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**Chapter 2. Women, Marriage and Agency in Restoration Dissent**

Alison Searle

When Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity in 1662, one unintended consequence was the marriage of Margaret Charlton and the controversial divine, Richard Baxter. Baxter believed that celibacy was preferable for ministers; his ejection from the Church of England after he refused to conform to the 1662 Act thus enabled him to marry Margaret Charlton. But Charlton's decision to marry Baxter was also driven by her beliefs. As Baxter later noted, Charlton thrived in an environment of persecution and political opposition; had he accepted the bishopric of Hereford, which he was offered, 'it would have alienated her much from me in point of esteem and love'.[1] Charlton (1636-1681) was a relatively wealthy woman and her personal income and passion for the gospel led her to facilitate Baxter's ministry; indefatigably to hire and build venues for him to preach in throughout London; to fund other preachers, and to set up schools. This activity on the part of a nonconformist woman in the public sphere provoked criticism. However, Baxter not only defended her, but commented: 'It was not mine which she gave, but her own....I am not ashamed to have been much ruled by her prudent love in many things'.[2]

Marriage offered Margaret Charlton emotional security and opportunities for personal interventions in the public sphere; for Anne Wentworth (1629/30-1693, though this latter date is

[1] Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, The Daughter of Francis Charlton ... Wife*

[2] Baxter, *Breviate*, K1v.

uncertain) it meant 'fierce looks, bitter words, sharp tongue, and cruel usage'.[3] In 1670 she experienced a divine healing from the physical and spiritual infirmities that had plagued her for years. This led to a religious awakening and transformed her from an oppressed wife to a prophet, determined to proclaim God's word publicly. Anne Wentworth had to contend with both the political powers of the state, which warily tracked her apocalyptic predictions in the years immediately preceding the Exclusion Crisis,[4] and the patriarchal authorities in her local Particular Baptist community. Unlike Margaret Charlton, she intervened in the public sphere through a deliberate rejection of her husband and ministers, asserting a spiritual authority that was conveyed by direct communion with and revelation from God. This found expression in her prophetic utterances and the dissemination of her writings through the medium of print. The contrasting histories of Charlton and Wentworth demonstrate the ways in which female piety was shaped by the religious settlement of 1660 and the vividness, breadth and influence of such piety within English culture before 1689. Gender and dissent each inflect the ways in which women like Charlton and Wentworth were able to engage in the public sphere following the reestablishment of the monarchy and state church that defined them as nonconformists. Recent scholarship has attempted to map the extent to which the inter-relationships between radical religion, gender and the public sphere were re-negotiated following the Restoration. Patricia Crawford postulated that '[e]nthusiastic religion was no longer a common cultural ground between men and women', and that 'elite men distanced themselves from lower-class men as well as women'. Rationalism, informed by scientific debate, became a male

[3] Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth Tending to the Better Preparing of all People for her Larger Testimony, which is Making Ready for Publick View* (London, 1677), p. 5.

[4] TNA, SP 29/398 fol. 175.

characteristic, while females continued to be defined in terms of emotion and instability.[5] It is necessary, however, to avoid the dangers inherent in telling historical narratives where 'women begin with a public role and end up by being banished into domesticity', as David Norbrook has remarked.[6] Norbrook's revisionist account of the English public sphere incorporates the multiple ways in which women were involved in the republic of letters and the impact of radical Protestant religion. Although '[n]arratives of seventeenth-century women's disappearing into a private sphere do draw our attention to important constraints' they also 'run the risk of patronizing a period of extraordinary energy and creativity'.[7] Kevin Pask argues, similarly, that a new concept of the literary public sphere emerged in England during the 1650s and 1660s, in which writing women played a central role. That which had previously been regarded as private and quotidian became essential to an understanding of one's social self and a collective public identity. This transformation transcends traditional period distinctions between the Interregnum and the Restoration and is exemplified in the love letters of Dorothy Osborne – particularly her manipulation of the marriage market – and the diary of Samuel Pepys.[8] As Norbrook observes '[s]ome women in the seventeenth century did indeed assume that certain spheres of discourse were universal, rather than specifically masculine, and hence vigorously claimed inclusion'.[9]

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[5] Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London, 1993), p. 185.

[6] David Norbrook, 'Women, the Republic of Letters, and the Public Sphere in the Mid-Seventeenth Century', *Criticism*, 46/2 (2004): p. 224.

[7] Norbrook, 'Women, the Republic of Letters', p. 235.

[8] Kevin Pask, 'The Bourgeois Public Sphere and the Concept of Literature', *Criticism*, 46/2 (2004): p. 251.

[9] Norbrook, 'Women, the Republic of Letters', p. 224.

