

TO ERR IN THE EYES OF THE AUTHORITIES: LADY ELEANOR DAVIES AND THE
RECLAMATION OF PROPHETIC SPEECH

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of CAITLIN MARIE CORNELL find it satisfactory and recommend it be accepted.

Chair

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Abstract

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Female prophecy of the seventeenth century has, of late, become popularized by literary scholars through the emergence of biographical literature on famous prophets. Prophecy occupies multiple spaces in the genre of women's writing in the English Revolution, including religious, political, and legal. While these women provide an interesting untapped source of scholarship that engages a variety of literary fields, feminist theory has been the frontrunner in exploring prophecy due to its engagement with issues of gender agency and speech over thousands of years. Feminists have begun to investigate female prophets as largely disregarded historical figures faded into obscurity. Specifically, scholarship has focused on Anna Trapnel, a famous physical prophet who gathered a large following after the execution of Charles I.

Lady Eleanor Davies, another prophet of the same period, has been largely overlooked despite her prolific publication. Beginning in 1625, Lady Eleanor began having visions of the future, the content of which focused on the political atmosphere of the day. Throughout her life she was imprisoned, committed to Bedlam, and constantly dismissed for her tracts, yet she still continued to write in the face of those challenges. Because of her status as contradictory and problematic writer, Davies specifically has avoided a great deal of analysis until recently.

This thesis will invoke Jürgen Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere in order to discuss Lady Eleanor's exclusion from public discourse during the seventeenth century. I will argue that because of her attempts to join the public sphere she was subsequently classified as mad in order to discredit her accurate prophecies.

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Dedication

To the mister.

Seventeenth-Century Prophecy and Lady Eleanor Davies

*“SIR [Charles Stuart],
Upon a reference from you (1633) to these your Commissioners, I being Sentenced by them, as
upon Record appears, because took upon me to be a Prophetess; first was Fined, and then to
make publique Submission at Pauls so many times; that Jericho for ever cursed, and farther a
close prisoner to continue at your pleasure.*

*So it be known, you are hereby required to make a publique acknowledgement of such
your capital Trespass and high Offence; and first to Ask me forgiveness, if so be you expect to
find Mercy in this world or the other.*

*Eleanor Douglas”*¹

Struck by religious ecstasy, Lady Eleanor Davies collapsed in her Englefield manor on 28 July 1625. She later claimed that the Old Testament prophet Daniel had visited her and compelled her to prophesy by his power. Throughout her 27-year prophetic career, Lady Eleanor predicted a range of personal and political events, including the rise and fall of the English monarchy as well as the deaths of both her husbands. She also experienced extensive persecution because of her prophecies and was frequently in and out of the Gatehouse Tower, Bedlam, and debtors prison up until her death in 1652. The first moment of Lady Eleanor’s prophetic experiences coincided with a current of religious and political tensions in England, specifically with the ascension of the doomed king – Charles I.

Charles I’s marriage to fifteen-year-old Catholic French princess Henrietta Maria before his accession came amid controversy over his potentially papist leanings. After enduring a Catholic Spanish bride (and subsequently humiliating rejection), the choice of the ardent Catholic Henrietta Maria spawned an outcry against the supposed popery of the crown. England’s politico-religious state used Episcopal governance to enforce the Church of England, which used bishops as supervisors of an extensive network of parishes. Many believed that the Church of England had, however, devolved into relying upon ritualistic, “papist” worship, especially as bishops began to campaign for altar cloths, chalices, and elaborate ornamentation

¹ Lady Eleanor Davies, January 1648. Reprinted in *The Blasphemous Charge Against Her* (1649). Compiled by Esther S. Cope, *The Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. p. 251.

throughout churches. The rampant fear of Catholicism in England was as much a matter of national pride as a harbinger to Mary I's bloody execution of Protestants during her reign at the suggestion of her Spanish husband Philip. The king or queen represented England, as well as England's religious faith. As such, the monarchy became a symbolic index of England's religious persuasion. Charles' ostensible Catholic sympathies undermined the nature of faith as both political and theological, as if the King followed the Pope's word, then he no longer held his country as the highest priority in making decisions. The evolution of Puritanism as the "anti-Catholic" form of the Church argued that the Church of England had begun to mime Catholicism with pomp and circumstance, and that its movement spurred English subjects to object vocally to treasonous similarities to papacy. Additionally, the appointment of William Laud in 1633, who had campaigned for the reinstatement of altars and other "papist" ornamentation, as the Archbishop of Canterbury and general representative of the Episcopacy, was a decidedly unpopular choice.²

Because of the ties between the monarchy and the Episcopacy, Charles and Laud were deemed ultimately responsible for the presumptively heretical leanings of the church. Charles, as the head of both Church and State, quickly found himself embroiled in conflict with vociferous conservative members of the Church. That political strife allowed for an explosion of divergent religious sentiments that directly conflated the monarchy and the Episcopacy as simultaneously sinful in its ritualistic pomp and divinely instituted as demonstrated by the divine right of kings. With the strict control mechanisms enacted by the Episcopacy, as well as legal restrictions on religious divergence, prophecy became a frequent cathartic outlet for criticism of authority. The very nature of Episcopacy, with its increased delineation of "appropriate" and "inappropriate" relationships with God that far more resembled Catholicism in ritual, generated prophecy as an

² Laud officiated Charles' coronation, and was subsequently promoted from Bishop of London to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633.

individual and seditious response to a reemergence of hierarchical doctrine. The English Civil War and subsequent regicide proved fertile grounds for prophetic utterance in which political and religious events were predicted with varying levels of accuracy. Frequent topics of prophecy included the death of King Charles I, execution of Archbishop Laud (who was frequently considered Charles's minion), and the end of the world, as signs of the "End of Days" pervaded prophetic interpretation. For example, radical millenarians saw the increasing vice of the Episcopacy as a sign of the impending apocalypse and called for the reform of the Church, as well as the people of England, in order to save their souls.³ The juncture of the religious and political caused an equally symbiotic bond between the religious ecstasy of prophecy and the content of prophets' messages. Into this politically and religiously controversial time Lady Eleanor began to prophesy with both positive and negative reactions from her contemporaries.

Lady Eleanor serves as a particularly interesting case study of female prophecy during the seventeenth century. As an aristocrat she had the ear of many powerful politicians within Charles' court, but also she possessed an attitude of privilege and arrogance that prevented her from ever gaining a serious religious following. Lady Eleanor's fall from favor, removal from the public eye through imprisonment, and "diagnosis" of insanity clearly exhibited the tendency of prevailing patriarchal norms to silence a particularly vocal woman who forced herself into a masculine public sphere. Indeed, even in its nascence during the seventeenth century, the public sphere was constructed to exclude those who could not fit within its stringently restricted requirements for participation. This paper will argue that Lady Eleanor's exclusion from public discourse was the result of her attempts to claim both masculine and feminine voices, thus

³ Bernard Capp's essay "The political dimension of apocalyptic thought." *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance thought and literature: patterns, antecedents and repercussions*. (Eds C.A. Patrides, Joseph Wittreich), as well as the other articles in this compilation, discuss apocalyptic literature in seventeenth-century England. Christina Berg and Philippa Berry discuss briefly the apocalyptic prophecies and female prophecy.

defying categorization as either gender in writing while society retained the negative stereotypes of her gender as a means to discredit her.

The emergence of female prophets, especially ones such as Lady Eleanor, can be seen as the result of several historical issues. Beyond the strife created by Charles, issues with Reformation theology made pre-Revolutionary England ideal for the explosion of female prophetic utterance. Reformation thought demystified religion and created unmediated relationships with God, enabling prophecy in general. These individual and unique relationships further encouraged a phenomenon that grew rapidly with coinciding circumstance of war and politico-religious strife: prophecy. Christina Berg and Philippa Berry posit that even with the Protestant termination of Catholic “mysticism,” beliefs in magic and prophetic powers did not end, but actually increased in response (41). Through Protestantism’s elimination of the church’s historic presence as the negotiator between man and God (Berry and Berg specifically cite the confessional as a symbolic “mechanism” of mediation), the individual became the highest priority when creating a relationship with God. Thus, the individual was the main interpreter of all communication with God, leaving “God speaking directly to the elect” (41). As each person began to explore a personal relationship with God, outbursts of radical religious sectarianism became increasingly worrisome, with each group claiming a particular brand of “truth” communicated directly from God. Seventeenth-century prophets especially took advantage of this new interpretation of religion, claiming the most personal type of individual relationship with God – embodiment and ecstasy.

With Protestantism widely instituted across Europe, the status of Christian prophets came under a great deal of scrutiny.⁴ Old Testament prophets communicated directly with God,

⁴ Greek, Roman, and other pagan prophets often operate at odds with societal expectations of conformity as well, but frequently it is in their portrayal after the death of these empires that we can see such a disparity in their treatment. Christian prophets, however, represent a scriptural continuum of religious thought that can illuminate the gendered division in treatment of prophets. As Christianity relies upon a similar document of both its history and laws, Christian prophets operate under the strictures of similar theological discourse.

receiving his commands through embodiment and the Holy Spirit, which meant future prophets were supposed to operate in a similar fashion. Should prophetic behavior differ from expectations of prophets as dictated in the Bible, their words were easily dismissed as the ramblings of an insane person. Referring to Biblical prophets allowed later prophets to exhibit their knowledge of the Bible (a necessity to be considered a “true” prophet) and draw similarities between their prophetic experiences and Biblical prophetic experiences. Daniel, for example, experienced God’s intervention in his life during persecution, making him a particular favorite for prophets to cite in order to give their prophecies legitimacy. As time progressed from the Bible’s original creation, other holy men and women were frequently lionized by followers after hearing God’s voice or being visited by the Holy Spirit, yet were always treated with suspicion by those either politically or religiously opposed to the truth of their prophecies.

Seventeenth-century opinions of prophets operated under the same expectations as those pertaining to the revered men and women of the Bible, as well as their clairvoyant predecessors, although society viewed male and female seers in different light given the content of their messages. Patricia Crawford notes that men and women frequently consulted prophets and “spiritual” individuals in order to ensure their happiness during and after life (98). Indeed, Crawford’s statement reinforces that Elizabethan and Stuart audiences interpreted the benign nature of prophets as quasi-consultants in all aspects of life. Prophets differed, however, from other occultists in their purpose. Occultists frequently used “magic,” herbal remedies, or more pagan methods of prophecy (tarot cards or reading tea leaves, for example) to aid those who sought their services. Christian prophets, however, often prophesied on any occasion as God compelled them. This difference provided a differentiating framework for the more benign forms of mysticism and the audaciously political prophets. Healers and those who claimed less conventional spiritual beliefs did not assert their place within the larger political or religious

sphere. Prophets, however, engaged in a far more dangerous profession – that of casting the future of the King, the bishops, and England itself. Their statements concerned far more than pregnancy, marriage, or ghosts of dead family members, but instead the present condition of society, as well as future implications in larger political and theological movements.

Pre-Civil War prophets considered themselves representatives of prophets who had deposed totalitarian leaders or had been martyred for their beliefs. During this time, Daniel was frequently invoked as the spiritual “patron” of prophets, as his persecution under a tyrannical regime made him a favorite among prophets who believed they experienced the same abuse under Charles I. In claiming the spiritual patronage of Daniel, prophets (other than Lady Eleanor) subsequently suggested that Charles’s regime actually *was* tyrannical, and destined to fall. Lady Eleanor Davies, for example, frequently invoked this conceit in anagram form to compare Charles (BE CHARLES) to Balchezzar, the biblical tyrant who oppressed Daniel (BALCHESER) (*Star to the Wise* 109). Additionally, prophets exhibited signs of physical embodiment of the Holy Spirit or an agent of God’s. These men and women fasted, wandered the streets mumbling their prophecies, or spoke in verse for days at a time. Additionally, these prophets frequently published their prophecies with additional interpretation of their messages. Grace Cary, for example, circulated her prophecies in manuscript form after attempting to warn King Charles about the “evils of Archbishop Laud and Queen Henrietta Maria” (Mack 99). William Lilly, the almanac-maker and astronomer, sold 1,800 copies of his tract *The Prophecy of the White King* in three days and had to reprint due to its overwhelming popularity (1644). His thinly veiled references to the “White King” clearly pointed to Charles as an exploiter of the Crown, and doomed to die for his indiscretions (Rusche 756-9). Both male and female prophets attempted to draw greater attention to their particular cause, some with greater success than

others. A collective interest, however, was the general trajectory of the kingdom and its highly visible leaders.

