



**POPULAR PROPHECY**  
**IN**  
**SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND:**  
**BY MOUTH AND PEN**  
**IN THE**  
**ALEHOUSE AND FROM THE PULPIT**

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## ERRATA

- p. 47            Lines 13 and 14 for "Pankhurst" read "Parkhurst".
- p. 48            Line 17 for "Fox" read "Foxe".
- p. 74            Line 5 for "Stryrre" read "Styrre".
- p. 93            Line 2 for "1588" read "1583".
- p. 123           Line 11 for "1558" read "1559".
- p. 156           Line 8 for "cardinal of York" read "archbishop of York".
- p. 161           Line 1 for "renown" read "renowned".
- p. 164           Line 7 for "principle" read "principal".
- p. 285           For "Viscout Lisle" read "Viscount Lisle".

## DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Should this thesis fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy I consent to it being made available for photocopying and loan.

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## ABSTRACT

Many historians of popular culture propose that during the sixteenth century a separation existed between the culture of the educated minority and that of the unlearned majority. Until recently the history of popular culture focused on examples of cultural division. In contrast this thesis presents non-scriptural prophecy as an example of shared culture. Non-scriptural prophecy was a phenomenon that crossed social boundaries and demonstrated the existence of areas of common culture despite the disparity among individuals created by other social, economic and cultural differences. This thesis also questions previous modern depictions of Tudor prophecy and presents a revision of the sources for a study of non-scriptural prophecy in an attempt to rectify the imbalance of many studies unduly influenced by the dominance of elite documentation. This re-examination of non-scriptural prophecies from a historical perspective, rather than a literary one, further uncovers the interests and motivations of non-learned adherents of prophecy and ultimately reveals that many people in the sixteenth century shared a common interest in prophecy that transcended social and other boundaries.

Part one of this thesis, The Definition of Prophecy, contains three chapters that provide a comprehensive definition of the cultural phenomenon. The first chapter reviews definitions of prophecy made by historians and literary scholars since Rupert Taylor published the first book on the subject in 1911. This initial chapter includes a general discussion of all prophetic types identified by scholars of medieval and early modern Europe. The second chapter defines prophecy as people understood the phenomenon in the sixteenth century. This chapter identifies the prophet and other methods of creating or receiving prophecies, while the final chapter in this section

identifies the literary genre of non-scriptural prophecies as a subject separate from their source of creation or dissemination.

Section two of this thesis, The Attack on Prophecy, examines the elite denunciation of non-scriptural prophecies. Learned individuals vilified prophecies predominantly through published treatises and the legislature. Chapter four reviews the practical and theological arguments against prophecy presented by literary commentators. Chapter five examines the laws against sedition, treason and prophecy used by the judiciary in the prosecution of prophesiers.

The final section of this thesis, The Transmission of Prophecy and the Participants, contains four chapters. Chapter six reveals the literary and oral exchange of prophetic knowledge throughout sixteenth-century society. The final three chapters discuss the participants, the nobility, the clergy and the common people, who adhered to prophecies and were known to judicial authorities of the period. This section is an attempt to expose the concerns of those who adhered to prophecy without the undue influence of elite opinion.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisors from the Department of History at the University of Adelaide, A. Lynn Martin and Frank McGregor for their help over the years it took to finish this thesis. I am enormously appreciative of their confidence in my ability and of their exemplary academic skills that contributed to the production of this work.

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I also wish to thank Al Gabay and especially Sara Warneke, who encouraged my interest in history at an undergraduate level and remained supportive throughout my years as a postgraduate and Bill Craven from the Australian National University for his comments. At the University of Adelaide, the assistance of Margaret Hosking, subject librarian at the Barr Smith Library, was invaluable as was the support of Julie, Marion and Gloria in the departmental office and my fellow postgraduates, in particular Lisl, Peter and Lynette. I have also appreciated the help given to me in the production of this thesis by Michael and Jill.



On a personal note, I am indebted to my family and friends for their understanding and unquestioning support - Fran and Dad, Maman, the Thiele family, Eliza Jane, Chris and Dianne, Karen, and Liz. A very big thankyou to David.

## ABBREVIATIONS

APC	<u>Acts of the Privy Council: New Series.</u>
ASSI 35	Assizes: Norfolk, Home and South-Eastern Circuits: Indictment Files (1559-1968), Public Record Office, London.
BL	British Library, London.
Bodleian	Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Cheshire	Cheshire Record Office, Cheshire.
CSPD	Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series.
CSPD. Add.	<u>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, Addenda.</u>
DNB	<u>Dictionary of National Biography.</u>
E	Exchequer, Public Record Office, London.
Folger	The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C.
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission.
JC	<u>Journals of the House of Commons.</u>
JL	<u>Journals of the House of Lords.</u>
LP	<u>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII.</u>
PC	Privy Council Registers, Public Record Office, London.
SP	State Papers, Public Record Office, London.
SR	<u>The Statutes of the Realm.</u>
STAC	Star Chamber Proceedings, Public Record Office, London.
STC	Short Title Catalogue number in A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, eds., <u>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640</u> (London, 1976-1986) and Donald Wing, <u>Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English Books Printed in Other Countries 1641-1700</u> (New York, 1945-1951).

## CONVENTIONS

When quoting material from the sixteenth century I have expanded abbreviations and made only minor alterations to spelling where appropriate. In giving dates I assume the year began on 1 January. I use modern place names wherever possible and otherwise retain the original spelling. The title of all proclamations derive from the Short-Title Catalogue by Pollard and Redgrave.

In quoting folio numbers I have consistently referred to the hand written number at the bottom of the manuscript page. The only exception is in the case of Elizabethan documents for which I cite, wherever possible, the printed number at the top right hand side of the manuscript page. For many of the documents used in this thesis no standard numbering system is evident, and in many cases the original documents include several folio numbers on a single page. However, I have tried to keep my citation of folio numbers consistent with that of other historians of the period and have included calendar references for the convenience of the reader.

## INTRODUCTION

**“Recognition of cultural divisions must not blind us to the existence, at any given point in time, of areas of common culture - shared meanings - which united all ranks of society”.**

Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and the ‘Reform of Popular Culture’ in Early Modern England”, Past and Present, no. 105 (1984), p. 79.



## INTRODUCTION

Following the Henrician Reformation of the 1530s religious reformers attacked the *opus operatum* of the Catholic Church and condemned all forms of prophetic activity as demonic. While prophecy was a valid form of communication between God and his people during biblical times, reformers argued that the spirit of prophecy no longer existed in their period. This belief resulted in elite condemnation, reflected in treatise and law, of contemporary prophecies. The written, spoken or illustrated subject of this negative elite commentary, referred to in this thesis as non-scriptural prophecy, encompasses only those predictions actually described as prophecies or employing clear prophetic language during the sixteenth century. Non-scriptural prophecies were those predictions considered false and fantastical by the Tudor parliament and distinct from other forms of biblical or true prophecy deemed acceptable, although no longer evident, by many commentators during the century. Although modern, the term non-scriptural avoids the inherent bias of Tudor references to such predictions that many writers called pretended, supposed or profane prophecy. Modern historians variously refer to non-scriptural type prophecies as political, pagan, ancient, traditional or symbolic as compared to other prophecies that were religious, biblical or Christian. While this thesis uses the unique phrase “non-scriptural prophecy”, no term wholly embodies the nature of the phenomenon, reflecting its ambiguous and confused character. While non-scriptural prophecies are difficult to define, clearly they attracted the curiosity of individuals from all social levels in sixteenth-century society. Such prophecies were “popular” because they derived from a culture accessible to all and were of interest to many.

Recent studies of sixteenth-century English non-scriptural prophecies emphasise the use of predictions by political protesters. Literary scholars Howard Dobin and Sharon Jansen argue that such prophecies were a “potent political weapon” for the disenfranchised populace of England who used forecasts to voice their political views at a time when other means of expression were unavailable.<sup>1</sup> In particular Jansen locates prophecy within non-elite society and describes prophetic disseminators as “ordinary men and women farthest from all sources of political decision and control”.<sup>2</sup> This latest trend in the study of prophecy accentuates the active involvement of predictions in political events of the century; the downfall of prominent members of the nobility and the incitement of the populace to rebellion. However, the level of influence prophecy exerted over sixteenth-century events is difficult to assess. Literary scholars validate their arguments by highlighting the potency of prophecy in shaping contemporary issues, but their work lacks effectual criticism of source material and relies on evidence that is circumstantial. Many modern commentators write from the viewpoint of “ordinary” individuals and claim to know why such persons invoked predictions. For the majority of sixteenth-century people, however, few explanations of their intentions are extant and the historian has no explicit evidence of their concerns.

Historians of popular culture have confronted these problems in their work and remain positive that, despite the difficulties, the historian can know something of popular beliefs and practices. Except for Keith Thomas in Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England,

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Dobin, Merlin's Disciples: Prophecy, Poetry, and Power in Renaissance England (Stanford, 1990), p. 28; Sharon L. Jansen, Political Protest and Prophecy Under Henry VIII (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup>Jansen, Political Protest, p. 19.

modern scholars of English prophecy ignore the methodological restrictions of their work.<sup>3</sup> Although an acknowledgment of the bias of source material used by scholars of English prophecy may seem a simplistic and unnecessary reiteration of a basic historical principle, previous commentators have overlooked this type of examination. Consequently the concerns of an educated elite has unduly overwhelmed recent studies of non-scriptural prophecies during the Tudor period. Historians of popular culture are particularly sensitive to the hidden agenda of documentation derived from elite sources and have developed a sophisticated methodology to uncover the viewpoint of the unlearned. This thesis addresses the claims of recent studies of sixteenth-century prophecy and draws on popular culture theory to redress the imbalance caused by the dominance of sixteenth-century elite documentation and to argue that non-scriptural prophecy was an example of a shared cultural phenomenon.

Before discussing sixteenth-century prophecies, however, an examination of the modern definition of the terms “popular” and “culture” is necessary. The Oxford Companion to the English Language defines culture as “a social condition, level of civilization, or way of life”.<sup>4</sup> This is a modern departure from earlier conceptions of the term when “culture” referred to a type of improvement or “cultivation” through education.<sup>5</sup> Modern commentators reveal their understanding of culture through the subject of their research. Natalie Zemon Davis in “The Historian and Popular Culture”, an introduction to a collection of essays on the French populace published in 1977, uses the nineteenth-century works of Jules Michelet and Charles Nisard to illustrate two

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<sup>3</sup>Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England (London, 1991), pp. ix-xi.

<sup>4</sup>Tom McArthur, ed., The Oxford Companion to the English Language (Oxford, 1992), p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>C.T. Onions, ed., The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford, 1991), p. 471.

early concepts of popular studies from which modern commentaries derive.<sup>6</sup> For both Nisard and Michelet, argues Davis, culture encompasses “beliefs, values and customs” and their outward expression in the arts.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, William H. Beik in his review article “Searching for Popular Culture in Early Modern France”, also published in 1977, observes that historians of the 1970s were following a historical method previously manifested in pioneer studies of popular beliefs by Georges Lefebvre, Philippe Ariès and Robert Mandrou.<sup>8</sup> In these early works, as in later studies, “culture” included political and social issues in addition to “customs, rituals, beliefs and festivals”.<sup>9</sup> The approach of this work seeks to reveal the “popular environment and consciousness”, the interactions between social groups and the “popular mentality” or “beliefs, attitudes, world views, and personal relationships, either expressed as ideas or lived in daily life”.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Burke in the 1994 revised reprint of his influential historical work Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe cites the development of “new cultural” or “socio-cultural” history in the early 1980s in which the conception of culture includes “the various rules or principles which underlie everyday life in different places or times”.<sup>11</sup> Socio-cultural historians aim for a deeper understanding of social groups beyond narrative accounts of life experiences. In Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and

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<sup>6</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Historian and Popular Culture”, in Jacques Beauroy, *et. al.*, eds., The Wolf and the Lamb: Popular Culture in France From the Old Regime to the Twentieth Century (Saratoga, 1977), p. 9; as quoted by Davis, Jules Michelet, Le peuple (1846) and Charles Nisard, Histoire des livres populaires (1854-64).

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>William H. Beik, “Searching for Popular Culture in Early Modern France”, The Journal of Modern History, IL (1977), pp. 266-281. As cited by Beik, Georges Lefebvre, The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France (New York, 1973); Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York, 1965); Robert Mandrou, Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640: An Essay in Historical Psychology (London, 1976).

<sup>9</sup>Beik, “Searching for”, p. 266.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 267, 270, 273, 277.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (Aldershot, 1994), pp. xxii-xxiii.



Society Raymond Williams asserts that the historian's use of culture relates "primarily to signifying or symbolic systems"; the new cultural history attempts to reveal the meaning of such structures.<sup>12</sup> Examples of this new approach include the study of Japanese concepts of time by T.C. Smith or the explication of conspicuous consumption as "a vehicle of plebeian self-consciousness" by German historian Hans Medick.<sup>13</sup> In conclusion Burke suggests that historians of popular culture could benefit from conceiving their work not in terms of subject matter but as "a mode of historical discourse", an idea borrowed from the scholar of intellectual history Keith Baker.<sup>14</sup> The concern of the historian of popular culture therefore is "for values and symbols, wherever these are to be found, in the everyday life of ordinary people as well as in special performances for elites".<sup>15</sup> However, most historians avoid lengthy discussions of the meaning of culture preferring to rely on the stated objectives of their research to inform the reader of their understanding of the term.

In contrast historians of popular culture often debate the evolution and use of the term "popular". In the sixteenth century the "popular estate" or "popular government" alluded to the population as a whole.<sup>16</sup> Use of the word "popular" could also infer a derogatory meaning of "low" or "base". The majority of historians view popular culture in either of these two ways, or both. An exception is the Italian historian of prophecy Ottavia Niccoli who interprets the term in its modern usage as "widely favoured" or "well-liked".<sup>17</sup> In early and modern definitions the term "popular"

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<sup>12</sup>Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London, 1990), p. 91.

<sup>13</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. xxiv.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Williams, Keywords, p. 236.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.; Ottavia Niccoli, Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy (Princeton, 1990), p. 5.

infers a degree of social differentiation in which “the people” form a cohesive social group. In The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present J.F.C. Harrison incorporates the division of social groups into his definition of popular literature as “either literature produced indigenously and spontaneously by the people, or literature provided for the people by other classes or interests”.<sup>18</sup> As Harrison demonstrates, this interpretation implies a split between popular and non-popular audiences, a distinction that encouraged historians to develop models and theories of social and cultural stratification. But who were the people in “popular”?

Burke attributes the eighteenth-century “discovery” of popular culture to a group of German intellectuals, including J.G. Herder and the brothers Grimm, who characterised “the people” as rural peasants.<sup>19</sup> Burke describes this identification as “purism”, a practice in which early writers favourably compared the rural peasant to urban populations idealising the peasant’s lack of susceptibility to foreign influences and close ties with the natural environment.<sup>20</sup> In the twentieth-century social anthropologist Robert Redfield originated the influential two-tier model of cultural division based on levels of literacy, although Herder was the first to elucidate the popular in opposition to the elite. Redfield theorised that early modern society incorporated two traditions: the “great tradition” of the literate and the “little tradition” of the non-literate population. Burke typifies Redfield’s description of the populace as a “residual” definition of popular culture, however, many historians find Redfield’s model a useful starting point for the

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<sup>18</sup>J.F.C. Harrison, The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present (Glasgow, 1989), p. 168.

<sup>19</sup>Peter Burke, “The ‘Discovery’ of Popular Culture”, in Raphael Samuel, ed., People’s History and Socialist Theory (London, 1981), pp. 216-217.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

identification of the people.<sup>21</sup> Keith Thomas, for example, situates his discussion of “popular beliefs” in comparison to the small early modern rich and educated population.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Burke divides social and cultural stratification between the non-learned majority and the educated minority. However, Burke cites this dichotomy as a “simplified description” and devotes his work to a thorough examination of the diversity of popular culture quoting from Antonio Gramsci, “The people is not a culturally homogeneous unit, but it is culturally stratified in a complex way”.<sup>23</sup>

Divisions of culture based on levels of education are problematic, and several historians note the difficulty of assessing the extent of early modern literacy. Tessa Watt observes in her 1991 study Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640 that historians often base literacy statistics only on the ability of an individual to write or sign their name.<sup>24</sup> However, the work of Margaret Spufford, in particular her study Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England, reveals that estimates of writing ability do not address the capacity of the English to read.<sup>25</sup> Descriptions of the elite as an educated group are also dubious, and Burke notes that many of the nobility and clergy had little reading or writing skills. In particular noblewomen rarely received any formal education.<sup>26</sup> Addressing these issues Harrison rejects any notion of a division between the learned and non-learned, commenting that, “There was no dichotomy between literate and illiterate but rather an

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<sup>21</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup>Tessa Watt, Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640 (Cambridge, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup>Margaret Spufford, Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England (1981), as quoted by Watt, ibid., p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, pp. 27-28.

infinite grading of degrees of literacy”.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the problems of assessing literacy historians of popular culture argue that while the educated person could participate in unlearned culture, learned culture was inaccessible to a large proportion of the sixteenth-century English population. While early pioneers in the examination of the populace presented a model of culture that segregated popular and elite, modern historians highlight the interaction between the two groups.

Working from the Redfield model, Peter Burke developed his theory of popular culture in 1978 and established the study as a legitimate historical enterprise. Burke contends that the main sources for the transmission of elite culture relied on literacy.<sup>28</sup> The learned, argues Burke, passed on their tradition through institutions “closed” to the populace such as grammar schools and universities.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, the little tradition was open and spread informally through church, tavern and market-place. Burke’s main point, crucial to the validity of the study of popular culture, is that the unlearned are accessible to historians through an examination of elite participation in their culture. As Bob Scribner explains in his article “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?”, Burke’s theory demonstrates that,

The associated notion of a ‘two-way flow’ between these two cultures enables us to study certain elites as mediators of popular culture to the learned. This is a useful postulate which both abolishes the insularity of the two-tier model and avoids the implication that ‘popular culture’ is merely residual.<sup>30</sup>

Analysis of the transmission of ideas and meanings is possible by examining the

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<sup>27</sup>Harrison, *The Common People*, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup>However, Burke acknowledges the possibility of an intermediate or “chap-book culture” of the semi-literate; Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup>Bob Scribner, “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?”, *History of European Ideas*, X (1989), p. 179.

mediation between cultural groups. Burke accentuates the importance of this interaction while maintaining the popular and elite dichotomy but warns that use of the model can overlook cultural differences within the two groups.<sup>31</sup> Scribner observes that the two-tier model contributes to a false impression of popular and elite culture as “distinct categories”.<sup>32</sup> Edward M. Peters in his article “Religion and Culture, Popular and Unpopular, 1500-1800” highlights the danger of the theoretical model.<sup>33</sup> Models can distort historical evidence and misrepresent relationships within society. In seeking to maintain the integrity of an approach, the historian may overlook contrary evidence. As Martin Ingram established in his examination of early modern charivaris, the “recognition of cultural divisions must not blind us to the existence . . . of areas of common culture - shared meanings - which united all ranks of society”.<sup>34</sup> Recent historians tend to concentrate on the interaction between cultural groups in early modern society as the only valid method of perceiving what was genuinely popular. This has led to the recognition that culture was essentially fluid and easily adaptable.<sup>35</sup>

The interest of historians in the popular precipitated an increased scrutiny of traditional historical sources. As a result some commentators question the validity of the study of popular culture. Given the existence of extensive illiteracy and semi-literacy during the early modern period, direct evidence of the popular is difficult to find, if it existed at all. The historian can only view the populace through indirect sources that Burke calls “mediators”. Burke identifies six types of mediators that coincide with

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<sup>31</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup>Scribner, “Is a History”, p. 175.

<sup>33</sup>Edward M. Peters, “Religion and Culture, Popular and Unpopular, 1500-1800”, The Journal of Modern History, LIX (1987), p. 318.

<sup>34</sup>Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music”, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup>Scribner, “Is a History”, p. 186.

traditional forms of evidence: great writers, the sermons of friars, broadsides and chapbooks, the oral tradition, trials and confessions of heresy, riots and rebellions.<sup>36</sup> Burke advances a detailed critical analysis of this evidence and, despite his criticisms, justifies the study of popular culture through an advocacy of “oblique” approaches to source material.<sup>37</sup> Although the problem of sources appears insurmountable, Burke overcomes them by referring to a basic historiographical precept that “historians never can trust their documents completely”.<sup>38</sup>

In 1983 Burke identified four trends in the study of popular culture by historians: the “attempt to be more precise and quantitative”, increasing interest in “non-verbal” sources, “a coming to terms with semiology” and a change in focus from popular culture itself to its interaction with the elite.<sup>39</sup> A decade or so later most of these trends have continued. In the study of sixteenth-century Italian prophecy historians Marjorie Reeves and Ottavia Niccoli include detailed scrutiny of source material in their work. Neither historian, however, has abandoned the two-tier model of early modern society.<sup>40</sup> Niccoli’s work in particular embodies Burke’s impression that interest in the popular would evolve into an examination of the relationship between learned and unlearned culture. In 1987 Niccoli remarked of Italian prophecy:

It has gradually become clear that the most outstanding characteristic of that phenomenon is not its location within a specific cultural and social milieu but rather an exceptionally open circulation and exchange of its content through different social and cultural strata.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Burke, *Popular Culture*, pp. 68-77.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 78-87.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup>Peter Burke, “From Pioneers to Settlers: Recent Studies of the History of Popular Culture. A Review Article”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXV, no. 1 (1983), p. 186.

<sup>40</sup>Ottavia Niccoli, “High and Low Prophetic Culture in Rome at the Beginning of the Sixteenth-Century”, pp. 203-222 in Marjorie Reeves, ed., *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period: Essays* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>41</sup>Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, p. xii.

Similarly, sixteenth-century English prophecy was prevalent throughout society and this location reveals that attempts to explain its function and appeal during the period must look beyond the insular association of prophecy with the popular.

As an aspect of culture modern commentators view prophecies as either a belief or a type of literature. Literary scholars became interested in English prophecy during the nineteenth century. Their work focused on the publication of verse predictions in various editions of poetry from the Middle Ages and early modern period. The interests of these scholars included attempts to date, determine authorship and interpret the inherent symbolism of a large body of manuscript prophecies extant for this period. During the 1970s several historians of sixteenth-century England attempted a review of the political aspects of predictions. Conceptions of the phenomenon changed and scholars no longer viewed prophecy merely as a literary diversion but as an aspect of early modern belief. The work of historians Madeleine and Ruth Dodds, Keith Thomas and Geoffrey Elton demonstrate this change.<sup>42</sup> For the purposes of examination and as an affirmation of the significance of the phenomenon, this thesis views prophecy as a type of belief that transcended social divisions. However, attempts to determine the level of credence specific individuals gave to prophecy are conjectural because anti-prophetic legislation ensured that people were reluctant to disclose their adherence to forecasts. In particular, descriptions of prophecy as a popular belief are problematical because the non-learned were unable to convey their attitude towards the phenomenon in a written form. Thus this thesis presents non-scriptural prophecy as an aspect of

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<sup>42</sup>Madeleine Hope Dodds and Ruth Dodds, The Pilgrimage of Grace 1536-1537 and The Exeter Conspiracy 1538 (London, 1971); Thomas, Religion and the Decline; G.R. Elton, Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell (Cambridge, 1972).

Tudor beliefs in a general sense, as a way of understanding or explaining the world, rather than as a statement about individual faith in the phenomenon.

Keith Thomas depicts prophecy as a popular belief, and argues that people in the sixteenth century saw in prophecy an explanation for civil unrest. Forecasts served as a “validating charter”, proposes Thomas, reassuring individuals in the face of change by demonstrating that others had prefigured present events.<sup>43</sup> The correlation, however, between prophecy and change, argued by Thomas, or the association between prophecy and rebellion, argued by Sharon Jansen and Howard Dobin, needs further examination. During periods of political and religious change, notably that of the English Reformation when judicial authorities examined many individuals for their use or knowledge of prophecies, government authorities were more vigilant than in less disruptive times.<sup>44</sup> This explains the apparent increase of prophetic offenders during periods of unrest. Until the passing of a specific law against predictions in 1542 the judiciary considered prophecies a form of sedition. In the 1530s the campaign to ‘enforce the Reformation’, as G.R. Elton termed it, led to the apprehension of many people for sedition and rumour mongering and among them individuals adhering to prophecies.<sup>45</sup> In the second half of the sixteenth century government authorities and other leading educated elites maintained that prophecy incited the common people to rebellion. The inherent bias of source material reflecting this contemporary viewpoint has distorted the historian’s approach to the phenomenon.

Despite these criticisms, elite debate concerning the validity of prophecies reveals their most interesting aspect. As part of sixteenth-century culture prophecy was

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<sup>43</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 493.

<sup>44</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*



evident at all levels of society. Many elite commentators believed predictions encouraged social conflict not only between the government and commoners, but also between the nobility and the monarch. Parliament reflected these beliefs in its enactment of three statutes against prophecy during the century. The first statute of 1542 demonstrated a particular concern for the defamation of the nobility and officers of the realm.<sup>46</sup> The act highlighted the distress predictions caused to prominent individuals and the damage to their reputation and their relationship with the monarch.<sup>47</sup> The second and third acts against prophecy emphasised the role of predictions in creating discord between the government and the populace. The statutes of 1549 and 1563 legislated against the use of predictions “to the intent thereby to make any rebellion insurrecion discencon losse of lyfe or other disturbance”,<sup>48</sup>

Local authorities brought many prophesiers before the judiciary for acting contrary to the statutes against prophecy or for treason, treasonous words, sedition, sorcery or heresy. Offenders came from nearly all social groups: the nobility, the clergy and the common people. Judicial authorities convicted several noblemen connected with prophecies as traitors during the period, although involvement with prophecy was not the crime of these individuals but the evidence supporting their treason. Many clergy also appeared before the courts. In 1538 the York assizes, for example, executed John Dobson, the vicar of Mustone, for repeating prophecies against the king and the realm.<sup>49</sup> Other offenders were ordinary individuals like Symon Yomans, a labourer from Little Dean in Gloucester, who said in a conversation about the need for rain, “It wilbe

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<sup>46</sup>33 Henry VIII, c. 14; JL, I, p. 198.

<sup>47</sup>SR, III, p. 850.

<sup>48</sup>3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 15 and 5 Elizabeth I, c. 15; *ibid.*, IV, i, pp. 114, 445.

<sup>49</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 97; SP 1/151, fol. 56.

worse before it be better”, knowledge he derived from a prophecy concerning Queen Elizabeth.<sup>50</sup> Legal documentation of this type illustrated the widespread dissemination of predictions throughout sixteenth-century England. Prophecy therefore was popular because it transcended different cultural and social groups. As in Burke’s model of culture, popular prophecy was accessible to all members of sixteenth-century society.

But was prophecy popular in the sense J.F.C. Harrison describes popular literature? Did the people produce prophecy or was it provided for them by other social classes?<sup>51</sup> The cultural origins of prophecy are obscure and difficult to determine. Some predictions derived from the medieval period in the work of chroniclers like Geoffrey of Monmouth or from oral traditions. The cryptic language of this type of prophecy encouraged its repetition and reinterpretation by individuals in successive centuries. The act of interpretation was a recreation of prophecy that occurred at all cultural levels. Unlike the symbolic medieval prophecies, less complex predictions were more obviously the invention of their disseminators. Although the origins of many predictions are difficult for the historian to trace, their transmission throughout sixteenth-century society is particularly interesting. As a popular phenomenon did prophecy “rise” from the beliefs of the populace to become part of learned culture, as Herder and his followers suggested? Or did prophetic ideas “sink” and become “an out-of-date imitation of the culture of the upper classes”?<sup>52</sup> Unlike the seventeenth century, when printers issued hundreds of individual predictions as pamphlets for a mass audience, the sixteenth century produced few printed prophecies. Only one prediction, published by Wynkyn de

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<sup>50</sup>SP 12/192, fol. 92.

<sup>51</sup>Harrison, *The Common People*, p. 168.

<sup>52</sup>Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 58.

Worde, appeared as a “lytel treatyse of the byrth & prophecye of Marlyn” in 1510.<sup>53</sup> However, in the 1580s two major printed works by Henry Howard and John Harvey discussed the validity of forecasts in detail.<sup>54</sup> Other predictions appeared scattered in publications by Richard Morison, Wilfride Holme, George Whetstones and John Harington.<sup>55</sup> Restrictions on printers during the period ensured that authors including prophecies in their work interpreted them favourably towards the government or condemned them outright. To what extent ordinary men and women were able to access printed works is a matter of conjecture. However, historians of popular culture generally agree with Tessa Watt that, although the modern scholar does not know exactly who comprised the audience of printed matter, publications probably reached a larger audience than scholars expect.<sup>56</sup> While buyers were those with the ability to read, those who heard printed works included persons from all social levels.

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<sup>53</sup>Here *Begynneth a Lytel Treatyse of the Byrth & Prophecye of Marlyn* (London, 1510) STC 17841.

<sup>54</sup>Henry Howard, *A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies: Not Hitherto Confuted by the Penne of Any Man, Which Being Grounded, Eyther Uppon the Warrant and Authority of Olde Paynted Bookes, Expositions of Dreames, Oracles, Revelations, Invocations of Damned Spirites, Judicialles of Astrologie, or Any Other Kinde of Pretended Knowledge Whatsoever, De Futuris Contingentibus: Have Beene Causes of Great Disorder in the Common Wealth, and Cheefely Among the Simple and Unlearned People: Very Needefull to be Published at this Time, Considering the Late Offence Which Grew by Most Palpable and Grosse Errors in Astrology* (London, 1583) STC 13858; John Harvey, *A Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophecies, How Far they are to be Valued, or Credited, According to the Surest Rules, and Directions in Divinitie, Philosophie, Astrologie, and Other Learning: Devised Especially in Abatement of the Terrible Threatenings, and Menaces, Peremptorily Denounced Against the King doms, and States of the World, this Present Famous Yeere, 1588. Supposed the Greatwoonderfull, and Fataall Yeere of our Age* (London, 1588) STC 12908.

<sup>55</sup>[Richard Morison], *An Exhortation to Styrr all Englyshmen to the Defense of Theyr Countreye* (London, 1539) STC 18110; Wilfride Holme, *The Fall and Evill Successe of Rebellion From Time to Time Wherein is Contained Matter, Moste Meete for all Estates to Vewe* (London, 1572) STC 13602; George Whetstones, *The English Myrror* (London, 1586) STC 25336; John Harington, *A Tract on the Succession to the Crown (A.D.1602)* (New York, 1970).

<sup>56</sup>Watt, *Cheap Print*, p. 7; I have modified Watt’s comments because her work concerns broadsides and ballads, a form in which few prophecies appeared.

Many sixteenth-century predictions were in manuscript form including three main collections of prophecies now in the Bodleian Library, British Library and Cheshire Record Office. Manuscript prophecies were largely the possession of educated persons. For example, the lawyer and parliamentarian Sir Humphrey Welles owned the Rawlinson anthology in the Bodleian Library.<sup>57</sup> However, the origin of prophecies recorded in manuscript collections is unknown. Did the collator copy predictions heard from others or compile the work from literary sources? Manuscripts also circulated at a popular level particularly as painted prophecies like that owned by Mistress Amadas, probably the wife of Robert Amadas, a previous master of the king's jewel house, or that seen by William Todde, the prior of Malton.<sup>58</sup> Legal documentation, however, reveals that many predictions circulated orally. Judicial authorities demonstrated a particular concern to find the original disseminator of prophecies, and evidence from examinations and depositions often revealed a series of exchanges of forecasts between individuals. Most of this evidence demonstrates a top-down view of cultural interaction that divulges more about the nature of historical evidence than reflects an accurate depiction of the distribution of prophetic ideas. The existence of an oral tradition, though difficult to examine, is also important as a means through which individuals broadcast their predictions. Studies that attempt to trace the early development of specific prophecies indicate their derivation from Welsh, Scottish and Irish unwritten culture. Other evidence of an oral prophetic tradition includes an emphasis on the attribution of prophecies indicating that the populace was familiar with figures such as the early Celtic prophets Merlin and Talissen, at least in name.

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<sup>57</sup>Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan, The Welles Anthology MS. Rawlinson C. 813: A Critical Edition (New York, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>BL Cotton Cleopatra E. iv, fol. 99 verso; E 36/119, fols. 130-130 verso.

Historical evidence of prophecy includes literary and legal documentation. Literary sources encompass the written compositions or literature of the period, such as printed treatises and works in manuscript, of educated persons, many of whom imbued their writings with the prejudices of their social position. However, as Burke argues these documents are not “worthless” as illustrations of the popular but “distorted”.<sup>59</sup> The usefulness of literary evidence to the historian of popular culture depends on the questions asked of the material. While elite descriptions of popular motives and intentions are problematic as accurate depictions of unlearned culture, they are valuable accounts of the elite attitude to others in their society. Particularly helpful are literary accounts of practices in which both elite and popular groups participated or accounts derived from individuals who were socially mobile. Burke proposes, for example, that the elite “understood ballads and carnivals from the inside”, and so their descriptions of such phenomena were more accurate than accounts of culture in which the elite did not partake.<sup>60</sup> There is evidence that several educated individuals participated in prophetic activities and, according to an application of Burke’s oblique approach to popular culture, these persons are the best sources for a description of prophecy. However, the illegality of forecasts ensured the biased nature of this material because individuals were reluctant to openly admit their involvement with the phenomenon. Others wrote commentaries to avoid suspicion or as a requirement of their punishment for prophesying. Henry Howard, for example, penned his treatise on prophecy, damning the phenomenon, during a period in which his position at the Elizabethan court was tenuous. Printed tracts of this sort in particular supported the anti-prophetic agenda of

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<sup>59</sup>Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 78.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

legal authorities and were a form of government propaganda. Although not all literary evidence is so obviously bipartisan, the historian cannot use this source material without acknowledging its subjectivity and hidden agenda.

Several articles by the legal historian J.S. Cockburn reveal that legal evidence is also highly problematic for the social historian. Documentation generated by judicial procedures reflected the dominant anti-prophetic ideology. Burke proposes that the historian of popular culture can avoid the proclivity of records relating to the trial of individuals by concentrating on information that was not overtly important to authorities.<sup>61</sup> However, Cockburn observes that this “incidental” information, such as the name, status, occupation and abode of the accused, was often inaccurate and formulaic. Writing specifically about the impact of assize indictments on studies of criminality, Cockburn notes that offenders sometimes gave aliases instead of their real name and variant spellings “could be extreme”.<sup>62</sup> The status, occupation and abode of defendants known as the “addition” was a statutory requirement of indictment records. To ensure a conviction lawyers did not always give accurate “additions” where information was lacking, although proof of inaccuracy could void the indictment.<sup>63</sup> Comparing assize indictments and recognisances, Cockburn concludes that when using legal evidence “we should begin from the assumption that except in cases where they are corroborated by collateral evidence, the ‘facts’ given in the indictment are unreliable”.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>62</sup>J.S. Cockburn, “Early-Modern Assize Records as Historical Evidence”, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, V, no. 4 (1975), pp. 221-222. See also J.S. Cockburn, “Trial by the Book? Fact and Theory in the Criminal Process 1558-1625”, pp. 60-79 in J.H. Baker, ed., *Legal Records and the Historian: Papers Presented to the Cambridge Legal History Conference, 7-10 July 1975, and in Lincoln’s Inn Old Hall on 3 July 1974* (London, 1978).

<sup>63</sup>Cockburn, “Early-Modern Assize”, pp. 222-224.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 225.

However, for the historian of English prophecy the additions of an indictment serve as a method of indentifying cases involving the phenomenon, rather than the basis of a statistical analysis. The records of indictment for individuals accused of prophesying and other related offences provide some useful information in particular a transcription of the defendant's offensive words.

Other forms of legal documentation are more helpful to the historian of popular culture. Depositions are a main source of information for the study of non-scriptural prophecies. As depositions were not legal documents "of record", they avoid some of the problems inherent in indictments.<sup>65</sup> However, the examiner determined the questions asked of a defendant and left little room for those examined to reveal their concerns or motives. Examinations, depositions and confessions are uncertain accounts from those suspected of involvement with prophecy because the historian has no means to judge the extent to which individuals gave statements under duress. Torture or the threat to use torture and the fear of prosecution were possible inducements for individuals to give inaccurate information. However, a careful examination of these types of documentation reveals a wealth of interesting information about those who adhered to prophecies and those who argued against the phenomena during the century. Anti-prophetic fervour enshrined in law, for example, is questionable. Legislative statements do not necessarily reflect elite perceptions of the seriousness of offences. A comparison between statutory statements and judicial evidence reveals that during the sixteenth century less than a hundred individuals involved with prophecy came to attention of the judiciary. Of these persons eight died as a result of their crime, seven for treason and only one for prophecy, indicating a gap between the intentions of parliament as evident

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<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.

in law and judicial reality. The enactment of statutes against prophecy, which imposed harsh penalties for offenders, demonstrated the reliance of Tudor governments on legislative deterrents at a time when policing was inadequate.

Contemporary evidence suggests that non-scriptural prophecies were more popular in the seventeenth than the sixteenth century. The passing of several laws against prophecy and the literary denouncement of the phenomenon during the Tudor period, however, affirms the importance of the sixteenth century to any study of non-scriptural prophecy. This thesis argues that the reason for the enactment by the English parliament of several laws against prophecy during the century did not derive from the popularity or overt political challenge of non-scriptural prophecy, but from the need to establish religious change and to ensure stability in the realm. A detailed examination of literary and legal documentation reveals a disparity between elite depictions of prophecy and the experiences of adherents to the phenomenon, prompting a re-evaluation of the sources for an examination of English prophecy. As Cockburn concludes in his study of assize records, “we must resist the temptation to impute to the records the assumptions of a novel methodology before allowing them to speak for themselves”.<sup>66</sup> Although the motives of the uneducated will probably remain partly obscure, I hope to expose the influence of elite ideas on the historian’s perception of prophecy and disentangle elite conceptions of the phenomenon from its popular appeal.

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<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 231.



## PART ONE

### THE DEFINITION OF PROPHECY

“Were it not a needles, or booteles labor, to make a special Analysis, either of their Abcedary and Alphabetical Spels, or of their Characteristicall, and Polygraphical suttelties, or of their Steganographicall, and Hieroglyphicall mysteries, or of their hyperbolicall metaphors, phantasticall allegories, and heraldicall illusions, or of their ambiguous aequivocations, interdeur amphibologies, and aenigmaticall ridles, or finally of any their other colourable glosses, & hypocriticall subornations, in some like prestigiatory, and sophisticall veine?”

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Modern Commentators**

A precise definition of prophecy is elusive. Despite modern attempts to understand the term, the word prophecy remains abstruse and easily applicable to a variety of fore-knowledge, as it was in the sixteenth century. All modern commentators acknowledge that prophecy, in its most basic sense, was knowledge of the future. However, to further understand the character of the phenomenon scholars classify predictions according to their content, transmission and purpose, emphasising the literary product of futuristic speculation. Scholars identify only a few types of prophecy but use a variety of terms to define them. This variation leads to confusion in modern prophetic language, complicating an already complex topic. More importantly the desire to unravel the complexity of prophetic discourse by categorising prophecy into specific types distances scholars from the subject of their inquiry through the use of sometimes anachronistic and misrepresentative terminology. The most prominent aspect of prophecy was its multiplicity and diversity, as the next few chapters demonstrate. Faced with a difficult subject modern commentators tend to sort and categorise prophecies for ease of discussion. While some writers produce work sympathetic to and reflective of how people in the sixteenth century understood prophecy, others impose their own order with misleading results.

In “Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 3. History as Prophecy” the prominent historian R.W. Southern outlines an enduring approach to the development of prophecy as a tradition of historical writing. Before the eighteenth century, states Southern, many people considered prophecy “the most certain of all sources of

historical information”.<sup>1</sup> Prophecy provided the structure of historical events and was “the only source of information about the future”.<sup>2</sup> Southern’s analysis of prophecy is expansive. Reaching beyond the most basic understanding of the phenomenon “in the vulgar sense of prediction”, Southern draws on the work of Thomas Aquinas and describes prophecy as “divinely revealed knowledge of matters, past, present or future, lying beyond the scope of human observation”.<sup>3</sup> Southern quotes from Aquinas, “the further removed the facts are from human cognition, the more they belong to prophecy”.<sup>4</sup> The divine nature of prophecy, the pious and non-pious recipients of prophetic knowledge and the “universal” subject matter of predictions were essential aspects of the phenomenon embodying the significance of prophecy in the past.<sup>5</sup>

Focusing on medieval prophecy, Southern divides the phenomenon into four groups, biblical prophecy, pagan prophecy, Christian prophecy and astrological prophecy, expanding Roger Bacon’s categorisation of prophetic types outlined in a letter to the pope written about 1267:

If only the Church would examine the prophecies of the Bible, the sayings of the saints, the sentences of sibyl and Merlin and other pagan prophets, and would add thereto astrological considerations and experimental knowledge, it would without doubt be able to provide usefully against the coming of Antichrist.<sup>6</sup>

Southern’s first category of biblical prophecy encompasses vaticinations (inspirational prophecies) derived from scripture. An important biblical passage during the medieval period was the initial chapter of Genesis. This chapter contained knowledge outside human

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<sup>1</sup>R.W. Southern, “Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 3. History as Prophecy”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series*, XXII (1972), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172.

experience and the essence of God's plan for his creation alluded to in the rest of the Old Testament. Southern maintains that Genesis contained a chronology of history, divided into six different ages and including a "providential plan of Redemption."<sup>7</sup> By the twelfth century scholars had deciphered the majority of prophetic biblical passages in the Old Testament and revealed the shape of future historical events. Only two sections resisted interpretation, the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel and the sixth chapter of the Revelation of St John.<sup>8</sup> Southern contends twelfth-century discussion of these passages, and biblical prophetic material in general, displayed a lack of interest in the apocalyptic, focused on the past for an illumination of the present and desired to create order out of confusion. The twelfth-century philosopher had "no strong impulse to take a leap into the unknown future".<sup>9</sup>

Following Southern, Katherine R. Firth in The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1645 further elaborates on the nature of biblical prophecy in the medieval period and in particular the transition from a spiritual to a practical mode of biblical interpretation. Firth distinguishes two medieval approaches to biblical exegesis.<sup>10</sup> The first was a historical explication in which scholars viewed the Book of Revelation specifically as the receptacle of "a hidden history unfolding its pattern in world events".<sup>11</sup> The second, an allegorical interpretation, highlighted biblical vaticination as "a moral allegory of the inevitable tensions between the demands of the flesh and the spirit".<sup>12</sup> Biblical prophecy exemplified the struggle between the path of the righteous and those who gave into the temptations of worldly existence. Ultimately, scriptural forecasts offered a warning to the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>Katherine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645 (Oxford, 1979).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

damned and provided consolation to believers.<sup>13</sup> In a discussion of these two methods Firth cites the twelfth-century work of Otto of Freising as an illustration of the emergence of the historical approach. Otto's critique of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation led him to specific conclusions concerning the course of history, demonstrated in Otto's commentary on St. Augustine's notion of dual cities. In The Two Cities Otto identified Augustine's city of God as the Roman Church and the city of man as the Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> Otto believed that biblical prophecy contained God's plan for the whole of man's existence. Thus Otto concluded that the fall of the Holy Roman Empire precipitated the end of the world.<sup>15</sup> Like St Augustine's two cities, biblical prophecy contained information at once spiritual and temporal. Although Firth identifies the development of dual interpretative methods, she admits Otto's exegesis "did not excite a flurry of interest and innovation".<sup>16</sup> During the sixteenth century, however, Otto's writings were an important heritage for apocalyptic thinkers. Southern and Firth both acknowledge that the major shift in the interpretive approach to scripture resulted largely from the work of another twelfth-century scholar Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202).

For the majority of the Middle Ages, maintains Southern, scholars viewed prophetic material as a practical means of foreshadowing the outcome of present events. By the end of the twelfth century a growing obsession with the end of the world altered the purpose and ultimate aim of biblical prophecy. Scholars sought to reinterpret prophetic passages to glean apocalyptic information. Southern regards this as a turning point in historical thinking precipitated by Joachim of Fiore; "In the middle of the twelfth century, the end of the world

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

was a remote expectation in most people's minds. A century later many knew, and most feared, that the end was close at hand".<sup>17</sup> The principal test of prophecy was the fulfilment of prediction, but failure did not always foster doubt. However, Southern argues the inability of those who disseminated apocalyptic and other predictions to ratify their forecasts led to the ultimate collapse of the prophetic enterprise in the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup>

In Prophecies and the Prophetic Spirit in the Christian Era John J. Ign. Von Dollinger, like Southern, identifies four types of prediction: religious, dynastic, national and cosmopolitan.<sup>19</sup> Although Von Dollinger does not specifically define "religious" prophecy, he seems to associate this type with biblical forecasts, an interpretation given by the translator of Von Dollinger's work, Alfred Plummer. In contrast to "cosmopolitan" prophecy, described by Von Dollinger as predictions concerning the Christian Church that combined religious and secular themes, religious prophecy was "purely religious".<sup>20</sup> Another characteristic of religious prophecy was that the individual did not initiate the reception of prophetic knowledge. Religious prophecies were "the spontaneously generated product of a certain condition of things and of public feeling, without any defined object, without the definite or conscious authorship of any individual person".<sup>21</sup> According to Plummer, religious prophecy was inspirational and, as Plummer undertook his translation of Von Dollinger's work "with the express sanction of the author", he probably agreed with Plummer's elucidation of the type as "divine, spontaneous, and disinterested".<sup>22</sup> Plummer contrasts Von Dollinger's characterisation of religious prophecy as inspirational with all other sorts of "lying

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<sup>17</sup>Southern, "Aspects of the European", pp. 170, 173.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>19</sup>John J. Ign. Von Dollinger, Prophecies and the Prophetic Spirit in the Christian Era: An Historical Essay (London, 1873), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. x.

divinations” that were “the result of human elaboration, calculation, and deceit”.<sup>23</sup> Thus Von Dollinger considered truthful and correct those prophecies described as religious in contrast to all other predictions which by implication were false. Similarly, in The Political Prophecy in England Rupert Taylor describes biblical prophecies as those imparted directly in comparison to symbolically delivered predictions.<sup>24</sup> Taylor also notes that biblical prophecies were clear and easily understood. Direct transmission was the “usual” method of conveyance for biblical vaticination, asserts Taylor; “The language may be figurative and obscure, but the main issue remains clear”.<sup>25</sup>

The direct or inspirational transmission of prophecy was a characteristic not only of biblical prophecy but of any prophecy received within a Christian milieu. R.W. Southern delineates Christian prophecy as the “dreams, visions, and voices, seen and heard by countless people, especially in religious communities”.<sup>26</sup> This type of prophecy encompassed vaticinations from the wider Christian community beyond those described in the Bible. Until the twelfth century individuals experiencing this form of prophetic insight normally directed their prophesying toward the outcome of events in the short term rather than the apocalyptic or universal. Southern cites Hildegard of Bingen as a prominent example of the kind of prophet who received direct inspiration from God.<sup>27</sup> John J. Ign. Von Dollinger incorporates similar vaticination within his description of “cosmopolitan” prophecy.<sup>28</sup> Predictions of this sort foretold the fate of Christianity in secular terms, and focused on the relationship between the “institution of Christianity” and the political environment.<sup>29</sup> Von

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Rupert Taylor, The Political Prophecy in England (New York, 1911), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Southern, “Aspects of the European”, p. 169.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>28</sup>Von Dollinger, Prophecies and the Prophetic, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Dollinger presents the history of cosmopolitan prophecy in four chronological phases: the period 800-1200, the Joachimite period of 1200-1347, the dark century of 1347-1450 and finally, the fourth epoch of 1450-1517.<sup>30</sup> Leading prophets cited by Von Dollinger in his discussion of cosmopolitan prophecy include Methodius, St Hildegard, Joachim and Dolcino.

While the first period of cosmopolitan predictions centred on forecasting the arrival of the Antichrist and dating the end of the world, the last epoch struggled with the decline of the Catholic Church and attacks on both the pope and his clergy.<sup>31</sup>

D.T. Etheridge in his doctoral dissertation “Political Prophecy in Tudor England” terms Christian forecasts “revelationary” prophecies, “knowledge of the future through the medium of direct revelation from God”.<sup>32</sup> Like Rupert Taylor, Etheridge characterises this prophetic type by the method of transmission including in his definition biblical prophets and all other individuals claiming futuristic insight through divine intervention. The historian Keith Thomas similarly denotes religious prophecy during the early modern period as a form of direct revelation. In Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England Thomas discusses both sacred and secular prophecy using the term “religious” prophecy to describe the former and “ancient” prophecy in reference to the latter.<sup>33</sup> Thomas presents religious prophecy as the dreams, visions and direct inspiration received by individuals within a religious environment, a definition concomitant with Southern’s characterisation of “Christian” prophecy. However, Thomas includes biblical exegesis in his elucidation of religious vaticination rather than designating scriptural forecasts as a separate type like Southern.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.

<sup>32</sup>D.T. Etheridge, “Political Prophecy in Tudor England”, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wales (1979), p. 131.

<sup>33</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, pp. 151, 461.



Despite the effects of the Reformation, argues Thomas, the English church upheld the concept of revelation. Many theologians believed that dreams were particularly portentous, although they were often a vehicle for demonic influence. As with other forms of prophecy, futuristic dreams received either divine or diabolical inspiration although the first type was rare. While some Protestants remained sceptical about the legitimacy of prophetic dreams, Thomas asserts, “the generally accepted view was that divine dreams, though unlikely, were still possible”.<sup>34</sup> Ministers faithfully recorded their dreams and those of their congregation. Thomas quotes the comments of the Cheshire minister Edward Burghall, “Such dreams as these are not to be slighted”.<sup>35</sup> The interpretation of dreams became increasingly popular, as did treatises explaining how to judge their significance. Visionaries experienced similar popularity. The Catholic nun Elizabeth Barton gained a significant following as a result of her claim to fore-knowledge through periodic trances.<sup>36</sup> Following her examination by a commission of inquiry at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, the church sactioned Barton’s activities until her predictions turned to the fate of Henry VIII.<sup>37</sup> Catholic and Protestant alike claimed visionary prophetic powers. Thomas attributes John Foxe’s work Acts and Monuments with the responsibility for spreading the belief in “supernatural knowledge of the future” among English Protestants.<sup>38</sup> Thomas cites a sermon given by Foxe while he was in exile, “in which he announced, by miraculous prescience, that the time had at last come for the return to England, though the news of Queen Mary’s death on the previous day had not yet reached him”.<sup>39</sup> As Thomas explains, the acceptance of this kind of prophecy rested on the premise that an individual

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 151-152.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

considered “holier” than others was likely to possess the ability to prophesy.<sup>40</sup>

Keith Thomas also includes in his discussion of religious prophecy apocalyptic speculation derived from the biblical texts of Daniel and Revelation. Like R.W. Southern’s explanation of thirteenth-century “biblical” prophecy, Thomas depicts this type of exegesis as an attempt to date the Last Judgement and the arrival of the New Jerusalem. The English Reformation made prophetic scripture accessible to a greater number of people.<sup>41</sup> While some individuals based their prophecies on scriptural interpretation, other less educated persons believed God gave them direct inspirational knowledge of the future. Assuming the persona of the Messiah or other biblical figures, these “pseudo-Messiahs”, as Thomas terms them, called on their contemporaries to repent in preparation for Judgement. Thomas recounts the story of John Moore, who in 1561 declared himself Christ, and his friend William Jeffrey, his disciple Peter. In 1562 a draper, Elizeus Hall, assumed the role of Eli and suffered imprisonment for his audacity. John White, a shoemaker from Raleigh in Essex, believed himself John the Baptist.<sup>42</sup> Thomas includes other prophets of this sort but the most infamous Messianic impostor he discusses is the illiterate William Hacket. The privy council arrested Hacket and his two companions, Edmund Copinger and Henry Arthington, in 1591 after they denounced the council and the queen in Cheapside. Judicial authorities ordered Hacket’s execution, and imprisoned Copinger who died of starvation in jail.<sup>43</sup> The claim of direct revelation also contained an anarchic element. Thomas argues the importance of revelatory prophecy lay in the “fact that religious prophecy and inspiration were potentially open to everyone”.<sup>44</sup> Religious prophecy, proposes Thomas, enabled artisans and tradesmen

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 177.

to gain attention and attempt to disrupt the peace of the realm. Commenting on Elizabeth Barton's case, Thomas Cromwell remarked, "If credence should be given to every such lewd person as would affirm himself to have revelations from God, what readier way were there to subvert all commonwealths and good order in the world?".<sup>45</sup> While biblical exegesis demanded a basic level of education, anyone could claim prophetic inspiration. However, Thomas asserts that the alliance between "religious enthusiasm and social radicalism" did not reach a climax until the English Civil War.<sup>46</sup>

While this thesis refers to prophecies that were not wholly religious in content as non-scriptural prophecies, other modern commentators discuss the type under a number of different names. Often separated from other types of prophecy for specific discussion, for example, are astrological predictions. As with religious prophecy, commentators identify astrological predictions, called prognostications, by the method of their creation. Prophecy was fore-knowledge inspired by God, however, prognostications were the result of divination, a practice associated with the devil. In Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels Margaret Enid Griffiths attempts to differentiate between divination and prophecy. Describing the "vaticination methods" of the Hebrews, Griffiths refers to two types of forecast produced through the "consultation of signs and omens" and meditation.<sup>47</sup> Many commentators refer to the first type of prediction as divination and the second prophecy, although Griffiths comments, "it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line" between the two.<sup>48</sup> Astrology belongs to the first type of prediction that Griffiths identifies. However, as a result of the popularity of astrology in the sixteenth century many historians include the

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<sup>45</sup>As quoted by Thomas, ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Margaret Enid Griffiths, Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels (Cardiff, 1937), p. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

practice in their discussions of medieval and early modern prophecy. D.T. Etheridge, for example, discusses astrology as a separate genre of prediction, although he often makes no distinction between astrology and other prophetic forms in his general comments.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, R.W. Southern categorises astrology as an inclusive prophetic type and an important mode of historical prediction. As God's creation, the stars represented a divinely inspired source of information concerning man's existence. However, to understand the significance of the stars they needed decoding: "The message of the stars like that of the [biblical] prophets could only be extracted by a careful study of their language, and in both cases careful study might be expected to produce results of great importance".<sup>50</sup> Astrological interpretation became an important study influential throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Astrologers consulted the stars to forecast events, the outcome of individual lives and weather patterns for the coming year, but they also used astral positions to aid in other areas like medicine. Keith Thomas examines astrology separately, not particularly as a prophetic type but rather as a system of belief. Thomas observes that astrology was influential throughout the early modern period, demonstrated particularly by the constant denouncement of the practice in elite literary circles.<sup>51</sup> However, while Thomas notes the disruption caused by the new star of 1572, the comet of 1577 and the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter in 1583 and 1603, he asserts that, "Highly political prognostications, of the kind common during the Civil War, had been relatively infrequent during the previous century".<sup>52</sup>

R.W. Southern categorises other prophecies as "pagan", a category he proposes emerged from classical interest in the esoteric Sibylline prophecies.<sup>53</sup> Virgil popularised and

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<sup>49</sup>Etheridge, "Political Prophecy", p. vi.

<sup>50</sup>Southern, "Aspects of the European", pp. 170-171.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 353.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 354, 349.

<sup>53</sup>Southern, "Aspects of the European", p. 166.

upheld the legitimacy of the Sibylline oracles by relating the story of Aeneas' consultation with the Cumaean oracle in the sixth book of his Aeneid.<sup>54</sup> The Cumaean Sibyl's premonition of the birth of Christ ensured the fame of all the oracles who served as a link between pagan and Christian people.<sup>55</sup> Southern attributes the popularity of Sibylline prophecies, despite their indeterminate nature, to a lack of effective historical criticism during the Middle Ages and a "psychological need for the existence of such documents".<sup>56</sup> Sibylline prophecies appealed to the medieval intellect and affirmed the presence of a Christian God from the earliest times. Rupert Taylor includes Sibylline predictions in his exposition of symbolic prophecy.<sup>57</sup> The origin of this prophetic type was the Oracula Sibyllina, explains Taylor, a vaticination popular in Europe before the twelfth century. Taylor contrasts the European Sibylline method of prophetic disguise with the English form that employed animal symbols.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Keith Thomas refers to the Sibylline prophecies as "ancient" predictions based on combinations of letters or numbers illustrated by the popular acrostic rhyme, "When Heme is spun, England's done".<sup>59</sup> In this forecast the letters of the word Heme represented the monarchs Henry, Edward, Mary, Philip and Elizabeth.<sup>60</sup> Later D.T. Etheridge incorporated Sibylline forecasts into his examination of "traditional" prophecy.<sup>61</sup> Like Thomas, Etheridge refers to the rhyme based on the letters of the word Heme, but also demonstrates the numerological emphasis of this prophetic type by referring to a prophecy by dice where the numbers of the dice acted as

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<sup>54</sup>Virgil, The Aeneid (Oxford, 1986), pp. 156-157.

<sup>55</sup>Southern, "Aspects of the European", p. 166.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>57</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 463.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Etheridge, "Political Prophecy", p. 258.

symbolic representations of certain individuals or groups.<sup>62</sup>

R.W. Southern includes the predictions of Merlin in his elucidation of “pagan” prophecy. Some medieval scholars were suspicious of the validity of Merlin’s prophecies although, like the Sibyls, Merlin’s conjectures served as a link between the pagan and Christian worlds. Southern notes university men studied pagan prophecy with interest and used Merlin’s sayings to illuminate events or reinforce previously conceived notions of history. John of Salisbury, Alexander of Wales, John of Cornwall and Gerald of Wales translated or commented on Merlin’s prophecies while enjoying the patronage of the monarchy or leading ecclesiastics. Southern asserts that twelfth-century pagan prophecy was not “popular mumbo-jumbo” but a “matter of grave intellectual concern to serious and practical men”.<sup>63</sup> Keith Thomas proposes that Merlinic predictions and other prophecies employing animal symbolism were the “most common” type of “ancient” prophecy. Termed Galfridian prophecy, predictions of this sort derived from the prophecies of Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s The History of the Kings of Britain and Life of Merlin, works described by Thomas as “the archetypal source for this genre”.<sup>64</sup> The symbolic imagery of this prophecy used animals as allegorical figures representing individuals, countries, monarchs, families or organisations. Thomas explains that this type of prophecy particularly suited the culture of the sixteenth century when heraldic images were common place. Individuals employing Galfridian prophecy recognised the adaptability of the predictions and reinterpreted the symbolism of the sayings to fit contemporary events. Other ancient prophecies Thomas categorises as “painted”. Also containing heraldic symbols and closely associated with emblem books of the period, painted prophecies

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>63</sup>Southern, “Aspects of the European”, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 462.

appealed mainly to the illiterate population.<sup>65</sup>

Rupert Taylor and D.T. Etheridge examine Galfridian prophecy at length. In particular, Taylor contrasts the animal symbolism of Galfridian prophecy with that of medieval allegory, fables and bestiaries. The animals of Galfridian symbolism represented specific people, explains Taylor, whereas the medieval bestiary or allegorical poem used animals to convey abstract and moral ideas; “In all there is more or less the tendency to abstractness; the figures in the beast fable are individual and concrete enough, but they are used to exemplify abstractions”.<sup>66</sup> Conversely, in Galfridian prophecies “The animal name is but a mask behind which the individual hides incognito. This concreteness and individuality of each figure is the peculiar and distinguishing characteristic of the symbolism”.<sup>67</sup> Taylor asserts that Galfridian prophecy was unknown before the twelfth century except for two works, the Vision of Edward the Confessor and The Omen of the Dragons.<sup>68</sup> Etheridge depicts Galfridian predictions in a similar way; however, where Taylor includes this type of forecast in his elucidation of “symbolic” prophecy, Etheridge prefers to term them “traditional” prophecies.

Keith Thomas depicts ancient predictions as “an elusively vague or ambiguous piece of prose or verse, resting on no clearly defined foundation, either magical or religious”.<sup>69</sup> The ambiguity of the forecast was an essential attribute of the type. Rupert Taylor explains that the lack of clarity evident in Galfridian and Sibylline prophecy resulted in his description of these predictions as symbolic.<sup>70</sup> Many methods for creating obscurity and disguise were evident in secular prophecies. Drawing on a commentator’s account of the Prophecy of John

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>69</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 461.

<sup>70</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, p. 3.

of Bridlington, Taylor summarises ten methods for establishing ambiguity: arbitrary names, accidental designation, equivocation, metaphor, words made from Roman numerals, etymologized translation, enigma, division of words, ambiguous words and abbreviation.<sup>71</sup>

R.W. Southern contends that obscurity often served as a test of authenticity and characterised the decipherment of prophecy as a “science”. “The source of prophecy was inspiration”, argues Southern, “but its interpretation was a science, and more than any other science it called for the coolest discrimination and for profound scholarship”.<sup>72</sup> The uncertainty created by enigmatic vocabulary and terms of reference resulted in an emphasis on interpretation. A prediction did not convey meaning alone but relied on a reader’s explanation of prophetic content. Etheridge argues that prophecies based on animal symbolism retained their meaning because “Traditional prophecy, like society itself, was founded on a basis of stability and a fundamental absence of radical change in English politics”.<sup>73</sup> The symbolism of Galfridian prophecy remained open to interpretation, maintains Etheridge, because families did not often change the imagery of their heraldic badges.