Dissenting women, however, felt the tensions experienced by other women and disenfranchised men who engaged in this republic of letters even more acutely due to their double alienation from the public sphere on the grounds of gender and religious affiliation.[10]

This chapter focuses on female agency within dissenting marriage in the Restoration era. It explores the extremely different, yet creative and influential ways in which individual women responded to the difficulties presented by a hostile government and state church after 1660 through new opportunities in the public sphere. Richard Baxter's *Breviate of the Life of Margaret ... Baxter* presents one option available to dissenting women: companionate marriage as an interdependent partnership, facilitating gospel ministry in the public sphere. Anne Wentworth's pamphlets offer a different model: radical protest against her husband, church and elements of London society through an appeal to her mystical marriage to Christ. The historical sources which form the basis of these case studies are inevitably partial and offset each other in important ways. Margaret Charlton's marriage is depicted primarily in the words of her husband; though he incorporates much of her own writing in the *Breviate*, it is pre-selected and framed by his own account. The reverse is the case with Anne Wentworth: her marriage is portrayed in typographical and vivid terms in her own words, and any indication of her husband's perspective is mediated through her representation of his behaviour and language. It is crucial to keep the absence of these two voices in mind when considering the different pathways and opportunities that marriage – physical and mystical – offered these two dissenting women from both mainstream nonconformity and the more radical sectarian fringe in Restoration England.

Joanne Bailey has noted that historiography treating the institution of marriage from the medieval to the Victorian periods inclines to either an optimistic or pessimistic model in its

[10] Pask, 'Bourgeois Public Sphere', p. 253.

assessment of the role and agency of women. She argues that it is better to think about agency in marriage in terms of inter-dependency, as 'a more convincing model of the causes of conflict can be built on the contrast between reality and ideals in marital roles'. This is because it was 'issues in which both spouses had a vested interest, like child care and upbringing and finances' that 'were those most likely to create power struggles, leading men to express and attempt to implement patriarchal ideals'.[11] Frances E. Dolan explores the way in which these tensions resulted from the marriage advice provided to men and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular, 'the persistent dilemma of reconciling spiritual equality and social hierarchy, the erotic melding into one and the tension between two potential heads of this shared body'.[12] Naomi Tadmor has traced the intimate relationship between early modern English Bible translations that 'served to naturalise in the text a monogamous idiom of marriage, which was also further hammered in through adjacent commentaries and notes' and 'the standardisation of marriage laws and their vigorous enforcement...by both church and state'.[13] Moreover, Rachel Weil has demonstrated that the close relationship between the family and politics, or marriage and the state, continued to flourish in late Stuart England.[14]

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[11] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 198-9.

[12] Frances E. Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 28-9.

[13] Naomi Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 53, 69.

[14] Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 1-3.

Bailey's model of marriage as inter-dependency is important: it offers an opportunity to explore the relationships detailed in this chapter in terms that are not limited to the dichotomy of patriarchal authority and submission or subversion. It is also necessary to recognise the tensions implicit in the ideology of marriage that developed in post-Reformation England between the assertion on the one hand of spiritual equality between men and women, and the reiteration of the other of hierarchies of gender and class that undercut this. Couples negotiated the implications for their marriages in different ways. Richard Baxter and Margaret Charlton combined a passionate commitment to the same religious convictions with an equally strong respect for their individual right to act autonomously. Anne Wentworth and her husband separated from one another due to their inability to unite a sense of religious vocation with a rigid understanding of male headship in marriage. The broadly shared conviction – that hierarchy and order in the family was a microcosm which reflected the stability and distribution of power in the state and church – meant that the organisation of these personal relations inevitably made an impact upon the ways in which dissenting women engaged with the public sphere.

This developing ideology of marriage was constructed alongside a parallel exploration of divorce and celibacy. Roni Berger notes that while divorce was technically illegal, the ideas about divorce that John Milton articulates in his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644) had already been circulating throughout England for at least a century.[15] Tim Stretton also emphasises that private separations were not a sudden innovation developed during the 1650s. 'It is undeniable that in that decade, when the jurisdiction of the church court was abolished with no immediate thought given to its replacement, estranged spouses had to seek alternative ways to separate', but

[15] Ronit Berger, *Legalizing Love: Desire, Divorce, and the Law in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Saarbrücken, 2007), p. 2.

in turning to private settlements by deed or conditional bond, 'they were drawing on a tried and tested mechanism familiar since at least the time of Queen Elizabeth'.[16] The common law had allowed couples from Elizabethan times to work around the limited legal options available in order to ensure that married partners who were no longer able to live together had pragmatic solutions open to them:

> the complex web of consultation, negotiation and compromise, and the consent and approval (willing, tacit or begrudging) of different members of the community, that preceded marriage did not suddenly evaporate once a couple became husband and wife. This rich mix of family, neighbourly and political surveillance continued to play a key role in maintaining (or where necessary in breaking) marital bonds throughout the duration of marriage.[17]

The community involvement, religious guidance and pragmatism that characterised the approach of early modern men and women to marriage relationships, divorce and celibacy, both prior to and during the Interregnum continued to shape the nature and practice of marriage relationships in a communal context after the Restoration.

The issue of female agency within dissenting marriage and the impact of marriage upon women's role in the home, their religious communities and the public sphere will be examined

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[16] Tim Stretton, 'Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England, 1540-1660', in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (eds), *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 39.

[17] Stretton, 'Marriage, Separation and the Common Law', p. 38.

through two detailed case studies. Firstly, I will analyse the experience of Margaret Charlton primarily as it has been recorded in the posthumous biography written by her husband, Richard Baxter, a noted cleric who can be loosely categorised as Presbyterian, though he strenuously resisted any labels other than that of Christian. Secondly, I will consider the apparently more radical nonconformist context offered by the Calvinistic or Particular Baptists.[18] The *Church Book of the Bunyan Meeting* records cases of congregational discipline which demonstrate the inconsistencies between prescriptions and practice that characterised dissenting marriages in the Baptist church led by John Bunyan;[19] this can also be seen in the autobiographical account of one of the female members of his congregation, Agnes Beaumont.[20] These instances offer an informative context for considering in detail the marriage experience and writings of the estranged Particular Baptist and prophet, Anne Wentworth.

