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THE DISCOURSE OF LOVE AND THE RHETORIC OF APOCALYPSE IN ANNA TRAPNEL'S FOLIO SONGS*

Matthew Prineas

And I went unto the angel, and said
unto him, Give me the little book.
And he said unto me, "Take it, and eat
it up; it shall make thy belly bitter,
but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as
honey." (Rev. 10:9, Authorized Ver-
sion)

Anna Trapnel has been called the "most celebrated" female visionary of Interregnum England. As the nearly one-thousand-page, untitled folio collection of her prophetic songs in the Bodleian library suggests, she may also rank among the more prolific.¹ Women contributed a small but significant portion of the twenty-thousand-plus pamphlets and books printed during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum—as Milton famously put it in 1644 (although not, per-

*I wish to thank the Faculty Research Committee at Idaho State University for funding my work in Oxford, and Brian Attebery, William Hamlin, and John Kijinski for reading early drafts of this essay.

¹B.S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men—A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 41. The massive Bodleian folio (shelfmark S.42.I.Th) suggests Trapnel was more prolific than has sometimes been assumed. Because the Folio does not appear in Wing's catalog, for instance, Hilda L. Smith concludes that Trapnel "was a less productive writer" than Eleanor Douglas, who authored "sixty-four mostly brief prophetic pieces." *Women and the Literature of the Seventeenth Century: an Annotated Bibliography Based on Wing's STC* (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1990), xiii. The first few sermons of the Folio volume also appear separately as *A Voice for the King of Saints and Nations; Or A testimony of the Spirit of the crucified Jesus, the risen and exalted King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the Lord Protector,...* (London, 1658), a title which C. Burrage speculates may have been affixed as well to the Bodleian folio; see "Anna Trapnel's Prophecies," *English Historical Review* 26 (1911): 534.

haps, in reference to female preachers), "disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, even to a rarity and admiration, things not before discoursed or written of."² Most religious writing by women in the mid-seventeenth-century is still quietly devotional in nature, but with the mystical or prophetic works of Eleanor Douglas, Jane Lead, Mary Carey, Sara Wight, Anna Trapnel, and others, the voices become bolder, more various, more insistent, less hesitant to engage in political or doctrinal controversy.³ These writers and their male sectarian apologists counter traditional Pauline strictures against women's speech with the authority of Joel: "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 handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28-9). To many of Trapnel's contemporaries it appeared the "Day of the Lord" had indeed arrived.⁴ Leading members of the Fifth Monarchist movement, who "thought highly of and paid great deference to" Anna Trapnel, trumpeted her prophecies as signs and harbingers; they also valued her as an effective, sensational, and possibly lucrative publicist for the movement's millenarian program of social and political reform.⁵ More generally, in other sects such as the Brownists, Inde-

²John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1957), 744.

³On the predominance of devotional works, see Patricia Crawford, "Women's Published Writings, 1600-1700" and "Provisional Checklist of Women's Published Writings 1600-1700," in *Women in English Society, 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 211-31, 232-64.

⁴The authority of Joel was typically reinforced by echoes in 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:28, and Acts 2:16-21. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Penguin, 1972), on prophecy as "almost a new profession" (72-3). Hill quotes Mary Cary, whose echo of Joel is typical of Trapnel as well: "The time is coming, [when] not only men but women shall prophesy...not only those who have university learning but those who have it not" (259).

⁵P.G. Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford UP, 1966), 147. Although Fifth Monarchism "never possessed a common programme," its ideas about political change followed certain regular patterns (Capp, 131). Trapnel's critique of the Army, Parliament, and Cromwell reiterates common Fifth Monarchist demands for social revolution, based on their belief that Rev. 20:1-5 predicted Christ's return as well as a thousand-year reign by the saints, a "Fifth Monarchy" which would follow the four empires of Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 8:20-2). Bryan Ball cautions, however, that Fifth Monarchism was "only one, and a very minor, expression of the contemporary eschatological urge." *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1975), 247-59. For the suggestion that Trapnel's prophecies may have "lucrative," see *Kissing the Rod: An*

pendents, Baptists, Familists, Quakers, Seekers, and Ranters, large numbers of women participated in church life, sometimes even securing positions of church leadership.⁶ It is during this brief window of tolerance and revolutionary energy that Trapnel's prophecies were able to attract the attention of "very many persons of all sorts and degrees" (*Cry*, 2), including several former and present members of Parliament.

In January of 1654, during the trial of Fifth Monarchist leader Vavasour Powell, she caused, by her own account, a sensation. For twelve days Trapnel lay in a death-like trance, refusing food, unable to respond to the voices of those around her, "[uttering] all in Prayer and Spiritual Songs" (*Cry*, 2). Skeptics and supporters as well as the merely curious gathered at an inn outside Whitehall to witness or dispute the authenticity of her groans, outcries, prayers, visions, and endless streams of apparently spontaneous, ecstatic songs.⁷ Taken

Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse, ed. Germain Greer, Susan Hastings, Jeslyn Medoff, and Melinda Sansone (New York: the Noonday Press, 1988), 179.

