

‘FRANTICK HACKET’: PROPHECY, SORCERY, INSANITY, AND THE ELIZABETHAN PURITAN MOVEMENT*

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ABSTRACT. *This essay reconsiders the career of the most famous of Elizabethan false prophets, William Hacket, the illiterate pseudo-messiah who, together with two gentleman disciples, plotted a civil and ecclesiastical coup, and was executed for treason in July 1591. It explores the significance of autonomous lay activity on the fringes of the mainstream puritan movement, demonstrating links between the dissident trio and key clerical figures who later prudently disowned them. Closer inspection of Hacket’s exploits sheds fresh light on the relationship between experimental Calvinist piety and the religious and magical culture of the unlettered rural laity – a relationship still widely presented as bitterly adversarial. Relocated in the context of contemporary attitudes to prophecy and insanity, the episode illuminates the eclecticism of early modern belief and the manner in which medical and theological explanations for bizarre behaviour comfortably coexisted and mingled. Various labels – a witch, visionary, and raving lunatic – Hacket’s case reveals the extent to which such roles, diagnoses, and stereotypes are socially, culturally, and politically shaped and conditioned. In exploiting the incident to discredit Presbyterian activism within the Church of England, leading conformist polemicists anticipated the main thrust of the campaign against religious ‘enthusiasm’ mounted by Anglican elites in the Interregnum, Restoration, and early Enlightenment.*

I

Early one Friday morning in July 1591 two respectable puritan gentlemen left a lodging house in Broken Wharf on the bank of the Thames and wove their way through the London streets towards Cheapside proclaiming ‘newes from heaven’. Their clamorous cry, ‘Repent England Repent’, soon attracted a ‘mighty concourse of the common multitude’. Indeed, ‘the throng and preasse of people’ grew so intense that Edmund Coppinger and Henry Arthington could continue no further along the thoroughfare and were compelled to mount an empty cart on the cobbles instead. From this makeshift pulpit they proceeded to announce that Jesus Christ had returned to judge the world in the guise of William Hacket, an illiterate maltmaker from Northamptonshire whom they had left behind lounging in bed. He had been sent ‘with his Fanne in his hand’ to sever the good from the bad, to establish the Gospel in Europe, and to introduce Presbyterian discipline into England. Coppinger and Arthington themselves were prophets of mercy and judgement and they

* I am grateful to Professor Patrick Collinson, Dr Jonathan Barry, and the members of the Tudor Seminar in Cambridge and the Early Modern Britain Seminar in Oxford for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

threatened the inhabitants of the city with hideous punishments, predicting a bloodbath in which ‘men should (there) kill and massacre one another (as Butchers doe kill Swyne) all the day long’. Declaring Hacket supreme king of the earth, they claimed that the queen had forfeited her crown by ‘giving credite and countenance to the Bishops’ and prayed that God would strike down the lord chancellor, Christopher Hatton, and the archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, whom, together with a third privy councillor, they denounced as traitors and cursed ‘to the pit of hell, as Opposers of the sincere Religion’. Plucked from their podium by an outraged acquaintance, the pair took refuge in the nearby Mermaid tavern, retreating from there via back alleys in the direction of the river, with an unruly company of ‘lads and young persons of the meaner sort’ straggling along in Arthington’s wake.¹

Much of the urban populace seem to have taken this outlandish pageant firmly in their stride. Some, perhaps, had witnessed the swift rise and fall of too many marketplace prophets to regard it as anything more than another fleeting novelty and nine-day wonder. According to Sir Francis Bacon, most rather laughed at the midsummer madness of the ludicrous duo ‘as a may-game, than took any heed of what they did or said’.²

The authorities, however, were far from amused. Later that day the pseudomessiah and his two unlikely lieutenants were arrested and confined in Bridewell, Arthington ‘groveling upon his face on the ground’ whenever he found himself in Hacket’s sublime and deified present.³ Tried and convicted of treason, on 28 July Hacket was hung, drawn, and quartered on a gibbet erected near the spot by Cheapside Cross where his inglorious reign had begun less

¹ This paragraph draws on the detailed narrative of the events of 12 July 1591 contained in [Richard Cosin], *Conspiracie, for pretended reformation: viz. presbyteriall discipline. A treatise discovering the late designments and courses held for advancement thereof, by William Hacket yeoman, Edmund Coppinger, and Henry Arthington gent.* (London, 1591), esp. pp. 55–7, supplemented by Richard Bancroft, *Daungerous positions and proceedings, published and practised within this iland of Brytaine, under pretence of reformation, and for the presbyteriall discipline* (London, 1593), p. 167, and William Camden, *The historie of the most renowned and victorious princesse Elizabeth, late queene of England* (London, 1630), bk iv, p. 29. Other contemporary accounts include Henry Arthington’s own version of the affair, *The seduction of Arthington by Hacket especiallie, with some tokens of his unfained repentance and submission* (London, 1592); [Thomas Phelippes to Henry Saintmain?], 19 July 1591, Public Record Office (PRO), SP 12/239/93; ‘Memorandum of the arraignment, at Newgate, of William Hacket, of Northamptonshire, for high treason’, 26 July 1591, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Fourteenth report, appendix, part IV: the MSS of Lord Kenyon* (London, 1894) (HMC, *Kenyon MSS*), pp. 607–9; John Stow, *The annales of England* (London, 1592), pp. 1288–90; and a Catholic account preserved at Stonyhurst College, printed in *Unpublished documents relating to the English martyrs, volume I, 1584–1603*, ed. J. H. Pollen, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, v (London, 1908), pp. 332–3. I owe this last reference to Dr Alison Shell. The third privy councillor denounced by Coppinger and Arthington was probably Thomas Savile, Lord Buckhurst.

² Francis Bacon, ‘Certain observations upon a libel published this present year, 1592’, in *The works of Lord Bacon* (2 vols., London, 1838), 1, p. 383.

³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 60. See also the correspondence of the privy council on the matter, *Acts of the privy council of England. New series. 1542–1631*, ed. John Roche Dasent et al. (46 vols., London, 1890–1964) (APC), xxi, pp. 293, 297, 299, 300, 319. A privy council order for Hacket’s indictment and trial survives: privy council to Archbishop Whitgift, 24 July 1592, London, Lambeth Palace Library, Fairhurst papers, MS 2008, fo. 29r.

than a fortnight before. Pouring forth terrible blasphemies and railing loudly against Elizabeth I, he uttered one last execrable prayer: 'O God of heaven, mightie Jehovah... send some miracle out of a cloude to convert these Infidels, and deliver me from these mine enemies: If not, I will fire the heavens, and teare thee from thy throne with my handes.' Turning towards his executioner he taunted: 'Ah thou bastards childe, wilt thou hange William Hacket thy king?' Watched by a tremendous crowd of curious onlookers, the noose was finally secured and the impious pretender tipped off the ladder and strangled to death. Coppinger died in prison the following day after a hunger strike lasting over a week, but Arthington recanted, craving Her Majesty's pardon for his 'dangerous error, and divelish seduction' and enshrining his 'unfained repentance' in a book whose publication was undoubtedly sponsored by the government.⁴

This was the dramatic climax of an exotic conspiracy which had been brewing for more than six months, an elaborate if rather fantastic scheme to liberate the commonwealth from the Babylonish captivity of episcopacy. The finer points of the abortive plot remain shrouded in mystery, but at its heart lay a plan to impeach and perhaps even assassinate those members of the queen's privy council intent upon crushing the clandestine movement to remodel the English church in the image of Calvin's Geneva. The removal from high office of these 'usurpers of Antichristian tyranny' would not only procure the release of Thomas Cartwright and eight other puritan ministers currently on trial in the court of Star Chamber, but precipitate a sweeping ecclesiastical revolution.⁵ This cabinet coup was apparently to be affected by means of a popular insurrection in the city, and in the days preceding the kerfuffle in Cheapside Coppinger had commanded Elizabeth's closest advisers 'to keepe their house or chamber for feare of stir'.⁶ Hundreds of illegally printed pamphlets and broadsides were disseminated under cover of night to potential participants,

⁴ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 71–3. See also Arthington, *Seduction*, p. 4; Camden, *Historie*, p. 30. The order for Hacket's execution can be found in *APC*, xx1, p. 325. For Arthington's published recantation, dedicated to the privy council, which no doubt whitewashes his role, see *Seduction*. Arthington again referred contritely to his 'late monstrous offence committed in Cheape' in *The exhortation of Salomon* (London, 1594), sigs. A3r–4r. In later years, with the help of a pension from the earl of Cumberland, he published other pious and philanthropic tracts: *Provision for the poore, now in penurie. Out of the store-house of Gods plentie* (London, 1597) and *Principall points of holy profession, touching these three estates of mankind* (London, 1607). See also A. G. Dickens, 'The writers of Tudor Yorkshire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 13 (1963), pp. 63–4.

⁵ Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 145; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 34. Hacket and his companions evidently intended to replace the ejected privy councillors with their own nominees. William Davison, the royal secretary disgraced for his part in precipitating the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, was destined to be the 'greatest magistrate' and 'chiefe Governour' in the new regime. Unnamed in Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 48–9, Davison is identified in PRO, SP 12/239/93. For the Star Chamber proceedings, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement* (London, 1967), pt viii, chs. II–III. The controversy over the ex officio oath has recently been illuminated by John Guy: 'The Elizabethan establishment and the ecclesiastical polity', in John Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 126–49.

⁶ Quotation from Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 167. See also Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 34; HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 609.

urging them to lend 'their helping handes' to a mighty enterprise that would very soon be brought to a triumphant conclusion.⁷ Hacket later confessed ominously on the eve of his death that had their grand stratagem succeeded 'it would have cost a number of innocent men their blouds': if his confederates were 'wel sifted' and 'straitly examined' they would reveal sundry 'matters of treason'. Arthington implied that his former idol had ultimately meant to murder the sovereign herself.⁸ Convinced that the Almighty had placed 'his cuppe of vengeance' in their hands, the three prophets clearly saw the projected putsch as an apocalyptic prelude to the millennium – a type of Armageddon.⁹

Whatever its objectives, the plot fizzled out of existence with astonishing speed, yet not before dealing another heavy blow to the Presbyterian cause, already under a cloud as a result of Martin Marprelate's savage but hilarious tirade against 'that swinish rable' of 'pettie popes' and 'proud prelates', the bishops.¹⁰ Seized upon by conformist propagandists, the episode became the subject of several brutally anti-puritan tracts. Richard Bancroft, the future bishop of London, Matthew Sutcliffe, dean of Exeter, and Richard Cosin, dean of the Arches and a distinguished civil lawyer, ruthlessly exploited the rich archive of incriminating letters and papers that fell so opportunely into their laps.¹¹ The *Conspiracie, for pretended reformation* they exposed was in many respects merely a polemical construct, and yet it is only by disentangling the dense web of distortion, exaggeration, and untruth these writers spun around the facts that historians have been able to reconstruct the activities of William Hacket and his accomplices in any detail at all.

⁷ Quotation from HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 608. See also Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 161–2; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 31–2.

⁸ Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 168; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 70. Hacket declared that 'men should shortly turne their speares into mattocks for the making of a true or better Reformation' (echoing but misremembering several biblical passages: Joel iii. 10, Isaiah ii. 4, Micah iv. 3): Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 51. The treasonous overtones of the Hacket conspiracy have an interesting echo in the obscure activities of the anti-Catholic agent Richard Cholmeley and his 'damnable' atheistical 'crew' in 1593: see Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: the murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1992), chs. 29–30. I owe this point to Professor Collinson.

⁹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 40–1.

¹⁰ On the Marprelate tracts, see William Pierce, *An historical introduction to the Marprelate tracts* (London, 1908); Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement*, pp. 391–6.

¹¹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, of which two editions were published in 1593 (STC 1344, 1344.5) (all subsequent references are to STC 1344); Matthew Sutcliffe, *An answer to a certaine libel supplicatorie, or rather deffamatory, and also to certaine calumnious articles, and interrogatories... to the slaunder of the ecclesiasticall state* (London, 1592); idem, *An answer unto a certaine calumnious letter* (London, 1595); idem, *The examination of M. Thomas Cartwrights late apologie* (London, 1596). The original letters and papers seized by investigating officials may now be lost. John Selden acquired a book 'conteyning the originalls of all Hackettes and Copingers business' from Lambeth Palace in the 1640s, but this MS cannot at present be traced. See D. M. Barratt, 'The library of John Selden and its later history', *Bodleian Library Record*, 3 (1951), pp. 128–42, 256–74. The MS in question is identified in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden supra 111, fo. 11v, and MS Tanner 88, fo. 23v. I am grateful to David Crankshaw of Robinson College, Cambridge, for drawing this to my attention, and to Melanie Barber of Lambeth Palace Library for further information.

Even so, the affair has generally been interpreted as preposterous, irrational, and absurd. Most scholars of Elizabethan puritanism have treated it as an embarrassing aberration from the sober priorities of those at the forefront of the campaign for progressive religious reform. They have stressed the fragility and insignificance of the links between the three prophets and the beleaguered classis leaders. 'Madcap', 'crackbrained', 'pure farce', the plot has been dismissed as the product of 'psychopathic disturbance', of the deranged and overheated imaginations of a trio of 'semi-insane extremists' – quite literally a lunatic fringe.¹² But as Bill Sheils has shown, the incident was rooted securely in local puritan developments in the diocese of Peterborough and their extraordinary repercussions in the godly underworld of late Tudor London.¹³

This essay seeks both to extend Dr Sheils's insights and to explore a further cluster of intersecting issues and themes. It emphasizes the extent to which the conspirators derived their inspiration from the deeply introspective piety practised by sincere 'professors of the faith'. And it argues that closer inspection of the mercurial William Hacket casts fresh light on the relationship between fervent Protestantism and the religious culture of unlettered lay people of relatively low social status and rank – a religious culture conventionally described as residually Catholic, 'superstitious', and 'magical'. For if, to some contemporaries, Hacket epitomized the zealous puritan, 'mechanick preacher', and popular prophet, in the eyes of others he bore more resemblance to a cunning man, sorcerer, white wizard, or witch. Viewed through a third interpretative lens he and his disciples appeared to be mentally unbalanced and out of their wits. The fluidity of Hacket's public identity, I want to suggest, highlights how far such roles, diagnoses, and stereotypes are socially, culturally, and, moreover, politically shaped and conditioned. A genuine threat to the stability of the Elizabethan church and state or a wild and impossible dream, the episode nonetheless yields some surprising new insights into the pre-history of the rise of 'rational religion' and the advent of the so-called 'age of the Enlightenment'.

¹² A. F. Scott Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan puritanism, 1535–1603* (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 320–4; M. M. Knappen, *Tudor puritanism: a chapter in the history of idealism* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 296–7; Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement*, pp. 424–5; Leland H. Carlson, *Martin Marprelate, gentleman: Master Job Throckmorton laid open in his colours* (San Marino, 1981), pp. 85, 87; Peter Lake, *Anglicans and puritans? Presbyterianism and English conformist thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988), pp. 113, 127–8. See also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 158–9: 'there was no real link between Hacket and orthodox Puritanism.' John Booty does little more than narrate the tale in 'Tumult in Cheapside: the Hacket conspiracy', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 42 (1973), pp. 293–317. The episode is discussed in the context of other Elizabethan false prophets in Richard Bauckham, *Tudor apocalypse: sixteenth century apocalypticism, millenarianism and the English reformation: from John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman* (Abingdon, 1978), pp. 191–204.

¹³ W. J. Sheils, *The puritans in the diocese of Peterborough, 1558–1610*, Publications of the Northamptonshire Record Office, 30 (Northampton, 1979), pp. 136–8.

