptists (also known as Particular Baptists) first organized under the leadership of John Spilsbury in 1633.³⁵ While these two communities were divided concerning this point of doctrine, and although their individual congregations were self-governing, both groups communicated by way of messengers and also held general meetings. Baptist communities usually followed democratic principles: men and women were allowed what Jeremy Taylor called the “liberty of prophesying.”³⁶ Officers were elected by congregational votes; any member of the congregation could be chosen as deacon, but election to eldership was reserved for those who were believed to possess special talents for pastoral duties.

³⁴ Davies, *Benediction*, 2.

³⁵ Louise Fargo Brown, *Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England during the Interregnum* (New York: Franklin, 1911), 1–43.

³⁶ Jeremy Taylor, *Theologia eklektike. A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying* (London: R. Royston, 1647).

Susanna Parr attests to these inherent contradictions and the suppression of women's opinions in Lewis Stuckley's congregation from which she was excommunicated in 1658:

Thus I did from time to time, whilst we were without Officers and Ordinances, partly through the great desire I had to promote the work of Reformation among us ... reprove them for their indifferency of Spirit, stir them up to that which I conceived was their duty ... But after the officers were chosen, I never medled (to my remembrance) with Church affaires, nor spake in the meetings, after I heard by Mr. *Stucley* my speaking was disrelisht; unlesse a Question was proposed, and I was desired to give my Answer unto it.³⁷

The title page notes that Parr composed and published this pamphlet "by her selfe, for the clearing of her own innocency, and the satisfaction of all others, who desire to know the true reason of their so rigorous proceedings against her" – thereby signaling the work's participation in the emerging literary forms of the conversion narrative and the true relation, which overlap with prophetic texts published by women and men within and across these three dissenting groups during the 1640s and 1650s. In their vigorous contextualization of these various writers and genres, sects and texts, Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby, and Helen Wilcox argue that Parr's rebuttal – "poised between rebellion against the church and affirmation of her understanding of correct Christian behaviour" – demonstrates "the independence women could construct, even whilst occupying what seem to be 'conservative' positions."³⁸

Although the *liberty of prophesying* was permitted among Baptists, Quakers, and Fifth Monarchists, the Quakers held a singular understanding about the individual's relationship to God's embedded presence – the light, or the seed – within the self that transcended contemporary notions of subjectivity. For example, whereas Parr would assert that she "had to promote the work of Reformation" and "was desired to give [her] Answer," Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers would affirm they "must wait to know the mind of God, what he would have [them] to do [for] the Lord would make it manifest."³⁹ Founded by George Fox – a Leicestershire man of Puritan background who began itinerant preaching in 1647, rallying various nonconformists (including Seekers, Ranters, and Baptists)

³⁷ Parr, *Susanna's Apologie*, 12–13.

³⁸ Graham et al. (eds.), "Susanna Parr," in *Her Own Life*, 102.

³⁹ Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, *This is a Short Relation of Some of the Cruel Sufferings (for the Truths Sake)* (London: Robert Wilson, 1662), 23–4.

around principles that rejected political hierarchy, organized church government and tithes, and all restrictive devotional practices in favor of *the inner light* – the Friends of Truth (also known as the Society of Friends) grew in membership and influence, ultimately numbering between 30,000 and 40,000 by 1660.⁴⁰ Quakerism, as Margaret Ezell observes, “offered women an important position in the literary life of the movement which far exceeded the range of activities of women publishing” in other Independent communities. Instead of “being subordinate to the external, masculine institutions of academia and the church, the [Quaker] woman sought knowledge residing in her; she, and she alone, became the ‘authority’ through the Light.”⁴¹ In 1659, for example, *above seven thousand* Quaker women presented to Parliament a petition against *the oppression of tithes*, which Mary Forster proclaimed as a *matter of so great concernment ... the work of the Lord at this day*.⁴² George Fox was imprisoned eight times, and the Quakers were widely persecuted until 1689.