**I.**

[18] John Bunyan, unlike most Calvinistic Baptists, held open communion principles. This meant that he was willing to accept adults into his congregation who had not been baptised a second time. See Anne Dunan-Page, *Grace Overwhelming: John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress and the Extremes of the Baptist Mind* (Bern, 2006), pp. 22-3.

[19] Monica Furlong (ed.), *The Trial of John Bunyan and the Persecution of the Puritans* (London, 1978), p. 119; G.B. Harrison (ed.), *The Church Book of Bunyan Meeting*, *1650-1821* (London, 1928), ff. 96, 100.

[20] Vera J. Camden (ed.), *The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont* (East Lansing, 1992).

Baxter's *Breviate* of his wife's life has been edited and republished several times since its first publication in 1681.[21] Ann Hughes observes that this biography 'openly displays the ambiguities of Puritan marriage'. By praising Margaret Charlton, Baxter could be seen to be validating his 'own authority and influence' or acknowledging his failure to be 'master' in his marriage.[22] Baxter, however, undercuts these traditional dichotomies between mastery and submission, public and private, by reconstructing the debate in terms of gospel imperatives for godly zeal:

There are some things charged on her as faults, which I shall mention. 1. That she busied her head so much about Churches, and works of Charity, and was not content to live privately and quietly. But this is just what prophane unbelievers say against all zeal, and serious godliness.[23]

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[21] Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, the Daughter of Francis Charlton...and Wife of Richard Baxter, Etc* (London, 1826); Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter and Margaret Charlton ... Being the Breviate of the Life of Margaret Baxter ... With Introductory Essay, Notes and Appendices by John T. Wilkinson, etc.* (London, 1928); *A Grief Sanctified: Passing Through Grief to Peace and Joy; J.I. Packer Presents Richard Baxter's Memoir of his Wife's Life and Death* (Leicester, 1998).

[22] Ann Hughes, 'Puritanism and Gender', in John Coffey and Paul Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 296-8. For a fuller discussion of the genre of the *Breviate* within the Puritan literary tradition see Alison O'Harae, 'Theology, Genre and Romance in Richard Baxter and Harriet Beecher Stowe', *Religion and Literature*, 37/1 (2005): pp. 69-91.

[23] Baxter, *Breviate*, I4v.

This, as Hughes notes, causes Baxter to critique his wife for her conformity to the stereotype of the silent woman: 'My dear wife was faulty indeed in talking so little of Religion in Company'. It resulted from her desire to avoid hypocrisy.[24] Baxter consistently advised godly women to speak more openly and freely to others. His chief female correspondent during the 1650s, a Derbyshire gentlewoman, Katherine Gell, concluded after reading Baxter's classic, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650):

wherin you earnestly presse the helping others to your rest & in particular by admonishing I was soe clearly convinced of my neglect & unaptnes to it & my uselessnes in my family that way; that I have drawne this conclusion from it that I am not in a state of grace & that upon this account that whoever lives in the constant omission of a known duty or commission of a know[n] sin is not in a state of grace but I have done \therefore/ & c: this hath cost me much sorrow for indeed sir I have indeavored it very much since & could speake but for a naturall foolish bashfullnes that attends me in all other matters hindering me much from doing or receiving good.[25]

[24] Baxter*, Breviate*, O2, L4. Neil Keeble has noted a similar instance in Christiana's response to Mrs Timorous in Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: Neil Keeble, 'Here is Her Glory, Even to be Under Him': The Feminine in the Thought and Work of John Bunyan,' in Anne Laurence et al (eds), *John Bunyan and his England, 1628-88* (London, 1990), pp. 136-7.

[25] Dr Williams's Library, London, MS 59.V.216. I am grateful to the Trustees of Dr Williams's Library for permission to quote from the manuscripts in their possession.

She is inclined to melancholy, but Baxter's spiritual counsel directs her away from introspection and privacy:

Sit not at home as if you had no body to looke after but yourselfe; but step out now and then to your poore tenants, or send for them to you, and deale with them about the matters of their salvation. And you may find that, compassion to them, and such holy discourse in the worke of God, will do more to enliven you, then much Sorrow Striving with your heart will do.[26]

Baxter's pastoral advice was given to Gell while he was still a bachelor on 7 June 1656. His own experience of marriage to Margaret Charlton, however, confirmed him in it. He observes in his biographical account of her life (1681):

When we were married, her sadness and melancholy vanished; counsel did something to it, and contentment something; and being taken up with our houshold affairs, did somewhat. And we lived in inviolated love, and mutual complacency, sensible of the benefit of mutual help.[27]

Baxter's and Charlton's relationship is one of the best exemplifications of the model of 'companionate marriage' that it is argued Puritan theology produced.[28] He comments further:

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[26] Dr Williams's Library, London, MS 59.V.217.

[27] Baxter, *Breviate*, G4.

[28] See, for example, B.J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 8-90.