To suggest the fallibility of the divine right of kings and royal prerogative was both treasonous and heretical. Because of these claims, concerned citizens were convinced that these visibly political prophets (as opposed to more benign mystics or occultists) were the agents of the devil who sought bring the apocalypse through the anti-Christ. Bursting into song, fasting to the brink of starvation, claiming to be long-lost heirs to the throne or even Jesus himself, and predicting the religious downfall of a “divinely instituted” king were frequently seen as proof of the devil’s presence on earth. Alternately, many of these prophets believed that Charles Stuart was the anti-Christ and cited his presence on earth as evidence of the impending apocalypse, as well as mined Revelation for support of this claim, creating conflicting theological opinions regarding scriptural interpretation (Capp 94). Some prophets called for the end of the monarchy and considered the removal of Charles, yet the termination of a governmental system that had existed for thousands of years was considered to be against the natural order of life. Many of the literate subjects, who could read the polemical tracts and reprints of fiery sermons of these prophets, simply saw prophets as a nuisance. Their views were understandable, as many prophets cried out their views in public, disrupted church with seemingly ridiculous sermons, or refused to abandon their notions regardless of derision or legal repercussions. Nonsensical ramblings or bizarre behavior that defied social norms made prophets easy to dismiss. Yet those in power, specifically the King, Parliament, and bishops, saw prophets as politically dangerous entities. Prophets believed they acted on behalf of God, which rallied discordant populaces to their cause in overturning the government and worried the already troubled leaders. These views increasingly shifted from the prophet as a benign eccentric to that of a dangerous threat after the Elizabethan period as the possibility for civil war became increasingly apparent. Prophets

became increasingly targeted as they refused to submit to societal expectations of behavior and publicly claimed the illegality of the monarchy's actions.

As one such prophet, Lady Eleanor Davies represented a mixture of the former and latter: both nuisance and political threat. Lady Eleanor's prophetic career oscillated in its popularity in Charles' court. Her first prophecy, *Warning to the Dragon and All His Angels* (1625), interpreted the book of Daniel. Lady Eleanor claimed Daniel visited her in 1625 to share a prophecy from God. In *Warning to the Dragon*, Lady Eleanor began her use of anagrams of her name, biblical references, and contemporary peers' names, in order to bring greater significance to political matters. Her reworking of names often irritated the subjects of her tracts, whose new names could be flattering on occasion, "CHARLES STUART: AL TRUTHS CESAR" (*Warning to the Dragon* 48), or viciously insulting, "ELIZABETH STANLEY: THAT JEZEBEL SLAIN" (*Woe to the House* 57).⁵ Additionally, Lady Eleanor frequently documented her experiences in retrospect in order to draw attention to the injustices enacted against her, including her imprisonment in Bedlam after defacing the cathedral at Lichfield for its likeness to the churches of the "Beast," or Pope (*Bethlehem* 371). Not one to be discouraged by licensing restrictions to prevent seditious writings, Lady Eleanor traveled to the Netherlands to print her tracts (those that disdained Laud and Charles as instruments of the devil), as many of her fellow pamphleteers did when prevented from publishing. Lady Eleanor's annoyingly pointed anagrams and her unwavering commitment to publishing her prophecies provoked many inquiries as to her mental and social capacities.

Female prophets, and especially Lady Eleanor, were considered exceptionally dangerous by those attempting to maintain power prior to and during the Civil War, as women who claimed to speak on behalf of a male God presented a particularly complex theological problem. By

⁵ Elizabeth Stanley was the mother-in-law to Lady Eleanor's daughter Lucy. "Jezebel" refers to the wife of King Ahab from 2 Kings 9:7-10.

embodying God, they had a quasi-sexual relationship with him, though one dissimilar to that of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit.⁶ Given that women were bound by the societal norms of chastity, silence, and obedience, the compulsion to speak was deemed unnatural, and forced women out of their prescribed roles into a sphere traditionally reserved for men. Oft-cited passages from Corinthians regarding Pauline injunctions for silence muted women's voices and deferred any questions of church law to their husbands at home.⁷ To speak inside a church, or against the institution in general, violated biblical laws that had effectively silenced women since the authoring of the Bible. Thus, the female prophet undermined one of the founding principles for female oppression – silence – during seventeenth-century England, as she was “burdened with the duty to speak” (Mack 26). Because of their position within a society that stringently regulated female action and trafficked in marriage and virginity, the “burden to speak” removed women from the “chaste, silent, and obedient” paradigm, opening their reputations to attack.⁸ Female prophets discovered that their speech and presence led to insults regarding their sexual behavior rather than commentary on the actual content of their statements:

When a seventeenth-century Englishman was confronted by the shocking spectacle of a woman who prophesied in public, what did he see and hear?
'A woman clothed with the sun,' 'a base slut,' 'a Jezebel,' 'a Jesuit,' 'a silly old woman,' a 'goat rough and hairy,' 'a woman to make your heart tremble,' 'an old trot.' (Mack 17)

⁶ The Virgin Mary was de-institutionalized by the Protestant Reformation as idolatrous, making any similarities to her borderline heretical. Also, claiming the type of virtue associated with the Virgin Mary would be false pride, which would have been deemed sinful and unfeminine.

⁷ “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church”(I Cor. 14:34-5).

⁸ Suzanne Hull's *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1470-1640* provides excellent information on women's behavioral guides. Additionally, the application of these principles can be seen in Heidi Brayman Hackel's article “‘Boasting of silence’: women readers in a patriarchal state” in *Readings, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*. Kevin Sharpe & Steven N. Zwicker, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 101-121.

Women who prophesied, then, became associated with sexual misconduct and Catholicism (as represented with the “Jesuit” slur), and as such something to be feared and discredited. By commenting on a woman’s sexual behavior, men of the day managed to attribute prophetic speech to nothing more than women’s deliberate disregard of both religion and societal norms (evidenced by the comparison to intentional feminine sexual misbehavior), as female prophets operated outside the traditional tenets of English society. Sue Wiseman also addresses the potentially subversive challenge female prophets posed to patriarchy, noting that women’s position within society was always subject to the patriarchy they could potentially overthrow:

we can see the shifting authority of women’s prophecy as opening up and structuring new potentially anti-patriarchal conceptualizations of political and religious authority, at the same time attempting to negotiate the material spiritual elite in a culture which was predicated on ‘women’ being what men were not, but also on the subordination of women to men.
(Wiseman 163)

At this time, as Wiseman indicates, women and men were seen as binaries to one another, where men were clearly superior to women, and women in opposition as “that which is not man.” As a female prophet, a woman claimed to occupy the same spaces as men. Their assertions in speech and print functioned in an equally political and overt manner as their male counterparts, as they spoke against the injustices of the King in a similar way, and subversively covert. Female prophets argued against the King implicitly denied the right of men to subordinate women, challenged patriarchal “conceptions of political and religious authority,” and staunchly refused to “subordinate” themselves. Female prophets spoke for themselves and communicated directly with God, removing the intermediary husband from their religious relationships. Instead of

formulating religious beliefs through information transmitted from men, female prophets defied social order and saw themselves as equals.

Seventeenth-century female prophets, then, occupied a particularly controversial space of independence and autonomy. While prophets in general were considered disruptive, female prophets faced the additional burden of biblical law to be silent and by contemporary law to obey their husbands without question. Many female prophets, however, were widows with financial independence, women who left their families, or unmarried women who had the protection of a patron or parish. Anna Trapnel, the famous Fifth Monarchist prophet who prophesied in trances for weeks at a time, was arrested for disturbing the peace. When tried, Trapnel was asked, “I understand you are not married?” as though her unwed state implied her unsuitable social freedom. She responded flippantly, “Then having no hinderance, why may not I go where I please, if the Lord so will?” (Mack 94-95). Trapnel’s disregard infuriated the judges, but clearly she was unwilling to bend to tradition. She directly disregarded two expectations of seventeenth-century women: vocal female dissent, and questioning the natural and divine law of womanly silence. Similarly, Lady Eleanor Davies, who was twice widowed and considered widowhood the ideal position for a woman, frequently challenged her two husbands’ authority by writing despite their disapproval. The two men, Sir John Davies and Sir Archibald Douglas, went so far as to burn her tracts in front of her eyes to discourage prophesy. As a response, she predicted their deaths, which occurred a few months later, and she continued her prophetic career without any hindrance. Without the regulatory eye of a husband, society consequently portrayed female prophets as disorderly, uncontrollable, threatening, and insane.

Additionally, female prophets occupied a distinctive space within the political upheaval prior to the English Revolution and regicide. Because men occupied the public sphere, women’s exclusion was a product of both tradition and fear of the power that they could exercise. While

male prophets did exist during the seventeenth century, the visibility and impropriety of female prophets created yet another scandal in a time when scandal ran aplenty. Female prophets overrode male expectations about clearly divisible gender roles by embodying a male god in a female body and also through representing the words of a male prophet such as Daniel. In speaking for a male, these prophets sought to give greater import to their prophecies by broadening their audience beyond their fellow women to reach the politico-religious sphere from which they had so long been excluded. These women straddled the two divided arenas of masculine and feminine movement – the public and the private.

Female prophets, then, were seen in a conflicting light. These women saw themselves as receptacles for God’s word, as the weakest rise to “confound the mighty,” so to speak.⁹ Thus, female prophets became a political and theological threat to the so-called “mighty”: their husbands, congregations, justices of the peace, the Episcopacy, and the King. As female prophets gained increasing notoriety, it became correspondingly imperative to keep them from ruffling an already politically contentious country. Phyllis Mack points to the pre-Revolutionary years as an enabling period for female prophets. Attitudes toward these women shifted from benign eccentric to menace, as “women in general were perceived as more visible and more aggressive than before and where fears about increasing social dislocation were frequently articulated as criticism of women’s independence” (52). Women, especially aggressively independent female prophets, such as Lady Eleanor, Anna Trapnel, Katherine Evans, and Sarah Cheevers, became targeted as the scapegoats of social problems and the control of these women subsequently became increasingly important to uphold the patriarchy.

⁹ Ironically, the same book of the Bible that commands women’s silence also calls for their strength: “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Corinthians, 1.25-27).

The main criticism of female prophecy was the co-opting of men's positions within society as the articulators of political and religious issues. Many women's prophecies concerned the well-being of King Charles I and his family, as well as the future of his rule, his ability to produce an heir, and his ultimate doom at the hands of his own people. The so-called "White King" was the topic of many male and female prophecies during this time and, unlike other revolutions on the continent, his downfall was seen as a crucial combination of God's will (through the hundreds of prophecies produced at this time) and violation of kingly duty by attacking his own people during the civil wars.¹⁰ Although female prophets did disagree about the legality and purpose of the regicide, many of these women discussed the outlook of England and the significance of the regicide. The involvement of women in such a groundbreaking political development was suggestive of a far more radical trend: they were beginning to claim a place within the complex public sphere as rightful members of discourse, rational or not.

Within this teeming atmosphere of female prophecy, secular turmoil, and religious upheaval, Lady Eleanor Davies serves as a particular case of seventeenth-century female prophecy. Born in 1590 and dying in 1652, Lady Eleanor played witness to three monarchs and some of the most significant events in England's history. The fifth daughter of the eleventh Baron of Audeley, George Touchet, Lady Eleanor was trained in most subjects that were restricted from women: Latin, Greek, classical rhetoric, Biblical interpretation. She received the training of an aristocratic young gentleman rather than instruction in the usual womanly subjects of needlepoint and drawing. The educational systems and cultural prohibitions of the seventeenth century largely prevented Lady Eleanor from pursuing any formal intellectual

¹⁰ For a discussion of prophecy used as propaganda, and the specific use of the "White King" metaphor as prophecy (exemplified in William Lilly's popular seventeenth-century prophecy created from a revised 'Merlin' prophecy), see Harry Rusche's "Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651." *The English Historical Review*. 84:333 (Oct, 1969): 752-770.

training at a university, although her upbringing allowed her to pursue the scriptural interpretation that pervaded her tracts.

In addition to her informal education, Lady Eleanor frequently relied upon her aristocratic family's reputation to give authority to her prophecies, defending herself against attacks by referencing its extensive history, and arguing its existence in England since before William the Conqueror. Lady Eleanor's prophecies *did* come true, except for her predictions regarding the apocalypse, which was a frequent error of her prophetic contemporaries as well. The true issue at hand, however, is not the veracity of Lady Eleanor's prophecies, but the treatment of her prophecies due to her gender and the danger she posed to the patriarchal status quo. Throughout her life, Lady Eleanor claimed to have been visited by God and his angels, and interpreted biblical scriptures to predict the immediate political future of England. Imprisoned, committed to Bedlam, lauded and denigrated for her work, Lady Eleanor's exceptional history can inform modern audiences of the range of seventeenth-century attitudes toward women, madness, and political defiance during and leading up to the English Civil War.