Margaret Fell met George Fox at Swarthmore Hall in Lancashire in 1652 and was immediately convinced that “what he spoke was the truth the first time she heard him, and was even more moved when [he] stood up in her local church and (with the rector’s permission) spoke to the congregation, upon which [she] first stood up in acknowledgement of what Fox was saying.”⁴³ Margaret soon thereafter became the primary organizer of Quaker women’s meetings, and was imprisoned in 1664 for permitting illegal gatherings at her home and for refusing the 1663 Oath of Allegiance. During this imprisonment, she wrote *Womens speaking justified* (1666, revised and reprinted in 1667), the first published defense of women’s public preaching, which delivers a powerful interpretation of Genesis 3:15 – “if the Seed of the Woman speak not, the Seed of the Serpent speaks; for God hath put enmity between the two Seeds, and it is manifest, that those that speak against the Woman and her Seeds Speaking, speak out of the enmity of the old Serpents Seed.”⁴⁴ In 1669, George Fox and Margaret Fell were married. Margaret published at least twenty works between 1642 and 1676, including, for example: *False prophets, antichrists, deceivers which are in the world* (1655); *To the generall councill of officers of the English army* (1659); *A touch-stone* (1667).

⁴⁰ Cannon (ed.), *Oxford Companion to British History*, 391.

⁴¹ Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*, 137.

⁴² Mary Forster, *These Several Papers was Sent to the Parliament the Twentieth Day of the Fifth Moneth, 1659* (London: Printed for Mary Westwood, 1659), 1.

⁴³ Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing*, 125.

⁴⁴ Fox, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 4.

and

add
Comma

Compared with the catatonic trance states of what Mack describes as the “traditional visionary” – as illustrated, for example, by the experience and writings of the Fifth Monarchist, Anna Trapnel – the Quaker prophet endeavored to suspend the ego in order to release the inner light “from the depths of the soul, through layers of temperament, appetite, and habit, finally bursting through the individual’s outer husk – her physical shape, her gender – to unite with the voices of other Friends in prayer or to enlighten strangers in the public arena.”⁴⁵ In a remarkable passage, Jane Withers documents this paradoxical and contradictory process of sensible self-abnegation:

When these words came to me, the power of the Lord seized upon me; but the deceit prevailed so over me, that I did not obey at the first movings; but the power of the Lord so seized on me again, that I was bound about my body above the middle, as if I had been bound with chains, and it was said to me, *That if I went not I should repent it, and he should know it*; and in the afternoon I was forced to go, and as I sent in at the door, I should have said, *The plagues of God must be poured upon thee*, but I did not speak the words then; and then the power of the Lord came upon me: but in that Priest Moor saies, I was in a trance, it is a lye, for I was as sensible all the while ever I was; and for foming at the mouth I did not, that is a lye; but for the working of the power of the Lord in my body I deny not; and two of the Priests own hearers which were close by me, we sent for, hearing this lying slander was sent to be printed, being examined whether or no they saw her fome at the mouth, the one of them did affirm that it was a lye, and she laid me on her lap; and the other said, She saw no such thing; but the Priest went his way, and I went after him & then I spoke the words that was commanded, and as soon as I had spoken them, the power ceased.⁴⁶

Withers recalls a sequence of alternating impulses, physical constraints, and contested accounts of her actions – “sensible all the while” – and subverts the printing of slanders against her. As this astonishing and true relation reveals, and as Mack insightfully argues, Quaker women “were not being assertive when they preached; on the contrary, they were actually preaching against their own wills and minds.”⁴⁷

During Anna Trapnel’s attendance at the January 1654 Council of State examination of Baptist/Fifth Monarchist Vavasour Powell, she “fell

⁴⁵ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 136.

⁴⁶ Jane Withers’s testimony in James Naylor, *A Discovery of the Man of Sin, Acting in a Mystery of Iniquitie, Pleading for His Kingdom, Against the Coming of Christ to Take Away Sin* (London: Giles Calvert, 1654), 45.