⁶J.C. Davis's book *Fear, Myth and History: the Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge UP, 1986) argues that the "Ranters" did not exist except as a sobriquet to be hurled at one's opponents. But see also Christopher Hill's response in *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 152–94. Anna Trapnel refers to her own earlier attraction and later rejection of "familistical ranting tenets." *The Cry of a Stone or a Relation of Something Spoken in Whitehall by Anna Trapnel...uttered in Prayers and Spiritual Songs, by an Inspiration extraordinary and full of wonder* (London, 1654), 10; hereafter cited as *Cry*. For representative discussions of women's participation in sectarian activity during the English revolution, see Ethyn Morgan Williams, "Women Preachers in the Civil War," *Journal of Modern History* 1 (1929): 651–69; Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," *Past and Present* 13 (1958): 46–7; and Rachel Trubowitz, "Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England," in *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution*, ed. James Holstun (London: F. Cass, 1992), 112–3. Other scholars have emphasized the participation of women in sectarian affairs well before 1640; see, for instance, Richard L. Greaves, "The Role of Women in Early English Nonconformity," *Church History* 52 (1983): 299–311; Claire Cross, "He-Goats Before the Flocks: A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches," *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972): 195–202; and Patrick Collinson, "The Role of Women in the English Reformation," *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972): 258–72.

⁷One B.T., eyewitness to the event at Whitehall, describes in a letter how he overcame his own initial skepticism of the prophetess. The physical manifestations of her trance strike him as more persuasive than anything she actually says; Trapnel is "so stified in hir Body that were she not warm one would thinke hir dead," leading him to the conclusion that "God in this dispensation doth teach his people, that when our Communion with him is enlarged, a very little of the Creature will satisfie us" (Burrage, 532).

down by an anonymous "relator," Trapnel's "spiritual songs" were rushed into print a few months later as *The Cry of a Stone*, which was followed in quick succession by the autobiographical *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea* (1654), and over the next few years by several other, mostly derivative, quarto pamphlets. Trapnel's final entry in Wing's catalog is a thick folio volume, printed most likely in 1659, which collects in one place sermon-like "songs" preached or sung in private gatherings from 1657 to 1658.⁸ In what follows, I argue that these later songs are more sophisticated in their use of Scripture, integrated in their internal argument and design, ambitious in their claims to authority, and sensuous in their representation of spiritual experience than are the songs of *Cry of a Stone* or of the various, minor pamphlets—many of these printed largely in response to the exigencies of an ongoing Fifth Monarchist propaganda war against the Cromwellian regime.

In the Folio, Trapnel, like a number of other sectarian writers in mid-seventeenth-century England, characterizes her songs as "prophetic epistles" and "psalms." Nigel Smith notes that sectarian pamphlets were frequently "written in the form of prophetic epistles after Paul, with the difference that the sectarian letters...are dated and the place where they were written is also noted."⁹ As my epigraph is meant in part to suggest, Trapnel and her contemporaries could draw upon the authority of Revelation to emphasize the very act of writing, of creating new sacred texts, as itself a sign and an instrument of millennialist transformation (Milton appears to imply something similar in the passage from *Aereopagitica* quoted earlier). As she answers her own earlier exhortations for "great Rols of writ, / Concerning Babylons fall" (*Cry*, 19), Trapnel becomes increasingly concerned with the authority and dissemination of her songs as *written* works (she will refer in the Folio to her "books" or "scrolls" or "records") as well as advertisements for or defenses of sensational public trances. Her earlier pamphlets, by contrast, appear more concerned with

⁸*A Legacy for the Saints* (London: T. Brewster, 1654) purports to be a series of letters Trapnel wrote to her congregation from a Bridewell prison. This volume is a fairly obvious paraphrase of *The Cry of a Stone*, as is the pamphlet *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-hall* (1654). For a detailed description of the contents of the Bodleian folio, see Bertram Dobbell, *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, viii, 319.

⁹Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in the English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 53.

merely documenting the authenticity and sensational aspects of her public performances.¹⁰

My essay advances a second, more speculative, notion. Over the course of her brief career, Trapnel incorporates an ever wider circle of biblical authorities into her songs. As the stakes of her claim to authorship and spiritual authority are raised, the songs appear to register an increasing sensitivity to the exegetical difficulties, even dangers, involved in linking her voice—the voice of a female preacher and prophet—with the primarily masculine authority of Psalms and the Book of Revelation. “Exegesis” is by no means as simple a term as some literary critics appear to think, and it is not my purpose here to prove that this is indeed Trapnel’s intent. While my essay is largely confined to the more modest work of reading and making sense of internal relationships among and within her various works, however, further studies might explore my tentative suggestion here that Trapnel, in recognizing and coping with the exegetical or at least rhetorical difficulties of maintaining an authoritative prophetic persona, tests the limits of Fifth Monarchist millennialist discourse as an appropriate and adequate idiom for the female preacher.¹¹ Bearing in mind the limits of her influence within Fifth Monarchist circles, the ultimate appropriation of her songs as fodder in the propaganda wars of the 1650s, her dependence upon what was by this time a commonplace apocalyptic rhetoric, and the sometimes disconcertingly awkward or crude syntax, meter, and diction of her verse, we might consider the extent to which Trapnel nonetheless constructs a prophetic identity whose claims to authority complicate (if they do not

¹⁰The Bodleian folio also differs from earlier pamphlets in its lack of editorial apparatus. Much of *Cry of a Stone* consists of prose testimonies (most likely by another hand) arguing for the authenticity and authority of her visions: Did she pause to search for a word or verse? Was there any sign that “what she delivered was from the strength of hir naturall memorie”? Was the twelve-day marathon of singing a rehearsed performance? Songs in *Cry of a Stone* appear only on pp. 2–3, 5–7, 10, 12–4, 43, 74–6; the rest of the work is prose, either paraphrasing Trapnel or justifying her work to the reader. The Folio by contrast is composed almost entirely of her sermon-songs with a bare minimum of editorial commentary.