Before and partially through the twentieth century, Lady Eleanor and her writings were frequently dismissed as mad, ignorant, or frivolous. S.G. Wright, who wrote in 1931, believed Lady Eleanor's unusual writing style displayed "a definite moral weakness," and Theodore Spencer in 1938 argued that Lady Eleanor was mentally deficient (Matchinske 366). Rather than exploring issues of *why* Lady Eleanor was considered mad, scholars simply assumed its truth. Recent critics, however, have gone to great lengths to disprove these stereotypes and bring Lady Eleanor to the forefront of gender studies for the seventeenth century. Claims as to Lady Eleanor's madness have been largely dismissed and scholars instead use Lady Eleanor's writings to discuss her political message. Esther Cope's seminal biography of Lady Eleanor Davies revived interest in Lady Eleanor as a subject of interest in feminist scholarship. Cope and

historian Elaine Hobby both document issues of gender and punitive actions taken against female prophets, contributing to larger discussions of femininity and prophecy during the seventeenth-century. Hobby and Cope point to female prophecy as a form of subversive rhetoric, as well as the patriarchal response to that rhetoric, and illuminate Lady Eleanor as an example of female prophecy in both her background and persecution. Cope claims that Lady Eleanor's arrogance translated to her prophesying without the permission of the Church, as such "amazed and frightened her contemporaries," (*Prophetic Writings* xiii), and "challenged the hierarchical and patriarchal authority which was the basis of order in family and society and in church in state," resulting in imprisonment and commitment to Bedlam (xiv-xv). Hobby especially argues that masculine attitudes toward such a highly visible female making seditious claims against the monarchy and Episcopacy encouraged a deeper dialogue of the implications of female prophecy. Phyllis Mack broadens the debate on female prophecy by addressing a variety of female prophets during the period and arguing that these women acted as the earliest radical feminists. Mack's broad discussion of female prophecy adds to the conceptualization of prophets as a political threat, as evidenced by the same punitive measures Cope and Hobby chronicle. Finally, Philippa Berry and Christina Berg's joint efforts on Lady Eleanor's public voice coalesce with Megan Matchinske's arguments that Lady Eleanor's voice matched her male contemporaries in politico-religious hatred. Specifically, Lady Eleanor's inability to fit within seventeenth-century expectations for women and beliefs of their inherent irrationality caused authorities to consider her mad, rather than a legitimate political threat.

While recent scholarship has finally acknowledged and documented the histories of female prophets during the seventeenth century in the service of enlarging the body of literature to include more forms of female writing, such histories ultimately fail to specifically engage Lady Eleanor as a representative of discrimination in the public sphere. Her writing, more often

than not, is excluded from even the expanding sphere of female writing because her seventeenth century construction as a madwoman remains an accepted caveat when discussing her writing. Similar to her inability to fit within the seventeenth-century paradigm of politico-religious debate, Lady Eleanor's writing actually cannot fit within today's feminist explorations of subversion and equality. Lady Eleanor's purpose in writing was not intentionally to liberate other women or better their position (like Anna Trapnel, Katherine Chidley, and Sarah Cheevers), but to create a space in which she could critically engage in the public sphere without being discredited due to her gender. As a female prophet, Lady Eleanor Davies's experiences and writings demonstrate the use of madness as a label to undermine her claim to be treated as a rightful and rational member of the public sphere specifically because of her insistence that her discourse was equivalent to a man's. By contextualizing Lady Eleanor both within her own time period and her own writings, I seek to complicate contemporary criticism of all female prophets by defining the interconnection between gendered exclusion in the public sphere and presumed irrationality of feminine speech.

Habermas' Public Sphere and Female Prophetic Exclusion

The conceptualization of the public sphere during the seventeenth century involves several fundamental contextual conditions. Jürgen Habermas's original theory states that the public sphere was the product of the eighteenth-century coffee house society, in which rational discourse flourished as a means to discuss contentious political topics in order to reach consensus.¹¹ While Habermas' theory usefully demonstrates the origins of democratic discourse, his arguments have been censured for ignoring seventeenth-century England's volatile political and religious environment in his discussion of the formation of the public sphere. Additionally,

¹¹ Habermas' key texts that discuss his theories of the development of the public sphere include *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) and *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984).

many feminists believe that Habermas' ideal public sphere inherently excludes women.¹² David Zaret, specifically, disagrees with two aspects of Habermas' views of the public sphere. First, Zaret believes that the public sphere actually began in the early seventeenth century. In fact, according to Zaret, "the public sphere appears to have been larger and stronger in the last half of the seventeenth-century than in the next century" (220). Second, he also argues the earlier emergence of the public sphere is due to religious strife, causing the mass production of pamphlets and pulpit politics. Although Habermas's original theory privileges the universal consensus rather than individual opinion, Zaret illustrates the importance of the Reformation's emphasis on the individual in order to create the kind of discourse Habermas desires: "Faith and reason were now held to be attributes of individuals, but they were defined, defended, and debated in arguments that appealed explicitly to public opinion" (221). Habermas would alternately argue that faith becomes an object of debate rather than an accepted ideology. As he writes in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, "the anchoring in divine authority that [the Church] represented – that is, religion – became a private matter ... and continued to exist as one corporate body among others under public law" (11-12). Habermas underscores the Church's shift from public to private, thus relegating religion to the home. The actual nature of faith itself became an object of reasoned debate, rather than an actual part of the public sphere as Zaret argues. Zaret considers Habermas' omission of the seventeenth century as a gross misstep in the creation of the public sphere: "Habermas's account glosses over the relevance of religion for the emergence of a public sphere in politics at a time when religious discourse was a, if not

¹² For more specific arguments regarding the exclusion of women from the public sphere, see Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Craig Calhoun, ed. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. 109-142; and Joan Landes' "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration." *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*. Ed. Johanna Meehan. New York: Routledge Press, 1995. 91-116. Habermas himself writes in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that women of London society "waged a vigorous but vain struggle against the new institution [of coffeehouses]," which he believes is the result of being left at home at night (33). The exclusion of women is recognized by Habermas, but never explored in any deeper level than an acceptance of women's failure to gain a position in the public sphere.

the, predominant means by which individuals define and debated issues in this sphere” (213).

Reconsidering the religious as part of the public sphere opens a new way to interpret Lady Eleanor’s writing during the emergence of the public sphere in the seventeenth century. Lady Eleanor’s writings dealt specifically with the religious, as she considered herself a vessel for God and used God’s message to discuss the shortcomings of England. These shortcomings, which Lady Eleanor believed were due to the religious missteps of Charles and Laud, were published in a series of pamphlets that preached both to Charles and the larger public to amend their ways before the ultimate judgment of God. Lady Eleanor’s opinions were derived from an individual relationship with God, which Habermas would deem inappropriate for public discourse. Habermas’ disapproval is because the Church changed during the Reformation, from a publicly accepted and legally reinforced entity to a private and individual relationship with God, its public discussion could only exist on a strictly theoretical level. As such, the insertion of one personal relationship would not, hypothetically, positively affect universal public opinion (*Structural Transformation* 11-12). Despite these reasons, Lady Eleanor’s presentation of these ideas through writing “appealed explicitly to public opinion” (Zaret 221).

Of more significance to Lady Eleanor and her reception in the public sphere are the requirements to join the public sphere as described by Habermas. Habermas demands rationality from those in the public sphere, which is expressed through “disinterested” discourse. “Disinterested” discourse requires the removal of the self and personal opinion from any movement toward consensus, as the public sphere attempts to create universals of public good. Lady Eleanor’s claims to disinterestedness and rationality, as she hoped to explore national issues, were undermined by the form in which she presented her ideas, which operated as a means to exclude her from the public sphere. As Michel Foucault accurately points out, concepts of discourse are influenced by the structures in which they operate:

A discourse is not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs ... Discourse is thus contained or expressed in organizations and institutions as well as in words; all of these constitute texts or documents to be read. (35)¹³

The rules and regulation of discourse are the products of the “organizations and institutions” that seek to reinforce their power. As such, the same institutions within the public sphere that uphold “rationality” determine the conceptualization and privileging of it. The tautological nature of “rationality” necessarily excludes those who are not allowed to decide what rationality actually is. Given the restrictions of the public sphere as defined by Habermas and “discourse” as defined by Foucault, it is questionable whether or not female prophetic utterance belongs in or can be accepted by the public sphere. As I will demonstrate later, the presumed irrationality of prophets, and especially female prophets, prevent their acceptance in that sphere despite discussing the same issues Habermas believes are at stake. Thus, the form of expression rather than the content became the main mode of discrediting the prophet’s statement. Additionally, femininity historically correlated with irrationality and disorder, making any woman’s statements inherently excluded. As such, “female” and “prophet” as a combination makes these women a primary target to be barred from speaking about, writing on, or engaging in any issues the public sphere may discuss. “Rationality” as a concept and “woman” were almost antithetical in the seventeenth century, making women’s communication an impossibility as per Habermas’s construction of the public sphere.

The meshing of gendered discourse suggested that Lady Eleanor laid a legitimate claim to join the public sphere, yet the inherent “irrationality” of female speech complicated her reception.

¹³ As reprinted and discussed in Joan W. Scott’s “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism.” *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (1988): 33-50.

For, as Phyllis Mack notes, as the content of Davies's message became increasingly concerned with matters of national interest, those who upheld the governance of the public sphere correspondingly took issue with her message: "Lady Eleanor Davies's pronouncements were tolerated, even welcomed, by the royal family when she spoke as a harmless but well-bred eccentric and then condemned when she became politically obstreperous in print" (75). For example, Lady Eleanor recognized the King's particular interest in her prophecy, as when describing her first imprisonment in *The Blasphemous Charge*, she was to be held indefinitely at "His Majesties pleasure, who had taken special notice of her and her Cause, and referred the Examination and Censuring thereof into this Court" (254). The movement to use content as a reason to exclude female prophecy is clear. When Lady Eleanor spoke about and published frivolous, feminine issues, she was welcomed because she only discussed the lives of the royal family (a subject more open to female interest due to court intrigue). In her presumption to address serious, masculine matters, however, she was condemned.

Writing in pamphlets became the primary method of participating in the public sphere in seventeenth-century England, making "rational" communication for females a rare discourse despite their extensive publication. The public sphere imposed limited self-regulation for women to not publish or attempt to publish articles engaging issues restricted to them, such as politics, religion, and court affairs. In other words, society disciplined women to not discuss issues outside their domestic sphere despite the explosion of print culture and pamphleteering leading up to the Civil War. Joan Landes recognizes the restrictive measures the public sphere imposed to maintain exclusivity from both lower classes and women during this time period. "Hence, class and its accoutrements (property, income, literacy, and cultural background) were major barriers to full participation in the bourgeois public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere was for

the most part a restricted male preserve” (96).¹⁴ The same social structures that formed the public sphere in the eighteenth century held true in the seventeenth as well.¹⁵ Zaret, in his contention that the public sphere began in the seventeenth century rather than eighteenth, claims that public opinion was far more influential on national politics than Habermas credits. The presence of the public sphere relied upon print culture and pamphleteering during this time, and the political troubles of the day prompted the public sphere’s strict regulation. Prophecy became one such form of publication that required heavy restrictions. Harry Rusche elaborates upon the importance of the public sphere’s views of prophecy and pamphlet culture, and documents certain laws enacted against prophecy that were designed to prevent the encouragement of “aspirations and confidence of the state’s enemies,” which “had to be suppressed by law, for times of uncertainty and trouble seemed always to prompt a stream of such publications” (753). Rusche’s statement is suggestive of the nature of the nascent public sphere as both an exclusive and highly regulated space that could potentially be dangerous to those who controlled it. Prophecy, then, became a target of the state as it merged political deviance with the absolutism of God, and madness evolved into the primary means of policing the nascent public sphere that discussed these issues in such a “rational” and “disinterested” light.

The overwhelming amount of pamphlet literature present during the pre-Revolutionary and Civil War years indicates the increasing concern of English subjects regarding the fate of their country. The reception of these pamphlets, however, was always subject to the overt criticism and censorship of the bodies governing the public sphere. During the years leading up

¹⁴ “Bourgeois” is an anachronistic term in the Marxist sense, as its use by Landes and other theorists is largely in terms of the eighteenth century unlanded gentry and merchants. While the aristocracy was not technically “bourgeois,” a *de facto* pre-bourgeoisie class performed an identical role in society in relation to gender, as well as expectations of class structures in that existed in pre-Revolutionary years. The same gender structures worked to oppress women in relation to the public sphere before a “bourgeois” class emerged in the eighteenth-century. I apply it here in terms of seventeenth-century aristocracy/mercantilism and its privilege, which Lady Eleanor claimed as a legitimating force in her prophecies.