⁴⁷ Mack, *Visionary Women*, 137.

into a trance which lasted twelve days,” during which time “her extemporary and prophetic verses and prayers were recorded by a friend.”⁴⁸ Two of these accounts were subsequently published in 1654: *Strange and wonderful newes from White-Hall*; and *The cry of a stone*. These two works were co-written with an amanuensis, who calls himself “the relator” and conveys Trapnel’s statements, prophecies, and songs (printed in verse), providing context and occasional explanations. As Paul Salzman reflects, these collaborative transcripts contrast with the highly personalized texts of Eleanor Davies. Whereas Davies channeled her prophecies through an idiosyncratic (sometimes cryptic) style of writing, Trapnel embodied her prophecies in these two works by foregrounding her testimony – that is, the truth of her experience – rather than her narrative’s form.⁴⁹ An ardent critic of Oliver Cromwell, Trapnel traveled to Cornwall to preach her apocalyptic visions and was arrested, then imprisoned in Plymouth in March 1654 for denouncing the Protectorate. In *The cry of a stone*, she protested that Cromwell had betrayed the Fifth Monarchists; rather than “blowing the trumpet of courage and valour,” he had “on a suddain” transformed into a Beast, who ran at her “with his horn to [her] breast” and who also charged “at many precious Saints that stood in the way of him, that looked boldly in his face.”⁵⁰

While in captivity, she wrote *Anna Trapnel’s report and plea* (1654). Compared with the collaboratively written pamphlets, this text reveals Trapnel’s impressive command of testimony and experience, substance and style, as she writes meta-discursively, weaving together autobiographical vignettes, political commentary, prophetic utterances, and courtroom drama from her trial at which she vindicated her true relation of how and why the Lord “told [her] what [she] should say.”⁵¹ Trapnel’s other publications include *A legacy for saints* (1654), and “[A] voice for the king of saints and nations” (1657). Following the collapse of Praise-God Barebone’s Parliament, the split between Cromwell and the Fifth Monarchists intensified. The militants attempted uprisings against the Protectorate in London in 1657 and 1661, but their group became increasingly splintered. Trapnel nonetheless continued her visionary work during these later years, as attested by the existence of what Erica

⁴⁸ Graham et al. (eds.), “Anna Trapnel,” in *Her Own Life*, 73.

⁴⁹ Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing*, 116–17.

⁵⁰ Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (London: [s. n.], 1654), 6 and 13.

⁵¹ Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea*, 80.

Longfellow describes as “a new Fifth Monarchist Bible”⁵² – a 990-page folio collection of Trapnel’s writings that survives in just one copy without title page.⁵³ Salzman surmises that this single volume signifies “a certain popularity that Trapnel still maintained” and that “other copies may have been hoarded and read until they disintegrated.”⁵⁴ The last entry in this folio is August 7, 1658, which suggests the volume may have been published near the time of Cromwell’s death on September 3, 1658.

“Twere Joy to Sing”: Of Devotion and Dissent

Wherein it pleased God to give me such enlargednesse of mind, and activity of spirit, so that this seeming desolate condicion, proved to me most delightfull: To be breif, I became affected to Poetry, inso-much that I proceeded to practise the same; and though the helps I had therein were small, yet the thing it self appeared unto me so amiable, as that it enflamed my faculties, to put forth themselvs, in a practise so pleasing.⁵⁵

The sole extant copy of An Collins’s *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) resides at the Huntington Library, shelfmark RB 54047. Compared to Trapnel’s rare folio, which charts a legacy in-progress, the singularity of Collins’s volume has informed the mistaken notion that she had no audience outside of London.⁵⁶ Collins’s book is a collection of devotional poems with two prefaces – one in prose, the other in verse – each intimating very little about the author. Even her most autobiographical texts (such as “The Discourse”) continue to yield only provisional accounts of Collins’s personal life; she has often been portrayed as a quietist writer who held little or no concern for either religious or political conflicts.⁵⁷ The book’s first preface, “To the Reader,” supports such interpretations, recounting the consequences of suffering: “I inform you, that by divine

⁵² Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 171.

⁵³ This volume is Bod Arch. A c.16.

⁵⁴ Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing*, 119.

⁵⁵ Collins, *Divine Songs and Meditations*, sig. A1^r; Gottlieb (ed.), *An Collins: Divine Songs and Meditations*, 1. All subsequent references to the poetry and prose of An Collins follow Gottlieb’s edition, hereafter identified parenthetically by either page or line numbers.

