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Deborah Frick

Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Seventeenth Century Women's Visionary Writings

[transcript] Lettre

Deborah Frick

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Lettre

I dedicate this book to my family and friends and thank them for their patience and tremendous encouragement during the years. I also wish to thank my supervisors Allen Reddick and Barbara Straumann for giving me the opportunity to work on this project and their support throughout the years. Another heartfelt thanks goes to Antoinina Bevan Zlatar for all her help during the last years and for inspiring my love for the Early Modern.

Deborah Frick, born in 1985, wrote her PhD thesis at the English Department of the University of Zurich. Her research focuses on medieval and seventeenth century women's visionary writings.

Deborah Frick

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[transcript]

This work was accepted as a PhD thesis by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Zurich in the spring semester of 2019 on the recommendation of the Doctoral Committee: Prof. Dr. Allen Reddick (main supervisor) and Prof. Dr. Barbara Straumann.

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Conventions

Original spellings have largely been retained. However, some of the older letter forms have been silently modernised. Quotations from the Bible have been taken from the *King James Bible Online* and quotations from Margery Kempe's *Book* edited, but not translated, by Barry Windeatt, unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

> "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" -
> 2 Corinthians 12:10

The above quotation perfectly describes the female visionary writers discussed in this study, namely women who when confronted with cultural restrictions and negative stereotypes, found a voice of their own against all odds. By using their so-called infirmities, such as weakness and illness and the reproaches against them, they were able to turn these into strengths. Rather than staying silent, these women wrote and published, thereby turning their seeming frailties into powerful texts. The focus of the following investigation revolves around two English visionary writers from the Middle Ages Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe as well as several female prophets such as Anna Trapnel, Anne Wentworth and Katherine Chidley from the seventeenth century. That period, particularly the decades between the 1640s and the 1660s, saw many revolutionary changes. In addition to such significant events as the beheading of Charles I in 1649 and the introduction of Cromwell's Protectorate in 1653, "the extensive liberty of the press in England [...] may have [made it] easier for eccentrics to get into print than ever before or since" (Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* 17). Indeed, according to Phyllis Mack, over 300 female visionaries were able to use the absence of censorship at that time to voice their concerns and write about their lives and circumstances in prophetic writings (218).

In addition to the absence of censorship the mode of prophecy was often used by these female visionaries in order to voice their concerns and ideas. For instance, as Hilary Hinds states: "prophecy provided a means by which, in the middle years of the seventeenth century, women were able to intervene

in public religious/political debates and events to an unprecedented extent" (*The Cry of a Stone* xiv). Prophecy, in this context, not only means predicting the future, as one might think, but also refers to "that which is done or spoken by a prophet; the action or practice of revealing or expressing the will or thought of God; divinely inspired utterance or discourse" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This definition proves to be very suitable, as it goes beyond individual instances of divine inspiration to include a more continuous state that depends upon a prophet's actions, rather than just her speech. It indicates that a prophecy can be much more than just an utterance and that once someone is established as a prophet, her speeches, her writings, and her actions can all be seen as divinely inspired. Margery Kempe, for instance, writes about her whole life. She is commanded by God to write about "hyr felyngs and revelacyons and the forme of her levyng, that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle world" (46-47). Thus, in addition to documenting her revelations, Margery is compelled to write about her feelings and her way of life in order to show God's goodness. Her whole life is consequently part of the prophecy.

However, despite the immense output of these female visionaries, not many of them are known. Indeed, in the words of Hinds, one of the few scholars who in the 1990s investigated seventeenth century visionaries as an emerging field of interest, "[g]iven their contribution to fundamental social changes at this time, one might well ask why so little is known of them by contemporary feminist critics" (*God's Englishwomen* 2). This is all the more pertinent, given the increased scholarly interest in male visionary writers after Hill's monumental *The World Turned Upside Down* and the immense output of writings between the 1640s and 1660s. These circumstances might very well leave us asking why women such as Anna Trapnel and Mary Carey are not spoken of in the classroom or among feminist critics. Indeed, Hinds accordingly concludes that her investigation must necessarily be a challenge to feminist scholarship, which has tended to set the starting point of women's writing in the eighteenth century (*God's Englishwomen* 2). What does it mean that the starting point of women's writings is set in the eighteenth century, even though there are texts by women centuries before? Are we only to consider women's writings in the main genres such as poetry, drama and novels? Admittedly, the texts by the prophets are hard to define, as they consist of conversion narratives, pamphlets, spiritual autobiographies, revelations and religious warnings. Some of them are even a mixture of genres, such as Trapnel's *Cry of a Stone*, which consists of revelations, songs, poems and predictions. Moreover, just as it is difficult to describe Margery Kempe (she has been

called a heretic, a mystic, orthodox, heterodox or, simply, mad), it is equally complicated to define her *Book*.[1]

However, as diverse and as unconventional as these writings may be in comparison to other genres, such as prose and poetry, religious texts and texts that concern themselves with religion cannot and should not be separated from discussions about literature, politics and life in general during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. Thankfully, there has been a clear change in scholarship nowadays to include women in anthologies, as is clear from the following preface to *The Northon Anthology*:

> We have in this edition continued to expand the selection of writing by women in all of the historical periods. The sustained work of scholars in recent years has recovered dozens of significant authors who had been marginalized or neglected by a male – dominated literary tradition and has deepened our understanding of those women writers who had managed, against considerable odds, to claim a place in that tradition. The First Edition of the Norton Anthology included 6 women writers; this Eighth Edition includes 67. (XXXV)

Furthermore, every new edition not only includes more women writers, but also adds more genres. However, there is still much that can be done.

Consequently, I not only wish to contribute to feminist scholarship in giving a voice to lesser-known women writers, but also to counter arguments that there were no women writers before the eighteenth century. Furthermore, I believe that strict period boundaries, for instance, between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, need to be constantly questioned. It is important that we remind ourselves of the artificiality of starting points and period boundaries, as well as definitions of literature and genres, especially in the field of women's writings, in order not to further the silencing and marginalising of women even more. The present study will thus focus on how female visionary writers in the Middle Ages and in the seventeenth century manage to gain agency for both themselves and their writings despite all the odds.

The clear focus on the similarities between these female prophets, of course, does not mean that there are no differences between them or their writings. For instance, not much is known about Julian of Norwich other than what she tells us about herself in the two versions of her revelations. We know

1 See, for instance, David Lawton (94) or Sandra J. McEntire ("The Journey" 51).

that she was thirty and a half years old when she received her visions in 1373 and that she was an anchoress with a cell at the parish church of St. Julian in Norwich. Nevertheless, we know nothing about her family and the class she was born into, so there is no way of knowing about her upbringing and the education she might have received. However, the level of sophistication of her writing has led people to believe that she might have been a nun before becoming an anchoress, though there is no clear evidence to suggest that this was indeed the case. As an anchoress, Julian can be seen as an orthodox Catholic, but, although she is adamant that she is not a teacher and that she is in complete alignment with the Church's teachings, her innovative approach to her universal salvation theory and her whole theodicy is rather subversive.

In contrast, Margery Kempe paints a rather different picture. First of all, she tells us much more about herself and her life than Julian does. Margery was the daughter of a merchant who had been the mayor of Lynn in Norfolk. She herself had a brewing business and a horse mill and was married with fourteen children. Furthermore, in complete contrast to the enclosed Julian, Margery was very mobile, not only travelling throughout the country but also going on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. She met several important people during her lifetime, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and Joan de Beaufort, sister to Cardinal Beaufort and aunt of the Duke of Bedford. Even though Margery was orthodox, she was accused of being a Lollard several times and was charged and imprisoned more than once, with people in the streets even threatening to burn her. Although Margery tells us that she is a simple creature, she manages to gain support from bishops and clearly knows about other works of contemplation, such as those by Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, St Bridget, Elizabeth of Hungary and Marie d'Oignies.

In terms of the seventeenth century, the female prophets also had different backgrounds and religious or political leanings. Anna Trapnel, for instance, was the daughter of William Trapnel, a shipwright, and of a mother, who "exerted seminal influence by raising her daughter as a literate woman of middle rank and teaching her to think of herself as uniquely chosen" (Davies). We learn about her family, her upbringing and acquaintances from the *Cry of a Stone*, in which a scribe captures what Trapnel spoke in an eleven-day-trance at Whitehall. Moreover, in the *Report and Plea*, Trapnel describes her travels to Cornwall and her interrogation by the judges who accused her of witchcraft and asked her about her suspicious travels without a husband. Her prophe-

cies focus on politics and religion, topics that cannot be separated in most of the visionary writings that are dealt with in this study. As a Fifth Monarchist, Trapnel implicitly tries to further her cause and relates the political context of the day, such as picturing Cromwell as a new Gideon, to the impending second coming of Christ and the Kingdom of the Saints. However, not much is known about the background of either Kathrine Chidley or Anne Wentworth. We know that Chidley was married to a tailor and had several children. As a Leveller, she was politically very active and she wrote several texts in which she argues her cause in response to Thomas Edwards' writings. Wentworth was also married, which gave rise to her prophecies in which she describes her unhappy marriage. Thus, we are aware of her husband and the Anabaptist congregation from which she was excommunicated, both of which she criticises in her prophecies.

As such, most of what we know about the writers in this study, then, they tell us themselves in their texts. They had different upbringings, were born into different classes and generally lived completely different lives, with some living enclosed in cells, some being married or mothers, and most having different political and religious alignments. Furthermore, with there being around 200 to 300 years between some of these prophetical writings, the political and religious contexts of these writers are vastly different depending on whether they lived in the late Middle Ages or the seventeenth century. The historical context of Julian's and Margery's lifetimes, for example, is marked by the Hundred Years War and the succession of various kings, particularly the deposition and murder of Richard II in 1399 and the subsequent ascent of the House of Lancaster to the throne. However, Lollardy and Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* provided the political context that most impacted vernacular writing. Steven Justice, for instance, maintains that "Lollardy produced an astonishing volume of vernacular writing (which by the beginning of the fifteenth century could cost people their lives)" (662). Thus, the translation of the Bible into the vernacular was not the Lollards' only achievement as their wish to facilitate more widespread understanding and discussion of theology seeped into other vernacular writings as well. This meant that the understanding of, and especially the questioning of, theological issues and the Church's teachings among the general populace proved to be very problematic. Consequently, Lollardy quickly became seen as heresy.

As early as in 1384, the first vernacular text was investigated in Cambridge for heretical content. This was William Nassington's *Speculum Vitae*, a 16000-line Middle English commentary on the Lord's Prayer. Even though the com-

mentary is rather orthodox, the text was still examined as it was written in the vernacular. According to Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous, "[t]he *Speculum* passed the test with flying colours: but the examination shows how unstable the boundary dividing orthodox and heretical literary production was to become" (135). Indeed, the use of the vernacular for discussing and writing about topics such as the Eucharist and other Church teachings opened up the possibility of a debate that was hitherto reserved for the clergy. It meant that the laity were now able to question what the clergy were telling them and to form their own opinions more thoroughly as the vernacular rendered texts more accessible. Consequently, Anne Hudson maintains:

> The authorities of the established church came to see that the vernacular lay at the root of the trouble, and that the use of it was more significant than just the substitution of a despised barbaric tongue for the tradition of Latin - that the substitution threw open to all the possibility of discussing the subtleties of the Eucharist, of clerical claims, of civil dominion and so on. ("Lollardy: The English Heresy?" 265).[2]

To dissuade dissent regarding the Church's teachings, punishment for heresy was severe. Indeed, the statute "De Heretico Comburendo" in 1401 shows the radical prosecution of the Lollards. It states:

> And if any Person within the said Realm and Dominions, upon the said wicked Preachings, Doctrines, Opinions, Schools, and heretical and erroneous Information, or any of them [...] do refuse duly to abjure, or by the Diocesan of the same Place or his Commissaries, after the Abjuration made by the same Person (pronounced fall into Relapse,) so that according to the Holy Canons he ought to be left to the Secular Court [...] and they the same Persons and every of them, after such Sentence promulgate, shall receive, and them before the People in an high Place do to be burn. (*Statutes of the Realm*, 2 Henry IV 15)

Thus, Lollards, who did not renounce their heretical thinking or resume their "erroneous" opinions and doctrines after abjuring were publicly burned.

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2 See also Justice: "The English hierarchy soon realized that the real threat was less Wyclif's teaching than its implicit premise, that everyone deserved to know it. If the laity had a rightful stake in theological argument and in the moral integrity of the Church, then the publication of theological matter was a logical and spiritual imperative" (666).

Furthermore, Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* (1409) leave no doubt that the fear of the clergy was not that English, as a "barbarous" language, was unsuited to talking about God, but rather that the vernacular texts would open up theological discussion among the laity. Arundel's fifth Constitution reads:

> We therefore decree and ordayne, that no man hereafter by his owne authoritie, translate any text of the Scripture into English, or any other tongue, by way of a booke, libell, or treatise, and if no man read anye suche booke libell or treatise, nowe lately set foorth in the time of Iohn Wickliffe. (Foxe, 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 549, (525))

This decree is not only limited to the translation of the Bible, but incorporates "any text of the Scripture," in any form. Moreover, both the writing and reading of such books, libels or treatises is prohibited. Thus, as Nicholas Watson rightly suggests:

> Analyzing the Constitutions as an outgrowth of a broader cultural conversation that the argument between 'orthodox' and 'heretic' illuminates a situation in which all but the most pragmatic religious writing could come to be seen, by the early fifteenth century, as dangerous: a perception that led inexorably to a by and large successful attempt to inhibit the further composition of most kinds of vernacular theology. ("Censorship" 825)

Thus, the political context of writing during this period was rather threatening. Even if it is true, as Justice maintains, that Lollardy initially produced a large amount of vernacular writing, it became increasingly difficult and life threatening to do so after Henry's *Statute* and Arundel's *Constitutions*. However, it was under exactly these circumstances that both Julian and Margery wrote their own religious texts and they did so in the vernacular. For her part, Margery was accused of Lollardy several times in her *Book*. Indeed, her encounters with the clergy as well as with the populace were thoroughly marked by the political context of her time.

As noted above, the seventeenth century was a time of many revolutionary changes. Charles I's reign was marked by the dissolution of Parliament in 1629 and the beginning of the twelve years of his 'Personal Rule.' As a result, Charles was able to finance his naval wars by demanding payment of 'ship money' without the consent of Parliament. However, the wars did not remain abroad. In 1639, Charles led troops to Scotland in order to impose the English prayer book. After the first standoff, Charles rejected Scottish demands, including the abandonment of recent church reforms, and planned instead a

second war. With Charles lacking necessary funding, however, the Scots were able to control as much as Northumberland, and with this new threat, the so-called 'Long Parliament' "was under intense pressure [...] to introduce changes to the government of church *and* state in England" (Morrill 19). Furthermore, according to Morrill, Parliament found itself in a unique position as occupation by the Scots meant that Parliament could not be dissolved anymore until their demands were met (19). In 1641, the Scots' demands, including self-government as well as a Presbyterian Church, were fulfilled. This was then followed by a rebellion in Ireland. In the next couple of years, wars broke out in all three kingdoms, with the Irish War starting in 1641, the English War in 1642 and the Scottish War in 1644. After the Second English Civil War in 1648, numbers in Parliament were reduced to the 'Rump' and in 1649 King Charles was tried and executed by the Rump Parliament and England was declared a free commonwealth. In the period between Charles' execution and the re-instatement of the monarchy in 1660, the Rump Parliament was dissolved, the 'Barebones Parliament' was established in 1653 and Oliver Cromwell was proclaimed Lord Protector in the same year.

One of the consequences of the many wars and the abolition of the monarchy was a breakdown of censorship. In fact, according to David Scott Kastan,

> Parliament itself attempted to restore order to the book trade, its efforts were largely unsuccessful, and an unregulated book trade produced propagandistic newsbooks and pamphlets at a remarkable rate. [...] More items were published in the twenty years after 1640 than in the entire previous history of English printing. (107)[3]

Kastan also mentions that the Civil War "was fought as fiercely with printed words as with muskets and cannon" (107). In Morrill's words: "the free choice of sides was possible because there was a revolution in the production of, and access to, the printed word" (21). In contrast to the restriction on the English language during Julian's and Margery's time, the collapse of censorship led to enormous output in the years between 1640 and 1660, resulting in the publication of various subversive ideas, involving religion, politics and everyday life.

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3 See also Andrew Bradstock: "Just how much freedom people thought they had to circulate their ideas in print once the landscape began to change can be seen from the fact that, while in 1640 just 22 tracts were printed, in 1642 the total was nearly 2000" (xiii).

All of these texts testify to “the emergence of hundreds of new independent congregations and the growth of a culture of dissent” (Bradstock xv).

As Christopher Hill puts it:

> [T]he revolt within the Revolution […] took many forms. […] Groups like Levellers, Diggers and Fifth Monarchists offered new political solutions. […]. The various sects – Baptists, Quakers, Muggletonians – offered new religious solutions. Other groups asked sceptical questions about all the institutions and beliefs of their society – Seekers, Ranters, the Diggers too. (*The World Turned Upside Down* 14)

The seventeenth-century female prophets who feature in this study all identify with one of these groups despite the fact that the groups’ ideas and membership could easily change.[4] The following short summary of some of these congregations, mentioned above, is in no way exhaustive. Rather, it is a short refresher in order to set the context for the female writers in this study.[5] The Anapabtists, for instance, originated from the radical Protestants of early sixteenth-century Europe who, rather than baptise infants, baptised only believers. However, the term was also used generally for all subversive groups. Often then the term Baptist was used for the group who baptised believers, even though “Baptists held that when they baptized believers they were not administering a second baptism but a first” (Bradstock 3). As such, Baptists rejected the label of Anabaptists. Furthermore, Baptist congregations believed that anyone could baptise thus one did not have to be a pastor in order to preach, baptise or administer the Eucharist.

Another such group was the Diggers, followers of Gerard Winstanley, who believed that land should be held in common. They cultivated land on St George’s Hill in Cobham, for example, which was common land. Winstanley’s writings and ideas were characterised by egalitarianism and economic

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4 See, for instance, Hill, who maintains: “Men moved easily from one critical group to another” (*The World Turned Upside Down* 14) and Bradstock: “An indication of the fluidity of these groups is the ease with which people moved from one to another. The Digger leader Winstanley, for example, may have been a Baptist in his youth and appears to have died as a Quaker, and the Leveller leader John Lilburne also became a Friend. A number of Baptists became Fifth Monarchists and Quakers in the 1650s, and Lawrence Clarkson appears to have been successively a Presbyterian, an Independent, […] a Baptist, a Seeker, a Ranter and a Muggletonian” (xix-xx).

5 See also the compact Historical Glossary in *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution*, p. 286-290.

reform. Although the Diggers were also called the True Levellers, they should not be confused with the Levellers, a group which, in contrast to the Diggers, "had no appetite for economic measures to redistribute wealth or land; rather, they upheld the right of the individual to own property" (Bradstock 41). Instead, the Levellers, such as John Lilburne or William Walwyn, prioritised the rights of the individual, such as the freedom to choose one's own religion, or the notion that no one has the right to rule over another as everybody is created equal. Similarly, Independents, who under Cromwell came to be closely connected with the New Model Army, believed in the liberty of conscience. They believed that one should be able to choose one's own religion as well as one's congregation and that each congregation should have the same authority and should be able to practice their beliefs freely. Finally, Fifth Monarchists believed that everything that was occurring in England was a clear sign that the fifth kingdom foretold in Daniel was imminent. They thus believed in the Fifth Monarchy of Christ according to Revelations whereby Christ would rule with his Saints for a thousand years.

Interpreting contemporary events in connection with the Fifth Monarchy resulted in the Fifth Monarchists being close linked to the politics and changes of the time. Cromwell, for instance, was seen by Trapnel first as a new Gideon, but later as a betrayer of the cause. Moreover, the Ranters were convinced that God was in everything and that sin, as such, was non-existent as it was part of God within them. Therefore, they took antinomianism to the extreme, believing that morality had no impact on destiny and did not even depend on the grace of God. Criticism of Ranters was often based on their behaviour. They took antinomianism to the extreme, leading people to accuse them of blasphemy, profanity, cursing and whoring. Ranters, for instance, even saw themselves freed from the commandments: "Since all men are now freed of the curse, they are also free from the commandments; our will is God's will" (Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* 207). According to this belief, Christ has freed us from sin and the Ranters consequently believed that the commandments from the Old Testament no longer applied. Some similar ideas can be found among the Quakers, although they behaved very differently. For the Quakers, the spirit was to be found in each individual, which was more important than external laws as determined by political or religious authorities. Precisely this preoccupation with individuality in contrast to contemporary political laws led some to fear the Quakers, as Bradstock maintains: "Their rapid numerical growth, their socially subversive behaviour and their concerted opposition to the church and the tithe made them a source of fear for

many" (113). Even though this is only a short summary of some of the groups that flourished in and around the twenty years between the 1640s and the 1660s, all such political and religious movements informed the writings of the female prophets in the present study.

However, although all these women are very different in terms of their religion, class or education, and their circumstances ensure different conditions for their texts, there are significant similarities and continuities in their writings. This study will show that the female prophets in the Middle Ages, Julian and Margery, use methods similar to those of the seventeenth-century female visionary writers in order to legitimise their writings as women. One factor that unifies all of these prophets is that negative labels mobilised against women are repurposed as strengths in their texts. The similarities and methods used by the female prophets in order to legitimise themselves and their writings thus form the basis of the following chapters. In the first chapter of this study, the female body and its weaknesses are the focal point, as several religious writings comment on the body. It is also often seen as weak and associated with sin and worldly temptations, while the mind is connected with the *imago dei*. The disparity between being created in the likeness of God and committing sin led many writers, such as Augustine, to compare the mind/soul to the likeness of God and the body to sin. Consequently, as Eve who supposedly gives into temptation, women are connected to sin and, by extension, to the body. This not only meant that women had to be subjugated to men, but also that they had to be excluded from the public sphere. The negative connotations of the body can even been detected in the writings of the mystics, such as in the texts by Hilton or Rolle. Since 'affective piety' significantly focuses on Christ's suffering, with his body taking centre stage, the bodily experiences of the mystics also become important. The connection between Christ on the cross and the mystics' ability to suffer with him opens the door to a more personal and closer connection to God, thereby serving as a gateway to a higher spirituality. However, according to Hilton and Rolle the body is still a prison that needs to be overcome in order to reach the highest contemplative level.

Consequently, the highest level is only achievable by leaving the body and sin behind. Nonetheless, both Julian and Margery stress the positive aspects of the body. In Julian's theology, the soul is divided into 'substance' and 'sensuality,' whereby God clearly also resides in sensuality, making it as important as substance. Margery, likewise, draws heavily from the mystical tradition, but surpasses these mystics by concentrating on her bodily experiences.

Indeed, she repeatedly achieves Rolle's highest form of contemplation, feeling the fire of love for many years. Furthermore, she also receives the gift of crying, whereby her whole body enacts God's grace for everyone to see. Both of these physical expressions of the spiritual negate the negative conventions around female bodies, enabling these women to legitimise themselves through their bodies in their writings.

A further negative epithet in relation to female bodies is the assertion that women are prone to illness and weakness, thus rendering them unsuitable for most all tasks outside the home. Interestingly enough, many of these female visionary writers experience an almost fatal illness, which marks their rite of passage to the status of a true prophet. Anne Wentworth, for instance, was "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, [she] was commanded to write, and give glory to him who had so miraculously raised [her] up from the grave" (*Vindication* 7). The other visionaries are similarly brought to the gate of death but are then saved and healed by God, enabling them to receive visions and prophecies. Furthermore, Margery's experiences a 'sickness' that is strongly connected to female bodies, namely childbirth. Childbirth could end in death and thus be seen as a sickness in itself, or could be followed by sickness or even madness. As was the case with the discussion on the connection between the body and sin, pain in childbirth is purported to be a direct consequence of Eve's transgression. However, childbirth is not only a curse but also redemption. Indeed, childbearing is strongly associated with Christ's suffering on the cross, giving these women another link between their bodies and Christ. Anselm, for instance, maintains: "Truly, Lord, you are a mother [...] For, longing to bear sons into life, you tasted of death, and by dying you begot them" (153). Thus, in many of the texts, the women draw an analogy between transgression and punishment, as well as redemption and Christ's suffering on the cross. As such, they use a clear link between themselves and Christ in this regard to lend both themselves and their texts the necessary credibility.

Furthermore, the visible suffering of these women, whether it is because of the weakness of their bodies or their childbearing, has another parallel with Christ. Their humble acceptance of suffering and their rejoicing in their suffering in Christ's name is another clear part of *Imitatio Christi*. Though the tradition of emulating Christ is not specific to women, they use it in order to legitimise themselves and their writings. By drawing this clear link between themselves and Christ, they cannot be insulted or rebuked without increasing

their grace and devotion, allowing them to be subversive and daring. Even though women's bodies, weaknesses and sickness are used in order to subject them to men and as evidence of why they are not suited to leaving the space of their homes, these female visionary writers use exactly these weaknesses in order to render their writings credible.

The second chapter of this study focuses on the exclusion of women from politics due to their being perceived as excessively weak and frail, thus ill-suited to public speaking. However, in contrast to Diane Watt and other scholars, I would argue that Margery and Julian were also clearly politically motivated. In addition to the fact that writing and speaking in public can already be seen as political acts in themselves, both Julian and Margery participate in the politics of their times. Julian's theology, for instance, is rather subversive. Though she makes it clear more than once that she does not contradict the Church's teachings, she does precisely this by creating a theory of universal salvation. In her theodicy, there is neither hell nor sin in the traditional sense. As human beings, we are not able to refrain from sin; nonetheless, all are ultimately saved by the grace of God and Christ who dwells in our soul. Furthermore, as discussed above, both Julian and Margery participate in contemporary political discussion via the vernacular.

Moreover, Margery not only uses the vernacular, but also shows behaviour and ideas that are labelled heretical. More than once, she is accused of being a Lollard and is even threatened with being burnt in the streets. She is questioned more than once for her mobility and her teaching, the latter being seen as leading people astray. Indeed, Paul's teaching - "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence " (1 Tim. 2:12) - is challenged by all of these women, not only in their writings but also when it comes to their participation in public discussions and politics. Consequently, both Margery and Julian feel the need to make sure that they are not seen to be teaching, with Margery even stating "'I preche not, ser; I come in no pulpytt. I use but comownycacyon and good wordys, and that wil I do whil I leve'" (253). Throughout all her encounters, it becomes clear that Margery evidently knows the political landscape around her and participates in it. Furthermore, she uses all of these encounters in order to legitimise her behaviour. Several bishops, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury, prove her orthodoxy when it comes to the articles of faith, but they also give her leave to travel the country and to wear white. As such, Margery is able to maintain her mobility and, more importantly, obtain what she wants.

In the politically tumultuous seventeenth century, the war was also fought with writing, as scholars have suggested, with female visionary writers also being very political in their texts. Katherine Chidley, for instance, entered into a pen war with London preacher Thomas Edwards, probably best known for his huge volume *Gangraena*. Chidley, however, had already gained fame for her responses to several of Edwards' earlier publications, even earning herself an entry in *Gangraena*. Interestingly enough, Chidley's responses to Edwards also revolve around Edwards' fear that men are losing their power over women. Arguing with the help of scripture, Chidley is able to answer each of Edwards' points in a very scholarly fashion, sometimes even using her apparent female 'weaknesses' to make her point. Thus, she confidently talks about the government, the Church and the different congregations, turning her weaknesses into strengths.

Anna Trapnel also contributes significantly to the movement of Fifth Monarchists. In the *Cry of a Stone*, one can clearly discern the hope that the Fifth Monarchists had at the beginning, still believing in Cromwell and the Barebones Parliament. Trapnel compares Cromwell to Gideon and paints a very positive picture of his military prowess. She sees him as appointed by God to change both the government and the church. However, this changes after Cromwell accepts the title of Lord Protector. The betrayal that the Fifth Monarchists felt after this event demonstrates that Cromwell clearly no longer followed the cause. Akin to Margery, Trapnel also had to answer for her mobility when she travelled to Cornwall, and she was also accused of being a witch. Nonetheless, Trapnel is able to answer each and every question with the help of God.

The third chapter of this study continues the discussion of these visionaries by focusing on authorship and writing itself. Most of these women are painfully aware of the restrictions they face, which can be seen in their need to justify their writing. Often, there is a complete self-effacement in the texts, with the women calling themselves weak and frail or repeatedly describing themselves as nothing. Several of these female visionary writers thus claim that God forced them to write and that they otherwise would never have dared to voice their opinion. They stress that they are called by God to write in order to further His cause, showing mankind His grace and His will. The same holds true for both their voices and the content of their writings. They make sure that the reader understands that everything they say or write comes directly from God and that they are only giving a voice to what He is telling them.

Moreover, the whole notion of authority is further complicated by the involvement of scribes. Margery's *Book* and Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone* are written by scribes. Indeed, Margery has three different scribes, none of whom seems trustworthy or capable of writing her *Book*. Likewise, Trapnel's scribe admits on more than one occasion that he was not able to understand everything that she was saying in her trance. Sometimes he even includes his own words in order to finish some of the songs. Consequently, one might question the authorship and authority of these female visionary writers. Firstly, they give their voices to God completely. Secondly, they use scribes to record their visions, thereby distancing themselves even further from a position of authorship. However, just as described in the first and second chapters, these visionary writers make use of, and indeed invert, cultural restrictions. By seemingly relinquishing all authority, they gain the greatest authorisation possible, namely God's. As vessels and mouthpieces of God, they gain an authority which no one can refute. Everything they say or do has relevance, affording them the possibility of voicing subversive ideas, as well as to telling their own stories. By ostensibly losing all authority, they in fact enable everything they do and write.

Chapter 1: Weakness and Illness – The Female Body

> "Tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatix, tu es divinae legis prima desertrix; tu es quae eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non valuit; tu imaginem dei, hominem adam, facile elisisti; propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius dei mori habuit" - Tertullian

1.1 The Dualism of Body and Soul and the Imago Dei

The female body is often given as the reason why women should not talk in public, be involved in politics or be able to publish their thoughts. Women and their bodies are seen as weak and prone to illness, which make them unfit to write or teach. This chapter will show the negotiations between these medieval and seventeenth century female writers and their bodies and will demonstrate how they used the stereotypes and preconceived shortcomings of their bodies as ways to legitimise their authority as producers of texts. As a starting point for the discussion on female bodies with which these female writers were confronted, one cannot avoid addressing the concept of the dualism of body and soul, which is of great importance in many religious writings. For example, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Matt. 26:41) is a passage that is frequently used as a basis for writings that concern themselves with the dualism of body and soul. From the Bible onward, the body has been associated with sin, uncleanliness and all sorts of worldly temptations, while the soul (also synonymously referred to as the mind or the spirit) has been linked

to love, faith, temperance and the ability to worship God.[1] In contemplative writings in particular, the body is often seen as a prison, the one thing that ties us to the world and cannot be discarded. Augustine, for instance, states that "the body which is corrupted presses down the soul" (Chapter XVII, Book 7), while Thomas à Kempis, in an even clearer statement, notes: "So long as we carry about with us this frail body, we cannot be without sin, we cannot live without weariness and trouble" (Chapter XXII, Book 1). The body is therefore closely connected to sin and passion and thus keeps one from a perfect spiritual life. Even the bare necessities of the body, such as eating and drinking, are a distraction that keep these contemplatives, such as Richard Rolle or Thomas à Kempis, from worshipping God completely.

Furthermore, the dualism of body and soul entails the oppositions of passion and reason, humanity and divinity, as well as female and male. Women have often been seen as more susceptible to outside influences, meaning all kinds of temptations and the female body has come to be associated with passion and sin. One of the central texts, if not *the* central one, that is often quoted in order to demonstrate this is Genesis 1-3. Many Christian theologians not only use the creation story and the fall of Adam and Eve to show how sin and woe came to be, but also to illuminate the relationship of men and God as well as men and women. Augustine, for instance, explains Genesis and God's creation of man in his likeness in the following fashion. It is worth quoting in full:

> We see the face of the earth, replete with earthly creatures; and man, created in thy image and likeness, in the very image and likeness of thee - that is, having the power of reason and understanding - by virtue of which he has been set over all irrational creatures. And just as there is in his soul one element which controls by its power of reflection and another which has been made subject so that it should obey, so also, physically, the woman was made for the man; for, although she had a like nature of rational intelligence in the

1 See, for instance, Galatians 19-24: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like [...] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Especially interesting is the fact that while witchcraft and heresies are connected to the body, the mortification of the flesh is associated with Christ's suffering on the cross.

> mind, still in the sex of her body she should be similarly subject to the sex of her husband, as the appetite of action is subjected to the deliberation of the mind in order to conceive the rules of right action. (Chapter XXXII, Book 13)

Augustine here comments on the *imago dei* and along with many other writers, he associates the likeness of the image with reasoning and the faculties of the mind and not with the body. The emphasis on rationality versus irrational beasts thus establishes the hierarchy of all the creatures on earth. Naturally, women are subordinated to men as well. Although Augustine states that women have "a like nature of rational intelligence in the mind," and with that he seemingly solves the problem of Genesis 1:27[2], women are still inferior in their faculties and should follow men by engaging in the "right action." Interestingly enough, when it comes to women physicality and the body are suddenly grounds for discussion. She is not only inferior in her faculties, but her body is also subjugated to men. The simile at the end of the quotation, furthermore, connects the female body with "the appetite of action" and, consequently, starts the associations of body and appetite, passion and sin.