¹⁵ In accepting Landes’s conception of the barriers in full participation in the public sphere, we must recognize that her argument is operating on Habermas’s stance that the public sphere began in the eighteenth century. Regardless, Landes’s point that the “restricted male preserve” represented the very nature of the public sphere is still valid. The same social structures that formed the public sphere in the eighteenth century held true in the seventeenth as well.

to the Civil War, as Ian Atherton observes, printing domestic news and opinions was illegal in England and manuscript censorship prevented publishing by the Licensing Company, which controlled publication by order of the Star-Chamber Court and, later, Parliament (43). Many authors and publishers, including female prophets, flaunted the restrictions imposed by the Star-Chamber Court by publishing illegally or abroad, creating a seditious environment that fought actively against ideological and domestic news censorship.¹⁶ The indignant claim to publication that illegal tracts made did not, however, necessarily include women. As Marcus Nevitt writes, “the rhetoric of inclusivity and democratization which has characterized most writing about the pamphlet frequently conceals the material and rhetorical barriers that women encountered when participating in revolutionary pamphlet culture” (4). The exercise of democratic acceptance by the public sphere, as Nevitt argues, did not extend to women, and by extension female prophets in their quest for acceptance in the face of their exclusion, as “many of these same men adopted a tone of amused disdain toward the real female visionary, whom they ridiculed as ignorant, superstitious, and, above all, *distinct* from themselves” (emphasis mine Mack 65).¹⁷ Female visionaries during this time fought against the same censorship issues as men, but could not necessarily hope to overcome them due to attitudes regarding both their intellect and their inherent difference from men.

Women still began to publish through pamphlet literature prolifically, although usually privately or illegally. Perhaps more critical than their publication, however, was the content of their pamphlets. While most pamphlets written by women discussed the current political and

¹⁶ Atherton’s article (“The Itch Grown a Disease: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century. *Prose Studies*. 21.2 (August 1998): 39-65), discusses censorship during the seventeenth-century as a means to control domestic news, yet an instigator for more radical pamphlets to be published. Harry Rusche connects the concept of censorship and propaganda to seventeenth-century prophecy in his article “Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651.” *The English Historical Review*. 84:333 (Oct., 1969): 752-770. Jeffrey Sawyer also connects the importance of pamphlet propaganda on the continent during the French Revolution in his book *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

¹⁷ As a point of clarification, in referring to “these same men,” Phyllis Mack is gesturing both toward men in the public sphere, and male prophets who were generally accepted there.

religious state, a majority of their literature used prophecy as strategy to gain legitimacy. Elaine Hobby comments that “[w]ell over half the texts published by women between 1649 and 1688 were prophecies,” yet the laws enacted against prophecy suggests their publication was largely illegal (26). Hobby’s comment implicitly reinforces the importance of the regicide and Civil War as topics and catalysts of prophetic utterance, and that many women were so unreservedly concerned with the future of the country that they wrote extensively about the subject. Prophecy became the primary mode of expressing female social anxiety, but also a legitimating form of writing. These women used God, an infallible and authoritative figure, to endorse their concerns that normally could be discredited as women’s worries. Unable to rely upon personal credentials, as women were inherently irrational and had little education to give authority to their fears, these women’s prophecies manipulated patriarchal expectations of the public sphere, and instead utilized prophetic utterance in order to draw more attention to their statements. Additionally, God became the only “man” to endorse what these women said, giving their statements more weight. So far removed from their domestic sphere and the Pauline injunctions to silence, clearly female prophets represented the pinnacle of impropriety, yet their concern about national issues could not be stymied. Female prophets began to publish abroad or illegally, as many of their tracts could not pass licensing laws given their seditious content, similar to writings by men on the same subjects. Despite the number of visionary pamphlets during this time, which could indicate the ease of publication, these women in fact took a great risk to communicate their messages, facing prosecution, ridicule, and derision. Regardless, God compelled these women to speak, write, or by any means communicate their messages, and the sheer number of prophecies published in this time imply an insistence upon using God as a means to gain authority and legitimacy that was otherwise denied them as women.

The nature of public discourse as debated by Habermas required a level of universality that female prophets could never hope to achieve given the individual nature of prophecy. The female prophet's individual connection to the divine challenged the mode of political and public discourse that privileged universality and consensus. Women were naturally outside of this discursive order, as their interests supposedly remained firmly grounded in the private, domestic sphere. Although claiming God's guidance gave these women a measure of authority, it also severely hampered their legitimacy, as the importance on universal consensus amplified. It was impossible for that individual relationship with God to become an interest of the public sphere, largely because individuality was a tenet that had been agreed upon by those in the public sphere as a private value, but one universally bestowed. Thus, consensus about God also became impossible given the multiplicity of individual relationships that could not possibly meet in a public environment. Consensus with God could not occur, as God was infallible and not open to compromise. The issue extends to the prophecy of Eleanor Davies, then. As a representative of God's word, it was not possible for her to enter into the public sphere that sought consensus. Lady Eleanor represented one particular point of view, and that was God's. She could not change what God told her to say, and her prophecy demanded adherence rather than mutual understanding.

Lady Eleanor's first calling to become a prophet occurred in 1625, far before the general outburst of prophecy began. Her movement to join the discourse on politico-religious issues at a level beyond the personal rested upon using God and her aristocratic connections to gain credence. She herself wrote in *Warning to the Dragon* (1625) that she "cannot stop my Nose or Mouth for niceness," suggesting a compulsion from God, as well as knowledge of the propriety, or "niceness" she eschewed. As Lady Eleanor consumed God's word, regardless of its message,

she was forced to communicate her prophecy in spite of the improprieties female speech connoted.

Lady Eleanor's rapid movement into the public sphere began in 1625 in her home at Englefield, during which she claimed the Old Testament prophet Daniel visited her.¹⁸ Her first experience with prophecy predated many of the revolutionary female prophets and coincided with the ascension of Charles to the throne. The personal and political intersected for Lady Eleanor, as she frequently collocated her family experiences with broader issues of the nation. Lady Eleanor had lost all her children but one, her daughter Lucy, and referred to her books as "babes," much to the dismay of her first husband, Sir John Davies.¹⁹ Davies himself became concerned regarding his wife's writing and publishing, which compounded the family difficulties Lady Eleanor so frankly discussed in her writings. Specifically, Lady Eleanor retrospectively described her difficulties in *Restitution of Prophecy* (1651) "This *Babe*, object to their scorn, for speaking the *truth*, informing of things future, notwithstanding thus difficult to be *fathered* or *licensed*" (344). Her language makes a marked commentary about both Davies's ability to father a child (they lost both sons, one due to severe handicap), but also her personal struggles to publish the "truth" in the face of the law. She correlates "fathering" and "licensing," further suggesting that Lady Eleanor's prophecies truly were replacements for her lost children, and needed to be recognized as legitimate.

¹⁸ Lady Eleanor wrote "A Warning to the Dragon and All His Angels" in response to this vision. Daniel, according to the Old Testament, experienced apocalyptic visions entrusted to him alone by God. Daniel foresaw the downfall of Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, and the crumbling of his kingdom. Lady Eleanor revisited this trope frequently throughout her writings, claiming that God had entrusted her alone with the future knowledge of King Charles' fate. Lady Eleanor frequently made Charles Stuart's name into the anagram "Belshazzar" or "Be Charles" into "Balchaser" through misspelling, just as she reorganized "Eleanor Audelie" into "Reveale o Daniel" as a way to further reinforce her right to prophesy.

¹⁹ It is possible that Lady Eleanor's intimate relationship with her writings could be a product of postpartum depression, although such an investigation would be purely speculative and beyond the scope of this argument. Additionally, insofar as depression could be a cause of Lady Eleanor's actual madness, her supposed insanity is also a supposition that cannot be proven given early modern conceptualizations of mental health. She calls her writings "babes" in both *Everlasting Gospel* (287) and *Restitution of Prophecy* (344).

Davies himself, a barrister and poet of some repute, took the first steps to silence his unruly wife. He burned her books in an effort to discourage her writing, realizing the dangerous nature of her tracts, which largely prophesied the fate of the king's heirs. Though casting the king's legacy and horoscope were considered treasonable offenses, Davies' primary concern seemed to be to reassert his authority as husband and rightful leader of their home. Lady Eleanor recognized the potentially challenging nature of her prophecies for both the domestic and public spheres. Female prophetic speech acted as a way to "challenge" those who uphold patriarchy. Lady Eleanor recognized the disturbance her prophecies could cause given the call of the "Spirit of Prophecy":

Servants had so incensed their Masters, setting all on fire, with Justices of Peace and Church-men, giving out he was a Vagrant, a Counterfeit, or a Witch. Immediately upon which the Spirit of Prophesie falling likewise upon me, then were all vext worse than ever, ready to turn the house upside down, laying this to his charge too: when laying aside Household cares all, and no conversation with any but the Word of God. (*Her Appeal* 183)

The complete disorder Lady Eleanor saw was a direct product of the "Spirit of Prophesie," "ready to turn the house upside down." Her reference to domestic chaos harkened to both the conflict experienced with her own husbands in their attempts to burn her writings, as well as the larger metaphor of "Household" (both of general authorities and her husband) that legally prosecuted her under the same laws as Daniel – "a Vagrant, Counterfeit, or Witch" – all symbols of members of society that refused to conform.

Lady Eleanor should not, by all considerations during the early modern period, have had the ability or voice to vocalize what was in her mind, prophetess or not. Her future prophecies

and writings leveled charges at King Charles, Archbishop Laud, and the Duke of Buckingham as men who had committed treason against the state and had heretically upheld the Episcopacy's "popery." In discussing matters of national concern, Lady Eleanor joined a sphere that was not her own, one of politics, religion, and kings – the public sphere of men. She had all of the requirements to join the public sphere that Landes cites and Zaret argues existed during the seventeenth century – extensive property, income, literacy, and cultural education. Accordingly, Landes argues that women's exclusion from the public sphere was far from accidental, even in cases when financially they equaled men, but instead was an intentional feature of the public sphere in an effort to maintain patriarchal standards that could never be met by women, thereby legitimating their exclusion. Landes cites "property, income, literacy, and cultural background" as tacit requirements to be a recognized member of the public sphere, and women's lack of these requirements made participation in the public sphere incredibly difficult for them. Patriarchy, in this sense, created, maintained, and upheld the rules of the Habermas's public sphere, acting as a solidifying and exclusive force.

In a further exercise of exclusionary powers, both public and private forces attempted to stop Lady Eleanor's hopes for serious consideration by her male peers by destroying her writings. Anthony Fletcher argues that the public sphere was nonetheless actively contested by those it oppressed: "Patriarchy rested quite as much on what was said and done in the street and market place as behind the closed doors of the home. It is these areas above all that it was most continually tested, reiterated, consolidated and challenged" (257). As such, the public and private became conflated as women pushed for the ability to speak with increased pamphleteering and petitions, challenging the patriarchy that regulated the division between these gendered spaces.²⁰ Given Fletcher's argument, the possibility of Lady Eleanor peaceably joining the public sphere

²⁰ See Marcus Nevitt's *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England, 1640-1660*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

becomes increasingly suspect and infeasible. At the very first moment of Lady Eleanor's first publication we see these difficulties. Stifled by her husbands from inside the domestic space she *should* have occupied, patriarchy was reinforced with the burning of her writings. In the public sphere Lady Eleanor experienced the same destruction of her work by those whose approval she sought. Men reasserted the gender role binaries that Lady Eleanor "continually tested, challenged," and muddled by refusing to join a particular gender category. As such, Lady Eleanor's brand of female prophecy involved two critical aspects: women joining a sphere that intentionally and legally attempted to exclude them based on the irrationality of feminine speech, and prophetic utterance that involved both seeming irrationality and an individual interest that failed to serve the disinterested, rational, and universal public sphere.

Lady Eleanor's particularly unique position as a seventeenth-century prophet involved her occupation of two gendered spaces. Because of her claim to this liminal area, Lady Eleanor defied classification as female or male in her intentions or writing. As such, it was the overlapping of seventeenth-century gender roles that made Lady Eleanor's writing so threatening. As Roy Porter reminds us, women speak in many different ways, and Lady Eleanor's acceptance of Daniel as her prophetic voice forced her to acquire an internal masculinity that would be considered quite unseemly.

In contemporary terms, Lady Eleanor broke the norms, because there was nothing 'feminine' in her behaviour or utterances. Spirituality and piety were permitted to women; but prophesy was the office of the male. In becoming Daniel, Lady Eleanor was wearing the trousers. Her behaviour was seen as inappropriate for her sex (Porter 57).

