

ANNA TRAPNEL

Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea; or,
A Narrative of Her Journey from
London into Cornwall



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Iter Press
Toronto, Ontario

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Tempe, Arizona

2016

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Printed in Canada.

This project benefitted from a Scholarly Editions and Translations grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Trapnel, Anna, author. | Hinds, Hilary, editor.

Title: Anna Trapnel's report and plea : or, a narrative of her journey from London into Cornwall / edited by Hilary Hinds.

Other titles: Narrative of her journey from London into Cornwall

Description: Toronto, Ontario : Iter Press, [2016] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016027967 (print) | LCCN 2016032015 (ebook) | ISBN 9780866985581 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780866987264 ()

Subjects: LCSH: Trapnel, Anna, author. | Great Britain—Politics and government—1649-1660—Sources. | Sermons, English—17th century. | Baptist women—England—History—17th century. | Fifth Monarchy Men—Sources.

Classification: LCC DA420 .T728 2016 (print) | LCC DA420 (ebook) | DDC 942.06/3092 [B] --dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016027967>

Cover illustration:

Anna Trapnel, after Richard Gaywood; line engraving, late 18th to early 19th century; © National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D29220.

Cover design:

Maureen Morin, Information Technology Services, University of Toronto Libraries.

Typesetting and production:

Iter Press.

Introduction

The Other Voice

The work of Anna Trapnel (1620–after 1660) is a signal instance of “the other voice” in early modern England. Her rank, her gender, her religious beliefs and practices, the kinds of texts she wrote, the manner in which they were written, the reputation of the works and of their author—all of these situate Trapnel as “other” to almost all the centers of social, religious, political, and literary power in the mid-seventeenth century and beyond.

Anna Trapnel’s background was not that of someone whose voice was likely to contribute to a national political debate. The daughter of a shipwright, she was brought up in the vicinity of the London shipyards in the hamlet of Poplar, part of the large parish of Stepney. This area lies to the east of the City of London, and so was at one remove from the civic and trading heart of the capital and the nation. While Trapnel was not brought up in poverty—she was literate, “trained up to my book and writing,” as she put it, and of substantial enough means to be a willing tax-payer—her social origins nonetheless were unlikely to have led to any expectation that she might intervene in public life.¹ Without the unprecedented political turbulence of the 1640s and 1650s, the years of the English Civil Wars, the execution of the King, and the establishment of an English republic, her modest background probably would have led her to live as her mother had, largely within the bounds of her family, her local community, and her congregation. Women of her rank and milieu were expected to work, certainly, running their households and frequently contributing to their husbands’ businesses. In those contexts, however, women’s voices would have been exercised in the interests of family (the principal social and economic unit), in line with expectations regarding the proper behavior of their sex.

It was the incessant political and religious flux and uncertainty of the middle years of the seventeenth century that gave Trapnel both the desire and the means to speak and write for larger and more powerful audiences. Hers was a voice that insisted on its own significance to the unfolding events of the English Revolution of the 1640s and 1650s. However, because she was a woman, because she came from a modest family background, because she rejected the practices of the Church of England, because she railed against the political establishment, and because she frequently uttered prophecies while in a state of trance, it was a voice without the endorsement of official discourse, and indeed a voice actively castigated by those who held the reins of power. As a woman, a radical, and a prophet, she had no ready access to public religious and political debate.

1. Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone*, ed. Hilary Hinds (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 6.

2 Introduction

The Civil War was a war of words as much as it was an armed encounter between the armies of the King and of Parliament. The ideas at stake inhabited that composite early modern domain that was at once political and religious, seeking to determine just what the institutions and practices of a godly society would look like. These debates took place not only among the upper echelons of the ruling elites of aristocracy, Parliament, gentry, and the army but also within and between congregations, in the coalescing of new political groups, in petitions to Parliament, and in the medium of cheap popular print. The proliferating radical religious groups that rejected the ordinances and practices of the Church of England and formed their own dissenting congregations proved to be one particularly rich source of such debate, as their members argued their positions not only in rejection of the Church of England but also in contradistinction to other religious splinter groups. Trapnel's voice was exercised and honed in just such an environment. A member of one of the most radical Baptist congregations in London, Allhallows the Great, she rubbed shoulders with many of the most influential—and controversial—separatist preachers of her day.² Like a number of them, she was also a Fifth Monarchist: a millenarian believer in the imminence of the Day of Judgment and the return of King Jesus to rule in person. Such beliefs were in themselves neither exceptional nor extreme—indeed, Oliver Cromwell, governing the country at the time, shared many of them—but they acquired a particular urgency and political iconoclasm in the hands of the group of which Trapnel was a part.

