BY WHAT AUTHORITY?: WOMEN WRITING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

"BY WHAT AUTHORITY?": WOMEN WRITING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

by

Sylvia Lorraine Bowerbank, B. A., B. Ed., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Sylvia Lorraine Bowerbank, B. A. (McMaster University)

B. Ed. (University of Toronto)

M. A. (Simon Fraser University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor W. G. Roebuck

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TO
GEORGE LANDON GRINNELL
1962-1984

AND
ANDREW PREBLE GRINNELL
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ABSTRACT:

This thesis attempts to reconcile a feminist with a contextualist approach. It enquires into the historical origins of the emergence of women as writers in the seventeenth century. At the same time, it places this women's movement in the context of a profoundly complex revolution in thought, thereby discovering that women's intellectual contributions to the destruction of the hierarchical world view and to the search for new, just alternatives were as diverse and as problematic as men's were.

The women who wrote in the seventeenth century were all preoccupied, implicitly or explicitly, with the question: By what authority do I cast off the traditional silence of women and dare to speak out? They gave different answers.

Part One uses the lives of Gertrude More and Mary Ward to illustrate the subtle ways in which the Catholic Church's concept of grace required the submission of women despite their conflicting inner voices.

In contrast, Part Two explores the challenge of the seventeenth-century chariasmatic movement to the traditional

notion of grace. The radical female Protestants made a significant step towards modern feminism both because they appealed to their own experience as a source for truth and because they initiated an autobiographical form which dramatizes the convinced woman in revolt against patriarchal structures.

Part Three demonstrates that, despite the decline in the authority of the prophet's experience which came with the triumph of the perspective and methods of science, Jane Lead's writings continued a mystical counter-tradition which would nourish the Romantic alternative to scientific reductionism.

Part IV analyzes the views of Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn who argued the natural right of a woman to write. Both challenged neoclassical aesthetic ideals--Cavendish by writing to delight herself, Behn by writing to delight her audience.

Part V concludes by contrasting the approaches of two women who appealed to the authority of rational argument to justify their views. Mary Astell emerges as an early theorist for enlightenment feminism, Anne Conway as a theorist for holistic feminism.

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INTRODUCTION:

> Vain man is apt to think we were merely intended for the world's propagation, and to keep its human inhabitants sweet and clean, but, by their leaves, had we the same literature, he would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies.
>
> Hannah Woolley, The Gentlewoman's Companion (1675)

In 1982, when Germaine Greer launched the journal Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, she observed that, despite major advances in women's studies and feminist criticism, "the vast mass of female literary activity remains scrambled and disfigured." Greer invited scholars to "reconstitute the literary landscape as composed of women as well as men."[1] There exist three general studies which contribute significantly to the unscrambling of the experience of seventeenth-century women writers. In 1920, when Myra Reynolds published The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760, she saw her work as pioneering survey of the little

known information on the subject. Ignoring modern critical values, she included any woman whose intellectual interests and pursuits seem to demand "a new freedom of self-expression, new training and new opportunities for women". Moreover, she did not apologize for the book's "single comparatively barren point of view", presenting each learned woman "as an exponent of new ideals for women or as marking by her own achievements new feminine possibilities in the arts, in learning , or in letters." She left it to other scholars to reform and enrich the history of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with detailed studies of the lives and writings of women.[2]

Hilda Smith's Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists (1982), a reworking of her 1975 PhD thesis, Feminism in the Seventeenth Century, is an impressive historical synthesis linking twelve "feminist" defenders of their sex in a movement "to write critically about their exclusion from educational institutions and positions of importance within English society."[3] Smith sees emerging feminism as part of the growth and triumph of rationalist and scientific thinking. Of these women, she

insists, "their love of reason must never be viewed as separate from an understanding of their feminism."[4] This approach works well with writers such as Mary Astell and Mary Chudleigh, but becomes problematic when applied to Margaret Fell, who appealed to the authority of the Inner Spirit, or to Margaret Cavendish, who defied scientific method and appealed to the authority of her fancy. As Smith admits, writers such as Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn do not fit into her analysis but their "literary success influenced the development of feminism."[5]

In The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-century England (1984), Antonia Fraser avoids imposing a feminist bias except that she writes with "a sense of justice and sympathy" for her subject.[6] Because The Weaker Vessel is an informative, entertaining and rich tapestry recapturing the diverse, complex, often contradictory experiences of the women of the period, it promises to rescue the lives of these women from oblivion more effectively than any other approach taken so far. As well, because it is narrative, rather than analytical, history, it lets the anecdotes speak for themselves to show that in the seventeenth century

there was no real change in "the relative standing of the sexes in respect to each other."[7]

This thesis partakes in the feminist attempt to rediscover and to rehabilitate women's literary history. It is part of gynocentric criticism which is characterized by Elaine Showalter as "a deliberate strategic foregrounding of the continuities and interrelations of a women's literary history."[8] At the same time, I try to avoid the excesses of "whig history" by placing the writings of these women in the context of the literary and intellectual concerns of their contemporaries. Our recovery of the literary legacy of our foremothers may not merely reinforce our present understanding but may lead us to recreate our vision of the past and of the future.

Despite an obvious range of style, social status and outlook, the women who are the subject of this thesis share a common, if I may call it "feminist," ground. Denied the authority of office, they began to appeal to the authority of their own experience. They dared to speak out against the silence imposed by tradition and Christian ideology. They dared to write--thereby

subverting and challenging the hierarchical authority of king, priest, father or learned critic. From their different perspectives, they began--and twentieth-century feminists continue--to articulate a just answer to the question the high priests asked when Jesus usurped their prerogatives: "By what authority doest thou these Things?"[9]

NOTES:

[1]Germaine Greer, "The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature: What We Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, 1 #1 (Spring, 1982), 13, 7.

[2]Myra Reynolds, The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760, 1st pub. 1920 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 425-426.

[3]Hilda Smith, Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 1.

[4]Hilda Smith, Feminism in Seventeenth-Century England, (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975), p. 119.

[5]Smith, Reason's Disciples, p. 1.

[6]Antonia Fraser, The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in the Seventeenth Century (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p. xii.

[7]Fraser, p. 465.

[8]Elaine Showalter, "Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 3 #1/2 (Spring/Fall, 1984), 39.

[9]Mark 11:28 [King James version].

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PART ONE:

BACKGROUND: AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE IN THE LIVES OF TWO CATHOLIC WOMEN

Chapter one: "The Galloping Nun": Grace and Place in the Jesuit-Thomistic World View

> Whoever wishes to be a soldier of God. . .[should] strive with all his strength to attain to this goal which God has set before him, each one, however, according to the grace given him by the Holy Spirit and the particular grade of his vocation, lest anyone by chance yield to zeal but not with knowledge. The decision about the particular grade of each one and the entire selection and distribution of duties shall be in the hands of the <u>prepositus</u> or prelate chosen by us so that the appropriate order necessary in every well-organized community may be preserved.
>
> Ignatius Loyola, "The First Sketch of the Institute of the Society of Jesus"

On the feast of St. Athanasius, May 2, 1608, Mary Ward (1585-1645), a novice at the English convent for Poor Clares at

Gravelines, was making cords of St. Francis for the use of the religious and, at the same time, reciting litanies to the Virgin so that "whosever should wear that cord might never commit mortal sin." Because Ward believed that the way to perfection lay in the practice of austerity and retirement, she had found joy and consolation in the strict convent life which she describes in this passage from her autobiography:

> they never eat meat even when ill, their food is poor in quality, and they never eat more than once a day, except on the day of the Nativity of our Lord. They sleep on straw mattresses; instead of linen, rough coarse cloth is worn; what may be called continual silence is kept; they rise at midnight, say the long Divine Office, and always make an hour of mental prayer after matins before returning to rest. For my part, during the whole of that year I rarely slept more than two hours during the night, from the hunger I felt.[1]

Suddenly, on that day, she was overcome by a violent divine force that told her she was not to be one of the Order of St. Clare. After much inner struggle and consultation with her mother superior and her spiritual advisor, she obeyed, as she stresses, "against my will."[2] After returning to England to recruit seven companions, in 1609 Ward set up a boarding school in St. Omer for daughters of English Catholics in exile and waited for God to specify the nature of her

vocation. In 1611, she was commanded in a vision to "Take the same [vow] of the Society," and understood that she was to found a female Society of Jesus, "the same both in matter and manner, that only excepted which God by diversity of sex hath prohibited."[3] Such a mission put Ward into a lifelong conflict with Church policy which, since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), had stressed the rule of enclosure for the female religious even while advocating a more active life for the male. The English clergymen were particularly zealous in their attempts to restrain and to repress a sisterhood which they contemptuously called "the galloping nuns." All of Ward's writings--the autobiographical fragments, her letters to the pope and other superiors, and her instructions to her companions--struggle with the contradiction between the two obediences: on the one hand, obedience to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit urging her to found communities of active nuns in the cities of Europe without so much as "two stakes put in cross in form of enclosure," and on the other hand, obedience to the collective voice of the Church to which she felt bound to listen and to contribute.[4]

In a "Memorial" to Pope Paul V in 1616, Ward argues that,

because her afflicted homeland is in great need of "spiritual labourers," Catholic women should "undertake something more than the ordinary." Her "English Virgins" are infused with a divine desire, she claims, "to embrace the religious state and at the same time to devote ourselves, according to our slender capacity, to the performance of those works of Christian charity towards our neighbour, that cannot be undertaken in convents."[5] She is asking papal approval for her Instititute of the Blessed Virgin as a religious order, following "a mixed kind of life," attending at once to the sanctity of self and to the salvation of society. Already sure of God's will, she is seeking Papal support for full female participation in the Catholic Reformation which was uncloistering the search for perfection and bringing it to the world.

Monasticism has been called the "boldest attempt" in Christian history to organize the search for human perfection.[6] It is a way of separation from the world. Following the teachings of persons such as Benedict who brought spiritual insights gained in the desert to regulated, communal life, monks find God through abstraction, by degrees, from the world, the flesh and the devil.[7]

Though because of what Augustine calls "the demands of charity," monks might get involved in pastoral care, they are not called to be "activists." Even the pursuit of virtue, hard work, theological debate, and preoccupation with social reform are ultimately distractions from the search for God.[8] Medieval spirituality, then, was two-sphered. In her Apology, the seventeenth-century Benedictine Gertrude More continues to assume two paths to God--divine and mundane, contemplative and active: what ordinary Christians "are bound to believe and do for salvation, the Catholic Church doth determine; but as to what we are to do for perfection. . .it must be the way of abnegation."[9]

Before the Reformation, in general, Christians saw the contemplative life as more perfect than the active one. To justify this view, proponents of monasticism often cite the passage in Luke 10:38-42 in which the good Martha is zealously concerned for the physical well-being of Jesus and becomes distracted by domestic activity. Her sister Mary--sometimes identified as Mary Magdalene--sits quietly at the Lord's feet and concentrates on the "one" thing needed. Mary's service is the better part, above Martha's

material and social plane. In his Holy Wisdom, another seventeenth-century Benedictine, Augustine Baker interprets the passage traditionally:

> The active life is typified by. . .Martha, who turmoiled herself with many exterior businesses and solicitudes, which though they were in themselves good and laudable, yet Mary's vacancy and inward attention to our Lord is much preferred.

Mary had taken "the best part," in Baker's commentary, because the contemplative life is "more spiritual, more abstracted from the body and its sensual faculties, and consequently more angelical and divine." Mary has already begun to practise heavenly "employment."[10]

Though the "demands of charity" provoked many pastoral revivals--for example, the Franciscan movement of the thirteenth century--, the teaching that the contemplative, separatist road to God is better than the active one remained at the heart of the medieval spiritual and social order which elevated those who detached themselves from the material world into the first estate. By the seventeenth century, in spite of some monastic revival, two-sphered spirituality was as much under attack as the two-sphered universe to which it was vitally connected. It was

challenged by the Protestant reformers who aimed to purify and perfect this world. The monasteries themselves were dissolved in England in the years 1536 and 1539. The King James Bible (1611) reads "Mary hath chosen that good part," thus denying the superiority of Mary's over Martha's part.[11] Typically, mainstream Protestants denied that to be perfect one had to be separate; for example, in a sermon at the funeral of Lady Margaret Mainard in 1682, the Anglican priest Thomas Ken praised a harmonious blend of Mary and Martha in a married woman.[12] Gilbert Burnet opposed Mary Astell's proposal for a lay monastery for the education of women on the grounds that such a separation of women from patriarchical authority was inimical to the interests of the church.[13]

But even the Counter-Reformation is as aptly called the "Catholic Reformation" because, although it aimed to restore traditional order and unity, it transformed the medieval spirituality to one engaged with the world, to a kind of monasticism-at-large.[14] This transformation is shown in the reinterpretation of the Martha/Mary passage written by Sister Dorothea, one of Mary Ward's spiritual sisters, who was working underground for the

Catholic cause in a village in Suffolk in the early 1620's. Dorothea is defending the activism of her Institute to a fellow Catholic without letting him suspect that she is one of the despised "galloping nuns":

> although it is true that our Blessed Saviour commended a contemplative life in St. Mary Magdalen, yet did He neither forbid nor disapprove a mixed life, and I have heard divers of good judgment commend, if not prefer this, if (as in these gentle women) contemplation be mixed with action.[15]

This paradoxical monasticism-at-large is best exemplified in the life of Ignatius Loyola and in the Jesuit movement. In his "The First Sketch of the Institute of the Society of Jesus" (1539), Loyola describes the nature of the Jesuit vocation "to be a soldier of God under the standard of the Cross." The "militia of Jesus Christ" must abandon the cloister for the active life defending Catholic truth from the forces of Protestantism. For Loyola, even liturgical rites--for example, hymns and organs at mass--which other orders use "to arouse and move their souls" to God are a "hindrance" to Jesuits in their calling to recapture the world.[16] For Jesuits, as long as the innovations of the so-called reformers threatened, individual searches for sanctity, even those described by Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises, were to be subordinated to the aim

to reunite Christendom under the Pope. As in Loyola's own example, the contemplative life was a preparation stage; the Jesuit was to use monastic experiences to renew his spiritual energy and then he was to go forth to fight in the world. The hermit was to be a soldier. Medieval separatist spirituality was so eclipsed by the latter half of the seventeenth century that, for example, when Margaret Mary Alacoque, an obscure nun at Paray-le-Monial, was overcome by intimate visions of Jesus' pulsating and enflamed heart, crowned with thorns, there began a successful campaign, sponsored by the Jesuits, to make mystical devotion to the Sacred Heart a popular and mass movement.[17]

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), thanks to a powerful Jesuit presence, there were three texts consulted: the Bible, the Pontifical Degrees and Aquinas' Summa Theologica.[18] Scholastic ideals triumphed over monastic. The Jesuits appropriated Thomism as their own world view because they found in Aquinas' reconciliation of Christian teachings with the Aristotelian hierarchical universe a world view that could provide a comprehensive case against the Protestant insistence on grace as a direct gift from God,

that could reinforce the authority and unity of the Catholic Church, and that could justify their own this-worldly orientation. Aquinas de-emphasizes the polarity of the two spheres--divine and mundane--by describing a universe in which every thing and body is qualitatively and hierarchically inter-related:

> . . .in natural things species seem to be arranged in a hierarchy: as the mixed things are more perfect than the elements, and plants than minerals, and animals than plants, and men than other animals; and in each of these one species is more perfect than others. Therefore, just as the divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction of things for the sake of the perfection of the universe, so is it the cause of inequality. For the universe would not be perfect if only one grade of goodness were found in things.[19]

God chooses to rule His creations indirectly through intermediaries: "He governs things inferior by superior."[20]

Thus, for Thomists, God's image exists in due degree throughout the natural order, including human institutions. Christians do not participate equally in God's grace. God "dispenses His gifts of grace variously, in order that the beauty and perfection of the Church may result from those degrees; even as He instituted the various conditions of things, that the universe might be perfect."[21] In the Catholic tradition, habitual or sanctifying grace is

the primary and usual mode of grace to which actual or infused grace is subordinate and exceptional.[22] Aquinas reaffirmed that grace is "a partaking in the divine nature. . .instrumentally caused by the sacraments, and principally by the Power of the Holy Ghost working in the sacraments," thus emphasizing that, in order to receive habitual grace, the individual must submit to the mediation of the ministry.[23] The over-all thrust of Thomism is that grace permeates, albeit in appropriate measure, the established ecclesiastical order. It is not surprising, then, that Jesuits such as Robert Bellarmine and Anglicans such as Richard Hooker could share in a "Thomistic revival" since Thomism provided a cohesive challenge to the extravagant claims of the Puritans for the authority of lay-spirit over that of the ordained ministry.[24]

At the Council of Trent, the Church hierarchy successfully rejuvenated itself and gained control of what had been a grassroots movement within Catholicism for renewal and reform.[25] The same dynamic impulse which moved the Jesuits to engage the world led to the founding of many new orders--such as the Oblates of Charles Borromeo (1578) and the Lazarists of Vincent de Paul

(1624)--orders freed from strict rule and devoted to special works in society. Female orders, though hampered by social custom and, theological restrictions--including rigid rules of enclosure reaffirmed at the Council of Trent--were nevertheless also moved by the needs of the times and attempted to uncloister their spiritual mission. In 1610, the widow Jane Frances de Chantal co-founded the Order of Visitation with Francis de Sales, author of the well-known Introduction to the Devout Life (1608) which instructed married people in the way of perfection. They intended the Order of Visitation to be uncloistered so that the nuns could work for the spiritual and bodily wellbeing of the poor, but de Chantal was forced to enclose the order and to restrict her sisters to teaching girls because the public and ecclesiastical opposition was so powerful. In 1633, Louise de Marillac, sponsored by another male, Vincent de Paul, initiated the Daughters of Charity who served the sick and poor at large, as described in this oft-quoted passage from de Paul:

> Your convent will be the house of the sick; your cell, a hired room; your chapel, the parish church; your cloister, the streets of the city or the wards of the hospitals; your enclosure, obedience; your grating, the fear of God; your veil, holy modesty.[26]

But the Daughters only got away with their freedom to act publicly by shrewdly claiming that they were not a religious order but merely an organized group of pious women. In short, the Church would not sanction female religious orders to take active part in the Catholic movement for social renewal--though nuns could suffer and pray for the cause in seclusion--as Mary Ward did as a Saint Clare before her visions freed her.[27]

In the England of the early seventeenth century, the call to action was particularly urgent. English priests were trained on the continent for adventurous and dangerous lives as missionaries and outlaws in their own country. Mary Ward not only felt called to abandon the cloister for the mission to reclaim England for the Pope, she also wanted, in imitation of the Jesuits, to forsake the jurisdiction of hostile local superiors for the direct authority of the Pope. After Ward's initial entreaties, Pope Paul V granted a provisional protection for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin which lasted fifteen years until 1631 when a Papal Commission decreed that the houses of the Institute, which had spread all over the continent, were to be dissolved and the sisters sent into other

convents or back into the world. Her enemies proved a more powerful and persuasive lobby in Rome than Ward and her sisters.

The nature of the objections to a female order modelled on the Jesuit rule and practice can be seen in "Memorial of the English Clergy to the Holy See," which attacks the lack of restrictions in the Institute: the sisters take only simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; they learn Latin; they are trained "to hold exhortation publicly, to engage in conversation privately with externs," and worst of all, the best of the order are prepared for the English mission. This training for action would "deserve much praise," the letter admits somewhat paradoxically, "if it confined itself within its cells and own walls."[28] The Pope is urged to disallow the "Jesuitress" order because

> It professes the offices of the Apostolic function, travels freely hither and thither, changes its ground and habit at will, accommodates itself to the manners and conditions of seculars, discharges the administration of others' families, in fact, does anything under the pretext of exercising charity to neighbours, and yet wishes to be numbered amongst religious families.

Though the Jesuits were open to the same charges, the English clergy reject the mixed life for women. They appeal to the authority of the

Council of Trent which strengthened the rule of enclosure for nuns and to the authority of Loyola himself who ruled that his Society was not to involve itself with the government of women. They protest the irregular comings and goings of these women: their disguises, their adventures, and their living publicly, though undetected, in high and low society; these women are "found to manifest such garrulity and loquacity in words, and display such boldness and rashness in common intercourse. . .behaviour unbecoming to their sex and untimely and inconvenient to the Catholic religion, labouring in the midst of heresies." Their main objection is clear: "It was never heard in the Church of God, that women, and they young such as these are, should discharge the apostolic office." But does age really matter? These "Apostolicae Viragines" were usurping ecclesiastical office.[29] The "galloping nuns" had to be suppressed.

Ward found few friends in the hierarchy. Even the Society of Jesus, in spite of the encouragement of individual members, hesitated to support a female branch of its increasingly controversial movement. In 1631, when her Institute was banned, Ward was imprisoned as a heretic in a Poor Clare convent in Munich

until the Pope ordered her release. From 1632 to 1634, she and her few remaining companions lived in Rome under papal protection. Undeterred by the malice and hostility of the world, Ward cautiously began to rebuild; there were two houses of women--no longer claiming to be nuns--in Munich and in Rome. In 1639, Ward returned to England to join her scattered companions who had worked on quietly during the past years. As her actions and writings show, she remained convinced, despite the official ban, that she was to further a divine design. One of her maxims reads, "Ours ought to be endowed with the zeal of the Apostles and the recollections of the spirit of hermits, to attend at the same time to both their own and their neighbours' salvation."[30]

And yet she accepted the teaching that God's will was also in the system. She did not challenge the right of her superiors to decide, as Loyola puts it in the passage which opens this chapter, "the particular grade of [her] vocation." Typically, as after her first vision, she waited for the interpretations of her superiors before she acted. That grace is in the hierarchy is a teaching that reconciled the ecstatic individual to institutional unity and stability by

subordinating the one to the other. Ward was well aware, as she reveals in a speech to her sisters, that male superiors often make mistakes because of the limits of their perspective and experience; yet she would never contradict male superiors publicly. When a priest made the foolish remark that women could not know God, she contented herself with a smile but remained silent: "I could have answered him by the experience I have of the contrary."[31] She could have, but she didn't.

NOTES:

[1]The autobiographical fragments and related documents are quoted extensively in Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers' The Life of Mary Ward, 1585-1645, 2 vol., ed. H. J. Coleridge (London: Burns & Oates, 1882, 1885), I, 179. 181.

If the austerity of the St. Clare order, as Ward describes it, was well known in England, it seems that Shakespeare's Isabella in Measure for Measure (1604) reveals that her zeal is excessive when she wishes for "a more strict restraint" than "the votarists of Saint Clare"[I,4,4-5].

[2]Chambers, I, 208.

[3]Chambers, I, 376 (Ward's italics).

[4]Quotation cited in Maisie Ward's "Mary Ward: 1585-1645," The English Way: Studies in English Sanctity from St. Bede to Newman (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), p. 251.

[5]Chambers, I, 376.

[6]R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 158.

[7]The Rule of St. Benedict, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. Mastro (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 47.

[8]Basil Hume, O. S. B., Searching for God (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp. 33, 28, 36.

[9]Gertrude More's "Apology," Inner Life and Writings of Dame Gertrude More, 2 vol., ed., Benedict Weld-Blundell (London: R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd., 1910), II, 240.

[10]Augustine Baker, Holy Wisdom or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation, 1st pub.1657 (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), p. 12.

[11]In order to illustrate further that the Protestants may have translated this passage to reflect their changing attitude towards the contemplative life, let me cite a few more versions:

In the Geneva Bible (1560), Luke 10:42 reads "Maria hathe chosen the good parte."

The Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims version (1582, 1609), which was based on Jerome's Vulgate, translates "Maria optimam partem elegit" to "Mary hath chosen the best part."

Incidentally, The New English Bible, a recent translation (1961) planned by a representative group of British churches including the Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalist, Presbyterians and Methodists, states that "the part that Mary has chosen is best."

For an insightful general discussion of the relationship between social history and biblical translation, see Peter Levi's The English Bible from Wycliff to William Barnes (London: Constable, 1974).

[12]in The English Sermon: volume II: 1650-1750, ed. C. H. Sisson (Cheadle, Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1976), p. 186.

[13]Myra Reynolds, The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1750, 1st publ. 1920 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 454-455, 350.

[14]H. O. Evennett, The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation, ed. John Bossy (Cambridge, 1968), p. 74.

[15]"Sister Dorothea's Narrative," in Chambers, II, 38.

16"Appendix III," The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola with Related Documents, ed. & trans. Joseph F. O'Callaghan (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 106-109.

[17]Peter Dwan, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (London: Catholic Truth Society, n.d.), pp. 5-14.

[18]Butler's Lives of the Saints, 4 vol., ed. Herbert Thurston, S. J. and Donald Attwater (Westminister, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), I, 512.

[19]Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica in Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton Pegis (New York: Modern Library, 1948), Q. 47.Art.2; p. 263. Useful secondary sources discussing the hierarchical model of the universe include C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). pp. 92ff.; James Daly, Cosmic Harmony and Political Thinking in Early Stuart England in Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 69, Part 7 (October, 1979), pp. 5-10; George Grinnell, "Newton's Principia as Whig Propaganda," City and Society in the Eighteenth Century, ed., Paul Fritz and David Williams (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973) pp. 187-188; Charles B. Schmitt, "Towards a Reassessment of Renaissance Aristotelianism," History of Science, xi (1973), 159-193.

[20]Summa Theologica, Q.22. Art.3; p. 221.

[21]Summa Theologica, Q.112.Art.4; p. 678.

[22]John A. Hardon, S. J., The Catholic Catechism: A Contemporary Catechism of the Teachings of the Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 176; Summa Theologica, Q.112.Art.2; p. 674.

[23]Summa Theologica, Q.112.Art.1; p. 673.

[24]Peter Munz, The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1971), pp. 146, 118.

[25]Jean Delumeau, Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: a New View of the Counter-Reformation (London: Burns & Oates, 1977), chapter one.

[26]Butler's Lives of the Saints, I, 600.

[27]Chambers, I, 179. For a well-written feminist attempt to see the female counter-reformers--in particular, Angelica Merici, de Marillac and Ward--as pioneers who "helped lay the ground work for a more modern view of women," see Ruth P. Liebowitz's "Virgins in the Service of Christ: The Dispute over an Active Apostolate for Women During the Counter-Reformation," Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 131-152.

[28]Chambers, II,184. The Benedictine Gertrude More lamented the unfortunate effect when superiors force nuns to learn the Jesuit way of action--for example, exercises in discourse--since "they cannot find these poor women sufficient action to employ themselves in." Apology in Inner Life, II, 252-254, 227. Peter Guilday observes that this repressive treatment of Ward reflects "the animosity the English Secular Clergy had for the Society of the Jesuits." The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1914), p. 177.

[29]Chambers, II, 183-187.

[30]Chambers, I, 467.

[31]Chambers, I, 410-411.

Chapter two: The Divine Perspective:

The Two Obediences Reconciled

in Gertrude More's Apology

The interior call never contradicteth the exterior (for if it do, it is to be shrewdly suspected.)

Gertrude More, Apology

Helen More (1606-1633) and Mary Ward were both from eminent Catholic families; both left Protestant England as young women in order to pursue service to God; both submitted to lives of chastity, poverty and obedience; both strove to restore Christian unity in Europe. As well, both were discontented with

the spiritual options open to English women in exile; both initiated new communities; both had divinely-directed missions which their superiors obstructed; both wrote autobiographies to vindicate their vocations. Their ways to perfection, however, were antithetical. Mary Ward was called to the active apostolate or, as we have seen, to the "mixed life" as both a Martha and a Mary. Helen More sought holy retirement; she changed her name to Gertrude and, in imitation of that great thirteenth-century saint, devoted herself to nuptial mysticism in which the seeker of God, whether male or female, comes to see herself as the bride of Christ and, by stages, achieves union with the Trinity. And yet, despite this fundamental difference, we find in More's writings a reconciliation of the two obediences, to God and to ecclesiastical superiors, very like that found in Ward's writings--a reconciliation which might be described as, at least for Roman Catholics, the traditional and orthodox response to grace.

Based on his reading of the lives of male Jesuits on the English mission, Paul Delany has somewhat rashly categorized Catholic autobiography in the seventeenth century as "res gestae," as "objective accounts of religious life," characterized by a

"barrenness," a holding-back of emotion," a lack of introspection. Delany writes, "Given the desperate political plight of the British Catholic Church it is hardly surprising that the great devotional and meditative Catholic tradition bore little fruit in Britain at this time."[1] What is hardly surprising--given the need for action, at least for priests--is that the contemplative revival that was taking place all over Europe should in the case of the English find its expression among a small community of Benedictine nuns in exile at Cambrai. In the years 1624-1633, Gertrude More, her sisters and their assistant chaplain, Augustine Baker, strove to recover the medieval way of perfection in their writings and in their lives. Together they rescued from oblivion the great English mystical texts of the late fourteenth century--Julian of Norwich's Showings, the anonymous The Cloud of Unknowing, and Walter Hilton's Ladder of Perfection.[2]

Baker wrote his Holy Wisdom to aid the nuns in the way of divine "inactions" so that they might become like angels having "a perfect view and contemplation of God as He is, not by any created forms and representations."[3] When Baker wanted to embody his teachings about the way of wisdom, which he saw as

the way of Mary who concentrated on the "one thing needed," he wrote a biography, his Inner Life of Gertrude More.[4] More herself wrote an Apology, as well as several fragments, before her death at twenty-seven of smallpox. Her Apology is a coherent and unified account of her brief religious life 1623-1633; it is a sensitive and intelligent revelation of her feelings and opinions; and it is a subjective history of a soul in relationship to the authority of the community to which More belonged.

More wrote Apology primarily as a diary, for "mine own comfort and help." She expects her writings "to be seen by no other, unless against my will, my Superiors only excepted."[5] We shall ignore the superiors for the moment. She writes to get closer to God: "Thee to praise,/And stir my poor frozen soul/By love itself to raise. . .as one that is sick with love/Engraves on every tree/Thy name and praise of him she loves,/So shall it be with me."[6] She wants "that which I have written in time of more light" to lie by her, to help her "when I am either in the obscurity of temptation or other bodily indisposition." She uses writing systematically to eliminate distractions from God, to grow more

and more in divine love, to transform herself little by little to see with "light" from a divine perspective. More addresses her diary to God; her style is so "plain and easy" that, she claims, "it is impossible for her to err seriously--at least in her main point, which is the love of God"(209-210,214). Apology is, in short, a "Confessions of a Lover."

It is an apologia pro vita, as well. It is a defence of the way of divine abstraction which she , her sisters and Baker were living. According to More, unsympathetic, if well-meaning, superiors attempted to discredit and to obstruct her contemplative prayer. More prays not to be "carried away" by criticisms about the unprofitability, dangerousness, and impossibility of achieving divine life, especially for women (212). At the same time, she defends Augustine Baker from the charges of Francis Hull, the vicar of the convent, who claimed Baker encouraged the nuns to deal in a "shifting manner" with superiors. Though More may have written for herself, in 1633, when Baker was called before the General Chapter of the Benedictine order to prove the orthodoxy of his teachings and the nuns' practices, More's private diaries contributed to a

vindication of Baker's teachings and their way of life as a true revival of the Benedictine tradition.[7]

Helen More went to France at seventeen. She had been raised under the watchful and loving care of Cresacre More, a father ever conscious of the pious and learned tradition of their family--Helen was the great-great-granddaughter of Thomas More, martyr.[8] With eight other English women and a dowry from her father, More founded a Benedictine convent at Cambrai in 1623. Though she had a vague desire to search for God and perfection, her first four years were years of disappointment and despondency: "I was as great a stranger to Almighty God as I was in England"(273). One of the main obstacles to her spiritual development, as Baker later realized, was that she was too scrupulous for the inner life.[9] In one place in the diary, she associates herself with "the urchin wench," described by Thomas More, who "goes whining up and down as if nothing she did or could do. . .did please God]"(269).

Unfortunately, she had inept spiritual advisors who misunderstood her character and her vocation and therefore kept her in an unsettled condition, ever mindful of her imperfections

and God's wrath (277). She complains that such advisers try to make themselves "so absolute that there is no power left in the soul under such to have relation or confidence in God." Women in their care "live miserable, dejected lives" in such fear that without their superiors' approval they "dare neither speak, think nor do anything." Though looking for the simple way of peace and perfection, such women are subject to the changeable, even disruptive, humours and opinions of their confessors (245-47,278).

Baker, who came as assistant chaplain to Cambrai in 1624, taught More not to be daunted by her sins and imperfections. From Baker, she learned "to overcome myself as I could, not as I would, and await God's pleasure in it." The true and immediate teacher in the contemplative way is God; Baker understood this and grounded his instruction on God, not on himself (222,225). As More and her sisters grew closer to God, they grew less dependent on their superiors for spiritual direction. This led to the anger of their superiors; for example, one confessor felt slighted by More's presumption that she was fit to govern herself: he "thinks himself neglected when souls have

no more business with him than in the mere confession of sin"(217).

The discord in the convent was the result of something more than just jealousy over Baker's popularity and over hurt feelings about More's apparent autonomy. Their opponents, including Francis Hull who challenged Baker's orthodoxy at the General Chapter in 1633, had little sympathy for the pursuit of an inner divine life. More describes her oppressors as those who have "so poor an opinion of prayer that they thought they did God good service when they hindered those who seem to make esteem of it" (215). She criticizes those Benedictine superiors who advocate the Jesuit vocation to perfect the active life, for sisters enclosed in monasteries: "nuns of contemplative orders prosper so ill under their hands; because they put them into exercises of discourse. . .[but] cannot find these poor women sufficient action to employ themselves in." She wanted to use her life for the solitary search for God: "I could never find good by discourse."[10] The only case in which Baker allowed the sisters to "deal in any shifting manner with Superiors," More explains, was to sneak time for contemplative prayer (211).

Indeed, Baker advocated the way of <u>true</u> obedience and More discovered it in her own life. She reconciled the two obediences: "he taught me true submission and subjection of myself to God, and to whosoever He puts over me in this life" (210). Before Baker's guidance, she had tried obedience as "a mere politic course," and found no inner peace. A nun who lives only external obedience "out of custom" will attain only "natural perfection"; her reward will come in this world: "the good liking and applause of her Superiors and companions" (263, 224). But if she is seeking divine perfection, she must avoid becoming distracted by the defects of superiors or she will remain a stranger to God. If a soul lives in the spirit of simplicity and tends "wholly towards that one thing which is alone necessary," the Saviour will answer for her preoccupation with God, as Jesus did for Mary Magdalen (229,233,236). True obedience is the result of a "truly prosecuted course of prayer." Without prayer, the nun becomes impossible to rule even by the wisest of men; with prayer, the nun is strengthened and enabled to see in the fumblings of an unskilled superior--"even to a very dog"--the

will of God (211,213). Truly obedient souls find no conflict between the dictates of God and those of their superiors; they are like the saints in heaven who are truly subjects of God:

> they grieve not to see others in higher degree than they, but see it is just that it should be in all things as it is.. . .This they see, and yet they remain in peace; and so shall we (though in a far inferior manner) if we perform obedience as we ought (219).

