

**'FORETELLING THE JUDGEMENTS OF GOD': AUTHORSHIP AND THE
PROPHETIC VOICE IN ELIZABETH POOLE'S *A VISION* (1648)**

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ABSTRACT. *A Vision: Wherein is Manifested the Disease and Cure of the Kingdome (1648)* is Elizabeth Poole's account of the prophecies she delivered before Cromwell and the Puritan Army's General Council as they debated the regicide of Charles I at the end of the first English Civil War in 1648-49. This article discusses the prophetic voice in Elizabeth Poole's texts as she uses strategies of 'self' and 'others' to establish her authority before her audience and her own sectarian group. While the circumstances surrounding Poole's participation in the Whitehall deliberations are unclear, her appearance represents a rare case of a woman's direct involvement in the mid-seventeenth-century discussions of the scope and legitimacy of government. With her defying anti regicidal speech, Poole builds her authorial voice beyond the divine mandate of her prophetic identity.

Keywords: Early Modern women's writing, authorship, prophetic writing, Seventeenth-century.

'PRESAGIO DEL JUICIO DE DIOS': AUTORÍA Y LA VOZ PROFÉTICA EN A *VISION* (1648) DE ELIZABETH POOLE

RESUMEN. *A Vision: Wherein is Manifested the Disease and Cure of the Kingdome (1648) es el relato de Elizabeth Poole de las profecías que comunicó ante Cromwell y el Consejo General del Ejército puritano mientras debatía el regicidio de Carlos I de Inglaterra al término de la primera Guerra Civil en 1648-49. Este artículo aborda la voz profética de los textos de Elizabeth Poole en el uso que ella hace de las estrategias del "yo" y los "demás" cuando intenta establecer su autoridad ante el público y el grupo sectario al que ella representa. Aunque las circunstancias que rodearon la participación de Poole en las deliberaciones de Whitehall son poco claras, su comparecencia supone un caso único de implicación directa de una mujer en los debates sobre el alcance y la legitimidad del gobierno a mediados del siglo XVII. Con su desafiante discurso anti regicida, Poole construye su voz de autora más allá del mandato divino que le otorga su identidad profética.*

Palabras clave: Escritoras del Renacimiento, autoría, escritura profética, siglo XVII.

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The work and public exposure of prophetess Elizabeth Poole (c.1622-1668) was circumscribed to a momentous, transcendent occasion in the history of England: the intervening weeks of December 1648 and January 1649 in which the Army Council debated the possible execution of Charles I. The English biographer and translator Lucy Hutchinson, while writing her husband's biography *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, captures the intensity of this historical episode:

In January 1649, the court sat, the king was brought to his trial, and a charge drawn up against him for levying war against the Parliament and people of England [...] The gentlemen that were appointed his judges, and divers others, saw in him a disposition so bent on the ruin of all that opposed him, and of all the righteous and just things they had contended for, that it was upon the consciences of many of them, that if they did not execute justice upon him, God would require at their hands all the blood and desolation which should ensure by their suffering him to escape, when God had brought him into their hands". (Hutchinson 1808: 193).

Hutchinson was a Baptist like her husband, a co-signatory of the death warrant of Charles I, and she does not hesitate in criticising the king for having breached the trust of his people and emphasising the accountability of the king's

judges before their own consciousness and even before God. Elizabeth Poole had the unique opportunity of intervening in these specific circumstances, of making her opinions heard and of contributing actively to the debate concerning the execution of the king –from a perspective that was starkly opposed to Lucy Hutchinson’s–, even though Poole was also partial to the revolutionary process. Poole was able to do so by assuming a prophetic role and exert it as a basis for a complex, serious political discourse. The fact that a woman should have been able to intervene in such a grave historical juncture, and to do so in an open manner, with a small but significant series of publications sustaining her intervention, is evidence to the fact that that Seventeenth-century prophecy was one of the few discourses that could play an enabling, empowering function for women; one that could allow them to break through the strictly defined boundaries of the private and the public and reach towards political debate and discussion.