Keith Thomas notes that the validity of an ancient prophecy often rested on the age of the prediction, the older the forecast the greater its reputation.<sup>74</sup> D.T. Etheridge, confirming Thomas’ observation, cites a passage from a sixteenth-century work the Mirror for Magistrates:

An therefore Baldwin teach men to discern,  
Which prophecies be false and which be true:  
And for a ground this lesson let them learne,  
That all be false which are deuised newe.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>72</sup>Southern, “Aspects of the European”, p. 160.

<sup>73</sup>Etheridge, “Political Prophecy”, p. 257.

<sup>74</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 469.

<sup>75</sup>Etheridge, “Political Prophecy”, p. 271.



Deliberate attempts to claim an ancient heritage for prophecies derived from a desire to prove the validity of fore-knowledge through the presentment of known past events as unknown predictions. Rupert Taylor explains, “The writer dated his prophecy earlier than the real time of composition and retold historical facts as a part of the genuine prophecy”.<sup>76</sup> Modern scholars discovered the composition date of many prophecies by fixing this transition point between actual events and prophetic conjecture. Keith Thomas argues that in the sixteenth century individuals used two main methods of creating an ancient character for their prophecies. The first involved the reinterpretation of older prophecies to fit contemporary events. The second method was the creation of a fictive past for predictions that their disseminators hoped would sway others with an impressive prophetic genealogy. Thomas sums up his depiction of ancient prophecies by concluding that,

they were usually of supposedly medieval origin; that they drew their prestige from their antiquity, and that although some contemporaries discussed whether the prophets had got their foreknowledge from God, from conjuration or from astrology, there was on the whole little interest shown in the precise origin and basis of such predictions.<sup>77</sup>

Another method of disguise involved the attribution of a prophecy to a figure like Merlin, Thomas Becket, Thomas of Erceldoune, Mother Shipton, Humphrey Tindall, Robert Nixon, John of Bridlington, Hildegard of Bingen or Bede.<sup>78</sup> In her doctoral dissertation “The Prophecies of Merlin and Medieval Political Propaganda in England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Henry VII” Susan Martha Schwartz describes attributed sayings as “pseudepigraphical” prophecies. Schwartz defines the subject of her study, Merlinic prophecy, as the prophecies of Merlin from the seventh book of Monmouth’s

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<sup>76</sup>Taylor, *The Political Prophecy*, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 469.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 464-465.

The History of the Kings of Britain and the romantic, political or historic stories that evolved from them.<sup>79</sup> Identifying many of the methods of disguise already discussed as attributes of Merlinic prophecy, Shwartz observes that all the prophecies of Merlin and their derivatives followed a tradition of attribution.<sup>80</sup> In addition pseudepigraphical prophecies employ “a recurring theme of the return of a king, and, frequently associated with that theme, supernatural and apocalyptic elements”.<sup>81</sup>

Moving away from the inherent characteristics of prophecy, Keith Thomas deliberates on their function and notes the relationship of ancient and religious prophecy to social and political dissent. The perceived popularity and influence of prophecy led successive governments to punish seditious prophetic outbursts. Thomas declares this is the best evidence of a close connection between prophecy and action.<sup>82</sup> Further, Thomas states that, “In fact prophecies of one kind or another were employed in virtually every rebellion or popular rising which disturbed the Tudor state.”<sup>83</sup> Many commentators describe Galfridian and Sibylline type prophecies as political. Rupert Taylor defines “political” predictions as “any expression of thought, written or spoken, in which an attempt is made to foretell coming events of a political nature”.<sup>84</sup> D.T. Etheridge similarly defines the focus of his study as political prophecy but argues that the term applies to any forecast with political subject matter, while acknowledging the description is usually applied to what Etheridge categorises as traditional prophecy. Etheridge explains,

Here the term traditional has been used as opposed to the more common classification of this type of prophecy as political. All forms of prophecy can

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<sup>79</sup>Susan Martha Shwartz, “The Prophecies of Merlin and Medieval Political Propaganda in England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Henry VII”, unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University (1977), p. 4.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>82</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 471.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>84</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, p. 2.

be termed political . . . to use the term to describe one particular genre imposes a univocity that cannot be maintained.<sup>85</sup>

Other observers identify political prophecy by referring to a body of prophetic literature. In “Prophecies and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII” Alistair Fox cites as political prophecies the predictions of Merlin, Pseudo-Methodius, John of Bridlington and Thomas of Erceldoune.<sup>86</sup>

Recent literary scholars expand the political aspects of predictions and define prophecy according to their perception of its function. The relationship between prophecy and civil discord is the subject of literary scholar Howard Dobin’s work Merlin’s Disciples: Prophecy, Poetry, and Power in Renaissance England.<sup>87</sup> Dobin combines traditional historical evidence and literary fiction, represented by the figures of John Dee and Merlin, in his examination of political prophecy. These two figures embodied the illegitimacy of the prophet, argues Dobin, and symbolised anti-establishment fervour, “Both Dee and Merlin were figures of danger and opposition to institutional authority; both stood at the margins of legitimacy, wielding powers that challenged and rivaled crown and church”.<sup>88</sup> Dobin revels in the ambiguity of prophecy that conveyed an otherworldly feel and reinforced the notion of the divinely inspired prophet. In reality, proposes Dobin, the “slippery and polysemic language of prophecy was the voice - not of God - but of the dissident, the rebel, and the devil”.<sup>89</sup> The vocabulary of prophecy resulted in a lack of clarity and indeterminate meaning.<sup>90</sup> The variety of interpretations possible from reading a single prophecy was

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<sup>85</sup>Etheridge, “Political Prophecy”, p. 274.

<sup>86</sup>Alistair Fox, “Prophecies and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII”, in Alistair Fox and John Guy, eds., Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics and Reform, 1500-1550 (Oxford, 1986), pp. 79-80.

<sup>87</sup>Dobin, Merlin’s Disciples.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

anarchic and undermined the authority of governing organisations attempting to dictate the beliefs and attitudes of the people: “It was the prerogative of the divinely sanctioned institution of power to ground meaning in itself by imposing its dogma on the confusion of individual interpretation”.<sup>91</sup> Dobin juxtaposes the priest and prophet, the first embodying official authority sanctioned by God, and the second representing the threat to that authority. By claiming fore-knowledge the prophet appealed to the divine and challenged the priest’s monopolisation of this power. The dichotomy of priest and prophet is the “central theoretical construct” of Dobin’s work.<sup>92</sup>

Dobin characterises political prophecy as the product of “civil crisis” and refers to the phenomenon as “native British political prophecy”.<sup>93</sup> Earlier John J. Ign. Von Dollinger had identified this sort of prediction as “national” prophecy. Prompted by the hopes or fears of a nation, Von Dollinger proposed that nationalistic prophecies emerged from one of two causes: either the recognition of “deep degeneracy” and “moral corruption” within society and the belief in retribution for such behaviour or as a result of oppression by a foreign power or loss of territory.<sup>94</sup> Von Dollinger cites the Welsh attachment to the prophecies of Merlin as the cause of fourteenth-century Welsh uprisings referred to by Ranulph Higden in *Polychronicon*.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Howard Dobin notes the emergence of political prophecy from national crisis but admits not all prophecies incited rebellion. Dobin’s opposition of priest and prophet is therefore based on ideology not active dissent.<sup>96</sup> Dobin uses Shwartz’s characterisation of Merlinic prophecy as the focus of his study but adds other prophetic types

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<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup>Von Dollinger, *Prophecies and the Prophetic*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>96</sup>Dobin, *Merlin’s Disciples*, pp. 34-35.

were they impinged on the prophecies of Merlin.<sup>97</sup> In summary Dobin postulates,

Prophecy is essentially a form of political discourse; the prophet invokes God as the authority superior to and more powerful than the earthly powers of church and state. Prophecy as political protest - as opposition to the reigning secular and sacred authorities - inevitably constituted a call for change and a challenge to the dominant order. In sixteenth-century England, prophets aimed their attacks at both the ecclesiastical and monarchical establishments. Prophecy became a potent political weapon.<sup>98</sup>

Sharon Jansen's recent work Political Protest and Prophecy Under Henry VIII takes up Dobin's notion of political prophecy as a vehicle of protest. Like other commentators Jansen characterises her subject as "political" prophecy. However, rather than explain the nature of this phenomenon in her own words, Jansen gives an example of the type of prophecy she means. From the 1537 examination of John Dobson, vicar of Muston, Jansen cites an account of a Galfridian recitation in which Dobson pronounced, firstly,

that Yowre Highnes shulde bee drivene oute of yowre realme and aftir [return] to the same againe and bee content to take the thirde parte thereof. The seconde is that the egle, which by there reaporte he saith is themperoure, shuld spred his wingis ouer all this realme. The thirde is that the dunne cowe, whiche by there reaporte he said is the pope of Rome, shuld gingle his keies and come into this realme and sette it in the right feithe againe.<sup>99</sup>

Jansen attributes Geoffrey of Monmouth with the invention of this type of prophecy.<sup>100</sup>

Identifying political forecasts as "deliberately obscure and willfully ambiguous", Jansen observes the emergence of four main prophetic groups or verses in the sixteenth century: the prophecies of Merlin, John of Bridlington, Thomas of Erceldoune and Thomas Becket. Jansen analyses prophecies derived from manuscript texts, and aims to decode the complex symbolism of political prophecy to demonstrate why the English government sought to

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>99</sup>As quoted by Jansen, Political Protest, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

outlaw prophecy in the sixteenth century. Jansen's definition of her subject is specific. Political prophecy was a weapon used as a vehicle of protest by disenfranchised individuals dissatisfied with contemporary events.<sup>101</sup> The criticism of government inherent in this type of prophecy defined its character. The method of Jansen's examination attempts to "connect the surviving historical documents and references to the texts of the prophecies themselves" for one decade, the 1530s.<sup>102</sup>

In contrast to commentators who emphasise the political aspects of prophecy, the Italian scholar Ottavia Niccoli, in Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy, contends that the most interesting aspect of prophecy "is not its location within a specific cultural and social milieu but rather an exceptionally open circulation and exchange of its content through different social and cultural strata".<sup>103</sup> Niccoli encourages scholars to explore the nature of prophecy beyond its relationship with political propaganda, a focus described by Niccoli as "in some measure insufficient".<sup>104</sup> Arguing against the specificity of studies of English prophecy in particular, Niccoli upholds the work of Thomas A. Kselman who demonstrated that emphasis on the political aspects of prophecies "is deceiving and reductive".<sup>105</sup> Instead Niccoli proposes an encompassing view in which prophecy serves as a "unified and complex entity requiring evaluation both for its specificity and for the relational networks that it created". During the sixteenth century,

prophecy seems to have constituted a unifying sign connecting nature to religion and religion to politics and coordinating all the scattered shreds of a culture that in the end turned out to be an integral way of knowing embracing observation of nature, political analysis, and religious reflection.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>103</sup>Niccoli, Prophecy and People, p. xii.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

Modern commentators use many different terms to define and categorise sixteenth-century prophecies according to their content, purpose and method of transmission. Although Rupert Taylor was the first to write a book on the subject, the four prophetic types outlined by R.W. Southern in the 1970s represent a persistent approach to the categorisation of medieval and early modern types of prophecy by modern commentators. Southern's identification of biblical, Christian, pagan and astrological prophecy is evident in the work of John J. Ign. Von Dollinger, Keith Thomas and D.T. Etheridge. However, the variation in the way modern commentators name types of prophecy leads to confusion. In addition, Southern's categories do not reflect the way sixteenth-century people generally thought of prophecies. More common was the division between true and false prophecy or, to put it another way, prophecies inspired by God and those derived from the devil. Studies by Rupert Taylor and Margaret Enid Griffiths, that focus mainly on non-scriptural type prophecies, as distinct from those that were religious, acknowledge and discuss this separation. In the 1990s Ottavia Niccoli's work moves beyond the identification of types to focus on the popularity and social mobility of prophecies, although her subject is Italian prophecy. Literary scholars have followed a different line of inquiry and have taken up Rupert Taylor's accentuation of the political aspects of prophecy. Literary commentators call non-scriptural type prophecies "political" and argue that such predictions exhibited not only a political content but a political function. The term political prophecy, however, is not sympathetic to or reflective of the understanding of prophecy in the sixteenth century and imposes on the Tudor people a world view more appropriate to the twentieth century. Despite these criticisms, the work of recent commentators demonstrates a shift in the study of prophecy from an analysis of the phenomenon as a literary curiosity, to the examination of the role of prophecy in society and attempts to explain its appeal.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Tudor Prophets and Methods of Prophesying**

Modern scholars identify non-scriptural type prophecy according to the characteristics of individual predictions defining the nature of prophecy by a forecast's religious or political theme or the use of popular sayings from larger prophecies. Many twentieth-century writers derive their definitions from the work of late sixteenth-century commentators like Henry Howard who wrote an extensive commentary on prophecy in 1583. Howard's treatise was one of only a few works that examined the characteristics of actual predictions and reflected the practical division between the prophet and prophecies recognised in law. During the sixteenth century both the individual who claimed the ability to prefigure events and the disseminator of prophecies were the subject of literary controversy and legal prosecution. Belief in the danger of non-scriptural prophecies, however, resulted from debate about the derivation of prophecy. Tudor works on prophecy and divination are the best source of information about how contemporaries categorised prophecy and reflected the opinion of reformed theologians that how a prophecy came into being determined its character. The identification of individuals thought to possess prophetic abilities and the examination of their method of prophesying was an important means of identifying non-scriptural prophecy in the sixteenth century.

No sixteenth-century individual questioned the validity of prophecy. Many reformed theologians, however, argued that the phenomenon no longer existed although in theory religious prophecy was still valid. Protestant theologians attacked the practices of the Catholic Church in an attempt to consolidate their theology in comparison to



pre-Reformation Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Reformers declared that while God gave divine-like powers to his followers during the biblical period, the practice had ceased in modern times. Reformed theologians considered all the magical aspects of Catholicism an abomination and affront to the omnipotence of God.<sup>2</sup> As Richard Bauckham asserts in his work on Tudor apocalypticism, the dominant Protestant belief was that vaticination “ceased in the early days of the church and all necessary prophecy was now contained in Scripture”.<sup>3</sup> When defining prophecy commentators made a distinction between direct inspirational prophecy and biblical exegesis. In a scriptural sense the term prophet applied to both forms of prediction. John Harvey acknowledged the two types of prophecy in A Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophetes where he defined the prophet as

a shewer, or foreteller of things to come, as Act.11.27.&c. Or else . . . a preacher, or interpreter of the scripture, as 1 *Corinth*.14. &c. After which last maner may our divines, or Theologers be termed prophets, but not otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

Although the focus of literary commentary was on the individual claiming direct inspiration or the ability to make forecasts through divinatory practices, the controversy surrounding the Elizabethan prophesying movement demonstrated the importance and persistence of biblical interpretation as a form of prophecy among Protestants.

Throughout the 1560s and 1570s Protestant leaders arranged “prophesying” meetings, also termed “exercises”, for local clergy who participated in the communal

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Richard Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation: From John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman (Oxford, 1978), p. 169.

<sup>4</sup>John Harvey, A Discursive, sig. F3.

discussion of biblical tracts to create doctrinal conformity.<sup>5</sup> In “The Prophesying Movement in Kentish Towns During the 1570s” Peter Clark observes that attendance at prophesyings varied and included less learned clergy, “official” Protestants involved in diocesan administration and radical Protestants who were often Marian exiles.<sup>6</sup> V.J.K. Brook in his biography of the archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker notes the influence of continental models on the movement and purports that the church used prophesying meetings to increase theological knowledge and ensure discipline.<sup>7</sup> Although successive bishops, including those of Peterborough, Norwich and Lincoln, sanctioned the prophesyings, they evolved into “dangerous centres of subversive talk and of presbyterian zeal”.<sup>8</sup>

In March 1574 Queen Elizabeth ordered Archbishop Parker to halt the gatherings in Norwich.<sup>9</sup> After learning of the archbishop’s intention to stop the prophesyings, the bishop of Norwich, John Pankhurst, sought encouragement to continue the meetings from William Heydon.<sup>10</sup> At the instigation of Heydon, Pankhurst gained support from several privy councillors who in May 1574 advocated the continuation of the prophesyings.<sup>11</sup> Despite the existence of support for the meetings within her council, Elizabeth reiterated her denunciation of the exercises.<sup>12</sup> In 1576 Parker’s successor, Edmund Grindal, attempted to reform the prophesyings by drawing

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Clark, “The Prophesying Movement in Kentish Towns During the 1570s”, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XCIII (1978), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>7</sup>V.J.K. Brook, *A Life of Archbishop Parker* (Oxford, 1962), p. 279.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>John Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, The First Archbishop of Canterbury in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1711), p. 460.

<sup>10</sup>R.A. Houlbrooke, ed., *The Letter Book of John Pankhurst, Bishop of Norwich, Compiled During the Years 1571-5* (Norfolk, 1974-1975), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

up “Orders for reformation of abuses about the learned exercises and conferences amongst the ministers of the church”.<sup>13</sup> However, the queen remained adamant in her conclusion that the exercises created schism through the uncontrolled interpretation and administration of God’s law contrary to those of the realm. Although the queen did not order the suppression of prophesyings in dioceses outside Norwich in 1574, she issued a general decree to all her bishops on 8 May 1577 “For the Purpose of Suppressing the Exercise Called Prophesying, and any Other Rites and Ceremonies but What are Prescribed by the Laws”.<sup>14</sup>

In practice, sixteenth-century writers used the word prophecy to describe vaticination rather than the interpretation of Scripture and described all other types of prophecy as false. Despite the general belief of reformist theologians that the spirit of prophecy no longer existed, some Protestant leaders upheld the notion of a continuation of the prophetic spirit to enhance the legitimacy of their religion. As Keith Thomas observes, the Reformation did not cause the church to lose all its “wonder-working qualities”.<sup>15</sup> John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments revered many Protestant leaders as prophets. In his description of Hugh Latimer, bishop of Worcester, who died in 1555, Fox wrote, “he did most evidently prophesy of all those kinds of plagues which afterward ensued, so plainly, that if England ever had a prophet, he might seem to be one”.<sup>16</sup> As Thomas argues, the belief that Protestant martyrs foreshadowed their prosecution under Queen Mary was not “political sagacity” but “proof of direct inspiration”.<sup>17</sup> Protestant

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<sup>13</sup>William Nicholson, ed., The Remains of Edmund Grindal, D.D. Successively Bishop of London, and Archbishop of York and Canterbury (Cambridge, 1843) [Parker Society Publication], pp. 373-374.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 467-469.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup>George Elwes Corrie, ed., The Works of Hugh Latimer, Sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555 (Cambridge, 1845) [Parker Society Publication], II, p. xxi.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 155.

unwillingness to rule out the possibility of contemporary prophecy led to the occasional deference to non-scriptural prophets. In The Actes of Englysh Votaryes, for example, the Protestant bishop John Bale celebrated Merlin as a great soothsayer and son of a holy nun.<sup>18</sup> Most works written after the Henrician period, however, followed Reginald Scot's assertion in Discoverie of Witchcraft that the gift of prophecy ceased after Christ's entrance into the world:

At sundrie times, and in diverse maners God spake in the old times by our fathers the prophets, in these last daies he hath spoken unto us by his sonne, &c. And therefore I saie that gift of prophesie, wherewith God in times past endued his people, is also ceased, and counterfeits and couseners are come in their places.<sup>19</sup>

Many sixteenth-century writers, while claiming that God no longer used inspirational prophecy as a method of influencing people, included details on how to determine false prophecy from true. Although preoccupied with the nature of divine prophecy, commentators argued that some predictions derived from the devil offering a means to detect and an argument against them. Many treatises discussed biblical prophecy at length, perhaps indicating an ultimate reluctance to abandon the possibility of direct revelation. God was the source of all true predictions, thus correctly used the term prophecy referred only to divinely inspired forecasts. As the anonymous author of the 1595 play The Pedlar's Prophecy explained,

To prophesie of things is a divine inspiration,  
Telling things to come with unmoveable veritie:  
A gift onely proceeding from Gods high majestie.  
A divine inspiration he calleth prophesie,  
That which doth all other Prophecies exclude.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>John Bale, The Actes of Englysh Votaryes (London, 1560) English Experience Facsimile no. 906 (Amsterdam, 1979) STC 1274, fol. 20 verso.

<sup>19</sup>Reginald Scot, Discoverie of Witchcraft (London, 1584) English Experience Facsimile no. 299 (Amsterdam, 1971) STC 21864, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup>W.W. Greg, ed., The Pedlar's Prophecy 1595 (Oxford, 1914), sig. A2, lines 6-10.

In the sixteenth century people commonly referred to divine prophets as seers because, as John Harvey explained, “The holy prophets, in respect of the apprehensive, and piercing operation or efficacie of their cleere, and pure understanding, were properly called Vidents, or Seers, pillars of divine religion, and men of God”.<sup>21</sup>

Harvey contended that the authenticity of divine prophecy was obvious when compared to demonic predictions.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Reginald Scot declared that the sayings of a divine prophet were always true while those of the devil were false.<sup>23</sup> However, Scot admitted that demonically inspired prophets occasionally forecast correctly, “For it is ods, but they will hit the truth once in a hundred divinations as well as the best”.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Harvey conceded that once or twice the diviner should chance “to hit the naile on the head” because the devil sometimes spoke truthfully from a desire to foster demonic belief and “more easily insinuate himselfe”.<sup>25</sup> Despite the occasional interference by demonic forces, the truth of prophecy remained a test of authenticity.<sup>26</sup> If the events foreseen occurred the prediction was probably divine in origin. As the author of A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies Henry Howard observed, divine prophecies were discernible by their plain, forthright and confident predictions.<sup>27</sup> All good prophets directed their sayings to the “glory of God, and comfort of the faythfull”; therefore, the attainment of monetary gain or other forms of profit revealed the falsity of prophecies.<sup>28</sup>

Although many writers argued that true prophecy no longer existed, authors like

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<sup>21</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. F4 verso.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., sig. B4 verso.

<sup>23</sup>Scot, Discoverie, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. I2.

<sup>26</sup>Henry Howard, A Defensative, sig. Rr3.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., sig. Qqii.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., sigs. Qq3 verso, Rri verso.

William Covell and Henry Howard nevertheless identified several methods used by God to convey messages to his chosen people and advice on how to discern valid from false prophecies.<sup>29</sup> Howard viewed direct inspiration from the Holy Ghost as the only proper vehicle for communication between man and the divine: “no prophecie of Scripture, is made by private interpretation. For, not by the wyll of man, was prophecy brought at anytime, but the holy men of God spake, inspyred with the holy Ghost”.<sup>30</sup> Howard argued that any individual claiming the gift of prophecy must prove divine inspiration of this nature.<sup>31</sup> In Polimanteia, or The Meanes Lawfull and Unlawfull, to Judge of the Fall of a Common-Wealth, Against the Frivolous and Foolish Conjectures of this Age Covell expounded three sorts of divine inspiration. God revealed the future to his prophets “by *vision walking*, by *dreames sleeping*, and by open *voyce* without *all obscuritte*”.<sup>32</sup> The first two methods Covell described as revelation involving “a certaine ravishment of the spirit, and transporting (as it were) of all the sence”.<sup>33</sup> The last type, exemplified by God’s appearance to Moses in a burning bush, occurred without distortion of the senses. However, the devil often imitated all three vehicles of communication to deceive humanity.

Howard expressed concern that the source of some types of inspiration was demonic and acknowledged that individuals occasionally faked knowledge of the divine spirit of prophecy. In particular, Howard denied belief in prophetic trances, attributing them to the work of “Avicenne” and an early attempt to cover up the falling sickness of

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<sup>29</sup>W[illiam] C[ovell], Polimanteia, or The Meanes Lawfull and Unlawfull, to Judge of the Fall of a Common-Wealth, Against the Frivolous and Foolish Conjectures of this Age (Cambridge, 1595) STC 5883, sig. N3 verso.

<sup>30</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Nni verso.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., sigs. Nni, A4.

<sup>32</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. I4.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

a leading rabbi.<sup>34</sup> Howard also deplored the prophecies of the sixteenth-century “Holy Maid”, Elizabeth Barton, and others who prophesied in trances and employed “these vailes and colours of abuse to deceive theyr auditours”.<sup>35</sup>

People were particularly receptive to the divine during sleep. Covell discussed dreams at length and expounded four types: natural, devilish, divinatory and divine.<sup>36</sup> Natural or common dreams contained images already experienced in everyday life “bringing the visions which before have been imprinted by a continual motion of the spirits”.<sup>37</sup> Two sorts of devilish dreams existed. The first kind of dream derived from the uncontrolled inspiration of the devil, while the individual instigated the other type.<sup>38</sup> Covell believed the second type of devilish dreams were those used by heathen “oracles”. Through “vowes and sacrifices” individual oracles persuaded the devil to give them a type of foresight that he conveyed through dreams and other methods. Well known oracles cited by Covell included “Trophonius” and “Seraphis” of Egypt and “Delphos” from Greece.<sup>39</sup> Warning against the devilish nature of oracles and dreams, Howard cited the words of Alcinous that, “From this head sprang all traunces, dreames, oracles, witchcraft, lunacie . . . and what so ever els (saith Alcinous) illudeth and abuseth men, under the maske of prophecye”.<sup>40</sup> Covell’s third category of divinatory or presaging dreams resulted from a sympathy between the stars and the brain of the dreamer. The stars “who (as it were) moved with an understanding of things to come, affect likewise the braine of him that dreameth by a commixtion & conjunction of the first qualities,

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<sup>34</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Ki verso.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. I2.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, sigs. I2-I2 verso.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, sigs. I2, I3-I3 verso.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, sigs. I3 verso-I4.

<sup>40</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Yii verso.

which are betwixt them from the beginning".<sup>41</sup> However, Covell urged his readers to avoid the interpretation of divinatory dreams because they increased superstition and were contrary to God's commandments.<sup>42</sup> The last type of dreams, the divine dreams, were those of the biblical prophets who received direct inspiration from God.<sup>43</sup>

Although God's use of dreams to communicate with people was evident, the phenomenon was also a vehicle for the demonic. Howard asserted that while biblical prophets experienced revelatory dreams, this did not indicate that ordinary people received divine inspiration.<sup>44</sup> Individuals who predicted events through dreams, proposed Howard, often experienced diabolical not divine inspiration. Difficulties surrounded the discernment of divine from demonic dreams. Howard warned his readers that,

since our bad angell, is more often busie with us in a dream then our good, as appeareth by the manifold illusions, which deceive us mightely in our sleepe . . . who can deliver any certaine note or marke, whereby we may be sure at all times to distinguish one from an other? For Sathan can transfourme himselfe into the figure of an angell.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Covell asserted that the devil used dreams to influence individuals and spread falsehoods.<sup>46</sup> However, Covell offered a means of testing a false from true dream by comparing the message of the vision against biblical teachings. Divinely inspired dreams were "acknowledged for good, by the conformitie which they have to the will of GOD".<sup>47</sup>

Writers of the sixteenth century tended to separate their discussion of prophecy between true and false prophecy or prophecy and divination. The term divination

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<sup>41</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. K4.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, sigs. M3 verso-M4.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. M4 verso.

<sup>44</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Mii. See also sig. Mi verso.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. Lii verso.

<sup>46</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. I2.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. N3.



referred to those practices that used magic to presage the future. In Magic in the Middle Ages Richard Kieckhefer explains that divination was “a means for knowing a destiny that was foreordained” in contrast to other types of magic that shaped or manipulated the future.<sup>48</sup> However, the separation between divination and prophecy was not always clear. William Covell defined divination as encompassing all forms of prophecy: “a foretelling of things to come, performing it in divers manners, as well artificially, as naturally”.<sup>49</sup> Covell stated that the etymology of the term revealed

that to divine is properly to foretell, and to foresee things to come, by an exterior motion, without having any subject, cause, or signe before hand to conjecture so; and therefore in this sort, God testifieth of himselfe, that he alone knoweth things to come.<sup>50</sup>

Following Covell’s argument, to consult a divinatory art was to divine artificially by an interior motion. The individual sought prophetic knowledge rather than received it as a gift from God. True divination, believed Covell, required no intermediary between God and the individual.

All other types of divination emanated from Satan. However, writers more commonly used the term divination to describe only artificial methods of prophesying. The Protestant William Fulke, in an early work Antiprognosticon that is to Saye, an Invective Agaynst the Vayne and Unprofitable Predictions of the Astrologians as Nostrodame, noted “the nature of mankynde, earnestely desyrous to have knowledge of thynges to come”.<sup>51</sup> Humanity invented a variety of methods to satisfy the desire to know the future and established a “science of Divination, or foreseeyng”.<sup>52</sup> Fulke listed several

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<sup>48</sup>Richard Kieckhefer, Magic in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1993), p. 85.

<sup>49</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. B.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>W[illiam] F[ulke], Antiprognosticon that is to Saye, an Invective Agaynst the Vayne and Unprofitable Predictions of the Astrologians as Nostrodame (London, 1560) STC 11420, sig. Aiii.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

methods of prediction encompassed by this science: pyromancy, hydromancy, geomancy, palmistry, capnomancy, sciomancy and astrology, the main subject of his treatise. Popular forms of divination included the turning of the riddle and shears. During the 1560s, for example, Alice Swan appeared before the ecclesiastical court of Durham for practising divination. Alice confessed that,

not having the feare of God before myne eyes, but following the persuasion of the devell, who moveth me and all mankind to a defection from God our Creator, have, of a filthie lucre and under colour of a singuler and secret knowledge of lost thinges, used by the space of certen yeres to cast or tourne the riddle and sheares, and albeit it seame to some to be but a trifling matter, yet seing it is a kinde of a divination or charming, expressedly forbidden by Gode's lawes and the Quene's Majestie.<sup>53</sup>

During the sixteenth century most commentators denounced all methods of prophesying initiated by the individual and viewed them as a form of demonic magic. Covell, for example, listed a number of unacceptable divinatory methods including the observation of flying fowls, the observation of dreams, sorcery or lots, devilish inspiration, and false and counterfeit devilish apparitions.<sup>54</sup> Richard Kieckhefer argues that while magic once referred to the esoteric knowledge of the Persians, during the early Middle Ages the term evolved to denote things demonic in origin.<sup>55</sup> This notion was largely due to the work of St. Augustine, who asserted that the devil invented the magical arts. At this time a close association existed between magic and divination. As Kieckhefer observes,

Up through the twelfth century, if you asked a theologian what magic was you were likely to hear that demons began it and were always involved in it. You would also be likely to get a catalogue of different forms of magic,

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<sup>53</sup>James Raine, ed., Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings From the Courts of Durham, Extending From 1311 to the Reign of Elizabeth (London, 1845) [The Surtees Society, XXI], p. 117.

<sup>54</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sigs. O3-O3 verso.

<sup>55</sup>Kieckhefer, Magic in the Middle, p. 10.

and most of the varieties would be species of divination.<sup>56</sup>

Later some commentators divided the concept of magic into two types, natural and demonic.<sup>57</sup> Medieval society accepted natural magic as a valid understanding of the world derived from the passive observation of causes and effects. Demonic magic, however, was dangerous, evil and manipulative. Tudor society similarly separated methods of prophesying that involved passive observation and those that were actively sought by individuals.

Although writers argued against all forms of non-scriptural prophesying and divided true and false prophecy, within the category of false prophecy or divination some types were more acceptable than others. Commentators differentiated between the observation of natural influences from the active manipulation of demonic agents or, as Patrick Curry describes the division in his work on early modern astrology, Aristotelian Naturalism from Neo-Platonic magic.<sup>58</sup> Writers largely concurred with the rest of Tudor society, including legislative authorities, that the passive observation of signs, called portents or prodigies, was less harmful than other types of divination.<sup>59</sup> Broadsides and tracts like St. Bateman's The Doome Warning all Men to the Judgemente recorded unusual occurrences as presaging events of symbolic import.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes individuals saw strange heavenly visions that, as William Covell explained, preceded catastrophic circumstances and "are shewed in the heavens contrarie to the course of nature, as Armies, Dragons, raining downe of bloud, fire, fearefull Eclipses, and such like, which

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>58</sup>Patrick Curry, Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern Europe (Princeton, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>59</sup>Kieckhefer, Magic in the Middle, p. 88.

<sup>60</sup>St. Bateman, The Doome Warning all Men to the Judgemente: Wherein are Contayned for the Most Parte all the Strange Prodigies Hapned in the Worlde, with Divers Secrete Figures of Revelations Tending to Mannes Stayed Conversion Towards God (London, 1581) STC 1582.

bring often times after them like chaunges to their owne strangenes".<sup>61</sup> Covell identified this type of divination as Teratoscopia, "a monstrous and strange vision".<sup>62</sup>

On 5 August 1571 the Spanish ambassador Guerau De Spes reported the sighting of a large arc of fire in the night sky of London. The vision, apparently viewed by five hundred people, lasted two hours. De Spes observed that the people of London were "disturbed" by the sighting "as they are so timid and greedy of wonders".<sup>63</sup> Another Spaniard Antonio De Guaras similarly reported a vision on 7 November 1574. The portent occurred in Northumberland where

there has appeared in the air a white St. Andrew's Cross and near it a wolf, which animals are unknown in this country. The people saw apparently a great number of deer enclosed in a park, and the wolf singling out the largest of them pursued it continually, taking no notice of the others. The wolf was seen no more, but the deer comes alone every day to the same place and is for two or three hours prancing about in great terror.<sup>64</sup>

De Guaras recorded that the English thought the vision a great portent although he believed "these people seem to attach to much weight to simple things like these".<sup>65</sup> Some commentators viewed this form of prophesying with the same scepticism evident in the reports of De Spes and De Guaras. Alluding to biblical examples, Henry Howard asserted, "there is no soothsaying in Jacob, nor divining in Israel . . . whereby we are to note, that the generality of the word in that place, is extended aswel to starres and planets, as to byrds or what other kind so ever".<sup>66</sup> John Harvey judged that signs and portents were "accidentall, and fallible arguments".<sup>67</sup> However, many observers thought

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<sup>61</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sigs. H4-H4 verso.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. H4 verso.

<sup>63</sup>Martin A.S. Hume, ed., *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs, Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas* (London, 1894-1899), II, p. 327.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Cciv verso.

<sup>67</sup>Harvey, *A Discursive*, sig. M2 verso.

of natural events like earthquakes and comets as legitimate portents.

Although Protestantism did not generally allow for the magical intervention of divine power in everyday life, the notion that nature embodied God's design and the providential shaping of human destiny was apparent. Keith Thomas postulates that within Protestant theology "Divine omnipotence was still believed to be reflected in daily happenings, and the world provided abundant testimony to the continuous manifestation of God's purpose".<sup>68</sup> The sixteenth-century populace considered natural phenomena indications of divine interaction with humankind of significant moral and physical importance. William Covell believed that the conjunction of planets was an accurate sign of forthcoming disasters and in particular the fall of governments.<sup>69</sup> Other portentous signs relating to the fate of governments were comets that Covell considered "more certaine and sure in their operation to signifie the change and events of Commonwealths then any other".<sup>70</sup> In 1572 a comet appeared in the sky over London. According to De Guaras, the English people considered "that such a sign has never been seen here excepting when it has presaged a change of government".<sup>71</sup>

In "Elizabethan Almanacs and Prognostications" Carroll Camden asserts that belief in the presaging power of comets was widespread during the sixteenth century; "scarcely any one dared to express an opinion that comets could be overlooked".<sup>72</sup> Further, Camden quoted the Elizabethan philosopher Francis Bacon's comments from "Of Vicissitude of Things" that "Comets, out of question, have likewise power and effect

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<sup>68</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 90.

<sup>69</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. I.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. H2.

<sup>71</sup>Hume, ed., *Calendar of Letters*, II, p. 449.

<sup>72</sup>Carroll Camden, "Elizabethan Almanacs and Prognostications", *The Library*, Fourth Series, XII (1932), p. 86.

over the gross and mass of things”.<sup>73</sup> Henry Howard, however, was sceptical of the power of comets to influence events for “as we see by prooffe, that the flame which comes from sacke whyle it is in burning gives an outward blaze, but hath not so much force as to sindge a clowte: we maye presume the lyke of spirites, which ascend and issue from the Comete”.<sup>74</sup> Howard sarcastically questioned the appointment of monarchs if God intended people to be “slaves and vassales to the blazing starres”.<sup>75</sup> The attitude of many Tudor people, however, upheld Covell’s assertion of the significance of phenomena occurring in the heavens. The Venetian ambassador in England Carlo Capello, for example, wrote to the Venetian Signory of a large fire ball seen in the sky at Greenwich on 13 January 1533 and commented, “which phenomenon, these English consider a prodigy, and draw conclusions thence”.<sup>76</sup>

Earthquakes were particularly ominous signs of future mishap. On 26 February 1574 an earthquake occurred in the north of England. Following the earthquake Edmund Grindal, archbishop of York, wrote to fellow clergyman Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, expressing his concern that the tremor was a portent of some unforeseen event. In particular, Grindal reminded Parker of a similar earthquake in 1551 that he thought presaged Edward VI’s demise, “fearing, as it seemes, this present Earthquake to portent the Queen’s death”.<sup>77</sup> An earthquake on 6 April 1580 heralded a number of printed moralising tracts like Thomas Churchyard and Richard Tarlton’s A Warning for the Wise, A Fear to the Fond, A Bridle to the Lewde, and a Glasse to the

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Vii verso.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., sig. Viii verso.

<sup>76</sup>Rawdon Brown, ed., Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy (London, 1867-1877), IV, p. 377.

<sup>77</sup>Strype, The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, p. 479.

Good.<sup>78</sup> Churchyard and Tarlton depicted the earthquake as a sign of God's displeasure.

Tarlton concluded,

Our health of soules must hang in great suspence,  
When earth and Sea doo quake for our offence.<sup>79</sup>

In an article about the earthquake Lily B. Campbell notes that Tarlton wrote two other tracts about unusual natural events that he interpreted as "signs of the doom which only repentance and reformation can avert".<sup>80</sup>

Other portents originated in the behaviour and observation of animals. In 1586 Geoffrey Whitney included in A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises a poem on providence alluding to the secret knowledge of nature used to predict change:

Suche providence hathe nature secret wroughte  
In creatures wilde, and eeke such knowledge straunge,  
That man, by them in somme thinges maie be taughte,  
As some foretell, when weather faire will chaunge,  
Of heate, of raine, of winde, and tempests rage,  
Some shoue by signes, and with their songs presage.<sup>81</sup>

During the century the reaction of English people to the unusual size and number of animals in the sea reflected the belief in animalistic signs expressed in Whitney's poem. In 1532 Capello wrote of two large fish caught in the Thames river "each measuring 30 feet in length, 10 feet high, and 11 feet broad".<sup>82</sup> One fish was male and the other a pregnant female. The English, declared Capello, thought the size of the fish "a prodigy foreboding future evil", a conclusion considered verified by fourteen suicides that took place within a few days of the capture of the fish.<sup>83</sup> On 19 November 1602 John

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<sup>78</sup>Lily B. Campbell, "Richard Tarlton and the Earthquake of 1580", The Huntington Library Quarterly, IV, no. 3 (1940-1941), p. 293.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>81</sup>Geoffrey Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises (Leyden, 1586) English Experience Facsimile no. 161 (Amsterdam, 1969) STC 25438, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup>Brown, ed., Calendar of State Papers, IV, p. 338.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

Chamberlain wrote that one of Queen Elizabeth's ships met over two hundred whales off the coast of Holland. Chamberlain recorded that in London there "is much descanting what they should portend more then the tempest that followed".<sup>84</sup>

During the sixteenth century the deformities of humans and animals often prompted discussion of either future events or present degradation.<sup>85</sup> In the medieval period the study of strange births was an elite preoccupation called monster lore or teratology. In Tudor England the invention of printing and dissemination of cheap broadside ballads ensured the popularity of prophecies based on nature's oddities.<sup>86</sup> Belief in the prophetic import of deformity by leading Protestant theologians also influenced the acceptance of this type of divination in England. In 1523 Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon jointly produced a chapbook, Deutung der czwo grewlichen Figuren, Bapstesel czu Rom, und Munchkalb zu Freiburg ynn Meysszen funden, that examined two recent aberrations of an ass and a calf.<sup>87</sup> In 1579 John Brooke translated the pamphlet into English as Of two Woonderful Popish Monsters, to wyt, Of a Popish Asse which was found at Rome in the River of Tyber, and of a Moonkish Calfe, calved at Friberge in Misne, Which are the very foreshewings and tokens of Gods wrath, against blinde, obstinate and montrous Papistes, Witnessed, and declared, the one by Philip Melanchthon, the other by Martyn Luther.<sup>88</sup> Luther and Melanchthon presented the animals as symbols of the pope and of the Catholic Church presaging the coming of the

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<sup>84</sup>Sarah Williams, ed., Letters Written by John Chamberlain During The Reign of Queen Elizabeth (London, 1861) [Camden Society. Old Series, LXXIX], pp. 163-164.

<sup>85</sup>Norman R. Smith, "Portent Lore and Medieval Popular Culture", Journal of Popular Culture, XIV (1980), p. 47.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>87</sup>Llewellyn M. Buell, "Elizabethan Portents: Superstition or Doctrine?", in Department of English, University of California, ed., Essays Critical and Historical Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell (Berkeley, 1950), p. 29.

<sup>88</sup>Dudley Wilson, Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment (London, 1993), p. 197.



Antichrist.<sup>89</sup> In her article “Elizabethan Portents: Superstition or Doctrine?” Llewellyn M. Buell concludes that the pamphlet illustrated “at the outset the typical Protestant attitude of complete self-reliance on the part of the self-appointed interpreters of God’s will as manifested by prodigies”.<sup>90</sup>

Other broadsides called for individual reform and prophesied on the basis of strange natural occurrences that without such reform the individual would suffer the wrath of God. In 1562 a broadside, The description of a monstrous pig, the which was farrowed at Hamsted besyde London, the xvi day of October, this present yeare of our Lord God, M.D. lxxii, recounted the tale of a sow that gave birth to a pig without a nose or eyes, a hole between the ears, upturned feet and a body without hair.<sup>91</sup> The pamphlet declared that the pig was a sign of God’s dissatisfaction with humanity; “be assured that these straunge monstrous sights do foreshew unto us that his heavy indignation wyl shortly come upon us for our monstrous livyng”.<sup>92</sup> Another broadside of 1568 depicted a malformed child born at Maidstone in Kent.<sup>93</sup> After describing the horrible deformities of the child the author included a poem entitled “A Warnyng to England” that cautioned readers,

This monstrous shape to thee, England,  
Playn shewes thy monstrous vice,  
If thou ech part wylt understand,  
And take thereby advice.<sup>94</sup>

Tudor society condemned all other methods of prophesying that involved more active participation on behalf of the diviner than passive observation as prophecy

<sup>89</sup>Buell, “Elizabethan Portents”, pp. 29-30.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>91</sup>A Collection of Seventy-Nine Black-Letter Ballads and Broadsides, Printed in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Between the Years 1559 and 1597 (London, 1867), p. 112.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 194-197.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

inspired by the devil. William Covell maintained that the devil imitated divine prophecy to entice individuals to follow him by appearing God-like: “all practises and sleights of Satan, to the intent to deceive mankinde, have beene invented under the shadowe of the institutions and workes ordained of God, and therefore justly he may be called Gods Ape”.<sup>95</sup> During the sixteenth century many writers presented the witch as an infamous servant of the devil who used demonic powers to presage events. In A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles George Gifford defined a witch as “one that woorketh by the Devill, or by some develish or curious art, either hurting or healing, revealing thinges secrete, or foretelling thinges to come”.<sup>96</sup> Although denying many of the skills traditionally attributed to witches, Reginald Scot described in Discoverie one type that “can manifest unto others, things hidden and lost, and foreshew things to come; and see then as though they were present”.<sup>97</sup> Scot argued that the witch was known by a number of different names, and he asserted that there was no difference between calling an individual a witch or a wise-woman; “sometimes observers of dreames, sometimes soothsaiers, sometimes the observers of the flieng of foules, of the meeting of todes, the falling of salt, &c: are called witches”.<sup>98</sup>

The necromancer was another type of diviner who used demonic powers to speak to the dead and gain prophetic knowledge. In 1535, for example, John Maydwell told Jasper Fydoll of a Black Friar, Dr Maydland, who through the science of necromancy professed to know that the “New Learning should be suppressed, and the Old restored by the King’s enemies from beyond the sea”.<sup>99</sup> The ability to communicate with the other

<sup>95</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. I4 verso.

<sup>96</sup>George Gifford, A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles (London, 1587) English Experience Facsimile no. 871 (Amsterdam, 1977) STC 11852, sig. Bii.

<sup>97</sup>Scot, Discoverie, pp. 9-10.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>99</sup>LP Henry VIII. IX, 846.

world meant the necromancer was also a type of conjurer. Henry Howard described a means of gaining unlawful prophecies through “conference with dampned spirites or familiars”.<sup>100</sup> These spirits, observed Howard, were thought by Plutarch to have

dwelt in bodyes among men, and afterward in respect of many greevous sinnes, were fyned at this penaltie, to wander up and downe lyke Lyons . . . seeking whome they may devoure, to inspyre by Dreames and Oracles, and to furnishe men which were assigned to that honour with the gift of prophecie.<sup>101</sup>

In A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse, of Magicall Sciences

Francis Coxe identified two methods of conjuring spirits. The first involved an agreement with the devil to forgo a certain food or drink. Coxe described a “great magician” of Bridgewater who did not eat bread and declared, “he did because it was so concluded betwene him & the spirit, which served him, for at what time he did eat bread: he should no longer lyve”.<sup>102</sup> The second method involved the presentment of a sacrifice. The type of sacrifice commonly used “is a pece of ware consecrated, or hallowed after their owne order . . . or els it is a chicken, a lapwing, or some livinge creatur”.<sup>103</sup> Coxe observed that the divinatory arts encouraged individuals to seek further predictions through conjuration because “the starres & skyes are not sufficient for their furture prediction: but they muste adjoyne there-unto moste detestable partes or societye with spirites”.<sup>104</sup> Keith Thomas argues that the term conjurer also commonly meant a recusant priest.<sup>105</sup> The skills of Catholic priests reputedly included the ability to

<sup>100</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Yi.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., sig. Yi verso.

<sup>102</sup>Francis Coxe, A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse, of Magicall Sciences, as Necromancie. Conjurations of Spirites, Curious Astrologie and Suche Lyke (London, 1561) English Experience Facsimile no. 501 (Amsterdam, 1972) STC 5950, sig. Aviii.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., sig. Aviii verso.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., sig. Avii verso.

<sup>105</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 78.

conjure the devil out of individuals or objects.<sup>106</sup> Judicial authorities investigated the activities of several clergymen during the century who reputedly dabbled in demonic practices of this sort.<sup>107</sup>

The most predominant form of divination during the sixteenth century was astrology.<sup>108</sup> Hilary Carey observes that from the fourteenth until the sixteenth century astrology changed from a respected science to a “popular movement”.<sup>109</sup> In the fourteenth century John Ashenden denounced the association of the astrologer with magic in his work Summa Judicialis and advised astrologers to “abstain from such illicit arts as magic, nigromancy [sic], and geomancy”.<sup>110</sup> However, in the fifteenth century a separation developed between divinatory astrology and the respectable science of astrology adhered to by John Ashenden and other scholars. In his work on early modern astrology Patrick Curry explains that during the sixteenth century people divided astrology into two different types, natural and judicial. The first type concerned the influence of the stars (a term that encompassed both planets and stars) on agriculture, weather and other natural phenomena.<sup>111</sup> Referring to the work of Lynn Thorndike and Otto Neugebauer, Curry notes that natural astrology was closely linked to natural philosophy and “early science” because of the emphasis on causal relationships between events and “law-like determinism”.<sup>112</sup> Judicial astrology, the second type, involved the

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>107</sup>SP 1/97, fol. 128.

<sup>108</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. G2.

<sup>109</sup>Hilary Carey, “Astrology and Divination in Later Medieval England”, unpublished D.Phil dissertation, University of Oxford (1984), p. 8.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>111</sup>Curry, Prophecy and Power, pp. 8-9.

<sup>112</sup>Otto Neugebauer, Astronomy and History: Selected Essays (New York, 1983) and Lynn Thorndike, “The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science”, Isis, XLVI (1955) as cited by Curry, Prophecy and Power, p. 8.

calculation of figures (horoscopes) to determine the outcome of the future.<sup>113</sup>

As with prophecies based on the interpretation of the significance of “monsters”, the advent of the printing press resulted in the wider dissemination of astrological prophecies throughout society. Carroll Camden maintains that the almanac and prognostication formed the basis of popular astrology and “offered the poor man a simple method of taking advantage of ‘practical astronomy’”.<sup>114</sup> Writers of the sixteenth century highlighted the divinatory claims of astrology as most works of this period argued against astrology and in particular the judicial branch of the practice. William Fulke defined the art as “knowledge, whereby the practisers of it saye, that they can tell of all thyng that are not come to passe, before they come to passe, by the course & movyng of the starres”.<sup>115</sup> Henry Howard defined astrology as a “kind of gessing and diving, by the sight, aspect, and secret influence of Starres & Planets from above”.<sup>116</sup> The prevalent view was that attempts to predict the future by the stars was an abomination and debasement of the science of astronomy. In Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800 Bernard Capp proposes that little difference existed between the astrologer and the magician or cunning-man.<sup>117</sup> Fulke referred to astrologers variously as prognosticators, soothsayers, fortune-tellers and false prophets.<sup>118</sup> In his invective against judicial astrology, John Chamber referred to astrologers as “Figure-flingers, and starre-gazers”.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, p. 83.

<sup>115</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sig. Diii.

<sup>116</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Niv.

<sup>117</sup>Bernard Capp, Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800 (London, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>118</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sigs. Avii verso, Diii verso, Dvii verso, Eiii verso.

<sup>119</sup>John Chamber, A Treatise Against Judiciall Astrologie: 2 Parts (London, 1601) English Experience Facsimile no. 860 (Amsterdam, 1977) STC 4941, sig. B2.

Definitions of magic and methods of prefiguring events in the sixteenth century were not radically different from those of the late medieval period when such practices were similarly prolific. However, the development of the printing press increased the dissemination of previously elite forms of magical practices, freeing the transmission of prophetic ideas between elite and popular culture. After the Reformation commentators and government officials, influenced by Protestant theology, condemned many forms of prophecy. The accepted view was that while some prophecies were true, others were false and inspired by the devil. The delineation of the two types of prophecy was highly subjective but commonly based on a prophecy's method of transmission. Generally, Protestants believed that God no longer used prophecy as a vehicle of communication with mankind. Many individuals dismissed the validity of any contemporary prophet, however, others supported a hierarchy of prophecies and judged some as more legitimate than others. While the sayings of the biblical prophets were the most genuine form of prophecy, people rarely ignored the words of contemporary prophets who could prove direct inspiration from God. Other individuals accepted some forms of divination, such as the passive observation of the natural world, but condemned all active means of divining the future practiced by judicial astrologers, necromancers or witches. Only a few individuals recognised or discussed the variety of prophecies that circulated independently and successfully throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Unlike modern commentators few Tudor writers attempted to categorise and record the character of predictions. The main concern of the literary community was to identify false and possibly demonic prophecy, a desire realised through the examination of the prophet or diviner and methods of transmission rather than individual prophecies.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Prophecies

During the sixteenth century successive parliaments recognised that there was a separation between the prophet or diviner and the prophecies they produced. In 1542 and 1563 parliament enacted independent statutes against those who practiced “conjurations & wichecraftes and sorcery and enchantments” and those who disseminated “Prophecies uppon Declaracion of Names Armes Badges, &c”.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Tudor period individuals repeated popular prophecies that circulated independently of divinatory practices and formed a genre of prophetic literature expressed verbally, pictorially and in writing. Most discussion of prophecy in literature of the period, however, did not separate the creator or disseminator of prophecy from their forecasts, and writers devoted little of their tracts to an identification of the character of non-scriptural prophecies. Most literary commentators focused on diviners and their art and examined at length the practice of witchcraft, necromancy, astrology and the observation of portents. Only two works, written by Henry Howard and John Harvey, accurately identified the literary style of prophecies characterising predictions according to their attribution, use of animal, heraldic, alphabetical, numerical or pictorial symbols and clarity of meaning. Despite the largely accurate depiction of non-scriptural prophecy presented by Howard and Harvey, they overlooked some characteristics such as the directness of prophecies that avoided the use of a complicated system of symbolism and those derived from larger medieval works reinterpreted to make

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<sup>1</sup>33 Henry VIII, c. 8 [SR, III, p. 837]; 33 Henry VIII, c. 14 [SR, III, p. 850]; 5 Elizabeth I, c. 15 [SR, IV. i, p. 445]; 5 Elizabeth I, c. 16 [SR, IV. i, p. 446].

sense in a contemporary milieu.

In the sixteenth century many writers identified non-scriptural prophecies through their attribution to well known authoritative people. Keith Thomas names as individuals credited with the authorship of prophecies Bede, Gildas, Archbishop Mellitus, Edward the Confessor, Henry II, Becket, Giraldus Cambrensis, Friar Bacon, Chaucer, Savonarola, Ignatius Loyola, James I, Sir Walter Raleigh and Archbishop Ussher.<sup>2</sup> Thomas argues that attributions added to the validity of forecasts, although the origin of a particular association between an individual and a prophecy is difficult for the modern scholar to determine.<sup>3</sup> Similarly noting the added legitimacy attributions gave to prophecies, Tudor writers questioned their authenticity and suggested that disseminators falsely ascribed their prophecies to famous persons.<sup>4</sup>

A particularly useful source of noted attributions was the prophecy commonly referred to as “The Sayings of the Prophets”.<sup>5</sup> This prophecy encompassed a list of predictions declaring the arrival of a king who would win the “holy cross”. Several different manuscript versions of “The Sayings of the Prophets” exist. The Folger Shakespeare Library manuscript includes as individuals to whom the prophecy credited prophetic sayings Saint Thomas of Canterbury, John of Bridlington, William Ambrose, William Silvester, the patriarch of Armonie, William the abbot of Ireland, a Sibyl, St. Peter, Mayfair de Bater, the prophet “Alffueck”, Saint Jerome, Mohammed, “Mamyvon”, Thomas of Erceldoune, Solomon, Merlin and Bede.<sup>6</sup> The names of other prophets, like

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, pp. 464-465.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>4</sup>Harvey, *A Discursive*, sig. K verso.

<sup>5</sup>The following manuscripts include a version of “The Sayings of the Prophets” prophecy: BL MS Lansdowne 762, fols. 48 verso-50 verso, Bodleian MS Rawlinson D.1062, Folger MS Loseley b.546, fols. 1-1 verso, BL MS Sloane 2578 and BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E vi, fols. 401-406. Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup>BL MS Lansdowne 762, fols. 48 verso-50 verso and Folger MS Loseley b.546, fols. 1-1 verso.



John Hall, David Lloyd and William Nixon, appear in a collection of manuscript prophecies from Cheshire and add to those mentioned in the Folger Shakespeare Library manuscript.<sup>7</sup> However, the best known prophet was Merlin.

Individuals critical of the English liking for prophecies often referred specifically to the predictions of Merlin. In The Complaynt of Scotland the anonymous author admonished the English for giving “ferme credit to diverse prophane propheseis of merlyne”.<sup>8</sup> The author of The Complaynt of Scotland suggested that the English adhered to the prophecies of Merlin because they believed that he forecast the merger of Scotland and England under one king. The prophecy endorsed the desire of the English to conquer Scotland.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in a sermon marking Queen Elizabeth’s accession to the throne of England Edwin Sandys, archbishop of York, associated Catholic belief in prophecy with the predictions of Merlin. Sandys ranted against the use by Catholics of prophecies that presaged the ascendancy of their religion and the disintegration of the state. The Catholics in England, declared Sandys, owned books of Merlin from which “they make such constructions and expositions, as may serve their purpose”.<sup>10</sup> When a Mr Lloyd wrote to Sir Robert Cecil in 1600 to ensure his election as sheriff in Cardigan, Lloyd promised to collect all volumes of Merlin’s prophecies for Cecil to burn in London because, he argued,

the old Romans were not so addicted to their Sibyls, the Egyptians to the priests of Memphis, nor the Frenchmen to their superstitious Druids, as many in his country are given to the prophecies of Merlin, or to the fond

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<sup>7</sup>Cheshire MS DDX 123, fols. 7, 22, 23.

<sup>8</sup>James A.H. Murray, ed., The Complaynt of Scotlande with ane Exortatione to the Thre Estaitis to be vigilante in the Deffens of their Public veil. 1549 (London, 1872) [Early English Text Society, Extra Series, XVII], p. 82.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>10</sup>John Ayre, ed., The Sermons of Edwin Sandys, D.D., Successively Bishop of Worcester and London, and Archbishop of York (Cambridge, 1842) [Parker Society Publication], p. 67.

fables of Taliessin.<sup>11</sup>

The strong association between non-scriptural prophecies and those of Merlin was also evident among those repeating and listening to forecasts.

The fame of Merlin led many individuals to ascribe their prophecies to him. In 1510 Wynkyn de Worde, Margaret Beaufort's printer, published Here Begynneth a Lytel Treatyse of the Byrth and Prophecye of Marlyn.<sup>12</sup> The prophecies of Merlin also appeared scattered in other publications like the treatises of Henry Howard and John Harvey. William Caxton's Chronicles of England and Wilfride Holme's The Fall and Evill Successe of Rebellion recounted the prophecy of the six kings, attributed to Merlin, that depicted Henry VIII as a mole and the last of six kings destined to bring ruin to England.<sup>13</sup> Often individuals referred to non-scriptural predictions in general as Merlin's prophecies. For example, prophetic verses found in the state papers of Henry VIII refer to several prophets including Thomas of Canterbury, Bede, John of Bridlington and Saint Jerome, although the collator titled the assortment of predictions "Merlin's prophecies".<sup>14</sup> When examined individuals often admitted that they saw or possessed rolls of prophecies derived from Merlin. John Dobson, William Weston, John Hale and John Ryan all declared that they knew of Merlin's prophecies.<sup>15</sup> In 1592 George Clifford, earl of Cumberland, demonstrated the acceptance of Merlin within elite society in his speech to Elizabeth made upon his appointment as chief champion of the Tilt

<sup>11</sup>HMC, Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire (London, 1904), X, p. 369.

<sup>12</sup>John Guy, Tudor England (Oxford, 1991), pp. 77-78; Here Begynneth a Lytel.

<sup>13</sup>Chronicles of England (Westminster, 1480) STC 9991; Holme, The Fall and Evill.

<sup>14</sup>LP Henry VIII. Addenda. I, 290.

<sup>15</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 64 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212]; SP 1/220, fol. 61 [LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1027]; SP 1/92, fol. 49 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 567]; SP 1/153, fol. 50 [LP Henry VIII. XIV, ii, 73].

Yard and self-styled Knight of Pendragon.<sup>16</sup> Clifford spoke of Merlin's participation in the founding of his family home, Pendragon Castle, and the discovery of a prophecy in a wall of the building. Clifford's speech reflected the popularity of medieval literary accounts of Merlin's prophecies among an educated audience.

Many sixteenth-century writers identified non-scriptural prophecies by their obscurity. Prophecies were ambiguous and did not clearly identify their subjects or when events predicted would happen.<sup>17</sup> Several writers asserted that readers needed an interpreter to decipher the meaning of prophecies. Commenting on the incomprehensibility of non-scriptural prophecies, Howard declared that without a Masters degree in the Arts an individual could not understand prophetic symbolism.<sup>18</sup> Harvey added to Howard's observation the need for a "Steganographicall decipherer", a logician and a philosopher for the interpretation of prophecies.<sup>19</sup> The methods of creating this language of obscurity were numerous. Harvey discerned many of the methods that created the perplexity of prophecy but argued,

Were it not a needles, or booteles labor, to make a special Analysis, either of their Abcedary and Alphabetical Spels, or of their Characteristicall, and Polygraphical suttelties, or of their Acrostique, and Anagrammatistique devises, or of their Steganographicall, and Hieroglyphicall mysteries, or of their hyperbolicall metaphors, phantasticall allegories, and heraldicall illusions, or of their ambiguous aequivocations, interdeur amphibologies, and aenigmaticall riddles, or finally of any their other colourable glosses, & hypocriticall subornations, in some like prestigiatory, and sophisticall veine?<sup>20</sup>

However, contrary to Harvey's assertion an illustration of the general characteristics of non-scriptural prophecies, observed and discussed by Harvey and Howard, is necessary

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<sup>16</sup>G.C. Williamson, George, Third Earl of Cumberland (1558-1605) His Life and His Voyages: A Study from Original Documents (Cambridge, 1920), pp. 108-109.

<sup>17</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. li2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., sig. Mmi verso.

<sup>19</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. H3.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., sigs. B-B verso.

for the clear identification of the phenomena.