For More, to see from a holistic divine perspective, which does not favour the individual's, the community's or the species' perspective, is to be able to accept the hierarchical status quo, "to see it is just that it should be in all things as it is." Baker's Holy Wisdom instructs the soul on how to achieve this perspective of wisdom; More's Apology is a narrative of her growth in wisdom with accompanying inner peace. At the end of the century, Francis Lee, disciple of the radical Philadelphian prophet Jane Lead, found a kinship between the aspirations of his own mystical Protestant community and those of the Cambrai convent. He felt there could be a movement of reconciliation based on the searches for wisdom found among the various denominations of Christianity. Baker and More too saw the way

of wisdom as the way to restore pure, primitive and unified Christianity. Aware that their contemporaries dismissed contemplatives for wasting their gifts in obscure retirement while "active livers" confronted the problem of disunity in Christendom, More argues that the contemplative way could conquer and perfect heart by heart and would thus do more to heal "the torn and mangled members" of God's church than the aggressive policies of the Jesuits (255). In a fragment meditating on "The Sanctity of the Old Orders in Ancient Times," she prays for a revival of the Holy Spirit. If all Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, did not intermingle "human ends or interests," we could come together in "one consent of heart to enjoy God."[11]

But despite this ecumenical kinship the Philadelphians and Cambrai Benedictines have a very different attitude towards obedience. Francis Lee claims that More and Baker:

> explicitly declare that the true object of obedience is God alone, and that none can live in true obedience without attending to the internal Divine call, whatever their superiors may persuade to the contrary, or their spiritual directors dictate.[12]

While it may be true More and Baker protested the "servile obedience" and complex, rigid methods taught by the Jesuits and favoured the old Benedictine way of life--a more free, subjective and conversational way to serve God--, they believed, as the opening quotation indicates, that "the interior call never contradicteth the exterior," at least for the soul who has truly achieved the divine perspective.[13] More insists that anyone who says that Baker's writings permit one to "resist, contradict, and disobey Superiors" misunderstands and reads Baker's work "with no other attention than to carp" (211). She could find no encouragement to disobey in his books: "they tend only and wholly to humble the soul, and urge her to seek, desire and rest in God alone" (216). If a superior is not truly spiritual, the contemplative nun must undergo "martyrdom": "for if we resist His will in our Superiors, in vain do we pretend to please Him" (235,257).

More's participation in the divine life, then, is in no way protestant or schismatic: she accepted the intercession of superiors, of the sacraments and of the saints--her diary is full of

petitions to Scholastica (Benedict's sister), Magdalene, and Augustine. Moreover, she insisted hers was the traditional monastic way of separation from worldly concerns, even admirable ones such as pastoral care and social reform. She was trying to transform herself, not the world. We can read her Apology as an attempt--much like that of the female prophets of the next chapter--to use autobiographical evidence to defend her views and to show the errors of her superiors: "I set down these things to be a help and a comfort to me amidst the opposition raised against what I have found to be so proper and good for me." But the very next sentence reads, "Yet whether it be so or not my Superiors will be better able to judge." For More, it was a higher, a more divine perspective that grieved not "to see others in higher degree," that saw that it was just as "it should be in all things as it is." The true contemplative finds even challenging the authority of her superiors a distraction from her single-hearted search for mystical union and perfection. Apology ends with a passage showing that the search for the divine way, if cloistered from the world, reinforces the stability and authority of the

system:

> If a soul be capable of contemplative instructions. . .and walk the way of entire abnegation, seeking God, and not His gifts, and be diligent in observing what God will do by Himself in her soul, and wherein He referreth her to others, and walk with such detachment that it is all one to her which way or by whom God will manifest His will to her,. . .this is to give to God what is God's and to Caesar that which is Caesar's (290,281,247).

Despite the orthodoxy of this resolution, there was more than enough conflict in More's life between the two obediences to make her Apology perceptive, readable and human.

NOTES:

[1]"The Society of Jesus had a more direct influence [than Teresa's mysticism] for all the British seventeenth-century Catholic autobiographers were members at one time or another" (my italics). Paul Delany, British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 37, 46, 4. As is clear from his chapter on "Female Autobiographers," Delany would not have been surprised, had he read it, that More's Apology expresses a range of emotion, since he points out that women were not content "to write orthodox res gestae" p. 165.

[2]See Edmund Colledge and James Walsh's "Introduction," to Julian of Norwich's Showings (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 2. The Benedictine nuns at Stanbrook (descendents of the nuns at Cambrai) describe the efforts of the Cambrai nuns, notably Barbara Constable, towards preserving Baker's manuscripts and towards renewing the English mystical tradition, in "Dame Catherine Gascoigne, 1600-1676," In a Great Tradition: Tribute to Dame Laurentia McLachlan, Abbess of Stanbrook (London: John Murray, 1956), pp. 15, 22. Serenus Cressy, O. S. B. (1605-1674) edited Scale of Perfection in 1659 and Julian of Norwich's Sixteen Revelations [in his translation] in 1670; he left a manuscript abridgment of Cloud of Unknowing. See Dom Gerard Sitwell's "Introduction" to Augustine Baker's Holy Wisdom or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), v-vii. Also see under "Cressy" in DNB.

[3]Augustine Baker, Holy Wisdom, pp. 491, 451.

[4]Augustine Baker, Inner Life and Writings of Dame Gertrude More, 2 vol., ed. Dom. Benedict Weld-Blundell (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1910); vol. one is Baker's Inner Life of Gertrude More; volume two includes More's Apology and other fragments. See Anthony Low's Augustine Baker (New York: Twayne, 1970), especially pp. 41-45. Low finds it "remarkable" that Baker wrote nothing on mysticism until he was at Cambrai and does not follow up his own observation that Baker obtained

"empirical knowledge of the interior life with which to supplement his reading and experience" from his encounter with the practising mystics at Cambrai.

[5]Apology is in vol. 2 of Inner Life, II, p. 209. All subsequent references to this source will be given in the body of the chapter.

[6]"Fragment," Inner Life, II, 177.

[7]For a brief discussion of the Benedictine-Jesuit conflict at Cambrai, see In a Great Tradition, p. 9.

[8]Cresacre More published a life of his great-grandfather about the year 1631 in Paris.

[9]Inner Life, I, p. 2.

[10]Inner Life, II, pp. 250-252, 227. More's animosity towards Jesuit training was so vehement that the editor of her diary, Weld-Blundell, felt it necessary to ask the reader not to judge her harshly as she was only in her mid-twenties when she wrote her opinion. He adds, "No doubt, if she had lived longer, she would have found occasion to modify her views" p. 254n.

[11]Inner Life, II, p. 154.

[12]Francis Lee, "Letter to Henry Dodwell, Easter, 1699," in Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of William Law, ed. Christopher Walton (London: Private Circulation, 1854), p. 218.

[13]Inner Life, II, p. 267. For a description of the Cambrai efforts as "a conscious return to the early monastic tradition and. . .a protest against arbitrary imposition of complex methods," see Thomas Merton's "Self-knowledge in Gertrude More and Augustine Baker," Mystics and Zen Masters, 1st pub. 1961 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), pp. 161, 154-177.

PART TWO:

GRACIOUS FEMINISM: THE REJECTION OF HIERARCHY IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE FEMALE PROPHETS

Chapter three: "Gracious Freedom": A Review of the Relationship between Feminism and the Seventeenth-Century Female Prophets

> The sturdiest champion of women's rights will hardly deny that the unfettered exercise of the prophetic ministry by the more devout sex can threaten the ordinary decencies of ecclesiastical order.
>
> R. A. Knox, Enthusiasm, [Nihil Obstat]

Feminist scholarship has two perspectives. At its best, it is intellectual history; it aspires to recreate the past more justly and holistically than earlier interpretations which, because of

unconscious or deliberate bias, overlooked, distorted and/or dismissed women's lives and writings as insignificant or irrelevant to the "main stream" of Western intellectual and social history. Yet feminist scholarship often falls prey to the seductions of "whig history": it studies and selects from the past to suit our present concerns; it values and canonizes those women (and men) who can be seen as originators of or contributors to the women's movement as we currently define it.[1] On the one hand, we seek to study all lost women, to understand their motivations and to empathize with their perspective even when their beliefs and actions complicate, contradict or force us to alter the very interpretative framework by which we see the past and present. On the other hand, we are constantly tempted to rescue only those women who reinforce our present preconceptions of and aims for the women's movement; we are tempted to dismiss those who cannot be recreated in our own image as obstructors of women's progress and then to reabandon them to oblivion.

This duality of perspective is nowhere more evident than in our ambivalence towards the seventeenth-century female

prophets. The enthusiast-millenarian revolution was radically democratic in its implications not only for the ecclesiastical but also for the social and political establishment.[2] We are attracted to the many women who, as Keith Thomas has shown in his "Women and the Civil War Sects," played a strikingly "disproportionate role" in the movement and helped to undermine the notion that women's subordination in church, state and family was divinely ordained.[3] Though the revolution failed in its own century, many of its ideas continue to influence us in the present century. And at first glance these women seem remarkably "modern" in their bold activism. For example, in 1660, the "mother of Quakerism" Margaret Fell wrote "A Declaration and Information from. . .Quakers" to the newly restored King Charles II warning him of their position: "We desire, and also expect to have the Liberty of our Consciences and just Rights, and outward Liberties, as other People of the Nation."[4] Fell's pamphlet <u>Women's Speaking Justified</u> (1666) makes it clear that she includes women in "we."[5] Since freedom of conscience remained the central tenet of Quakerism, it is not surprising that over the past few centuries Quaker women have made a notable

contribution to the equal rights movement.[6] Fell's statement is, I suspect, substantially the answer a modern liberal feminist would give if asked, "what do women want?" But the grounds for Fell's demand for freedom are alien to our own. She threatens the king with civil disobedience because she is obedient to the Holy Spirit within. The arguments of the female prophets for female emancipation were limited by and derived from their concept of grace. And as another Quaker teacher Elizabeth Bathurst insists--and modern feminists would agree, albeit from the opposite perspective--: "there is a vast difference between the Natural Freedom of Man's Will, which some plead for and the Gracious Freedom thereof maintained by the Quakers."[7]

In the second century, when Christianity was defining the limits of its community, it repudiated various "heresies"--a word which etymologically signifies "choices." Not surprisingly, it rejected enthusiasm--or Montanism as it is sometimes called after its first leader--which by its nature undermined and denied institutional authority and mediation. Enthusiasts (from the Greek, <u>en</u>+<u>theos</u>) by definition claim to have direct experience of the Holy

Spirit within their hearts. Because of the charismatic and millenarian character of the early church, because of strong scriptural support for the doctrine of sufficiency of the Spirit and despite repression, outbursts of enthusiasm have repeatedly occurred throughout the history of Christianity.[8] What distinguished seventeenth-century enthusiasts from the Protestant mainstream was their insistence that the Holy Spirit which had operated in apostolic times was renewing its efforts to transform the human order into a divine one. When Mary Penington, for example, abandoned her belief that "there was nothing manifest since the apostles' days" and came to trust her inner visions that Christ was about to re-enter human history, she went beyond the iconoclastic Puritanism of her early life to become a hopeful enthusiast, in her case, of the Quaker sect.[9] The enthusiasts were radical Protestants because they strove to push to the limits the implications of the Protestant emphasis on grace as a direct gift from God. They were, in this sense, spiritual levellers.

At the same time, they were spiritual separatists. The millenarian prophet Jane Lead once remarked that "the whole

Gospel, the whole Covenant" could be found in Genesis 3:15: "the seed of the Woman shall break the Serpents head."[10] Seventeenth-century enthusiasts divided the world into two "seeds": the seed of woman--or the pure church of the Spirit--was separating itself from the seed of the serpent--or the Antichrist, the polluted church of the law--in order to restore Christianity to its primitive simplicity in preparation for Christ's return. History was seen as a struggle between these two seeds: in apostolic times, the Holy Spirit had been preparing Christ's kingdom, but the Antichhrist--the persecuting, materialistic forces that had their origins in the Roman Empire--destroyed the prophets, perverted Christ's teachings and founded the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Such a view of history could lead two Quaker women, Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, to go boldly to idolatrous Malta in 1661 to try to provoke even Papists to turn away from empty, deluding authority to the Light within. Predictably, the women were imprisoned by the Inquisitor of Malta, thereby having experience confirm their conviction that the Catholic Church suppressed the Spirit's operations.[11] Though the papacy was the

archetypal persecuting Antichrist, the symbol was so imprecise that it could easily be generalized to include any authorities which preserved the traditions and forms of Catholicism and thus hampered the free movement of the Spirit. In the seventeenth century, English enthusiasts first denounced the episcopal church as the Antichrist but later extended the condemnation to many Puritan institutions and groups which tried to prevent the coming of Christ's just kingdom.[12] For instance, when Cromwell began to make compromises with the imperfect world, thereby hampering the saints' revolution, Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel prophesied his downfall.[13] Her ecstatic messages, which attracted leading members of the government to her bedside, eventually led to her imprisonment in Bridewell as a subversive.[14]

In contrast, ecstatic individuals who wished to pursue a way of separation and perfection in the monastic, two-sphered tradition were physically and psychologically detached from the world. As Evelyn Underhill points out, ecstatic visions are "always paid for by psycho-physical disturbances"; the two-sphered system accommodated such disruptions in the regulated enclosure of the

monastery.[15] But when non-conformists of any age bring the hope of perfection, the "possibility of the exceptional," beyond the monastery walls, they disrupt and threaten not only "the regular, normative way of religious salvation" but the social order as well.[16] The very etymology of "ecstasy" suggests being "out of place." Infused with grace, the mystic in varying degrees unites with the divine nature and is higher than the mere human plane. Such a teaching, though tame when contained in the context of the two-sphered system, becomes revolutionary when the visionary is set loose in the world. The enthusiast-millenarian beliefs--that there is a renewal of prophecy and that traditional Christian institutions are obstructing this renewal--have disruptive social implications. They allow, even require by divine mandate, otherwise powerless groups, including women, to speak out against established repressive authority.

The prominence of women in the leadership of charismatic revolt over the centuries has led a recent authority on enthusiasm, Father Ronald Knox, to conclude that the history of enthusiasm is "largely a history of female emancipation."[17] In

1645, an indignant Presbyterian, Thomas Edwards, complained of "the liberty of preaching" among enthusiasts: "What swarms are there of all sorts of illiterate mechanick Preachers, yea of Women and Boy Preachers!"[18] Though the rise, defeat and retreat of the saints' revolution or "God's cause" is a familiar story to seventeenth-century scholars, it might be useful to review that pattern from a woman's eye view.[19] The following five sketches of the lives of female participants recall the socially disruptive nature of "gracious freedom" as well as the grounds and justification for their beliefs and behaviour.

In 1625, Lady Eleanor Davies (c.1590-1652) was told by a voice from heaven that she was to be "God's handmaiden" and to prepare the nation for God's destruction of Charles I in nineteen-and-a-half years.[20] Among other signs, an anagram of her maiden name--Eleanor Audeley: Reveale O Daniel--convinced her and others that she was the new Daniel. She was viewed as dangerous not only because she identified the king and the church with the forces of the Antichrist as described in <u>The Book of Revelation</u>, but also because her uncanny success in foretelling the

future made her popular with the powerless. In 1628, for example, she predicted accurately the death of the king's favorite, the Duke of Buckingham. She spent two unrepentant years, 1633-1635, in jail for publishing her anti-government messages. In 1636, in a typical act of protest against the Anglican hierarchy, she covered the altar of the Lichfield cathedral with tar and proclaimed herself the new bishop. She was declared insane and locked up in Bedlam. But after a decade of suffering, she was freed by Cromwell. Her earlier warnings of Charles' doom were no longer considered mad, but prophetic; in 1649, they were republished and read in Parliament.[21] Davies' career aimed at, as the title of one of her pamphlets shows, "the restitution of prophecy" as a legitimate source of authority--a source as accessible to women as to men.

Unlike Davies, Katherine Chidley and Mary Cary claimed no immediate charismatic experience, but felt that the Holy Spirit had led them to expect a just kingdom by directing their reading of scripture. When George Ballard remembered Chidley (fl. 1640's) a hundred years later in his Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain (1752), he relied on a description by her

arch-enemy Thomas Edwards, notorious for his contempt for enthusiasts in his Reasons against Independent Government (1641) and especially in his Gangraena (1645). Chidley is portrayed as a violent, bitter woman disrupting a church meeting in Stepney by denouncing minister and parishioners alike for continuing idolatrous papist services. Though one man countered her attacks by quoting scriptures, "instead of being satisfied or giving any answer, she was so talkative and clamourous, wearing him with her words, that he was glad to go away."[22] Elsewhere, Edwards dismisses his opponent as "a brazen-faced, audacious old woman, resembled unto Jael" [Jud.4:21].[23] Edwards himself was probably weary "with her words" since she addressed her two books, The Justification of Independent Churches of Christ (1641) and A New Yeares Gift (1645), directly against his views. The Chidley we meet in her own writings is a formidable antagonist, despite repeated apologies for being a mere woman. Not only does she attack Edwards' position with scriptural evidence and good humour, she also provides a cogent vindication of religious tolerance and of the sufficient authority of God in our consciences. In Justification, after

easily showing that his first two "Reasons" against independent churches have no ground in scripture, she jests, "Now these two being thus turned aside by one of the meanest of all the army of Jesus Christ, you may justly fear that all the rest of your soldiers will run away wounded."[24] With considerable skill in exegetical polemics, she destroys his "Reasons" one by one, always attributing her powers to the Holy Spirit. She admits that "these my answers are not laid down in a schollerick way, but by the plaine truth of holy scripture."[25] At the end of her Justification, she challenges Edwards to a public debate with moderator, but if he wins, she admits, "your conquest will not be great for I am a poore worme, and unmeete to deale with you." Benjamin Hanbury comments that it must have been "mortifying indeed" for Edwards to have been "encountered in print by a woman,. . .divested of his imagined superiority and reduced to the base level of one of those on whom he had bestowed his gratuitous vituperation."[26]

Having "tasted of the pressures of the hyrarchy above these twenty years," Chidley aims to discredit the ministry for usurping power over the consciences of others. She argues that if

Edwards claims apostolic succession as justification for his ministerial power, he takes his instructions from the Antichrist, Rome; if he claims the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he must acknowledge the "ordination" of the Spirit--even in the lowest of mechanicks.[27] For Chidley and other enthusiasts, there are two seeds only--that of the woman and free Spirit or that of the serpent and oppressive power. There is no middle way. Though Chidley calls hers "the way of separation," she has hope to reclaim not only the church but also the state for the Spirit. She is social as well as a spiritual democrat.[28] Enraged by Edwards' demand that parliament throw out the petitions of separatists, she argues that the members must stand for the interests of all the people, as articulated in petitions:

> they are indeede the very Eyes of the whole land; the Eares of the whole land, and the Tongue of the whole land; Yea the hand and power of the whole land.. . .Would you have them, I say be blinde of one eye? and to looke upon the Petitions and complaints of some of the people of the land and not upon all?[29]

Not surprisingly, Chidley was a leading activist in the *Leveller* movement. H. N. Brailsford speculates that it was she who wrote a democratic petition which was signed by ten thousand women in

1649. It is certainly her message and that of the female enthusiasts:

> Since we are assured of our creation in the image of God, of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also of a proportionate share in the freedoms of the common wealth, we cannot [but] wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this Honourable house.[30]

Many of the same themes occur in the writings of Mary Cary (b. 1621, fl.1653). She presents herself as "the meanest of the servants of Jesus."[31] She claims to be a prophet because from the time she was fifteen the Holy Spirit guided her in the "serious and continual study of the Scriptures," particularly the prophetic books. For example, in Resurrection of Witnesses, and Englands Fall from (The Mystical Babylon) Rome (1648), Cary is able to deduce from a passage-by-passage analysis of Revelation 11 the turbulent events of the 1640's. For Cary, "they are Prophets to whom God discovers his secrets."[32] The Spirit of prophecy, therefore, defies the hierarchy of the ecclesiastical system. Her version of Joel's promise for a new age of prophecy reads:

> the time is coming when this promise shall be fulfilled, and

> the saints shall be abundantly filled with the spirit; and not only men, but women shall prophesy; not only aged men but young men; not only superiors but inferiors; not only those that have University learning, but those that have it not; even servants and handmaids.[33]

Ordination is to be by the Spirit and the Spirit seems to prefer "the little ones."

In her A Word in Season. . .A Precious Cordial for a Distempered Kingdom (1647), Cary expects the English state to be founded on the spirit of prophecy with "the Apple of God's Eye" as a new elite. She appeals to Protestant solidarity: "we all condemn that Anti-Christian principle in Popery: to injoyn all to believe as the Church believes, that is the Pope and his Clergie, as their Lawes, and Degrees and Cannons required them, not suffering to search scriptures." In scripture, Cary claims, will be found the "shortest cut to a happie and flourishing state." To prepare for a new order, the government should let Jesus Christ speak in the consciences of His people and protect the rights of all prophets to speak. Even "for erroneous persons, we ought to use no weapons against them, than what the Apostles did: they preached against them." For Cary, besides liberty to prophesy, the other main

requirement for a blessed nation is justice for the poor.[34] In her "Postscript of April 1648" of Resurrection, Cary congratulates Cromwell's army and parliament for being "instruments" of God's will and encourages them "to go on in opposing the Beast, and his adherents and defending the Witnesses of Jesus." But she adds a warning of their downfall should they begin to "aime at corrupt and self-ends" rather than "the promoting of Justice." By the time of her "Postscript of October, 1653" to Resurrection, she cautions saints and herself to be patient: the "expected date of compleat joie and gladness to the Saints will dawn by degrees" to give Jesus time not only to destroy oppressors but also "to prepare and fit [his people] for those new heavens and new earth into which they must enter." Even so, she adds in a concluding ejaculation, "Lord Jesus, come quickly."[35] It is not known what Cary was doing at the end of 1660 when her sect, the Fifth Monarchists, lost patience and tried to overthrow the newly restored Antichrist.

In 1652 just before the coming of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, Margaret Fell had a vision of a man in a white hat who would come into Westmoreland "to

confound the priests."[36] As her autobiography presents it, Fell (1614-1702) was convinced by George Fox that year and began to live in gracious freedom that year with the inner Spirit directing her actions. She rejected the authority of the system, telling her unconvinced husband, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." As Christopher Hill comments, "God has been democratized."[37]

It was in defence of the thousand Quakers imprisoned for following the Spirit within that in 1660 Fell wrote her "Declaration of Information" to Charles II, reminding him that God had already overturned governments which persecuted His witnesses. "For your own good and prosperity," she advises him to grant religious toleration and civil liberties.

Already in this letter dated the 22nd Day of the fourth month of 1660, the Quakers are disassociating themselves from the uprising which took place in December 1660/January 1661 led by the Fifth Monarchists. Quakers were seeking to conquer the heart rather than the state. Quakers had begun to internalize the revolution. Fell's "Declaration of Information" is the first public

statement of Quaker pacificism: "Our Weapons are not Carnal, but Spiritual."[38] As early as 1653, Fell envisioned the transformation to Christ's kingdom to be a slow, inner process: "I do see the Work of God going on in People's Minds."[39]

The female prophets saw their public defiance not as self-expression, not as a women's movement, but as participation in and co-operation with a divine operation to perfect the human order. Fell's Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by Scripture (1666) reveals the nature of "gracious feminism." In their use of scriptural evidence, the arguments in Women's Speaking resemble those of modern Christian feminists.[40] Fell demonstrates that God created woman in the divine image too (Genesis 1:27-28), and that Christ repeatedly selected women as his disciples and messengers. In Fell's best example, Christ had Mary Magdalene and other women announce his resurrection to the apostles:

> Mark this, ye despisers of the Weakness of Women, and look upon your selves to be so wise: But Christ Jesus dothe not so; for he makes use of the weak.. . .Mark this, you that despise and oppose the Message of the Lord God that he sends by Women; What had become of the Redemption of the Whole body of Mankind, if they had not cause to believe the

> Message that the Lord Jesus sent by these Women, of and concerning the Resurrection?[41]

Notice the emphasis Fell puts on the weakness and dependency of these women. Christ chose them to be vessels because their hearts were so tender towards him that they did not leave his sepulchre as the men did, but waited to carry out His will. Mary's Magnificat, Fell points out, celebrates the exaltation of the lowly so that God's, not man's, will be done; typically, the hypocritical Anglican clergy forbids women to preach or teach, and yet puts Mary's Magnificat in the Book of Common Prayer. Keith Thomas maintains that this emphasis on the weakness of the prophet "must have served to perpetuate the legend of women's inferiority," but he also notes that Cromwell used the same language of dependency without developing the point.[43] The enthusiasts equated strength, domination and oppression with the Antichrist; they wanted to turn this world upside down. The New Jerusalem was to elevate "the little ones"; it was to grow on the plant of "tender conscience"--a favorite expression of the enthusiasts. Long before Nietzsche, enemies tried to discredit the Christian "tender conscience" by dismissing it as slavish and "effeminate." In

Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan shows the power worldly ridicule has to undermine the spiritual person:

> [Shame said] A tender conscience was an unmanly thing; and that for man to watch over his words and ways, so as to tie himself from that hectoring liberty that the brave spirits of the times accustom themsellves unto, would make him the ridicule of the times,. . .He, moreover, objected the base and low estate and condition of those that were chiefly the pilgrims.[44]

Modern Christian feminists would maintain that when Paul makes women subordinate to men and forbids them to speak in church, he falls from the divine perspective to a culturally-determined perspective; he falls from "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male not female: for ye are all one in Christ" to " A man. . .is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (Gal3:28; ICor. 11:7). Fell manages to explain away Paul's apparent attacks against women speaking--see, for example, ICor. 14:34-5; ITim. 2:11-12--by appealing to the enthusiast paradigm which divides the world into the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The women Paul prevents from speaking, says Fell, are women of the false church, wanton women born afer the flesh and under the

law, represented archtypally by Jezebel: "the great whore, and tatling and unlearned Women and Busie-bodies." Women "led by the Spirit" are not under the law: "for Christ in the male and in the female is one." Paul reiterates this division of women when he uses Sarah and Hagar allegorically to represent two covenants: Sarah's offspring are born free "after the Spirit"; Hagar's are born in bondage after the flesh and should be cast out of the new Jerusalem (Gal. 4:22-31). Since only women in whom Christ reigns may usurp authority over men, Women's Speaking is not so much a vindication of women's speaking as of prophets' speaking out.[45]

Both sexes are told elsewhere "to wait low in silence, until the Word be committed to you to minister." Beware of speaking subjectively, Fell tells Friends, "under the pretence of a Burthen; which Burthen is the Earthly Part in yourselves, and the Words that you speak belong to your own Particulars." If they wait in silence searching inwardly, they will be united in one eternal truth. Sufficiency of the Spirit is not self-sufficiency. Speak only from a "pure moving" and then divine perfection becomes possible.[46] This is gracious freedom.

One night in 1670, Jane Lead, an impoverished widow, sat up praying, as she had done for many years, trying to understand God's promises for a new order in light of the obvious political defeat of God's party in 1660. As Lead was devoted to the teachings of Jacob Boehme in which Sophia, the Wisdom Goddess, plays a significant role, she was rereading the Old Testament Books of Wisdom. Suddenly Wisdom appeared. In the nightly visitations that followed, Wisdom promised to initiate a renewal of the image of God in humans.[47] Lead learned that the trinitarian God had had the Virgin-Wisdom hid within Him from all eternity. "The True Divine Masculine," according to Lead, is male and female. Therefore, because Adam was created in God's image, the human before the fall was an androgynous virgin spirit before he/she fell into division (Adam and Eve). The true Adam would have procreated spiritually.[48] Her prophetic visions made Lead an influential leader of theosophical movements in England and in Holland and Germany [theo=God, sophia=wisdom in Greek]. While admitting that her seemingly obscure teachings might only be understood by a spiritually-disciplined elite, Lead assured her

readers that the spirit of Wisdom would move eventually to redeem not only all humans but all lapsed creation including the damned angels.[49] So great is God's love, Lead prophesied, that it would overcome God's justice; God revealed "I am Love and cannot bear to see any of my creatures miserable to all eternity."[50]

In a letter of 1698 to Francis Lee, Lead's leading disciple and co-founder with Lead of the Philadelphian movement, Henry Dodwell condemned Lead's writings as heretical because he claimed that her promise that God would eventually forgive every creature would have a subversive and licentious effect on contemporary society. He also complained that her feminizing of the godhead threatened church unity and authority; after all, orthodox Christianity had "declared against the difference of sex in the Divinity" and had repudiated second-century Gnosticism which said that God was at once male and female.[51] But Lead intended her teachings to be ecumenical rather than divisive; she invited her followers to negate their loyalties to outward differences--Protestant vs Catholic, English vs French, male vs female--loyalties which kept Christians alienated from one another

and attached to earthly concerns. Though Lead's works outline the stages towards restoring the virgin spirit through separation from the world, she submitted outwardly to traditional authority and observances with such divine indifference that she seems hardly to have noticed them. A true Philadelphian, she writes, "is one perfectly Content with that State or Lot in which he stands" because only "a narrow contracted spirit" is always "Seeking its Own and not that which is for the Good of the Whole."[52] The regeneration of the human state was to be an "intrinsical" rather than an institutional process, a holistic evolution within the souls of individuals co-operating with grace.

What emerges from these five biographical sketches is that all of the female prophets, whether actively disobedient to ecclesiastical or civil authority or inwardly withdrawing from the imperfect world, saw themselves as founding and furthering a new Jerusalem. They justified their socially subversive beliefs and behaviour in the name of gracious freedom. Just before writing the sentence that opens this chapter, Father Knox pictures some "unbalanced" prophets: "Martha Simmonds escorting Naylor into

Bristol with cries of Hosanna, Madame Guyon training up her director in the way he should go, the convulsionary priestesses going through the motions of saying Mass at St. Medard." Then he expects even feminists to be disgusted by such anti-social, irrational behaviour and ultimately to reject the claim to divine grace as an argument for female emancipation.[53] And modern feminists--dominated as we are by materialist and rationalist considerations--have wondered what contribution such women prophets made to the women's movement . How are we to evaluate these women who spoke out in public in ecstatic frenzy thus reinforcing, in Phyllis Mack's view, "negative female stereotypes" and provoking their own repression; who dissipated their energy on propagating transcendental visions; who postponed justice and equality till after Christ's return instead of challenging the material realities of their lives?[54] Their attempt to short-circuit the ecclesiastical power structure by claiming a direct line to God through prophecy failed in their own century to gain any lasting spiritual, let alone social, authority for women. And yet, it was only the belief that they were co-operating with God's

grace that encouraged and provoked so many women to leave the security and sanctity of their place.

In her Faces of Feminism (1981), Olive Banks wisely defines feminism in such a broad way that it can include the diverse, even contradictory, groups that claim to be feminist: "any groups that have tried to change the position of women or ideas about women" are feminist. The advantage of such a simple definition is that it presents the women's movement as a single historical process.[55] It allows us to bring together as feminists women who are otherwise alien even antagonistic because it underlines the essential characteristic of feminism: its rejection of the traditional position of women. Whatever intellectual, political, or spiritual framework is presupposed, whatever method is pursued, any individual or group which helps to undermine and to overthrow the hierarchical ordering of man over woman is feminist.

The enthusiast movement resurrected old heresies--Gnosticism and Montanism--which undermined the patriarchal notion that God had preordained the subordinate place

of women in church, state and family. It challenged the narrow orthodoxy of the traditional world view in which the beliefs of so-called marginals and eccentric types were "heresy." Modernity, as Peter Berger has insightfully argued, is characterized by the multiplication of choices; it is the triumph and universalization of heresy.[56] Once it is understood that, despite the diversity, dissension and disunity that characterizes the women's movement at present and in the past, feminists are participants in a long revolution against hierarchy in the human--as well as in the natural and in the supernatural--order, then the significance to feminism of the seventeenth-century female prophets becomes evident. After all, prophets only prepare the way. Moreover, the enthusiasts left feminists a literary legacy, their chief "spiritual weapon," the autobiography of the individual spirit.

NOTES:

[1]Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History, 1st publ. 1931. (London: G. Bell, 1968), pp. 24, 28.

[2]The best study of the enthusiasts as spiritual democrats is Christopher Hill's The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.15. Sources which focus on the contribution of women to the movement include Keith Thomas' "Women and the Civil War Sects," Past and Present 13 (Apr. 1958), and Phyllis Mack's "Women as Prophets During the English Civil War," Feminist Studies 8, #1 (Spring, 1982).

[3]Keith Thomas, pp. 45, 50, 57.

[4]Margaret Fell, A Brief Collection of remarkable Passages and Occurrances Relating to the Birth, Education, Life, ... (London: J. Sowle, 1710), p. 209. The most complete single source on Fell is Isabel Ross' Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949).

[5]Brief Collection, pp. 331-350; see pp. 62-65 for my description of the arguments in Women's Speaking Justified.

[6]For a historical overview of that contribution, see Hope Elizabeth Luder's pamplet Women and Quakerism (Wallingford, Penn.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1974).

[7]Elizabeth Bathurst, Truth's Vindication or a Gentle Stroke to wipe off the Foul Aspirations[sic], False Accusations and Misrepresentations, cast upon the People of God, called Quakers (London: Sold by W. S. & J. B., 1683), p. 44.

[8]One of the scriptural passages enthusiasts frequently quote to support the claim for "sufficiency of the Spirit" is "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" [IICor. 12:9]. The best general study is R. A. Knox's

Enthusiasm: a Chapter in the History of Religion with special reference to the XVII and XVIII centuries. 1st publ. 1950. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); for a succinct summary of Father Knox's findings, see New Catholic Encyclopaedia, X, pp. 1078-79.

[9]Mary Penington, Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington Written by Herself, ed. Norman Penney (Philadelphia: Biddle Press, 1911), pp. 32, 35.