Elizabeth Poole described and interpreted her prophecies before Oliver Cromwell and the Army Council in December 1648, precisely when the Council had started its deliberations on the convenience of carrying forward the regicide. Even though consistent efforts had been made to force a compromise between the imprisoned Charles I, the Parliamentarians and the Army Council in order to maintain a constitutional monarchy, by the end of 1648 the situation was coming to a halt. The army General Thomas Ireton was already convinced of the futility of reasoning with the king and had supported the second *Agreement of the People* published on December 10, 1648, which insisted on a thorough parliamentary reform¹. It was shortly after this that Elizabeth Poole was summoned to appear before the Army Council, where, on December 29, she explained and commented on the vision she had received concerning the future of England; a version of her speech on that day, and of her short debate with the army grandees, was published in December 1648 under her own name and the long title *A Vision: Wherein is Manifested the Disease and Cure of the Kingdome, Being the Summe of what was delivered to the General Council of the Army, December.29, 1648, Together with a Copie of what was delivered in writing (the fifth of this present January)*. Her subsequent intervention earned Poole a harsh reprimand from the Baptist leader William Kiffin and a whole discredit campaign from Henry Ireton, in which several references were made to her past “sins” and against her reliability as a prophet.

¹ “That to prevent the many inconveniences apparently arising from the long continuance of the same persons in authority, this present Parliament be dissolved upon or before the last day of April, in the year of our Lord 1649” (art. I).

Poole's friend Thomasina Pendarves tried to defend her in a letter emphasising the prophetic nature of her message, published in 1649 along with a reprint of the original *Vision* in another short tract entitled *An Alarum of War Given to the Army*. Poole found herself writing another tract interpreting the actual meaning of her prophecy, also published in 1649 as *Another Alarum of War given to the Army* in which she adds a long subtitle specifying that she is "foretelling the judgements of God". The text of the *Vision*, together with part of the material contained in the two subsequent *Alarums*, are all the actual printed material that can be credited to Poole as an author: an extremely brief corpus, but nevertheless essential to any serious approach to seventeenth-century prophecy by women.

A significant aspect of Poole's writing is her tendency to accommodate her prophetic personality to the political situation at hand. In both tracts written by Poole, the visionary material on which her discourse is based is succinct and contained, summarised only in a few short lines: in strict quantitative terms, the purely visionary is short compared to her development and political elaboration of it; in the case of the *Another Alarum*, moreover, the central image that she describes as having "seen" is not even openly described by her as a vision, as it was the case in the first tract. This can be partly explained as a result of the urgency of the issues at hand, and of the intricacy and relevance of the political subject that Poole was handling. Even her contemporary audience understood that her "messages from the Lord" were concentrating too heavily on the political and social repercussions of regicide; this emphasis on politics over spirituality raised suspicious remarks from some of her readers and listeners, who came to question the prophetic or transcendent status of her message.

Speaking from a post-Habermasian perspective, Catharine Gray has pointed out that the public activity of women as political agents was particularly relevant in the mid-seventeenth century when "women's public identities flourished in the loose voluntary associations of religious radicals, political moderates, and even royalists" (2007: 25); this led in specific occasions to direct action, since they might be "active in collective politics during this period: women petitioners directly addressed Parliament during the mid-seventeenth-century on a number of issues" (Gray 2007: 25). The importance of these interventions cannot be diminished: women were allowed to participate in the creation of public opinion and articulate points of view that were not directly controlled or harnessed by the state. These cannot be regarded as being equivalent to the formation of a "sense of the people" or a "public spirit" as opposed to governmental policies that Jürgen Habermas

located as occurring in the eighteenth century,² but it is certainly a precedent for it. It signals the entrance of women in an area of public debate and political confrontation: a moment in which, due to the upheavals brought about by the English Revolution, they were able to voice their own views and those of the groups they belonged to outside of the control of the state. It is from this perspective that I will now approach the brief prophetic corpus authored by Elizabeth Poole.