If her background and her religious affiliation rendered her voice “other” to the mainstream, so too did her mode of speaking. Trapnel was a prophet, uttering her stormy tirades against the government of Oliver Cromwell and his allies in a series of visionary trances, the best known of which overtook her in January 1654 while she was attending the examination of Vavasor Powell, a fellow Fifth Monarchist, in the Palace of Whitehall, the former chief royal residence in London and the seat of government then as now.³ For eleven days, fasting, she lay in a room in a nearby inn, where crowds of curious onlookers gathered, and spoke in verse and prose her words of angry lamentation at Cromwell's betrayal and of ecstatic anticipation of the coming millennium. As a prophet, she quite literally spoke as “the other voice,” for she claimed that she spoke not of her own volition but at the insistence of God—indeed, that she was “made a voice, a sound ... a voice within a voice, another's voice, even thy voice through her.”⁴ Her voice needs to

2. Figures such as John Simpson, Christopher Feake, and William Greenhill were of great importance to Trapnel, and as such appear in her *Report and Plea* (London, 1654).

3. On the history of Whitehall Palace, see Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, eds., *The London Encyclopædia* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 959–60; and Simon Thurley, “The Lost Palace of Whitehall,” *History Today* 48.1 (1998): 47–52.

4. Trapnel, *Cry*, 45.

be understood as “other” not only to the dominant culture but also—and powerfully—to herself.

It was the prophetic words spoken in the inn near Whitehall that formed her first publications. Two versions of these visionary prophecies were quickly published, her words having been transcribed by someone in the room identified only as “the relator.”⁵ This alerts us to yet another way in which her voice might be said to be “other,” for her route into print was not via an act of straightforward authorship, her own words transmitted by her own pen into her own, authorized, text. Instead, she speaks words prompted by the Lord, in a trance of which she can recall nothing once she comes to herself again, and transcribed by a well-meaning but imperfect “relator” who cannot catch everything she says. This relay of voices speaking through a variety of textual collaborations and mediations reminds us that “authorship” has no simple or monolithic form and allows us to hear still other voices alongside and as a part of Trapnel’s own.

Trapnel was a woman of the middling sort, a committed member of an oppositional religious movement speaking out insistently for a political agenda that put her at odds with the government of the day, a visionary prophet, and a collaborative author. As such, her profile challenges many of our expectations as to where and how an early modern woman’s voice might be heard. Yet to catalogue the many ways in which her voice might be understood as other to the dominant modes of spoken and written discourse of her time is to risk corralling her into a position where that voice sounds always responsive, defensive, secondary, perhaps even impotent—a beleaguered counterpoint to the dominant discursive strain. *Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea*, the text republished here in its entirety for the first time since it appeared in 1654, however, quickly dispels any such categorization. Here, in the final text of hers to be published in that most remarkable year, Trapnel’s voice sounds out loud and clear. It is assured, sometimes angry. It is unapologetic, politicized, not only literate, steeped as it is in the language of the Bible, but also rhetorically adept, as it makes its case—against all the odds, perhaps—that she is “a woman like others, that were modest and civil,”⁶ undeserving of the opprobrium that is heaped upon her.

It is also a voice that, in the *Report and Plea*, moves between the genres of autobiography, travel narrative, polemic, and personal defense. It not only tells her own remarkable story of her journey into Cornwall, in the far southwest of the country, and her subsequent imprisonment in Bridewell Prison, back in London, but also examines her fears regarding her prophetic calling and her hopes for the restitution of the ways of God in a nation she believed to be losing its way. It is a voice that claims for itself a place in the public life of the nation, such that its

5. The two texts were Trapnel, *Cry*, and Anna Trapnel, *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-Hall* (London, 1654).

6. 122. Page numbers for the *Report and Plea* refer to the present edition.

characteristics as “other” become no less than the rationale for their being reinscribed as indispensable.