[10]Jane Lead, A Treatise of the Souls Union with Christ (London: J. Hancock, 1680), p. 275. Compare the enthusiasts' interpretation of Genesis 3:15 with that of the Calvinists. Calvin reads the passage as literally and "simply" as he can. There is to be a natural strife between the human race and serpents. God "assails Satan under the name of the serpent." Gone is the patristic association of "the seed of woman" with the Virgin Mary's son and the foreshadowing of human regeneration. According to Calvin, God only mentions the "seed of woman" for the sake of Eve who had "peculiar need of consolation" after her role in the fall. John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), pp. 167-172.

[11]"The Narrative of Katherine Evans, " in Joseph Besse's A Collection of the Sufferings of the people called Quakers, 2 vol. (London: Luke Hinde, 1753), II, pp. 399-420.

[12]Christopher Hill, The Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 4,5,44; in general, chapters II and III.

[13]Anna Trapnel, A Legacy for Saints (London: Printed for T. Brewster, 1654), "To all that fear the Lord, under what form so ever."

[14]Anna Trapnel, The Cry of a Stone, or a Relation of Something Spoken in Whitehall (London: 1654), p. 2.

[15]Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 363. For Saint Benedict, mystics live most perfectly as cenobites under the guidance of a shepherd; only seasoned veterans are prepared for "the single combat of the hermit." Lives without rule or enclosure are not recommended for seekers of perfection. The Rule of Saint Benedict, trans. Anthony C. Meisel & M. L. del Mastro (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 47.

[16]Steven E. Ozment, Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 1-2.

[17]Knox. p. 20.

[18]Thomas Edwards, Gangraena (London: 1645), "The Epistle Dedicatory."

[19]In his "Introduction" to The World Turned Upside Down, Hill observes that David Underdown's Pride's Purge (1971) deals with the same period as his book, but because their views are from different angles, their indexes contain totally different names. "His is the view from the top, from Whitehall, mine is the worm's eye view" (p. 14). I am covering the enthusiast movement as Hill does, but foregrounding the female participants, whom Hill merely mentions in passing if at all.

[20]This initial vision is described in a number of her pamphlets, for example, The Lady Eleanor, Her Appeale to the High Courte of Parliament (London: 1641), p. 14; The Lady Eleanor her Appeal. Presented to Mr. Mace (London: 1646), p. 9.

[21]Besides her own writings, the best single source for Davies' biography remains Theodore Spencer's "The History of an Unfortunate Lady." Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, XX (1938), 43-59.

[22]George Ballard, Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who have been celebrated for their Writings or Skill in Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1752), pp. 281-282; Gangraena, I, pp. 79-80.

[23]cited by Benjamin Hanbury, Historical Memorials relating to Independents or Congregationalists from their Rise to the Restoration of the Monarchy, 3vol. (London: Fisher & Son, 1839), III, p. 184n.

[24]Katherine Chidley, The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ. Being an Answer to Mr. Edwards (London: Printed for William Larner, 1641), p. 9.

[25]Justification, "To the Christian Reader."

[26]Justification, p. 81 [mistakenly numbered p. 80]; Hanbury, II, p. 108.

[27]Katherine Chidley, A New-Yeares Gift, or A Brief Exhortation to Mr. Thomas Edwards, that he may breake off his old sins (1645), "To the Godly Reader"; Justification, "Answer to his Introduction."

[28]For detailed studies of the involvement of women in the crisis politics of the interregnum, see Ellen A. McArthur, "Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament," The English Historical Review 24 (1909), 698-709; Patricia Higgins, "The Reactions of Women with special reference to women petitioners," Politics, Religion and the Civil War, ed. Brian Manning (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 179-224.

[29]Justification, p. 78.

[30]The thousand women who carried the May 7, 1649 petition to parliament, Brailsford claims, "with seagreen ribbons pinned to their breasts may be reckoned in their modest anonymity among the forerunners of Mary Wollstonecraft." H. N.

Brailsford, The Levellers and the English Revolution, ed. Christopher Hill (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 317-318.

[31]Mary Cary, A Word in Season to the Kingdom of England or A Precious Cordiall for a distempered Kingdom (London: Printed by R. W. For Giles Calvert, 1647), title page.

[32]Mary Cary, The Resurrection of the Witnesses, and Englands Fall From (The Mystical Babylon) Rome. . . 2nd ed. (London: Printed by H. Hills, 1653), title page, "To the Reader. . .August 1653). Fellow sectarians such as J. Downame might challenge Cary's "pretended demonstration" calling it "a partiall fantasy," but at the same time, he recognizes her as a "minister" and admires her as a woman of "parts." The Account Audited Or the Date of the Resurrection of the Witnesses, Pretended to be demonstrated by M. Cary (London: 1649), pp. 14, 2.

[33]Mary Cary, A New and More Exact Map or Description of the New Jerusalem's Glory (London, 1651), p. 236, from excerpt in Not in God's Image, ed. Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 265. See also Joel 2:28 for comparison. The theme that God will elevate the "little ones" pervades Cary's work; here is one more example: "[Jesus] did not tie up the spirit of Prophesie in Law, neither to the Priests or Levites, nor the Prophets or the Sons of Prophets, but gave out of that Spirit to Amos a Heardsman and to others; much less has he tied up the spirit of Prophesizing now in the Gospel, unto such and such degrees of humane learning. . .." Word in Season, p. 5.

[34]Cary, Word in Season, "To the Reader," pp. 1-5, 10. Cary was harsh against idlers and sinners among the poor, p. 2. Also see B. S. Capp, The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 147, 149.

[35] Resurrection, pp. 114, 148.

[36]The Journal of George Fox, 2 vol., ed. Norman Penney, 1st pub. 1911 (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), I, p. 52.

[37]Hill, World Turned Upside Down, pp. 42-43; Fell quotation taken from Isabel Ross, p. 119.

[38]A Brief Collection, p. 209.

[39]"A Letter to Francis Howgill, 1653," Brief Collection, p. 51.

[40]Fell's position is the same as that of the Quakers in general. George Fox writes that, "And if Christ be in the female as well as in the male, is he not the same? and may not the spirit of Christ speak in the female as well as in the male? is he there to be limited? Who is it that dare limit the Holy One of Israel?. . .and you that will not have him reign in the female as well as in the male, you are against Scripture." from The Woman Learning in Silence, quoted in Not in God's Image, ed. O'Faolain, p. 267.

[41]A Brief Collection, pp. 331-332, 336-337.

[42]A Brief Collection, p. 346.

[43]Keith Thomas, p. 56. Joseph Besse uses the fact that "even feeble Women, having no might of themselves" were able to make more than manly Opposition to the persecuting Spirit" to show the Power of God's grace to strengthen and change even female lives. II, p. 213.

[44]John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress From this World to That Which is to Come and Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, ed. James Thorpe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 137.

[45]A Brief Collection, pp. 349, 344, 342, 349.

[46]A Brief Collection, pp. 54-55.

[47]In one of her late appearances, on January 1, 1696, Sophia showed herself to Lead as the woman clothed in the sun, standing on the moon and crowned with twelve stars, as mentioned in the Book of Revelation, 12:1. This prefigured the Third Coming, that of Wisdom, which would end the reign of the Dragon. (Christ's and the Holy Spirit's at the Pentecost were the first two comings.) The best sources of information about Lead's life are her own writings especially her diary, A Fountain of Gardens: Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure (London: 1697), and Nil Thune's The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries (Uppsala: 1948), especially pp. 68-97, 174-216. Also see Catherine Smith's perceptive "Jane Lead: The Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic," in Women of Spirit, pp. 183-204.

[48]Jane Lead, The Revelation of Revelations (London: A. Sowle, 1695), pp. 31-32. For recent essays attempting to wrestle with the relationship between feminism, androgyny and holism, see The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement, ed. Charlene Spretnak (New York: Doubleday, 1982), especially Spretnak's "Introduction."

[49]D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 218-230.

[50]These words are from "A Divine Communication Delivered through. . .Reverend Richard Roach who was thirty years under the Spirit's operation, in union with Jane Lead," in Jane Lead's Divine Revelations and Prophecies, 1st pub. 1700 (Nottingham: H. Wild, 1830). pp. 86, 81.

[51]Henry Dodwell, "Letter to Francis Lee, Aug. 23, 1698," in Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of William Law, ed. Christoper Walton (London: 1854), pp. 193-194. For a recent

attempt to recover and to reassess the Gnostic tradition, see Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Random House, 1979), especially chapter three, "God the Father/God the Mother."

[52]Jane Lead, The Messenger of An Universal Peace: or A Third Message to the Philadelphian Society (London: 1698), pp. 57, 61. For Lead's ecumenical ideas, see Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, History of the Ecumenical Movement (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), pp 83, 100, 105.

[53]Knox, p. 20.

[54]Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets During the English Civil War," Feminist Studies 8, #1 (Spring, 1982), 38. See p. 36 for discussion of why "the community of reasonable men and women" suppressed Martha Simmonds.

For essays arguing that "spiritual" and "political" feminists have the same goals, such as justice, love, and equality, see Hallie Iglehart, "The Unnatural Divorce of Spirituality and Politics," and Judith Antonelli, "Feminist Spirituality: The Politics of the Psyche," in Spretnak, pp. 404-414, 399-402.

[55]Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement (Oxford: Martine Robertson, 1982), pp. 3, 1.

[56]Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation (New York: Doubleday, 1980), chapter one, pp. 1-29.

Chapter four: Grace vs. Place: Conflict in the Spiritual Autobiographies of the Female Prophets

> By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority to do these things?
>
> Chief Priests to Jesus [Mark 11:28]

Virginia Woolf once remarked that "all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn" for winning them "the right to speak their minds." Because of Behn's example, hundreds of 18th-century women earned money making translations and writing "innumerable bad novels" now forgotten. Nevertheless, it was from this "experience of the mass" that the masterpieces of Jane Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot were born. For Woolf, therefore, this 18th-century phenomenon is a more important historical event than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses: "the middle-class woman began to write."[1] But what about the hundreds of 17th-century women from all classes who took to writing enthusiastic autobiographies which were just as

innumerable and just as "bad" as the novels of the 18th-century ladies? Unfortunately, they have no recognizable heir. There is no "single voice," no descendent, who created a masterpiece from this 17th-century "mass of experience." This chapter explores the nature and extent of the legacy of the female prophets to literary history.

The critical consensus about enthusiast writers in general is not encouraging. James Sutherland dismissed their writings as belonging "rather to the history, or sub-history, of religion than to that of literature."[2] Donald Stauffer describes their autobiographies as "of little value. . .redundant and blurred in their materials, imitative in their style."[3] W. Y. Tindall ridicules these testimonials as mere "advertisements of the gifts of God."[4] For Paul Delany, in his British Autobiography in the 17th Century, these writings are not "true autobiography" which must be a "coherent account of the author's life. . .composed after a period of reflection and forming a unified narrative"; they have no "authoritative model" and so are shapeless, wearisome to read, and often absurd; worst of all they are rarely coherent.[5] Three

centuries of critics and readers, at least secular ones, have agreed with this verdict. Though there may be some exceptions--notably Bunyan's Grace Abounding and Fox's Journal--the spiritual autobiographies of the enthusiasts have not been read--at least with pleasure.

The literary historian need not be deterred by bad writing.[6] Moreover, as Delany points out, few 17th-century autobiographers--if the term can even be used anachronistically--cared about literary excellence.[7] There was a pervasive attitude in the 17th century that speaking with the Spirit often meant speaking incoherently. Even an Anglican such as Mary Astell agreed that "Fluency of Expression is a meer Humane Art. . . .when Desires are truly Fervent and Pathetic, they are too big for Words, and to use a Scriptural Phrase, are express'd in Groans that can't be utter'd."[8] This view was especially true for the enthusiasts who were proud that their ministry was made up of women, mechanics and uneducated persons,--all "weak instruments" seized by the power of the Spirit and made to speak. Since they presented their writings as the spontaneous outpourings

of the Spirit, they repudiated all semblance of learning, premeditation, reflection and revision in order to emphasize the sufficiency of the Spirit. In Grace Abounding, Bunyan claims he did not dare "play" with this "working of God with my soul," so he wrote in a "plain and simple" style, just "as it was."[9] The Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel's writings are "not my Works, but the Spirit's works"; indeed, Cry of a Stone is a record of Trapnel's ecstatic and autobiographical utterances during seven days when Trapnel was so transported by the Spirit that her words--the Spirit's words--had to be taken down by "a slow hand" who was present at her bedside.[10]

For enthusiasts, the quality of the writing was not nearly as important as the quantity because the more autobiographical testimonies that were disseminated, the more persuasive the evidence that the Holy Spirit was indeed conquering hearts for the new kingdom. In order to attack "bare professors"--priests, teachers and officials who sustained empty forms and institutions and obstructed the Spirit's free movement--, enthusiasts used two inter-related weapons: first, Biblical passages,

especially from Daniel, Joel, and the Book of Revelation, predicting the fall of the old and the coming of the new order; and second, the inner experiences of the witnesses that this promised revolution was actually going on. Thus, in 1662, when an otherwise obscure woman like Dorothy White sends forth her seven-page tract, "A Trumpet of the Lord of Hosts Blown unto the City of London," the conventional Biblical language of the testimony merges with her own urgent voice; the prophet and the self become one: "I do proclaim the Day of Free-Love. . .This is the breath of my life. . .I do not withhold but I freely let it go."[11] It was essential that everyone--even women--"advertise," as Tindall would have it, their visions because each testimony--regardless of its style, its brevity, its conventionality--added to the "experimental knowledge" and the cohesiveness of the enthusiast-millenarian paradigm.[12]

Because the subject is a mere witness, a spiritual autobiography is as aptly called a testimony (after testis, Latin for witness). I have used "spiritual autobiography" and "testimony" interchangeably to refer to writings by women who identified

themselves as vessels of the Spirit. In Margaret Fell's Relation of. . .Her Birth, Life, Testimony and Sufferings for the Lord's Everlasting Truth in her Generation (1690), it takes only two paragraphs to cover the events of the first thirty-eight years of her life, 1614-1652, when she sought God but fell "short of the right way." After convincement, all incidents in Relation are prefaced explicitly or implicitly with "I was moved by the Spirit to. . ." Thus in spite of the variety and adventure in Fell's life--her organizing her home at Swarthmore, Westmoreland, as a communication centre and northern refuge for itinerant Quakers; her nine journeys to London (the last at 76 in 1690) to lobby with the king and other officials on behalf of persecuted Quakers; her steadfastness in spite of persecution including imprisonments, once for four years; her tracts and letters written to further the cause of religious tolerance; her marriage to George Fox--in spite of this variety, her Relation makes for tedious reading (except for the convinced, perhaps) becasue Fell eliminated her sentiments and personal detail in order to focus on one subject: what she contributed to the establishment of the Spirit's truth. One has to look at other Quaker documents,

especially her own letters, to find the human Fell. In Relation, for example, Fell presents her husband Judge Fell (who refused to convert to Quakerism) as a "Friend to the Friends" and herself as an obedient and loving wife. And yet her letters reveal that the Margaret who went to prison for refusing to obey "Man, contrary to my Conscience" would apply the same principle to an obstructing husband.[13] In October, 1657, because the Judge had forbidden her to publish a tract, she wrote to a friend, "Let it come forth speedily and be sent abroad, before my husband come up to London, lest he light of it and prevent the service of it."[14]

The energy of the spiritual testimony comes from the confrontation between the two seeds, the way of the Spirit and the way of the world. At its most mechanical, the testimony gives a brief description of the subject's transformation into an active minister and then invites the reader to turn inward.[15] For example, in Visit to the Spirit in Prison (1658), Sarah Blackborow writes typically in Biblical phraseology--the way "was declared unto me"--and in Quaker body language--"I knew that that was Gods witnesse which had been working in me from my childhood,

and had begotten pure breathings and desires, and thirstings after God." But the enemy is shadowy and simplistic--those with "their minds abroad in the visible" who imprison the Spirit's vessels--and the witness herself is so conventional that there is not much in her tract to move the reader to her perspective.[16]

Better is a brief but vivid testimony by Elizabeth Bathurst entitled An Expostulatory Appeal to the Professors of Christianity. The confrontation between the two seeds is given bodies. One Sunday in 1678, Elizabeth Bathurst with her sister Anne standing "patiently by me" attended a church meeting led by the Reverend Samuel Ansley--inevitably, "in answer to the Requirings of the Lord." Bathurst waited politely until the service was over; then the Spirit made her speak to warn them that they were "out of the right way." The congregation became rude and violent. A short while later, the reluctant Bathurst was required to send these people a letter, her Appeal, to give them "a true Accompt" of her outburst. In order to provoke them "to turn into the secret of your own Souls" and to renounce the empty forms and customs of their church, she tells them her life story. In her "tender years," she

sought God and found him not in public assemblies not in scripture, though there she read the reports of ancient witnesses of His operations: "but what was this to me? whilst I knew him not myself." This appealing to one's own experience characterizes enthusiasts. Finally Bathurst found God through grace, without false mediators, the only way "every one may learn to know God savingly." She sends the unwilling congregation her liberating message so "I am clear concerning you at this time."[17] While admiring Bathurst's Truth's Vindication for its use of personal experience to plead for the whole group, Luella Wright, in The Literary Lives of the Early Friends 1650-1725, is disappointed that Bathurst never transformed it into memoirs.[18] But then, Bathurst was not aiming to be a writer: "Neither have I fondly desired to get my Name in Print; for 'tis not an Inky Character can make a Saint."[19]

In the Narrative of Katherine Evans, even the Antichrist is humanized and given dialogue; the result is a readable testimony. According to Joseph Besse, the Narrative recounts "the wonderful Preservations and Deliverances" of Evans and her friend Sarah Cheevers from the trials, temptations, "subtil Sollicitations,

Contrivances, and Threats" of the Inquisition, that great agent of the Antichrist.[20] On one hand, Evans successfully presents herself as a "sufferer for the seed's sake," made remarkable and dauntless by the Spirit within. There is, however, enough descriptive detail in the Narrative to let us understand, if not to sympathize with, the position of the "Antichrist." Evans and Cheevers got off a ship in Malta, "having a great Burden," and began preaching and handing out pamphlets against the religious practices of the people of Malta. Not surprisingly, they were called before the Inquisition and asked questions like "Wherefore we came into that country," "What new Light we talked of," "How came this Light to be lost ever since the Apostles Time," and "How she [Sarah] knew it [her inner voice] was from the Lord." Because they refused to quit the island and to stop preaching till the Lord commanded them to, the women were imprisoned in a room "so hot and so close, that we were fain to rise often out of our Bed, and to lie down at a Chink of the Door for Air. . . our Skin was like Sheep's Leather, and the Hair did fall off our Heads." Despite this suffering, the fearless Evans "was compelled to declare [to the Maltese people who passed beneath her prison

window] against all their Ways, Works and Worships." The women were questioned regularly by inquisitors and friars and gave such clever answers from scripture that, on occasion, even the enemy was made to reflect: "they were silent for some time, the power of God greatly working." Some answers showed less tact; Sarah said, "The Devil was a Catholick and she would not be one." The people of Malta were moved to compassion by the courage and agonies endured by the two women: "all their holy Women did pray for us." Yet, Evans views this as a trick to convert them to idolatry. When their money ran out, the Lord Inquisitor gave "a great Allowance. . .for our Maintenance," but God would not let them "meddle" with such money and made them "content with what we had." Finally, the women were freed when English merchants put up 4,000 dollars to ensure "that we should never come into those Parts again."[21]

The influence of the Pauline model on spiritual autobiography is pervasive; there is a before and an after; there is living under the law and there is living in the Spirit of Love.[22] Most testimonies tend to emphasize the activities of the transformed witness, but, while Anna Trapnel's A Legacy of Saints describes her

later attacks on ecclesiastical and social tyranny, it develops the insight that the forces of the Law, of the Antichrist, are not just reigning externally but also within. Legacy depicts an inner struggle between the spirit of the law and that of love for Trapnel's allegiance. At fourteen, Trapnel prayed eagerly in "a very formall manner"; she sought out "the strictest professors"; she "ran with great violence" after the appearance of being a saint. "I had great parts, in prayer great enlargements, and in discoursing and repeating of Sermons, I was very forward, and did it with great delight and affection, and much trembling of spirit was upon me, but I was in all this very legal, and yet more legal."[23] But suddenly she realized that God would not be fooled by her talent for outward forms and she was oppressed with the "terrors of the Law." She could find no rest, she went from minister to minister, she considered suicide. Yet she continued to prefer her tempestuous dramatics to the peaceful--"cold, lean, poor-- doctrine of saving grace. "I delighted in the thunderings of the Law, and they pleased me best that preached most upon the Law, and that prest legal qualifications." Finally, after much self-indulgent suffering, she

surrendered to Jesus: "You cannot out-sin mercy," she discovered. Legacy reveals an inner life so intense, we almost forget Trapnel's lack of real people and places. She describes her "unspeakable joy" at experiencing the perspective of the mystics: "My soul was made a partaker in every creature."[24] When Trapnel brought this perspective to the world, she became the effective propagandist for the new Jerusalem one meets in her other writings.

Recently, novelist Erica Jong wrote that "I do not know what a writer would write of if all of her characters were superwomen, cleansed of conflict. Conflict is the soul of literature."[25] This is certainly true for the modern reader. The spiritual testimony comes alive when it embodies the confrontation between obedience to God and obedience to human authority whether in church, state or family; when the requirements of being in God's grace contradict those of a woman's place in her society; when the witness (the "superwoman") becomes a woman and the Antichrist a flesh-and-blood man--her king, her magistrate, her minister, and most poignantly, her father or husband. For example, there is no conflict in the polemical, repetitive tracts of Eleanor

Davies. Yet one autobiographical passage has narrative interest despite God's intervention. When Davies was chosen as the handmaid of the Spirit in 1625, she tells us that she laid aside all worldly activity including the "Household cares" of a wife and would have "no conversation with any but the Word of God." When her husband, John Davies, resisted her vocation--which included proclaiming doom for Archbishop Laud and Charles I--and burned her writings, God's wrath turned upon John as we learn from this memorable passage describing how Lady Davies started wearing black to show her confidence in her own prediction of his imminent death. I quote at length to include the fate of her second husband and to illustrate Lady Davies' peculiar, apocalyptic style in imitation of Daniel and John:

> This Book of mine was sacrificed by my first Husbands hand, thrown into the fire, whose Doom I gave him in letters of his own Name (John Daves, Joves Hand) within three years to expect the mortal blow; so put on my mourning garment from that time...
>
> Accordingly which too soon came to pass, for contrary to a solemn vow within three Months married to another Husband, who escaped not scot free: he likewise burning my Book, another Manuscript, a remembrance to the king for beware great Britains blow at hand, shewd him thus, Dan. 12.[26]

Eternal truth could encounter particular circumstances and create a tension even in the lives of two convinced enthusiasts. Quaker Alice Curwen's A Relation of the Labours, Travail and Suffering (1680) is mostly a routine narrative about carrying out the Spirit's mission, except for one vivid incident when love of her husband complicates obedience to the Holy Spirit. In 1660, when Quakers were being tortured and a few hanged in the "Bloody Town of Boston," Alice was called to go there. Her children were dependent and her husband Thomas was in prison for refusing to pay the tithe, but the voice told her "that the Lord would deliver him out of Prison and that we must travail in another Nation together." Unfortunately, the Spirit neglected to move Thomas to go to America. When he was released from jail, "he did not see it to be required of him at that time." But since Thomas "gave me Liberty in Obedience to the Invisible Power," she set out reluctantly alone, "God making me willingly." She was on board about to sail before "it pleased the Lord. . .to send my Husband to go along with me."[27]

Davies, Evans, Fell and Curwen rarely forget that they are witnesses of the Spirit when they are writing, but the Narrative

of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont in 1674 is remarkable for its development of a sustained psychological tension between obedience to God and obedience to man--in this case, to Beaumont's father--and consequently, for its energy and readability. Beaumont's Narrative is intended as a self-vindication, concentrating of the events of the few weeks surrounding her father's death after which she was accused by a former-suitor-turned-enemy and was charged in court with poisoning her father with the aid of John Bunyan. Narrative opens with conventional, but sincere, thanks to God for the "enlargement of heart" experienced as a result of her sufferings. In the year before the events of the Narrative, Beaumont writes, she was constantly ravished by the Spirit of God. In November 1672, she had joined John Bunyan's Baptist community in Bedford against the will of her father, a man of "hasty temper. . . though, when his passion was over, few exceeded him in good nature." Her story reveals that father and daughter had a warm relationship and that, with tact and patience, Agnes could handle his temper and, by indirect ploys, gain her will. As she began to have "great and frequent enjoyments of God," scarcely eating and sleeping,

her father became increasingly irritable. Since he believed some malicious rumours about Bunyan, he was particularly set against her going to Sunday meetings: "to pray hard was the most successful method of obtaining my father's consent."[28]

One winter Sunday in 1674, she got his permission and went to her brother's nearby farm to go with him, but they could get her no horse. When Bunyan happened by on his way to services, she begged a ride with so many tears that he reluctantly agreed, though he said, "Your father will be grevious angry if I should." As they went along, she confesses in her youthful, charming way, "my heart began to be lifted up with pride, at the thoughts of riding behind this servant of the Lord." Bunyan was by then well-known for his sufferings, writings and imprisonments for God's cause. But "my pride soon had a fall" because an antagonistic clergyman saw them together and "soon after raised a vile scandal upon us." On returning that evening, she found her enraged father had locked her out of the house so she spent the night in the barn in ecstacy, receiving the promises of her heavenly Father's love. The next day she was forced to move in with her brother whose negotiations on her behalf only

enflamed the father more. Much of the Narrative describes Agnes following her father about the yard, "crying and hanging about him," begging him to relent, but he only shouted threats--such as "he would not give me one penny so long as he live; no, nor when he died neither; but would sooner leave his substance to a stranger than to me." At her brother's, she prayed until she was "willing to go to service and to be stripped of all for Christ!" Later, when she stole the house key, the father caught her in the yard, and yelled, "Hussy! give me the key quickly, or else I will throw you in the pond." Agnes gave it up, crushed with sadness at his relentless cruelty.[29]

Despite her father's pride, violence and abuse of his financial power over her, Agnes never lets her portrait of him degenerate into a stereotype. It is her ambivalence, her sympathy for this persecutor of the seed, that gives her Narrative aesthetic as well as spiritual tension. Later in the week, the father said she could come home if she vowed never to go again to the Baptist meetings as long as he lived. Despite the warnings of her brother, Agnes thought "nothing could move me," but her affection for her father was too powerful and she gave in to his condition--adding she would not go

to a meeting "without his consent" thinking she could soften his heart later. In the first evenings after her return, she wept so bitterly for having betrayed Christ that finally her father too "wept like a child," confessing how he worried and missed her when she was locked out. The next night, unfortunately, he was struck with a pain in his heart as he slept. Agnes describes in vivid detail his last moments and her frantic, fruitless attempts to help him--his cries for "one day more" to prepare for death; his dead weight leaning on her as she held him before the fire; his face changing to black when she gave him a warm drink she hoped would revive him; her attempts to recall passages from scripture to keep herself from fainting. This passage is typical:

> After he had sat awhile, he felt an uneasiness in his bowels, and called for a candle to go into the other room. I saw him stagger as he went over the threshold; soon followed him and found him on the floor, which occasioned me to scream out, "Father! father!" putting my ;hands under his arms, lifting with all my might, first by one arm, then by another, crying and striving till my strength was quite spent.
>
> I found all my attempts to raise him in vain; and therefore, though not without fears of rogues who I thought waited at the door, ran, like some distracted creature, through deep snows, to my brother's where I stood crying in a deplorable state.. . .But in the midst of my trouble I had a secret hope that he was gone to heaven.

Beaumont's Narrative is candid, energetic and cohesive.[30] It is the spiritual testimony at its best and deserves to be remembered as more than a footnote to Bunyan's biography.

Mary Penington's A Brief Account of my Exercises from my Childhood is highly readable and lively because it has several honest moments of narrative tension when spiritual demands encounter worldly interests. In particular, though Penington sought and embraced enthusiasm wholeheartedly, she had trouble reconciling her unmistakable concern with what was appropriate to her outward rank and family tradition with joining in the kinship of the Spirit which did not distinguish lady from lowly mechanic. Her early years are typical of spiritually precocious children. She became discontented with the formal religion of her guardians and sought true prayer which she found to be vehement, loud, spontaneous outpourings in her own room. She was accused of being "proud and schismatic," because she would only worship with those who prayed with the Spirit. Her family and friends threatened that she would only be able to marry "some mean person or other" since "no gentleman was of this [Puritan] way" and since she refused

"those matches proposed to me by vain persons." But she was sure God was class-conscious too and would provide a Puritan husband "of my outward rank."[31] And He did.

Before William Springett's death in the Civil War, Mary and he spent two compatible years, if not finding the true way of the Spirit, yet in zealously uprooting the dead way from their hearts: "We scrupled many things then in use amongst those accounted honest people, viz.: singing David's Psalms in metre. We tore out of our Bibles the common prayer, the form of prayer, and also the singing psalms, as being the inventions of vain poets, not being written for that use. We found that songs of praise must spring from the same source as prayers did; so we could not use any one's songs or prayers." When they annouonced that they would not have their infant "sprinkled," Penington noticed the extent to which her beliefs alienated her from her family and class: "I became a by-word and a hissing among the people of my own rank in the world; and a strange thing it was thought to be, among my relations and acquaintance."[32]

When she and her second husband Isaac Penington

(another seeker of good background) were considering joining the Quakers, she hesitated to take up the cross and give up "the language, fashions, customs, titles, honor and esteem in the world." Yet after a spiritual struggle "not consulting how to provide for the flesh, " she joined "these despised people" because "my heart owned them." Even after they suffered the loss of his estate and most of hers, she was still concerned with living "suitable to our rank." When they were forced to move from their neighbourhood where people "knew of our former affluence" and honoured the Peningtons because "we contentedly submitted to mean things," Mary was worried how "we could still support a degree of decency." When they bought Woodside with its house in ruinous condition, the contemplative Isaac refused to get preoccupied with worldly considerations like restoring a building, but Mary was eager to have a suitable dwelling place. For four years while she was improving her property so it would be "ordinary," she prayed earnestly, "Lord, thou knowest I did not seek great things for myself: I desired not a fine habitation." When she was again a widow, she was pleased with her efforts because "I am quite disentangled and in a very easy state

as to outward things." This was not because she had repudiated possessions as her husband had, but because she had paid most of her mortgage and debts and had left "a handsome provision" for her children "considering it is all out of my own inheritance, having nothing of their father's to provide them with." But if she is indirectly boasting at the expense of her otherworldly husband, she acknowledges his superior singlemindedness in spiritual matters. When he died with so much anguish, she wondered about her own death: "If it be thus with the green tree, how will it be with me, who am to him but as a dry twig."[33] It is just this constant inner struggle to co-operate with God's grace even though it means forfeiting one's place that gives A Brief Account the "freshness and intensity" that Paul Delany could admire.[34]

The prophets, whether male or female, contributed to the conception and development of a literary form not only accessible to the powerless, uneducated and homebound, but also particularly effective in embodying disaffection with the world-as-it-is, conversion to a new vision of the world-as-it-should-be, and the conflict, whether psychological or

social, which results when the witness confronts a world unwilling to reform. Admittedly, as the last chapter points out, there is a basic alienation between the prophets and feminists. Prophets justify their actions because they have "gracious freedom"; feminists, because they have "natural freedom." In practice, however, it is often hard to distinguish the activism or pacifism of a woman who acts from sufficiency of the Spirit from a woman who acts from self-sufficiency.

And it does not take much imagination to secularize the two-seeds paradigm I have been describing and to see a kinship between the testimonies of prophets and those of feminists as dramatizations of the confrontation between the convinced, liberated individual and the hierarchical, patriarchical order. In a recent essay, Sandra Gilbert appropriates the language of conversion to describe the feminist's experience: "Most feminists speak. . .like people who must bear witness, people who must enact and express in their own lives and words the revisionary sense of transformation. . ."[35] Like our enthusiast foremothers, feminists use autobiographical evidence to demonstrate the oppressive nature

of the establishment, to dramatize our conversion to a new social vision, to convince others to work for regeneration and to establish a powerful network with other converts. Like them, we encourage all persons to publish their conversion experiences because the piling up of evidence persuades ourselves and others that the women's movement is irreversible and growing and that a just society will be found. As literary critics, we might also see the fatal consequences of reducing the world into two simplistic "seeds" and of disembodying ourselves and our enemies so that even our autobiographies will read like polemics that later generations might find unreadable.

NOTES:

[1]Virginia Woolf, "Aphra Behn," Women and Writing, selected by Michele Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 91.

[2]James Sutherland, English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 337. Sutherland is speaking specifically of Quaker writings, but his remarks would undoubtedly apply to other sectarian effusions. Fox's Journal and Barclay's Apology are excepted from his dismissal--Fox's Journal because Fox was able "to express the inner religous life in terms of everyday experience," and Barclay's Apology because Barclay has "that 'perspectiveness' which Coleridge saw as the mark of an educated writer" (p. 338).

[3]Donald Stauffer, English Biography before 1700 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. 203.

[4]W. Y. Tindal, John Bunyan, Mechanick Preacher (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. 23.

[5]Paul Delany, British Autobiography in the 17th Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 1-2, 82, 84, 103-104.

[6]Arthur Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea, 1st pub. 1936 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 19.

[7]Delany, pp. 173, 1.

[8]Mary Astell, Moderation truly Stated: or, A Review of a Late Pamphlet, entitled Moderation a Virtue (London: Printed by J. L. for Rich. Wilkin, 1704), p. 45.

[9]John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress and Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, ed. James Thorpe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), "Preface," p. 5.

[10]Anna Trapnel, The Cry of a Stone or a Relation of Something Spoken in Whitehall (London: 1654), p. 4.

[11]Dorothy White, A Trumpet of the Lord of Hosts Blown unto the City of London (London: me, D. W., 1662), p. 7.

[12]The expression "experimental knowledge" was commonly used to describe autobiographical evidence; see, for example, Elizabeth Bathurst's Truth's Vindication (London: 1683), p. 27.

[13]Margaret Fell, "A Relation of Margaret Fell," A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages (London: J. Sowle, 1710), pp. 3, 7.

[14]Spence MSS. III.49/21.8 1657 (October); cited by Isabel Ross, Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), pp. 96-97.