⁵⁶ Recent scholarship has found evidence of an audience for Collins in Edinburgh. See Howard, “Introduction: Imagining An Collins,” in Howard (ed.), *An Collins and the Historical Imagination*, 6–7.

⁵⁷ For example, Helen Wilcox, “An Collins,” in Graham et al. (eds.), *Her Own Life*, 54–7, tentatively introduces An Collins as “a middle-of-the-road believer who interpreted and found purpose in her uncomfortable and withdrawn life by means of biblical precedent and a vocation to poetry” (55).

An ✓

Providence, I have been restrained from bodily employments, suting with my disposition, which enforced me to a retired Course of life" (1). Following this poignant articulation, however, Collins acknowledges an indwelling force shaping the crux of her situation – the gift of poetry, which, as she reflects in the passage above, "enflamed [her] faculties, to put forth themselvs, in a practise so pleasing." The second preface (and first poem) in *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, "The Preface" (19 stanzas, 133 lines), establishes relationships among physical affliction, spiritual knowledge, and social criticism that are central to Collins's devotional and political poetics. This experiential and rhetorical progression – from suffering to reflection to praxis – turns upon a principle of conversion: through saving faith, Collins extends to her readers a defense of knowledge that yields (in a majority of her poems) religious and political critiques as well as historical prophecies. Through the modalities of poetic elegy, Collins fashions her own *politics of mourning*⁵⁸ as a model for her reader's spiritual conversion and social commitment to the ongoing work of Reformation. Such priorities suggest Collins's affiliation with either Particular Baptists (sympathetic toward the Fifth Monarchists) or Quakers.

Collins's more overtly political poems – especially the elegies, "A Song composed in time of the Civill Warr"⁵⁹ and "Another Song. Time past we understood by story"⁶⁰ – have been recognized as significant texts, not only for their deft critiques of the Rump Parliament's acts and policies between 1649 and 1653 but also for their apt figurations of Collins's autobiographical, devotional, and prophetic personae.⁶¹ After distinguishing herself from false prophets and poets in "A Song composed in time of the Civill Warr," Collins boldly invokes Deborah of Ephraim⁶² from Judges 4 and 5. Collins subtly qualifies her alignment with this figure – "twere joy to sing" – at the same time as she analogically

⁵⁸ See Howard, "An Collins and the Politics of Mourning."

⁵⁹ Helen Wilcox, "Literature and the Household," in Loewenstein and Mueller (eds.), *Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, 737–62, offers a compelling reading of this poem as a defense of the positive qualities of home life threatened by the Engagement Controversy.

⁶⁰ Clarke, "The Garrisoned Muse."

⁶¹ Howard, "Imagining An Collins," 1–22.

⁶² Deborah of Ephraim (c. 1200–1124 BC), prophetess of Yahweh and fourth Judge of pre-monarchic Israel; counselor, warrior, and wife of Lapidoth. See Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 214–19.

An —

appropriates⁶³ Deborah's song of triumph for Israel over Sisera (leader of Jabin's Canaanite forces) as a remedy for England's turmoil:

With *Deborah* twere joy to sing
 When that the Land hath Rest,
 And when that Truth shall freshly spring,
 Which seemeth now deceast,
 But some may waiting for the same
 Go on in expectation
 Till quick conceipt be out of frame,
 Or till Lifes expiration. (Lines 9–16)

Just as Deborah's song – a remarkably outspoken voice from the only female judge in the entire history of pre-monarchic Israel – praises triumphant godly acts in times of religious and political crisis, Collins's own "quick conceipt" defends God's Truth in the schismatic public sphere.⁶⁴ Collins's affirmation of redemptive spiritual knowledge – the "fruit most rare" (28) of her *Divine Songs and Meditations* – links the prophetic charge of Deborah's song to this poet's private apprehension of public urgency.