Quite simply, women had full access to all of the restricting norms of Christian piety and spirituality, but once engaging in an "office of the male," women crossed the line into

unacceptable action and speech. As Roy Porter facetiously writes, Lady Eleanor began to “wear the trousers” the minute she began to speak for a man (both in God and Daniel). In her first tract, *Warning to the Dragon* (1625), Lady Eleanor actually writes in first person as Daniel: “Then I DANIEL” (51), even signing the salutation at the end of document as Daniel (56). In acquiring a masculine voice, Lady Eleanor gains a subjectivity that represents far more than simply her personal condition as “woman,” but the broader condition of women who could not speak, and the social implications of men’s politics from which she was excluded. Lady Eleanor herself writes in *Warning to the Dragon* that when God calls to the faithful, “no age so weake, nor sex excusing” can ignore that call (2). Lady Eleanor’s reference to “excusing” a particular sex certainly emphasizes both that one gender cannot ignore God’s call, nor can the opposite “excuse” that message because of the vessel from which it comes. Thus, the juncture of masculine and feminine in Lady Eleanor’s writings upset expectations of the private female and public male, and hedged into the exclusive masculine public sphere. Clearly, “there could be no rigid gender terms between public and private worlds” for Lady Eleanor, as Anthony Fletcher argues, because her prophecies called for a consideration of both spheres through her duplicity of gender and voice (256-7).²¹

The actual form of Lady Eleanor’s prophecies began to interfere with her public reception. Habermas’s “disinterested” discourse requires a removal of self and self-

²¹ This ability to have both male and female interests as represented through Lady Eleanor speaking for both God/Daniel and herself could be valuable rather than damaging, however. As Elizabeth Harvey contends, this type of multiple discourse can be empowering for women: “The doubleness of women, which, according to Marcel Mauss, results from their simultaneous alliance with order and disorder, lends them a special power” (55). Women, as such, always have the capacity for disorder beneath their smooth veneer of control and men must inscribe that control. The doubleness of Lady Eleanor can be attributed to how she speaks as a man using a woman’s voice, as God’s prophetic message belongs to both men and women as recipients of His divine message, and as such is “so his and hers both,” and in speaking as such represents both sexes (*Restitution of Prophecy* 344). In being both ordered in the message she sought to convey about the downfall of King Charles (an issue debated by men and thus correlated with order) and disordered in means by which she conveyed that message (in that her voice as a woman would inherently be considered out of control), Lady Eleanor gains a seat of power where men are unsure how to handle her startling words. Thus, her voice represented not only her own interests, but also those of men, as she coalesces the public and private symbiotically into one.

interestedness to actively and effectively engage in the public sphere. As such, the early modern public sphere would thoroughly reject the subjective in favor of the objective. Here Lady Eleanor's occupation of a liminal gendered discourse places her awkwardly within a simultaneously self-interested and disinterested form of participation. Unlike other female prophets who were exceptionally vicious in their attacks on the monarchy, Lady Eleanor's disinterestedness is actually greater than that of women writers seeking equality during this time, matching that of male revolutionaries, "But it also calls out to her readers the 'problem' of subjectivity as it is constructed in patriarchy" (Matchinske 350). The very same gatekeepers of the public sphere that sought to exclude women as Matchinske illustrates, constructed "subjectivity," and Lady Eleanor's presence problematized how "subjectivity" was defined. Lady Eleanor struggled between the culturally assigned self-interestedness associated with female writing and disinterestedness of the "masculine" message of the day. Indeed, her writing was a compromise of these two modes of discourse. According to Matchinske, "Davies's writing is far more constrained [than other women's] given the markedly different role it plays within the newly emerging British state." Lady Eleanor is distinct in that her writing was a compromise of broad public issues, yet "[h]er texts match those of her male contemporaries in hatred and aggression," which suggests that the actual content of Lady Eleanor's writing is equivalent to those of her male contemporaries concerned with similar politico-religious issues (350). By matching the "Holy Hatred" of men, she becomes less disinterested, as she needs to prove herself continually by referring to her prophetic ability. Lady Eleanor frequently uses "I" in her texts, calling herself "The Alpha and the Omega" (102), as well as saying "Ande I thinke that I have also the Spirit of God" (56) in what could only seem to be incredible arrogance. In purposefully involving her personal voice in tracts, Lady Eleanor lost any hope of seeming objective and disinterested. Additionally, several of her tracts specifically addressed personal issues, such as

her time in Bedlam and the Gatehouse, as well as the execution of her brother for sodomy and rape.²² Matchinske reinforces the importance of disinterested discourse, in that Lady Eleanor's writings involve the personal voice "only at the expense of what her contemporaries might have conceived of as an 'appropriate subjectivity,'" and "calls out to her readers the 'problem' of subjectivity as it is constructed in patriarchy," when that "subjectivity" of her personal relationship with God was required to gain any sort of authorial legitimacy (350). Subjectivity, in this context, meant an inability to separate the personal from the larger argument Lady Eleanor attempted to make. Additionally, "appropriate subjectivity" calls for the removal of self in a rational and unbiased manner, and Lady Eleanor seems unable to separate herself from her prophecies. This inability is precluded by the intimate and individual nature of prophecy, which directly opposes the universal and communal nature of the public sphere. Lady Eleanor conflates the personal and political, undeniably undermining the requirements of the public sphere by forcing herself into it.

Not only did Lady Eleanor emphasize her personal life and individual self, she also emphasized that self's femininity. Lady Eleanor's nouns and pronouns accentuated her femininity, rather than diminished it. Esther Cope points to the conceptual challenge this proffered to those reading her work: "The pronouns with which she described the 'prophetical everlasting Order' that the Spirit would introduce were feminine. She, herself, represented that Spirit who was the '*Queen of Peace, or She-councillor*'" (151). Not insignificantly, Lady Eleanor calls herself a "Queen" and "She-councillor," using political terms that carry authority within the monarchy. Additionally, Lady Eleanor also refers to her own prophetic position as a "Handmaid" (*Restitution of Prophecy* 347) and as "*The Mother*" (350). By feminizing these

²² Lady Eleanor wrote several tracts specifically regarding her brother Mervin, Lord Audeley and Second Earl of Castlehaven, who was arrested, tried, and executed for sodomy and accessory to the rapes of his wife and daughter. Lady Eleanor saw this as a great injustice, as his aristocratic privilege should have dismissed such outrageous charges. She frequently compares Mervin's wife, Ann Stanley, to a traitorous whore – Salome and "A LYE SATANN" – in *Woe to the House* (1633).

positions reserved for men (as ascension to the throne went first to a son rather than daughter) and repositioning women as the rightful recipient of God's word, Lady Eleanor correlated her claims to authority with irrationality by seeming overly subjective, and men usually interpreted a woman's personal subjectivity as irrational. As such, it became impossible for Lady Eleanor to be taken seriously in a context that called for an immediate distancing of oneself from the materials and speech entering the public sphere, further objectifying her as a "subject" of both the state and the men acting on behalf of it.

Given the subjectivity and individuality inherent in Lady Eleanor's writings, her entrance into the public sphere became a threat to the men who sought to uphold its rules and regulations. Lady Eleanor's writing, and the particular discourse it generated, unbalanced the expectations of those who generated power within the seventeenth-century public sphere, as well as undermined the construct of "discourse" of that public sphere. Lady Eleanor became a threat because she discussed issues of national interest, yet did so in a way that was distinctly female in its mode of communication, while decidedly male in the message it sought to communicate. Only when Lady Eleanor's writings upset the status quo was she prosecuted, whereas after the regicide, her prophecy of Charles's death was reprinted and read at Parliament because it supported the political authority of the day (Mack 75). Lady Eleanor's prophecies, then, were only endorsed when convenient and supportive of contemporary political sentiments, indicating that the content of her prophecies only could be used when supportive of the current regime.

The capacity of Lady Eleanor's writings to represent a political and ideological threat to the patriarchal structures focused a great deal of attention to her cause and position. Philippa Berry and Christina Berg argue that the interest given to Lady Eleanor was, in fact, due to her femininity and flouting of rule.

What emerges, in fact, is an enormous anxiety over the unique phenomenon of prophetic speech, and its refusal satisfactorily to be assimilated into a fixed symbolic order. Yet in what respect exactly did this kind of discourse constitute a threat? We believe that its threat lay precisely in its feminine character... the extremist forms of prophetic discourse constitutes an extremely dangerous challenge to conventional modes of expression and control within seventeenth century patriarchal society. (39-40)

Berg and Berry's argument that prophetic speech refused to conform to "a fixed symbolic order" engages concepts of discursive power and rules. The femininity of Lady Eleanor's speech further aggravated a mode of discourse that already evaded the type of classification needed to gain legitimacy. With this in mind, female prophecy could possibly never enter the public sphere as rational discourse, because the fear and "anxiety" over an "extremely dangerous challenge to conventional modes of expression and control within seventeenth century patriarchal society." Indeed, Eleanor Davies was a considerable threat to the universalized rationality of the public sphere, because she believed that rationality ruled the "fixed symbolic order" unjustly and fought it using the very structures that sought to silence her – the Bible and God.

Lady Eleanor herself recognized that the court's incredulity regarding her speech was largely because she invoked a decidedly masculine educational background in order to interpret the Bible and prophecies. In *The Blasphemous Charge Against Her* (1649), Lady Eleanor reiterates the words of the court, and the reasons for her prosecution as

touching the printing and publishing of unlicensed Books, as such bold attempts as those of hers, in taking upon her to interpret and expound the holy Scriptures, yea, and the most intricate and hard places therein, such as

the gravest and most learned Divines would not slightly or easily undertake, without much study and deliberation. (253)

In boldly attempting to interpret scripture, Lady Eleanor trespassed onto not only the public sphere that required the legal approval of her works, but the education that was reserved for men, and only “the gravest and most learned.”²³ According to the court, this conception of a rightful scriptural interpreter did not include Lady Eleanor. Furthermore, the court considered the intricacy of scripture to be beyond a woman, thus the court sought to redefine her writings as an ignorant and presumptuous endeavor to join a discourse for which she lacked the training. Without the education the court deemed necessary, Lady Eleanor would always be an amateur, as she supposedly lacked the “study and deliberation” as a woman. Lady Eleanor’s supposed ignorance, then, became another means to ensure her ostracism. Her claims to that education and privileged knowledge became another means to threaten the reserved masculine sphere that relied on the exclusivity of that knowledge to prevent women from “boldly” attempting to enter discourse with men.

Lady Eleanor experienced further difficulties when attempting to join the public sphere. The public sphere’s drive for consensus and mutual understanding requires that all opinion be superseded by a drive for universality, Lady Eleanor’s works can only partially fit into Habermas’s conception. What I have attempted to question instead is if the construction of the public sphere during the seventeenth century based itself on flawed premises in relation to female prophecy and feminine participation. If women have been constructed as inherently irrational, their presence can never be tolerated as active members of the public sphere. Lady Eleanor’s oddly garbled speech and forays into intense political concerns place her far beyond what could

²³ For more information on the legal restrictions on women’s education, see Heidi Brayman Hackel’s “‘Boasting of silence’: women readers in a patriarchal state.” *Readings, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*. Eds. Kevin Sharpe & Steven N. Zwicker. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 101-121.

possibly be considered rational during the seventeenth century. The result, as Matchinske posits, is an extreme rejection by those Lady Eleanor considered her equals:

As a result of these rhetorical shifts, Davies's voice becomes inscribed within state-ordered considerations of control in a markedly different manner than that of her contemporaries. Not only do her texts become more easily disposable, subject to greater ridicule and indifference by virtue of their failure to fulfill certain accepted conventions, but her own status in relation to them is held equally suspect (363).

The problem with Lady Eleanor's writings became Lady Eleanor herself – a mixture of masculine and feminine, academically literate and socially unconscious. With seventeenth-century constructions of femininity demanding silence and obedience, any female attempt to speak operated outside “certain accepted conventions,” but could only be considered “within state-ordered considerations of control” that rejected that which did not conform. Lady Eleanor's “status” as both citizen of England and potential member of the public sphere would always been seen as distinct and “other” because her writings were decidedly outside the norm of accepted rational discourse expected in seventeenth-century England. Although her writings were read aloud after Charles' death, her vehement tracts could only be accepted when they were interpreted as a means to support a new regime of truth.

This conceptualization of prophecy and femininity functioned as more than simply an exclusionary force. In fact, the tools deemed necessary for women to be adequate vessels for God's word made them inherently excluded from public sphere as defined by Habermas. As Phyllis Mack notes, “we have seen that beliefs about the traditional and quite familiar qualities of passivity, irrationality, and passion that had justified women's *absence* from the political arena were used to justify their visionary activities as well” (Mack 106). Female prophets' ability to

receive God's word hinged upon their "passivity, irrationality, and passion," further reinforcing their "rightful" segregation from the public sphere. Lady Eleanor recognizes that truth is often "excluded for their *Approbation*," "savored but as *non science*" (*Restitution of Prophecy* 344-5). Only the external public sphere gave approval of truth presented by a prophet, and truth could often be mistaken as "non science" or nonsense. Lady Eleanor's prophecies marked her as "without sense," and subject to the "rightful" rejection from the public sphere. With this ideological rejection of Lady Eleanor and her writings, social rejection followed closely. As Matchinske notes, Lady Eleanor's texts were "easily disposable, subject to greater ridicule and indifference" by those who read them. Unfortunately, the content of Lady Eleanor's messages was frequently true. By claiming a lack of reason, irrationality, or, subsequently, madness, authorities used these discrediting factors as an "emotive point for those who wished to keep [women] from male preserves" (69-70). As such, authorities deployed an exceptionally powerful tool to effectively rid the public sphere of Lady Eleanor and her seditious writings: accusations of lunacy and madness.