“*The world’s stage*”: *Anna Trapnel’s Historical Context*

“The report was, I went from place to place, aspersing the government.”⁷ This sentence, taken from the closing pages of Trapnel’s *Report and Plea*, brings into sharp relief just how much was at stake as a consequence of her prophesying, publishing, and traveling.⁸ The events recorded in this text, and indeed the very figure of its author, caused reverberations that went right to the heart of the public life of the day. To “aspersion” the government was to speak “seditious words”; and sedition, a treasonous act, was punishable by death.⁹ To prophesy in the way that Trapnel did was to give voice to words that the prophet claimed were God’s own, and in so doing fearlessly to speak truth, as she saw it, to temporal power. Whether one interprets such an act as reckless or courageous, deluded or inspired, it unquestionably brought her into situations where she was vulnerable to the weight of government retribution.

Anna Trapnel lived in tumultuous times, when a good deal more than small-scale acts of sedition was in contention. In 1642, twelve years before her journey to Cornwall, the Civil Wars had first broken out, with the armies and supporters of King Charles I lining up against those of Parliament. At issue were not only questions of taxation, the King’s “personal rule” (from 1629 to 1640 Charles I ruled alone, without calling Parliament), or the power of the prerogative courts, but also more fundamental and far-reaching questions of monarchical power, its origins and its limits, and thus the nature of tyranny and freedom. The Parliamentary armies finally prevailed in 1647, capturing the King, trying him, and in January 1649 executing him. Shortly afterwards, the monarchy itself was abolished, as was the House of Lords. England was declared a Commonwealth, or Republic, to be governed by a small Council of State, its members drawn from Parliament and the

7. 76.

8. See 85n250.

9. *The Weekly Intelligencer* 243 (May 30–June 6, 1654), 280, recorded that Trapnel “is for some seditious words brought up from *Cornwall* by Order of the Council.” An act identifying what offences shall be “adjudged high treason” had been passed on January 19, 1654; it included the words: “if any person or persons shall maliciously or advisedly either by writing, printing, openly declaring, preaching, teaching or otherwise, publish, That the Lord Protector and the people in Parliament assembled are not the Supreme Authority of this Commonwealth, ... Or that the said Authority or Government is Tyrannical, usurped, or unlawful, ... Then every such offence shall be taken and adjudged to be High Treason.” C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., “19 January 1654: An Ordinance Declaring that the offences herein mentioned, and no other, shall be adjudged High Treason within the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the Dominions thereunto belonging,” *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660*, 2:831–35 (London: Stationery Office, 1911), 832.

Army, and led by the increasingly powerful figure of Oliver Cromwell. A Member of Parliament since 1640 and an officer in the Parliamentary armies since 1642, Cromwell rose to become the New Model Army's Lord General (commander-in-chief) in 1650. In 1653, he dissolved the Barebone's (or Nominated) Parliament, the short-lived assembly that had seemed briefly to offer radicals like Trapnel the promise of a social and political order premised on the millenarian beliefs they espoused. At the same time, Cromwell accepted the title of Lord Protector, a move proposed by his fellow rulers but seen by radical groups as dangerously close to the assumption of the crown.¹⁰ It was in the wake of these momentous and (to her) treacherous acts that, in January 1654, Trapnel went to Whitehall—the center of government—to attend the examination of a fellow radical, the Welsh preacher Vavasor Powell, by the Council of State. There she fell into a visionary trance that lasted eleven days and during which she uttered the prophecies published as *The Cry of a Stone* in February 1654. There, in Whitehall, began the train of events that kept Trapnel in the public eye for the best part of a year.

Such an account gives little sense, however, of the complexity, the uncertainty, and the turmoil generated by the unprecedented and fast-moving events of the 1640s and early 1650s. While the main political fault line of the times undoubtedly lay between Royalist and Parliamentarian, the subdivisions among the Parliamentary supporters were many and complex. In the 1640s, for example, there were two main factions in Parliament itself. On one side were the Presbyterians, “conservatives” who favored negotiation with the King, feared the increasing power of Cromwell's New Model Army, and supported the establishment of a Presbyterian and antisectarian religious system. On the other side were the more radical Independents (who ultimately prevailed), aligned with the Army and arguing for religious toleration. London, the capital city and seat of government, was the forum in which the political consequences of the Civil Wars were fought out most intensely, not only among Parliamentarians themselves but also among the many popular political groups that formed and agitated in these years, of whom the Levelers, led by John Lilburne, are only the best known. With the demise of the old system of censorship in 1641, there was a proliferation of cheap printed pamphlets and petitions, by means of which groups such as these made their cases and argued their corners in unprecedented numbers. So it was, as Nigel Smith has suggested, that the events of these years effected a revolution of words still more far-reaching even than the revolution in government and the social order. “In that all but the poorest now had the possibility of authorship,” he writes, “we can say that the English Revolution was more thoroughgoing in the extension of