A characteristic means of producing the ambiguity of prophecies was the use of animals as symbols. Howard proposed that bestial representations acted as a subterfuge to hide mistakes in the forecast.<sup>21</sup> Modern commentators argue that the symbols were an attempt by prophets and diviners to avoid prosecution by concealing the meaning of their work.<sup>22</sup> Non-scriptural forecasts disguised prophetic characters rather than name individuals outright. Harvey identified the use of animal symbols as a particular feature of the prophecies of Merlin employed to delude and beguile the common people through the appeal of animal figures:

what reckoning is indeede to be made of his Irish Lions, hideous woolves, despituous Antilops, griphins, buls, beares, foxes, moldwarps, swans, bussards, cranes, cocks, owles, and other fierce or tame creatures; are they not meere gewgawes to delight children.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes prophecies included animal representations from the heraldic badges of the English peerage.<sup>24</sup> Harvey described this form of symbolism, derived from the family crests of the nobility, as “monsterous Heraldicall blazonings”.<sup>25</sup> Howard believed that prophetic swindlers studied the familial relationships between noble houses and shaped their forecasts accordingly.<sup>26</sup> The popularity of heraldic images reflected Howard’s assertion that the nobility were the main subject of prophecies because the fate of the nation rested on the destiny of the powerful.<sup>27</sup> In 1530 William Harlokke disclosed that he received from a friend, Dr. Austyn of Colchester, a calendar of prophecy with

<sup>21</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. li2 verso.

<sup>22</sup>Evidence suggests, however, that judicial authorities were able to convict offenders without the need to decipher predictions.

<sup>23</sup>Harvey, *A Discoursive*, sigs. H3 verso-H4.

<sup>24</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Hh2 verso.

<sup>25</sup>Harvey, *A Discoursive*, sig. H4.

<sup>26</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Hh2 verso.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. Hhiii.

“pictures of kings and lords arms”.<sup>28</sup> In 1532 William Neville was heard repeating a prophecy that “a beyr whiche had ben long tyde to a stake shuld arise and make peace & unytie”.<sup>29</sup> Neville believed that the bear symbolised himself as the earl of Warwick, confirming Neville’s aspiration to the earldom for which a bear chained to a ragged staff was a heraldic standard.<sup>30</sup> In An Exhortation to Stryrre all Englyshemen to the Defense of theyr Countreye Richard Morison attempted to interpret the symbolism of animals in a prophecy from Wales in favour of Henry VIII.<sup>31</sup> The prophecy claimed an eagle would take over the world crushing all monarchs and kingdoms beneath its feet.<sup>32</sup> Morison believed the eagle was a representation of the Antichrist and specifically, the bishop of Rome. However, a lion would arise to deliver the people from the tyranny of the eagle. Morison argued that the lion depicted Henry VIII because just as the eagle was an image of Rome, the lion appeared on Henry VIII’s badge as the earl of Richmond.<sup>33</sup> In 1528 William Roy’s satirical treatise denigrating Cardinal Thomas Wolsey highlighted the popularity of heraldic prophecies.<sup>34</sup> Roy created his own heraldic shield for the cardinal with angels of Satan, bloody axes and the decapitated head of bulls. Roy explained the meaning of each symbol on the arms and prophetically interpreted the shield in a verse concluding,

Wherin shalbe fulfilled the prophecy  
 Aryse up Jacke and put on thy salatt  
 For the tyme is come of bagge and walatt  
 The temporall chevalry thus throwen downe  
 Wherfor prest take hede and beware thy croune.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup>SP 1/58, fol. 101 [LP Henry VIII. IV. iii, 6652].

<sup>29</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 197 verso [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

<sup>30</sup>Robert Gayre, Heraldic Standards and Other Ensigns (Edinburgh, 1959), Plate XIII.

<sup>31</sup>[Morison], An Exhortation, sig. Div verso.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., sigs. Div verso-D verso.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., sigs. Dvi-Dvi verso.

<sup>34</sup>[William Roy], Rede Me (Strasburg, 1528) English Experience Facsimile no. 485 (Amsterdam, 1972) STC 21427.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., a verso.

In many instances knowledge of heraldic imagery did not clarify the meaning of prophecies. In The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey, written by George Cavendish in the 1550s, a dun cow represented Henry VIII.<sup>36</sup> Cavendish recounted a prophecy told to him by Cardinal Wolsey that when the “Cowe ridyth the bull than prest beware thy skull”.<sup>37</sup> Like Morison, Cavendish referred to the device of the earls of Richmond in his reading of the prophecy. However, where Morison thought that the lion symbolised the king, Cavendish believed the dun cow referred to Henry VIII for the same reason.<sup>38</sup> Morison claimed that the bull signified Anne Boleyn because the animal was a device of the Boleyn family.<sup>39</sup> However, in 1537 John Dobson, vicar of Muston, believed the dun cow represented the bishop of Rome.<sup>40</sup> In another prediction concerning Anne and Henry VIII an unknown person confessed to hearing a prophecy that a “bull shulde serde the mayres daughter”.<sup>41</sup> The confessor interpreted the prophecy in reference to Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn and depicted her father, Thomas Boleyn, as the mayor. In this case a bull represented Henry VIII. The use of heraldic images neither added significantly to the accurate interpretation of prophecies that often used similar beasts to denote several individuals nor described such images clearly enough to identify their heraldic derivation. People interpreting predictions made sense of prophetic symbolism as best suited their interests.

Occasionally prophecies incorporated symbolic images of other natural phenomena derived from heraldic devices. In 1537 an investigation into the abbey of

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<sup>36</sup>George Cavendish, The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey (London, 1959) [Early English Text Society, Original Series, CCXLIII].

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.; Retha M. Warnicke, The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 165-166.

<sup>40</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 63 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212].

<sup>41</sup>BL Cotton Appendix L, fol. 72 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 794].

Furness revealed that a prophecy concerning the English break with the papacy was circulating among the Cistercian friars. Robert Legate deposed that at least two of the brethren repeated a prophecy that “in England shalbe slaine the decorat rose in his mothers bely”.<sup>42</sup> The abbot of Furness’ description of the device as a red rose indicated that the prophecy referred to the Tudor rose, a badge of Henry VIII.<sup>43</sup> The friars interpreted the prophecy to mean that the king would die at the hands of the clergy because they viewed the church of Rome as his mother.<sup>44</sup> The prosecution of John Dobson revealed two other prophecies employing heraldic devices. Three individuals from the parish of Honnonbye in north-east Yorkshire accused Dobson of saying that the “mone shall kin[dle] againe & take light of the sone”.<sup>45</sup> As explained in the charges against Dobson, the moon symbolised the Percy family because the crescent moon appeared on their heraldic guidon.<sup>46</sup> The parishioners also claimed Dobson said, “skalop shelles shalbe brokene and goo to wreke”, probably a reference to the Dacre family of northern England whose arms and badge contained images of the escallop.<sup>47</sup>

Other means of disguising the identity of individuals in prophecies included the symbolic use of letters and figures. In 1520 a prophecy by dice appeared in the state papers of Henry VIII. In this prophecy the numbers of the dice, rather than symbolic animals, represented individuals:

Then  $\diamond \diamond$  shall a Ryse and set uppe  $\square \square \square \square$  Than England shalbee in paradyse  
 When  $\square \square \square$  and  $\square \square \square$  ys my swente Than all England shalbee shente  
 Then shall ye have a newe parliament Then  $\square \square \square \square$  shall a Ryse and  $\square \square \square$  shall  
 undre A ded man shall a Ryse and that shalbee greate wondre he that

<sup>42</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 4 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 841].

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., fol. 7.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., fol. 4.

<sup>45</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 63 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212].

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.; Gayre, *Heraldic Standards*, Plate VI.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. The escallop was, however, a popular device and appeared on the heraldic ensignia of many families. Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (London, 1909), pp. 299-300.

dedde and buryed in sight shall a Ryse ageyne and lyve in land  
incomforting of a yonge knyght That fortune hath chosyn to bee his  
feor.<sup>48</sup>

Another prophecy dating from the 1530s used numbers, without reference to the sides of the dice, to replace the need to name people involved in the events foreseen. Described as a political rhyme, this short prophecy began “vi is com v is goon wyth thris ten be ware all men vii wyth vii shall mete wyth viiith and viiith many a thousande shall wepe”.<sup>49</sup> However, prophecies using numbers were rare. More common were prophecies that employed letters in place of the name of an individual. John Harvey described the false prophet’s use of alphabetic imagery as “one of their highest and deepest inventions” referring specifically to the prophecy titled “HEMME” or “HEMPE”.<sup>50</sup> In 1602 the knight John Harington remembered that he heard the prophecy as a child and recorded the saying in A Tract on the Succession to the Crown:

After Hempe is sowen and growen  
Kings of England shall be none.<sup>51</sup>

Harington believed that the letters of the word Hempe stood for the first letters of the names of the monarchs of England: Henry, Edward, Mary, Phillip and Elizabeth.<sup>52</sup> A grand jury at the Sussex assize court indicted John Fuller for repeating a similar prophecy that he found written in a book. The jury heard that on 3 June 1595 Fuller said, “when hempe is come and gone, happye were he out of England”, which he interpreted as a reference to Henry VIII and Edward VI only.<sup>53</sup> George Whetstone included a variation

<sup>48</sup>SP 1/232, fols. 219 verso-220 [LP Henry VIII. I, 290]. For a copy of this prophecy and other prophecies by dice see Jansen, Political Protest, p. 145 and Etheridge, “Political Prophecy”, p. 259.

<sup>49</sup>SP 1/121, fol. 238 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 184].

<sup>50</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. I2 verso.

<sup>51</sup>Harington, A Tract on the Succession, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>ASSI 35/37/9, m. 43 [J.S. Cockburn, ed., Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments Elizabeth I (London, 1975), pp. 301-302].



of this prophecy, noted by Harvey as the Hemme prediction, in his work The English Myrror.<sup>54</sup> Whetstone argued that during the reign of Henry VIII a prophecy foreshadowed the reformation of the English Church after Queen Elizabeth succeeded to the throne. The prophecy asserted that

E shall follow H, next E (with wonder) M,  
M shall be crowned, and soone confounded  
Next unto M, E or A shall raigne,  
Then shall the Church converted be againe.<sup>55</sup>

In this prophecy the letters H, E, M and E referred to the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth.

Similar prophecies circulated referring to Henry VIII's wives and associates. During the 1530s several individuals admitted that they knew of a prophecy about Thomas Cromwell. In 1537 Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, seized a version of this prophecy and sent a copy to Cromwell. The prophecy stated

that a litle cuntrey called braytin  
shalbe brought in such caas certayne  
and be compelled to begyn agayne  
at a.b.c. that saide not christe crosse.<sup>56</sup>

Although Norfolk gave no indication of how people interpreted the saying, Sharon Jansen describes the letters a, b, and c as references to Anne Boleyn and Cromwell.<sup>57</sup>

The same prophecy also included a direct allusion to Cromwell as "Crumwell" and the letters "r. l. & m.":

much ill cummeth of a smal note  
as Crumwell set in a mans throte  
that shall put many other to payne god wote  
but when Crumwell is brought in lawe  
and we rode owte the christ crosse rowe

<sup>54</sup>Whetstones, The English Myrror, p. 134.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 177 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 318]; see also Jansen, Political Protest, pp. 41-42.

<sup>57</sup>Jansen, Political Protest, p. 42.

to r. l. & m. then shall we knowe nowes.<sup>58</sup>

Jansen and Madeleine Hope Dodds in her article “Political Prophecies in the Reign of Henry VIII” argue that the letters represent Katherine of Aragon and Lady Mary, later Queen Mary.<sup>59</sup> In 1546 Richard Laynam confessed that he repeated another version of this prophecy referring to K L and M.<sup>60</sup> In 1537 the Council of the North interrogated several priests about a prophecy spreading around York that similarly referred to Cromwell, A B C and K L M.<sup>61</sup> In the same year the abbot of Furness deposed that one of his monks, John Broughton, had shown him a prophecy that “abc and iii ttt shuld set all in one state”.<sup>62</sup> Dodds suggests that in the prophecy of the monks of Furness the letters a, b, and c stood for Anne Boleyn and Cranmer.<sup>63</sup> However, none of the people who repeated alphabetical predictions provided an interpretation of their prophecies. The modern scholar’s attempt to determine the identity of the individuals symbolised by the letters a, b, c, k, r, l, or m is therefore guesswork. One prophecy for which some evidence exists of an interpretation appeared in a contemporary biography of Anne Boleyn. George Wyatt recorded in his Life of Queen Anne Boleyn that a painted prophecy given to Anne depicted “the figure of some personages, with the letter H upon one, A upon another, and K upon a third”.<sup>64</sup> Wyatt observed that the figures and letters

<sup>58</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 177 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 318].

<sup>59</sup>Jansen, Political Protest, p. 42; Madeleine Hope Dodds, “Political Prophecies in the Reign of Henry VIII”, The Modern Language Review, XI, no. 3 (1916), p. 278. There is some disagreement about the correct transcription of this prophecy. Jansen and Dodds believe the alphabetical references include the letters “K. L. and M”, however, James Gairdner, an editor of the LP, and I read “r. l. & m”. LP Henry VIII, XII. i, 318.

<sup>60</sup>SP 1/220, fol. 64 [LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1027].

<sup>61</sup>SP 1/127, fols. 63-67 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212].

<sup>62</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 7 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 841].

<sup>63</sup>Dodds, “Political Prophecies”, p. 278.

<sup>64</sup>John Gough Nichols, ed., Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Chiefly from the Manuscripts of John Foxe the Martyrologist; with two Contemporary Biographies of Archbishop Cranmer (London, 1859) [Camden Society. Old Series, LXXVII], p. 52.

represented Henry VIII and his wives Katherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn.<sup>65</sup>

Wyatt's reference to painted prophecy revealed that prophecies also took an illustrated form in which artists used pictorial images as a method of disguise. The 1537 transcript of the examination of William Todde, prior of Malton, included a vivid example of this type of forecast. The prior described a night during which

he sawe in one Geffery Lancastres handes a rolle in parchement of half a yarde in length and half a quarter of a yarde brode or thereaboute wherin was a mone paynted growing with a noble of years growing as the mone dyd and where the mone was at the full there was a cardinall paynted and beneth hym the mone waned and ii monkes paynted a rowe one under another hedlesse . . . and the wolde of that rolle was a strike made at an overthwarde particion And under that lyne in the nother part of the roll a childe paynted with axes and butchers knyves and instruments about hym.<sup>66</sup>

Other individuals, like Mistress Amadas, similarly revealed their possession of painted prophecies, while in the reign of Elizabeth, Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford, accused Charles Arundel of referring to a "boke of pictures after the maner of a prophesie".<sup>67</sup>

While Henry Howard and John Harvey noted many common attributes of non-scriptural prophecies they overlooked others. Not all prophecies employed a complicated system of symbols to disguise their meaning. Many prophecies conveyed their prophetic message clearly, contrary to Howard's depiction of non-scriptural prophecies as "difficult in sence or understanding".<sup>68</sup> In his confession of 1532 William Neville related a conversation between himself and a man named Nashe of Cirencester who forecast an illustrious future for Neville.<sup>69</sup> Nashe revealed that Neville's wife would die leaving him free to marry a Graystoke heiress and become Lord Latimer. Nashe

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>E 36/119, fols. 130-130 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 534].

<sup>67</sup>BL Cotton Cleopatra, E iv, fol. 100 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 923]; SP 12/151, fol. 112 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 44].

<sup>68</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Mmii verso.

<sup>69</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 200 [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

further predicted that Neville would become the earl of Warwick. Nashe recommended to Neville the services of Richard Jones of Oxford, a necromancer and astrologer, who told Neville that Henry VII and his son would not reign any longer than 24 years.<sup>70</sup> Although Nashe and Jones told Neville of one prophecy employing heraldic imagery, their forecasts were generally straight forward and easily understood.<sup>71</sup> On 27 May 1535 Antony Wayte wrote to Lady Lisle of a rumour spreading in London that the government would commit a man to the Tower for prophesying that “this month shall be rainy and full of water; the next month, death; and the third month, wars”.<sup>72</sup> Wayte reported that authorities were to keep the man imprisoned until time revealed the fulfilment or failure of his prediction.<sup>73</sup> Other individuals similarly repeated direct prophecies like Robert Dalyvell of Hertfordshire who said, “our soveraynge lorde the kyng shall not lyve nor be on lyve amonth after the feast of the Nativitie of saynte John Baptiste” in 1538 unless he “amende his condicons”, or John White a woollen weaver who forecast in 1551 “as hot a summer as ever was, and as evil and busy one as the last summer was”.<sup>74</sup>

Several individuals clearly and simply interpreted and repeated prophecies that they heard. Riding from Okehampton to Launceston in Cornwall John Shere, prior of Launceston, told William Genys, a previous canon of Launceston, that a scholar from Oxford asserted that “his grace shulde be in daunger of his lyve. Orels avoyde his realme before the yende of Marche nexte comyng”.<sup>75</sup> The Essex Brentwood assizes of August

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<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 202.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 197 verso.

<sup>72</sup>Muriel St. Clare Byrne, ed., *The Lisle Letters* (Chicago, 1981), II, p. 493.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>BL Cotton Cleopatra, E iv, fol. 159 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 74]; Walter Rye, ed., *Depositions Taken Before the Mayor & Aldermen of Norwich, 1549-1567* (Norwich, 1905), p. 20.

<sup>75</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 141A [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 298].

1594 indicted William Barbor for seditious words after he confessed to saying that “Corne wilbe dere and ther is one in the Tower that doth prophecye that wheate wilbe at sixteene shillings a bushell shortely”.<sup>76</sup> The March Southwark assizes in Surrey indicted George Barret in 1600 for pronouncing equally direct prophecies. Barret declared that “the Queene would be taken away”, knowledge he acquired from a 300 year old prophecy. Barret revealed that

By that prophesie the Queene should live but three yeares and that this was the Whyte Sommer wherein should be rumors of warrs and noe warrs come to passe, which was spoken of in the prophesye. After which Sommer all these things are prophesied to come to passe.<sup>77</sup>

Many prophecies used direct language and avoided the ambiguity that treatise writers often cited as a characteristic of non-scriptural prophecies. Even the occasional verse prophecy lacked the obscurity often referred to by commentators. For example, David Wolf’s description of Ireland made for the ambassador of Portugal, John Borgia, included a prophecy of the “heretics of England” that “He that will England win, let him in Ireland begin”.<sup>78</sup> In 1588 the ambassador of Spain, Bernardino de Mendoza, repeated for Charles V an old English prophetic rhyme “about the soldiers who are to dominate England, coming with snow on the crests of their helmets”.<sup>79</sup>

Although many prophecies of the sixteenth century derived from the revelations of prophets or the practices of diviners, other prophecies were popular extracts of larger prophecies from the medieval period. A popular example of the circulation of a short prophetic saying was the widespread reference to the mole or moldwarp. Prophecies

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<sup>76</sup>ASSI 35/36/2, m. 39 [J.S. Cockburn, ed., Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments Elizabeth I (London, 1978), p. 427].

<sup>77</sup>ASSI 35/42/7, m. 27 [J.S. Cockburn, ed., Calendar of Assize Records: Surrey Indictments Elizabeth I (London, 1980), p. 487].

<sup>78</sup>J.M. Rigg, ed., Calendar of State Papers, Relating to English Affairs, Preserved Principally at Rome, in the Vatican Archives and Library (London, 1926), II, p. 165.

<sup>79</sup>Hume, ed., Calendar of Letters, IV, p. 215.

concerning the mole derived from a prediction cited by literary scholars as the “Prophecy of the Six Kings to Follow King John” or the “Prophecy of the Six Kings”. As Rupert Taylor explains this prophecy alluded to the identity of the six kings following the reign of King John symbolised by the Lamb of Winchester, the Dragon, the Goat, the Lion (or Boar), the Ass and the Mole.<sup>80</sup> Taylor proposes that the “Prophecy of the Six Kings” emerged from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Prophecies of Merlin.<sup>81</sup> However, as Taylor observes, the derivation was not a direct transcription but a similar use of animal symbols beyond which the two works have nothing in common.<sup>82</sup> Caroline D. Eckhardt in her edition of a fifteenth-century version of Geoffrey’s Prophecies describes the “Prophecy of the Six Kings” as an example of the “post-*Historia* tradition”, works obliquely derived from The History of the Kings of Britain.<sup>83</sup> T.M. Smallwood in his article “The Prophecy of the Six Kings” notes that the prophecy was a popular saying ascribed to Merlin that appeared in many texts.<sup>84</sup> The “Prophecy of the Six Kings” gained notoriety as a result of a belief that the prediction played an important role in the Percy-Glendower uprising against Henry IV. During this period of unrest rebels interpreted the six kings as Henry III, Edward the First, Edward II, Edward III, Richard II, and lastly, Henry IV.<sup>85</sup> As the mole, Henry IV was the king presaged to bring disaster to England before a dragon, a wolf and a lion would drive him from the realm.<sup>86</sup> Over

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<sup>80</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, pp. 48-50.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>83</sup>Caroline D. Eckhardt, ed., The Prophetia Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth: A Fifteenth-Century English Commentary (Cambridge, 1982), p. 7.

<sup>84</sup>For manuscript versions of the prophecy in English, French, Latin and Welsh see Eckhardt, The Prophetia Merlini, p. 7 n. 22 and T.M. Smallwood, “The Prophecy of the Six Kings”, Speculum, LX (1985), pp. 571-592.

<sup>85</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, pp. 48-50. See also Griffiths, Early Vaticination, p. 201. Smallwood, however, questions the involvement of the “Prophecy of the Six Kings” in this controversy. Smallwood, “The Prophecy of the Six”, p. 589-592.

<sup>86</sup>Taylor, The Political Prophecy, p. 50.

one hundred copies of the English prose version of the prophecy survive, including revised prose versions in an English translation of The Brut and in William Caxton's Chronicles of England, attesting to the popularity of the prophecy.<sup>87</sup>

The mole or sixth king was an evil figure destined to provoke havoc and disruption in the world, as Caxton's unflattering depiction demonstrated: "After this lambe shall come a moldewarpe cursed of god des mouthe a caytyfe a coward an hare he shall have on Elderly skyne as a gote and vengeaunce shall fall doon hym for synne".<sup>88</sup> During the turmoil of the 1530s religious reformation many people expressed their objection to the changes by referring to Henry VIII as the mole. In 1533 an account of Mistress Amadas' "ungracious Rehersalls" recorded that in her book of prophecies Henry VIII was a moldwarp cursed by God.<sup>89</sup> Thomas Skydmore revealed in 1535 that he heard John Hale, vicar of Isleworth, repeat similar words that the king was the moldwarp depicted in the Prophecies of Merlin.<sup>90</sup> Thomas Syson, abbot of Garadon, explained to John Bower in 1536 that in his book of prophecies the mole denoted Henry VIII, saying, "who so er gevyth the molle is curyst of godds owne mouth for he rotyth uppe the churches [as] the molle rotyth uppe the mollehilles".<sup>91</sup> Other individuals suspected of similarly interpreting the identity of the mole in the "Prophecy of the Six Kings" included Richard Bishop, the Exeter attorney John Bonnefant and the itinerant prophet Richard Laynam.<sup>92</sup> Only Wilfride Holme objected that Henry VIII was not the mole,

<sup>87</sup>Smallwood, "The Prophecy of the Six", pp. 572 n. 8, 579.

<sup>88</sup>Chronicles, sig. Dvii verso.

<sup>89</sup>BL Cotton Cleopatra, E iv, fol. 99 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 923].

<sup>90</sup>SP 1/192, fol. 39 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 565].

<sup>91</sup>SP 1/81, fol. 175 [LP Henry VIII. VI, Appendix 10]. The LP incorrectly states that this document derived from 1533. Elton, Policy and Police, p. 71 n. 4; Jansen, Political Protest, p. 40 n. 43.

<sup>92</sup>SP 1/120, fol. 102 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1212]; Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., Ballads from Manuscripts (New York, 1968), I, p. 476; SP 1/220, fol. 61 [LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1027].

proposing instead that the lion, eagle or bear made better representations of the king.<sup>93</sup> In the second half of the sixteenth century individuals reinterpreted the “Prophecy of the Six Kings” in reference to Queen Elizabeth. The Spaniard Antonio De Guaras reported in 1577 that the citizens of London were interpreting a 300-year old prophecy “which some people think applies to this Queen, as she, like a mole, is burrowing in the lands of her neighbours and is accursed by the mouth of God”.<sup>94</sup>

Another saying derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s work was a prediction commonly cited as the prophecy that “Priests Should Bear Arms”. Madeleine Hope Dodds writes that the “Priests Should Bear Arms” prophecy evolved from a passage in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Life of Merlin presaging that,

Bishops will then bear arms, will then follow the military life, will set up towers and walls on sacred ground and give to soldiers what should go to the poor. They will be swept along by riches and follow the worldly path, and take from God what their holy office forbids them to take.<sup>95</sup>

Dodds suggests that Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church and attack on the English clergy precipitated the revival of this prophecy that was also popular during the conflict between Henry I’s daughter Matilda and his nephew Stephen, count of Mortain. In 1530 William Harlokke referred to a painted prophecy in his possession that he thought forecast a “grette bateille of prests”.<sup>96</sup> Five years later Alexander Clavell expounded a similar prediction that the priests would rebel against Henry VIII.<sup>97</sup> Clavell’s examiner Thomas Arundell discovered that the prophecy originated from an old man named Payne who further stated that the priests would make a field and rule

<sup>93</sup>Holme, The Fall and Evil, sig. liii verso.

<sup>94</sup>Hume, ed., Calendar of Letters, II, p. 539.

<sup>95</sup>Basil Clarke, ed., Life of Merlin: Geoffrey of Monmouth Vita Merlini (Cardiff, 1973), p. 89; Dodds, “Political Prophecies”, p. 276.

<sup>96</sup>SP 1/58, fol. 101 [LP Henry VIII. IV. iii, 6652].

<sup>97</sup>SP 1/92, fol. 194 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 736].



England for three days and nights.<sup>98</sup> Sharon Jansen proposes that these scattered references to an uprising of the clergy alluded to an extract from “The Prophecies of Rhymer, Bede, and Merlin” that appeared in manuscripts of the 1530s.<sup>99</sup> The verse form of the prophecy declared that the

Holy Churche shall harnes hente  
 And three yeres stande on stere,  
 Mete and fyght uppon a bente  
 Even as they seculers were.<sup>100</sup>

The description of contemporary non-scriptural prophecies advanced by Henry Howard and John Harvey reflected some of the characteristics of prophecy as it existed in their community and, most importantly, extricated the literary genre of prophetic sayings from other magical practices. Common features of non-scriptural prophecies included the use of attributions, notably to the prophet Merlin, and a prevalent obscurity created by animal, numerical, alphabetical and pictorial symbolism. The use of animals as representations of individuals was a particularly widespread characteristic of such prophecies often associated with the heraldic badges of the nobility. However, the link between heraldry and the depiction of people as animals did not add significantly to the consistent interpretation of prophecies. Several commentators observed that only a highly educated person could decipher the symbolism of non-scriptural prophecies, but their ambiguity enabled individuals to adapt selective passages from larger medieval works as commentaries on events in their contemporary environment. Contrary to the belief of Tudor commentators, however, the meaning of many prophecies was clear and direct, significantly undermining the treatise writer’s presentation of non-scriptural

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<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 194 verso.

<sup>99</sup>Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 68.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68, 80.

prophecy as a demonic phenomenon.

The most important definition of prophecy during the sixteenth century concerned the distinction between true and false predictions. For many commentators the term prophecy applied only to biblical exegesis or the revelations of biblical prophets. People commonly referred to other types of prophecy as “false” or “fantastical”, indicating their belief that these prophecies were spurious in nature and demonic in origin. Prophecies circulating throughout Tudor society derived not only from contemporary prophets and diviners, but also from individuals and works of an earlier period. Many individuals reinterpreted extracts from older prophecies to fit events taking place around them but all non-scriptural prophecies, regardless of their origin, displayed common characteristics that defined the phenomena. While some individuals cited obscurity as a defining feature of false predictions, others similarly vilified direct prophecies on the basis of their lack of biblical content or derivation. Although sixteenth-century literary commentators identified many prophets and diviners, few separated them from the prophecies they produced, while the distinction was common among legislative and judicial authorities. Despite differences in their view of prophecy, Tudor legal and literary communities formed a powerful and persuasive opposition to the phenomenon whose depiction of non-scriptural prophecy unjustly dominates modern discussion of the topic.

## PART TWO

### THE ATTACK ON PROPHECY

“Those things that are above our reach, conserne us not, therefore we ought not to enter into the bowels & secrets of the Lord . . . For to them that goe about, and labour so buselye by speculations, by astronomie, astrologie, and the like curious arts to judge of things to come, and thinke they can tell all things by the same, . . . Christ our saviour saith, . . . It is not for you to knowe the times and seasons, which the Lord God hath reserved to himselfe”.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Literary Opponents of Prophecy

Only two anti-prophetic works of the sixteenth century refer to prophecy in their title. Most writers expressed anti-prophetic sentiments in treatises against astrology and witchcraft. Non-scriptural prophecies commonly circulated independently of the divinatory practices and the prophets that created or received them, yet literary commentators did not so clearly separate prophecies from their source. Writers vilified contemporary prophecies at their conception by using both theological and practical arguments against a variety of divinatory methods for the creation of prophecy. The most prominent form of divination under attack was astrology but writers denounced all active means of producing prophecy alike, particularly those in which the individual sought knowledge of the future rather than passively received inspiration from God. The social disruption caused by the dissemination of popular astrological prognostications prompted many commentators to produce their tracts. Theological concerns motivated some commentators who believed that non-scriptural prophecies were a vehicle of the devil, while several other writers were under suspicion from the privy council and used their tracts as public declarations of their aversion to divinatory practices. However, literary opposition to prophecy was silent in the first half of the sixteenth century.

As Bernard Capp notes in Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800, the English hardly acknowledged debates raging on the continent about prognostications concerning the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter during the 1520s,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Capp, Astrology and the Popular, p. 19.

Originating from an extract about the consequences of the conjunction in Johann Stoeffler's Ephemerides, a rumour quickly spread that a great flood of biblical proportions would occur in 1524.<sup>2</sup> Controversy surrounded the legitimacy of the prediction and the astrologers who promoted the forecast. Lynn Thorndike in The History of Magic and Experimental Science observes that the conjunction turned astrological practitioners against one another and encouraged discussion about the validity of judicial astrology.<sup>3</sup> In England equivalent debate did not occur until the 1560s following the publication of prognostications by continental astrologers in translation. The appearance of anti-prophetic publications in England closely followed what Capp describes as the "revival of English astrology".<sup>4</sup> The popularity of astrological forecasts during the Elizabethan period, concomitant with a resurgence of applied mathematics and in particular astronomy, prompted attempts to curtail the pervasive influence of almanacs and their prognostications. The development of the printing press allowed the cheap dispersal of astrological knowledge, and ensured an increase in the readership of forecasts, convincing writers of the need to alert people to the dangers of divinatory practices. Although the popularity of astrological and other types of prophecy brought the phenomenon to the forefront of sixteenth-century intellectual debate, anti-prophetic commentators wrote to persuade their readers that contemporary prophecy was evil and false. The lack of works in defence of prophecy, besides Christopher Heydon's publication in 1603 of A Defence of Judiciall Astrologie, further exacerbated the bias of prophetic commentary as historical evidence. However, the

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<sup>2</sup>Lynn Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science (New York, 1934-1941), V, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>4</sup>Capp, Astrology and the Popular, p. 19.

writer's perception of his audience revealed that prophecy was prevalent at all levels of sixteenth-century society and appealed to the noble and commoner alike.

Writers who argued against the validity of non-scriptural prophecies wrote to persuade and to convince their readership that prophecy was wrong, rather than make an accurate analysis of the phenomenon as it existed in their community. Many commentators wrote as reformed astrologers, diviners and prophesiers, atoning for their involvement in illegal magical practices by writing virulent attacks on such phenomena and emphasising the evil of divination through their own example. Others wrote from theological concerns and highlighted the demonic nature of divinatory practices that they believed put many people in danger of eternal damnation. Francis Coxe, Henry Howard and John Harvey were adept in the prophetic arts, although they produced works ostensibly against the phenomena. Coxe's A Short Treatise Declaringe the Detestable Wickednesse of Magicall Sciences, as Necromancie Conjurations of Spirites, Curious Astrologie and Suche Lyke derived from his public confession in 1561 after the privy council prosecuted him on a charge of sorcery. Camden describes Coxe as a "quack doctor", but Coxe referred to himself in this work as a practitioner of the divinatory sciences who hoped, through his example, to stop others from committing a similar offence.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the Dictionary of National Biography describes Coxe's work as a "grovelling and terror-stricken pamphlet".<sup>6</sup> Evidently prosecution did not deter Coxe from printing five years later a prognostication for 1566, in which he claimed respectability by describing himself as "Master F. Cox. Phisition".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Camden, "Astrology in Shakespeare's", p. 27; Coxe, A Short Treatise, sig. Aii verso.

<sup>6</sup>DNB, XII, p. 419.

<sup>7</sup>F. Cox, A Prognostication Made for the Yeere of Our Lorde God. 1566. Declaryng the Change, Full, & Quarters of the Moone, with other, Accustomable Matters, Serving all England (London, 1565-1566) STC 431.7.

Henry Howard was aware of prophecies from a young age, and had been collecting material for his A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies since he was fifteen years old. Howard asserted that he maintained “a mortall mallice against prophecies” and had “alwayes conceyved them to be the froth of follie, the scumme of pride, the shipwracke of honour”.<sup>8</sup> However, while Howard stated that he hated both painted pamphlets and astrology, two contemporary works depicted him as an astrological adept. In 1593 Augur Ferrier dedicated his Learned Astronomicall Discourse, of the Judgement of Nativities to Howard, while in The Honour of the Garter George Peele described Howard’s possession of

That admirable mathematic skill  
Familiar with the stars and zodiac,  
To whom the heaven lies open as her book.<sup>9</sup>

The privy council arrested Howard on several occasions during the sixteenth century. In writing A Defensative Howard hoped to avert suspicion and to prove his dislike of all types of prophecy.<sup>10</sup> Howard collected arguments against non-scriptural prophecies and, as he asserted, marshalled them for his own defence.<sup>11</sup> In “Elizabethan Almanacs and Prognostications” Carroll Camden concludes of Howard that his opinions were not “typical of the times”, citing as evidence a note in the Dictionary of National Biography describing Howard as a man lacking in principle.<sup>12</sup> This scepticism is equally applicable to the validity of A Defensative as a reflection of common attitudes to prophecy in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>8</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Kki.

<sup>9</sup>Camden, “Astrology in Shakespeare’s”, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. ¶ii verso.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., sig. ¶iii.

<sup>12</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, p. 198.

The false predictions of astrologers concerning the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter in 1588 in particular prompted John Harvey to write A Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophesies. Harvey aimed to differentiate clearly between the legitimate and illegitimate practices of astrologers and stated that his purpose was not

to confute, or any way disallow any laudable practise, or profitable exercise of any lawfull and warrantable Art, learnedly and honestly proceeding to a provident fore-sight, or fore-knowledge of future things and events, inquirable by legitimate skill, or otherwise searchable by assured experience.<sup>13</sup>

Harvey explained that legitimate fore-knowledge included only predictions from “the consequence of Naturall or Morall effects, by deepe and due consideration of the antecedent causes, or apparent signes, either Naturall or Morall”.<sup>14</sup> However, in “The Astrological Prognostications of 1583: Bibliographical Notes” René Pruvost observes that Harvey’s condemnation of the prognostications for the 1580s “makes rather entertaining reading”, for both Harvey and his brother Richard published several prognostications in the years before.<sup>15</sup> John Harvey even declared in his discourse of 1588 that “I cannot sufficiently marvell what mooved so famous learned men . . . to ascribe, or attribute so exceeding much unto that silly Conjunction”.<sup>16</sup> Richard Harvey was one such learned man who predicted disastrous events resulting from the conjunction of 1583. John Harvey not only supported his brother’s work in An Astrologically Addition, or Supplement to be Annexed to the Late Discourse Upon the Great Conjunction of Saturne, and Jupiter, but he also printed prognostications like that of 1583 entitled Leepe Yeere. A Compendious Prognostication for the yeere of our Lorde

<sup>13</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. L2 verso.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., sig. L3.

<sup>15</sup>René Pruvost, “The Astrological Prognostications of 1583: Bibliographical Notes”, The Library, Fourth Series, XIV (1934), p. 105.

<sup>16</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. P3 verso.



God. M.D. LXXXIII.<sup>17</sup> The reason for John Harvey's transformation from a man proficient in astrological practices to an opponent of astral forecasts is unknown. The value of A Discursive as a representation of contemporary views of prophecy is therefore uncertain.

For other anti-prophetic authors theological concerns motivated them to write. William Covell was a University of Cambridge graduate, vicar of Sittingbourne and Leaveland in Kent and sub-dean of Lincoln who in 1612 received the benefice of All Saints in Hungate.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, John Chamber was a well known ecclesiastic, canon of Windsor and teacher at the University of Oxford.<sup>19</sup> Religious objections to the phenomenon also prompted the work of writers on the periphery of the literary attack on prophecy. Leland L. Estes in "Reginald Scot and his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Religion and Science in the Opposition to the European Witch Craze" describes Reginald Scot, for example, as a "deeply religious man" whose opposition to witchcraft derived from a theological source.<sup>20</sup> Although modern commentators cannot substantiate that Scot was a Puritan, his work demonstrated that he was anti-clerical, anti-papal and generally critical of the Elizabethan church.<sup>21</sup> Other works that reflected a Protestant world view included Henry Holland's A Treatise Against Witchcraft.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>John Harvey, An Astrological Addition, or Supplement to be Annexed to the Late Discourse Upon the Great Conjunction of Saturne, and Jupiter (London, 1583) STC 12907; John Harvey, Leepe Yeere. A Compendious Prognostication for the yeere of our Lorde God. M.D. LXXXIII (London, 1583) STC 12909.

<sup>18</sup>DNB, XII, p. 356.

<sup>19</sup>Don Cameron Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel About Astrology and Its Influence In England (Durham, 1941), p. 126.

<sup>20</sup>Leland L. Estes, "Reginald Scot and his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Religion and Science in the Opposition to the European Witch Craze", in Brian P. Levack, ed., Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: A Twelve Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles (New York, 1992), IV, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-177.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

In the treatises of William Fulke and William Perkins theological concerns merged with a desire to overcome past experience with divinatory practices. Sanford V. Larkey in “Astrology and Politics in the First Years of Elizabeth’s Reign” observes that William Fulke wrote Antiprognosticon when he was only 22-years old and a graduate of the University of Cambridge.<sup>23</sup> Larkey proposes that Fulke’s purpose in writing Antiprognosticon was to impede the dissemination of predictions harmful to Protestant belief.<sup>24</sup> Possibly Fulke’s guilt about adhering to astrological practices in the past encouraged his theological aims. As Fulke stated,

If I hadde not beene my selfe seduced by suche a vayne credyde that I gave to the wrytyngs of Astrologians, I would never beleeve, that any manne endowed with common sence and reasone, shoulde have respecte to castynge of Nativities, or Fortune tellynges.<sup>25</sup>

In The Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel About Astrology and its Influence in England Don Cameron Allen notes that Richard Harvey also listed Fulke as an astrologer, and that Fulke produced prognostications for 1561 and 1563 following the publication of Antiprognosticon in 1560.<sup>26</sup> Allen explains the apparent incongruity of a man who wrote a treatise against astrology while at the same time practised the art by stating that Fulke objected only to judicial astrology.<sup>27</sup> However, Allen’s conclusion does not accommodate Fulke’s authorship of prognostications or his explanation that “our purpose is (to speake it at one breathe) utterly to overthrowe the science of astrologie”.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, James Hitchcock in “George Gifford and Puritan Witch Beliefs” describes William Perkins, who taught theology at the University of Cambridge, as “one

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<sup>23</sup>Sanford V. Larkey, “Astrology and Politics in the First Years of Elizabeth’s Reign”, Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, III, no. 3 (1935), p. 174.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>25</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sig. Dvii verso.

<sup>26</sup>Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sig. Diii.

of the greatest Puritan theologians”.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, in Abel Redevivus T. Fuller asserted that as a graduate Perkins

was much addicted to the study of naturall Magicke, digging so deepe, in natures mine, to know the hidden causes and sacred quallities of things, that some conceive that he bordered on Hell it selfe in his curiosity. Beginning to be a practitioner in that *black Art*, the blacknesse did not affright him but name of Art lured him to admit himselfe as student thereof.<sup>30</sup>

The desire to expiate previous involvement with illegal divinatory practices and religious zeal were powerful motivating factors that prompted many authors to produce polemical tracts against non-scriptural prophecy. In several works the content was almost of secondary importance compared to the author’s reason for writing. However, the bias and lack of originality evident in treatises against prophecy did not deter from their influence on members of parliament and served to justify the Tudor legislative attack on non-scriptural prophecies.

As Carroll Camden asserts in “Astrology in Shakespeare’s Day”, the main objections to astrology during the sixteenth century were theological.<sup>31</sup> Although Camden discusses astrology in particular, Elizabethan writers used similar religious arguments against all forms of prophecy and divination. However, the style of theological discourse on non-scriptural prophecy was not new and closely followed arguments previously outlined during the patristic and medieval period in the work of leading religious thinkers like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In the City of God Augustine outlined an enduring approach to the nature of the prophetic spirit prominent until the thirteenth century. Augustine characterised all predictions of pagan

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<sup>29</sup>James Hitchcock, “George Gifford and Puritan Witch Beliefs”, in Brian P. Levack, ed., Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: A Twelve Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles (New York, 1992), IV, p. 222.

<sup>30</sup>Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup>Camden, “Astrology in Shakespeare’s”, p. 26.

authority as demonic except those of the Sibylline oracles. Of pagan philosophy Augustine wrote, "Such teaching gets no hearing from that vast multitude whom Christ came to set free from the domination of the demons".<sup>32</sup> However, the Sibyls prophesied the coming of Christ, and so Augustine described them as "counted among those who belong to the City of God".<sup>33</sup> Augustine believed in the divine origin of Sibylline inspiration because the Sibyls prophesied accurately. Demons, asserted Augustine, "are often deceived, while the angels are never deceived".<sup>34</sup> However, Augustine did not deny that demonic angels sometimes prophesied correctly, although their insight did not originate wholly from the divine.

Augustine's hierarchical interpretation of the cosmos influenced later ideas about the transmission of prophetic insight and explained demonic ability to prophesy. According to Augustine's great chain of being a demonic or "bad angel", although morally evil, occupied a higher spiritual plane than a morally good human being. Thus demons possessed greater knowledge than humans and could prophesy more accurately but remained ignorant of truth. Later in Summa Theologiae Aquinas disagreed with Augustine and argued that the divine may choose to express an element of truth through the demonic because "God uses even the wicked for the benefit of the good".<sup>35</sup> Where Augustine upheld the notion that those who did not follow God mostly prophesied falsely, Aquinas believed that any individual could receive direct revelation from the divine. Both of these early Christian thinkers asserted that the only true prophecies derived unsought through the inspiration of God. Sometimes predictions

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<sup>32</sup>St Augustine, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 411.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 790.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>35</sup>St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae (London, 1970), 2a2ae, 172, art 6.

made with the aid of demonic forces were correct but only because demonic agents were able, as a consequence of their greater knowledge, to make better informed guesses. In the sixteenth century writers repeated arguments derived from both Augustine and Aquinas, but most upheld an Augustinian view of prophecy depicting all non-scriptural prophecy as demonic and false. Most commentators denied that the secular prophet was a vehicle for prophetic truth. However, writers also argued that direct revelation from God no longer occurred.

Sixteenth-century writers against prophecy commonly argued that the ability to see into the future belonged to God alone.<sup>36</sup> In The Anatomie of Abuses, published in 1583, Philip Stubbes maintained that

Those things that are above our reach, conserne us not, therefore we ought not to enter into the bowels & secrets of the Lord . . . For to them that goe about, and labour so buselye by speculations, by astronomie, astrologie, and the like curious arts to judge of things to come, and thinke they can tell all things by the same, . . . Christ our saviour saith, . . . It is not for you to knowe the times and seasons, which the Lord God hath reserved to himselfe.<sup>37</sup>

As John Harvey observed, acknowledgment that prophecy was a privilege of the divine was evident in the classical writings of Greek historian Thucydides who wrote that, “directly, or certainly to fortell future haps, or contingent casualties, is the propertie of a God, not the qualitie of a man”.<sup>38</sup> Harvey further elucidated the nature of prophecy and described the phenomenon as “heavenly essence”, a “supernatural” spirit that only the divine could use or understand.<sup>39</sup> In 1595 William Covell, citing the opinions of “Basill, Chrysostome, Nazianzen, Theodoret, Austin, Ambrose, Lactantius, Eusebius, Hierome”

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<sup>36</sup>Camden, “Astrology in Shakespeare’s”, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>As quoted by Camden, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>Harvey, A Discoursive, sig. F3 verso.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

and the classical authors “Plato, Aristotle, Hipocrates and Celsus”, concluded that people were unable to “sound the secrets of heaven” and presage future events.<sup>40</sup>

Several writers observed that non-scriptural prophecies turned people away from the divine. Henry Howard maintained that diviners opposed God because they claimed like powers. Howard wrote of such individuals, “they clappe a lawfull marke upon a lawlesse prise”.<sup>41</sup> False prophets, by asserting that they could access the secrets of heaven, replaced the need for spiritual guidance. Howard argued that the need to seek prophetic knowledge revealed a deep distrust of God and lack of faith.<sup>42</sup> William Covell similarly condemned individuals who governed all their actions by the stars and the advice of astrologers “preferring their Prognostications before Gods promises”.<sup>43</sup> As John Harvey observed, the characteristics of non-scriptural prophecies also indicated their ungodly nature for they were without the appearance of “christian inclination, agreement, uniformitie, constancie, or any other vertuous qualitie”.<sup>44</sup> In comparison the divine nature of biblical prophecies overshadowed the base fantasies of forecasts derived from the practitioners of divinatory sciences.

Divinatory practices that relied for success on the notion of determinism and humanity’s lack of free will were particularly dangerous because they supplanted God. Inherent in the philosophy of the diviner was the idea that individuals acted without choice, maintaining the fixity of and allowing insight into the future. Anti-prophetic commentators argued that astrologers believed the stars governed all human action, prompting many writers to contend that this belief denied the necessity of God. In A

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<sup>40</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sigs. M2-M2 verso.

<sup>41</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Bbiii verso.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., sigs. Biii-Biii verso.

<sup>43</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. G4 verso.

<sup>44</sup>Harvey, A Discoursive, sig. F3.

Treatise Against Judiciall Astrologie John Chamber exclaimed that if the stars influenced all aspects of human life then “God may have an everlasting playing day, and let the world wag”.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the diviner undermined the importance of God in the daily life of individuals. Christian theologians and philosophers, believing that the spirit of prophecy ended when Christ entered the world, therefore sought to explain away the presence of contemporary prophets by arguing that their prophecies derived from Satan.

Many commentators questioned the reliability of knowledge gained from divinatory attempts to see into the future. Howard noted that God’s knowledge of the world was beyond human comprehension.<sup>46</sup> Individual attempts to grasp at an understanding of the future, divine in origin, was therefore pointless. In his treatise on witchcraft Reginald Scot similarly denied the validity of any prophetic enterprise undertaken by individuals because “prophesie is the gift of God, and no worldlie thing”.<sup>47</sup> To illustrate his point Scot contrasted the wisewoman Mother Bungie’s attempts to find lost trinkets and animals with the prophetic abilities of biblical characters like Samuel and Elizeus. God was unlikely to bestow so great a gift as prophecy on Mother Bungie.<sup>48</sup> Scot deplored the impudence of people who aspired to gain knowledge given in the past by God to a select group of faithful and argued that prophecy had ceased “and counterfeits and couseners are come in their places”.<sup>49</sup> As Leland L. Estes observes, Scot avoided the problem of separating divine from demonic predictions by denying the validity of all contemporary prophecy.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Chamber, A Treatise Against Judiciall, pp. 3-4.

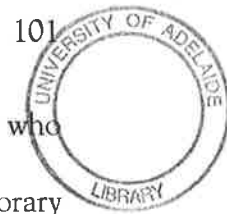
<sup>46</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Bii verso.

<sup>47</sup>Scot, Discoverie, p. 158.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Estes, “Reginald Scot”, p. 181.



John Harvey expressed equal incredulity at the presumption of those who assumed the ability to prophesy when he compared biblical prophets to contemporary “prophets”. Harvey asked,

Can we remember how the words Prophetie and Prophets are taken amongst learned men; or how they are used in the scripture, and not withall consider, and perceive that there is no such extraordinarie, or miraculous gift to be expected in any man, woman, or childe at these daies?<sup>51</sup>

In biblical texts God favoured some prophets over others, but all “heathen prophets were evermore knowne and said to be mad and foolish”.<sup>52</sup> Scot and Harvey believed that individuals could not seek true prophecy because it derived unsought from God. Only the divine could bestow the gift of fore-knowledge on an individual through direct inspiration. As Scot argued, people could not see into the future at will.

No sixteenth-century commentator questioned the validity of biblical prophecy, but several argued that God no longer used prophecy to communicate with humanity. Divine prophecy had ceased, and contemporary prophecy was therefore demonic in origin. Writers willingly acknowledged Satan’s talent for deception and asserted that those who sought fore-knowledge succumbed to a diabolical desire to imitate God. As Howard noted, “the devill will not cease to egge us in the wonted manner, to search of mysteries unsearchable, and making bolde comparisons with the almightie”.<sup>53</sup> Although prophetic knowledge belonged only to God, most commentators followed St. Augustine in affirming that the power of demonic agents to guess at future events exceeded that of mankind. Howard explained that,

neyther Sathan nor his angels understande . . . what shall come to passe, or know more than is in woorking at that present when they spake,

<sup>51</sup>Harvey, *A Discursive*, sig. F2.

<sup>52</sup>Scot, *Discoverie*, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Biii.



though men by frailty and shallownesse of sence, be not so well able as they (by their subtiltye) to sounde the bottome of concealed misteries.<sup>54</sup>

In their assessment of the skill and influence of demons many late sixteenth-century writers, like Chamber, admitted that astrologers and others who professed prophetic abilities sometimes prophesied correctly.<sup>55</sup> Harvey believed that the devil's occasional truthful prediction allowed him to "insinuate" himself into the lives of gullable and unwary individuals.<sup>56</sup> The idea that the devil inspired non-scriptural prophecy was a common argument against the phenomenon. As Carroll Camden notes, treatises against judicial astrology in particular argued that the practice involved the manipulation of demonic power.<sup>57</sup>

A major objection to non-scriptural prophecies derived from the belief that the devil was involved in their production. Always waiting to delude the unwary, demonic agents worked on the natural desire of individuals to seek knowledge of the unknown to win over individuals in the constant struggle between good and evil. In A Treatise Against Witchcraft Henry Holland declared that two kingdoms co-existed and competed in the world for command of human souls:

The Scriptures of God . . . in sundrie places, doe most evidently teach us, that there are two spirituall kingdomes in this world, which have continual hatred & bloody wars, without hope of truce for ever The Lord and king of the one, is our Lord Jesus, the tyrannical usurper of the other, is Sathan. Again, this also we are as clearely taught, that all men living without exception, are eyther true subjects of the one, or slaves unto the other.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., sig. Yiii.

<sup>55</sup>Chamber, A Treatise Against Judiciall, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup>Harvey, A Discoursive, sig. I2.

<sup>57</sup>Camden, "Astrology in Shakespeare's", p. 26.

<sup>58</sup>Henry Holland, A Treatise Against Witchcraft: or A Dialogue, Wherein the Greatest Doubts Concerning that Sinne, are Briefly Answered: A Sathanicall Operation in the Witchcraft of all Times is Truly Prooved: The Moste Precious Preservatives Against such Evils are Shewed: Very Needful to be Knowen of all Men, but Chiefly of the Masters and Fathers of Families, that they may Learn the Best Meanes to Purge their Houses of all Unclean Spirits, and Wisely to

Protestant writers argued that prophecies and miracles no longer occurred and that any appearance of such phenomena was a deception created by Satan.<sup>59</sup> The devil, wrote Coxe, “goeth about lyke a roring Lion, seking whom he may devour”.<sup>60</sup> Henry Howard compared the allures and baits of Satan to the “lippes of a strumpet, and the wine of court . . . which hath a mild tast at the first, but afterward a tange and bitesth like an Adder”.<sup>61</sup> In describing the devil’s use of prophecy as a method of influencing people, the most common literary motif was that of the “swete and delicious poyson”.<sup>62</sup> Prophecy, while offering esoteric knowledge, turned people away from God and, as Coxe observed, “sweete meats hathe sower sauce, so is this sweetnes tempered, with an everlastinge bitternes or gall”.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, anti-prophetic commentators appealed to the absolute authority of Scripture for an unequivocal statement against the validity of contemporary prophecy. In 1561 Coxe pleaded with his compatriots to “flee frome these mooste wicked and damnable sciences of divination, manifestly prohibited, by the sacred Scriptures and eternall woorde of God”.<sup>64</sup> Coxe supported his warning with several biblical passages often repeated in anti-prophetic tracts. Leviticus decreed that, “if a man or woman have a spirite of divination or sothsaying in them: they shall dye the death, they shall stone them to deathe, their bloudde shalbe upon them”.<sup>65</sup> Other biblical statements against

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Avoide the Dreadfull Impieties and Greate Daungers Which Come by Such Abominations (Cambridge, 1590) STC 13590, sig. A2.

<sup>59</sup>Sydney Anglo, “Evident Authority and Authoritative Evidence: The *Malleus Maleficarum*” in Brian P. Levack, ed., Articles on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology: A Twelve Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles (New York, 1992), IV, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup>Coxe, A Short Treatise, sig. Aiiii.

<sup>61</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Ggiii.

<sup>62</sup>Coxe, A Short Treatise, sig. Av.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., sig. Av verso.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., sig. Bv.

divination derived from the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Deuteronomy.<sup>66</sup> However, individual interpretation of scriptural passages often led to their citation in arguments for and against divination. Astrologers maintained that Moses himself was a practitioner of their art. The book of Acts described Moses as “skilfull in all the knowledge of the Egyptians”.<sup>67</sup> Thus astrologers believed that the Bible confirmed the validity of their profession. Howard disputed this suggestion, however, and asserted that the Bible provided no evidence that the heavens were a source of knowledge about the future.<sup>68</sup> William Covell agreed and argued that the passage declaring Moses’ knowledge of Egyptian practices denoted only lawful arts.<sup>69</sup>

Beyond theological objections to prophecy writers used logical and practical arguments in their derogation of the phenomenon. During the sixteenth century the literary attack on judicial astrology overwhelmed the debate about prophecy, although in many instances secular objections to astral fore-knowledge were also applied to prophecies created by other means. In “Astrology: Arguments Pro and Contra” A.A. Long observes that the controversy about the legitimacy of astrology developed in the second century BC in the work of astronomer Claudius Ptolemy and later writers like Marcus Tullius Cicero.<sup>70</sup> The claims of astrology rested on the principle that because the effects of the sun on the earth were obvious, other planets and stars must also influence life on earth. This view of the world remained influential until the work of early modern thinkers like Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo seriously challenged the

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<sup>66</sup>Isaiah XXX, Jeremiah X and Deuteronomy XVIII, *ibid.*, sigs. Bv verso-Bvi; Fulke also referred to Isaiah XLXVII, F[ulke], *Antiprognoticon*, sig. E.

<sup>67</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. L4 verso.

<sup>68</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Oii.

<sup>69</sup>C[ovell], *Polimanteia*, sig. L4 verso.

<sup>70</sup>A.A. Long, “Astrology: Arguments Pro and Contra”, in Jonathan Barnes, *et al.*, eds., *Science and Speculation: Studies in Hellenistic Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 165-166.

notion of a geocentric universe. Tudor writers borrowed extensively from the debates of antiquity. As Don Cameron Allen remarks of sixteenth-century treatises against astrology, the arguments of previous thinkers “are repeated *ad nauseam*; the illustrations and the wording are sometimes new, but the basic arguments are ever the same”.<sup>71</sup> The most popular objection to astrology was that astrologers believed the heavens determined all aspects of human life. Henry Howard noted that the practice of astrology often obscured the true causes of events, as “often times the proper and true causes lurke, when the false and counterfeyte appeare more bright and evident in outward showe”.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, astrological determinism called into question the purpose of all prophecy. If, as the astrologers asserted, the stars determined the conditions of a person's life at birth and an individual could not overcome the circumstances of their life, what was the use of being forewarned through prophecy? John Chamber declared of astrologers and their forecasts:

if their predictions or prognostications be true, then they are of necessitie, and if of necessitie they cannot be avoided, and if they cannot bee avoyded, they are knowne in vaine: for to what end should we know things so before, if wee cannot prevent and avoide them?<sup>73</sup>

To educated opponents of astrology the world of the astrologer was atheistic and predetermined.

On the continent some scholars questioned the nature of the universe and the Ptolemaic explanation of planetary relationships. Some thinkers observed that the movement of the heavenly bodies did not conform to that expected in a geocentric

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<sup>71</sup>Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance*, p. 54.

<sup>72</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. T3.

<sup>73</sup>Chamber, *A Treatise Against Judiciall*, p. 47.

universe and were acutely aware of the gaps in astronomical understanding.<sup>74</sup> In England, however, astronomy was an accepted science and opponents denounced only the prophetic branch of astrology. William Fulke's view of astrology was unusual. Commenting on the aim of his Antiprognosticon Fulke declared his purpose was "utterly to overthrow this tower of Astrology".<sup>75</sup> Fulke was sceptical of all astrology and preferred to seek natural and "scientific" explanations for events. Comparing astronomy and astrology, Fulke asserted that while the first was a science based on true and demonstrable precepts, the basis of the second was fatally flawed.<sup>76</sup> Fulke queried how astrologers determined the constitution and effect of planets. Why did astrologers, asked Fulke, attribute to Saturn earthly characteristics when it was the farthest planet from the earth?<sup>77</sup> Fulke proposed that the sun and the moon were more important as they were closest to the earth and sustained life on the planet; "wherof the Sonne ruleth heate, & the Moon moistness, all life is preserved and nourished".<sup>78</sup> The time it took for the effects of the planets to reach the earth, given the extraordinary distances between the spheres, was also a problem for astrologers. Henry Howard also questioned the astrologer's lack of astronomical knowledge.<sup>79</sup> Comparing an astrologer to a carpenter, Howard reasoned that,

the carpenter can judge of the strength and season of the tumber, wherewith he resolves to builde, but Astrologers neither understand the properties of all those Planets, which they take upon them to knowe best, nor of a world of Starres beside, which because they can not marshall in their arte, they give over and set out for ciphers.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Henric Cornelius Agrippa, of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences, Englished by Ja. San. Gent. (London, 1569) STC 204, sigs. Mi-Miii verso.

<sup>75</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sig. Aiv verso.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., sig. Bii verso.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., sig. Biii.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., sig. Biii verso.

<sup>79</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sigs. Xii verso-Xiii.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., sig. R2 verso.

Considerations of this sort discredited the astrological assertion that planetary conjunctions shaped human lives.

Most critics, however, attacked the basic tenets of astrology only where they impinged on the creation of prognostications. Francis Coxe described the precepts of judicial astrology as “meare fables, and toyes” without truth.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Howard proposed that astrologers, finding their skills could not give them foresight, employed deception and chance to disguise the inadequacies of their art.<sup>82</sup> Critics often disputed the validity of the astrologer’s use of analogy and argued that the use of experience as a method of calculating the significance of astral movements was fallible. Opponents of judicial astrology objected that the correlation of an event with a particular astral position or occurrence, such as the sighting of a comet, did not reveal its true cause. Astrologers were often highly selective in their citation of events that coincided with particular astrological signs. William Fulke noted the impossibility of an astrologer observing all the events that took place at any given moment when recording the significance of an astral arrangement. Fulke argued that even the diligent astrologer must acknowledge that “those thynges whyche chaunce or come to passe bee infinite, that is innumerable to men”, many of them contrary to astrological theory.<sup>83</sup> Commentators depicted this methodology as one calculated to delude the less educated person. Howard vividly illustrated how the simple person may mistake coincidence for the cause of an event:

It chaunceth sometimes to thunder about that time and season of the yeare, when Swannes hatch theyr young; and yet no doubt it is a paradoxe of simple men to thinke, that a Swanne can not hatch without a cracke of thunder.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Coxe, *A Short Treatise*, sigs. Avi verso-Avii.

<sup>82</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. li2.

<sup>83</sup>F[ulke], *Antiprognosticon*, sig. Dv.

<sup>84</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. T2 verso.

For many critics of astrology the use of analogy in the accumulation of astrological knowledge was insubstantial and did little to elucidate the nature of the relationship between the stars and mankind.

One of the most popular objections to judicial astrology derived from the independent fortunes experienced by twins.<sup>85</sup> Writers opposed to the casting of horoscopes cited twins as a prime example of two people born at the same time who, contrary to astrological theory, often experienced different lives.<sup>86</sup> John Chamber noted that the lives and personalities of many twins differed vastly from each other.<sup>87</sup> In other examples Siamese twins died at different times, while others were born with one child alive and the other dead despite their common nativity.<sup>88</sup> Astrologers retorted that the planets and stars moved so quickly that the position of the heavens altered significantly between the birth of one twin to the arrival of the other. In response to this defence Chamber contended, “for the same reason we must thinke, that no one man is wholly borne under the same constellation, for he commeth not all way at once, but peece-meale, part after part”.<sup>89</sup> Chamber concluded that the time of birth was an inaccurate means of determining individual fortune. Debate about the problems of calculating a nativity, in which astrologers declared that the singularity of the time and place of birth maintained the individuality of horoscopes, revealed another ancient controversy. Henry Howard maintained that the time of conception was more significant than birth because at conception the soul entered the body, the main determinant of individual personality and character.<sup>90</sup> Howard proposed that the reason why astrologers ignored

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<sup>85</sup>Long, “Astrology: Arguments”, p. 173.