II

It was in the winter of 1591 that Edmund Coppinger began plotting feverishly to save Presbyterianism in England from utter extinction. Coppinger was a minor royal servant and the impoverished younger son of a Suffolk gentry family connected by patronage with the puritan earl of Warwick.¹⁴ It was mutual despair about the dismal prospects for further religious reform that cemented his friendship with Henry Arthington, a Yorkshire gentleman temporarily resident in London. Passionately anti-Catholic, he had been an active detector of ‘olde massing Priests and Jesuits’ to the northern ecclesiastical commissioners and may also have assisted in circulating seditious Calvinist tracts smuggled south of the Tweed.¹⁵ Both men were obsessed by the plight of the Presbyterian leaders detained in the Fleet, as well as that of John Udall, held under sentence of death in the White Lion in Southwark. Both were known to be ‘professors of the Gospel, neither of the coldest or lewke-warme sort’ and indeed ‘scalding hote in desire of innovation’.¹⁶ Their ultra-Protestant views brought them into close rapport with William Hacket, whose heart Coppinger wished might be knit with his as tightly ‘as Davids & Jonathans, Moses & Aarons’.¹⁷ Not long after Cartwright’s confinement the threesome held ‘a solemne meetinge in a woode, when great consultation was had concerninge the deliverye of ther restrained bretheren’, and in May Coppinger boldly informed Udall that a ‘great worke’, in which ‘divers that lie hid’ had been ‘hammering their heads’ and ‘busying their braynes’, was firmly afoot. ‘I beseech you cheere up yourselves in the Lord’, he declared jubilantly, ‘for the day of our redemption is at hand.’¹⁸

Early in 1591 Coppinger began seeking sanction for this ‘secret project’ from the nine imprisoned ministers and other notable provincial and metropolitan puritans. Among those he pestered with an endless stream of unsolicited messages and letters were Stephen Egerton, preacher at St Anne Blackfriars, William Charke, lecturer at Lincoln’s Inn, and Walter Travers, author of the controversial *Book of discipline*, in addition to two strong suspects in the hunt for the elusive Master Marprelate, John Penry, in exile in Scotland, and the

¹⁴ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 1; *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*. Coppinger does not seem to have taken a degree, although both his brothers were at St John’s College, Cambridge. Henry was rector of Lavenham, 1578–1622; Ambrose was MP for Ludgarshall, Wiltshire, in 1586; John and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, part I: from the earliest times to 1751* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1922–7), II, pp. 395–6. Ambrose was also ‘chiefe officer’ to the earl of Warwick: see Thomas Cartwright, *A briefe apologie of Thomas Cartwright, against all such slaundersous accusations as it pleaseth Mr Sutcliffe in severall pamphlettes most injuriouslie to loade him with* ([Middelburg], 1596), sig. B2r, and Job Throkmorton, *The defence of Job Throkmorton, against the slaunders of Maister Sutcliffe* ([London], 1594), sig. A2v.

¹⁵ Arthington, *Seduction*, pp. 9, 42; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 1. Arthington was in London to obtain official approval for the foundation of a free grammar school in Wakefield. He also appears to have had recusant connections: see Hugh Aveling, ‘The Catholic recusants of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1558–1790’, *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, 10 (1962–3), p. 287.

¹⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁸ HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 608; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 36, cf. Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 157.

Warwickshire gentleman, Job Throkmorton. He also established contact with the lawyer acting for the Star Chamber defendants, Nicholas Fuller, and Peter Wentworth, an MP whose manoeuvres in favour of a fully fledged reformation need no introduction here.¹⁹ Cautious and non-committal at first, their response to Coppinger's importunate overtures grew increasingly frosty as the foolhardy scheme started to veer in the direction of political terrorism. '[L]oath to quench the spirite of God in him, or to hinder his zeale', Cartwright and Egerton entreated him 'wisely, and lovingly' to be 'carefull and circumspect'. When he failed to heed their advice, however, they pronounced him utterly 'unworthy, to be conferred withall'.²⁰ Throkmorton too was initially equivocal, urging the Suffolk gentleman to be sure of his 'ground and warrant' before pursuing such a 'sole and singular course'. Although ready to offer his 'affection and good will', he consistently refused to be made privy to the 'particular platforms' of the plot, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of Coppinger, who had latched on to him with all the tenacity of a barnacle.²¹ And just days before the disastrous coup, William Charke took the unusual step of sternly rebuking the conspirators from a public pulpit, saying there were 'some persons so desperate, that they would willingly thrust themselves upon the rockes of the land'.²²

These sharp strictures did nothing to dissuade the self-appointed prophets and they now turned upon Cartwright and his colleagues and subjected them to a withering critique. In the *Prophecie of judgements against England* Arthington sat up writing in the early hours of Monday 12 July, leading preachers were denounced as 'hypocriticall Idolaters' who upheld Presbyterianism in one breath but denied it in another by condoning 'the counterfeit worship of God with crosse and surplesse', which was 'worse then Sodome and Gomorre, or the purple whoore of Rome'. They were guilty of winking at wicked magistrates and ministers who strove to 'keepe out the Elderships ... and mainteine in their

¹⁹ Letters to and from these individuals are selectively cited and printed in Cosin, *Conspiracie*, and Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*. For their activities, see Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement*, index, s.n. Egerton, Charke, Travers; for the London puritan lectureships, see Paul Seaver, *The puritan lectureships: the politics of religious dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford, 1970). On Egerton's involvement, see the letter from Richard Bancroft, bishop of London, to Sir Robert Cecil, 2 Apr. 1601, HMC, *Calendar of the manuscripts of the Most Hon. the marquis of Salisbury &c. preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, part XI* (London, 1906), p. 154. Other London ministers with whom Coppinger was in contact include (Martin or Robert) Cooper, Richard Gardiner, Edward Phillips; he also corresponded with the Scottish clergyman James Gibson.

²⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 16–17; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 148–9, 151.

²¹ Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 154–5, 174; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 17; Throkmorton, *Defence*, esp. sigs. A2v, B2r–v. Throkmorton tells how Coppinger hung around his lodging house, asking for him three or four times a day, and arriving one morning before he was even out of bed. Throkmorton eventually reluctantly agreed to hear Hacket pray: *ibid.* sigs. A3v, D1r, D2r–v.

²² Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 163–4; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 27. Coppinger retorted to Charke's censure from the pulpit by declaring that it was he and other ministers who had brought the church into 'danger of shipwracke': *ibid.* p. 28. In Cheapside the prophets had commended with 'excessive praise... Thomas Cartwright, that had bene sometimes when he first wrote in the cause of the Discipline of the Church, but not of him as he now was, for that... he was false away from his former love': Cartwright, *Brief apologie*, sig. B4r.

roome, officers and offices of Antichrist'. Their halting between God and Belial had hardened the Lord's heart against granting their requests for 'bringing in the Discipline'.²³

But it would be wrong to infer that Hacket, Coppinger, and Arthington were shunned and rebuffed by all who accounted themselves sworn enemies of the prelates. They did in fact forge effective links with a number of individuals who played an important if relatively inconspicuous role at the heart or on the radical margins of the puritan movement. Ralph Hockenhull, probably minister of Chalfont St Peter in Buckinghamshire, acted as an intermediary between Coppinger and Cartwright, relaying messages to and from the Fleet.²⁴ Another regular go-between was John Bentley, servant to Sir Richard Knightley, the Northamptonshire magnate whose Fawsley estate had temporarily housed the Martinist press just two years before.²⁵ Bentley frequently joined the trio for religious exercises at the home of Thomas Lancaster, an otherwise obscure London schoolmaster, whom the prophets lauded as 'a more holie man then any Preacher... throughout the whole land' because 'he had kept himselfe undefiled from the common corruptions of these times'.²⁶ Hacket lodged in several puritan households in the city and a whole regiment of hot Protestant matrons apparently helped disperse the manifestos the prophets devised 'for preparing... the mindes of the people'. Not least among these indomitable dames was Mistress Margaret Lawson, the sharp-tongued shopkeeper's wife whose unseemly clashes with Bishop Aylmer and intrepid adventures during the Marprelate campaign had earned her the epithet 'the shrew at Pauls Gate'. It was said that the conspirators had deliberately targeted 'the sisters of that faction', 'the weaker vessels', as the best way of winning over their husbands and brothers to support the perilous scheme.²⁷

²³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 38, 39–40, 59.

²⁴ See, for example, Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*, pp. 151, 158; Cartwright, *Briefe apologie*, sig. B2v. A bond dated 27 June 1591 from Hockenhull to the bailiff and burgesses of Warwick can be found in Thomas Kemp, ed., *The blacke booke of Warwick* (Warwick, 1898), p. 361.

²⁵ See Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*, p. 144. The second of the Marprelate tracts (generally known as *The epitome*) was printed at Fawsley House in late Nov. 1588: William Pierce, ed., *The Marprelate tracts, 1588, 1589* (London, 1911), p. 103.

²⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 42, 51; Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*, pp. 144, 161, 164–5.

²⁷ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 31–2; HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 608. 'Mistress L' is also referred to in Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*, p. 160. Margaret Lawson is mentioned in several Martinist and anti-Martinist tracts as a famous enemy to 'dumb dogs and tyrannical prelates'. She was notorious for the 'immodestie' and 'vilenesse of her tongue' and other 'unwomanly behaviour'. For her activities in the Marprelate campaign and her confrontational encounters with Bishop John Aylmer in 1586, see Pierce, ed., *The Marprelate tracts*, pp. 30–2, 268–9; Albert Peel, ed., *The seconde part of a register being a calendar of manuscripts under that title intended for publication by the puritans about 1593, and now in Dr Williams's Library, London* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1915), II, pp. 35–6. The 'Mistress B' also noted by Cosin may be 'Mistress Blackwell' referred to in Marprelate's *Epistle*: Pierce, ed., *The Marprelate tracts*, p. 32. These allegations about female activism anticipate Richard Hooker's famous suggestion in the preface to *Of the lawes of ecclesiastical politie. Eyght booke* (London, 1594), pp. 17–18, that puritan evangelists bestowed 'most labour... to win and reteine towards this cause them whose judgements are commonlie weakest by reason of their sex', 'this so eminent industrie in making proselytes more of that sex then of the other groweth, for that they are deemed apter to serve as instruments and helps'. For reflections on these themes, see Patrick Collinson, "'Not

Investigating officials seized no less than 1,000 copies of these unlicensed publications waiting to be dispatched to Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, and Essex: this too surely bespeaks inside information about an extensive communication and distribution system already in place.²⁸

Even more significant is the connection between the three enthusiasts and the Reverend Giles Wigginton, a dissident preacher who had been deprived of his Yorkshire living of Sedbergh and Dent in 1585. A bitter adversary of Archbishop Whitgift, renowned for his 'bold hardie forwardnes', he referred flippantly to Elizabeth I as 'a Queene of a may game' and seems to have had little patience with those who tarried politely for the magistrate.²⁹ Confined in the Counter gaol in Woodstreet, in the spring of 1591 Wigginton became embroiled in the conspiracy right up to his neck.³⁰ It was probably Wigginton's theological training and acerbic wit which lay behind the propaganda circulated on the eve of the coup: a treatise of 'Praedestination' which claimed that God had preordained his saints to collaborate with the insurgents and that to resist was to impugn his immutable will, and two ballads entitled *The Fooles bolte* and *A fatherly exhortation to a certain yong courtier*, which lashed out

sexual in the ordinary sense": women, men and religious transactions', in idem, *Elizabethan essays* (London, 1994), pp. 119–50. The pamphlets were printed with the help of one Browne at Whitsun, who apparently died 'for sorrow' two days after his arrest: HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, pp. 608–9.

²⁸ HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 608; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 32.

²⁹ Quotations from Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 2; Sutcliffe, *Answer to a certaine libel*, p. 200. Wigginton clashed swords with Whitgift while at Trinity College, Cambridge, then under the mastership of the future archbishop, who was to haunt him for the rest of his chequered career, ever ready to suspect him of stirring up trouble. For Wigginton's stormy undergraduate years, his suspension from Sedbergh, and his other woes at the hands of the bishops, see Peel, ed., *The seconde parte of a register*, II, pp. 225, 231–2, 238–58, quotation at p. 246; and London, Dr Williams's Library (DWL), Congregational Library MS 1. e. 14, fos. 11–17 (a report of two conferences between Wigginton and Whitgift on 28 May and 21 June 1584), fos. 18–26 ('A short somme of my release out of prison'), printed in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 2 (1905–6), pp. 379–86. Wigginton's sermons appear to have influenced London separatists. See, for example, the examination of Edward Boys, haberdasher of St Bride's, Apr. 1593: *The writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591–1593*, ed. Leland H. Carlson, Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts, VI (London, 1970), pp. 349, 379. But separatist leaders like Barrow condemned Wigginton along with other 'tolerating preachers', who, he claimed, 'straine at a gnat and swallow a camel': *The writings of Henry Barrow, 1587–1590*, ed. Leland H. Carlson, Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts, III (London, 1962), p. 103. He seems to have been briefly restored to his living in 1592 despite Cosin's efforts to incriminate him. In 1594 he wrote to Michael Hicks regarding the rights of some of his friends living in tenements there: British Library (BL), MS Lansdowne 77, fo. 159r. By April 1597 he had been suspended for four or five years and wrote asking for Burghley's intervention on his behalf, and urging him to establish a 'Counter-seminary colledge' to produce propaganda in reply to the stream of polemic issuing from Rheims and Rome: BL, MS Lansdowne 84, fo. 238r. There is a brief account of him in Charles Henry Cooper and Thompson Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigienses* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1858–1913), II, pp. 329–31.

³⁰ See Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 33, cf. Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*, pp. 164–5. For Wigginton's own report of his conferences and speeches with the prophets, see Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 49–52. It may well have been from Wigginton that the trio copied the practice of refusing to give bishops and magistrates their official titles: see DWL, Congregational Library MS 1. e. 14, fos. 13, 14–16, 25; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 34, 59.

extravagantly against the current civil and ecclesiastical regime. The halting rhyme and frivolous spirit of these impertinent ditties was suspiciously similar to the idiom employed in Master Marprelate's memorable philippic against the bishops – widely ascribed to Wigginton himself:

My sonne if thou a Courtier sue to bee,
In flowre of youth this lesson learne of mee.
A Christian true although he be a clowne,
May teach a King to weare sceptre and crowne.
For God will sure confound such, as devise
His ordinance or church, to tyrannize.³¹

It was Wigginton, moreover, who introduced the false Christ to his spiritual comrades.³² The son of a saddler, like Hacket he was a native of the Northamptonshire market town of Oundle and it was here that he returned after his suspension from the ministry. Business partners in the malt trade, the two soon emerged as the ringleaders of a Protestant splinter group hovering on the threshold of separatism. The curate Hugh Clarke recalled many 'bickerings and disputations' he had had with 'some of the chief of them'.³³ In 1589–90 the aspiring messiah was hauled before the consistory court for having taken 'the surples from the deske in the church... where it did hange and contemptuously in the time of service layd it under his taylor'.³⁴ Hacket's allergy to the rags and relics of Rome eventually induced him to forsake his own parish and defect to the adjacent village of Stoke Doyle instead. Even there he and his band of followers exhibited precisian scruples, lingering 'in the Greene churchyard... untill they heard the Psalme begun before the sermon, for feare they should be polluted by those prayers'.³⁵ Warmly embraced by locals who shared his stiff liturgical views, Hacket was inducted into a select circle of the godly scattered across the east and west midlands. He became closely acquainted with Robert Catelin, vicar of All Saints, Northampton, and stayed no less than a month in the home of the MP Paul Wentworth in Hampshire, where he was 'used most

³¹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 32; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 162 (who was quick to point out the similarities between these 'rimes' and the Marprelate tracts); HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, pp. 608–9. There are several references to Wigginton in the tracts, including an account of his deprivation: *The Marprelate tracts*, pp. 57–9, 266, 276. For suspicions that Wigginton was Martin, see *ibid.* p. 246; Peel, ed., *The seconde parte of a register*, 1, p. 16. Wigginton's satirical skills, as well as his pastoral concerns, are evidenced in the mock visitation in his hand now in DWL: 'Certeine articles ministred by the Arch: at noe time, leaste he should hurte or shame his owne prophane hirelinges for neglecting of most Excellent and waightlie matters and duties: as well is knowne they doe neglect and despise them', Congregational Library MS 1. e. 14, fos. 1–10, printed in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 3 (1907–8), pp. 27–32.

³² Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 153.

³³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 3; Samuel Clarke, *A generall martyrologie... Whereunto are added, the lives of sundry modern divines* (London, 1651), p. 389. According to Clarke, the region was strongly infected by Brownism. For the Northamptonshire context, see Sheils, *The puritans in the diocese of Peterborough*, esp. pp. 51–72, 119–30, 136–40.

³⁴ Northampton, Northamptonshire Record Office, Peterborough Diocesan Records (NRO, PDR), MS X609/23 (Correction book, July 1588–Nov. 1590), fo. 143v. I owe this and subsequent references to Hacket's exploits in Oundle and its vicinity to Dr Sheils.

³⁵ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 4.

Christianly' and 'deeply exercised in the spirite'.³⁶ In the vicinity of Oundle he attracted quite an entourage, including Robert Pamphlin, a schoolmaster who acted as his reader and scribe, and Robert Welford, a yeoman from Earl's Barton, indicted in 1592 for repeated absence from communion and matins, 'a notable Browninge, a martin despisinge government, sometime... Hacketts co[m]panion'. Behind this coalition we can discern the outlines of an evolving conventicle.³⁷

There can be no doubt that Hacket, like Coppinger and Arthington, was inflamed with that intense and athletic strain of lay piety Patrick Collinson has taught us was the tell-tale sign of a 'puritan'.³⁸ All three engaged in devotional practices which many of their peers would have regarded as highly pretentious optional extras. Inveterate sermon-gadders, their 'itching eares' carried them all over the city in search of preachers with sound Presbyterian views: Hacket would walk out rudely on any lecturer who deigned to wear traditional vestments.³⁹ By July the threesome were assembling regularly for marathon sessions of fasting, humiliation, and extemporary prayer – a task to which Hacket fell as if 'to his sworde and buckler' and in which, although wholly unlettered, he proved to be unusually skilled. His manner of praying as though he was 'speaking to God face to face' had an hypnotic effect on Coppinger and Arthington, but to Job Throkmorton his prolix groanings and murmurings, 'puffinges and beatings', were more 'like the wildegoose chase', having 'neither heade nor foote, rime nor reason'.⁴⁰ Hacket punctuated this strange, inspired form of utterance with solemn oaths and imprecations, imploring the Almighty to confound him body and soul if he dissembled or lied.⁴¹ This daring technique, which deeply impressed his disciples, reflected their peculiarly literal belief in the Lord's propensity to intervene suddenly to strike down perjurers and sinners. They also shared an unhealthy and typically puritan preoccupation with the inner workings of their souls and the providential 'signs' and 'seals' by which God conversed with his 'saints'. In all three this would culminate in the conviction that they had been privileged with familiar

³⁶ Ibid. p. 44. One of his associates was Anthony Palmer, lord of the manor and a kinsman of Sir Richard Knightley: Sheils, *The puritans in the diocese of Peterborough*, p. 137. On Catelin, who had previously been schoolmaster at Oundle, see ibid. pp. 74–6, 80–1, 100, 141–2, and Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 168.