These near nineteen years I know not that we ever had any breach in point of love, or point of interest, save only that she somewhat grudged that I had persuaded her for my quietness to surrender so much of her Estate, to a disabling her from helping others so much as she earnestly desired.[29]

According to Baxter, the assurance of faith, security and spiritual comfort that Margaret Charlton gained through the pastoral care of and marital relations with her husband helped to liberate her from the religious anxieties and corrosive introspection that marked her conviction of sin, doubts and depression around the time of her conversion and a serious illness. Indeed, the combination of marriage and persecution by external authorities seems to have positively enabled Charlton's transformation from an introspective, melancholic young woman into an energetic, redoubtable and highly intelligent nonconformist patron and activist during the 1660s and 1670s. Baxter clearly indicates that prior to their marriage he and Charlton concluded a pre-nuptial agreement that gave them both a remarkable degree of economic and personal freedom within their relationship.[30] Their nonconformity repeatedly exposed them to persecution and removal, but

[29] Baxter, *Breviate*, G4.

[30] Baxter notes that they agreed to the following conditions prior to their marriage: '1. That I would have nothing that before our Marriage was hers; that I (who wanted no outward supplies) might not seem to marry her for covetousness. 2. That she would so alter her affairs, that I might be intangled in no Law-suits. 3. That she would expect none of my time that my Ministerial work should require.' Baxter, *Breviate*, G4.

Charlton arranged and managed each transition with care and wisdom.[31] She also energetically promoted Baxter's nonconformist pastoral activities following the Act of Uniformity. He notes that she 'prepared her house [at Acton] for the reception of those that would come in, to be instructed by [him], between the morning and evening public assemblies, and after'.[32] When he was imprisoned for teaching, 'she cheerfully went with [him] into Prison; *she brought her best bed thither*, and did much to remove the removable inconveniences of the Prison. I think she scarce ever had a pleasanter time in her life than while she was with me there'.[33] The Five-Mile Act (1665) forced them to move from Acton to Totteridge, where she found an apprenticeship for the son of her poor landlady.[34] Following the Declaration of Indulgence (1672), which gave nonconformists 'leave to build Meeting-places, and preach,' once other ministers were settled, Charlton strongly encouraged Baxter to return to London for the exercise of his ministry, taking a 'most pleasant and convenient house in *Southampton-Square*'.[35]

Margaret Charlton's facilitation of Baxter's ministry went further, however. In London, seeing him 'too dull and backward', she 'fisht out of [him] in what place [he] most desired more Preaching'; he replied, 'St. *Martins* Parish, where are said to be forty thousand more than can come into the Church, especially among all the new buildings in St. *Jameses*, where Neighbours many live like *Americans*, and have heard no Sermon of many years'.[36] She managed to hire

[31] Baxter, *Breviate,* H1.

[32] Baxter, *Breviate*, H1v.

[33] Baxter, *Breviate*, H2.

[34] Baxter, *Breviate*, H2-H2v.

[35] Baxter, *Breviate*, H2v.

[36] Baxter, *Breviate*, H3v.

'some capacious Room there' and when on one occasion the building almost collapsed under the weight of the roof, she found a carpenter who was able to prop up the beam, thus protecting Baxter's auditors from harm.[37] She also built a chapel in Oxenden Street, set up a school for poor children in St James's, hired another chapel in Swallow Street, and encouraged Baxter to travel to Southwark, when due to his notoriety as a prominent nonconformist he was no longer able to preach in the chapels she had founded.[38]

Margaret Charlton's public ministry was not limited to physical and material initiatives. Baxter unreservedly praises her quick apprehension in various cases of conscience, noting the 'excellency of her reason', which 'lay not so much in the speculative, as the *prudential practical part*'.

> [I]n this I never knew her equal: In very hard cases, about what was to be done, she would suddenly open all the way that was to be opened, in the things of the Family, Estate, or any civil business. And to confess the truth, experience acquainted her, that I knew less in such things than she; and therefore was willing she should take it all upon her....*Except in cases that require Learning, and skill in Theological difficulties, she was better at resolving a case of conscience than most Divines that ever I knew in all my life*....Insomuch that of late years, I confess, that I was used to put all, save secret cases, to her, and hear what she could say.[39]

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[37] Baxter, *Breviate*, H3v-H4.

[38] Baxter, *Breviate*, H4v-I2.

[39] Baxter, *Breviate*, K2-K2v.

This was extraordinary praise from one of the most respected English casuists of the seventeenth century. Something of Margaret Charlton's broad education, patience, practicality and tact in dealing with and advising those within her circle of patronage can be seen in her surviving correspondence with her husband's second cousin and heir, William Baxter.[40] Charlton was the one who ensured that his education was provided for financially; she wrote to him personally with advice as to his professional training, suggesting that he should not become a nonconformist minister,[41] and she sought to establish him as a doctor or as a lawyer depending on his own inclination. Richard Baxter disarmingly concludes: 'I was naturally somewhat tenacious of my own conceptions, her reasons and my experiences usually told me, that she was in the right, and knew more than I'.[42]

## II

The complex pastoral, theological and congregational concerns that shaped the understanding of marriage amongst non-denominational nonconformists such as Margaret Charlton and Richard Baxter were also integral to the communal life and writings of the Particular Baptists. One of the most challenging elements from the perspective of pastoral care and oversight was the attempt to resolve problems resulting from a mixed marriage (the union of a believer with a nonbeliever) or domestic abuse, which could lead to a hardening or radicalisation of the beliefs and practices of

[40] N.H. Keeble and Geoffrey Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (2 vols, Oxford, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 192-3.