<sup>86</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Pii.

<sup>87</sup>Chamber, *A Treatise Against Judiciall*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>90</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Si.

the time of conception in their calculations was because they found it difficult to determine the precise moment when a mother conceived her child.<sup>91</sup> Astrologers relied incorrectly on the time of birth to cast a horoscope and the resultant forecasts were therefore inaccurate and false. The majority of writers who opposed the validity of non-scriptural prophecy addressed their criticisms to the forecasts of astrologers, attesting to the popularity of astrology at all levels of sixteenth-century society. Some critics used complex and detailed arguments against prophecy drawn from classical philosophers and the work of church fathers like Augustine and Aquinas. The sophistication of the evidence used by Henry Howard, John Harvey and John Chamber revealed that they directed their arguments towards an educated audience.

Other anti-prophetic discussion was straight forward and included obvious and accessible objections intended to lead the less learned reader from what critics perceived as a demonic world of magic into a Godly environment founded on the observable causes and effects of nature. Writers asserted that contemporary prophets were liars who sought to swindle and delude the believer in God. Howard argued that the false prophets “cogge and lye, pretending what is probable by mans conjecture but not conceiving what is certaine in Gods providence”.<sup>92</sup> The learned community vigorously attacked the prophecies of astrologers in particular because they were often incorrect. The occasional fulfilment of such prophecies served merely to reveal the demonic inspiration of the prophet. The inaccuracy of the prophecies of astrologers was obvious to everyone and openly substantiated by Nicholas Allen’s The Astronomers Game for Three Whetstones, Played by Two Masters of Art and a Doctor and William Perkins’

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., sig. Gg2 verso.



Four Great Lyers, Striving Who Shall Win the Silver Whetstone.<sup>93</sup> Drawing on similar works by continental writers Pico della Mirandola and Sixtus van Hemminga, Allen and Perkins compared the forecasts of several astrologers and noted their discrepancies.<sup>94</sup> John Chamber encapsulated the point when he asserted that the falsity of astral predictions “can no way better appeare than by comparing of diverse Almanacs together, where you may see, if you will see, the exceeding folly of both parts, as well of them in writing, as others in beleeving”.<sup>95</sup>

The controversy about the inaccuracy of published forecasts for 1583 and 1588 demonstrated that criticism of judicial astrology came from within and without the astrological community. Sarah Dodson maintains in her article “Holinshed’s Sources for the Prognostications about the years 1583 and 1588” that speculation concerning the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the 1580s began with Richard Harvey’s An Astrological Discourse upon the Great and Notable Conjunction of the Two Superior Planets, Saturn & Jupiter, Which Shall Happen the 18 day of April, 1583 and Sheltoo a Geverin’s Of the Ende of this Worlde, and the Seconde Comming of Christ.<sup>96</sup> Geverin, whose work Thomas Rogers translated and published in London in 1577, predicted calamity surrounding the years 1588 and 1593 in particular and generally for the decade beginning in 1583.<sup>97</sup> Richard Harvey, however, gave a specific date of 28 April 1583 for the conjunction of the planets and the disastrous events that were to follow. Carroll

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<sup>93</sup>Nicholas Allen, The Astronomers Game for Three Whetstones, Played by Two Masters of Art and a Doctor (London, 1569) STC 361.3; William Perkins, Four Great Lyers, Striving Who Shall Win the Silver Whetstone (London, 1585) STC 19721.7; Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, pp. 116-117.

<sup>94</sup>Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, pp. 117-118.

<sup>95</sup>Chamber, A Treatise Against Judiciall, p. 39.

<sup>96</sup>Sarah Dodson, “Holinshed’s Sources for the Prognostications about the Years 1583 and 1588”, Isis, XXXVIII (1947-1948), p. 60. The second edition of Richard Harvey’s discourse was published in 1583, the first edition no longer exists.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp. 60, 62.

Camden notes that several Elizabethan works concerned with the conjunction gave different dates for the event.<sup>98</sup> Many writers took exception to the erroneous forecasts of astrologers particularly when events predicted for the year 1583 did not occur. Raphael Holinshed observed in his Chronicles of England that following the lack of disastrous events in 1583 “people fell to their former securitie, and condemned the discourser of extreme madnesse and follie”.<sup>99</sup> The failure of the prognostications of 1583 and 1588 produced harsh criticism of astrologers and Richard Harvey in particular. At the turn of the century John Chamber proposed that astrologers should have the number 88 branded on their forehead as a constant reminder of their failure and the inconsistency of their art.<sup>100</sup>

Astrological and prophetic satire also highlighted the deficiencies of non-scriptural forecasts. In “Some English Mock-Prognostications” F.P. Wilson cites the fool’s prophecy of Shakespeare’s King Lear, Sir Walter Raleigh’s “On the Cards and Dice”, the cobbler’s song in The Cobbler of Canterbury and Nicholas Breton’s Pasquil’s Pass, and Passeth Not as examples of sixteenth-century mock prophecy.<sup>101</sup> Printers produced several satirical prognostications during the period aimed at the less learned reader, the first A Mery Pronosticacion printed in 1544.<sup>102</sup> In 1591 two more pamphlets appeared written by Adam Foulweather and by Simon Smellknavé.<sup>103</sup> In A Wonderfull

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<sup>98</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, pp. 194-200; for information about Robert Tanner’s A Prognosticall Judgement of the Two Superiour Planets, Saturne and Jupiter, Which Shall Happen the 28. Day of Aprill.1583. The Fruit of a Godly Minde, Warning us to be Mindfull of the Sodaine Comming of Our Lord and Saviour Christ to Judgement: A Comfortable and Most Necessary Discourse, for these Miserable and Dangerous Dayes (London, 1583) see Pruvost, “The Astrological”, pp. 103-104.

<sup>99</sup>As quoted by Dodson, “Holinshed’s Sources”, p. 62.

<sup>100</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, p. 200; Chamber, A Treatise Against Judiciall, p. 43.

<sup>101</sup>F.P. Wilson, “Some English Mock-Prognostications”, The Library, Fourth Series, XIX (1939), p. 8.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

Strange and Miraculous, Astrological Prognostication for this yeer of our Lord God 1591. Discovering Such Wonders to Happen this Yeere, as Never Chaunced Since Noes Floud. Wherein if there be Found one Lye, the Author will Loose his Credit for Ever Foulweather predicted among other things that an eclipse would cause people to lose their hair and increase the number of fleas and monstrous births.<sup>104</sup> Many other anti-prophetic statements acknowledging the inaccuracy of prophets appeared scattered in larger works and compilations. More, for example, composed the following epigram mocking the falsity of the astrologer's predictions:

The crowd proclaims thee wondrous wise,  
 If out of all thy prophecies  
 One only proveth true.  
 Be, Fabianus, always wrong,  
 Then will I join the gaping throng,  
 And call thee prophet too.<sup>105</sup>

Other commentators ridiculed the astrologer's habitual observation of the heavens. As Geoffrey Whitney humorously illustrated in A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises, the astrologer often overlooked the obvious cause of events because they constantly directed their eyes towards the sky.<sup>106</sup> Thomas More also recorded the failure of judicial astrologers to take into account the obvious:

To thee thou airie Prophet all  
 the Starres themselves do shoue:  
 And do declare what destinies,  
 all men shall have bylowe.  
 But no Starres (though they all thinges see)  
 admonish thee of this:  
 That they [sic] wife doth with erie man,  
 behave her selfe amisse.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup>Alexander B. Grosart, ed., The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe (n.p., 1883-1884), II, pp. 147, 149, 151.

<sup>105</sup>As quoted by Camden, "Elizabethan Almanacs", p. 87.

<sup>106</sup>Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes, sig. V3.

<sup>107</sup>As quoted by Etheridge, "Political Prophecy", p. 30.

Whitney and More comically demonstrated a concern acknowledged by many commentators - the danger of attributing all human action to the stars.

The negative effects of prophecies on society provided effectual and approachable objections to the phenomena. William Fulke, for example, believed that prognostications of bad weather often encouraged farmers to sell their produce earlier than necessary causing the poor to suffer.<sup>108</sup> To combat the undesirable results of incorrect forecasts, Fulke and Henry Howard tried to demonstrate that alternative explanations could be found for changes in the weather and other natural phenomena like earthquakes. Fulke contended that environmental changes, not the stars, were responsible for periods of agricultural scarcity or plenty.<sup>109</sup> Howard proposed that the sun alone was the cause of weather changes and declared, contrary to astrological theory, that the alteration “proceedeth not of influence sent downe, but of vapors lifted uppe”.<sup>110</sup> Howard also contradicted the assertion that comets created earthquakes and proposed that their cause was heat “suppressed and restrained” underground. Although the views of Fulke and Howard were unconventional, most writers accepted the point that they should not overlook natural causes and that the stars did not explain every aspect of human life.

Several writers maintained that a particularly dangerous aspect of contemporary prophecies was their influence on politics. Camden asserts that arguments against the publication of almanacs that cited their involvement in politics were particularly effective.<sup>111</sup> Prophecies could induce individuals and even monarchs to behave in a manner detrimental to the realm. The monarch could involve a nation in unnecessary

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<sup>108</sup>F[ulke], *Antiprognosticon*, sig. Avii verso.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. Dvi.

<sup>110</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Xiv.

<sup>111</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, p. 88.

war or an individual might commit seditious or treasonous acts prompted by adherence to prophecy.<sup>112</sup> Several critics also thought prophecy reflected demonic attempts to alter the stability of life on earth. In Polimanteia William Covell explained the danger of diabolical meddling in government through prophecy:

he [the devil] intrudeth himselfe often into the handling of them, & entermedleth in the counsel of Kings and Princes, enforcing them by all means possible to bring in a confusion: to trouble the estate: to oppose themselves one against another: to disperse Realmes: to debase lawes tending to the good government of the Commonwealth.<sup>113</sup>

In The Terrors of the Night Thomas Nashe even went to the extent of proposing that astrologers predicted riots and rebellions because they sympathised and colluded with the rebels and knew their movements.<sup>114</sup>

Fulke Greville in his Life of Philip Sidney stated that a well-trained observer of political events could presage the future of governments without the help of an astrologer. Greville remarked, “I beleeve no Star-gazers can so well prognosticate the good, or ill of all Governments, as the providence of men trained up in publique affaires may doe”.<sup>115</sup> Henry Howard and John Harvey similarly argued that the abilities of false prophets did not exceed those of the experienced observer and consistently urged their readership that reason and learning were better grounds on which to base political forecasts. Howard wrote, “knowledge & experience, which the wiser sort hath had of cousailes, forces, person, times and practises, may minister more certaine gesses, in this case then all the starres or Planets in the firament”.<sup>116</sup> Harvey was despondent about the credit false prophets received and declared,

<sup>112</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. Aiv.

<sup>113</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sig. C2.

<sup>114</sup>Camden, “Elizabethan Almanacs”, p. 89.

<sup>115</sup>Fulke Greville, Life of Sir Philip Sidney (Oxford, 1907), p. 141.

<sup>116</sup>Howard, A Defensative, sig. Hhiv verso.

Can any man better foresee politique events, or rightlier prognosticate publique casualties . . . than a sound Politician, or wise counsellor, of deepe insight, and provident foresight, in such affaires? Must we resort to wizards, or southsaiers, or sorcerers, or cunjurers, or witches, or gypsies, or shepheards, or any like private prophets of basest condition.<sup>117</sup>

Opponents of prophecy suggested that people did not need to delve into the divinatory sciences to presage the outcome of earthly concerns. Howard further accentuated this argument when he included in his work an account of the disastrous consequences suffered by those who took note of prophecies, particularly those in government. Through his description of the fate of Emperor Maximinus, who ruled according to the advice of demonic spirits, Howard hoped to deter individuals from listening to prophecies. Maximinus endured “a foule impotume” to

brake out of hys lower partes, and eating uppe his entrailles, as it were by peece meale, replenished the carcasse with gnawing wormes, which together with the putrefaction of the caule of fatte, made so noysome and contagious a stincke, as his dearest freendes were gladde to keepe out of his chamber.<sup>118</sup>

Eventually, Maximinus' subjects threw him into the Tiber river to die.

Several critics emphasised the influence that non-scriptural prophecies exerted over the commons. The attitude of the literary community to the less learned was paternalistic, and their work depicted the people as ill-educated and credulous individuals. Howard observed how easily false prophets persuaded the “vulgare sorte” who “have an eye to see, and an eare to heare, but no skill to judge, nor learning to dissolve the doubttes, and scruples which are dayly scattered abroad by the malignant adverdarye”.<sup>119</sup> Arguing that non-scriptural predictions rarely deceived the learned, John Harvey attributed the popularity of these prophecies to the simplicity of the

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<sup>117</sup>Harvey, *A Discursive*, sig. I4 verso.

<sup>118</sup>Howard, *A Defensative*, sig. Kk2 verso.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. Aiv verso.

uneducated.<sup>120</sup> Harvey proposed that the majority of the commons were unable to discern the natural laws that governed life and gave themselves over to unruly passions. The unlearned, Harvey noted, were easy prey for the devil's prophets: "The smaller skil, the greater credulitie: the lesser knowledge, the more passion".<sup>121</sup> Harvey argued that nothing was "more easie, than to blind the rude multitude".<sup>122</sup> In 1536 Richard Morison, author of the anonymous pamphlet A Remedy For Seditiō written to deter the commons from rebellion, lamented how easily the population succumbed to the designs of individuals wishing to subvert the authority of the government.<sup>123</sup> Belief in the gullibility of the commons was a theme reiterated by many writers.

Henry Howard asserted that the "simple sort" were naive and particularly susceptible to the counterfeit tales of demonic agents; "I know the snares are infinite", he declared, "which Sathan settes to entangle and entrappe a multitude of simple soules".<sup>124</sup> Deliberating on the shortcomings of the unlearned that allowed for their easy persuasion, Howard unflatteringly described them as "brainsicke fooles" who "cherish idle dreames and fancies" and believe "that there is small difference, betweene the showe of seeming Prophets and the substaunce of true prophesie".<sup>125</sup> The ignorance of the people increased their tendency to believe non-scriptural prophecies. Howard believed that this was especially true of women who lacked the faculty to reason and spoke "onely lyke a parrette".<sup>126</sup> Howard further protested that commoners lacked faith in God and

<sup>120</sup> Harvey, A Discourse, sig. B3 verso.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> [Richard Morison], A Remedy For Seditiō, Wherin are Conteyned Many Thynges, Concernyng the True and Loyall Obeysance, that Commens Owe Unto Their Prince and Soveraygne Lorde the Kyng (London, 1536) STC 20877, sig. Biii verso.

<sup>124</sup> Howard, A Defensative, sig. Gi verso.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., sigs. Cii verso-C3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., sig. Ooiv verso.

so they suffered “the voyce and warrant of such wilie persons, as made profite of their imbecillitie”.<sup>127</sup> Critics declared that non-scriptural prophecies were delusional, a demonic device designed to hide biblical truth. John Harvey argued that the intention of “counterfet prophesiers” was to draw the uneducated away from God and cause their damnation. “How facile or easie a matter it is to delude, and mislead the Comminaltie”, Harvey concluded, “They knew it full well, and over well, which first adventured to publish such absurd fantasies, amongst the vulgar sort”.<sup>128</sup> At the beginning of William Fulke’s treatise against astrological predictions William Painter proclaimed in verse that,

A foule fall doutles Fulce doth geve  
thastrologers eche one:  
Bycause no firme foundation  
they buylde their arte upon.  
Who doo surmyse and fondly fayne,  
mens fortunes to foreshewe.  
And make the symple sorte beleve,  
that they their fates can knowe.<sup>129</sup>

The conventional opinion of literary commentators was that non-scriptural prophecies and their disseminators had a dire effect on commoners and caused the damnation of their souls.

Harvey also believed that non-scriptural prophecies incited the commoner to rebel against secular authority. The literary community rarely used this argument but the objection became particularly pertinent for legislative authorities as it justified their concern about sedition and treason in all forms. Harvey warned that the uneducated, who were easily persuaded and lacked a proper understanding of the affairs of state, were easy prey for the traitorous intentions of the demonically inspired prophet. While

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<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, sig. C3 verso.

<sup>128</sup>Harvey, *A Discoursive*, sig. I3.

<sup>129</sup>F[ulke], *Antiprognoticon*, sig. Aii.



biblical prophecy brought knowledge of God and encouraged faith, the aim of the false prophet was to create havoc and disruption in the world. Harvey perceived how easily non-scriptural prophecies

occasion, and ingender troublesome sturs, tumults, uprores, seditions, mutinies, garboiles, commotions, insurrections, rebellions, private myseries, common mischiefes, publique calamities, and desolations: Such finall ends as commonly overthrow, and destroy the best established states, and at length bring most flourishing kingdomes, principalities, and commonwealthes to their finall ends.<sup>130</sup>

Few writers, however, used the connection between rebellion and prophecy as an argument against the phenomenon.

The work of anti-prophetic commentators clearly demonstrated their involvement in an intellectual debate far removed from the experiences of contemporary adherents to prophecy in the wider community. Critics wrote to persuade their readers of the danger of non-scriptural prophecies and the individuals who created them, and were often motivated by personal or religious concerns. The debate about astrology was the main focus of critical discussion, although arguments against astrological practices were equally applicable to other forms of divination. Treatise writers of the sixteenth century were lengthy and enthusiastic in their discussion about the illegitimacy of non-scriptural prophecies. However, such works were more a means of dissociating the author from previous prophetic practices or the presentation of a theological argument than a practical means of diverting individuals away from prophetic practices. The description of prophecy presented by writers hardly provided an accurate account of the phenomenon. The objections of anti-prophetic commentators appeared to have little practical effect on the community but were an important validation of the legislative

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<sup>130</sup>Harvey, *A Discursive*, sig. K4.

attack on prophecies and divinatory practitioners. The dearth of works supporting prophecy demonstrated the Tudor government's recognition, exemplified by publication restrictions, that the written word was a powerful mode of expression and source of dissension.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Legislative Opposition to Prophecy and Methods of Prosecution**

During the sixteenth century judicial authorities used many different laws to prosecute those who adhered to or repeated non-scriptural prophecies. Statutory laws against sedition, treason and prophecy included provisions for the punishment of individuals adhering to non-scriptural prophecies. Medieval laws against false news, commonly referred to as scandalum magnatum, established the crime of sedition enabling authorities to discipline prophesiers that spread false tales about the future of the realm. Until the passing of a new Treason Act in 1534 the Tudor courts indicted several individuals under the Edwardian act against treason of 1352 in which interest in prophecy served to establish other traitorous intentions. Common and ecclesiastical law also included statements against the dissemination of prophecies and provided the means for judicial authorities to prosecute offenders when statutory legislation lapsed or was inadequate. During the sixteenth century the monarchy issued many proclamations under which the judiciary could punish the prophesier such as those against heretical and seditious books, the slander and defamation of the nobility and the inciting of rebellion. At all levels the English law associated prophecy with disruption to the peace of the realm, either in the form of an attack against the monarch and the nobility or actual rebellion. This association between prophecy and disorder found its clearest expression in the three acts against prophecy passed during the century.

Judicial authorities viewed the verbal repetition of prophecies as a form of sedition. In "The Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition" Roger B. Manning identifies the emergence of the crime from the traditions of scandalum magnatum and the judicial

construction of treason.<sup>1</sup> As a form of sedition, prophecy was potentially disruptive to the peace of the realm. Before the enactment of the 1542 statute against prophecy, judicial authorities disciplined individuals who disseminated predictions through the laws against false news and treason by words (for a list of statutes relating to the punishment of individuals adhering to prophecy see appendix one). Edward Coke in Institutes of the Laws of England cited as a precursor to the Henrician prophecy act the 1275 Westminster statute “None Shall Report Slanderous News, Whereby Discord May Arise”.<sup>2</sup> Two statutes of Richard II’s reign further extended and re-established the act of 1275. In 1378 parliament passed another law concerning “The Penalty for telling slanderous Lyes of the Great Men of the Realm”, followed in 1388 by an act titled “Reporters of Lies against Peers, &c. shall be punished by the Council”.<sup>3</sup>

Together the three medieval statutes of 1275, 1378 and 1388 formed a collection of statutes referred to as scandalum magnatum. This set of laws dealt specifically with individuals who repeated words that slandered the nobility and leading officials of the realm with the intent to create dissension.<sup>4</sup> Under the provisions of the 1275 statute any person who repeated or published rumours that initiated unrest in the realm was liable to imprisonment until judicial authorities discovered the author of the tale.<sup>5</sup> As to the reprimand of the individual who invented the tale, Coke explained in his treatise on English law that “he is left to the common law to be punished by fine and

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<sup>1</sup>Roger B. Manning, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition”, Albion, XII, no. 2 (1980), pp. 99-100.

<sup>2</sup>Edward I, c. 34 [SR, I, p. 35]; Edward Coke, The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown. and Criminal Causes (London, 1797), p. 128; Edward Coke, The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Containing the Exposition of Many Ancient and Other Statutes (London, 1797), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>Richard II. st. 1, c. 5 and 12 Richard II, c. 11 [SR, II, pp. 9, 59].

<sup>4</sup>Manning, “The Origins”, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup>SR, I, p. 35.

imprisonment”.<sup>6</sup> While the statute of 1275 concerned disruptions to the peace between the king and his people, the acts of 1378 and 1388 referred only to the creation of discord among the peerage or between the peerage and the commons “whereof great Peril and Mischief might come to all the Realm, and quick Subversion and Destruction of the said Realm, if due Remedy be not provided”.<sup>7</sup>

In the sixteenth century judicial authorities also punished prophesiers under statutory laws devised to combat sedition. Tudor parliaments expanded medieval statements against false news in “An Acte against seditious Woordes and Rumours” of 1554 and two Elizabethan statutes “for speaking false slanderous News” against the Queen.<sup>8</sup> The 1554 statute recited and upheld the tradition of scandalum magnatum by acknowledging the detriment of false news to the nobility.<sup>9</sup> The Marian parliament broadened the act to include not only individuals disseminating false news, but the originators of the tales.<sup>10</sup> Judges were able to punish convicted felons with a period in the pillory and the removal of their ears unless the offender paid a fine and consented to imprisonment for three months. Individuals who reported or spread rumours received a similar punishment consisting of pillorying and the loss of an ear unless they agreed to imprisonment for a month and the payment of a fine.<sup>11</sup> Judicial authorities often punished individuals who repeated non-scriptural prophecies under these laws.

The 1554 act also included a clause for the discipline of those who wrote false tales and rumours. Under this law individuals who wrote, printed or published in the form of a book, ballad or letter any words that slandered the king or queen could have

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<sup>6</sup>Coke, The Second Part of the Institutes, p. 228.

<sup>7</sup>SR, II, pp. 9, 59.

<sup>8</sup>1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c. 3; 1 Elizabeth I, c. 6; 23 Elizabeth I, c. 2.

<sup>9</sup>SR, IV, i, p. 240.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

their right hand cut off.<sup>12</sup> A second offence for any of the crimes outlined in the 1554 statute resulted in life imprisonment and the forfeiture of goods. Punishment was contingent on an accusation against the offender occurring within three months of the crime.<sup>13</sup> During the 1554 parliamentary session the lords also enacted a bill establishing the notion of treason by words entitled “An Acte for the punishement of Traterous Woordes against the Quenes Majestie”.<sup>14</sup> Directed towards religious heterodoxy, the act legislated against individuals who criticised the faith of the queen or wished for her death.<sup>15</sup> However, a penitent offender avoided the death penalty and received corporal reprimand at the discretion of a justice.

The Elizabethan reiteration of the crimes outlined in the two 1554 acts of Philip and Mary occurred in 1558 and 1581, although parliament revived and continued the statute against seditious words and rumours twice during Mary’s reign.<sup>16</sup> The 1558 act merely extended the 1554 act to cover infractions committed against Queen Elizabeth.<sup>17</sup> The 1581 statute, however, specifically attacked those who promulgated prophecies concerning the Queen. In a clause relating to divination and prophecy the statute referred to individuals who “by setting or erecting of any Figures, or by casting of Nativities, or by calculation, or by any Prophecieng Witchcrafte Cunjuracion or other lyke unlawfull Meanes” sought to know how long the queen would live or who would rule after her.<sup>18</sup> Punishment dictated by the 1581 act was severe, but tempered by the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 240-241.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>14</sup>1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c. 9 [SR, IV, i, p. 254].

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>2 & 3 Philip and Mary, c. 21 (1555) and 4 & 5 Philip and Mary, c. 9 (1557-1558) [SR, IV, i, pp. 297, 331].

<sup>17</sup>1 Elizabeth I, c. 6 “An Acte for the explanacion of the Statute of sedytyous Woordes and Rumours” [SR, IV, i, pp. 366-367].

<sup>18</sup>23 Elizabeth I, c. 2 [SR, IV, i, p. 660].

short period during which prosecution could take place. For an indictment based on words the act required accusation of the offender to occur within a month of the crime and on the deposition of at least two witnesses. A conviction in the Court of King's Bench resulted in death and the forfeiture of goods without benefit of clergy. The act remained law for the whole of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>19</sup> Although earlier legislation against prophecy was in force, the need for the 1581 act revealed an increase in parliamentary concern to halt predictions specifically about the queen's demise and the naming of her successor. The type of prophetic activity prosecuted according to the statutes against false rumour exhibited specific characteristics. Judicial authorities required evidence that the prophecy was offensive and slanderous to the nobility, leading officials of state or, later, to the monarch. Under the requirements of the statutes justices were only to indict individuals using easily understood, direct prophecies or those with an accompanying interpretative key. Proof of the seditious nature of the offence depended on establishing the intent of those using a prophecy, although in practice lack of evidence about the way an individual interpreted a prophecy did not obstruct their prosecution.

Tudor monarchs also made clear their suspicion of prophecies through the promulgation of proclamations against repeating or writing tales, rumours and slanders. The issuing of proclamations allowed judicial authorities to prosecute individuals for seditious words during periods when statutory law concerning the crime had lapsed or was inadequate. Several proclamations declared the seditious nature of religious heterodoxy. As the legislature often associated belief in non-scriptural prophecies with Catholicism and dissent, proclamations against heretical books included prophecies.

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<sup>19</sup>SR, IV, i, pp. 660-661.

Several proclamations addressed the importation of seditious books. On 16 November 1538 Henry VIII issued a proclamation outlawing books containing “seditious” opinions “contrarie to the true faith” of the church of England.<sup>20</sup> Henry VIII banned the importation and printing of books without a licence and enforced the examination of all printed works by himself, a member of the privy council or a bishop.<sup>21</sup> Queen Elizabeth issued several proclamations against seditious books in 1568, 1583 and 1588. Concerned about the influence of “malicious” persons on her subjects, the queen ordered the populace to relinquish illegal writings to the bishop of their diocese and avoid “seditious books” in the future.<sup>22</sup> The proclamation of 1 March 1568 outlawed any books “contayning matter derogatorie to the soveraigne estate of her Maiestie, or impugning the orders and rites established by lawe for Christian religion and devine service within this Realme”.<sup>23</sup> Later proclamations expressed a similar concern for the influence of “seditious and scismatical doctrine” on the faith of the queen’s subjects and their belief in the church of England.<sup>24</sup> The proclamations encouraged individuals to hand up to local authorities heretical books and impart knowledge of persons harbouring seditious works.

Other proclamations concerned the slander and defamation of the monarch and government policy also inherent in some prophecies. A proclamation of 1 July 1570

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<sup>20</sup>A Proclamation Prohibiting Unlicensed Importation and Printing of Books, Requiring Observance of Church Ceremonies, Removing St. Thomas à Becket from the Calendar, etc. (London, 1538) STC 7790.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>A Proclamation Forbidding Importation of Unlawful Books (London, 1569) STC 8014.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>A Proclamation Against Certaine Seditious Bookes and Libelles (London, 1583) STC 8141; A Proclamation for the Suppressing of Seditious Bookes and Libelles (London, 1584) STC 8146; A Proclamation Against Certaine Seditious Books and Libels (London, 1589) STC 8182. See also A Proclamation Agaynst Maynteyners of Seditious Persons, and of Trayterous Bookes and Writinges (London, 1570) STC 8035.



directed individuals to bring seditious books to their local justice of the peace or any other government officer who could read for further examination into the matter.<sup>25</sup> The queen's officers sought and apprehended suspected originators and dispersers of unlawful writings for further inquiry. The type of books and other writings considered unsuitable slandered the queen, her officials and the nobility and encouraged the people to question and rebel against the government.<sup>26</sup> The queen issued a similar proclamation on 28 September 1573 specifically directed against a group of traitors involved in a recent rebellion and who later fled England.<sup>27</sup> This proclamation demonstrated a desire to curb the influence of dissenting individuals on the rest of the queen's subjects. In particular, Elizabeth abhorred attempts to undermine the loyalty of her councillors through the dispersal of books and libels instigating "gelousie, and discorde amongst her highnesse counsaylours".<sup>28</sup> The proclamation encouraged people to inform local authorities about the disseminators of unlawful books to ensure the punishment of traitorous "sowers of sedition" and their adherents.<sup>29</sup>

English laws commonly depicted an association between the dissemination of prophecies and rebellion. Throughout the Tudor period the repetition of a prophecy could suggest to judicial authorities involvement in an attempt to encourage civil unrest. This was particularly true in instances where a prophecy concerned the monarch and the future of the realm. Adherents of prophecy were therefore open to prosecution under common laws such as the proclamations issued by Queen Elizabeth in 1576 and

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<sup>25</sup> A Proclamation Made Agaynst Seditious Bookes, Billes, and Writinges (London, 1570) STC 8032.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> A Proclamation Ordering the Destruction of Seditious and Libellous Books (London, 1573) STC 8064.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

1601 for the discovery of the authors of libels against the monarch. The 1576 proclamation, prompted by recent libels “tending to sedition, and dishonourable interpretations of her Maiesties godly Actions and purposes”, encouraged people to reveal the authors of sayings against the queen by offering a reward.<sup>30</sup> In 1601 Elizabeth issued a proclamation against the authors of libels that slandered the queen and incited rebellious activities.<sup>31</sup> For information revealing the name of the authors, writers or disseminators of libels and leading to their apprehension the queen offered a reward of £100.<sup>32</sup>

Tudor monarchs also promulgated many proclamations similar to the 1275 statute against slanderous news in an attempt to keep the peace between the sovereign and the people. In A Proclamation Concerning Tale Tellers of 24 May 1547 Edward VI identified the teller of tales and spreader of false rumours with the vagrant.<sup>33</sup> Travelling from town to town the wanderer conveyed information at markets, fairs and alehouses. The topics of conversation outlawed included any form of rumour or story that contributed to the “disquietyng and disturbyng of the Kynges highnes, his nobles and subiectes”.<sup>34</sup> Punishment for the spreading of false and slanderous tales entailed imprisonment of the perpetrator until they revealed the author of the sayings. The decree encompassed all methods of spreading false reports through speech, writing or

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<sup>30</sup>A Proclamation Offering to Reward Information on Seditious Libels (London, 1576) STC 8076.

<sup>31</sup>A Proclamation Offering £100 Reward for Information on Sources of Seditious Libels (London, 1601) STC 8286.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Richard Grafton, All Suche Proclamacions, as Have Been Lette Furthe by the Kynges Maiestie (and passed the Print) From the Last Daie of Januarii, in the Firste Yere of his Highnes Reigne, unto the Last Daie of Januarii, beeyng in the iiiii Yere of his Moste Prosperous Reigne, That is to Saie, by the Space of iiiii Whole Yeres (London, 1550) STC 7758, sig. Aiii.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., sigs. Aiii-Aiii verso.

publication.<sup>35</sup> However, the spread of rumour and tales continued as Edward VI lamented in the proclamation “for tale tellers” of 29th April 1549.<sup>36</sup> Considering past punishments ineffectual, Edward VI ordered disseminators of false rumours and tales imprisoned until they revealed the authors of their sayings. For the originator of seditious tales, however, the proclamation set out a harsher punishment to “bee committed into the Galley, there to rowe in cheines, as a slave or forsary, duryng the kynges maiesties pleasure to the example and terror of all other”.<sup>37</sup>

Edward VI issued a similar order concerning false news and rumour, entitled A Proclamation for Tale Tellers, on 8 July 1549. This proclamation differed from that of 29 April by emphasising the character of the tellers of tales as ex-felons, prison breakers, ex-soldiers, loiterers, ruffians, vagabonds and ringleaders deceiving the king’s true subjects with their seditious tales.<sup>38</sup> The proclamation encouraged individuals to report the authors of dissenting tales by offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of a seditious “malefactour”.<sup>39</sup> During the sixteenth century Tudor monarchs issued many proclamations against false news and rumours.<sup>40</sup> All called for people to reveal the name of individuals instigating tales that criticised the sovereign, the nobility and officials of the realm. While the punishment of offenders varied, as did the reward for informants, the monarchy promulgated proclamations throughout the period against

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., sig. Aiiii.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., sig. Fi verso.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., sig. Fii verso.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., sig. Hi.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., sig. Hiii.

<sup>40</sup>In addition to the proclamations discussed: A Proclamacion, Set Furth by the Kynges Maiestie, with the Advice of his Highnes Moste Honorable Counsail, for the Reformation of Vagabondes, Players, and Printers Without Licence (London, 1551) STC 7835; A Proclamacion Set Furth by the Kinges Maiestie with the Advice of his Hignes Most Honorable Privy Counsail, Concernyng Casters, and Spreaders Abrode of Sedicious Billes (London, 1551) STC 7838; A Proclamation Against Seditious Rumours (London, 1553) STC 7848; A Proclamation Against Rumours of Sedition (London, 1586) STC 8162.

sedition practices demonstrating the enduring, pervasive nature of the offence and the government's concern to outlaw this crime. The judiciary considered individuals repeating, copying or in any other way disseminating non-scriptural prophecies as a similar threat to the stability of the realm and often indicted them for sedition.

Concurrent with the development of scandalum magnatum, concerning attacks on the leading officers and nobles of the realm, judicial authorities punished adherence to prophecies as treason when individuals threatened the monarch. Authorities sometimes viewed prophetic sayings as treason by words, a concept initially established as constructive treason under the 1352 treason act and later clearly defined under the Henrician acts of treason and succession of 1534. The Edwardian act of treason of 1352 informed the jurisdiction of indictments for the crime, including prophecy, in the period 1352 to 1534.<sup>41</sup> In response to previous alterations of the treason law Henry IV had consolidated the 1352 statute in 1399 by repealing all legislative definitions of treason not encompassed in the Edwardian statute and declared, "in no Time to come any Treason be judged otherwise than it was ordained by the Statute in the Time of his Noble Grandfather King Edward the Third".<sup>42</sup> From 1399 onwards the law of treason experienced no serious changes.<sup>43</sup> In The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages J.G. Bellamy argues that from 1352 to 1485 the treason statute of Edward III served the needs of the monarch adequately as the judiciary was willing to construe treason to suit the requirements of prosecuting authorities where the act lacked clarity.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup>25 Edward III. st. 5, c. 2.

<sup>42</sup>1 Henry IV, c. 10 [SR, II, p. 114]; Samuel Rezneck, "Constructive Treason by Words in the Fifteenth Century", The American Historical Review, XXXIII (1928), p. 545.

<sup>43</sup>A statute against treason of 1397 removed the requirement of an "overt" act of treason for indictment, however, Henry IV repealed this law in 1399 diminishing the significance of this legislative statement. Elton, Policy and Police, p. 263; 1 Henry IV, c. 10 [SR, II, p. 114].

<sup>44</sup>J.G. Bellamy, The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 136-137. See also Elton, Policy and Police, p. 263.

The treason act of 1352 is important as the first official statement of offences that constituted treason. Before the statute of 1352 the definition of treason lacked clarity.<sup>45</sup> Comparing the “ancient” legal treatises of Glanville, Bracton and Britton, Robert Chambers argued in his lectures on English law that these works offered “sufficient proof”

that treason was in those days not nicely distinguished nor accurately defined. So great was the uncertainty, that not only one author differs from another, but Britton apparently varies from himself, by making several crimes treason in his twenty-second chapter which are not mentioned in the eighth where he professedly delivers the doctrine of treason.<sup>46</sup>

In an attempt to avoid confusion, the House of Commons petitioned the parliament of Edward III in 1352 for an unequivocal statement of treason because previously “the justices of our lord the king in diverse counties condemn those who are accused before them, *as traitors* for causes which the Commons do not know to be treason”.<sup>47</sup> Although historians disagree on the precise origin of the statute of 1352, Bellamy depicts the act as “the direct result” of attempts by judges to extend the jurisdiction of common law treason.<sup>48</sup> Conceived during a period of increasing legal definition and involving an apparent curtailment of royal prerogative, the act of 25 Edward III sets out several different types of treason while also providing for the development of previously unknown crimes. The reliance on judicial construction in cases involving only verbal attacks on the monarch allowed for the prosecution as traitors individuals who used prophetic statements to support their treasonous intentions.

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<sup>45</sup>I.D. Thornley, “The Act of Treasons, 1352”, *History*, New Series, VI (1922), p. 106.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Chambers, *A Course of Lectures on the English Law Delivered at the University of Oxford 1767-1773* (Oxford, 1986), I, pp. 353-354.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>48</sup>Bellamy, *The Law of Treason*, p. 100; for an analysis of historical arguments concerning the development of the 1352 statute see chapter four of Bellamy’s work entitled “The Great Statute of Treasons”.

The treason law of 1352, a “Declaration What Offences Shall be Adjudged Treason”, listed several different types of treason summarised by Chambers as acts against “the safety of the king, his queen, or eldest son”, “the right of succession or the honour of the Royal family”, “the king’s prerogative by usurping the signature of his coin or seal” and “certain great officers who act immediately by the king’s authority”.<sup>49</sup> The act outlawed crimes which attacked the king and his family and, most importantly, for individuals adhering to prophecies, compassing or imagining the death of the monarch.<sup>50</sup> Edward III’s parliament also incorporated within the act provision for the development of new treasons. The statute directed justices to present for judgement to the king and parliament all individuals that they believed had committed treason, although the wording of the treason law may not have defined their behaviour as such.<sup>51</sup> This enabled Henry VIII to prosecute nobles on the basis of their interest in prophecy with little evidence of treasonous activities. Such individuals were accused of imagining and compassing the death of the king. Chambers provided a useful definition of the term to compass and to imagine and stated that “to form the design is to imagine it, to meet for the adjustment of that design is to compass it”.<sup>52</sup> While to imagine the death of the king involved only the construction of an idea, Chambers believed that the word compassing referred to the active implementation of that idea though fell short of the act itself.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries compassing and imagining the death of the king included verbal and written evidence, which explained the dominance of this

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<sup>49</sup>Chambers, *A Course of Lectures*, I, p. 356.

<sup>50</sup>25 Edward III. st. 5, c. 2 [SR, II, p. 320].

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.* SR, II, p. 320.

<sup>52</sup>Chambers, *A Course of Lectures*, I, p. 356.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

particular crime.<sup>54</sup> The 1352 statute did not list speaking words critical of the king and his government as a crime, rather judges “construed” words as treason in preference, notes Bellamy, to the procedure outlined in the statute for the development of new treasons.<sup>55</sup> How judges constructed this treason within the spirit of the act is a matter of debate among historians.

Edward Coke and Matthew Hale asserted that under the Edwardian statute of 1352 judges required an overt act to convict an individual for the compassing and imagining of the king’s death.<sup>56</sup> Coke claimed that statutory attempts to make words equal to overt deeds always failed and cited a common saying “that bare words may make an heretick, but not a traytor without an overt act”.<sup>57</sup> Words compassing and imagining the death of the king were not high treason but considered by other acts as misprision. Similarly, Hale, in a discussion of Richard II’s treason law, argued that parliament repealed the statute because “it was too dangerous a law to put mens bare intentions upon the judgement even of parliament under so great a penalty, without some overt act to evidence it”.<sup>58</sup> Until parliament passed a new law of treason in 1534, an individual who referred to a prophecy was not convicted of treason without other examples of their conspiracy to act on their desire to usurp the power of the monarch. Judicial authorities did not consider prophecy an overt act of treason. As Robert

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<sup>54</sup>John Bellamy, The Tudor Law of Treason: An Introduction (London, 1979), p. 11; for discussion of cases see James Walter Weingart, “The Concept of Treason in Tudor England”, unpublished PhD dissertation, Northwestern University (1976), p. 29; Isobel D. Thornley, “Treason by Words in the Fifteenth Century”, The English Historical Review, XXXII (1917), pp. 556-557; Rezneck, “Constructive Treason”, pp. 548-551; Bellamy, The Law of Treason, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup>Bellamy, The Law of Treason, p. 107.

<sup>56</sup>Coke, The Third Part of the Institutes, pp. 13-14; Matthew Hale, Historia Placitorum Coronae 1736 (London, 1971), I, p. 108.

<sup>57</sup>Coke, The Third Part of the Institutes, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup>Hale, Historia Placitorum, p. 111.

Chambers explained an overt act was “such an action or tendency to action as shows not only a desire but a settled purpose of treasonable violence”.<sup>59</sup> Thus Chambers viewed words as an overt act correlative to other treasons uttered “in consultation” of treasonous purposes. Evidence of an individual’s interest in a treasonous prophecy reflected only the desire to commit treason not the intent. The case of Elizabeth Barton in particular demonstrated the limitations of the 1352 statute and the notion that prophecy was not an overt act of treason in itself. Where early in the sixteenth century judicial authorities convicted noblemen like Rhys ap Gruffydd and Edward Stafford, duke of Buckingham, of treason using their interest in prophecy as part of the evidence against them, the judges refused to indict Barton only on the basis of her prophesying.<sup>60</sup>

Henry VII’s minimal alteration to the treason law and the failure of Henry VIII’s first draft of an act against treason resulted in the dominance of the 1352 statute until 1534. Although the statute of 1352 included provision for an extension of the law of treason, the inability of the act to encompass crimes resulting from Henry VIII’s need to enforce the Reformation and minimise dissent resulted in attempts to redefine the offence. The judiciary augmented the scope of 1352 act through their construction of treason by words during the fifteenth century. Thus Bellamy concludes, “it is obvious that it was not the scope of the law of treason which restricted any despotic tendencies in this field . . . It was the courts, particularly the juries, which restricted autocratic practice”.<sup>61</sup> In the early sixteenth century the judiciary used this control and refused to extend construction to include offences not directly threatening the monarch as

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<sup>59</sup>Chambers, *A Course of Lectures*, p. 358.

<sup>60</sup>See chapter seven for a full analysis of the role of prophecy in the prosecution of Rhys ap Gruffydd and Edward Stafford.

<sup>61</sup>Bellamy, *The Law of Treason*, p. 137.



understood by compassing and imagining the death of the king. Henry VIII therefore found the 1352 statute inadequate because neither the law nor the interpretations of lawyers extended to the sanction of his policies as well as the protection of his life.<sup>62</sup> Drafting of a new law of treason began in 1530 for presentation in the next parliamentary session of 1531.<sup>63</sup> However, parliament did not enact the new legislation until 1534 and even then the bill contained many revisions.

In 1533 the trial of Elizabeth Barton demonstrated the reluctance of judicial authorities to convict an individual for treason only on the basis of their adherence to non-scriptural prophecies. Most commentators agree that the Barton case prompted Henry VIII's desire for a treason law that defended his divorce of Katherine of Aragon and break from Rome.<sup>64</sup> Possibly considering a divorce from Katherine of Aragon as early as 1526, Henry VIII did not remarry until 25 January 1533, although his relationship with Anne Boleyn began in 1527.<sup>65</sup> In 1528 the visions and prophecies of Barton, a young girl from Court-at-Street in Kent, turned towards the question of Henry VIII's marriage.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the archdeacon of Ely, Nicholas Hawkins, on 20 December 1533 describing the circumstances surrounding Barton's rise as a prophetic visionary.<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth, wrote Cranmer, "said that the Kyng shuld not contynew Kyng a moneth after that he were married And with vi Monethes after god would stryke the Realme with such A plagge as never was seen

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<sup>62</sup>Weingart, "The Concept of Treason", p. 32.

<sup>63</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 265.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 274-275; see also Jonathan K. Van Patten, "Magic, Prophecy and the Law of Treason in Reformation England", *The American Journal of Legal History*, XXVII (1983), p. 10.

<sup>65</sup>Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 120, 57-64.

<sup>66</sup>E.J. Devereux, "Elizabeth Barton and Tudor Censorship", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XLIX (1966), p. 94.

<sup>67</sup>BL MS Harl. 6148, fols. 40-41.

And than the kyng shuld be destroyed".<sup>68</sup> The increasing notoriety of Elizabeth and her sayings, coupled with the publication of many of her prophecies, convinced Cromwell and Henry VIII of the need to indict her. In 1533 Cromwell recalled Barton from the nunnery at St. Sepulchre in Canterbury and attempted to try her for treason in the Court of Star Chamber without success.<sup>69</sup>

Edward Coke claimed that Elizabeth Barton did not commit an overt act of treason under the 1352 legislation.<sup>70</sup> Possibly the judges believed that although Elizabeth compassed and imagined the death of the king, the fulfilment of her prophecies depended on the king's future marriage to Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth's compassing and imagining of the king's death was conditional. Bellamy believes that the judges refusal to convict Barton indicated that Henry VIII and Cromwell were confronted with a level of opposition from the judiciary that previous kings had avoided.<sup>71</sup> Another barrier to conviction resulted from an inability to prove that Elizabeth Barton conspired to compass and imagine the death of the king. Sometime in 1533 Elizabeth sought an audience with Henry VIII and told him of her visions.<sup>72</sup> In a letter to Cromwell an unknown person reported Elizabeth Barton saying "that yf he [Henry VIII] maryed and tok An to wyffe the vengauce of God shuld plage hym, and (as she sayth) she shewyd this unto the kyng".<sup>73</sup> An accusation of conspiracy was not valid because Elizabeth made no attempt to hide her predictions from the king. Henry VIII and Cromwell finally ensured Elizabeth's conviction through parliamentary

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., fol. 41.

<sup>69</sup>A. Denton Cheney, "The Holy Maid of Kent", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, New Series, XVIII (1904), p. 113.

<sup>70</sup>Coke, The Third Part of the Institutes, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup>Bellamy, The Tudor Law, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup>Cheney, "The Holy Maid", pp. 113-114.

<sup>73</sup>Thomas Wright, ed., Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries (London, 1843) [Camden Society. Old Series, XXVI], pp. 14-15.

attainder, avoiding her indictment at common law. Curiously, the difficulty of indicting Barton for treason because of her prophesying resulted in a revision of the treason law in the early 1530s rather than the creation of a law against prophecy. Possibly the curtailment of the monarch's prerogative, inferred by the refusal of the judges to follow the orders of the king, was more important to Henry VIII than the actual crime that Barton committed.

At the beginning of 1534 Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII attempted to overcome some of the problems revealed by the Barton case in a new act of succession that clearly established the illegality of words critical of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn.<sup>74</sup> Under the provisions of the statute, individuals saying anything dismissive of the king's second marriage received punishment for misprision of treason despite Cromwell's attempts to secure the crime's denouncement as high treason.<sup>75</sup> The act of succession expanded the medieval concept of treason to include writing as an overt act without the reliance on judicial construction. In "Magic, Prophecy and the Law of Treason in Reformation England" Jonathan K. Van Patten argues that this development augmented Henry VIII's ability to punish not only attacks on his person but also criticism of his policies.<sup>76</sup> However, Cromwell failed to persuade the drafting committee to incorporate treason by words into the new statute, as a result the crimes of Elizabeth Barton remained on the periphery of treason.<sup>77</sup> The Treason Act of 1534, described by Elton as "the first comprehensive statement [of treason] since 1352", rectified the problem of treason by words.<sup>78</sup> The Succession Act did not rectify the inability of

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<sup>74</sup>25 Henry VIII, c. 22 [SR, III, pp. 471-474].

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 474; Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 276-277.

<sup>76</sup>Van Patten, "Magic, Prophecy", p. 11.

<sup>77</sup>Bellamy, *The Tudor Law*, p. 30.

<sup>78</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 265.

judicial authorities to apply significant punishment to verbal attacks on the king and his policies. The forfeiture of goods and imprisonment under a conviction of misprision was ineffectual. The new act of treason, however, addressed treasons expressed through publication, writing or words. The statute defined as traitors any individuals who “wyshe will or desyre by words or writinge, or by crafte ymagen invent practyse or attempte, any bodely harme to be donne or commytted to the kynges most royall personne, the Quenes, or their heires apparaunt”.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the act regarded as treason descriptions of the king as a “heretyke scismatike Tiraunt ynfidell or usurper of the Crowne”.<sup>80</sup>

Later parliaments regretted the inclusion of treason by words in the act of 1534 and practised moderation. In 1547 “An Acte for the Repeale of certain Statutes concerninge Treasons, Felonyes, &c.”, passed during the first parliament of Edward VI, reduced verbal compassing and imagining of the death of the king to a felony and the law of treason reverted to the definitions encompassed in the 1352 act.<sup>81</sup> The statute acknowledged that the laws of Henry VIII

which might seme and appere to men of exterior Realmes and manny of the Kings Majesties Subjects verie streighte sore extreme and terrible, allthoughe theie were then when they were made not with owt greate consideracion and pollicye moved and established and for the tyme to thadvoydaunce of further inconvenyence verie expedyent and necessarie.<sup>82</sup>

However, the act included the punishment of treason by words as high treason on a third offence. Similarly, the Marian “Act Repealing Certayne Treasons Felonies and Premunire” of 1553 referred to past laws where “not onelye the ignoraunte and rude

<sup>79</sup>26 Henry VIII, c. 13 [SR, III, p. 508].

<sup>80</sup>SR, IV, i, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup>1 Edward VI, c. 12 [SR, IV, i, pp. 18-22].

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

unlearned people, but also learned and expert people . . . are often and many tymes trapped and snared, yea many times for woordes onelye”.<sup>83</sup> As with the Edwardian statute, Marian legislation upheld the 1352 law of treason. I.D. Thornley describes the treason legislation of Henry VIII as “emergency measures”, acts passed to deal with periods of unusual popular disturbance or change before returning to the statute of 1352 for a definition of the offence.<sup>84</sup> Queen Elizabeth, however, did not return to medieval treason legislation, and by 1571 treason clearly encompassed disaffection towards the monarch and government of the realm.<sup>85</sup> Evidently judicial authorities always possessed the means to convict individuals on the basis of the spoken word despite controversy surrounding the validity of words as treason. However, the enactment of a statute against prophecy in 1542 significantly reduced the need to prosecute individuals referring to prophecies under the laws against treason.

In the fifteenth century two statutes incorporated legislation against prophecies. Henry IV’s parliament outlawed the prophecies of Welsh bards in 1402.<sup>86</sup> Prompted by the opposition of Owen Glendower, who rallied the Welsh through an appeal to their prophetic history, Henry IV attempted to halt the dispersal of prophecies by banning the gathering of Welshmen to listen to bardic tales.<sup>87</sup> The chronicler Edward Hall described

howe a certayne writer writeth that this earle of Marche, the Lorde Percy and Owen Glendor wer unwisely made believe by a Welsh Prophecier, that King Henry was the Moldewarpe, cursed of Goddes owne mouth, and that they thre were the Dragon, the Lion and the Wolffe, which

<sup>83</sup>1 Mary 1. st. 1, c. 1 [SR, IV, i, p. 198].

<sup>84</sup>I.D. Thornley, “The Treason Legislation of Henry VIII (1531-1534)”, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Third Series, XI (1917), p. 87.

<sup>85</sup>Weingart, “The Concept of Treason”, p. 39.

<sup>86</sup>Rotuli Parliamentorum; Ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parlamento Tempore Ricardi R. II. [London, 1767-1777], p. 508; SR includes this statute as an act “Against Wasters, Minstrels &c. in Wales” 4 Henry IV, c. 27 [SR, II, p. 140].

<sup>87</sup>M.H. Keen, England in the Later Middle Ages: A Political History (London, 1975), p. 308; Shwartz, “The Prophecies of Merlin”, pp. 68-69; V.J. Scattergood, Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century, 1399-1485 (London, 1971), p. 117.

shoulde devide this realme betwene them, by the deviacion and not divination of that mawmet Merlin.<sup>88</sup>

Several years later, in 1406, the Prince of Wales and the House of Lords pushed for the enactment of a law against the Lollards to whom parliament attributed the spreading of false prophecies and rumours of Richard II's survival.<sup>89</sup> James H. Ramsay suggests in a survey of fifteenth-century English history that this legislation alluded to the prophecies of John of Bridlington.<sup>90</sup> However, the act never appeared on the statute books, perhaps indicating that the measure was temporary.<sup>91</sup>

The first sixteenth-century statute against prophecy passed at Westminster during the initial parliamentary session of Henry VIII's reign (for a complete transcript of all three sixteenth-century acts against prophecy see appendix two).<sup>92</sup> The only record of the bill's presentment exists in the Journals of the House of Lords that recorded the passing of the bill through the upper and lower houses on 24 March 1542 and the enactment of the statute as "An Act against false Prophecies, upon Declaration of Names, Armes, Badges, &c."<sup>93</sup> This law defined prophecy as any attempt to determine the fate of the monarch or any other person.<sup>94</sup> Prophecies encompassed predictions based on the "beasts" or "fowles" or "any other suche lyke thinge accustomed in armes cognisaunce badges or signete, or by reasone of tres of the name".<sup>95</sup> The emphasis on prophecies using the symbolism of heraldic devices, "Arms Badges or Cognisaunces",

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<sup>88</sup>As quoted by Scattergood in Politics and Poetry, p. 117.

<sup>89</sup>Rotuli Parliamentorum, pp. 583-584; Margaret Aston, Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion (London, 1984), p. 28; James H. Ramsay, Lancaster and York: A Century of English History (Oxford, 1892), I, p. 103.

<sup>90</sup>Ramsay, Lancaster and York, p. 103, n. 3.

<sup>91</sup>No such act appears in SR.

<sup>92</sup>33 Henry VIII, c. 14.

<sup>93</sup>JL, I, pp. 191, 198.

<sup>94</sup>SR, III, p. 850.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

illustrated the concern of parliament to subdue predictions about the nobility.<sup>96</sup> The 1542 statute focused on the defamation of privileged persons inherent in non-scriptural prophecies and the distress and damage to the reputation of individuals that they caused. Specifically, the legislation referred to the past when “many noble men have suffered, and (if theyr Prince wolde gyve any eare ther to) mught happe to doo herafter”.<sup>97</sup> D.M. Loades in “The Theory and Practice of Censorship in Sixteenth-Century England” claims that the later Elizabethan act against prophecy “stood in the direct tradition of *Scandalum Magnatum*”.<sup>98</sup> This was equally true of the 1542 statute that also dealt with the slander of individuals.<sup>99</sup> Later acts sought to curb the influence of prophecies on individuals disrupting the peace of the realm and to halt their association with rebellion. However, the 1542 act concerned the reputation of the individuals on whom the prophecies centred.

The 1542 act was significant because it imposed a harsh penalty on those taking part in dissenting gossip. Previously judicial authorities indicted individuals repeating prophecies concerning the monarch for treason by words and viewed prophetic allusions to other individuals as sedition, a crime enforced by proclamation and punished on the pillory. The 1542 act, however, made prophecy a capital offence. The statute stated that offenders would suffer the “paynes of deathe forfaitures of land tente goode and catalls” without benefit of clergy.<sup>100</sup> The act encompassed the punishment of individuals who repeated prophecies in print, writing, speech or song and included those who

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>D.M. Loades, “The Theory and Practice of Censorship in Sixteenth-Century England”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, XXIV (1974), p. 144.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>100</sup>SR, III, p. 850.

abetted or encouraged the offender.<sup>101</sup> However, the first parliamentary session of Edward VI repealed the 1542 legislation against prophecies in the 1547 “Acte for the Repeale of certain Statutes concerninge Treasons, Felonyes, &c.”.<sup>102</sup>

The second sixteenth-century act against prophecy passed during the third session of Edward VI’s parliament that sat during 1549 and 1550.<sup>103</sup> The initial record of the presentation of the bill occurred in the Journals of the House of Lords. The peers first heard the bill, titled “Billa, against Prophetes”, on 7 November 1549. The lords formed a special committee to consider the proposal.<sup>104</sup> After several readings in both houses of parliament during November and December, the draft was finally recorded as an act “Against fond and fantastical Prophecies”.<sup>105</sup> This title remained when the bill passed into law, and parliamentary clerks recorded the act in a calendar of laws passed during the session.<sup>106</sup> The Edwardian act declared the illegality of prophecies based on “any armes fildes beastes fowles badges and such other lyke thinge accustomed in armes conysances or sygnete”.<sup>107</sup> The type of prophecy described closely resembled that defined by earlier legislation. The subject of prophecies were the king, peers and the commons. However, where the 1542 act focused on the slander of the nobility and the derogation of the relationship between the king and his noble men, this second statute concerned the prophetic incitement of rebellion.

Ultimately, the first and second sixteenth-century acts against prophecy regarded the disturbance of the peace between the king and his subjects. The Edwardian act

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>G.R. Elton, The Parliament of England 1559-1581 (Cambridge, 1986), p. 110; 1 Edward VI, c. 12 [SR, IV, i, pp. 18-22].

<sup>103</sup>3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 15.

<sup>104</sup>JL, I, p. 356.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., pp. 358-361; JC, I, pp. 13-14.

<sup>106</sup>JL, I, p. 389.

<sup>107</sup>3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 15 [SR, IV, i, p. 114].



broadened earlier preoccupations and included the use of prophecy “to the intent thereby to make any rebellion insurrecon discencon losse of lyfe or other disturbaunce within this Realme or other the Kinge Domynions”.<sup>108</sup> The wording of the act explained the reason for this development. In the period between the parliamentary session of 1549-1550 and the previous session,

divers evill disposed parsons, mynding to stirr and move sedicon disobedience and rebellion, have of their perverse mynde feyned ymagined invented published and practysed dyvers fantasticall and fonde Prophesyes . . . to the greate disturbaunce and perill of the kinge Majestie and this his Realme.<sup>109</sup>

Thus in defining the type of prophecy encompassed by the act parliament included declarations that nominated the date of any future conflict.<sup>110</sup> The punishment determined by the 1549-1550 session of parliament illustrated the desire of the members for greater leniency than that laid out in Henrician legislation against prophecy. Initially individuals who repeated by writing, printing, singing, speaking or publishing false prophecies suffered imprisonment for one year and a fine of £10. For a second offence the judiciary could imprison individuals for life and seize all their possessions.<sup>111</sup> However, the act dictated that the accusation of offenders must occur within six months of the alleged crime.

The last sixteenth-century prophecy act passed through Queen Elizabeth’s parliament in 1563 after Mary’s first parliament of 1553 repealed the 1549-1550 statute against fond and fantastic prophecies.<sup>112</sup> The draft legislation, however, first appeared in

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>1 Mary I, c. 1 “An Acte Repealing certayne Treasons Felonies and Premunire” [SR, IV, i, p. 198].

the parliamentary session of 1559.<sup>113</sup> In The Parliament of England 1559-1581 G. R. Elton describes the bill as an example of “splitting”, where parliament splits an inclusive bill into several independent acts.<sup>114</sup> The Journals of the House of Commons initially recorded the draft proposal on 15 March 1559 as a bill covering “Conjurations, Prophecies, and Sodomy”.<sup>115</sup> The Commons accepted the legislation as “The Bill against Sorcery, Witchcrafts, and Prophecies of Badges and Arms” and sent the bill to the upper house.<sup>116</sup> The Lords read the bill but did not proceed further.<sup>117</sup> In Elizabeth’s second parliamentary session the proposal reappeared on 11 February 1563 and passed in the lower house as an expanded “bill for Servants robbing their Masters, Buggery, Invocation of Evil Spirits, Inchantments, Witchcraft”.<sup>118</sup> The Commons passed the second bill to the House of Lords which first read the proposed legislation on 15 February. At this time the bill expanded to include fond and fantastic prophecies and sorcery.<sup>119</sup> The Lords split this comprehensive bill into several individual proposals and a separate “bill against fond and fantastical Prophecies” appeared for an initial reading in the lower house on the 12 March. Following two more readings the House of Commons passed the draft legislation on 18 March 1563.

The use of Henrician terminology in the bill of 1559 indicated a desire to revive an act against prophecy similar in format to that of 1542. The wording of the 1563 statute “agaynst fonde and phantasticall Propheyses” similarly imitated the statute of 1549-1550. The 1563 act legislated against prophecies based on “any Armes Fields

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<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth I, c. 15.

<sup>114</sup> Elton, The Parliament, p. 110.

<sup>115</sup> JC, I, p. 57.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>117</sup> Elton, The Parliament, p. 110.

<sup>118</sup> JC, I, p. 65.

<sup>119</sup> Simonds D'Ewes, The Journals of All the Parliaments During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Both of the House of Lords and House of Commons (London, 1682) STC D1250, p. 68.