Deborah's namesake is *Bee* and Collins figures herself, in "The Preface," as a Bee who converts spiritual and social sufferings into "sweetnesse, fit for some good end," thereby countervailing the "vennom so compacted" of a "spider generacion" (lines 115 and 114).⁶⁵ The bee was a common conceit in devotional writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, signifying the manner by which a pure meditative soul extracts the essence of spiritual wisdom from either sacred or secular exemplars, improving those sources of inspiration through the process of reflection.⁶⁶ In such instances, Collins skillfully employs the rhetoric of the enclosed garden topos to political ends. Other connotations of the bee conceit hover

⁶³ Some scholars might object that Collins's personal relationship with Christ precludes her prophetic role. See, for example, Miriam Beth Garber, *Gender and the Authority of Inspiration* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 42. More recently, others have connected An Collins to an early modern visionary/prophetic tradition including a diversity of writers, such as Eliza, Margaret Fell, Sarah Jones, Morgan Llwyd, Elizabeth Major, Elizabeth Poole, Anna Trapnel, Henry Vane, and Elizabeth Warren. See Clarke, "The Garrisoned Muse," and Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate*.

⁶⁴ Deborah led a successful counterattack against Jabin, King of Canaan, and his military commander, Sisera (Judges 4:1–24): "And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this *is* the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?" (4:14) (KJV).

⁶⁵ Walter B. Fulghum, Jr, *Dictionary of Biblical Allusions in English Literature* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 54–5.

⁶⁶ See Greer et al. (eds.), *Kissing the Rod*, 151 n114.

with particular resonance for An Collins. While Collins clearly alludes to Deborah through these metaphors, the bee motif also signals her deft tribute to Aemilia Lanyer's "Authors Dreame" that praises the "finer, higher priz'd" sugar of Mary Sidney Herbert's completed *Psalmes of David* (c. 1599), which circulated widely in manuscripts throughout the seventeenth century. Lanyer figures the Countess of Pembroke as the Queen Bee/poet for whom she, "the painefull Bee," strives to gather her own fruits/verses.⁶⁷ Many scholars (including Margaret Hannay) have demonstrated the significance of the Sidney-Pembroke psalter for the development of the seventeenth-century religious lyric, while others (including Debra Rienstra) have explored the richness of Lanyer's tropes for the Countess of Pembroke throughout *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611).⁶⁸ Helen Wilcox and Lynette McGrath include Collins's *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) in a tradition of devotional poetry inspired by Mary Sidney Herbert and the works of other contemporaries, such as Diana Primrose's *A Chaine of Pearle* (1615), George Herbert's *The temple* (1633), Anne Bradstreet's *The tenth muse* (1650), and *Eliza's Babes* (1652).⁶⁹

Within such a rich field of poetics and praxis, An Collins's *Bee* lights upon her own connection to a distinctive community of women's readership and authorship⁷⁰ that would also include Margaret Fell Fox's *Womens speaking justified* (1666–7) and Bathsua Makin's *Essay to revive the antient education of gentlewomen* (1675), which praises Deborah as "without all doubt a learned woman, that understood the law."⁷¹ Following her relative obscurity throughout the nineteenth century, then her intermittent visibility throughout much of the twentieth, An Collins – the mid-seventeenth-century English poet of devotion and dissent – has once again reached a horizon of critical expectation that continues to unfold.

⁶⁷ Aemilia Lanyer, "The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie, the Countesse Dowager of Pembroke," in Lanyer, *Poems*, line 199.

⁶⁸ Margaret P. Hannay, "Princes you as men must dy': Genevan Advice to Monarchs in the Psalmes of Mary Sidney," *English Literary Renaissance*, 19 (1989), 22–41; Debra Rienstra, "Dreaming Authorship: Aemilia Lanyer and the Countess of Pembroke," in Eugene Cunnar and Jeffrey Johnson (eds.), *Discovering and (Re)Covering the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 80–103.

⁶⁹ Wilcox, "The 'fineness' of Devotional Poetry"; Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

⁷⁰ Mary Morrissey, "What An Collins Was Reading," *Women's Writing*, 19 (2012): 467–86. On the bee motif as a trope for women's literacy, see Snook, *Women, Reading*, 57–82.

⁷¹ Joy A. Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113; and Makin, *Essay*, 25.

— add
space

An —