Comments on *imago dei* often do not include women, especially if the Fall is used as an argument as to why women are not created in the likeness of God. Many of these interpretations are also much more derogatory than Augustine's. Tertullian, for instance, who wrote on a variety of theological issues in Latin, states: "Tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatix, tu es divinae legis prima desertrix; tu es quae eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non valuit; tu imaginem dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti; propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius dei mori habuit" (Chapter I, Book 1).[3] From Tertullian's point of view, Eve alone is guilty. It is she who is weak, having given in to temptation and is accordingly punished with death. Furthermore, in calling Adam the image of God, Tertullian makes it clear that he does not

2 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." This account of Genesis implies that men and women are equally created in God's image.

3 Tertullian is often quoted when it comes to Eve and the relationship of men and women and her subjection to men. See, for example, Sandra J. McEntire's English translation of Tertullian's passage in her essay "The Likeness of God": "*You* are the devil's gateway; *you* are the unsealer of that tree; *you* are the first foresaker of the divine law; *you* are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not brave enough to approach; *you* so lightly crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of your punishment, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die" (167).

consider Eve to be made in God's image. Consequently, Eve is the only one to blame for the death of Christ. As seen in Augustine's quote above, in the bipartite soul system, the *imago dei* is connected to the mind/spirit and man and in contrast the body is connected to woman. With reference to Tertullian's comment on the Fall, Eve is not made in God's image and is responsible for sin entering the world. Accordingly, the body, which is connected to sin and passion, seems to be strongly associated with women and needs to be subjugated to the mind and to men.

Even Walter Hilton (c. 1343-1396), a mystic and contemporary of Julian of Norwich who propagated the mixed life, followed Augustine's bipartite system and subordinated the bodily to the spiritual. In his *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, Hilton opens the way for a life between the *via contemplativa* and the *via activa*. Since the *via activa* is seen as inferior and the contemplative life only open to a few recluses, the mixed life was meant to enable a middle class toward leading a spiritual life despite their obligation to concern themselves with worldly matters.[4] Thus, according to Hilton, a spiritual life was possible without forsaking the bodily realm entirely. However, it becomes clear that although middle and upper class people are responsible for their family and servants and, thus, have to deal in worldly matters, Hilton associates the body with sin as well. According to him, one needs "to break down the disobedience of the body" and "as St Paul says, as woman was made for man, and not man for woman, just so bodily work was made for the spiritual" (*Epistle on the Mixed Life* 105). In Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, which he wrote for an anchoress, this notion becomes even more explicit: "and as your body is enclosed from bodily association with men, just so should your heart be enclosed from the fleshly loves and fears of all earthly things" (Chapter I, Book 1). In describing the active life and its works again in contrast to the contemplative life, Hilton states: "Moreover, a part of the active life lies in great bodily work one does to oneself, such as great fasting and denial of sleep, and other sharp acts of penance, in order to chastise the flesh" (Chapter II, Book 1). Although one can achieve spirituality through an active life, Hilton's negative stance toward the body becomes apparent. Similar to Augustine's passage above, Hilton also

4 The mixed life seems to have been popular in fourteenth and fifteenth century England, as evidenced not only in Hilton's work, but also in other texts. See, for instance, the 'common profit' books which were "made for the new context of a community of devout London lay people" (Scase) or Pantin "Instructions for a devout and literate layman."

connects the subordination of women to men with the subordination of the body to the spirit, associating the body through analogy with women.

Thus, the body and by extension women are often connoted negatively. Indeed, Dyan Elliott states: "In short, whether orthodox or gnostic, a woman had to deny her nature to advance spiritually" (16-17). Curiously however, Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) does not deny her body, managing instead to include it positively in her theology. Most of what we know about Julian comes from her *Showings*, an account and reflections about her sixteen revelations that she received in 1373 at the age of thirty and a half. She is, furthermore, described as an anchoress[5] and, thus, a voluntary recluse who is enclosed for life. "Anchorite enclosure was considered the highest religious calling. [...] By the fourteenth century, according to books of guidance composed for anchorites by Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, [...] contemplative or mystical union with God was the ultimate goal of the recluse" (Denise N. Baker, "Introduction" x). Moreover, Julian shares her mystical union, the sixteen revelations, not only with the learned, but addresses her *Showings* to all "evyn Cristen" - "I say nott thys to them that be wyse, for they wytt it wele. But I sey it to yow that be symple, for ease and comfort, for we be alle one in love" (*Showings* 16). Thus, just like Walter Hilton's *Mixed Life*, Julian's *Showings* speaks to a growing audience of devout lay people.

Julian's revelations also comment on many theological issues, among which the dualism of body and soul is of special interest here. According to Julian, "Hyely owe we to enjoye that God dwellyth in oure soule, and more hyly we owe to enjoye that oure soule dwellyth in God. Oure soule is made to be Goddys dwelling place, and the dwellyng of oure soule is God, whych is unmade" (*Showings* 84). Thus, for Julian, God is in our soul and our soul is in God. This means that the *imago dei* in her theology is rooted in a bipartite soul system, just as it is for Augustine and many others. For her the soul is divided into 'substance' and 'sensuality', whereby substance is the equivalent to Augustine's higher part of the soul, the part in which reasoning and rationality is possible. Indeed, Julian maintains that she "sawe no dyfference betwen God and oure substance," as this substance is a part of God (*Showings* 84). However, the important difference between Julian's

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5 See, for instance, Margery Kempe: "And than sche was bodyn be owyr Lord for to gon to an ankres in the same cyte, whych hyte Dame Jelyan. [...] many wondirful revelacyons whech sche schewyd to the ankres to wetyn yf ther wer any deceyte in hem, for the ankres was expert in swech thyngys and good cownsel cowd yevyn" (120).

imago dei and Augustine's is that in hers the bodily is not condemned: "Thus I understode that the sensuallyte is groundyd in kynde, in mercy, and in grace, whych ground ablyth us to receyce gyftes that leed us to endlesse lyfe. For I saw full suerly that oure substaunce is in God, and also I saw that in oure sensualyte God is" (*Showings* 85). As far as Julian is concerned, our sensuality is based on kindness, mercy and grace and it plays an important part in salvation. Thus, despite the separation in Julian's soul system, akin to that of Augustine, it differs from the latter in that sensuality and the body are also part of the *imago dei*.

1.2 Affective Piety and the Mystical Experience

As a consequence, by linking the body to sin and thereby to women, the focus on the positive aspects of the bodily seems to be far more important for women than for men. However, the importance of the body, in one way or another, is part of the mystical tradition of 'affective piety' to which Julian, Rolle, Hilton and Margery all belong. 'Affective piety' is the emotionally charged meditation on Christ's Passion and it focuses not only on Christ's suffering but also on his humanity. Both his humanity and his body take centre stage. At the same time, the bodily experiences of the mystics themselves are significant. Through their bodies, they are able to feel Christ's suffering and be part of his Passion, thereby achieving a higher spirituality and personal connection to God. Indeed, Anselm, Rolle and Hilton all have extensive passages in which they describe their experience of the Passion. Most of these accounts are very detailed and concentrate heavily on the body. For example, Anselm (1033-1109) was abbot of Bec and archbishop of Canterbury and his *Prayers and Meditations* is one of the foundational texts of 'affective piety'. His personal and devotional style and his prayers in the form of a dialogue influenced many later writers. Sentences directed to God like "I thirst for you, I hunger for you, I desire you, I sigh for you, I covet you" (94) and Passion scenes such as "I am mindful of your passion, your buffeting, your scourging, your cross, your wounds, how you were slain for me, how prepared for burial and buried" (95) are later taken up by many mystics such as Rolle, Hilton, Margery and Julian.

Julian, for instance, wishes for three gifts at the beginning of her treaties. The very first is "mynd of the passion" (*Showings* 5) and her first revelation begins with the following words: "And in this sodenly I saw the reed bloud rynnyng downe from under the garlande, hote and freyshely, plentuously and

lively, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head" (*Showings* 8). In her writings, the notion of a mystical union with God is a very personal one and the desire for, and, indeed, the love of, God is central. The Passion scene is often used as a beginning for contemplation, as the humanity and fleshliness of Christ on the cross seems to function as a bridge to a higher spirituality. Even though Anselm, Hilton and Rolle also use images of sinners being imprisoned in their own bodies and yet being able to connect with God on a higher contemplative level through Christ's humanity, Julian and Margery embrace and use these images particularly frequently. This is perhaps because the close connection between the mystics' bodies and Christ's body gives these women an opening to attain spirituality at a time when their bodies and their 'nature' would ordinarily have been condemned and connected to sinfulness.

Margery Kempe also belongs to the mystical tradition of affective piety. Most of what we know about her comes from her *Book*, which is often called the first autobiography in English. Since the discovery of the manuscript in 1934, she and her text have sparked a wide variety of commentary. Although *The Book of Margery Kempe* was not known until the manuscript was found, Kempe's name appeared on a seven-page pamphlet printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501 called *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Jhesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of lynn*. As the pamphlet mostly contains Christ's speech to Margery and thus excludes her vivid life and her extraordinary voice, Henry Pepwell, who reprinted the text in an anthology of mystical pieces in 1521, calls Margery "a devoute ancres" (Windeatt, "Introduction" 1). Thus, the rediscovery of the *Book* in 1934 was accompanied by expectations that the whole book would be, as Pepwell says, by a devout woman, probably even similar to Julian of Norwich's *Showings*. The *Book*, however, does not seem to have met those expectations and this becomes apparent in early criticism in which one can sense clear disappointment. David Lawton states that many critics agree that Margery failed

> and their sense that the failure and the exclusion require explaining. The explanations have fluctuated between eccentricity - on a sliding scale of hysteria, unreliability, religious megalomania, even paranoid schizophrenia - and, on the other hand, heterodoxy, or blasphemy, of the type that canon law calls indirect. (94)

According to Sandra J. McEntire, not only is Margery seen in criticism as "unconventional, mediocre, mad, sensational, monotonous, hysterical, ab-

normal, trivial, and even morbid" ("The Journey" 51), but she also does not seem to fit into any one convention or genre. Alternately, she is called a mystic or a heretic and her *Book* a hagiography or an autobiography. Margery Kempe does avail of these genres and conventions but she ultimately defies them and establishes an agency and voice of her own accordingly.

For instance, in describing her mystical experience, she draws heavily from the mystical tradition available to her. In her *Book*, she states that a priest came to her and read books to her for seven or eight years. "He red to hir many a good boke of hy contemplacyon and other bokys, as the Bybyl wyth doctowrys therupon, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, *Stimulus Amoris*, *Incendium Amoris*, and swech other" (280). Apart from the Bible, Margery mentions a book by St. Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373), who must have been an interesting visionary for her given that she was also married, a mother and a pilgrim who found God later in life. Indeed, the importance of St. Bridget for Margery is apparent from the frequency with which she is mentioned in the *Book* and from the fact that Margery even visits the places in Rome where St. Bridget lived. At one point Margery finds a certain degree of agency in her similarities with St. Bridget while providing proof for the truth of St. Bridget's book: "Than seyd owyr Lord ayen to hir: 'Ther schal be an erdene. Tel it whom thow wylt, in the name of Jhesu. For I telle the forsothe, ryght as I spak to Seynt Bryde, ryte so i speke to the, dowtyr, and I telle the trewly, it is trewe every word that is wretyn in Brides boke, and be the it schal be knowyn for very trewth'" (129-130). In this extract, Margery validates both St. Bridget's writings and her own power and status as a visionary. However, she makes sure that she is seen as being even more graced by God than St. Bridget. Shortly before this passage, she is attending mass and she sees the sacrament move and flutter like a dove with its wings in the priest's hands. Still marvelling at this occurrence, Margery hears Christ telling her: "Thow schalt no mor sen it in this maner; therfor thank God that thow hast seyn. My dowtryr, Bryde, say me nevyr in this wyse" (129). In claiming that St. Bridget never saw Him in this way, Margery gains special status as God's mouthpiece.

Margery also includes Hilton and the *Incendium Amoris* in her list of "many a good boke." The *Incendium Amoris* was written by Richard Rolle (c. 1305-1349) who was a hermit and mystic. Most of what we know of him stems from references in his own writings as well as what the Hampole nuns wrote thirty years after his death (Hughes). According to Watson, "[d]uring the fifteenth century he was one of the most widely read of English writers, whose works survive in nearly four hundred English (or American) and at least seventy

Continental manuscripts, almost all written between 1390 and 1500" (*Richard Rolle* 31). Rolle's popularity and his descriptions of his mystical union with God make him the perfect writer to emulate. Indeed, Margery twice mentions that *Incendium Amoris* [6] had been read to her. Rolle's writings also serve as proof for the scribe who has lost faith in Margery's possessing the grace of God.[7] Margery does more than reference Rolle, she incorporates several elements from his writings in order to give greater credibility to her own union with God. Though these include references to both fragrance and melody,[8] the clearest acknowledgement of his work is her repeated use of the term "fyre of love."[9] This fire of love is described in Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* as well as in *The Form of Living*, in which he talks about three degrees of love, whereby the third, and highest, is described in the following way:

> Þe thyrd degre es heest, and maste ferly to wyn, þat es calde synguler, for it hase na pere. Singuler lufe es, when all comforth and solace es closed owt of þi hert, bot of Jhesu Cryste alane. Other joy lyst it noght, for þe swetnes of hym in þis degre es swa comfortand and lastand in his lufe, sa byrnand and gladand, þat he or scho, þat es in þis degre, mai als wele fele þe fyre of lufe byrnand in þaire saule, als þou may fele þi fynger byrn, if þou putt it in þe fyre. (*The Form of Living* 105)

This third degree is the aim of contemplation. It is the highest, purest and most difficult degree that one can attain.[10] By comparing the feeling of the fire of love in the soul to the sensation of a finger in a fire, Rolle describes an almost bodily experience that bridges the physical with the spiritual in the union of the mystic and God.

6 See on p. 115 and 280.

7 "He red also of Richard Hampol, hermyte, in *Incendio Amoris* leche mater that mevyd hym to yevyn credens to the sayd creatur" (295-296).

8 See, for example, p. 137: "I schal take thi sowle fro thi body wyth gret myrthe and melodye, wyth swet smellys and good odowrys, and offyr it to my Fadyr in hevyn."

9 See, for example, pages 97, 166-67, 193-94,285, 334 and 361.

10 See also Hilton when he speaks about the highest degree of contemplation: "No one can have the practice and full use of this gift without being first reformed to the likeness of Jesus by fullness of virtue. I suppose no one living in a mortal body can have it often in its fullness, but occasionally, when he is visited; and as I conceive from the writings of holy men, it is for a very short time, for soon afterward he lapses into sobriety of bodily feeling" (*The Scale of Perfection*, Chapter VIII, Book 1). Here, again, Hilton draws attention to the negative aspects of the body.

Hence, Margery, who is able to feel this fire of love throughout the *Book*, has attained this third and highest degree of love and is able to legitimise her mystical experience through Rolle's directions in *The Form of Living*. Indeed, at one point, she describes the fire of love in more detail:

> Also owr Lord yaf hir another tokne, the whech enduryd abowtyn xvi yer, and it encresyd evyr mor and mor, and that was a flawme of fyer, wondir hoot and delectabyl and ryth comfortabyl, nowt wastyng but evyr incresyng, of lowe, for, thow the wedyr wer nevyr so colde, sche felt the hete brennyng in hir brest and at hir hert, as verily as a man schuld felyn the material fyer yyf he put hys hand or hys fynger therin. (193-194)

The two descriptions are strikingly similar. Not only are the same adjectives used, such as comfortable and burning, Margery even uses the same analogy as Rolle in claiming that the heat is felt just as it would be if one were to put a finger into a fire. In Margery's case, however, the description is even more bodily than in Rolle's. She feels the heat in her breast and in her heart and she even mentions the weather to imply that the heat would be able to warm her if necessary. In this way, the fire of love is felt in the soul as well as the body. The body is not negated here, instead it plays an important role as part of the mystical union between Margery and God.

Moreover, although Rolle suggests that this degree is only attainable after long and serious contemplation in a solitary cell,[11] Margery obtains it without having been an anchorite or resorting to living in seclusion. Karma Lochrie thus states: "Kempe remains one of the most problematic of mystics, English or continental, because of her very mobility and unbridled mystical practices" (88). In contrast to other mystics, who are either nuns, hermits or anchorites, Margery is very mobile, travelling throughout England and going on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. Furthermore, Staley suggests that: "whereas in devotional treatises like *The Cloud of Unknowing* or Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* [...] we find manuals of spiritual instruction that are intended to guide the fledgling contemplative, Kempe offers no sense that Margery's experience might be duplicated by another devout woman or be seen as exemplary and therefore available" (98). However, despite Margery's

11 Rolle's extreme notions for the solitary life have been, for example, countered by Walter Hilton. "He warned Rolle's followers about interpreting *canor* in too literal a sense, advising them not to neglect their families and their social responsibilities by becoming hermits" (Hughes).

mobility, she still uses features and conventions that are typical of mystical writings in order to validate both herself and her life. Indeed, in contrast to what Staley states, Margery's *Book* can be seen as both exemplary and instructive: "Alle the werkys of ower Saviowr ben for ower exampyl and instuccyon, and what grace that he werkyth in any cratur is ower profyth" (41). Thus, God's grace as manifested in Margery (as she reassuringly tells us again and again) serves as an example, while the life she lives serves as a form of instruction. After all, God commands her to write "hyr felyngys and revelacyons and *the forme of her levyng*, that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world" (47, my emphasis).

Margery's mobility and her ability to feel the fire of love for a prolonged time stands in stark contrast to Rolle and Hilton's notion of contemplation. Her example seems much more inclusive and shows that a laywoman can achieve the highest degree of contemplation. Even though her *Book* is not constructed as a manual per se, it serves as an example and appeals to a more inclusive audience than just recluses, hermits and the audience of Hilton's mixed life. Similarly, Julian's notion of the *imago dei* and her insistence on addressing "all" Christians speaks of a more inclusive audience as well, even though Julian herself is an anchoress. Despite the fact that Rolle maintains that his writing is aimed at the simple and the unlearned, his claim can be seen merely as a means by which to critique learned theologians and philosophers. He states: "I offer, therefore, this book for the attention, not of the philosophers and sages of this world, not of great theologians bogged down in their interminable questionings, but of the simple and unlearned, who are seeking rather to love God than to amass knowledge" (*The Fire of Love* 46). In his view, theologians amass too much knowledge and are, thus, too heavily invested in the world to understand the ardent love that he feels towards God. He takes the view that one needs to leave behind everything belonging to the world in order to devote oneself completely to the love of God (*The Fire of Love* 47). Thus, Rolle's work serves as a manual for hermits or contemplatives, that is, for those who follow a solitary life devoted to God, as can also be seen by the aforementioned *The Form of Living*, which is addressed to a young female recluse (82). Furthermore, as described above, the highest degree of contemplation can only be achieved by a few, at least according to Rolle and Hilton. It seems curious then that both women, marginalised for their gender, tend to speak to a broader audience than their contemporary male authors.

Margery uses Rolle as an example of the fire of love and similarly includes affective piety in her *Book*. In his *Longer Meditations*, Rolle meditates on Christ's

Passion and uses several quite peculiar analogies for Christ's wounds. One is as follows: "Once more (a comparison), sweet Jesu: Your body is like a dove-house, because, just as a dovecote is full of openings, so your body is full of wounds" (113).[12] This dove-cote is also picked up by Margery in one of her meditations on the Passion:

> Sche had so very contemplacyon in the sygth of hir s[owle] as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode. And whan thorw dispensacyon of the hy mercy of owyr Sovereyn Savyowr, Crist Jhesu, it was grawntyd this creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body - alto-rent and toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys than evyr was duffehows of holys, hangyng upon the cross wyth the corown of thorn upon hy hevyd. (166-167)

A well as using the same analogy, Margery avails of all the important features of a Passion meditation. She concentrates on Christ made flesh and thus with her bodily eyes is able to see the Passion scene.

Furthermore, what mystics often wish for is to be present at the Passion, seeing and grieving with Christ's mother. Rolle is the perfect example of this:[13] "O sweet lady, why could I not have been beside you, hearing what you were hearing, seeing that scene right beside you, taking my share of that tremendous grief, perhaps being able to alleviate your misery? After all, people say it is a consolation to have a companion in trouble" (*The Longer Meditations* 121).[14]

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12 The dove can be interpreted in different significant ways throughout the Bible, but Rolle's analogies seem to be meant as common day-to-day experiences that everybody can understand. In this analogy, for instance, the dove is safe from the hawk in the dove-house and he compares the wounds also to the stars, a net, a honeycomb, a book and a meadow (*Longer Meditations* 112-114). Margery does something similar in a dialogue between her and Christ: "Dowtyr, for thu art so buxom to my wille and clevyst as sore onto me as the skyn of stokefysche clevyth to a mannys handys whan it is sothyn" (197).

13 See also Julian's description: "Me thought I woulde ben that tyme with Magdaleyne and with other that were Christus lovers that I might have seen bodilie the passion that our Lord suffered for me, that I might have suffered with him as other did that loved him. And therefore I desyred a bodely sight wher in I might have more knowledge of the bodily paynes of our Saviour and of the compassion of our Lady and of all his true lovers that were lyviyng that tyme and saw his payne. For I would have be one of them and have suffered with them" (*Showings* 4). In addition to the typical references, the constant use of "bodily" is astounding.

14 See also Anselm: "Why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow [...] Why did you not see with horror the blood that poured out of the side of

Margery's *Book*, on the other hand, goes much further. It is as Barry Windeatt states:

> When Kempe mentions to Richard Claister some spiritual classics she knows, 'Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne *Stimulus Amoris*, ne *Incendium Amoris*' (17: 39), it is not simply to list her devout reading for its own sake. Margery Kempe's project is bolder: she measures her experience against these classics only to assert her superior authority and originality, claiming that her own inward confabulations with the divine, if only she could express them, are unmatched by any such texts she ever heard read, in speaking of the love of God. ("Introduction" 6)

Whereas Rolle would have liked to have been at the Passion scene and to have shared Our Lady's sorrow, Margery actually gets to experience it. She not only sees the Passion with her bodily eyes, she even participates in it. She is the one who says to the Lady: "I prey yow, Lady, cesyth of yowr sorwyng, for yowr sone is ded and owt of peyne, for me thynkyth ye han sorwyd anow. And, Lady, I wil sorwe for ow, for yowr sorwe is my sorwe" (350). Interestingly, Margery even commands the Blessed Virgin to stop being sorrowful and in the end she quite literally takes over Mary's sorrow by crying, screaming and running around herself. She even brings Christ's mother a hot drink to comfort her (352). Akin to her usage of the fire of love, Margery makes clear that she is singular and that she has a special grace from God. She cleverly uses several features, such as the fire of love, the Passion scene and the dialogues with Christ in order to connect herself to other established mystics, such as Rolle, and by so doing gives authority to both herself and her *Book*. In contrast to the male writers, Margery and Julian emphasise the bodily. It seems much more important for them to include their bodies positively in their union with God. Julian not only stresses her bodily experience in the Passion scene, but also includes the body in her *imago dei* in which God is in the substance as well as in the sensuality. In Margery's case, everything that she does, she does with her whole body. Her fire of love is a real bodily sensation and she is present at and participates in the Passion scene. The gift of her crying and the pain that she experiences when thinking of the Passion both include her whole body and are clear for everyone to see. Both of these mystics negate the negative

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your Redeemer? [...] Why did you not share the sufferings of the most pure virgin, his worthy mother and your gentle lady?" (95).

conventions around female bodies and are able to legitimise themselves as visionaries in their writings.[15]

1.3 Illness and Weakness as a Rite of Passage

Another way in which these female visionaries gain authorisation and find their own voice is through illness and weakness, which are similarly related to the body. Women are seen as weak and prone to illness, which forms the basis of arguments that they are unfit for politics, thinking or public speaking. Diane Purkiss, for instance, states: "In the seventeenth century, illness and bodily weakness were feminized. Women were thought to be particularly prone to illness, and illness and weakness were in turn negative signs of femininity, underwriting woman's subordination" (144). Many female visionary writers still saw the need to defend themselves and, thus, included negative stereotypes, such as being weak and prone to illness, in their texts. Interestingly, these epithets, weakness and illness, are used by the visionary writers to establish their authority and authorship, as we have already seen with Margery and Julian. As weak and humble beings, they are the perfect vessels and instruments of God and are thus able to utter divinely inspired truths.

Anna Trapnel (fl. 1642-1660), for instance, fell into a twelve-day trance in January 1654 while she was at Whitehall supporting Vavasor Powell, who was being investigated for treason. During her trance, she was visited by many important people and her utterances were taken down by a scribe who was

15 As mystics often focus their attention on contemplation as the highest level to communicate with God, the body often becomes obsolete, as seen with Hilton or Rolle. This probably led Paul Maltby to contrast the notion of epiphany with the mystics' visions. He maintains: "Finally, in the visions of the religious mystics, for example, the "shewings" or apparitions experienced by Julian of Norwich or Margery Kempe, nothing is physically sensed; the source of the vision is purely internal and sometimes physically induced by bodily abuse (starvation or flagellation) or illness. On the other hand, the literary moment may be triggered by an external stimulus: for example an overheard comment […] or a smell" (19). However, I do not agree with Maltby that "nothing physically is sensed" in the visions of these mystics, as the body is of importance. Rolle, for instance, feels the heat of God's love physically, and Margery's visions are clearly felt physically as well, as I have shown above. Even though Hilton and Rolle have a negative stance towards the body, contemplation starts with the body and the female visionaries use their bodies to connect with God and attain their visionary status.

present most of the time (*The Cry of a Stone* 1-3). Trapnel's prophecies[16] are not only personal but also political, as she was part of the Fifth Monarchist movement, which was based on millenarian ideas drawn mostly from the books of Daniel and Revelation, namely that the second coming of Christ and his rule on earth were imminent and that it was time to prepare for the establishment of the New Jerusalem in England.[17] Interestingly, the first thing that Anna Trapnel reveals to us after her name and those of her family and acquaintances is the illness that she had suffered seven years previously:

> Seven years ago I being visited with a feaver, 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 the up, and thou shale live in my sight: which two days were two weeks that I should lye in that feaver, and that very time that it took me that very hour it should leave me, and I should rise and walk, which was accordingly. (*The Cry of a Stone* 3)

The near-death experience brought on by Trapnel's illness brings her nearer to God. Indeed, her rite of passage towards becoming a true prophet is marked by her quoting scripture[18] and by her hearing God's testimony that after the illness she will live in his sight. Illness here is not the negative characteristic of a woman. Rather, it is something sent by God, who singles Trapnel out in order to make her into a prophet and an instrument of His will.

Although Purkiss states that "illness and bodily weakness were feminized" in the seventeenth century, becoming a female prophet as a result of ill health was already a common feature in the visionary writings of medieval women. Julian of Norwich receives her sixteen revelations in 1373 during a severe illness. She tells us: "And when I was xxxth yere old and a halfe, God sent me

16 The Oxford English Dictionary defines prophecy as "[t]hat which is done or spoken by a prophet; the action or practice of revealing or expressing the will or thought of God or of a god" and more importantly a "divinely inspired utterance or discourse." Anna Trapnel's prophecy is, thus, meant as divinely inspired and an expression of the will of God.

17 See Graham p.12 or Hinds *The Cry of a Stone* p. xxvii.

18 Hosea 6:1-2: "Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." For Trapnel, the duration of three days does not seem to be binding. Although it took her two weeks, she still believes the sickness to have been sent by God and that she was healed as a sign of His grace.

a bodily sicknes, in the which I ley iii daies and iii nyghtes.[19] And on the iiii nyght I toke all my rightes of holie church and went not to have leven tyll day. And after this I lay two daies and two nightes. And on the third night I weenied often tymes to have passed, and so wenyd thei that were with me" (*Showings* 6). The bodily sickness is sent to Julian by God, enabling her to receive the sixteen revelations that are then written down and intended for all Christians. The same holds true for Margery Kempe. In the first chapter of her *Book*, we learn that, after giving birth to a child, Margery "was labowrd wyth grett accessys" (52) and that "this creatur went owt of hir mende and was wondyrlye vexid and labowryd wyth spyritys half yer, viii wekys and odde days" (54). During this time of sickness and madness, Margery is visited by Christ telling her that he has never forsaken her. "And anoon, as he had seyd thes wordys, sche saw veryly how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn [...] And anoon the creature was stabelyd in hir wyttys and in hir reson as wel as evyr sche was beforn [...] Sythen this creatur dede alle other ocupacyons as fel for hir to do wysly and sadly inow" (56). Again, the sickness sent by God marks the beginning of a journey as a visionary and as an instrument of God. Thus, although sickness and weakness have traditionally been negatively connoted in characterisations of women, the female visionaries describe them as God-sent, thereby portraying their weak and sick bodies as perfect sites for divine inspiration.

1.4 Childbirth

Thus, in contrast to male writers, such as Anselm, Hilton or Rolle, many female writers experience a bodily sickness before they establish themselves as prophets. Male writers are also concerned with their bodies of course but they do not begin writing as a result of their sickness or dwell on their weak bodies to the same extent women do. Indeed, one 'sickness' that is solely experienced by women is of particular interest here - namely childbirth. As seen above, Margery's sickness and her beginnings as a visionary are closely related to childbirth, an event that can not only end in death, but can also be seen as sickness itself, or be followed by sickness or even madness. As was the case

19 The mention of the three days and three nights, connects Julian with the resurrection of Christ: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

in the discussion above about the *imago dei* and Eve's connection to passion and sinfulness, childbirth and its pains are considered direct consequences of Eve's transgression: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). In Eve's punishment, pain in childbirth is connected to her subjugation to her husband. However, although childbirth is connected to pain, suffering and sickness, it is both a curse and also a path to redemption. This connection can be seen in 1 Timothy 2:13-15: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." Pain in childbearing is her punishment, but it is also how Eve is saved, suffering through it to ensure the continuance of the human race.

Moreover, this connection between childbearing and redemption is associated with Christ's suffering on the cross. Following the previous discussion on mystics reliving the Passion scene, childbirth and motherhood constitute another link that is often made between women and Christ's suffering. Anselm's assertions in his prayer to Paul are relevant here:

> Truly, Lord, you are a mother, for both they who are in labour and they who are brought forth are accepted by you. [...] It is by your death that they have been born, for you had not been in labour, you could not have borne death; and if you had not died, you would not have brought forth. For, longing to bear sons into life, you tasted of death, and by dying you begot them. (153)

Anselm takes up Paul's statement in Galatians 4:19: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." After comparing Paul to a mother, his prayer culminates in the above quoted passage, describing Christ as the ultimate mother who in death brings forth children. Jesus' suffering on the cross and his dying are therefore compared to childbirth and bring redemption to the children who are born through his sacrifice.

Julian's first revelation has also been interpreted as a childbirth sequence, with comparisons being made between this scene and the Passion of Christ (Park 33). Indeed, according to Park, Julian brings together Incarnation, Passion and birth in death (37). However, I disagree with Park's interpretation that this first revelation is a childbirth scene. It is true that Julian experiences a shortness of breath and a feeling of numbness beginning from her legs upwards (*Showings* 6-7) and, thus, the pain and the bodily site of the Passion

are similar to those in descriptions of other Passion scenes but there is no clear connection to childbirth per se. The links to Christ's Passion are clearer as Julian is linked to Jesus' resurrection by lying sick in bed for three days and three nights. In addition, the link becomes even more apparent in what Denise N. Baker calls Julian's "astonishing comparison of Jesus to a mother" ("Introduction" xv). Indeed, in her XIV. Revelation, Julian develops her theodicy by comparing Jesus to a mother and describing his three forms of motherhood: "The furst is grounde of oure kynde makyng. The seconde is takyng of oure kynde, and ther begynnyth the moderhed of grace. The thurde is moderhed in werkyng, and therin is a forth spredyng by the same grace of lenght and brede, of hygh and of depnesse without ende. And alle is one love" (*Showings* 93). In her opinion, "[t]he moder's servyce is nerest, rediest, and suerest" (*Showings* 94) and Julian compares Jesus to a mother who gives her child milk to suck (*Showings* 94) and who helps frightened and hurt children, but is also wise and an educator (*Showings* 96). Though there is not the space here to examine all the implications of Julian's comparison and her theodicy in detail, the link between motherhood and Christ's Passion is clear throughout her deliberations. For instance, instead of a mother who lays her child to her breast, Jesus "homely lede us in to his blessyd brest by his swet opyn syde and shewe us there in perty of the Godhed and the joyes of hevyn with gostely suernesse of endlesse blysse" (*Showings* 94). The link is even clearer in the following statement: "And in the takyng of oure kynd he quychyd us, and in his blessyd dyeng uppon the crosse he bare us to endlesse lyfe" (*Showings* 99). As with affective piety, in which, through Christ's humanity, the mystic connects with God on a higher contemplative level, the association between Christ's dying on the cross and giving birth to endless life gives women and childbearing another form of authorisation that cannot be imitated by men.[20]

Purkiss' claim that sickness and illness were feminised in the seventeenth century is further substantiated by Louis Schwartz in his study on maternal mortality at that time: "the frequency and difficulty of birth in early modern England caused a great deal of sickness among women, who were far more often sick than men, and often chronically so" (45). He further states that "[t]here is also evidence that anxieties about mortality, morbidity, and disfiguration

20 Paul does compares himself to a mother, which is also picked up by Anselm, but I would still argue that childbearing and the pain and suffering that are connected to it are clearly connected to Eve and women and are used more often as a means of establishing authority by women.

were the cause of a significant amount of mental illness among women" (47).[21] Childbirth was, thus, one of the reasons why women were often seen as chronically sick and weak. Indeed, maternal mortality figures from the period reveal the dangers that women were exposed to. According to Roger Schoefield, who looked at maternal mortality over three centuries, the rate was just over 10 deaths per 1000 baptisms in the first half of the seventeenth century over thirteen parishes in England (250). This number rose to 15.7 in the second half of the seventeenth century (248), while in London it was even 23.5 per 1000 baptisms (233). Even though Schoefield maintains that childbearing was a "less mortal occasion than we may have been inclined to believe" (260), it was an additional cause of death that was exclusive to women. The numbers, particularly in London, in the late seventeenth century were quite high and women must have seen it as a serious and dangerous burden that they needed to endure.