Beastes Badges or suche other lyke thinges accustomed in Armes Cognisaunces or Signettes, or upon or by reason of any Time yere or Daye name Blodshed or warre".<sup>120</sup>

The basic wording of the act, defining the type of prophecies outlawed, remained constant since the first statute against prophecy. Like the Edwardian statute against prophecy, the Elizabethan act specifically stated that previous rebellious activities prompted the passing of the statute:

Forasmuche as sithens the expiration and ending of the Statute made in the time of King Edward the Syxthe entitled, An Act against fond and fantasticall Prophetes, divers evill disposed psons, enclined to the stirring and moving of Factions Seditions and Rebellions within this Realme, have byn the more bolde & attempte the lyke Practise, in fayning imagining inventing and publishing of suche fonde and fantasticall Prophetes.<sup>121</sup>

The provisions of the Elizabethan legislation for the punishment of individuals publishing, writing, printing, singing or speaking false prophecies followed those made during Edward VI's reign. After initial conviction under the act, the offender suffered imprisonment for a year and a fine of £10, but for a second offence the offender incurred life imprisonment and the forfeiture of all possessions.<sup>122</sup> In the second and third sixteenth-century acts against prophecy the justices of assize, oyer and determiner, and peace held the power to convict.<sup>123</sup> Both acts imposed a time limit for the accusation of six months.

All three sixteenth-century acts against prophecy depicted a similar conception of the type of prophesying parliament wanted to outlaw. The emphasis on prophecies using the symbolism of fields, beasts, fowls or badges from the arms, cognisances and

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<sup>120</sup>SR, IV, i, p. 445.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 115, 446.

signets of the nobility or derived from variations on the name of individuals indicated heraldic or numerical prophecies. The inclusion in 1549 of prophecies that named the date of future conflicts suggested the desire of the legislature to include astrological forecasts in the act. Parliament outlawed prophecies concerning all individuals, although the character of the prophecies described indicated a particular interest in predictions about the monarch and the nobility. The statutes also referred to the intent of the individuals who used non-scriptural prophecies. The two later sixteenth-century acts specifically associated prophecy with rebellion. The Edwardian act declared the use of prophecy illegal where an individual intended to “make any rebellion insurreccion discencion losse of lyfe or other disturbaunce”.<sup>124</sup> The Elizabethan act used the same wording.<sup>125</sup> The Henrician statute, however, did not refer explicitly to rebellion. Instead the statute legislated against individuals who used prophecies “to make folke thinke that by theyre untrew gessys it might be knowne what good or evyll thinge shulde coome happen or be doone” to the detriment of the nobility.<sup>126</sup> Despite the inclusion of statutory clauses defining the instances in which the use of prophecy was illegal, judicial authorities did not require proof of intent to convict individuals.

During the sixteenth century parliament augmented the acts against non-scriptural prophecies with statutes against witchcraft, conjurations, sorcery and enchantments of 1542 and 1563. While the statutes against witchcraft and other magical practices legislated against the individual as a witch, conjurer, sorcerer or enchanter, the prophecy acts legislated against prophecies rather than the prophet. Parliament acknowledged that the individuals who disseminated or repeated prophecies

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<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 445.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, III, p. 850.

were rarely the source of prophetic inspiration and that prophecies interested a wide range of different people not just those claiming to be prophets or diviners. Prophecies stood apart from their source and were potentially open for anyone to interpret. The admonishment of the divinatory arts in statute began as early as 1530 in a statute against vagrancy.<sup>127</sup> Section four of “An Acte concernyng punysshement of Beggars & Vacabunds” included provisions for the chastisement of “fortunetellers”

usyng dyvers & subtyle craftye & unlawfull games & playes & some of them feynyng themsefes to have knowledge in Physyke, Physnamye, Palmestrye, or other craftye scyencs wherby they beare the people in hande, that they can tell their destenyces deceases & fortunes & suche other lyke fantasticall ymagenacions to the greate deceypte of the Kyngs Subjects.<sup>128</sup>

Examined before two justices of the peace, convicted offenders received two days of whipping for a first offence, scourging, pillorying and the loss of an ear for a second offence and whipping, pillorying and the loss of a second ear for a third offence.<sup>129</sup> The 1542 statute against the witch, conjurer, sorcerer or enchanter implicitly referred to the practise of divination outlawing the use of any “Invocacionss or conjuracions of sorceries” for any unlawful intent or purpose.<sup>130</sup> The act regarded witchcraft and sorcery as a felony, offenders suffered death and the forfeiture of their possessions without benefit of clergy.

An Elizabethan statute legislated against the use of any “wytchcraftes Enchantementes Charms and Sorceries” to divine the place of gold or silver, or ascertain

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<sup>127</sup>22 Henry VIII, c. 12 [SR, III, pp. 328-332].

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup>33 Henry VIII, c. 8 “The Bill ayest conjuracion & wichecraftes and sorcery and enchantments” [SR, III, p. 837]; C. L’Estrange Ewen, ed., Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes held for the Home Circuit A.D. 1559-1736 (London, 1929), p. 13.

where individuals could find lost items.<sup>131</sup> Under this legislation the consequences of the use of witchcraft determined the extent of the offence. The accused received harsh punishment for acts resulting in the death of others; however, using divination to find lost or stolen items or provoking unlawful love resulted in imprisonment for one year and pillorying every three months for six hours. However, a second offence often led to death.<sup>132</sup> Evidence suggests that parliament based the Elizabethan statute on earlier examples of the punishment of witches. In a letter to Sir William Cecil of 20 April 1561 Robert Catlyn outlined early precedents in common law for the proposed statute against witchcraft enacted in 1563. Catlyn referred to Britton's thirteenth-century discussion "Of Arsons" that mentioned the burning of "sorcerers" and "sorceresses" after conviction before the king's justices.<sup>133</sup>

Ecclesiastical authorities also made provision for the punishment of individuals who used prophecies. Several visitation articles issued directions for inquiry into knowledge of magical practices including soothsaying. Edward VI issued injunctions in 1547 "intending the advancement of the true honour of Almighty God" and "the suppression of idolatory and superstition throughout all his realms".<sup>134</sup> Thomas Cranmer, on a visitation to the diocese of Canterbury in 1548, later ordered inquiry into anyone who used "charms, sorcery, enchantments, witchcraft, soothsaying, or any like

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<sup>131</sup>5 Elizabeth I, c. 16 [SR, IV, i, p. 446].

<sup>132</sup>SR, IV, i, pp. 446-447.

<sup>133</sup>SP 12/16, fols. 56-(56); translation from Francis Morgan Nichols, *Britton* (Oxford, 1865), pp. 41-42.

<sup>134</sup>Edward Cardwell, *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England; Being a Collection of Injunctions, Declarations, Orders, Articles of Inquiry, &c. From the Year 1546 to the Year 1716* (Oxford, 1844), I, pp. 4, 30; Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, eds., *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation* (London, 1910), II, p. 111.

craft invented by the devil".<sup>135</sup> During Mary's reign Edmund Bonner, bishop of London, administered similar articles within the London diocese in 1554 as did John White, bishop of Lincoln, within his diocese in 1556.<sup>136</sup> Queen Elizabeth issued royal articles and injunctions in 1559 that included a directive "that no persons shall use charms, sorceries, enchantments, witchcrafts, soothsaying, or any suchlike devilish device, nor shall resort at any time to the same for counsel or help".<sup>137</sup> The clergy followed Elizabeth's instructions by issuing interrogatories and injunctions concerning soothsaying in 1560 and 1561 and articles in 1568 and 1588.<sup>138</sup>

Since 1275 the English legal system had provided adequate means to punish prophetic offenders. Therefore, the significance of specific acts against prophecy passed during the sixteenth century is questionable. In his article "Enacting Clauses and Legislative Initiative, 1559-1571" Elton cautions the historian using parliamentary acts as evidence; "since it is often impossible to know who promoted a given act it is very far from easy to deduce policy".<sup>139</sup> Events leading to the enactment of legislation against prophecy are unknown, although clearly an inability to punish prophetic disseminators did not prompt statutory additions. An analysis of sixteenth-century prophecy laws reveals that all three acts focused on the slander of or opposition to the monarch, offences previously enshrined within scandalum magnatum and the law of treason.

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<sup>135</sup>John Edmund Cox, ed., Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556 (Cambridge, 1846) [Parker Society Publication], p. 158; see also Cardwell, Documentary Annals, I, p. 58; Frere and Kennedy, Visitation Articles, II, p. 188.

<sup>136</sup>Cardwell, Documentary Annals, I, p. 161; Frere and Kennedy, Visitation Articles, II, pp. 353, 398.

<sup>137</sup>Frere and Kennedy, Visitation Articles, III, pp. 20, 5; Cardwell, Documentary Annals, I, pp. 226, 246.

<sup>138</sup>Frere and Kennedy, Visitation Articles, III, pp. 92, 106, 205; Cardwell, Documentary Annals, II, p. 34.

<sup>139</sup>G.R. Elton, "Enacting Clauses and Legislative Initiative, 1559-71", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, LIII (1980), p. 183.

Difficulties surrounded the statutory development of treason by words; however, judicial construction ensured that before the sixteenth-century “treason by words was then a recognised principle of the law of the land”.<sup>140</sup> The Treason Law encompassed written or spoken prophecies derogatory to the monarch. In the fifteenth century accusations of high treason made against the duchess of Gloucester and Thomas Burdett, resulting from their use of sorcery and necromancy, indicated the absorption of prophetic and magical type practises within the construction of treason.<sup>141</sup> Scandalum magnatum, followed by statutes and proclamations against false news, upheld the illegality of seditious words and the notion that tales and rumours were precursors of rebellion. The case of Elizabeth Barton in 1533 highlighted the inadequacies of the law of treason for Henry VIII. The problem, however, was not the inability of the judiciary to indict those adhering to prophecies but Henry VIII’s desire to secure a harsh penalty for similar offences. Ultimately, Henry VIII employed parliamentary attainder to convict Elizabeth, a method he did not hesitate in using again.<sup>142</sup> Finally, the Treason Act of 1534 brought words explicitly within statutory definitions of treason, although judicial authorities indicted few adherents of prophecies according to the revised act on the basis only of their prophesying.

Throughout the sixteenth-century the judiciary dealt with the interest of individuals in non-scriptural prophecies through statutory, common and ecclesiastical laws. During the century English law provided ample means for the punishment of prophetic offenders. The acts against prophecy perhaps demonstrated a parliamentary

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<sup>140</sup>Thornley, “The Treason Legislation”, p. 107.

<sup>141</sup>Weingart, “The Concept of Treason”, p. 29; similar cases are also extant. See Bellamy, The Law of Treason, pp. 126-127; Rezneck, “Constructive Treason”, pp. 550-551.

<sup>142</sup>Stanford E. Lehmberg, “Parliamentary Attainder in the Reign of Henry VIII”, The Historical Journal, XVIII (1975), p. 677.



desire to ensure greater consistency of indictment, however, in practice judicial authorities accused offenders of many different crimes including sedition, treason and heresy. Alternatively, the laws against prophecy represented a symbolic statement of official policy towards the phenomenon. This conclusion may explain the reaffirmation of anti-prophetic legislation in the 1581 statute against seditious words and rumours. Henry VIII's law against prophecy brought the offence within reach of the death penalty and was part of a general expansion of legislation against treason described by Van Patten as "a symbolic response to a symbolic challenge" and "an indication of the seriousness of the Crown in carrying out policies of reform in religion and society".<sup>143</sup> The law against prophecy openly declared the official attitude toward the phenomenon and attempted to establish a clearer definition of the type of prophetic activity deemed inappropriate than existed in medieval law. In combination with the literary denouncement of prophecy during the sixteenth century, legislative opposition to the phenomenon produced a period of vilification unrivalled at any other time during the early modern age.

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<sup>143</sup>Van Patten, "Magic, Prophecy", pp. 32, 11.

### PART THREE

#### THE TRANSMISSION OF PROPHECY AND THE PARTICIPANTS

“I think you have heard how the late Duke of Buckingham moved with the fame of one that was reported for an holy monk and had such talking with him as after was a great part of his destruction and disheriting of his blood, and great slander and infamy of religion. It sufficeth me, good Madam, to put you in remembrance of such thing, as I nothing doubt your wisdom and the spirit of God shall keep you from talking with any persons, specially with lay persons, of any such manner things as pertain to princes’ affairs, or the state of the realm, but only to common and talk with any person high and low, of such manner things as may the soul be profitable for you to show and for them to know”.

Thomas More to Elizabeth Barton, Chelsea, [1533], Thomas More, Selected Letters (New Haven, 1967), pp. 184-185.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Transmission of Prophecies: Points of Transition**

The exchange of prophetic knowledge between an oral and a literary tradition began with the emergence of the prophecies of Merlin in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, one of the most important writers in the history of non-scriptural prophecy. Geoffrey popularised the prophecies of Merlin in his works but lamented the lack of written sources available to him concerning early British monarchs, apart from extracts in Gildas and Bede. However, Geoffrey also acknowledged the existence of an oral tradition that had preserved the deeds of the kings.<sup>1</sup> Thus Geoffrey identified the two main sources of prophetic information available before and after the publication of the History in the early twelfth century. Similarly, during the sixteenth century individuals gained access to prophecies through written material and the verbal repetition of predictions in conversation with others or directly from a diviner or prophet. The combination of literary and oral sources ensured the dissemination of prophecies to a diverse audience. The two types of source were not in opposition but shared a similar prophetic language and content. Historians of popular culture often represent the divide between literate and illiterate individuals as concomitant with a cultural separation. However, an examination of prophecy within the two communities reveals a continuity and sharing of prophetic information. In the sixteenth century many points of contact existed between the two traditions ensuring that individuals from all levels of society participated in a common prophetic culture.

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<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain (London, 1966), p. 51; Michael Winterbottom, ed., Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works (London, 1978); Bede, A History of the English Church and People (Harmondsworth, 1955).

Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote of the prophecies of Merlin in three works: the Prophetia Merlini (Prophecies of Merlin) or Libellus Merlini (Book of Merlin), Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain) and the Vita Merlini (Life of Merlin). In his History Geoffrey explained that the popularity of the prophet Merlin during the time when he wrote resulted in his publication of the Prophecies of Merlin.<sup>2</sup> In his dedicatory letter to Bishop Alexander, Geoffrey stated that he translated the Prophecies from another manuscript into Latin.<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey's reference to a written work is interesting as modern scholars know of no other literary source of Merlin's prophecies before Geoffrey's History and perhaps his Prophecies.<sup>4</sup> However, many prophecies derived from the oral traditions of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. As several scholars argue, Geoffrey drew the ideas for his prophetic material from many different sources including the Bible, classical works, ecclesiastical writers and traditional Celtic, orally transmitted folk-lore. The importance of Geoffrey's work to the study of prophecy derives from his incorporation into a literary community with a scarcity of prophetic material knowledge of a significant Celtic oral prophetic tradition. However, as the redaction of this oral tradition often occurred later than Geoffrey's work, difficulties surround the scholar's attempt to establish the nature of this early literature. Although several scholars believe that the Prophecies were largely the product of Geoffrey's imagination, others identify many characteristics that indicated Geoffrey's use of Celtic material.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Monmouth, The History, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Some scholars suggest that Geoffrey circulated a version of the Prophecies of Merlin prior to the publication of the History. H.G. Leach, "De Libello Merlini", Modern Philology, VIII (1911), pp. 1-4; Bernard Meehan, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, Prophecies of Merlin: New Manuscript Evidence", The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, XXVIII (1978-1980), pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup>R.F. Treharne, The Glastonbury Legends (London, 1975), p. 66; C. Brooke, "Geoffrey of

John J. Parry asserts in “Celtic Tradition and the Vita Merlini” that early Celtic scholars noted the difference between Geoffrey’s Merlin figure as he appeared in the Life of Merlin compared to his characterisation in the History. The disparity between the two Merlins indicated to many commentators that Geoffrey used at least two alternative sources for his depiction of the prophet, one a literary and the other an oral source.<sup>6</sup> While the character of Merlin Ambrosius derived from written sources, a considerable Celtic prophetic tradition was available to Geoffrey from which he drew his depiction of the prophet in the Life of Merlin. In “Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend” A.O.H. Jarman asserts that the legend of Merlin emerged from the Scottish, Welsh and Irish tales of Lailoken, Myrddin and the Suibhne Geilt based on the theme of the wild man in the woods.<sup>7</sup> Basil Clarke, in a recent edition of Geoffrey’s Life of Merlin, concludes that “there is no doubt about the existence of a mass of material on which prophecy-writers like Geoffrey drew”.<sup>8</sup> Clarke points particularly to Geoffrey’s contemporary William of Newburgh who, despite his vilification of the Prophecies, did not question Geoffrey’s claim that he translated the work from a native British source. Geoffrey’s use of a variety of literary and oral sources demonstrated that, as Jan

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Monmouth as a Historian”, in C.N.L. Brooke, et al., eds., Church and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to C.R. Cheney on his 70th Birthday (Cambridge, 1976), p. 78; H.A. MacDougall, Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons (Montreal, 1982), p. 12; Roger Sherman Loomis, “The Development of Arthurian Romance”, in D. Eisenberg, ed., Transformations of Myth Through Time: An Anthology of Readings (San Diego, 1990), p. 410.

<sup>6</sup>John J. Parry, “Celtic Tradition and the Vita Merlini”, Philological Quarterly, IV, no. 3 (1925), pp. 193-194.

<sup>7</sup>A.O.H. Jarman, “Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend”, in Rachel Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones, eds., Astudiaethau Ar Yr Hengerdd: Studies in Old Welsh Poetry (Caerdydd, 1978), p. 327. See also J.S.P. Tatlock, “Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*”, Speculum, XVIII (1943), p. 269; A.O.H. Jarman, “The Welsh Myrddin Poems”, in Roger Sherman Loomis, ed., Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History (Oxford, 1979), p. 29; H.L.D. Ward, “Lailoken (or Merlin Silvester)”, Romania, XXII (1893), pp. 504-526; J.S.P. Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Its Early Vernacular Versions (Berkeley, 1950),

<sup>8</sup>Clarke, ed., Life of Merlin, p. 18.

Ziolkowski comments of the Life of Merlin in “The Nature of Prophecy in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*”, his prophetic material stood “at the intersection of oral and written, Church, classical Latin, and Celtic”.<sup>9</sup>

The exchange of prophetic information between literary and oral culture, that began with the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, was similarly evident in the sixteenth century. While Geoffrey’s work demonstrated the absorption of orally transmitted prophecies by a literary culture, sixteenth-century sources more clearly depicted the interest of the unlearned in written prophecies. In the Tudor period many individuals gained their knowledge of prophecies orally. In several instances prophecies were spread by rumour and gossip. Anthony Wayte, in a letter to Lady Lisle, discussed a “rumour” that judicial authorities imprisoned a man in the Tower of London for predicting a war.<sup>10</sup> In 1536 Eustace Chapuys, ambassador to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, wrote that Anne Boleyn boasted of her lack of concern for a well known prophecy that a queen of England would burn alive.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the reign of Henry VIII judicial authorities sought out and punished those spreading rumours. In 1538 Robert Crowley intimated the danger of tale telling in a letter to Thomas Cromwell concerning a recent verbal slander against the councillor. Crowley declared, “I fear the King might be misinformed upon your Lordship if others were timorous to advertise you of the truth”.<sup>12</sup> The rumour apparently began among some commissioners in Ireland who not only defamed Cromwell by saying that he cared more for money than people

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<sup>9</sup>Jan Ziolkowski, “The Nature of Prophecy in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*”, in James L. Krugel, ed., Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition (Ithaca, 1990), p. 162.

<sup>10</sup>St Clare Byrne, ed., The Lisle Letters, II, p. 493 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 771].

<sup>11</sup>Pascual De Gayangos, ed., Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain Preserved in the Archives at Simancas and Elsewhere (London, 1888), V, ii, p. 122 [LP Henry VIII. X, 909].

<sup>12</sup>SP 60/6 fol. 47 [LP Henry VIII. XIII. i, 470. See also LP Henry VIII. XIII. i, 471].

but also claimed Cromwell sought an Irish prophecy that “a pelican should come out of Ireland and should do many strange marvellous things in England”.<sup>13</sup> The commissioners implied that Cromwell, despite his indictment of others for their involvement with prophecy, was an adherent of the phenomenon.

Others similarly derived prophetic knowledge from things they heard. In a confession of April 1539 an unknown person revealed that they heard “a prophecy that the King should fain forsake his land”.<sup>14</sup> In the same year a memorandum in “Budgegood’s Papers” suggested that Thomas Wolsey, cardinal of York, conspired against Katherine of Aragon because he heard that a woman would be the cause of his downfall.<sup>15</sup> During the Northern Rebellion of 1572 Lawrence Banister questioned Edward Elwold, a yeoman of Westmoreland, about his knowledge of local prophecies concerning the fate of Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk. Elwold replied, “I have hard a prophecye spoken of, that the hound shold chase the whyet lyon to Berwicke”.<sup>16</sup> In legal documentation some individuals gave detailed accounts of the people from whom they received prophetic information. The Launceston canon William Genys revealed that his prior John Shere told him a prophecy concerning the 1536/7 rebellion of the North. Genys discovered that Shere heard the forecast from “a scholar of Oxford”.<sup>17</sup> The fruiterer John Ryan, after repeating predictions concerning Henry VIII to several people in 1539, explained that, “The man who told him the prophesies is in the King’s service, a cunning prophesier and the best cronacler in England”.<sup>18</sup> James Gairdner, editor of the Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, proposes that the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>BL MS Cotton Appendix L, fol. 72 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 794].

<sup>15</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 186.

<sup>16</sup>SP 15/21, fol. 160 [CSPD. Add. XXI, 76.iii].

<sup>17</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 141A [LP Henry VIII. XII. I, 298]

<sup>18</sup>SP 1/153, fol. 51 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. ii, 73].

individual Ryan referred to was the Portcullis pursuivant Robert Fayery.<sup>19</sup> Information concerning Shere and Ryan suggested that the oral dissemination of prophecies often derived from educated sources, a scholar and a chronicler. Other evidence revealed the transferral of written material to less literate individuals such as Robert Dalyvell, a saddler from Royston in Hertfordshire. During his examination on 12 June 1537 Dalyvell explained that he gained his knowledge of prophecy on a visit to Scotland in 1536 to learn how to make saddles. While in Scotland some local people read from books of prophecy in his hearing: “he harde dyvers Skottyshe men some of reputacyon & the more parte lyght parsons saying as they Redde uppon bokys of prophecys that their kyng shulde be kyng of Englonde”.<sup>20</sup> Although no evidence remains of the individuals that heard Dalyvell repeat these prophecies, in other cases judicial authorities noted the extensive oral history of particular prophecies.

Late in 1531 the Ilchester gaol in Somerset was the scene of prophetic speculation prompted by the execution of Rhys ap Griffith, whose indictment involved treasonable activities encouraged by a favourable prediction. The depositions of the inmates revealed the transmission of prophecies among several people. On 8 February 1532 a prisoner, Thomas Cheeselade, admitted that the year before another inmate John Ricardis told him of several prophecies about the future of England.<sup>21</sup> Another prisoner William Davy revealed that Ricardis also told him about the prophecies that inmate Peter Aleyn reported to Thomas Cheeselade and yet another prisoner, Alexander Parker.<sup>22</sup> In his deposition Ricardis claimed that he heard the prophecies nine or ten

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<sup>19</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIV. ii, 73.

<sup>20</sup>BL MS Cotton Caligula B. i, fol. 130.

<sup>21</sup>SP 1/237, fol. 123 verso [LP Henry VIII. Addenda. i, 768].

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., fol. 126.



years ago from an old man named Horlock.<sup>23</sup> The examination of the Ilchester inmates demonstrated how quickly a prophecy spread throughout a closed environment.

A case three years later, in 1535, further highlighted the passing of prophetic information from person to person when Thomas Arundell attempted to follow up a prophetic saying that Alexander Clavell told one of Lord Daubeney's servants.<sup>24</sup> Clavell said he heard the forecast from a tenant of Arundell's father, John Arundell. An old man named Payne told the tenant of the prediction and, after speaking with Payne, Arundell found that the old man had heard the prophecy and other predictions from "his master whyche was he sayed a well lernyd man who and was ded l [fifty] yeres gon".<sup>25</sup> In the same year Cromwell personally interviewed several Carthusian priors and a monk who refused to swear an oath recognising Henry VIII as the supreme head of the church in England, an acknowledgment of the 1534 act of supremacy.<sup>26</sup> Depositions from the Carthusian clergy revealed that John Hale, vicar of Isleworth in Middlesex, spread a prophecy defaming the king and his marriage to Anne Boleyn.<sup>27</sup> While John Leek, a clerk of the monastery at Syon in Middlesex, heard of Hale's predictions from another Syon resident Thomas Skydmore, Hale asserted he heard a prediction from "layman a prophecye".<sup>28</sup> In a letter to the king's council Hale exposed the source of his sayings and wrote that, "a bowght a ii yere past or there a bowghte The fellow of Bristow showd the professye of marlyon not oonly to me but unto dyvse other of Syon for by my

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., fols. 126 verso-127.

<sup>24</sup>SP 1/92, fol. 194 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 736].

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., fol. 194 verso.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., fols. 34-34 verso [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 565]; William Cobbett, Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors From the Earliest Period to the Present Time (London, 1809), I, p. 472.

<sup>27</sup>The record of John Hale's trial, however, cited Hale as a clerk of Isleworth. Third Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records (London, 1842), p. 237.

<sup>28</sup>SP 1/92, fols. 40, 42 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 565].

throw the master Skydmore showyd to me also the same profecy".<sup>29</sup> These depositions reveal the oral exchange of prophetic information among many individuals, a transferral ultimately derived from a man of "Bristow", who was probably the prophet Laynam that Hale referred to in his deposition.<sup>30</sup>

Like the incident at the Ilchester jail, prophecies spread quickly by word of mouth within religious houses. A visitation to the Cistercian abbey of Furness in 1537, before Henry VIII dissolved the monastery, disclosed that the monk John Broughton spread a prophecy among his fellow brethren. Robert Legate, a friar admitted into the abbey to teach the incumbents, deposed that John Broughton, John Harrington and several other monks interpreted a prophecy against Henry VIII and his proposed suppression of the monastic houses. Legate attested that he often heard the prophecy spoken of by the other monks.<sup>31</sup> The abbot of Furness, Roger Pyle, also declared that Broughton showed him the prophecy, although he did little to combat the dissemination of the forecast.<sup>32</sup> Broughton confessed that he obtained a "bill" containing prophecies from William Dicson of Windermere and another from William Rawlinson of Colton.<sup>33</sup> The discovery of the interest of the monks in prophecy justified Cromwell's desire to dissolve the abbey, and on 5 April in the same year the abbot of Furness surrendered the monastery to Henry VIII that the earl of Boulogne, later King Stephen, founded in 1127.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 49.

<sup>30</sup>Judicial authorities interviewed one Richard Laynam in 1546 who was prophesying from a house in Wiltshire around 1530 (discussed later in this chapter). This "laynam a prophecyer" was possibly the same individual.

<sup>31</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 4 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 841].

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 7.

<sup>33</sup>SP 1/88, fol. 188. This document is incorrectly dated 1534 in the LP Henry VIII, the confession belongs with the other depositions from the abbey of Furness of 1537 [LP Henry VIII. VII. Appendix, 43].

<sup>34</sup>Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters*, pp. 153-154.

The better educated clergy were in a unique position to access written prophetic sources and convey the content to their less learned brethren or parishioners. William Love, abbot of Coggeshall, for instance, made use of his position to disseminate prophecies to the inhabitants of an abbey in Essex. In 1536 one of the Cistercian monks of Coggeshall submitted to judicial authorities several articles against the abbot that eventually reached Thomas Cromwell. Among the articles was an accusation that the abbot “ded Rede a certen booke conteynyng iiii leaves or ther abouts of a certen prophisi amongst us beyng hys brethern”.<sup>35</sup> The abbot also used a key and a book in the practice of divination. Two monks of the house, Richard Clerke and John Bokkyng, confirmed that the articles were true.<sup>36</sup> However, in a letter to Cromwell the earl of Essex, Henry Bouchier, argued that the monks of Coggeshall falsely accused Love and therefore the case disappeared from the records.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in 1537 some parishioners of Mustone in Yorkshire accused their vicar, John Dobson, of reciting prophecies against the king in both the church and the alehouse:

the said vicar hath reaported divers tymes aswell in the churche porch of Mustone aforesaid as in the ale hous to divers and many of his said parishones speciellye syns Midsomer laste paste that the kings said Maiestie shuld bee compelled to forsake this his Realme & flye unto the See.<sup>38</sup>

Dobson repeated many other predictions and was able to reach a large secular audience for his sayings that his parishioners claimed derived from “a booke in paper”.<sup>39</sup>

Although many prophecies circulated orally, but ultimately originated from a written source, other predictions came directly from an individual claiming prophetic

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<sup>35</sup>SP 1/101, fol. 153 [LP Henry VIII. X, 164. See also LP Henry VIII. X, 774].

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., fols. 158, 160-161.

<sup>37</sup>SP 1/101, fol. 88 [LP Henry VIII. X, 94].

<sup>38</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 63 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212].

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., fol. 63 verso.

abilities. The most renowned prophet of the early Tudor period was Elizabeth Barton, commonly called the Holy Maid of Kent. Barton was a young servant girl suffering from what many modern commentators deduce was epilepsy who prophesied while in the trance-like state induced by her illness.<sup>40</sup> After coming to the notice of the archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, Barton entered the Benedictine convent of St. Sepulchre in Canterbury. In a group of documents relating to her arrest and trial a note in Latin recorded that during Barton's second year in the convent of St. Sepulchre the nun "saw visions and spoke divine words, which she neither learnt from others, nor could have invented herself, being unlearned".<sup>41</sup> Others wrote down her revelations, but Barton often spread her predictions orally to many people who visited her seeking personal prophetic information. Richard Gwent declared that Warham's successor, Thomas Cranmer, sent the nun to Court-at-Street during his examination of Barton to induce another trance, and thereby gain further knowledge concerning the fate of Henry VIII and Queen Katherine.<sup>42</sup> Gertrude Courtenay, marchioness of Exeter, also appealed to Barton for information concerning the future. Barton confessed that the marchioness sent for her while she was visiting the Bridgettine abbey of Syon, however, Barton admitted only that the marchioness wanted a blessing for the health of her prospective children.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Elton, *England Under*, p. 137; E.W. Parkin, "Cobb's Hall, Aldington, and the Holy Maid of Kent", *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXXXVI (1971), p. 16. David Knowles, however, describes Elizabeth Barton's illness as "hysterical or psychopathic". David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge, 1959), III, p. 185.

<sup>41</sup>SP 1/80, fol. 140 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468]. The LP dates this document 1524. This is an unlikely date as several sources confirm that Barton was still a servant girl in Aldington in 1525 and had not yet entered the convent in Canterbury. The exact date of Barton's entry into the convent is unknown but she was at St. Sepulchre's when Warham wrote to Wolsey requesting that he see Barton in 1528. The event described in this document probably occurred in 1527 or 1528.

<sup>42</sup>SP 1/78, fol. 119 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 967].

<sup>43</sup>SP 1/80, fol. 142 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

At other times Elizabeth Barton personally approached those she thought would benefit from and popularise her futuristic visions. In 1528 Archbishop Warham wrote a letter to Thomas Wolsey on behalf of Barton requesting an audience for her with the cardinal. After describing Barton as a “very well disposyd and vertuouse woman”, Warham wrote that she

is very deserouse to speke with your grace personally. What she has to say or whether it be good or yll I do not know, but she hath desyeryd me to write unto your grace and to desir the same as I do that she may come to your grace presence.<sup>44</sup>

The ambassador Eustace Chapuys recorded in November 1533 that Barton also attempted to speak with Katherine of Aragon. Chapuys applauded the divorced queen’s foresight in not allowing Barton to visit her, as Henry VIII’s council saw the prophet’s trial for treason as a good opportunity to implicate Katherine in her downfall. The nun, wrote Chapuys,

had been very urgent at divers times to speak with her and console her in her great affliction, but the Queen [Katherine of Aragon] would never see her. Yet the Council do not desist from making continual inquiry whether the Queen has had any communication with her.<sup>45</sup>

Barton also managed to gain an audience with Henry VIII. At the nun’s trial the judges refused to find her guilty of treason for compassing and imagining the king’s death because in 1532 she told Henry VIII of her prophecy concerning the calamity that would ensue if he married Anne Boleyn.<sup>46</sup> In a deposition of 1533 an informant claimed that John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, “wepte” when he heard Barton’s prophecies “sayinge that he dyd gyve to them the more cre[dence] becaws that she had bene with the kynge

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<sup>44</sup>SP 1/50, fol. 163 [LP Henry VIII. IV. ii, 4806].

<sup>45</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1419.

<sup>46</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1445.

dyvars tymes & reprovdy hyme of hys syns".<sup>47</sup> Barton told many people of her prophecies and her fame ensured the wide dissemination of her sayings outside the convent in which she lived. As Thomas Cranmer noted in a letter to the archdeacon of Ely, Nicholas Hawkins, of 20 December 1533,

dyvers and many aswell great men of the Realme as meane men and many lerned men but specially divers and many religious men had great confidence in her and often resorted unto her and communed with her tothentent thei myght by her knowe the will of god.<sup>48</sup>

Other prophets gained their insight through divinatory practices and disseminated their forecasts directly to a specific individual. In the case of William Neville, who believed he would attain the earldom of Warwick, judicial authorities traced the source of Neville's prophetic knowledge to three "soth sayers": Richard Jones, William Wade and Nashe of Circencester. In December 1532 Thomas Wood accused Neville of adhering to the predictions of Richard Jones from Oxford who, after communication with four "king devylls", revealed that Neville would become an earl.<sup>49</sup> Jones confessed he knew of Neville's future "by his seyence", the science of necromancy.<sup>50</sup> Neville noted the contents of Jones's chamber where he saw

certayne stylatoryes alembykes & odre instruments of glasse and also a septer & odre things which he said did appertaine to the conjuration of the iiii kyngs And also an image of white metall and in a boxe a serpents skinne.<sup>51</sup>

Neville also consulted the astrologer William Wade who told him that he would be the earl of Warwick within five years.<sup>52</sup> The other person to whom Neville spoke was Nashe

<sup>47</sup>SP 1/80, fol. 138 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

<sup>48</sup>BL MS Harl. 6148, fol. 40 verso [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1546].

<sup>49</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 196 [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., fol. 204.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., fol. 200 verso.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., fol. 197.

of Cirencester, a man Wood described as “a calkar”.<sup>53</sup> Neville’s confession and the deposition of Wood revealed little about the diviner, although Neville explained that he wrote to Nashe because “one chambre of london”, who lived at the same lodgings, mislaid some spoons.<sup>54</sup> A case brought by the attorney general in the Court of Star Chamber during the reign of Henry VIII suggested that Nashe was probably a well known fortune-teller.<sup>55</sup> In the William Neville case Jones, Wade and Nashe conveyed their prophecies directly to Neville, a man who was the principle subject of their prophecies and for whom they laboured in their divinatory practices. However, unlike the diviners consulted by Neville who made their own forecasts, other prophets like Laynam and Harlock repeated older prophecies and reinterpreted them to fit contemporary events.<sup>56</sup>

Many individuals like Robert Dalyvell, John Broughton, William Love and John Dobson, although they spread prophetic information orally, derived their sayings from a written source. Literary prophetic material circulated extensively throughout the sixteenth century contrary to Diane Watt’s comments in her 1993 doctoral thesis “God’s Secretaries: Studies of Four Women Visionaries and Prophets as Writers in the Late Middle and Early Modern Ages” that in the first half of the century oral transmission was the dominant method of communicating prophecies.<sup>57</sup> Individuals employed both literary and oral methods of transmission in the dissemination of prophetic information. A significant number of individuals admitted that they owned or saw books of prophecy,

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., fol. 197 verso.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>The star chamber case referred to Nashe of Circett, “one expert man in the knowleg of thyngs stolen”. STAC 2/17/64.

<sup>56</sup>Jansen, *Political Protest*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>57</sup>Diane Watt, “God’s Secretaries: Studies of Four Women Visionaries and Prophets as Writers in the Late Middle and Early Modern Ages”, unpublished D.Phil dissertation, University of Oxford (1993), p. 178.

although in many instances the nature of these books is unknown. The term “book” could refer to a bound collection of handwritten prophecies or a printed pamphlet, ballad, chapbook or treatise. The well known prophet Richard Laynam asserted that he took several of his prophecies from books. On 9 June 1546 Laynam explained that Robert Barker offered to show him a book of prophecies from the house of William Weston. Laynam also admitted he knew a man named “yonge hurlok” from Warminster in Wiltshire who had “bookes of prophecies”, probably the source of Laynam’s predictions as the two men often “communed”.<sup>58</sup> John Fuller, in answer to his indictment of 1595 for “repeating a contumacious prophesy”, similarly asserted his knowledge of prophecy derived from a “booke” containing “a prophesie of all the kinges had reigned a long tyme”.<sup>59</sup> Laynam and Fuller revealed little about the character of the books of prophecy they saw, however other examinations provided more information about written prophecies.

In 1530 the king’s officers Edmund Walsingham and John Daunce examined William Harlokke in the Tower of London. Harlokke confirmed he owned a “kalendre of profysye” that Dr Austyn, a learned man “doctor of phesyke and astronmyer”, gave him before the doctor died in 1521.<sup>60</sup> Harlokke showed the calendar to many people in Somerset resulting in the widespread acknowledgment throughout the county that Harlokke possessed the prophecy. Despite the knight Nicholas Wadham’s attempts to stop Harlokke displaying the prophecy, Harlokke showed the work to Richard Loweth, a goldsmith from Taunton. Loweth also possessed books of prophecy including one

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<sup>58</sup>SP 1/220, fol. 65 [LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1027].

<sup>59</sup>ASSI 35/37/9, m. 43 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex*, pp. 301-302]

<sup>60</sup>SP 1/58, fol. 101 [LP Henry VIII. IV. iii, 6652].



“wreten in Walsh in a blakke booke”.<sup>61</sup> Harlokke further revealed that he heard other prophecies in the home of John Barbour of Norwich who

hath a boke of profyeces whiche he redde to thys deponent in the presence of Sir William[son] chapleyn to mr halle Roger Coper dwellinge at the said mayden hedde and one Robert a worsted wever which maryed a wedowe in Norwiche and diverse other whos names thys deponent knoweth not.<sup>62</sup>

The chaplain, named Williamson, later remarked to Harlokke, “I have redde in a boke of profyecie of mr hals that alle profycyes that ben past I have found them true”.<sup>63</sup>

Harlokke exposed four individuals who owned books of prophecy, although on questioning the chaplain claimed he told Harlokke of Mr Hall’s book only to divulge “whether he had any boks of profycie or not”.<sup>64</sup> Harlokke described his book as “a kalendre of profysye wherin ther were pictures of kings and lords armes”.<sup>65</sup>

Several books of prophecy contained images based on heraldic devices, although the evidence does not reveal if they composed pictorial or written prophecies. The original accusation against William Neville by his chaplain Edward Legh of 3 December 1532 disclosed that Neville consulted a book of prophecy to establish the nature of his claim to the earldom of Warwick.<sup>66</sup> Legh asserted that Neville sought information from two prophets not mentioned in the accusation of Thomas Wood or Neville’s confession taken later in the year. Interestingly, the first “kalcar” Legh mentioned was “on hurlock”. However, failing to secure the employment of Harlock, Neville turned to another man known for his acquaintance with several prophecies. Neville sent a priest, Thomas Avennell, to fetch a man with prophecies or, if he would not come, to bring

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<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 102.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 102 verso.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 101.

<sup>66</sup>E 163/10/20; Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 50.

back copies of his predictions.<sup>67</sup> Upon Avennell's return Neville consulted a book of heraldic arms of the nobility of England. Neville appeared to interpret his copy of the prophecies using the book of arms as a key. Heraldic knowledge was an important skill necessary for the decipherment of prophecies, as the deposition of John Bower suggested in 1536. In a conversation about his collection of prophecies Thomas Syson, abbot of Garadon, quizzed Bower on his understanding of heraldic badges and connected the names of prominent individuals to animal symbols in the decipherment of his book.<sup>68</sup>

Other prophecies were obviously handwritten or painted manuscripts rather than printed works. Several individuals referred to rolls of prophecy. Mistress Amadas, for example, said she owned a "rowll wherin is payntyd and wryten all her profecyes".<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Lancaster's painted prophecy composed "a rolle in parchement of half a yarde in length & half a quarter of a yarde brode or therabout".<sup>70</sup> In a petition to Henry VIII and his Council in the North, John Dobson explained that while on a visit to Scarborough in 1536 John Borobie, the prior of the White Friars, showed him a prophecy written on a "rowle in paper".<sup>71</sup> In another petition Dobson referred to the same work as "a rolle of prophecies".<sup>72</sup> Borobie stated that he copied the prophecy from a priest he met in Beverley who showed the prophecy to Borobie written "in ii shetes of paper which I copied there in Sente Margaret chapell".<sup>73</sup> Borobie also admitted that he copied a prophecy derived from William Langdale, a gentleman of Scarborough, and yet another prediction that one of the brethren of the White Friars brought to him on "a

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<sup>67</sup>E 163/10/20.

<sup>68</sup>SP 1/81, fol. 175 [LP Henry VIII. VI. Appendix, 10. This document is incorrectly dated 1533. See LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 800. Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 71 n. 4].

<sup>69</sup>BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E. iv, fol. 100 [LP Henry VIII, VI, 923].

<sup>70</sup>E 36/119, fol. 130 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 534 and 1023].

<sup>71</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 64 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212].

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 64 verso.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 65.

scroll of paper” that belonged to a priest of Rudstone, John Paikok.<sup>74</sup> In pursuing an indictment against Borobie the Council of the North took the deposition of William Langdale who asserted that John Borobie lent him two prophecies: a “litle roll of paper wherein was writtene a prophecye in ryme otherwise called a gargone” and “a long paper roll of profecies”.<sup>75</sup> The information revealed about the dissemination of John Dobson’s prophecies suggested that rolls of prophecy circulated widely and were often handwritten copies of other predictions.

During Thomas Cromwell’s ascendancy as chief adviser to Henry VIII, his officers in the counties, who followed up information concerning those who referred openly to prophetic sayings, often sent him books and copies of prophecies. In a letter of 4 November 1536 Cromwell thanked Lord Hungerford for sending him documentation concerning the examination of several people who possessed a book of prophecies:

Thiese shalbe to advertise the same that I ha[ve] receyved your lettres with the deposicions and confessions of certayne persones and a boke, wherin was written amonges other thynges certain prophecies accordyng to your lettres.<sup>76</sup>

In 1537 Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, similarly sent Cromwell a copy of a prophecy seized from some people in Northumberland. “Some lewd persons”, wrote Norfolk, “do not cease to speak ill of you as you shall perceive by a prophecy framed of late copy enclosed The original I keep to try out the writer by the hand”.<sup>77</sup> Later in the year Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, wrote to Cromwell concerning Robert Seyman and Richard Bishop who spoke of a prophecy that the people would rise in rebellion against the king. In his deposition Bishop confessed that he asked Seyman to come to Bungay,

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., fols. 65 verso-66.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., fols. 66-66 verso.

<sup>76</sup>Roger Bigelow Merriman, *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford, 1968), II, p. 35.

<sup>77</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 175 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 318].

where Bishop lived, to hear a prophecy that “one man hadde taken payne to wache in the nyght to write the cople of”.<sup>78</sup> Suffolk complained to Cromwell of the difficulties he encountered trying to make Bishop confess, but finally was able to send both his examination and copies of the prophecy, concluding: “I have sent for the origynall of the same And hym that hath yt And to know who hath had coplees out of the saide boke And further to knowe in what companyes the said coplees hath ben rede”.<sup>79</sup> Ten days later Suffolk still could not find the original “book of prophecy” that Bishop cited.<sup>80</sup>

Cromwell’s involvement in the Elizabeth Barton trial ensured his diligence in seeking both manuscript rolls and printed books of prophecy and taking them out of general circulation. At least two books concerning the visions of Barton existed, and although E.J. Devereux in “Elizabeth Barton and Tudor Censorship” suggests that several people disseminated other works, none survive.<sup>81</sup> The first published account of Barton’s revelations was a pamphlet written soon after Barton miraculously recovered from her initial illness during a service in a church at Court-at-Street. William Lambarde quoted the content of this first book in A Perambulation of Kent, first published in 1570. Lambarde described the work as “a little pamphlet, conteining foure and twentie leaves, penned by Edward Thwaytes, or I wote not by what doltish dreamer, printed by Robert Redman, intituled A marveilous worke of late done at Court of Streete in Kent”.<sup>82</sup> Edward Thwaytes was an early follower of Barton whom she referred to in 1533 as a recipient of her prophetic knowledge.<sup>83</sup> The act of attainder against Barton and her adherents cited Thwaytes as the gentleman who “translated and wrott dyverse

<sup>78</sup>SP 1/120, fol. 102 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1212].

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 100 verso.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 202 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1284].

<sup>81</sup>Devereux, “Elizabeth Barton”, pp. 96-97, 99, 103-104.

<sup>82</sup>William Lambarde, A Perambulation of Kent (Bath, 1970), p. 170.

<sup>83</sup>SP 1/80, fols. 126, 127 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

quayres and shetis of paper concernyng the seid false feyned revelacions and myracles of the seid Elizabeth".<sup>84</sup> John Capon, abbot of Hyde and bishop-elect of Bangor, confirmed the title, although not the author, of this pamphlet in his sermon against Barton and her followers of 23 November 1533. Capon referred to a printed book "*of the wonderful work done at Our Lady at Court-of-Street*".<sup>85</sup>

After the incident at Court-at-Street the fame of Barton came to the attention of Anthony Warham who commissioned an inquiry about Barton and her revelations. Following a favourable outcome Warham appointed the cellarer of the monastery of Christ's Church in Canterbury, Edward Bocking, as Barton's "gostely ffader".<sup>86</sup> Bocking was the author of another book concerning Barton mentioned by Capon in his sermon as the "great book written with Dr. Bocking's hand".<sup>87</sup> Devereux proposes that Capon referred to the original copy of the "great book" written in Bocking's hand but argues that the book was also meant for publication by John Scot.<sup>88</sup> Cromwell recorded in 1533 that Bocking gave the "Nun's book" to Scot for publication. The printer kept 200 copies while Bocking received 500 copies of his book.<sup>89</sup> Cromwell also called for the examination of Scot in the hope that the man would confess his intention to publish the nun's book, although many copies of Bocking's work were already in circulation.<sup>90</sup> Thomas Goldwell, the prior of Christ's Church, revealed that he knew two people to whom Bocking delivered several copies of Bocking's book. Goldwell maintained he had

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<sup>84</sup>Devereux, "Elizabeth Barton", p. 101.

<sup>85</sup>L.E. Whatmore, "The Sermon Against the Holy Maid of Kent and Her Adherents, Delivered at Paul's Cross, November the 23rd, 1533, and at Canterbury, December the 7th", The English Historical Review, LVIII (1943), p. 465; Knowles, The Religious Orders, p. 189.

<sup>86</sup>Explained by the prior of Christ's Church in a letter to Cromwell. Wright, ed., Three Chapters of Letters, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup>Whatmore, "The Sermon", p. 470.

<sup>88</sup>Devereux, "Elizabeth Barton", pp. 103, 94-95.

<sup>89</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1194.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

not read any part of the work “nor never sawe them but onely when they were delyvered, one of them to Mr. Attorney before his last goyng to London, and the other to John Antony, when he was sent for it”.<sup>91</sup> Prompted by Barton’s particularly ominous discussion of Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn, the act of attainder against the nun called for the suppression of all works relating to her treason.<sup>92</sup> The king gave Cromwell the responsibility of questioning Barton and those involved with her and the seizing of literature spreading information about her visions.

The books about Elizabeth Barton received wide circulation during her lifetime and after she died. Barton’s confession and that of several of her followers included a large list of individuals who knew of Barton’s revelations, including the bishop of Rochester and many members of the nobility.<sup>93</sup> In December 1533 Thomas Cranmer, probably referring to the work by Edward Thwaytes, described a book written after Barton’s miraculous cure at Court-at-Street, “which ever syns that tyme hath byn comonly sold and goone abrode amongs all people”.<sup>94</sup> Determining the success of the parliamentary order to suppress the books about Barton is difficult. However, Devereux argues that because no book now exists resembling either the work of Thwaytes or Bocking Cromwell accomplished his “censorship” of the press.<sup>95</sup> Devereux describes the Barton case as “what may be the first case of really successful suppression of books and ideas in England”.<sup>96</sup> Following the Barton trial Cromwell maintained his vigilance against the spread of printed books of prophecy. In 1539 Cromwell entered into a correspondence with James V of Scotland through the king’s councillor at Berwick,

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<sup>91</sup>Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters*, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup>25 Henry VIII, c. 12.

<sup>93</sup>SP 1/80, fols. 126-136 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

<sup>94</sup>BL MS Harl. 6148, fol. 40 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1546].

<sup>95</sup>Devereux, “Elizabeth Barton”, pp. 96-97.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 91.

William Eure, concerning some prophecies interpreted against Henry VIII and published in Scotland but circulating in the North of England. Cromwell wrote to James V, but sent the letter in Eure's name, sending a copy of the "sundry bokes of balettes and diffamatorye reallinges" and requesting him to halt the publication of the books.<sup>97</sup> In reply to the petitions James V promised to deal with the matter and "if any of his subjects are taken with them, to punish them with death".<sup>98</sup> The attempt to control the dissemination of printed books of prophecies continued after Cromwell's downfall. On 29 July 1583 the Essex Assize judges at Witham heard the indictment of John Tusser, a gentleman of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, for publishing false prophecies.<sup>99</sup> A Mr Lloyd of Mariton even cited the need to suppress written prophecies as an election promise when he attempted to become sheriff of Cardigan in 1600.<sup>100</sup>

The substantial number of books of prophecy could seriously revise the historian's notion of literacy during the early modern period. Less learned individuals like trades people, yeomen and some clergy owned and copied prophecies that appeared on manuscript rolls or in books. However, the lack of information regarding the nature of such works curtails the development of any firm conclusions about educational levels during the sixteenth century. Despite this limitation of the evidence, the presence of written and oral methods of information exchange demonstrated that a clear distinction between elite and popular prophetic culture did not exist, and that the written source was more prevalent than historians believe. The transferral of prophecy among people

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<sup>97</sup>SP 1/142, fol. 189 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 275]. This is a modern copy of the letter made by a late keeper of the State Papers in the Public Record Office, London. The original document is difficult to read and partly mutilated. SP 1/143, fol. 69 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 178]; see also LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 240.

<sup>98</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 241.

<sup>99</sup>ASSI 35/25/1, m. 37 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex*, p. 241]

<sup>100</sup>HMC, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury*, X, p. 369.

during the sixteenth century appeared to demonstrate a top down view of social interaction. However, the use by Geoffrey of Monmouth and other medieval authors of traditional Welsh, Scottish and Irish folklore indicated that the literary elite drew many of their prophecies from an abundant oral source that exceeded the scope of other literary material. When viewed over several centuries the pattern of the dissemination of prophecy is clearer and the historian is able to avoid the distortion that an examination of a single century or the scarcity of documentation may produce. With a broader view the transmission of prophetic knowledge between the educated and less learned appears circular, involving a level of interaction between written and oral culture that has obscured the origin of many prophecies.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Participants: The Nobility**

In the sixteenth century nobles were not the creators of prophecies but their subject and on occasion their adherents. In the first statute against prophecy of 1542 the dire effect of prophecy on the nobility, including the king, was the main concern of the law. Legislative authorities directed the statute towards prophecies based on the heraldic symbols of the nobility: "Touching Prophetes uppon Declaracion of Names Armes Badges, &c".<sup>1</sup> The wording of the act presented the peerage as unwilling victims of an evil and troublesome phenomenon "wherby in tymes paste many noble men have suffered".<sup>2</sup> The 1542 act was an attempt to protect the nobility and the monarchy from the danger of prophecies. The act accurately reflected the relationship between prophecy and the nobility, as demonstrated in judicial proceedings, whose attention to prophecy validated other subversive activities. All the peers involved with prophecy and examined by the courts during the sixteenth century faced prosecution for high treason. Judicial authorities did not charge any of the nobility for acting contrary to the statutes against prophecy. In cases involving the peerage the concern of successive Tudor governments was treasonous, rather than prophetic practices. The interest of nobles in prophecy was incidental to their involvement in other political events of the century.

On 13 May 1521 the Court of the Lord High Steward pronounced Edward Stafford, duke of Buckingham, guilty of high treason and ordered his execution, commuted from hanging, drawing and quartering to beheading, to take place on 17

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<sup>1</sup>SR, III, p. 850.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

May.<sup>3</sup> Stafford's trial indicated that his attention to prophecy did not instigate his prosecution and only played a minor role in his indictment for treason. While scholars debate the reason for Edward's downfall, the Stafford family history was an important factor in Henry VIII's suspicion of the duke. As Barbara J. Harris explains in Edward Stafford, Third Duke of Buckingham, 1478-1521, Edward Stafford's familial ties made him a significant royal claimant.<sup>4</sup> The duke was careful to maintain the strength of his heritage through his marriage and those of his children, forging ties with the Percy, Pole, Howard and Neville families (for a genealogical chart of the Stafford family see appendix three). Stafford was a major land owner who possessed significant wealth, power and influence.<sup>5</sup> During the reign of Henry VII several people considered Stafford a legitimate prospective heir to the throne if Henry VII died earlier than expected.<sup>6</sup> Early in the sixteenth century John Flamank informed Henry VII that those mindful of the king's ill health suggested the duke of Buckingham or Edmund de la Pole should succeed him.<sup>7</sup> When Henry VIII acceded to the throne of England in 1509, Richard Fox, bishop of Durham, heard that several men were speculating that the duke of Buckingham would become the Protector of England.<sup>8</sup> Rumours also spread suggesting that the duke would gain the throne if Henry VIII failed to produce an heir.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, pp. 233-234.

<sup>4</sup>The duke of Buckingham was a descendant of Edward III; through his mother Edward could trace his lineage to John of Gaunt, Edward III's third son. Edward Stafford's father was a descendant of Thomas Woodstock, Edward III's fifth son. Barbara J. Harris, Edward Stafford, Third Duke of Buckingham, 1478-1521 (Stanford, 1986), pp. 234-235; Robin Frame, The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100-1400 (Oxford, 1990), p. 134.

<sup>5</sup>Carole Rawcliffe, The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394-1521 (Cambridge, 1978), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Mortimer Levine, "The Fall of Edward, Duke of Buckingham", in Arthur J. Slavin, ed., Tudor Men and Institutions: Studies in English Law and Government (Baton Rouge, 1972), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>James Gairdner, ed., Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III. and Henry VII. (London, 1861), I, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup>P.S. and H.M. Allen, eds., Letters of Richard Fox, 1486-1527 (Oxford, 1929), p. 43.

<sup>9</sup>The Venetian ambassador Sebastian Guistinian noted that the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk

In his recent survey of the Tudor monarchy John Guy suggests that the duke of Buckingham was unable to adjust to a subservient role in the reign of Henry VIII, who fought to overcome the memory of a long and embittered civil war by uniting the English peerage under his absolute sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> The monarch ruled supreme overriding the greater nobility, despite their wealth and power as land owners who governed their home counties and often possessed a prestigious genealogy. Mindful of his importance within sixteenth-century society, the duke was vocal about his hereditary rights and often antagonised his king. Not only did Edward refer to himself as “Prince”, but he doggedly pursued his claim to the hereditary office of Lord High Constable of England against Henry VIII’s wishes.<sup>11</sup> In 1518 Henry VIII concluded of the duke of Buckingham, “ther is no man lyvyng that ponderth mor the seuryty of his parson, and the comon welth of this his reame”.<sup>12</sup> In the following year Henry VIII wrote to Cardinal Wolsey requesting him to keep a close watch on the movements of the dukes of Buckingham and Suffolk, the lords of Northumberland, Derby, Wiltshire and “others whyche yow thynke suspecte”.<sup>13</sup>

In November 1520 Stafford requested a grant from the king to marshal a small armed force to visit Stafford lands in Wales, but Henry VIII refused his application.<sup>14</sup>

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hoped to accede to the throne of England on Henry VIII’s death. Brown, ed., Calendar of State Papers, II, p. 561.

<sup>10</sup>Guy, Tudor England, p. 96.

<sup>11</sup>Edward claimed the constablership as a descendant of Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, and his control of the manors of Haresfield, Newnham and Wheaten entailed on the office. The controversy about the office of High Constable became a legal wrangle, but the duke’s hereditary right to the position was ultimately upheld by a final judgement in 1514. However, the influence of the office curtailed Henry VIII’s royal prerogative and the king refused to restore the continuity of the constablership. *Ibid*; Levine, “The Fall of Edward”, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup>Helen Miller, Henry VIII and the English Nobility (Oxford, 1986), p. 50.

<sup>13</sup>BL Additional MS 19,398, fol. 44.

<sup>14</sup>The duke’s sister, Anne, married George Hastings, earl of Huntingdon. In 1511 Edward became steward of the earl’s lands in Wales strengthening the duke’s influence in the Welsh Marches. Rawcliffe, The Staffords, pp. 39-40. See appendix three.

The hostility of the Welsh indicated that Edward's request was reasonable; as the duke wrote to his chancellor Robert Gilbert, "we kanne not be ther [Wales] for our suerty with owt iij. or iiij. hundred men".<sup>15</sup> However, Stafford's request was dangerously reminiscent of the beginnings of his father's revolt against Richard III in 1483.<sup>16</sup> Henry Stafford, the second duke of Buckingham, initiated his coup from the Welsh border where Henry Tudor raised an army and planned to march into England, recruiting other rebels as the army proceeded.<sup>17</sup> Edward's actions, so like the beginnings of his father's rebellion against Richard III, prompted a charge of treason against the duke. In April 1521 Henry VIII ordered Stafford's arrest and prosecution for high treason.

Although the extent of Edward's guilt is unknown, his trial demonstrated that the evidence against him was insubstantial.<sup>18</sup> Henry VIII appointed Stafford's father-in-law, Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, as steward to preside over the duke's trial before the Court of the Lord High Steward. Five shires presented indictments against Stafford to the High Steward for the duke's formal arraignment.<sup>19</sup> On 16 April Stafford entered the Tower to await trial. In May the High Steward notified the specially selected nineteen peers, who were to sit in judgement against the duke, to appear in court.<sup>20</sup> L.W. Vernon Harcourt describes the Court of the Lord High Steward as a "fraudulent device for the degradation of the nobility" intended to circumvent their right to trial in parliament, while maintaining their privilege of trial by peers.<sup>21</sup> Helen Miller in Henry

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<sup>15</sup>Harris, Edward Stafford, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>18</sup>Guy states that Buckingham was "almost certainly guilty of the basic offence" but agrees that the evidence against the duke was flimsy. Guy, Tudor England, p. 97; Levine, "The Fall of Edward", p. 42.

<sup>19</sup>London, Surrey, Kent, Somerset and Gloucester. "Form of Proceedings Before a Lord High Steward Upon the Trial of Peers", The Gentleman's Magazine, New Series, I (1834), p. 266.

<sup>20</sup>Miller, Henry VIII, pp. 45-47.

<sup>21</sup>L.W. Vernon Harcourt, His Grace the Steward and Trial of Peers: A Novel Inquiry into a

VIII and the English Nobility explores the lack of objectivity of the lords, noting that Henry VIII gave several of them grants of Buckingham land after the duke's conviction.<sup>22</sup> As Miller observes, the majority of the selected peers were the duke's friends but ultimately they upheld the king's desire for Buckingham's conviction, rather than reject the obviously tenuous evidence against him.<sup>23</sup>

Three witnesses presented evidence against the duke at his trial for imagining and compassing to deprive and to depose Henry VIII and "effect his death and destruction".<sup>24</sup> The majority of the charges against Stafford related to alleged conversations that took place between the duke and several of his servants. John Delacourt, the duke's chaplain, deposed that on 24 April 1512 Stafford sent him to the Carthusian Priory at Henton, Somerset, to seek prophetic knowledge from a monk Nicholas Hopkins. Delacourt told the duke that Hopkins prophesied he should "have all" and that the monk advised the duke to cultivate the love of the community. Hopkins further revealed that Henry VIII would not produce a male heir, apparently confirming Stafford's belief that he would become king.<sup>25</sup> Other hearsay evidence included a conversation of 20 February 1519 in which the duke said to his chancellor, Robert Gilbert, that he

would delay putting off his intensions until a more convenient time: and that the thing could be well done, if the noblemen of this kingdom would mutually declare their minds to one another, but that many of them were afraid so to declare their minds, and therefore this spoiled all.<sup>26</sup>

Gilbert asserted that the duke also confessed his opposition to Henry VIII's policies,

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Special Branch of Constitutional Government Founded Entirely Upon Original Sources of Information, and Extensively Upon Hitherto Unprinted Materials (London, 1907), p. 442.

<sup>22</sup>Miller, Henry VIII, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 47, 49.