A PROPHETIC VOCABULARY OF HER OWN

Elizabeth Poole's work has begun to attract scholarly attention in the last ten years, although an edition or facsimile transcription of her tracts is not yet available, and her critical assessment still depends on readings from the original sources in folio (or sexto, in the case of *Another Alarum*). Critics such as Marcus Nevitt (2006) and Manfred Brod (1999), each of them devoting a monograph article on Elizabeth Poole, have focused on her use of the trope of the body politic. While Nevitt surveys her adept use of the metaphors of divorce to justify an anti-regicidal discourse, his emphasis is put on her contribution to the political debate rather than her authority as a prophet or a writer. Brod's approach leans towards archival research, since he pays considerable scholarly attention to Poole's biographical details and the circumstances of her appearances at Whitehall. Susan Wiseman (2006) and Katherine Gillespie (2004) respectively have expanded on Brod's line of inquiry, and have concentrated on elucidating who was pulling the strings behind Poole's public interventions so as to relate them to wider considerations on women's voice and political authority in the seventeenth century. All of these studies take Poole's corpus as a whole and pay close-reading attention to *A Vision*, but they largely ignore the rest of Poole's bibliography, *An Alarum of War* and, very especially, *Another Alarum of War*. While *An Alarum* offers a reprint of *A Vision*, complemented by copy from other writers, the latter is an essential text for the study of Poole's articulation of her own authority in print and in public speech. Poole's value as a writer cultivating the prophetic genre –who at the same time emancipates

² "From the early part of eighteenth century on, it became usual to distinguish what was then called 'the sense of the people' from the official election results. The average results of the county elections were taken to provide an approximate measure of the former. The 'sense of the people', 'the common voice', 'the general cry of the people', and finally 'the public spirit' denoted from this time onward an entity to which the opposition could appeal" (Habermas 1989: 64-65).

herself from it— rests heavily on this final tract, where she recreates and develops her anti-regicide standpoint.

Elizabeth Poole often referred to the prophecies she delivered to the Army Council as her “message” and the title page of *An Alarum of War* states that the tract’s contents had been “by the will of God; revealed in Elizabeth Pooll, sometimes a Messenger of the Lord to the Generall Councell, concerning the Cure of the Land, and the manner thereof”. By stating her prophetic status in print, Poole could identify herself as a legitimate representative of her church, a member of an “elect” who could exercise influence within the public political sphere. The issue of whether Poole was acting on behalf of someone else, and especially of whom, has been an object of speculation.³

Membership within the Baptist “house of spirit” offered the possibility that a person could be elected to represent the congregation before an official gathering of a Particular Baptist group. Each of these congregations elected delegates (or “messengers”) that were sent to periodic gatherings, otherwise known as “general meetings” (White 1996: 67). According to Patricia Crawford, “no women were ever sent as messengers when the church wanted to resolve vital policy” (1998: 144), but it is worth noting that Apart from “granting access to a public discourse” (Gillespie 2004: 137) and earning the capacity to represent the particular Baptist congregation, Baptists could perform a spiritual “cure” through rebaptism and the “laying on of hands”. Men and women considered to have the gift of purgation of past evils took part in these rituals, since appointment and acceptance to the congregation was ritualistically displayed when an “elder” laid hands on the new member after Baptism. Since healing was akin to saving, there was a fine line between a woman’s assisting a male minister in his practice and her assuming the ministerial function of acting as a vehicle for another’s salvation. Curing was synonymous with an inner transformation of the spirit, and hence Poole could defend the notion that through divine intermediation a person could purify his “head” if he wanted to.

An additional power that was conferred through Baptist affiliation was the ability to divorce an “unregenerate” spouse on the grounds of free will in relation to baptism. If a person preferred not to be baptised, the regenerate spouse was entitled to mend his mistake and to leave her—even if that “spouse” was a king—.

³ Teresa Feroli (2006: 68) suggests that Poole may have been brought before the Council by either Colonel Rich or General Fairfax, since both men were interested in preserving the king’s life. Ian Gentles (1994: 301) marks the same point. Manfred Brod (1999: 398) supports this view drawing from the facts that Colonel Rich interrogated Poole after her second vision. David Underdown (1985:183) and Marcus Nevitt (2002: 235ff.) point at either Cromwell or Ireton as sponsors of Poole’s appearance, although evidence of this is not conclusive.

The wife could also seek that dissolution because men and women were equals "in the Lord".