¹¹The difficulties of the texts themselves, I believe, justify the preliminary nature of this thesis. As many literary scholars have pointed out—in tones ranging from despair to celebration—the writing of seventeenth-century sectarians can seem quite crude, semi-literate, strung together in ways which defy (or simply ignore) logic. As someone who has taught his share of freshman composition courses, I think *seem* is the operative term here. We need to keep an open mind about the unconventional logic of Trapnel’s texts; on the other hand, I take issue here with those critics who see the denial of logic itself as somehow liberatory, or indicative of a distinctly feminine idiom.

quite undermine) the "prophetic" as it would have been understood by her male, sectarian brethren. It is in seeking a specifically scriptural basis for her claims to prophetic authority that Trapnel may be qualifying her initial dependence on Fifth Monarchist apocalypticism, as well as her role within the movement's ultimately patriarchal hierarchy.

II

Revisionist historians of the conflict at mid-century have recently questioned assumptions (largely informed by the earlier work of Christopher Hill) about the extent to which Parliament in the mid-seventeenth century included the voices of an insurgent and disenfranchised public.¹² Although not of the revisionist persuasion, the historian Phyllis Mack has emphasized the limits of even the most radical politician's sympathy for women's prophecy and preaching; women's voices were valued by male, sectarian leaders, she argues, only insofar as they were "exclusively associated with qualities of intuition, enthusiasm...and emotional energy."¹³ Despite the weakening of traditional Pauline strictures in some quarters, any woman who would preach—let alone one who would publish her sermons in prestigious folio form—continued to face vehement opposition, even from within the most progressive of sects. Indeed as sectarian movements were institutionalized, such resistance became more strident.¹⁴ The new, albeit qualified valuation of women's prophetic speech did not, in any case, protect them against subsequent public backlash and persecution by government authorities, often including physical abuse or imprisonment.¹⁵

¹²The principle representative of the conservative, revisionist school is Conrad Russell. See, for instance, his *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–1642* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990); and *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). But see also Hill's comments on revisionism in the introduction to *A Nation of Change and Novelty*, 1–5.

¹³Phyllis Mack, "The Prophet and Her Audience: Gender and Knowledge in the World Turned Upside Down," in *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of C. Hill*, ed. Geoff Eley and William Hunt (London: Verso, 1988), 141–4, 147.

¹⁴Thomas, 53.

¹⁵See Mack, "The Prophet and Her Audience," 140, for a description of these abuses. Dorothy Ludlow suggests, however, that Trapnel's connections with influential leaders in the Fifth Monarchist movement may have ensured that she "had to be handled with discretion and moderation" and that she escaped harsher treatment (such as public

With some notable exceptions (Trapnel among them), women who wrote religious texts in the mid-seventeenth century tended as previously to confine themselves to matters of devotion rather than controversy. Prayer, pious exhortations, and conversion narratives were forms of speech for which women had in the past been accorded limited authority, but such acceptance did not usually extend to any woman who explicitly engaged in doctrinal controversy, questions of exegesis, or matters of church government—any woman, that is, who presumed to preach. Further complicating our understanding of how authorship was constructed in the texts of early modern women is a recognition that most of these writers would have exercised very little control over the final form or dissemination of their texts. The writings of mostly poor, sectarian women, in particular, present an acute instance of Evelyn Tribble's description of the printed page in the Renaissance as a "territory of contestation," a place where writers, editors, and printers struggled over "broad issues of textual authority and ownership."¹⁶ Trapnel's developing sense of authorship offers a revealing example of how gender as well as class shaped seventeenth-century struggles over issues of who owned the text, by whose authority it spoke, and for whom it spoke.

That Trapnel is able in part to circumvent the many obstacles to women's preaching owes much to good timing. Her anti-Cromwellian visions represented useful propaganda for Fifth Monarchist leaders during a critical period for the movement in the mid-1650s.¹⁷ Yet I would argue that it is precisely her response to the continuing and even increasing resistance to women's preaching which drives Trapnel's more interesting rhetorical efforts and encourages the development of a distinctive prophetic idiom. For the boundaries between preaching and prophesying were never entirely clear.¹⁸ Trapnel and other women exploit this uncertainty, finessing traditional restrictions by claiming to act as passive vessels or mouth-

flogging) regularly doled out to sectarian agitators considered subversive. "Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations: Sectarian Women in England, 1641–1700," in *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. Richard L. Greaves (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 98.

¹⁶Evelyn Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 2, 6.

¹⁷Trapnel saw the Protectorate as the manifestation of an antichrist "Fourth Monarchy." Ludlow, however, points out the limits of her role: "Even Anna Trapnel is best described as a publicist for the Fifth Monarchist cause rather than a leader" (121). See also Capp, 131–6.