<sup>24</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, p. 230.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

declared himself a great sinner and revealed his secret possession of an act of parliament legitimising the duke of Somerset.<sup>27</sup> More alarming to Henry VIII were the recollections of the duke's former surveyor, Charles Knyvet. Late in 1519, declared Knyvet, Stafford suggested that if Henry VIII committed him to the tower the duke would endeavour to murder the king with a dagger. Stafford also discussed with Knyvet the prophecies of Hopkins and his intentions should he become king.<sup>28</sup>

Under the statute against treason of 1352 the peers were able to accept words alone as proof of treason and in Stafford's case this was how they construed the evidence of Stafford's conversations. The 1352 act, however, was a point of contention at Stafford's trial. The Year Book recorded that the duke questioned the basis of the Treason Act and the peers consulted Chief Justice Fineux to settle the point of law.<sup>29</sup> Fineux confirmed that the 1352 statute did not require an overt act of treason, words alone were enough to condemn an individual.<sup>30</sup> Stafford's indictment did, however, present several overt acts as evidence of treasonous activities, although this evidence also relied on the eye witness accounts of his servants. Delacourt proposed that in 1515 Stafford attempted to enlist support for his traitorous plans to depose the king by giving gifts of gold, silver and silk to the king's guard. Delacourt asserted that the duke also increased his retinue and employed more people in his service than required.<sup>31</sup> The jury similarly interpreted Stafford's attempt to acquire a grant from the king to raise an armed force for an expedition into Wales as a demonstration of his intention to

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<sup>27</sup>This act ratified the Beaufort claim to the succession. As Levine observes the act was of little importance to Henry VIII, but the allegation that the duke hid the document from Henry VII was significant because the act supported his accession. Levine, "The Fall of Edward", p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, p. 232.

<sup>29</sup>Year Book, Easter Term, 13 Henry VIII. Harcourt, *His Grace the Steward*, pp. 469-470.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>31</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, p. 231.

“strengthen himself against the King that he might thereby destroy and subdue the King and take upon himself the Crown”.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the charges against Stafford included his retention of the king’s servant William Bulmer in his service, a direct affront to Henry VIII and violation of the laws of livery and maintenance.<sup>33</sup> At the end of his trial the duke’s peers unanimously pronounced him guilty of treason and Stafford met with the executioner’s axe on 17 May 1521.<sup>34</sup>

Several modern commentators argue that the charges against the duke were dubious and did not warrant his execution. Aside from the issue of the duke’s guilt, in the context of his trial Stafford’s involvement with prophecy served to indicate his treasonous intentions and formed only one of several points that attested to the duke’s guilt. Hopkins’ prophecies did not initiate the duke’s treason, but supported his aspirations. As the record of Stafford’s trial revealed, to bring his treason “into effect” the duke sent Delacourt to Hopkins “in order that the *Duke* might have further knowledge therof”.<sup>35</sup> The duke’s alleged treasonous intentions, or imaginings, began before he consulted Hopkins. The third duke of Buckingham was a political rival of Henry VIII, a man of illustrious birth with considerable wealth and power. For many scholars the duke’s trial was, as Carole Rawcliffe states, a “foregone conclusion”.<sup>36</sup> Henry VIII personally interviewed the witnesses against the duke, demonstrating his active involvement in the trial. The selection of the Court of the Lord High Steward, described by Harcourt as a “fraudulent” judicial tool that “resolutely did the will of the king”, indicated that the king took great care in his choice of judicial procedure to

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Harris, *Edward Stafford*, p. 208.

<sup>34</sup>Harcourt, *His Grace the Steward*, p. 441.

<sup>35</sup>*Third Report of the Deputy*, p. 230.

<sup>36</sup>Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, p. 43.

ensure the duke's conviction.<sup>37</sup> The king personally selected the panel of peers judging Stafford. Barbara Harris argues, however, that the duke's trial, although an aberration of justice by modern standards and concepts of impartiality, was typical of the period.<sup>38</sup> As Levine observes, no documentation proves that the duke was not guilty, only that the evidence presented against him in court was suspect and that the trial lacked objectivity.<sup>39</sup> The duke's adherence to the prophecies of a Carthusian monk was of minor importance in the context of his treasonous actions and, although the prophecies were important, they were not treasonous in themselves.

Ten years later Rhys ap Gruffydd (Rice ap Griffith) suffered a similar fate to Stafford as a prominent individual who incurred the wrath of Henry VIII. Adherence to prophecy also formed part of the indictment against Gruffydd, who Ralph A. Griffiths in Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family: A Study in the Wars of the Roses and Early Tudor Politics describes as another political victim of the Tudor regime.<sup>40</sup> Rhys ap Gruffydd was the grandson of Rhys ap Thomas. In "Sir Rhys ap Thomas: A Study in Family History and Tudor Politics" David Jones observes that the people of Wales considered Rhys ap Thomas a prince; his grandfather claimed descent from the ancient chieftain Urien Rheged.<sup>41</sup> At the end of the Wars of the Roses Rhys ap Thomas supported Henry Tudor's successful attempt to gain the English throne and rallied the Welsh to Henry's cause. Jones describes Rhys ap Thomas as the man responsible for Henry's accession to the throne. Rhys ap Thomas brought to Bosworth Field several thousand armoured

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<sup>37</sup>Harcourt, His Grace the Steward, p. 441.

<sup>38</sup>Harris, Edward Stafford, pp. 192-199.

<sup>39</sup>Levine, "The Fall of Edward", pp. 36-37.

<sup>40</sup>Ralph A. Griffiths, Sir Rhys ap Thomas and his Family: A Study in the Wars of the Roses and Early Tudor Politics (Cardiff, 1993), p. 88.

<sup>41</sup>David Jones, "Sir Rhys ap Thomas: A Study in Family History and Tudor Politics", Archaeologia Cambrensis, Fifth Series, IX, no. 34 (1892), pp. 86, 98.



horse and footmen and was a powerful lord to whom the Tudor monarchs were heavily indebted.<sup>42</sup> For his contribution Henry VII appointed Rhys ap Thomas constable, lieutenant and steward of the lordship of Breghnoc, chamberlain of South Wales in Carmarthen and Cardigan and steward of the lordship of Builth.<sup>43</sup>

However, as Jones notes, Rhys ap Thomas was also a dangerous subject whose princely heritage was a potential threat to Henry VII's control over Wales. In seeking an explanation for Henry VIII's enmity for Rhys ap Gruffydd, Jones suggests that Henry Tudor passed his suspicion of Rhys ap Thomas and his family to Henry VIII.<sup>44</sup> After the death of Rhys ap Thomas in 1525, Henry VIII did not confer Rhys' appointments on his inheritor and grandson, Rhys ap Gruffydd. Within a year Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers, assumed the appointments of justiciar of the counties Carmarthen and Cardigan for life and chamberlain of South Wales.<sup>45</sup> Lord Ferrers' presence in Wales resulted in open conflict with Rhys ap Gruffydd. When he encountered problems in Wales with Lord Ferrers' justice, Rhys wrote to Cardinal Wolsey, previously a friend of Rhys ap Thomas, to seek support. On 3 March 1529 Rhys declared to the cardinal, "my pouer tenants & servunts by the light & malicious myndes of suche light persons that be deputies under my Lorde fferrers in these parties, be dayly without cause reasonable or good grounde put to vexacion and trouble wrongfully".<sup>46</sup> From Lord Ferrers' point of view Rhys undermined his authority and influence. In "A Welsh Insurrection" W. Llewelyn Williams proposes that Lord Ferrers felt threatened by Rhys' popularity among the Welsh people, quoting the observation of a contemporary chronicler Ellis Griffith

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<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>45</sup>Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted by Jones, "Sir Rhys ap Thomas", p. 97.

that “When Rhys went to Wales the whole country turned out to welcome him, and this made Lord Ferrers envious and jealous”.<sup>47</sup>

The conflict between Lord Ferrers and Rhys led to an incident at Carmarthen Castle during which Lord Ferrers imprisoned two of Rhys’ servants. In an attempt to free his servants Rhys and several of his soldiers entered the castle to confront the chief justice, but in the ensuing argument the two men attacked each other with daggers. Lord Ferrers arrested Rhys and reported the incident to the Council of the Marches and Cardinal Wolsey, claiming that Rhys tried to kill him. On the following day Rhys’ wife, Catherine Howard, wrote to Wolsey.<sup>48</sup> In Catherine’s version of the incident Lord Ferrers initiated the struggle and hurt Rhys in the arm.<sup>49</sup> Lord Ferrers brought the matter before the Court of Star Chamber where he accused Rhys of treason “for attempting to procure the death of the King’s Justice”.<sup>50</sup> In his letter to Wolsey, Lord Ferrers also accused Rhys’ friends of encouraging the Welsh people to rebel in support of their countryman.<sup>51</sup> The Court of Star Chamber released Rhys around November 1529 and ordered him to make peace with the king’s appointed governor in Wales. Noting Cardinal Wolsey’s alliance with the Howard family and Rhys’ grandfather, W. Llewelyn Williams attributes Rhys’ escape from a charge of treason to the cardinal.<sup>52</sup> However, Wolsey’s position as chancellor was in jeopardy due to his failure to attain a divorce for the king, and with his fall at the end of 1529 Rhys lost an important sympathetic voice at

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<sup>47</sup>Quoted from Ellis Griffith by W. Llewelyn Williams, “A Welsh Insurrection”, *Y Cymmrodor*, XVI (1902), p. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Rhys ap Gruffydd married Catherine, half sister to Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, in 1524. See appendix five.

<sup>49</sup>LP Henry VIII, IV, iii. 5686; Jones, “Sir Rhys ap Thomas”, p. 100.

<sup>50</sup>Jones includes a copy of the Star Chamber indictment against Rhys in his article. Jones, “Sir Rhys ap Thomas”, pp. 192-195.

<sup>51</sup>LP Henry VIII, IV, iii. 5682; Jones, “Sir Rhys ap Thomas”, pp. 99-100.

<sup>52</sup>Williams, “A Welsh Insurrection”, p. 23.

court.<sup>53</sup>

During the period 1529 to 1531 Rhys and his wife continued to be at odds with Lord Ferrers. While the king held Rhys a prisoner, Catherine and her followers attacked Lord Ferrers and killed some of his men. After his release Rhys suggested that he would continue the treasonous behaviour his wife began. In a letter of 15 October 1530 the Spanish ambassador Eustace Chapuys asserted that Rhys' desire to attack Lord Ferrers was the basis of his second arrest earlier that month.<sup>54</sup> Further evidence from Chapuys indicated that judicial authorities released Rhys in June 1531 because he was suffering from ill health after months of incarceration without indictment.<sup>55</sup> However, on 26 September 1531 Chapuys reported to Charles V that Rhys was back in the Tower of London

accused of having tried to procure means of escaping [from England], and going either to your Majesty's Court or into Scotland, where, owing to the credit and favour he enjoys in Wales, he hoped to be able to undertake something against the King.<sup>56</sup>

A Middlesex jury heard the charges against Rhys and two of his servants William Hughes and Edward Lloyd, and passed the case to the King's Bench in November 1531. After the King's Bench heard the charges the justices referred the case to the Exchequer Chamber where the attorney general and several of the king's council gave their verdict against the three men. As Justice John Spelman recorded, alleged treasonous activities in the town of Islington and London formed the basis of the indictment against the men.<sup>57</sup> Ralph A. Griffiths suggests that the trial was "officially inspired" and based around events that allegedly took place in the county of Middlesex to avoid referral of

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<sup>53</sup> Cardinal Wolsey died a year later on 24 November 1530. Elton, *England Under*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, "A Welsh Insurrection", p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> As quoted by Williams. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>57</sup> J.H. Baker, ed., *The Reports of Sir John Spelman* (London, 1977), I, p. 47.

the case to the Council in the Marches, which would otherwise have dealt with Welsh affairs.<sup>58</sup> The king and his council were, therefore, able to maintain their control of the case and its outcome.

Included in the charges against the men was the accusation that Rhys, William Hughes and Edward Lloyd imagined the death of the king by discussing a prophecy that “James the King of Scots with the red hand and the raven shall conquer all England”.<sup>59</sup> Spelman recorded that the men interpreted the raven as a reference to Rhys, “for this was his badge”.<sup>60</sup> Encouraged by their Welsh prophecy the men plotted to fulfil the forecast, to replenish their monetary provisions and to seek support for their rebellion in Scotland.<sup>61</sup> The aim of the three men was to enlist the help of the Scottish king by offering him the English throne and gaining for Rhys complete freedom in Wales as prince.<sup>62</sup> In the process of fulfilling their plans Rhys colluded with his kinsman James ap Gruffydd ap Hywel (James ap Griffith ap Howell). According to Spelman, Rhys’ messages to James ap Gruffydd and attention to the Welsh prophecy were “overt acts” of treason.<sup>63</sup> After the examination of Rhys, Hughes, Lloyd and James ap Gruffydd, Justice John FitzJames briefed the trial jury and sent them to deliberate on their judgement.<sup>64</sup> The result was a guilty verdict against Rhys and Hughes, Lloyd avoided indictment because he was the chief witness against the other two men.<sup>65</sup> As a nobleman, Rhys

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<sup>58</sup>Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup>Baker, ed., *The Reports*, I, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*; Sharon Jansen states that as head of the house of Dynevor, Rhys’ heraldic badge incorporated three ravens on a white field. Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup>Williams published the indictment against Rhys in his article. Incorporated within the document was other evidence of Rhys’ attempt to raise money including his intention to mortgage his lordships of Carew and Narbeth. Williams, “A Welsh Insurrection”, pp. 33-43.

<sup>62</sup>Baker, ed., *The Reports*, I, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>64</sup>Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, p. 109.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

received the commuted sentence of beheading on the 4 December 1531. Hughes, however, suffered the traditional fate of a traitor.

Contemporaries of Edward Stafford and Rhys ap Gruffydd observed the similarity of their fate. In a letter to Charles V of 4 December 1531, the day of Rhys' beheading, Chapuys noted that the Welshman's execution occurred at the same place as that of Edward Stafford, Tower Hill.<sup>66</sup> In the following year William Neville, a man accused of adherence to prophecies, confessed that "the late duke of bukingham yong rise & odre hadde caste them selves away by . . . to [m]och trust in prophecies".<sup>67</sup> Modern commentators also highlight the two cases as examples of Henry VIII's arbitrary justice. Ralph A. Griffiths describes the executions of Stafford and Rhys as acts of "judicial murder based on charges devised to suit the prevailing political and dynastic situation".<sup>68</sup> Although the extent to which Edward Stafford or Rhys ap Gruffydd adhered to prophecy is unknown, contemporary testimony suggests that the evidence presented against them was insubstantial and contrived. Events surrounding the indictment of Stafford and Rhys indicated that factors beyond those presented in court contributed to their prosecution. The trials of Stafford and Rhys revealed that knowledge of prophecy or repeating a prophecy was not enough to convict an individual without other examples of treasonous behaviour. In both cases prophecies clarified an idea of treason put into effect by other actions.

In 1532 the case of William Neville demonstrated that without additional evidence of conspiracy, prophetic sayings alone did not ensure a conviction of high treason, despite Chief Justice Fineaux's interpretation of the 1352 statute during the trial

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<sup>66</sup>LP Henry VIII. V, 563; Jones, "Sir Rhys ap Thomas", pp. 203-204.

<sup>67</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 201 verso [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

<sup>68</sup>Griffiths, Sir Rhys ap Thomas, p. 110.

of Stafford. William Neville was one of the fifteen children of Richard Neville, Lord Latimer, and brother to the third Lord Latimer, John Neville, who succeeded to the title in 1530.<sup>69</sup> In Policy and Police G.R. Elton gives a lively account of William Neville and his prophetic interests, and notes that William was the author of a work entitled Castle of Pleasure published in 1518.<sup>70</sup> In December 1531 Neville consulted a Nashe of Cirencester about some spoons that Mr Chamber, a man who shared Neville's lodging in London, mislaid.<sup>71</sup> Nashe was a caulker, a fortune teller whom, as John Patriche revealed, people consulted for prophetic and other psychic information.<sup>72</sup> In his confession Neville disclosed Nashe's prediction that his wife would soon die and that he would marry as his second wife a Graystoke heiress and become Lord Latimer. Sometime later Neville visited Nashe again and took his brothers George and Christopher with him. At the second meeting Nashe recommended that Neville seek the services of Richard Jones from Oxford.

When Neville's wife became ill he sent for Jones who confirmed that she would die within ten years.<sup>73</sup> Jones told Neville that he would marry a girl of fifteen years with 500 marks of land, become Lord Latimer and be greater than a baron. Neville admitted that Jones also offered to "make a thing for me by mean wherof my lorde my brodre shulde favour me above all men".<sup>74</sup> Neville paid Jones well for his services and medical help for his wife, but did not see Jones again for some time. At their next meeting

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<sup>69</sup>George Edward Cokayne, The Complete Peerage of England Scotland Ireland Great Britain and the United Kingdom Extant Extinct or Dormant. New Edition, Revised and Much Enlarged (London, 1910-1959), Alan Sutton Facsimile (Gloucester, 1982), VII, pp. 481-482.

<sup>70</sup>Elton, Policy and Police, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 197 verso [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

<sup>72</sup>See chapter six. STAC 2/17/64.

<sup>73</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 200 [LP Henry VIII. V, 1679].

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., fol. 200 verso.

Neville saw Jones in his chamber at Oxford.<sup>75</sup> Jones offered to make Neville a ring of gold that brought the wearer favour with important men. Later Jones told Neville that he would be a great man of the realm and earl of Warwick.<sup>76</sup> John Neville would be slain in battle, asserted Jones, leaving the way clear for William to become Lord Latimer and later an earl. Jones' predictions also turned to the fate of Henry VIII, talk that was dangerous and possibly treasonous. Jones asserted that, "none of cadwaladres blode shulde reign longer than xxiiii yeres" and that, "prince edward hadde issiue a sonne whiche was conveyed over see & there hadde issue a sonne".<sup>77</sup> Jones concluded that either the grandchild of Prince Edward or the king of Scotland would become the sovereign of England after Henry VIII died. Jones also told George Neville that Henry VIII may be driven from his realm by the commons of England.<sup>78</sup>

Thomas Wood revealed that in a conversation Neville told him that the king "wold shotly over see and that he shuld never come agayne".<sup>79</sup> Neville also knew by his prophecies that the king would not reign more than 24 years and that the king of Scotland "shulde make iii battells in England".<sup>80</sup> When examined, Neville's chaplain, Edward Legh, maintained that Neville similarly declared, "the kynges grace shuld not reygne fully the space of xxiiii yers bot be sleyn & that non of hys blud shuld reyn after him".<sup>81</sup> When Wood asked Neville how he would gain the earldom of Warwick, Neville replied, "not bi the king for he shall not reign but by my right inhirtaunce".<sup>82</sup> Neville intimated to Wood that when the king did not return from overseas Neville would

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., fol. 201.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., fol. 202.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., fol. 203.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., fol. 196.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., fol. 196 verso.

<sup>81</sup>E 163/10/20.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

assemble his men, for “he that had strengeth shuld rule and namely he being of great blode”.<sup>83</sup> As G.R. Elton observes, encouraged by the prophecies of Jones, Nashe and an astrologer William Wade, Neville began to believe that he could revive the Yorkist earldom of Warwick without the king’s permission and become one of the most powerful men in the realm.<sup>84</sup> Neville’s attention to Jones’ premonition of Henry VIII’s death and an invasion by the king of Scotland, however, was particularly hazardous.

Fearing the consequences of Neville’s interest in the treasonous deliberations of Jones, Legh and Thomas Wood wrote to the king’s council on 24 December 1532 revealing the nature of Neville’s discussions about prophecy.<sup>85</sup> In his deposition of 30 December Legh asserted that he tried to dissuade Neville’s interest in prophecies, and advised Neville, “do not trust unto suche thyngs for you know very well what grete men hath lost there lyvys for such grete presumption & sure yf you do not spede well hyt wyl cost you your hedd”.<sup>86</sup> Thomas Cromwell dealt with the information that the king’s council received from Legh and quickly arranged for the examination of Legh, Wood, William Neville and his brother George.<sup>87</sup> William Neville appeared not to incur any recrimination for his involvement with the diviners. Although the 1352 statute against treason was open to judicial interpretation, there is no evidence that Cromwell initiated a trial against Neville or any of the other people involved in the case, despite the treasonous tone of Neville’s communications with Jones. Neville, although he claimed to have suffered impoverishment as a result of his brush with judicial authorities, returned to official duties as a commissioner of the peace in Worcester by 1534 and

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<sup>83</sup>SP 1/72, fol. 197.

<sup>84</sup>Elton, Policy and Police, p. 53.

<sup>85</sup>E 163/10/20.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Elton, Policy and Police, p. 55.



acted as one of the king's servants during the pursuit of rebel Francis Bigod in 1537.<sup>88</sup> Cromwell incarcerated Richard Jones who remained in the tower of London at least until July the next year without indictment.<sup>89</sup> Jones declared in a letter to Cromwell that many people knew Neville for his "pastyme" but he never heard him say anything treasonous.<sup>90</sup> In July 1533 Roger Jones wrote a petition to Cromwell on his brother's behalf requesting that he be allowed to give sureties for Richard's release from the Tower.<sup>91</sup> Roger described his brother as a poor priest with no friends. After his examination the only other reference to Neville's chaplain was a letter he wrote to the king's council in 1533 pleading for financial restitution to cover his expenses for the impeachment of Neville.<sup>92</sup>

The case of Elizabeth Barton, that also arose in 1533, demonstrated the reason why Cromwell did not pursue charges against William Neville. The courts refused to indict Barton for verbal prophetic slanders against the king and not until Henry VIII bypassed the judiciary altogether, and sought her punishment in the parliament, was Barton executed for treason. The difficulty of the Barton case demonstrated that in the early 1530s the judiciary was reluctant to prosecute an individual for treason on the basis of prophecy alone.<sup>93</sup> The judges required further evidence of treasonous activities, such as they received in the trials of Edward Stafford and Rhys ap Gruffydd, no matter how flimsy. The Barton case prompted a revision of the Henrician treason law to confirm that words alone were valid evidence for the prosecution of traitors. However, in 1537

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*; SP 1/88, fol. 92; LP Henry VIII. XII, i. 234.

<sup>89</sup>Richard Jones signed a letter to the Mayor of Bristol of 19 July 1533 "pryssynor in the tower of london". SP 1/78, fol. 21 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 873].

<sup>90</sup>SP 1/73, fol. 1 verso [LP Henry VIII. V, 1680].

<sup>91</sup>SP 1/238, fol. 119 [LP Henry VIII. Addenda, i. 863].

<sup>92</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 258.

<sup>93</sup>See chapter eight for a full examination of Elizabeth Barton and her crimes.

judicial authorities ignored the prophesying of Edward Neville and George Crofts during their trial, preferring to rely on other examples of their traitorous activities.

Edward Neville, brother of George Neville, Lord Abergavenny, and the chancellor of Chichester cathedral George Crofts formed part of a Yorkist faction that Madeleine Hope Dodds and Ruth Dodds describe as “The White Rose Party”.<sup>94</sup> At the centre of the faction was the Pole family, descendants of George Plantagenet, duke of Clarence, through Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury (for a genealogical chart of the Pole family see appendix four). The Pole family supported the Catholic Church and were adversaries of Henry VIII’s policy to divorce Katherine of Aragon. In 1536 the son of the countess of Salisbury, Reginald Pole, became a cardinal and later renounced his allegiance to Henry VIII to serve the pope in Rome.<sup>95</sup> Reginald’s actions brought the Pole family under suspicion and led to the execution of several members of the family for treason.<sup>96</sup> Judicial authorities examined several individuals who were part of the Yorkist faction, including Geoffrey Pole, Henry Pole (Lord Montague), William and Gertrude Courtenay (marquis and marchioness of Exeter), Margaret Pole (countess of Salisbury), George Crofts, Edward Neville, Hugh Holland and John Collins. Most of the evidence against these people encompassed the verbal denouncement of the king’s policies and his separation from the church in Rome.

In her examination Gertrude Courtenay asserted that Edward Neville prophesied to her concerning the fate of her husband William. While William Courtenay was in the north investigating a recent insurrection, Neville went to Gertrude’s home in

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<sup>94</sup>Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, I, pp. 31-33; Dodds and Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 289; Cobbett, *Cobbett’s Complete*, pp. 480-481.

<sup>95</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 155.

<sup>96</sup>The courts convicted the marquis of Exeter, Lord Montague and the countess of Salisbury of treason and sentenced all three to death although the countess did not die until 1541. Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 153.

Horsley and, in a conversation about her husband, Neville warned her not to be afraid of a first or second battle, but a third. Gertrude recalled that Neville constantly referred to his Welsh prophecies and she warned him, “one day this wyll turn you to displeasure”.<sup>97</sup> However, Neville’s prophesying did not prompt his indictment for high treason, rather his comments about Henry VIII were the cause of his arraignment. Geoffrey Pole confessed that Neville declared, “The King is a beast, and worse than a beast”.<sup>98</sup> Gertrude Courtenay heard Neville say, “he trustyd knaves shuld be put downe and lords shuld reigne one daye”.<sup>99</sup> From this information a jury believed that Neville “falsely and treacherously imagined, intended, practised, and attempted, not only to deprive the King of his crown and dignity, but also to bring about the King’s death and destruction”.<sup>100</sup> A Middlesex sessions presented a second charge of seditious words against Neville for his comments comparing Henry VIII to a beast and for saying, “this world will change one day, and then we will be merry. We shall have a day upon these knaves that rule the King”.<sup>101</sup>

Geoffrey Pole’s examination also revealed the prophesyings of George Crofts. Crofts told Pole that his brother Reginald would restore the church in England, and recalled a vision he received from the Virgin Mary that Geoffrey should “do better here than if he went over sea”.<sup>102</sup> Crofts’ indictment, however, cited as evidence of treason his declaration that “The King is not Supreme head of the Church of England but the Bishop of Rome is Supreme head of the Church” and his comment that he felt remorse

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<sup>97</sup>SP 1/138, fol. 158 verso [LP Henry VIII. XIII, ii. 765]

<sup>98</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIII, ii. 830.

<sup>99</sup>SP 1/138, fol. 224 verso [LP Henry VIII. XIII, ii. 831].

<sup>100</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, pp. 251-252.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>102</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIII, ii. 830.

for swearing an oath renouncing the pope as head of the church.<sup>103</sup> The indictment submitted against Crofts stated that he machinated and conspired to “extinguish the cordial love and affection of the King’s subjects” and to “deprive him of his royal dignity”.<sup>104</sup> On 3 December a Westminster jury found Neville and Crofts guilty of all the charges made against them and endorsed their execution as traitors at Tyburn.<sup>105</sup> The trial of Edward Neville and George Crofts indicated that their criticism of Henry VIII and his religious policy was more important than their prophesying. The evidence presented against the two men deliberately ignored their prophetic activities, as under the Tudor treason law only those words, or in this case prophetic sayings, that presented the king in a negative way or attacked the stability of his rule came within the definition of treason.

Despite the passing of several laws against prophecy in 1542, 1549 and 1563, the only other trial during the sixteenth century involving a member of the nobility who attended to prophecy similarly employed the phenomenon as evidence supporting other treasonous activities. As with all cases involving the nobility during the Tudor period, the focus of judicial authorities was on treason not prophecy. The trial of Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, took place in 1572, the culmination of years of political intrigue and plotting to change the structure of the Elizabethan court. Like Stafford, the duke of Norfolk was a wealthy and prominent peer connected by marriage to many leading noble families and, at the time of his trial, the only duke in England (for a genealogical chart of the Howard family see appendix five).<sup>106</sup> Howard led what John

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<sup>103</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, p. 253.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>106</sup>Two of Henry VIII’s wives were cousins of Thomas Howard’s father the earl of Surrey and his grandmother was the daughter of Edward Stafford, while the duke himself married into three wealthy and important families. Neville Williams, A Tudor Tragedy: Thomas Howard Fourth

Guy describes as “Norfolk’s Court party” that included Henry Fitzalan, William Herbert, John Lumley and the Northern earls, Thomas Percy and Charles Neville.<sup>107</sup> These members of the nobility formed a faction brought together by a desire to displace the dominance of the queen’s chief minister William Cecil, Lord Burghley, to restore the prominence of the Catholic Church and to secure the former queen of Scotland, Mary Stuart, as heir to the English throne.<sup>108</sup>

In 1569 the Norfolk faction joined forces with a court party led by Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and Nicholas Throckmorton in an attempt to secure the marriage of Thomas Howard and Mary Stuart and the dismissal of Cecil as Elizabeth’s chief minister. The Norfolk faction sought foreign aid in their conspiracy and contacted, through the Florentine merchant Roberto Ridolfi, the Spanish ambassador Guerau de Spes who was able to communicate with Mary and seek assistance from Philip II’s commander Ferdinand Alvarez de Toledo, duke of Alva.<sup>109</sup> When the duke of Alva refused to offer Spanish assistance and Queen Elizabeth rejected Howard’s proposed marriage to Mary, Howard retreated to his estates until Elizabeth recalled him to London. G.R. Elton proposes that Howard planned to rise in rebellion against the queen with the Northern earls, but when summoned to London decided to abandon the attempt advising the earls to follow his example.<sup>110</sup> The earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland did not take Howard’s advice and, fearing legal retribution for their involvement with Howard’s conspiracy, marched with about 5,700 men through

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Duke of Norfolk (London, 1964), pp. 32, 34, 126-7.

<sup>107</sup>The 12th earl of Arundel, 1st earl of Pembroke, Lord Lumley, 1st earl of Northumberland and 6th earl of Westmoreland respectively. Guy, Tudor England, p. 273.

<sup>108</sup>Elton, England Under, p. 297.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

Durham, Ripon and Hartlepool before submitting to the queen.<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth committed Howard to the tower for his role in the Northern Rebellion, but released him in August 1570. As Elton explains, when the queen released Howard, Ridolfi seized the opportunity to revive the goals of the Norfolk faction and a new conspiracy developed - the Ridolfi plot.<sup>112</sup> The aims of this second conspiracy extended those of the first and included the supplantation of Elizabeth by Mary Stuart, after her marriage to Thomas Howard. However, by September 1571 Cecil uncovered the plot, examined those involved and arrested Howard.<sup>113</sup>

In November 1571 Cecil drew up a list of Howard's offences that included the charge that he sought money for Mary Stuart from the duke of Alva, knew of the Northern Rebellion and a plan to invade the tower of London, aided and wrote to the queen of Scots and laboured to marry her "without hir Majesty knolledg, whom he hym self had knowen to have attempted the depriving of hir Majesty from hir Crown and had not made satisfaction therfor to hir Majesty".<sup>114</sup> Cecil also accused Howard of maintaining and aiding the queen's enemies in Scotland and acting as the "principall consellor and director of Ridolfi", encouraging the merchant to discuss the invasion of England with the duke of Alva, the king of Spain and the pope.<sup>115</sup> Lastly, Cecil declared that Howard knew of an attempt to break up parliament and abduct the queen. Elizabeth's chief minister developed a conclusive case against the duke through the successive examinations of his servants: Howard's secretaries, Robert Hickford and William Barker, his officer in the North, Lawrence Bannister, the Howard employees at

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<sup>111</sup>Guy, *Tudor England*, pp. 274-5.

<sup>112</sup>Elton, *England Under*, p. 300.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup>SP 12/83, fol. 57 [CSPD 1547-1580. LXXXIII, 24].

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, fol 57 verso.

Howard House, the MP Henry Goodere and Mary Stuart's confidential secretary, John Leslie, bishop of Ross.<sup>116</sup>

Among the overwhelming evidence gathered against Howard was a statement made by Robert Hickford recalling that Howard once gave him a sheet of paper on which was a prophecy in Latin about the queen of Scotland.<sup>117</sup> During Howard's trial Queen Elizabeth's serjeant Nicholas Barham presented the prophecy as evidence that the duke, despite his abhorrence of Mary's involvement in the murder of her husband, wished to marry her because he believed his children would become heir to the English throne.<sup>118</sup> Barham repeated the prediction and explained the meaning of the saying:

At the exaltation of the Moon (which was the rising of the earl of Northumberland that giveth the moon) the Lion (which is the queen's majesty) shall be overthrown: then shall the Lion be joined with a Lion (which is the duke of Norfolk with the Scottish queen, for they both bear lions in their arms) and their Whelps shall reign (that is, their posterity shall have the kingdom).<sup>119</sup>

On 11 October 1568 Howard had written to Elizabeth professing his horror of Mary's crimes, revealed in a collection of correspondence between Mary and James Hepburn, earl of Bothwell. Howard wrote that the letters, found in a silver and gilt casket, "do discover such mordinat, and filthy love betwene her, and Bothaile, her loathsommes, and abhorring of her Husband that was murdred, and the conspiracy of his death".<sup>120</sup> In a document relating the charges against Howard, the unknown author cited Howard's letter to Elizabeth commenting, "how could he be moved to love hir as his wife, but only

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<sup>116</sup>Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, pp. 217-225.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>118</sup>Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete*, pp. 996-997. Williams notes that Cobbett's account of the trial of Thomas Howard is printed "verbatim" from *The Tryal of Thomas Duke of Norfolk by His Peers* (1709), pp. 1-136. Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, p. 273 n. 20.

<sup>119</sup>Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete*, p. 997.

<sup>120</sup>SP 12/85, fol. 33 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1547-1580. LXXXV, 10].

to some greate purpos".<sup>121</sup> At Howard's trial the prosecution argued that the prophecy of the moon and the lions revealed the nature of this "greate purpos" and Howard's motivation for his marriage to Mary.

In court Howard claimed he did not remember the prophecy. "It was in your own keeping", asserted Barham, to which Howard replied, "What should I do with it?". Barham commented that prophecies "have oft deceived noblemen", but Howard dismissed the prophecy as a foolish toy.<sup>122</sup> Howard's denial of any knowledge of the prophecy was not surprising; he did not mention the prophecy in his confession of 10 November 1571 either.<sup>123</sup> On 14 January 1572 the queen appointed George Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, as the Lord High Steward to preside over Howard's trial, which took place on 16 January.<sup>124</sup> Although Howard pleaded not guilty, his peers upheld his indictment for high treason, a long document that did not mention the prophecy cited by Hickford.<sup>125</sup> The Court of the Lord High Steward condemned Howard to death, but Elizabeth vacillated and gave Howard several reprieves before she consented to his execution on 2 June, after five months of waiting in the Tower.<sup>126</sup>

During Howard's arrest and trial judicial authorities similarly confined his brother Henry, who wrote A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies, in the Tower. In the aftermath of Thomas Howard's execution for treason judicial authorities continued to suspect Henry Howard's loyalty to the queen. Like his brother, Henry's involvement with prophecy served to increase the government's mistrust of his actions, although the main concern of Elizabeth's council was his Catholic tendencies

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<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 34.

<sup>122</sup>Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete*, p. 997.

<sup>123</sup>SP 12/83, fols. 23-29 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1547-1580. LXXXIII, 11].

<sup>124</sup>SP 12/85, fol. 39 [CSPD Elizabeth 1547-1580. LXXXV, 12].

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*; Cobbett, *Cobbett's Complete*, pp. 959-965, 1035-1042.

<sup>126</sup>Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, pp. 253-254.



and involvement in the treasonous activities of the duke of Norfolk. After his release Henry retired from court but maintained similar interests to his brother, associating with men sympathetic to the plight of Mary Stuart and the interests of the Catholic Church like Charles Arundell and Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford.<sup>127</sup>

To avert Elizabeth's persistent mistrust, Howard petitioned several of the queen's prominent ministers professing his innocence and asking for a return to favour with his sovereign.<sup>128</sup> Howard further demonstrated his subservience to Elizabeth by writing in support of her proposed marriage to the duke of Anjou and about the glory of her reign in the Regina Fortuna.<sup>129</sup> However, Howard's letters did not divert the enmity and distrust of Elizabeth's council, which decided to question him further in 1581. On January 10 Thomas Norton sent Francis Walsingham a list of questions for the examination of Howard regarding a treatise concerning Thomas Howard's trial and a papal bull referring to the excommunication and deposition of Elizabeth.<sup>130</sup> In response Howard petitioned Francis Walsingham declaring his faithful service to the queen and desire for release.<sup>131</sup> By October Howard was free, but a quarrel with Edward de Vere led to another period of incarceration and examination by the queen's council.<sup>132</sup> On 1 December 1581 Howard wrote to Walsingham, "I here by common voice of a freshe attempte to shake and undermine my libertie since my laste waytinge on youe".<sup>133</sup>

Sometime late in 1581 judicial authorities drew up a list of questions to ask

<sup>127</sup>Linda Levy Peck, Northampton: Patronage and Policy at the Court of James I (London, 1982), p. 10.

<sup>128</sup>Harris Nicolas, Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton, K.G., Vice-Chamberlain and Lord Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth (London, 1847), pp. 115-117, 137-139.

<sup>129</sup>Peck, Northampton, p. 12.

<sup>130</sup>SP 12/147, fols. 6-6 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CXLVII, 4. i].

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., fols. 8-8 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CXLVII, 6];

<sup>132</sup>SP 12/150, fol. 96 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CL, 51].

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., fol. 150 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CL, 81].

Henry Howard and Charles Arundell concerning their association with the earl of Northumberland, their religious sympathies and seditious talk concerning the king of Scots and the duke of Guise.<sup>134</sup> The interrogatories derived from the accusations made against Howard and Arundell by de Vere, who also asserted that Arundell “presented a certayne boke of pictures after the manner of a prophesie”.<sup>135</sup> Arundell’s possession of a prophecy was one of many accusations de Vere made against him inferring that Arundell frequently associated with Jesuits and attended Catholic mass.<sup>136</sup> In an attempt to avert their disgrace Howard and Arundell made counter accusations against de Vere.<sup>137</sup> Howard listed among de Vere’s “daungerouse practisis” his continual railing against the queen and intention to murder Robert Dudley and Philip Sidney.<sup>138</sup> In a letter to Francis Walsingham, Arundell revealed the seriousness of de Vere’s accusations by requesting aid from the privy councillor in the procurement of a “speedy trial”.<sup>139</sup> In September 1582 Howard similarly wrote to Walsingham declaring the falsity of his accusers and explaining that he did not know of any prophecies. At the end of his letter Howard disclosed to Walsingham, “my sute is only for trial by extremitie or restitution by favor”.<sup>140</sup>

Judicial authorities did not indict Howard, although he lost favour with the

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<sup>134</sup>SP 12/151, fols. 96-96 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 42]. No date appeared on any of the documents relating to the argument between Howard, Arundell and de Vere. The editors of the Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry Eighth suggest the documents derived from 1581 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CL]. On the basis of Howard’s letter to Walsingham of 1 December 1581 the documents were probably drawn up at the end of 1581 or the beginning of 1582.

<sup>135</sup>SP 12/151, fol. 98 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 44].

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., fols. 98-99 verso.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., fols. 100-102 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 45]; SP 12/151, fols. 103-104 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 46]; CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 49-50.

<sup>138</sup>SP 12/151, fol. 118 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 57].

<sup>139</sup>CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLI, 53.

<sup>140</sup>SP 12/155, fol. 84 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLV, 44].

queen and did not attend her court for at least a year. In February 1583 Howard petitioned Walsingham again asking him to intervene on his behalf with the queen to end the “storm of trouble” arising from his quarrel with de Vere.<sup>141</sup> At about this time Howard wrote his A Defensative, perhaps inspired by the accusations of adherence to prophecy levied against both himself and Arundell. In September 1583 Elizabeth’s council arrested Howard on suspicion of treasonous activities resulting from his association with Mary Stuart.<sup>142</sup> Howard suffered a harsh confinement in the Tower of London until his release in 1585 into the care of Nicholas Bacon.<sup>143</sup>

The examinations of several noblemen of the sixteenth century revealed an association with prophecy. However, the judiciary was unable or unwilling to prosecute any member of the nobility for interest in prophecy alone. Although the common law of England provided a means to charge individuals adhering to prophecies according to Henry VIII’s numerous proclamations against sedition, the judiciary only considered the possibly treasonous implications of prophetic sayings in cases involving the peerage. The council did not indict William Neville, for example, despite his comments about the early demise of the king, as the notion of treason by words was yet to receive confirmation in the case of Elizabeth Barton of 1534. Before the passing of the new law of treason, the cases against Edward Stafford, Rhys ap Gruffydd and William Neville demonstrated that the success of an indictment for high treason required evidence of active conspiracy in addition to adherence to prophecy. After parliament established treason by words as an offence, the trial of Edward Neville and George Crofts revealed

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<sup>141</sup>SP 12/158, fol. 175-175 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLVIII, 77].

<sup>142</sup>CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLXIII, 59; CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLXIV, 36, 43; CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLXVIII, 14.

<sup>143</sup>Nicolas, Memoirs of the Life, pp. 368-369, 376-377.

the unsatisfactory nature of prophecy as evidence of treason when judicial authorities ignored their prophesying in favour of more direct verbal slander of Henry VIII. At all times the concern of the government was treason not prophecy. Although the council used an individual's interest in prophecy to confirm treasonous intentions, as in the case of Thomas Howard, this interest was often incidental to larger issues. For judicial authorities prophecy was a tool that the prosecution employed in cases against the nobility to enhance other evidence of treason, rather than a crime in itself, even after the passing of several statutes against prophecy during the century. For the few nobility listening to prophecy the phenomenon confirmed or encouraged other actions or beliefs that preceded their interest.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Participants: The Clergy**

Many clergy repeated non-scriptural prophecies in the sixteenth century. Nearly all examples of the adherence to prophecy by ecclesiastics derived from the period of the Reformation, when individuals sought an end to doctrinal and social upheaval in prophecy. For the clergy non-scriptural prophecies were a symbol of hope for the future ascendancy of their religion and retribution for those individuals responsible for the attack on Catholicism in England. The government, however, feared that Catholic sympathisers used prophecies to encourage others to protest against the onset of the Reformation. As G.R. Elton observes in Policy and Police, Thomas Cromwell and his agents indiscriminately investigated all individuals who criticised Henry VIII and his religious policy in his attempt to 'enforce the Reformation'.<sup>1</sup> Henry VIII's council viewed prophecy as one of many forms of sedition that often accompanied the more serious crime of high treason. The majority of cases involving clergy occurred in the 1530s, before parliament enacted the first statute against prophecy. The main concern of judicial authorities therefore was the role of prophecy as an example of seditious beliefs that they thought led to more active opposition to the Tudor government.

The 1530s opened with an investigation into the activities of Elizabeth Barton, the most prominent case of prophesying by an ecclesiastic during the century. The examination and trial of Barton set a precedent for judicial intervention in cases of prophesying during the rest of the 1530s, although no other case involved as many people or demonstrated the same level of political intrigue as that of the Holy Maid of

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<sup>1</sup>Elton, Policy and Police, p. 82.

Kent. Barton, a servant girl working for Thomas Cobb, steward of the archbishop of Canterbury's estates around Aldington, began prophesying in 1525 when she predicted the death of her employee's child.<sup>2</sup> Barton's prophecies initially encompassed only doctrinal and sacred issues that won her many followers but avoided the suspicion of judicial authorities. The Elizabethan antiquary William Lambarde recalled that after Barton's favourable examination by the archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, and his commissioners, she returned to the chapel of Court-at-Street where she entered "accompanied with these commissioners, many Ladies, Gentlemen, and Gentlewomen of the best degree, and three thousand persons besides, of the common sort of people in the Countrie".<sup>3</sup>

Soon after Barton entered the Benedictine abbey of St Sepulchre in Canterbury, Warham appointed as her religious adviser Edward Bocking, cellarer of the Benedictine monastery of Christ Church and head of the ecclesiastical commission that examined Barton.<sup>4</sup> Thomas More asserted that at about this time he received from the king a list of Barton's sayings. In a reflective letter to Thomas Cromwell of 1534 More revealed his opinion of the nun's prophesyings, as they appeared in the note from Henry VIII, writing, "when his Highness asked me, I told him, that in good faith I found nothing in these words that I could anything regard or esteem . . . . And the King's Grace, as methought, esteemed the matter as light as it after proved lewd".<sup>5</sup> Although Barton attracted a large following, her prophesying did not concern the king until 1527 when she began to intervene in the political affairs of the realm.

Barton, either on her own initiative or as a result of the influence of those

<sup>2</sup>Parkin, "Cobb's Hall", pp. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>Lambarde, *A Perambulation*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>Knowles, *The Religious Orders*, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup>More, *Selected Letters*, pp. 193-194.

around her, was an opponent of the king's proposed marriage to Anne Boleyn and a supporter of Catholicism in England. All Barton's political prophecies related to events surrounding the Reformation and her attempt to dissuade Henry VIII from continuing divorce proceedings against Katherine of Aragon. In 1533 an unknown person sent Cromwell a detailed account of some of the nun's prophecies and visions that she discussed with the Franciscan monk Hugh Rich. According to this anonymous account, Barton prophesied that if the king "maryed and tok An to wyffe the vengauce of God shuld plage hym".<sup>6</sup> An angel appeared before the nun and told her to go to the king and "byd hym take his owyld wyff ayen, or elles".<sup>7</sup>

An examination of Barton and her adherents late in 1533 further uncovered the treasonous nature of her sayings. Barton predicted that if Henry VIII married Anne "he should not live six months after", and when the king did not visit the Benedictine monasteries during a visit to Canterbury, she stated that he "was so abominable in the sight of God, that he was not worthy to tread on hollowed ground".<sup>8</sup> Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, recounted that the nun prophesied Henry VIII's deposition as monarch within a month of his marriage to Anne and death, six months later, after a devastating plague ravaged England.<sup>9</sup> Barton also imparted her prophecies to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, telling him of a vision she experienced in which the cardinal held three swords; the first representing the spiritual realm, the second the temporal realm and the third the king's great matter of the divorce.<sup>10</sup> In the Observant friar Richard Risby's

<sup>6</sup>Wright, ed., Three Chapters of Letters, p. 14 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1466].

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>SP 1/80, fol. 138 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, to Nicholas Hawkins, bishop of Ely, Lamethe, 20 December 1533. BL MS Harl. 6148, fol. 41 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1546]; C.H. Williams, ed., English Historical Documents, 1485-1558 (London, 1967), p. 836.

<sup>10</sup>Wright, ed., Three Chapters of Letters, p. 15.

interpretation of Barton's vision for Thomas More he asserted that the swords symbolised the cardinal's responsibilities and "if he ordered not well, God would lay it sore to his charge".<sup>11</sup> Barton declared that Wolsey's death resulted from his lack of attention to her prophetic vision.<sup>12</sup>

As a prophet Barton piqued the interest of many individuals. Documents relating to Barton's trial and examination name over seventy people who read or heard of her revelations concerning the king, either through direct contact with the nun or through her followers: Franciscan Observant friars Hugh Rich and Richard Risby, Benedictine monk John Dering, priest of Aldington Richard Masters, Barton's confessor, Edward Bocking, and the parson of Aldermary in London Henry Gold.<sup>13</sup> Among those who knew of Barton's prophecy that the king "shall not be kyng a monyth after that he married the quens grace" were Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, and Gertrude Courtenay, marchioness of Exeter, who in 1537 were active participants in the controversy surrounding Reginald Pole's desertion of Henry VIII.<sup>14</sup> Other prominent individuals involved with the nun included the bishop of Rochester John Fisher, Henry VIII's ex-chancellor Thomas More, Katherine of Aragon and her daughter Mary. As conspicuous opponents of the king's divorce, Henry VIII hoped to implicate Fisher, More and the dowager queen in the treasonous activities of Barton.<sup>15</sup> However, judicial authorities released Fisher with a fine of £300, and Henry VIII's ministers convinced the king to remove More's name from the bill of attainder against Barton and her

<sup>11</sup>More, *Selected Letters*, p. 194.

<sup>12</sup>Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>SP 1/80, fols. 126-128 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468].

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 126 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468]; BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E iv, fols. 94-95 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1464]; SP 1/80, fols 124-124 verso [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1465].

<sup>15</sup>SP 1/80, fol. 126 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1468]; BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E iv, fols. 154-154 verso [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1467].



adherents.<sup>16</sup>

Katherine of Aragon easily proved her innocence as she avoided all conversation with the nun.<sup>17</sup> In a letter to Barton of 1533 More warned the Holy Maid against repeating her political prophecies to secular individuals.<sup>18</sup> More reminded the nun of the fate of Edward Stafford, duke of Buckingham:

I think you have heard how the late Duke of Buckingham moved with the fame of one that was reported for an holy monk and had such talking with him as after was a great part of his destruction and disheriting of his blood, and great slander and infamy of religion. It sufficeth me, good Madam, to put you in remembrance of such thing.<sup>19</sup>

Despite More's advice, Barton disseminated her prophecies against Henry VIII to many leading people in England, including the king, in an attempt to halt the Reformation. Barton persisted in her effort to influence prominent ecclesiastics like Archbishop Warham, Bishop Fisher and Cardinal Wolsey and petitioned Pope Clement VII through his representatives in England, Silvester Darius and John Anthony Pulleon.<sup>20</sup>

In July 1533 Henry Man, procurator of the Carthusian monastery at Sheen, declared that Barton "has raised a fire in some hearts that you would think like the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Primitive Church".<sup>21</sup> For Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell the enthusiasm of the people for Barton and her prophecies, in particular those sympathetic to the plight of Katherine of Aragon and persistent adherents of the pope in religious houses, made her a focus of dissent. In the same month Cromwell wrote to Archbishop Warham, at Henry VIII's request, to inquire about Barton's

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<sup>16</sup>Elton, *England Under*, p. 138.

<sup>17</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1419.

<sup>18</sup>More, *Selected Letters*, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>20</sup>Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters*, pp. 15-16, 20 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 1466 and 1470]; Knowles, *The Religious Orders*, p. 183; SP 1/50, fol. 163 [LP Henry VIII. IV. ii, 4806]; Whatmore, "The Sermon Against", p. 467.

<sup>21</sup>Henry Man to Edward Bocking, (n.p.), 15 July 1533. LP Henry VIII. VI, 835.

activities.<sup>22</sup> On 11 August Richard Gwent of the Arches informed Cromwell about the success of Warham's examination of the nun, undertaken on behalf of the councillor. Gwent reported that "when my lord of cant[erbury] had examynyd the none of cant[erbury] apou your interogatyrys she began to c[ome] nere home & desyryd to speke with my lord apart & then she confessyd many mad foolys".<sup>23</sup> Late in September Henry VIII's attorney-general, Christopher Hales, succeeded in capturing the leading supporters of the nun.<sup>24</sup> On 12 November the imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys recorded Barton's arrest by judicial authorities and noted that the

cause of her imprisonment is that she had had a revelation that in a short time this King would not only lose his kingdom, but that he should be damned . . . . Many have been taken up on suspicion of having encouraged her to such prophecies to stir the people to rebellion.<sup>25</sup>

Chapuys asserted that a special jury of judges, prelates and nobles spent three days deliberating on Barton's crimes.<sup>26</sup> After the jury considered Barton's offences, Thomas Audley, Lord Chancellor, made a speech depicting the nun as a woman who "wickedly conspired against God and religion, and indirectly against the King".<sup>27</sup> However, the assembled peers and ecclesiastics remained unconvinced and unwilling to convict Barton who had openly revealed her prophecies to the king.

The Windsor herald and chronicler Charles Wriothesley reported that on 23 November Barton and several of her followers stood on a scaffold at Paul's Cross while a

<sup>22</sup>SP 1/78, fol. 126 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 887].

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 119 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 967].

<sup>24</sup>Knowles, *The Religious Orders*, p. 187.

<sup>25</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1419.

<sup>26</sup>Some confusion surrounds the nature of Barton's trial. Barton's contemporary Eleanor Manners, Lady Rutland, asserted that the king's council examined the nun, while John Stowe maintained that she appeared before the Star Chamber. LP Henry VIII. VI, 1438; John Stowe, *The Annals of England, Faithfully Collected Out of the Most Authentick Authors, Records, and Other Monuments of Antiquitie, Lately Corrected, Encreased, and Continued, From the First Inhabitation Until this Present Yeere 1601* (London, 1601) STC 23336, p. 959.

<sup>27</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1445.

priest gave a sermon declaring that Barton was a false prophet.<sup>28</sup> The priest, John Capon, addressed his audience proclaiming that his intent was to show “the beginning, the progress, and final intent of this false, forged, and feigned matter”, to the intent that his listeners “shall perceive what guile, what malice, what conspiracy hath been imagined and contrived” against the king.<sup>29</sup> Capon attributed many crimes to Barton, in particular he asserted that she caused Archbishop Warham and Cardinal Wolsey to change their opinion of the king’s proposed divorce and to halt their proceedings to this intent with the pope.<sup>30</sup> Barton encouraged, announced Capon, those who opposed Henry VIII’s marriage to “stand stiffly against the said marriage with all their powers” and ultimately contributed to “the great stincking, staying, and delaying of this the King’s Grace’s marriage with the Queen’s Grace that now is”.<sup>31</sup> Capon further declared that Barton convinced people that Henry VIII was not a righteous king and that they were not his proper subjects.<sup>32</sup> Chapuys wrote that Capon repeated his vilification of the nun and her adherents on the two Sundays following 23 November, and at other times throughout the realm “in order to efface the general impression of the Nun’s sanctity, because this people is peculiarly credulous, and is moved to insurrection by prophecies”.<sup>33</sup>

However, Henry VIII did not fulfil his desire to convict the Holy Maid until 21 March 1534, when parliament passed a bill of attainder against Elizabeth Barton, Richard Masters, Edward Bocking, John Dering, Richard Risby and Henry Gold.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup>Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, From A.D. 1485 to 1559* (London, 1875) [Camden Society. New Series, XI], I, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup>Whatmore, “The Sermon Against”, p. 464.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1460.

<sup>34</sup>25 Henry VIII. c. 12 [SR, III, pp. 446-451]; Cheney, “The Holy Maid”, p. 114.

act sought the punishment of the nun and her followers who had disturbed the peace of the realm in their attacks on Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn. According to the act, Barton and her adherents were "maliciously" fixed in their opinion against Henry VIII's divorce and

by false feyned hipocrise [dissymulate] sanctite and cloked holynes not only sett fourth and put in the heddes of a greate nombre of the subjects of this realme aswell nobles as other Spirytuall and temporall persones, that they had knowlege by revelacion from Almyghty God and holy Sayntes that God shuld be [displeased] with our seid Sovereigne Lorde, for hys seid procedynges in the seid devorce and separacion.<sup>35</sup>

Henry VIII believed that Barton's prophecies imagined and compassed his death, but the jury Henry VIII assembled for her conviction refused to indict the nun for treason. As the cases of Edward Stafford, Rhys ap Gruffydd and William Neville demonstrated, the verbal repetition of a prophecy was not enough to establish treasonous behaviour without evidence of other conspiratorial activities. Parliament, however, was willing to comply with Henry VIII's wishes and enacted an attainder against Barton on the basis that she created division between the king and his subjects.<sup>36</sup> On 21 April 1534 Barton, Bocking, Dering, Risby and Gold received their punishment of execution by hanging.<sup>37</sup> The belief of Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell that Barton's activities and those of her followers were a dangerous challenge to the authority of government prompted them to push for a reform of the Tudor law of treason.

As for Barton's motivation in the dissemination of her prophecies, most modern scholars argue that Barton was an innocent victim manipulated by her religious advisers who used her revelations to rally support for Katherine of Aragon and Catholicism in

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<sup>35</sup>SR, III, p. 446.

<sup>36</sup>Van Pattern, "Magic, Prophecy", p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>Cheney, "The Holy Maid", p. 114.

England. Barton was an instrument used or unduly influenced by Edward Bocking to renew a religious faith threatened by the king's determination to divorce his queen and prompt the excommunication of the realm from the church in Rome.<sup>38</sup> Modern depictions of Barton reflect that of sixteenth-century commentators, many of whom viewed Barton as a simple and uneducated girl encouraged by her confessor to commit treason. Capon asserted that in the period before Barton met Bocking she did not speak of political or heretical matters. However, after Barton heard Bocking "rail and jest like a frantic person" against the king and his marriage, acts of parliament and heretical beliefs, Barton began to receive prophetic revelations from God criticising the king and his policies.<sup>39</sup> Chapuys also noted that Barton seemed easily influenced by others. In November 1534 the ambassador wrote,

many believe that those who have the said Nun in hand will make her accuse many unjustly in order to take vengeance on the Queen's party, and get money from them . . . . The said Nun has been almost entirely under the keepership of Cromwell or his people, and is continually treated as a stupid (?) lady (*grosse dame*), which strongly confirms the above-named suspicion.<sup>40</sup>

In a recent doctoral thesis, however, Diane Watt depicts Barton as an assertive woman who drew on the lives of St Catherine of Sienna and St Bridget of Sweden as inspiration for her involvement in Tudor politics. Watt observes that Bocking read to Barton everyday from the lives of the two saints, both of whom were involved in political events of the fourteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Watt describes Barton as a woman who consciously

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116; Elton, *England Under*, p. 138; Devereux, "Elizabeth Barton", p. 94; Knowles, *The Religious Orders*, p. 186.

<sup>39</sup>Whatmore, "The Sermon Against", pp. 466-467.

<sup>40</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 1445. Alan Neame, however, suggests that Chapuys' description of the nun as a "grosse dame" meant she was a "lady of rank and consequence", although this interpretation is unlikely. Alan Neame, *The Holy Maid of Kent: The Life of Elizabeth Barton, 1506-1534* (London, 1971), p. 239.

<sup>41</sup>Watt, "God's Secretaries", pp. 172-173.

directed her life according to a Christian model of the female prophet.

Few other instances of prophesying by religious persons obtained the notoriety of Elizabeth Barton. Cromwell learnt from the Barton case how dangerous and popular prophecies could become, and in the future he acted quickly to suppress all forms of criticism against Henry VIII's government. Before the enactment of the new law of treason two cases came to Cromwell's attention that involved sayings contrary to the act of succession passed by parliament early in 1534.<sup>42</sup> The act established the prosecution for high treason of individuals who attacked Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn in writing, print, deed or act, or misprision of treason for a verbal assault.<sup>43</sup> In the same year the curate Thomas Arundell wrote to Cromwell about "master Brown", the parson of Chesterton, who kept "a false wrytten in manner of a profcy and false and abhomynable contary to hys hooth [oath]".<sup>44</sup> Brown asked Arundell to copy the prophecy for him, but Arundell copied the prophecy twice intending to give the first to the parson and to show Cromwell the other. The prediction, wrote Arundell, renounced the authority of the king, his queen and privy councillors.<sup>45</sup>

Later in 1534 the clerk of the king's council, Thomas Bedyll, examined two priests concerning a prophecy about Anne Boleyn that they heard repeated in Warwickshire the year before.<sup>46</sup> According to Thomas Gebons, Ralph Wendon described Queen Anne as a whore and a harlot, and referred to a prophecy that "a queen should be burned in Smithfield, and he trusted it would be the end of queen

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<sup>42</sup>25 Henry VIII, c. 22.

<sup>43</sup>The Statutes at Large, From the First Year of King Edward the Fourth to the End of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth (London, 1786), II, pp. 191-192; Elton, England Under, p. 135.

<sup>44</sup>SP 1/88, fol. 56 [LP Henry VIII. VII, 1624].

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>SP 1/77, fol. 112. [LP Henry VIII. VI, 733]; Although the LP includes the documents relating to this case in their calendar for the year 1533, G.R. Elton believes the examination took place late in 1534. Elton, Policy and Police, p. 374 n. 2.

Anne".<sup>47</sup> Further examination revealed that Gebons was a man of questionable character who John Veysey, bishop of Exeter, believed had committed "manifold misdemeanours" at Oxford and Cambridge. Cromwell dismissed the charges against Wendon at Bedyll's suggestion.<sup>48</sup> The cases against Brown and Wendon revealed that participants knew of the danger attached to prophesying or speaking derogatively of the king and queen. When Arundell disclosed to Brown the illegality of his prophecy, the parson accused the curate of being a disciple of Cromwell and "oone of new laws".<sup>49</sup> Brown was probably referring to the act of succession passed earlier in the year. No evidence indicated that Cromwell charged Brown, suggesting that the parson's prophecy did not conform to the requirements for prosecution under the act of succession. However, Bishop Veysey noted the seriousness of Gebons' accusation as a crime when he asserted, "if the said Thomas Gebons moved such words as he had shewed h[im] the night before that there was no dout but he shuld be cast in prison untill the proofes were made".<sup>50</sup>

At the end of 1534 parliament passed a new treason law, in force from 1 February 1535, that established treason by words and enabled Thomas Cromwell to charge many clergymen for repeating prophecies inherently treasonous in the view of the government. However, in Cromwell's next encounter with prophesying clergymen the judiciary charged the offenders for acting against the act of succession, rather than the law of treason, because the case involved both written and oral evidence of an attack on the king's marriage. In April 1535 Cromwell conducted an examination of two

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<sup>47</sup>LP Henry VIII. VI, 733. Chapuys proposed that Anne Boleyn knew of this prophecy before she married Henry VIII "but, to please the King, she did not care". LP Henry VIII. X, 909.

<sup>48</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 374.

<sup>49</sup>SP 1/88, fol. 56 [LP Henry VIII. VII, 1624].

<sup>50</sup>SP 1/77, fol. 112 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 733].