These elements of seventeenth-century Baptist practice play a major role in Poole's visions and bear an influence on the fashioning of her prophetic speech. Through her elaborated metaphor of "curing" and "divorcing" the body politic, Poole fashions herself as a concerned individual who is restoring the "health" of an ailing nation whose leaders have severed a sacred contract with their people. The central images that Poole presented as being the core of her visions, and also on those that she developed apart from her visions and as a commentary on them are closely interrelated. Nevertheless, a distinction must be established from the outset between the content of the initial transcendent experience and the political discourse that developed from it. Their visionary content is relatively small and the vision itself is only introduced; from this initial, concentrated set of images comes a longer and articulated political discourse, where Poole clarifies her message and addresses the central issues concerning regicide. This applies to both of the tracts that she authored, but especially to *Another Alarum of War*, in which her "vision" is not even presented openly as such, but where the political discourse is maintained and even enhanced. The opening of her speech, according to the title page of the tract, "was delivered to the council of War" by Poole:

I have been (by the pleasure of the most High) made sensible of the distresses of this Land, and also a sympathizer with you in your labours: for having sometimes read your Remonstrance, I was for many daies made a sad mourner for her. (Poole 1648: a2r).

The beginning of Poole's address is startling in the directness with which it immediately links the political and the spiritual. In the very first sentence, she presents herself as having become conscious of the difficulties of England by the grace of God: by dint of His will she has gained political awareness. She has entered a new situation of solidarity with the members of the Army: she can now "sympathize" with them; she has been able to understand their troubles and share them. The visionary experience does not precede the political: on the contrary, it seems to be entirely framed by it, even motivated by it. We are not only facing an interaction between the political and the spiritual, but a precedent, both thematic and chronological, of the former over the latter.

Even more significant and surprising, perhaps, is the fact that the speaker reacts to an experience of reading: she has become "a sad mourner" for England because she has been reading the "Remonstrance" for some time. Here Poole is referring to *A Remonstrance of Fairfax and the Council of Officers*, a formal statement of grievances on the state of the kingdom, similar to the one that had been produced by the House of Commons and addressed

to the Crown in 1641⁴. This is a remarkable detail, since *A Remonstrance* had been only recently released; Poole might have been able to get a copy of it through the network of booksellers and radical activists that she befriended, even though this tract had been issued as an internal political document: whether Poole was aware of this or not, it may well be the case that she had access to privileged insider information, probably from the connections between her immediate environment and John Lilburne's circle of *Levellers*. The opening of *A Vision* performs, therefore, two functions: it establishes a firm political context for the spiritual experience that will be described, and it acts a particular *captatio benevolentiae* in front of the specific audience before whom her speech is delivered.

Having set the vision in its particular political context, Poole proceeds to describe her own personal state as she was about to receive it:

I was for many daies made a sad mourner for her; the pangs of a travelling woman was upon mee, and the pangs of death oft-times panging mee, being a member in her body, of whose dying state I was made purely sensible (Poole 1648: a2r).

The reiteration of the central word here (“pangs”) is intended to focalise the experience of suffering that affects the whole nation on Poole herself. These “pangs” can be understood either as literal or as metaphoric: it was customary for prophetic visions to be heralded, or physically announced, by the appearance of different forms of suffering which manifest themselves unexpectedly in the body of the seer, thus preparing her for the transcendent experience at hand. But it is quite characteristic of Poole's approach to prophecy that she does not put too much emphasis on these sufferings: she does not make any further reference to them after this in the whole of the *Vision* (and there are no references to them at all in the text of *Another Alarum*, where she explains the second vision that she had, after the execution of the king had taken place). The function of these references to her sufferings is another: they identify the person of Poole as an integral part of the suffering body of England, so as to further her own identification with the country. In this way Poole acquires a strong authority even before her vision: she is able to speak about the state of England because she is deeply identified with its troubles; her own body thus concentrates, synecdochally, the “pangs” of the whole country, thus expressing

⁴ For the whole Remonstrance, see *Puritanism and Liberty, being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents*, selected and edited with an Introduction by A.S.P. Woodhouse. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.