[41] Dr Williams's Library, London, MS 59.V.170; MS 59.V.234.

[42] Baxter, *Breviate*, K2.

the perceived offender. Several such cases are recorded in the *Church Book of the Bunyan Meeting* at Bedford and John Bunyan also presents the dangers and problems inherent in this kind of troubled marriage in his pseudo-novel, *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*. This situation also arose amongst the London Baptist congregations led by Hanserd Knollys and Nehemiah Cocks in the 1670s to which Anne Wentworth belonged. Wentworth appears, in Elaine Hobby's words, to have been a 'battered woman'.[43] She was married to a man whom she accused of maintaining an outward show of piety, without possessing the inner reality.[44] Unlike Mr Badman's exemplary first wife, however, Wentworth was not prepared to endure this situation patiently. When the church officers in a disciplinary meeting accepted and endorsed her husband's character, authority and version of events, she resisted vociferously. However, the justification she provided for her separation from the Baptist community and the divine authorisation of her prophecies was marriage to her heavenly bridegroom, Christ. Her subjugation in this heavenly union absolved her of all responsibilities to her earthly husband, whom she accused of spiritual hypocrisy and a desire to murder her, reducing the experience of this earthly relationship to nothing more than an eschatological signifier of the judgement to come.

Dolan argues that Wentworth understood 'her husband's metaphorical death as the precondition of her own union with Christ and consequent salvation'; this was not a unique position for female prophets in seventeenth-century England.[45] 'Wentworth adopts violent metaphors that conflate her bodily and spiritual experience....[She] imagines that her husband's metaphorical

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[43] Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649–88* (London, 1988), p. 51.

[44] Wentworth, *Vindication*, pp. 3-4.

[45] Dolan, *Marriage and Violence*, pp. 59-60.

death is necessary for her to be able to commit herself to a new spiritual union; yet she construes this new marriage as equally violent, its violence is again a matter of bowing her will, breaking to pieces, becoming nothing'.[46] Wentworth's position on marriage is almost identical to Bunyan's views, as described by Thomas Luxon, though she was driven by different gender concerns and external pressures:

...for Bunyan, marriage remains an insistently bodily matter, confined to this world of corruption. In the next world, the glorious bodies and souls of Christians belong utterly to Christ....Bunyan does not say so explicitly...but to enter fully into the marriage supper of the lamb [he] implies one must be separated from the wife of one's corruptible flesh.[47]

For Wentworth, separation from the husband of her corruptible flesh occurred in the present, earthly realm, not the future kingdom of God. Elizabeth Clarke has noted that more work needs to be done on 'how this kind of spirituality intersected with women's experience of earthly marriage in the seventeenth century, but it is clear that the relationship is a conflicted one, the spiritual discourse often compensating for or comparing favourably with a less than ideal relationship with earthly husbands. When these kind of direct comparisons were made...the absolute distinction between the discourse of divine love and that of human

[46] Dolan, *Marriage and Violence*, pp. 59-60.

[47] Thomas H. Luxon, 'One Soul Versus One Flesh: Friendship, Marriage, and the Puritan Self', in Vera J. Camden (ed.), *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan* (Stanford, 2008), p. 89.

sexuality which allegorical interpretations of the Song of Songs demanded became untenable'.[48]

If Margaret Baxter's life is compared with that of Anne Wentworth, the dramatically different lives and experiences of nonconformist women during the Restoration can be readily illustrated. Wentworth and her husband were both members of the London Baptist community led by Hanserd Knollys and Nehemiah Cocks.[49] Initially, it appears that Wentworth was respected and admired by Knollys. In 'An Admonition to the Reader' attached to Wentworth's final publication, *England's Spiritual Pill* (1679), an anonymous supporter (A. B.) writes:

...but that thou mayst know, what kind of woman Mrs. *Wentworth* is, and not misjudge of her with others, let me present thee with a description, given to some persons of quallity and my self by Mr. *Hansward Knoylls*, upon our first acquaintance with Mrs. *Wentworth*, which is above two years agone. We went to him to inquire, what she was, and to get his assistance to procure Mrs. *Wentworths* Book of experience and other papers out of her Husbands hands. This latter he waved, but as to the fotmer [sic], he was neer an hour

[48] Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 169.

[49] Anne Wentworth, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ just as he Spake it in Verses at Several Times, and Sometimes in Prose, unto his Faithful Servant Anne Wentworth, who Suffereth for his Name* ([London], 1679), p. 20. The most recent biography of Hanserd Knollys does not mention Anne Wentworth at all: Dennis C. Bustin, *Paradox and Perseverance: Hanserd Knollys, Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England* (Milton Keynes, 2006).

describing her, and gave such a character of her, from her child-hood, for her nature, humility, modesty and Christianity, that I never heard a better of any creature! He said, whereever she lived, she adorned the Gospel, and made all the families, where she came, in love with religion; and moreover, was of so tender a spirit, that a child might domineer over her, nay a stamp of her husbands foot was enough, to make her swound; and much more he added, which made us all desirous of her acquaintance; wherein I have continued ever since....[50]

Once Wentworth started writing and prophesying in a way that publicly indicted her husband, relatives and the leaders of the Baptist congregations for their behaviour towards her, their attitude changed; she may well have been excommunicated.[51] In *A True Account* (1676) Wentworth states:

let now *Thomas Hicks* and *William Dix* draw up their Bill, and all the rest of my Husbands brethren what it is they have to charge me with of all they have against me in misbehaviour in life and conversation, or neglect of my duty to their Brother, in not obeying of him from the first day of my Marriage unto the day of my healing, compleat 18 years the third of *January*, 1670.[52]

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[50] Anne Wentworth, *Englands Spiritual Pill* (London, 1679), p. 34.