Carthusian priors who refused to believe that the king was supreme head of the church in England. Robert Laurence, prior of Beauvale, and Augustine Webster, prior of Axholme, refused to acknowledge the act of supremacy of 1534.<sup>51</sup> Included with the documents related to Laurence and Webster was a collection of depositions concerning a “slanderous bill” against the king and queen. Richard Reynolds, a monk of the monastery at Syon, showed the bill, containing information about the queen’s mother and her two daughters, to the clerk of the monastery, John Leek.<sup>52</sup> The bill became a focus of discussion within the monastery for several monks, Thomas Skydmore, Robert Feron, Thomas Mody and the vicar of Isleworth John Hale, and led to a conversation about the prophecies of Merlin and their significance to religious men. Hale referred in particular to the prophecies of “Layman” that presaged the pope’s arrival in England.<sup>53</sup>

John Houghton, Laurence, Webster and Reynolds were adamant that Henry VIII was not the supreme head of the church, contrary to the act of supremacy and the law of treason.<sup>54</sup> The sentiments of the four Carthusian clergymen prompted their trial and conviction by a Westminster jury on 29 April and subsequent execution for treason at Tyburn.<sup>55</sup> At the same session the justices indicted John Hale, who died with the Carthusians.<sup>56</sup> Hale committed treason when he slandered Henry VIII’s marriage, an offence under the 1534 act of succession, rather than as a result of any direct comment about the king’s supremacy over the church.<sup>57</sup> Hale referred to the king as the

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<sup>51</sup>26 Henry VIII, c. 13; SP 1/92, fol. 34 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 565].

<sup>52</sup>SP 1/92, fol. 36.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., fol. 42.

<sup>54</sup>26 Henry VIII, c. 1 and 26 Henry VIII, c. 13; LP Henry VIII. VIII, 566; Third Report of the Deputy, p. 238.

<sup>55</sup>Cobbett, Cobbett’s Complete, p. 472; Third Report of the Deputy, p. 239.

<sup>56</sup>Cobbett suggests that Feron received a pardon from the king. Cobbett, Cobbett’s Complete, p. 473.

<sup>57</sup>Third Report of the Deputy, p. 237. None of the documents concerning the Carthusians name John Hale as an individual who refused to take the oath acknowledging the king’s supremacy



“molywarppe that Marlyn prophecyd . . . accursyd of gods owne mou[th]”, suggested that “the Kyngs grace hadd medlyng with the qu[eens] mother” and claimed that Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne was unlawful.<sup>58</sup> In a letter to the council Hale complained, as an excuse for his behaviour, that he was an ill and aged man who had fallen from his horse several times causing him to become “trowblyd yn my wytte” and lacking in memory.<sup>59</sup> Hale confessed, “I have malycyosly slawndyrd owr suffren lord the kyng & qwyens grace & the lords & masters of theyre most honorable cowncell”.<sup>60</sup> Feron ensured Hale’s conviction for high treason when he produced a written outline of Hale’s disparaging remarks about the king.<sup>61</sup>

Prophetic discussion among the clergy about Henry VIII’s Reformation continued unabated, although the judiciary often failed to secure the indictment of ecclesiastics adhering to prophecies. In March 1536 two clergymen appeared before the York assizes suspected of treason for words spoken against the king and for repeating prophecies the year before. In September 1535 William Bodinam disclosed that his employer, Robert Holdisworth, vicar of Halifax, repeated a prophecy to him that, “Apon Herre all Yngland mey werre” and declared that if the king reigned any longer the church would be destroyed.<sup>62</sup> Two months later several inhabitants of Londesborough, another Yorkshire town, revealed that their parson, William Thwaytes, spoke to them of prophecies about a battle in England and often lamented the state of the realm. During a gathering at the house of the husbandman John Chapleyn, Thwaytes said, “the kyng

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over the church in England, although clearly Hale was an opponent of the king’s divorce and papal sympathiser.

<sup>58</sup>SP 1/92, fols. 39, 40.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 49 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 567].

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 50.

<sup>61</sup>*Third Report of the Deputy*, p. 238.

<sup>62</sup>LP Henry VIII. IX, 404.

our soverenge lorde shulde be distroied by the moste vile people of the worlde and that he shulde be gladdē to take a bote for safgarde of his lyf and flee in to the sea and so forsake his own realme".<sup>63</sup> Other Londesborough residents asserted that Thwaytes repeated slanderous sayings about the king to the extent that his neighbours refused to talk to him and disclosed that Thwaytes "spoke moche of prophecies".<sup>64</sup> The parishioner John Nesfield suggested that Thwaytes refused to acknowledge Henry VIII's supremacy over the church. The parson, asserted Nesfield, failed to attend an assembly of the curates of the deanery of Herthill before Thomas Magnus, archdeacon of the East Riding of Yorkshire, to receive a brief probably concerning the king's supremacy.<sup>65</sup>

On 27 March Christopher Jenney reported the result of the examinations of Holdisworth and Thwaytes.<sup>66</sup> Henry Clifford, earl of Cumberland, arrested Thwaytes "for certeyn words that he shuld speke of the kyngs highnes", however, Jenney believed the accusations against the parson were "spoken of malice".<sup>67</sup> Despite Thwaytes's acquittal at the assizes, Jenney sent the clergyman to Cromwell to appear before the minister at a later date.<sup>68</sup> The accusations against Holdisworth were equally serious. Jenney believed that Holdisworth declared certain words that "if they be true sounde eyther to treason or else to suche effect that he deservithe imprysonement all his lyff".<sup>69</sup> However, Jenney questioned the validity of the accusation made against Holdisworth, and bound both the vicar and his accuser over, on their own recognisance, to appear before Cromwell in the next term. Holdisworth's future looked grim for Jenney also

<sup>63</sup>SP 1/99, fol. 20 [LP Henry VIII. IX, 791].

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 20 verso.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*; Dodds and Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, p. 72.

<sup>66</sup>SP 1/91, fol. 161 verso [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 457]; this document is incorrectly dated 1535, the correct year is 1536. Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 358.

<sup>67</sup>SP 1/91, fol. 161 verso.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*; Dodds and Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, I, p. 73.

<sup>69</sup>SP 1/91, fol. 161 verso.

suspected that the vicar withheld information about his wealth at the last “valuary”.<sup>70</sup>

Early in 1536 a case came to Cromwell’s attention that involved more than just verbal opposition to Henry VIII’s reform of the church. The brethren of the Cistercian abbey of Coggeshall in Essex submitted to Cromwell several articles against their abbot, William Love.<sup>71</sup> Among the crimes listed by the inhabitants of the abbey was the assertion that Love preached a belief in the ascendancy of the pope over the church, contrary to the act of supremacy and the monastic oath. The monks of Coggeshall accused Love of hiding the riches of the abbey during a visit by one of the king’s commissioners, buying his office and attempting to see into the future by unlawful means. Love also slandered the king’s chief minister when he described Cromwell as a heretic.<sup>72</sup> Examination of two monks from the abbey, Richard Brayntre and John Bocking, revealed further details of Love’s misdemeanours, adding that the abbot ignored an injunction to pray for the king and queen at high mass and refused to ask for a collection from the brethren as a token of their love for the sovereign.<sup>73</sup> Brayntre maintained that Love “had a bok that told hym and shewed playnly of all the troble that the clergy had and shuld susteyn and what ponysshemente shuld folow and howe in the ende ther shuld be a newe pope chosen by god” and that the abbot “useth dyvers onlawfull crafte as to tell of thynge that ben fellen and lost”.<sup>74</sup>

The abbot verbally attacked the king by refusing to acknowledge his marriage and ignoring his title as head of the church in England, but Love compounded his treason by depriving Henry VIII of several sources of money. Although the charges

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>SP 1/103, fol. 215 [LP Henry VIII. X, 774].

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>SP 1/101, fol. 153 [LP Henry VIII. X, 164].

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., fol. 158.

against the abbot were serious, Henry Bouchier, earl of Essex, wrote to Cromwell on Love's behalf urging the minister that the accusations against the clergyman were erroneous.<sup>75</sup> Bouchier and John de Vere, earl of Oxford, examined Love concluding that he possessed "as trew hart & faythe unto the kyngs grace as eny man within the realme".<sup>76</sup> Although these early cases against the clergy proved insubstantial, Cromwell continued to take note of clerical censure of Henry VIII's religious reforms that could encourage other individuals to disseminate harmful gossip, or to become involved in active opposition against the king.

In April 1536 Cromwell received information concerning the parson of Wedyneshorowe, who was sent to the minister for examination on a charge of treason.<sup>77</sup> The informant, John Whalley, asserted that the parson owned a book of prophecies and associated with many Catholic sympathisers in Kent, concluding, "yf he be well handelid either by compulsion or by faire wordes he can declare a greate multitude of papistes in this countrey".<sup>78</sup> In June Cromwell heard of another clergyman, the prior of Tortington in Sussex, who read a prophecy to the inhabitants of his priory.<sup>79</sup> Henry VIII's council, possibly concerned about the influence the prior exerted over the canons of the Tortington community, sent the knight William Goryng to investigate. The other canons readily admitted the misconduct of their prior and revealed that the book of prophecy owned by the clergyman derived from his brother, "one Mayys" a grocer in

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<sup>75</sup>SP 1/101, fol. 88 [LP Henry VIII. X, 94].

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>John Whalley to Thomas Cromwell, Dover, 2 April 1536. SP 1/103, fol. 76 [LP Henry VIII. X, 614]; Jansen refers to Wednesborowe as the town of Wednesbury in Staffordshire, however, the town of Woodnesborough in Kent is another possibility as Whalley wrote from Dover about events in Kent. Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 40.

<sup>78</sup>SP 1/103, fol. 76.

<sup>79</sup>William Goryng to Thomas Cromwell, Borton, 26 June 1536. SP 1/104, fol. 227 [LP Henry VIII. X, 1207].

Southwark.<sup>80</sup> Another canon, Harry Rynghede, maintained that the prior knew he was committing an offence because when the prior was in court for another reason he wrote to Rynghede asking him to burn all his correspondence with Mayys.<sup>81</sup>

In the same year Cromwell investigated the abbot of Garadon in Leicestershire, Thomas Syson, who predicted the death of the king.<sup>82</sup> In a conversation with a man named John Bower the abbot asserted that Henry VIII “shall have a grett ffall” and “the egle shall Ryse with such a nombre that the kyng shall go fforth of the ralme & the kyng shall come in agayne when he is al most heighest & be slayne”.<sup>83</sup> Syson described Henry VIII as a mole who would “rotyth uppe” the churches in England. Syson also told Bower of a cryptic prophecy that “when the towre is whyte & another place grene then shall be bornyd ii or iii byshopps & a quene”.<sup>84</sup> When all his prophecies had come to pass, declared the abbot, the world would be merry. Syson risked a charge of treason when he prophesied the king’s death, but the abbot exacerbated his crime by encouraging others to undermine the authority of the monarch. A year later the original informant, John Beaumont, reminded Cromwell of the seditious words that the abbot repeated to John Bower and others.<sup>85</sup> Syson’s prophecies, revealed Beaumont, encouraged many people to attempt a rebellion against the king, contrary to the laws of God. In reminding Cromwell of Syson’s offence Beaumont hoped to resolve the matter “which I shall (accordyng to my dutye) to my powers accomplysshe effectually”.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>John Beaumont to Thomas Cromwell, (n.p.), [1536]. SP 1/81, fol. 175 [LP Henry VIII. VI, Appendix 10].

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>John Beaumont to Thomas Cromwell, Leicester, 1 October 1537. SP 1/125, fol. 91 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 800].

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

Beaumont's assessment of Syson's influence is, however, questionable as Bower clearly did not understand how to interpret the abbot's prophecies. Syson relied on heraldic and other animal imagery to decipher his sayings, but Bower possessed only a limited knowledge of prophetic symbols. Initially Syson asked Bower, "knowe you any arms" to which his companion replied, "noe but the lord m[arquis] and the er[le] of huntygdon".<sup>87</sup> The abbot persisted in questioning Bower and asked him about the identity of the eagle, but he did not know who signified the bird. Finally, Syson said to Bower, "knowe you who gevyth the molle & the sayd bower sayd no".<sup>88</sup> Despite Bower's awareness that Syson's conversation was dangerous and illegal, he knew nothing of what his prophecies meant without the abbot's explanation. In the 1530s, before parliament passed laws against prophecy, the treason of individuals repeating or adhering to prophecies derived not from the sayings but from their interpretation. Contrary to Beaumont's suggestion, Syson rather than his prophecies was allegedly responsible for encouraging people to rebel against the king, demonstrated further by Cromwell's pursuit of people prophesying as he would any other seditious talkers. For most of the decade no evidence suggests that interest in prophecy encouraged anything more than verbal opposition to Henry VIII's policy of religious reform and was an affirmation of strongly held beliefs. However, at the end of 1536 the Northern Rebellion or Pilgrimage of Grace became the focus of treasonous discussions and prophetic speculations involving several clergymen.

While unrest in the north began at the end of 1536 and continued into the beginning of the next year, Cromwell's surveillance of people making prophetic

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<sup>87</sup>SP 1/81, fol. 175.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

utterances in 1537 began with a relatively innocuous case. In January Cromwell received an accusation made by a canon of Launceston, William Genys, against his prior John Shere. Shere told Genys that a scholar of Oxford divulged to him that if the rebellion in the north of England continued, “his grace shulde be in daunger of his lyve or els avoyde his Realme before the yende of Marche nexte comyng”.<sup>89</sup> Increasingly, prophetic sayings turned to the rising of the commons and encouraged people to associate with the rebels. In April Robert Radcliffe, earl of Sussex, investigated the monks of the abbey at Furness in Lancashire.<sup>90</sup> Complaints about the Cistercian monastery derived from the vicar of Dalton and one of the brethren, Robert Legate. The vicar of Dalton deposed that several of the monks of Furness met with the northern rebels and made a financial contribution to their cause.<sup>91</sup> Legate disclosed that the abbot, Roger Pyle, told his brethren not to co-operate with the king’s commissioners during a visitation to the abbey and ignored the opposition of several of the monks to Henry VIII’s reformation of the church.<sup>92</sup> Legate heard one of the monks declare that the king “was not right here [heir] to the cro[wn for] his father came in by no true lyne but by the sword”, while another asserted, “the bishop of Rome was unjustly put down in your [Henry VIII] realm and within ii years it shalbe changed again and all the new lawys that the kniges grace hadd made shuld stande to now effecte”.<sup>93</sup> Henry Salley, maintained Legate, similarly professed his belief that as a layman the king should not be head of the church in England, but Pyle “[k]nowing of this treason” did not reprimand

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<sup>89</sup>SP 1/115, fol. 141A [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 298].

<sup>90</sup>For discussion of the investigation into the abbey of Furness see also Dodds and Dodds, The Pilgrimage of Grace, II, pp. 146-147.

<sup>91</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 2 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 841].

<sup>92</sup>Christopher Haigh, The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace (Manchester, 1969) [Remains Historical and Literary Connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester. Third Series, XVII], p. 194.

<sup>93</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 4 verso.

his brethren for their comments or report them to the king or his council.<sup>94</sup>

In his examination Pyle laid the blame for the seditious talk and involvement with the rebels on his brethren, claiming that the “brethren hadd any [af]fecion to any man so moche as they hadd to the commons”.<sup>95</sup> In their depositions the monks of Furness implicated the abbot fully in their treasonous activities and support of the rebels during the Pilgrimage of Grace. The inhabitants of the abbey were vocal and active in their opposition to Henry VIII’s religious reforms, expressing their hostility through prophecy. Legate revealed that the monks John Broughton, John Harrington and others of the monastery often spoke of a prophecy that “in England shalbe slaine the decorat Rose in his mothers belly” and “they expounding this say that yor grace shall die by the hands of priests for thir churche is yor mother and the church shall sley yor grace”.<sup>96</sup> The abbot similarly asserted that Broughton showed him the cryptic prophecy, “a b c and iii t t shuld set all in one seate and shuld [work] greate mervales and afterward he said that the red rose shuld die in his mothers wombe” and confessed, “this is a marvelous and a daungerous word [saying]”.<sup>97</sup> There is no evidence that the prophecies discussed by the monks initiated their support of the rebels; rather they appear as confirmation of the ascendancy of their religion and as an expression of their hopes for the outcome of the unrest in the north. In a letter to Henry VIII Radcliffe and several other of the king’s lieutenants in the north of England reported that they had imprisoned two of the brethren of Furness.<sup>98</sup> Although the monks committed offences contrary to both the law of treason and the act of supremacy, the lieutenants declared, “there

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<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 5.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 7 verso.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, fol 4.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 7.

<sup>98</sup>One of the monks was Henry Salley. LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 842; Haigh suggests the other monk was John Broughton. Haigh, *The Last Days*, p. 98.



seemed no likelihood of finding anything further that would serve the purpose except things done before the pardon".<sup>99</sup>

In the south of England the problems in the north were an interesting topic of discussion. On 21 April 1537 Thomas Neville, a justice of the peace in Kent, took depositions from schoolteacher Adam Lewes and shop keeper John Domeryght about their conversation in West Malling with the priest James Fredewell.<sup>100</sup> Lewes explained that after he met Fredewell he played cards and drank some ale with him before accompanying him to Domeryght's shop to buy a book. At the shop the conversation turned to the recently suppressed northern rising. Fredewell asserted that the unrest was not over and declared that Henry VIII would encounter new enemies. Fredewell prophesied, "ther is another byrde a bredyng that cam not forthe yett which wyll cum forthe before mydsomer that the kyng had never suche syns he was kyng of ynglond".<sup>101</sup> While Fredewell idly discussed the instability in the north of England, Cromwell interviewed the leaders of the rebellion. An investigation into the activities of Francis Bigod revealed his association with the clergyman William Todde, prior of the Gilbertine monastery in the Yorkshire town of Malton. During his examination, Todde explained that Bigod visited his priory to show him a copy of Henry VIII's pardon for the rebels and the articles listing the rebels' demands made at Doncaster in December 1536.<sup>102</sup> In return Todde showed Bigod a painted prophecy that the prior received many years ago presaging an attack on the clergy by a cardinal.<sup>103</sup> The prior was adamant that

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<sup>99</sup>LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 840; Henry VIII offered the northern rebels, led by Robert Aske, a pardon in December 1536. Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 150.

<sup>100</sup>SP 1/118, fol. 231 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 990].

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>SP 1/116, fol. 165 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1023]. See also E 36/119, fols. 130-130 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 534].

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 165 verso.

he did not interpret the prophecy or say anything against the king, despite his friendship with the rebel leader.

On another day Bigod sent one of his followers to the priory to request that Todde send his servants to take part in the uprising and, although at first he refused, Todde claimed the rebels later forced him “upon peyne of deth” to send one of his employees and a cart with two men but no harness.<sup>104</sup> Bigod disclosed that Todde also showed him another prophecy that “this kyng shulde be fayne to flye owt of this his realme and ere he cam in agayn shuld be glad to departe with two partes of his lands so he might sytt in peax [peace] with the thridd [third]”.<sup>105</sup> Todde revealed to Bigod that “the church shuld abyde woo for three yeres, and afterwards shuld refflorish aswell as ever it did”.<sup>106</sup> Bigod probably sought affirmation of his actions in Todde’s prophecies, rather than initial inspiration for his opposition to Henry VIII. As Bigod visited Todde at least three months after the beginning of the rebellion, the prior’s prophecies served only to raise the spirit of the insurgents acting, as they did for the monks of Furness, as confirmation that their actions were just and would have the effect they desired. Although Todde maintained that he contributed men to the rebellion under duress, his prophetic encouragement of the rebels and examination along with the leaders of the Pilgrimage suggests that Cromwell took the participation of the prior seriously, although the prior’s fate is unknown.

After Henry VIII put down the rebels involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace, the Council in the North continued their vigilant pursuit of possible resurgence. In December 1537 the parishioners of Mustone in Yorkshire presented the council with a

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<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 166.

<sup>105</sup>SP 1/119, fol. 84 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1087].

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

list of accusations against their vicar, John Dobson, demonstrating his treason.<sup>107</sup> Alexander Caulf, William Lowndisburgh and Rowland Ladebeter declared on behalf of the inhabitants of Mustone that for over a year Dobson refused to pray for the king or acknowledge his supremacy over the church in England.<sup>108</sup> Dobson also repeated many prophecies to his parishioners saying, among other things, that “the kings said Majestie shuld bee compelled to forsake this his realme & flye unto the see and aftirward his highnes shuld retourne hither againe & bee contente with the thir parte of his realme”.<sup>109</sup> Dobson also prophesied that the “cowe which is the bishop of Rome is . . . castene in hir stall & she shall come into England gyngling with hir keies & sette t[he] churche againe in the right feith” and that “the crume is brought lowe there shall we begine cristis crosse rowe meanyng by the said word crume, my lord previe seale”.<sup>110</sup>

In a petition to Henry VIII's councillors Dobson admitted his adherence to the prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune and Merlin, and revealed his knowledge of several other prophecies he thought relevant to the state of the realm. Of his fellow clergymen Dobson wrote, “the ruff shuld bee ruffullie rente and the clergie shulde stand in feare and fight as the seclers were”.<sup>111</sup> In a letter to Henry VIII of 18 December the councillors in the north reported their imprisonment of Dobson to await trial, despite the testimony of several inhabitants of Mustone that the vicar was an honest man accused by those who disliked him.<sup>112</sup> In January the council sought instructions from Cromwell about the vicar, and later informed Henry VIII that Dobson was one of four people found guilty of

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<sup>107</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 63 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1212]; Sharon Jansen gives a detailed account of John Dobson's case in her book on prophecy during the 1530s. Jansen, *Political Protest*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>108</sup>SP 1/127, fol. 63.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 63 verso.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 64 verso.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 97-97 verso [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 1231].

treason at the Lent session of the York assizes and executed.<sup>113</sup> Dobson's dissemination and interpretation of prophecies that attacked Henry VIII so soon after the northern rebellion led to his death. Although the examination of Dobson and other clergy about the vicar's prophecies revealed only verbal opposition to Henry VIII, his case demonstrated that the Tudor government would no longer tolerate dissenting gossip and slander of the king. Possibly Cromwell decided to use Dobson's indictment as a warning to other clergy that following the northern uprising the judiciary would deal harshly with any threat to the peace of the realm.

After Dobson's death cases involving the repetition of prophecies by the clergy waned as Cromwell's dominance over the king's council decreased and the reform of the church in England gained acceptance. Some clergy, however, never accepted the monarch as supreme head of the church. In November 1538 Robert Elys, a Grey Friar from Plymouth who was sent to jail in Lanston, referred to a time in the future when he would be able to wear his habit again and revealed that he knew a prophecy "that there should be a king in England who would do great wrong to the commonalty and afterwards repent".<sup>114</sup> In 1585 the knights Henry Neville and William Knollys examined a vagrant priest Gregory Gunnes, who was at one time rector of Elford in Oxfordshire, on a charge of treasonous words.<sup>115</sup> Richard Davison overheard a conversation between Gunnes and another man Evan Arden of Henley in which Gunnes stated, "the day will come, and I hope to see yt, and so may you too, that there shall be an offeringe where Campion did suffer".<sup>116</sup> Gunnes believed that a church would be built on the site where

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<sup>113</sup>SP 1/128, fol. 124 verso [LP Henry VIII. XIII. i, 107] and SP 1/131, fol. 56 [LP Henry VIII. XIII. i, 705].

<sup>114</sup>SP 1/242, fol. 103 verso [LP Henry VIII. Addenda. ii, 1370].

<sup>115</sup>C. A. Newdigate, "The Tyburn Prophecy of Gregory Gunnes", *The Month*, CLXIV, no. 841 (1934), pp. 56-57.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60.

Edmund Campion died, and declared that Queen Elizabeth was a heretic and not supreme head of the church. The councillors imprisoned Gunnes whose prediction became known as the prophecy of Tyburn.<sup>117</sup>

A few books of prophecy continued to circulate. During the 1540s judicial authorities caught a chantry priest of Tenterden, Humphrey Cotton, and a vicar from Weston, William Croom, in possession of written prophecies.<sup>118</sup> In 1554 the privy council similarly requested the examination of a canon of Peterborough who was “gevinge abroad prophesies out of an olde booke” and “abusyng thereby the simple heads of the Quenes Heighnes’ subjectes”.<sup>119</sup> Although no other ecclesiastics appeared before judicial authorities for prophesying, rumours of clerical adherence to prophecy continued throughout the sixteenth century. In February 1592, for example, Henry Saintmain wrote, “ther is a great repaier of priestes into Lankeshire and into the northern partes for certeine The Catholickes have great prophecies that the Queen shall dei this yeare, which I thinke are devised by the priestes who intend some such thinge”.<sup>120</sup> By 1601 the priest Lewes Devett had gained a reputation as a soothsayer for predicting that the queen would conquer all her enemies during the first forty two years of her reign and if she continued to prevail during the next five “she should reign long in her kingdom”.<sup>121</sup> John Garnons wrote to Robert Cecil at the time expressing his concern that Devett’s prophecies would encourage support for the opposition to the queen of the earl of Essex, Robert Devereux.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>118</sup>LP Henry VIII. XVIII. ii, 546; APC, II, p. 451.

<sup>119</sup>APC, V, p. 17.

<sup>120</sup>Henry Saintmain to Thomas Phelippes, (n.p.), 13 February 1592. CSPD Elizabeth 1591-1594. CCXLI, 45; see also SP 15/31, fol. 39 [CSPD Add. 1580-1625. XXXI, 32].

<sup>121</sup>HMC, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury*, XI, p. 135.

<sup>122</sup>Glanmor Williams, “Prophecy, Poetry, and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales”, in Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language, and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), p. 82.

During the 1530s judicial authorities recognised that the repetition of prophecies by the clergy occasionally disclosed further opposition to Henry VIII and his policies of reform. Of particular concern to Thomas Cromwell were individuals who prophesied to a large audience, such as Elizabeth Barton, whose followers disseminated her sayings by mouth and pen, or John Dobson who prophesied to his parishioners in the ale house and the pulpit. As in cases against the nobility, the interest of judicial authorities focused on the treasonous interpretation of prophecies, rather than the actual sayings. Often Cromwell received information about a clergyman not because the cleric attended to a prophecy, but because the content of the prediction revealed resistance to the acts of supremacy or succession. Except in the cases of Elizabeth Barton and John Hale, Cromwell took a generally lenient view of clergymen who discussed prophecies before the rebellion in the north of England. During the Pilgrimage of Grace several clergymen adhered to prophecies that encouraged, rather than initiated, their dissent. However, the judiciary's increasing association of prophecy with rebellion persuaded them to take a harsher view of prophesying clerics. Despite this change in the attitude of the judiciary, only one cleric, John Dobson, suffered from Cromwell's determination to avoid further disruption in the realm. Although judicial authorities increasingly perceived the possibility of rebellion as a corollary of prophecy, the involvement of clergy with the phenomenon derived from less sinister motives. For the clergy non-scriptural prophecies served as a vision of hope and an affirmation of their beliefs.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **Participants: The Common People**

During the sixteenth century many commoners adhered to non-scriptural prophecies, although few received severe punishment as a result. In the 1530s the treatment of individuals repeating prophecies altered following the Pilgrimage of Grace as judicial authorities gained a heightened awareness of the need to suppress all forms of dissent. During the 1540s the privy council imprisoned several commoners for possession of books of prophecy, but the records of the council reveal little about the individuals involved. The Edwardian statute against prophecy described how certain individuals with evil intentions inspired and created sedition and rebellion in the realm by publishing 'fond and fantastical' prophecies. The Elizabethan parliament reiterated the legislative stand made against prophecies in 1549, however, judicial evidence reveals that belief in the power of prophecies to incite the common people to rebellion was insubstantial. Interest in non-scriptural prophecies rarely involved active opposition to the government. While in some cases commoners turned to prophecies for an explanation of events and as an expression of hope, others confessed that they could not understand them.

Many commoners, like the clergy, attended to prophecies during the 1530s. In the first half of the decade, however, no evidence suggests that judicial authorities convicted any commoner for adherence to prophecy. The first case of this period was that of William Harlokke, a man examined by the lieutenant of the Tower, Edward Walsingham, and his associate, John Daunce, in September 1530.<sup>1</sup> Possibly a previous

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<sup>1</sup>SP 1/58, fol. 101 [LP Henry VIII. IV. iii, 6652].

servant of Dr Austyn who lived in the Essex township of Colchester, Harlokke possessed a calendar of painted prophecies and heraldic arms given to him by his employer. Although Harlokke did not interpret the calendar himself, during the late 1520s he showed the prophecy to others who were willing to decode the hidden message of the pictures. A man named Byrte of White Stauton in Somerset believed that Harlokke's prophecy revealed a tumultuous few years following the 1530s and a great battle involving the clergy.<sup>2</sup> Although word of Harlokke's prophecy and his infamy in Somerset reached a knight of the shire, Nicholas Wadham, who demanded that Harlokke burn the calendar, Harlokke persisted in his attempt to decipher the prophecy. In 1529 Harlokke showed the calendar to a goldsmith from Taunton named Richard Loweth who undertook to interpret the prophecy by comparing the calendar with his own book of prophecies.<sup>3</sup> Loweth's comments disclose the nature of some of the prophetic pictures the work contained. Harlokke declared that he thought the prophecy concerned a dreadful dragon. Loweth confirmed Harlokke's suspicion, adding that the dragon, which symbolised James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, twelfth earl of Desmond, should land with the bare-legged hens. Loweth also referred to the gentle lion, a beast he thought represented the king of Scotland, and said, "at Sandynghford haven shalland [sic] a curtes knyght and shalle pyche hys baner in a stone upon the right hand of the haven and there shalle the blewe bore mete the curtes knyght and geve batelle tylle they do swete and ffoome [foam]".<sup>4</sup>

After disclosing the names of those to whom he showed his calendar, Harlokke went on in his examination to name several other prophesiers. Harlokke asserted that in

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., fol. 101 verso.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., fol. 102.



1528 he heard John Barbour read from a book of prophecies in Norwich. Several others were present at this reading including a priest named “Sir William”. After hearing the prophecies Harlokke discussed them with the clergyman who maintained he knew of several other prophecies in a book concerning the king. Harlokke informed two sheriffs of Norwich of the conversation, but they concluded that the case “ys but a tryffyllinge matter to come before the kinge”.<sup>5</sup> Sir William, as Harlokke declared, had tried to coax him into divulging his knowledge of prophecies against the king to no avail. Harlokke also deposed that he heard from a Suffolk man, Thomas Larke, that a white lion, representing the king of Denmark, would kill the king.<sup>6</sup> Harlokke’s examination in the Tower was not his first. Harlokke had come to the attention of judicial authorities three times before his interview with the king’s councillors in 1530. Although Thomas Cromwell referred to Harlokke as a “blind” prophet, he seems to have incurred no penalty for his interest in the future.<sup>7</sup> Harlokke’s calendar did not concern the fate of the king and, although he heard treasonous predictions from others, he avoided speculation about the fate of his monarch. Harlokke’s actions were not treasonous.

In 1532 an incident involving the inmates of the Ilchester jail in Somerset and another man named Harlock similarly came to nothing. According to the investigating officer, chief justice John Fitzjames, two prisoners invented a story of conspiracy and treason to bring about their removal from the jail. The incident began when the inmate Peter Aleyn demanded to see one of the king’s councillors to inform the council of a plot to poison the monarch. On 28 January some the king’s leading councillors, including the high chamberlain John de Vere and Thomas Cromwell, interviewed Aleyn and sent

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 102 verso.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>E 36/139, fol. 48 [LP Henry VIII. VII, 923].

Fitzjames to inquire into the matter at the jail.<sup>8</sup> For several days Fitzjames took depositions from the prisoners involved, all of whom declared that they did not know of a plot to poison the king apart from what Aleyn told them. The examination of the old keeper of the jail John Wynsom revealed that, although he knew nothing of treason, he was aware of a plan by prisoners Aleyn, John Chesselade and others to escape their incarceration.<sup>9</sup> While Fitzjames continued his investigation into both the attempt on the king's life and the planned escape from the jail, Chesselade told the justice of another prisoner John Ricardis who knew several prophecies. Ricardis repeated a prophecy about a white hare that would run a white greyhound into the roots of an oak tree.<sup>10</sup> As no one in the jail undertook an interpretation of the prophecy, the saying was harmless, but Chesselade further asserted that Ricardis predicted the king's death saying that Henry VIII would be driven from his realm and killed at the gates of Paris. Chesselade explained that Ricardis heard the prophecies near Warminster in Wiltshire six years before from a man named Horlock. Ricardis continued to prophesy an end to the kings of England saying, "ther shulde be suche a gappe in the West that all the thornes in the realme shuld nott stoppe it" and that after "ther shulde oon com owte of the West that shulde bryng snowe upon his helmete that shulde sett all england in peas [peace]".<sup>11</sup>

The prophesying apparently began when word of Rhys ap Gruffydd's death reached the jail. Ricardis explained that a conversation began about war, and he contributed to the discussion the prophecies told to him by Horlock nine or ten years

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<sup>8</sup>E 36/120, fols. 76-76 verso [LP Henry VIII. V, 759].

<sup>9</sup>SP 1/237, fol. 121 [LP Henry VIII. Addenda. i, 768].

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 123 verso.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

earlier.<sup>12</sup> Ricardis denied, however, that he had ever spoken of the king. None of the prison inmates knew what the prophecies meant or undertook to interpret them. Ricardis asserted that he repeated Horlock's prophecies to find out if anyone else knew what they meant, but no one did.<sup>13</sup> Chesselade and the other prisoners who deposed that they did not know of the prophecies, Alexander Parker and William Davy, all declared that they did not understand the predictions.<sup>14</sup> None of the prisoners believed that Ricardis' prophecies were treasonous and all maintained that they knew of no treason against the king except that referred to by Peter Aleyn. After taking the depositions of the inmates of Ilchester jail, Fitzjames informed Henry VIII of his conclusion that Aleyn invented the conspiracy to prompt his early release.<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Thomas Cromwell later in the month Fitzjames revealed that the king decided not to pursue Aleyn's assertion of a conspiracy to against him. Regarding the prophecies Fitzjames wrote, "it weer great pitie that a noble p[erson] shuld any thyng regard it/ And yn my mynd he that spake it [is] a vere innocent".<sup>16</sup> Henry VIII directed Fitzjames to inquire further into the prophesyings but there is no evidence to suggest that he did so.

In 1533 a collection of state papers included the "ungracious rehearsals" of Mistress Amadas, possibly the wife of a previous master of the king's jewel-house Robert Amadas.<sup>17</sup> The documentation explains little about Amadas or how judicial authorities dealt with her prophesying. The comprehensive list of her sayings revealed that Amadas adhered to her predictions for more than twenty years and that she believed 1533 was

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 126 verso.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 127.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 123 verso, 125, 126.

<sup>15</sup>SP 1/69, fol. 115 [LP Henry VIII. V, 793].

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 136 [LP Henry VIII. V, 830].

<sup>17</sup>BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E iv, fols. 99-100 [LP Henry VIII. VI, 923].

the year of their fulfilment.<sup>18</sup> Amadas openly attacked the king, calling him a moldwarp and prophesying his expulsion from the realm and death during a battle of priests. The Scottish would conquer England, declared Amadas, and afterward the “clobbes of Essex shall fryve them forth agan and a busshe in Essex shalbe worth a castell in Kent”.<sup>19</sup> Amadas’ prophecies often alluded to the usurpation of Henry VIII’s government of his realm and cryptically referred to a religious or dead man who would hold a parliament of peace in the Tower of London. Amadas did not hold Henry VIII in high esteem, as the recorder of the list of her sayings wrote, “she daly defameth and slandreth the kyngs highnes and his nobles sprituall and temporall with her contenuall raylyngs of bawdry and lecherye”.<sup>20</sup> Like her own husband, Henry VIII deserted his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, and Amadas was sympathetic to the plight of the dowager queen. In a conversation with George Whitenall, Amadas protested, “teyshe the devylls strawe I care not for the kynge a reshe under my fote”.<sup>21</sup> A witness to her conversation with Whitenall thought Amadas was “madde or elles distracte”. For the Tudor historian G.R. Elton Amadas’ belief that the king tried to seduce her and “make her a hoore” confirms his suspicion that she was not sane and provides sufficient evidence that she avoided prosecution as a result of her illness.<sup>22</sup> Amadas knew the danger of her prophesying, acknowledging both that others saw her as a witch and that if time did not reveal the truth of her prophecies, in particular her prediction that Queen Anne would burn to death at the stake, “she will be bornte her selfe”.<sup>23</sup> Despite the treasonous nature of Amadas’ prophecies, her fate is unknown.

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 99.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 99 verso.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 99.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 99 verso; Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup>BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E iv, fol. 100.

Allusion to a battle of priests, referred to by Amadas in her book of prophecies, was common talk among the clergy and common people. In May 1535 one of the commissioners for the suppression of religious houses Thomas Arundell informed Thomas Cromwell of another incident of such talk by a man named Alexander Clavell. The case revealed the extensive repetition of prophetic speculations but also demonstrated how idle chat could expose more threatening prophecies. In conversation Clavell commented, “hit was a hevye world and was lyke to be worse shortly for he had herd say that the prystes wold ryse ageyne the kyng”.<sup>24</sup> Clavell maintained that his prophecy would soon come to pass because the clergy “pay so moche mony to the kyngs grace”.<sup>25</sup> After tracking down the source of the saying, an educated man who died several years before, Arundell discovered the whole prophecy that “the prystes shuld make a feld” and

rule the reame iii dayes and iii nyghts and then the whit fawcon shuld come oute off the northe west and kyll allmost all the prystes and they that shuld eskape shuld be fayne to hyde ther crowne with the fylthe off bests bycause they wold not betakyn for prysts.<sup>26</sup>

Although Clavell appeared not to have suffered for his comments about the clergy, after the Pilgrimage of Grace of 1536 others were not so lucky.

As in cases against the clergy, the year of the rebellion in the north of England was a turning point in the prosecution of commoners who adhered to non-scriptural prophecies. In January 1536 Hugh Latham was unfortunate enough to suffer imprisonment for commenting about Woburn Abbey that, “yt and other mo[re] shold downe or twelvetyde”.<sup>27</sup> Although Latham denied the charge, Cromwell kept him on

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<sup>24</sup>SP 1/92, fol. 194 [LP Henry VIII. VIII, 736].

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., fol. 194 verso.

<sup>27</sup>SP 1/101, fol. 5 [LP Henry VIII. X, 5].

remand to await trial.<sup>28</sup> In May 1537 Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, informed Cromwell about the treasonous conversation of two Suffolk men, Richard Bishop of Bungay and Robert Seyman of Wutton.<sup>29</sup> The seriousness of the discussion between Bishop and Seyman, which took place on a hot day at Tyndale Wood in Suffolk earlier in the month, resulted from their comments about the king. Meeting by chance, Bishop chose to reveal to Seyman his prophecies, thinking that Seyman was a trustworthy and plain man to whom he could “open hys mynde unto”.<sup>30</sup> After expressing his dissatisfaction with the constant surveillance of his conversations with others by the king’s constables in Bungay, Bishop asked Seyman to come to Bungay where he could show and read to him many prophecies.<sup>31</sup>

Bishop declared that a rebellion of the people would take place during the year and echoed Mistress Amadas’ sayings by referring to Henry VIII as a mole who would “be subduyt and put down”.<sup>32</sup> Bishop continued to prophesy about Edward Stanley, earl of Derby, and Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, both of whom participated in putting down the Pilgrimage of Grace, and suggested that the pilgrims would prevail against the king. Finally, Bishop asserted without explanation, “thre kyngs shall mete at mos[hold] heathe and the prowdest pute in crystendome shuld be ther subduyt and that the whyte lyon shuld stey att that besynes at lengt[h] and shuld obtayne”.<sup>33</sup> Henry VIII believed that Bishop and Seyman deserved harsh punishment for their discussion of such prophecies, particularly because several copies of similar predictions were circulating at the time. Bishop came dangerously close to inciting rebellion with his sayings and

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*; see also SP 1/101, fol. 6 [LP Henry VIII. X, 6].

<sup>29</sup>SP 1/120, fol. 100 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1212].

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 102.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 102 verso.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 103.

clearly supported the rebels. Seyman deposed that Bishop asserted, “if three hundrethe good fellowes werre to gyther that they shuld have company inough to subdue the gentillmen”.<sup>34</sup> After his examination of the offenders, Brandon commented about Bishop’s reference to the rebellion, “I thynke surely he spake theym” but neither “by fayremeanes nor be fowlle I can make hym confesse”.<sup>35</sup> After receiving from Cromwell the king’s orders for the fate of Bishop and Seyman, Brandon replied to the councillor assuring him that he “shall not fayle, god willing to accomlishe the kyngs plea[sure]” and ensure their punishment.<sup>36</sup>

In the next month, June 1537, a group of examiners from the Hertfordshire town of Royston and from York heard the confession of Robert Dalyvell concerning his comments about the king. Dalyvell admitted he prophesied that the king “shall not lyve nor be on lyve amonth after the feast of the nativities of Saynte John baptiste” unless “he do amende his condicions”.<sup>37</sup> Dalyvell also declared that within a year a horse worth ten shillings would carry all the noble blood of England.<sup>38</sup> When Cromwell heard of Dalyvell’s case he became interested, not in what Dalyvell said, but in what he knew of sentiments about the king in Scotland. During his visit to Scotland the year before Dalyvell had heard several prophecies. Cromwell drew up a list of questions to ask Dalyvell that Edward Walsingham, lieutenant of the Tower, delivered to him on 12 June. Cromwell wanted to know why Dalyvell went to Scotland, with whom he associated while he was there and what he heard in the country about England.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 100.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 202 [LP Henry VIII. XII. i, 1284]; Dodds and Dodds argue on the basis of Brandon’s letter that the king ordered the execution of Bishop and Seyman, but the document reveals no explicit evidence that this occurred. Dodds and Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, II, p. 176.

<sup>37</sup>BL MS Cotton Cleopatra E iv, fol. 159 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 74].

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>SP 1/121. fol. 93 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 74].

Dalyvell explained that he went to Scotland to learn the craft of a saddler in Edinburgh. While in Edinburgh, Dalyvell heard several Scottish men repeat prophecies from a book that “ther kyng shulde be kyng Englund & crownyd yn london byfore mydsomer day or wythyn one monyth after shalbe thre yerys”.<sup>40</sup> Dalyvell revealed that the Scottish often speculated about the succession of their king to the English throne and “rede the prophecyes of marlyn [Merlin] yn hys heryng”.<sup>41</sup>

Despite Walsingham’s harsh questioning, during which the lieutenant submitted Dalyvell to “the rack & ther streynyd hym usyng suche cyrcumstances as my pore wytt wolde extende to”, the apprentice saddler did not name any prophesiers in England.<sup>42</sup> Judicial authorities worked hard, as is evidenced by the examination of Bishop and Dalyvell, to extract possibly treasonous information from prophesiers. Like Bishop, Dalyvell suffered as a result of judicial interest in his prophetic speculations having both his ears removed. However, this experience did not deter Dalyvell and a year later he committed a similar offence. On 23 December 1538 Henry Bouchier, earl of Essex, reported to Cromwell that Dalyvell repeated one of his prophecies in Royston.<sup>43</sup> The year 1537 ended with the unrevealing case of Richard Laund, a pinner of Norwich. An informant Roger Touneshend wrote to Cromwell in August revealing that Laund read from a paper of prophecies that he enclosed with his letter.<sup>44</sup> Cromwell’s reaction to the matter is unknown.

During 1537 Henry VIII’s only legitimate son, Edward, was born. The fate of Edward and his reign soon formed the basis of several prophetic discussions. The only

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<sup>40</sup>BL MS Cotton Caligula B I, fol. 130 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 80].

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 130 verso.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 131.

<sup>43</sup>SP 1/140, fol. 125 [LP Henry VIII. XIII. ii, 1090].

<sup>44</sup>SP 1/124, fol. 132 [LP Henry VIII. XII. ii, 602].



case of 1538 involving a commoner was that of Richard Swann, a servant from Hounslow, who asserted that “he should be killed that never was born”.<sup>45</sup> Swann believed that his prophecy referred to Prince Edward because during the birth of the prince doctors cut the boy from his mother’s womb.<sup>46</sup> In August 1539 judicial authorities examined several people who heard John Ryan, a fruiterer and keeper of an inn at Aldgate, repeat an old prophecy attributed to Merlin.<sup>47</sup> The mariner Roger Dicons [Dickens] and tinker John Wessell heard Ryan discuss the prophecy about Prince Edward while they were having breakfast at Ryan’s lodging house, situated at the sign of the bell on Tower Hill in London. During the conversation the men talked of the Irish wars and toasted the king and his young son before Ryan revealed that a prophesier who owned many books of prophecies told him that, “Edward shold succed henry & were [sic] the crown of Englonde And that ther shold be more murder and traytours in his tyme then were in all the tyme of kyng henry his ffader”.<sup>48</sup> However, Dicons and Wessel remembered only Ryan’s treasonous comments about the royal family and description of the king and his son as murderers. Ryan, deposed Wessel, declared the prince was a murderer because he killed his mother at birth, while Dicons maintained that when he asked Ryan why he thought the king was a murderer he replied, “ht apperd dayly howe men of worshipp as lords & state were murthred”.<sup>49</sup> By 31 August Ryan and Dicons were prisoners at the king’s convenience.<sup>50</sup> Ryan maintained in his examination that his prophecies derived from a pursuivant named

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<sup>45</sup>Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 59.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>SP 1/153, fols. 5-5 verso [LP Henry VIII. XIV. ii, 11].

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 50 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. ii, 73].

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 5-5 verso.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 74-75 [LP Henry VIII. XIV. ii, 102].

Robert, “a connyng prophesier & the best chronacler in Englonde”.<sup>51</sup> Dicon and a fellow prisoner Robert Harvey deposed to the clerks of the Counter, the place of their imprisonment, that during his incarceration Ryan attempted to coax Robert into coming to the prison and take the blame for Ryan’s seditious talk; however, the prophesier refused to appear.<sup>52</sup>

During August 1539 the result of another case of interest in prophecies was dramatic and final. While dining with friends John Northbrook and Adam Wilcocks, the Exeter attorney John Bonenfant began to speculate about the future of the realm and certain prophecies.<sup>53</sup> During their conversation the three men discussed the identity of Henry VIII as the moldwarp cursed by God and a Welsh prophecy about a bull and a dun cow. The prophecies appeared on a piece of paper that they burned after deciding that the prophecies foreshadowed the king’s downfall. Following their conversation Northbrook and Wilcocks feared that Bonenfant, with his legal knowledge, would initiate an indictment against them as the two men acknowledged that their interpretations of the prophecies were treasonous. To avoid their prosecution the two men informed on Bonenfant. Judicial authorities set up a commission of inquiry and found Bonenfant guilty of high treason for saying that the king was a moldwarp who would undermine the stability of the realm.<sup>54</sup> Bonenfant’s punishment consisted of death by hanging and quartering.

In 1542 parliament passed the first act against prophecy. Although the enactment of the legislation against prophecy may have increased the number of offenders appearing before the judiciary in the last years of Henry VIII’s reign, the

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 50 verso.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 74.

<sup>53</sup>Furnivall, ed., *Ballads from Manuscripts*, I, p. 476.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 476-477.

legislation did not ensure their conviction or harsher punishment. The privy council dealt with most individuals who prophesied during the 1540s and 1550s; however, the court released or imprisoned the majority of people prophesying during this period. Unfortunately, only scant knowledge of many of these individuals and their sayings exists because the record of their examination is missing. On 16 January 1542, for example, the proceedings of the privy council revealed that a man named Fulke Piggott from London appeared before the councillors. All that is known of the case is that the privy councillors released Piggott on his own recognisance on the condition that he delivered to the council all books or scrolls of prophecies in his possession and promised never to prophesy again in word or deed.<sup>55</sup> Similarly scant records of cases included that of John More, who told several people in 1544 that Henry VIII was not the supreme head of the church and discussed other treasonable matters concerning the King, his realm and prophecy.<sup>56</sup> All the evidence that survives today is the privy council record that the king pardoned More and two other men, William Daunce and the clerk Roger Ireland, for their participation in the treasonous conversation.<sup>57</sup> On 28 August of the following year the privy council imprisoned Thomas Yemans of Berekeley in Oxfordshire because he was “seeming to be in a frensie” and declared that God sent him a message to give to Henry VIII.<sup>58</sup> On 1 September the council received further information about Yemans who the council decided after examination was a harmless and “foolishe prophete”.<sup>59</sup> Before his arrest Yemans roamed the country and the council ordered the

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<sup>55</sup>Harris Nicolas, ed., *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (London, 1837), VII, p. 293.

<sup>56</sup>Patent Rolls, 36 Henry VIII. 748. ix, m. 32 [LP Henry VIII. IX. i, 444]; Patent Rolls, 36 Henry VIII. 762. xxiii, m. 11 [LP Henry VIII. XX. i, 282].

<sup>57</sup>Patent Rolls, 36 Henry VIII. 748. ix, m. 32; Patent Rolls, 36 Henry VIII. 762. xxiii, m. 11; LP Henry VIII. XIX. i, 6.

<sup>58</sup>APC, I, p. 236.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, I, pp. 238-239.

investigation of Yemans' father and other associates to glean more information about his sayings. However, the privy councillors soon agreed to release Yemans after he repented and was "nowe come to himself".<sup>60</sup> Yemans identified the cause of his behaviour by explaining that he had "been seduced for the love of a woman".<sup>61</sup>

The privy council records for 1546, however, reveal an unusually detailed case for the period demonstrating that non-scriptural prophecies often served as a means of expressing the desired outcome of current political events, but rarely exposed a connection between the prophesier and active participation in the events they discussed. This well documented case concerned Richard Laynam, an itinerant prophet arrested several times during the reign of Henry VIII. Laynam's prophecies mainly concerned the unrest in the north of England and the king's supremacy over the church. On 7 June 1546 the privy council imprisoned Laynam in the Tower and William Weston, a luteplayer to whom Laynam revealed several of his prophecies, in the Porter's Lodge.<sup>62</sup> Weston, Laynam and another acquaintance, Robert Barker, confessed the extent of their crimes a few days later on the 9 June. Weston knew Laynam the longer than Barker after he met the prophet in about 1529 at the house of a man named Mountepeson in Wiltshire.<sup>63</sup> While the men were at Mountepeson's home, Laynam told Weston what events to expect in the coming decade and revealed that many battles would take place in England, referring to one in particular involving a conflict with the Scots in the north of England. Laynam declared, "there sholde a cock of the north busk himself" and "there sholde rise a dead man at whiche tym [time] the hote bathes sholde

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<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 249.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>APC, I, p. 449; LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1013.

<sup>63</sup>SP 1/220, fol. 60 [LP Henry VIII. XXI. i, 1027].

be cold and further said the kynges maiestie sholde have vi or vii wives".<sup>64</sup> During the Pilgrimage of Grace Weston met Laynam again and "demanded how and to what point thinsurrecion then in the north partes wolde grow".<sup>65</sup> Weston asserted that a few years later judicial authorities arrested Laynam "for wordes".<sup>66</sup> A letter from Thomas Cromwell to Henry VIII in 1538 confirmed that Cromwell examined Laynam at this time, as Weston confessed, but decided he was merely a "mad prophet".<sup>67</sup> According to Weston, Cromwell released Laynam after six months as a prisoner in the Porter's Lodge. However, Laynam continued to prophesy, despite his imprisonment, and when Weston saw him twelve months later, Laynam predicted that "a king be torn [sic] with the feete of a moile" and "further said there sholde be a pope within Englonde and that charing Crosse sholde be taken down to pave a markett place".<sup>68</sup> Finally, Weston confessed that he spoke to Laynam again only the week before at which time Laynam confirmed his suspicion that Henry VIII was the last of the six kings referred to by Merlin. The prophecy of the six kings was well known to Weston, who argued that Henry VIII could not be the last king "for that the bore was not com", but Laynam called him a fool and prophesied further that "the kinges majestie sholde be gladde to gev three partes of his realm to kepe the foureth in peace".<sup>69</sup> Throughout his confession Weston maintained that he did not understand and so could not offer an interpretation of Laynam's prophecies, although he plied the prophet for information about the rebellion in the north of England.

Laynam confessed that he conversed with Weston and Barker about several

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., fol. 60 verso.

<sup>67</sup>LP Henry VIII. XIV. i, 806.

<sup>68</sup>SP 1/220, fols. 60 verso-61.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., fol. 61.

prophecies, but revealed little else about himself. As Weston inferred, Laynam's prophecies dealt with current events, in particular an insurrection of priests and commoners and the king's break with Rome. In 1546 Laynam and his acquaintances continued eagerly to await retribution for Henry VIII prompted by his alteration of the church in England. Laynam declared that he read or saw a prophecy that,

tote abowt and tak good hede at midsomer cometh a newe mone men shall see it doon in deade that cocok tyme shall come eftsoon and betwixte three and sixe (meaning therby the date of our Lorde betwixt xliii & xlvi) all shalbe doon then beware the crosse and the Crosses bothe and all those that will the crosses found yo[ur] wickednesse will worke you woo [woe].<sup>70</sup>

Laynam referred to a book in which Bede prophesied, "godde wolde vengeons [vengeance] tak when all mglonde [England] is a loste meaning therby when the king hath expulsed the Bisshoppe of Rome".<sup>71</sup> Laynam concluded from interpreting his prophecies that 1546 was the year that God would seek vengeance against the king.<sup>72</sup> When Barker suggested that Henry VIII would leave his realm, Laynam argued that the priests and clerks would force the king to flee, but that he would return with the help of a "lion rampion in silver sette with ermign free" or the Lord Privy Seal.<sup>73</sup> Discussion of rebellion leading to the king's forced abandonment of his realm was of great concern to those who examined Laynam and Weston. Barker's confession suggested that he was more of a witness to than participant in Laynam's prophetic conversations. Barker asserted that Weston told him about Laynam's prophecy that unknown forces would drive the king from England and further stated, "men shalbe oppressed and the comons shall be so handled that they will make insurreccion".<sup>74</sup> As a result the examiners

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., fol. 64.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., fol. 64 verso.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., fol. 65.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., fol. 68.

specifically asked Weston and Laynam if they knew any one “which sholde be the stirrer or mover of any comocon” against the king. Both men denied any involvement in rebellious activities contrary to the laws of England. The case of Richard Laynam revealed that although some commoners turned to prophetic discussion of events taking place around them, their interest rarely led to active involvement in dissent.

Several individuals suffered arrest and examination for their involvement with prophecies during the 1550s. As in the decade before, the content of the prophecies repeated was obscure, but punishment usually involved imprisonment or setting the offender on a scaffold or in a pillory. The chronicler Charles Wriothesley observed that in September 1550 a poulter from Surrey named Gryg was the subject of judicial interest for his popularity in London as a prophet. Gryg also took to “curing divers people but with speaking prayers on them, sayinge he tooke noe money, so that people would followe him as yf he had bene a God”.<sup>75</sup> John Dudley, earl of Warwick, examined Gryg and sentenced him to a period on the scaffold at Crowden and Southwark. In May the following year the privy council placed a Cambridgeshire man William Tassell into the custody of the Master of the Horses “for casting of figures and prophesieng”.<sup>76</sup> However, the council released Tassell and his accomplice, “oone Preston” from Suffolk, the next month because they were unable to substantiate their crimes.<sup>77</sup> In April 1552 John Clerk, secretary of Thomas Howard, third duke of Norfolk, was not so lucky. The council committed Clerk to the Tower indefinitely describing him as “a reporter abroade of certaine lewde prophecies and other slaunderous matters touching the Kinges Majestie and dyvers noble men of his Councell”.<sup>78</sup> The council also imprisoned another

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<sup>75</sup>Wriothesley's *Chronicle*, p. 42.

<sup>76</sup>APC, III, p. 279.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, III, p. 300.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 13; Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, p. 27.

man “one Hartlepool” to the Fleet “for being privie and a doer with the sayd Clerk in his lewde demeanor”.<sup>79</sup>

During the second half of 1552 the privy council punished four men for reporting “lewede” prophecies. In June the council sent instructions to one of their officers Anthony Auchier ordering him to put “one Rogers” on the pillory for seditiously repeating prophecies.<sup>80</sup> In October the council sent instructions to Francis Talbot, earl of Shewsbury, asking him to arrest “one Lytser” and search his house in York for books or writings of prophecy.<sup>81</sup> At the end of the year, in November, the council imprisoned both David Clover from Bath and John Davies in the Tower for repeating prophecies. On 14 June 1553 the privy councillors ordered the arrest and imprisonment in the Tower of William Cossey and sent a letter to Henry Radcliffe, earl of Sussex, instructing him to send them a servant named Neweton.<sup>82</sup> The council also wished to review Neweton’s “bookes touching prophesies or other inconvenient matters”.<sup>83</sup> Later in the same month an entry in the diary of London resident Henry Machyn demonstrated common resort to the use of the scaffold and pillory as a punishment for those repeating prophecies or pretending to embody the spirit of prophecy. Machyn observed that a post was set in the ground in Chep where a young man stood “ted to the post, [with a collar] of yron a-bowt ys neke, and a-nodur to the post with [a chain; and] ij men with ij whypes wpyng hym a-bowt the post, [for pretended] vessyones, and for obbrobyus and sedyssyus wordes”.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>APC, IV, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 156.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, IV, p. 287.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>John Gough Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, From A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563* (London, 1848) [Camden Society. Old Series, XLII], p. 34.



Although Queen Mary ascended to the throne in 1553, at which time parliament revoked the Edwardian law against prophecy, the treatment of prophesiers during the rest of the 1550s did not alter from the way the council dealt with them previously. On 13 February 1554 an examiner questioned the Herefordshire gentleman James Croft about his involvement with John Davies, “a soothsayer”, who was probably the same Davies that the council incarcerated in 1552.<sup>85</sup> Croft participated in a conspiracy against Mary, prompted by her agreement to marry the heir to the Spanish throne Phillip II in March 1554.<sup>86</sup> The Council of the Marches arrested Croft in February after the rebel Thomas Wyatt raised an armed force of three thousand men in Kent.<sup>87</sup> Although the council imprisoned Croft for his involvement in the uprising, he denied any familiarity with Davies leaving no evidence of a relationship between the Wyatt rebellion and adherence to non-scriptural prophecies. On 6 July 1554 authorities prepared a scaffold for a young woman Elizabeth Croft who “spake in the wall and wustelyd in Althergat stret” in London.<sup>88</sup> The woman believed she heard prophetic voices in the wall, but later revealed that the voice belonged to John Drakes, a servant of the knight Anthony Knevett.<sup>89</sup> In September the privy council imprisoned an owner of written prophecies “one Creswelle” from Harting, Sussex.<sup>90</sup> The decade ended with the case of Nicholas Colman who told the mayor of Norwich, John Aldrich, that he knew from “certain visions and dreams that he had in his sleep” the city would soon burn down.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>CSPD Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth 1547-1580. III, 23.

<sup>86</sup>Guy, *Tudor England*, pp. 231-232.

<sup>87</sup>R.E. Ham, “The Autobiography of Sir James Croft”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, L (1977), p. 53 n. 8.

<sup>88</sup>Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, pp. 66, 339.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>90</sup>APC, V, p. 76.

<sup>91</sup>Rye, ed., *Depositions Taken Before*, pp. 61-62.

In the next few years, after Queen Elizabeth succeeded her sister Mary, the diarist Henry Machyn noted two prophets that came to the attention of judicial authorities in London. On the pillory in February 1561 was a scrivener from Southwark that the judiciary arrested for “sondrys and practyses of grett falsode and mucche on-trowthe”.<sup>92</sup> Judicial authorities also placed a collar around the man’s neck because he was soothsaying.<sup>93</sup> In 1562 Machyn recorded that the bishop of Durham, James Pilkington, gave a sermon at Greenwich before the queen against Helyas (Elizeus) Hall, a draper who experienced visions and was popular in London as a prophet.<sup>94</sup> The bishop of London, Edmund Grindal, arrested and examined Hall before Pilkington’s sermon during which the draper confessed that he was a special messenger, who had visited both heaven and hell, sent by God to the queen.<sup>95</sup> In the following year the Elizabethan parliament passed the third law against prophecies prompted, as stated in the act, by the attempts of certain individuals to encourage dissent through their dissemination of non-scriptural prophecies.<sup>96</sup>

After the passing of the 1563 act against prophecy the assize judges, who increasingly became the main judicial authority dealing with those disseminating or adhering to prophecies, heard several cases against individuals repeating non-scriptural prophecies. One such person was Peter Turner, a yeoman who repeated seditious words in Maidstone, Kent, in May 1568. According to Turner’s indictment he said, “That this yere shulde be a plentyfull yere and that the next yere following shulde be greate trouble

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<sup>92</sup>Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, p. 251.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 284, 390.

<sup>95</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 157.

<sup>96</sup>SR, IV, p. 445.

and greate death".<sup>97</sup> Turner also declared, "there shulde be greate slaughter and happy shulde that man be that shulde have one to stande by hym in hys quarrell".<sup>98</sup> The assize jury found Turner guilty and sentenced him to imprisonment for a year and a fine of £10. While Turner's prophesyings appeared innocuous, judicial authorities considered those of Mr Bircles in Chester more sinister. In 1569 a group of inhabitants of the town of Chinley in Derbyshire gathered together to protest about the enclosure of some common land.<sup>99</sup> In defiance of the queen's officers the inhabitants "did ryotously assemble themselves together in great companies . . . with unlawfull weapons, that is to saye, with bowes, pytchefforkes, clobbes, staves, swords, and daggers drawn".<sup>100</sup> When judicial authorities examined several of the rioters they concentrated on finding out if any of them did "confederate, consulte, practise, or otherwise confer and talk" with the prophesier named Bircles.<sup>101</sup> The examiners inquired about the rioters' knowledge of prophecies in the possession of Bircles and "what is the effect thereof".<sup>102</sup> The judicial officers feared that Bircles' sayings encouraged the uprising in Derbyshire or that Bircles was attempting to incite the townsfolk to more serious dissent through his prophecies.