her intimate connection to that wider, superior body. It is only at this point that the vision begins; and its content is delivered briefly in the following lines:

And after many daies mourning, a vision was set before me, to shew her cure, and the manner of it, by this similitude: A man who is a member of the Army, having sometimes much bewailed her state, saying He could gladly be a sacrifice for her, ...was set before me, presenting the body of the Army; and on the other hand, a woman crooked, sick, weak, and imperfect in body, to present unto me, the weak and imperfect state of the Kingdom: I having the gift of faith upon me for her cure, was thus to appeal to the person on the other hand, that he should improve his faith in fullnesse to the kingdome, by using a diligence for the cure of this woman, as I by the gift of faith on me should direct him. (Poole 1648: A2r).

It is important to notice the key function of terms such as “similitude” and “presenting” in this fragment. These are specifically meant to underline the metaphoric content of the images that are presented to Poole in her vision; Poole herself specifies that the “cure” of England was revealed to her “by this similitude”, and that the figures that appeared to her actually “presented” (“represented” is the term we would use today) or signified something beyond themselves: the soldier represented the army, and the crooked woman represented the land. This is a very basic metaphoric vocabulary, just as the vision is rather simple in its content and structure; what is relevant here is that Poole understands that the images she has received are signs, not objects in themselves, and she explains and defines them as such. She does not specify that she understood these images afterwards or that she had to work them out on her own, when the visionary experience was over: she seems to have understood from the outset that the persons she was seeing were staging a “similitude” that could clarify the means to restore England to peace. This awareness of the figural content of the prophecy seems to tone down the intensity that we would associate with a spiritual ecstasy, while it increases the didactic purpose of the prophet and it emphasises the fact that her words are aimed towards practical application.

The vision itself is already interpreted for us by the prophet, and its content appears to be, initially, quite simple. The soldier that Poole has seen (“a man who was a member of the army”) was lamenting loudly for the state of a sick and infirm woman (“a woman crooked, sick, weak, and imperfect in body”) that embodies, as Poole herself quickly clarifies, the deficient and sad state of the country. England, like a sick and crooked woman, is in need of a cleansing cure, and the army is her rescuing attendant spirit; curing her is its responsibility, and this cure is to be brought about by using due diligence and fulfilling the advice that Poole herself has received “by the gift of faith” (in the lines immediately following these, Poole will clarify that this diligence entails, for the army,

retaining the “kingly power” in its own “godly” hands and preserving the life of the monarch, rather than betraying its function by “giving up” the power entirely to the people). It is worth noticing that the bodily metaphor that had been used at the very beginning of the text is revisited here, and employed to refer to the army officer that appears before Poole, just as Poole herself was presented as “a member” of the body of England: both of them are “members” of bodies that are bigger than themselves. This sense of inclusion is at the heart of Poole’s political ideology: the tropes of the body politic are, for her, an instrument through which she can speak about participation and membership, values that can only be upheld if the army continues to act without worldly care for their own ambition, and with the sole desire to contribute to the nation’s definitive cure.

The metaphors centred on images of bodily ties are extended in the next paragraphs of *A Vision*, and it is there that, for the first time, the theme of the relationship between the king and his subjects is resumed and explored:

The King is your Father and husband, which you were and are to obey in the Lord, & no other way, for when he forgot his Subordination to divine Faith hood and headship, thinking he had begotten you a generation to his own pleasure, and taking you a wife for his own lusts, thereby is the yoake taken from your necks... You have all that you have and are, and also in Subordination you owe him all that you have and are, and although he would not be your Father and husband, Subordinate, but absolute, yet know that you are for the Lords sake to honour his person. For he is the Father and husband of your bodies, as unto men, and therefore your right cannot be without him. (Poole 1648: 4).