[15]For a less superficial description of conformity and individuality in Puritan autobioraphy, see Owen C. Watkins, "Themes and Variations," The Puritan Experience (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 37-52.

[16]Sarah Blackborow, A Visit to the Spirit in Prison and An Invitation to all people to come to Christ. . . (London: 1658), pp. 9, 7.

[17]Elizabeth Bathurst, An Expostulatory Appeal to the Professors of Christianity, Joyned in Community with Samuel Ansley (London: 1680), pp. 4-5, 2, 6.

[18]Luella M. Wright, The Literary Lives of the Early Friends 1650-1725 (New York: Ams Press, 1966), p. 196. In "Quest for Community: Spiritual Autobiographies of Eighteenth-Century Quaker and Puritan Women in America," Carol Edkins has also noted that 18th-century Quaker and Puritan autobiographers used their personal experience to affirm group cohesion. These women were neither "rebels or artists" but women "who searched very hard and sometimes very long for a niche and who, once having found it, symbolically celebrated their sense of community via the written

word." in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 52.

[19]Truth's Vindication, "An Epistle to You Five. A. W., E. T., M. J., B. P., & E. F."

[20]Joseph Besse, A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers, 2 vol. (London: Luke Hinde, 1753), II, p. 399.

[21]Katherine Evans, "The Narrative of Katherine Evans," in Besse, II, pp. 412, 399-400, 405, 401-402, 413.

[22]For Paul's influence on religious autobiography, see Delany, pp. 29-31.

[23]Anna Trapnel, A Legacy for Saints, Being Several Experiences of the dealings of God with Anna Trapnel (Lonson: 1654), pp. 1-2.

[24]Legacy for Saints, pp. 4, 7, 9.

[25]Erica Jong, "Blood and Guts: The Tricky Probelm of Being a Woman Writer in the Late Twentieth Century," The Writer on her Work, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 175.

[26] Eleanor Davies, The Lady Eleanor her Appeal. Present this to Mr. Mace (1646), pp. 8, 15-16.

[27]Alice Curwen, A Relation of the Labour, Travail and Suffering of that faithful servant of the Lord (1680), p. 3.

[28]Agnes Beaumont [Story], The Narrative of the persecution of Agnes Beaumont in 1674, in The Trial of John Bunyan and the Persecutions of the Puritans: Selections from the Writings of John Bunyan and Agnes Beaumont, ed. Monica Furlong (London: Folio Society, 1978), pp. 123-124, 130, 125.

[29]Beaumont, pp. 126-127, 130-132.

[30]Beaumont, pp. 135, 137, 138. G. B. Harrison finds the Narrative "a remarkable piece of natural prose writing," in his "Introduction," The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont in 1674, 1st pub. 1760 (London: Constable's Miscellany, 1929), p. vii.

[31]Mary Penington, Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington written by herself, ed. Norman Penney (Philadelphia: the Biddle Press, 1911), pp. 24-25.

[32]Penington, pp. 26, 28.

[33]Penington, pp. 44, 55, 58-63, 71.

[34]Delany, p. 166. For an introductory overview of 17th-century female autobiographers, see Delany's chapter, "Female Autobiographers," and Cynthia S. Pomerleau's "The Emergence of Women's Autobiography in England," in Jelinek, pp. 21-38.

For a comparison of Penington's Brief Account and Alice Hayes' A Legacy: or Widow's Mite which argues that both works are "significant contributions" and have "literary and historical merit," see Catherine La Courreye Blecki, "Alice Hayes and Mary Penington: Personal Identity within the Tradition of Quaker Spiritual Autobiography," Quaker History, LXV (Spring, 1976), pp. 19-31.

[35]Sandra Gilbert, "Life Studies, or Speech After Long Silence," College English, 40 (April, 1979), 850; Elaine Showalter brought this passage to my attention in "Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 3 #1/2 (Spring/Fall, 1984), 34.

PART THREE:
THE REVOLUTION INTERNALIZED:
THE SPIRIT IN RETREAT

Chapter five: Prophecy Methodized:
The Seventeenth-Century Triumph of Reason

> Here impeached of the sin against the Holy Ghost, guilty of the blood of these his Sacred Ambassadors slain by them: the Prophet Daniel and John, no inferior prophets, wrote, and these Imprinted at Holland, Anno 1633. immediately seized on, shrouded in a loose sheet of paper; their embalmed bodies about Doctors Commons, the good hour waiting for of their resurrection wounded in that barbarous manner, assaulted by merciless desperate men,. . .an account but current heretofore, never compleat till now the Holy Ghost in such manner blasphemed: the invincible truth term'd madness, the Prophets Testimony as extant on Record, and published, sentenced detestable.
>
> Eleanor Davies Apocalyps II. Its Accomplishment

> 9. To choose those constructions which without straining reduce things to the greatest simplicity. As the world, which to the naked eye exhibits the greatest variety of objects, appears very simple in its internall constitution when surveyed by a philosophic understanding, and so much the simpler by how much the better it is understood, so it is in these visions.
>
> Isaac Newton, "Rules for Methodizing the Apocalypse"

Looking back from the perspective of the twentieth century, the self-proclaimed New Daniel, the "mad" prophet Eleanor Davies, seems to have little in common with Sir Isaac Newton, founder of the rational and lawful universe which our culture takes for granted. The differences in approach to prophecy are obvious in the passages I have justed quoted. In her characteristic apocalyptic style, Davies describes the destruction and resurrection of her writings--seen in 1633 by Charles I's government as treasonous and in 1649 by Cromwell's government as prophetic. Newton's aim is to replace such ecstatic, fragmentary outbursts as hers with systematic, coherent "laws" encapsulating the meaning of the prophetic books. Yet both writers were passionately engaged in interpreting the Book of Revelation and in preparing for the new order, the New Jerusalem. Before exploring the implications of the differences between enthusiasts and rationalists, this chapter recalls their common ground.

Seventeenth-century mechanical philosophers and mechanical preachers were essentially "modern"; they declared war

on all fronts against the moral and intellectual authority of the traditional hierarchical order.[1] This is the insight Jonathan Swift exploits in his well-known satires against moderns when he deliberately confounds the rationalist's eccentricities with those of the enthusiast. A brief explication of A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit (1704) reinforces this point. The work might as aptly be called ". . .the Mechanical Operation of the Mind" because, although "the subject of Enquiry" is ostensibly the "phenomenon" of spiritual mechanism, the narrator's mentality--that of a mechanical philosopher--is equally exposed as folly. To achieve this striking effect, Swift at once explicates and conflates three overlapping meanings of the word "mechanical": the "mechanicks" or tradesmen worked with their hands to produce "mechanical arts"; "mechanical" was appropriated by Francis Bacon to describe the method by which natural philosophers were to imitate the experimental and systematic accumulation of knowledge found in the mechanical arts; the new philosophers were called "mechanical" because they assumed that the universe was a contrivance whose operations could be detected and reduced to a few unalterable

laws.[2]

Swift's narrator displays all the qualities of the mechanical philosopher: he claims to be impartial and to write for the good of mankind; he makes "judicious Observations"; he reduces enthusiasm to a mechanism; he describes its physical movements--humming, see-saw swaying of bodies, eye rolling--; he tries to deduce a fundamental law to explain the phenomenon. Because he observes corporeal disruptions during ecstasies and an otherwise unaccountable preponderance of mechanics and women in the enthusiast movement, the narrator concludes that the spiritual experiences of the enthusiasts are irrational "intrigues" of the imagination, the genitals and the mechanick class to overthrow right reason and order. To create the narrator's perspective, Swift drew on and exaggerated learned tracts against enthusiasm, especially by Meric Casaubon and Henry More.[3] And yet, in spite of the sanity of the form of the narrator's discourse, his views--like those of so many of Swift's rationalist-narrators--are clearly reductionist, irrelevant and meaningless. He observes only the material movements of the enthusiasts and has no understanding of inner spiritual experiences.

This point is made obvious more than once; for example, when the narrator finally reveals the "whole scheme" of spiritual mechanism as "it hath fallen upon my knowledge and Experience," he can only produce ten orderly rows of asterisks.[4] Throughout the discourse, a spiritual disorder is being explicated by a narrator whose mental disorder is equally the target of Swift's wit.

There was, then, a kinship between the new philosophers and the enthusiasts, a kinship especially evident to a satirist of the human as "a topsy-turvey Creature."[5] They both undermined hierarchical authority, whether in church, society or cosmos, because that authority hampered human advancement in perfection--however that might be interpreted.[6] But as the century proceeded, the new philosophers eventually emerged triumphant by managing to capture the middle "rational" ground. And, especially after 1660, they joined forces with churchmen to discredit enthusiasm.

Scholars are heirs to the spirit of reason, not to the spirit of prophecy. Whether it is Eleanor Davies covering the altar of Lichfield cathedral with tar and consecrating herself bishop in 1636;

or Martha Simmonds singing hosannas and laying down palms as she led the donkey carrying James Naylor into Bristol in 1655; or Margaret Brewster blackening her body with ashes, wearing sackcloth and going out among the people of Barbados as God's sign in 1673 only to be locked up as "some wild Satyr, or some lunatick Person," because the priest there was "an utter stranger to such prophetick Appearances"; all of the ecstatic activists say they were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak out in protest.[7] Yet we scholars look for natural explanations for their behaviour as individuals and as a movement. In general, scholars see the enthusiast movement as a widespread psychic and social disorder fed by the phantasies and mad hopes of the rootless poor and other unruly marginals.[8] This view is obviously confirmed by the most frequently studied contemporary sources on the subject which were written by men, such as Hobbes, Locke and Swift, from an antagonistic perspective.

As well, students of women's history, while pleased to find so many female leaders in the enthusiast revolt, complain that the ecstatic exhibitions of the female prophets hampered the emancipation of women because such actions reinforced negative

stereotypes of women as hysterical and irrational in the minds of their audiences.[9] Even recent "sympathetic" scholars have successfully humanized the prophetic outbursts of the millenarians by re-interpreting their "mad" behaviour as a "natural and rational" expression of protest and revolt given the seventeenth-century cultural and economic context.[10] But the process of denying that prophecy is an arational, even divine, insight into the nature of reality began before this century. This chapter recalls, then, familiar ground by rehearsing the arguments so successfully advanced by the new philosophers to discredit enthusiasm which by the end of the century had waned into an obscure and otherworldly movement. It looks back on the prophets' revolt from the viewpoint of the emerging and triumphing new philosophy, that is, from an alien, antipathetic perspective, a perspective which scholars have inherited, and, despite our awareness of its limitations and excesses, have not yet escaped.

Seventeenth-century rationalists--whether secular or religious--rejected enthusiasm for four closely related reasons.[11] First, philosophers joined churchmen to attack the essential teaching

of enthusiasm that the Spirit within is a sufficient authority to guide a person's actions. Henry More's influential Enthusiasmus Triumphatus (1656) denounces enthusiasm as "a full but false, persuasion in a man that he is inspired," a delusion in a man that he is "moved by the power or Spirit of God to act, speak, or think what is holy, just and true."[12] This conviction that the Spirit moved their actions led enthusiasts to de-emphasize the authority of the Bible. Even a non-conformist such as Richard Baxter was alarmed by sects such as the Behmenists, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers and Anabaptists because they looked "too much to revelations within, instead of the Holy Scripture."[13] Because of their utter dependency on the dictates of the Spirit, enthusiasts rejected any external ecclesiastical authority. All persons were equal in the Spirit; all could preach and teach if they had the Spirit. In his "Antifanatical Religion and True Philosophy" (1676), Joseph Glanvill complains that, among enthusiasts, "every Age, and every condition. . .every Youth, and Ignorant; every Rustick, and Mechanick would pass absolute and definitive sentence" against ordained ministers who carried on traditional rites and forms as inherited from the apostles but who

had no charismatic experience of their own. Though enthusiasts insisted on complete concord between Biblical and immediate revelation, Glanvill writes that, in order to vindicate their destabilizing spiritual and social visions, they exploited the "pretended mysteries" of the Book of Daniel and Book of Revelation.[14] Elsewhere Glanvill was willing to admit that enthusiasts were skillful in creating "unexpected applications of Scripture to their crazy conceits" about religion, but these interpretations were the products of minds characterized by "alienation and singularities."[15] Hobbes also underlined the anti-social aspect of enthusiasm by calling it the opinion of having "a private spirit."[16] The foremost danger of enthusiasm, then, for both philosophers and churchmen was its subjective orientation and the attendant rejection of any external authority except God.

Second, rationalists denied that enthusiasm was a supernatural operation and sought a natural cause to explain its effects. In Leviathan (1651), Hobbes presents a human mind in which, if it is sound, the imagination with its close connection to the senses and the passions is subordinate to judgment. For Hobbes,

opinion resulting from such a disorder is that one has a "private spirit." These "inspired" persons want the "curiosity" to search for natural causes for their experience. They neglect to ask"by which conduct of reason" they came to their truths (or untruths) and instead "admire themselves as being in the special grace of God." Predictably, for Hobbes, "whatsoever we imagine is finite (his italics)."[17] Without denying the possibility of true inspiration, Meric Casaubon and Henry More developed a more detailed explanation of the natural cause of enthusiasm which went something like this: enthusiasm is the result of an excess or disease of the imagination in which the inferior intellectual faculty, the imagination or fancy, turns rebel and usurps the prerogatives of reason.[18] As More puts it, in an enthusiast, the subordinate imagination, which "works without our leave" as respiration does, becomes "overheated" and "overbearing" so that the person no longer listens to reason, "that more free and superior faculty."[19] The deluded fanatic mistakes this psychological disorder for the operations of the Holy Spirit. In a passage derived from this paradigm, Glanvill describes enthusiasm as a physical phenomenon:

not only the mind but the body too is infected with the chaos of the passions and senses and is cast into "Raptures, Extasies and Deliquiums of Sense, in which every Dream is taken for a Prophesie, every Image of the Fancy for a Vision, and all the glarings of the Imagination for new Lights and Revelations." What is vehement is taken to be sacred.[20] Swift's considerable debt to this scholarly tradition, in A Tale of a Tub and A Discourse on the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, for example , is obvious.[21]

Third, enthusiasm as a disease of the imagination is contagious. It quickly spreads from one individual to infect other people especially the powerless. What begins as a mental singularity and physical disorder in an individual leads to a disruption in the ecclesiastical and social hierarchy. As early as 1645, Thomas Edwards, a Presbyterian minister, depicted the enthusiast movement as a pernicious disease on the body of church and state in his Gangræne. Meric Casaubon speculated on the diseased imagination as the cause of plague.[22] Looking back over the events of the civil war and interregnum, Richard Baxter censured enthusiasts for their threat to Christian unity and civil

stability.[23] A secular rationalist such as Hobbes was not so much disturbed by the singularity of the enthusiast's imagination-- after all, even sober men have "secret thoughts" which when undisciplined are vain, extravagant, even mad. But imaginations should be kept to oneself unless reason approve their appropriateness to time and place because when the opinion of being inspired becomes widespread, "the rage of the multitude is visible enough" and contention and civil disorder result.[24] Even Father Knox, who is not sympathetic with the sterility of thought in the age of reason, warns that enthusiasm is an ever threatening divisive spirit in Christian history generated, problematically, from and "excess of charity." Knox's general description of the phenomenon appropriately, if more sympathetically, captures seventeenth-century churchmen's objections to its existence:

> You have a clique, an elite, of Christian men and (more importantly) women, who are trying to live a less worldly life than their neighbours; to be more attentive to the guidance (directly felt, they would tell you) of the Holy Spirit. More and more, by a kind of fatality, you see them draw apart from their co-religionists, a hive ready to swarm. There is provocation on both sides; on the one part, cheap jokes at the expense of over-godliness, acts of stupid repression by unsympathetic authorities; on the other, contempt of the half-Christian, ominous references to old

> wine and new bottles, to kernel and husk. . .the break comes. . .A fresh name has been added to the list of Christianities.[25]

After the Restoration, rationalists rejected not only gnostic elitism, but also the enthusiast call to discard institutional and customary barriers between Christians and to return to the pure, primitive church; instead they worked to set up "reason" and compromise with the world as the grounds for unity and peace in church and state.

Fourth, what infuriated the rationalists most was the claim made by enthusiasts that reason and learning are not only unnecessary but even inimical to the workings of the Holy Spirit. The title of cobbler Samuel How's 1644 tract proclaims "The Sufficiency of the Spirit's Teaching without Human Learning, or a Treatise tending to prove Human Learning to be no helpe to the Spiritual understanding of the Word of God." In her many pamphlets--such as The Restitution of Prophecy (1651), Eleanor Davies rejected the mediation of the learned for the authority of the inspired individual. Typically, newly converted Quaker Mary Fisher was called not only to attack ministers without the Spirit but also to journey in 1653 to Cambridge to condemn the university as

"a cage of unclean birds."[26]

Like its Greek ancestor, enthousiasmos, the word "enthusiasm" connotes an arational, even super-rational state.[27] Yet rationalist Christians like More denied that enthusiasm and inspiration were the same thing. The Holy Spirit, More claims, does not reveal truths that are not "agreeable to, if not demonstrable from, what we call Reason." True inspiration submits to reason. But what is this "reason" More is appealing to? His definition is worth quoting in full:

> By Reason I understand so settled and cautious a Composure of Mind as will suspect every high flown and forward Fancy that endeavours to carry away the assent before deliberated examination; she not enduring to be gulled by the vigor or garishness of the representation, nor at all to be born down by the weight and strength of it; but patiently to trie it by the known Faculties of the Soul, which are the Common notions that all men in their wits agree upon, or the Evidence of outward sense or else a clear and distinct Deduction from these (his italics).[28]

Here More reiterates his suspicions against the spontaneous and intuitive response to experience asserted by enthusiasts. He reaffirms the Baconian idea of the lawful marriage of the empirical to the rational faculty, whereby "reason doth buckle and bowe the

Minde unto the Nature of things."[29] But notice too the emphasis More puts on the common agreement of men, as a criterion for determining what is reasonable. This is typical of the new philosophers. Hobbes' definition of reason may be materialist and reductionist: it is "nothing but reckoning, that is adding and substracting--of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the marking and signifying of our thoughts." But his aim is to define reason so as to provide a common mode for detecting certain knowledge to which all humans can assent--an admirable social aim, perhaps, amid the chaos of the 1630's and 40's.[30]

Others tried to Christianize this basic approach. Glanvill's Usefulness of Real Philosophy addresses itself to the false principle that reason is the enemy to the Spirit by arguing that, while enthusiasm betrays persons into believing the delusions of "their own distempered brains," philosophy or "Reason methodized" is an attempt to free the mind "from Prejudices and Pre-ingagements which sophisticate and pervert our Judgments, and render us incapable of discerning things as they are."[31] Because the imagination bogs up down in our subjective passions,

sensual experiences, and singular opinions, it is only reason which can find detached and impartial knowledge which humans can share. Here's Glanvill again: "Imagination is the Rebel; Reason and Faith are at perfect Unisons: The disharmony is in the Phancy."[32]

The arguments of the rationalists are cogently reiterated by John Locke in his "Of Enthusiasm," in Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). Enthusiasm, Locke complains, "takes away both reason and revelation, and substitutes in the room of them the ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain, and assumes them for a foundation both of opinion and conduct." Lovers of truth, says Locke, will not entertain "any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant." Enthusiasts deliberately lay aside reason and submit to an irrational state and, according to Locke, cannot provide any evidence for their opinions to which others may assent. The only authority enthusiasts appeal to is their own unshakeable persuasion that what they say is true. But Locke's lover of truth is not willing to accept the testimony of another as evidence. Locke can only conclude that pretenders to spiritual truth find it easier to

claim immediate revelation than to attempt the "not always successful labour of strict reasoning." Only reason provides a basis for assent. Even revelation, Locke insists, must be judged by reason. After all, "God when he makes the prophet does not unmake the man."[33]

Many of the new philosophers were deeply Christian and, therefore, did not intend prophecy itself to suffer the contempt they were mobilizing against the so-called false prophets. So there emerged a determined, and ultimately futile, attempt to redefine the nature of prophecy in order to separate it from charismatic, arational experience and to make it compatible with the new philosophy, A defence of this "prophecy" can be found in the writings of Joseph Mede and his successors, the most significant of whom was Isaac Newton.[34] In their hand, the new prophet became a kind of detached exegete who interprets apocalyptic tests not to prophesy about the future, but to demonstrate, only after events have happened, that scripture predicted them. Gone is the prophecy which occurs not only externally in the text, but also internally in the prophets, the vessels who become transformed by

their ecstatic surrender to God's will. But let Newton defend the mechanical prophet:

> The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretel times and things by this Prophecy [Book of Revelation], as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness, they have not only exposed themselves, but brought Prophecy also into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilld they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters, be then manifested thereby to the world. For the event of things predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by Providence.[35]

Newton, as Frank Manuel has demonstrated, was as much concerned with developing laws of interpretation of scripture as laws of motion.[36] He assumed that the scripture, like the universe, was an "engine" without ambiguity, incongruity, or intricacy, for which the true interpreter could find a simple design. The interpreter with "a philosophic understanding" uses the same principle--what Manuel calls a "law of parsimony"--to guide him whether he is interpreting God's word or God's work.[37] Newton's "Rules for Methodizing the Apocalypse" reduce contemporary prophets to analyzers and systematizers of the text, limited to such activities as assigning

consistency of meaning to the same words in the same vision, preferring the natural meaning of a word unless the sense and tenor of a passage require allegory and choosing interpretations which reduce visions "to the greatest harmony of their parts."[38] For Newton, any sort of subjective response to apocalyptic texts "savours of a luxuriant ungovernable fansy and borders on enthusiasm."[39]

Not only did the rationalists re-define the idea of prophecy, but more significantly, they appropriated and transformed by degrees the millenarian vision itself. Again Joseph Mede played a key role. Mede, as Theodore Olson contends, reinterpreted historical events as successive victories for the saints thus providing "a concrete historical basis. . .for the notion of improvement in history. . . .The scientific, cultural and political achievements of modern men become evidence of positive advance. . .towards the goal of the millenium."[40] This practical and materialistic view of the meaning of the millenium permeates the writings of Bacon and his successors. As Charles Webster points out, Bacon was particularly fond of Daniel's description of end-time: "Many shall pass to and fro and science shall be increased" because the passage seemed at once to

predict and to sanction the growth of the knowledge of things as "a plant of God's own planting."[41] Like enthusiasm, the new philosophy was nourished by the conviction that humans could overcome the effects of the fall and restore themselves to their former perfect estate. Bacon contends there were two falls, from "innocency" and from "dominion over nature" and that "both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired," the former by perfecting our knowledge of God and the latter by perfecting our knowledge of things.[42] "Let men endeavour an endless progress of proficience in both" divinity and philosophy so long as they do not "confound these learnings together."[43] And though he may integrate passages from scripture into his arguments, he does so to show that it is God's design that humans should repair their estate and enlarge their dominion over nature. Thus Daniel, in Bacon's understanding, foretells "the opening of the world by navigation and commerce and the further discovery of knowledge.[45]

For Bacon and his intellectual descendents, the way to restoration was through mastery of nature; their God was the providential God of "the Six Days Work."[46] For an obscure circle

called the Philadelphians, followers of the prophet Jane Lead, the way to restoration was through mastery of self. They sought to withdraw from"all that smells, or savours of the six days of labour" and to rest in the "true Inward Sabbath."[47] Their God was the God of the seventh day. The new philosophers were going to study "the wisdom of God" as an object in His creation; the Philadelphians were going to participate in that wisdom.

NOTES:

[1]Stephen Mason, "The Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation," A History of the Sciences (New York: Collier, 1977), pp. 175-191.

[2]These three meanings are illustrated in the following seventeenth-century usages of "mechanical": 1. Robert Barclay describes the ministry of the Quakers: "God hath raised up witnesses for himself, as he did Fishermen of old, may, yea most of whom are laboring and mechanick men. . .without. . .learning." An Apology for the True Christian Divinity (1678), p. 212.

2. Francis Bacon admires the method of the mechanical arts as haaving a "breath of life" because they "are continually growing and becoming more perfection," by adding step-by-step to the experience and knowledge of the past generation. The Great Instauration in A Selection of His Works, ed. Sidney Warhaft (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 302-303.

3. Robert Boyle defined the mechanical philosophy in his About the Excellency and Grounds of the Mechanical Hypothesis: "the universe being once framed by God, and the laws of motion being settled and all upheld by his incessant concourse and general providence, the phaenomena of the world thus constituted are physically produced by the mechanical affections of the parts of matter, and what [sic] they operate upon one another according to mechanical laws." The Works, 6 vol. ed. Thomas Birch (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1966), IV, pp. 68-69. For a historical description of the triumph of the idea of a cosmos operating according to mechanical and mathematical laws, see E. J. Dijksterhuis, The Mechanization of the World Picture, trans. C. Dikshoorn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 495-501.

[3]For the influence of More and Casaubon on Swift's treatment of enthusiasm, see Phillip Harth, Swift and Anglican Rationalism: The Religious Background of A Tale of a Tub (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), chapter 3.

[4]Jonathan Swift, A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit in A Tale of a Tub and other satires, ed. Kathleen Williams (London: Dent, 1975), p. 181.

[5]Swift, "A Meditation upon a Broomstick," in A Tale of a Tub, p. 194.

[6]Christopher Hill explores the nature of this kinship in "Mechanical Preachers and the Mechanical Philosophy," The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 287-305.

[7]Joseph Besse, A Collection of the Sufferings of the people called Quakers, 2 vol. (London: Luke Hinde, 1753), II, p. 319.

[8]See Norman Cohn's "Introduction" and "Appendix: The Free Spirit in Cromwell's England: the Ranters and their literature," The Pursuit of the Millenium, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 287-330.

Christine Berg and Philippa Berry suggest we reconsider Freud's ideas on hysteria in relationship to the female prophets; they also initiate a promising discussion of the implications of Julia Kristeva's distinction between semiotic and symbolic orders to suggest that the female prophets as users of nonrational, socio-sexual language challenged the male status-quo in order to share not only for power in church and state but possession of meaning; God compromised his masculinity by using a female body to deliver his Word. "'Spiritual Whoredom': An Essay on Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century," 1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century, Proceedings of the Essex Conference on Sociology of Literature, July 1980, ed. Francis Baker and others (Wivenhoe Park, Colchester: University of Essex, 1981), pp. 37-54.

[9]Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets during the English Civil War," Feminist Studies 8, #1 (Spring, 1982), 38; also see Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil War Sects," Past and Present 13 (April, 1958), 56.

[10]Hill, World Turned Upside Down, p. 16. John Hoyles seeks to reinterpret the mysticism of the seventeenth century from a materialist "but not mechanical" perspective which "avoids reductionism and gives a local habitation, both psycho-sexual and socio-economic, to the practices and experiences of mysticism." "Beyond the Sex-economy of Mysticism: Some Observations on the Communism of the Imagination with Reference to Winstanley and Traherne," 1642:Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century, pp. 238-239.

[11]For the best essay on this subject, see George Williamson's "The Restoration Revolt against Enthusiasm," Studies in Philology, XXX (1933), 571-603.

[12]Henry More, Enthusiasmus Truimphatus (London, 1662), facsimile, intro. M. V. DePorte, Augustan Reprint #118 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Library, University of California, 1966), p. 2.

[13]The Autobiography of Richard Baxter, abridged by J. M. Lloyd Thomas, ed. N. H. Keeble (London: Dent, 1974), p. 179. Baxter was a moderate non-conformist in his attempt to be "a sober rational man." See Owen Watkins, The Puritan Experience (London: Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 129-133.

[14]Joseph Glanvill, "Antifanatical Religion and Free Philosophy in a Continuation of the New Atlantis," Collected Works 9 vol., facsimile ed. Bernard Fabian (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1970-1979), VI, pp. 41, 43.

[15]Joseph Glanvill, "The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion," Works, VI, p. 19.

[16]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Parts I & II (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 70.

[17]Leviathan, pp. 70-72, 36.

[18]Meric Casaubon, A Treatise concerning Enthusiasm (1655), intro. Paul J. Korshin (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 970), chapter 3; More, pp. 3-6.

[19]More, pp. 4, 5.

[20]Glanvill, "The Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion," Works, VI, p. 18.

[21]See note 3 above.

[22]Casaubon, p. 123.

[23]Baxter, p. 190 and passim.

[24]Leviathan, pp. 67, 70-71.

[25]Ronald Knox, Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion with special reference to the XVII and XVIII centuries, 1st pub. 1950 (Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 1976), p. 1.

[26]Besse, I, p. 84.

[27]F. E. Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

[28]More, p. 38.

[29]The Great Instauration, in Selection, p. 309; The Advancement of Learning," Book II, cited in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I, p. 6.

[30]Leviathan, pp. 46, 49, 50.

[31]Works, VI, pp. 20, 22-23.

[32]Vanity of Dogmatizing, Works, I, pp. 103-104.

[33]John Locke, "Of Enthusiasm," An Essay concerning Human Understanding, 2 vol. (New York: Dover, 1959), II. pp. 429-431, 434, 436, 438.

[34]For Katharine R. Firth, the learned, sober, authoritative Mede tradition is the apocalyptic tradition. The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1645 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[35]Isaac Newton, Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John (London: Darby & T. Browne, 1733), p. 251.

[36]See Frank Manuel, A Portrait of Isaac Newton (Washington, D. C.: New Republic Books, 1979), chapter 17.

[37]Isaac Newton, "Rules for methodizing the Apocalypse," Appendix A in Frank Manuel's The Religion of Isaac Newton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Also see Manuel's comments, Religion, p. 98; Portrait, p. 379.

[38]"Appendix A," in Manuel, Religion, pp. 116, 118, 121.

[39]"Appendix A,"in Manuel, Religion, p. 119.

[40]Theodore Olson, Millenialism, Utopianism and Progress (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 202-203.

[41]Francis Bacon, Works, 14 vol. ed James Spedding, 1st pub, 1857-1874 (Stuttgard-Bad: Friedrich Fromm, 1963), III, 220-221; Charles Webster, The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660 (London: Ducksworth, 1975), pp. 23-25.

[42]Bacon, The New Organon in Selection, p. 392.

[43]Bacon, Advancement of Learning, in Selection, p. 205.

[44]Bacon, The Great Instauration, in Selection, p. 310.

[45]Webster, pp. 23-5.

[46]Bacon, The New Atlantis, in Selection, p. 436.

[47]Jane Lead, The Laws of Paradise Given Forth by Wisdom to a Translated Spirit (London: T. Sowle, 1695), p. 9

Chapter six: The Restored Imagination: Jane Lead's Alternative to Reason

God made the world in Wisdom.
Proverbs 3:19

Reason is natural life whose ground is the temporal beginning and end, and cannot come to the supernatural ground where God is to be understood.
Jacob Boehme, Mysterium Magnum (1620)

. . .May God us keep
From single vision and Newtons sleep.
William Blake, "Letter to Thomas Butts"
(November 22, 1802)

. . .a great mind must be androgynous.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Table Talk

By the time John Milton published his Paradise Lost in 1667, his contemporaries were deeply suspicious of claims to direct insight into God's plans and processes. Yet in the familiar, cautious invocations preceding Books I, III and VII, Milton invites "the Heavenly Muse" to dwell in his inner temple--"th' upright heart and pure"--, to illuminate his understanding so that he can "see and tell/Of things invisible to mortal sight," and to instruct him on how "to soar,/Above the flight of Pegasean wing"[1]. Milton intends to

interpret the ways of God to humans. For him, the poet is a prophet. This kinship between poetry and enthusiasm is an old one. Philip Sidney's An Apology for Poetry, for example, brings together a complex Platonic and Christian heritage to present the poet, who like the prophet, partakes of a "heart-ravishing knowledge" beyond nature and human reason[2]. Forgetting perhaps that Plato banished poetry from his republic as "thrice removed from truth," Sidney interprets in the poet's favour, as many others have done, the influential passage from Ion in which Socrates describes a great poet as one who is able to speak to humans in the voice of the god:

> A poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself and reason is no longer in him. So long as he has this in his possession, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy[3].

But in the latter half of the seventeenth century, enthusiastic poetry suffered the same scorn as enthusiastic religion. Hobbes calls it a "foolish custome, by which a man, enabled to speak wisely from the principles of nature and his own mediation, loves rather to be thought to speak by inspiration, like a Bagpipe"[4]. The true poet reconciled his fancy, as the true prophet reconciled his faith, to the

dictates of sober reason. Thomas Rymer summarizes the common feeling of the age when he attacks "Fanaticks in Poetry" who claim that poetry is "blind inspiration, is pure enthusiasm, is rapture and rage all over." For Rymer, poetry and reason are "cater-cousins": "Fancy, I think, in Poetry, is like Faith in Religion: it makes for discoveries, and soars above reason, but never clashes or runs against it.. . .reason is always principally to be consulted"[5]. As these well-known lines from John Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel demonstrate, the insights of the Restoration poet were limited to the social and natural order, to what is accessible to reason: "Here stop, my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;/No pinions can pursue immortal height"[6]. In an extreme, but influential, statement of the demotion of both poetical and religious imagination to a natural faculty, Hobbes insists, "Whatever we imagine is finite"[7].

One of the most significant creations in literary history was the romantic rehabilitation of the imagination--not completely purged of its spiritual origins. Norman O.Brown opened a recent article with the assertion that "we will not get 'Blake and Tradition' right until we see the tradition as the Prophetic Tradition."[8]. Brown was

concerned with Islamic and early Christian heretical undercurrents which, despite suppression, have fed into mainstream Christianity through the centuries. Blake's poetic vision is an articulation of a prophetic countertradition--or rather a re-experiencing of the mystical perspective. In particular, Blake admired the writings of Jacob Boehme and found in them the claim that the imagination can participate in the divine nature[9]. In his search for forerunners, Blake tried to purge Milton of his conventional virtues and to rehabilitate Milton in his own image of the poet as prophet "true to our own Imaginations"[10]. Boehme's writings were kept alive in England in the 17th century by a small circle--first under the leadership of John Pordage (d. 1681) and then of Jane Lead (d. 1704)--which was later known as the Philadelphian society [fl. 1694-1703]. The central teaching of the Philadelphians was that through the regeneration of the imagination, which Boehme and Lead personified as Sophia or Wisdom, there would be a restoration of creation to the unfallen state[11]. Many of the Philadelphian papers were collected and preserved by William Law who was unsympathetic to Boehme's claim that God manifests his love through Sophia, his

emanation, his mirror, to his creatures[12]. Blake--perhaps influenced by his reading of Law's interpretation of Boehme's writings--ignored Sophia, but, unlike Law who rejected the possibility of a regenerate imagination, Blake made Jesus the imagination, the intermediary by which the divine becomes knowable[13]. Yet whether or not he read any of the Philadelphian writings directly, as this chapter will show, Blake's vision resembles that of the Philadelphians much more than Milton's or Law's because of his internalization of the radical sectarian perspective into a theosophical, apolitical revolution of the imagination.

