Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Christopher Hill puts it:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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