Moreover, even if childbirth did not end in death, women suffered not only the pains of bearing children, but also pain and sickness during and after pregnancy.[22] Richard Baxter (1615-1691) sums up women's lives in his second part or "Family Directory" of his *Christian Directory* in the following way:

> Women especially must expect so much suffering in a married life, that if God hat not put into them a natural inclination to it, and so strong a love to their children, as maketh them patient under the most annoying troubles, the world would ere this have been at an end, through their refusal of so calamitous a life. Their sickness in breeding, their pain in bringing forth, with the danger of their lives, the tedious trouble night and day which they have with the children in their nursing and their childhood; besides their subjection to their Husbands, and continual care of family affairs; being forced to consume their lives in a multitude of low and troublesome businesses. (Part II, Chap. 1, p. 8)

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21 See also Michael MacDonald: "Women sought medical treatment more often than men because they were more often ill. In addition to the afflictions men bore, women also suffered from diseases that tormented only their sex. [...] Childbirth without anaesthesia or asepsis was excruciating and dangerous: Difficult and botched deliveries often left women mangled, sterile, or lame – if they survived the infections that appear commonly to have followed dangerous labors" (38).

22 For example, see Linda A. Pollock: "Rather than associating childbearing with a sense of well-being and joy, pregnancy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was correlated with physical discomfort and mental unease" (45).

In Baxter's view, women's life is marked by subjugation to their husbands, sickness while being pregnant and the pains and dangers to their lives while giving birth. Baxter also mentions the burdens that women bear in nursing their children as well as in the latter's upbringing. It seems clear from all these texts[23] that women were undoubtedly anxious about childbearing.

Thomas Bentley, author of *The Monument of Matrones*, includes over forty prayers for women before, while and after childbearing. Throughout the prayers, it becomes clear that both pain and the danger of imminent death are at the forefront of women's minds. Interestingly, many of these prayers are also connected to the aforementioned themes, namely, Eve's transgression and punishment, redemption, and Christ's suffering on the cross. Suffering pain in childbirth is the consequence of sin and as such must be endured humbly, as the following prayer shows:

> I acknowledge, O Lord, that iustlie for our sinfull transgression of thy commandements, thou saiedst unto the first woman, our grand-mother Eve, and in hir to us all; I will increase thy sorowe, when thou art with child: with paine shalt thou bring foorth thy children. All our paines therefore that we suffer in this behalfe, are none other thing, but a woorthie crosse laid upon us by thy godlie ordinance, to the which with hart & mind I humblie submit my selfe, trusting surelie, and being fullie persuaded in my faith, that thou callest none into perill and danger, but both thou canst, and wilt at convenient season deliver them. (96)

Apart from the acknowledgement of Eve's transgression and punishment and the pain that must be suffered humbly, Christ is implicitly evoked through the bearing of this cross. There are other prayers that are much more explicit in connecting childbirth with Christ's suffering. The end of the next prayer even calls to mind affective piety and the mystic's dwelling on the wounds of Christ: "Give me power to pitch my confidence onelie and alone in the bloudie

23 In addition to its frequent appearance in texts, Judith W. Hurtig discusses death in childbirth as represented on seventeenth-century English tombs. She states: "Although it had always been common that women and their children died in childbirth, it was not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England that this cause of death was made the focus of the imagery on their tombs. […] It is not the intention here to argue that there was an underlying change in attitude towards death in childbirth, but rather to indicate that the appearance of these funerary monuments occurred at a time when childbirth and its perils appear to have been the subject of particular concern and anxiety" (603).

wounds of Christ Jesus, to whome in this my distresse I flie, and appeale for remedie and comfort. Grant this O gratious God, which livest and reignest world without end, Amen" (107). The connection becomes even clearer when Bentley encourages women "In long and sore labour" to say Psalm 22 of David, which he calls "The complaint of Christ on the Crosse" (109). Although much of the Psalm is retained in Bentley's prayer, he undertook some interesting changes such that it would pertain to a woman in childbirth. Male pronouns turned into female ones and the line "I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" becomes "I seeme rather to be a worme than a woman, the doonghill of Adam and Eve, the outcast of the vulgar people" (110), while Christ on the cross becomes a woman in labour: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It seemeth that I shall not obteine deliverance, though I seeke it with lowd cries" (109). Here, Bentley clearly plays with the double meaning of "deliver" and thus closely connects giving birth and redemption. Anselm, as we have seen, already associated Christ's suffering on the cross with giving birth to a redeemed humankind and Bentley's changing of Psalm 22 links women's suffering in childbearing with Christ and redemption for themselves as well as for humankind.[24]

However, even though it seems clear that the suffering in childbearing is to be seen as just punishment for Eve's transgression and is to be endured humbly, several of Bentley's prayers speak of women's anxiety and pain:

> How is it Lord, that for no intreatie thou wilt not deliver thine hand-maid from such indurable greefes? How long shall I suffer the paines of the birth, and the anguish of the travell? How long Lord shall my bowels thus sound like an harpe, my bones and sinewes be racked asunder, and mine inward parts be thus greevouslie tormented for my sins. [...] Oh Lord, spare me, oh deare God, have mercie upon me, and my babe! Shall I be the grave of my child? Shall I give death the fruit of my bodie, for the sins of my soule. (115)

24 As seen in 1 Timothy 2:13-15, women are saved through childbearing and this of course goes hand in hand with the command "increase and multiply." Bentley has another prayer that breaks down these connections: "In the beginning of the world, O father of heaven, after thou hadst formed man of the slime of the earth, and yet prince over all creatures, it pleased thee of thy goodnes to create a woman of his side, aswell for his solace, as for the continuance of his seed: it was thy word unto them, Increase & multiply. This increase was easie, but mother Eve hath made it hard, by passing the bounds of thy will, to all hir posteritie; so that the woman conceiveth and bringeth foorth in great paine, and painefull travell, the fruit of hir wombe" (127).

The continuously asked questions show the woman's pain rather than her patience and the mentioning of her bowels, bones and sinews draws a very graphic picture of her suffering. Jane Sharp (fl. 1641-1671), who wrote a textbook on midwifery in the seventeenth century, comments on this pain: "Childbearing is so dangerous that the pain must needs be great, and if any feel but a little pain it is commonly harlots [...] these doubtless are the greatest of all pains women usually undergo upon Earth" (170).[25]

Aside from the references to pain in Bentley's prayer, the question "Shall I be the grave of my child?" indicates that the fear of death was indeed part of the mindset before and while giving birth. This can be seen, for instance, in several writings by women, who were not only thinking about the death of their child, but also about their own possible demise. Anne Bradstreet (1613-1672), for instance, wrote a poem to her husband entitled "Before the Birth of one of her Children":

> All things within this fading world hat end,
> Adversity doth still our joyes attend;
> No tyes so strong no friends so clear and sweet,
> But with deaths parting blow is sure to meet.
> The sentence past is most irrevocable,
> A common thing, yet oh inevitable;
> How soon, my Dear death may my steps attend,
> How soon't may be thy Lot to lose thy friend,
> We both are ignorant, yet love bids me
> These farewell lines to recommend to thee (1-10, p. 134-135)

Bradstreet here bids farewell to her husband as she assumes that she is not going to survive giving birth to her child. She asserts that death is common and inevitable in principle but the birth of her child occasions her to write this poem and to imagine her own death. Furthermore, she not only humbly accepts her death, but she also shows sadness at the end of the poem, where she

25 Even though Jane Sharp describes all the ways in which childbirth can be dangerous and painful in a more or less scientific fashion, she also states: "The accidents and hazards that women lye under when they bring their Children into the world are not few, hard labour attends most of them, it was that curse that God laid upon our sex to bring forth in sorrow, that is the general cause and common to all as we descended from the same great Mother Eve, who first tasted the forbidden fruit" (167). Thus, she too continues the discourse about Eve's transgression and just punishment that has to be endured by all women.

asks her husband to "look to her little babes her dear remains" (22) and "with salt tears this last Farewel did take" (28). Childbirth clearly caused anxiety and that fear was frequently reflected in women's writing.

Another such example is Elizabeth Jocelin (1596-1622), who wrote a one-hundred-and-fourteen-page instruction[26] to her unborn child, because she was certain that she would die in childbirth. Elizabeth writes in a letter to her husband: "Mine owne deare love, I no sooner conceived an hope, that I should bee made a mother by thee, but with it entred the consideration of a mothers duty, and shortly after followed the apprehension of danger" ("The Letter"). Even in life, Elizabeth writes as though from the grave: "It may seeme strange to thee to recieve these lines from a mother, that died when thou wert borne" ("The Approbation"). Elizabeth was sure enough of her death that she felt the need to write these meditations for her child, in order to be able to have a say in how the child was raised and educated. Thomas Goad, who published *The Mothers Legacie to her Unborne Childe* after Elizabeth's death, clarified that shortly after Elizabeth gave birth to her child, she died of a fever.

In "The Approbation," Goad describes the circumstances of the meditations, and his descriptions are telling:

> when as the course of her life was a perpetuall meditation of death, amounting almost to a propheticall sense of her dissolution, even then when she had not finished the 27 yeere of her age, nor was oppressed by any disease, or danger, other than the common lot of child-birth, within some moneths approaching. Accordingly when she first felt her selfe quicke with childe (as then travelling with death it selfe) shee secretly tooke order for the buying a new winding sheet: thus preparing and consecrating her selfe to him, who rested *in a new Sepulcher wherein was never man yet layd*. And about that time, undauntedly looking death in the face, privatly in her Closet betweene God and her, shee wrote these pious Meditations.

Goad mentions her almost prophetical ability to foretell her own death as soon as she becomes aware of her pregnancy. Interestingly, even though Goad describes childbirth as a "common lot," he nevertheless lists it along with disease and danger, pointing to the fact that childbirth is seen as both dangerous and having an association with illness. Furthermore, his addition in parentheses

26 This text, for instance, also shows that childbirth was clearly a topic in the seventeenth century, as it "appeared in seven further editions in the seventeenth century alone" (Brown).

"as then travelling with death it selfe," turns her baby into the harbinger of death and death itself. The vocabulary used in several of these texts and poems is often rather graphic, portraying the women as graves or the children as death. Goad, however, also links Elizabeth to Christ in quoting the Bible in connection to her buying a new winding sheet and preparing herself to die. The Biblical quote can be found in the following context: "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:40-41). Thus, in choosing this quote to speak of Christ, Goad both links Christ's linen clothes with Elizabeth's winding sheet and evokes his crucifixion, thereby once more linking childbirth to Jesus' suffering on the cross as is the case in so many other texts.

Mary Carey (*b. c.* 1609, *d.* in or after 1680) wrote several poems on the death of her children. A common denominator of these poems is Carey's humble acceptance of these deaths and her praising of Christ. In this vein, she writes: "My lord hath called for my sonne/ my hart breth's forth; thy will be done" (1-2,"On the death of my 4th, & only Child, Robert Payler," p. 156) or

> I thought my all was given before
> But mercy ordred me one more:
> [...]
> My Dearest Lord; hast thou fulfill'd thy will,
> Thy hand maid's pleas'd, Compleatly happy still: (1-2, 9-10, "The death of my 4th sonne and 5th Child Perigrene Payler," p.157-58)

Despite the deaths of several of her children, she considered it to be God's will and was still "happy" to serve Him.

Interestingly, one of her longer poems is about a stillborn child and is called "Upon ye Sight of my abortive Birth ye 31th: of December 1657." Carey similarly stresses her humble acceptance:

> What birth is this; a poore despissed creature?
> A little Embrio; voyd of life, and feature
> [...]
> This is no lesse; ye same God hath it donne;
> Submits my hart, thats better than a sonne:
> In gieveing; taking; stroking; striking still;
> His Glorie & my good; is. his. my will: (1-2,9-12, p. 158)

This passage shows that even though stillborn, this child and its death are in accordance with God's plan and will. However, Carey also links the death of her child to her own sins here, (19; p. 159) asking: "I only now desire of my sweet God/ the reason why he tooke in hand his rodd?" (17; p. 159).

Much like Margery Kempe, who transcribes entire dialogues between herself and God, Carey also lets God speak in her poem. In answer to her question, God says:

> Whose taught or better'd by ye no Relation;
> Thou'rt Cause of Mourning, not of Immitation:
> Thou doest not answere that great meanes I give;
> My word, and ordinances do teache to live: (46-49, p. 160)

With these rather harsh words, Carey makes clear that the stillborn child is a punishment for not living according to God's word. Despite starting her poem positively in saying that God has gained one more child in heaven to praise him (8, p. 158), she still assumes it to be a punishment for her sins. Carey accepts God's will but at the same time bargains with Him in these poems. In the poem "On the death of my 4th, & only Child, Robert Payler," for instance, she expresses the desire to exchange her dead son with Christ:

> But if I give my all to the
> Lett me not pyne for poverty:
> Change with me; doe, as I hve done
> Give me thy all; Even thy deare sonne: (5-8, p. 156)

In this exchange, Carey links herself to God by making an analogy to His sacrifice and her own. She gives a child to God and in return receives Christ. In doing so, Carey almost reverses the order of God's sacrifice of His Son and puts her own sacrifice first.

In the poem about her stillborn child, furthermore, she tries to bargain after the words spoken by God. This time, however, her wish is another one:

> I'm a branch of the vine; purge me therfor;
> Father, more frute to bring, the heertofore;
> [...]
> Lett not my hart, (as doth my wombe) miscarrie;
> But precious meanes receive, lett it tarie;
> [...]

> Thy quickning Spirit unto me convey;
> And therby Quicken me; in thine owne way: (70-71, 74-75,84-85, p. 160-161)

In the latter section of the poem, Carey tries to reverse God's words and be the source of imitation, rather than mourning. In calling herself "a branch of the vine," Carey makes it clear that she still lives God's word and will. Furthermore, she asks God to quicken her with his Holy Spirit. Playing with the double sense of the word 'quicken' and exchanging her heart with her womb, she substitutes living fruit, namely her children, for more spiritual ones. Instead of giving birth to more children, Carey produces texts and poems, which will have "Gosple shape, & sute; / my meanes, my mercyes, & be pleasant frute" (76-77, p.161). Carey thus manages to use conventional symbolism here, such as the humble acceptance of and the punishment for her own sins, in order to empower herself and her texts. Quickened by God's Spirit, her texts gain another level of authorisation and Carey will not be the source of mourning but of imitation.[27]

As a consequence, childbirth, the punishment for original sin, is also associated with Christ's suffering on the cross and redemption. These female visionary writers negotiate these notions in order to produce writings and attain authorship for their texts. Women writers, such as Bradstreet, Jocelin and Carey, try to reconcile themselves with the perceptions of illness and transgression and the connection to Christ's suffering and redemption. Through the link to Jesus, these women are able to legitimise their voices as well as their writings. Similar to the link between childbearing and Christ, the next section will focus on other forms of imitation.

1.5 Imitatio Christi

Illness marks a rite of passage to a visionary stage and allows people to see God's workings through the sickness and healing of the visionaries. Throughout Trapnel's writings, and also in Margery's *Book*,[28] illness and weakness is

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27 See also Louis Schwartz's discussion of the poem. He, for instance, maintains: "I would argue that this poem provides us with a remarkable example of the imaginative power a woman could wield with instruments that in other contexts were designed to simply admonish her" (65).

28 See, for example, on p. 219: "And sche in schort tyme aftyr fel in gret sekenes, in-somech that sche was anoyntyd for dowt of death. […] And than owr Lord Jhesu Crist

mentioned again and again in order to demonstrate God's works. Another look at the above cited passages, in which Julian, Margery or Anna lie sick in bed, shows that the bystanders are witness to a serious illness that will likely end in death but the visionary is suddenly healed. Thus, the contrast between the initial visible weakness and the subsequent sudden strength gained through God serve as proof of the visionary's divine bond. Indeed, at the end of *The Cry of a Stone*, the scribe stresses exactly this point as a final confirmation of Trapnel's status as a prophet. These last words are worth quoting in full:

> Herewith she closed, having layn in bed eleven dayes and twelve nights together; in all or most of which time her weakness of body was such, that after she had kept her bed the first two dayes and nights, being raised up wile her bed was made, she was not able to go, but as she was carried in a Chair to the fire, and was ready to faint in place, though they made hast to make her bed ready for her, notwithstanding this weakness, after she had kept her bed II. dayes together, without any sustenance at all for the first five dayes, and with onely a little toste in small beer once in 24 hours for the rest of the time, she rose up in the morning, and the same day travelled on foot from *White-Hall* to *Hackny*, and back to *Mark-Lane* in *London*, in health and strength. (76)

Trapnel has spent eleven days in bed and barely eaten. They even have to carry her across the room, and she nearly faints there on a chair from weakness. However, in the morning, after all these days of weakness, she simply rises up and is able to travel approximately ten miles through London. For those who witnessed Trapnel's recovery, as well as those reading the account in *The Cry of Stone* this must have seemed like nothing short of a miracle.

In Anna Trapnel's *Report and Plea*,[29] which reports her journey to Cornwall, her arrest and trial, her return to London as well as her imprisonment in Bridewell, Trapnel makes explicit the connection between her weakness, strength and the Lord: "Then after that singing, I was put to bed, being weak

seyd to hir in hir sowle that sche schul [not] dey yet, and sche wend hirselfe that sche schulde not a levyd, for hir peyn was so gret. And hastily aftyrwarde sche was heyl and holy."

29 The page numbering in *Report and Plea* is not straightforward. After page 28 it goes back to 25 again. Page numbers are shown as in the manuscript. When quoting from 25-28 pages are marked as for example 25.1 or 25.2 to avoid any confusion.

in body and head, between two friends, where I lay and prayed till the morning; and coming into my ordinary capacity, I rose and had strength of body [...] This I mention, to advance Christ, and not for any by-end" (5-6). The bodily weakness that is often associated negatively with women is here turned into strength. Trapnel shows to her two friends, as well as to the readers of the *Report and Plea* that in spite of the fact that she is weak, she is able to gain strength through Christ. In the eyes of an outsider, this can serve as proof of God's grace as well as of the intimate bond between the visionary and the Creator. Hence, women's weakness is literally and symbolically turned into strength.

In addition, weakness and illness are also associated with suffering. As with the suffering felt in childbirth, pain, weakness of body, disease and, indeed, any kind of suffering become important topics for several of these visionaries. However, far from being perceived as negative, suffering is used as further proof of the intimate bond between the visionary and Christ, and even as a means by which to be compared to him. The one self-inflicted suffering that is quite common with women visionaries is fasting and bodily penance. Throughout Trapnel's writings, it is pointed out that she eats almost nothing and is still able to live and function as a vessel for God. In the passage mentioned above, the scribe, in describing her eating and drinking habits in so much detail, not only makes sure to stress these miraculous moments of gaining strength through Christ, but also captures the astonishment of the onlookers who witness her during her trances. Again, the performance of not eating and drinking in company over a long period of time while remaining healthy enables Trapnel's status as a prophet.

Fasting and bodily penance are also themes that arise again and again in Margery's *Book*. As in Trapnel's case, Margery's fasting and bodily penance are performed in public: "Sche yaf hir to gret fastyng and to gret wakyng; sche roos at ii or iii of the clok and went to cherch, and was ther in hir prayers onto tyme of noon and also al the afyrnoon. And than was sche slawnderyd and reprevyd of mech pepul for sche kept so streyt a levyng" (64). Margery is even slandered because of her strict life, indicating the jealousy of others who are not able to emulate her. On several occasions, she reminds those around her such as her husband or people with whom she goes on pilgrimages of her intimate relationship with Christ in that she is able to fast and lead a strict life in contrast to their lives. It seems that fasting and bodily penance are only possible through special grace and help from Christ and, thus, both Trapnel and Margery are singled out in the public eye. Interestingly, these women

prophets do not concentrate on the penance of their bodies as, for instance, is prescribed by Hilton in the above cited passage. Of course, they stress their sinfulness and nothingness repeatedly but the chastising of the flesh in order to rule over their sinful bodies seems to be of secondary importance. Trapnel, for her part, does not generally connect her fasting with bodily penance at all. Instead she uses it, as in the above mentioned passages, to show the world the special bond between her and Christ. In a similar fashion, Margery also comments on her sinfulness and turns her penance into a public spectacle, thereby achieving the same goal as Trapnel. Consequently, bodily penance and suffering are marked as granting authority and proving the visionaries' special connection to God.

Another bodily spectacle in terms of suffering is Margery's gift from God, namely to cry and weep in remembrance of Christ's Passion. In chapter 28, where she had "the fyrst cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon" (163), the word *cry* in its various forms appears no fewer than thirteen times in sixty-six lines. In the next chapter, where the different places of Christ's Passion are briefly listed, the words *wepyng*, *sobbyng* and *cryed* are mentioned eleven times in only sixteen lines. However, this gift is the main reason why most of her contemporaries in ecclesiastical or worldly offices believe her to be either hypocritical or mad. From this point onwards she cries so often ("onys sche had xiiii on o day") and everywhere ("sumtyme in the cherch, sumtyme in the strete, sumtym in the chawmbre, sumtyme in the felde" (164-65)) that references to it reappear in almost all other chapters in the *Book*. As was the case with her bodily penance, those around her slander her for it: "And this maner of crying enduryd many yerys aftyr this tyme, for owt that any man myt do, and therfor sufferyd sche mych despyte and mech reprefe. The cryeng was so lowde and so wondyrful that it made the pepyl astoynd" (163).

As a result, Margery repeatedly needs to legitimise this aspect in the *Book* and, at one point, she gains authority in a very significant way. The priest who writes down Margery's words is sometimes shown to be deeply sceptical about her. In chapter 62, he once again does not believe her until he is convinced by God to compare Margery with other saints. He then begins listing several saints such as Marie d'Oignies (ca. 1177-1213), who herself wept so many tears that she was unable to hear the Passion of Christ spoken or performed. Thereafter, texts such as *Stimulus Amoris* by Bonaventure, *Incendio Amoris* by Richard Hampole are listed. Reference is also made to Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231) who also cried loudly in devotion to Christ. As a result: "Than he levyd wel that the good woman, which he had beforn lityl affeccyon to, myth

not restreyn hir wepyng, hir sobbyng, ne hir cryying, whech felt meche mor plente of grace than evyr dede he, wythowtyn any comparison. Than knew he wel that God yaf hys grace to whom he wolde" (294). Thus, the scribe of her *Book* and the reader are convinced of Margery's true devotion to Christ and of her gift, which she is unable to restrain. Her suffering is made visible by her tears and her body again takes centre stage in showing her intimate bond with Christ.

Tears and crying have long been deemed to be female attributes, as can be seen in relation to Margery, Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary. This still held true in the seventeenth century when John Featley, a Church of England clergyman, wrote *A Fountaine of Teares* for Elizabeth Keate. He explains the decision to write his book in the following way: "I was first invited to this taske by the *moanes* of a *gracious* and *veruous gentle-woman*, who much complained that her *sexe* was so much *neglected* by *Divines*, that they had not *penned devotions* for all their *severall sufferances* that are common to many" ("To the Reader"). He thus dedicates his work to her and "For her deere sake these *Soliloquies* and *Prayers* were fitted for *Females*, and taught to speake in the *persons* of the *Weaker vessells*" ("To the Reader").

Here, Featley mentions several stereotypes that supposedly characterise women, such as crying or women being the weaker vessels who are in need of prayers fitted for them. In the first chapter of his book, Featley maintains that a "*teare* of a faithfull soule which *floweth* from the conscience of evill, purifieth the *conscience*" (2). As a result, tears can be purifying, especially when one cries because of one's sins and iniquities and makes these tears a visible part of one's repentance. As a further positive example of crying, Featley mentions Mary Magdalene, who cried at the feet of Christ and washed his feet with her tears (2). The example of Mary Magdalene is also taken up by Margery Kempe to justify her own tears. Shortly after Margery receives her gift in Jerusalem, the Virgin Mary tells her not to be ashamed of her crying: "no mor than I was whan I saw hym hangyn on the cros - my swete sone, Jhesu - for to cryen and to wepyn for the peyn of my swete sone, Jhesu Crist; ne Mary Mawdelyn was not aschamyd to cryen and wepyn for my sonys lofe" (171). Furthermore, in Margery's mind, weeping is strongly connected to prayer (360), just as it is for Featley, who calls the *Teares of godly sorrow* "[t]he sanctified Ejaculation to precede each severall meditation, and prayer" (1). As distinctly female a feature as tears seemingly are, they are not a sign of weakness. Being able to cry for one's sins as well as for Christ's suffering substantiates the bond between the supposedly weaker vessels and Christ.

In addition to the public spectacle of their suffering, the ability to bear this suffering humbly and in any form makes these women comparable to Christ. In this regard, there are parallels to the links felt in affective piety. The humble acceptance of suffering can be seen, for instance, in the texts about childbirth. Moreover, Trapnel and Margery repeatedly stress their joy in suffering in the name of Christ. Trapnel knew that she would meet a great deal of resistance and many people who would despise her on her journey to Cornwall. However, she states: "it made my heart much affected with my journey, and my Spirit leapt within me, and rejoyced that I was come into a country where I should suffer for the testimony of Jesus" (*Report and Plea* 13). The more she is despised and the more she bears her suffering in humility, the more she rises in God's esteem. As she herself tells us: "thus they spit forth venome against me; but it did me no hurt, because my Father made it work for good; my joy was not lessened, but increased" (*Report and Plea* 18). In fact, a clear connection to Christ's sufferings is even made: "That so I might all my dayes be willing to take up the Crosse of Christ, and follow him, whether so ever he would have me, either to do or suffer" (*Report and Plea* 45). Again, the suffering of these women is compared to Christ's crucifixion and everything that is said negatively to them and about them makes them rise in God's grace.

Of course, this is not particularly specific to women. Humility and suffering in the name of God or Christ applies to all Christians, male and female and stems from the Bible. Luke 6:22-23 states: "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven."[30] The suggestion is that the more one suffers for Christ's sake, the more one is rewarded in heaven. This concept is then taken up throughout history, for instance, by Thomas à Kempis. He is most probably the author of *Imitatio Christi*, which was written in the Netherlands between 1420 and 1427 and which went through forty-six editions in six translations before 1640 ("Introduction" xiii). His book is a manual for emulating Christ in order to live the perfect life in God's name and will. In this regard, Kempis says: "If thou canst not behold high and heavenly things, rest thou in the passion of Christ and dwell willingly in His sacred wounds. For if thou devoutly fly to the wounds of Jesus, and the precious marks of the nails and the spear, thou shalt find great comfort in

30 See also Matthew 10:22: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."

tribulation, nor will the slights of men trouble thee much, and thou wilt easily bear their unkind words" (Chapter IV, Book II). Here, Kempis connects the humble acceptance of tribulations and suffering in the name of Christ to the mystics' affective piety.

Thinking about the Passion, therefore, both leads one to a higher contemplative level and gives one comfort to bear all kinds of suffering in the world. Furthermore, Kempis maintains that Christ was also despised and rejected while on earth and that we should therefore not complain but instead bear the suffering humbly and patiently (Chapter V, Book II). Calvin talks about Jesus' suffering in a similar way in his *Institutes*, stating that:

> as he passed to celestial glory through a labyrinth of many woes, so we too are conducted thither through various tribulations. [...] How powerfully should it soften the bitterness of the cross, to think that the more we are afflicted with adversity, the surer we are made of our fellowship with Christ; by communion with whom our sufferings are not only blessed to us, but tend greatly to the furtherance of salvation. (Chapter XIII, Book III, 431-32)

Following Christ's example and suffering in his name is rewarded and, at the same time, shows the world that one is connected to the Lord.

Even though the humble acceptance of suffering in the name of Christ is not specific to women alone, they use it in order to legitimise themselves in a way that is specific to their gender. Their suffering is often connected to their bodies and, thus, to other themes, such as sin and redemption. This holds true for Margery. Throughout her *Book*, people speak ill of her, she is slandered by her fellow pilgrims, attacked as a witch, a Lollard, a hypocrite and much more. The connection between this slander and her being rebuked, as well as God's love for her because of this, is established very early on in her text:

> Sche was so usyd to be slawndred and repreved, to be cheden and rebuked of the world for grace and vertu wyth whech sche was indued thorw the strenth of the Holy Gost, that it was to her in a maner of solas and comfort whan sche sufferyd any dysese for the lofe of God and for the grace that God wrowht in hyr. For evyr the mor slawnder and repref that sche sufferyd, the mor sche incresyd in grace and in devocyon. (43-44)

In addition to references to suffering and to the subsequent increase in grace and devotion, Margery makes sure to include the fact that she is rebuked by others because of the virtue and grace that the Holy Ghost works in her.

Thus, she manages to legitimise all the behaviour for which she is rebuked throughout the *Book*.

Interestingly, this is also a topic that Margery discusses with Julian of Norwich during her visit. Julian tells her that she should not fear the language of the world "for the mor despyte, schame, and repref that ye have in the world, the mor is yowr meryte in the syght of God" (122). Furthermore, the analogy between Margery and Christ's crucifixion is again made explicit in the following speech of Christ's: "for as long as he spekyth ageyns the, he spekyth ageyns me, for I am in the and thu art in me. And herby mayst thow knowyn that I suffyr many schrewyd wordys, for I have oftyntymes seyd to the that I schuld be newe crucifyed in the be schrewyd wordy, for thu schalt non otherwyse ben slayn than be schrewyd wordys sufferyng" (189). The slandering words against Margery re-enact a crucifixion of her own, turning her into Christ and vice versa. Through the constant repetition of this theme, Margery is able to legitimise her behaviour, even though that behaviour is eccentric and a topic of discussion among other citizens or fellow travellers. She cannot be rebuked or insulted without increasing her grace and devotion. Whatever her behaviour is, she is able to justify it.

As we have seen, negative terms related to the female body, such as transgression, sin, weakness and illness, are used by these female visionary writers in order to legitimise their writings. The often negative connotations stem, for instance, from religious writings. In many of these texts, such as the Bible or works by Augustine, Rolle and Hilton, the body is strongly connected to sin and has to be repressed or overcome. Even though the body does play an important role in affective piety, in as much as the mystic thinks about the Passion and Christ made flesh in an explicitly physical way, the discarding of the body is still a prerequisite in order to gain a higher contemplative level. The subordination of the body to the spirit, furthermore, often goes hand in hand with an analogous subordination of women to men and interpretation of the *imago dei*. From there, the negatively connoted body is often associated directly with women, characterising them as sinful and passionate. Interestingly, Julian of Norwich also uses the bipartite soul system in her writing, but, for her, God is both in the 'substance' and in the 'sensuality'. As we will see in the next chapter, in Julian's perception of the *imago dei*, sensuality, and thus the body, also plays an important role in our salvation. In general, stressing the positive aspects of the body is far more important for women than men and the visionaries examined here focus heavily on the body and use it to their advantage. Affective piety, for instance, gives both Julian and Margery

an opening for their 'sinful' bodies to connect to Christ's body and to gain an intimate bond and a higher spiritual level that would otherwise be denied to them. In her text, Margery draws heavily from the mystical tradition, including Hilton and Rolle, but finally surpasses those writers. The fire of love that Rolle describes as the highest level of contemplation and thus as difficult to attain is felt by Margery for sixteen years even though she is not a recluse and is quite mobile. By using affective piety and their bodies to their advantage, both Margery and Julian therefore succeed reversing negative stereotypes related to the female body.