10. For a fascinating account of the momentous events of the 1640s and 1650s from the point of view of one of Trapnel's fellow Fifth Monarchists, see Christopher Feake, *A Beam of Light, Shining in the Midst of Much Darkness and Confusion* (London: J. C. for Livewell Chapman, 1659).

the possession and use of words than it was in property redistribution.”¹¹ Popular contributions to political debate, in the form of a plethora of pamphlets and petitions as well as debates and disputes, took place on an unprecedented scale and played a significant part in shaping the events and agendas of these years.

These pamphlets—topical, ephemeral, often quickly produced and comprising only a few pages—debated political issues still recognizable as such today. These include issues of parliamentary representation, property and land ownership, taxation, law reform, the justice or injustice of monarchical rule, and so on. But they also rehearsed matters of great complexity and burning urgency that today we would be more likely to categorize as religious rather than political. At issue were questions of the nature of salvation and the bestowal of God’s grace, church governance and congregational autonomy, and interpretations of current events in the light of biblical prophecies. In the seventeenth century, however, arguments about religion were also debates about politics, and vice versa. At stake in them all was the matter of a godly society. What would this comprise? How should it be constituted, so that God’s will for his people be best ensured? Who would rule, and how? Whose voices could legitimately be heard, in what form, and in what kinds of situation? How much room should there be for diversity of religious views and practices? Which translation of the Bible should be used? Thomas Edwards, a conservative Presbyterian who deplored this outpouring of discussion and dissent, published a three-volume collection of what he saw as reprehensible and blasphemous contemporary religious opinion. Entitled *Gangraena; or, A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies, and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this Time* (1646), it gives a vivid, if expostulatory, sense of the ferment and scope of religious ideas at this time.

Not all commentators, however, responded with the fear or revulsion of Edwards. For an indication of the excitement and sense of possibility that such debate could also engender, we do better to listen to the poet, pamphleteer, and Parliamentarian John Milton. In *Areopagitica* (1644), his pamphlet against pre-publication censorship, he celebrates the English people as “a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse.” Such a people, he argues, can be trusted to discern the difference between God’s truth and the erroneous opinions that were in circulation. The work of revolution, Milton insists, is as much about the hammering out of ideas as it is about the fashioning of the “instruments of armed Justice,” and he argues that his readers should celebrate the fact that “there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas ... others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of

11. Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 6.

reason and convincement.”¹² The argument that this was a revolution of words and ideas as well as of military force was as current then as now.

The matters so hotly contested might now seem arcane, but at the time they were urgent, fraught, and contentious, for the 1640s and 1650s were not only years of political upheaval but also marked the culmination of decades of religious disputation and fragmentation. The Reformation in England—the separation from the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of an English Protestant church—had precipitated an unparalleled level of intense debate about the proper interpretation of the Bible, the ordinances and practices of the church, and the beliefs that underpinned them. With this debate came a splintering of the national body of believers, and the establishment of a number of separate autonomous groups such as the Independents (later the Congregationalists), the Baptists, and the Quakers, committed to worshipping as their consciences and their beliefs dictated. Trapnel belonged to the “Particular Baptists,” a group whose origins lay in the previous century but whose numbers proliferated in the 1640s. The epithet “Particular” in their name referred to the belief that salvation was predestined only for the few, rather than potentially available to all, as the “General Baptists” believed.¹³ The two groups were united, however, in their rejection of the practice of infant baptism.