Coleridge's characterization of the imagination as an organic and creative process, distinct from the mechanical process he called "fancy," is a commonplace in criticism. Predictably, he elevated Milton, who wrote to the "eye of the imagination," over his clever contemporaries--Jeremy Taylor, for example--who merely presented images of the fancy "to the common and passive eye"[14]. Coleridge thought that the two centuries preceding his own had succumbed to "the general contagion" of the mechanical philosophy, had misunderstood "reason" in an unregenerate, abstract sense "as a mere

organ of science," and had suppressed the true synthetic relationship between Reason and the Imagination which "gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are conductors"[15]. Less familiar are Coleridge's attempts to rescue enthusiasm from the "contagion." According to Coleridge, widespread contempt and condemnation of enthusiasm resulted because even "the best writers" confounded enthusiasm with fanaticism [he is thinking, perhaps, of Swift; see pp.79-81]. As in the case of "imagination and fancy," Coleridge insists, "enthusiasm and fanaticism" should be "desynonymized." The enthusiast is "solitary" and "harmless," absorbed in the object contemplated and "disinclined to outward action." The fanatic, however, lacks the strength to create an inner synthesis and therefore relies "on the sympathy of the sect"; the fanatic becomes "an eager proselytizer" and "a swarm-maker"[16]. The creative effects of enthusiasm are such that, for Coleridge, "enthusiasm indeed. . .is almost a synonyme of Genius"[17]. Enthusiasm enlarges the mind and elevates the soul; "the disease of the age is want of enthusiasm"[18].

In Biographia Literaria, when Coleridge is tracing the origins

of his conception of the imagination, he confesses his gratitude and obligation to the Protestant mystics, praising by name George Fox, Jacob Boehme and the latter's commentator, William Law. The "fulness of heart and intellect" in their writings kept Coleridge from becoming imprisoned by "any single dogmatic system":

> They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentiment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of DEATH[19].

In his essay "Coleridge and Boehme," Thomas McFarlane speculates on a probable connection between Boehme's ideas on the imagination and those of Coleridge. For example, in some famous passages such as the one defining the primary imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM," Coleridge intimates that the human imagination, at its highest level, echoes "an implied divine imagination"[20]. Whatever specific debt Coleridge owed to Boehme, he acknowledged the "indistinct" contribution of Boehme to his thought--and through Coleridge to literary criticism in general--from a counter-tradition which kept "alive the heart in the head" and which sustained the search for a faculty which partook of

the eternal not merely of the material. Jane Lead's writings belong to this counter-tradition.[21]

Jane Lead's work internalizes the revolutionary sectarian paradigm by re-interpreting the confrontation between the two seeds, that of serpent and of woman, as a struggle between two perspectives, that of reason and that of wisdom or the restored imagination. The material world is in a "Dark, Ignorant State,. . .in the Region of Traditional and Literal Knowledge, according to the Rational Wisdom of Man, which through the Innundation of the Spirit must all be drowned."[22] Her writings reveal her struggles against the resourceful and persuasive tactics of reason, the internal antichrist, which would reconcile her to the fallen world and prevent the restoring of her celestial sight. In her Laws of Paradise Given forth by Wisdom to a Translated Spirit (1695), for example, "the King-crowned Beast" tries to seduce the "translated spirit" of Lead back to the way of the world. He is, in general, the usual Beast of millenial movements, the villain who has prevented Christ's reign for centuries. While the Beast craftily acknowledges God as the creator and as the ruler in the heavenly sphere, he insists he himself is a legitimate "subordinate

power" and the appropriate lord over "all lower created beings." His "true prophet" is that "Judicious Spirit of Reason." Reason is his "sword" against those who would impose "laws of paradise" on earth. His own laws are seductive and sensible for surviving and faring well in the world: live on earth according to natural laws, according to the dictates of sense and reason; love what the world can give rather than coveting "the things that are reserved for Eternity"; serve the king of this world because "I do not defer my Rewards"; be happy with a natural, sensual husband rather than lusting after an unattainable divine union. To live according to the Spirit is a "self-destroying covenant" appropriate "for Angelicks, but not for Creatures that bear mortal Shapes." If the translated spirit insists on being "singular," the Beast warns her that human society will desert her. Recognizing the truth and power of the Beast's words when heard from the worldly perspective, the translated spirit interrupts his arguments to renounce "that low, sordid, corrupt Rational life," that "Lapsed Womb of Rationality," that can give birth only to "outward man."[23]

Lead's work is a sustained effort to find and to articulate a higher principle of apprehension than reason which, following

Boehme, she calls wisdom. The history of the concept of wisdom--sophia in Greek, sapientia in Latin--is too complex to be treated here.[24] One of the most traditionally relevant and influential approaches to the subject appears in Book Twelve of Augustine's On the Trinity in which he interprets the story of Adam and Eve allegorically. Eve represents scientia, the lower level of the rational faculty which knows things temporal and changeable; this knowledge is derived through the senses and is closely related to the physical appetites. Adam represents sapientia, the higher level of the rational faculty which contemplates things eternal. This analogy allows Augustine to explain away the literal sexism of the passages from Paul which seem to deny that woman is in God's image. Take for example, Paul's "[Man] is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (ICor. 11:7). According to Augustine, Paul "may be understood to have intended to signify something to be sought in one individual man, by assigning the image of God to man only, and not also to woman." Augustine rehabilitates the Pauline idea that "the woman together with the husband is the image of God. . .but when she is referred to separately. . .is not the image of God; but as regards the

man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely" by claiming Paul is referring to the proper hierarchical order of the intellectual faculties. Corporeal reasonings and actions should be subordinate to contemplative judgment which is linked to the divine perspective. Eve without Adam falls prey to inferior knowledge which "puffs up"; Adam should "restrain," "bridle" and/or "withdraw" from his "spouse": it is given to the "masculine part" of the inner man to preside in the "watch tower." This is the "rational wedlock" of the mind: "As the twain is one flesh in the case of male and female, as in the mind one nature embraces our intellect and action, or our counsel and performance, or our reason and rational appetite."[25]

Though the idea that wisdom signified a contemplative faculty with divine connections remained convincing throughout the monastic centuries, by the time of the renaissance, "wisdom" had been humanized into a "virtue," that is, a merely social or "manly" attribute.[26] In the "Preface" of De la Sagesse (1601), Pierre Charron refuses to understand "wisdom" subtly "in the arrogant and pompous sense of theologians and philosophers, who love to describe things which have never yet been seen and lift them to such a degree of

perfection that human nature is incapable of them except in the imagination."[27] By the mid-seventeenth century, the infamous Hobbes could reduce wisdom to a quantity of knowledge: "much science is wisdom."[28]

At the same time, Augustine's allegorizing seemed suspect; Thomas Browne wondered whether interpreting the temptation of Adam by Eve as "the seduction of the rational and higher parts by the inferior and feminine faculties" was not one of the "vulgar and common errors."[29] And yet, though Milton's Paradise Lost may be too psychologically and historically grounded to be reduced to an allegory, the Augustinian undercurrent is undeniable.[30] Eve is Adam's "Best Image of myself." Though she is the "inferior, in the mind/And inward Faculties. . .resembling less/His Image [that is, God's]", she is not merely sensual and bestial. God had to create Eve because Adam, when he rejected spiritual procreation, was unable to mate with the brute creation.[31] Eve needs Adam as an intermediary; she submits to divine messages only when Adam mixes them "with Conjugal Caresses": "God is thy Law, thou mine."[32] Satan shuns Adam's "higher intellectual" and tempts the organ of fancy. Eve separated from Adam

becomes a "too easy" victim to false reasoning.[33] Adam succumbs when Eve rebels against the divine order because wisdom "in her presence falls degraded."[34]

Jane Lead's vision of the fall begins with Adam's turning to Eve, the mundane perspective, and away from wisdom, the celestial perspective--personified countertraditionally as Sophia. Like Milton, Lead saw the restoration of paradise as an inner process, but unlike him, she emphasized that it would come about by a reorientation and regeneration of the so-called lower faculties, the passions and the imagination. While Milton concentrates on interpreting the creation story of Adam and Eve as given in Genesis 3 , Lead develops the imaginative possibilities of Genesis 1:26-27: "Let us make him in our image. . .God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"[my italics]. Lead rediscovered the Gnostic insight that God is both male and female, father and mother. When searching for an authoritative characterization of the hidden divine woman, Gnostic Christians find one alternative in the Books of Wisdom: a female voice and power called Wisdom.[35] According to Lead and her teacher Boehme, the

true Adam, created in God's image, also had a virgin hid in him which was his link with divine nature and creativity, but he "looked outward, as if he were not sufficient of himself to encrease and multiply for the replenishing of Paradise."[36] When Adam rejected the Virgin Wisdom, God gave him Eve; generation by the flesh began.[37] In Lead's view, as in Boehme's, there were really two falls: in the first, androgynous Adam fell from supernatural to natural, from union into matter and multiplicity as symbolized by the division into two sexes.[38] Then Adam and Eve fell a second time into labour and death because reason, that "vile principle of self-confidence" as Lead calls it, led them to rebel and to sin.[39] They had their eyes opened, as the serpent of rationality promised, but only to the way of living in the fallen world. For Boehme and his disciples, as Peter Erbs reiterates, the imagination is the neutral faculty of humankind by which "he orients his consciousness" either towards or away from divine perfection.[40] The Boehmistical fall is a fall of the imagination into created things. Wisdom fled when Adam surrendered to Eve and turned from a celestial to a mundane perspective.

According to Lead, reason obstructed human restoration for

centuries; it is "the Forbidden Fruit to the children of the Resurrection" because it prevents humans from purifying the imagination in order to see from a divine perspective. Reasoning with "our Machiavellian brains of hell" convinces us that we live in a loveless, mechanical universe. It makes us doubt that God's love and tenderness reaches to "every particular creature" and that "no wickedness, wretchedness, no vileness that can be imagined, is any impediment to the Lord's acceptance of the Soul into union with the Lord Jesus." Judicious reason may make us successful in the world, but it "contributes nothing to the growth of perfection." Though some claim reason is necessary "to govern those low and terrestial affairs, which the fallen State hath necessitated," Lead warns it is a dangerous usurper which must always be kept low.[43] For Lead, the spiritual ideal is not--as Augustine would have it--a hierarchical "lawful wedlock" of the intellectual faculties, based on the social analogy of the wife subordinate to the husband. Lead polarizes the two faculties--and reason is male and wisdom, female. Do not halt between two principles, she warns readers. If one serves Lord Reason, one will not understand the Virgin Wisdom.[44]

Wisdom, for Boehme, is the body of the Holy Trinity. He speaks of her "always by analogy," as Erb points out, especially calling her "the mirror of divinity" in which God beholds himself and beholds his creation.[45] This Boehmistical theme is pervasive in Lead's writings: "I write here from no other Ground, then what the Spirit of Christ, in the Glass of Wisdom, hath presented to mine Inward Eye, which pierceth into the Deep of God's Mind."[46] Once reason is banished, the "loveless soul" can see "pretious truths" from wisdom's perspective in "that pretious heavenly Christal glass, through which the spiritual eye comes to discern the very Heart of God towards it."[47] For Lead, Wisdom is the medium by which God manifests to his creatures his design "to restore Nature to its own Eternal Originality."[48]

With Wisdom's mediation, Lead learned to pierce the divine mysteries and to re-see the visible world in the image of the invisible one. Her work aimed to restore the imagination to a "heavenly Christal glass" so that it could see and articulate for humans the divine perspective. As Nicolas Berdeyaev writes, for Boehme and his followers, "the whole of the invisible world is a

symbol of the interior world."[49] It was this way of seeing the symbol that the Romantics appropriated and secularized into a literary term. The mystic vision became a poetic one.[50]

For Lead, her own experience is the ground of certainty and authority for her teachings. "But you will say," she writes addressing the skeptics of her age, "this is only a private Revelation, though it be, yet I know from whence it is; and if I were not upon sure ground, I should not dare to have declared it."[51] When Lead writes of the "certain, infallible evidence" by which one can recognize true enthusiasm, she relies on what she calls "experimental knowledge": "I can give no other Direction, than what my self have been taught in, and in some degree put into practice."[52] She published her spiritual diary, Fountain of Gardens (1697), so that others could "take diligent notice of the Method and Way" God brought her over the decades by degrees to greater and greater detachment and perfection.[53] She uses examples from both her inner and outer life to show the way to die to "all superfluity."[54] At the age of fifteen, she began her lifelong, systematic elimination of unnecessary concerns. Despite her

careful choice of a pious husband, William Lead (d.1670), she writes of her twenty-seven-year marriage: "my Spirit ever failed within me, as desponding ever to get rid of my First Husband; without which no Marriage with the Lord from Heaven can be."[55] Because her husband trusted her inheritance to a swindler, at his death Lead was left destitute. Rather than accept a financial "redemption" from her relatives, an acceptance that would have jeopardized her spiritual redemption, Lead chose to live her life in poverty and in joy as a prophet: "had it not been for this precious Sealing-gift of this Holy Spirit, I must have spent my days, in Gloominess, and Sadness."[56]

Her The Wonders of God's Creation Manifested in the Variety of Eight Worlds; As they were made known Experimently to the Author (1695) is a masterful exposition of the psychological stages in purging the self of the natural and rational life and in growing in the divine life. She finds vivid imagery to recapture the first seven worlds, but of the eighth, still eternity, she writes, "there is no way possible for anyone to describe, or give an account of [it], but by being taken up into it." Lead realizes how

unconvincing experiential evidence is to those "ignorant" of God's way of "immediate teaching." On many occasions, she addresses readers warning them to "forbear Rash and Censorious Judgment upon those things that are at present above their reach."[57] This type of warning to the uninitiated is, of course, conventional in mystical writings. In her "To the Impartial Reader" prefacing co-seeker John Pordage's Theologica Mystica (1683), she asks readers not to be "offended at either the Author or the matter, Method or Expression." They should read from a mystical perspective: "If the Meat be too strong for thee, thou hast the liberty to refuse, and maist set it by, till thou art stronger in the Spirit."[58] For Lead, the authority of her inner vision of the Third Coming--that of Wisdom--to establish the reign of Love took precedence over any human authority--ecclesiastical or social. Not surprizingly, orthodox contemporaries saw Lead as irrational and heretical.

At the end of the century, fellow nonjuror Henry Dodwell wrote a series of letters to Francis Lee, co-seeker with Jane Lead and co-founder of the Philadelphian Society, warning him of

his "rational obligation" to the Christian, that is Anglican, community. In his first letter, Dodwell is disturbed that Lee has ventured "your soul on luscious fancies or warm affections which would be more excusable in a person of meaner education."[59] Lee's initial response to this charge is somewhat flippant: he tells Dodwell that he has studied one of Dodwell's own learned tracts against sectarianism: "Sir I leave you to judge whether one of an overheated imagination (as I am supposed to be), could have the patience to read over a book both of that bulk, and of that close argumentation."[60] Dodwell's letters make the nature of his concern more explicit. He attacks the prophetic pretensions of Jane Lead (Lee's mother-in-law). He mistrusts her for decrying "the trial of her cause by reasoning." The seductive visions she describes in her works are not true revelations but the products of an "ungoverned imagination."[61] Lee's replies to Dodwell form an extensive and cogent vindication of Lead's teachings particularly against the charge that she writes subjectively and heretically. Lee chides Dodwell for his lack of esteem for the imagination, a faculty which God makes use of to express concealed truths in the

prophetic books of St. John, Ezekiel and Daniel, as well as in the parables of Jesus. Lead mistrusts reason only when it pretends to be a spiritual principle. Her whole aim is "to superinduce a principle superior to reason" to penetrate into God's reflected image.[62] Lee insists Lead's imagination was far from being unruly and sensuous; she had spent her life disciplining and concentrating her vision; she strove "to purify all the avenues of the imaginative faculties, and to drive the soul into a Super-sensual and Super-imaginative state."[63] The essential aim of her writings is to teach others the way to restore the imagination to wisdom, to mirror the divine:

> The imagination is properly Speculum Anima, which in its lapsed, depraved state, is filled with innumerable broken images, very inadequate and preposterous; but in its restored and pure state, all these images being cast out, it becomes a bright mirror, to reflect the immaculate and entire image of God.[64]

In her Fountain of Gardens, Lead teaches seekers of wisdom the "Rules for the Government of the Imagination" by which we can rid our minds of "fruitless and unnecessary objects," thus allowing Wisdom to speak within "the newly created Heart."[65]

Wisdom"s human vessels--trained, as Lead puts it, "in the Eunuch Reservatory"--would no longer see from the self-interested and species-centred perspective of reason, but from a divine perspective.[66] Moved by her own awakening to Wisdom's operations, Lead proclaimed the obsolescence of external churches and founded the Philadelphian Society (fl.1697-1704) which was the prototype of the regenerate, mystical church, the last church, as described in the Book of Revelation 3:7. The true Philadelphian is holistic: "There is nothing more contradicts the Beautiful Law of Order, than a narrow contracted Spirit, which is Always Seeking its Own and not that which is for the Good of the Whole."[67] Lead prophesies that Wisdom, God's emanation of Love to his creatures, would eventually manifest Herself in all of lapsed creation so that the restoration would be universal: even "Nature may come to be refined, and made all Crystalline for God's Heart to move in."[68] There was to be a spiritual evolution, heart by heart, towards the New Jerusalem.

As Francis Lee stated when he defended her from the charge that she was a Gnostic heretic, Lead's devotion to Sophia

and to an androgynous God, a God with Wisdom hid in Him, was not an attempt to feminize the Godhead.[69] Rather she resurrected the androgynous symbol to articulate a holistic vision, as opposed to a single vision, of truth. In our own century, Jungians have attempted to rehabilitate Sophia. Erich Neumann points out that Sophia who symbolizes the "Goddess of the whole, who governs the transformation from the elementary to the spiritual level," only survived the patriarchical-Christian era in "heretical and revolutionary bypaths.[70] Another Jungian, June Singer defends androgyny not as a feminist principle but as the "guiding principle" towards a new age of holism.[71] Ecumenical Christians, as well, with their concern to restore the holistic nature of the church as "the mystical body of Christ" are reviving some of the insights of mystical, even "heretical," counter-traditions. One study of the history of the movement sees Jane Lead as a pioneer of ecumenism.[72] Christian feminists, in particular, uphold the universality of Christ's teachings--"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female(Gal.3:28)."--while revolting against the patriarchal

institutions which are founded on the inequality of the sexes. But, as Catherine Smith points out in an insightful essay on Jane Lead as feminist, modern feminism is materialistic, rational, and activist while Jane Lead was spiritual, arational and contemplative.[73] Yet mysticism has given women a voice over the centuries--albeit an indirect and seemingly impotent one. Lead's follower, Richard Roach, prophesied that the Third Coming, that of Sophia, to establish the New Jerusalem would benefit women in particular: "Favours will be indulged to the females of this day, both virgins and others. . .but in a more internal and spiritual way."[74] Women mystics, Catherine Smith claims, created "a new universe that we are still trying to realize."[75]

Inherent in Catherine Smith's evaluation of Lead's contribution and in general studies such as Women of Spirit (which includes Smith's essay) and The Feminist Mystic (which denies that its title is a contradiction in meaning) is the plea that the women's movement not be defined and limited by rationalism and materialism, by liberalism and Marxism, by a self-centred or species-centred perspective. As Lead and the mystics teach,

humans must attempt to transcend the prison of our rational perspective to see from a holistic one. Not surprisingly, then, in her recent gyno-centric history of seventeenth-century English feminists, which defines feminists as "Reason's Disciples" and as "individuals who viewed women as a sociological group whose social and political position linked them together more surely than their physical or psychological natures," Hilda Smith excludes Jane Lead.[76] For most modern feminists, even some ecumenical Christians, to retire to the "eunuch reservatory," to merge the self into divine harmony and to await prayerfully the Third Coming is to continue the tradition of female isolation, resignation and powerlessness, thus allowing the reign of the antichrist to thrive in church and state.

NOTES:

[1]John Milton, Paradise Lost in Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), I:6, 18; III:19, 55; VII:1-4; pp. 211-12, 258-59, 345-346.

[2]Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 156.

[3]"An Apology for Poetry," in Adams, p. 171; Plato, Ion in Adams, p. 15; also see p. 171, n. 44.

[4]Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's Preface to Gondibert," in Adams, p. 214.

[5]Thomas Rymer, Tragedies of the Last Age in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century in 3 vols., ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), II, p. 185.

[6]John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel," Selected Works, ed. William Frost (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1971), ll. 854-55; p. 44.

[7]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Parts I & II, ed. Herbert W. Schneider (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 36.

[8]Norman O. Brown, "The Prophetic Tradition," Studies in Romanticism, 21 , no. 3 (Fall, 1982), 367.

[9]For example, see Desirée Hirst, Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 95-99 and passim; and also see Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition, 2 vol. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), I, pp. 207-218.

[10]William Blake, "Preface," to Milton, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David Erdman (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), p. 95.

[11]The best general studies of the Philadelphian movement and its relationship to Boehme's theosophy are Nils Thune, The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries (Uppsala, 1948); and Serge Hutin, Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Paris: Editions Denoel, 1960). Desirée Hirst situates Boehme, Lead and Blake in the same "hidden" tradition and even speculates briefly on the possible influence of Lead's writings on Blake (pp. 303-304). But she is not specifically interested in the theme of the regenerate imagination except in passing (pp. 65-67) and not in relationship to Lead. Though Morton D. Paley shows Blake's unquestionable debt to Boehme for a concept of a regenerate imagination, he mistakenly claims that "even Boehme's English followers" disapproved of the imagination as a "false prophet." He formed his erroneous opinion from his reading of the views of Thomas Bromley which sound more like those of Hobbes and the Cambridge Platonists than those of Boehme. Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 150-151.

[12]Stephen Hobhouse, Selected Mystical Writings of William Law (London: Salisbury Square, 1948), p. 253. Predictably, Law was also hostile to female "imaginary" pretensions to prophecy especially Lead's as she was able to attract a following which included educated men like Francis Lee and Richard Roach, both Oxford fellows and nonjurors. See Law's commentary in Christopher Walton's curious collection of Law's Philadelphian papers known as Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of William Law (London: Private Circulation, 1854), pp. 141, 148, 188 and passim. Notes is intended as an advertisement for an editor with "masculine strength of reason and judgment" to write an adequate biography of Law and evaluation of the mystical materials (p. xxxiii).

[13]Raine, II, p. 202. See "The Later Law" in Erwin Paul Rudolph's William Law (Boston: Twayne, 1980) for Boehme's influence on Law, an essay which surprisingly makes no mention of Law's extensive study of the Philadelphian writings.

[14]John Spencer Hill has edited a convenient collection of Coleridge's pronouncements and musings on the imagination in Imagination in Coleridge (London: Macmillan, 1978). For Coleridge's comparison of Taylor and Milton, see "Apologetic Preface" to Fire, Famine and Slaughter, p. 161.

[15]Lay Sermons in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, vol. 6, ed. R. J. White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 28-29, 69.

[16]Coleridge, "Note on a Sermon on the Prevalence of Infidelity and Enthusiasm, by Walter Birch, B. D.," in Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from His Published and Unpublished Prose Writings, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 102-103; also see Aids to Reflection in Inquiring Spirit, p. 405.

[17]Coleridge, annotation to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, cited in Lay Sermons, p. 23, n.1.

[18]"Note on a Sermon. . .by Walter Birch," p. 102.

[19]S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 2 vol., ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), I, p. 98 .

[20]Thomas McFarlane, "Coleridge and Boehme," Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 330. M. H. Abrams shows that the Romantic creative imagination elevates the imagination above reason by virtue of its "hidden claim that

this is the mental process re-enacting God." The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 275.

[21]I do not know if Coleridge, an avid admirer of seventeenth-century writers, read any of the works of Lead or other Philadelphians, but he did write approximately 150 pages of marginalia on the William Law translations of Boehme's works (1764-81). See McFarlane, pp. 248, n.7 , 249-250.

[22]Jane Lead, A Fountain of Gardens: Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure (London, 1697), pp. 4-5.

[23]Jane Lead, The Laws of Paradise Given Forth by Wisdom to a Translated Spirit (London: T. Sowle, 1695), pp. 54-64.

[24]For a useful introduction ot the history of "wisdom," see Eugene F. Rice, Jr., The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[25]Augustine, On the Trinity in Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, 2 vol., ed. Whitney Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), II, pp. 814-820.

[26]D. W. Robertson, Jr. describes the widespread discussion in the middle ages of the Augustinian account of the fall; see A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 74-75.

[27]quoted by Rice, Jr., p. 179.

[28]Hobbes, p. 50. Recently ecological thinkers have tried to reclaim "wisdom" as a way of perceiving distinct from "knowledge" of material things. For example, E. F. Schumacher presents wisdom as a holistic, if not divine, perspective in Small is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 35-36.

[29]Thomas Browne, Pseudodoxia Epidemical in Selected Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968), p. 234.

[30]For a general discussion of Milton's adaptation of Augustinian ideas, see J. M. Evans' Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). Evans does not mention the passages I am discussing from Augustine's On the Trinity.

[31]Paradise Lost, V:95; VIII:460-461, 541-544, 441-452.

[32]Paradise Lost, VIII:56; IV:636, 299.

[33]Paradise Lost, IX:483; IV:799-809; IX:734-739.

[34]Paradise Lost, VIII:551-552.

[35]Elaine Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity." in The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship, ed. Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 101-102 and The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Random House, 1979), chapter three, "God the Father/God the Mother." See also Carol Christ's "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections," Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 273-86.

The orthodox writer of the "Introduction to the Wisdom Books," The Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1961) finds the personification of a female Wisdom figure as "a divine attribute" detached from God himself as too problematic to be more than a "poetic device. The monotheism of the Old Testament forbids it" (p. 724).

[36]Jane Lead, The Revelation of Revelations (London: A. Sowle, 1683), p. 38. For Boehme's description of the fall, see

Mysterium Magnum or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called Genesis, trans. John Sparrow, 1st pub. 1654 (London: John M. Watkins, 1965); Alexandre Koyre, "La creation," La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme, 1st publ. 1929 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), pp. 415-450; and Serge Hutin, pp. 90, 99, 104-109.

[37] Revelation of Revelations, p. 35.

[38] Peter Erb, "Introduction," Jacob Boehme, The Way to Christ, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 10.

[39] Jane Lead, A Treatise of the Souls Union with Christ (London, 1680), p. 569.

[40] Erb, "Introduction," The Way to Christ, p. 24.

41. Boehme, Mysterium Magnum, pp. 117-124; The Way to Christ, pp. 145-148.

42. Jane Lead, The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking. The Lord Christ's Ascension-Ladder Sent Down (London: 1681), p. 11.

43. Souls Union, p. 229; Heavenly Cloud, pp. 11-12.

44. Laws of Paradise, p. 69.

45. Erb, "Introduction," The Way of Christ, pp. 9-10.

46. Jane Lead, The Wonders of God's Creation Manifested in the Variety of Eight Worlds (London: T. Sowle, 1695), p. 9.

47. Souls Union, p. 229.

48. Laws of Paradise, p. 4.

49. Nicolas Berdyaev, "Unground and Freedom," in Jacob Boehme's Six Theosophical Points and Other Writings (Ann Arbor:

University of Michigan Press, 1971), pp. vii-viii.

50. For the further despiritualizing of the notion of symbol into a representation of reality rather than a participation in reality which took place in the 19th century, see M. Jadwiga Swiatecka's The Idea of Symbol: Some Nineteenth-Century Comparisons with Coleridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

51. Jane Lead, The Enochian Walks with God, Found out by a Spiritual Traveller, whose Face Towards Mount Sion Above was set (London: D. Edwards, 1694), p. 17.

52. Enochian Walks, p. 2.

53. Fountain of Gardens, p. 5.

54. Heavenly Cloud, pp. 14-15.

55. Fountain of Gardens, p. 69.

56. Enochian Walks, p. 5. We know very little about Lead's life. For some time she stayed at Lady Mico's home for impoverished gentlewomen; later, a German admirer, Baron Knyphausen, set up a yearly allowance for her. Enochian Walks, p. 31; Thune, pp. 81, 86.

57. Wonders of God's Creation, p. 39; Fountain of Gardens, p. 14.

58. Theologica Mystica or the mystic divinitie . (London, 1683), p. 6.

59. quoted by Christopher Walton in Notes, pp. 207-208.

60. Ibid., pp. 189-90.

61. Ibid., pp. 191-92.

62. Ibid., p. 194.

63. Ibid., p. 198.

64. Ibid., p. 199.

65. Fountain of Gardens, pp. 337-39, 266.

66. Fountain of Gardens, p. 326. Without the emphasis on otherworldly virtues such as chastity and continence, the Philadelphian teachings could be misinterpreted as in the case of the "prophetess" Eva von Buttlar, "the leader in a disgraceful aberration," which celebrated communal use of goods and sex. New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge, vol. 2, pp. 321-22; Thune, pp. 146-47.

67. Jane Lead, A Message to the Philadelphian Society, Whithersoever dispersed over the whole Earth (London: J. Bradford, 1696), p. 49. The universal restoration included the fallen angels; see D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), chapter XIII; and Thune pp. 72-77.

69. Francis Lee, "Letter to Dodwell," in Walton, Notes, pp. 207-208.

70. Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 1974), p. 331.

71. June Singer, Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 3.

72. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, History of the Ecumenical Movement (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), pp. 83, 100, 105.

73. Catherine Smith, "Jane Lead: The Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic," Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 184-203.

74. Richard Roach, "A Divine Communication. . .by Rev. Richard Roach who was Thirty Years under the Spirit's Operation, in union with Jane Lead," in Jane Lead, Divine Revelations and Prophecies, 1st publ. 1700 (Nottingham: H. Wild, 1830), p. 87.

75. Catherine Smith, p. 200.

76. Mary Giles, "The Feminist Mystic," The Feminist Mystic and Other Essays on Women and Spirituality, ed. Mary Giles (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

77Hilda L. Smith, Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 4.

PART FOUR:
IN THEIR OWN IMAGE:
WOMEN IN SEARCH OF NATURAL STYLE

Chapter 7: The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the "Female Imagination"

Recently, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), was remembered in the popular Book of Failures as "the world's most ridiculous poet."[1] And, for the past three hundred years--though Charles Lamb may have enjoyed the eccentricity of her person and prose--readers of her works have agreed that she failed as a philosopher and as a writer. In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf goes searching for a seventeenth-century "Judith Shakespeare" and finds in Cavendish's writings "a vision of loneliness and riot. . .as if some giant cucumber had spread itself over all the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death."[2] In her study of seventeenth-century travel fantasies, Voyages to the Moon, Marjorie Nicolson refuses to describe Cavendish's New Blazing World because she cannot bear to reread that "ponderous tome" in

order "to bring order out of. . .chaos."[3] But Cavendish herself confesses her shortcomings. In a typically disarming epistle to the reader, she warns, "I shall not need to tell you, I had neither Learning nor Art to set forth these Conceptions, for that you will find yourself" (PO/63).* Her naiveté of method can be and has been blamed on her lack of education and lack of access to learned and critical communities.[4] Yet anyone who has ventured to read ten pages of Cavendish's work knows that her method, or rather her defiance of method, is deliberate.

1. Cavendish's Conception of Herself as a True Wit

In most of her writings Cavendish celebrates, in theory and in practice, what she calls her "natural style." Her first book, Poems and Fancies (1653), announces the approach she exemplifies:

> Give Mee the Free, and Noble Stile,
> Which seems uncurb'd, though it be wild:. . .
> Give me a Stile that Nature frames, not Art:
> For Art doth seem to take the Pedants part (PF,110).

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*See page 201 for key to abbreviations.

She associates the writings of the learned with sterile artificiality and laboured imitation. She seeks the fantastic originality of what she calls the "true-born Wits":

> Give me that Wit, whose Fancy's not confin'd
> That buildeth on it selfe, not two Braines joyn'd (PF, 154).

Cavendish's "true wit" is natural wit unrestrained. Occasionally in her writings, she depicts playful confrontations between fancy and reason; for example, in Philosophical Fancies (1653), Reason cautions Thoughts not to run "in such strange phantastick waies" because the world will "scorn," and "think you mad"; instead Thoughts should "walke in a Beaten Path." But Thoughts rebel: "we do goe those waies that please us best./Nature doth give us liberty to run/Without check." It is Reason's "disputes" that cause Thoughts to "run unevenly." Therefore, Reason is to "trouble us no more,/For if you prate, wee'l thrust you out of doore." In spite of a teasing tone here and elsewhere, Cavendish consistently advocates the freedom of wit from the oppression of study, of discipline, of "the beaten path," in a word, of reason. In a later work, she defends untrained fancy, charging that great memories are "like standing ponds" made of "nothing but the showers of other men's wits" and have no

"running streams of their own." Great wits forget easily. "Indeed it's against Nature for natural wits to remember, for it is impossible that the mind should retain and create; and as we see in Nature, death makes way for life"(TR,182). In short, for Cavendish, "Learning is Artificial, but Wit is Natural" (OEP, "To the Reader").