In several instances, moreover, the female visionaries use an illness as a rite of passage to their prophetical status, which is clearly different from the approach taken by male authors. As women are often seen as prone to weakness and illness, this becomes an important topic in several of these female visionaries' writings. Trapnel, Margery and Julian all nearly die of an illness, which is the beginning of their visionary status. One 'sickness' that affects only women is childbirth of course. The suffering and pain that women experience in childbirth is deemed to be the punishment for Eve's transgression, but it is also her redemption. Furthermore, through its suffering and redemptive character, childbearing is often associated with Christ's suffering on the cross. Continuing the tradition from Paul and Anselm, Julian pictures Christ as a mother. In her case, however, she goes one step further and includes him in her theodicy as both a mother who gives birth to redeemed humankind and as a nursing mother who raises and looks after her children. Many prayers, texts and poems were produced on the topic, whereby Eve's transgression and the analogy to Christ's suffering were still important parts of the discussion. Carey, for instance, sees the death of her child as a punishment for her own sins, but is still able to bargain with God at the end of her poem. In turning her womb into her heart and substituting living fruit for spiritual ones, she empowers herself as well as her texts. Instead of giving birth to children, she now gives birth to a poem, quickened by the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, through their weak bodies, these women are able to show the people around them and their readers the intimate bond that they have with God. Be it an illness, a weak disposition, fasting or bodily penance, Margery or Trapnel show the world that they have special grace from God, as they are able to suddenly walk many miles after being weak or sick. Even Margery's abundant crying and weeping is proof of her status as a visionary. Thus, these women's whole bodies become a visual sign of God's grace, turning the negative labels associated with the female body into markers of authorisation.

The more these women suffer, the more they are able to justify their writings. Suffering in the name of Christ and bearing it humbly forms another part of the comparison to the Lord. Taking up the concept from the Bible, namely "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you […] reproach you […] for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:22-23), Trapnel and Margery are able to profit from being reproached and slandered. In spite of the negatively connoted connection of female bodies to sin, weakness and illness, these women are able to gain agency through these stereotypes and mobilise their bodies to their advantage. In the next chapter, we will see these women visionary writers negotiate further negative epithets that should have, but in truth did not prevent them from writing, speaking in public, or participating in political discussion.

Chapter 2: Women and Politics

> "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." –
> 1 Timothy 2:11-14

2.1 Julian's Universal Salvation

The first chapter has shown that the female visionaries used the negative stereotypes around their bodies in order to gain authority through their voices and their writings. In this chapter, the focus lies on politics. At the time in which they lived, women were said to be too weak and frail to speak in public, let alone to be involved in politics. Yet, as these women visionaries will show, they and their writings were very political, albeit to different degrees and for different reasons. Commenting on the political nature of these writers, Diane Watt states:

> Unlike many of their continental counterparts Margery Kempe and almost all other late medieval women prophets and visionaries in England only intervened in matters relating to the communities in which they lived […] Margery Kempe […] was very much a *local* prophet, concerned only with questions involving her immediate communities. […] English women's prophecy became more politicized with the Reformation. (55)

Despite this claim that medieval English visionaries were less political than visionary writers elsewhere in Europe, and even less political than their seventeenth century counterparts, I would nonetheless argue that Margery and Julian were clearly political. Firstly, religion is often not separable from politics, neither in the Middle Ages nor in the seventeenth century. Secondly,

writing and public speaking can already be seen as political acts in themselves for these female visionary writers.

As already mentioned in the first chapter, Julian states in her first revelation that she writes for everybody: "I say nott thy to them that be wyse, for they wytt it wele. But I sey it to you that be symple, for ease and comfort, for we be alle one in love" (*Showings* 16). Indeed, the revelations are shown to her by God "in comfort of us alle" (*Showings* 15). This simple statement has various implications. First of all, Julian tells the reader that she does not write for the learned because they already know the content of her revelations. With this comment, she is able to legitimise her writings, making it clear that everything she writes is already well known by the learned. More importantly, however, she says that she writes for the simple, the unlearned, for her "evyn Cristen," in short, for everybody. As such, the revelations are an unmediated message from God through Julian to the people. Mediation is, of course, an important concept in the Church's teachings, as God's words are delivered through the Church and are not typically a private and direct conversation between God and his people.[1] The *Showings*, however, contradict the Church's teachings by the mere fact that Julian, rather than a priest, is the intermediary. That she is aware of the fact that her revelations are potentially dangerous in this regard can be seen in the way she affirms everything the Church teaches in her first revelation: "But in all thing I beleve as holy chyrch prechyth and techyth. For the feyth of holy chyrch, which I had before hand understondyng and as I hope by the grace of God wylle fully kepe it in use and in custome, stode contynually in my syghte, wyllyng and meanyng never to receyve ony thyng that myght be contrary ther to" (*Showings* 16).

Julian states clearly that she believes in the Church's teachings and that she does not want to write anything that runs counter to these, her revelations are decidedly subversive in parts nonetheless. In revelations xiii and xiv, for instance, she struggles with the Church's teaching that God is full of wrath and that sinners are damned. This is because God shows her in her revelations that "Alle maner thyng shall be welle" (*Showings* 44). Julian, thus, cannot reconcile her own understanding, for example that she should have faith in God's word and believe Him when He says that everything shall be well, with the Church's teaching that heathens and sinners are damned (*Showings* 45). After all, God

1 Prayers are, needless to say, a private conversation between God and his people. What is meant here is the word of God and His teachings, which are mediated through the Church.

does not show her hell or sin, but only His goodness and love for everyone. For several pages, she contrasts what the "holy chyrch techyth [her] to beleve," namely that "we oughte to leve, and leve many good dedys undone that we oughte to do, therfore we deserve payne, blame, and wrath," with what she saw in her revelation: "And nott withstanding alle this, I saw verely that oure Lorde was nevyr wroth nor nevyr shall. For he is God, he is good, he is truth, he is love, he is pees" (*Showings* 64). Similarly, in revelations xiii and xiv, Julian goes back and forth, making her struggle visible by repeating sentences as well as trying different approaches to the topic. In revelation xiv, for instance, she asks God: "Yf I take it thus, that we be no synners nor no blame wurthy, it semyth as I shulde erre and faile of knwoyng of this soth. And yf it be tru that we be synners and blame wurthy, good Lorde, how may it than be that I can nott see this truth in the, whych arte my God, my maker in whom I desyer to se alle truth?" (*Showings* 69).

This question and Julian's struggle between the Church's teachings and her revelations mark the beginning of her theodicy of universal salvation - a theodicy that is in stark contrast with what she has thus far been taught by the Church. In answer to her question to God, which is stated above, Julian is given another revelation about God and the servant. In chapter 51, she sees a servant who is willing to do his lord's bidding, but falls into a pit, no longer able to serve or see his master's face. The servant still expresses a desire to serve and, similarly, the lord's love for the servant never falters. Julian goes on to explain that the servant is Adam and his fall into the pit represents the first sin. At the same time, she makes it clear that the servant is not only Adam, but also Christ, as "Goddys Sonne myght nott be seperath from Adam, for by Adam I understond alle man" (*Showings* 76). Christ, thus, in becoming a man in order to redeem mankind, becomes the servant, who represents all mankind who participated in the original sin. Through his sacrifice, Christ descends into hell and redeems Adam and thus everyone else along with him. This is the answer to Julian's question; we are all saved through Christ as "oure good Lorde Jhesu [has] taken uppon hym all oure blame, and therfore oure Fader may nor wyll no more blame assigne to us than to hys owne derwurthy Son Jhesu Cryst" (*Showings* 76).

The notion of *felix culpa*, or the fortunate fall, is, of course, nothing new. Nor is the concept of Christ being made flesh and redeeming us from original sin. However, Julian's theodicy does not stop there. Her revelation shows her that Adam is Christ and that Christ is Adam. In the light of this, mankind is not only absolved from original sin, but cannot be blamed for future sin.

This is because everybody has two parts in themselves: "the goodnesse that we have is of Jesu Crist, the febilnesse and blyndnesse that we have is of Adam" (*Showings* 76). Here, Julian also begins to include her notion of the *imago dei*, as described in chapter 1. The part in our soul that she calls "substance," which is always a part of God, is in this revelation connected to the part of us which was and is Christ. Thus, by exchanging Adam with Christ, she understands that through God's grace, there is no sin and no blame and, thus, no more hell.

> I sawe and understode in oure Lordy a menyng that we may nott in this lyfe kepe us fro synne, alle holy in full clenesse as we shall be in hevyn. But we may wele by grace kepe us fro the synnes whych wolde lede us to endlesse payne, as holy chyrch techyth us, [...] wyttyng that we may nott stonde a twynglyng of an ey but with kepyng of grace, and reverently cleve to God, in him only trustyng. (*Showings* 81)

For Julian, it is clear that we are not able to refrain from sin, but that, through God's grace and the part of the soul that is Christ, everyone, without exception, will ultimately be saved.

Interestingly, Julian never mentions Eve in this revelation. Instead, she talks about Adam's fall and his feebleness and weakness. Thus, despite the fact that Eve is often connected to the fall and original sin and is called the first transgressor, in Julian's version, it is Adam who falls into the pit, causing the fortunate fall from which Christ has to save us. After the fall it is thus Adam and not Eve who has to "do the grettest labour and the hardest traveyle that is" (*Showings* 75). Furthermore, Julian not only leaves Eve out of the first transgression, but she clearly vindicates the flesh and thus the body in her revelation about God and the servant: "And oure foule, dedely flessch that Goddys Son toke uppon hym, whych was Adam's olde kyrtyll, streyte, bare, and shorte, then by oure Savyoure was made feyer, new, whyt, and bryght, and of endlesse clennesse" (*Showings* 78). Adam's old kirtle, and thus his flesh, is made new through Christ, making it bright and clean. Just as in the discussion in chapter 1, the flesh is part of Christ, giving Julian the starting point for her discussion about the bipartite soul, in which both substance and sensuality are positively connoted. Even though Julian tries to repeatedly make it clear that she believes in the Church's teachings, her parable of God and the servant and her universal salvation theory make it difficult not to see her theodicy as subversive and political.

2.2 Language and Heresy

Language is another important area in which Julian is part of the political discussion of the time. Of course, discussions about language and the word of God have a long tradition. In 2 Corinthians 12: 2-4, for instance, we read:

> I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

This passage illustrates the crucial point of the discussion: how is it possible to utter something that is unspeakable? God is transcendent and it is not possible for human beings to understand God's words fully. Human language is also fallible so the question remains: is what we are reading in the Bible God's word or is it mediated through fallible human language? Augustine, for instance, while describing an out of body experience, explains the problem in the following way:

> Wisdom is not made, but is as she has been and forever shall be; for 'to have been' and 'to be hereafter' do not apply to her, but only 'to be,' because she is eternal and 'to have been' and 'to be hereafter' are not eternal. And while we were thus speaking and straining after her, we just barely touched her with the whole effort of our hearts. [...] We returned to the sounds of our own tongue, where the spoken word had both beginning and end. (Chapter X, Book 9)

Here, the argument is that wisdom, and God for that matter, is eternal. Human language, in contrast, cannot exist in eternity as it has a beginning and an end. On earth, as human beings, we exist through time, past, present and future, with everything clearly demarcated by a beginning and an end. In this sense, there is no possibility to understand or talk about the word of God. Human language will thus always be a vehicle that fails to express the eternal wisdom of God.

This discussion about fallible human language led to a tradition known as the *via negativa*. The concept goes back to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (around AD 500), who maintains that we can achieve a union with God but only through 'unknowing' everything, leaving all earthliness behind and being

in a state of complete darkness. For Pseudo-Dionysius, divine grace makes it possible to attain a union with God in contemplation. However, in this contemplation, you must "forsake your bodily sense […], and also your spiritual senses, otherwise known as your intellectual activities; […] and all things that now exist or that have existed though they do not now exist; and all things that do not now exist, or that may exist in the future though they do not now exist" (2). Here, Pseudo-Dionysius voices similar sentiments as Augustine did. In order to attain a spiritual union with God, one has to achieve some sense of eternity, leaving behind the past, present and future. He further states: "once everything has been negated in this way, you will be drawn up in your feelings above understanding to the radiance of divine darkness that transcends all being" (2). This darkness represents the 'unknowing' of everything, which is accomplished by means of negation, hence the name of the tradition. In the end, "once this ascent is over, there will be no voice, and all will be united with that which is unspeakable" (2). As such, language must be left behind as there is no voice in a union with God. We become one with the unspeakable itself.

In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* presents similar ideas. In chapter 70, he states that he only wishes to cite St. Denis (whom he confuses for Pseudo-Dionysius) as the authority of his work. He encapsulates his own work as well as that of Pseudo-Dionysius in the following quote: "'The godliest knowledge of God is that which is known through ignorance'" (96). Negation and a spiritual darkness that becomes a cloud in his work are, thus, necessary in a union with God through contemplation. As was the case with Rolle's and Hilton's views, this kind of ecstasy is only rarely achieved by human beings and the unknown author makes it clear from the start that his book is not for everyone. Indeed, he goes out of his way to restrict his readership to the perfect Christian:

> I command and beseech you […] whoever you my be that have this book in your possession […] that so far as you are able you do not willingly and deliberately read it, copy it, speak of it, or allow it to be read […] by anyone or to anyone, except by or to a person, who, in your opinion, has undertaken truly and without reservation to be a perfect follower of Christ […] and one too who does all he can, and, in your opinion, has long done so, to prepare himself for the contemplative life by means of virtuous active living; for otherwise it has nothing to do with him. (11)

As we have seen in the first chapter, this is very similar to the approach taken by Rolle and Hilton but it stands in stark contrast to that of Julian and Margery. Julian's work is explicitly for everyone. It is written in the vernacular, from one 'unlearned' person to another, and is, as she says, for "evyn Cristen." The same holds true for Margery, who is instructed by God to write about her way of life for the entire world to know. Language is of crucial importance here. The author of the *Cloud* describes it as a "clumsy, beastlike tongue" (118) and speech as a "bodily activity" (88). Nonetheless, only the vernacular makes it possible at all for these spiritual works to be widely read and understood by everyone. Thus, not only is language itself seen as inadequate in understanding the word of God, the discussion also shifts to the vernacular.

The use of the vernacular in religious texts at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century is clearly political. This can be first and foremost seen by the *Constitutions* of Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, drafted in 1407 and published in 1409. In fact, Nicholas Watson rightly states that "Arundel's Constitutions [...] need to be regarded as the linchpin of a broader attempt to limit religious discussion and writing in the vernacular" ("Censorship" 824) and that "all but the most pragmatic religious writing could come to be seen, by the early fifteenth century, as dangerous" ("Censorship" 825). Even though it is quite evident that Arundel's *Constitutions* are aimed against the Lollards, they have further ramifications that are directed towards English religious writings in general. In his first constitution, Arundel states:

> That no maner of person seculer or reguler, being authorised to preach by the lawes now prescribed, or licenced by special priviledge: shal take upon him the office of preaching the word of God, or by any meanes preach unto the clergy or Laitie, either within the Churche or without, in English, except he first present himselfe, and be examined of the Ordinary of the place where he preacheth. (Foxe, 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 548 (524))

In this first constitution, the English language as such becomes the problematic issue. In connection with constitution seven, one could argue that Arundel's concern is the vernacular language, which cannot convey religious concepts or the word of God, as was the case in the general discussion about human language in the passages above. It also reflects a general concern about translating texts. He states that "it is a dangerous thinge [...] to translate the text of the holy scripture out of one tongue into an other: for in the translation the same sense is not alwayes kept [...] We therefore decree and ordayne,

that no man […] translate any text of the Scripture into English […] by way of a booke, libell, or treatise" (Foxe, 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 549 (525)). However, if one looks at constitution five in which he decrees:

> no scholemaisters and teachers what soever, that instruct children in grammer, or […] in primitive sciences… intermingle any thing concerning the catholicke fayth, contrary to the determinations of the church. Nor shall suffer theyr schollers to expound the holy Scripures, […] not shal permit them to dispute openly or privily concerning the catholicke fayth (Foxe, 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 549 (525)),

then it becomes clear that there is more behind the decrees than only what might be lost in translation.

Arundel's *Constitutions* are the culmination of the Oxford translation debate,[2] in which scholars on both sides argued about the role of the vernacular in religious writings. The Wycliffite Bible and general English religious writings were at the core of this argument. Discussions about translations of the Bible were the primary concern. After all, during copying and translating, errors can arise and there are always certain things that cannot be translated into another language due to the fact that the terminology does not exist in the target language. The question of the fallibility of human language becomes even more problematic when the word of God is copied and translated over and over again. However, as seen in the constitutions, the debate was not only about translation. Prohibiting preaching in English as well as forbidding all discussion about the teachings of the Church in schoolrooms and in private make it clear that the discussion was also about Church politics. There was clearly a fear that if everyone were able to read the Bible and talk to each other about scripture, everyone could become a teacher and the clergy would become irrelevant. Using English in religious texts, as Julian and Margery do, in order to reach a wider audience, and one that was not necessarily educated, was therefore dangerous in its own right.

This can also be seen in Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Love uses the momentum of Arundel's *Constitutions* to publish his work. Indeed, Michael G. Sargent argues that Love's *Mirror* "was the most important literary version of the life of Christ in English before modern times. In fact, to judge by the number of surviving manuscripts and early prints, it was one

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2 See Anne Hudson "Lollardy: The English Heresy" and "Debate on Bible Translation" as well as Nicholas Watson "Censorship" 842-43.

of the most well-read books in late-medieval England" (Love, "Introduction" ix). Although the *Mirror* is written in English, it becomes clear that it fits right into Arundel's politics, as testified by a Memorandum at the beginning of the book. Love states that the *Mirror*

> was presented in London by its compiler, N, to the Most Reverend Father and Lord in Christ, Lord Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, for inspection and due examination before it was freely communicated. Who after examining it for several days, returning it to the above-mentioned author, commended and approved it personally, and further decreed and commanded by his metropolitan authority that it rather be published universally for the edification of the faithful and the confutation of heretics or lollards. (xv)

In this Memorandum, Love makes it clear that he has Arundel's complete approval and his express permission for the book to be "published universally." In contrast to other religious texts that are written in English, this book is, therefore, set up as a text that is for the edification of all that are faithful, making it a book that is going to prove the heretics and Lollards wrong.

The fact that this book clearly takes aim at the unfaithful is evident in the margins of several passages, in which Love writes "contra lollardos"[3] to signal his arguments confuting the Lollards. He states that contrary to "the fals opinyon of lollardes" (90), confession needs to be said out loud to a priest "that [God] hath specialy ordeynet in his stede" (91). He also devotes several paragraphs to talking about transubstantiation in the Eucharist (151-154), calling the Lollards "lewede" and "fals" (152) and stating that: "I sal say more over sumwhat in speciale that I knowe sotherly of the gracious wirching in sensible felyng of this blessed sacrament, the which merveylouse wirching & felyng above comune kynde of manne sheweth & proveth sovereynly, the blessed bodily presence of Jesu in that sacrament" (152). Love's comments here are motivated by the Lollards' attacks on transubstantiation and on the pronunciation of absolution, which are their attempt to undermine clerical power,

3 See pages 90, 132, 138, 142 and 152.

the very power that Love seeks to protect.[4] Fundamentally, if God alone is able to pronounce absolution and if the miracle of transubstantiation by a priest is placed in doubt, the clergy becomes irrelevant. Thus, though Love's text is written in English, the clear attacks on the Lollards and the presence of the Memorandum at the beginning undoubtedly further Arundel's cause and aid the unhindered dissemination of Love's book.

Love's awareness of the political landscape is evident from the proem. He states that several books have been written by "devoute men not onelich to clerkes in latyne, but also in Englyshe to lewde men & women & hem that bene of symple undirstondyng" (10). These "symple creatures the whiche as childryn haven nede to be fedde with mylke of lyghte doctryne & not with sadde mete of grete clargye" (10). Here, Love contrasts the false texts written by the Lollards in English with other texts that were written in English first and foremost for the "symple creatures" who are incapable of understanding difficult texts. English is here used as a means by which to bring lighter doctrine to the masses, setting these books apart from the sophisticated Latin texts by the clergy. In addition, Love comments on several authors, such as Hilton, Rolle, Julian and others, who contemplate Christ as a man:

> [T]he monhede of cryste is more likyng more spedefull & more sykere than is hyghe contemplacion of the godhed ande therfore to hem is pryncipally to be wette in mynde the ymage of crystes Incarnacion passion & Resurreccion so that a symple soule that kan not thenke bot bodyes or bodily thinges mowe have somwhat accordynge unto is affecion where with he maye fede & stire his devocion. (10)

By equating the contemplation of Christ as a man to simple souls who are not able to reach higher contemplation, Love diminishes authors who use affective piety in order to connect with Christ or God. The body and "bodily thinges" more generally are here again used to indicate those with a lower mental capacity and the uneducated. Love's book thus stands both against the teachings of the Lollards as well as authors who use affective piety in order

4 See the "Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards," in which the fourth conclusion states that the Eucharist is a "feynid miracle" and that "every trewe man and womman in Godis lawe make the sacrament of the bred withoutin oni sich miracle" (Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings* 25). The ninth conclusion, furthermore, maintains that priests do not have the power to pronounce absolution and that it only "enhaunsith prestis pride" (Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings* 27).

to reach a higher contemplative level. It also demonstrates the contemporary fear of the dangers of the English language and the interest of the masses in religious matters, as the above passages illustrate. Julian and Margery both participate in this political landscape and have to negotiate the difficulty to legitimise their texts written in English.

2.3 Margery and Heresy

Margery's participation in the political landscape of her time is not limited to her use of the vernacular, it is also reflected in her views and behaviour, which can be termed heretical. Lynn Staley, for example states that "[Kempe][5] uses Margery in a way that evinces her sensitivity to the whole range of issues that had accrued around the Lollard heresy and that suggests her sympathies for what might loosely be called Lollard views" (127). As was discussed, such Lollard views as instigated by John Wyclif included reading the (vernacular) Bible as the sole authority and the limitation of priesthood by denying the clergy the power to give absolution and by disputing the miracle of transubstantiation in the Eucharist. Lollards also condemned any form of idolatry, including images and pilgrimages, and swearing.[6] Given their belief that the Bible was the sole authority and that every good man could be a priest, the threat that the Lollards posed to the Catholic Church was great and had inevitable consequences. Indeed, Margery is accused of being a Lollard several times in her text. One of the issues that comes up again and again is Margery's mobility and her talking, if not preaching, about God to numerous people on her journeys.

From Paul's teaching, it is clear that women should neither teach nor preach: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression" (1 Tim. 2:11-14). Adam's superiority is established thereby as being "first formed" and as we have already seen, it is Eve is who is responsible for the original sin. As a consequence, women are

5 Lynn Staley makes a distinction between Margery as a subject and Kempe as the author of the *Book* (3).

6 See, for instance, the "Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards" (24-29) in Hudson *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*.

not permitted to teach, and even learning should be done in silence and only in subjugation to men.[7] Women are allowed to talk at home to other women or to their children but as the inferior sex they are unable to teach or preach outside the domestic space, especially not to men, who are the superior sex. The arguments as to why women are not allowed to preach are summarised by Walter Brut, a Lollard, whose trial took place in 1391, as follows:

> (i) A woman, because of her female sex, is by nature subject to man, or if not by nature, at least by command of the Lord. Therefore, it is not her place to teach in public [...]. (ii) So that men will not be led into sexual desire by the public teaching of a woman, it is forbidden to them to teach in public because in so doing they would harm men rather than benefit them. (iii) The third reason is that women in general have weak and unstable natures and thus they are incomplete in wisdome; therefore, they are not allowed to teach in public [...]. (Blamires 252-53)

The first and the third point are also outlined by St. Paul, quoted above, and point to the inferiority of women in their mind as well as their bodies. Interestingly, Brut elaborates on the second point, claiming that "although the beauty of her appearance and every movement of woman may lead men to sexual desire, it is chiefly the sweetness of her voice and the pleasure of hearing her words that does this" (Blamires 252). The suggestion is that men are distracted and led astray even by hearing a woman's voice and, thus, the content of what she is saying does not seem to matter.

When Margery Kempe is interrogated in the articles of faith, it becomes clear that her voice has the power to lead people astray. At a particular moment, a mayor says to Margery: "I wil wetyn why thow gost in white clothys, for I trowe thow art comyn hedyr to han awey owr wyvys fro us and ledyn hem wyth the" (236). On another occasion when she is examined by the Archbishop of York, the clerics maintain: "We knowyn wel that sche can the articles of the feith, but we wil not suffyr hir to dwellyn among us, for the pepil hath gret feyth in hir dalyawnce, and peraventur sche myth pervertyn summe of hem" (250). Margery's interrogators are forced to acknowledge that "sche knowith

7 See also 1 Cor. 34-35 for women preaching and learning: "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. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

hir feyth" (250) yet the seductiveness of her voice still seems to be a problem, as she is able to lure away wives and to lead people astray.

As such, the main problem is that Margery is not allowed to teach, regardless of the content. This becomes clear shortly after the passage quoted above: "Than seyd the Erchebischop to hir: 'Thow schalt sweryn that thu [ne] schalt techyn ne chalengyn the pepil in my diocyse'" (251). However, she refuses to swear and maintains that God does not forbid speaking of Him. She even sets out to prove it with evidence from the Gospel:

> And also the Gospel makyth mencyon that, whan the woman had herd owr Lord prechyd, sche cam beforn hym wyth a lowde voys and seyd: 'Blyssed be the wombe that the bar and the tety that yaf the sowkyn.' Than owr Lord seyd ayen to hir: 'Forsothe, so ar thei blissed that heryn the word of God and kepyn it.' And therfor, sir, me thynkyth that the Gospel yevyth me leve to spekyn of God. (251-252)

Margery here demonstrates that she knows scripture and that she is able to quote from it in English. This is exactly what Arundel's *Constitutions* aimed to prohibit, as the embracing of the vernacular meant that everyone would be able to read the Bible and to discuss matters that were formerly the preserve of the clergy. Clearly, Margery's citation of the Gospel makes her seem even more suspicious. One particular cleric quickly comments that she must have a devil in her, before quoting from St. Paul's instruction "that no woman schulde prechyn" (253). However, as Margery is evidently aware of the ramifications of being branded a Lollard, she gives a very clever answer: "I preche not, ser; I come in no pulpytt. I use but comownycacyon and good wordys, and that wil I do whil I leve" (253). Although she maintains that she is not preaching, but rather only using good words in her conversations with other people, she comes very close to comparing herself to a preacher shortly afterwards:

> in place wher my dwellyng is most, is a worthy clerk, a good prechar, whech boldl spekyth ageyn the mysgovernawns of the pepil and wil glatyr no man. Heyth many tymes in the pulpit, "Yyf any man be evyl plesyd wyth my prechyng, note hym wel, for he is gylty." And ryth so, ser,' seyd sche to the clerk, 'far ye be me, God foryeve it yow.' (256)

Here, the suggestion is that the clerk is guilty for not being pleased with Margery's tale about the priest and is in need of forgiveness. In this analogy, it is Margery who boldly speaks out against people and their faults. Though she does not do so from the pulpit, this conforms to preaching in terms of

content. Nonetheless, it is difficult to find fault with what Margery says, as she knows to give the clerics and the Archbishop the right answers to the articles of faith. Thus, she manages to legitimise her unorthodox behaviour of publicly speaking (or preaching?) about God, even though she is accused of being a Lollard several times.

Margery's strategy does not end with the clerks, as she is also quite cunning in legitimising her public speeches for the reader. Shortly after her encounter with the Archbishop of York, we read the following: "Than stode sche lokyng owt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to hem that wolde heryn hir, in-so-meche that women wept sor and seyde wyth gret hevynes of her hertys: 'Alas, woman, why schalt thu be brent?'" (260). This scene wherein Margery speaks from a window to all who will listen is akin to talking from a pulpit. Nevertheless, she tells us that her audience is convinced by what she has to say and that they even cry in disbelief that such a woman as she should be burned. In addition, the most interesting authorisation of her speech comes from God: "Dowtyr, I sent onys Seynt Powyl unto the, for to strengthyn the and comfortyn the, that thu schuldist boldly spekyn in my name fro that day forward. And Seynt Powle seyd unto the that thu haddyst suffyrd mech tribulacyon for cawse of hys wrytyng" (304). Not only does God give her leave to talk boldly in His name, but St. Paul also acknowledges that Margery is suffering because of his writings and that she will receive a reward for these tribulations. Probably aware of the irony, Margery uses the much-quoted St. Paul who forbids women to preach to legitimise her own preaching. She makes sure that in every encounter in which she is labelled as a Lollard, she is able to prove her orthodoxy in the articles of faith. As such, she uses these episodes to counter every accusation whilst simultaneously using them as authorisation for her speeches.

Margery's numerous arrests and confrontations with the public are a common theme throughout her *Book*. Through all of these encounters, she clearly participates in the political landscape of her time, managing at the same time to prove her orthodoxy as well as to legitimise her voice and impose her will. This is established very early on in the *Book* in a speech by Christ who tells her the following:

> Also, my derworthy dowtyr, thu must forsake that thow locyst best in this world, and that is etyng of flesch. And instede of that flesch, thow schalt etyn my flesch and my blod, that is the very body of Crist in the sacrament of the awter. Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, that thow receyve my body every Sonday,

> and I schal flowe so mych grace in the that alle the world schal mervelyn therof.
>
> Thow schalt ben etyn and knawyn of the pepul of the world as any raton knawyth the stokfysch. Drede the nowt, dowtyr, for thow schalt have the vyctory of al thin enemys. I schal yeve the grace inow to answer every clerke in the love of God. (71-72)

Here, Christ tells her that it is his will that she receive communion every Sunday. On the one hand, this establishes her orthodoxy, in that she states that this "is the very body of Crist in the sacrament of the awter," thus aligning herself clearly against the Lollard's teachings, as discussed above. On the other hand, it also shows Margery's exceptional status as a prophet, because receiving communion this often was rather unusual. Miri Rubin, for instance, states that in late medieval culture "the bread was not simply accessible, and was not frequently to be consumed. Communion was taught as an annual duty, which could be taken perhaps thrice a year on the major feasts of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, but only after due penance and preparation" (147-48). Thus, receiving communion this often marks Margery's special status as Christ's prophet as well as her purity and readiness to receive it in the first place. Furthermore, in the second part of the statement, Christ prepares her for future encounters in which the public will literarily pull her to pieces. However, it is made clear that she will be able to answer every question that the clerks will ask her and that she will always be victorious over all her enemies by the grace of God.

Shortly after this speech by Christ, the reader encounters one of the first of these confrontations. In Chapter 16, Margery comes to London and rebukes several of Archbishop Arundel's clerks for swearing, something which she criticises throughout her *Book*. One of the women then tells Margery: "I wold thu wer in Smythfeld, and I wold beryn a fagot to bren the wyth; it is pety that thow levyst" (110). This reference to Smithfield is the first of several which connect Margery to Lollardy, as William Sawtry, a parish priest of the Church of St. Margaret in Lynn was the first Lollard to be burnt at Smithfield in 1401.[8] Furthermore, a typical feature of Lollards was their objection to the swearing of oaths. In fact, at the trial of William Thorpe, who is often mentioned alongside Sawtry, Thorpe is questioned about five things he said in a

8 For an account of his trial, see Foxe, 1570 edition, Book 5, p. 635-639.

sermon, all of which belong to the main charges brought against Lollards in general:

> That the Sacrament of the Altar after the consecrations was material bread.
> And that images should in no wise be worshipped.
> And that men should not go on any pilgrimages.
> And that priests have no title to tithes.
> And that it is not lawful to swear in any wise. (Pollard 121)

Thorpe maintains that "by the authority of the Gospel and of Saint James, and by witness of divers Saints and Doctors I have preached openly, in one place or other, that it is not lawful in any case to swear by any creature" (Pollard 149). Objecting to swearing thus became closely connected to Lollardy during that period.

However, Margery Kempe is then sent for by Arundel himself, from whom she seeks permission to choose her own confessor and to receive communion every Sunday "undyr hys lettyr and hys seel thorw al hys provynce" (110). In this encounter, she is granted everything she asks for, even though "this creatur boldly spak to hym for the correccyon of hys meny" (111), and she, thus, receives his letter and his approval of her way of life. Yet, in other encounters, Margery is openly accused of being a Lollard. The Mayor of Leicester calls her "a fals strumpet, a fals Loller, and a fals deceyver of the pepyl" (229). She is then brought before the Abbot of Leicester who asks her about the "blysful sacrament of the awter" (234) in order to prove that she is a heretic. Margery's answer is orthodox and it shows that she is aware of the dangers that such an answer brings with it. She says:

> Serys, I beleve in the sacrament of the awter on this wyse: that what man hath takyn the ordyr of presthode, be he nevyr so vicyows a man in hys levyng, yyf he sey dewly tho wordys ovyr the bred that owr Lord Jhesu Criste seyde whan he mad hys Mawnde among hys disciplys ther he sat at the soper, I beleve that it is hys flesch and hys blood and no material bred. (234-35)

Here, she acknowledges her belief that communion is Christ's flesh and blood and not simply bread - a sentence which is repeated in most of the heresy trials at the time. She also comments on the fact that it has to be an ordained priest who conducts the ritual and that it is of no consequence if he happens to be a vicious man. In raising these additional points, she attempts to distance herself from the Lollards' belief that all virtuous men (and sometimes

women) can be priests capable of performing the sacraments and from their questioning whether a vicious priest can also perform the sacrament of the altar.[9] By answering as she does, Margery shows that she is aware of several disagreements between the Church and the Lollards and she addresses them all at once. Though they question her further and seem to be unsure about her, they are obliged to let her go as "sche answeryth ryth wel to us" (235).