¹⁸Thomas, 47.

pieces for the Spirit. They construct prophetic identities precisely by denying authorship, by claiming that their texts are not merely divinely inspired (as a male poet might assert), but divinely *imposed*: "thy Servant," Trapnel declares, "is made a voyce, a sound, it is a voyce within a voyce, anothers voyce, even thy voyce through her" (*Cry*, 42).¹⁹ Part of her claim to prophetic authority also seems to be the sheer volume and startling intensity of her verses. Most of the thousand pages of songs in the Bodleian folio appear to have been delivered on relatively few occasions.²⁰ She declares that her songs record "a *livelyer* voice then any Creatures voice, and a *livelyer* testimony against all that is against truth, beyond all the testimonies of all the saints, together with their ordinary measures of the Spirit" (italics mine).²¹ Trapnel's songs are thus marked by the divided rhetorical purposes of denying authorship (claiming to speak as a passive vessel and instrument for the Spirit) and asserting a distinctive prophetic identity (claiming for herself a legitimate voice within the Fifth Monarchist movement).

In a recent critique of Freud's account of identification, Diana Fuss describes how "at the very same time that identification sets into motion the complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that brings a sense of identity into being, it also immediately calls that identity into question."²² Trapnel's songs in the untitled Bodleian folio identify hers with prophetic voices drawn from the Song of Solomon and the Book of Revelation, Rosamond Rosenmeier has similarly described Anne Bradstreet's language in terms of her "heavy reliance on Canticles and Revelation," as well as her tendency to speak "as one who is echoing an ancient, usually male, often

¹⁹See Sue Wiseman's brief discussion of this strategy in Trapnel's *Cry of a Stone*: "Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse," in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 188.

²⁰The dates of her utterances are carefully recorded. From 1657: 11, 13, 14 October; 5, 12, 28, 30 November; and 1, 2, 3, 4, 14, 15, 26, 29, 30, 31 December. From 1658: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 21 March; 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 16, 17 April; 19, 20, 25, 26, 27 June; and 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 August.

²¹The Folio also records an instance of Trapnel's response to some "doubting Quakers" in the congregation: "Whiles this was uttered, the Quakers being present, spake but could not interrupt for with more power and swiftness, the Voice went on..." (Burrage, 527).

²²Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

biblical spokesman."²³ The combination was a conventional one (commentaries on Revelation frequently accompanied commentaries on Canticles), but Trapnel's peculiarly intense identification with the language and the female Beloved of the Song creates a voice, as she puts it, at once "strange" and "sweet." While relying on the traditional terms of allegorical interpretation as well as on contemporary millenarian appropriations of that tradition, her emphasis on the female Beloved tends to overshadow the figure of John, troubling conventional (and Fifth Monarchist) accounts of how biblical prophecy and revelation are perpetuated through a series of primarily male voices. Her personal identification with the biblical "Spouse" suggests a figure who is not merely a type of the church but also an historical character and a prophet in her own right. In the opening sermon of the Folio, for instance, she declares of John's Revelation:

O the sweet Spouse did show before,
 A pattern to thy song,
 And brought her Epistle to be
 A pattern unto John. (16)

In Trapnel's revisionary prophesy, the "Spouse" thus becomes not only an important prophetic voice, but even the *original* Old Testament prophet, the primary recipient of the Spirit, and her erotically charged encounter with Christ the direct source for all subsequent (and secondary) male prophets.

Trapnel seems to have been initially attracted to the Song as a scriptural analogue—or, to use Barbara Lewalski's term, a "correlative type"—for her own trial and imprisonment by authorities in Cornwall.²⁴ Much of *Report and Plea* is concerned, accordingly, with dramatizing a series of incidents in which she overcomes her fear of being unable to sing or speak before congregations or private gatherings. These fears culminate in an account of her trial: "the report was, that I would discover myself to be a witch when I came before the Justices, by having never a word to answer for myself; for it used to be so among the witches, they could not speak before Magistrates,

²³Rosamond Rosenmeier, "The Wounds Upon Bathsheba: Anne Bradstreet's Prophetic Art," in *Puritan Poets and Poetics* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1985), 133.

²⁴Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 142.

and so they said, it would be with me" (*Report and Plea*, 25).²⁵ The details of her trial recorded in *Report and Plea* subsequently become part of Trapnel's prophetic idiom, the dialogues of accusation and defiance reappearing several years later as dramatized confrontations in the songs of the Bodleian folio:

The Spouse comes forth with lovely song,
 And it was envyed,
 What note is this thou bringest forth,
 Was to her often said.
 What spirit is this; O it is strange,
 It differeth from other.
 They did against the song complaine.
 But she sings of her lover,
 And maketh unto him complaint,
 That they at her do strike. (*Voice*, sig. A3)²⁶

Trapnel alludes here to the complaint of the beloved, who is persecuted as she seeks her lover, who is "beaten," "wounded," and stripped of her mantle by the city watchmen (*Song of Solomon* 5:7). In the biblical *Song*, the female Beloved is in the next verse interrogated by a chorus of voices, the daughters of Jerusalem, who scornfully demand, "What is your beloved more than / another beloved, / that you thus adjure us?" (5:9) The female Beloved then defends herself with an ecstatic, sensual poem of praise for her lover. Likewise, Trapnel defies those who object to her song's "strangeness" with redoubled expressions of rapture. She may be responding to an urgent need in the mid-1650s for countering the opponents of Fifth Monarchism, or she may be registering her own vivid sense of the way political events impinge on recently won freedoms, by casting her persecution as the reenactment of scriptural drama and herself as the unjustly maligned prophet, a singer of truth in the wilderness of "false sounds." To borrow Calvin's metaphor, it is through the "spectacles" of Scripture that accusations of witchcraft, "carnal bold-

²⁵Demonic possession would have seemed a real possibility for many in Trapnel's audience. Phyllis Mack comments that "Women's capacity for ecstasy and receptivity was all the more significant—and potentially ominous—to those who viewed the universe as animate, full of spiritual forces, and peopled by demons who could and did invade the souls of susceptible humans." "Women as Prophets during the English Civil War," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1992): 25.