While Restoration comedy might be seen to share this perspective in spirit, if not in method, the prevailing literary opinion and practice of her age denied such a polarization between natural wit and learned judgment. As early as 1595, Philip Sidney's Defence of Poesie claimed that natural wit "reined with learned discretion" becomes true wit."[5] In Timber, Ben Jonson uses the same image of the rider-poet reining in his horse (spontaneous wit) with a bit (judgment). Like the bee--now known to scholars as "the neo-classic bee"--the true writer imitates; he is able "to draw forth out of the best, and choicest flowers. . .and turn all into honey."[6] In Epicoene, Jonson creates the archetypal Truewit who has many descendents in Restoration comedy. In all his speeches Truewit seems to speak spontaneously; actually Jonson constructed his "instinctive" eloquence by means of a careful rejuvenation of classical sources.[7]

For Jonson, study and imitation, rather than making wit artificial, purify it and make it more right and more natural. In later neoclassical writers like Dryden, the trend to understand true wit in terms of judgment dominating fancy increased to the point of eliminating fancy altogether.[8]

It will be clear how estranged Cavendish was from the prevailing literary attitudes if we look at a passage from a writer of the next generation who excelled at anatomizing perversions of wit. Readers of A Tale of a Tub are familiar with Swift's masterly creation of the narrator who can be identified as "a mad modern." In a remarkable passage at the end of "A Digression concerning. . . Madness," Swift reveals the narrator's mentality by playfully applying the traditional horse/rider image: madness is the overthrow of reason by fancy; it is a "revolution" against the natural hierarchical order of the two faculties:

> I myself, the Author of these momentous truths, am a person, whose Imaginations are hard-mouthed, and exceedingly disposed to run away with his reason, which I have observed from long experience to be a very light rider, and easily shook off; upon which account my friends never trust me alone.[9]

What is mad for Swift is feminine for Cavendish. Reason may predominate in men, but fancy predominates in women. In Poems and Fancies, Cavendish reminds readers that poetry is "built upon Fancy" and therefore women may claim poetry as "belonging most properly to themselves." Female brains, she claims, "work usually in a Fantasticall motion" and therefore "go not so much by Rules and Method as by choice" (PF, "To all Noble and Worthy Ladies"). Elsewhere she emphasizes that reason is enslaved by necessity while fancy is voluntary (BW/66, "To the Reader"). In "The Poetesses hasty Resolution" prefacing Poems and Fancies, she describes how her self-love in its ambition for fame overcame her judgment when she published her poems without revision. Reason is depicted as an authoritarian bully who would have told her how ill her poems were if she had not rushed them into print. In a later work she defends herself against a rude comment by a reader who said, "my wit seemed as if it would overpower my brain" by asserting that "my reason is as strong as the effeminate sex requires" (TR, p. 151).

She is claiming, for women at least, a freedom from

"rules and method" denied writers by the seventeenth-century literary climate, dominated as it was by the opinions of Horace, whose satiric target in Ars Poetica is the Democritus who believes "that native talent is a greater boon than wretched art and shuts out from Helicon poets in their sober senses."[10] Cavendish was convinced that her originality was enough "ground" for "lasting fame."[11] Over and over again, she tells her readers that she has no time for studying other people's work because "our sex takes so much delight in dressing and adorning themselves." Besides, her ambition is not to be a lowly scholar but a great philosopher: "A Scholar is to be learned in other mens opinions, inventions and actions, and a philosopher is to teach other men his opinions of nature" (PO/55, "To the Reader"). This ambition led her to send her Philosophical and Physical Opinions (1655) to Oxford and Cambridge. Hoping this action is "not unnatural, though it is unusual for a woman," she asks the universities to house her book "for the good encouragement of our sex; lest in time we should grow irrational as idiots, by the dejectedness of our spirits, through the careless neglects and despisements of the masculine sex to the

two Universities"). Besides, she does not see why her opinions should not be studied with other "probabilities" (such as Aristotle's teachings); after all, only the custom of teaching ancient authors prevents readers from a "right understanding" of "my newborn opinions" (PO/55, pp. 26-27).

As we have seen, Cavendish associates fancy unregulated by judgment with vanity, especially in women. Yet she expects readers to share her good-natured tolerance of this charming foible, "it being according to the Nature of our Sex" (PL, p. 1). At the same time, she presents literary labour as pedantry not becoming to noble persons like herself. Although this attitude was not uncommon among her contemporaries (at least professedly), it led Cavendish to reject revision of her work as a task beneath her dignity and also unnatural to her as a woman. In her supposedly revised Philosophical and Physical Opinions (1663), she thinks it is enough that she is "very Studious in my own Thoughts and Contemplations" and that she records them in their natural and noble disorder: she has "neither Room nor Time for such inferior Considerations so that bothe Words and Chapters take their Places

according as I writ them, without any Mending or Correcting" (PO/63, "Epistle to Reader," my italics). She goes on to hope that "Understanding Readers" will not reject the "Inward worth" of her philosophy "through a Dislike to the Outward Form." The truth is there somewhere, she insists, because she makes no attempt to censure "Nature" which gives her thoughts "which run wildly about, and if by chance they light on Truth, they do not know it for a Truth" (PF, "Epistle to Mistris Toppe").

Her justification for her lack of method is that she recreates pure nature. Although she cannot create a well-wrought urn, so to speak, she gives fresh thoughts: she asks, "Should we not believe those to be Fools, that had rather have foul Water out of a Golden Vessel, than pure wine out of Earthen or Wooden Pots?" (ODS, "To the Reader of My Works"). The natural trait she imitates is fecundity. Nature brings forth monsters, as well as well-proportioned offspring, and lets them die of their own deformity; in like manner, Cavendish claims, she "scribbles" down whatever comes to her and lets the reader sort it out (TR, pp. 185, 205, 206). Fecundity and originality are the gifts of the true wit.

Cavendish is best understood, then, as a defender not of her sex, but of self and self-expression.

Hers is the mentality which is the target of Swift's Battle of the Books (1704). In the famous confrontation between the bee and the spider, the ancient and the modern respectively, Swift uses the bee to symbolize the principles and practices of neoclassicism. "By an universal Range, with long Search, much Study, true Judgment, and Distinction of Things," the bee-writer "brings home Honey and Wax."[12] The Spider, on the other had, is akin to Jonson's Littlewit, in Bartholomew Fair, who "like a silkworm" spins creations "out of myself."[13] Swelling up, Swift's spider boasts, "I am a domestick Animal, furnisht with a Native Stock within my self. This large Castle. . .is all built with my own Hands, and the Materials extracted altogether out of my own Person." His characteristics--his stress on originality; his fondness for a domestic rather than a "universall" perspective; his aimless creativity which, although it creates a space for himself, gives nothing of use (honey or wax) to others--are so extreme that he is fittingly called a subjectivist. The neoclassical bee warns that the spider's perspective

("a lazy contemplation of four Inches round") and his method ("feeding and engendering on it self") turns "all into Excrement and Venom; producing nothing at last, but Fly-bane and a Cobweb."[14]

Yet with what exuberance did Cavendish embrace this subjectivist perspective and method as her own. With a curious aptness she favours imagery of silkworm, spider and spinning for depicting literary creativity, particularly hers. In Poems and Fancies, she writes that "all brains work naturally and incessantly" and goes on to call the writing of poetry "spinning with the brain." She intends to win fame a s a writer "by spinning" a "Garment of Memory": "I cannot say the Web is strong, fine or evenly Spun, for it is a Course piece; yet I had rather my Name should go meanly clad, then dye with cold" (PF, "The Epistle Dedicatory"). I have italicized "web" to emphasize how naturally Cavendish could fuse the images of the spinner and the spider. Cavendish resorts to spinning imagery when excusing herself for encroaching on male prerogative: women have so much "waste time" that "our thoughts run wildly about," producing not only "unprofitable, but indiscreet Actions, winding up the thread of our lives in snarles on unsound bottoms" (PF, "An

Epistle to Mistris Toppe"). To describe "great masters of speech," she writes that they can speak "untangled"; they "can winde their words off their tongue" without a snarl or knot; they can work the "thread of sense into a flourishing discourse" (TR, p. 181). Yet Cavendish is aware of the commonplace implications of the imagery of silkworm and spider. In Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil (1656), a collection of conflicting tales about life by various speakers usually identified by sex alone, she has "a Man" denigrate the creativity of spider and silkworm:

> The Silkworm and the Spider Houses make,
> All their Materials from their Bowels take. . .
> Yet they are Curious, built with Art and Care,
> Like Lovers, who build Castles in the Air,
> Whic ev'ry puff of Wind is apt to break,
> As imaginations, when Reason is weak (NP, p. 126).

In her autobiography Cavendish presents a poignant picture of her life as an isolated duchess who would be a famous writer. Her one delight was her solitary creativity which she describes using her favorite imagery: "I had rather sit at home and write. . .I must say this on behalf of my thoughts, that I never found them idle; for if the senses bring no work in, they will work of themselves, like silkworms that spins [sic] out of their own bowels" (TR, p. 208).

2. No Room in Salomon's House

In his New Atlantis, Francis Bacon imagines Salomon's House, a patriarchal institution dedicated to enlarging "the bounds of Human Empire" over nature.[15] When the Royal Society was founded in 1662, it was based on the Baconian principle that the search for knowledge requires a mind "steadily fixed upon the facts of nature." Bacon was suspicious of the speculative mind which works "upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, and brings forth only "cobwebs of learning."[16] For Baconians, there could be no room in Salomon's House for natural philosophers who give out their "own imaginations for a pattern of the world."[17]

Margaret Cavendish's writings, as we shall see, attempted to provide an alternative perspective to the prevailing Baconian paradigm. Her lifelong ambition was to win public acceptance as Nature's true champion. In 1653, as R. H. Kargon points out, Cavendish "expounded an Epicurean atomism at once so extreme and so fanciful that she shocked the enemies of atomism and embarrassed its friends."[18] Everything could be explained by the motion of atoms, such as: what causes dropsy, how the brain

works, and why the earth has attraction. And "the Cause why things do live and dye,/ Is, as the mixed Atomes lye" (PE, p. 14). At times her descriptions of atoms are no less plausible than the descriptions of her more restrained contemporaries who were also fumbling around in search of a credible mechanics--for example, Robert Boyle with his corpuscular universe.[19] At other times she is fancy-free and plays with ;her atoms, as when she imagines "A World in an Eare Ring": "Wherein a Sun goeth round, and we not see./And Planets weven abvout that Sun may move." And her ultimate defense of her opinions is that, although they may or may not be true, they are natural. After all, "I do not applaud my self so much as to think thast my works can be without errors, for Nature is not a Deity" (OEP, "To the Reader").

Her intuitive, if erratic, exposition and defense of Nature's ways continued after 1660, although, probably in response to the more restrictive intellectual climate of the Restoration, she abandoned atomism: if each atom were "absolute," there could never be "good government" in the universe (PO/63, "Another Epistle to the Reader"). This use of a political analogy suggests that her social

perspective--that of a royalist duchess restored to her place in a regulated kingdom--had some influence on these later speculations about the natural order. In another work she repudiates atomism because in that philosophy every atom is "a kind of Deity" undermining the harmonious whole of Nature. In this typically entertaining passage she depicts rebellious democratic atoms: "Nature would be like a Beggars coat full of lice; Neither would she be able to rule those wandering and stragling atomes, because they are not parts of her body, but each is a single body by itself, having no dependence upon each other" (OEP, p. 142).

Yet she continued to present Nature as self-moving and perceptive. Philosophical Letters (1664) should be read as a vindication of the wisdom and the "intelligence" of matter from what Cavendish considers the belittling attacks by Henry More, Hobbes and Descartes. She ridicules More for assuming the passivity of nature (PL, "Letter VIII"). She denies Hobbes' claim for human supremacy by means of language over the rest of creation. As everyone knows, she quips, "a talking man is not so wise as a contemplating one." Other creatures, she says, have their own

reason: "For what man knows, whether Fish do not know more of the nature of water, and ebbing and flowing, and the Saltness of the Sea?" (PL ,pp. 113, 40). She attacks Descartes' separation of mind from the body and his reductionist attitude toward the body: "the Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue, and all the Body, have knowledge as well as the Mind." The only difference is that the mind, rational matter, is not "encumbered with grosser parts of matter to work upon" but the senses, sensitive matter, "works or moves only in its own substance" (PL, pp. 116, 127). Reason, as she tells us in another work, is "nothing but corporeal self-motion, or a particle of the purest, most subtil and active part of the matter." This being the case, she asks why the human should "be the onely Creature that partakes of this soul of Nature," and why the rest of Creation "should be soulless or (which is all one) irrational." The natural soul of reason permeates nature: "I do not deny that a Stone has Reason" (OEP, pp. 45-46). Clearly these insights into nature's vital connectiveness resemble the ideas of Anne Conway and others.[20]

Her philosophy of nature is empathetic, subjective, and fragmentary. Sometimes she happens to create a startlingly

beautiful analogy; for example, she likens animate matter to a spinner and inanimate matter to yarn: "Natural air seems to be made by such kinds of motions as spiders make cobwebs, for the animate matter's motions spin from a rare degree of inanimate matter."[21] But mostly her natural philosophy consists of passages excusing and flaunting her ignorance; for example, she writes about the anatomy of the body by confessing that she never read a book on the subject nor studied the body because "the modesty of my Sex" would not permit her (PO/55, p. 100). In Observations upon Experimental Philosophy (1666), she presents a curious anti-Baconian argument to show that speculation is a higher means toward knowledge than experiment is. Playing on the overlapping social and intellectual connotations of the word "mechanick," she writes that "experimental or mechanick Philosophy" should be subservient to speculative philosophy just as "the Artist or Mechanick is but a servant to the student" OEP, p. 7). Her main target in Observations is the microscope, that "artificial informer" that "more deludes than informs." The year before, Robert Hooke published his influential Micrographia describing his experiments with the microscope.

Cavendish thinks it "unnatural" to change the size of creatures so they "cannot be judged according to their natural figure." For illustration, she ridicules one of the experiments describing the 14,000 eyes on a fly. The microscope must be misleading us here or else, she asks, why doesn't a fly see a spider? She adds that these "eyes" might be "blisters or watery pimples" (OEP, pp. 24, 26-28).

This is the kind of speculation Joseph Glanvill, an apologist for the Royal Society, compliments in a letter to "your Grace" when he admires "the quickness and vigor of your conceptions." But he adds that hers is a pattern that men should not imitate. Glanvill denies that ratiocination is higher than "perfection of sense" by reasserting the Baconian paradigm. A natural philosopher must be willing "to tie down the mind in Physical things, to consider Nature as it is, to lay a Foundation in sensible collections, and from thence to proceed to general Propositions, and Discourses" (Coll, p. 99). Walter Charleton, another member of the Royal Society, also treats her with the tact required in writing to a duchess: he professes not to know "which of the two, Aristotle or your Grace, hath given us the best definition of the humane Soul." But he also

warns her that all opinions, even hers, must be subjected to "skeptical Judgement" (Coll, pp. 111-112).

In another letter, Charleton tells her the use to which he puts her philosophy: "Whenever my own Reason is at a loss, how to investigate the Causes of some Natural Secret or other, I shall relieve the Company with some one pleasant and unheard of Conjecture of yours so that by reading your Philosophy, I have acquired this much advantage: that where I cannot Satisfy, I shall be sure to Delight" (Coll, pp. 143-144). With her peculiar sense of humour and self-importance, Cavendish would have been pleased with this unusual tribute. There is no doubt that in small selected doses Cavendish delights us, as she intends to, with her fanciful conjectures and self-mockery. Charleton also teased her about her eccentric style: "You plant Fruit-trees in your Hedge-rows, and set Strawberries and Raspberries among your Roses and Lilies." Yet even for this "art" he flatters her: she has a fancy "too generous to be restrained" by "the laborious rule of Method" (Coll, pp. 143-144).

It was probably not any of her ideas--radical and eccentric as they may seem--that alienated her from the community

of natural philosphers. After all, Charleton, a popularizer of Epicurean atomism of the type made respectable by Gassendi, was forgiven after he trimmed his work to the hostile winds of Restoration science.[22] As we have seen, Cavendish willingly discarded her politically dangerous atomism. And other writers, if more cautiously, were sympathetic to finding the life principle immanent in nature.[23] There were two main factors, then contributing to her exclusion from the intellectual community: her sex and her untamed method. Lady Ranelagh is the only other contemporary Englishwomen who has a claim to being "a scientific lady," and she was content to work through her brother, Robert Boyle.[24] To a limited extent Cavendish was able to overcome social restrictions because of her status as a duchess and as the wife of a patron of virtuosi: she corresponded with leading thinkers; she published her works; she got invited, albeit as a spectator, to the Royal Society in 1667. But mostly she was isolated. With good reason, then, she defends contemplation as the means, indeed her only means, to seek natural truths. The Royal Society, based as it was on the inductive method and the fraternal accumulation of

knowledge, could provide no home for her person or or her perspective.

Cavendish's response to her failure as a natural philosopher was to retreat into fantasy. In 1666 she created her own New Blazing World. As she tells us in "To all Noble and Worthy Ladies" of the 1668 edition, the opinions advance in New Blazing World have "sympathy" and "coherence" with those expresses in Observations, to which it was originally appended in 1666. But in New Blazing World, she could be "Margaret the First" in a more congenial world; no one should begrudge her this pleasure "since it is in every ones power to do the like" (BW/66, "To the Reader").

The tedious chaos of the "plot" is an obvious feature of this work which has been attacked elsewhere.[25] The central character is an Empress of a newly found polar kingdom whose main interest is in ruling over the virtuosi: "for example, the Bearmen were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her astronomers, the Flyworm- and Fish-men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenick Physicians" (BW/68, p. 15). The Empress becomes angry at her virtuosi when

Bearmen observe celestial phenomena through a telescope and begin to quarrel. The Empress condemns the telescopes as "false informers" which "delude" their senses. Obviously this is the same opinion Cavendish advances in Observations, but in New Blazing World the Empress has power to command them to smash their instruments. She lets them keep their toys when her experimental philosophers admit that "we take more delight in Artificial delusions, than in Natural truths" (BW/68, pp. 26-28).

In New Blazing World, Cavendish deliberately let fancy take the reins and creates a world which indulges her fondest wishes--even allowing her some harmless retaliations against the Royal Society. Cavendish imagined a situation, improbable even in the twentieth century, in which a female leader dominates the scientific community. Her experimental philosophers are hack workers on detail, servants who bring in their observations so that the Empress can triumphantly speculate and create a synthetic truth. But the independent Empress gets lost in the oblivion of Cavendish's prose.

What we remember instead is the eccentric duchess

created in Pepys' Diary, who made an infamous visit in 1667 to the Royal Society during which leading scientists such as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke did experiments to provide what Marjorie Nicolson derisively calls "the afternoon's entertainment."[26] According to Pepys' enduring version, Cavendish did not "say anything that was worth hearing, but. . .was full of admiration, all admiration."[27] What we remember, then, of the seventeenth-century "scientific lady" of England is the image of woman as audience and, at best, as patron of men's accomplishments.

To reinforce how fanciful, how "mad," how revolutionary, and ultimately how irrelevant Cavendish's vision of a female scientific genius was to her contemporaries, we need only compare the relationship of the Empress to her virtuosi with the more famous depiction of the relationship between an intelligent woman and a modern philosopher in Bernard Fontenelle's Plurality of Worlds. Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes (1686) was one of Fontenelle's most ingenious tactics in his life-long attempt to popularize the ideas of the new philosophy. There were 28 editions of Entretiens in Fontenelle's long lifetime (1657-1757).[28] The

passages quoted in this chapter are from the 1688 translation by Aphra Behn. The immense popularity of Plurality of Worlds can be explained, to a great extent, by Fontenelle's choice of format. As Behn's subtitle tells us, he uses "five nights conversation with Madam the Marchioness of ***" in a garden in order to defend the mechanical philosophy and the theory that there are other inhabited worlds. We are to enjoy a pleasant flirtatious dialogue between "Fontenelle" and Madam even as we learn the truths of the Cartesian universe: "we are always in the Humour of mixing some little Gallantries with our most serious Discourses."[29]

But what interests us here is the relationship between the two conversationalists: "Fontenelle" is the the authority; he will teach the Copernican system. There are, for him, "no more unnecessary Difficulties" because he can reduce nature to a few easy laws. Because nature works like the contrivance of machines behind the scenes of an opera, he can "draw the Curtains and shew you the World." What room is there for dialogue when one party has all the answers? Well, this expert is a chivalrous servant to a noble and charming lady. Madam is an eager, intelligent, and pliable student.

But she has her little rebellions--"just like a woman." When "Fontenelle" offers to demonstrate a point by drawing a zodiac in the sand, she stops him: "It would give a certain Mathematical Air to my Park, which I do not like." Although she admires the simplicity of the Copernican system, she objects to the insecurity of the earth in it. She teasingly professes to favour the Indian system in which the earth is supported by four elephants. If danger threatens these solid foundations, the Indians "would quickly double the number of their elephants." "Fontenelle" laughs "at her fancy"; this is reminiscent of Charleton's pleasure at Cavendish's wit. Late on the first night, Madam at last agrees to be reasonable and to be Copernican. Later when she holds back in attractive timidity from the implications of such a vast universe, he urges her on to intellectual courage.[30]

Thus although moderns like Fontenelle might eagerly debunk the traditional cosmic hierarchies of Aristotle and Aquinas, "Fontenelle" and Madam embark into the new universe with their respective sexual roles intact. He leads intellectually and she follows. Even though Behn might object to the inconsistency of Madam's superficial yet profound character, Fontenelle's book did

teach women (and men) what was actually being debated in the science of the seventeenth centruy, and Behn approved of bringing women into intellectual, as well as literary, circles. But Cavendish's New Blazing World offered no instruction and no access to or compromise with the outside world.

In her own world Cavendish can refuse to moderate her desires to accessible goals and can create her women free from the restrictions which hampered Cavendish in both the social and intellectual realms. Only in paradise, only in a state with people of many complexions--literally azure, purple and green--and only in a state ruled by an Emperor "extraordinary" like her husband in his easygoing, non-authoritarian character, only in fantasy, could Cavendish find a haven for the intellectually ambitious woman. But beyond making this crucial point, New Blazing World offers little reading satisfaction or intelligibility. A passage from Robert Boyle reiterating the contempt the new science felt for subjective truth illustrates why Cavendish failed as a natural philosopher in the age of reason. There was no room in Salomon's House for the spider who "taking notice only of those objects, that obtrude themselves upon

her senses, lives ignorant of all the other rooms in the house, save that wherein she lurks."[31]

3. Margaret Cavendish and the Crabbed Reader

Cavendish was used to such complaints as mine. In Orations of Divers Sorts (1668), she ridicules her censorious critics: "those Faults or Imperfections I accuse my self of, in my Prefactory Epistles, they fling back with a double strength against my poor harmless Works; which shews their Malice and my Truth." She asks such "ill-natured" readers why they bother to accuse her plays of having no plots when she already acknowledges that. Such critics "prefer Plots before Wit." Then she states, her most chararacteristic stance as a writer: "I write to please myself, rather than to please such Crabbed Readers."[32] Still there is a proliferation of prefaces before her works in which she addresses readers, shares her problems as a writer and a thinker, and tells us how to read her work. Yet for three hundred years, her readers have remained crabbed--except for her husband, Charleton perhaps, and Charles Lamb. Perhaps we have yet to understand the nature of the legacy

she left to posterity.

Maybe her sense of humour eludes us. Maybe we are like her sour contemporary, Mary Evelyn, who on overhearing the friendly banter between Charleton and the Duchess to the effect that the universities should be abolished if they didn't abandon Aristotle and teach Cavendish's new-found ideas, became so provoked by Cavendish's manner that she dismissed the Duchess as mad.[33] Maybe Cavendish intends us to laugh at the incongruous juxtaposition of her self-deprecation and self-dramatization. She not only ridicules herself and the foibles of her sex but also--and this is important--casts doubt upon serious claims to knowledge of nature's secrets. William Cavendish seems to have shared her skeptical and playful attitude in this passage inserted at the end of her Philosophical and Physical Opinions (1663): "Since now it is A-la-mode to Write of Natural Philosophy, and I know, no body Knows what is the Cause of any thing, and since they are all Guessers, not Knowing, it gives every Man room to Think what he lists, and so I mean to Set up for my self, and play at this Philosophical Game as follows, without Patching or Stealing from any

Body." Perhaps Margaret Cavendish developed her science of the fancy to restore the balance in an age of reason. Her work represents, in a whimsical way, a groping toward an alternative vision to Salomon's House with its pretence to finding certain and objective knowledge. And she does attempt a relationship with nature that runs counter to the exploitive mastery proposed by Bacon; her approach is sensitive and reverent as well as subjective.

By her own admission, she was vain, inconsistent and silly; yet she took herself and her philosophy seriously. She was incapable of sustained study and thinking, so she said; yet she wanted to be a famous philosopher and to join the scientific establishment. In the same work she expounds a vitalistic and mechanistic universe. Her writing is muddled and indecisive; yet she expected posterity to admire it. The effect of letting contradictions stand is to undermine any authoritative stance she might be achieving. And yet at times this method gets at the complexity of psychological and social reality; for example, in Orations of Divers Sort, she lets several female speakers describe the lot of women from conflicting perspectives. They claim everything

from "we live like Batts, or Owls, labour like Beasts, and dye like Worms," to "what can we desire more than to be Men's Tyrants, Destinies, and Goddesses?" (ODS, pp. 240-246). Since Cavendish makes no judgmental distinctions among her female orators, it would be a mistake to guess her viewpoint; perhaps she shared all their attitudes to some extent.[34] Contradiction is typical of her style. It is hard to say whether this is an intentional strategy or the result of her refusal to revise and to edit her writing.

Cavendish's work is a defense fo free fancy or subjective expression in principle and in practice. Some modern writers like Anais Nin advocate a revolution in style toward one that would reflect psychological reality: the new literary form would be "endlessly varied and fecundating as each crystal varies from the next."[35] Cavendish can be seen as a pioneer of such an approach. Evn those of us who are attracted to her personality and ideas cannot help but wish she had been a more disciplined writer. It is also useful, then, to see Cavendish's place in literary history as a cautionary tale for those of us who would suggest that craftsmanship and order are masculine, and artlessness and chaos are feminine. Do

we really want to create a literary ghetto called the "female imagination" and claim as its characteristic style of expression, anarchic formlessness? Style has no sex. As her contemporary, William Davenant, points out, wit "is a webb consisting of the subt'lest threads; and like that of the spider is considerately woven out of ourselves; for a Spider may be said to consider. . .because hers are the works of time, and have their contextures alike."[36] The real spider's web, although spun out of herself, is architectonically sound, even elegant.

ABBREVIATIONS:

The following abbreviations have been used in the text and notes.

BW/66: The Description of a New Blazing World, appended to OEP.

BW/68: The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World. London: A. Maxwell, 1668.

Life: The Life of the First Duke of Newcastle. 1st ed. 1667. Everyman Library #182. London: J. M. Dent, n. d.

NP: Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to Life. London: A. Maxwell, 1671.

OEP: Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, to which is added, the Description of a New Blazing World. London: A. Maxwell, 1666.

ODS: Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places. 2nd ed. London: A. Maxwell, 1669.

PF: Poems and Fancies. 1st ed. 1653. Facsimile, Scolar Press, 1972.

PL: Philosophical Letters: or, Modest Reflections Upon some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, Maintained by several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age. London, 1664.

PO/55: The Philosophical and Physical Opinions. London: J. Martin & J. Allestrye, 1655.

PO/63: Philosophical and Physical Opinions. London: William Wilson, 1663.

TR: A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life appended to Life.

Coll: A Collection of Letters and Poems: Written by several Persons of Honour and Learning, Upon divers Important Subjects, to the Late Duke and Dutchess of Newcastle. London: Langly Curtis, 1678.

NOTES:

[1]Stephen Pile, The Incomplete Book of Failures (New York: Dutton, 1981), p. 94. This verdict is probably based on Samuel Pepys' comment on reading Cavendish's Life of her husband: "it shows her to be a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman, and he an asse to suffer [her] to write what she writes to and of him." The Diary of Samuel Pepys, 9 vol., ed. Robert Latham & William Matthews (London: Bell & Hyman, 1974), IX, p. 123.

[2]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, 1st ed. 1929 (London: Granada, 1979), pp. 59-60.

[3]Marjorie Nicolson, Voyages to the Moon (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 224.

[4]See Myra Reynolds' The Learned Lady iin England, 1650-1760 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920, pp. 46-49; see also Douglas Grant's Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle 1623-1673 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 37-38 and passim; Hilda Smith's Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 75-95.

[5]Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," in Critical Theory since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 158-59.

[6]Ben Jonson, "Timber or Discoveries," The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), ll. 2146, 3068; pp. 426, 448. Also see James W. Johnson, "That Neo-classic Bee," Journal of the History of Ideas, 22 (1961), 262-266.

[7]Jonas Barish, "Ovid, Juvenal and the Silent Woman," PMLA, 71 (1956), 213-224.

[8]Dryden defined wit as merely "a propriety of thoughts and words"; see "Introduction," Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 3 vol. ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I, xxxi.

[9]Jonathan Swift, A Tale of a Tub and other Satires, ed. Kathleen Williams (London: Dent, 1975), p. 114.

[10] Horace, Satire, Epistles and Ars Poetica, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 475.

[11]Grant, p. 192.

[12]Swift, p. 149.

[13]Ben Jonson's Plays, 2 vol., Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1967), II, p. 183.

[14]Swift, pp. 149-50.

[15]Francis Bacon, New Atlantis in A Selection of His Work, ed. Sidney Warhaft (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), p. 447.

[16]Bacon, The Proficience and Advancement of Learning, in Selection, p. 225.

[17]Bacon, The Great Instauration, in Selection, p. 323.

[18]Robert Kargon, Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 73.

[19]See Robert Boyle, The Works, 6 vol. ed. Thomas Birch (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), I, p. 356; II, p. 43.

[20]In chapter eleven, entitled "Women on Nature," Carolyn Merchant discusses Anne Conway's vitalism, but does not note this strain in Cavendish's work. The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

[21]PO/63, p. 183; Grant, pp. 199-200.

[22]See Nina Rattner Gelbart, "The Intellectual Development of Walter Charleton," Ambix, 18 (Nov., 1971), 149-168; Howard Jones, Pierre Gassendi 1592-1655: An Intellectual Biography (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1981), pp. 280-95.

[23]Even the fathers of mechanics, Newton and Leibnitz, sought a vitalistic inner principle in nature because they were not satisfied with mechanistic explanations of biology. See Merchant's chapter "Leibnitz and Newton," pp. 275-89. Descartes thought the machine metaphor was adequate to describe the life of bodies. See Philip R. Sloan, "Descartes, the Skeptics and the Rejection of Vitalism in Seventeenth-Century Physiology," Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science, 8 (1977), 1-28, p. 17.

[24]For the close relationship between Boyle and Ranelagh, see Gilbert Burnet's "A Sermon at the Funeral of the Honourable Robert Boyle," Select Sermons (Glasgow: Robert Foulis, 1742). Brother and sister died within a week of each other; Burnet preached the sermon on Jan. 7, 1692. See Charles Webster's attempt to establish Ranelagh's "membership" in the Invisible College. The Great Instauration: Science Medicine and Reform 1625-1660 (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 62-63. For a general study, see Gerald Meyer, The Scientific Lady in England 1650-1750: An Account of Her Rise, with Emphasis on the Major Roles of the Telescope and Microscope (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955).

[25]See Nicolson's attack referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

[26]Marjorie Nicolson, "'Mad Madge' and 'The Wits'," Pepys' Diary and the New Science (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia, 1965), p. 113. For another account, see Samuel Mintz, "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 51 (1952),119-128.

[27]Pepys, VIII, p. 243.

[28]Leonard M. Marsak, "Introduction," The Achievement of Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970), pp. xvi, xxvi.

[29]"Monsieur Fontenelle's History of the Plurality of Worlds," in Histories and Novels of Mrs. A Behn, 2 vol. (London: D. Browne, 1718), II, p. 98. Behn's was the third English translation.

[30]Plurality of Worlds, II, pp. 7-9, 19, 22, 27, 95.

[31]Robert Boyle, "Of the Usefulness of Natural Philosophy," Works, II, p. 9.

[32]"To the Readers of my Works," ODS; also see TR, p. 213.

[33]Mary Evelyn, "A Letter to Mr. Bohun," Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, ed. William Bray (London: George Routledge, 1900), pp. 731-732.

[34]Woolf takes the angry "we live like Batts" for Cavendish's own voice in Room, p. 59.

[35]Anais Nin, The Novel of the Future (New York: Collier, 1976), p. 29.

[36]William Davenant, "Preface to Gondibert," Spingarn, II, 20.

Chapter 8: The Sugar-Candied Reader: The Authority of the Audience in Aphra Behn's Writings

On the lowest rung of the critical ladder Mrs Behn. . .

James Sutherland, English Literature in the Late Seventeenth Century

All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn,. . .who makes it not quite fantastic for me to say to you tonight: Earn five hundred a year by your wits.

Virginia Woolf, Room of One's Own.

"Wit is nothing more that Nature well exprest," writes Aphra Behn, elegantly encapsulating the sentiment of her age.[1] Yet while Behn seems to have anticipated Alexander Pope's often quoted definition--"True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,/What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed"--Behn's concept of wit (and of "Nature") must be distinguished from that of mainstream critics in her century including, for example, such disparate figures as Jonson, Dryden and Hobbes who insisted that natural wit had to be regulated

with learning and judgment to be true wit.[2] As we've seen in the last chapter, Jonson claimed instinctive genius had to be refined by study, exercise, and imitation.[3] For Hobbes, judgment--the acquired ability to distinguish, to discern and to judge--is so essential that "Judgment therefore without fancy is wit, but fancy without judgment not."[4] Behn, like Cavendish, polarizes judgment and wit; wit is not an acquired, learned skill, but an instinctive, natural gift. Both writers, having no formal education because they were women, cast off the authority of learned judgment for the authority of their own experience. Cavendish, however, wrote, in isolation, to delight herself and failed to please "crabbed readers," while Behn wrote, in company, to delight her "Sugar-Candied Reader" and won widespread popularity among her contemporaries, if not with posterity.[5]

Early in her career, in the "Prologue" to her second play, <u>The Amorous Prince</u> (1671), Behn railled against the "grave Dons" who impose "great Johnson's way," that of severe and learned judgment on plays especially comedies (IV,121). She returned to the theme in "The Epistle to the Reader" of her next play, <u>The Dutch</u>

Lover (1673): "Plays have no great room for that which is men's great advantage over women, that is learning." She praises Shakespeare, in contrast to Jonson, as a true and natural wit ("though," she quips, Jonson was "no such Rabbi neither," I,224). Cavendish too defended Shakespeare as a "natural poet" able "to express naturally to the life."[6] For Behn, the Jonsonian critic with his "musty rules of unity" was a false wit. She exposes his affectation in this portrait of a fop who, against his will, responds spontaneously:

> I have seen a man the most severe of Jonson's sect, sit with his hat removed less than a hair's breadth from one sullen posture for almost three hours at The Alchemist; who at that excellent play of Harry the Fourth. . .hath very hardly kept his doublet whole (I,224).

The ultimate test of a good comedy for Behn is the experience of the audience: does it make them laugh?