Whereas the General Baptists were “Arminian”—that is, they believed that people could act, for good or ill, so as to affect their own progress toward salvation—the Particular Baptists, like the majority of the many radical religious groups of the time, subscribed to Calvinist doctrines of election and predestination. These held that Christ had died to save only particular individuals, the predestined “elect,” the chosen few or (in Trapnel’s terminology) the “Saints.” This emphasis on predestination—the belief that God had decided “before the foundations of the world were laid” who would be saved and who would be damned—brought with it a stress on the inability of a believer to intervene in their own spiritual progress.¹⁴ Salvation could not be earned but was the unmerited gift of a beneficent God; as St. Paul put it, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and

12. John Milton, “Areopagitica,” in Milton, *Prose Writings*, ed. K. M. Burton, 145–85 (London: Dent, 1958), 176, 177.

13. On these groups, and others, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972; this ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin: 1975); J. F. McGregor and Barry Reay, eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Andrew Bradstock, *Radical Religion in Cromwell’s England: A Concise History from the English Civil War to the End of the Commonwealth* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

14. From Article XVII of the “Articles of Religion” (39 Articles) of the Church of England, first prepared under Edward VI and revised under Elizabeth I, and included in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1571; this ed. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, n.d.), 691.

that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”¹⁵ Together these elements produced a religious discourse of both remarkable intensity and extraordinary variety. The spiritual autobiography of a Particular Baptist such as John Bunyan, for example, is an unremitting record of uncertainty, self-doubt, and torment, as he sought to navigate the inevitable indeterminacy of his spiritual destiny. “How can you tell you are Elected? and what if you should not: how then?” he asks himself, and records that “By these things I was driven to my wits end.”¹⁶ For Anna Trapnel, in contrast, the doctrine of election and reprobation, and the consequent relinquishment of all sense of individual spiritual agency, seems to have released her from fear of sin and temptation into a frequently ecstatic and blissful state: “I had exceeding raptures of joy very frequent, little or no intermissions, no questions or doubtings in the least measure.”¹⁷ Confident in her sense of God’s love, and of his providential hand intervening in the world to protect her and to subdue her enemies, she concludes with disarming simplicity in the *Report and Plea* that “it’s a lovely life the life of faith.”¹⁸ The doctrine of Calvinism and the cultures and affective responses it generated, therefore, were not monolithic. While they were certainly frequently productive of anxious, sometimes anguished, discourse such as Bunyan’s, the insistence on human powerlessness in the face of divine omnipotence could also be, as it was for Trapnel, a source of liberation, joy, comfort, and even confidence and courage.

As well as being a Baptist, Trapnel was a Fifth Monarchist: that is, a millenarian who believed (as so many people—John Milton and Oliver Cromwell among them—did at the time) that the revolutionary events currently unfolding in England represented the fulfillment of biblical prophecies, and that the political turmoil presaged the imminence of Christ’s Second Coming. Of particular importance for Fifth Monarchists in this respect were the books of Daniel and Revelation, with their prophecies of the demise of the four earthly monarchies and the institution of the fifth monarchy, when King Jesus would return to rule on earth, in person.¹⁹ The Fifth Monarchists are notoriously difficult to locate in relation to specific religious groupings or doctrinal positions, and indeed the historian Bernard Capp writes that “their genesis was political rather than religious.” Nonetheless, they were drawn principally from the Independents and the Particular Baptists, and Fifth Monarchist groups coalesced within these congregations, from

15. Ephesians 2:8.

16. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding, with other Spiritual Autobiographies*, ed. John Stachniewski with Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

17. Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints; Being Several Experiences of the Dealings of God with Anna Trapnel, In, and After her Conversion* (London: Thomas Brewster, 1654), 10.

18. 52.

19. On the importance of the books of Daniel and Revelation, see Bradstock, *Radical Religion*, xii–xviii, 117–19, 136, 163–64. He also discusses Trapnel: see 125–28, 130–34.

which they differed “only in certain details of eschatology, and in their political attitude. But they saw themselves as a distinct group ... and their meetings had a religious as well as a political function.”²⁰ In Trapnel’s case, the congregation of which she was a part, Allhallows the Great, on Thames Street in London, was one of the “very capitals of the Fifth Monarchy,” as the historian Austin Woolrych calls it. There, the movement’s leading preachers and spokesmen John Simpson and Christopher Feake were weekday lecturers and held a number of rousing meetings where they prayed that “all *Corrupt, Wicked, and ungodly Magistrates* might be removed, and put out of place and power; and that a Righteous generation of Rulers might be set up in their stead.”²¹ Religion and politics, as these words show, together spoke a single language.