Madness and Truth: The Dishonor of a Prophetess

"Here madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them." – Michel Foucault²⁴

Lunacy is defined legally as an incapability to participate in court, as well as a questioning of soundness of mind.²⁵ An "incapability to participate" can be correlated to conceptualizations of participation in the public sphere. By deeming Lady Eleanor "mad" or the victim of "lunacy," the ruling authorities simply prevented her from joining the rational discourse required of the public sphere. Lunacy, however, is self-perpetuating. When Lady Eleanor did

²⁴ Quoted from *Madness and Civilization*, p. x.

²⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1989: "Lunacy." Definition 2.

participate, she was marked as something “other than appropriate” for the institution. Rather than considering her to be a legal threat, as were many dissatisfied subjects who predicted the regicide or spoke against the King, the classification of “lunacy” became expedient and effective. Such a label relied upon already-constructed beliefs about women’s susceptibility to madness. Thus, authorities did not have to pursue her in a criminal way, which would require her to be a recognized member of the public sphere in order to be taken seriously. Lunatics were not held criminally responsible for their actions, making her seditious pamphlets and attempts to print overseas the product of a crazy woman, rather than a treasonous act to be given credence within the public sphere. The Court of Wards and Livries decided upon a lunatic’s criminal responsibility, property rights, and care, especially in the cases of those engaging in extreme behavior that could no longer be controlled by their families (Rosen 144). As Esther Cope recognizes, madness legally suggested a variety of issues under the law. “The laws recognized the existence of madness under the terms *idiocy* or *lunacy*. Lunatics were individuals deemed temporarily insane, in contrast to idiots, the permanently insane” (Cope 87). Lunacy, then, would serve as a perfect means to discredit the temporary “visions” or “prophetic moments” of Lady Eleanor, and its effectiveness cannot be denied.

Lady Eleanor’s supposed madness, however, has kept her out of academic discourse for three hundred years, which partially illustrates the enduring effectiveness of such a label. Considerations of the many legal processes Lady Eleanor experienced, as well as her imprisonment in Bedlam cannot be overlooked as means for patriarchal authorities to discredit her prophecies to prevent her entry into the public sphere. While female prophets such as Anna Trapnel, Sarah Cheevers, and Katherine Evans did experience imprisonment, Eleanor Davies was unique in her removal to Bedlam. Lady Eleanor was highly aware of the employment of this

label against her. In fact, Lady Eleanor was actively conscious of the slander against her name, and often expressed her frustration through her tracts.

Lady Eleanor's six spells in prison marked her as compulsively criminal, or perhaps simply compulsive. The publication of books abroad caused Lady Eleanor's first arraignment in October 1633, which ended with the burning of the books she had printed abroad. Lady Eleanor's audacious tract "Handwriteing October 1633" in part caused these actions, as she tauntingly sent "Handwriting" to Archbishop Laud to warn him of his downfall. Laud reacted by complaining to the king, who gave him permission to burn her illegally printed books. On the 23rd of October Laud burned all of Lady Eleanor's seized books and additionally sentenced her to pay fines and imprisonment in the Gatehouse at Westminster (Cope 75-77). After her release in June 1635, Lady Eleanor stayed with her daughter Lucy until moving to Lichfield, which was under Laud's jurisdiction and recently ornamented with altar cloths and hangings. At Michaelmas in 1636, Lady Eleanor destroyed the new decorations in the cathedral by smearing them with tar and wheat paste. Laud's frustration seethed as he once again appealed to Charles to "silence her terrible profanations" (Porter 55). On 17 December the Privy Council ordered her immediate imprisonment in London's Bethlem Hospital without trial. After a great deal of complaining on Lady Eleanor's part, she was transferred to the Tower of London in April 1636 then entirely released in 1638 (Cope 93-97). In addition to her time in prison due to her defiance of the law, Lady Eleanor also went to debtor's prison on several different occasions for failure to pay her printing fees.

Lady Eleanor was a constant object of legal controversy over whether or not she deserved imprisonment (as a rational criminal would receive) or committal to Bedlam (as an irrational one would). Given the danger her writings posed as accurate prophecies prior to the regicide, authorities placed increasing importance on keeping Lady Eleanor silent and out of the public

eye. An effective punishment and solution for her viciously active pen, the authorities “buried [her] in the *Land of Oblivion*” (*Bethlehem* 374). With Lady Eleanor’s forceful attempts to join the public sphere and her corresponding sentencing, it is no surprise that her sojourn in Bethlem Hospital rapidly worked to discredit her prophecies. Madness, however, was no uncommon occurrence in early modern England, rather a frequent trope that occupied the early modern imagination.²⁶

Much research has documented the nature of insanity in the early modern period, most notably Michael MacDonald’s book *Mystical Bedlam*, which focuses on the Bedlam’s history, purposes, conditions, and physicians. Tracing the work of physician Richard Napier, who diagnosed and treated many forms of insanity in almost two thousand cases, MacDonald discusses the intersection of unchecked behavior and commitment as insane. Its purpose as such was not to rehabilitate its patients, but to restrict their supposedly inexplicable behavior, then use them as a spectacle for the English people to see. Notably, as MacDonald articulates, Napier diagnosed and treated 1,286 cases involving females and 748 cases for males (36). This great disparity is certainly telling of early modern conceptions of madness for men and women, in that irregular behavior could more easily be attributed to madness rather than a different medical issue. While MacDonald does concede that these numbers are similar to the ratio of female to male madness in modern day Britain, Napier’s telling statistics reinforce that madness truly is the “Female Malady,” one which reinforces the irrationality and supposed ‘natural’ condition of women as slightly closer to insane than their male counterparts.²⁷

²⁶ Carol Thomas Neely’s *Distracted Subjects* (2004) and “‘Documents in Madness’: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Early Modern Culture” (Autumn 1991) provide extensive argument regarding the presence of madness on the stage in early modern England and the gendering of madness.

²⁷ MacDonald’s specific statistics are as such: “The evidence that more than three centuries ago, the women among Napier’s clients also suffered from more insanity, sadness, and anxiety than men is perhaps more surprising. He recorded 1,286 cases of mental disorder involving females and 748 cases concerning males. Five disturbed clients had sexually ambiguous names and their sex could not be guessed from the language of Napier’s case notes. Expressed conventionally as the number of males per 100 females, the sex ratio of Napier’s mentally disturbed clients was 58.2, a figure very similar to the ratios reported for modern medical practices in Britain” (36). Elaine Showalter, however, interprets these findings differently in *The Female Malady*. She writes, “There have always been those who argued that women’s high rate of mental disorder is a product of their social situation, both their

Indeed, most men of Lady Eleanor's day believed women who both prophesied and preached belonged in the same institutions. As Megan Matchinske notes, society hastily snubbed the work of those who were considered mad:

'Thus I have declared some of the female academies,' the anonymous writer admits, 'but where their university is I cannot tell, but I suppose that Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for them.' The twentieth century has been no less quick to marginalize Davies's writings, insisting that they are the work of a 'madwoman' (366).

The anonymous writer Matchinske references reinforces the multiple ways in which female prophets and their companions who preached against the law could be easily dismissed, and where these women belonged for their audacity to speak, Bridewell or Bedlam, making female prophecy the act of either a criminal or a lunatic. London authorities used Bridewell to house homeless children and disorderly women, while Bedlam, the most public of insane asylums, represented all that was negative about mental disorder and the necessary treatments used to control that disorder. Additionally, the legacy of Lady Eleanor's madness has followed her into even today's scholarship, making her an object of ridicule, marginalizing her works and their corresponding importance to English Civil War research. As Matchinske notes above, the supposed answer to women who challenged traditional modes of patriarchal church authority, there were only three solutions: Bridewell (the famous prison), Bedlam, or historical snubbing.

confining roles as daughters, wives, and mothers and their mistreatment by a male-dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession. Thus Richard Napier noted that, among his patients, women of all social classes complained more of stress and unhappiness in marriage, expressed more anxiety over their children, and suffered more from depression in their daily lives than their male peers" (3). Additionally, Showalter recognizes that "Women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in the conduct of their lives" (7). Carol Thomas Neely also discusses the representation of madwomen on the stage (as Bedlam was mere blocks from the theatre district in London) as further reinscribing certain behaviors of women as naturally insane, as "plays' theatrical innovations thus contribute to secularization and gender distinctions in mental disorders" (23-4).

Bedlam itself was closer to Bridewell than common conceptions of modern mental institutions. As MacDonald reminds us, “Bethlem Hospital was the only institution of its kind, and its inmates languished there for years, living in squalid conditions without adequate mental treatment” (4). His language is telling. Bedlam is described as having “inmates” rather than patients, underscoring its position as a penitentiary rather than rehabilitative institute (4). Donald Lupton, a clergyman and writer, described Bedlam as “so hideous, so great; that they are more able to drive a man that hath his wits rather out of them” (MacDonald 45). In sending Eleanor Davies to Bedlam Hospital, the point was not to rehabilitate her but to incarcerate, humiliate, silence, and undermine her. The power of the mental institution to silence and invalidate is markedly clear, and Lady Eleanor recognizes its force, as well. Indeed, in her tract *Bethlehem*, Davies writes that she was “shut up by the space of two years” (371),²⁸ “buried in silence” by those who condemned her (373). In this sense, Bedlam served as a penitentiary far more than any sort of rehabilitative facility. Esther S. Cope discusses the nature of the care at Bedlam, as well as its purpose:

The appointment of Dr. Croke, physician to James I, as keeper of Bedlam in 1619 may have been an attempt to provide real medical attention to the ‘prisoners,’ as they were referred to in the records, but the Privy Council’s inquiry into conditions there in 1632 revealed that Croke had, for the most part, been providing *custodial rather than rehabilitative care* (emphasis mine 86).

Custodial care, in this sense, suggests that such an offender must be held, rather than rehabilitated in a prison of sorts. Lady Eleanor refers to the hospital as “*Bedlems loathsome Prison*” in her tract *Bethlehem* (1652), acknowledging the nature of its purpose – to lock away

²⁸ Lady Eleanor writes elsewhere that she was imprisoned for little over a year, yet in *Bethlehem* she writes two years. This inconsistency on her part has been oft-cited as proof of her insanity, rather than perhaps a condition of extended imprisonment.

those who were insane, dangerous to themselves and others. The conditions of Bedlam are suggestive of the importance the hospital placed on actual mental care – very little – versus the function it served in relation to society – deterrence and spectacle.

Lady Eleanor never managed to form a large following, unlike many other female prophets of her day. Anna Trapnel, for example, was followed from town to town by those who wanted to see her prophesy and Trapnel actually encouraged their presence. Unlike Anna Trapnel, Lady Eleanor’s popularity certainly depended on the political mood of the day. Lady Eleanor experienced some royal favor after successfully predicting the birth of Charles I’s son, yet lost a significant amount of that favor after correctly predicting the death of her first husband John Davies. Indeed, authorities frequently portrayed Lady Eleanor as far too eccentric and unbending to be associated with court life, and Charles asked her to relinquish her house at Whitehall after the increasingly bizarre behavior that started in 1625. Lady Eleanor, however, never sought the same type of following as Anna Trapnel or other female prophets, but only sought the approval and serious consideration of Charles and his court due to her aristocratic snobbery. Teresa Feroli discusses prophetic discourse as a particularly dangerous political tool, especially from the voices of women who could potentially wield power. “The women prophets’ concern with politics did not merely represent a literary exercise; indeed, many female visionaries gained recognition as political players. Evidence for this claim comes from the seriousness with which ruling authorities regarded these women’s pronouncements on matters of national importance” (19). Clearly, in light of Feroli’s arguments, Lady Eleanor potentially held some measure of political sway given the extreme nature of her punishments.²⁹ Her ability to self-publish, the politically seditious quality of her tracts, and refusal to bend to patriarchal

²⁹ Esther Cope discusses the sentences of various criminals by the High Court during the same period of time as Lady Eleanor’s conviction. Cope concludes that Lady Eleanor “was treated severely,” in that no one received a fine of £3,000. No one else, in the entire year in which Lady Eleanor was sentenced, received such a large fine. Cope cites Theophilus Brabourne, “summoned because of his unauthorized publication of a book containing ‘erroneous, heretical and judaical opinions’ [and] incurred a fine of £1,000, the same day that Lady Eleanor was fined three times that amount” (73).

authority both at home and from the court reinforced the threat she posed to that authority. Additionally, Lady Eleanor occupied herself with discussing issues of national concern, yet unlike the punishments for men, her “imprisonment was, in itself, a means the commissioners used to encourage acquiescence” (Cope 74).