This "extreme position" of appealing to the response of the audience as her guiding critical principle is what provoked James Sutherland to place Aphra Behn "on the lowest rung of the critical ladder."[7] For Behn, true wit delights. In the flirtatious "prologue" of her first play, The Forc'd Marriage (1670), she argues that as a

woman she should be allowed the privilege to write plays, to "join the force of wit to Beauty," in order to give herself one more charm by which a woman can fetter and pleasure men (III,285-6). Behn's playful address to the reader of The Dutch Lover as the "Good, Sweet, Honey, Sugar-Candied Reader" marks a dramatic departure from the contempt shown by other writers to their audiences, a departure which she is well aware of; she adds, "[this] "I think is more than anyone has called you yet"(I,221). This "Epistle to the Reader" goes on to challenge the view that plays ought "to instruct." No play (or sermon, for that matter) has ever done much to improve morality. Plays are "intended for the exercising of men's passions not their understandings." Since Behn defers to the delightful satirical power of "the mighty Echard" who had already characterized false wit "to my satisfaction," we might digress to include John Eachard's hilarious portrait of an "Academick Wit," taken from his The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy (1670) which advises the clergy that "a learned twang" is "out of fashion":

> He that in his Youth has allowed himself this liberty of Academick Wit, by this means he has usually so thinn'd his judgment, become so prejudiced against sober sense, and so altogether disposed to trifling and jingling: that so soon as he

> gets hold of a Text, he presently thinks that he has catch'd one of his old School-questions; and so falls a flinging it out of one hand in to another, tossing it this way and that; lets it run a little upon the line, the tanutus, high jingo, come again; here catching a word, there lie nibbling and sucking at an and, a by, a quis or a quid, a sic and a sicut; and thus minces a Text so small, that his Parishioners, until he rendevouze it again, can scarce tell what's become of it.

Eachard remarks that only boys, school masters and country divines are impressed with Greek and Latin in one's conversation; such learnedness is "esteemed but very bad Company."[8] For Eachard, the clergy must preach to the capacity and needs of the parishioners; Behn took the same attitude towards her audience. In "An Essay on Translated Prose," Behn justifies her stand against literal translations ("the Letter kills, but the Spirit enlivens.") and in favour of loose translations which can be "understood by the meanest Capacity," by citing God's example in the Bible. He did not despise His creatures for their inferior understanding, but "condescending to our Weakness," He expressed Himself "to fit our Capacities, and to fit the common Acceptance, or Appearances of things to the Vulgar."[9] As a playwright, she argues that she should aim to delight the audience: "a play is the best divertisement that wise men have.. . .I studied only to make this [The Dutch Lover] as entertaining as I could." The

success of her effort "my gentle reader, you may for your shilling judge"(I,223). She repudiates conventional rules of unity and decorum, claiming that she follows no rules of playwriting but "making them pleasant, and avoiding of scurrility"(I,224). Elsewhere, in the "Prologue" to The Rover (Part II, 1681), Behn admits, "'The Rabble 'tis we court"(I,115). Even though, as we'll see, there were moments of mutual recrimination in the relationship between Behn and her audience, her courtship of the audience was to continue throughout her literary work. This appeal to the humour, wit and good-nature of the audience as her authoritative literary principle led to the easy conversational style which characterizes all her writings, whether plays, poems, novelettes, or translations.

Her attitude towards her audience defies an overwhelming current of literary elitism, evident in writers as diverse as Jonson and Shadwell, Dryden and Rochester. In "To the Reader" of The Alchemist and "To the Reader in Ordinary" of Catiline, Ben Jonson, for example, clearly expects that his audience--except for "the Reader Extraordinary"--will not understand his work.

Therefore he is determined that "neither praise nor dispraise from you can affect me." He ignores response, whether negative or positive; he is "above such molestations" because the general audience has no discrimination anyway.[10] For Jonson, to write the "theatrical wit" which is fashionable with "the beast, the multitude" is to degrade wit to the people's base level: "This is truly leaping from the stage to the tumbril again, reducing all wit to the original dungcart."[11]

Not surprisingly, Thomas Shadwell imitates Jonson's disdain for "this illiterate age" in which "the rabble of little People" are more entertained with farce--"custard handsomely thrown" in the face--than with true wit. He protests against those who claim that the purpose of a writer is to delight rather than to instruct: "methinks a Poet should never acknowledge this, for it makes him of as little use to Mankind as a Fidler or Dancing Master, who delights the fancy onely, without improving the Judgment."[12] It is because, Shadwell claims, he refuses to conform to the vulgar tastes and low understandings of the rabble and continues to reprove and to ridicule them for their folly and ignorance that his plays are not

popular with those lacking in discernment: "some women, and some men of feminine understandings, who slight plays only that represent a little tattle sort of conversation like their own; but true humour is not liked or understood by them."[13]

In his "An Allusion to Horace, the Tenth Satyr of the First Book," Rochester admires Shadwell for scorning "to make fools and women praise" his works and chastises Dryden for prostituting his muse to be popular. The closing passage of the poem recaptures the Horatian view that the writer should spurn the fickle favour of the crowd and be content with the approval of a worthy few:

> Scorn all applause the vile rout can bestow,
> And be content to please those few who know.
> Canst thou be such a vain, mistaken thing
> To wish thy works might make a playhouse ring
> With the unthinking laughter and poor praise
> Of fops and ladies, factious for thy plays?
> Then send a cunning friend to learn thy doom
> From the shrewd judges in the drawing room. . . .
> I loathe the rabble; 'tis enough to me
> If Sedley, Shadwell, Shepherd, Wycherley,
> Godolphin, Butler, Buckhurst, Buckingham,
> And some few more, whom I omit to name,
> Approve my sense: I count their censure fame.[14]

In fact, Dryden tried to please "the shrewd judges in the drawing room" as well as the "vile rout." Whatever his other

differences with the Rochester-Shadwell circle, he often reveals the same disdain for the audience's intelligence and judgment. In his "Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668)," he claims that his chief endeavour "is to delight the age in which I live." Yet he has to overcome a reserved and sullen nature to write successful comedies. "I will force my genius to obey it [the humour of the age], though with more reputation I could write in verse." At the same time, he recognizes that he will get no literary immortality for his comedies.[15] In his "Preface" to An Evening's Love (1671), he describes "my disgust of low Comedy." He is vexed because the audience laughs and claps "where I intended 'em no jest; while they let pass the better things without taking notice of them." While admitting that the chief end of comedy is to delight rather than to instruct, he is ashamed that he can please people so successfully with such inferior, that is, farcical, material: "This confirms me in my opinion of slighting popular applause, and of contemning that approbation which those very people give, equally with me, to the zany of a Mountebank." What they miss is the wit of plays which should move them to an appreciation of the propriety and elegance

of the style, "to a pleasure that is more noble." Because the audience laughs without discernment, without distinguishing coherence and craftsmanship from serendipity and extravagance: "the true poet oftens misses of applause, because he cannot debase himself to write so ill as to please his Audience."[16] Ultimately, Dryden wrote with success for "the most discerning critic" who would study his plays exegetically to seek out and to appreciate the "hidden beauties" which could be "but confusedly judged in the vehemence of the action." He valued live applause only "in reference to my profit" and sought literary glory as a timeless and true poet. "But, as 'tis my interest to please my audience, so 'tis my ambition to be read: that I am sure is the more lasting and the nobler design."[17]

Like Dryden, Behn frequently discusses the conflict between writing for immediate popularity with the rabble as the judges of one's success and writing for literary reputation with the discriminating few and posterity as the judges of one's success. For her the former purpose took precedence; writing was her livelihood. As this passage from the "Epilogue" to The Dutch Lover reveals, she hoped to find and to please a "middle" audience between the

censorious "shrewd judges in the drawing room" and the fickle "vile rout":

> Her humble Muse soars not in the High-rode
> Of wit transverst, or Baudy A-la-mode;
> Yet hopes her plain and easy Style is such,
> As your high Censures will disdain to touch.
> Let her low Sense creep safe from your Bravadoes,
> Whilst Rotas and Cabals aim at Granadoes(I,330).

The "Prologue" to Sir Patient Fancy (1678) sees modern poets as tradesmen (rather than craftsmen) who sell "what's in fashion. . .And cozen you, to give you all content." Her contemporaries have no reverence for traditional authority including that of literary classics:

> True Comedy, writ even in Dryden's Style,
> Will hardly raise your Humours to a Smile. . .
> The Monarch Wit unjustly you dethrone
> And Tyrannick Commonwealth prefer
> Where each small Wit sets up and claims his share.

This very democraticization of literary values is what gives Behn the opportunity to write: "Nay even the Women now pretend to reign"(IV,8-9). The "Epilogue" returns to the same theme. Since "Method and Rule" are "out of fashion," educated male writers have no advantage over female writers: "Your learned Cant of Action, Time and Place,/ Must give way to the unlabour'd Farce"(IV,116). As is revealed in her dedicatory epistle "To the Lord Marquess of

Worcester," of The Emperor in the Moon (1687), Behn rejected the elitist's out-of-hand condemnation of farce as "too debas'd and vulgar as to entertain a Man of Quality"; those willing to look beyond the buffoonery and "the humble Actions and trivialness of the business" in her play will "find Nature there"(III,391). In his "Preface" to Gondibert, William Davenant, who shared the modern inclination against the authority of the ancients, laments that writers "are apter to be beholding to Bookes then to Men." Instead they should refine their conceptions in the company of people.[18] Well might Behn who knew no Latin of Greek but excelled in conversation, in observation and in drawing to the life the portraits of the jilts and cuckolds around her, well might Behn ask, "pray tell me then,/ Why Women should not write as well as Men"(IV,116). In an age in which, as "The Person of Quality" complains in the "Prologue" to The Rover, "the only wit. . .now in fashion" is "the Gleanings of good Conversation," Behn could triumph.

Thus though as a lifelong Tory, Behn might mock the new power of "each small wit," as a writer and as a realist, she made her living by giving the people what they wanted. As the "Prologue"

to The Rover (Part II, 1681) insists,

> In vain we labour to reform the Stage,
> Poets have caught the Disease o' th' Age.

These days, "'tis the Rabble we court" because of its new-found power "to impose even Laws on Kings"(I,115). Like the politicians, the poets easily pass off old and nonsensical plots for new and witty ones because the ignorant people are so easy to cheat. Though Behn, on occasion, tells the crowds to see themselves mirrored in the fops of her plays, she still courted them, finding their purses "useful" if their heads "empty":

> Almighty Rabble, 'tis to you this Day
> Our humble Author dedicates the Play,
> From those who in our lofty Tire sit,
> Down to the dull Stage-Cullies of the Pit,
> Who have much Money, and but little Wit(I,116).

In "To the Reader" of Sir Patient Fancy, Behn presents herself as one "who is forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to own it." Her poverty is the reason she must write to please a degenerate age in a way "too cheap for men of wit to pursue who write for Glory, and a way which even I despise as much below me." She worries that some critics are ruining her reputation with the ladies by claiming it is "unnatural" for a woman to write such a

bawdy play as Sir Patient Fancy: "had it been owned by a Man, though the most Dull Unthinking Rascally Scribler in Town, it had been a most admirable Play." She urges the ladies to come to judge the play for themselves; "the most innocent Virgins" will find less of "that Bugbear Bawdry" in it than in any other play, ancient or modern(IV,7). This she claims even though in Act III, for example, Lady Fancy in the dark mistakes her step-daughter's fiancé Lodwick for her life-long lover Wittmore and invites him to bed; at first Lodwick has no "appetite" and resists her advances because he mistakes her for his betrothed Isabella--"who would first sully the Linen they mean to put on?"--, but on realizing that "'tis the charming mother" greedily makes a cuckold of Sir Fancy, his future father-in-law (IV,45,52-53). Realizing that other women may not share her easy sense of humour, Behn asks that the ladies have the "good Nature" to forgive her, even if they find the play too smutty, since poverty forces her to write to please the men.

In an age in which a playwright--Behn's friend Thomas Otway, for example--could live and die in destitution, Behn's need to be prolific and popular cannot be underestimated.[19] Despite her

success, Behn had continual financial worries, particularly in the 1680's when the political climate was changing and she had to turn more and more to translating and to writing novels. In a letter written around 1683/84 to her publisher, Jacob Tonson, she reveals that she views translating Abbe Tallemant's Le Voyage de l'Isle d'Amour as "low gettings." The letter begs Tonson for an advance on her expected earnings for the translation: "I want extreamly or I wo'd not urge this."[20] In the "Epilogue" to The Emperor of the Moon,--a play that has been recognized as one of the best English farces--, she regrets that her talents have dwindled down to a farce.[21] Unfortunately, poets no longer live in an ideal state like Rome which supported its poets: "Freed from want, they only writ for Fame"(III, 462).

Thus, while it is true that the epistles, prologues and epilogues to Behn's plays propagate a self-deprecating image of Behn as an impoverished hack writer who dashes off her plays to please a foolish and loose age, the very fact that she wrote so many apologies for her works reveals that she wrote for glory as well as bread. She continually and vehemently vindicates her reputation as a great and

natural wit from three persistent accusations: 1) that she plagarized her plays from other, particularly French, writers; 2) that it was unnatural and immoral for a woman to be a writer; and 3) that her plays appealed to the low appetites of the audience. The first charge she deals with confidently and good-naturedly by inviting the readers to compare her plays with the originals from which she took "hints" in order to discover whether or not she has improved the original and/or made the material her own.[22] We get some idea of the extensive creative effort Behn usually put into rewriting her sources when we read the apology she wrote the year before her death, in 1688, to the public for her translation of Fontenelle's Plurality of Worlds. Even in translating she intended "to give you the Subject quite changed and made my own," but, "having neither health nor leisure," had to publish a mere French-into-English translation "such as it is."[23]

The other two attacks proved more problematic, especially in the 1680's when moralistic criticism began to dominate. In 1673, in "An Epistle to the Reader" of The Dutch Lover, she could cheerfully pillory the sexist critic as "a long, lither, phlegmatic, white,

ill-favoured, wretched fop"--a smelt which when it opened "that which serves it for a mouth, out issued such a noise as this to those that sate about it, that they were to expect a woful Play, God damn him, for it was a woman's." True wits could be relied on to ridicule "scraps as they pick up from other folks" and to judge the play for itself(I,223-24). By 1686, in the "Preface" to The Lucky Chance, she is still pleading with the ladies not to credit hostile critics, who would raise a scandal against her play "that 'tis not fit for the Ladys." Those who have the "Christian charity" to read, compare and think will find that there is nothing in the play which is "unnatural or obscene" except what "'tis proper for the Characters"; it is decorum that the witty Lady Fulbank makes "a cuckold of her husband with dexterity." Could Behn help it if the actor playing Sir Feeble Fainwou'd, Mr. Leigh, improvised by opening his nightgown in Act III to clear the women out of his unwilling bride's bedroom? Since men write worse plays--and she lists examples--she can only conclude "the Ladys were oblig'd to hear Indecencys only from their Pens."

As it goes on, the "Preface" becomes less playful and

more defensive in tone. She hopes the "witty few" will attest to the propriety of Behn's own behaviour; as they know, "my Conversation [is] not at all addicted to the Indecencys alleged." They should ask themselves whether she would put obscenities in her plays, thereby renouncing "my Fame, Modesty and Interest for a silly Sawcy fruitless Jest, to make Fools laugh, and Women blush, and wise Men asham'd" She ends the "Preface" with her well-known feminist plea that male writers not restrict to themselves the freedom to write what pleases audiences:

> All I ask, is the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in, to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern writers have set me, and by which they pleas'd the World so well(III,187).

In writing for bread, like her successful predecessors, she is writing for glory. She declares her literary ambition: "I am not content to write for a third day only"(III,185-187). As Summers points out, on the third day of performance, the whole of the profits went to the playwright(III, 484). As "all unbyast Judges of Sense" would admit, if her comedies had come out under a man's name, she would be recognized as a good a writer as any of her contemporaries(III,186).

She ends the "Preface" to The Lucky Chance clearly revealing her bitterness at the malice and sexism of the critics who conspired to ruin her name: "I value Fame as much as if I had been born a Hero; and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful World, and scorn its fickle Favours"(III,186).

The Lucky Chance was as successful and as bawdy as any comedy she wrote; her editor--and I agree--puts it as one of her three best plays--the other two being The Rover and The Feign'd Curtezans. Yet despite the raunchiness of the play itself, the ironic denial of this in the "Preface," and Behn's demand to write with the same "freedom" as her "brothers of the Pen," Behn's dedication "To the Right Honourable Laurence, Lord Hyde, Earl of Rochester" seems, to at least one critic, to repudiate her earlier defiant stand in the "Epistle to the Reader" of The Dutch Lover that plays do not reform morality.[24] In the "Dedicatory Epistle," Behn cites with approval Cardinal Richelieu's opinion that public entertainments are "the Schools of Vertue": "they are secret Instructions to the People, in things that 'tis impossible to insinuate into them in any other Way." But the virtue she is referring to is not sexual morality; this is clear

for two reasons. First, the witty heroine, Lady Julia Fulbank, defends and celebrates Behn's commitment to natural morality. When Sir Cautious asks his wife to cuckold him "in a civil way," she angrily rejects hypocritical reputation; instead, she defends the free and honest morality of following one's inclinations openly (III,267-68). Second, in the "Epistle Dedicatory," Behn describes a reformed playgoer "who with beholding in our Theatre a Modern Politician set forth in all his Colours, renounc'd his opinion, and quitted the Party"(III,183). She is arguing that her pen is useful to good government and to the Royalist cause. In fact, many of her plays of the 1680's include political satire against the Whigs; The Roundheads, or the Good Old Cause (1682), for example, ridicules the Whig leaders as ambitious, degenerate fools, incessantly plotting for power. In The Lucky Chance itself, there is a hilarious confusion of midnight plots--amorous and political--involving the two old cuckolds, the alderman and the banker. The City Heiress, or Sir Timothy Treat-all (1682) uses the partisan trick of making the old fop a seditious Whig and the gallants Tories.[25] In fact, it is taken to be a matter of Tory principle that the successful way to court a

woman is with libertine directness and combative wit. The Tory, Sir Anthony Meriwill, threatens to disinherit his unnatural nephew, Sir Charles, because the spiritless Charles fails to win Lady Galliard by honourable petition into marriage, while his rival Wilding seduces her with cynical charm and witty abuse.[26] The uncle undertakes to teach Charles how he should have conducted "a little Courtship of my Mode":

> a Pox upon thee--I took thee for a prettier Fellow--
> You shou'd have huft and bluster'd at her door,
> Been very impudent and saucy, Sir,
> Leud, ruffling, mad; courted at all hours and seasons;
> Let her not rest, nor eat, nor sleep nor visit.
> Believe me, Charles, Women love Importunity(II,218).

Finally the uncle, after threatening to burn his books which spoiled him for whoring, gets him drunk enough so that Charles breaks into Lady Galliard's bedroom and, with his uncle cheering the "rogue" on, takes off his breeches and, despite her rage, won't leave till she promises to marry him. She is aroused by this display of passion and wit and agrees "to plague thee" with the intrigues of a wife (II, 291). As we shall see, Behn comedies not only associate sexual passion and intrigue with being Tory but also celebrate them as being innocent and natural.

Wit for Behn is "Nature well exprest." What makes Behn's concept of wit revolutionary is the vision of nature that it well-expresses. For Behn, unlike the traditional Christian, neoclassic or Hobbesian writers, nature and the human in the state of nature are inherently good. In her poem "The Golden Age," she celebrates that "Blest Age" of "Eternal Spring" when "the Heav'ns laugh'd with continued Light." Then there were "no rude Rapes upon the Virgin Earth"; yet the Virgin cared for all creatures from "her Teeming Womb." There was no religion, no law, no patriarchy and no war (VI,138-139). It is an age-old theme-- the most familiar version occuring in the opening of Ovid's Metamorphoses. In the Age of Saturn, the Golden Age, creatures lived without law, punishment, agriculture, tyranny or war, in joy and harmony with each other and with the gods. But with the fall of Saturn and the ascendancy of Jupiter, creatures descended through the ages of silver, bronze and iron into savagery, baseness, impiety and violence. The gods departed one by one until "the maiden Astraea, last of the immortals, abandoned the blood-soaked earth."[27] Astraea's return, it is said, will herald the dawning of the new golden age.[28]

Following the fashion of poets of her age to take pastoral names, Behn chose "Astraea."[29] "The Golden Age" presents the ideal behind all of her writings, that of anarchic freedom and natural love:

> Each Swain was Lord o'er his own will alone,
> His innocence Religion was, and Laws. . .
> Then it was glory to pursue delight,
> And that was lawful all, that Pleasure did invite(VI,140).

This is the Eden Behn would have restored. Behn satirizes civilized humankind in which the "Tyrant Honour" usurps power. In its service, humans pervert language: "Right and Property" are used to justify imperializing by law and army over others; as well, "Rape, Invasion and Tyrannies" are called "gaining of a Glorious Name"(VI,140). Honour invents "those Fopperies of the Gown" and "those Politick Curbs" which restrict our freeborn inclinations by calling them sin:

> Who but the Learned and dull moral Fool
> Could gravely have forseen, man ought to live by Rule
> (VI,141).

"Cursed Honour" damns women to shame and, worst, "rob'st us of our Gust." To protect their Honour (that" base Debaucher of a Generous Heart"), civilized women pervert their spontaneous response into

"set Formality"; the "wishing maid" degenerates into the scheming jilt. (In "The Fair Jilt," Behn studies the degeneration of Miranda, a woman "of the best Quality," who abuses her wit and beauty to gain power over others and to maintain a hypocritical reputation for goodness.) Though Behn implores Honour to "let the Golden Age [reign] again" at the end of "The Golden Age," she advises the young wood-nymph Sylvia "the gay hasty minutes [to] prize"; one can only expect a fleeting glance at paradisal joy. What little we know of Behn's circle encourages us to speculate that they tried, however inadequately, to live with prelapsarian, pastoral gaety and freedom, celebrated in her poems.[29] When one of the swains, Celladon, deserted his friends for Ireland and Business "to Toyl, be Dull and to be Great," Behn wrote a poem lamenting that "for Empire he did Eden change" (VI,144). For Behn, seeking love and seeking power are incompatible.

Behn's celebration in Oroonoko of primal innocence has been widely recognized as anticipating the Enlightment's rehabilitation of the natural human.[30] Oroonoko affords us a opportunity to clarify the relationship of Behn's concept of wit to

natural innocence because, in that work, the African prince Oroonoko represents true wit while, in contrast, the native Americans represent prelapsarian innocence and the white Europeans (with the exception of the Frenchman, the Englishman Trefry, and the narrator Behn herself) represent corrupted civilized behaviour. For Behn, the native Americans are "an absolute Idea of the first state of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin"; they are "like our first Parents before the Fall" because even though they wear only beaded aprons "as Adam and Eve did Fig leaves," they are modest, shy and decent in their courtship. They have "native justice" and know nothing about dishonesty, hypocrisy, cunning and other vices except what "they are taught by the white men." Their tranquility and joyfulness Behn takes as evidence that "Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress. 'Tis she alone, _if she were permitted_, that better instructs the world, than all the Inventions of Man," including law, politics and religion (VI,131-132, my italics).

Behn is also aware that their innocence makes the natives vulnerable to the cunning ways of civilized Europeans. When Behn, Oroonoko and some others venture inland to visit a

village, she finds that the natives want to make one of her kinsmen a god because he does a trick with a magnifying glass: "by the extreme Ignorance and Simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant Religion among them." With sarcasm, she praises the colonists for treating the natives as friends instead of as slaves, but goes on to point out that only the natives know where and how to get food in that difficult environment and, in exchange for "trifles" will supply to the Europeans what they cannot get for themselves. Besides, she adds, the whites do not dare be imperialistic, "their Numbers so far surpassing ours in that Continent" (V,132-133).

The main target of Behn's indignation in Oroonoko is the hypocrisy of the Christians: "no Peoples profess'd so much, none perform'd so little" (V,196). The English captain who lures Oroonoko and some followers to a party aboard his ship and sells them into slavery at Surinam is not condemned for slave trading--after all, the hero Oroonoko and his countrymen are coastal middlemen in the English slave trade. He is condemned for betraying a friend and great man though he gave "the word of a Christian" guaranteeing

their just treatment. This treachery teaches Oroonoko about the "Christian" way: "'Tis worth my Sufferings to gain so true a knowledge both of you, and of your Gods" (V,161-166). Admittedly, many of the "Christians" at Surinam are the worst elements in exile from English society. The governor's council consists "of such notorious Villains as Newgate never transported." Oroonoko chooses Sunday to lead the exodus of slaves to freedom because the whites are drunk--"Sunday being their Day of Debauch" (V,200,189). When the attempt of the slaves to escape fails because the slaves are cowardly and treacherous, Oroonoko realizes that they "were by Nature Slaves. . .fit to be used as Christian tools." They would rather suffer the ignominy and misery of servitude than to risk their lives to establish a free, noble and just colony:

> They wanted only but to be whipped into the knowledge of the Christian Gods, to be the vilest of all creeping Things; to learn to worship such Deities as had not the Power to make them just, brave, or honest(V, 196-7).

Oroonoko is willing to die fighting the whites rather "than live upon the same earth with such Dogs" as his fellow-slaves. Unfortunately, once again he trusts the word of a Christian when the lieutenant-governor Byam promises Oroonoko that he can name his

own conditions of surrender. Though Oroonoko insists on the white custom of a contract, on his return to the colony, Byam has him whipped till he almost bleeds to death; then Indian pepper is rubbed into his wounds (V,196-97).

Prince Oroonoko has often been characterized a typical hero of a romance--albeit with black skin. As well, he embodies Behn's ideal of true wit. Except for his blackness, his beauty is European: a Roman nose "instead of African and flat" and a finely shaped mouth "far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of Negroes" (V,136). But Behn also stresses his "greatness of Soul," his "absolute Generosity," and his "Softness" which makes him "capable of the highest Passions of Love and Gallantry." Not only are his features European, but so is his education. From the English and the Spanish, he learned not only their languages, but also slave-trading (V,135). The strongest influence on his education, character and wit is the Frenchman who had been banished as a heretic: "he was a Man of little Religion, yet he had admirable Morals, and a brave Soul" (V,160). Oroonoko also shares Behn's Tory "abhorrence" for the execution of Charles I. "Fine

wit," insists Behn, is not confined to Europeans (V,135-36).

For Behn, the wit is most capable of love. In contrast, as she tells us in "The Fair Jilt, " the fop is incapable of real passion; in a fop, the wounds of love "reach the Desire only, and are cur'd by possessing, while the short-liv'd Passion betrays the cheat." In the wit, love "has the Power of changing Nature; and is capable of performing all those Heroick things of which History is full" (V,137,74). When Behn describes Oroonoko's eternal love for Imoinda (eternal because "her soul would always be fine, and always young") she takes the opportunity to attack Christians as false professors of monogamy. In polygamy, "the only Crime and Sin against a Woman, is, to turn her off, to abandon her to Want, Shame and Misery: such ill Morals are only practis'd in Christian Countries, where they prefer the bare Name of Religion" (V,139). The scenes of Oroonoko which take place in Coramantian, Oroonoko's homeland, read like a Restoration play: the tyrannical old king, Oroonoko's grandfather, uses his power to force Imoinda to be his concubine, though she is betrothed to Oroonoko. Fortunately for Oroonoko's honour, at a hundred odd years old, "alas, he could, but innocently

play." Forced to intrigue, Oroonoko outwits the king and gets to Imoinda's bed; without false modesty, she welcomes him according to her natural inclination. Both lovers remain honest and constant through the trials of separation, enslavement, and death. Trefry, the English slaveowner of Imoinda, is also a man of "excellent Wit and Parts" when asked why he did not rape Imoinda who, though his slave, refused his advances, he says that he was moved by her modesty and quality. Everyone laughed at this "civility to a slave" except for Oroonoko who sees this as a sign of Trefry's "Nobleness of Passion and Nature." For Behn, nobleness is natural and within. As Oroonoko's favorite maxims states, "A Man of Wit could not be a Knave or a Villain" (V,172,168).

The true wit somehow is able to cut through the viciousness, repressiveness and hypocrisy of civilized behaviour and to recover the generosity, honesty and innocence of passion of the natural state. Behn's nostalgic vision of the state of nature, as revealed directly in her poems and in Oroonoko, contrasts sharply with Hobbes' view of the natural state as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."[32] In Behn's comedies (and probably in

Restoration comedy in general), reducing her wit-heroes to "Hobbesian" rakes somehow misses the good-natured attitude of the playwright towards her subject. I am using "Hobbesian," as Samuel Mintz does, to indicate attitudes which are "roughly analogous to Hobbes' view of nature, at least in so far as the rakes who move through the plays are licentious, predatory and rapacious."[33] The natural world to which the wit-rakes appeal to justify their outrageous flaunting of conventional morality is more Saturnalian than Hobbesian. Restoration comedy, as Ian Donaldson suggests, inherited its spirit from age-old social rituals--like the Roman saturnalia--which allow the people "to re-enact the freedom and equality of the Golden Age" for a few hours.[34] When Jonson turns the world upside down in his comedies and overthrows the "natural" hierarchical relationships, the social and cosmic disorder which results would lead a judicious man to favour social discipline over freedom, social distinction over equality. Behn's attitude towards the reign of anarchy in her comedies is more favourable. She creates an amiable and liberated Saturnalian atmosphere in her plays--The Feign'd Curtezans, for example, takes place in Rome

where the gay Galliard counsels the constant lover Filamour to live as the Romans do "according to the generous indulgent Laws of Nature; [they] enjoy 'em [women] as we do Meat, Drink, Air, and Light, and all the rest of her common Blessings" To seek an "innocent passion" or "lawful enjoyment" is not appropriate: "to be an Anchoret here, is to be an Epicure in Greenland". The female wits liberate themselves from the "dull, virtuous life" of respectable women--Cornelia is destined for a nunnery, Marcella for a forced marriage--into this epicurean world of love and adventure by disguising themselves as courtesans (II,312,329). Though at the end of this play, the female and male libertines conform to marriage, they do so only after their natural honesty has triumphed over civilized "honour" which requires consideration of financial interest and obedience to parental authority. They can make a free choice, based on equality of beauty and wit. The world of Behn's comedies is frankly, if implicitly, epicurean.[35]

The free love which Behn advocates is not merely physical and predatory. Such foppish lust for power is ridiculed in a memorable scene from The Town Fop (1676) when Bellamour,

who is disappointed in his true love for Celinda, throws himself into debauchery--dice, wine and sex; he is determined to "towse and ruffle, like any Leviathan." In a scene which inverts the "normal" sex roles to comic effect, the wonderfully whorish Betty Flauntit would help him along, but he keeps having fits of revulsion: "Gods! what an odious thing mere Coupling is!/A thing which every sensual Animal/Can do as well as we--." Flauntit is confused by this talk of a "nobler" something between men and women and decides, "he's very silly, or very innocent, I hope he has his Maidenhead; if so, and rich too, Oh, what a booty were this for me!"(III,67).

For Behn, what is unnatural and "machiavellian" or "Hobbesian" is to betray freedom and love for money or power. Galliard is outraged in The Feign'd Curtezans when he discovers, as he thinks, that the courtesan he loves, Silvianetta(Cornelia in disguise), has "grown a Machiavellian in your Art" by preferring a fool and easy money to himself, her equal in wit and beauty. Thinking she has committed the worst of sins, he rejects her for such unnaturalness:

> Oh Women, Women, fonder in your Appetites
> Than Beasts, and more unnatural!
> For they but couple with their Kind, but you
> Promiscuously shuffle your Brutes together,
> The Fop of business with the lazy Gown-men--the learned Ass with the illiterate Wit--the empty Coxcomb with the Politician, as dull and insignificant as he; from the gay Fool made more a Beast by Fortune to all the loath'd infirmities of Age. Farewel--I scorn to croud with the dull Herd, or graze upon the Common where they fatten (II,382-83).

Though Galliard repeatedly derides "that dead Commodity called a Wife," and Cornelia despises a faithful suitor as "a civil whining Coxcomb," Cornelia finally outwits Galliard with a project to prevent his attempts at inconstancy; he remarks, "So many Disappointments in one night wou'd make a Man turn honest in spite of Nature." He decides to marry Cornelia when she promises to be "the most Mistress-like Wife,. . .expensive, insolent, vain extravagant and inconstant" (II,374,327,406,408-9).

Galliard gives up his "loose way of living" because Cornelia's wit is so creative that she will keep him interested for life. This is the same reason Willmore and Helena abandon the carnival for marriage at the end of The Rover. Likewise, Aminta submits to being a wife at the end of Behn's first play, The Forc'd Marriage with these words: "Whilst to Inconstancy I bid adieu/ I

find variety enough in you" (III,380). Maundy, a character in Sir Patient Fancy, warns that if lovers ever get addicted to each other's wit, as Lady Fancy and Wittmore do, they betray themselves into constancy:

> Well, there never came good of Lovers that were given to too much talking; had you been silently kind all this while, you had been willing to have parted by this time (IV,28).

Trapped by the conventions of comedy, the men and the disguised, and therefore liberated, women of these delightful intrigues and carefree adventures are led inevitably to marriage. At the end of her second play, The Amorous Prince (1671), Behn has Lorenzo protest to the sudden decision of his prince Fredrick to marry Cloris the shepherdess he debauched in the first act:

> Here's fine doings; what am I like to come to if he
> Turn honest now? This is the worst piece of Inconstancy
> He ever was guilty of; to change ones Humour, or so,
> Sometimes, is nothing: but to change Nature,
> To turn good on a sudden, and never give a Man
> Civil warning, is a Defeat not be endur'd (IV,207).

Elsewhere Behn writes, somewhat less cynically in her own voice, that love has "the Power of Changing Nature," that what distinguishes the wit from the fop is his potentiality for "metamorphosis" (V,74). The Fredrick of Act I of The Amorous

Prince is seeking "conquest" not love; he seduces the innocent Cloris easily with a mere promise of marriage because she lives the morality of the shepherdess--free, generous and trusting. She has to learn the politics of civilized courtship after Fredrick abandons her to seduce his friend's love, Laura, with a more sophisticated line: "Fy, fy, Laura, a Lady bred at Court, and/ Yet want complaisance enough to entertain? A Gallant in Private! This coy Humour/ Is not a-la-mode" (IV,160). Isabella argues that women would love honestly and freely but that the conventions of society force them into elaborate contrivances to find lovers:

> . . .I have a thousand little Stratagems
> In my head, which give me as many hopes:
> This unlucky restraint upon our Sex,
> Makes us all cunning (IV,152).