The *Report and Plea* makes clear just what an important source of community and comfort, as well as political expression, the congregation was to Trapnel. She visits Feake and Simpson in jail in Windsor Castle before she embarks on her journey to Cornwall; she thinks of her congregation repeatedly, and with some longing, in the course of her travels, and sends them letters; and when she is imprisoned in Bridewell, members of the congregation not only visited her there but also stayed with her to take care of her, and intervened with the authorities on her account. In July 1654, while she was still in Bridewell, they also published on her behalf *A Legacy for Saints*, a collection of her autobiographical accounts, prophecies, and letters. The congregation was thus much more than a body of like-minded believers. It provided an environment as emotionally intense, as supportive, as irritating, and sometimes as explosive as that more typically associated with the family.²²

Separatist congregations such as Trapnel’s at Allhallows the Great drew as many women to them as men; indeed, Bernard Capp has found that the surviving church lists show that “women easily outnumbered men.”²³ These religious groupings proved to be important for women’s entry in significant numbers into the world of public debate, writing, and publication. While the ratio of women’s writings to men’s did not change significantly in this period, their overall quantity did rise substantially. Trapnel’s publications constitute just one instance among

20. B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 172, 182.

21. Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 18; and Feake, *A Beam of Light*, 41. A lecturer was a preacher; see Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, 69n170; and Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970).

22. One of Trapnel’s letters to Allhallows from Cornwall shows her clearly irritated by her congregation’s failure to reply to her last letter; see introduction, 22. For the later split in the congregation of Allhallows the Great, see Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 276–78.

23. Capp, *Fifth Monarchy Men*, 82.

many of sectarian women's accession to print in this period. Other women who traveled this route to publication include Mary Cary, Katherine Chidley, Sarah Jones, Margaret Fell, Jane Turner, Barbara Blaugdone, and Anne Wentworth. As the twentieth-century feminist historians and literary critics who were instrumental in returning the work of these writers to public view noted, this period marks a sea-change not only in women's entry into print culture but also in the unprecedented access to it assumed by women of the middling sort.²⁴ Alongside their male counterparts—and sometimes head-to-head with them—these writers staked their claims in the great conversation that unfolded through the revolutionary years.

It was not as a religious polemicist, political commentator, or biblical exegete, however, that Trapnel first found her way into print, but as a prophet. For sectaries such as Trapnel, “prophecy” was not so much, or not only, the foretelling of events, but rather, in the historian Diane Purkiss's words, “any utterance produced by God through human agency.”²⁵ This frequently involved the interpretation of current events and phenomena in the light of biblical teachings. It is, therefore, a very capacious category, comprising a range of different kinds of divinely originating discourse. The Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary, for example, believed that “all might prophesy, that is (in the lowest sense) be able to speak to edification, exhortation and comfort.”²⁶ Trapnel's prophetic mode, however, was less quotidian in its form. Her prophecies were the result of the “bringing of my Spirit into this extraordinary praying and singing, and visions.”²⁷ Frequently, this involved a period of fasting and the advent of a trance state, often of long duration, during which she extemporized prayer and prophecy, in verse and prose, and of which she had no recollection once the trance ended.

Prophecy, whether uttered by women or men, was a mode of expression to which people during the revolutionary years were more than usually open. The historian Phyllis Mack has suggested that “over four hundred women prophesied at least once during the second half of the seventeenth century.”²⁸ In a providentialist society, where it was understood that the hand of God routinely intervened

24. For one study of early modern print culture, and of women's place in it, see Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

25. Diane Purkiss, “Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century,” in *Women, Writing, History, 1640–1740*, ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman, 139–58 (London: Batsford, 1992), 139.

26. Mary Cary, *A New and More Exact Mappe or Description of New Jerusalems Glory* (London: W. H., 1651), 237. See 1 Corinthians 14:3.

27. 73.

28. Phyllis Mack, “The Prophet and her Audience: Gender and Knowledge in the World Turned Upside Down,” in *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill*, ed. Geoff Eley and William Hunt, 139–52 (London: Verso, 1988), 150n1.

in human affairs, and with the polity in such a state of flux and already attuned to millenarianism, prophecy for a short time found an audience open to its claims to divine inspiration.²⁹ Not all who encountered such prophets were persuaded by them, of course. As Trapnel found, her opponents were quick to attribute her utterances to the wiles of Satan, to witchcraft, to willful sedition, or to madness. But she, like other prophets, was convinced that such opposition was just part of the great struggle between God and the devil in these last days.