[51] Catie Gill, 'Wentworth, Anne (1629/30–1693?)', *ODNB*. [http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/67075, accessed 12 April 2011]

[52] Anne Wentworth, *A True Account of Anne Wentworths Being Cruelly, Unjustly, and Unchristianly Dealt with by Some of Those People Called Anabaptists* (London, 1676), p. 16.

Wentworth believed that the male church hierarchy favoured her husband's testimony over her own, due to an inbuilt gender bias. She writes of how they represented her 'as a *Proud, Passionate, Revengeful, Discontented* and *Mad* Woman, and as one that has unduly published things to the prejudice and scandal of my Husband; and that have wickedly left him.'[53] This may have led them, perhaps inadvertently, to legitimize abusive patterns of behaviour through their adherence to a particular form of male headship in marriage. Wentworth describes her husband's 'fierce looks, bitter words, sharp tongue, and cruel usage'.[54] She comments further: 'I...spent out all my natural strength of body in obedience to satisfy the unreasonable will of my earthly Husband, and laid my body as the ground, and as the street for him to go over for 18 years together'.[55] However, on 3 January 1670, Wentworth claimed to have been dramatically healed from her debilitating meekness and physical infirmities. This transformed the silent woman who had been oppressed and abused for so many years.[56] She subsequently became convinced that she was called to testify to God's goodness and to prophesy in his name. Unsurprisingly, her husband was not pleased at the prospect of being exposed publicly through his wife's prophetic activity and 'in a most cruel manner' he hindered Wentworth 'from performing' the commands of her heavenly bridegroom by 'seizing, and running away with [her] Writings'.[57] She criticized the Particular Baptist community for a false typological reading of Scripture which led them to

[53] Wentworth, *Vindication*, p. 2.

[54] Wentworth, *Vindication*, p. 5.

[55] Wentworth, *True Account*, p. 8.

[56] Wentworth, *True Account*, p. 10.

[57] Wentworth, *True Account*, p. 3.

view her husband as 'the patient, meek Lamb', defining her in contrast as 'an impudent Hussy....deluded by a lying Spirit'.[58]

While Wentworth wrote letters of warning to the Lord Mayor of London and Charles II and foretold of coming judgement upon England,[59] her prophetic publications were firmly rooted in and primarily directed at the Particular Baptist congregations of London. She wrote: 'From the house of my abode this ten years in *Kings-Head Court* in *White-Cross-street* neer *Cripple-Gate*'.[60] And, in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1679), she referred directly to her husband and other members of the Baptist community by name, pronouncing God's judgement upon them:

Therefore all that they have done, and do so, shall feel the Rod of an angry God, as there is *Hanserd Knolys* with his Church, and *Nehemiah Cocks*, my Husbands Pastor, *Thomas Hicks*, *William Dicks, Philip Barder*, my Relations, and hundreds more, that have a hand in setting my Husband against me, so that he will not own me: And then they go on to blame and defame me, and say, that I am run away from him![61]

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[58] Wentworth, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 20.

[59] TNA, SP 29/395 fos.118-23.

[60] Wentworth, *True Account*, p. 22.

[61] Wentworth, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 20. Despite Knollys's high view of Wentworth's character, his presence on one of the occasions when Anna Trapnell was prophesying, and his willingness to write a prefatory letter endorsing Katharine Sutton's more discreet prophecies (Bustin, pp. 304-5), he was not prepared to countenance Wentworth's rebellion against her husband in the name of obedience to Christ, or on the grounds of self-defence.

Wentworth's abusive marriage, sectarian persecution and sense of divine calling precipitated an entirely different engagement in the public sphere to that undertaken by Margaret Baxter. Wentworth interpreted her broken relationship with her husband as a typological signifier of God's relationship with his church in the world. She developed a hermeneutic common to radical sects of the earlier seventeenth century, of reading according to the Spirit, rather than the letter of God's word, drawing particularly upon the Song of Songs. Erica Longfellow observes that:

[M]ystical marriage was one way of negotiating this paradox [between an injunction to silence and the requirement to live a godly life]....[M]ystical marriage mediated between human and divine relationships in which gender was ultimately irrelevant, a mere construct....The sacrificial love of Christ served as a model of gendered behaviour that was not oppressive to women. His unimpeachable authority provided a means to authorise their conventionally silenced voices.[62]

Sharon Achinstein has noted that Wentworth's prophetic interpretation of the Song of Songs radicalises divine romance and leads to an 'assault upon patriarchal marriage' in her 'Revelations'.[63] Katharine Gillespie suggests further that the 'pastoral ideal of marriage, which was to end every social plot with the virginal woman's rupturing submission...was both reified and frustrated through the separatist displacement of 'marriage' on to the eternally 'chaste' and

[62] Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 13.