Elsewhere, in "A History of a Nun," Behn suggests that "Women are by Nature more Constant and Just than Men." Women learn vice from the example of men and from unjust customs which force women to learn "art" and to dissemble if they would follow their natural inclinations (V, 263-4,284-6). Like most of Behn's plays, the plot of The Amorous Prince is built on the contrivances, disguises and projects of female wits--in this case, Cloris, Isabella,

Ismena and Laura--to test, refine and to win worthy mates for themselves. What Cloris must learn is what worldly-wise Belvira observes to her lover in "The Unfortunate Bride," : "Women enjoy'd are like Romances read.. . .When the Plot's out you have done with the Play"(V,407). The women who triumph in Behn's comedies are wits, like herself, who are eternally changing and rejuvenating the plot.

Dryden once protested that he did not write his comedy, An Evening's Love "to make libertinism amiable," but to show such sinners being reclaimed by marriage.[36] Whatever his aim, the wit-rakes of comedies were well-loved by the audiences, as Behn well knew. Behn's most popular stage creation was the rover, Wittmore, a most restless and selfish rogue, "a mad Fellow for a Wench," and "a senseless Swine" as his best friend Belvile calls him after Wittmore tries to rape Belvile's fiancé Florinda because he is so drunk he mistakes her for a harlot. When asked "Why, how the Devil came you so drunk?" the ingenuous Wittmore retorts, "Why, how the Devil came you so sober?" Wittmore is tamed by the equally wild Helena who has escaped a convent--"I

have an excellent humour for a Grate"--to enjoy the freedoms of the world. "Let's ramble," she insists to her more cautious sister. Helena (along with similar characters, for example, Lady Fulbank in The Lucky Chance and Cornelia in The Feign'd Curtezans) is one of Behn's most engaging and original creations; Helena is a creature from the Golden Age, as Sutherland puts it, a woman in "whose unashamed hedonism there is even a kind of innocence."[37] But the libertine rover himself apparently proved so aimiable to audiences that when Behn wrote a sequel, Helena is "a saint" in Naples while Wittmore is out for more conquests in Madrid, only to be matched in intrigue by the engaging La Nuche.

In a letter written late in life (November, 1699) to an aspiring writer, Elizabeth Thomas, Dryden regretted that he had "been myself too much a Libertine in most of my poems" which he wished were destroyed. In the same letter, he commends Thomas on her decision to keep her writings private, thereby avoiding "the licenses which Mrs. Behn allowed herself, of writing loosely, and giving (if I may have leave to say so) some scandal to the modesty of her sex."[37] Though Dryden, in his fair way, went on to admit

the hypocrisy of his condemnation, the image of Behn that the 18th-century critics were to pass on, often without reading her writings, is succinctly captured by Pope's infamous couplet: "The Stage how loosely does Astraea tread,/ Who fairly puts all characters to bed."[39] As well, Behn's looseness of style was condemned repeatedly; for example, Swift lampooned her for writing bad "Pindarick" odes, a form she deliberately chose because, like others of her age, she mistakenly saw it as a free, graceful and unconfined form--as Thomas Sprat puts it, "near to the plainness of common Discourse."[40] In The Battle of the Books, "Pindar slew. . .Afra the Amazon light of foot" for this modernist denigration of the Pindarick ode.[41] Ironically, then, Behn's very success in writing loosely--both in content and in style--to please "an Age which has given severall proofs it was by this way of writing to be obliged" undermined her reputation with literary critics most of whom did not read her works but erected a barrier between Behn and her potential audience in posterity.[42]

The only image that has kept Behn from oblivion is that of a pioneer of the novel form. Behn's editor Montague

Summers, while admitting that her comic genius sometimes strayed outside "the bounds of niggard propriety," argues that it is time (1915) that critics overcame the prejudices of the elitist, condemnatory tradition--which includes Pope's "jaded couplet"--because Behn's comedies, if read, would place her among the greatest playwrights of her day. Having said this, he takes it for granted that she has been recognized for her contribution to the novel.[43] Robert Phelps, the unlikely editor of Selected Writings of the Ingenious Mrs. Behn, can barely contain his condescension: Behn translates Horace "however tritely"; "her ideas may strike us as commonplace, her politics as convenient, her tastes as vulgar." Yet even Phelps testifies that Behn had a "genuine, natural gift, that of a tale-teller" and that "Aphra--however primitive or unconscious--was an artist."[44] It was her habit of flattering, teasing and courting a "sugar-candied reader" that helped her to develop an effective narrative technique. In her best-known "novel" Oroonoko, she says that she left out anything from Oroonoko's history that "might prove tedious or heavy to my Reader, in a World where he finds Diversions for every

Minute"(V,129). She writes as if she is talking to friends who might yawn at any minute if she does not find something immediately engaging to say.

As many readers have noticed, she suggests immediacy and realism in her stories, even when the material is conventional, romantic and improbable, by creating herself as a narrator who witnessed the events. Of Oroonoko, she writes, "I was myself an Eyewitness to a great Part of what you will find here set down."[45] She cannot remember some of the details of that incredible story "The Fair Jilt" because she neglected to jot them down "in my Journal-Observations" (V,110). She can tell "the whole truth of the story" of "The Unfortunate Unhappy Lady" because she got it from one of the family (V,37). There are countless interjections into the texts of her stories which reveal the conversational casualness of her style: "as he told me afterwards," "as near as I can remember," "as I have said before," and "the rest I have forgot" (V, 89, 13, 58, 33). Anticipating her audience's boredom in Oroonoko at her catalogue of the customs of the native Americans at Surinam, she says she'll reveal these "as they fall in

my Way" (V,132). She picks up flagging interest with trashy irrelevancies: "'tis a very great Error in those who laugh when one says, 'A Negro can change Colour': for I have seen 'em.. frequently blush and look pale"(V. 145). She's ever ready with some titillation: the innocent Imoinda is ordered undressed by the doting King and led to the bath (V,141). As Lucy, in "The Court of the King of Bantam," takes "his majesty" to bed, Behn stops the narrative with, "Where I think it fit to leave 'em for the present; for (perhaps) they had some private Business" (V, 31-2). In Oroonoko, Behn claims she won Oroonoko and Imoinda's affection because she excelled at story-telling, especially at tales of nuns (V,175). But notice the sensational way Behn uses "nun" material in many of her stories to excite the interest and prejudice of her protestant readers. She is an authority on convents and nuns because, she claims, she was once "design'd an Humble Votary" but, having the wrong disposition, abandoned such a life for the vanities of the world (V, 265). In The Lucky Mistake, Charlot is a fugitive from the oppression of the convent (like Helena and Cornelia in Behn's comedies) who ran off with Rinaldo because "I was out of love with

the Nunnery; and took any Opportunity to quit a Life absolutely contrary to my Humour" (V,396). Isabella, in "The History of a Nun" diverts another nun's brother at the grate every day; her vows and increasingly dissembled devotion merely heighten the "innocent" passion of the two lovers (V,291). Behn makes Miranda, in "The Fair Jilt," one of the "Galloping Nuns" which for Behn means that Miranda lived in an unenclosed house, had a confessor who must approve her lovers, increased her desirability with the best quality suitors because "being retir'd. . .there is a sort of Difficulty to approach 'em," and mastered the "Female Arts" of witty conversation and intrigue (V,75-76). A church in Behn's stories is a place to display one's beauty to advantage (V,100).

In 1692, Congreve distinguished between the romance and the novel this way:

> Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the First Rank, and so forth; where lofty language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into giddy Delight. . .[until] he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye. Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented.[46]

Behn's best story Oroonoko would be a stereotypical romance but for her conversational injections and for the erotic detail she embroiders into the narrative: snake skins from Surinam are three-score yards in length--one "may be seen at his Majesty's Antiquary's"; the feathers worn by the actress in Dryden's Indian Queen were brought back by Behn from Surinam; the outward sign of Imoinda's quality is her "being carved in fine Flowers and Birds all over her body"; as well, Imoinda, though a slave, has a shock-dog like any lady of the court--Pope's Belinda, for example; Behn enjoys eating armadillo; George Martin, brother to Harry "the Great Oliverian," slew a tigress and laid its cub "at my feet"; the natives looked like hobgoblins because they had ritualized their competitions in courage to cutting off noses, ears, lips and other members to prove superior bravery.[47]

Thomas Southerne, who rewrote Oroonoko into a popular play, commented that Behn "always told his Story more feelingly, than she writ it."[48] Charles Gildon describes her as a "great favorite of Nature" who needed no room of her own, but who wrote with "the greatest of ease. . .in the midst of Company.. . .I

saw her myself write Oroonoko, and keep her turn in Discoursing with several then present in the Room."[49] As her first biographer describes Behn, she was "the Mistress of all the pleasing Arts of Conversation."[50] Storytelling to a live audience was Behn's strength; she could adapt her material and experiences to her listeners and keep them diverted for hours.[51] Behn regrets twice in Oroonoko that her hero did not find "a more sublime Wit" than hers--a "Female Pen"--to celebrate his fame, but she ends with the hope that "the Reputation of my Pen is considerable enough to make his glorious name to survive to all Ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful and the constant Imoinda"(V,169,208). Though to create her easy, conversational, style in her comedies, novels, poems and translations, Behn used as her guide for her technique "the reader over her shoulder," the pleasure-seeking playgoer, the restless listener in the room, she hoped for and deserves an audience in posterity. Yet, whatever the negative moral and critical biases that have destroyed her reputation, whatever critics like Summers and feminists like Goreau say in her defence, utimately only her works can defend her reputation. Yet

her works remain unread even--perhaps not surprisingly--in academic circles. Behn has no contact with her sugar-candied reader.

NOTES:

[1]"Wit is no more than Nature well exprest;
And he fatigues and toyles in vain
With Rigid Labours, breaks his Brain,
That has Familar Thought in lofty Numbers drest."
Aphra Behn, "To Henry Higden, Esq; on his Translation of the Tenth Satyr of Juvenal," The Works of Aphra Behn, 6 vol., ed. Montague Summers, 1st pub. 1915 (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), VI, p. 404. Subsequent references to this source will be given in the text.

[2]Alexander Pope, Essay on Criticism in Poetical Works, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), ll. 297-98, p. 72. Ruthe Turner Sheffey compares Pope's passage with Behn's in detail in her unpublished dissertation, The Literary Reputation of Aphra Behn (Chicago, 1959), p. 97. For a general discussion of the meaning of "wit," see C. S. Lewis' chapter in Studies in Words, (Cambridge: University Press, 1967) and J. E. Spingarn's "Introduction," Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 3 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I, ix-cvi.

[3]Ben Jonson, "Timber," The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), ll. 2979-80; 2128-35 and passim.

[4]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), I.8; p. 67.

[5]"Epistle to the Reader," The Dutch Lover, Behn, I, 221. The fullest study of the obliteration of Behn's literary accomplishments over the past three hundred years is Sheffey's The Literary Reputation of Aphra Behn. Recent attempts to rehabilitate her reputation include two provocative biographies, Maureen Duffy's The Passionate Shepherdess (New York: Avon Books, 1977) and Angelina Goreau, Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of

Aphra Behn (New York: Dial Press, 1980).

[6]Margaret Cavendish, "Sociable Letters," The Life of the Duke of Newcastle and Other Writings (London: Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent, n.d.), pp. 285-86. Richard Flecknoe also contrasted Shakespeare's and Jonson's styles as being the difference between nature and art, wit and judgment: "Wit being an exuberant thing, like Nilus, never more commendable then when it overflowes; but Judgement, a stayed and reposed thing, alwayes containing itself within its bounds and limits." A Short Discourse of the English Stage (1664) in Spingarn, II, 94.

[7]James Sutherland, English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 397-98.

[8]John Eachard, The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy, 2nd ed. (London: 1672), pp. 41,45.

[9]Aphra Behn, "An Essay on Translated Prose," in All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs Behn, 2 vol. (London: 1718), pp. 10, 11. Behn's "To Mr. Creech. . .on his Excellent Translation of Lucretius" pays tribute to Creech for helping females to be equal with men by making a classic available to those "unlearn'd in Schools" (VI, 167).

[10]Ben Jonson, The Complete Plays, 2 vol. (London: Dent, 1967), II, p. 91.

[11]Jonson, Timber," Complete Poems, ll. 714-23, ll. 3290-3313; pp. 392, 453-454.

[12]Thomas Shadwell, "Preface to The Humorists, " in Spingarn, II, pp. 153, 155.

[13]Thomas Shadwell, "To the Most Illustrious Prince, William Duke of Newcastle," The Virtuoso, ed. Marjorie Nicolson & David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 4.

[14]Horace, "Satire X," Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classic #194 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 115-125. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "An Allusion to Horace, the Tenth Satyr of the First Book," The Complete Poems, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 125,126.

[15]John Dryden, "Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Essays of John Dryden, 2 vol., ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), I, p. 116.

[16]Dryden, "Preface to An Evening's Love, " in Ker, I, pp. 135-36, 143, 136. "The laughter of the audience was no criterion of excellence," write L. A. Beaurline and Fredson Bowers, "General Introduction," to John Dryden, Four Comedies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 5.

[17]Dryden, "Dedication of The Spanish Friar," in Ker, I, 248.

[18]William Davenant, Preface to Gondibert," in Spingarn, II, p.26.

[19]There is a persistent legend that Behn lent Otway £5 and read his last manuscript just before he died and the manuscript was lost. See Duffy, pp. 244-47.

[20]quoted by Montague Summers, "Memoir of Mrs Behn," The Works of Aphra Behn, I, xlvi.

[21]Works, III, 393; Sheffey, p. 53.

[22]For example, in the "Postscript" to The Rover, Behn defends herself against the malicious accusation that her play is merely Thomas Killigrew's "Thomaso alter'd": "I will only say the Plot and Bus'ness (not to boast on't) is my own." Her editor, Montague Summers says Thomaso "jades and flags most wearily owing to the author's prolixity and diffuseness." Behn remade what was "clumsy," verbose and unstageable into a witty and

vivacious play: "In fact she has made the whole completely and essentially her own" (I, 107, 4). Summers read the plays from which Behn borrowed and compares them to her advantage in most cases; see his "Source" comments before each of the plays.

[23]Behn, "An Essay on Translated Prose," p. 21.

[24]Sheffey thinks Behn "yielded to the pressure of public taste," pp. 103, 12.

[25]Pope comments on partisan appropriation of the word "wit" in these lines from the Essay on Criticism: "Thus Wit, like faith, by each man is applied/To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside." ll.396-97.

[26]Behn uses a variation of this strategy of contrasting two young male wits--one cynical and unromantic with one constant and slavish--in many of her comedies, for example, Willmore, the rover and Bellamour in The Rover, Galliard and Fillamour in The Feign'd Curtezans and Gaymore and Bellmour in The Lucky Chance; the female wits are also paired with one wild, the other more conventional--for example, Helena and Florinda in The Rover, Cornelia and Marcella in The Feign'd Curtezans, Lady Fulbank and Leticia in The Lucky Chance.

[27]Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb #42 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), I, 89-150, pp. 8-13; Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manual, "The Golden Age of Kronos," Utopian Thought in the Western World (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 64-92.

[28]Virgil promises, "Iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna." in Ecologues, IV, 6. See Frances Yates, "Astraea: Classical and Christian Interpretations," in Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (London; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 29-38.

[29]Both Duffy and Goreau think Aphra took the name of Honoré D'Urfé's heroine in his widely read L'Astrée.

[30]Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), pp. 34-40; Edward D. Seeber, "Oroonoko in France in the XVIIIth Century," PMLA 51 (1936), 953-959.

[31]There is a scarcity of reliable material on Behn's social circle. Her "Our Cabal" describes her "pastoral" friends who do "what Love and Musick calls us to," but she only uses initials to identify them. George Woodcock's chapter "The English Sappho" is a good attempt to reconstruct the bohemian world in which Behn moved; The Incomparable Aphra (London: T. V. Boardman & Co., 1948), pp. 80-118. For a discussion of Behn's attempt and failure to translate her ideal of love into practice, see Goreau, pp. 189-206.

[32]Hobbes, Leviathan, I,13, p. 107.

[33]Samuel Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 139.

[34]Ian Donaldson, "Justice in the Stocks," The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 15, 20.

[35]Epicurus writes, "When we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of the profligate or that which depends on physical enjoyment. . .but by pleasure we mean the state wherein the body is free from pain and the mind from anxiety." Letters, Principal Doctrines and Vatican Sayings, trans. Russel M. Geer (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 57. As Thomas Franklin Mayo points out, citing Congreve's Millamant and Mirabell as examples, Epicurean heroines and heroes are sufficiently intelligent, like Epicurus himself, "to build their decently pleasant lives about a love which includes good fellowship

between intellectual and spiritual equals." "Epicurus in Restoration Comedy," Epicurus in England (1650-1725) Dallas: The Southwest Press, 1934), p. 163.

[36] John Dryden, "Preface to An Evening's Love," Ker, I, p. 143.

[37] Sutherland, p. 134.

[38] John Dryden, The Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham, N. C.: 1942), p. 29.

[39] Pope, "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace imitated: to Augustus," (ll. 290-91), Poetical Works, p. 369.

[40] Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley," in Spingarn, II, 132,136.

[41] Jonathan Swift, The Battel of the Books in A Tale of a Tub and other Satires, ed. Kathleen Williams (London: Dent, 1975), p. 158.

[42] Summers describes the destruction of Behn's reputation: "She was condemned in no small still voice as immoral, loose, scandalous; and writer after writer, leaving her unread, reiterated the charge till it passed into a by byword of criticism, a type and summary of all that was worst and foulest in Restoration days." "Memoirs," p. lx; Sheffey documents the details of this shameful history of criticism.

[43] Summers, "Memoirs," p. xlix, passim.

[44] Robert Phelps,"Introduction," Selected Writings of Aphra Behn (New York: Greenwood Publishers,1950), pp. 3,14,17.

[45] Works, V, 129; critics have disbelieved Behn's autobiographical claims at their own peril; for example, Ernest Bernbaum "proved" Behn was never in Surinam and stole her descriptions from George Warren's Impartial Description of

Surinam (1662), in "Mrs Behn's Biography a Fiction," PMLA, 28 (1913), pp. 432-53. Both internal and external evidence has since made his theory seem ridiculous. See, for example, Harrison Pratt Jr. "Astraea and Celadon: An Untouched Portrait of Aphra Behn," PMLA, 44 (1934), 544-59.

[46] William Congreve, "Preface to the Reader," Incognita, or Love and Duty Reconcil'd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1922).

[47] In many ways, Oroonoko is a pioneering work in a genre which might be called the novel of subjective anthropology because it presents the first person narrator responding as a person, rather than objective observer, to the native Americans. Florinda Donner's recent and excellent Shabono, dealing with the peoples in the same general era, describes the one of these brutal competitions in courage; as well, in Oroonoko and Shabono, there is a remarkably similar description of the natives greeting the newcomer with an honest hands-on inspection of the body. Works, V, 185; Shabono (New York: Dell, 1982), p. 57.

[48] Thomas Southerne, "Epistle Dedicatory," Oroonoko: A Tragedy (London: B. Tooke, 1696).

[49] Charles Gildon, "An Account of the Life of Mrs Behn," in Aphra Behn's The Younger Brother, ed. Charles Gildon (London: 1696).

[50] The History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs Behn by one of the Fair Sex in Seventeen Histories and Novels written by the Late Ingenious Mrs Behn (London: 1718), p. 51.

[51] This is her strength, but also her weakness as a novelist if, as Walter Benjamin points out, the story teller and the novelist are profoundly different: "The birth place of the novel is the solitary individual" who breaks with oral traditions. Illuminations (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 87.

PART FIVE:

THE SEARCH FOR RATIONAL AUTHORITY

Chapter 9: Unreasonable Authority:

The Origins of the Female Enlightenment

> Most in this depraved age think a woman learned enough if she can distinguish her husband's bed from another's.
>
> Hannah Woolley, The Gentlewoman's Companion (1675)

> If the Regal Power sho'd fall often into the hands of Women, they would favour their own Sex, and might in time restore 'em to their Primitive Liberty and Equality with the men, and so break the neck of that unreasonable Authority they [men] so much affect over us.
>
> Anonymous, An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (1696)

For those who regard "faith in reason" as central to the development of feminism, Mary Astell, despite her contradictions, emerges as the seventeenth-century mother of feminism. As Hilda Smith demonstrates, Astell, influenced by Descartes, defended the authority of individual reason.[1] Thus when Astell explains her fierce commitment to Anglicanism, she emphasizes her individual and

rational consent to scriptural and institutional authority: "I have according to the best of my Understanding, and with some application and industry, examin'd the Doctrine and Precept of Christianity, the Reasons and Authority on which it is built."[2] For Astell, the most destructive enemy of religion and good sense is "wit"--understood as "unlimited freedom of Raillery." In her Bart'lemy Fair: or An Enquiry after Wit (1709), she directs a sarcastic polemic against libertine wit:

> If you offer to Reason with a Wit, you will find him a very poor, superficial Creature; who unless he is allow'd to piqueer upon Religion; to sally pertly now and then upon its Outguards; to pun, and trifle, and Laugh where there is no Jest; has not one Word to say, but loses all his Briskness and Good Humor. Shall this pass with any Reasonable Person?[3]

If the libertine wits of her time will not apply themselves enough to be persuaded by theological arguments for Christianity, she appeal to the authority of Isaac Newton, "if your Reason is sublime enough to understand him." Even nature, by which she means "the Material World, and those Effects which are regularly produc'd according to certain Mechanical Laws," argues for a belief in God:

> Mutual Attraction or Gravitation, is one of the most Universal and Uniform Affections of Bodies; but it is not essential to Matter, any more than Motion is , both proceeding from the Will

> and Power of a Superior Cause, which can't be a Material one [if Superior].[4]

Notice the Newtonian insistence on the passivity of matter and on God's intervention (motion is "not essential to Matter");[5] any theory of immanent force would encourage all sorts of contemporary philosophies and theologies of freedom--vitalism, enthusiasm, libertinism and atheism. According to Astell, in Moderation Truly Stated (1704), reason supports religion because both accept the order as it is: "Order is a Sacred thing, 'tis that Law which God prescribes Himself, and inviolably observes."[6] Though the mechanical philosophy might seem to us to justify a radical atomism and democracy in cosmos, state and church, for Astell--as for many of her contemporaries—the order remains hierarchical; "moderation," the highest social virtue, is defined as "the proportioning our Esteem and Value of every thing to its Real Worth."[7] Religion and reason lead us to accept a system founded on social distinction:

> Subordination is a necessary consequence of order, for in State of Ignorance and Pravity such as ours is, there is not any thing that tends more to Confusion than Equality. It does not therefore become the gross of Mankind to set up for that which is best in their own conceit; but humbly to observe where God has Delegated his Power, and submit to it.. . .Nor can any Alternations be Made but by the same Authority [God] that

confirms the Establishment.[5]

Astell favoured conformity in religion because she was certain that the rationality inherent in Anglicanism would persuade the people who had been frightened away by the "bugbear" popery: "The Solidity and Piety, the Grave and Affecting Expressions of our Liturgy; the Rational, Useful, and Moving Eloquence of our Preachers; would soom prevail over the incoherent, irreverent Rapsodies of their Ex tempore Effusions, the Mean Childish and ill-considered Harangues, for which they have been, and are still, so famous."[8] This commitment to hierarchical order led her to accept subordination of wife to husband--not surprisingly, since reason had to be consistent: "right Reason is Uniform, all of a Piece. . .it won't lead us into Measures inconsistent with Dictates in other cases."[9]

Yet, at the same time, Astell wrote her Serious Proposal to the Ladies (1694) as a "Lover of her Sex," arguing that men should exercise only a due, judicious authority over women:

> Custom has usurpt such an unaccountable Authority, that she who would endeavour to put a stop to its arbitrary sway, and reduce it to Reason, is in a fair way to render herself the Butt for all the Fops in Town to shoot their impertinent censures at.[10]

Elsewhere, in Some Reflections on Marriage (1700), she laments that anyone who attempts to improve or deliver women from their ignorance and servitude must be a "fool" since "custom" is so pervasive and contemporary "reason" so prejudiced:

> No,. . .let them Houswife or Play, Dress and be pretty entertaining Company! Or, which is better, relieve the Poor to ease their own Compassions, read pious Books, say their Prayers, and go to Church, because they have been taught and us'd to do so, without being able to give a better Reason for their Faith and Practice! Let them not by any means aspire to being Women of Understanding, because no Man can endure a Women of Superior Sense.[11]

Wherever Astell's reason led her in regards to social inequality, what is unmistakably feminist is her insistence that men and women's intellects are potentially equal--"potentially" because women had still to restore themselves to their rightful place as rational beings through education. This conviction led Astell, in her Serious Proposal, to advocate the setting up of an academic retreat where women, whether destined for the single or married life, might escape the follies of their lives to pursue a reclusive, ordered and intellectual life. The institution was to be a step towards the regeneration of her sex, of marriage, and, ultimately, of society itself. Though Astell's intentions

were probably to reinforce Anglican and rational order, Bishop Burnet saw such a scheme to separate women from social and ecclesiastical power as dangerous and, therefore, used his influence with Queen Anne to get royal sanction, and, consequently, public support for the project withdrawn.[12]

Astell demanded that the rational authority to which humans agree be comprehensive and just enough to include women's consent. She challenged fellow rationalists, such as John Locke, who revealed their sex's bias by arguing that the basis for legitimate goverment is consent but that the basis for man's domination over woman is natural: "Is it not then partial in men to the last degree to contend for and practise that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state?. . .If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?"[13] Whatever the lack of success in her own time and whatever the partisanship which prevented Astell from having a wider view of justice, her contribution to mainstream feminist ideology is undeniable because, as Jean Kinnaird argues, she put her faith in "the authority of the thinking self."[14] Astell, then, initiated--and Wollstonecraft a century later,

furthered--women's participation in the struggles and fruits of the Enlightenment, a historical movement which believed that through the knowledge and mastery of nature (as material reality), humans could free themselves from ignorance and the arbitrary authority of institutions and could set up a heavenly city to which all humans could consent.[15]

NOTES:

[1]Hilda Smith, Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 117-139.

[2]Mary Astell, The Christian Religion, As Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England (1705), pp. 6-7; cited by Smith, p. 120.

[3]Mary Astell, Bart'lemy Fair: or, An Enquiry after Wit (London: for R. Wilkin, 1709), pp. 166, 114.

[4]Enquiry after Wit, pp. 116-17; for a general discussion of the use of Newton's natural philosophy to buttress the intellectual foundations of Anglicanism, see Margaret Jacob' s The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720 (Hassocks: Harvester, 1976).

[5]Newton writes, in his "Preface" to Opticks: "And to show that I do not take gravity as an essential property of matter I have added one question concerning its cause, choosing to propose it by way of a question because I am not yet satified about it for want of experiments."

[6]Mary Astell, Moderation truly Stated, or A Review of a Late Pamphlet, entitled Moderation a Vertue (London: 1704), p. 59.

[7]Moderation truly Stated, p. 6.

[8]Moderation truly Stated, p. 95.

[9]Moderation truly Stated, p. 28.

[10][Mary Astell], A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of their true and greatest Interest by a Lover of her Sex (1694), p. 75.

[11]Mary Astell, Some Reflections on Marriage, Occasion'd by the Duke and Dutchess of Mazarine's Case (London: 1700).

[12]See Myra Reynolds' discussion of the public response to Astell's proposal in The Learned Lady in England: 1650-1760 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 302-303.

[13]Quoted by Laurence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, abridged ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 165. Lorenne M. G. Clark's recent "Women and Locke: Who owns the apples in the Garden of Eden?" exposes, in anaytical detail, the same basic contradiction Astell found in Locke's theories. (The Sexism of Social and Political Theory, ed. Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 16-40.) Janet Radcliffe Richard's The Skeptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry is an eloquent plea that women not abandon the struggle to master "male logic and male science" for the "fruits of unreason." (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 48.

[14]Jean Kinnaird, "Mary Astell: Inspired by Ideas, 1668-1731," Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 39.

[15]This is Carl Becker's characterization of the Enlightenment in The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers, 1st pub. 1932 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

Chapter 10: Anne Conway's Holistic Reason

> [Dedication to Anne Conway] whose Genius I know to be so speculative, and wit so penetrant, that in the knowledge of things as well Natural as Divine you have not onely out-gone all of your own Sex, but even of that other also, whose ages have not given them over-much the start of you.
>
> Henry More, An Antidote against Atheism (1662)

Carolyn Merchant's Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (1980) at once demonstrates that the seventeenth-century "fathers" of the scientific revolution contributed to the philosophy of dominance over nature and over woman and , at the same time, seeks to revive holistic alternatives from the seventeenth century.[1] One such alternative which Merchant finds is Anne Conway's monistic vitalism which challenged the mechanists and won the approval of Leibnitz.[2]

In The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy, Conway attempts to reconcile materialism with spirituality and rationalism with enthusiasm, in order to articulate a truly holistic reason which would co-operate with God not only to

benefit and to perfect the human species but the whole of creation.[3] For Conway, there are only three essential types of beings: God, creatures and Jesus. God is the unchangeable, free and perfect being. Creatures are changeable, but naturally inclined toward perfection in due degree. Jesus is the intermediary who took on changeability for our sakes, but can only change toward the good. Although, as in Thomism, Conway's universe is hierarchical, "place" is a dynamic not a static concept. And while she acknowledges God's external operations in the world, she is much more interested in the way He co-operates internally with each creature. Like Jane Lead, Conway emphasizes a psychological evolution, as opposed to a political revolution, towards the new Jerusalem. And, again like Lead, but in more analytical detail, Conway extends the principle of immanent divine activity to all of nature. Every creature participates by degree in the Spirit and, therefore, by its own labour, can contribute to the "Intrisecal Melioration" of creation: "God is able of Stones to raise up Children of Abraham."[4] The vital spirit of each creature creates its body through its imagination: "it dothe most strongly imagine to itself, or concieve its own proper image; which therefore the external body

is necessarily forced to assume."[5] Perfecting occurs when the creature acts naturally according to vital motion "proceeding from the innermost parts." Sin, for Conway, is unnatural motion which "endeavours to carry a body , or anything, to a place where unto it hath properly no natural inclination." Sin occurs when the creature acts mechanically. [6]

Though Conway's universe is hierarchical, it is sympathy rather than dominance that characterizes relationships. True generation of life takes place because of the "conjunction and co-operation" of beings. When God created all creatures out of the same "distinct essential substance,"

> he implanted a certain Universal Sympathy and mutual Love in Creatures, as being all Members of one Body, and (as I may so say) Brethern, having a common Father, to wit, God in Christ, or the Word made Flesh; and so also one Mother, viz. that Substance or Essence alone, out of which they proceeded.[7]

Here, as in other places, Conway uses a male/female analogy to explain creativity, thereby continuing the traditional association of the male with God and with the soul and the female with nature and with the body. Yet the arguments in the Principles work to deny the essential polarity of male/female/ heaven/nature,

soul/body. For Conway, there can be no "repugnant" gaps in the universe, as the dualism of Descartes assumes. For example, the soul loves its body; the body is the soul's helpmate. And, Conway insists, the body differs from the soul not essentially but gradually: "They are of one Nature and Substance. . .the Body is nothing but a fixed and condensed Spirit, and a Spirit nothing but a subtile and volatile Body." Nature's processes are part of the spiritual engendering towards perfection; Nature too "works to a farther perfection of subtilty and spirituality, even as this is the most natural Property of all Motion and Operation."[8] Thus Principles redeems nature from being passive and dead.

Originally, Conway's Principles was written as a journal "for her own use" to aid her own growth in perfection, but its abstract arguments give a rational justification for the emotional and subjective testimonies of the enthusisasts. It is not surprising that she joined the Quaker movement despite the views of her close friend Henry More who tried to persuade her of its irrationality. Conway's vitalistic account attempts. to find a macrocosmic correspondence for the microcosmic experience of the enthusiasts. God is seen as moving their hearts to form a new

Jerusalem. Hers was a universe in which each creature, in its degree, shared the joy and wisdom of God when it participates in perfecting creation. Once more grace and place were reconciled, but this time in a dynamic, rather than in a static, relationship.

The literature of seventeenth-century women expresses the range of possibility of perspective we can have on the human condition: the ego-centric (psychological) and the species-centric (social) perspective, as well as the holistic perspective which seeks to transcend and to redeem the other two perspectives. The insight of holistic vision, however experienced by a particular individual, is that God is Love--not power or knowledge--which means, in natural terms, that everything in the universe participates and co-operates in the Spirit of Life. When a visionary returns from the wilderness to try to incarnate what she has witnessed into social reality, corruption of the vision, whether personal or political, threatens.

To resort to the seventeenth-century strategy of using a Biblical illustration: Jesus takes Peter, John and James up a mountain where they resee, from a divine perspective, Jesus transfigured in the company of Moses and Elijah. Peter's

immediate reaction was to try to put up a "tent" to hold the vision, to institutionalize that moment of truth [Matt. 17:1-8]. But the trinitarian reconciliation of self, society and nature is an organic phenomenon which each person and each generation must recreate for themselves.

NOTES:

1. Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). For a discussion of the problematic nature of reconciling the feminist and green movements, see my review of Death of Nature in the Newsletter for the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (Summer, 1982).

2. Merchant, "Women on Nature: Anne Conway and Other Philosophical Feminists," Death of Nature, pp. 253-274. For Conway's place in the history of philosophy and the relationship of her ideas not only to those of her contemporaries, like Hobbes and Descartes, but also to those of twentieth-century philosophers like Wittgenstein, see Peter Loptson's "Introduction," to his edition of The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982). The best biographical source remains Marjorie Nicolson's edition of The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess of Conway, Henry More and their Friends, 1642-1684 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

3. The full title of her only existing work reveals much about the content: The Principles of the most ancient and moden philosophy Concerning God, Christ and the Creatures, viz. of Spirit and Matter in General; whereby may be resolved all those Problems or Difficulties, which neither by the School nor Common Modern Philosophy, nor by the Cartesian, Hobbesian, or Spinosian could be discussed.The Latin translation was published by Francis Mercury Van Helmont in Amsterdam in 1690; this edition was translated back into English by "J.C." forming the 1692 edition from which I shall quote.

4. Principles, pp. 97, 168. And like Jane Lead, Conway believed that all of lapsed creation would eventually be redeemed; see D. P. Walker, The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Torment (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1964), pp. 137-145.

5. Principles, p. 70.

6. Principles, p. 165.

7. Principles, p. 56.

8. Principles, pp. 140-41.

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