From Chapter 46 to Chapter 56, Margery is accused of Lollardy, arrested and imprisoned several times and questioned by bishops, clerks and archbishops. It seems that her attire and her traveling alone initially arouse greatest suspicion. She is asked on several occasions why she wears only white. In York, she is questioned in the following way:

> "Woman, what dost thu her in this cuntre?"
> "Syr, I come on pilgrimage to offyr her at Seynt William."
> Than seyd he ayen: "Hast thu an husbond?"
> Sche seyd: "Ya."
> "Hast thu any lettyr of recorde?"
> "Sir," sche seyd, "myn husbond yaf me leve wyth hys owyn mowthe." (246)

A women traveling without her husband was rather unusual at that time, and her traveling without a letter of permission even more so and this made people very critical of her behaviour. Thus, after this conversation, Margery is again examined in the articles of faith and is, of course, able to answer in full. However, the clergymen of York Minster are not yet satisfied and send her to appear before the Archbishop of York. Furthermore, near Hull, she is arrested by two of the Duke of Bedford's yeomen, because she is "holdyn the grettest Loller in al this cuntre" (258). Apart from being accused of being a heretic, she is also reprimanded for not acting as a woman should: "Damsel, forsake this lyfe that thu hast, and go spynne and carde as other women don, and suffyr not so meche schame and so meche wo" (258-59). The implication is that instead of traveling the country alone, going on pilgrimages and telling people about her way of life, whilst criticising them for theirs, she should rather stay at home, be silent, and spin as women should. From this, we see that her being a woman who travels freely without a male authority seems to be a major cause of concern.

9 See the "Twelve conclusions of the Lollards" (Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings* 24-29), "The Examination of Sir William of Thorpe," or other heresy trials such as those of Hawisia Moone and Margery Baxters ("Heresy Trials").

Margery then is brought before the Archbishop of York again. In this second encounter, she is questioned about her visit to Joan de Beaufort, the sister of Cardinal Beaufort and aunt of the Duke of Bedford. It is said that Margery has counselled Joan's daughter, Elizabeth Greystoke, to forsake her husband. This serious accusation once more ties Margery to Lollardy, given that Lollards such as Hawisia Moone, for instance, held the belief that "oonly consent of love betuxe man and woman, withoute contract of wordis and withoute solennizacion in churche and withoute symbred askyng is sufficient for the sacrament of matrymoyn" (Hudson, *English Wycliffite Writings* 35). In the eyes of the Lollards, priests and holy sacraments became irrelevant, as men and women could be married by consent alone. This also meant, of course, that a marriage could be dissolved by consent as well, which had even more religious and legal consequences. However, Margery again prevails and manages to prove her innocence. She even asks the Archbishop for his letter and seal: "My Lord, I pray yow late me have yowr lettyr and yowr seyl into recorde that I have excusyd me ageyn myn enmys and nothyng is attyd ageyns me, neithyr herrowr ne heresy, that may ben prevyd upon me" (267). This letter would not only exonerate her from all error and heresy, but it would also give her leave to travel the county without any troubles. The Archbishop "ful goodly grawntyd hir al hir desyr" (267) and Margery is free once again.

Even though Margery is arrested and slandered several times and accused of Lollardy in many of the towns she visits, these episodes are clearly part of her authorisation process. First of all, in all of these encounters, she is able to prove her orthodoxy, as she gives the right answers and furthers her authority by showing the reader that her words are true. As discussed in Chapter 1, slander ties her to Christ and calls attention to her special grace. This special grace, however, is not only connected to Christ, but also very much situated in the earthly realm. Throughout all these episodes, she meets very important people, such as Archbishop Arundel, the Archbishop of York or Joan of Beaufort. The letters and seals, as well as the positive responses to her talk by these people, enhance Margery's authority. They enable her to roam freely around the country and afford her the possibility of choosing her own confessor. She is even allowed to have communion every Sunday and her words in general have more authority. They permit her to teach (or even to preach) all over the country though it occasionally appears that she is walking a thin line of representing exactly that of which she is accused throughout her *Book*. In addition, all her answers to the clergy prove her awareness of the contemporary political landscape as she uses these episodes to participate in the country's politics.

Although Julian and Margery do not counsel kings and queens, they certainly participate in the political issues of their day in many different ways. Firstly, a book written by a woman can be seen as a political act in its own right. Furthermore, as politics and religion cannot be separated, both Julian and Margery's own ideas can be seen as subversive and, thus, political. Julian, for instance, contradicts the Church's teachings with her universal salvation theory in which there is no hell and in which all sinners are saved by the grace of God in the end. Furthermore, the writing of religious texts in English can be seen as another political act by these writers. The use of the vernacular and the notion that their texts are for the edification of everyone almost lead to censorship and persecution. Arundel's *Constitutions* make it clear that even though they are largely aimed against Lollards, they are directed against English religious writings in general. The fear of everybody being able to talk about scripture and theological concepts in general and of the clergy becoming irrelevant is seen in both the *Constitutions* and the heresy trials. Margery, for instance, holds several views that can be termed heretical, yet she manages to increase her authority by using the political issues with the Lollards for her own ends. Even though she teaches/preaches in public and travels around the country without her husband, the many trials that she has to go through showcase her awareness of the problems of the time and her knowledge in general. She is able to legitimise her talk through various bishops, Joan of Beaufort, as well as the highest authority of all: God. Margery and Julian not only take part in politics, but, for women who should be silent and should not teach in public, they also legitimise their writings as well as their voice exactly through the political landscape of the time that tries to limit them.

2.4 Katherine Chidley

As stated in the first chapter, the seventeenth century saw a proliferation of texts by female visionary writers and the decades between 1640 and 1660 contained many revolutionary changes. Andrew Bradstock summarises this aptly:

> The combined effect of three very bloody civil wars, the trial and execution of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the king, and the abolition of institutions such as the monarchy, House of Lords, Star chamber, bishops and church courts combined to create a breakdown in censorship which allowed ideas

> hitherto considered heretical and kept underground to surface in print and in word. (xiii)

Many female visionary writers were able to give voice to their hopes, concerns and visions in print at this time. It may well be that the absence of censorship and the revolutionary circumstances made it possible for women to publish to such an extent. Christopher Hill maintains:

> During the brief years of extensive liberty of the press in England it may have been easier for eccentrics to get into print than ever before or since. Before 1641, and after 1660, there was a strict censorship. In the intervening years of freedom, a printing press was a relatively cheap and portable piece of equipment. (*The World Turned Upside Down* 17)

Furthermore, Hill also states: "From [...] l645 to 1653, there was a great overturning, questioning, revaluing, of everything in England. Old institutions, old beliefs, old values came in question. Men moved easily from one critical group to another" (*The World Turned Upside Down* 14). This is also true of women. Many of them moved from one group to another and participated in the political debates of the time.

Katherine Chidley, a religious controversialist and Leveller active between 1616 and 1653, also used her prophecies for religious and political ends. Her *Justification* of the Independent Churches and *A New-Years-Gift* are both responses to the London preacher Thomas Edwards, who is probably most famous for his huge volume *Gangraena*. In this three-part volume, which consists of approximately 800 pages, Edwards attacks the different sects, such as the Levellers, the Diggers or Ranters, and lists all their errors in the form of a catalogue. He includes letters and pamphlets from people he encounters in order to fight these sects and the toleration of such groups in the Church as well as in the government. On *Early English Books Online* (*EEBO*) alone, one is able to find 24 direct responses to Edwards' *Gangraena* and a further 31 records which mention the work either positively or negatively. Among these responses are also names such as John Goodwin and William Walwyn. Walwyn, for instance, wrote five pamphlets in answer to *Gangraena*. He not only picks up on Edwards' accusation against him, but also uses similar imagery, such as the use of scripture as authority and disease, in reference to Edwards' title of his text, with a view to highlighting Walwyn's own beliefs and arguments. His belief in love as the foundation of religion and of relationships between human be-

ings makes a compelling argument against Edwards' often harsh *Gangraena*, which condemns hundreds of people.

Chidley, however, already has an answer to Edwards' earlier writings such as *Antapologia* and *Reasons Against the Independent Government of Particular Congregations* in which he already writes against toleration, Independency and the superiority of the 'true church.' Though *Gangraena* received many responses, Chidley was the only one to reply to *Reasons* and among the few who also replied to *Antapologia* (P.R.S. Baker). This earns her a part in *Gangraena*:

> There is one Katherine Chidly an old Brownist, and her sonne a young Brownish, who not content with spreading their poison in and about London, goe down in to the Country to gather people to them, and among other places have been this Summer at Bury in Suffollke, to set up and gather a Church there [...]. I have great reason to think by the Epistle to the Reader, that Katherine Chidly and her sonne made that Book call'd Lanseters Launce [...]. [A]nd the brasen-faced audacious old woman resembled unto Jael. (Edwards, *The Third Part* 170)

Here Edwards shows the danger of Katherine Chidley, who not only gathers people around her in London, but also in the country in order to set up different churches. He links the spreading of the independent congregations not only to a gangraene, but also a poison. Interestingly, Edwards insults Chidley as a "brasen-faced audacious old woman" and associates her with Jael. Even though Jael (Judges 4-5) is often represented as a heroic figure, Edwards clearly follows the different tradition "that portrayed her murder of Sisera not as a brave act but as a deceptive, treacherous one" (Conway 51). Rather than seeing her as a heroine, Edwards clearly fears her power.

In *Reasons*, furthermore, Edwards lists several arguments against independent government and the toleration of different churches. He maintains that "the Great and Present Controversie of these Times is about the Church, and Church Government" (A2). One of the reasons he gives is that these congregations have ministers and officers who are not ordained and he concludes that

> [n]o man ever being an ordinary Officer in the Church, without Ordination, let them produce one instance if they can: hence the most learned Divines in reformed Churches tell us, that no man ought to be admitted [. . .] to an ordinary function in the Church unlesse they be lawfully called, and that lawfull calling stands in Ordination as well as Election. (*Reasons* 3-4)

Chidley, however, states that the Independent government *is* Christ's government (*Justification* 20) and that "well-meaning Christians be the fittest on the earth to make Churches, and to choose their officers; whether they be Taylors, Felt-makers, Button-makers, Tent-makers, Shepherds, or Ploughmen, or what honest Trade soever" (*Justification* 22-23). Here, she clearly aligns herself with the Leveller belief[10] that no one has the right to rule over another and that all are created equal. Furthermore, the phrase "Well-meaning Christian" also shows that, if one believes in Christ and acts in accordance with scripture, anyone can be an officer of the church without the need for ordination. This also displays the Leveller sentiment that the existing church government does not act in accordance with scripture and in general does not fulfil the ideals and prerequisites that they should according to these groups. She, thus, declares: "For they that understand but little, doe see and know that that Government is vaine and Popish" (*Justification* 23).

It is quite fitting that it is a woman who answers Edwards' treatise, as the power of women is part of the discussion as well. One of Edwards' fears is that such toleration will negatively impact men's power over women. This fear that women have power over men can already be seen in his calling Chidley Jael in the quotation above. In addition, he maintains. "O how will this toleration take away […] that power, authority, which God hath given the husbands, fathers, and masters, over wives, children, servants" (*Reasons* 26). As seen in the first chapter, Edwards subscribes to the widespread belief that God has given men power over women. According to Edwards, the new toleration would shift these power relations. Without restrictions in church government, anyone would be able to preach, including women. Even though the new congregations were less restrictive and women were able to take part in numerous activities, such as preaching, leading groups and taking part in public discussions, these were nonetheless the exception and women were generally still seen as weak, unfit for politics and definitely not equal to men. Chidley is plainly aware of this fact when she calls herself a "weake Instrument" (*Justification* 2) and justifies her writing in the following way: "But though these my Answers are not laid downe in a Schollerlik way, but by the plaine truth of holy

10 See Bradstock: "If we can talk about a Leveller philosophy, at its heart was the idea that all people were created equal and that no one had any God-given or natural right to govern or rule over another. […] Levellers shared the disdain which all radicals felt for the clergy of the established church" (31-37).

Scripture" (*Justification* 2). In spite of not being a scholar and not being able to write like a man, she has the authority of scripture and the "plaine truth."

Furthermore, her style and the way she answers Edwards point by point illustrate her skills in countering these stereotypes while at the same time appearing to accept them. Her answer to Edwards' fear of men losing power over women is as follows:

> To this I answer, O! that you would consider the text in I Cor. 7.[11] Which plainly declares that the wife may be a believer, & the husband an unbeleever but if you have considered this text, I pray you tell me, what authority this unbelieving husband hath over the conscience of his believing wife; It is true he hath authority over her bodily and civill respects, but not to be a Lord over her conscience. (*Justification* 26)

Here, Chidley concedes that a husband has power over his wife's body, but does not have authority over her conscience. Her choice of I Cor. 7 is apt, as it argues that women also have authority over men's bodies and that either a man or a woman should be able to leave their marriage if they do not believe. In Chidley's argument, it is made clear that no one has authority over her conscience, as she is the true believer. Despite using the traditional negative epithets applied to women, such as being weak and not being a scholar, she nonetheless gives him "scholarly" answers and uses scripture to underpin her arguments. She even uses her "weakness" in order to ridicule him. In answer to Edwards' image of gathering up his forces to win this war against toleration (*Reasons* 20), Chidley answers: "Understanding that you are a mighty Champion, and now mustering up your mighty forces (as you say) […] But that I (in stead of a better) must needs give you the meeting" (*Justification* 7). Furthermore, at the end of this justification and her "scholarly" contestation of Edwards' reasons, she states: "But if you overcome me, your conquest will not be great, for I am a poor worme, and unmeete to deale with you" (*Justification* 80). Chidley, thus, cleverly uses her womanhood to make it impossible for Edwards to refute anything that she says.

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11 I Cor. 7: 13 – 15: "And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart."

In *A New-Years-Gift*, she responds to Edwards' next book *Antapologia*. In it, her disdain for the English Church is evident: "I therfore challenge you now, to prove [by the Scripture] that the Church of England is a *true* Church, and the Ministry thereof a *true* Ministry, and that they have a true outward calling, which yet you have not done" (*A New-Years-Gift* 2). Like Chidley, many Levellers believed that the Church of England was corrupt and only interested in furthering its own cause. Moreover, they believed in freedom of consciousness as well as in a church which was based on scripture and in which members were equal. She, thus, declares: "We pleade but for one intire *governement* established upon sound principles, unalterable. And not a *government* which may look with *severall* faces, in *severall* times, upon *severall* occasions, according to *mens fancies*" (*A New-Years-Gift* 20). Her argument is, that the clergy and the government should not change daily in order to fulfil their own wishes and desires. This point is also made by Walwyn who makes it clear that the Church of England is not the true church, given that

> by their art and sophistry, they lead the poor deluded people in the greatest errors, for maintenance of their own pride, covetousnesse, and luxury [...] advance only themselves and their uncertain Doctrines, for their own ambitious ends only, without any regard to the glory of God, or good of men. (*The Vanitie of the Present Churches* 10)

As with the discussion of the vernacular in the Middle Ages, Walwyn and Chidley are able to use scripture in order to prove the flaws of the established church. The clergy are no longer the only ones able to read and preach the word of God, as scripture is by now readily available to the public. Being able to read the Bible and to form their own opinion, both Walwyn and Chidley refute the Church as well as the government.[12]

Furthermore, Chidley was not only politically active through her writings, but, according to Ian J. Gentles, also besieged parliament on several occasions when some of the Leveller leaders were imprisoned. In 1653, for instance, when John Lilburne was imprisoned again, she organised a petition with over 6000 female signatures to demand his freedom, even managing to wear down

12 Interestingly, Bradstock also mentions that the Levellers insisted on translating the laws, which were still written either in Norman French or Latin, into the vernacular in order to understand them and, of course, to be able to defend themselves (38). Being able to read the laws or the Bible in their own language would give them the advantage to defend themselves from arbitrary attacks, opinions and rules.

some of the members of Parliament. Ultimately however, the female signatures did not count before the law (Gentles). Although she may have been a leader in her congregation as well as a business woman and a political figure among the Levellers, there were still limitations to her political power due to her being a woman. Her participation in the pamphlet war at the time as well as her responses to Edwards' two first books is remarkable nonetheless. Despite insisting that she is not a scholar, she clearly offers her response in a learned manner. Furthermore, she not only uses similar imagery and styles as other pamphleteers, but she clearly uses the fact that she is a woman to her advantage.

2.5 Anna Trapnel

As part of the Fifth Monarchist movement, Anna Trapnel asserts "the continued significance of the Fifth Monarchist cause at a time when it was under severe pressure. Thus, her writings are a topical response to and intervention in current events; she uses the prophetic mode to express her views on the political situation" (Chedgzoy 248). As mentioned earlier, throughout *The Cry of a Stone*, Trapnel compares Cromwell to Gideon.[13] At first, she draws a positive picture of his military prowess, reflecting the optimism of the Fifth Monarchists about the Barebones Parliament or the Parliament of Saints and "the possibility that the aims of the Fifth Monarchist for an end to tithes and to the national church, for radical law reform, even for rule by the godly, would be realized" (Hinds, *The Cry of a Stone* xxxi). She describes Cromwell in the following way, which is worth quoting in full:

> [T]o prove *Oliver Cromwell*, then Lord-General, was as that Gideon [...] blowing the trumpet of courage and valour [...]; that as sure as the Enemy fell when *Gideon* and his Army blew their trumpets, so surely should the *Scots* throughout *Scotland* be ruinated. Upon this I praised for some hours together, that God had provided a *Gideon*, and this I saw both by Vision, and Faith, and Prayer and Praises, that God had appointed him for the work of that present day to serve this Nation; and told me that great things should be done. (*The Cry of a Stone* 6)

13 For an account of Gideon in the Bible see Judges 6-8.

Here, she depicts Cromwell as a great military leader of "courage and valour," with the ability to defeat the Scots and to serve the nation in many "great things." More importantly, she sees Cromwell as appointed by God, and, thus, as evidence of the Lord providing the nation with another Gideon.

Shortly after this, Trapnel has a vision about the dissolution of parliament several days before it happens. Cromwell is still depicted as Gideon while he advocates for the dissolution of a parliament that failed to reform the laws either of the government or the church (*The Cry of a Stone* 10).[14] At this point, some of the Fifth Monarchists see Cromwell as another Moses and he is expected to launch the Kingdom of Christ. Shortly after the dissolution, several petitioners ask Cromwell: "First That You, whom we look upon as our *Moses*, leading Gods people, would be pleased, as alwayes you have been, still to be for the people to God ward, that you may bring the causes unto God, and advance the Scepter of our Lord Jesus" (*Severall Proceedings of State Affaires* 187, p. 2954). However, this feeling of excitement and hope is very short lived. Soon thereafter Trapnel writes: "the Lord gave me Visions of their breaking up, and of the deadness of *Gideons*[15] spirit towards the work of the Lord, shewing me that he was laid aside" (*The Cry of a Stone* 10). The Fifth Monarchists' feeling of betrayal after Cromwell's taking the title of Lord Protector[16] becomes increasingly apparent in Trapnel's writing:

> I beheld at a little distance a great company of Cattle, some like Bulls, [...] the foremost, his Countenance was perfectly like unto Oliver *Cromwels*; [...] he run

14 For an account of the dissolution of the Rump as well as an in-depth study on the Fifth Monarchists, see Bernard Capp *The Fifth Monarchy Men*: "Throughout 1652 the army had expressed its dissatisfaction of the failure of the Rump to carry out reforms, and its refusal to allow fresh elections. The crescendo of Fifth Monarchist and army prayer meetings in 1653 made the issue pressing, and the Rump's alleged plan to replenish its numbers by a series of by-elections, thus postponing indefinitely a dissolution, led Cromwell to feel that action was essential. On 20 April 1653 he took his seat in the House, condemned the Rump's proceedings and, calling in a troop of soldiers, dissolved it by force" (61-62).

15 After taking the title of Lord Protector, Cromwell showed that he was no Gideon. After all, Gideon refused to be king when it was offered to him since only God rules over Israel: "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23).

16 See also Marcus Nevitt who maintains that "the tenor of the utterances" are "scathing critiques of Cromwell and his regime (7).

> at many precious Saints that stood in the way of him, that looked boldly in his face; he gave them many pushes, scratching them with his horn, [...] and the Lord said, mark that Scripture, *Three horns shall arise, a fourth shall come out different from the former, which shall be more Terror to the Saints then the others what went before.* (*The Cry of a Stone* 13-14)

Thus, instead of being the emissary of hope for the Kingdom of Saints, Cromwell is now the bull who prevails against the saints and is the greatest "Terror" for the people. He represents the fourth kingdom, which is the worst one because it destroys the earth before Christ arrives to rule.[17]

Even though Trapnel's disappointment is sometimes palpable and her hymns and songs are quite clearly going against Cromwell,[18] sometimes the hopes and expectations the Fifth Monarchists had for him still shine through. A reason for this hope is, as Bernard Capp states, that "Cromwell was himself a fellow-traveller until 1653" (*The Fifth Monarchy Men* 14). Indeed, in a speech from July 1653, for instance, Cromwell addresses the assembly making his millenarian ideas evident:

> And why should we be afraid to say or think, that this may be the door to usher in the things that God has promised; which have been prophesied of; which He has set the hearts of His people to wait for and expect? We know who they are that shall war with the lamb, against his enemies; they shall be a people called, and chosen and faithful. [...] it is our duty to endeavour this way; not vainly to look at that prophecy in Daniel, 'and the kingdom shall not be delivered to another people.' Truly God hath brought this to your hands. (Wilbur Cortez Abbott 64)

Here, Cromwell speaks of the prophecy in Daniel and of how everything happening in that moment can be seen as fulfilling that prophecy. The assembly

17 Daniel 7:23-27: "Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom."

18 She, for instance, says at one point: "Write how that Protector shall go, And into graves there lye: Let pens make known what is said, that, They shall expire and die" (*The Cry of a Stone* 19-20).

will be witness to the "things that God has promised," and they will become part of the Kingdom of the Saints.

Trapnel thus pleads with God for Cromwell at various points in the beginning of *The Cry of a Stone*: "Must thy Servant that now is upon the Throne, must he now die and go out like a candel? Oh that thy servant could mourn day and night for him! Oh that he might be recovered out of that vain glorious Counsel" (22). The suggestion seems to be that if only Cromwell could see that he had surrounded himself with the wrong people, he would change course and return to rule with his former fellows of the Fifth Monarchists:

> Oh let him now deny, and cast it down, and say: Without these Dignities, and great Titles, I will serve the People and Commonalty; and then wilt thou say to him, thou art my *Gideon*; Let him consider that thine shall rule over all Nations; and let him say why may not this be the time that it does draw near? (29)

Several days into the trance, however, Trapnel paints a picture that shows Cromwell's failings in the eyes of the Fifth Monarchists: "If he were not (speaking of the Lord *Cromwell*) backsliden, he would be ashamed of his great pomp and revenue, whiles the poore are ready to starve, and art thou providing great Palaces? Oh this was not *Gideon* of on old" (50). Clearly, Cromwell has become a king, residing in palaces, while the poor go on wanting. Thus, he has embraced everything the Fifth Monarchists hoped he would change.[19] Although Trapnel's utterances during her trance in Whitehall also included other topics, Cromwell along with the hopes and disappointments of the Fifth Monarchists are central throughout *The Cry of a Stone*. Her prophecy is clearly a statement about the political situation at that time.

Furthermore, the prophecies seem to have been taken seriously. The scribe lists several people who came to visit Trapnel during her trance:

> [A]mong others that came, were Colonel Sidenham, a member of the Council, Colonel West, Mr. Chittwood, Colonel Bennet, with his wife, Colonel Bingham, Captain Langdon, Members of the late Parliament; Mr. Courtney, Mr.

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19 Capp states that "the figures and other sources show that the Fifth Monarchists did attract the very bottom strata of society (excluding paupers), the labourers and servants, that is, apprentices and journeymen" (*The Fifth Monarchy Men* 85). Cromwell moving into the royal palaces must thus have been one of the great disappointments of the movement.

> Berconhead, and Captain Bawtrey, Mr. Lee, Mr. Feak the Minister, Lady Darcy, and Lady Vermuden. (2)

Several of these, such as Sydenham and Bennett, were members of the Barebone Parliament. The visitors were not all millenarians; Sydenham, for instance, was a supporter of dissolving the Barebone Parliament and thus a supporter of the protectorate. Bennett, however, had millenarian leanings and housed Trapnel during her travels to Cornwall, which can be read about in her *Report and Plea*. Christopher Feake is probably the most well known Fifth Monarchist and "one of the most hostile and outspoken critics of Cromwell and his government" (Ball). These visits show how much interest there was in millenarian beliefs at the time as well as in Trapnel's status as a prophet.

Her prophecies were more than just a curiosity and were actually seen as a political threat. The pamphleteer and journalist Marchamont Nedham even wrote a letter to Cromwell about Trapnel's trances and prophecies. The note is worth quoting in full:

> There is a twofold design about the prophetess Hannah [Trapnel], who played her part lately at Whitehall at the ordinary; one to Print her discourses and hymns, which are desperate against your person, family, children, friends, and the government; the other to send her all over England, to proclaim the viva voce. She is much visited, and does a world of mischief in London, and would do in the country. The vulgar dote on vain prophecies. I saw hers in the hands of a man who was in the room when she uttered them day by day in her trance, as they call it. He promised to lend me them; if he does, I will show you them. They would make 14 or 15 sheets in print. (*Calendar of State Papers*, February 7, 1654)

Nedham is warning Cromwell about Trapnel, fearing that she is part of an evil plan that might have an effect on the Lord Protector and his family as well as on the government. He also stresses the fact that Trapnel not only dares to print her prophecies, she also travels all over England to give voice to them. The fact that she is visited by many people shows further the influence and possible threat of the public spectacle of her trances. Thus, Trapnel's prophecies have an impact not only on people who read them or hear her uttering them, they also have a political dimension.

In Trapnel's *Report and Plea*, an account of her travels to Cornwall, she is brought before a judge where she faces similar questions to the ones Margery had been asked on several occasions. In keeping with Nedham's concern, and

the concern of several people in Margery's case, the focus of the judge's questioning is on the fact that Trapnel is a single woman who travels alone. Justice Lobb questions her:

> *How it came to pass, that I came into that Country.*
> I answered *I came as others did that were minded to go into the Country.*
> Lobb. *But why did you come into this Country?*
> A.T. *Why might not I come here, as well as into another Country?*
> Lobb. *But you have no lands, nor livings, nor acquaintance to come to in this Country.*
> A. T. *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.*
> A. T. *Then having no hindrance, why may not I go where I please, if the Lord so will?* (26.1)

A woman traveling alone, without a husband, raises concern and is likely to cause "a world of mischief," as Nedham warned. It means that she is traveling without the supervision of a man. However, just like Margery, Trapnel is able to legitimise her travels through God, claiming that "[t]he Lord gave [her] leave to come" (26.1).

It is not just Trapnel's independence that worries the authorities. There is also the age-old fear of the seductiveness of a woman's voice: "Justice *Lobb* told me, *I made a disturbance in the town*: I asked, *Wherein?* he said, *By drawing so many people after me*" (*Report and Plea* 28.1). It seems that the judge is concerned that Trapnel is leading people astray simply by talking to them, even if what she says is actually true and in line with the Church's teaching. Indeed, it is made clear again and again that she is telling the truth, and is using scripture as well as voicing what God is telling her. For example, during the examination in front of the judge, she is perfectly able to answer all the questions. From the start, however, she makes sure that the reader knows that the words leaving her mouth are not her own: "*Are you guilty, or not?* I had no word to say at the present; but the Lord said to me; *Say Not guilty*" (*Report and Plea* 24). Furthermore, as Margery did with the clerks who judged her, Trapnel quotes scripture and turns the table on the judge:

> A.T. *I will take you up [on] your word, in which you said, I was not to judge: you said well; for so saith the Scripture,* Who art thou that judgest 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 judged me, and never heard me speak* […] I said, *I will leave one word with you, and that is this: A time will come when you and I shall appear before the great Judge of the tribunal seat of the most High, and then I think you will hardly be able to give an account for this days work before the Lord, at that day of true judgement*. (*Report and Plea* 27.1-28.1)

Here, Trapnel boldly speaks out against the accusations of the judge and maintains that the "day of true judgement," which is, of course, far more important than the judgement happening there in Cornwall, will favour her.

Before that, however, she, like Margery before her, will have to face the judgement of those around her, including answering accusations about being a witch:

> Some at *Dartmouth* reported that I had bewitched the winds, that the ships could not go to sea, and 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. (*Report and Plea* 35)[20]

She is accused of having power over the winds and of, therefore, being responsible for interfering with the lives of ordinary people who are dependent on the weather for their business. However, as already mentioned in the first chapter, this episode is further proof of the connection that Trapnel has with Christ, as she humbly accepts any slandering in his name. Moreover, Christ not only helps her to bear the reproaches, she also does not get sick in the storm, which can be seen as another sign that she is blessed by Christ. As in Dartmouth, her appearance before the judge in Cornwall is related to accusations of her being a witch: "but the report was, That I would discover my self 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" (*Report and Plea* 25). In this case being a witch means that one is not able to answer questions in front of a judge. However, Trapnel, as stated above, is able to counter the judge's questions with the help of God and thus proves that she cannot be a witch.[21] This notion is further

20 Margery faces similar accusations: "for it was telde hir yyf thei haddyn any tempest, thei woldyn castyn hyr in the se, for thei seyd it was for hir; and thei seyde the schip was the wers for sche was therin […] And so sche toke hir schip in the name of Jhesu and seylyd forth wyth hir felaschip, whom God sent fayr wynde and wedyr" (226-27).

21 The similarity to Margery is striking. When Margery is accused of Lollardy once again, the dialogue is as follows: "Ther wer men of lawe seyd unto hir: 'We han gon to scole

confirmed by the people who she encounters after the trial: "And 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" (*Report and Plea* 28.1). On the one hand, being able to "speak good words" and quoting scripture is proof of Christ's blessing. On the other, it is a slippery slope that causes their problems in the first place. Even though these women have to face all these accusations, they are still able to justify their preaching, their writing, and their individuality quite cleverly.

All female visionary writers we have seen in this chapter are clearly political in their writings, able to voice their concerns and assert themselves through participating in the political discussions of their time. Even though Julian and Margery are often seen as "local" prophets and less political than other visionary writers, they do take part in the political landscape of the day. Julian's universal salvation, for instance, decidedly goes against the teaching of the Church. Firstly, her revelations are intended for everyone. They are a message from God without an intermediary priest. Secondly, her parable about God and the servant is at the heart of her universal salvation theory. By interchanging Adam with Christ and Christ with Adam, Julian develops a theodicy in which everyone is a sinner but everyone, without exception, will be saved in the end. Furthermore, in Julian's revelations, there is no hell and she vindicates not only Eve but also the body in general by clearly stating that Christ is part of the flesh and our sensuality. Even though Julian states time and time again that she believes in the teachings of the Church, her revelations break with these teachings in very important ways and are, thus, unquestionably political.

Both Julian and Margery are part of the political discussion about language at the time. Not only do they have to negotiate the century old concept of the *via negativa*, which postulates that fallible human language cannot be used to talk about an infallible God but they are also political in using the

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many yerys and syet arn we not sufficient to answeryn as thu dost. Of whom hast thu this cunnyng?' And sche seyd: 'Of the Holy Gost.' Than askyd thei: 'Hast thu the Holy Gost?' 'Ya, serys,' seyd sche, 'ther may no man sey a good worde wythowtyn the yyft of the Holy Gost, ofr owr Lord Jhesu Crist seyd to hys disciplys, 'Stody not what ye schal sey, for it schal not be yowr spiryt that schal spekyn in yow, but it schal be the spiryt of the Holy Gost'" (269).

vernacular to write about their revelations. In 1409, Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, published his *Constitutions* in which he countered the Lollards' aim to bring religion to the people and urged to restrict religious discussions to Latin or Greek. The fear that the clergy would become obsolete, if everyone were able to read and teach the Bible, is clearly visible in Arundel's *Constitutions*. Within this context, Margery and Julian's use of the vernacular to talk about theology, scripture, and contemplation and their ability to reach a wider audience through that language is politically subversive and potentially dangerous.

Margery, furthermore, displays several beliefs and attitudes that could be called heretical. She has to defend herself on several occasions throughout her *Book* and shows that she is acutely aware of her political surroundings. These encounters with the public as well as with several bishops, archbishops, and the clergy in general are a common thread running through the *Book* that give her the possibility to establish her authority as a prophet each time. She is able to show that she knows scripture and that what she is saying (sometimes even preaching) is aligned with the Church's teachings. She walks the thin line of being too forward with several high members of the Church, of preaching rather then talking with the public, and of spreading her revelations during her travels throughout the country. She even includes a dialogue with God who allows her to speak boldly in his name and sends her St. Paul who acknowledges that she has had to suffer because of his writings. In the end, Margery is allowed to travel freely around the country, to choose her own confessor and to receive communion every Sunday. She is able to assert herself in front of very important people as well as in front of the reader making the impression of a clever negotiator and a true prophet with a close connection to God and Christ.