In committing Lady Eleanor to Bedlam rather than sending her to prison once more, the magistrates made a bold statement about the ineffectiveness of the legal system – it required recognition of its power to work. Clearly Lady Eleanor did not fear her punishments, as she continued writing what would be considered treason. Roy Porter argues the purposes behind trying Lady Eleanor as a lunatic rather than criminal were myriad. First, trying Lady Eleanor as a criminal would give validity to her claims against Charles and Laud, for “she might have acquired the status of a noble, brave protester, a defender of spiritual and intellectual freedom, for treason implied the possibility of truth” (59). Porter’s point rings true here, as treason *does* imply the possibility of truth, in that treason suggests a valid opposing argument and, for Lady Eleanor as a prophet of Daniel, the existence of an illegal tyrannical regime. Although the court recognized the treasonous content of Lady Eleanor’s writings (judging by their statements in her trials discussed above), to try her as a criminal would give credence to her argument and confirm her as a political threat. Additionally, their attempts to jail Lady Eleanor were based on her printing illegal books – in other words, she deigned to have ideas and publish what authorities did not wish to hear. In vandalizing the cathedral at Lichfield, Lady Eleanor put her words into actions. Esther S. Cope reminds us that heroes of the day taking a political or religious stance were men, not women (82). No woman should be given such consequence, thus the multiplying importance of discrediting her as a lunatic as quickly as possible. Second, Lady Eleanor had already been imprisoned and fined (although the fine was never paid), to no avail. Third, “the meaning of committing her as a mad woman to a madhouse, by contrast, was to deny her protest

any validity” (Porter 59). What is particularly compelling here is Porter’s phrasing. Lady Eleanor became the “mad woman” going to the “madhouse,” as though the two neatly fit together, rather than the traitor going to a martyr’s death. How simple to separate her from the very tools she needed to gain any sort of credibility: a pen and an audience to believe her, as was the case in her previous sentence in the Gatehouse; and further associate any of her future writings with the taint of insanity. Women and the home fit together symbiotically into the seventeenth-century views of women, the addition of “mad” to the titles operated as a means to twist those images into the suppression of a woman who moved outside that sphere.

As a highly visible woman, Lady Eleanor was particularly targeted as a prophetic writer. Her position within society as an aristocrat, as well as her ability to forcibly inject her prophecies into the public sphere with illegal self-publication led to frequent prosecution. Lady Eleanor’s unique position as the only female prophet sent to Bedlam suggests several dangers she posed to those determining her sentencing. First, simple imprisonment did not work to discredit Lady Eleanor. In fact, she refused to negotiate with the High Commission to lower her sentence, as “complying would [be] for her to deny the authenticity of her voice” (Cope 74). Additionally, Lady Eleanor’s vandalism finally combined direct action with her writings, a movement more akin to a man’s rather than a woman’s at this time. Her class also provided a distinction to the High Commission. As an aristocrat and a woman who aspired to be given serious consideration by her peers, Lady Eleanor disassociated herself from other lower class women who embraced other lower-class female prophets, and instead hoped to rally men to her cause – men of action who were already decidedly upset with Charles’ regime. The threat Lady Eleanor posed in her absolute refusal to submit to patriarchy could very well set a damaging example to other women or other less visible female prophets. Because of the court’s reaction to her very public prophecies, mass publication, and position within Charles’s court, time in Bedlam seemed the

most appropriate to contain this particular prophets. Given specific sentences for her other terms of imprisonment that were specifically designed to silence her, it is unsurprising that the courts would deem the humiliating jail of Bedlam the most appropriate.³⁰

The magistrates in the Star-Chamber Court deliberating Lady Eleanor's case began to plant the seeds of her potential insanity. Notably, the court initiated this case in 1633 rather than an individual suing for slander damages, a sign of the truly defiant nature of Lady Eleanor's work. In *The Blasphemous Charge Against Her* (1649), Davies reprinted the sentencing decrees in which the Star-Chamber Court deemed Lady Eleanor's "*bold attempts and impostures, tending to the dishonor of God, and scandal of Religion, whereof she was found and adjudged guilty by the Court, she was thought well worthy to be severely punished*" (emphasis mine 253-4).³¹ It was Lady Eleanor's boldness in her statements that serves as the crucial statement in this sentencing. Perhaps had she not been so bold as to interpret the scriptures, Lady Eleanor could have escaped the notice of the Star-Chamber Court.

The Star-Chamber Court used its power to reinscribe Lady Eleanor within her proper role of silence and obedience. The register of the Star-Chamber's suggested punishments (Lady Eleanor lists these in *The Blasphemous Charge*) included "Imprisonment till she enter Bond with sufficient Security to write no more" (251), and "Imprisonment, and not to have pen, ink and paper" (252). These suggestions (eight of the judges agreed with these punishments, only one argued he "desired [her] to be spared from their Sentence") focused on removing the tools that

³⁰ This is not to discount the fact that other famous female prophets were sent to various prisons both in England and on the continent. For example, Anna Trapnel was under both house arrest and imprisoned in Bridewell, as well as came before several separate local courts. Sarah Cheevers and Katherine Evans left their families to spread God's word on the continent, and were subsequently jailed by the Spanish courts.

³¹ Interestingly, Lady Eleanor does not write about her experiences in Bedlam until after the regicide occurs. The beginning notes of the text, which are dated January 1649, state that Charles was "*hereby required to make a publique Submission at Pauls so many times; that Jericho for ever cursed, and farther a close prisoner to continue at your pleasure. So be it known, you are hereby required to make a publique acknowledgement of such your capital Trespass and high Offence; and first to Ask me forgiveness*" (*Blasphemous Charge* 250). Lady Eleanor reinforces the prophecies of Charles's death she made in 1625, clearly marking his death as a moment of his public submission and a lack of "mercy in this world" for his inability to apologize. By demanding his public submission, Lady Eleanor refers to her first sentencing for publishing illegally and predicting Charles's death. Of course, Lady Eleanor never submitted or paid her fines, further infuriating the courts.

Lady Eleanor had used to write “scandalous matter,” which was “derogatory to His Majesty and the State” which she presumed to write (253). Indeed, the seemingly most effective way to prevent Lady Eleanor from rejoining the public sphere was to deny her the tools with which to participate. Indeed, the loss of paper and pen was an institutional reiteration of the action her husband took against her. One particular judge, Lord Rochester, agreed with all the sentences delivered before him, but added “if the Court will bear it, he would send her to Bedlam” (252). While Lady Eleanor does not elaborate as to why Lord Rochester suggested sending her to Bedlam, the first suggestions of her insanity, as opposed to her insubordination, had begun (although the proposition was made at the Court’s forbearance rather than the potential for helping her mental condition). Even in the actual final sentence, the language is telling: “She was committed to the *Gatehouse*” (252). Not simply sentenced, jailed, or imprisoned, but “committed.” Even during the seventeenth century, “commit” carried suggestions of psychological confinement rather than simple criminal imprisonment.³² The nascent impression of Lady Eleanor’s insanity had been based upon her desire to write and publish her prophecies. Sir John Lambe, Dean of Arches and a member of the court, in an effort to mock Lady Eleanor’s extensive use of anagrams, changed Lady Eleanor’s anagram that served as her proof of prophetic power from LADY ELEANOR AUDELIE: REVEALE O DANIEL to NEVER SOE MAD A LADIE in an attempt to discredit her.³³ Lady Eleanor frequently used the anagram of her name to give veracity to her prophecy and signed the end of her tracts with this anagram. Indeed, Lady Eleanor’s use of the REVEAL O DANIEL anagram called upon Daniel to give her more prophecies and encourage her to write more. In undermining this anagram, John Lambe dismissed not only the basis of her prophecies up to the trial, but the prophecies to come in the

³² Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1989: “Commit.” Citation 3a.

³³ “REVEALE O DANIEL” was one of Lady Eleanor’s anagrams based on her maiden name (as she spelled it) “Audelie.” “Audley” is actually suggestive of “ancient,” as Lady Eleanor emphasized her family’s extensive history in England to promote her veracity as a prophet. She used this anagram to prove her prophetic vision as the product of Daniel’s divine visitation and Lady Eleanor’s aristocratic heritage (Cope 70).

future. No surviving record exists to verify this statement's truth, yet the fame of the statement and the humiliating power of the anagram worked to confuse and embarrass her, taking the power of her aristocratic name and prophetic authenticity and satirized the very basis of Lady Eleanor's reason for writing. Lady Eleanor's own work became the foundation of her persecution for madness.

The political nature of Lady Eleanor's prophecies became especially dangerous in the years leading to the Civil War. One particularly ominous problem with Lady Eleanor's prophecies, as well as for the courts that sought her downfall, was that her prophecies were correct (with the exception of her apocalyptic predictions). Had she been wrong throughout her prophetic career, committing her based simply on her writings might have been far easier than her extensive legal history may insinuate. Proposing Lady Eleanor's madness, as Sir John Lambe and Lord Rochester suggested, did not necessarily equate to her madness. Lady Eleanor's insanity had to be based upon her actions at Lichfield rather than her actual writings. The validity of her writings served to be particularly problematic for those seeking to discredit her, making the suggestion of madness far more important. In an alternate contention, the judges who committed Davies argued that they had been far too lenient in her initial imprisonments and fines, as the punishments did nothing to cow her efforts. Instead, because Lady Eleanor's prophecies directly concerned the fate of the King, the magistrates recommended the King should determine her punishment. The magistrates, for their part, focused on the disruptive impudence of Lady Eleanor's prophecies. As one judge stated (concerning her writings discussed in *The Blasphemous Charge Against Her*), she engaged in

touching those matters of high nature, which concerned his Majesty [i.e. her prediction of his death] the Court did not anyways proceed against her, as holding them of too high a nature for this *Court* to meddle withal, but

forasmuch as she took upon her (which much unbeseemed her Sex) not only to interpret the Scriptures, and withal the most intricate and hard places of the Prophet *Daniel*, but also to be a Prophetess, falsely pretending to have received certain Revelations from God, and had compiled certain Books of such her fictions and false Prophecies and Revelations. (Davies 253)

Lady Eleanor was committed not for reading the King's horoscope and predicting his death, as such predictions were certainly high treason. Instead, the Court specifically avoids these matters and "did not anyways proceed against her." Parliament enacted statutes against witchcraft and false prophecy to prevent (as Harry Rusche discusses) religious dissent and sectarianism and, as Esther S. Cope notes, "[Davies's] contemporaries had few doubts about the dangers of religious or political heterodoxy. Prophecy, whether practiced by men or women, posed special problems in an age when freedom of expression was strictly limited, dissenters were suspected of fomenting sedition if not treason, and those who stubbornly clung to aberrant views were deemed mad" (38).³⁴ Indeed, Lady Eleanor's desire to discuss matters of Scripture that were "intricate and hard," but more specifically reserved for "the gravest and most learned scholars" – men – led to her classification as mad. Indeed her ideas were "aberrant," suggesting a political and religious deviance that could not be challenged.

The Court also believed her guilty of interpreting the Scriptures for prophetic and personal purposes, "which much unbeseemed her Sex," and then "pretending" to be a "Prophetess" (emphasis mine).³⁵ Aside from the fact the Court had no way of determining

³⁴ Harry Rusche cites the importance behind controlling prophecy: "This popular interest in prophecies and their danger as propaganda to the state were so great that in earlier centuries it was necessary to enact laws against printing or circulating them. Prophecies designed to inflame the aspirations and confidence of the state's enemies had to be suppressed by law, for times of uncertainty and trouble seemed always to prompt a stream of such publications" (753).

³⁵ Christina Berg and Phillipa Berry discuss this particular passage in further depth. See Berg, Christina, Phillipa Berry. "Spiritual Whoredom": An essay on Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century." *1642: literature and power in the seventeenth century*. F. Baker et al, Eds. Colchester: University of Essex, 1981. 37-54.

whether or not Lady Eleanor was actually pretending to be a prophet, the most important aspect of this ruling is the gendered language accompanying it. As Philippa Berry and Christina Berg argue, “[t]he decision of the judges [regarding the truth of her prophecies] in this case seems to have been reached as much on the basis of her femaleness (and so of the inconceivable possibility of her reception of the word of God as much as because of the treasonable matter that she prophesied)” (47). For these men, it was inconceivable that a woman such as Lady Eleanor could discuss the desires of God and interpret scriptures, but more so that she was a woman attempting to do so. A woman could not join the public sphere, as discussed earlier, nor could a female prophet’s inherently irrational speech be taken seriously within a paradigm that cannot acknowledge the truth of that speech. The very conception of Lady Eleanor’s brand of female prophecy, in her aggressive entrance into the public sphere, was madness.