²⁶The same passage appears in the first sermon of the Folio.

ness," or vagrancy come rather to signal her possession of contrary values: piety, chastity, and devotion to a single Master.²⁷

Participating in the widespread popular attack on learned authority, Trapnel also responds in the Folio to "professors great" who predictably "despise these things" because they are upset over the propriety of her intimate similes: "dost thou, / Liken him to such things, / We cannot it allow" (Folio 2-3).²⁸ But she explains that like the love song of Solomon's bride, her visions of Christ constitute an "emblem sweet" and should be understood in their figurative or "spiritual" sense. Both the song and its singer are "sweet" because she "sets him rarely out," describing Christ's head, mouth, teeth, lips, temples, locks, and limbs in erotic terms drawn from Song of Songs:

I will describe him through out
Even from his head to feet,
His Temples, Head and bushy locks,
The spouse extolleth high,
She is taken with his looks so sweet...
She describeth his teeth and eyes,
His Temples that are rare,
His head, and mouth, and saith of him
That's nothing can compare.
His Temples they do shine
His locks like to Pomgrannet
They are most choice and fine. (Folio, 3)

Trapnel thus dramatizes both the ecstasies of and obstacles to singing. Her songs contain, like the final passages of Revelation, both a blessing and a curse. The intensity and sensual immediacy of passages of rapture alternate with the vehemence of her diatribes against that blind learning which seeks to intimidate with "deep speech gathered up and fetcht from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities"—a false learning which she charges has contrived to make God's true saints appear "Novices, and shallow fellowes, and frantique handmaids, not fit to stand to speak to the Learned wise Rabbies of these times" (*Report and Plea*, 54).

²⁷"Just as old or bleary-eyed men...can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds...clearly shows us the true God [in his works]." Quoted by Georgia Christopher, "In Arcadia, Calvin...A Study of Nature in Henry Vaughan," *Studies in Philology* 70, no. 4 (1973): 181.

²⁸Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 93.

III

An unmarried woman travelling alone or in the company of Fifth Monarchist supporters was vulnerable to slander. In her *Report and Plea*,²⁹ Trapnel thus appropriates the biblical discourse of love not only to ground her visions in scriptural authority, but also to deflect charges of “carnal boldness”—to defend, that is, against the tendency of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators to associate verbal assertiveness in women with concupiscence. She struggles specifically against the suggestion that the intensity of her raptures stems from a physiological or possibly a sexual disorder—a charge made against sectarian preaching in general, but made with particular aggression when the target also happened to be a woman. It is significant, in this context, that Trapnel’s defense in both *Report and Plea* and in the Bodleian folio, like the apologies of many other women writers, dwells almost obsessively on assurances of the author’s chastity. Fairly representative, for instance, is a collection of devotional poems entitled *Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s-Offering* (1652), written by a contemporary of Trapnel’s who identifies herself on the title-page simply as “a lady,” or “Eliza.” The book’s anonymity, its references to the writer’s chastity, and its tendency to downplay religious controversy suggest how obstacles to women’s speech in early modern England were experienced not as disparate religious strictures and prejudices but as manifestations of what must have seemed a ubiquitous social stigma.³⁰

But here again Trapnel and other women writers carved out new rhetorical space for themselves. For the discourse of chastity in early modern England proved no less vexed (or blessed) by contradictions than had the scriptural injunction against women’s speech. Ostensibly the antithesis of concupiscence, chastity was constructed by early

²⁹If authorities were so worried by the spectre of “masterless men,” speculates Mack, then the “masterless, untethered female prophet” may have represented the “ultimate threat” (“The Prophet and Her Audience,” 142). Something of the tenor of Trapnel’s spirited defense is indicated by the book’s subtitle: *Whereto is annexed A Defiance Against all the reproachful, vile, horrid, abusive, and scandalous reports, raised out of the bottomless pit against her...*

³⁰Joseph Frank calls the poems by “Eliza” “a sort of poor man’s George Herbert,” and he classes the volume as “non-political pious.” *Hobbled Pegasus: a Descriptive Bibliography of Minor English Poetry, 1641–1660* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 22.

modern writers in England as a virtue, in the words of Nancy Weitz Miller, "desired to the point of eroticization"; thus the discourse of chastity could serve as a vehicle for the expression of an otherwise stigmatized sexuality.³¹ Such a strategy seems particularly relevant for our interpretation of Trapnel if it is also true, as John Rogers has argued, that a "new, or revitalized, Protestant affirmation of sustained sexual abstinence"³² develops during the early years of the English Revolution. While admitting that the seventeenth century saw the ultimate ascent of a Puritan ideal of temperance in marriage over a medieval, Catholic virtue of absolute virginity, Rogers denies that this shift necessarily took the form of a "steady march"; he presents intriguing evidence to the contrary of a countercultural revival of the older ideal of chastity in the 1640s.³³