The female visionary writers of the seventeenth century, such as Katherine Chidley and Anna Trapnel, also used their writings for religious and political ends. Chidley, for instance, responds to Edwards' *Antapologia* and *Reasons*, and not only displays an awareness of the concerns of her time, but also demonstrates a sophisticated writing style that is thought to be impossible for a female writer. She is politically active when petitioning for the freedom of John Lilburne or by incorporating Leveller beliefs and concerns in her writing. In her responses to Edwards, she uses scripture to refute Edwards and to show that no one has the right to rule over another because everyone is created equal. Furthermore, she negotiates being a woman who possesses a

conscience of her own and individual autonomy, and she actively participates in political discussions.

Likewise, Trapnel furthers the cause of the Fifth Monarchists in *The Cry of a Stone*, where she recounts the revelations that she received in Whitehall over a period of twelve days. In believing that the reign of Christ on earth is imminent, she inserts her beliefs directly into the political events of her time. Cromwell is likened to Gideon who saves them and leads them into the government of the Saints. However, by failing to reform the laws and the church government and by accepting, in the end, the title of Lord Protector, Cromwell loses his status as Gideon, inviting Trapnel's evident disappointment. Her political influence is further demonstrated by the many visits she received from important people, such as Feake and numerous members of parliament, during her trances. This compels Nedham to write to Cromwell to warn him of the dangers posed by Trapnel to him, his family, and the government. Her travels across the country are also perceived as a threat. As with Margery, she is able to lure people away and is called a witch on several occasions during her travels. Trapnel, however, is able to consistently justify her voice and her writings by standing up firm against the judges and by showing to the people the special grace she has received from God. Despite the fact that women were forbidden from participating in politics, these women were able to have a political voice in their writings. The main focus of the next chapter, thus, will be to show a continuation of the struggle for female authorship and autonomy in these visionary writings by making writing and authorship themes in their own right.

Chapter 3: The Vessel of God – Voice vs. Mouthpiece

> "Then he gave me a command that often makes me ashamed and causes me to weep because my utter unworthiness is obvious to my eyes; that is, he commanded me, a frail woman, to write this book out of God's heart and mouth. And so this book has come lovingly from God and does not have its origins in human thought" –
> Mechthild of Magdeburg

3.1 Called to Write

As discussed in the preceding chapters, women were seen as inferior, prone to outside influences, and weak in mind and body. These perceived flaws meant that women were excluded not only from politics or public speech but also from writing. This chapter will focus on how the female prophets in question were, nevertheless, able to justify their writings by focusing on the production of text itself as well as on authorship, and on the voice that these women claim for themselves. Most of these women are painfully aware of the aforementioned restrictions, which can be seen at the beginning of several of their works, where they see the need to defend their writing. Julian, for instance, writes in her *Short Text*:

> I beg you all for God's sake and advise you all for your own advantage that you stop paying attention to the poor, worldly, sinful creature to whom this vision was shown, and eagerly, attentively, lovingly and humbly contemplate God, who in his gracious love and in his eternal goodness wanted the vision

> to be generally known to comfort us all. [...] For if I look solely at myself, I am really nothing. (*Revelations Short Text* 9-10)

Here, she makes it clear that she herself is nothing, a sinful creature nobody should pay attention to. Instead, one should only contemplate God and completely forget the "symple creature unlettyrde leving in deadly flesh" (*Showings* 4).

Her complete self-effacement, however, is not only connected to being human and thus sinful, it is also a consequence of her being a woman: "But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not what I mean, nor did I ever mean it; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail" (*Revelations Short Text* 10-11). Julian wilfully assumes the negative connotations associated with women, their supposed weakness in body and mind. By doing so, she demonstrates her awareness of the cultural ramifications revelations of a female writer could have. Since she is familiar with Paul's teaching, stating that a woman is not allowed to teach and should keep quiet, she wants to make sure that the reader knows from the start that she is not teaching. With respect to this, Denise N. Baker maintains:

> Julian is careful not to claim any special authority for herself in either the short or the long text. Fourteenth-century England was much more conservative in matters of spirituality than the Continent, where accounts of women's visionary experiences were quite numerous from the twelfth century on. As the first English woman identified as a writer, Julian is acutely aware that she may be criticized for violating St. Paul's prohibition [...] against women preaching. ("Introduction" x)

Although I agree with Baker that Julian knows that she might be criticised for her teaching, I do not agree that it was any different for women on the Continent.

Indeed, even though the accounts of women's visionary experiences were more numerous on the Continent, those women faced the same cultural restrictions as Julian. Gertrud of Helfta (1256-1301), for instance, a German mystic at the monastery at Helfta, states: "I considered it so unsuitable for me to publish these writings, that my conscience would not consent to do so; [...] [God] added further: 'I desire your writings to be an indisputable evidence of My Divine goodness in these latter times, in which I purpose to do good to many'" (qtd. in Petroff 229). Another mystic at Helfta, Mechthild of Magdeburg (c 1207-1282) similarly declares:

> Then he gave me a command that often makes me ashamed and causes me to weep because my utter unworthiness is obvious to my eyes; that is, he commanded me, a frail woman, to write this book out of God's heart and mouth. And so this book has come lovingly from God and does not have its origins in human thought. (Book IV, Chapter 2)

Both of these women see the need to defend their writings as women. Like Julian, they state their unworthiness and acknowledge that, by virtue of being women they are unsuited for the task. Although people on the Continent were more accustomed to visionary writings by women, both Gertrud and Mechthild began their writings in the same fashion as Julian.

However, as soon as the self-effacement is displayed and Julian admits to her shortcomings, she also establishes her authority. In the first quote, she states that God wanted the vision to be known and that she was the only one to be entrusted with it. Thus, she is merely the intermediary between God and all Christians, and she is not a priestess. Furthermore, shortly after explaining that as a woman, she is ignorant and weak, she maintains: "Just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God, when I saw at the same time both his goodness and his wish that it should be known" (*Revelations Short Text* 11). In the *Long Text*, she removes most of the personal pieces, such as her mother standing over her and closing her eyes (*Revelations Short Text* 16), as well as the passage above about her as a teacher. However, in the *Long Text* she becomes much more self-confident. As we have seen in chapters one and two, Julian, although a "symple" and "unlettyrde" woman, is able to speak against the Church's teachings and participate in the political landscape of her time. Her theodicy is very different from that of her contemporaries. By combining sensuality and substance she creates a sophisticated universal salvation theory. In stating her unworthiness and the supposed inferiority of her gender, she not only displays her humility, she also establishes her authority in and through her work in the most powerful way, namely, through God who only gives His revelations to her, wanting her to spread them further onto every Christian. Admission of her inferiority as a woman and her illness are what justify her text in the first place, making her more suitable for voicing God's truth.

The same holds true for Margery. At several points in her *Book*, she describes herself as "a synful caytyf" (41) or says: "I am the most unworthi creatur that evyr thow schewedyst grace unto erth" (132). Once again, sinfulness and unworthines are used by a female visionary writer to describe herself. Despite

her being an unworthy sinner, Margery is, nevertheless, commanded by God to write her *Book*: "Aftyrward, whan it plesyd ower Lord, he comawnded hyr and charggyd hir that sche schuld don wryten hyr felyngys and revelacyons and the forme of her levyng, that hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle the world" (46-47). By stating that God commanded her to write the book, she is able to claim that she as a woman would otherwise not have written or published anything and that she is only doing God's bidding. As with Julian's revelations, Margery's *Book* is to be shown to the entire world because her way of living and her revelations set an example for everyone to follow. God's wish for her to publish her writings frames the entire *Book* and is not only stated at the beginning but is also the theme of the last few chapters of the first part. There, God tells her again: "yet shulde ye not plesyn me mor than ye don wyth yowr writyng, for, dowtyr, be this boke many a man schal be turnyd to me and belevyn therin" (379). The message here is that, more than anything that is written in the *Book* about her life and her good works, it is the writing of the *Book* itself that pleases God the most as the *Book* will persuade people to believe in Him.

In addition, it is not only God who gives testimony to Margery's writings. Shortly after this passage, while she is occupied with the writing of the *Book*, we read the following: "And oftyn in the menetyme, whan the creatur was in cherche, owr Lord Jhesu Crist, wyth hys gloryows modyr and many seyntys also, comyn into hir sowle and thankyd hir, seying tht thei wer wel plesyd wyth the writyng of this boke" (382). Thus, Christ, his mother, and many saints also come to her and thank her for writing the *Book*. They give everything that is written in the *Book* credence and the highest possible authority. Moreover, as shown in the first chapter, weakness and illness are used to show God's special grace for these visionary writers and this topos is also used in Margery's text in connection to writing. The reader learns that Margery was ill several times while the *Book* was being written, but as soon as she was set on the task, "sche was heil and hoole sodeynly in a maner" (383). This demonstrates that the writing and the *Book* clearly come from God, who is able to make her healthy again. Her text is set apart from other writings in that it is commanded by God and is blessed by Christ, his mother and many saints. The truthfulness of revelations, in general, is explicitly addressed in the last paragraphs of the *Book*:

> And sumtyme tho that men wenyn wer revelacyonis, it arn deceytys and illusyons, and therfor it is not expedient to yevyn redily credens to every

> steryng, but sadly abydyn and prevyn yf thei be sent of God. Nevyrthelesse as to this felyng of this creatur, it was very trewth schewyd in experiens. (383-384)

The point here is that, while some revelations can be illusions and one should not believe everything that is said or seen, the revelations Margery has seen are the truth and God is witness to this. His command and her testimony lend her writings the best possible authority.

The seventeenth century was no different in this regard. Commenting on women's writings in the 1650s, Elaine Hobby states:

> Women writing for publication in the period exposed themselves to adverse judgement, and their writings therefore commonly included justifications for their unfeminine boldness. It is this consciousness of the need to justify their activity that unites the writings of the decade. ("'Discourse So Unsavoury'" 17)

Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century, women still felt the need to justify their writings even though women were publishing more works during this period than in the Middle Ages. In the *Report and Plea,* the first thing that Trapnel writes to her reader is the following: "The Lord, and my Father (Courteous Reader) [have] put me upon this work and imployment. 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*" ("To the Reader"). Again, it is God who wants her to write and publish her work and she even cautions the reader not to call it idleness as it comes from God rather than from herself.

In contrast to *The Cry of a Stone*, *Report and Plea* is not written by a scribe but by Trapnel herself who has been "[c]ommended for the justification of the Truth, and satisfaction of all men, from her own hand," as the Title Page says. The Title Page further states that it is a narrative of her journey from London to Cornwall whose purpose it is to show that the people are against the reign of Christ because they treat her in a "harsh, rough, boisterous, rugged, inhumane, and uncivil" way. The implication here is that since she has been singled out by God to write down her journey, everything that people say to her is ultimately directed against God. In treating her harshly and in an uncivil manner, they by extension stand in the way of Christ's reign on earth. In the section where she talks directly to the reader, Trapnel maintains that the *Report* is not about vindicating herself: "the Lord knows, I would not reach out tongue, hand nor pen, to right my self, or to seek restauration of my loss, I

wave that, such a thing is below my spirit" ("To the Reader"). In showing that calling her mad or a witch is ultimately wrong, in the same way that calling the prophet Hannah a drunk, Trapnel not only reverses judgment, but is also able to exonerate herself, even though she claims that that is not her aim.

Trapnel does not have to fear any slander and, in the end, does not need to defend herself, as the short statement before she begins her narrative claims: "A Declaration from my own hand shall follow, not being put on by any, save by the great Instructor, who counselleth with his eye, who beareth me out before men and devils. The Lord is on my side, I will not fear men" ("To the Reader"). Even though she is the one who writes the *Report*, God is her instructor and, therefore, the content is irrefutable. Several times throughout the *Report*, Trapnel makes sure that God is seen as the commander of all of her work, be it her writing or her journey to Cornwall. She describes how she prayed to avoid going to Cornwall, stating that her mind was "so strongly bent against that journey," but that God answered her that he "hath purposed thy going there, and his purpose and counsel shall stand, [...] it pleaseth him, thy going there" (*Report and Plea* 2). With these words, she fashions herself a prophet who merely obeys God's commands.

As with Julian and Margery before her, Trapnel still, on the one hand, sees the need to justify herself and her writings, and, on the other hand, makes a strong case for herself:

> 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 hand-maid, as well as for a strong *Paul*. (*Report and Plea* "To the Reader")

Here, she calls herself inferior, unworthy, and weak. However, she also states that she has the grace of Christ and that he lives within her. Since her life is lived in accordance with her faith, it must be a worthy life that makes her a worthy person. Unworthiness and weakness are turned into strengths, as in 1 Corinthians 1:27: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." The suggestion here is that even though she is weak, she will be able to win against the mighty and even though she is called foolish, she deems herself as wiser than the judges and the people who speak against her. She even compares herself to Paul by using the same words

as he did and by stating that Christ "gave himself for a weak hand-maid, as well as for a strong Paul."

Moreover, calling herself a "weak hand-maid" also emphasises her status as a prophet:

> End times will see an increase in men and women prophets: And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the hand-maids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)

As a Fifth Monarchist, Trapnel clearly sees the end times coming, and it is clear from scripture that God pours out his spirit upon handmaids in these end times. Being a weak handmaid, therefore, makes her the perfect vessel for God and perfectly suitable for writing at his command.

Halfway through her *Report*, Trapnel summarises the creation of her work in a way that encapsulates God's command to write perfectly and is worth quoting in full:

> [F]or in all that was said by me, I was nothing, the Lord put all in my mouth, and told me what I should say, and that from the written word, he put in my memory and mouth: so that I will have nothing ascribed to me, but all honor and praise given to him whose right it is, even to Jehovah, who is the King that lives for ever. I have left out some things that I thought were not so material to be written: and what I have written of this, it's to declare as much as is convenient to take off those falsities and contrary reports that are abroad. (28.2)

She stresses that she is merely a vessel. It is God who puts the words into her mouth and He is also the creator of the written text. Everything that is in her memory comes from Him. Nevertheless, she also admits that she has consciously omitted some things, which she decided were unimportant. In the second part of her statement, she then becomes the creator again by deciding what to write and what to leave out. Even though she maintains that God commanded her to write the *Report*, Trapnel also wants to write the truth about her journey so as to set the record straight against all the false reports circulating about her. With regard to these false reports, she states: "I don't take delight to stir in such puddles, it's no pleasant work to me; but that truth engageth me to let the world know, what men have acted against the pourings out of the Spirit in a dispensation beyond their understanding" (22). The

implication here is that the people who write or tell stories about her are not able to judge her since her connection to God is beyond their understanding. In the end, the *Report* is also written to vindicate her and to portray her as an independent and strong woman who is able to fight for herself and voice her concerns about politics, about how people should live and about what they should believe.

As was the case with Margery and Julian, Trapnel's status as a prophet and a writer becomes a topic in and of itself. True and false prophets are set against each other, using the text as proof that these female visionary writers belong to the few true prophets. In *The Cry of a Stone*, she says: "They that are thy true Seers shall stand, when they that are false Seers shall fall, and wither, and dye; the true Seers they shall goe on and prosper, thou wilt provide for them sufficient maintenance" (43). The true seers are the ones who need no sustenance because God invests them with spiritual as well as bodily nourishment. As already discussed in the first chapter, Trapnel and Margery report repeatedly that they are weak and sick, only to then suddenly be healthy again. Throughout *The Cry of a Stone* as well as the *Plea*, there are several scenes where the weak body and Trapnel's eating habits are described in great detail. During her trances, she does not eat and has to be supported or carried to her bed. However, as soon as the trances cease, she is able to walk again a great distance through London. In all these episodes, she positions herself as a true seer, someone who is commanded by God to write down her experiences for all to read.

Furthermore, as seen in the second chapter, Chidley mobilises her gender as an argument against Edwards' writings. As a woman who is not able to answer him in a scholarly fashion, she denies him any triumph he might have in refuting her writings: "But if you overcome me, your conquest will not be great, for I am a poore worme, and unmeete to deale with you" (*Justification* 80). In the pages before this, she clearly demonstrates that she is able to answer him in a very sophisticated manner. By writing this at the end of her *Justification*, she undermines any reply from Edwards that comes afterwards. However, she also begins her writings by saying that she is weak and not skilled enough to write. She makes sure that the reader knows that anything that is of weight comes from God and that her answers are "the plaine truth of holy *Scripture*" (*Justification* 2). She uses her 'unskillfulness' strategically when answering Edwards for no man would concern himself with indulging such "ungrounded arguments" (*A New-Years-Gift* "Introduction") only to moments later portray herself as a prophet who speaks the truth through God.

Like other true prophets, she is "able to unfould the Misteries of the Scripture, (not) by the will of man but by the holy Ghost" (*Justification* 80). Paradoxically, by using both her unskillfulness and God's testimony in her defence, she is able to legitimise her political views and her writings.

Anne Wentworth (1629/30-1693), a religious writer who wrote prophecies about the nation, her Baptist congregation and her husband, is even more explicit in her call to write usage. Right at the beginning of her *True Account*, she maintains about her writing: "[I] utterly deny it to be any will of my own, but was commanded of God my Father to declare his goodness, and exalt his name alone, and make his power and Faithfulness known" (5). Throughout the *Account*, Wentworth denies writing it of her own volition and instead claims that she was commanded by God to write it. Her husband and her congregation, however, believe her to be "deceived, and deluded, and full of notions, whimsies, and self-will" (11) while she criticises them in public. In this *Account*, we learn how difficult it could have been for women to write and publish their opinions. Indeed, she explains how much she suffered for the book, which was "laid to (her) charge as a great heinous crime" (12). She states:

> Now whoever read this, you may understand here is a Book of a weak, foolish, despised womans writing, that sche hath suffered and been persecuted nigh unto death oft and many a time for it, even to the Gates of death, not expecting to live, that its no less than a miracle that I am alive, or in my senses. (13)

It is evident that Wentworth was slandered from all sides, especially by her husband, and was called mad for writing her books. Her writings were even labelled a "heinous crime" and she had to fight against these rumours to restore her credibility in her texts.

In her *Vindication*, she explains that her husband even seized the texts that God had commanded her to write. Since she is under so much scrutiny, she has to insist that she does not write of her own free will, but that she is commanded by God to write for the good of the nation. At one point in the *Vindication*, she describes her struggle in more detail, which is worth quoting in full:

> And I do further declare, that the things I have published and written, and which are such an offence 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 bed'd of God I might rather die, then do it.

> That I was commanded of God to record them. That my own natural temper was so greatly averse to it, that for eleven months together I withstood the Lord, till by an Angel from Heaven he threatned to kill me, and took away my sleep from me: And then the terrors of the Lord forced me to obey the command. (7)

Here, Wentworth is much more explicit about how she is called upon to write her books than the other visionaries mentioned above. She describes her suffering and how she tried to resist God's command for eleven months. She goes so far as to say that God threatened to kill her, if she did not write. Forced to write the books, she publishes her prophecies against her husband's wishes and those of her congregation for the good of all. She writes about her "unworthyness and nothingness" (12), which paradoxically allows her to stand up to her husband and assert herself as a writer.

3.2 The Scribe

Questions of authority and authorship are complicated further by the fact that Margery Kempe and Anna Trapnel's works were written down by scribes and not by the women themselves. Indeed, several of the medieval women's visionary writings are written by scribes, with Liz Herbert McAvoy, for instance, maintaining: "Here, as elsewhere, we are reminded that, even if the impulse towards writing is the woman's own, the ultimate achievement of that design remains dependent on the good-will and endorsement of an appropriate male authority" ("'wonderfully turnyng'" 106). This suggests that female writers were dependent on men to write the books or at least to legitimise them. However, authorship has had different connotations and meanings across history. Thus the relatively modern notion of authors as single creators, whose works constitute their own intellectual property, does not necessarily apply to the medieval period. Jennifer Summit, for instance, maintains that "the modern idea of the author as a single, creative individual holds limited relevance for medieval textual culture, in which many texts were collaborative, anonymous, or adopted as common property" (91). Just because a woman uses a scribe does not mean that her text gains authority only thanks to the involvement of a male writer. These transcribed texts should be seen as collaborative works that do not diminish the authorship of, for example, Margery, Trapnel or other visionary writers.

However, Margery's *Book* is further complicated by having three different scribes, which Rosalyn Voaden comments upon in the following way: "It is obvious that at least three people are writing this book, and none of them is particularly good at it. This lack of skill raises questions about the nature of the collaboration between visionary and scribes, and doubts about the authenticity of the memories in the *Book*" (113). Through all these different 'voices' in the *Book*, it seems difficult to know if what is written is authentic or whether what is claimed in the *Book* is true. Although it was common for women's visionary writings to be written by a scribe, Voaden notes what is different about Margery's *Book*:

> Bridget's female body is written out of the visionary narrative, and she is constructed as voice alone, uttering the unmediated words of God. Margery Kempe's *Book*, attempting to reconcile conflicting discourses, mapping her visionary experiences on to a geography of abusive attention, fails to achieve this effect. (119)

Margery's multiple discourses and voices do not represent the same unified construction of a voice that other visionary writings did.

The different scribes and the *Book*'s writing history are recurrent topics throughout the *Book*. The reader is told that Margery was asked by various people to write down her revelations and her feelings but she was told by God that she should wait. When God finally commanded her to write down everything, she first had difficulties finding a writer until a man from Germany came to England and agreed to do so. However, this man died and the priest who subsequently agreed to finish the *Book* could not make any sense of it, calling it "evel wretyn" (46-47). This priest, furthermore, was then influenced by the evil talk about Margery and told her "he cowd not redyn it, wherfor he wold not do it. He wold not, hey seyd, put hym in perel therof" (48). Therefore, he advised her to ask a friend of the first scribe whether he could make sense of the pages. However, this friend was not able to read it either and Margery again was left without a book or a scribe. In addition to all this confusion, she also states that the *Book* "is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was retyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn" (49). Thus, not only is there no structure to the *Book*, but Margery also tells us that it was such a long time ago that she has forgotten when the revelations happened and in what order. This could cast doubt on "the authenticity of the memories," as Voaden states. If everything

happened so long ago that Margery has forgotten when and in what order they transpired, then one has to ask what else has been forgotten.

However, in some of the chapters, there are instructions for the reader, which seem to be an attempt to bring order to the *Book*. At the end of Chapter 16, for instance, we find the following sentence: "(Rede fyrst the xxii chapetre, and than this chapetre aftyr that)" (112). Furthermore, even if the different scribes and the different discourses make one question the authenticity of the *Book*, I would not necessarily agree with Voaden. The second scribe who "was vexyd in his consciens" (49), ultimately comes back and agrees to write the *Book*. As mentioned in the first chapter, Margery's gift of crying abundantly for Christ was one of the things that people, including the second scribe, questioned about her credibility. However, when the priest then presents the reader with a list of several other visionary writers who had also cried "wyth lowde voys" (296), such as Elizabeth of Hungary and Marie d'Oignies, this information restores Margery's credibility and the trust of her scribe. Even though Margery's authenticity is in doubt, not only from the scribe, but also from the reader, I would argue that this is just another feature, which in the end legitimises her unique voice. When the second scribe comes back to write the *Book*, Margery promises to pray to God for him so that he be able to read the pages no one has been able to decipher so far. Trusting in her prayers, the priest is suddenly able to read everything "and so red it ovyr beforn this creatur every word, sche sumtym helpyng where ony difficulte was" (49). This clearly signals that her prayers are powerful and that God wants the *Book* to be written. It also shows the collaboration that exists between the scribe and Margery. He reads "every word" to her, and she corrects and helps him whenever necessary.

Later, after the scribe starts writing again, his eyes suddenly fail and he cannot write anymore. Even though he is able to see and read everything else, he is not able to write Margery's *Book*. To this she answers: "hys enmy had envye at hys good dede and wold lett hym yf he mygth, and bad hym do as wel as Gold wold yeve hym grace and not levyn. Whan he cam ageyn to hys booke, he myth se as wel, hym thowt, as evyr he dede befor" (50). The priest cannot read and write the book anymore because the enemy is envious of the good work being done. But suddenly, through God's grace (and Margery), he is able to see and write again. It seems like all the problems Margery faces in writing her *Book* are there only to show that she has God's grace and is a true prophet. All the different scribes are there to establish her authority, as are God and the people she encounters throughout the *Book*. Even the lack of

structure and the plurality of discourses add to her trustworthiness. We are shown the life, as well as feelings, of a prophet which cannot be structured as a book. The scribes do not include anything that could lend the episodes greater order or a unifying theme so as not to add anything which is not true. "And therfor sche ded no thing wryten but that sche knw rygth wel for very trewth" (49). Nothing but the truth is written and Margery's unique voice can be heard throughout the *Book*, without any distortion from the scribes.

In the case of Anna Trapnel, the fact that she is in a state of trance and does not know what she is uttering means that we need to rely on the scribe's record and therefore she is even further removed from authorship. In addition, the scribe is not a completely reliable source. As he himself says:

> The things she delivered during this time were many; the four first days no account can be given, there being none that noted down what was spoken. For the rest of the time, from the fifth day to the last, some taste is herein presented of the things that were spoken, as they could be taken by a slow and imperfect hand. (*The Cry of a Stone* 2)

Hence, not everything has been written down and, from the days for which he has taken notes, he is only able to give us a taste. Interrupting Trapnel's account several times, the scribe explains time and again that he failed to write down "many precious things" because of "the press of people" or that he only "could take them in some scattered expressions" (*The Cry of a Stone* 35). He is not able to write down most of the songs and, in general, maintains that he could really only record bits and pieces. Indeed, in most of the introductory comments, he writes: "Having with these uttered many other things [...] which escaped the Relators pen, by reason of the lownesse of her voice, and the noise of the people; only some pieces were taken here and there, but too broken and imperfect to relate" (*The Cry of a Stone* 58). The implication is that much more is said and sung by Trapnel and the choices regarding what to include and to leave out seem to be made by the scribe rather than the prophet herself.

At one point, he even declares that "[t]he foure last words of the last Verse are added by the Relator, who could not take the Maids owne words, her voyce as it were dying, and sinking into her breast, with which she closed for that time" (*The Cry of a Stone* 45). Not only is the report incomplete, the scribe even changes or adds his own words to the utterances he notes down. The interesting thing is that Trapnel could have written *Cry* herself by relying on her visions and the evidence of the witnesses. After all, it is clear from the *Report and Plea* that she is able to write, but she chooses not to do it. In acting as a

witness, the scribe, even in his unreliable nature, adds another layer of authorisation to the account. He believes in Trapnel and, through him, the reader is able to learn what he witnessed, to experience the immediacy of being close to a prophet, which otherwise the work would not have had. It is as if we, too, are in the room with the scribe, listening to Trapnel's utterances while people are bustling about hoping to stand witness themselves. The scribe describes the room, mentions the numerous people who come to visit Trapnel, and is able to depict her as a true prophet. By explaining that his transcription could not be complete because of the many people in the room or because of Trapnel's way of delivering the prayers and songs, he also gives credence to her trances. This demonstrates that many people are interested in hearing her, as the room is always full of people, some of them even mentioned by name. The importance of some of these people has already been touched upon in the second chapter, validating the political impact of Trapnel's revelations as well as the significance of her utterances as prophetical declarations.

The difficulty to transcribe Trapnel's exact words is attributed to the prophetical nature of these utterances. She is God's mouthpiece and her outbursts are a direct representation of this bond. The scribe, for instance, comments more than once on the way she delivers her prophecy. She sings and prays in a language that the scribe is not able to repeat because the words are "much more largely then the Relator did, or could take them from her" (*The Cry of a Stone* 45). He also describes her deliverance in the following way: "Here she seemed to have over-flowings of joy and delight in spirit, and poured out her heart in a Song" (*The Cry of a Stone* 48). The scribe's failure to record everything does not reflect negatively on the truthfulness of Trapnel's revelations, it proves exactly the opposite. Her "over-flowings of joy and delight" and the "large" words that she utters come directly from God and are, thus, impossible for the scribe to accurately convey.

In an introductory epistle right at the beginning of the *Cry*, Trapnel's status as a prophet becomes a topic in its own right.

> It is hoped in this day, a day of the Power of God, a day of wonders, of shaking the heavens and the earth, and of general expectation of the approachings of the Lord to his Temple, that any thing that pretends to be a Witness, a Voice, or a Message from God to this Nation, shall not be held unworthy the hearing and consideration of any, because it is administred by a simple and unlikely hand.

The point being made here is that although the account has been written by "a simple and unlikely hand" the message comes from God and is of great importance and for all to hear. This is especially true when it is a prophecy that speaks of and facilitates the imminent Kingdom of Christ on earth. This, of course, adds a political dimension to the Fifth Monarchist movement and Trapnel's, as well as the scribe's, beliefs and involvement in the group. Apart from this political statement, Trapnel's status as a prophet is established and defended here. Just as in the *Report and Plea*, witchcraft and madness are only two of the many accusations that she has to deal with after her utterances. Thus, the epistle states:

> If any may be offended at her Songs, of such it is demanded, If they know what it is to be filled with the Spirit, to be in the Mount with God, to be gathered up into the visions of God, then may they judge her; until then, let them wait in silence, and not judge in a matter that is above them. (*The Cry of a Stone*)

The implication here is that only those who have also received visions from God are able to judge Trapnel, which is to say that most of her opponents cannot say anything against her, as the "matter […] is above them." Trapnel voices the truth, because of the bond between her and God, which is underlined by the scribe's witnessing of the prophecies.

Both the scribe and Trapnel are cognisant of the fact that her opponents will call her mad or a witch, which is why, just like in *Report and Plea*, the epistle concentrates on the authenticity of the account to help counter the accusations:

> There being various reports gone abroad concerning this Maid, too many being such as were not according to truth, whereby it comes to pass that the things she spake, do not appear to men as they cam from her, but as deformed and disguised with pervertings and depravings of the Reporters, therefore it was upon the heart of some that heard her […] to present to publick view a true and faithful Relation of so much as for some 7 or 8 dayes could be taken from her. (*The Cry of a Stone*)

The accusations against Trapnel are caused only by the untruthful accounts circulating about her. It is the reporters of these accounts who distort her visions and are, thus, responsible for any misunderstandings and false statements that she is being condemned for in the first place. *The Cry of a Stone* is, therefore, the result of the combined wish of the many listeners that came to

visit Trapnel to "present to publick view" the truth, which nobody will be able to judge. This lends credibility not only to this account but to her prophecies in general. This is the only accurate account of her utterances in White Hall, containing the words of God spoken through Trapnel.

To legitimise the revelations even further, the scribe presents a first-hand account by Trapnel at the beginning of the *Cry* in order to answer all questions and assuage all doubts that might arise about her credibility: "touching the condition of the Party, where? or what she is? to whom is she known? is she under Ordinances? what hath been her conversation formerly?" (2). Personal information about Trapnel, her relations, and where she comes from are of great importance in establishing her as a prophet. The next page opens, therefore, in the following way:

> 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, where these to the Lord for her daughter. Lord! Double thy spirit upon my child; These words she uttered with much eagerness three times, and spoke no more. (*The Cry of a Stone* 3)

The account here switches to a first person narrative. Trapnel states her name as well as those of her parents and the profession of her father. Her mother, however, seems to be of even more importance as she is the one who, with her dying words, asks Christ to "double" his spirit on Anna. This account, then, not only changes to a first person narrative, it also shows that Trapnel provides the scribe with her personal history. We detect here signs of a clear collaboration between Trapnel and her scribe, making *The Cry of a Stone* effectively her work and words.

In the subsequent paragraphs, Trapnel, furthermore, establishes herself in her community, listing the church meetings at All Hallows in London with John Simpson, Mr. Greenhill, Henry Jessey, Mr. Venning and Mr. Knollys, all of whom "have knowledge of me, and of my conversation; If any desire to be satisfied of it, they can give testimony of me, and of my walking in times past" (*The Cry of a Stone* 3). The testimony of these important figures demonstrates her position in the Fifth Monarchist movement. Knollys, a Particular Baptist and Fifth Monarchist, for instance, became a member of Henry Jessey's congregation in 1644 (Knewport), while Jessey, a nonconformist minister, was friends with Simpson and a lecturer at All Hallows (Wright). With regard to

Simpson, it is said that after serving as a major in the campaign against the Scots' invasion in 1651,

> he joined Christopher Feake in calling a meeting at All Hallows to rally support for the millenarian cause. It was here that the Fifth Monarchist movement was born, with All Hallows its centre and Feake and Simpson its first leaders. Unlike many radicals, Simpson placed no trust in Oliver Cromwell as the instrument of God. (Capp)

Trapnel has testimonies from all these leaders of the Fifth Monarchist movement, closely connecting her to All Hallows and to the political stances of the millenarians that were touched upon in the second chapter. All of these very important testimonies firmly confirm her background and lend her credibility as a prophet rather than a madwoman. After her validation as a member of the Fifth Monarchist movement, the reader learns that her mother's dying wish has come true. Trapnel begins her rite of passage to becoming a prophet through her illness, from which she is then delivered by God. Her subsequent visions about the Battle of Dunbar and Cromwell's appearance firmly establish her credibility as a prophet.