³⁷ On Pamphlin, who was presented with eight others for not attending church whenever the minister was absent in September 1589, and had already been in court for associating with Wigginton, see NRO, PDR, MS X609/23, fos. 144v–6r, MS X609/23a (Correction book, Oct. 1589–Nov. 1592), fo. 51r; and Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 23. On Welford, NRO, PDR, X610/25 (Correction book, Nov. 1588–June 1595), fo. 19r, printed in 'A calendar of a court book of Richard Howland, bishop of Peterborough, 1584–1600', ed. E. A. Irons, *Northamptonshire Notes and Queries*, NS, 3 (1910–11), p. 239.

³⁸ See esp. Patrick Collinson, *The religion of Protestants: the church in English society, 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), ch. 6, and idem, 'The English conventicle', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Voluntary religion*, Studies in Church History, xxiii (1986), pp. 223–59.

³⁹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 2, 46; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 160. Cosin scornfully described the 'superstitious' piety of puritans in the preface to his *Conspiracie*, sigs. A3v–B1v.

⁴⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 5, 7–8; Throkmorton, *Defence*, sigs. D2v–3r.

⁴¹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 5, 24.

conversations with their Maker and with supernatural revelations and dreams.⁴² A side-effect of what R. T. Kendall has called 'experimental predestinarianism',⁴³ such close encounters with the invisible world also anticipate the ecstatic experiences of Civil War 'enthusiasts'. Writing in 1655, Richard Baxter would remember the trio as having 'lived a while as wrapped up in the Spirit', and link them explicitly with the Grindletonians, the Yorkshire antinomian sect that foreshadowed the Quakers and Seekers.⁴⁴ The cultural and ideological roots of seventeenth-century radical dissent may yet be shown to lie in mainstream Elizabethan puritanism.⁴⁵

III

The religious subculture described above is one which we are accustomed to associating almost exclusively with the well-to-do gentry and rising 'middling sort'. Many recent studies have implied that ardent Protestantism, which set such a premium on reading the bible, was by its very nature virtually incompatible with illiteracy. Historians have posited a sharp polarity between the dynamic Calvinism of a tiny minority of the populace and the 'profane', semi-pagan, and 'popish' beliefs and rituals of the rest; and they have superimposed this stubborn cultural dichotomy upon one created by wealth, class, and, perhaps above all, education.⁴⁶

In many respects William Hacket represents an intriguing challenge to this historiographical paradigm. Born into a humble Oundle household, though

⁴² For Coppinger, see *ibid.* pp. 10–12, 46; for Arthington, p. 47; for Hacket, below.

⁴³ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), esp. pt III.

⁴⁴ Richard Baxter, *The unreasonableness of infidelity manifested in four discourses* (London, 1655), repr. in *The practical works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (23 vols., London, 1830), xx, p. 296. See also Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia sacra. Or, a treatise of Satans temptations: in three parts* (London, 1677), pt II, ch. 2, p. 188. On the Grindletonians, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in puritan faith and experience* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 178–80; C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660–1688* (London, 1968), pp. 290–1, and more generally Nigel Smith, *Perfection proclaimed: language and literature in English radical religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), esp. chs. 1–2.

⁴⁵ Cf. Patrick Collinson's recent work, which stresses the conservative and stabilizing character of puritanism, arguing that far from being potentially corrosive of the established church, it simply represented its most vigorous and successful tendencies: see esp. *The religion of Protestants*, pp. 275–83; 'The English conventicle', pp. 223–59. The question of the genealogy of seventeenth-century dissent is addressed from another angle in Margaret Spufford, ed., *The world of rural dissenters, 1520–1725* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁴⁶ This line of thinking is most pronounced in the work of Dr Christopher Haigh: see, for example, 'The recent historiography of the English reformation', in Christopher Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation revised* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 24; 'Puritan evangelism in the reign of Elizabeth I', *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), pp. 30–58. See also Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and piety in an English village: Terling, 1525–1700* (Oxford, 1995 edn), esp. chs. 6–7. The link between puritanism and literacy is upheld in Martin Ingram's recent survey of early modern popular religion: 'From reformation to toleration: popular religious cultures in England, 1540–1690', in Tim Harris, ed., *Popular culture in England, c. 1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 103. Margaret Spufford launches a vigorous reaction against this interpretative paradigm in 'The importance of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in *The world of rural dissenters*, pp. 1–4, 10.

naturally clever, he had, by all accounts, never learnt to read or write. He acquired his yeomanry status by marrying Anna Moreton, the widow of a prosperous farmer. Their courtship took place while Hacket was in the service of Gilbert Hussey, a tenant of the powerful recusant gentleman, Sir Thomas Tresham, upon whose extensive estates he was also subsequently employed.⁴⁷ During this period he may have been a church papist himself: in October 1577 he was presented for not receiving the Eucharist 'at Ester nor synce'.⁴⁸ Non-communicating, of course, was not always a gesture of Catholic conscientious objection; often it was merely a symptom of spiritual indifference – the practical godlessness of 'cold statute protestants' and 'carnal Christians'. And at this point Hacket does seem to personify the negative stereotype invented by incurably pessimistic Calvinist preachers. The lurid biographical details related by Cosin were no doubt carefully selected and deftly embroidered, but they have their foundation in a personal 'historie' the prophet dictated to Coppinger, as well as in local gossip and rumour.⁴⁹ A drunkard and adulterer addicted to blaspheming and swearing, Hacket quickly wasted his wife's inheritance by following 'loose and licencious companie'. He was an irascible fellow, notorious in the neighbourhood for biting off the nose of a schoolmaster during a brawl in a tavern and then, 'in a most spitefull & divelish outrage', chewing it up. Also a talented comedian and mimic, he attended sermons 'of purpose to gibe, mocke, and carpe' at the preacher and amuse himself in alehouses repeating them 'in scoffing maner', to the obvious delight of tipplers in their cups.⁵⁰

All this was prior to his 'conversion' to Protestantism, which coincided with the arrival of Giles Wigginton upon the scene. '[W]onderfullie altered and come home', Hacket rapidly developed an uncontrollable loathing for Roman Catholicism, informing against local recusants, and indulging in vicious 'Table talke against Papists and Seminaries', whom, he declared gleefully, were destined to 'be broken in hell'.⁵¹ He wholeheartedly embraced the religious voluntarism of the godly and became a vociferous advocate of Presbyterian discipline, which he imagined 'would proove like the boxe of Pandora', a cure for all ills.⁵² Gradually Hacket came to believe he was engaged in a kind of holy crusade. Externalizing the emotional psychomachy experienced by many a

⁴⁷ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁸ NRO, PDR, archdeaconry of Northampton, visitation court book v, 1574–80, fo. 39r. Gilbert Hussey seems to have exhibited various degrees of Catholic nonconformity. In August 1575 he was presented for not having communicated 'thes sixteen yeres': MS X607/9 (Ecclesiastical commissioners, Mar. 1573–Jan. 1578), fo. 40v. In September 1578 he was refusing to attend both communion and matins: archdeaconry of Northampton, visitation court book v, 1574–80, fo. 85r.

⁴⁹ For Hacket's 'historie', see Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 43–6. This was apparently intended for publication, p. 9. It bears interesting similarities with the conventionalized genre of 'godly lives' and autobiographical narratives which came to full maturity in the seventeenth century: confessions of youthful sinfulness often preceded accounts of 'conversion' to an impeccably Protestant lifestyle. See William Haller, *The rise of puritanism* (New York, 1938), ch. 3, esp. pp. 97–115.

⁵⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 2–3, 4–5, 6.

⁵¹ Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. B1v; Arthington, *Seduction*, p. 8; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 3, 43.

⁵² Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 6.

puritan, he told of the terrible torments he had endured for the sake of the Gospel, his 'buffettings' by Satan and his persecution by the pope and his minions. Throughout these grievous afflictions the Lord and his angels had not only watched over him 'like unto doves', but sent a large cross upon his breast, 'unloosed his feete and handes from his fetters' and revealed to him the gaping mouth of hell and the mysteries of celestial paradise.⁵³ Reports of these divine conferences spread and Hacket began to be 'mervailed at, and greatly magnified' 'as a man greatly vouchsafed with God, and adourned with rare and singular endowments from heaven'.⁵⁴ In the 1580s he travelled to Lincoln and York as an itinerant preacher, announcing to the inhabitants that he was a second John the Baptist, 'sent thither... to prepare the way of the Lord'. Whipped and banished by the civic authorities, he then adopted the mantle of a prophet of divine vengeance in the mould of Jeremiah, Hosea, or Joel, charged with threatening impenitent England with the triple plague of sword, pestilence, and famine.⁵⁵ By the time he joined forces with Coppinger and Arthington he was modelling himself self-consciously on Daniel as well: visiting the lions in the Tower of London, he purportedly took 'the fiercest of them by the head' and escaped without being mauled.⁵⁶ Ultimately he would see himself as the Angel of the Apocalypse somehow fused with the Son of Man dividing the sheep from the goats.⁵⁷

And yet this Northamptonshire maltmaker remains contradictory and amphibious. His entry into the ranks of the 'saints' did not entail turning his back completely on the 'alternative society' Calvinist divines were striving tooth and nail to combat and reclaim. It does not seem, for instance, to have put an end to his amorous adventures. On his sermon-gadding excursions he was allegedly accompanied by 'light idle gossips' and he himself bragged of his many 'baits' and 'temptations' with members of the opposite sex. Accused of attempting to rape a poor virgin 'under colour of giving godly counsell', is it inappropriate to depict him as a religious seducer, an individual who managed to combine his evangelical impulses with his erotic instincts?⁵⁸ Nor did Hacket's puritanism preclude continued participation in the rich vernacular culture of mocking rhymes and defamatory 'balladding' unveiled for us by Doctors Ingram and Fox. Whereas before he had hurled verbal abuse at any

⁵³ Ibid. pp. 24–6, 43–5. On the psychological turmoil experienced by puritans, see Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: madness, anxiety, and healing in seventeenth century England* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. pp. 217–19; John Stachniewski, *The persecutory imagination: English puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford, 1991), esp. chs. 1–2.

⁵⁴ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 8.
⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 7–8. On medieval itinerant preachers of repentance, see Richard C. Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), esp. pp. 35–6, 462–90; Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and people in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, 1990), ch. 4. A good comparative example is the Drummer of Niklashausen, the young German shepherd and minstrel who stood at the centre of a penitential cult in 1476: see Norman Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium: revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the middle ages* (London, 1970 edn), ch. 12.

⁵⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 46. Daniel vi. 22–3.

⁵⁷ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 50. Rev. vii. 2; Matt. xxv. 32. Here he was relying on muddled memories of biblical passages rather than precise exegesis, as Bauckham notes: *Tudor apocalypse*, p. 199.

⁵⁸ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 4, 6, 43.

representative of the institutional church, he now 'spen[t] his mouth largely in invectives, railings and contumelies' against the bishops, 'not sticking', it was said, to procure 'sundry lewd infamous libels', which he 'framed and set up thereabouts'.⁵⁹ Professor Collinson has recently demonstrated that the Marprelate Tracts themselves emerge at least partly from the realm of popular satire and ridicule and it is surely in the same tradition of 'underground literature' that we should situate *The fooles bolte* and *A fatherly exhortation to a certaine yong courtier* – songs Hacket himself apparently performed in the streets and may even have helped to devise.⁶⁰ It may be a mistake, then, to assume there was an unbridgeable gulf between the ethos of the 'godly' elite and the outlook and lifestyle of the 'ungodly multitude'. Aggressive Protestantism did not necessarily leave its converts immune to the recreational customs and behavioural conventions of their 'unreformed' neighbours and forebears.⁶¹

More striking still is William Hacket's affinity with a body of practices and attitudes Protestant clergymen vehemently denounced as heresy and diabolism. To my mind he slides as, if not more, comfortably into a cultural milieu characterized by charms, omens, spells, and 'superstitious' techniques as into one organized around sermons, the sabbath, and a reverence for scripture. Some of his exploits as a popular prophet bear an uncanny resemblance to the activities of the part-time healers, diviners, and white wizards who inhabited almost every rural community in Elizabethan England; others bring him closer to the world of black magic and malevolent witchcraft.⁶² In boasting that he could reveal secrets, soothsay, and 'bewray things concealed', for example, he was asserting special gifts of clairvoyance very similar to those claimed by village cunning men and women: predicting the weather, foretelling the future, and discovering lost and stolen goods figure prominently in the professional services they provided to their clients.⁶³ Many such magicians likewise attributed their psychic skills to divine inspiration, supposing that the spirits manifested to them in crystal balls, mirrors, and dreams were 'holy Angels, or the soules of excellent men, as of Moses, Samuel,

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 3–4. Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, rough music and mocking rhymes in early modern England', in Barry Reay, ed., *Popular culture in seventeenth-century England* (London, 1988), pp. 166–97; Adam Fox, 'Ballads, libels and popular ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past & Present*, 145 (1994), pp. 47–83.

⁶⁰ Patrick Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical vitriol: religious satire in the 1590s and the invention of puritanism', in Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 150–70. For Hacket singing songs in the streets, see Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 33. A ballad entitled *The fooles boulte is soone shott* (London, [c. 1630]) survives in the Pepys collection in Magdalene College, Cambridge.

⁶¹ In this regard Hacket cuts a very different figure from the well-known London artisan Nehemiah Wallington, at least as he has been presented to us by Professor Paul Seaver: *Wallington's world: a puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London* (London, 1985), p. viii.

⁶² On popular magic, black and white, see C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and demonism: a concise account derived from sworn depositions and confessions obtained in the courts of England and Wales* (London, 1933), pp. 76–92; Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a regional and comparative study* (London, 1970), ch. 8; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, chs. 8, 16. For a contemporary account of witchcraft techniques, see Richard Bernard, *A guide to grand-jury men, divided into two books* (London, 1629 edn), ch. 13.

⁶³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 7, 43, 98.

David, and others'.⁶⁴ Nor was it unusual for witches to experience ecstasies or extraterrestrial journeys like those Hacket described: in demonological literature stories of the night trips on which the devil carried his servants abound.⁶⁵ As for his bold insistence that, if imprisoned, the bolts would instantly fall from his heels, this savours less of a steadfast trust in providence than a residual belief in the supernatural immunities afforded by amulets, talismans, incantations, and tutelary spirits.⁶⁶ No less revealing is his alleged ability to open and shut the heavens at will: even if every divine in the land prayed for a downpour, swaggered Hacket, it would not occur until he gave the command. Rainmaking was a miraculous faculty ascribed to the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation xi; it was also one vaunted by many a sorcerer.⁶⁷ So was the art of casting out demons – and by 1591 the Oundle Yeoman seems to have gained quite a reputation as an amateur exorcist. Among his patients was 'good Maistress Honeywood', the pious gentlewoman whose religious hypochondria had already been treated by spiritual physicians as famous as Edward Dering and the martyrologist Foxe. 'Possessed' by the devil for over a decade, it is perhaps not so incredible that she turned to an illiterate tradesman with dubious credentials and highly unorthodox methods. According to Arthington, Hacket prayed that the resident fiend might be transferred from her body to his, and, by all accounts, his supplications sounded more like mumbo jumbo than any standard clerical litany.⁶⁸ He also promised certain success in a way puritan therapists like John Darrell would never have dared.⁶⁹ Such unshakeable confidence in the automatic efficacy of petitionary prayer sits uneasily with Calvinist theology, which categorically rejected the ideal that God could be mechanically coerced. The same might be said about the prophets' practice of invoking judgements from heaven against their archenemies: this too implied that it was possible to manipulate divine action in a manner that was

⁶⁴ See George Gifford, *A dialogue concerning witches and witchcraftes* (London, 1593), sig. F1v, cf. sig. E2v; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, p. 126; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 323–4.