It is therefore striking that during this same period, the eschatological pairing of Song of Songs and Revelation occurs more frequently and vividly in texts written by sectarian women than by their male counterparts, a preference which Catherine Smith argues reflects the experience by sectarian women of a "different redemption."³⁴ Whether or not her assertion is correct, the erotic idiom of Song of Songs—with its remarkable capacity for dissolving boundaries between man and woman, natural world and human, or self and other—offers peculiar advantages to any writer who must deny agency in order to gain authority, to any writer whose expressions of desire must at the same time deflect charges of "carnality," to any writer who must couch such expressions in assertions of chastity and purity. At the same time that it is intimate and personal, the Song of Solomon presents a metaphorical field broad enough for the prophetess who would address, as Trapnel does, "Govenors, Army, Churches, Ministry, Universities: and the whole Nation" (*Cry*, frontispiece).

Francis Landy's description of the astonishing figurative range of the Song of Songs suggests why this biblical text might have been so

³¹My thanks to Nancy Weitz Miller, whose work on eroticization is in progress and will appear in her book *Rape and the Rhetoric of Female Chastity in Early Modern England*.

³²John Rogers, "The Enclosure of Virginity: the Poetics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Revolution," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. R. Burt and J. Archer (Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1994), 233.

³³Rogers, "The Enclosure of Virginity", 229–50, esp. 233.

³⁴Catherine Smith, "Jane Lead's Wisdom: Women and Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature* (Rutherford and London: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1984), 56.

attractive for a female prophet: "The discourse of love, of which the Song is a distillation, is created not only by the lovers, is not only the basis of a community predicated on love, first developing from the family, the mother-child relationship, and then the society of lovers to which the Song appeals, but also draws into its orbit things, plants, animals, geography."³⁵ In Landy's description, the Song is also a text whose authority is predicated on the denial of self. The voice in the Song expresses an aggregate identity: "the lovers are two persons, with presumably their own separate biographies, but the poem is their composite speech, expressing a common personality to which they both contribute, to which each is opened up, and which is experienced in relation to the other."³⁶ Trapnel finds in the biblical discourse of love a palpably immediate, intimate expression of an apocalyptic and powerful virginity.

Pragmatically, the Song offers Trapnel a rhetorical means for reconciling expressions of desire ("his fruit is sweet to my taste," Song of Solomon 2:3 New Jerusalem Bible) or erotic plentitude ("Fountain of the garden / well of living water," 4:15) with assertions of purity and chastity ("a garden enclosed / a sealed fountain," 4:12). She frequently describes the purity of the infant Christ, of the Virgin, and of the Church of the Elect, but just as often she emphasizes the fruitfulness of Mary's "virgin-womb":

This Body the Father sent out
It was prepared of old,
And came forth in sweet Virgin-state,
Though laid in manger mold.
This prepared Body, dear God,
It was compleat and choice.
And thou didst send it forth in time
With a choice Virgin-voice. (Folio, 346)

Trapnel identifies her song and her voice (which is not her own, she reminds us) with the Virgin Birth; perhaps we are to infer a parallel between her pouring forth of the Word with Mary's giving birth to it. The language of the Song of Solomon provides her with a medium for expressing her sense of how the permeability *and* the purity or integrity of self affects one's efficacy as a vessel or medium for God's Word, for Christ. Alimentary metaphors underline the unification of

³⁵Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987), 305.

³⁶*Ibid.*

intimate connection with psychic and sexual inviolability: "O let this enter in your souls, / Not in your head and brain, / But in your inward vital parts, / Even your hearts and veins" (Folio, 9). It is through the sensuous language of the biblical Song that Trapnel directs the reception of her prophecies. The listener should experience her words as a physical sensation: if his head previously ached with the unlawful proliferation of empty thoughts, he should now feel the presence of the Spirit in his "inward parts." A circulatory system balanced between heat and sobriety, like the prophet's own "bold meekness," models the ideal congregation as well as an ideal (prophetic) language; in such a congregation, body, or language, the free and uniform flow of sense will not be hindered by slander or rhetorical distortion.

It is also worth noting in this context the relatively pacifistic tone of the Bodleian folio, especially those sermons drawing heavily from the Song of Songs. In her later songs, despite a continuing criticism of the Cromwellian regime, Trapnel is less overtly warlike than, for example, Eleanor Douglas or Mary Cary. Trapnel had earlier advised the saints that "though he [Cromwell] doth repulse them, yet let them tell him of his sins, and tell him with humility, and with tears; not as those deluded spirits, that go running about the streets, and say, we have such Visions and Revelations, who come out with their great speeches of vengeance, and judgement, and plagues" (*Cry*, 22). I hear in this preference for the discourse of love what may seem a slight distancing from the more aggressive strains of millennialist preaching, from the rhetoric of retribution and destruction which Megan Matchinske has characterized as the "holy hatred" of sectarian writers in the 1640s.³⁷

IV

Trapnel's earliest published songs, however, closely echo Fifth Monarchist language and ideas, dramatizing not only the movement's belief in the imminence of Christ's Second Coming, but also its more singular notions about the economic and political details of a thousand-year reign by the saints. All her songs appropriate Revelation's rhetoric of crisis, the urgent rhythms of a text which insists on itself

³⁷Matchinske, 349.

as the final and definitive Book of Scripture, subsuming all that has been and will be written:

For I testifie unto every man that heareth the wordes of the prophesie of this booke, if any man shall adde unto these things, God shall adde unto him the plagues, that are written in this book.