After this first person account, the scribe interrupts again to include the visions Trapnel had in White Hall, and adds his own questions to her to help authenticate her trance-induced revelations. He, for instance, asks her: "was it Vision wrapping up your outward senses in trances, so that you had not your senses free to see, nor hear, nor take notice of the People present?" (*The Cry of a Stone* 14). Her answer, of course, was that she neither saw nor heard anything except the voice of God, to which the scribe adds:

> besides her own word, the effects of a spirit caught up in the Visions of God, did abundantly appear in the fixedness, and immoveableness of her speech in prayer, but more especially in her songs, nothwithstanding the distractions among the people - which was observed by many who heard her, who seemed to us to be as one whose ears and eyes were locked up. (*The Cry of a Stone* 14)

His descriptions of Trapnel's body and movements, as well as him mentioning everyone present and witness to these visions serve to establish her authority as a prophet. Here, the collaboration between Trapnel and the scribe becomes apparent through their dialogue. It shows that she has a hand in the writing of the *Cry* and that she would have been able to change the account if she had wished to do so. Even though the scribe excuses himself for being simple and

slow, his interruptions and descriptions, in addition to Trapnel's own account of her becoming a prophet, contribute to authenticating both the visions and Trapnel herself.

3.3 The Vessel and the Mouthpiece

Authorisation is further complicated through the self-effacing disclaimers these female visionary writers make about the content of their prophecies. In addition to their claims that they would not have dared to write their books, if God had not commanded them to, and their use for scribes in some of their writings, most female visionaries surrender the content of their books completely to God. They depict themselves merely as vessels or instruments of God who only repeat God's words. Thus, self-effacement is involved not only when it comes to writing the books, it also shapes female speech and the whole content of the books.[1] In Margery's case, the dialogues between her and Christ or God belong to the most prominent features in the text. Once she is established as a prophet, meaning after the reader has been told about her background and personal history and the illness from which God delivered her, Christ starts talking to her, asking her to "thynk swych thowtys as I wyl putt in this mend [...] and I schal yefe to the hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon" (73). As commanded by God, Margery writes about her life, her feelings, and her revelations that come from God rather than from herself. Furthermore, Christ is the one who places thoughts into her mind. Thus, she only acts as a mouthpiece in everything she says, thinks and does. At one point, the Lord not only turns her into a mouthpiece, he even exchanges places with her: "For thei that worshep the, thei worshep me; thei that despysyn the, thei despysn me, and I schal chstysen hem therfor. I am in the, and thow in me. And thei that heryn the, thei heryn the voice of God" (85). When she speaks, we hear the voice of God and everything that is done to her is also done to Him. If people despise her, they despise Him. He even gives permission to worship

1 In many of these books the line between speech and writing is very much blurred. Large parts of Margery's *Book*, for instance, consist of direct speech between her and Christ. The lack of order and structure, give the *Book* an immediacy that can be attributed to speech. In the *Cry of a Stone*, the representation of Trapnel's direct utterances is also a written testimony of speech. The written representation of a prophecy, which is closely connected to speech, becomes a feature integral to the process of authorisation established in these chapters.

her, claiming that it is the same as if He is being worshipped. Thus, Margery is much more than only a voice.

Given the use of direct speech in the text, the reader can still see a clear distinction between Margery and Christ's voice. We can hear the conversation between the two and we, especially, hear the uniqueness of her voice. Even though she constantly expresses her doubts about her status as a prophet due to her sinfulness and unworthiness, Christ continues to confirm her status as divinely inspired. As a result, Margery's authority is repeatedly re-established throughout the *Book*. Christ's answers to her doubts add to the uniqueness of her voice and the special status she has in His eyes. Although she was a business woman for part of her life and bore fourteen children, she is depicted as though she has been perfect all her life. At one point, she tells Christ that she wants to dance with the virgins in heaven and that "lak of maydenhed is to (her) now gret sorwe" (135). She also mentions that she regrets that she had not loved the Lord all her life. In spite of these flaws, Christ reassures her:

> Thu art to me a synguler lofe, dowtyr, and therfor I behote the thu schalt have a syngular grace in hevyn … Dowtyr, whan thu art in hevyn, thu schalt mown askyn what thu wylt, and I schal grawnte the al thi desyr. I have telde the befortyme that thu art a synguler lover, and therfor thu schalt have a synguler love in hevyn, a synguler reward, and a synguler worshep. (135-138)

The word "synguler" is repeated six times within these few pages. Margery is singular in her love of Christ but also singularly loved by Him. What is more, she has such grace that she can wish for anything she wants and He will grant it. In the same conversation He also tells her: "so schalt thu dawnsyn in hevyn wyth other holy maydens and virgynes, for I may clepyn the dere abowte and myn owyn derworthy derlyng" (138). It seems like Margery will be able to dance with the virgins in heaven, even though she is a mother of fourteen children. Not only is her authority established, she is also singled out as especially loved by Christ and able to wish for whatever she wants, thereby gaining a status otherwise only given to saints or virgins.

And Margery does have several wishes. As we saw in the second chapter, she receives a signed letter, which allows her to travel throughout the country. She also has another letter giving her the right to choose her own confessor and receive communion every Sunday. Furthermore, she also goes on pilgrimages without any money and she asks Christ to let her see all the important sites, such as Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela, with her own eyes, and her wish is granted. At one point, there is a great fire in

Bishop's Lynn, threatening to destroy the church and other parts of the town. So Margery, who is there at the time, begins to pray: "Good Lord, make it wel, and sende down sum reyn er sum wedyr that may thorw thi mercy qwenchyn this fyer and esyn myn hert" (308). When the sparks begin to enter the church and all seems lost, three men come into the church saying: "Lo, Margery, God hath wrowt gret grace for us and sent us a fayr snowe to qwenchyn wyth the fyr" (308). Her prayers have been heard and God works a miracle to save the town and the church. It appears that it is not just the Creator that deserves to be thanked here but also Margery. As the priest states: "he belevyd that God grawntyd hem for hir preyerys to be delyveryd owt of her gret perellys" (308). Had it not been for her and had her wish to perform miracles not been granted, the fire would not have been extinguished.

Many of her wishes are also rather worldly. She often asks God about the lives of people around her, wishing to know their fate and their faith. This stands in stark contrast to Julian who asks God a similar question about a friend but does not receive an answer. Indeed, as already mentioned, Julian removes most of the personal material from the *Long Text*, such as information about her mother and her own story. Instead, she only includes that one episode about her friend, of whom she wants to know whether he or she will continue in "good levyng" (48). The answer to her query is the following:

> And in this syngular desyer it semyd that I lettyd my selfe, for I was nott taught in thy tyme. And then was I answeryd in my reson, as it were by a fendulle mene, 'Take it generally and beholde the curtesy of thy Lorde God as he whewyd to the, for it is more worshype to God to beholde hym in alle than in any specyalle thyng.' (48)

The implication, here, is that asking God to satisfy her personal curiosities is selfish and that Julian would do better to learn about God, in general, than concern herself with such trivial things. She should not concern herself with these earthly matters and instead concentrate on her revelations, which are of much greater significance and scale as they deal with matters of sin, salvation, and the greater humanity. This is a possible reason for why she decided to exclude most personal information from the *Long Text*. Her persona should be seen as unimportant, which is meant to lend her voice more authority when talking about her rather subversive theodicy and the political interpretation of her revelations.

Margery's approach, however, is the complete opposite. She, for instance, asks Christ to have mercy on a "wykkyd woman," who was on the point of

death: "'Lord, as thu lovyst me, save hir sowle fro dampnacyon,' […] And owyr Lord grawntyd hir mercy for the sowle" (139). She also asks about a good friend who was very ill and Christ tells her: "Dodwtyr, be not abaschyd for this man, he schal levyn and faryn wygth wel" (140). Throughout the *Book*, there are many instances such as these, where Margery uses her bond to Christ and her role as his instrument to her advantage. In more then one instance He tells her that He will fulfil all of her wishes and desires and she seems to take these statements quite literally. She is even able to choose someone who will be her companion in heaven. When she wishes for her spiritual father, Master R, to be her companion, Christ asks why she would not choose her own father or her husband to be with her in heaven. However, He also assures her: "I graunt the thi desyr of hym, and yet schal thi fadyr ben savyd, and thi husbond also, and alle thi chylderyn […] Dowtyr, I schal be a trew executor to the and fulfyllyn all thi wylle" (81). All of her wishes are granted. All she has to do is ask and Christ fulfils her wishes. Sometimes she is even granted privileges she has not asked for.

At one point, she asks for a priest to give a sermon to her every day and Christ answers: "Ther schal come on fro fer that schal fulfillyn thi desyr" (279). This same priest then reads many books to her, including "Bonaventur, Stimulus Amoris [and] Incendium Amoris" (280). As mentioned in the first chapter, these books are of great importance to Margery, since she models herself after their authors and tries to outdo them even so as to demonstrate her piety and her special status as a prophet. It is interesting how the *Book* tries to argue that it is the priest who benefits from Margery, not the other way around: "for he fond gret gostly comfort in hir and cawsyd him to lokyn meche good scriptur and many a good doctowr, whech he wolde not a lokyd at that tyme, had sche ne be" (279-280). It seems like she asks the priest specifically for these books and that had it not been for her, he would not have read them. Additionally the priest receives spiritual comfort from Margery, turning her into a priestess herself. Thus, she gains authority not only by being able to wish for anything she wants, but also through the fact that she can bestow spiritual comfort and leadership onto others.

What transpires is that Margery's way of life and revelations are superior to what the priests can preach. This is first made clear in the second chapter, when she is able to rebuff all the questions the clergy ask of her and clear her name of all accusations of heresy, and it becomes even clearer in a later episode, in which her love and wishes are again the topic of conversation between her and Christ. After Christ promises that, if she obeys His will, He will

fulfil hers, He states: "Ther is no clerk can spekyn ayens the lyfe whech I teche the; and yyf he do, he is not Goddys clerk, he is the develys clerk" (301). In other words, if any clerk should speak up against her, he is the devil's clerk. When she suggests that God should teach priests and other religious men the same way of life He has taught her, He answers that this is not possible because "undyr the abyte of holynes is curyd meche wykkydnes" (302). God assures Margery that He does not teach priests and other religious men what He has shown to her because there is much wickedness under the habit of holiness. This rather bold statement gives Margery authority over the clergy as she is shown to be holier than the priests. Interestingly, as the conversation proceeds, God also explains that there will come a time when all these men will believe in her grace and believe in Margery herself. Those who still do not believe, He "schal chastisyn hem as it wer for myself" (302). To which Margery answers: "'Nay, derworthy Lord Jhesu, chastise no creatur for me'" (302). Margery explains that she does not want chastising men, and asks for mercy and grace for all men. God assures that He will "spar for thy lofe" (302). Though Margery is careful in her wording ("yyf it be thy wille to grawnt it" (302)), the roles seem almost reversed. She is the one able to spare the wicked. Her love for her "evyn-Christen" (303) saves them and her authority over her community reaches its peak here, becoming almost God-like.

In addition, although Margery uses the conventional strategies of self-effacement and of claiming to have been commanded by God to write, she goes far beyond them to assert her authority in the dialogues between her and the Lord. She clearly uses her intimate relationship and her status as a singular inspired woman to her own end. Margery's voice and desires are made evident in chapter eleven, where she goes as far as bargaining with Christ. In this chapter, she and her husband talk about her chastity, which is very important for her to keep. Her husband only agrees to live a chaste life if Margery grants him three wishes: the first is that they still lie in a bed together, the second is that she pays his debts before going on pilgrimage and the third is that she breaks her fasting on Fridays. The third wish poses a problem, as fasting on Fridays is a divine order Margery cannot break. She then starts bargaining with God and tells Him in no ambiguous terms: "For yyf I wold brekyn that maner of fastyng whech thow comawndyst me to kepyn on the Fryday wythowtyn mete or drynk, I schuld now han my desyr" (88). She states her wishes boldly against God's command. His answer, however, is even more surprising: "For, my derworthy dowtyr, this was the cawse that I bad the fastyn, for thu schuldyst the sonar opteyn and getyn thi desyr, and now it is

grawntyd the" (89). God's answer that he only commanded her to fast so that she would have something to bargain for reads like a rather clever gesture of self-authorisation on Margery's part.

In terms of authorship and authorisation, Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone* and her *Report and Plea* are also quite intricate and complex. On one level, *The Cry of a Stone* is a prophecy, meaning that Trapnel is expressing God's will. Rather than her own voice, we are supposed to hear the voice of God through her. Diane Purkiss explains that a "prophetic utterance necessarily involves a radical dislocation of the voice from the body, since in authentic prophecy the voice comes from God, while the body through which it speaks is a passive conduit" (141). This gives Trapnel the best possible claim on authorisation because it means that everything she says, including the politically controversial topics, do not originate in her but come directly from God. She is protected through the mode of prophecy and since it comes from God, she necessarily speaks the truth. On the other hand, the question remains as to whether Trapnel can be seen as the author of *The Cry of a Stone* or the *Report and Plea* given that their writing has been commanded by God, and she is only an instrument and a mouthpiece of God's words. However, the loss of one's own voice and even of the self in favour of the ultimate authority is one of the most dominant features of women's visionary writings. With regard to Trapnel, Sue Wiseman, thus, states: "Her voice expresses a message from God. Authority for speech here is returned to the ultimate source and origin of all things" (187). In order to gain this authority, Trapnel repeatedly asserts that she is nothing, merely an instrument and a vessel to the will of God.

Phrases such as "I was nothing" and "I was a simple creature, onely divine wisdome 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" (*Report and Plea* 28.2) are repeated throughout her works. "Trapnel presents herself […] as quite passive, scarcely conscious or in control of what she says. This is a notion which recurs frequently in seventeenth-century prophetic writing: the prophet operates by abandoning control of the self to God" (Chedgzoy 243).[2] This can be seen, for instance, in the episode in which Trapnel needs to answer before the judge. As seen in the second chapter, she is able to answer all of his questions and even reverses their roles. In addition, she also uses the interrogation to prove that she is not a witch since witches would not be able to answer a judge.

2 As we have seen, this is not only true for the seventeenth century but also for the medieval visionary writers.

As further evidence of her authority, she cites conversations with people whom she meets on her journey to Cornwall and back when she insists on not having the answers herself but on God giving her the words: "many people spake much to me, asking me questions, the which the Lord helped me to answer" (*Report and Plea* 22). To explain how the Lord helped her answer, she states:

> *"Take no heed what thou shalt say; being brought before them for the Lord Christ's sake, he will give thee words: dost thou know what they will ask thee? Therefore look to the Lord, who will give thee answers suitable to what shall be required of thee [...]"* And this I thought, I would be nothing, the Lord should have all the praise, it being his due. (*Report and Plea* 23)

Again, she claims that she is nothing and that everything she says comes from God rather than from herself. He provides the answers in all situations, giving her the right words for judges or people whom she meets on her journey. The ability to have the right answer in each situation helps her to prove to people that she indeed is a prophet and a mouthpiece of God.

On the one hand, the complete debasement of her self and the loss of her own voice seem to contradict a powerful self-authorisation of her as an author. On the other hand, however, as an instrument of God, she has great power. As He says to her: "I will make thee an Instrument of much more; for particular souls shall not only have benefit by thee, but the universality of Saints shall have discoveries of God through thee" (*The Cry of a Stone* 3). Through Trapnel, her writings and her voice, people benefit and learn of God. She, thus, has the power of the path of salvation, giving the people around her the possibility to hear God and follow the right path. This paradox of having a voice, but also having God's voice is perfectly expressed in *The Cry of a Stone*: "Oh, it is for thy sake, and for thy servants sakes, that thy Servant is made a voyce, a sound, it is a voyce within a voyce, anothers voyce, even thy voyce through her" (42). It is a voice within a voice and a voice that speaks through her. Her voice and God's voice through her give her the necessary proof that what she says is the truth, no matter what she expresses. It is difficult to say then which is her voice and which belongs to God. This duplicity acts as a powerful source of authority, investing her with the power needed to speak about politics and religion, which would otherwise not be possible.

Thus, she portrays herself as a true prophet, who has insights from God that only she can know. Similar to comparing herself to a weak handmaid, who is the perfect vessel of God, she also voices the following:

> I was a simple creature, onely divine wisdome was pleased to make use of the simple […] I am a poore sorry reed, but divine power, and the wind that Christ told *Nichodemus*, in the 3. of *John* the 8.[3] which bloweth where it listeth, that wind said I, hath taken a silly creature, and hat made her understand its sound, that which Nichodemus a great Rabbi, could not tell what to make of. (*Report and Plea* 28.2)

Once again, Trapnel insists that she is a "simple creature" and a "poore sorry reed." At the same time, she claims she is the one who understands the wind that not even Nicodemus could understand. In contrast to this "great Rabbi," she is spiritually reborn and has a direct connection to God. He speaks to her and she understands everything that He says. She is, thus, a true prophet. Indeed, throughout the *Report* and in the *Cry*, it is of great importance to Trapnel to vindicate herself and make sure that everything said against her is not only exposed as false but understood as an attack against God. In the end, it is Trapnel who chooses what to say and what not. She is the final authority over her own words even though she claims otherwise. As we have seen above, she chooses to include some things in her *Report* but not everything. In the conclusion of the text she states: "I shall begin to shorten my relation, least I should be too tedious to the Reader, and leave the Visions and opening of Scriptures that the Lord brought to my soul, while I was in *Bridwell* for my own benefit" (*Report and Plea* 45). She does not want to be "too tedious" by keeping on writing, but she also wants to make sure that the reader knows she has had many more visions from God, which she chooses to leave out for her "own benefit." Even though her voice is not her own and she can be seen as rather passive, as Chedgzoy maintains, we can hear Trapnel clearly in several instances. She is at once invested with authority from God by acting as His mouthpiece and she is able to wield this authority for her own interests.

In Anne Wentworth's case, as we have seen in the beginning of the chapter, it is also God forcing her to write the texts. She writes that she resisted this command as long as she could until God threatened to kill her. Like the other female visionaries, she also portrays herself as a vessel and a mouthpiece of divine intention:

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3 John 3:8-10: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell wence it cometh, and wither it goeth […] Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"

> My *God* who has been so many years *Emptying* me from Vessel to Vessel, *breaking* me all to pieces in myself, 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 his work. (*Vindication* 3)

She seems to have been broken into pieces by God and then rebuilt again. Indeed, her whole persona is reduced to nothing but a vessel for God. Like a reed, she bows to his will and only does his bidding. At several points, she calls herself a "weak instrument" (*Vindication* 9) and makes sure that nothing she writes or says can be seen as coming from herself: "But I have renounced my self, and laid down my own wisdom and will in this work, and am given up to all the will of God herein" (*Vindication* 9). As with the other women discussed here, Wentworth portrays herself as a mouthpiece without any thoughts of her own. The implication is that nothing in her writings reflects her own opinions. She is but a messenger of God, helping the world to see the truth.

Though Wentworth seems to be giving up any individual sense of authority, the whole content of her texts revolves around her person. In *Vindication*, as well as in *True Account,* she legitimises herself not only by claiming to be a strong, individual woman, but also a single woman separated from her husband. At the beginning of *True Account*, after stating that she is nothing but a vessel for God's words, she also frames her intent in the following way:

> and I must confess all the cause I gave, and what I have done, and how this war begun, and how it came to rise so high, and grow so hot, that it cannot be ended or taken up in private, but must come into the open field of the World to be tryed and fought out, and all see whether truth or men be strongest, and which the Victory got. (*True Account* 5)

This, in a nutshell, captures Wentworth's intention to write. Interestingly, in the beginning of her statement, she uses the word "confess." The confession in question, normally given in private, happens to be public, as is the entire content of her texts. She openly discusses the war with her husband concerning his mistreatment of her during their long marriage and her ultimate separation from him. This conflict with him and their fellow church members is laid bare in the texts, although she acknowledges it should ideally be "taken up in private." Because she knows that the content of her texts is highly delicate and distinctly personal, she feels the need to justify making this public confession.

At various points, she talks of the ill treatment she received from her husband and their fellow church members, who would call her mad and try to prevent her from writing. She maintains that

> [they] have declared me an *Heathen*, and a *Publican* for matters of Conscience, in which I was faithful to the Teachings of God, according to the Scriptures of Truth, and obey'd the voyce of the Lord, who called me out from amongst them, that I might not partake of those Terrible Plagues, and dreadful judgments which are coming upon all *Formalists*, *Hyppocrites*, and *profane Persons*, who are all of them the Inhabitants of this Earth. (*Vindication* 1)

Here, she is called a heathen by her husband and their congregation in order to defuse the impact of her words and her texts. She further explains:

> And yet I also judge it is the *mistaken* and *rotten Interest* of my Adversaries, not only to *report*, but to *believe* me a person beside my self: for if I be sound in a *right mind*, how *Mad* must they be discovered to have been, in their blind rage and fury against *me* and *my Testimony*. (*Vindication* 8)

Apart from being called a heathen, Wentworth is also labelled mad. As she states herself, they only call her that, because it is in their interest to represent her as being mad, as, otherwise, they would have to recognise her prophetic authority. She thus turns their slander upside down, reducing it merely to a rhetorical device that disguises their false beliefs. But she assures the reader that she is the one who is "faithful to the Teachings of God" and speaks the truth of scripture. As a prophet and mouthpiece of God, she proves to be the one who is chosen by God to tell the truth, which, interestingly, includes her own personal story about her marriage and the ill treatment she had to endure from her husband.

Furthermore, she not only wants to justify or vindicate herself, but she also prophesises the punishment of her husband and anybody who makes slanderous comments against her. The quote above hints at the "dreadful judgment" that is in store for hypocrites and profane people. Occasionally she is even more specific, mentioning the punishment in store against her husband and her congregation, the reason for which she summarises in *Vindication* in the following way:

> Full eighteen years with grief consum'd,
> and to the Grave bow'd down,
> Because the Lord have rais'd me up,

to make his power known
and bad me shew his wonderous works,
And glorifie his Name.
[…]
Disprove me plainly if you can,
Before the next New Year.
For after that, great wrath expect,
which on those will burn as fuel,
Who their fellow creature were
Not merciful, but cruel
[…]
O God arise, make hast to judge
between my Foes and me,
O stop their mouths, clear me, and let
but guilty ones go free. (*Vindication* p. 19-20)

For more than eighteen years, she endures her marriage. But now God is asking that her story becomes known by everyone to glorify His name, and to free Wentworth from her husband and her congregation. As a prophet of God, she warns that her enemies will only have time to disprove her until the New Year. After that, God's wrath will come down upon them, proving that Wentworth was right all along. God will make the truth known and her husband's attempt to silence her will become his downfall.

Furthermore, she turns her husband's accusation of her being a heathen on its head. Even though she does not exactly say anything unkind about him, she makes it clear that he is not born again and thus does not belong to the chosen few. She describes him as an honest man, who has the "gift of his tongue," making him the ideal businessman and fit for "employment in this world" (*True Account* 11). However, even though she calls him honest, she also states that he is a man of the world, which stands in stark contrast to her own service to God. In contrast, all of her husband's honesty does not make him fit for true service in the name of God since he only concentrates on worldly matters. She maintains that she does not know of any "gross sin that he is addicted to," but, on the other hand, she describes him as selfish and known "to satisfy himself in all his own will, without being born again; for I dare be bold to affirm that he never yet knew the new birth, the life of the new man" (*True Account* 7). Like Trapnel, when she talks about Nicodemus in the above cited passage, Wentworth and her congregation believe that one has to be

born again in order to belong to the chosen few, which is why she claims she is "a true child of God, born from above [...] *except we be born again we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God*" (*True Account* 1).[4] Hence as her husband is not born again, his words and everything he says against her cannot be taken as the truth. Unlike his wife, he is not "a true child of God."

Wentworth's ingenuity is to counter her husband's accusations with scripture. Everything that she had written before had been destroyed by her spouse and her leaving him is the reason for writing these texts. At the beginning of *True Account* and at various other points, she explains her dilemma of not wanting to write or say anything against her husband and the congregation but being commanded by God to do so. It is of utmost importance for her that we understand that she is the vessel of God. This allows her to counter the slander by pointing out that, as a vessel of God, she can only speak the truth: "Yet the Lord would have me speak the truth, and the more they dashed at it, and beat the poor weak instrument for it, the more the Lord of Life, who was the Agent, confirms it, and in the close now gives his reasons why he would have this work done" (*True Account* 6). Her work is God's work and the more slander she has to endure, the more the truth will be known and the more severe God's wrath and punishment will be.

Wentworth also uses scripture to refute her husband's claim about her being a heathen by making several analogies between herself and biblical figures. For instance, she maintains: "For they might as well accused *Abigail* for saying her Husband was a churlish *Nabal*, and folly was with him,[5] and have reproved *Moses* for writing that King Pharaoh was an opressing King" (*True Account* 11-12). Abigail, who is "a woman of good understanding," has the same right to refer to her husband as churlish as Wentworth has to write about her husband's abusive treatment during their marriage. She also compares herself to Moses, justifying her writings about the oppression of her husband. Through figures such as Moses and Abigail, as well as the ultimate authority, God, she argues convincingly for her essentially private life in a public forum

4 John 3:4-7: "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

5 1 Sam 25:3: "Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb."

against her oppressive marriage, vindicating her reputation and asserting her autonomy. The confidence she gathers by such means is reflected in the conclusion to her writing: "And though it begun in much weakness, yet it will end in full strength, that the evil one shall not be able to overcome, for a child is not a man as soon as he is born" (*True Account* 13). Even though her husband might have destroyed most of her previous writings, Wentworth learns to argue and structure her texts anew as a result. Just as a child needs time to learn and perfect different skills in growing up, so, too, does Wentworth refine her writing to a point where her husband is not able to destroy or refute it anymore. Though she might have been weak and dependent at the start, she ends her text "in full strength," having fashioned a confident, powerful, and independent woman with the help of her writing.

Since they are aware of the cultural restrictions against them, such as the edict in Paul's writings that women ought to be silent, should not participate in political discussions, and are not allowed to teach, all of these women go to great lengths to prove that they have been commanded by God to write. All of these female visionary writers begin their texts by commenting on their shortcomings, their weaknesses and their nothingness. While giving into these negative stereotypes seems to contradict any type of authority or authorship these women might have, they manage to use these cultural restrictions in their favour. By ostensibly conceding authorship and their own voice, they are able to do exactly the opposite, namely to produce texts, participate in political discussions and make their voices heard in a public space, which would otherwise not be available to them. As God's vessels, they gain an authority nobody is able to refute, which provides them with an opportunity to make their thoughts known and tell their personal story.

Julian, for instance, begins by claiming that she is a "woman, ignorant, weak and frail" and she is very careful to counter any notions of her being a teacher. But at the same time she insists that she is the only one to have received these revelations, which are beneficial to all Christians and which need to be published by God's command. There is no intermediary between her and God, no priest who needs to translate or make sure it conforms with the Church's teachings. Thus, many of the revelations are subversive, such as Julian's salvation theory and her treatment of the *imago dei*. Even though she is commanded by God to write and revelations are shown to her, we also hear her unique voice on religious and political matters. In Margery's case, it is not only God who gives testimony to her writings, but also Christ, his mother, and many saints, all of whom thank Margery for writing her *Book*.

Different from Julian, Margery is commanded to write about her feelings and her way of life to show God's goodness to the entire world. Her personal life is significant and an account of it has to be written down and published. At several points, Margery is ill and weak and only when she goes back to writing her *Book* is she suddenly cured again. Writing is treated in the same way as the rite of passage for becoming a prophet. God cures Margery as soon as she (re)commences writing, thus showing his grace and the importance of the written word.

The same holds true for seventeenth century visionary writers discussed here. They still felt the need to justify their writings, although many more women were able to publish between the 1640s and the 1660s. Trapnel, for instance, also insists on being nothing and on having been commanded by God to write about her travels to Cornwall. He is her instructor and tells her everything she needs to know to stand up to the people and the judges she encounters. Even though she maintains that she is inferior to the holy men and women in scripture, she still compares herself to Paul, and in calling herself a poor handmaid she identifies herself with the prophets in the Bible. God's testimony and his command allow her to justify her travels, to counter all the negative reports about her, and lend great importance to her texts in the first place. All these women are established as true seers, chosen by God to write about their lives and their thoughts. The seemingly complete loss of their voices and their selves, which in Wentworth's case came at a steep price, as her husband and her congregation continuously fought against her writings, give these women the necessary authority to make themselves heard and to be taken seriously. God's authority becomes their own authority to produce texts and to publish their thoughts and ideas.

The question of authority and authorship is further complicated by intermediaries, such as scribes, as well as by the insistence of these writers that they are merely vessels for the voice of God. Margery, for instance, has several scribes whose voices can be heard throughout the book. The lack of order and structure of the *Book* also calls the authenticity of the content into question. However, the different scribes and the structure of the *Book* become topics in their own right in the text. Indeed, the collaboration between Margery and the scribes, together with their testimonies at several points throughout the text bolster her credibility. Their scepticism and their 'conversion' by Margery and God invite the reader to follow a similar path. Even though one may be sceptical, the stories, miracles, and all the people converted into believers are meant to, likewise, convince the reader. Trapnel's scribe, who wrote down as

much as he could during her trance, serves the same purpose. On several occasions he notes that he was not able to write down everything Trapnel had said and he even uses his own words to finish some of her songs or sentences. But his testimony and his introduction of Trapnel, her family, and her important acquaintances give her and her utterances even more credence. The scribe's questions and his own scepticism also anticipate the questions of the reader and lead the reader step by step to the necessary conclusion, namely that everything that Trapnel utters and that is written in the text must be the truth.

In addition, as vessels and mouthpieces of God, these female visionary writers seem to surrender the entire content of their texts to their Creator. Trapnel's statement in *The Cry of a Stone* encapsulates this issue perfectly: "Oh, it is for thy sake, and for thy servants sakes, that thy Servant is made a voyce, a sound, it is a voyce within a voyce, anothers voyce, even thy voyce through her" (42). The formula of a voice within a voice or God's voice speaking through her are meant to show that the visionary voice is not her own, but God's. However, all of these female prophets let their own voices clearly come through in their texts. Margery, for instance, even bargains with God in order to be granted her wish of being chaste along with many more wishes that are fulfilled throughout the *Book*. One of the most prominent features in her *Book* is the direct speech between her and Christ, where we can detect a clear distinction between Margery's voice and His. Trapnel, in turn, is better able to vindicate her life and her travels for the reader, and portrays herself as a singular prophet who knows God's secrets, some of which she is willing to share with us. In Wentworth's case, we hear about the entire struggle that she has to undergo to be able to write her texts. Her suffering is made open to the public and though she maintains that she only writes at God's command, her texts are ultimately her justification for leaving her husband and her congregation. All of these visionary writers are commanded to write texts in which they surrender their voices – sometimes to male scribes, but always to God – thereby giving up their authority, authorship, and voice to be able to write and publish in the first place. And yet, writing allows them to emerge with an even more distinct voice and an authority of their own. These texts show them to be strong women able to share their ideas, their political worldview, and their important religious insights.

Conclusion

The similarity between the literary strategies these female prophets use to legitimise their writings is astounding. Even though they are seemingly worlds apart – due to their different upbringings, different backgrounds, different religious leanings, and the fact that some of them lived in different centuries, there is a consistency of topoi that unites them. They all face cultural restrictions portraying them as the weak sex that must be silent and remain inside the home. Writing and publishing is an endeavour that confronts several obstacles, all reflected in their texts. But instead of fighting against the negative stereotypes of them being weak, prone to illness, not fit for politics or writing, they use these and turn them into strengths and clever strategies for gaining authority for their writings precisely using these negative epithets.

Even though the scope of this study does not allow for a comprehensive investigation into all the female prophets of the Middle Ages or of the seventeenth century, a quick glance at medieval Continental visionaries shows that the themes of this study did not take place in a vacuum. Margery mentions several influential visionary writers in her *Book*. In the second half of the thirteenth century, for instance, a group of female mystics lived and wrote in the Benedictine monastery in Helfta, Saxony. We have visionary texts by Mechthild of Hackeborn (1240-98), Gertrud of Helfta (1256-1301) and Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282), a beguine[1] who joined the convent in Helfta in 1270. The Prologue of Mechthild of Madgeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, which is written by Brother Heinrich, demonstrates the cultural prejudice surrounding female prophets:

1 "Beguines were women who chose to lead a life of voluntary poverty, chastity and religious devotion while remaining in the secular world. Unlike nuns, they did not take a vow of obedience" (Andersen 4-5).