⁶⁵ See Ewen, *Witchcraft and demonianism*, pp. 83–5; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: deciphering the witches' sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London, 1989), esp. pt. II.

⁶⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 25, 47, 64, 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 22, 25. Hacket also claimed that when he and his travelling companions were caught in a torrential rainstorm not one drop fell upon their clothes as they rode: p. 44. Rev. xi. 6. Witches often alleged they could raise storms and control the weather at their pleasure: Ewen, *Witchcraft and demonianism*, pp. 89–90; Norman Cohn, *Europe's inner demons: an enquiry inspired by the great witch-hunt* (London, 1975), pp. 152–3, who cites the example of Elena Dalok, arraigned before the commissary of London in 1493, who freely boasted that she could make it rain at will.

⁶⁸ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 5, 64, where she is referred to as 'maistress H'. She is identified by Arthington, *Seduction*, p. 14. For her earlier interactions with Dering and Foxe, see Edward Dering, *Certaine godly and verie comfortable letters, full of christian consolation* ([Middelburg, 1590?]), sigs. A6r–B4v, C3v–5r; Thomas Fuller, *The history of the worthies of England* (London, 1662), bk II, p. 86.

⁶⁹ Darrell and his associates insisted that their thaumaturgic methods were not infallible: they were not miracles but wonders, not 'miraculum' but 'mirandum'. See D. P. Walker, *'Unclean spirits': possession and exorcism in France and England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1981), esp. pp. 5–6, 66–9; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 569–72. As Thomas notes, the Protestant remedy of fasting and prayer had the potential to develop into a ritual claiming near mechanical efficacy.

utter anathema to Protestant theorists.⁷⁰ Shot through with the assumption that hostile words could harm and kill, such comminations were all too reminiscent of the ritualized cursing that was a basic technique of maleficium. Convinced that his own afflictions were brought about by sorcerers employed by the pope, king of Spain, and other Catholic princes, Hacket clearly subscribed to the view that malice in and of itself was a powerful weapon.⁷¹

Most compelling of all is the crime that clinched the government's case that the pseudo-messiah was guilty of treason. In one of his London lodging houses, he had not only defaced the queen's arms (scratching out the eyes of the lion and dragon and obliterating the cross on the crown), but pierced a printed portrait of Elizabeth 'with some bodkin or yron instrument in the very place, representing her royall heart'. He said he had been 'mooved therunto inwardly by the spirit, to take away her whole power of her authoritie' and one of the two charges levelled against him was that he had 'compassed', 'imagined', and 'devised' her deprivation and death 'by the instigation of the Devill'.⁷² His judges were in no doubt that this act of political iconoclasm was more than merely symbolic, and the sinister overtones of image magic are certainly very hard to ignore. Accusations of fatal injuries inflicted by sticking pins in effigies or pictures of the victim made a recurrent appearance in witchcraft trials in late Tudor England and this ancient method of wreaking revenge had been used against reigning monarchs and government ministers right back to Edward II.⁷³ In 1571 the privy council interrogated several persons in connection with 'a boke painetted wherein the Queen's Majestie's image is with an arrowe in her mowthe'. Later that decade the discovery of a box containing three wax models was thought 'very likelie to be intended to the destruction' of Elizabeth; in 1580 Stephen Kilden and his spouse were accused of attempting to murder Lord Burghley and the earl of Leicester by engraving their faces in wood; and in January 1590, just eighteen months before the Cheapside conspiracy came to a head, one Mrs Dewse paid a conjurer 'two lemons a sugare lofe & a capon' to make figurines of several leading statesmen who had contrived to eject her husband from office. She hoped that the suffering she inflicted would be deemed 'Gods doinge' – in other words, divine retribution.⁷⁴ Hacket differed only in thinking that he *was* the Lord's instrument of wrath.

⁷⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 5, 25, 35.

⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 24, 25–6, 45. On cursing, see Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 599–611; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, pp. 171–6, 196–7. An interesting parallel is Elizabeth Jackson, an old woman accused of cursing and bewitching a London teenager in 1602. Upon hearing of her victim's affliction, she boasted 'I thanck my God he hath heard my prayer, and stopped the mouth and tyed the tongue of one of myne enemies': Stephen Bradwell, 'Mary Glovers late woeful case, together with her joyfull deliverance' (1603), BL, MS Sloane 831, fo. 4v, printed in Michael MacDonald, ed., *Witchcraft and hysteria in Elizabethan London: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover case* (London, 1991), p. 4.

⁷² Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 46, 61, 65–6. See also HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 607.

⁷³ See George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), ch. 3; Ewen, *Witchcraft and demonianism*, pp. 29, 79–80, 152–3, 200–1, 244, 346, 353, 458.

⁷⁴ *APC*, viii, p. 31; *APC*, xi, p. 22; BL, MS Harley 160, fo. 188r, and *APC*, xiii, p. 80; PRO, SP 12/230/30 and 31 (Jan. 1589), printed in W. Hart, 'Observations on some documents relating

It is little wonder, then, that William Hacket's contemporaries found him difficult to fathom. The 'simpler sort' and 'credulous multitude' were unsure whether to impute his telepathic powers to 'sorcerie and enchauntments' or to the Holy Ghost working within him, whether to fear him for his spells or revere him for his puritanical zeal. Opinion in Oundle was mixed about the eerie light seen shining in his chamber late one evening: did it indicate the presence of a good or evil spirit? Was he a religious visionary or a wicked practitioner of the magical arts?⁷⁵ Hacket's landlord in London, Ralph Kayes, was taking no risks: he promptly evicted his lodger after camomile plants in parts of his garden where Hacket had walked 'did wither up the next night, and waxed blacke'.⁷⁶

What all this implies is that the transition from cunning man to Calvinist shaman and mystic could be as smooth and unproblematic as that from healer to witch. It surely reinforces David Gentilcore's argument that we need to see 'religion' and 'magic', divine and demonic, as part of the same 'cultural dynamic', part of a single pool and a seamless web of supernatural beliefs – and to recognise such distinctions and dichotomies as largely polemical.⁷⁷ Hacket's ambivalent charisma also suggests that confrontations between Calvinism and 'superstitious' opinions did not always result in the total annihilation of the latter. What we sometimes find in practice is evidence of fruitful and creative convergence, of a complex and mutually enriching dialogue between reformed theology and popular culture.⁷⁸ William Hacket

to magic in the reign of Queen Elizabeth', *Archaeologia*, 40 (1866), pp. 395–6. For other cases, see *APC*, x, p. 309; John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and establishment of religion, and other various occurrences in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's happy reign* (4 vols. in 7, Oxford, 1824), III, ii, pp. 615–16; iv, p. 16. See also Roy Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 39–40. It may well have been Hacket's iconoclastic destruction of her portrait which caused the queen to be 'very much moved at the straungeness' of the conspiracy. According to Phelippes, she was 'more troubled with it than it is worth': *APC*, XXI, p. 297; PRO, SP 12/239/93. Anxieties about magical assassination persisted: the discovery in the royal chamber of a card of the queen of hearts pierced through the forehead by a nail caused serious concern at the time of Elizabeth's death in 1603. See Philip Caraman, ed., *The other face: Catholic life under Elizabeth I* (London, 1960), p. 286.

⁷⁵ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 7, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 22. See also p. 43 where a gentleman suspected him of being a witch or cunning man because of Hacket's ability to reveal secret information to which he was privy.

⁷⁷ David Gentilcore, *From bishop to witch: the system of the sacred in early modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1992), passim, esp. pp. 9–10, 131, 201–2, 259–61. A number of other early modern prophets had a popular reputation as conjurers, sorcerers, and magicians. Lady Eleanor Davies's prophecies gave her 'the reputation of a cunning woman amongst the ignorant people': Christopher Hill, *The world turned upside down: radical ideas during the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 278. For cases of clergymen prosecuted for casting figures and engaging in other magical techniques, see Peter Rushton, 'Women, witchcraft, and slander in early modern England: cases from the church courts of Durham, 1560–1675', *Northern History* (1962), pp. 121–2.

⁷⁸ Cf. Valerie I. J. Flint, *The rise of magic in early medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991), esp. conclusion, pp. 400, 407. A somewhat similar line of argument is pursued by Ann Kibbey, 'Mutations of the supernatural: witchcraft, remarkable providences, and the power of puritan men', *American Quarterly*, 34 (1982), pp. 125–148, esp. p. 135; David D. Hall, *Worlds of wonder, days of judgment*:

enshrines both the syncretic character of parochial piety and its indocility – its refusal to submit passively to acculturation by puritan elites.⁷⁹ He casts a small shadow of doubt on the thesis that a marriage between committed Protestantism and people living on the margins of literacy could never succeed.

IV

The foregoing discussion goes some way to explaining why leading Presbyterians were torn between embracing Hacket and his companions as ‘sanctified brethren’ and repelling them as men ‘deceived by the subtiltie of Satan’.⁸⁰ But we must now briefly examine Protestant attitudes to the phenomenon of prophecy itself.

When it came to defining a prophet most ministers were in broad agreement. Prophecy, declared Peter Martyr Vermigli, sometime Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, was a supernatural faculty given to particular men and women ‘without teaching or learning, whereby they are able certeinlie to knowe things heavenlie, high, and secret, and to open the same unto others for edifieng of the church’. In theory the religious vocation of persons who received an ‘extraordinary calling’ was sharply distinct from that of the ‘ordinarie ministerie’ – from the priests, scholars, and teachers who formed the backbone of institutionalized Christianity on earth. In practice, however, the clerical task of expounding scripture was often loosely described as ‘prophesying’ and many a preacher presented himself as a direct descendant of the Hebrew prophets, as a kind of divine mouthpiece and amanuensis.⁸¹

This form of ‘prophecy’ was, of course, perpetual.⁸² Whether the special office of inspired oracle and seer had continued into modern times was altogether more controversial. All agreed that the Lord had raised up many such emissaries while the church militant was still in its adolescence and

popular religious belief in early New England (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), esp. ch. 2; Michael P. Winship, ‘Encountering providence in the seventeenth century: the experiences of a yeoman and a minister’, *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 126 (1990), esp. pp. 35–6; Richard Godbeer, *The devil’s dominion: magic and religion in early New England* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁷⁹ Cf. H. C. Erik Midelfort’s suggestions in ‘The devil and the German people: reflections on the popularity of demon possession in sixteenth-century Germany’, in Stephen Ozment, ed., *Religion and culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, xi (Kirkville, Miss., 1989), p. 117.

⁸⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 16.

⁸¹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The common places of... Peter Martyr*, trans. A. Marten (London, [1583]), pt 1, ch. 3, quotations at pp. 18–19. For a similar distinction between ‘prophet’ and ‘prophesier’, see Stephen Denison, *The white wolfe, or, a sermon preached at Pauls Crosse, Feb. 11* (London, 1627), p. 4. See also Bauckham, *Tudor apocalypse*, pp. 185–7. On ministers as prophets, see John Harvey, *A discursive problem concerning prophecies* (London, 1588), pp. 36–7; Heinrich Bullinger, *A hundred sermons upon the Apocalyps* (London, 1561), p. 304; and the examples cited in my ‘Aspects of Providentialism in Early Modern England’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1994), pp. 244, 276.

⁸² See Arthur Dent, *The plaine-mans path-way to heaven. The second part* (London, 1612), p. 186; Charles Odingsells, *Two sermons lately preached at Langar in the valley of Belvoir* (London, 1620), pp. 8–9.

infancy. When mankind was first converted to the Gospel from ‘Greekish gentilitie’, instruction by direct revelation had been nothing less than essential, but once the canonical books of the bible were complete prophets, like miracles, were slowly phased out.⁸³ Some Protestants insisted that the gift of ‘breathing’ new scripture had ‘utterly’ and ‘finally ceased’ at the end of the apostolic era – Reginald Scot claimed it had stopped with the coming of Christ.⁸⁴ Such emphatically negative statements often emanated from those fighting a rearguard reaction against the flood of astrological prognostications issuing from Elizabethan presses, alongside predictions based on the obscure pronouncements of such legendary figures as Nostradamus, Merlin, Cyril, St Bridget, and the Sibyls.⁸⁵ Most theologians also maintained that the notion of Enoch and Elijah *redivivus* was a medieval myth which had no warrant in holy writ: Malachi iv. 5 had already been fulfilled – either literally in the person of John the Baptist or figuratively in the entire post-Reformation priesthood. The two witnesses presaged in Revelation xi were likewise a metaphor for the multitude of men who had risen defiantly to resist the Romish Antichrist.⁸⁶

Yet not everyone was prepared to rule out the possibility that God might send more prophets to illuminate his people. Peter Martyr was typically hesitant: ‘perhaps there be some now a daies in the church, yet I thinke ther be not manie.’ There were circumstances in which the Almighty commissioned the laity to appropriate the seat of their pastors and preachers: ‘at anie time’ when the regular clergy ‘be out of course’ He was likely to send in auxiliaries ‘to restore things unto order’.⁸⁷ But what constituted an emergency and how could any individual be sure that he or she had such a mandate?

It was on these subjects that Edmund Coppinger engaged in a protracted debate with Thomas Cartwright and other leading puritans in the incipient stages of the ill-starred conspiracy. Soon after experiencing a number of dreams in which the Lord had imbued him with a ‘wonderfull zeale’ he began to solicit

⁸³ Vermigli, *Common places*, pp. 18, 23–4.

⁸⁴ Denison, *The white wolfe*, p. 5; Dent, *Plaine-mans path-way*, p. 186; Reginald Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft, wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notablie detected* (London, 1584), bk viii, ch. 2, p. 159. Parallel discussions took place about the cessation of miracles, most of them in the context of attacks on the Roman Catholic thaumaturgic cult: see D. P. Walker, ‘The cessation of miracles’, in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: intellectual history and the occult in early modern Europe* (London, 1988), pp. 111–24.

⁸⁵ Harvey, *A discursive problem*, pp. 35, 39; Henry Howard, *A defensative against the poyson of supposed propheties* (London, 1583), passim. See also Bullinger, *A hundred sermons upon the Apocalips*, p. 12; William Perkins, *A fruitfull dialogue betweene the Christian and the worldling, concerning the ende of the world* (1587), in *The workes of... M. W. Perkins* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1608–9), iii, p. 468; Edward Topsell, *Times lamentation: or an exposition of the prophet Joel, in sundry sermons or meditations* (London, 1599), p. 63. Perkins’s tract was prompted by the widespread popular speculation generated by Regiomontanus’ prophecy regarding 1588, on which see Bauckham, *Tudor apocalypse*, ch. 9.

⁸⁶ Vermigli, *Common places*, pt iii, ch. 16, §20, pp. 382–4; Bullinger, *A hundred sermons upon the Apocalips*, p. 312. See also Henry Smith’s *The lost sheepe is found*, a personal denunciation of a Leicestershire apprentice who claimed he was Elias in 1582, in *The sermons of Master Henry Smith, gathered into one volume* (London, 1611), p. 41.

⁸⁷ Vermigli, *Common places*, pp. 18, 22. Cf. p. 24: he could not deny ‘but that there be still prophets in the church’.

opinions. Could heavenly 'workers and helpers' be found in a country in which godly preaching and proper administration of the sacraments was only sporadic and where Genevan discipline was openly oppugned by the prince and her magistrates? Could the Elizabethan church be said to be languishing in a state of 'desolation' or 'waste'?⁸⁸ No one had the nerve to affirm that this last contention was in any sense true, though Cartwright conceded that God did very occasionally appoint prophets to assist in 'th'erection of a church out of the dust'.⁸⁹ Giles Wigginton replied rather unguardedly that the time was indeed ripe for such 'extraordinarie callings', and alluded to the anonymous Jew who trod the streets of Jerusalem crying woe to the city in the years prior to the siege in AD 70 and to a Yorkshireman who had admonished London's citizens in a similar vein during the parliamentary session of 1589.⁹⁰ Both Cartwright and Wigginton asserted that an individual so empowered need not seek 'counsell of fleash and bloud'; to the former, Coppinger's inner doubts about his prophetic status were 'an evident and an invincible argument that he was none'.⁹¹ Undeterred, thereafter the Suffolk gentleman trusted nothing but the 'motion' within him, asserting that the Lord effected 'the greatest woorkes by the weakest instruments', 'men of base accompte... & such as are... the verie abjectes of th'earth'. '[T]hough temporizing Christians' refused to admit it, Protestantism in England was very likely to perish unless desperate measures were taken by 'some faithfull Zorobabell or Nehemiah'.⁹²

Even before the apotheosis of Hacket and his accomplices, the trio received 'slender and cold discouragement' from leading urban preachers.⁹³ Why were they so wary? Scripture taught that false prophets would proliferate in the last days and clear guidelines existed on how to identify those who came 'in sheep's clothing, but [were] inwardly ravening wolves'.⁹⁴ Seers who upheld heretical doctrine or lived vicious lives could be immediately disqualified, declared William Perkins in a dialogue published in 1587. So should those who were rash, unruly, and obstinate, or 'babbling and talkative' rather than 'silent with wisdom'. Equally suspect was any oracle who spoke strangely and opaquely, or whose utterances engendered not God's glory but 'foolish feare' and 'disquietnesse in the church and commonwealth'.⁹⁵

Some self-styled prophets were simply 'cousenors', 'mountebankes', and frauds who simulated their supernatural gifts for mercenary ends like money or fame.⁹⁶ Others were agents of Satan – individuals who had entered voluntarily

⁸⁸ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 11–12, 13–14; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 146–7.