In 1569 the rebellion of the northern earls began during which time some individuals sought prophetic support for the unrest. In July 1572 Henry Lord Scrope and Richard, bishop of Carlisle, examined some associates of Lawrence Bannister, officer general in the North for Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk.<sup>103</sup> Bannister participated in

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<sup>97</sup>ASSI 35/10/5, m. 5 [J.S. Cockburn, ed., Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments Elizabeth I (London, 1979), p. 77].

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>R.H. Tawney gives a full account of the incident in The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century (New York, 1969), pp. 327-329.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>CSPD Elizabeth 1566-1579. XXI, 76.

Howard's conspiracy with the earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland to usurp Queen Elizabeth's throne. Scrope and Carlisle interviewed several men in connection with Bannister's activities including a yeoman from Duston in Westmoreland, Edward Elwold. While Bannister and his men were staying at Rockcliffe castle, Cumberland, during the revolt, Bannister asked Elwold what he knew of prophecies concerning the duke of Norfolk.<sup>104</sup> Elwold replied, "I have hard a prophecye spoken of, that the hound shold chace the whyet lyon to Berwicke".<sup>105</sup> Bannister interpreted the prophecy to mean that Leonard Dacre would follow the duke of Norfolk to Berwick, but he was sceptical that Dacre would do anything so predictable. Bannister declared that he did not believe in the prophecy and so the prediction was irrelevant to Bannister's decision to rebel against the queen. At the end of 1572 John a Wood, a trugger from Mayfield, appeared before the assize judges at East Grinstead in Sussex.<sup>106</sup> Wood talked of future wars in the north of England involving the Scottish, perhaps inspired by the previous unrest in that part of the country and the flight of Dacre into Scotland to seek asylum and support for the northern rising. However, Wood also prophesied about events closer to home saying, "the Earle of Leicester shall marrye the Quene and shalbe crowned Kynge and shall reigne three monethes and then shalbe slayne at London, and the Quenes majestie put from her crowne and dignitie".<sup>107</sup> The assize jury sentenced Wood to imprisonment for one year and ordered that he be set on the pillory.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>SP 15/21, fol. 160 [CSPD Elizabeth 1566-1579. XXI, 76. iii]; Rockcliffe castle was part of the Dacre inheritance acquired by the Howard family when Thomas Howard gained the wardship of the Dacre heirs following his marriage to Elizabeth, widow of Thomas Dacre, in 1567. Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, pp. 116-119, 191.

<sup>105</sup>SP 15/12, fol. 160.

<sup>106</sup>ASSI 35/14/6, m. 22 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex*, p. 88].

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>Wood also appeared before the assize sessions in March 1571 for seditious words against several members of the queen's council. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex*, p. 71.

In the aftermath of the uprising in the north of England judicial authorities maintained their vigilance in seeking out those referring to prophecies. One of the queen's officials in the north of England William Wharton, from Ripon in Yorkshire, was given the task of tracking down non-scriptural prophecies. Wharton was active in his pursuit of prophecies at least since November 1571, when he wrote a letter to Elizabeth apologising because he did not succeed in his mission "for the revealing and unfolding of the Quene of Scottes secret practises . . . and also for the bringinge unto youre majestie owne handes a booke of prophesies wherein youre highnes is so largelie touched with dishonour".<sup>109</sup> In February 1574 Wharton petitioned the Council of the North about the continued unrest, following the rebellion of the duke of Norfolk and the northern earls, and his problems in attempting to identify those stirring up discontent in the north. In particular, Wharton asked the council to send for John Molineaux, a justice of the peace in the north riding of Yorkshire, who gave Wharton a book of prophecies denigrating the queen.<sup>110</sup> Wharton hoped that through Molineaux the council would find the author of the prophecy.<sup>111</sup> As the privy councillor Francis Walsingham and Henry Hastings, President of the Council of the North, explained to the queen, Wharton believed the prophecy could encourage dissidents to rebel further.<sup>112</sup> The information Wharton gave the council about the prophecy and individuals who were "receiving and supporting persons guilty of the late rebellion and . . . giving and receiving intelligence from undutiful subject" apparently endangered his life.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>CSPD Elizabeth 1547-1580. LXXXIII, 28.

<sup>110</sup>SP 15/23, fol. 112 [CSPD. Add. 1566-1579. XXIII, 41. i].

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>CSPD Add. XXIII, 44.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

In 1575 Thomas Green appeared at the East Grinstead assizes accused of seditious words. Green, a Winchelsea merchant, complained about the state of religion in England to several others and hoped he would be able to attend mass at his local church within twelve months.<sup>114</sup> Green's indictment accused him of repeating the prophecy that, "When faithe fayleth in pristres sawes and lordes hestes ben taken for lawes, when lecherous lustes are counted for solace and stolen goodes called for purchase, than lett the Lande of Albeon loke sone for confucion".<sup>115</sup> However, the Grinstead jury found Green not guilty of saying the prophecy. The assize judges also acquitted the next man to appear before the sessions for an offence related to prophecy, although he appeared at the sessions nearly ten years later than Green. John Tusser, a gentleman from Tolleshunt D'Arcy, appeared at the Witham assizes in Essex on 29 July 1583 for "publishing false prophecies".<sup>116</sup> The record of indictment against Tusser echoed the parliamentary act against prophecy of 1563 stating that Tusser published "fantastical and false prophecies". Tusser's prophecies employed several animal images: "A lyon, a horse, a liberd shall crowne E. by the helpe of the great Egle".<sup>117</sup> The prophecies also spoke of the arrival of a "dead man" who would put the crownes of England on the head of the "Ryall E." who would "roote out all heresies cleane out of this realme restoringe the church and the Catholicke Faythe".<sup>118</sup> Despite the symbolic imagery of the prophecies, the meaning was clear.

In their pursuit of Catholic sympathisers in the north of England, Henry Scrope and John, bishop of Carlisle, examined Richard Kirkbride from Ellerton in 1584.<sup>119</sup> A

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<sup>114</sup>ASSI 35/17/3, m. 25 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex*, p. 105].

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, m. 27.

<sup>116</sup>ASSI 35/25/1, m. 37 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex*, p. 241].

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup>SP 15/28, fol. 163 [CSPD. Add. 1580-1625. XXVIII, 58].

search of Kirkbride's lodgings uncovered several prophecies in rhyme; however, Scope and Carlisle declared, "we can find nothing against him".<sup>120</sup> In the same year a Surrey assize jury in Croydon convicted John Carre, a yeoman of Southwark, of seditious words.<sup>121</sup> Carre asserted that a king of Scotland would rule England: "he hath harde say sundry and divers tymes that the Scottishe wyf shall have a sonnne that shall wynne all brittayne".<sup>122</sup> Other individuals prophesied a dramatic change within England, rather than an attack from outside the country. In February 1586 William Randall from Ipswich wrote to councillors Francis Walsingham and Christopher Hatton about some prophecies that Elizabeth Vessie of London heard repeated by a Lancashire woman named Jane Stanlie.<sup>123</sup> Stanlie told Vessie that she would "have a marvell of good fortune" and prophesied the return of Edward VI. Vessie would help the "kinge of this land", asserted Stanlie, and "bringe him in to his statt agene".<sup>124</sup> The result would cause great trouble for the queen and her council.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the demise of Queen Elizabeth was the main subject of prophetic speculation. On 24 August 1586 Sybil Horte and John Toye of Winterborne in Gloucester revealed to two justices of the peace that they heard Symon Yomans talk about a prophecy concerning the queen.<sup>125</sup> Horte and Toye maintained that in a conversation with Yomans, a labourer from Little Dean in Gloucester, about the failure of the harvest that year, Yomans said, "it wilbe worse before it be better".<sup>126</sup> Yomans declared he gained this information from a prophecy that

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 134-135 [CSPD. Add. 1580-1625. XXVIII, 58. v].

<sup>121</sup>ASSI 35/26/7, m. 25 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Surrey*, p. 262].

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup>SP 12/186, fol. 181 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CLXXXVI, 91].

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>SP 12/192, fol. 80 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CXCII, 50].

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

predicted three wars within the year signalling the death of the queen. When Horte replied, “god save her [the queen]”, Yomans insisted that god could not help Queen Elizabeth because “the profecie dothe speake that this is the laste yeare of her raigne”.<sup>127</sup> According to Horte and Toye, Yomans prophesied a merrier world after the queen’s death with fewer peers, but in his examination the labourer denied that he repeated the prophecy blaming a convenient loss of memory.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, on 22 October the same year justice of the peace Arthur Herrys wrote to the Lord Chancellor, Thomas Bromley, about John Whyte, a shoemaker from Rayleigh in Essex, who gave a speech denigrating the queen from his town stall.<sup>129</sup> Herrys examined several townspeople about Whyte’s speeches one of whom, Roger Foster, a smith from Rayleigh, recalled a conversation with Whyte who said that the queen “hath but a smale tyme to lyve”.<sup>130</sup> Most of Whyte’s sayings, however, related to religious issues and Herrys concluded that the shoemaker was a “lunatyk or of imperfect sence” who became “overstudyed with Anabaptystycall conceyets”.<sup>131</sup>

On 8 August 1594 William Barbor, a labourer from Hatfield Peveral in Essex, confessed to referring to a prophecy that “wheate wilbe at sixteene shillings a bushell shortely”.<sup>132</sup> Barbour’s comment, however, was harmless compared to the prophecies of two other men that appeared at the assizes in 1595 and 1600 that dealt with the future of the monarchy. The first was John Fuller, a smith from Heathfield in Sussex, who appeared before the judges in July accused of “repeating a contumacious prophesy”.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>SP 12/192, fol. 81 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CXCII, 51].

<sup>129</sup>SP 12/194, fol. 87 [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CVCIV, 57].

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., fol. 88 verso [CSPD Elizabeth 1581-1590. CVCIV, 57. i].

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., fol. 87.

<sup>132</sup>ASSI 35/36/2, m. 39 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex*, p. 427].

<sup>133</sup>ASSI 35/37/9, m. 43 [Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex*, p. 301].



Fuller referred to a book of prophecy and said, “the prophesie did shewe there should be a chaunge (Meaning the death of the queen) within seaven yeres, and then the boxe should rise and get the victorie, but he should enjoye it a short tyme but should be putt downe by a poole”.<sup>134</sup> Five years later a labourer from Dulwich in Surrey named George Barrett appeared at the Southwark assizes for “pronouncing prophesies”.<sup>135</sup> Barrett knew by a prophecy three hundred years old that the queen would soon no longer be monarch. Barrett revealed that by his prophecy “the Queene should live but three yeares and that this was the Whyte Sommer wherein should be rumors of warrs and noe warrs come to passe, which was spoken of in the prophesye”.<sup>136</sup> The jury decided that Barrett was innocent of the charge and released him from custody. In the last year of Elizabeth’s reign judicial authorities punished “one Butler”, a labourer from Elme near Wisebridge, with whipping for his prophesying.<sup>137</sup> After the death of the queen Butler continued to disseminate his prophecies prompting Thomas Lake, Viscount Cranborne, to suggest that he appear before King James’s chief justice or the privy council.<sup>138</sup>

In many cases involving the common people evidence is scant and does not reveal the result of judicial interest in individuals who repeated or adhered to non-scriptural prophecies. However, the evidence does suggest that, contrary to the belief of legislative authorities, few prophesying commoners actively participated in dissent during the sixteenth century. In many instances judicial authorities did not pursue charges against an individual or sentenced the offender to imprisonment or time on a pillory, as prescribed under laws against sedition. Only one commoner died as a result of

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>135</sup>ASSI 35/42/7, m. 27 [Cockburn, ed., Calendar of Assize Records: Surrey, p. 487].

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>HMS, Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury, XVII, p. 36.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-25.

prophetic talk, convicted not of prophesying, but of high treason. While the Henrician act against prophecy sanctioned the execution of individuals adhering to non-scriptural prophecies, the later two acts prescribed imprisonment and loss of possessions as suitable chastisements. However, the variety of punishments suffered by commoners who prophesied during the century, regardless of whether a statute against prophecy was in force, suggests a lack of consistency of indictment and the existence of a relatively autonomous judiciary. As with the nobility and the clergy, the common people appeared to find in non-scriptural prophecies a source of curiosity and hope, and an explanation of their dissatisfaction with their contemporary environment.

## CONCLUSION

“It is easy, in reading sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, to note the recurrence of certain ideas, and to assume that they recur because everyone accepted them. It is equally possible that they were repeated (often eloquently and emphatically) because they were under attack”.

Christopher Hill, “Censorship and English Literature” in Christopher Hill, The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill (Brighton, 1985), I, p. 33.

## CONCLUSION

Depictions of non-scriptural prophecies by the elite during the sixteenth century were inaccurate and often motivated by personal, theological or political concerns. Although the entirely objective historical source does not exist, modern commentators sometimes lose sight of the importance of assessing the value of documentation before using it in their work. As historians of popular culture have shown, elite sources are particularly fraught with difficulties when used as reflections of non-learned culture. Certainly the historian cannot take elite documentation at face value. Unfortunately, a tendency exists for modern scholars of prophecy to refer indiscriminately to material produced by an educated minority without attempting first to clarify the privileged and biased perspective of this work. Despite the problem of the sources, the characterisations of prophecies by the educated were not worthless. A careful analysis of elite commentary uncovers the concerns of Tudor authorities and the reasons for their vilification of prophecy during the century. However, examination of individual cases of adherence to prophecy reveals a disparity between literary and legislative depiction of the phenomenon and judicial reality.

Sixteenth-century writers used their treatises to denigrate non-scriptural prophecies as demonic and dangerous. Arguing from a theological perspective, writers asserted that only two types of prophecy existed. The first type derived from God, communicated directly from the divine to chosen individuals through revelation. The second type included all other prophecies identified by commentators as delusions created by the devil. Most critics argued that true prophecy no longer occurred and therefore all non-scriptural prophecies were false. This belief was a departure from the

medieval concept of prophecy that accepted its validity but noted that individual prophecies could have either a demonic or divine origin. Contrary to the impression propagated by critics, in the sixteenth century many people, including some Protestant theologians, continued to adhere to a medieval view of prophecy rather than deny its validity outright. Some critics asserted that non-scriptural prophecies turned individuals away from God but no evidence suggests that this occurred. People used prophecy to support and encourage both Protestantism and Catholicism, depending on their own beliefs, and to confirm the legitimacy of their religion. In some examples writers claimed prophecy encouraged a predetermined view of the world. However, those clerical adherents to prophecy who voiced their opposition to the Reformation in particular did so because their prophecies validated the need to actively pursue change, rather than passively await the inevitable.

Judicial proceedings revealed that those interested in non-scriptural prophecies included people from a broad range of social positions and occupations. Several noblemen, like Edward Stafford, Thomas Howard, Rhys ap Gruffydd, William Neville and Edward Neville, owned books of or read prophecies, an interest used in court to discredit their character and justify their indictment. Several lesser gentry like William Langdale, John Tusser and James Croft also adhered to prophecies, along with the government official Robert Crowley and the attorney John Bonnefant. Depositions of the period exposed as prophesiers three university educated men: Richard Jones, a scholar from the university of Oxford, Dr Austyn, a doctor of “phesyke and astronomy”, and a chronicler who was perhaps Robert Fayery. Other prophesiers like William Harlokke, Richard Laynam, Thomas Yemans and John Davies were itinerant and appeared to have turned their prophesying into an occupation. In 1532 the chief justice

investigated several prisoners at the Ilchester jail about their interest in a prophecy concerning Henry VIII but no other individuals who came to the attention of authorities were from the bottom of the social scale. Many commoners appeared in legal documentation of the period in relation to the spread of prophecies, in particular labourers, servants and clerks. Other occupations represented in legal proceedings included several yeomen, a merchant, a goldsmith, a tinker, a weaver, a saddler, a mariner, a fruiterer, a trugger, a draper, a poulter, a pinner, a smith, a shoemaker and a musician. Prophecies were also popular among the clergy that included abbots, vicars, priors, priests, parsons, friars, monks and a nun. Only three women appear in the documentation of the period for their involvement with prophecy.

Anti-prophetic treatises presented the main adherents of non-scriptural prophecies as simple, unlearned and credulous individuals. However, many different types of individuals owned books of prophecies or copied predictions from manuscript rolls borrowed from those with a similar interest. Contrary to the belief of some modern scholars, the oral dissemination of prophecies was not the only means of exchanging prophetic information in the sixteenth century. Individuals disseminated approximately two thirds of the non-scriptural prophecies revealed in this thesis in a written form. Many of the clergy in particular possessed books of prophecy that they read and circulated to others, like the abbot of Coggeshall William Love or the vicar of Mustone John Dobson; while prophecies often spread by word of mouth in religious houses. Other individuals such as the prophesier Richard Laynam or the goldsmith Richard Loweth also owned books of prophecies. Handwritten predictions were popular but printed material was rare. Edward Thwaytes and Edward Bocking both printed works on the sayings of Elizabeth Barton but Thomas Cromwell was quick to halt the

dissemination of these publications. In 1539 Cromwell corresponded with James V of Scotland seeking the king's co-operation in an attempt to halt a number of prophecies produced in Scotland but circulating in England. In 1583 John Tusser appeared before the assize judges in Witham for publishing a prophecy but the only other printed prophecies appeared in the works of anti-prophetic commentators. A lack of education and faith, in addition to lowly status, characterised the adherent to prophecy in the literature of the period. Evidence from court proceedings, however, suggests that the rich and the educated often adhered to non-scriptural prophecies, although predictably the majority of those who appeared before the courts were clergy or commoners.

Apart from documentation produced by the early modern judicial system, an examination of those who owned manuscript collections and other books of prophecies demonstrates considerable interest in prophecy by the elite. People from the middling ranks of society, like the parliamentarian Humphrey Welles, who owned the Rawlinson C. 813 manuscript, did not appear before authorities but were obviously fascinated with prophecies and collected them. Leading officers of England, like Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor Thomas More, possessed manuscript collections of prophecy, while other predictions appeared in commonly read works like Arthurian prose romances.<sup>1</sup> Only a cursory analysis of this type of evidence comes within the scope of this thesis; however, an extensive examination of noble and gentry libraries during the century would help determine the validity of comments by contemporary writers that prophecy was enormously popular. Pauline Croft, for example, in her study of early modern libels, a form of literature not unlike prophecies, found that country gentlemen often included

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<sup>1</sup>Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 150.

examples of the genre in their common place books.<sup>2</sup> Currently, any comment made by writers in the sixteenth century or by modern scholars about the number of adherents to prophecies during the Tudor period is suspect due the lack of a scale by which to measure levels of popularity. The number of individuals investigated by judicial authorities as a result of their interest in non-scriptural prophecies seems low. For the period 1509-1603 the number of cases averaged less than one a year. The measurement of prophesiers that came to the attention of authorities may, however, more accurately reflect the efficiency of Tudor policing than the popularity of the phenomenon.

Several writers noted that prophecies were politically influential. The devil, critics argued, used man's natural interest in non-scriptural prophecies to influence life on earth and in particular to create chaos. Commentator John Harvey noted an association between prophecy and rebellion, although literary works did not emphasise this connection as prominently as did the laws against prophecy. The Edwardian and Elizabethan statutes legislated against individuals who used prophecies "to the intent thereby to make any rebellion insurreccion discencion or losse of lyfe".<sup>3</sup> The acts specifically addressed those who invoked prophecies to "move" and "stirr" dissent within England. Both the second and third acts against prophecy indicated that, since the passing of the previous statute against the phenomenon, many individuals had sought to encourage opposition to the monarch through their appeal to non-scriptural prophecies. Recent scholars accentuate the importance of prophecy in rebellions of the period, a view seemingly substantiated by legislative evidence. Sharon Jansen, for example, writes in her work on political prophecies during the reign of Henry VIII,

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<sup>2</sup>Pauline Croft, "Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England", *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, LXVIII, no. 167 (1995), p. 273.

<sup>3</sup>SR, IV. i, p. 114.



The sanction political prophecies gave to sixteenth-century resistance cannot be emphasized enough, and this is one of its unique features. It is quite distinct from the more general interest in medieval prophecy in this respect, as noted by Robert E. Lerner, for example: “. . . resort to prophecy was meant to provide edification and comfort, not inspiration for insurrection”.<sup>4</sup>

However, during the sixteenth century no evidence supports Jansen’s inference that non-scriptural prophecies inspired rebellion or had in any way the force of a political “weapon, wielded deliberately, if sometimes wildly, by a very different class of person than Geoffrey of Monmouth, Froissart, or powerful families fighting for the interests of Lancaster or York”.<sup>5</sup>

On the contrary, considerable evidence suggests that for several noblemen prophecy supported and encouraged, rather than initiated, a history of opposition to the monarch prompted by political and dynastic conflict. Given the complexity of the grievances of men like Edward Stafford and Thomas Howard, that developed over many years, the attribution of their dissent solely to a single instance of adherence to prophecy is reductionist. For many clergy non-scriptural prophecies were a symbol of hope and an assurance of retribution for religious opponents. Only a minority of these individuals actively opposed the monarch, and even in such cases evidence suggests that others drew them into conspiracy. Elizabeth Barton’s ecclesiastic advisers manipulated her into seeking foreign support for a Catholic attempt to undermine the king, while the rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace used threats to cajole William Todde into contributing men to their cause. No evidence reveals the participation of prophesying commoners in rebellion.

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<sup>4</sup>Jansen, *Political Protest*, p. 148 n. 2.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

The nobility, clergy and commoner alike found in prophecy a convenient commentary of contemporary events that often expressed a political bias but in no way prompted or was a precursor of active revolt. Perhaps surprisingly, given the view propagated by recent scholars, many individuals found prophecies difficult to interpret or confessed that they did not understand them, suggesting that the appeal of prophecy may have rested in the genre's obscurity and reputation as a dangerous and illegal phenomenon. The lack of consistency in the interpretation of prophecies and the total inability of some individuals to comprehend them undermines the argument that prophecy was a weapon or vehicle of dissent. In order to function successfully as an expression of political opposition, those who appealed to prophecy needed to understand the meaning of the phenomenon; clearly many individuals did not.

Despite the limitations of elite documentation, literary works and legal material supported other evidence that adherents of prophecy came from all levels of sixteenth-century society. Individuals investigated by the judiciary derived from several social groups and participated in a single prophetic culture. Literary tracts similarly reflected the diversity of prophetic adherents, not only in the content but also in the readership of such works. Writers gave an abundance of theological and practical arguments against non-scriptural prophecies that mirrored their conception of their audience. Some writers relied on authoritative evidence and complex objections to persuade an educated audience familiar with classical and theological texts. Other works contained practical and accessible criticisms of prophecy easily understood by the less educated individual.

A work based on a profusion of authoritative evidence, anecdotal illustrations and technical arguments was Henry Howard's A Defensative Against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies. Howard wrote his treatise to clear himself of suspicion resulting

from his sympathy for Catholicism and the recent conviction of his brother Thomas Howard for treason. Howard's continual citation of Latin extracts from the Bible and ancient scholars, the density of his prose and even the reduced size of the print all contributed to the lack of accessibility of A Defensative and demonstrated that Howard envisaged an educated readership for his treatise. Another anti-prophetic work intended for a learned audience was William Covell's Polimanteia. The subject of Covell's treatise was the threat of divinatory sciences to the stability of the Commonwealth. Covell envisaged the majority of his audience, as the second half of his work shows, as English scholars, legislators and governors. Covell explained to his patron the earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, "I take upon me Englands person and speake like a Common-wealth", and addressed the latter part of his treatise, "A letter from England to her three daughters, Cambridge, Oxford, Innes of Court, and to all the rest of her inhabitants".<sup>6</sup>

In A Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophecies John Harvey envisaged a mixed readership for his treatise. Harvey explained that friends and "certaine worshipfull Gentlemen" encouraged him to write and to examine in particular the prophecies about 1588. Harvey wished to halt and to expose the abuse of astrology and other divinatory practices that deluded the common people. The learned, Harvey argued, had little need of his work as "few or none" of them "were ever addicted to the maintaining, fostering, or favouring of any such paultry", but "Simplicitie is soone persuaded, and beguiled".<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Harvey also observed that both the learned and common people "maketh great adooe" about well known prophecies, and so he

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<sup>6</sup>C[ovell], Polimanteia, sigs. () 2, () .

<sup>7</sup>Harvey, A Discursive, sig. B3 verso.

concluded, “I presume it a matter neither unprofitable to the one, nor unacceptable unto the other, to utter some reasonable part of my reading”.<sup>8</sup> Harvey considered his treatise valuable for the education of the common people and acceptable to the learned. However, A Discursive, like the work of Howard and Covell, rarely considered the common reader, included many quotations in Latin and relied largely on authoritative evidence. The works of other writers, like William Fulke and William Perkins, were more accessible to the less learned reader, but even their readership did not include the illiterate or “simple sort” as some authors implied.

In The Star-Crossed Renaissance Don Cameron Allen proposes that William Painter’s translation of Fulke’s Antiprognosticon “placed the book at the service of the vast middle class, who, without doubt, contributed vastly to the support of the astrologer”.<sup>9</sup> Fulke explained, however, that his readership included not only the individual who adhered to predictions but also those who intended to learn a divinatory science.<sup>10</sup> While Fulke presented conventional arguments against prophecy, he increased the accessibility of his work by including a second part, “for the better understandyng of the common people, unto whom the fryst labour seemeth not sufficient”.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Allen asserts that William Perkins’ Four Great Lyers was “one of the few anti-astrological writings of the Renaissance to put its case in terms that could be grasped by the relatively unlearned”.<sup>12</sup> Fulke and Perkins intended that their work appealed to a less learned, although not illiterate, readership.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., sig. B.

<sup>9</sup>Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>F[ulke], Antiprognosticon, sig. Aiiii verso.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., sig. A.

<sup>12</sup>Allen, The Star-Crossed Renaissance, p. 121.

Historians have a limited knowledge of those who actually read anti-prophetic tracts in the sixteenth century. Evidently, when critics of prophecy stated that they wrote for the unlearned they were not referring to the illiterate - or were they? Critics supposed that prophecy seduced the common people because they were simple and lacked scholarship. Commentators depicted the commoner as stupid, base, vulgar, weak, ignorant and easily deceived, not the type of individual who could read and absorb long dialectical tracts. Individuals who actually read anti-prophetic works needed a basic level of education, but they could communicate the content of such tracts to illiterate audiences appreciative of a simpler argumentative style. Individuals often transmitted prophetic knowledge through the verbal exchange of information derived from a literary source, and those who read printed treatises probably disseminated them in a similar way.<sup>13</sup> The terminology used by the literary community to describe social groups was confusing and distinguished between the educated and the general populace without specific recognition of the multitude of people, including some elites, the latter group encompassed. Writers also based the distinction between commoners and the learned on other factors like economic and noble status. The acknowledgment of anti-prophetic commentators that both types of individuals adhered to forecasts and were the intended audience for their work revealed that prophecy was prevalent at all levels of society.

After examining elite depictions of prophecy, the limitations and inaccuracies of this type of source, and the distortion of modern depictions of prophecy that rely too readily on material produced by the learned, there remains only the need to offer an explanation for the widespread vilification by the Tudor elite of non-scriptural prophecy. The most obvious explanation is a religious one. Henry VIII's reformation of the English

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<sup>13</sup>See chapter six.

church, his excommunication from the church in Rome and subsequent passage of the act of Supremacy, prompted a need to establish a clear doctrinal break from Catholicism with regard to certain practices. The enactment of the first law against prophecy was not an isolated event. In the same parliamentary session a statute against witchcraft, conjuration and sorcery also passed, indicating that the two laws were a legislative statement against all forms of magical practices previously associated with the medieval Catholicism. As Keith Thomas observed, "The medieval Church . . . appeared as a vast reservoir of magical power, capable of being deployed for a variety of secular purposes. Indeed it is difficult to think of any human aspiration for which it could not cater".<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, practitioners of Catholicism did not always promote the magical qualities of their religion; however, in the Tudor period many Protestants viewed the Catholic church as a repository of superstition.

In the medieval period debate about the legitimacy of prophecy centred on attempts to discern true prophecy from false. While individuals considered that both types were able to predict the future correctly, one derived from God and the other from the devil. In the sixteenth century the belief of many commentators that true prophecy no longer existed prompted legislative authorities to make a direct association between the prophesier and Catholicism, asserting that only a Catholic would seek to claim the ability to prophesy. Judicial authorities often described non-scriptural prophecies as "papist" and saw them as evidence of adherence to schismatical doctrine. The religious attack on prophecy during the Tudor period was part of a general trend towards the demystification, or as Christopher Hill describes the phenomenon in The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the Reformation, the democratisation of the

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas, Religion and the Decline, p. 51.

church in England.<sup>15</sup> C. John Sommerville identifies this trend as a secularisation of religion in The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith.<sup>16</sup> Sommerville argues that in an attempt to exert control over the church Henry VIII sought to break down Catholicism's traditional sources of authority that included possession of the spirit of prophecy.

Henry VIII attacked in particular the use of Latin by the medieval church, ordering an English translation of the New Testament for the use of his people as early as 1530.<sup>17</sup> The translation and publication of the Bible in English reduced the mystery inherent in medieval Catholicism, however, it also made religion increasingly accessible and open to interpretation by the common man. Sommerville suggests, for example, the Protestant belief that true prophecy had ceased explained their refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the practice of speaking in tongues that validated the contemporary prophet.<sup>18</sup> Protestant theologians, like their Catholic counterparts, needed to maintain a level of authority over Scripture to ensure the coherence of their religion. As Richard Lachmann notes in "State, Church, and the Disestablishment of Magic: Orthodoxy and Dissent in Post-Reformation England and France", although the increasing rationalism of Protestantism led to the uncontrolled popular appeal to all forms of magic in the seventeenth century, including prophecy, "in the long run Protestant espousal of

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<sup>15</sup>Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Reformation (London, 1972), p. 75.

<sup>16</sup>C. John Sommerville, The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith (New York, 1992), pp. 44-45.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

rationalism and championship of the efficacy of man's works created an intellectual climate which undermined belief in magic".<sup>19</sup>

Religious considerations were not the only factors in the attack on non-scriptural prophecies during the century. Henry VII's appeal to Welsh prophecy during his bid for the throne of England made his son wary of others who attempted to employ prophecies in a like manner. In order to win the support of the Welsh people, Henry VII depicted himself as their Messiah, the long hoped for Welshman who would unite England and Wales under one king. The itinerant Welsh bards, who travelled extensively among the houses of the Welsh nobility, promoted Henry Tudor as the man who would fulfil the ancient prophecies and become the "son of prophecy" or *Mab Darogan*.<sup>20</sup> David Rees in The Son of Prophecy: Henry Tudor's Road to Bosworth explains that during the Wars of the Roses Wales held the balance of support for the opposing Lancaster and York factions.<sup>21</sup> The bards became increasingly politically active and composed a particular branch of poetry called cywyddau brud or prophetic poems that reflected their loyalties.<sup>22</sup> The repetition of cywyddau brud that depicted Henry Tudor as the embodiment of Welsh political aspirations gained widespread support for him.

Rees observes that the prophecies of the bards won over popular sentiment and contributed to Henry Tudor's victory at Bosworth field, although the noble sponsors of the bards were practical men unlikely to provide military support for the Tudor monarch on the basis of prophecy alone.<sup>23</sup> The effect of the dissemination of messianic prophecies

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Lachmann, "State, Church, and the Disestablishment of Magic: Orthodoxy and Dissent in Post-Reformation England and France", in David Lee Miller, et al., eds., The Production of English Renaissance Culture (Ithaca, 1994), p. 60.

<sup>20</sup>David Rees, The Son of Prophecy: Henry Tudor's Road to Bosworth (London, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 108.



by the Welsh bards was one of several explanations for Welsh support of Henry Tudor, but it was nevertheless a significant influence on the attitude of the Welsh people to the Lancaster and York dynastic conflict. In particular, as W. Garmon Jones notes in “Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor”, the prophecies became a focus of Welsh nationalism.<sup>24</sup> Of Henry Tudor’s success in the Wars of the Roses, as the son of the Welshman Owen Tudor, Jones wrote, “Henry had appealed to his own race and his nationality had decided the struggle”.<sup>25</sup> Henry Tudor witnessed the power of prophecy to sway public opinion and was consequently aware of the inherent threat of all prophecy interpreted to the detriment of his kingship. The whole Tudor dynasty acknowledged the political implications of prophecy and sought to diminish their influence throughout the sixteenth century.

Many non-scriptural prophecies were symptomatic of unrest and sedition. Few individuals interpreted prophecies favourably towards the government. As the first monarch to succeed to the throne from his father since the dynastic conflicts of the fifteenth century, Henry VIII needed to strengthen the stability of the realm and suppress all forms of dissent. The attack on prophecy was part of this policy of ensuring the longevity of the Tudors, put into practice by Henry VIII’s judiciary. Regardless of the legitimacy of the association between prophecy and rebellion, the view of the legislature was that adherence to prophecy often revealed more serious forms of opposition to the government and the monarchy. Throughout the sixteenth century the laws against sedition and treason, promulgated by proclamation and statute, provided sufficient means to prosecute individuals disseminating or adhering to prophecy. In

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<sup>24</sup>W. Garmon Jones, “Welsh Nationalism and Henry Tudor”, Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, Session 1917-1918 (1919), p. 11. See Garmon Jones also for an examination of other factors that contributed to Welsh support of Henry Tudor.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

many cases adherence to a prophecy was not as important as the interpretation of its content, which often revealed treasonous or seditious sentiments liable to prosecution under the acts against treason, the act of supremacy or the act of succession. The courts found no difficulty in prosecuting the many clerical adherents to prophecy during the Reformation, perhaps indicating the reason why parliament did not pass a law against the phenomenon until 1542. The event or events that prompted this first law against prophecy, however, are unknown. Clearly an explanation does not lie in the inability of the government to punish offenders, indicating that the statute of 1542 was more a symbolic statement about a body of practices considered inappropriate by the governing elite, than a pragmatic legislative measure designed to assist the smooth working of the judicial process.

The concern of successive Tudor governments to maintain the stability of the realm, seen in many of the laws passed during the century, also manifested in the high level of censorship during the period. Christopher Hill explains in “Censorship and English Literature” that ecclesiastical authorities and the Stationer’s Company licensed all official works printed during the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the publication of one of Merlin’s prophecies in 1510, no other complete prophecy appeared in print during the century, except favourably interpreted predictions in larger compilations and those used to demonstrate the type in anti-prophetic treatises such as Henry Howard’s A Defensative. Authorities allowed the publication of natural astrological forecasts in almanacs, although in 1570 Queen Elizabeth’s grant to the printers R. Watkins and J. Roberts monopolised the production of almanacs and prognostications.<sup>27</sup> The Tudor

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<sup>26</sup>Hill, “Censorship and English Literature”, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup>H.R. Plomer, “A Catalogue of English Almanacs of the Sixteenth Century, With Bibliographical Notes”, Notes and Queries, Sixth Series, XI (1885), p. 221.

government was careful to suppress all knowledge considered dangerous to the common people. As Hill argues, censorship was a form of control instituted because the Reformation and the secularisation of religion by Protestantism undermined the traditional form of maintaining authority by keeping the majority of individuals illiterate.<sup>28</sup>

The rise in literacy during the period and the advent of printing, which increased the accessibility of ideas to commoners, forced the Tudor monarchy to use censorship as a means of asserting authority and order. In “The Theory and Practice of Censorship in Sixteenth-Century England” D.M. Loades suggests that the success of Henry VIII’s break from Rome depended on the acceptance of the Reformation among English people.<sup>29</sup> Control of the printing press was an effective method of both disseminating chosen information and halting the spread of heterodoxy. Censorship was a logical development from the laws against verbal criticism of the monarch instituted in the acts of treason and *scandalum magnatum*.<sup>30</sup>

Censorship, however, ensured only one side of the debate about prophecy was evident in Tudor literature; in examining the phenomenon modern scholars need to be as aware of what printers omitted from publishing as what they produced. In the words of Hill,

It is easy, in reading sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, to note the recurrence of certain ideas, and to assume that they recur because everyone accepted them. It is equally possible that they were repeated (often eloquently and emphatically) because they were under attack.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup>Loades, “The Theory and Practice of Censorship”, pp. 141-142.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>31</sup>Hill, “Censorship and English Literature”, p. 33.

Hill inverts the whole notion of an attack on certain beliefs by the learned indicating that the theological and political conflict between the governing elites and the commons was a constant struggle for the supremacy of ideology. Several historians of popular culture view this conflict in terms of an attempt by the elite to reform popular culture.<sup>32</sup>

Like this reform movement, the desire to suppress prophecy during the sixteenth century derived from religious change and the fear of rebellion. In Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850 Tim Harris situates the first period of the attempt to reform popular culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, describing its association

with the desires of religiously inspired reformers, especially Puritan, to create what they thought to be a more godly society, and also those of the magisterial classes and local elites to regulate the disorders of the poor at a time when the pressures of inflation and rapid population growth seemed to be posing a threat to the stability of society.<sup>33</sup>

However, anti-prophetic commentators did not view prophecy as a solely popular belief, instead they took a paternalistic view highlighting the dangerous influence that practitioners of divinatory sciences had on the innocent commons. The motivation for the attack on prophecy by the elite derived from a dislike of a certain type of practice adhered to across social boundaries, rather than an attempt to modify the beliefs of a particular group of people. The depiction of the attack as an entirely elite phenomenon is also inaccurate. Many commoners informed on each other, indicating that the vilification of prophecy, as with the participants, followed an ideological not a social division, although the sources for the phenomenon are predominantly elite.

As Harris explains, the concept of the reform of popular culture originated in the notion that the culture of “the people” changed during the early modern period and was

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<sup>32</sup>Tim Harris, ed., Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850 (London, 1995), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

“the passive victim of the historical process, undermined and impoverished by various attempts at reform or suppression”.<sup>34</sup> However, in the seventeenth century the dissemination of non-scriptural prophecies increased dramatically with the relaxation of censorship and the uncertainty of the civil war period.<sup>35</sup> Prophecy was a useful form of propaganda used by both royalists and parliamentarians, and scholars concur that the political influence of prophecies at this time was significant.<sup>36</sup> In “Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651” Harry Rusche argues that the popularity of prophecy did not experience a sharp rise in the 1640s as they “were always there, submerged in the popular culture”.<sup>37</sup> Although many prophecies circulating during the civil war period claimed to derive from the sayings of sixteenth century prophets, Rusche’s comment is difficult to substantiate. The seventeenth century, however, provided a better milieu for the reception of forecasts as Protestant theology, despite its earlier rejection of contemporary prophecy, encouraged a personal relationship with God and inadvertently re-established the legitimacy of the prophetic spirit in the Jacobean period and allowed the female prophet to gain acceptance.<sup>38</sup>

In questioning the appeal of non-scriptural prophecies during the sixteenth and seventeenth century Keith Thomas wrote,

they provided a ‘validating charter’ . . . for new enterprises undertaken in the face of strong contemporary prohibitions. They justified wars or

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup>Harry Rusche, “Prophecies and Propaganda, 1641 to 1651”, *The English Historical Review*, LXXXIV (1969), p. 753; Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London, 1993), p. 106.

<sup>36</sup>Rusche, “Prophecies and Propaganda”, p. 753; Hill, *The World Turned*, p. 72; see also Harry Rusche, “Merlini Anglici: *Astrology and Propaganda from 1644 to 1651*”, *The English Historical Review*, LXXX (1965), pp. 322, 333.

<sup>37</sup>Rusche, “Prophecies and Propaganda”, p. 753.

<sup>38</sup>Phyllis Mack, “The Prophet and Her Audience: Gender and Knowledge in *The World Turned Upside Down*”, in Geoff Eley and William Hunt, eds., *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill* (London, 1988), p. 147; Hill, *The World Turned*, p. 73.

rebellions and they made periods of unprecedented change emotionally acceptable to those who lived in them.<sup>39</sup>

Although the emotions and thoughts of the common people of sixteenth-century England in particular are often beyond the historians grasp, prophecy was an enduring and popular phenomenon. The subject of prophecies was often political in the sense that they reflected contemporary issues, but their role in disorder during the period did not reach the impact evident in the next century. Adherence to prophecy reflected the hopes and desires of individuals and often validated other activities. Ultimately, however, an explanation for the fascination of prophecy may simply lie in what William Fulke described in 1560 as “the nature of mankynde”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Thomas, *Religion and the Decline*, p. 503.

<sup>40</sup>F[ulke], *Antiprognoticon*, sig. Aiii.

APPENDIX ONE

**STATUTORY LEGISLATION UNDER WHICH JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES  
WERE ABLE TO PROSECUTE PROPHESIERS**

- 1275           None Shall Report Slanderous News, Whereby Discord May Arise.
- 1352           A Declaration Which Offences Shall Be Adjudged Treason.
- 1378           The Penalty for Telling Slanderous Lyes of the Great Men of the Realm.
- 1388           The Punishment of Him That Telleth Lies of the Peers or Great Officers  
of the Realm.
- 1397           Treason Act.
- 1399           The Repeal of Certain Treasons.
- 1402           Against Wasters, Minstrels &c. in Wales.
- 1530           An Acte Concernyng Punysshement Of Beggars & Vacabunds.
- 1534           Act of Succession.  
  
Act of Supremacy.  
  
An Acte Wherby Divers Offences Be Made High Treason, And Takyng  
Way All Saynturies For All Maner of High Treasons.
- 1542           An Act Against False Prophecies, Upon Declaration of Names, Armes,  
Badges, &c.  
  
The Bill Agest Conjuracion & Wichecraftes and Sorcery and  
Enchantments.
- 1547           An Acte for the Repeale of Certain Statutes Concerninge Treasons,  
Felonies, &c.
- 1549           An Acte Against Fonde and Fantasticall Prophecies.
- 1553           Act Repealing Certayne Treasons Felonies and Premunire.
- 1554           An Act Against Seditious Woordes and Rumours.  
  
An Act for the Punishment of Traerous Woordes Against the Quenes  
Majestie.

- 1558 An Acte for the Explanacion of the Statute of Sedytyous Woordes and Rumours.
- 1563 An Act Agaynst Fonde and Phantastical Prophesyes.
- An Act Against Conjuracion & Wichecraftes and Sorcery and Enchantments.
- 1581 An Act Against False and Slanderous News or Tales Against the Queen.



APPENDIX TWO

## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY STATUTES AGAINST PROPHECY

33 Henry VIII, c. 14      1541-1542

**An Act Against False Prophecies, upon Declaracion of Names, Armes, Badges, &c.**

Where dyvers and sondry psones, making theyre foundation by Prophecies, have taken uppon theyme knowledge as it were what shall become of theyme whiche beare in theyre armes cognysaunce or badge felde beasts fowles, or any other thing or thinge whiche hathe ben used or accustomed to be put in any of the same, or in and uppon the tres of theyre names, have dyvised descanted and practised to make folke thinke that by theyre untrew gessys it might be knowne what good or evyll thinge shulde coome happen or be doone, by or to suche psones as have and had suche Armes Badges or Cognisaunces or had suche tres in theyre names, to the greate pill and destruccion of suche noble psonages of whome suche false Prophecies hath or shulde hereafter be set fourthe, wherby in tymes paste many noble men have suffered, and (if theyr Prince wolde gyve any eare ther to) mught happe to doo hereafter; For remedye wherof be it enacted by the kinge Highnes with thassent of the Lords spirual and temporall and the commons of this present Parliament, that if any psone or psones prynte or wryte, or elle speake sing or declare to any other psone of the King or of any other psone, after the firste daye of Julie next coomyng, any suche false Prophecies uppon occasion of any Armes feldes beaste fowles or other suche lyke thinge accustomed in armes cognisaunce badges or signete, or by reasone of tres of the name of the king or of any other psone to thintent to set furthe such prophecies, that thenne everye suche offence shalbe deamed felonye, and

thoffenfourers therin and theyre Counsellors and abettours and everye of theyme, being therof convicte by thorder of the commen lawe afore suche as have or shall have power and authoryte to here and determyne felonyes, shall suffre suche paynes of deathe forfaictures of lande tente goode and catalls as in cases of felonye at comen lawe is determyned and appointed, without priveledge of Clergie or Sanctuarie to be allowed to theime or any of theime.

3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 15. 1549-1550

**An Act Against Fonde and Fantasticall Propheties**

Where nowe of late, sythens the progacion of the last Cession of this present Parliament, divers evill disposed parsons, mynding to stirr and move sedicion disobedience and rebellion, have of their perverse mynde feyned ymaged invented published and practysed dyvers fantasticall and fonde Prophetyses, concerning the kinge Majestie dyvers honorable parsons gentlemen and commons of this Realme, to the greate disturbaunce and perill of the kinge Majestie and this his Realme: for remedy therof be yt ordeyned and enacted by the king our Sovereign Lorde, wwith thassent of the Lordes spirituall and temporall, and of the Comens in this present Parliament assembled, and by auctoritie of the same, That if any parson or parsones after the first daye of February next commeng, doe sett forth in writing printing singing speaking, and publish or otherwise declare to any parson or parsons, any phantasticall or falce prophetysye, apon occasion of any armes fildes beastes fowles badges and such other lyke thinge accustomed in armes conysances or sygnete, or by reason of any tyme yere or daye name bludshed or warr, to the intent thereby to make any rebellion insurreccion discencion losse of lyfe or other disturbaunce within this Realme or other the kinge Domyinions, That then every such parson, therof being lawfully indicted and convicted according to the due course of the lawes, for every such offense shall suffer ymprisonment of his body by the space of one yere withoute baile or maynprise, and shall forfeite for every such offence the somme of ten pounce: And yf any such offendor doo after such convyccion eftsones offend in any of the premysses, and be therof lawfully indycted and convicted by the due course of the lawes, that then every such offendor shall for his second offence and conviction, as is

abovesaide, suffre imprisonment of his bodie, without bayle or mainprise during his life, and shall forfaite all his goode and chattelle reale and personalle, the moyties therof to him that shall or will sue for the same in any of the kinge Courte or Record, by accion bill playnt or informacion, in which case no Essoyne wayer of lawe or proteccion shalbe allowed or admytted. And Be it further enacted by thauctoritie aforesaide, That all and every Justice of Assize Justice of Oyer and Determiner, Justice of Peace, shall have power and auctoritie by vertue hereof, to inquire here and determyne all and every Offence or Offence abovesaid, commytted or done within the lymite of theyre Commyssion, contrary to the tenor and meaning of this Act.

Provided alwaies and be it enacted by thauctoritie aforesaied, That no parson or parsones, shall at any tyme hereafter be impeched for any offence hereafter to be commytted or doon contrary to this Acte, onelesse he be therfore ympeched or accused eithin syx monethes next ensueng any such offence by him or them commytted or doon; and this Acte to endure to thend of the next Parliament.

## 5 Elizabeth, c. 15 1562-1563

## An Act Agaynst Fonde and Phantasticall Prophetes

Forasmuche as sithens the expiration and ending of the Statute made in the time of King Edwarde the Syxthe entituled, an act against fonde and fantasticall Prophetes, divers evill disposed persons, enclined to the stirring and moving of Facions Seditions and Rebellions within this Realme, have byn the more bolde & attempte the lyke Practise, in fayning imagining inventing and publishing of suche fonde and fantasticall Prophetes, aswell concerning the Quenes Majestie as divers honourable Parsonagies Gentlemen and others of this Realme, as was used and practised before the making of the sayd statute, to the grete disquiet trooble and perill of the Quenes Majestie and of this her Realme: For remedie wherof, Bee yt ordeyned and enacted by thauthoritee of this presente Parliament, That yf any person or persons, after the first daye of Maye next comming, do advisedly and directly advance publishe and set fourthe by Writing Prynting Synging, or any other open Speache or Dede, to any person or persons, any fonde fantasticall or false Prophecye upon or by thoccasion of any Armes Fields Beastes Badges or suche other lyke thinges accustomed in Armes Cognisaunces or Signettes, or upon or by reason of any Time Yere or Daye name Blodshed or Warre, to thintent therby to make anye Rebellion Insurrection Dissention losse of Leif or other Disturbance within this Realme and other the Quenes Dominions; that then every suche person, beyng therof lafully convicted according to the due course of the Lawes of this Realme, for everye suche Offence shall suffer Imprysonement of his Bodye by the space of one yere without Baile or Mayneprise, and shall forfait for everye suche Offence the somme of tenne powndes: And yf any suche Offendor do after suche Conviccion eftsones offende in any of the Premisses, and

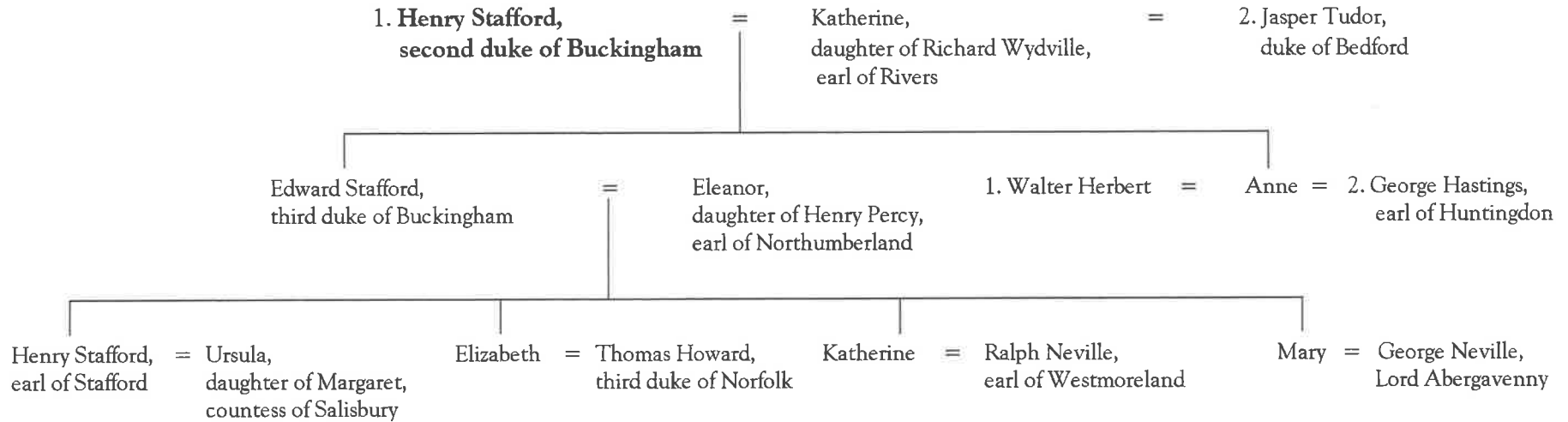
bee therof lafully convicted as yf aforesaid, that then every suche Offendor shall for his seconde offence and conviccion as is aforesayd suffer Imprisonement of his Bodye during his lyef without Bayle or Mainepriise, and shall forfaitte all his Gooddes and Cattelles realles and personalles; The moyeties of every whiche Forfaitures shall bee to the Quenes Highnes her Heyres and Successoures, and thother moyeties therof to him that shall or will sue for the same in any of the Quenes Courtes of Recorde, by Actyon Bill Playnt or Informacion, in whiche case no Essoigne Wager of Lawe or Proteccion shall bee allowed or admitted.

And bee yt further enacted by thauctoritee aforsayd, That all and every Justice of Assise, Justice of Oyer and Determyner, Justice of Peace, shall have full power and authoritee by vertue hereof & enquire heare and determine all and every offence and offences abovesaid, committed or doon withein the lymttes of their Commission contrary to the tenour and meaning of this Acte.

Provided always and bee yt enacted by thauctoritee aforesaid, That no person or persons shall at any time hereafter bee impeached for any Offence hereafter to be committed or done contrary to this Acte, unles he bee therfore impeached or accused within sixe monethes next ensuing any suche offence by him or them committed or done.

APPENDIX THREE

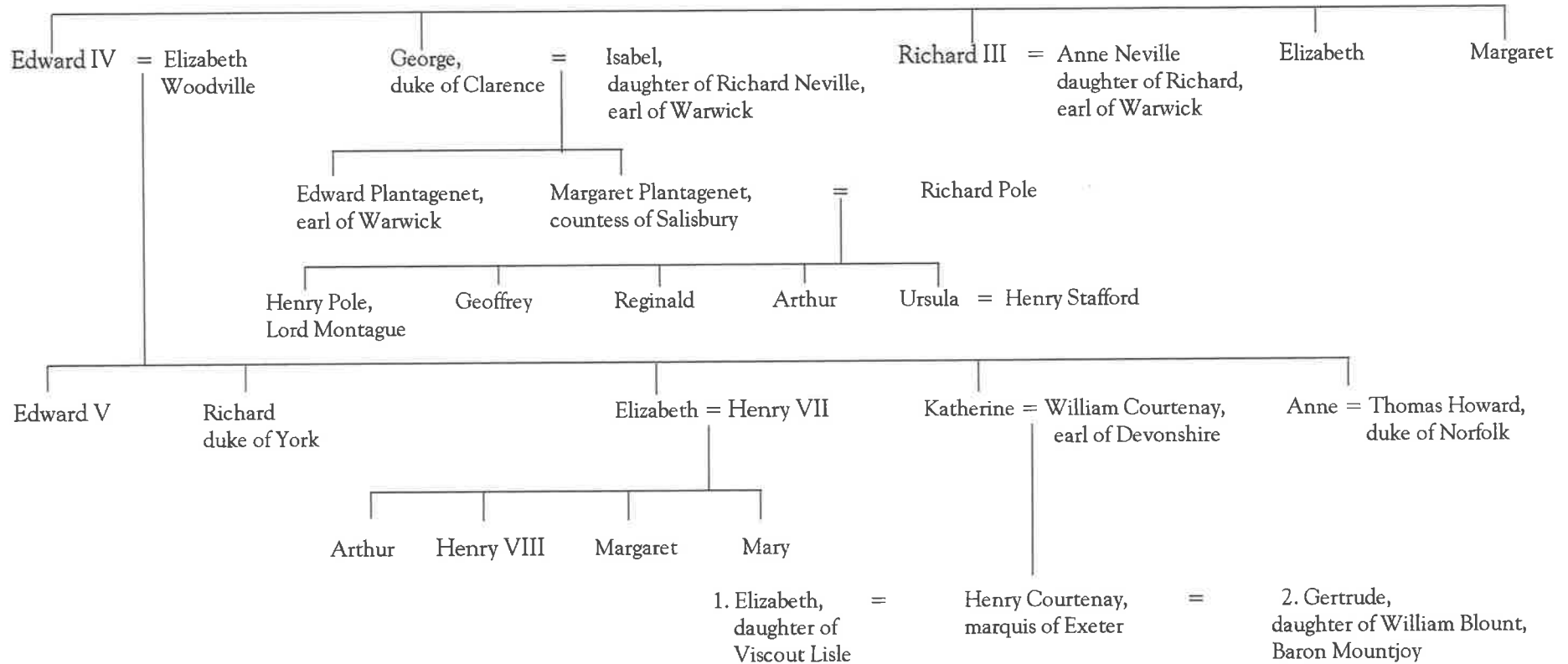
THE STAFFORD FAMILY



This is an abridged genealogical chart containing only information relevant to the argument presented in this thesis. Collated from Cokayne, Complete Peerage, I, pp. 31-33, II, pp. 390-391; Levine, "The Fall of Edward", p. 34; Elton, England Under, p. 488f.

APPENDIX FOUR

**THE POLE FAMILY**

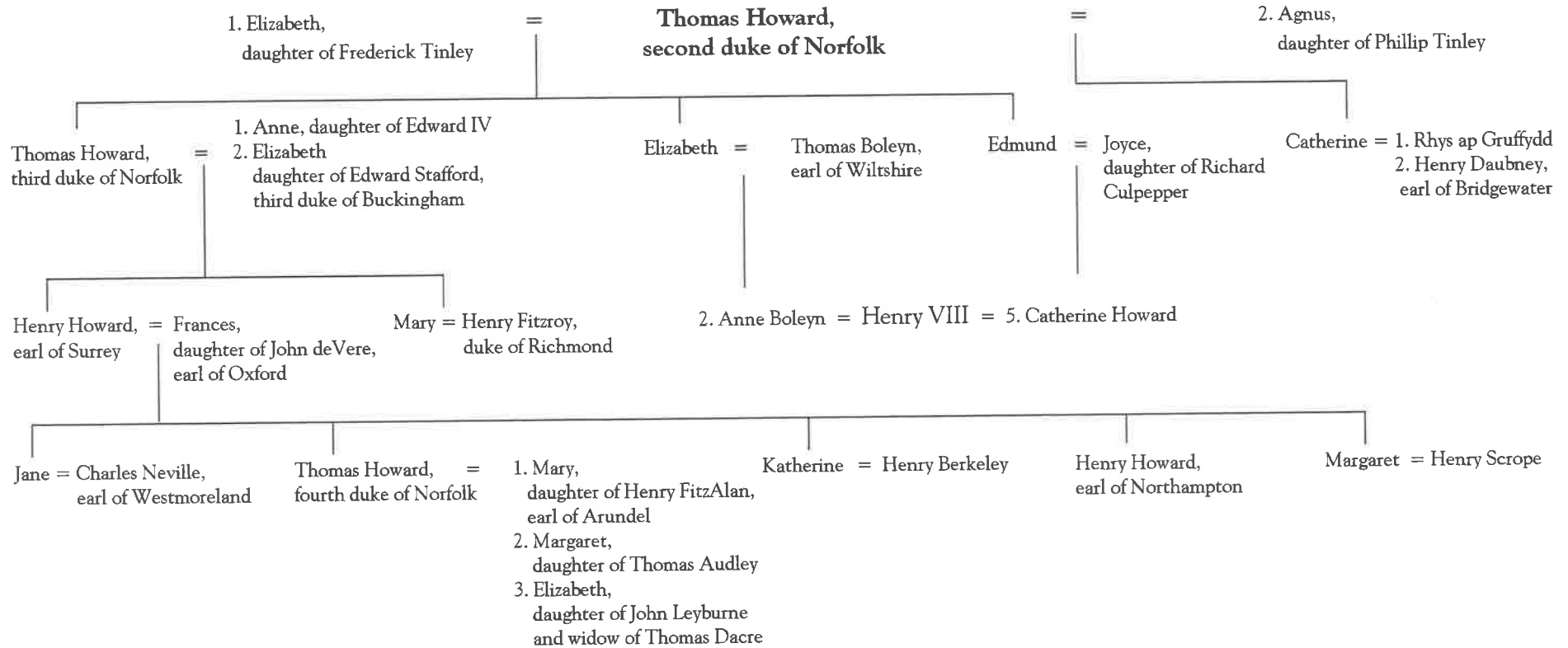


This is an abridged genealogical chart containing only information relevant to the argument presented in this thesis. Collated from Elton, Policy and Police, p. 488f; Christopher Morris, The Tudors (London, 1976), p. 2.



APPENDIX FIVE

**THE HOWARD FAMILY**



This is an abridged genealogical chart containing only information relevant to the argument presented in this thesis. Collated from John M. Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk* (Oxford, 1982), p. 240f; Griffiths, *Sir Rhys ap Thomas*, p. 84; Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, IX, pp. 612-624; Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy*, pp. 4, 32, 34, 126-127.

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Cotton Appendix L.

Cotton Caligula B.i, D.viii.

Cotton Cleopatra E.iv, E.vi.

Cotton Titus B.i.

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646	Sir Simonds D'Ewes, An Account of my Life 1602-1636
1226	William Hudson's "Treatise Concerning the Court of Star Chamber"

Harley 6,148.

**Lansdowne**

2	William Wicherly, Examination, 1549
762	Sixteenth-century collection of miscellaneous verse including several prophecies

**Public Record Office****ASSI 35**

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**E 36**

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- STAC 1 Star Chamber Proceedings, Henry VII.
- STAC 2 Star Chamber Proceedings, Henry VIII.
- STAC 3 Star Chamber Proceedings, Edward VI.
- STAC 4 Star Chamber Proceedings, Mary.
- STAC 5 Star Chamber Proceedings, Elizabeth I.

## **CHESTER**

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- DDX 123 Predictions of Robert Nixon, sixteenth century

**OXFORD****Bodleian Library**

Rawlinson C.813

Sixteenth-century book of miscellaneous verse  
including several prophecies**WASHINGTON D.C.****Folger Shakespeare Library**

Losely b.546

Copy of medieval prophecies, c.1540

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## GLOSSARY

<b>Non-Scriptural Prophecies:</b>	Any type of foretelling of future events without a biblical origin, either direct or resulting from exegesis, or purely religious subject matter.
<b>Direct Prophecy:</b>	Any prophecy with a clear meaning.
<b>Vaticination:</b>	Prophecy derived from the direct and spontaneous inspiration of a deity.
<b>Revelation:</b>	Knowledge gained from a deity.
<b>Prophecyings or Exercises:</b>	The communal interpretation of scripture.
<b>Divination:</b>	Overt practices used to inquire into the future, either through passive observation or the active manipulation of agents thought to reveal prophetic knowledge.
<b>Galfridian Prophecy:</b>	Prophecies derived from the work of twelfth-century writer Geoffrey of Monmouth.
<b>Prophet:</b>	One who speaks by divine inspiration or in the name of a deity i.e. the biblical prophets. This term applies only to individuals judged as legitimate prophets.
<b>Prophesier:</b>	One who predicts or foreshadows the future or disseminates knowledge of the future. This is a general term that avoids any assumption of individual prophetic legitimacy.
<b>Vision:</b>	Any type of futuristic insight, usually visual, received during an altered state of consciousness.
<b>Dream:</b>	Visions that occurred during sleep.