> Quite often, in fact, almighty God has chosen what is weak in the world to confound what is stronger for its good. Therefore, let no one wonder or, lacking trust, fall into disbelief if God in the time of grace renews his marvels. He, who in the time of the law of Moses mercifully saw fit to perform similar works, now reveals his mysteries to the fragile sex. Because the people of Israel believed Deborah's prophecy, they won freedom from oppression and victory over their enemies. (Prologue Brother Heinrich)

Brother Heinrich explains that even though the visions originate from a woman, they should not be dismissed. Mechthild may appear weak and fragile but scripture can help legitimise her claims. After all, in 1 Corinthians 1:27 we read: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." God is known to choose the weak to confound the strong, so all doubt and disbelief in Mechthild should be suspended. Brother Heinrich also compares Mechthild to Moses and Deborah. He states that God chose Moses as a prophet and now he has chosen the "fragile sex" to reveal his mysteries. Furthermore, there are prophetesses in the Bible, such as Deborah, and Brother Heinrich highlights the benefits that the people of Israel received from believing in her. They were freed from oppression and able to withstand their enemies. Similarly, by believing in Mechthild, people stand to benefit greatly. The relation between individual weakness and the ability to prophesise is drawn by several of the women in this study. Trapnel, for instance, maintains that "the Son of God, who died, […] gave himself for a weak hand-maid, as well as for a strong Paul" (*Report and Plea* "To the Reader"). Even though she is weak, inferior and unworthy (in her own words), she has the same status as Paul. As we also see in the Bible, God pours out his spirit upon the handmaids (Joel 2:28-29), using the weak rather than the strong.

This weakness is not only reflected in the faculties of the mind or the spirit, but is, of course, closely connected to the body. In many of the religious writings, the body is clearly subordinated to the mind and the spiritual. Augustine, for instance, claims that because man was created in the likeness of God "he has been set over all irrational creatures" ("Chapter XXXII" Book 13). In contrast, however, woman is made to obey man and is therefore linked to the irrational creatures man "has been set over." Augustine associates women with the body and appetite, and men with reason and the mind. Thus, women

became closely connected to the body, which separates them from a spiritual life and God.

In the mystical experience, however, the body is of great importance. Mystics used Christ's humanity and his suffering on the cross as a gateway for contemplation. His body, as well as the mystics' bodies, took centre stage and formed the basis of the very intimate and personal connection between the mystics and God. However, male mystics, such as Hilton and Rolle, use this bodily experience only as a first step into contemplation and make it clear that the body needs to be left behind in order to reach higher levels of contemplation. In their eyes, the ultimate union with God can only be spiritual. Female visionaries, in contrast, not only use Christ's humanity as a gateway into contemplation, they generally also place stronger emphasis on the body than do their male counterparts. Julian, for instance, uses a bipartite soul system, just like Augustine and Hilton, and divides the soul into 'substance' and 'sensuality.' However, she clearly emphasises the importance of the 'sensuality,' which in her theology is based on kindness, mercy, and grace, and plays an important part in our salvation. She maintains: "I saw that in oure sensualyte God is" (*Showings* 85). Margery, on the other hand, goes above and beyond her contemporary mystics. She uses Rolle's imagery of the fire of love, which she locates more firmly in the bodily than he does. Margery also visualises the Passion scene and even participates. She literally takes over Mary's sorrow by crying, screaming, and running around and she even brings Christ's mother a hot drink in order to comfort her. The bodily experience is, thus, very much emphasised and both Julian and Margery use their weak bodies in order to gain authority.

Weakness is often used synonymously with illness. The notion that women are not fit for politics and fit to think or speak in public often stems from the idea that women are prone to illness. Many of these visionary writers use this concept to legitimise their status as prophets. For many of them, a severe, often almost fatal, illness marks their rite of passage as prophets. For instance, God warns Mechthild of Magdeburg, of an illness she will recover from: "Then our Lord said: 'You shall obey and trust me in these matters, and you shall also become sick for a long time, and I shall take care of you myself'" (Book IV, Chapter 2). This sickness marks the starting point of her visions and, therefore, has positive connotations. Likewise, both Trapnel and Julian are sick for three days and almost die when they are suddenly healed by God. Julian receives her sixteen revelations during her illness, and Trapnel lives in God's sight after hers, marking her as His prophet and instrument. The

significance of the three days and nights connects the two women with the resurrection of Christ, and is a clear sign of their union, and their status as prophets. In the case of Mechthild of Hackeborn, it is the continuation of sickness during her whole life that reveals her to be a prophet. In the description of her visionary abilities, we read: "Moreover our gracious Lord so continually held His scourge over her, that almost constantly she suffered from pain of the head, and disease of the hair, and exceeding heat of the liver" (8).

Margery also begins her life as a prophet with an illness. However, her illness is clearly linked to childbirth, which, like the *imago dei,* is connected to Eve's transgression. Her punishment is pain in childbirth as well as to be subjected to her husband. But childbirth, even though connected to pain, suffering, and sickness, is not only a curse but also a form of redemption. In this sense, childbearing forms another parallel between women and Christ's suffering on the cross. Indeed, in several instances, Christ is portrayed as a mother who, in dying, is giving birth to a redeemed human race. As with Julian, in Mechthild of Magdeburg's visions there is also a clear analogy between the wounds of Christ and breastfeeding:

> Then both His wounds and her breast were open; the wounds poured, the breasts flowed, so that the Soul was revived and wholly restored when He poured the pure red wine into her red mouth. When the Soul was thus born out of the open wounds and became alive, then she was childlike and very young. (Book I, Chapter 22)

The soul is born out of the wounds of Christ and the milk of Mary's [2] breasts is given the same attributes as the precious blood of Christ. Breastfeeding becomes even more important in another statement: "When I thus became the Mother of many a homeless child, my breasts became full of the pure, undefiled milk of true, bountiful mercy, so that I suckled the prophets and the wise men before I was born. After that I suckled Jesus in my childhood" (Book I, Chapter 22). The suggestion here is that prophets and wise men become what they are through her milk. Christ's mother suckled Christianity, martyrs, apostles, and Jesus. Her milk becomes everything: "Lady, thus did you suckle then and suckle still the hearts of martyrs with strong faith, the

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2 Interestingly, throughout this vision it is not clear if Mechthild is talking about her own or Mary's breasts. Thus, breastfeeding, and the implications made here, becomes an attribute belonging to all women.

ears of confessors with holy protection the virgins with your chastity, widows with constancy, married people with kindness, and sinners with patient hope" (Book I, Chapter 22). In the end, her milk is God's word and, through breastfeeding, she feeds his instructions to everyone.

Several of the prayers and the texts written by women in the seventeenth century reflect the same connection between childbearing and Christ's suffering on the cross. The pain in childbirth is connected to Eve's transgression and must be suffered humbly. Women have to bear their cross: "All our paines therefore that we suffer in this behalfe, are none other thing, but a woorthie crosse laid upon us by thy godlie ordinance, to which with hart & mind I humblie submit my selfe" (Bentley 96). Death becomes another important part in these texts, which are rather graphic in describing women's pain in childbirth: "How long Lord shall [I] be racked asunder, and mine inward parts be thus greevouslie tormented for my sins" (Bentley 115). Bentley's prayers portray Christ's dying on the cross and, at the same time, tell of the all-too-real possibility of women dying during childbirth. Many of the texts by these women depict the same tension between anxiety, fear of dying and accepting their 'curse' humbly.

Yet, suffering in the name of Christ is an important part of the *imitatio Christi*. In Luke 6:22-23, we read: "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven." Many of these women incorporate this notion of humble suffering within their texts as a way to legitimise themselves. Mechthild of Magdeburg, for instance, maintains: "Ah, dear Jesus, reward all those lovingly who have here poured out bitterness for me to drink, for they have made me rich in divine favors" (Book II, Chapter 24). The argument, here, is that the more these women are slandered or rebuked, the more divine favours they will obtain. Both Trapnel and Margery repeatedly stress their joy in suffering in the name of Christ. Trapnel states: "thus they spit forth venome against me; but it did me no hurt, because my Father made it work for good; my joy was not lessened, but increased" (*Report and Plea* 18). Meanwhile Margery claims: "For evyr the mor slawnder and repref that sche sufferyd, the mor sche incresyd in grace and devocyon" (44). The imitation of Christ and his suffering on the cross is another strategy used in these women's process to gain authority. Trapnel, for instance, clearly says that she is willing to take up the cross of Christ and suffer every day for him (*Report and Plea* 45), while Margery takes it even a step further by saying that the slander directed

against her is a type of crucifixion. In the dialogue between her and Christ, they even switch roles (189). By imitating Christ, these women not only gain authority, they also render all slander and criticism against them invalid, and even increase their grace. Their voice, along with their behaviour, which can be very subversive, is thus legitimised.

These visionary writers are very much involved in politics as the second chapter shows. Even though the cultural restrictions of their time were aimed at preventing these women from talking in public or becoming involved in politics, they managed to write about their political opinions and about contemporary issues. The intimate bond between Christ and these women naturally meant that there was no need for the intermediation of a priest, a fact that was, in itself, political in the Middle Ages. For instance, even when Julian repeatedly states that she believes in the Church's teachings, she goes against several core doctrines. According to her theology there is no sin and no hell, thereby creating a universal salvation theory. In her vision of God and the servant, Adam is Christ and Christ is Adam, and she clearly sees that, although humans are not able to refrain from sinning, through Christ's sacrifice they are redeemed from original sin as well as from all future sin.

Additionally, both Margery and Julian share in the preoccupation with language and the vernacular contemporary to their time, prefaced also in Mechthild of Magdeburg's exclamation: "Now my German fails me; I do not know Latin. If there is something of merit here, it is not my doing" (Book II, Chapter 3). Questioning the ability of language to express the word of God has a long-standing tradition. Questioning how we can express something that is unspeakable has preoccupied scholars for a long time, the implication being that God's transcendence cannot be expressed in fallible human language. However, for a long time, Latin was the accepted language for talking about theological issues because it was the language of the learned. Mechthild's apology that she does not know Latin and her uncertainty about the merit of what she is writing, although it comes directly from God, opens the discussions on the appropriateness of the vernacular to talk about God. At one point, she talks about how surprised Master Heinrich was about many of the words she used in the book, stating that: "Indeed, ever since I, sinful woman, have been required to write, it has been a matter of great distress to me in my heart that I am able to describe this authentic knowledge and these holy sublime contemplations to no one except through these words. They seem to me, compared to eternal truth, all too feeble" (Book V, Chapter 12). Even though the words come from God, Mechthild is writing them down in her

"feeble" language. It seems incredulous to her that the "authentic knowledge" she receives from God could be expressed in common language.

In England, at the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, the use of the vernacular in religious matters became extremely controversial. The notion that religious ideas could be written in the vernacular for everyone to read and to understand was seen as dangerous and subversive. Indeed, Arundel's *Constitutions*, which were published in 1409, were a direct response to Lollardy, as well as to the use of the vernacular in religious texts. The *Constitutions* stipulated that no one was allowed to preach in English, translate scripture into English or discuss "any thing concerning the catholicke fayth, contrary to the determinations of the church" (Foxe, 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 549 (525)) in a classroom or in private. Furthermore, Arundel's prohibiting to "translate any text of the Scripture into English [...] by way of a booke, libell, or treatise" (*Acts and Monuments* 1583 edition, Book 5, p. 549 (525)) expands the ban to all English texts that concern themselves with religious topics. But both Julian and Margery insisted on writing their texts for the unlearned and in Julian's words for "evyn Cristen." By writing in the vernacular their texts become subversive and political in their own right. In addition, Margery is acutely aware of her political surroundings, being accused of Lollardy several times in her *Book*. She is seen teaching, is accused of leading people astray with her talk and she is very mobile despite not being accompanied by her husband. This leads to her being questioned by several bishops and Archbishops about her subversive lifestyle.

The female visionary writers of the seventeenth century were equally, if not more, political in their writings. In the tumultuous period between the 1640s and the 1660s, many writers fought in writing for changes in both government and the Church. Katherine Chidley, for instance, writes both her *Justification* and *A New-Years-Gift* in answer to Thomas Edwards, a London preacher, who attacks numerous congregations in his writings. His *Gangraena*, in particular, is an 800-page catalogue listing all the failings of the different sects. Chidley's responses to Edwards align her with the Levellers, when she states, for instance, that "well-meaning Christians be the fittest on the earth to make Churches" (*Justification* 22) or when she puts forward the argument that no one has the right to rule over anybody else and that everybody is created equal. She also maintains that "Taylors, Felt-makers, Button-makers, Tent-makers, Shepherds, or Ploughmen" (*Justification* 23) should be able to become officers of the church without ordination and

she argues that the current Church government does not act according to scripture, but is "vaine and Popish" (*Justification* 23).

Furthermore, she also responds to Edwards' fear that men will lose control over women if the independent churches gain control. His fear was that if anyone could become an officer of the church, women could also become preachers and men's domination over them would cease. Chidley is well aware of the cultural restrictions against women when she justifies her writing at the beginning of the *Justification*. She calls herself weak, and explains that even though she is not able to write like a man in a scholarly way, she has the authority of scripture and the "plaine truth" (*Justification* 2). Yet, her point-for-point rebuttal of Edwards' arguments convincingly demonstrates her writerly skill. She uses scripture, engages with Edward's arguments thoroughly, and also uses humour to disarm his inflated self-image.

Anna Trapnel uses her writings to participate in the political landscape as well. As part of the Fifth Monarchist movement, she reflects the hopes, disappointments, and political views held by many people of her time. In *The Cry of a Stone*, she paints the rise and fall of Cromwell, describing him first as a new Gideon, a great military leader that is appointed by God to defeat the Scots. She even foresees the dissolution of parliament several days before it happens, which was greeted with excitement by the Fifth Monarchists. Cromwell was depicted as a second Moses destined to lead God's people and help prepare for the kingdom of Christ on earth. But no sooner did he take the title of Lord Protector, the Fifth Monarchist felt betrayed and Trapnel refers to him as the fourth kingdom destroying the earth before Christ arrives to rule it. Trapnel's writings were so impactful that they were considered a serious political threat.

The third chapter has also further shown that these prophetesses are aware of the cultural restrictions imposed on women at the time. In concentrating on the production of texts as well as on authorship and the voice that these women claim for themselves, female visionary writers make writing and authorship topics in their own right in their texts. Mechthild of Magdeburg, for instance, more than once mentions her sinfulness and weakness. Like all the other prophetesses in this study, she calls herself a "sinful, lazy creature" (Book II, Chapter 7) and a "worthless vessel" (Book II, Chapter 24). Nevertheless, she is commanded by God to write her book, even though she is a woman. Indeed, the first words in her book are: "One Should Receive This Book Eagerly, For it Is God Himself Who Speaks the Words" (Book I). Here, she clearly tells the reader that the words are not her own, but God's.

The following paragraph is worth quoting in full as it sums up the struggle that these women had in order to write and publish their books:

> I was warned against writing this book. People said: If one did not watch out, It could be burned. […] 'Because you are the one who told me to write it.' At once God revealed himself to my joyless soul, held this book in his right hand, and said: 'My dear One, do not be overly troubled. No one can burn the truth. […] The book is treefold and portrays me alone. The parchment that encloses it indicates my pure, white, just humanity that for your sake suffered death. The words symbolize my marvelous Godhead. It flows continuously Into your soul from my divine mouth. The sound of the words is a sign of my living spirit And through it achieves genuine truth.' […] 'Ah, Lord, if I were a learned religious man, And if you had performed this unique great miracle using him, You would receive everlasting honor for it. But how is one supposed to believe That you have built a golden house on filthy ooze' […] 'I always sought out the lowest, most insignificant, and most unknown place for them.' (Book II, Chapter 26)

The words are from God himself, and come from his mouth directly to Mechthild, who only writes them down. Moreover, the sound of the words symbolises the Holy Spirit, thereby making the whole book a trinity, which further substantiates the truth of everything that Mechthild writes. However, Mechthild is still worried about being chosen by God to write the book instead of a learned man. God's answer is that He has always used "the lowest, most insignificant" vessels for his truths. Mechthild, here, uses several topics that also feature in the texts of the other visionary writers in this study. As an unlearned woman, Julian, for instance, also calls attention to her being simple, while Margery, Trapnel and Wentworth are all, likewise, forced by God to write their books. God's use of the low and insignificant is also taken up by Trapnel who compares herself to a weak handmaid, evoking Joel 2:28-29 who states that God will use servants as well as handmaids to pour out his spirits. These women are, thus, made into prophets that must spread God's word to their fellow Christians.

The same holds true for Mechthild of Hackeborn. After her fellow nuns confess to having recorded her revelations, she is very sad and does not want the book to be published. Yet, God then tells her: "'All who search therein with faithfulness of heart, shall be made glad therein, and they who love Me shall grow more burning in My Love, and they who are sad shall find in it consola-

tion'" (152-153). Similarly, in answer to Gertrud the Great's pleas that she does not have to publish her writings, God says:

> When I chose Jeremiah to be my prophet, he thought he was incapable of speaking with knowledge or discretion, yet by the words of his mouth I reproved peoples and kings. In the same way, my intention to clarify certain things through you by the light of knowledge and truth shall not be frustrated, for no one can hinder what has been predestined from eternity [...]. By virtue of my divinity, those who read this book for my glory with upright faith, humble devotion, and devout gratitude, seeking edification, will obtain remission of their venial sins, the grace of spiritual consolation, and, what is more, they will be made more receptive to grace. (48)

Through God, then, these women are able to reprove people and kings. No one is able to refute anything that they say as it is the truth and all their words come directly from God. Furthermore, anyone that reads their books will find consolation, faith, grace and even forgiveness for their sins.

The question of authority is further complicated by the involvement of scribes. Margery's *Book* involves three different scribes who clearly lack the skills to write down her story in a clear and structured way. These different voices and discourses affect the text and the scribes' own scepticism towards Margery raises questions surrounding her authenticity. Trapnel's scribe is not a completely reliable source either. He states that he has "a slow and imperfect hand" (*The Cry of a Stone* 2) and, on several occasions, he is not able to write down what Trapnel is saying, because of the many people in the room. At one point, he even reveals that he has altered the last words in Trapnel's song since he was not able to hear them clearly (*The Cry of a Stone* 45). Thus, the report is incomplete and, in parts, inaccurate. However, in both Margery's and Trapnel's cases, the scribes also act as witnesses and supporters. There is clearly a collaborative relationship between the scribes and the visionaries. Margery makes it clear that she does not want to add anything she cannot remember or is not the truth. The same holds true for Trapnel. The scribe's account is more immediate and adds another layer of authorisation. He believes in her and clearly portrays her as a true prophet and he is able to anticipate her opponents' accusations and refutes them before they are even able to voice them.

Contrary to all self-effacement and the insistence that they are only vessels and mouthpieces of the Creator, these prophetesses manage to gain the authority that is denied them. They are able to write and publish their books

against all odds. They can voice their political inclinations, their feelings, hopes, and religious thinking. Once they have established their status as prophets, everything they say and do is legitimised by God. Margery's status as divinely inspired, for instance, is confirmed throughout the *Book*. She is shown as singularly loved by Christ and she is able to wish for anything that she wants from Him. She is able to choose her own confessor, promised to dance with the virgins in heaven despite having fourteen children, and is able to go on pilgrimages. She even bargains with Christ, trading her fasting for her chastity. Anna Trapnel, furthermore, travels the country not only spreading the word of God, but also defending her political thinking and opinions in the *Report and Plea*. She portrays herself as a true prophet who knows more than Nicodemus and is privy to God's secrets (*Report and Plea* 28.2). In addition, she makes clear that she is the one who decides what she tells the reader and what she keeps to herself. In Anne Wentworth's case, she not only shows herself to be a strong woman, she is also able to justify wanting to be separated from her husband. Even though her text is political and spreads the word of God, it is clearly also personal, talking about her and her husband in a very public setting. She ends her text "in full strength" (*True Account* 13), as she has learnt to argue and structure her texts through the whole process when her husband tried to destroy all of her writings. She refines her writing to a point where nobody can refute it anymore. All of these female visionary writers use the negative stereotypes directed at them, such as accusations of weakness and illness, to voice their concerns, beliefs, and autonomy in a very powerful way.

The similarities between these writers are astounding, especially as there is not much evidence that they were aware of one other. Even though Margery visited Julian, it does not mean that Margery was aware of her text. Alexandra Barrat, for instance, states: "there is no evidence that her text […] circulated widely, if at all, in the Middle Ages. […] [T]he earliest surviving complete manuscripts of [the Long Version] are as late as the seventeenth century" (241-42). Similarly, although there are brief descriptions of Margery's *Book* in the sixteenth century, her text was only rediscovered in the twentieth century and, thus, it is not clear whether it was known by seventeenth-century writers like Trapnel or Wentworth. Even though Mechthild's text was well known in England and was translated into Middle English (Barrat 245), there is no evidence that Margery or Julian knew her. Meanwhile, the female writers of the seventeenth century were probably not interested in these writers since they represented the Catholic faith most of them regarded as "vaine and Popish."

Yet, they all faced similar cultural restrictions and negative stereotypes, and they all used them to overcome these restrictions and to legitimise themselves and their writings as a unifying feature across space and time.

In this study, I have focused on English visionary writers in the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, and their respective cultural and historical contexts, and tried to give them enough space to make their voices heard. The scope of the study, however, has left several things unaddressed, which future studies could inspect further. The short glimpse into visionary writers from the Continent, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, shows that there are parallels between these visionaries and the ones analysed in this study. The mystics on the Continent, some of them very well known, would without a doubt make a fruitful object for further inquiry. Catherine of Siena, for instance, a medieval mystic and one of the few women the Roman Catholic Church granted the doctor title ("Introduction" 1), sparked a wide variety of interest. Apart from her visionary writings, she wrote letters and prayers, and participated in the politics of her time.

However, even though there are clear similarities between Catherine and the female visionary writers in this study, there are also differences. There seems to be no evidence that Catherine used the called-to-write topos that is so prominent in other female visionary writings. Catherine wrote letters to popes and kings and does not seem to struggle with the fact that she is writing a book as a woman. She is clearly orthodox, even though she is fighting for a reformed church and plays an evident part in the politics of the day. She is very mobile and travels to Florence and Rome and speaks with popes, kings, cardinals and nobles. The similarities, but also the differences, between her and the other visionaries, thus, would be a fruitful way to expand the present study. There are also many more medieval visionaries on the Continent that deserve to be researched. These include Bridget of Sweden, who was married and had children, advised popes and kings, and was a representative of the 'mixed life' discussed in chapter one, or Elizabeth of Hungary, Marguerite Porete, and Hildegard of Bingen. All of these visionaries could prove to be fruitful avenues for future studies and could provide a more thorough answer to the apparent similarities of topoi between Britain and the Continent whilst also highlighting differences.

The same holds true for the seventeenth century. The scope of the study meant that many more writings by women from that period remained untouched. A quick glance at Sarah Wight serves as a case in point. We learn about Sarah Wight in the *Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced by the Spirit of Grace,*

in an Empty Nothing Creature. Her account and the eyewitness testimonials contain many of the topoi that have been examined in this study. For instance, Wight recounts her severe illness marked by deep despair, suicide attempts, blindness, and dumbness. During this period, she begins to quote from scripture. She is believed to be dying but then she is suddenly healed. Again, for a prophet, a severe illness healed by God is a rite of passage. In her suffering, Sarah also links herself to Christ: "I desired nothing but a crucified Christ, and I have him; a crucified Christ, a naked Christ [...] I am sore all over; I can neither heare, nor see; I desired him so, and I have him so [...] wee should be contented to beare the Crosse" (22). Just like the medieval mystics, she tells us that by having Christ and being Christ, her eyes become opened and her ears can hear again. Moreover, she portrays herself as an empty vessel and shows the above mentioned self-effacement: "What am I? a poor, empty, disconsolate, sinfull, vaine, contemptible worme, a poor, wretched, empty, unthankfull, sinfull, vile, contemptible worme, to tread upon" (22). Yet, just like the other visionary writers, Sarah is able to legitimise herself and her status as a prophet, demonstrated by the many testimonials and the published text itself.

Although the focus of this study is clearly on visionary writings, there are, of course, other genres and texts by women in the seventeenth century worth investigating, which could be contrasted with these visionary accounts. Margaret Cavendish, for instance, writes poems, an autobiography, books on philosophy and atomic theory, as well as love stories, plays, and letters. Even though she does not use the call-to-write topos to legitimise her writings, she comments on the subordination of women and the many restrictions they have to face throughout her works. In *Natures Pictures* she explains: "since all Heroick Actions, Publick Employments, as well Civil as Military, and Eloquent Pleadings, are deni'd my Sex in this Age, I may be excused for writing so much; for that is the Reason I have run, more busily than industriously, upon every Subject I can think of" ("The Preface"). She also tells the reader that women are kept like birds and that education is seldom available to them, and "by an opinion, which I hope is but an erronious one in men, we are shut out of all power, and Authority" (*Philosophical and Physical Opinions* "To the Two Universities"). Her anger over the exclusion of women in almost all areas is palpable as the paragraph continues. Contrasting different writings and genres could reveal different kinds of authorisation to produce a complementary picture of women's writings in the seventeenth century.

Even though the scope of the present study has not allowed me to delve into a comparison of visionary writings with other genres, future studies could do well to devote more attention to how visionary writings of the Early Modern period relate to the concerns of early narrative texts. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, for instance, is very much concerned with questions of authorisation and the telling of truth. *Oroonoko* begins with the following opening lines:

> I do not pretend, in giving you the history of this royal slave, to entertain my reader [...] There being enough reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention. [...] I was myself an eyewitness to a grat part of what you will find here set down, an what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself, who gave us the whole transactions of his youth; and though I shall omit for brevity's sake a thousand little accidents of his life, which, however pleasant to us, whre history was scarce and adventures very rare, yet might prove tedious and heavy to my reader. (2183)

Although the story comes not directly from "the hero," Behn insists on the truth of the events, as she has been an eyewitness to most of what she is going to recount. Similarly to the scribes of Margery Kempe and Anna Trapnel, Behn lends authority to a story, which otherwise could be seen as fictitious and untrue. Both scribes observe the visionaries and their behaviour and are thus able to give authenticity to the story they are writing down for the reader. The eyewitness report described at the beginning of *Oronooko* serves the same purpose. However, even though the emphasis is on a true account that relates everything without any addition, it is clear that we are not told everything. There are things that are "omit[ed] for brevity's sake a thousand little accidents of his life," in the same way that Anna Trapnel tells the whole truth, but decides what messages from God she keeps to herself.

Many of the early narratives that Ian Watt, for instance, describes in his influential *Rise of the Novel* are concerned with "the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals" (27). As Barbara Foley states, this "pseudofactual imposture survived to the end of the century and beyond" (119). Also in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, the editor maintains that he "believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it" ("The Preface"). Furthermore, he states that "the story is told with modesty, with seriousness, and with a religious application of events to the uses to which wise men always apply them to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and

honour the wisdom of Providence" ("The Preface"). As we have seen in these visionary writings, the text is written down as an example of God's will and glory for everyone to witness. Martin J. Greif thus maintains that "a fundamental purpose of Defoe's novel is to set forth and magnify the great grace, love, and compassion of God the Father to the greatest sinner, who through Jesus Christ returns by an unfeigned, sincere faith to Him" (552). Even though Crusoe has divided critics in reading the text either as a kind of conversion narrative or the emergence of capitalism and colonialism, or a mixture of both,[3] it seems clear that *Robinson Crusoe,* just like many other early novels, plays with the claims of authority similar to those used in visionary texts.[4]

Although many of the female visionary writers disappeared after the monarchy was restored that does not mean an investigation of the later centuries would not be promising. Barbara Straumann, for instance, shows that female characters in novels from the mid-nineteenth century onwards gain a public voice as singers, actresses, speakers or preachers. Furthermore, she argues that "nineteenth-century novels about female performers can be seen to link the voices of their figures to issues of feminine agency and to negotiate questions concerning the social, cultural and political role of women in this period" (1). Her discussion of George Eliot's novel *Adam Bede* and Margaret Fuller's essay *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is very reminiscent of the issues raised in this study. Indeed, she maintains: "In Eliot's novel, the prophetic role empowers the Methodist preacher Dinah Morris to present herself as a passive vessel of a divine voice and, at the same time, speak with authority as she preaches the gospel and reprimands individual members of her congregation" (99). Dinah uses the same language as many of the visionary writers preceding her: "sometimes it seemed as if speech came to me without any will of my own, and words were given to me that came out as tears come, because our hearts are full and we can't help it" (qtd. in Straumann 111). Just as the other visionaries were called to write, Dinah

3 James O. Foster, for instance, claims that "Crusoe's story becomes one of the earliest fictional narratives in prose to present and explore the conflicts within a divided self that exists in a world where the inherited paradigms used to locate identity and to interpret experience are losing their explanatory adequacy" (183). Christopher Hill, for instance, states that "In many ways Robinson Crusoe, a book about life on a desert island, is a glorification of west European technology" ("Robinson Crusoe" 12).

4 "Documentation goes on the offensive in these texts, securing a terrain for the propositional value of fiction by decrying the mendacity of other discursive modes charged with the responsibility of telling an unmediated truth" (Foley 114).

speaks without a will of her own. She speaks God's word and, thus, has his authority.

Moreover, Dinah also comments on the weakness of her body: "I felt a great movement in my soul and trembled as if I was shaken by a strong spirit entering into my weak body [...] and I spoke the words that were given to me abundantly [...] That was the beginning of my preaching [...] and I've preached ever since" (qtd. in Straumann 112). Again, Dinah mentions that the words are given to her, rather than coming from herself. In addition, the weakness of her body makes it the perfect vessel and marks the beginning of her preaching. Dinah, here, uses the same language and the same negative epithets that the medieval and seventeenth-century visionary writers used, in order to present herself as a true prophet who has the authority to speak and write. However, in contrast to the other visionaries, she clearly states that she is preaching, which can be seen as a major shift. Most of the visionary writers discussed above were still very hesitant to call what they do preaching. Furthermore, Straumann's analysis of Fuller's essay shows this shift of confidence as well. She maintains: "Margaret Fuller [...] does not need to be authorized by the voice of God because she finds a divine source within herself" (99). This short glimpse of the nineteenth century has shown that many of the same issues can be detected, but that there are also differences that are worth investigating.

Even though my focus has been on the historical context as well as the individual voices of the prophetesses, rather than on theoretical aspects of feminism, the study still contributes to it. The study raises issues of subjectivity, voice, and the struggle faced by women in a patriarchal society to write and find their public voice, a struggle that continued throughout the nineteenth century. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf again raises the same issues. Echoing the angry outburst of Margaret Cavendish discussed above, Woolf states: "I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten. Such were the chief occupations that were open to women before 1918" (2111). Women were still excluded from most "Heroick Actions [and] Publick Employments" (Cavendish, *Natures Pictures* "The Preface") and "it is fairly evident that even in the nineteenth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist" (Woolf 2120).

In addition, Woolf also states: "But what I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century" (2115). My aim with this work has been to fill in this historical gap, to give women a voice where they have traditionally been

excluded from history books and from the literary canon. The present study contributes to the feminist approach of giving voice to lesser-known women and their texts, and shows that there were indeed texts by female authors before the eighteenth century. Even though the struggle of these women to write and to find a voice of their own is palpable, the study still shows that there is a proliferation of texts to investigate and that these women were able to legitimise their writings, their political participation, and their involvement in the public sphere. There is silence, along with silencing, but there are also some remarkable voices that indeed should still be heard today.

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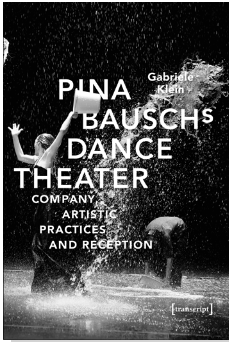

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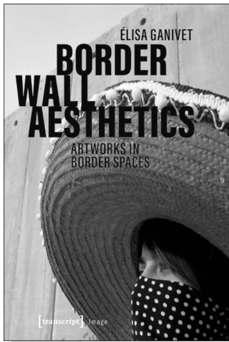

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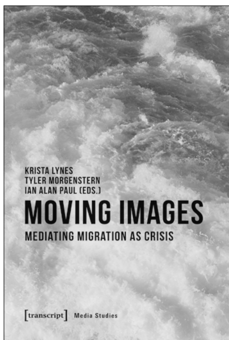

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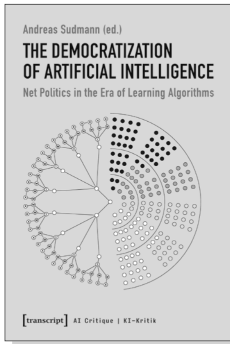

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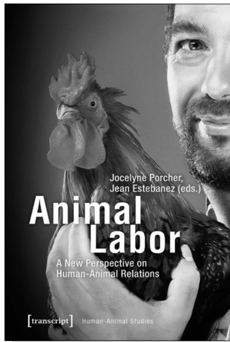

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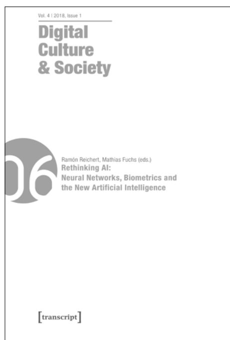

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