⁸⁹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 18; Cartwright, *Brief apologie*, sig. B2v.

⁹⁰ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 14; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 146, 160. Peter Wentworth apparently applied the example of Joshua summoned by God 'to cast the enemies of the Israelites out of the land of Canaan, that they might possesse it': *ibid.* p. 174.

⁹¹ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 14; Cartwright, *Brief apologie*, sig. B2v.

⁹² Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 19, 26, 27–8; Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. B1v; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 145.

⁹³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 20.

⁹⁴ Matt. vii. 15. For the proliferation of the false prophets in the last days, see Matt. xxiv. 5, 11, 24; Mark xiii. 6; Luke xxi. 8.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *A fruitfull dialogue*, in *Workes*, iii, p. 468.

⁹⁶ Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft*, p. 159; Denison, *The white wolfe*, p. 6; Harvey, *A discursive problem*, p. 2; Perkins, *A fruitfull dialogue*, in *Workes*, iii, p. 468; Vermigli, *Common places*, p. 20.

into a pact with the devil or were the unwitting victims of invasion by unclean spirits. More than a few of the disturbed children and adolescents cured by Catholic and Protestant exorcists in this period turned out to be what Erik Midelfort has called ‘pious demoniacs’: what issued from their mouths in between streams of obscenities and blasphemies were rousing sermons of repentance, moralistic discourses dictated, rather paradoxically, by the Father of Lies.⁹⁷ It was well known that the Archfiend could transform himself into an angel of light and ‘apishlie counterfeit’ the spirit of Christ. The visions and voices seen and heard by seers might be no more than a ‘sleight’ and ‘illusion’ of Lucifer.⁹⁸ What seemed like divine ecstasy could in fact be a variety of diabolical ventriloquism.⁹⁹

A third way of explaining symptoms similar to the raptures of St Paul or the euphoria of the apostles filled with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was to attribute them to mental disease.¹⁰⁰ ‘[M]anie frenticke persons’, commented Reginald Scot, did ‘step up and saie’ they were prophets; absurd revelations, echoed the Sussex rector Edward Topsell, were all too often the hallucinations of the ‘brainsicke’ and insane. If the ‘complexion’ and ‘temperature’ of the candidate’s body was odd, observed Perkins, then he or she was likely to be suffering from ‘the phrensie, or some such like’. And the Swiss divine Ludwig Lavater cited many examples of apparitions and premonitions experienced by men and women who were out of their wits. Prophecy and insanity were easily mistaken: when the heathen saw Christians infused with the spirit of God, noted Peter Martyr, ‘they called it furie, and distraughting of the mind’.¹⁰¹

If clerical elites noted the confluence of the two conditions, so did contemporary medics. In describing that most fashionable of Elizabethan maladies, melancholy, Tudor physicians in the Galenic tradition often referred to the ‘strange imaginations’ that accompanied an illness they assumed was organic at root – the consequence of a surfeit of black bile, one of the four bodily humours. In his *Breviarie of health* (1552), Andrew Boorde remarked that some melancholics ‘be so fantastickall that they will thenke them selfe God or as good’ and Phillip Barrough, author of *The method of phisicke* (1583), listed

⁹⁷ Midelfort, ‘The devil and the German people’, pp. 113–15, quotation at p. 117. For English examples, see Walker, *Unclean spirits*, pp. 7, 17, 54, 55, 58. One Protestant polemicist who noted this phenomenon in Catholic cases of demonic possession remarked: ‘If the devils be made... Messengers of divine truths, by the power of your Exorcismes, why doe you indeavour to expell them?’: Richard Baddeley, *The boy of Bilson: or, a true discovery of the late notorious impostures of certaine Romish priests in their pretended exorcisme, or expulsion of the divell out of a young boy, named William Perry* (London, 1622), p. 46.

⁹⁸ Vermigli, *Common places*, p. 19; Smith, *Sermons*, p. 39; Perkins, *A fruitfull dialogue*, in *Workes*, III, p. 468.

⁹⁹ An added complication was the fact that sometimes God suffered Satan and his vassals to declaim the truth as a means of punishing sinners, who deserved to be given over to ‘strong delusions’ and errors. See Vermigli, *Common places*, p. 19. ¹⁰⁰ 2 Cor. xii. 4; Acts ii. 4.

¹⁰¹ Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft*, p. 160; Topsell, *Times lamentation*, p. 62; Perkins, *A fruitfull dialogue*, in *Workes*, III, p. 468; Ludwig Lavater, *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght, and of strange noyses, crackes, and sundry forewarnynges, whiche commonly happen before the death of menne, great slaughters, & alterations of kyngdomes*, trans. R. H. (London, 1572), p. 10 and ch. 2, passim; Vermigli, *Common places*, p. 19, and see p. 21. See also Howard, *Defensative*, sigs. I1r–K1v.

among other diagnostic features the vain persuasion that one was 'inspired with the holy Ghost' and could 'prophecy upon things to come'.¹⁰² The Buckinghamshire divine and astrological doctor Richard Napier treated several patients with religious delusions of grandeur: Mistress May Mydlemore believed she had spoken directly with the Lord, who had 'promised salvation of fools', while one Roger Laurenc, a servant, was said to be 'frantic with a vision that he should go teach all nations'.¹⁰³ Ministers who denounced false prophets as demented and deranged had the backing of a sizeable technical and theoretical literature.

Which of these three strategies was adopted by Thomas Cartwright and his colleagues? For the time being we shall set that question to one side. What ought to be emphasized first is that Calvinist theology clearly did more to inhibit than encourage the appearance of popular prophets.¹⁰⁴ But this should not blind us to the fact that it created a climate in which the idea that rational people might communicate with God and glimpse the unseen could not be dismissed a priori as ridiculous. As yet each particular case had to be seriously investigated and separately assessed – hence the profound uncertainty of the puritan leaders.¹⁰⁵ It is at least possible that they might have endorsed a more credible claimant had one emerged.

It is worth noting that some seers did actually enjoy clerical approbation. In 1581, for instance, an eleven-year-old boy named William Withers had godly preachers and magistrates swooning by his bedside when he lapsed into a trance on Christmas Eve and awoke ten days later to deliver a series of impromptu sermons against the sins that were drawing down divine wrath upon the realm. Withers won support largely because his exhortations merely parroted the habitual moral concerns of the clergy.¹⁰⁶ Like the succession of

¹⁰² Andrewe Boorde, *The breviarie of health: wherein doth folow, remedies, for all maner of sicknesses and diseases* (London, 1575 edn), fo. 78r; Philip Barrough, *The method of physick, containing the causes, signes, and cures of inward diseases in mans body, from the head to the foote* (London, 1617 edn), pp. 45–6. See also Andreas Du Laurens, *A discourse of the preservation of the sight: of melancholike diseases; of rheumes, and of old age*, trans. Richard Surphlet (London, 1599), p. 86; John Cotta, *A short discoverie of the unobserved dangers of severall sorts of ignorant and unconsiderate practisers of physicke in England* (London, 1612), p. 67. Extracts from a number of these medical texts are printed in Richard Hunter and Ida Macalpine, eds., *Three hundred years of psychiatry, 1535–1860* (New York, 1982). See also Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan malady: a study of melancholia in English literature from 1580–1642* (East Lansing, Mich., 1951), chs. 2–3; Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and depression from Hippocratic times to modern times* (New Haven, 1968), ch. 5.

¹⁰³ MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 154–6. Napier diagnosed these 'prophets' as melancholics, but it is worth noting that he himself conversed with the Archangel Raphael about points of theology and scribbled down a prophecy dictated to him in his notebook: p. 157. One Edmund Francklin, a patient committed as a 'Lunatique' to Bedlam hospital in 1630 by Helkiah Crooke, its Keeper, had similar delusions: he said 'That his Brother George was God the Father, His Son, God the Sonne and the Lady Dyer God the Holy Ghost. He hath divers times... said that he was God, that he suffered more than Christ...': Hunter and Macalpine, eds., *Three hundred years of psychiatry*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁴ As Bauckham has noted: *Tudor apocalypse*, p. 194.

¹⁰⁵ See MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁶ John Phillip, *The wonderfull worke of God shewed upon a chylde, whose name is William Withers, being in the towne of Walsam, within the countie of Suffolke* (London, 1581). See also my "'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings'": prophecy, puritanism, and childhood in Elizabethan Suffolk', in Diana

teenaged girls who functioned as ‘sober catechizers’ during the Civil War and Interregnum his penitential message reinforced rather than undercut the hegemony of an all-male and adult ministry.¹⁰⁷ It was those whose pronouncements threatened the integrity of the institutional church or clashed with the priorities of particular factions within it who found themselves defamed as charlatans, lunatics, or creatures of the devil. Thus when a young Leicestershire apprentice called Robert Dickins set himself forth as an ‘Anglican’ Elias in 1582, avowing that Protestant England had nothing to learn from her sister Geneva, he was instantly written off by the puritanical Henry Smith as a stooge of the Father of Lies.¹⁰⁸ An Essex shoemaker who insisted he was a new John the Baptist four years later was likewise deemed to be ‘over studied with Anabaptystycall conceyptes’ and ‘partelye entred into Lunacye or Frensyne’.¹⁰⁹

The civil authorities used the same technique to debunk prophets who bothered the monarch or busy politicians with barely intelligible predictions or revelations embodying an oblique critique of the current regime. John Richardson, who requested an appointment to see the ageing queen on an errand from the Almighty in 1601, was reckoned by Robert Cecil a ‘frantic man’ and peremptorily dismissed.¹¹⁰ So, it would seem, were the authors of a remarkable collection of prophetic letters received by Lord Burghley in the 1570s and 80s, now preserved in MS Lansdowne 99.¹¹¹ And a youth who admonished James I at Theobolds in May 1619 was escorted swiftly to London’s notorious hospital for the insane, Bedlam, notwithstanding the fact

Wood, ed., *The church and childhood*, Studies in Church History xxxi (Oxford, 1995), pp. 285–99. Conventional moralism is also characteristic of the pronouncements of the Lutheran prophets currently under investigation by Jürgen Beyer. For a typical case widely popularized in England: Eyriak Schlichtenberger, *A prophesie uttered by the daughter of an honest countrey man, called Adam Krause* (London, 1580).

¹⁰⁷ See Nigel Smith, ‘A child prophet: Martha Hatfield as the wise virgin’, in Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs, eds., *Children and their books: a celebration of the work of Iona and Peter Opie* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 79–93, quotation at p. 91. A good example is *A wonderful prophecy. Declared by Christian James, a maid of twenty years of age... who was born and bred near the town which is called Padstow* (London, [1656]). Phyllis Mack, ‘Women as prophets during the English Civil War’, *Feminist Studies*, 13 (1982), p. 32 and passim; idem, *Visionary women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England* (Berkeley, 1992), esp. pp. 34, 91, 99, 104–8.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Sermons*, pp. 36–56, esp. pp. 45–6.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Herry to Lord Chancellor Bromley, touching certain indecent speeches uttered by John Whyte, alias Snellyng, a shoemaker of Rayleigh in Essex, enclosing the examination of George Yonge and others, 22 Oct. 1586, PRO, SP 12/194/57. In 1561 William Geffreie was whipped for proclaiming one John Moore Christ ‘till he changed his song’. Moore was sent to Bedlam. See Raphael Holinshed, *The first and second volumes of chronicles... Newlie augmented and continued by J. Hooker alias Vowell gent and others* (3 vols., London, 1587), III, p. 1194.

¹¹⁰ HMC, *Salisbury*, XI, p. 219.

¹¹¹ BL, MS Lansdowne 99 (Burghley papers), esp. nos. 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 19, 26, 31, 34, 36. John Strype annotated the items anachronistically, describing the individuals concerned as mad and mentally ill and their visions and revelations as ‘enthusiastical’. Whether a contemporary or some later individual grouped them together in this volume remains unclear. I am grateful to Dr Cecile Zinberg of California State University, Fullerton, for sharing her expertise on Strype and the Lansdowne MSS with me.

that many could 'perceive no spice of madness in his ordinary speech and conversation'.¹¹²

As both Keith Thomas and Phyllis Mack have remarked, it was often not so much what was being done as who was doing it, who witnessed it, and when. It was the ideological outlook of the observer, combined with the circumstances in which the oracle spoke, which determined whether he or she was respected as a seer, laughed off the streets as a harmless idiot, or branded a demoniac or witch.¹¹³ William Hacket was one of a small handful of pretenders to heaven against whom events so conspired that they were sentenced to death as traitors as well. Condemned by leading Presbyterians and their conformist opponents alike, as we shall see, assessing the source of his false prophetic consciousness became a major bone of contention itself.

V

The proclamation of an illiterate puritan messiah in Cheapside was precisely the sort of lurid scandal for which Richard Bancroft and his associates had been waiting for weeks. Writing in 1603, the Kentish minister Josias Nicholls recollected the carnivalesque spectacle as the third of 'three most greivous accidentes' which did 'verie much darken the righteousness of our case', and indeed Lambeth's propagandists eagerly exploited the antics of Hacket and his gentlemen lieutenants to hammer one last nail in the coffin of Elizabethan puritanism as a decisive political force.¹¹⁴ Richard Cosin immediately set to work on his *Conspiracie, for pretended reformation*, which was reinforced by Arthington's fawning confession printed early in 1592 and Bancroft's even more savage exposé of the subversive activities of the Presbyterians, *Daungerous positions and proceedings*, published the following year. Further salvos were fired by Matthew Sutcliffe, the born controversialist who would found Chelsea College in 1609. And in the dedication to Whitgift prefacing book five of his *Lawes of ecclesiastical politie*, Richard Hooker added his own damning indictment of the 'desperate adventures' of the fanatical trio.¹¹⁵

Wresting the evidence in hand, Bancroft, Cosin, and Sutcliffe bent over backwards to demonstrate that senior puritans were deeply implicated in the

¹¹² Thomas Birch, *The court and times of James the first* (2 vols., London, 1849), II, pp. 159–60.

¹¹³ Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 580–1; Mack, 'Women as prophets', p. 31; idem, *Visionary women*, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ Josias Nicholls, *The plea of the innocent: wherein is averred; that the minister & people falslie termed puritanes, are iniuriouslie slaundered for enemies or troublers of the state* ([London], 1602), pp. 31, 34.

¹¹⁵ Cosin, *Conspiracie*; Arthington, *Seduction*; Bancroft, *Daungerous positions*; Sutcliffe, *Answere to a certain libel*; idem, *An answere unto a certaine calumnious letter published by M. Job Throkmorton* (London, 1595); idem, *Examination of M. Thomas Cartwrights late apologie*; Hooker, *Of the lawes of ecclesiastical politie*, dedication to bk v, sigs. A3v–A4v. Cosin had served his apprenticeship as a government polemicist by producing a learned defence of the ex officio proceedings of the High Commission. See Guy, 'The Elizabethan establishment and the ecclesiastical polity', pp. 137–42. On Sutcliffe, *DNB*. For the broader polemical context, see Lake, *Anglicans and puritans?*, esp. pp. 111–13. As Thomas Phelippes remarked 'the enemies to the puritanes take great advantage agaynst them ... for that these profettes have beene great followers of that sort of preachers, and have in ded solicited all those that they knew affected to theyr sect...': PRO, SP 12/239/93.

conspiracy. The marketplace prophets had not only plotted their ‘dangerous designements’ ‘under colour of preaching, fasting, and keeping the Saboth’ – under the camouflage and ‘vaile’ of their hypocritical piety.¹¹⁶ They had done so with the connivance of ‘Cartwright and the rest’, who had ‘secretly clapped such fellows on the backs for zeale, and laughed in their sleeves to see them go so forward’.¹¹⁷ The cool attitude of the classis leaders was entirely expedient, proof of the ‘cunning dealing’ of men who quietly nourished hopes that the hazardous scheme would succeed, but were anxious to avoid the potentially fatal consequences ‘if thinges fell out amisse’. In tacitly endorsing the treacherous machinations of the conspirators these machiavellian ministers were none other than aiders, abettors, and accessories to the fact.¹¹⁸

The ‘furious attempts’ of such ‘giddy & seduced malecontentes’, it was argued, were simply a logical consequence of the inherently anarchic ideology that was Presbyterianism.¹¹⁹ Here was further evidence that radical Calvinists were violent incendiaries who would stop at nothing – mutiny, massacre, or another ‘Sicilian evensong’ – to erect a ‘true’ reformation in England.¹²⁰ Had Hacket’s treasons succeeded, alleged Bancroft, they would undoubtedly have been justified by the ‘disciplinarie doctrine’ and ‘Allobrogicall new learning’ of these red hot Protestant revolutionaries.¹²¹ Contemporaries had only to peruse the resistance writings of the Marian exiles and scan the recent course of Scottish history to see that the aborted rising was bound to have ended in terrible bloodshed.¹²² Cosin also conjured up the awful spectre of the anabaptist outrages in Lutheran Germany in the mid 1530s – above all the messianic reign of John of Leyden in Munster.¹²³

¹¹⁶ Sutcliffe, *Answer to a certaine calumnious letter*, fo. 7r; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, sig. A3v and preface, passim.