And if any man shall take away from the wordes of the booke of this prophesie, God shall take away his part out of the booke of life, and out of the holy citie, and from the things which are written in this booke. (Rev. 22:18)

Attempts to define "apocalypse" as a genre have been diverse and a matter of some controversy.³⁸ A useful survey of such attempts in the journal *Semeia* develops the collective definition of apocalypse as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality...."³⁹ By this measure, Trapnel's visions—unlike, say, the otherworldly visions of Jane Lead—do not appear to be "apocalyptic." But there is an additional quality of apocalypse which David Hellholm has suggested as an emendation to the *Semeia* definition of apocalypse: "intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority."⁴⁰ In the passage from Revelation I have quoted, John's circular promise and warning announces the totality and finality of his vision. He associates the conflicts and struggles described in that vision with the ultimate fate of his own text at the hands of future interpreters. Through recurring images of scrolls and writing, Revelation dramatizes itself as forever in the process of being written ("Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter," Rev. 1:19), forever in the present tense, never declining into the condition of secondary or derivative text. Trapnel's text is also insistently present tense, and she is equally vigilant in preempting false or

³⁸See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (New York: Oxford UP, 1957), xiv; Bernard McGinn, introduction to *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, ed. Marjorie Reeves (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 4–5; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 2–3; and C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1982), 9–22.

³⁹John J. Collins "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9. The *Semeia* definition is also quoted in Bernard McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism: The Ongoing Debate," in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, ed. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1984), 4.

⁴⁰Quoted in Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 31.

malicious interpretations: "The Lord..[has] 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" (*Report and Plea*, 54). In Trapnel's account, the process—if I can call it that—of apocalypse becomes an endless warfare against the corruptors of language.

Bernard McGinn has pointed as well to the "bookish" nature of apocalyptic writing. It is a "scribal phenomenon," foregrounding the process of textual mediation and dissemination, the ways in which revelation is repeatedly rewritten in tablets and books.⁴¹ The writerly aspects of Revelation have also been explored (and parodied) by Jacques Derrida, who characterizes this biblical text as a "scene of writing."⁴² Throughout Trapnel's folio, there appear various images of an idealized book, alternately the "Lambs book of life" (144), the "choice book" that John ingests; the Book of Revelation itself; the "report that David doth / Of the beloved bring" (926), or the Book of Psalms; the "book" composed by the Spouse, or Song of Solomon; as well as Trapnel's own book of spiritual songs, her Folio collection.⁴³ It is not clear in Trapnel's texts whether she meant for us to consider these as identical books or as manifestations of a single, seamless, idealized Book, but their association has the effect, in any case, of registering Trapnel's deepening concern for the fate of her book of songs *as a book*—not just as the record of "something spoken" (as *Cry of a Stone* suggests) but as a prophetic vehicle in its own right:

Now then friends treasure up these notes,
Lay them up in your breast,
That you may know the difference,
Between false visions and the best.⁴⁴

⁴¹Bernard McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism," 5.

⁴²Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," *Semeia* 23 (1982): 63–5. See also Derrida's early articles on Edmond Jabes, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 64–78, 294–300.

⁴³There was a great deal of speculation about what might lie inside the Book that John receives, the language (if any) in which this text was written. See Joseph Wittreich, *Visionary Poetics: Milton's Tradition and his Legacy* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1979), 20–1.

⁴⁴These words, either Trapnel's or perhaps the "reporter's," appear at the conclusion of the quarto *Voice for the King of Saints and Nations*.

Here Trapnel represents hers as a book for the benefit of "those in the Country," who cannot come to London to witness her prophecies but through the written word "might partake of it in some Kind."⁴⁵ Throughout the Folio, and particularly in the final sermons, she emphasizes the activity of recording: "Thou sendest down thy Spirit to / Record, and again bring / The things that we have heard this week" (942). Sometimes the purpose expressed is a humble one, of memory: "And therefore they are so willing to / Bring a record sometimes / In tenderness, lest that they should / Let things slip out of their minds" (942). At more exalted moments she links the Song of Solomon, her own "report," the mysterious sweet book which the angel (or the "Spouse") brings to John, and the Psalms of David: "Much sweeter than the honeycomb, / So doth the Psalmist sing of him: / And this is the report that David doth / Of the beloved bring" (926).

The songs of the Bodleian folio also imitate what M.H. Abrams calls the "recursive procedures" of apocalyptic literature, and Revelation in particular—this text's capacity for "[representing] the present and the future by replicating or alluding to passages in earlier biblical texts, especially in Genesis, Exodus, the Old Testament prophets, and the apocalyptic visions in Daniel."⁴⁶ One of the most complex and, in Abrams's terms, apocalyptic tropes in the Bodleian folio, for instance, is Trapnel's representation of Jerusalem as the antitype of the "Spouse." Jerusalem becomes both singer and object of praise, both subject and object of the prophet's ravished gaze: "My heart is took with thee, / Jerusalem, O thy bright look, / Greatly doth ravish me" (Folio, 29). Open and yet inviolable, Jerusalem unites acceptance with refusal, humility with boldness. Unlike the Jerusalem or Zion of innumerable preachers of this period, however, Trapnel's figure is closely identified not just with the nation of England but with the prophetess herself:⁴⁷

Jerusalem O Thou art she,
That art the wedded wife,

⁴⁵Quoted by Burrage, 534.