[63] Sharon Achinstein, 'Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England', *English Literary History*, 69/2 (2002): p. 422.

enclosed relationship that every individual enjoyed with God as a self-sufficient 'couple' of one'.[64] Longfellow concludes that women could exploit 'the contradictions inherent in early modern gendered morals, using the seemingly limiting model of the prophetess who was not herself when she spoke in order to emphasise the divine origins of her speech....The paradigm enabled...women prophets to deflect attacks against themselves onto God himself".[65]

Wentworth drew a sharp distinction between the body and the spirit or soul, complemented by a clear differentiation between her earthly husband and her spiritual or heavenly bridegroom. She must be removed from the former, if she was to remain faithful to the latter. Her authorial persona was thus a dizzying juxtaposition of extreme self-abnegation and triumphant spiritual exaltation: Wentworth's language shifts as she moved from describing her earthly marriage to her mystical union with Christ, eliding the real impact that the life of the spirit has on the life of the body. However, this was balanced by her detailed attention to the material ways in which her mystical bridegroom provided tangibly for her physical needs – housing, food and furniture. Her vision of a spiritual union with Christ was concretely realised through providence in this world, as well as in the world to come.

Wentworth developed a broader sense of the prophetic and religious significance of her experiences and sufferings by fusing her autobiographical account with a typological hermeneutic, attributing both to God's direct revelation:

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[64] Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 7.

[65] Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing,* p. 162.

my *oppressions* and *deliverance* had a *Publick* Ministry and *meaning* wrapt up in them, and that it must be seven years before I could perfect that writing, and the Lord would bring forth his end in all this, and give an open Testimony to the world that he had chosen and called me to write and glorifie him'.[66]

Her prophetic attempts to use her own experience of domestic abuse and oppression as a signifier of God's attitude towards England and, more specifically, as a loaded message to hypocritical professors amongst the Baptists, foundered due to a resolute refusal on the part of her audience either to read her life in this way, or to accept her reinterpretation of traditional biblical images, such as the 'meek Lamb'.[67] She saw the support given by the male pastors and members of her family to her husband's headship and authority in the marriage, at the expense of her own physical safety and spiritual freedom, as the inevitable result of their inherent gender bias and wilful spiritual blindness.

Gillespie has commented that sectarian women like Wentworth developed an 'internalized sovereignty that often manifested itself most fully...in a state of crisis'; 'a secure and stable sense of self that acted as a counter to...pressures – and that was the God-within'.[68] Wentworth responded to the resistance of her husband and pastors by identifying herself more closely with

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[66] Wentworth, *Vindication*, p. 12.

[67] Wentworth, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 20. Objections to a politicized reading of the Song of Songs were not limited to a male audience. Elizabeth Clarke traces Jane Lead's dislike of the apocalyptic specificity with which Wentworth interpreted the trope of mystical marriage: Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs*, p. 168.

[68] Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent,* p. 171.

her divine bridegroom, proclaiming judgement as God's mouthpiece. The additional, initialled authors who contributed to *England's Spiritual Pill* indicate that Wentworth had some support from believers who were willing to promote her message and, presumably, helped her to publish her prophecies. Wentworth's anonymous friend claims that God established the truth of her words by returning her to the home on White-Cross Street, from which her husband had evicted her, and providing her with 'Beds...Chairs, Tables, and all manner of useful Things' from strangers.[69] Wentworth indicts her husband for his failure to conform to traditional conceptions of masculinity as a crucial justification for her decision to enter the public sphere and appeal to a broader audience for support. It is important to recognise that her prophetic activity in this respect was far from radical in origin.[70] However, her clear and consistent vision of the ways in which her mystical union with Christ providentially transformed her physical, material and spiritual condition in this world and acted as a justification for her denunciation of the state of the nation does make her stand out amongst nonconformist female writers in the 1670s.

Unlike Margaret Charlton, though, Wentworth did not have a supportive husband or pastor to publicise and justify her ministry to posterity, nor was she commemorated amongst the pious women memorialised by the industrious compiler Samuel Clarke. In his introductory letter 'To the Reader' prefacing *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age* by his friend, Clarke, Baxter explicitly set out his views on the value of biography. This collection included short lives of divines, and the nobility and gentry of both sexes, like Baxter's wife, Margaret. Baxter argued that these biographies helped to convince those who had not known people of holy

[69] Wentworth, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 21.

[70] Warren Johnston, 'Prophecy, Patriarchy, and Violence in the Early Modern Household: The Revelations of Anne Wentworth', *Journal of Family History*, 34/4 (2009): pp. 344-68.

character that it was possible to attain a high level of sanctification. It is crucial that 'the Faithful' are truly represented in the face of Satan's lies in order to vindicate 'Gods Image upon them'.[71] But more than this: 'Nature is delighted in History…And the true History of exemplary Lives, is a pleasant and profitable recreation to young persons; and may secretly work them to a liking of Godliness and value of good men, which is the beginning of saving Grace: O how much better work is it, than Cards, Dice, Revels, Stage-Plays, Romances or idle Chat'.[72] Baxter disarmingly confessed that he had not had an opportunity to read the volume he has been asked to introduce. However, his own knowledge of the persons and histories recounted convinced him that 'the Reader will have no cause to question the Historical truth'.[73] The life of Joseph Alleine, he noted, 'I had a hand in Publishing and Prefacing heretofore: And O that I could reach that heavenly frame of mind, by which they lived and died in triumphant joy and praise to God!'[74] Baxter models the affective response that he desires to evoke in Clarke's readers and offers a glimpse of how he would have liked to similarly package and publish the short biographies that he had penned in a variety of other genres: 'I have in Funeral Sermons and Epistles described truly many excellent persons, whose Examples would be useful to this depraved Age; were it not for the charge of Printing, I would wish them Bound all together as these be, viz. Mrs. *Bakers* of

[71] Baxter, 'To the Reader', *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age* (London, 1683), a3.