¹¹⁷ Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 170.

¹¹⁸ Quotations from Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 173, and bk iv, chs. 13–15, passim. See also Sutcliffe, *Answer to a certaine libel supplicatorie*, pp. 197–201; idem, *Examination*, esp. fos. 34v, 37r; idem, *Answer to a certaine calumnious letter*, passim, esp. fos. 48r, 59r; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 20–1 and passim.

¹¹⁹ Hooker, *Of the lawes of ecclesiastical politie*, dedication to bk v, sig. A4v; Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, p. 142. A relevant and interesting parallel is the case of Peter Birchet, a student of the Inner Temple who tried to assassinate the explorer John Hawkins in 1573, under the mistaken impression that he was that well-known enemy of the puritans, Sir Christopher Hatton. Like Hacket, Birchet was swiftly sent to the gibbet, and much was made of the fact that he had attended Thomas Sampson’s lecture at Whittington College on the morning of the attack, which the authorities regarded as a manifestation of misguided Presbyterian zeal and adherence to Genevan notions of tyrannicide. Birchet too was perceived by some contemporaries to be ‘cleane out of his wittes’ and ‘greatly troubled with mallencollee’, but his previous history of mental illness was played down by those who had a vested interest in linking his deranged behaviour with the puritan movement. See BL, MS Lansdowne 16, fos. 191r–8v; Strype, *Annals*, II, i, pp. 426–7; Collinson, *The Elizabethan puritan movement*, pp. 50–1.

¹²⁰ Sutcliffe, *Answer to a certaine libel supplicatorie*, p. 74.

¹²¹ Bancroft, *Dangerous positions*, pp. 176, 182 and bk iv, ch. 15, passim.

¹²² Ibid. bk iv, ch. 15. Bancroft’s account of the Hacket conspiracy is placed in book four of his *Dangerous positions*, ‘English Scottizing, for Discipline by force’.

¹²³ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 81–101. This was echoed at Hacket’s trial and in contemporary accounts: ibid. p. 70; HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 609; PRO, SP 12/239/93. See also Oliver Ormerod, *The picture of a puritane: or, a relation of the opinions, qualities, and practises of the anabaptistes in Germanie, and of the puritanes in England* (London, 1605), pp. 71–81 (I owe this reference to Dr Patrick Carter).

Conventionally enough, conformist propaganda presented the failed insurrection as an enterprise inspired by the Archfiend. The Cheapside prophets were the 'seduced instruments' of Lucifer, who was now become 'mille-artifex', a 'perfite crafts-master' at masquerading in the guise of godly religion.¹²⁴ Hacket, declared Arthington with the benefit of hindsight, was 'a vile sorcerer' and 'divell incarnate' who had 'soulde his soule to Satan' and bewitched his companions in 'the shape & countenance, of the holiest mortall man' that ever lived.¹²⁵ Cosin poured scorn on Hacket's occult powers as false and meretricious. His success in controlling the weather, for instance, could be ascribed to sheer common sense: 'forseeing it not unlikely to raine (after a long time of drought)' he had merely prayed in the presence of his besotted followers at the appropriate juncture.¹²⁶ This Northamptonshire yeoman was nothing more than a clever con man and trickster.

Yet what is conspicuously absent from these scurrilous tracts is the contention that the pseudo-messiah and his confederates were simply insane. None of the three apologists attempted to explain away their eccentric exploits medically, even though this was a standard polemical ploy. They contrast sharply in this regard with the Henrician divines charged with counteracting the claims of Elizabeth Barton, the ill-fated Nun or Holy Maid of Kent. In a sermon written by Nicholas Heath, amended by Thomas Cranmer and preached in London and Canterbury late in 1533, the Nun's inflammatory prophecies against the royal divorce and the English Reformation were declared to be devilish, fraudulent, and the product of an adolescent illness which had left her with a weak, idle, and psychologically abnormal imagination.¹²⁷

In studiously avoiding a proto-scientific explanation, these Elizabethan polemicists also diverge strikingly from those who participated in the controversy over exorcism and demonic possession that broke out at the turn of the century. Provoked by a rash of cases of charismatic healing involving the celebrated therapist John Darrell, this pamphlet battle was another phase of Whitgift's and Bancroft's ongoing anti-puritan campaign. Determined to stop the godly from using thaumaturgy for missionary purposes, high-ranking churchmen emphatically denied the possibility of both corporeal invasion and

On John of Leyden, see Cohn, *The pursuit of the millennium*, ch. 13, esp. pp. 271–80, and note also the Elizabethan account, which glances at puritans and Presbyterians, in Thomas Nashe, *The unfortunate traveller. Or, the life of Jacke Wilton* (London, 1594), sigs. D2v–E2v. Catholic polemicists used the episode to argue that puritans were far more disloyal and untrustworthy than recusants: see Robert Southwell, *An humble supplication to her majestie* ([English secret press], 1595 [1600]), pp. 47–8; [Richard Verstegan], *A declaration of the true causes of the great troubles, presupposed to be intended against the realme of England* ([Antwerp], 1592); Andreae Philopatri [Robert Persons], *Elizabethae Reginae Angliae edictum promulgatum Londini 29. Novemb. Anni M. D. XCI* (1593), pp. 40–1.

¹²⁴ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, sigs. A4r, B1v. See also pp. 7, 46.

¹²⁵ Arthington, *Seduction*, pp. 2, 4, 23, 60 and passim. See also Arthington, *Exhortation of Salomon*, sig. A4r.

¹²⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 79.

¹²⁷ L. E. Whatmore, ed., 'The sermon against the Holy Maid of Kent', *English Historical Review*, 58 (1943), pp. 464–75. See also Alan Neame, *The Holy Maid of Kent: the life of Elizabeth Barton, 1506–1534* (London, 1971), pp. 18–20.

the miraculous ejection of unclean spirits in the post-apostolic age. John Deacon, John Walker, and the up-and-coming Samuel Harsnet set about reclassifying alleged demoniacs as dissemblers who were incidentally suffering from some kind of psychosomatic complaint.¹²⁸ Citing continental authorities like Johann Weyer and Levinus Lemnius, they reinterpreted the convulsive symptoms of Darrell's clients as epilepsy or melancholia.¹²⁹ A timely translation of the verdict reached by a team of doctors in the trial of the Parisian imposter Marthe Brossier did much to bolster Lambeth's assertion that 'possession' could have purely pathological causes.¹³⁰ Such arguments were expounded even more systematically by the English physician Edward Jorden in the wake of another much-publicized case of religious psychotherapy – that of Mary Glover, the teenage daughter of a godly London shopkeeper, exorcized in 1602. As Michael MacDonald has shown, Jorden's *Briefe discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother* was also semi-official. Diagnosing the girl's condition as hysteria compounded with a large dose of deceit, it was part of a fresh assault on the activities of Catholic and puritan exorcists and their not always entirely innocent patients. In short, Jorden's medical scepticism must be seen as largely strategic. He marshalled the tenets of classical medicine to serve the vested political interests of the Anglican hierarchy.¹³¹

So why did Cosin, Bancroft, and Sutcliffe pass up the opportunity to invalidate the claims of the false Christ and his acolytes by declaring them madmen? Because, as it happens, this was the chief line of defence adopted by the embattled Presbyterians. Some sympathizers suggested in desperation that the threesome were not fervently Protestant but intractably Catholic: when Hacket's blasphemies had swelled to such a height of impiety 'that they made

¹²⁸ See Walker, *Unclean spirits*, pp. 66–73; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 576–8. John Deacon and John Walker, *Dialogicall discourses of spirits and divels* (London, 1601), esp. pp. 206–7; Samuel Harsnet, *A discovery of the fraudulent practises of John Darrel Bachelor of Artes, in his proceedings concerning ... pretended possession and dispossession* (London, 1599). See also Harsnet's attack on Catholic exorcists and demoniacs, *A declaration of egregious popish impostures* (London, 1604), esp. pp. 136–7. This was a standard method of discrediting the Romanists' claims: see Baddeley, *The boy of Bilson*, p. 19; Thomas Fuller, *The church-history of Britain; from the birth of Jesus Christ, untill the year M. DC. XLVIII* (London, 1655), bk x, p. 73.

¹²⁹ Johann Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum* (Basle, 1563), on which see Christopher Baxter, 'Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum*: unsystematic psychopathology', in Sydney Anglo, ed., *The damned art: essays in the literature of witchcraft* (London, 1977), esp. pp. 63–4; Levinus Lemnius, *De miraculis occultis naturae* (Antwerp, 1559), later trans. as *The secret miracles of nature: in four books* (London, 1658), esp. bk II, ch. 2, pp. 41–2. See also Oskar Diethelm, 'The medical teaching of demonology in the 17th and 18th centuries', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 6 (1970), pp. 3–15; Paul H. Kocher, *Science and religion in Elizabethan England* (New York, 1969), pp. 127–45.

¹³⁰ *A true discourse, upon the matter of Martha Brossier of Romorantin, pretended to be possessed by a devill*, trans. Abraham Hartwel (London, 1599). See esp. pp. 18, 22, 25, 29. The English edition is dedicated to Bancroft. For the Brossier case, see Walker, *Unclean spirits*, pp. 33–42; Sarah Ferber, 'The demonic possession of Marthe Brossier, France, 1598–1600', in Charles Zika, ed., *No gods except me: orthodoxy and religious practice in Europe, 1200–1600*, Melbourne University History Monograph Series, xiv (Melbourne, 1991), pp. 59–83.

¹³¹ Edward Jorden, *A briefe discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother* (London, 1603), reproduced in facsimile in MacDonald, ed., *Witchcraft and hysteria*. See the introduction, esp. pp. viii–ix, xlviii, liv.

Christians eares to glow, and his adherents to blush', complained the Jesuit Robert Southwell, 'then was hee posted over to us for a Papist, and so named to vulgar sort; so common a practice it is to bestowe upon us, the infamies of all offenders'.¹³² But this was no way out of the awkward corner in which the classis leaders unhappily found themselves. Well aware that their letters and messages to the prophets were sufficiently incriminating to make the charges of complicity levelled by their enemies stick, they strongly disavowed all knowledge of the conspirators' subversive intentions and did their best to downplay the extent of the dialogue that had actually taken place between them. In a pair of tracts against the 'slaunderous accusations' of their conformist opponents printed in 1594 and 1596, Thomas Cartwright and Job Throkmorton insisted that neither they nor the movement they represented could be held responsible for the deranged behaviour of individuals who were quite clearly unhinged. Cartwright claimed he had known all along that the man had '*laesum principium*' – 'That is, some crazing of the braine.' He had paid no attention to his talk of 'horrible treasons' because they proceeded from the 'broken witte' of 'one bereaved of common sense' and led astray by the deceitful suggestions of Satan. So did his 'straunge conceites' of an 'extraordinary calling'. Indeed, Cartwright had tried hard 'to dissuade him from such frantike opinions', even going so far as to threaten him with incarceration in Bridewell or Bedlam.¹³³ One taste of Coppinger's ravings of 'th'overthrow of the BB. and th'expelling of dumme ministers all at one clappe' and 'sundrie other reeling vagaries' had also been enough to convince Throkmorton that he was stark raving mad. As for the Oundle yeoman, 'the verie puffing and swellinge of his face, the staring and gogling of his eyes, with his gahstlie countenance, did ... sufficientlie decipher out unto me, what was in the man, at the first sight'. The 'phantasticall revelations' of the trio were no more than a travesty of true religious ecstasy produced by disease.¹³⁴ It was hardly fair, protested Josias Nicholls, 'to thrust into the ballance' against us the bizarre and furious actions of 'frantick Hacket'.¹³⁵

The logic of the puritan leaders was credible, as well as compelling, not least because it coincided closely with public opinion. When Thomas Phelippes, spy

¹³² Southwell, *Humble supplication*, p. 78. See also *The letters and despatches of Richard Verstegan* (c. 1550–1640), ed. Anthony G. Petti, Publications of the Catholic Record Society, LII (London, 1959), p. 2.

¹³³ Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. A3v; Cartwright, *Brief apologie*, sigs. B3r–v, B2v. A letter from Matthew Parker to William Cecil c. 1575 throws interesting light on Cartwright's diagnosis of Coppinger's insanity. It would appear that the Presbyterian leader's younger brother suffered from some form of mental disability. See London, Inner Temple Library, Petyt MS 538, vol. 44, fo. 57r.

¹³⁴ Throkmorton, *Defence*, sigs. A2r–v, D2v, A3v respectively. See also Cosin, *Conspiracie*, sig. A2v and p. 73: 'There are some also, purposing to extenuate the fault, and to prevent that so just a blot may not fall upon the meanest favourer of pretended reformation, who will needs make them to have been starke madde, and such as knew not what they sayd or did'; 'some there are so perversely wedded to their owne wits, and addicted to their owne fansies once conceived, that they give out they were madde, and furious persons...'

¹³⁵ Nicholls, *The plea of the innocent*, p. 114.

and cipher to Sir Francis Walsingham, wrote to his mysterious associate Henry Saintmain a week after the mock coronation in Cheapside, he instinctively situated the three prophets in 'the ranke of madde men'.¹³⁶ And on the night of Coppinger's first face-to-face encounter with God in a dream, his bedfellows, woken by peculiar noises and moans, had begun to suspect him 'not to bee well in his wittes'.¹³⁷ William Hacket, meanwhile, was already well known to Northamptonshire magistrates as a serious headcase. When his 'vile, lewd, and seditious speaches' against the queen came to their ears they were content to attribute them 'to some spice of phrenesie' rather than the 'setled and advised malice' of a really dangerous political dissident.¹³⁸ Instead of reporting him to the privy council, they sent him, like other lunatics who committed minor breaches of the peace, to a local house of correction. It may well be, moreover, that Hacket's alleged sufferings at the hands of 'sorcerers' and 'papists' for the sake of the Gospel are really evidence of the harsh and inhumane therapies applied to the insane in an age which equated madness with unchained animality and treated it with a brutal discipline comparable to that it meted out to irrational beasts. Beaten with a bastinado in Hampshire and flogged with 'rods' in the 'sincke hole' of a Hertfordshire cellar, it is certainly noteworthy that some of his so-called 'tormentors' surmised that the maltmaker was out of his mind.¹³⁹ So did the lord treasurer himself. When Hacket disgraced himself during an interview by 'falling flatte on his face, groveling, groaning, and foming at the mouth' he and Coppinger were dismissed 'without further adoe', Burghley expostulating angrily that his precious time had been wasted with the inane rantings and ravings of a certifiable 'mad man'.¹⁴⁰

In the light of this last statement the official response to the attempted insurrection is particularly interesting. Summing up the verdict of high treason reached by the judges at Hacket's trial, the solicitor-general declared that 'most plainlie and evidentlie' the conspiracy 'was never complotted by men possessed with frency or lunacies'. Throughout the hearing at Newgate, counsel for the crown had maintained that not one of the three fanatics was

¹³⁶ PRO, SP 12/239/93.

¹³⁷ Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. A4v. Cf. Cosin's account of the same episode: *Conspiracie*, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 8, cf. p. 9: the authorities interpreted 'his felonies to be but follies'.