Interestingly enough, the content of this passage seems to bear an implicit paradox that concerns the conceptual distribution of gender roles. Poole’s language involves traditional connotations of masculinity and loyalty, and harnesses them to the specific political situation at hand; but, by doing so, the army itself is conceptually re-sexed as female, which immediately projects upon it a strong sense of subordination and dependence upon its metaphoric “father and husband”. The message that Poole is offering, like the vision that she received, appeals to well-established, ancient notions of contract and patriarchy in order to draw the limits that the revolutionary process must not trespass, and to insist upon the idea that the king’s person is sacred; for Poole, the king’s deep transgressions require fair punishment, but at the same time, the army must secure and respect his person and refrain from executing him. Poole is tapping into a political language that comes from a well-established tradition harnessed before in the various debates concerning the role of the monarchy – even before the start of the Revolution–. Her use of this political vocabulary is

one essential aspect of her appropriation of previously existing elements in order to intervene actively in the public sphere.

If *A Vision* tries to prevent the regicide, the tract entitled *Another Alarum of War* relates Poole's own experiences and opinions in the spring of 1649, after the execution of Charles I. The prophet's perspective has changed in this work, because her advice has gone unheeded, but also because of what she sees as a further step downwards in the degeneration of her original audience, the members of the Army Council. There is also a moment in this tract in which a kind of prophetic vision is experienced (even though the term "vision" is not used). It shapes the ideological core of the text, since the central images of the passage are presented to the reader before the key to their meaning is clarified by Poole herself. It occurs shortly after the beginning of the text, in its second page, immediately after the author voices her complaint against the army due to the recent execution of the king:

For I have seen your carcasses slain upon the grounds, and whilst I was mourning over them, because of that spirit of justice, judgement, and equity, which had sometime appeared in you; there stood up a young man, a man of strength in whom they appeared, and I, seeing they had their resurrection in anther, was comforted, as also this word I received, their carcasses fell in the wilderness though unbelieve; thereby I saw it was but your carcasses, or he body of your confederacy or combination, wherein ye were for your selves. (Poole 16492: 2).

In this case there is no reference to the "pangs" that prepare the prophet for her transcendent experience, and the phrase "a vision was set before me", which had played an essential role in the first tract, is completely absent here: what Poole presents here has actually been witnessed by her ("for I have seen..."), but it may have been experienced as an image created by herself, as an allegory, out of her own meditations; at any rate, its status remains ambiguous, and it cannot be firmly seen as the result of a visionary experience or a trance. The description of what Poole "saw" or imagined in this occasion is, in itself, quite simple again; it is articulated in two parts, the first one offering an image of death, and the second presenting one of resurrection. In the first moment, the dead bodies or carcasses of the members of the Army Council are strewn on the ground before Poole, who immediately recognises them (there is no doubt at all about whose corpses are those she sees). Her immediate reaction is to weep and mourn, not so much because of the recent behaviour of the army, but because of its past glory, that is, "because of that spirit of justice, judgement and equity which had sometime appeared in you". That moment of mourning is followed by a glimpse of hope: before Poole appears a young man, whom she

immediately identifies as the resurrected body of the army itself; there is a brief aural element in the whole situation, as she hears a voice that tells her: “Their carcasses fell in the wilderness through unbelieve”. Poole immediately offers the interpretation of the whole scene (still without defining it as “vision”) to her readers: the carcasses represent the army insofar as it has responded only to its own material interests, being only “wise for your selves... that is, your wisdoms, counsels, devotions, humiliations and religious consultations”, where they would “inquire of God (as you call it) though it were grounded in your hearts what to doe”. The accusation is severe, and the metaphoric language is also powerful, though simple; it is also strongly linked to the images of the bodily that we have seen articulated in the early *Vision*. The imagery in that text was related to notions of integration, belonging, sharing, all of them expressed through imagery that laid its emphasis on the restoration of an ill body (the body of the nation) to its full health and vigour. Here, the imagery also plays on notions of corporeal life, but this time the metaphoric game has intensified, just as the political situation that triggers it has become more dramatic: there is now a sense of the irrevocable in Poole’s discourse, which is expressed in the images of death and grieving; the possibility of recovery, however, is still present, and it is metaphorically expressed by images of resurrection. Elizabeth Poole herself still appears here, as she did in the *Vision*, as the best interpreter and commentator of her own prophecy, and therefore as a valid (though self-appointed) moral guide for the Army Council.