⁴⁶M. H. Abrams, "Apocalypse: Theme and Variations," in Patrides and Wittreich, 343.

⁴⁷Boyd Berry, *Process of Speech: Puritan Religious Writing and Paradise Lost* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 9. In *Cry of a Stone*, Trapnel had described "a glorious vision of the New Jerusalem, which melted me into rivers of tears, that I shrunk down in the room; and cryed out in my heart, Lord, what is this?" The answer came that she had had a revelation "of the glorious state of whole Sion, in the reign of Lord Jesus, in the midst of them, and of it thou shalt have more visions hereafter."

And thou shalt sit down with him that,
 To thee will bring sharp knife,
 To cut all thy forskins then,
 And circumcise thy heart,
 For thou shalt then most willing be,
 And he will take thy part.
 O thou shalt then declare high things,
 And others shall them know,
 And be refreshed with those things,
 That from thy heart doth flow. (Folio, 28)

Jerusalem's story also turns out to be Trapnel's tale, writ large. The terms of their struggle against worldly authority recall the account in *Report and Plea* of Trapnel's confrontation with the Cornish magistrates. In their overlapping narratives of beset and broken selfhood, prophet and nation are scattered, defiled, fragmented. Jerusalem's walls are "broken and so down," "scattered in thy bones," "soyled in every place," "gone, / Into remote parts far"; and Trapnel is likewise "hissed at by all," talked against and despised (Folio, 25). Prophet and nation, however, defy their persecutors with a "high loud praying voice." Both speak for those Trapnel terms "poore ones"; as Jerusalem is the beacon of all other nations, calling to "Heathenish Indians" and "those poor black ones," so is Trapnel a voice within England for its saints, soldiers, merchants, and handmaids.⁴⁸

Yet this odd juxtaposition of "wedded wife" with "all thy forskins," the awkward attempt here and elsewhere to reconcile singular and plural senses of prophet and nation, suggests how the songs of the Folio involve themselves in new exegetical difficulties. Although Nigel Smith argues that sectarian preaching and prophesying "often included an inspired outpouring or 'groaning' which, though dense with 'Scripture language,' was an original utterance, somewhat divorced from a close exegetical relationship with any biblical passage,"⁴⁹ we should not dismiss the possibility (as some of their anti-Puritan contemporaries did) that Trapnel and other female preachers might have recognized exegetical problems, problems with their

⁴⁸The title "Cry of a Stone" accordingly alludes to Habakkuk 2: 11-2: "For the Stone will cry out from the wall, / and the beam from the woodwork respond / Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and founds a city on iniquity." For another possible source in the Book of Esdras, see Wiseman, 188. For a brief discussion of gender and race in the texts of early modern women writers (including a brief biography) see Travitsky and Seeff, 284-5.

⁴⁹Smith, 53.

contradictory uses of Scripture, even if they did not possess the tools or the learning to unravel those difficulties. To overemphasize the supposedly non-rational and extra-scriptural elements of women's prophetic speech is to risk reproducing the condescension of their contemporary critics.⁵⁰

Ernst Curtius has commented that "Christ is the only god whom antique art represents with a book-scroll. Not only at its first appearance but also throughout its entire period, Christianity kept producing new sacred writings—documents of the faith such as gospels, letters of apostles, apocalypses; acts of martyrs; lives of saints; liturgical books."⁵¹ I have described some of the ways Trapnel appropriates the ecstatic, erotic verse of Song of Songs and, in her later songs, represents her own printed prophecies as new sacred writings; this concern for a continuity of prophetic inspiration, Trapnel's quite rational interest in internal and scriptural consistency, calls into question those readings of seventeenth-century female preachers which overemphasize their irrational and downplay their rhetorical and logical aspects. I have more tentatively suggested that Trapnel's construction of prophetic authority responds to the particular obstacles she faced as a female preacher in a sympathetic, but still male-dominated sectarian movement. Yet Curtius's comments suggest another, if not more fundamental, kind of conflict. Two radically different texts inhabit Trapnel's prophetic songs: whereas Song of Songs offers a language of repose (its eroticized images of a garden, of a place of intimate encounter), from John's Revelation she derives, rather, the totalizing dream of an integrated and inviolable text that consumes all competing texts and finally reality itself ("the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up," Rev. 12:14). While Trapnel evokes these two biblical texts in part because it was conventional to do so, the difficulties she ultimately faced in constructing from these sources a single prophetic idiom remind us that the absorption of

⁵⁰Typical is the sneering reference by the author of *Tub Preachers Overturm'd*:

And that her zeal, piety, and knowledge,
 Surpassed the gravest student in the College
 Who strive their human learning to advance;
 She with her Bible and a Concordance
 Could preach nine times a week morning and night
 Such revelation had she from the New Light.

Quoted by Williams, "Women Preachers," 56.

⁵¹Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 310.

what Christians call the Old Testament has never been a given, but rather the endless labor of a long tradition of exegesis. Conversely, her struggle to find a language appropriate to the female prophet also reminds us that this cultural work has not been the sole provenance of a few, elite exegetes, but rather the labor of many and diversely motivated hands.

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