¹³⁹ Ibid. pp. 43-4, 37, 25 respectively. For local responses to lunatics and madmen, see A. Fessler, 'The management of lunacy in seventeenth century England: an investigation of quarter-sessions records', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 49 (1956), pp. 901-7; Peter Rushton, 'Lunatics and idiots: mental disability, the community, and the Poor Law in north-east England, 1600-1800', *Medical History*, 32 (1988), pp. 34-50. For the punitive therapies used to treat the early modern insane, see MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 196-7; Patricia Alderidge, 'Hospitals, madhouses and asylums: cycles in the care of the insane', in R. T. Murray and T. H. Turner, eds. *Lectures on the history of psychiatry. The Squibb Series* (London, 1990), pp. 28-46; Jonathan Andrews, 'Bedlam revisited: a history of Bethlem Hospital c. 1634-c. 1700' (Ph.D. dissertation, London, 1991), esp. ch. 4. For attitudes to the mad, Michel Foucault, *Madness and civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London, 1965), esp. ch. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. D1v; Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 30 (though note how he suppresses Burghley's verdict). Burghley had earlier dismissed Coppinger by letter for building 'castels in th'ayre': Throkmorton, *Defence*, sig. A4r.

now, or ever had been, mentally ill.¹⁴¹ In view of his humble submission, Henry Arthington's 'sanity' could scarcely be questioned. But soon after his arrest Coppinger, 'by his owne voluntarie choise' or 'through anxietie... of minde', had begun to pretend he was 'distracted' and 'transported with furie'.¹⁴² The profanities into which Hacket had spontaneously burst in the dock were likewise nothing but a crafty, last-ditch effort to save himself from the scaffold – 'a villainous dissimulation to have his execution respited'. Such 'franticke humours lately contrived' had no bearing whatsoever on his legal and moral culpability.¹⁴³

To comprehend the prosecution's case fully we need to review briefly the contemporary jurisprudence of criminal insanity. By the late Tudor period there was a long history of acquitting felons who were *non compos mentis*, on the grounds that they lacked the capacity to differentiate right clearly from wrong. The test applied by the courts was, however, rigid and stringent: the condition of any offender exempted from capital punishment had to be 'absolute madnesse, and a totall deprivation of memorie'. Less severe mental disorders which resulted in only partial loss of the senses did not guarantee the same immunity under the law.¹⁴⁴ There had, of course, always been a problem when the personal safety or honour of the monarch was involved, and expedients were evolved to ensure that no intended regicide could exploit this loophole to escape. When a demented priest who believed he was God's scourge tried to assassinate Henry III at Woodstock in 1235, his subsequent hanging at Coventry was justified by the claim that he had 'feyned him a prophete, and sumtyme feyned him a frentick'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 609.

¹⁴² Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 75, 60, 76–8, 73 respectively. Cosin claimed that Coppinger's stubborn resolution to starve himself was not characteristic of one 'that is madde in deed, & knoweth not what he doeth'.

¹⁴³ Ibid. pp. 66, 78; HMC, *Kenyon MSS*, p. 608. Cf. Cosin, p. 8: 'in the whole course besides of other the speaches and actions of his life, both before and after, none alienation of minde or madnesse, could be noted in him'. It is worth noting how familiar the symptoms of madness were in early modern society, a society in which people paid money to gaze at the entertaining antics of madmen in Bedlam Hospital or those who impersonated them professionally on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. See Andrews, 'Bedlam revisited', ch. 2, and Robert Rentoul Reed, *Bedlam on the Jacobean stage* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

¹⁴⁴ See Edward Coke, *The third part of the institutes of the laws of England: concerning high treason, and other pleas of the crown, and criminall causes* (London, 1644), ch. 1, p. 6; Matthew Hale, *Historia placitorum coronae. The history of the pleas of the crown*, ed. Sollom Emlyn (2 vols., London, 1736), I, pt 1, ch. 4, pp. 29–37. See also Nigel Walker, *Crime and insanity in England*, vol. 1: *The historical perspective* (Edinburgh, 1968), ch. 2, esp. pp. 38–9; Joel Peter Eigen, 'Intentionality and insanity: what the eighteenth-century juror heard', in W. F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd, eds., *The anatomy of madness: essays in the history of psychiatry* (2 vols., London, 1985), II, pp. 34–51. On the intrusion of medical language into legal contexts in sixteenth-century Germany see also H. C. Erik Midelfort, 'Johann Weyer and the tranformation of the insanity defence', in R. Po-Chia Hsia, ed., *The German people and the Reformation* (Ithaca, 1988), pp. 234–61.

¹⁴⁵ Walker, *Crime and insanity in England*, p. 183. Henry VIII's solution was to introduce a bill which provided that persons who committed high treason while in their senses, but then fell into madness or lunacy should be the subject of a special commission of oyer and determiner of treasons (33 Henry VIII c. 20). This was repealed by 1 & 2 Phil. & Mary c. 10, which explains why it was not applied in Hacket's very parallel case. See Walker, *Crime and insanity in England*, pp. 183–4.

Medieval precedents were thus in place for Hacket's execution. Richard Cosin defended it adeptly, arguing that whether or not the defendant's insanity was ingenuous, it did not amount to '*furor*' or '*dementia*', in which the patient had no control over his conduct. If not a plain imposter, he was suffering at worst from what in classical terminology was called '*insania*' and in popular parlance 'braine-sicke, cracked-witted, cocke-braines, or hare-brained' – a limited type of mental infirmity which could not absolve a delinquent from blame.¹⁴⁶ It was reported some years later that one lawyer had pleaded ingeniously on Hacket's behalf 'that the Bishops had made him madd with persecuting of him'.¹⁴⁷ If this rather apocryphal story is true, all one can say is that the barrister in question simply added fuel to the flames.

It is easy to see that had the authorities acknowledged that the Cheapside prophets were insane the anti-puritan potential of the affair would have been lost. Hacket and his companions were not mad, declared Cosin, Bancroft, and Sutcliffe, but merely Presbyterian – or only mad insofar as Presbyterianism itself was, so to speak, a form of mental disease. Matthew Sutcliffe milked this metaphor for all it was worth. Coppinger, he contended, had no more 'folly then the common folly of puritans, who being otherwise not unwise, yet hold frantike & foolish opinions'.¹⁴⁸ His sober carriage, cogent letters, and cunning practices all disproved the allegation that he was 'a mazed foole' and 'Bedlem mate'.¹⁴⁹ If any kind of madness could be imputed to him at all it was the madness of those who sought 'so furiously' to bring in deacons, elders, and synods, 'this madde and strange cast' of conspiring to dismantle the episcopal hierarchy – 'which kind of madnes I could yet never perceive that either Tho. Cartwright or Throk. did disallow'. As far as William Hacket went, 'percase he was distempered with a rheume of indigested discipline'. But the dean of Exeter's most telling rejoinder was this: 'if all that have talked of the overthrow of Bishops and the Ecclesiasticall government, were to be reputed as madde men, Bedlem if it were thrise so great would not holde them'.¹⁵⁰ Brilliantly turning the tables, it was certainly Sutcliffe who had the last word.

VI

On one level this lively polemical interchange is a remarkable reversal of what received wisdom and subsequent history might lead us to expect. If the ensuing controversy over demonic possession is indicative, it was generally the defenders rather than the critics of the Elizabethan Settlement who embraced scientific explanations for bizarre behaviour which was popularly believed to

¹⁴⁶ Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 73–5. As Walker, *Crime and insanity in England*, p. 39, notes, Cosin's arguments were a free translation of Cicero's *Tusculan Questions*, bk iii. The case is heralded as an early example of a trial in which the defence of insanity was raised by Hunter and Macalpine, eds., *Three hundred years of psychiatry*, pp. 42–5.

¹⁴⁷ Fuller, *Church-history*, bk ix, p. 206.

¹⁴⁸ Sutcliffe, *Examination*, fo. 36r.

¹⁴⁹ Sutcliffe, *Answer unto a certaine calumnious letter*, fos. 10v, 11v; idem, *Examination*, fos. 32v, 36r.

¹⁵⁰ Sutcliffe, *Answer unto a certaine calumnious letter*, fos. 11r, 14v, 60v, 8r. See also fo. 62v and Cosin, *Conspiracie*, p. 75.

be supernaturally induced. It was not evangelical Calvinists but their conformist counterparts who began that great cosmological shift towards a world in which miracles had ceased and divine providence no longer intervened unpredictably.¹⁵¹ Yet here, apparently, we have the hotter sort of Protestants usurping the role of Anglican 'sceptics'.

Or do we? In arguing that Hacket and his disciples were 'frantick' prominent puritans were not necessarily abandoning the notion of a theocentric universe or articulating an intellectual position which signalled the evolution of an essentially 'secular' perspective on events. They remained locked within a cognitive framework in which insanity was a theological concept. Centuries of Christian thinkers had used psychiatric language to describe the spiritual and moral condition of sin. Just as every transgression of divine law was a species of madness, declared the Buckinghamshire vicar, Thomas Adams, in his sermon *Mystical Bedlam*, so was alienation of mind an emblem of the estrangement from God brought about by wicked thoughts and deeds.¹⁵² In presenting psychic disorder as a symbol of the eschatological drama, the war between good and evil raging within everyman's soul, Calvinist ministers were revitalizing the Manichean assumptions and structures of popular psychology. While many ordinary people attributed their inner traumas and torments to witches' spells, malevolent demons or the irresistible pressures placed upon them by the Tempter himself, Protestant theorists attenuated the autonomous power of Lucifer: it was only when the deity withdrew his protective presence from sinners that they were invaded by Satan and driven out of their wits. They presented insanity as an exemplary punishment inflicted by the devil acting as the Lord's executioner.¹⁵³ Contemporary anthologies of retributive judgements on notorious sinners compiled by godly preachers and lay people are full of stories of adulterers, murderers, and sabbath-breakers whose guilty consciences send them round the bend or induce them to commit suicide. The biblical prototypes for these 'bad madmen' were Judas and Nebuchadnezzar, and it was into this class of crazed reprobates that puritan observers instinctively assimilated Hacket and Copping.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ See Walker, *Unclean spirits*, pp. 66–73; MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 3, 206–7.

¹⁵² Thomas Adams, *Mystical Bedlam, or the world of mad-men* (London, 1615). See also Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's children: conventions of madness in middle English literature* (New Haven, 1974), esp. chs. 2–3; H. C. Erick Midelfort, 'Sin, melancholy, obsession: insanity and culture in 16th century Germany', in Steven L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding popular culture: Europe from the middle ages to the nineteenth century* (Berlin, 1984), esp. p. 134; Roy Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles: a history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London, 1987), pp. 19–20.

¹⁵³ MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 3, 167–9, 175, 217–20; idem, 'Religion, social change, and psychological healing in England, 1600–1800', in W. J. Sheils, ed., *The church and healing*, Studies in Church History, xix (1982), esp. pp. 107, 109–10; idem and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless souls: suicide in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990), esp. pp. 31, 35–6. See also David Harley, 'Mental illness, magical medicine and the devil in northern England, 1650–1700', in Roger French and Andrew Wear, eds., *The medical revolution of the seventeenth century* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. pp. 122–3, 128, 139, 143.

¹⁵⁴ For example, Thomas Beard, *The theatre of Gods judgements: revised and augmented* (London, 1631 edn), pp. 52, 62–3, 65–6. Note also the language used by local authorities to describe mad

On the other hand, scripture also encouraged the view that Christian mysticism was a form of ‘mania’ itself. From the Pauline epistles to Erasmus’ *Praise of folly*, one can trace an unbroken tradition that utter derangement is the ultimate state of spiritual grace.¹⁵⁵ Early modern people continued to entertain the idea that illness and insight were symbiotically linked and that the simplicity of the fool and the delirious mutterings of lunatics might well be a vehicle for transcendental truths. This was a society in which ‘mild mental abnormality’ was ‘still regarded as somehow sacred’.¹⁵⁶ We have already seen the confusion into which this strand of thinking threw the leading Presbyterians who encountered our prophets. Their insistence that the trio were clinically ill must be relocated in a cultural context in which magical, religious, and medical interpretations of madness coexisted and mingled.¹⁵⁷

Closer examination of conformist polemic also restores the conventional picture of the Church of England as the champion of ‘scientific’ interpretations of mental instability. For, in traducing puritanism as Protestant lunacy, Bancroft, Cosin, and above all Sutcliffe were revealing the faint outlines of later developments. They were anticipating the main thrust of the onslaught on religious ‘enthusiasm’ mounted by orthodox elites in the Interregnum, Restoration, and eighteenth century. Alarmed at the proliferation of radical sects during the Civil War and Cromwellian protectorate, Anglican propagandists began to assert more methodically than ever before that the ecstatic experiences of zealous Protestants had physiological and neurological origins.¹⁵⁸ In 1655, the Royalist clergyman Meric Casaubon’s *Treatise concerning enthusiasme* declared that ‘enthusiastick divinatory fits’ were nearly always ‘an effect of nature’ rather than of Satan or of God. Similar suggestions were made

men and women they committed to custody. In 1641 one Lancashire man was said to have ‘fallen by gods Judgment and Visitation into a lunatic frensie and distraction of his wittes and senses’: Fessler, ‘The management of lunacy’, p. 903. For Judas and Nebuchadnezzar, see Matt. xxvii. 5, Daniel iv. 33. See also Deut. xxviii. 28. See Arthington, *Seduction*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁵ See M. A. Screech, ‘Good madness in Christendom’, in Bynum, Porter, and Shepherd, eds., *The anatomy of madness*, 1, pp. 25–39; idem, *Erasmus: ecstasy and the praise of folly* (Harmondsworth, 1988 edn), esp. ch. 3. For Pauline ‘divine madness’ see 2 Cor. xii. 4; Acts ii. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Hill, ‘Arise Evans: Welshman in London’, in *Change and continuity in seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 1991 edn), p. 75. Foucault has famously claimed that the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the devaluation of divine madness and the cessation of dialogue between the sane and insane: *Madness and civilization*, esp. pp. xii–xiii.

¹⁵⁷ See MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, esp. pp. 7, 212–13; idem and Murphy, *Sleepless souls*, pp. 59–60. The same point is made by Richard Neugebauer, ‘Medieval and early modern theories of mental illness’, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 36 (1979), pp. 477–83.

¹⁵⁸ On the campaign against ‘enthusiasm’, see George Williamson, ‘The Restoration revolt against enthusiasm’, *Studies in Philology*, 30 (1933), pp. 571–603; George Rosen, ‘Enthusiasm: “A Dark Lanthorn of the Spirit”’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 42 (1968), pp. 393–421; John F. Sena, ‘Melancholic madness and the puritans’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), pp. 293–309; Michael Heyd, ‘The reaction to enthusiasm in the seventeenth century: towards an integrative approach’, *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981), pp. 258–80. R. A. Knox’s classic *Enthusiasm: a chapter in the history of religion with special reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford, 1950) has surprisingly little to say about the opponents of enthusiasm.

a year later by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More in his *Enthusiasmus triumphatus*: individuals who supposed they had the gift of the Spirit were the victims of fabulous delusions fostered by the melancholy humours that had polluted their brains. Both, significantly, made mention of William Hacket in passing.¹⁵⁹ This trend accelerated under the later Stuarts, coinciding with the foundation of the Royal Society, the rise of 'rational religion', and the growing tendency to see both the devil and the deity as passive spectators, rather than active participants, in earthly affairs. One consequence of this gradual 'disenchantment of the world' was the repudiation of divine communication as part of legitimate piety and its secularization or 'somatization' as a medical syndrome. At the same time as witchcraft confessions and diabolical apparitions were being rediagnosed as figments of diseased imaginations and suicide was acquiring the psychiatric connotations it still has today, so were claims to be able to converse directly with celestial beings and prophesy the future dismissed axiomatically as marks of mental derangement. By the 1750s, all manifestations of charismatic Protestantism were being stigmatized as species of madness – the equation of religious enthusiasm with insanity had become a ruling-class shibboleth.¹⁶⁰

Even so, it would be a mistake to assume that the Anglican propagandists who denounced William Hacket as a puritan lunatic were precociously early exponents of secular 'Enlightenment' views. It needs to be stressed that in depicting the conspiracy as a Satanic device and the pseudo-messiah as a servant of Lucifer, Bancroft, Cosin, and Sutcliffe were not merely resorting to

¹⁵⁹ Meric Casaubon, *A treatise concerning enthusiasme, as it is an effect of nature: but is mistaken by many for either divine inspiration, or diabolical possession* (London, 1655), passim, quotation at p. 29. He refers to Hacket on pp. 213–14. Henry More, *Enthusiasmus triumphatus, or, a discourse of the nature, causes, kinds, and cure, of enthusiasme* (London, 1656), passim. For Hacket, see p. 16. Both Casaubon and More are extracted in Hunter and Macalpine, eds., *Three hundred years of psychiatry*, pp. 143–7, 151–3. See also Joseph Glanvill, *The vanity of dogmatizing: or confidence in opinions* (London, 1661), esp. ch. 11, p. 99. Cf. the defence of the reality of the supernatural and condemnation of false prophets as diabolical agents or victims of satanical delusion by the nonconformist Cumberland divine Richard Gilpin in *Daemonologia sacra*. Hacket and his disciples are referred to in pt II, chs. 1–2, pp. 178, 188; pt III, ch. 15, p. 128. For a slightly earlier articulation of the same 'anti-enthusiasm' sentiments, see Ephraim Pagitt's attack on Civil War sects, including, significantly, the Grindletonians: *The mysticall wolfe: set forth in a sermon preached in the church of Edmond the king, in Lombard-street* (London, 1645), pp. 11–12: 'to heare these base fellows to discourse of the holy Trinity, of Gods eternal decree, and other deep points of divinity, you may hear the mad men in Bedlam to prate as wisely as they, & are not they that run after such men as mad as they?'