There is yet another key image in the *Alarum*, one which is obsessively repeated throughout the text: the image of the destruction of idols, which Poole develops in multiple directions. This image is not part of the short vision that is at the core of the *Alarum*, and even though it is thematically linked to it, it is developed in a relatively independent direction. Its first appearance occurs after Poole has concluded her revision and re-enactment of her original *Vision*, in order to reprimand the Army Council; the following fragment introduces the second part of the text, in which she warns the members of the Council of the possible temptations (or icons) that still may tempt them further away from the fulfilment of their duties:

In the day that the Lord shall shake terribly the Earth, then shall yee take the images of Gold and silver which every man hath made unto himselfe, and cast them to the Moulds and to the Bars, for yee have formed glorious, glittering Images of State policies, religious ordinances, Orders, Faiths, Lights, Knowledges, and these are drawne over them very beautiful pretences, curiously wrought over with needle worke, very costly (when I say Images, that is to say, as if every man hath imagined to himselfe something more desirable

than another), whereas all things are to be knowne in God, with the like estimation, for old things shall be done away, and behold all things shall become new. (16492: 12).

This fragment showcases Poole's appropriation of an image that had been central in the discourses, not only of the English Revolution, but of the confronted and opposed traditions of European Protestantism. Practically every Protestant group, since the origins of Lutheranism, had insisted on the importance of casting down idols, and this insistence had acquired a major urgency in the various radical discourses that emerged all through the early seventeenth century, and especially in the 1630s. These various appropriations of iconoclasm responded to different programs and agendas, but the subject itself had become deeply charged with meaning on all sides; it had even played a strong part in the debates concerning regicide (most notably, in the royalist pamphlet *Eikon Basilike* and John Milton's *Eikonoklastes*). In this specific fragment, Poole presents the casting down of idols with strong apocalyptic overtones, warning her audience of the day when "the images of Gold and Silver that every man hath made" will be thrown to "the Moulds and the Bars": the army is being accused of having built their own idols, to have taken their own ambition in various areas of political and civil life and having turned them into images of desire, projections of their own wishes. There is yet another aspect worth highlighting in the fragment above: once again, Poole insists on the figural, metaphoric nature of her discourse. She herself makes clear that, when she speaks of the "Images" that are being worshipped, she is using a figural expression ("that is to say") in order to refer to unlawful desires, those that "every man hath imagined to himself". In the second *Alarum*, as in *A Vision*, Poole's intention remains firmly didactic, and the clarification of her message takes precedence over the transcendence of her visionary experience.

PROPHETIC PERSONALITY

The fact that Poole should be actually trying to influence the army on such a dramatic and serious question as the possibility of regicide does not contradict her need to be persuasive and seek this sense of well-meaning, considered advice; on the contrary, it is precisely the transcendent significance of the historical moment that necessitates this kind of presentation: well-meaning and considered, even while it is serious and firm in trying to guide the addressees to a specific kind of "action". This action would perhaps appear as passivity in a different context: because the army is required not to execute the king, but to refrain from taking revenge on him, and to place themselves in the hands and the will of God so as to complete the salvation of the country without further

bloodshed. It is especially important to observe that the iconoclastic discourse that dominates the last part of *Another Alarum* includes and develops, as well, a special emphasis on the prophet's own authority. While insisting on the different kinds of idol-worship that the army has displayed, she constantly contrasts the idols that they have built to her own position as their adviser, thus suggesting that their attention has been misdirected: they should have heeded her words, rather than their own interest.

Thus Poole cleverly reasserts her role and her prophetic personality as a counselor that is motivated by the same ideals as those of her audience: however, her advice has been ignored and the disaster she warned against has come to occur, but the moral failure of the army shows, after the event, the importance of heeding the advice of those who may appear more marginal or humble (such as herself), but who, in strict Christian logic, may also be those through whose mouth God speaks. At no point does Poole suggest that her womanhood makes her inferior, or that she has not been listened to because she is a woman; this aspect is kept out of her self-vindication in *Another Alarum*, just as it was kept out of *A Vision*: for her, being a prophet seems to be, in itself, a condition that immediately undoes all the connotations of inferiority that might be attributed to her genre.

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