Using madness as a label against Lady Eleanor occurred with her immediate imprisonment and removal to Bedlam after she desecrated the Lichfield Cathedral with hot tar and wheat paste, and then sat on its throne, proclaiming herself “Primate and Metropolitan.” “Primate and Metropolitan” was the title given to Archbishop Laud, Lady Eleanor’s censorial enemy, as part of the pomp of the Episcopal Church. Lady Eleanor also sat in the seats designated for dignitaries and their wives and smeared the altar cloth with red paint, wheat paste and tar with the help of several of her female followers.³⁶ She was quickly arrested and taken into state custody at the request of Archbishop Laud in an attempt to “silence her ‘terrible profanations’” (Porter 55). The main purpose, as illustrated by Laud’s appeal to King Charles, was to “silence” Lady Eleanor, and end her “profanations” against the Stuart regime. Lady Eleanor’s patron abroad, Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, wrote to her brother, King Charles, to

³⁶ Beyond the actual vandalism of the cathedral, Lady Eleanor and her friends sat in the pews reserved for the wives of dignitaries and other wealthy families, which, as Anthony Fletcher writes, would be considered a major upheaval of social norms and stratification.

plead for Lady Eleanor's release.³⁷ The response to Queen Elizabeth from the Star-Chamber Court reads that Lady Eleanor was

a woman too well knowne and whose devellish practizes in her pretended prophecies have drawne upon her this weeke a severe censure in the high commission court: and might have cast her into further danger there being a mixture in them of treasonable conceptions, if the judges had not thought her possessed with a frantique spirit, to be conjured out of her by restrayning her libertie and disabling her to do hurt (Cope 71).

The importance of these statements cannot be overlooked. Lady Eleanor's fame as a "pretended" prophetess led to her "censure," or silencing. By "restrayning her libertie" the council could protect themselves and their reputation from the "hurt" that she could potentially instigate. The use of "disabling" is particularly compelling, as taking away Lady Eleanor's ability to do harm through her writing can be considered an assignment of lunacy, or "inability to participate." Thus, these justices were assigning Lady Eleanor the label of madness as a way to "disable" her participation. As Cope suggests, this document suggests that dealing with Lady Eleanor as a problem surpassed the issue of her madness in significance. Lady Eleanor's "libertie" had far surpassed her place in society as a woman, and her "frantique spirit" was the cause. The words of the High Court signaled not only madness but the purpose of her imprisonment – that the institution existed and operated to remove her physically as well as her madness, and it further instituted its prerogative to protect itself by "restraining her libertie." Additionally, the Court sought to "disable" Lady Eleanor, at once crippling her abilities and then returning her to her

³⁷ Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, Charles's sister and eldest daughter of King James I, ruled one states governed by the Holy Roman Empire. Regional Catholics deposed her and her Protestant husband, Frederick V, Elector of the Palatinate, thus upsetting the delicate balance of Protestant and Catholic countries under the HRE's Evangelical Union. Elizabeth became a liminal figure of authority within the public sphere. She was a ruler without a country to rule, a public figure without a public sphere. Regaining the Palatinate became a high priority for Charles's foreign policy, although it was never won. Elizabeth was a popular figure, and Lady Eleanor often cited her as an important figure as both a widow and a mother (Cope 71).

proper place of action, hopefully without her “frantique spirit” that was so potentially damaging. Restraint, or discipline, order, and imprisonment of the liberties that Lady Eleanor had taken became their priority, as submission was their goal.

As Teresa Feroli notes, authorities most frequently imprisoned female prophets because they feared that the disruptive religious sects and dissatisfied segments of society would notice their politically challenging speech and writing, as well as their seemingly authentic ability to predict the future. While Lady Eleanor’s popularity was limited during her life, in some ways, Charles’s court and the Episcopacy had every right to fear such subversion. Lady Eleanor’s prophecies *did* return to haunt Charles’ regime after the execution of Laud in 1645 and the regicide in 1649. Cromwell’s army and the Parliament that sentenced Charles to death read aloud Davies’s polemics against King Charles and Archbishop Laud, as well as her subsequent prophecies of their deaths as a way to legitimize their claim to English government. Thus, the danger of a rogue female prophet such as Lady Eleanor was based as much on her femaleness as the content of her message, setting a thoroughly dangerous example for nonconformist groups who sought reasons for rebellion.

Lady Eleanor’s sentencing to Bedlam occurred without her presence. The gentlemen who signed the order actually had no medical experience, but based their decision from their previous experience with her eccentricities as well as her desecration of the cathedral. Their legal procedures suggest that the issue of madness, as well as their resulting judgments, was fundamentally a legal or political status rather than medical. Madness became, as such, a subject of public issue rather than a personal or domestic problem. The court’s statement as recorded by Lady Eleanor reads, “In ordering her to be sent to Bedlam, the council declared Lady Eleanor’s actions ‘being of soe fowle and strange a nature that we cannot conceive them to passe from any person but one wholely distracted of understanding’” (Cope 86). Indeed, it was the men’s lack of

“understanding” that led to such a punishment. In reality, Lady Eleanor’s actions were not “wholly distracted of understanding,” but quite the opposite. She had desecrated a cathedral built especially for Archbishop Laud, which upheld a form of worship that she found to be sacrilege for a man that she believed to be the devil incarnate. Additionally, she claimed the titles of “Primate and Metropolitan,” which were especially reserved for “Bishop and Archbishop.” Laud had claimed the ability to deny her legitimacy as a prophet, as determining true prophets was an office of the Church, that determination was always in the Church’s interest to regulate (Cope, *Prophetic Writings* xiv). He denied Lady Eleanor her prophetic entitlement by refusing to acknowledge her legitimacy, and she refused to acknowledge Laud’s ability to do so by claiming his titled authority to recognize prophets. In demanding recognition of her prophetic legitimacy, Lady Eleanor inherently requested the delegitimation of the unjust and improperly managed institution that oppressed her. Laud had burned her writings in 1633, articles that he found to be heretical and representative of false prophecy; Lady Eleanor destroyed the cathedral swathed in expensive purple cloths and a newly reinstated altar.³⁸ In short, Lady Eleanor took an eye for an eye.

In writing and speaking, Lady Eleanor most certainly found herself in a position of public recognition, where her publications became famous for both their accuracy and unintelligible writing style. Lady Eleanor’s writing and speaking publicly, however, insinuated that her personal virtue was questionable. The highest virtues for women entailed chastity, silence, and obedience. In disregarding commands for silence and obedience, Lady Eleanor’s chastity became suspect. Chastity in Lady Eleanor’s case, however, moves beyond physical virtue. As Hilary Hinds notes in her book *God’s Englishwomen*, a lack of chastity could only lead to “infamy,” and any memory associated with that woman will bear that stigma. Chastity hinges on

³⁸ Lady Eleanor was fervently anti-Catholic, and saw the campaigns of Archbishop Laud to return to the use of splendor, altars, and other rich decoration was seen as heresy by many, as the grand ornamentation mimed Catholic cathedrals.

the distinction between public and private. Privacy, reticence, a 'mind retired' were impervious not only to 'envy', but also to 'fame.' 'Fame' embraced not only infamy but also the opposite of the 'mind retired': a concern with 'public' issues (37). Lady Eleanor's shedding of the seventeenth-century view of chastity through her vocal disobedience brought "fame," which she certainly experienced in the court, but also "infamy," suggesting scandal, shame, and disgrace.³⁹ To bring overt attention to oneself or one's family was not the role of a woman, who was only to minimally reflect her husband. Additionally, however, "infamy" implies a loss of all or certain rights of a citizen, based on some sort of criminal act. Indeed, Lady Eleanor's multiple imprisonments, including her time at Bedlam, resulted in her losing privileges even of pen and paper. Hinds' quote encourages us to remember the importance of chastity in both action and thought, and how "a concern with 'public' issues" can be detrimental to a woman's reputation and subsequent treatment. Lady Eleanor's interest in public issues and forceful writings indicated a lack of concern for her reputation, her home, and general welfare, but a total commitment to her prophetic career. As Matchinske notes, seventeenth-century gender roles demanded what most behavioral manuals restated: "chaste, silent, obedient," nothing more or less (369). Since Lady Eleanor so clearly deviated from these standards, she entered a sort of liminal space between male and female, challenging the male yet still reliant upon the female. This duality can be seen in both her prophecy and attitudes toward her rights as a woman. Matchinske also posits that Lady Eleanor's struggles with voice and authority existed in a predominantly masculine genre, and her anger with those struggles often resulted in an androgynous mode of writing that seemed inappropriate to her readers. This impropriety was largely rooted in the expectations of absolute hierarchy, in which state concerns take clear priority over the individual. Thus, without acting in a particular gendered space, it is no wonder that many recognized the necessity to discredit her through madness rather than criminality.

³⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, 1989: "Infamy." Def. 1 and 3.

Conclusion: Prophecy Reclaimed

'taking prophesie for no other than madness'
*Eleanor Davies*⁴⁰

Certainly Lady Eleanor, in her prolific prophetic history, recognized that she was called to the extraordinary. Throughout her life, Lady Eleanor's personal vendetta against those who sought to break her pen led to many frustrations and great expense. Her daughter Lucy, for example, found herself frequently employed pleading for her mother's release. Lady Eleanor died in poverty after spending several months in debtors' prison. Her two husbands, whose deaths Lady Eleanor predicted, died in relative obscurity (despite the fantastical nature of their prophesized downfall) with their property lost shortly thereafter. She did, however, manage to thoroughly aggravate the men who upheld the status quo of the day, both in the public sphere and private.

Lady Eleanor often found herself at odds with the public sphere she so longed to join. As Stevie Davies describes Lady Eleanor's writing, it was "a mindprint of electrical discharges, chain-reacting along arbitrary links of words. This mindstorm evolves its own kind of logic, after which the trained, if giddy reader of Lady Eleanor learns to stumble" (58). Thus, it is possible to understand Lady Eleanor's prophecy, albeit with an extensive knowledge of scriptures and their meanings, as well as the ability to untangle her snarled prose to actually discern the points of the tract. Her prophecy was not meant for the casual reader, but the serious and well-read intellectuals who controlled the trajectory of the political and religious worlds. She hoped to gain admittance to this exclusive sphere, and there unravel her "mindstorm" with those who took her seriously.

Writing and entering the public sphere, then, becomes an act of a madwoman. Lady Eleanor's visible entrance into a public sphere that operated within a paradigm that could not

⁴⁰ Found reiterated in *And Without Proving* and *Wherefore to Prove*.

understand her only further reinforces the concept that what humans do not understand they fear. As Sue Wiseman reminds us, “The nature of [Lady Eleanor’s] punishment reminds us that for a woman access to written words depended on a relationship not only to God but to a whole socio-cultural system” (192). Lady Eleanor’s reliance upon the authority of God and her aristocratic name did not satisfy the men who found her texts so extremely offensive. Instead, that confidence aggravated their conceptualization of how God and society should operate. Female prophecy undermined how and why women should act in a particular way, calling into question years of oppression and silence by claiming the right to speak. Lady Eleanor’s commitment to Bedlam reminds us that she could not rely on God alone for endorsement of her message, but needed those in the surrounding social structures to approve it as well. Indeed, “Lady Eleanor confronted her contemporaries with questions about her conduct as a woman, her legitimacy as a prophet, and her defiance of the authorities of church and crown” (Cope 88-9). Her penalty for such a confrontation was to be considered insane up until the twentieth century. The status of her madness can thus serve as a further testament to the effectiveness of the “regime of truth” that conflated females speaking in public through masculine discourses with madwomen. So in presuming to join a masculine public sphere, Davies’ example reminds us to be cautious of the discourses governing the public sphere, in which a label of “madness” could still be accepted as a means for silencing a woman who claimed equivalent rationality of a man.

Lady Eleanor’s assigned madness certainly worked to quickly undermine what little positive reception she may have had. As a particularly volatile woman, her supposed insanity was easily assumed. Lady Eleanor’s actual versus imagined madness was irrelevant, however. She recognized that the men in her life mistook her “prophesie for no other than madness,” and that self-reflexive awareness of her claims to legitimacy and the precariousness of her situation confirmed her acute understanding of the institutions that prevented her from speaking.

Regardless, Lady Eleanor's attempts to speak, write, and defend God's word became the project of a madwoman, for who would commit themselves so entirely to such a futile project?

Ironically, Lady Eleanor's public recognition did prove successful, but only at the end of her life. Parliament read her prophecies aloud in order to reinforce their godly claim to governance after the regicide. After all her struggles, Lady Eleanor received the recognition she so strongly believed she deserved. Despite living life as a martyr for her prophetic cause, Lady Eleanor's peculiar brand of communication finally emerged triumphant over Charles, Laud, and anyone who sought to silence her voice or stay her pen.

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