With its characteristic seamless mix of religion and politics, of the biblical and the contemporary, of anger and joy, prophecy is a form of discourse likely to be profoundly unfamiliar to a twenty-first century readership. It is also, however, one that offers an unusually immediate, affective, and telling perspective on this historical juncture. As Trapnel played her part on “the world’s stage,” as she put it, she did so not only tirelessly and inventively but also by articulating an idiom entirely and compellingly evocative of the extraordinary historical moment in which she lived.³⁰

“From her own hand”: The Life and Work of Anna Trapnel

Although it is possible to glean some information about her family from parish records, everything of substance that we know about the life of Anna Trapnel, we know from her own writing. Since the events of her life were crucial evidence of her credentials as a prophet, she details them extensively. Her status as a prophet thus ensured in two distinct ways that she did not disappear from the historical record. First, it brought her to public notice and created an appetite for her prophecies, and second, it required the invocation of details about her life to underwrite the claims she made for the godly origins of her utterances.

Anna was the daughter of William Trapnel and his wife, Anne. She was baptized at the church of St. Dunstan and All Saints, Stepney, on September 10, 1620, at ten days old.³¹ The Trapnels had lived in this parish for several generations. Her grandfather, William Trapnel, married his first wife, Ellen Quarby, there on June 2, 1588. Their son William, Anna’s father, was baptized there on April 13, 1589, and their daughter Betteris on August 29, 1591. Ellen was buried on August 9, 1597, and William, her widower, married Mary Brooke the following month. The register does not record when William, Anna’s father, married his wife, Anne, but their son William was baptized there on April 8, 1617. No further records of

29. On providence, see Blair Worden, “Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England,” *Past and Present* 109 (1985): 55–99.

30. Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, 122.

31. Saint Dunstan and All Saints, Register of Baptisms, September 1608–January 1637/8, P93/DUN, Item 256. London Metropolitan Archives. I am grateful to Brian Austin, historian of the Trapnel (or Trapnell) family, for first drawing the importance of these records to my attention.

William, Anna's brother, have been found, and Anna herself never refers to him. Her father died very soon after her birth: he was buried on December 5, 1621, when Anna was just a year old. The parish records show an Anne Trapnell, widow, marrying Richard Hanley, a shipwright, on July 16, 1629. Although the evidence is inconclusive, this may be a reference to Anna's mother. If it is, this invites further speculation: since there is no record of Hanley in Trapnel's writings, and since she inherited property from her mother following her death in 1643, perhaps her stepfather Hanley also died in the course of Anna's childhood.

What is certain is that William Trapnel, Anna's father, had also been a shipwright, or shipbuilder, in Poplar in east London, where he probably worked in the East India Company's shipyards in nearby Blackwall, on the river Thames. Shipyards, as Purkiss reminds us, were dangerous places, full of inflammable materials, fires burning, timber being sawn and hewn, heavy weights being moved around with ropes and pulleys.³² Perhaps working in such an environment caused the early deaths of William Trapnel and Richard Hanley. While we know nothing of Anna's early family experiences, the shipbuilding context certainly made its mark on her religious life and her linguistic resources: it is striking how frequently she reaches for a nautical metaphor to flesh out a spiritual point. In *A Legacy for Saints* (1654), for example, she writes of a metaphorical "Sea in which my spirit first received trouble and dark dissertation," and in the *Report and Plea* she warns that the "council ships" and "Parliament ships" cannot be held together by "clergy nails," but, being "made of wood; and pitch, and rosin, and tar, and oakum . . . will burn to ashes when the fire comes."³³ Such a detailed enumeration of the materials involved in building and caulking ships suggests a childhood spent in close proximity to the shipyard where her father and stepfather worked. Moreover, her subsequent reference to her heavenly father as the "great Ship-Wright" allows speculation that her earthly father figures provided a paternal model of loving authority on which she could later draw in her prophetic work.

Poplar was a small hamlet in Stepney, a large parish to the east of the City of London, and long associated with reformed, radical, and separatist religion. Huguenots sought refuge there from Catholic persecution in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first General Baptist group in England was formed in Spitalfields in 1612, and the first Particular Baptist church was formed in nearby Wapping in 1633.³⁴ Poplar had no place of worship of its own until 1654, when a chapel paid for by public subscription was built on land donated

32. Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War: A People's History* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 41. On the history of shipyards, see David Loades, "The English Maritime Community, 1500–1650," in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485–1649*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury, 5–26 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), 6–8.

33. Trapnel, *Legacy*, 17; Trapnel, *Report and Plea*, 133.

34. VCH, *Middlesex*, 11:74–75.