[72] Baxter, 'To the Reader', a3v.

[73] Baxter, 'To the Reader', a4.

[74] Baxter, 'To the Reader', a4; see also Richard Baxter, 'Introduction', *The Life and Death Of...Mr. Joseph Alleine* (London, 1672), A6v-B6v. It is worth noting that Baxter here endorses the narrative account provided in part by Alleine's wife, Theodosia.

Worcester, Mrs. *Coxes*, Mrs. *Hamners*, my Wives Mother, Alderman *Ashhursts*, Mr. *Waddesworth*, Mr. *Stubbs*, Mr *Corbets*, &c'.[75]

Significant in Baxter's list is the number of exemplary women – Wentworth, however, is not amongst them. Her commemoration is limited to the testimony of her initialled supporters, included in her own publications. These, unlike Baxter's *Breviate* of his wife, have not been consistently republished. To some extent this testifies to the fragility of narratives told by men and women in the early modern period when not legitimated by a supportive, authoritative patron. It may also reflect anachronistic preconceptions regarding the genres of biography, autobiography and self-revelation and a pragmatic commercialism on the part of those republishing that led them to focus on what they knew would sell. Baxter, despite his prescriptive emphasis on the uses of biography, was preoccupied with the idiosyncrasies of his subjects in a way that pre-empts the concerns of modern biographers. Wentworth's self-revelations – a mixture of first-person narration, poetry, biblical commentary and prophecy – do not conform; they are part of 'a culture of life-writing whose very inclusivity and taxonomical strangeness demand[s] that [we] revisit many of [our] assumptions about autobiographical forms'.[76] Much, in fact, as Margaret Charlton's papers must have looked before they were rearranged into a chronological and didactic account by Baxter after her death.[77]

Richard Baxter's admiration for his wife's abilities, refusal to benefit from her personal income and advocacy of the gospel imperative to live 'as fruitfully to the Church and others, as we can

[75] Baxter, 'To the Reader', a4v; see also Baxter, *Breviate*, A3-A4.

[76] Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 1.

[77] See, for example, Baxter, *Breviate*, B3-B4, C1v—D3v, E1v-E4, F4v-G2, M1-N1.

do in the world'[78] enabled him to defend, support and encourage her various endeavours to further the gospel in the public sphere and to manage the practical aspects of their mutual spiritual endeavours. By contrast, the Calvinistic Baptist communities in Bedford and London demonstrate the social conservatism characteristic of dissenting denominations in the Restoration often perceived to be radical and subversive. The prescriptive advice enshrined in Bunyan's *Life and Death of Mr Badman* illustrates his pastoral concern over the dangers of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. While the first, pious wife of Mr Badman is commended for her courage in resisting his evil influence and for her desire to stay at home and order things wisely, she is condemned for her failure to seek godly counsel prior to contracting her unsuccessful marriage. Badman's second wife is loud, sexually licentious and indicted for her tendency to spend time outside, rather than keeping her home. The *Church Book* of the Bunyan meeting reveals that cases of discipline for such mixed marriages were not uncommon. Anne Wentworth's prophetic writings demonstrate in detail what such a mixed marriage looked like. Despite the glowing testimonial provided by Knollys to Wentworth's character and his earlier support for Katherine Sutton whose 'writings voiced teachings of a prophetess in a very public forum',[79] neither he, nor his fellow minister Nehemiah Cocks, nor Wentworth's relatives were willing to support or defend her when she claimed that her husband had failed to fulfil his role as provider, and they threatened her life after she began to prophesy.

Understanding marriage as an inter-dependent relationship helps to illustrate the threat that Wentworth posed to her husband's reputation and standing both within the Baptist community and, more generally, amongst their neighbours in London and politically through her letters to

[78] Baxter, *Breviate*, K3.

[79] Bustin, *Paradox and Perseverance*, p. 305.

the Lord Mayor of London and Charles II. Her husband's refusal to return her writings and decision to bar her from their home left her physically vulnerable and in great need. Her family and church's endorsement of her husband's position illustrates the importance of community in policing violence and sustaining marriage unions or, alternately, pragmatic separations. Wentworth's response to her unsatisfactory relationship with her earthly husband was also expressed in the language of marital union: her divine spouse, Christ, authorized her agency in the public sphere as a prophet and writer. The disintegration of her human union became a typological signifier of God's judgement on the Baptists and Restoration England. Though the cases of Charlton and Wentworth are by no means exhaustive, they demonstrate the diverse and creative ways in which individual dissenting women exercised agency in the public sphere, from which they were excluded twice on the grounds of religion and gender, in and through the institution of marriage.