¹⁶⁰ See Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles*, esp. pp. 78–81; idem, 'The rage of party: a glorious revolution in English psychiatry', *Medical History*, 27 (1983), pp. 35–50; Michael MacDonald, 'Insanity and the realities of history in early modern England', *Psychological Medicine*, 11 (1981), passim, esp. p. 14. As MacDonald notes, when Galenic humoral theory declined religious enthusiasm was no longer discussed in terms of melancholy but redefined as absolute madness: pp. 15–17. Porter contests Foucault's contention that the prime target of elite society's efforts to defame its enemies as irrational was the lower class, arguing that it was not the poor but the godly: 'Rage of party', passim, pp. 39–40. On changing attitudes to madness, see also idem, 'Being mad in Georgian England', *History Today*, 31 (1981), pp. 41–8. For the rise of 'rational religion', see John Spurr, '"Rational religion" in Restoration England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), pp. 563–85.

a powerful but empty metaphor for social, moral, and political disorder. They skilfully assimilated the Northamptonshire yeoman to the demonological stereotype of the sorcerer and witch – in much the same way as enemies of the Quakers successfully demonized members of this sect in the 1650s and 60s.¹⁶¹ But there is little evidence to substantiate a claim that they denied the reality of diabolical activity itself. Indeed, recent work is suggesting that belief in direct revelation, providence, and supernatural phenomena persisted well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – among many of the intellectual elite, as well as ill-educated lay people. In the circles of the learned older ideas and presuppositions fed into and fused with newer occult and spiritualist traditions. Even medical professionals found it possible to reconcile scientific empiricism with their evangelical and metaphysical convictions.¹⁶²

Nevertheless, the conformist response to the Hacket affair still deserves to be heralded as a landmark in the evolution of disease as a new language of religious deviance. Signs that the campaign to marginalize prophets and enthusiasts on medical grounds was well underway can be detected as early as the 1630s. After Enoch ap Evan, a disturbed puritan yeoman from Shropshire, murdered his mother and brother with an axe in July 1633 a local anti-Calvinist divine adopted exactly the same polemical tactics as Matthew Sutcliffe, announcing that the homicidal maniac was no more insane than the rest of his misguided co-religionists.¹⁶³ Arminian and Laudian clerics showed themselves increasingly willing to denounce men and women with prophetic pretensions as mad. When Jane Hawkins, a pedlar from St Ives in Cambridgeshire fell into a coma in 1629 and held forth in verse to an inquisitive crowd including the ‘precisian’ vicar and curate of the town, the bishop of Lincoln took swift action to ensure that the ‘Riminge precheresse’ was exposed as an imposter whose muse was not the Holy Ghost but her own distempered brain.¹⁶⁴ Richard Farnham and John Bull, the cockney weavers who re-enacted Christ’s entry to Jerusalem and professed to be the two witnesses

¹⁶¹ As Peter Elmer has shown in ‘“Saints or sorcerers”: quakerism, demonology and the decline of witchcraft in seventeenth century England’, in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in early modern Europe: studies in culture and belief* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 145–79.

¹⁶² I am most grateful to Jonathan Barry for very helpful discussions on this point and for allowing me to read his forthcoming article: ‘Public infidelity and private belief? The discourse of spirits in Enlightenment Bristol’. See also Harley, ‘Mental illness, magical medicine and the devil’.

¹⁶³ See Peter Studley, *The looking-glasse of schisme: wherein by a briefe and true narration of the execrable murders done by Enoch ap Evan, a downe-right non-conformist... the disobedience of that sect... is plainly set forth* (London, 1635 edn), esp. pp. 100–1, 103, 108, 111, 114, 117–18; Enoch’s madness is defended by Richard More, *A true relation of the murders committed in the parish of Clunne in the county of Salop by Enoch ap Evan upon the bodies of his mother and brother* (London, [1641]), esp. pp. 15, 18, 24–5, 32, 38, and 90–1, where he concludes that ‘Sathan (working upon his predominant humour of melancholy) tempted him to commit these murders’; and by Henry Burton, in *For God, and the king. The summe of two sermons preached on the fifth of November last in St. Matthewes Friday-Streete. 1636* ([Amsterdam], 1636), p. 18. See Peter Lake, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism and a Shropshire axe-murder’, *Midland History*, 15 (1990), esp. pp. 51, 57. Lake notes the link with the Hacket conspiracy on p. 42.

¹⁶⁴ Bishop Williams of Lincoln to Secretary Dorchester, 28 Apr. and 5 May 1629, PRO, SP 16/141/63 and 16/142/19.

referred to in Revelation xi in 1636, were similarly declared to be 'shuttle witted fellows', and shut up in Bridewell and Bedlam for their pains.¹⁶⁵ The violently swinging fortunes of Lady Eleanor Davies are especially revealing: during the Personal Rule her prophecies against William Laud led to her confinement in London's most famous asylum; as soon as the Long Parliament had assembled she was elevated to the ranks of a public celebrity.¹⁶⁶ Hostile commentators still paid lip-service to the assumption that insanity was a supernatural state, but it is nevertheless clear that the 'psychiatrization' of religious nonconformity was gathering pace. In 1624 Richard Montagu, later bishop of Chichester, was loudly denouncing 'the frantick fitts and froth' of 'Puritan paroxysme[s]', while in 1615 Thomas Adams was already asserting that 'Schismatickes' and 'Separatists' were 'Protestants out of their wittes'.¹⁶⁷ What began as a clever rhetorical stratagem ended as an insidious technique of social policing.

Yet by far the most eloquent statement of the shape of things to come was Robert Burton's *Anatomy of melancholy*, published in 1621. In it, the Oxford vicar declared that puritanism was both the cause and effect of a psychopathological disorder he termed 'religious melancholy'. '[G]iddy precisians' were the victims and carriers of a form of mental disease whose 'principall agent and procurer' was Satan. At one end of the spectrum were those driven into a kind of holy desperation by the predestinarian doctrine of 'thundering Ministers'. At the other was a tribe of 'pseudo-prophets' and 'enthusiastickes' so puffed up with spiritual arrogance and pride that they dubbed themselves the 'saints'. Some were obsessed with eradicating superstition and set out to purge it with 'a preposterous zeale'. Others were 'so farre gone' with private revelations that they presumed to 'bee of privy councill with God himself, and know all his

¹⁶⁵ T[homas] H[eywood], *A true discourse of the two infamous upstart prophets, Richard Farnham weaver of White-Chappell, and John Bull weaver of Saint Butolphs Algate* (London, 1636), sig. A2v (where reference is made to 'that Psuedochristus Hacket'), pp. 10, 11, 14. See also *False prophets discovered* (London, 1641); and PRO, SP 16/379/9. Farnham was held prisoner in Bedlam by order of the Council, even though he did 'not appear to be mad or lunatic'.

¹⁶⁶ Esther S. Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, never soe mad a ladie* (Ann Arbor, 1992), p. 34 and passim. Another example is Arise Evans. See Hill, 'Arise Evans: Welshman in London'; idem and Michael Shepherd, 'The case of Arise Evans: a historico-psychiatric study', *Psychological Medicine*, 6 (1976), pp. 351–8.

¹⁶⁷ *The correspondence of John Cosin, D.D. lord bishop of Durham, together with other papers illustrative of his life and times*, Surtees Society, LII, LV (2 vols., Durham, 1869–72), I, p. 32; Adams, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 69. And cf. Richard Napier's views on puritan depressives as mentally ill: MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 220–1. In some respects Protestant writers were simply reworking a theme that was already part of the stock-in-trade of Roman Catholic polemicists. When an English nailsmith named Richard Atkins was burnt at the stake in August 1581 for setting himself forth as a prophet of the reformed gospel, crying out against the papacy and committing iconoclastic acts in St Peter's, hostile observers insisted that all the 'furie of the fellow, was but the phrenesie of heresie'. Catholic accounts alleged Atkins had previously been whipped and confined in Bedlam and Bridewell for 'certaine lewde speeches against the Quene'. See *The copie of a double letter sent by an Englishe gentilman from beyond the seas, to his frende in London* ([Rheims, 1581?]), pp. 7–10. But cf. the hagiographical Protestant account in Anthony Munday, *The English romayne lyfe... There unto is added, the cruell tyranny, used on an English man at Roome, his Christian suffering, and notable martirdome, for the gospell of Jesus Christe, in anno. 1581* (London, 1582), ch. 8.

secrets'. Burton referred to 'those mad men of Munster', to David George, an unlearned Dutch painter who had proclaimed himself messiah, and to the many deluded 'Eliases' who wandered European cities. But 'we need not rove so far abroad', he wrote, 'we have familiar examples at home, Hacket that said he was Christ, Coppinger and Arthington his Disciples'. The 'most compendious cure' for this 'company of blockheads' and 'braine-sicke hereticks' was not 'fire and faggot' but 'Hellebor' and Bedlam.¹⁶⁸

By the mid-Jacobean period, then, conformist divines were brandishing the Cheapside prophets as a paradigm of puritanical insanity. It was no longer necessary to deny that the illiterate Oundle yeoman and his companions were quite literally mad – the polemical circumstances which had constrained their Elizabethan forebears to do so had irrevocably changed. When William Hacket made his way into the history books it was as a prototypical figure whose notorious life and death had object lessons to teach posterity. While hot Protestants like the Huntingdon schoolmaster Dr Thomas Beard and Samuel Clarke, godly pastor of St Bennet Fink, held him up as a stock example of the horrible providential punishments which befell blasphemers,¹⁶⁹ leading lights of the later Stuart church such as Charles II's chaplain Peter Heylyn continued to present him as a *locus classicus* of the dangers of populist puritanism. In his *Aerius redivivus: or the history of the presbyterians* (1670) Heylyn retold the tale of the fanatical trio as proof of the innate treachery of this 'dangerous Sect', which fetched its pedigree from 'that famous Triumvirate, Korah, Dathan and Abiram'. The short reign of the plebeian Redeemer proclaimed from a rickety cart was further witness to the 'rude humor and ungoverned zeal' of each and every defender of Calvinist discipline.¹⁷⁰

The controversy generated by the Hacket conspiracy lends weight, I would argue, to the provocative thesis Michael MacDonald has championed in a number of articles and books. Rejecting an older, whiggishly linear approach to the history of medicine, MacDonald has proposed that the rise of secular medical psychology was not a result of the inexorable march of liberal, scientific rationalism over gross 'superstition', but rather the consequence of religious strife, social antagonism, and political conflict. The educated elites of late

¹⁶⁸ Democritus Junior [Robert Burton], *The anatomy of melancholy, what it is. With all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and severall cures of it* (Oxford, 1621), pt III, sub. IV, memb. 1–2, quotations at pp. 772, 775, 797, 756–7, 752, 773 [vere 763], 758.

¹⁶⁹ Beard, *The theatre of Gods judgements*, pp. 105–6, 193; Samuel Clarke, *A mirrour or looking-glasse both for saints, and sinners, held forth in some thousands of examples* (London, 1657), p. 251; Samuel Hammond, *Gods judgements upon drunkards, swearers, and sabbath-breakers* (London, 1659), pp. 70–1. I owe the latter reference to Ariel Hessayon. Hacket also made his way into the chronologies of memorable events in a number of early seventeenth-century almanacs: see for example Samuel Perkins, *Perkins 1638. A new almanack and prognostication for the yeere of our lord, MDCXVII* (London, 1617), unpaginated; Arthur Sofford, *Sofford. 1630. A new almanacke and prognostication, for the yeere of our lord God, 1630* (London, 1630), sig. B4r.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Heylyn, *Aerius redivivus: or, the history of the presbyterians. Containing the beginnings, progress and successes of that active sect* (Oxford, 1670), sigs. A2r, A2v, A1r, pp. 304–9. The conformist version is also followed in Camden, *Historie*, pp. 27–30. Fuller, *Church-history*, bk IX, p. 206, reserved judgement.

Stuart and early Hanoverian England did not reject supernatural explanations for mental distress because of the intrinsic superiority of the somatic and psychiatric theories emerging in intellectual circles at the time. They did so because these beliefs had been discredited by the tumultuous events of the previous century. It was the attack on religious enthusiasm that prompted the medicalization of madness and not vice versa. ‘Scepticism’, suggests MacDonald, must be seen as a by-product of the exigencies of ecclesiastical politics. Contemporaries from all confessional and denominational standpoints were quite capable of manipulating ‘sceptical’ arguments to serve their own polemical ends.¹⁷¹ The case study presented here bears out these insights in offering us a glimpse of a brief but significant moment of Elizabethan ‘Enlightenment’.

VII

Throughout this essay I have deliberately sidestepped the question of whether or not our spurious messiah and his two lieutenants were, judged by modern criteria, insane. I do so animated by a conviction that psychohistory is a sterile and reductionist exercise: slapping clinical diagnoses on the deviant dead is both enormously condescending and inexcusably anachronistic.¹⁷² A more sophisticated interpretation of these false prophets might discern method in and behind their apparent madness. It might see their claims to divine inspiration as a devious and highly rational manoeuvre – a strategy for articulating dangerous ideas in a digestible way, a shrewd technique for winning attention in a world where only a tiny minority had the right to express opinions about public affairs.¹⁷³ As well as implicitly negating the possibility of an authentic religious experience, such an approach arguably falls into the same trap of assuming that insanity is an objectively verifiable phenomenon. Here I have tried to highlight the extent to which it must be seen both as a personal disorder and as a ‘social artifact’ or ‘cultural construct’ whose meaning is subject to continuous renegotiation and, to use a currently fashionable phrase, ‘manufacture’. As much recent theoretical work in this field has insisted, we need to be aware of the element of ‘irreducible relativism’ involved in labelling mental illness, as well as the ability of the mentally ill to

¹⁷¹ MacDonald, ‘Insanity and the realities of history’, *passim*, esp. pp. 20–3; idem, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 230; idem, ‘Religion, social change, and psychological healing’, esp. pp. 102, 103, 119; idem, ‘Introduction’, in idem, ed., *Witchcraft and hysteria*, esp. pp. xlviii, xl, li, lii, liv, lv. See also Elmer, “‘Saints or sorcerers’”, pp. 172, 173 and *passim*. For a similarly politicized reading of the repeal of the witchcraft legislation in 1736, see Ian Bostridge, ‘Witchcraft repealed’, in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in early modern Europe: studies in culture and belief* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 309–34.

¹⁷² For examples of ‘psychohistory’, see Alfred Cohn, ‘Prophecy and madness: women visionaries during the puritan revolution’, *Journal of Psychohistory*, 11 (1984), pp. 411–30, and Ronald Matthews, *English messiahs: studies of six English religious pretenders, 1656–1927* (London, 1936).

¹⁷³ Hill, *The world turned upside down*, ch. 13; Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 163–5. This is also perhaps implicit in Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia’s dreams: politics and prophecy in sixteenth century Spain* (Berkeley, 1990).

conform their symptoms to contemporary expectations.¹⁷⁴ We need, in the words of Christopher Hill, to recognize the degree to which lunacy, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder.¹⁷⁵

No less fluid and subjective was the status of prophet. Hacket's curious oscillation between cunning man and mystic, witch and visionary, suggests that differentiating between divine ecstasy, demonic possession, and natural disease was at every level a matter of perspective, and, in the broadest sense of the term, a political act.¹⁷⁶ It attests to the eclecticism of collective mentalities in post-Reformation England, and it places a question mark beside prevailing views of the essentially adversarial relationship between zealous Protestantism and the religious culture of the vast mass of the unlearned and illiterate people. It implies that puritan piety and traditional magical practices and beliefs could, with relative ease, be reconciled.

Yet can close scrutiny of an individual so many of his peers considered an anomalous freak really help us to understand the religious complexion of his society at large? If we relinquish the notion that the insane are alien outsiders whose discourse and experience diverge sharply from that of the sane, then a case can perhaps be made that 'Frantick Hacket' was at least in some respects not a maverick but a man of his times.¹⁷⁷ Bancroft, Cosin, and Sutcliffe may have been wrong in concluding that this small band of conspirators was proof of the anarchic potential of puritanism per se – though the episode does present us with a more fractious and disorderly picture of Elizabethan puritanism than we have hitherto received.¹⁷⁸ But in asserting that these marketplace prophets were representative of broader tendencies latent in evangelical Calvinism they may just have been right.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas S. Szasz, *The manufacture of madness: a comparative study of the Inquisition and the mental health movement* (London, 1971), esp. p. xxvi (Szasz sees this process as a conspiratorial form of scapegoating); H. C. Erik Midelfort, 'Madness and the problems of psychological history in the sixteenth century', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 12 (1981), p. 12 and passim; Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and healers in the context of culture: an exploration of the borderland between anthropology, medicine, and psychiatry* (Berkeley, 1980), esp. pp. 24–5, 38, 71–8; Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles*, esp. pp. xi, 15–16; idem, *A social history of madness: stories of the insane* (London, 1987), pp. 8–9.

¹⁷⁵ Hill, *The world turned upside down*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. MacDonald, ed., *Witchcraft and hysteria*, p. lii.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Porter, *A social history of madness*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Peter Lake, "'A charitable Christian hatred': the godly and their enemies in the 1630s", in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, eds., *The culture of English puritanism, 1560–1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), esp. pp. 178–83.