

**Mysticism, Millenarianism, and the Visions of
Sophia in the Works of Jane Lead (1624-1704)**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the published works of the prophetess and mystic, Jane Lead (1624-1704), probably the most prolific woman writer and most important female leader in late seventeenth-century England. By contextualising her and by drawing out the nature of her devotions it draws attention to her as a figure in her own right. This thesis challenges studies that have tended to reduce her to one example within a certain tradition. As much of her theology was mystical and experiential, it is concerned to look more closely at the individual, for only then can we map out the development of her ideas and beliefs to show that she did not conform to any one particular tradition. It considers the role of gender in religious discourse by questioning how she was able to act as potential agent of change and it examines the nature of her writings and the reception of her published works.

This thesis also considers Jane Lead's use of mysticism, millenarianism and her visions of the Virgin Wisdom, or Sophia to show how her religious ideas straddle the crossroads of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, by examining important themes in her writings, such as purification, salvation, redemption and sophiology. It considers the gender dynamism of her visions of Sophia to show that her hybrid theology of the feminine has ramifications for contemporary scholarship, especially in the areas of women's history, early modern women and writing, and women and religion. The thesis aims to show that Jane Lead was indeed, a most extraordinary seventeenth-century woman.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Editorial Note	v
Abbreviations	vi
Illustrations	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE - The Philadelphians' Prophetess	
Norfolk's Child to 'Bride of Christ'	15
The Philadelphian Society	35
Descendants of Hamond Warde	51
CHAPTER TWO - The Pen of An Angel	52
The Whole Process of a Soul under such Divine Communications	56
Survey of Jane Lead's Works	57
Nature of Jane Lead's Authorship	61
A Prophet in Grub Street?	66
CHAPTER THREE - Searching for Go(l)d: Spiritual Alchemy	71
Vision of the Glassy Globe	77
The Philosopher's Stone: Wisdom's Pearl	85
CHAPTER FOUR - The Divine Ark: A Vision of the Second Noah's Ark	91
A Second Ark of Redemption	95
CHAPTER FIVE - Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and The New Jerusalem	107
The Path to Universal Salvation	114
The Eight Worlds	119
The Apocalyptic Virgin	121
CHAPTER SIX - Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny	126
Maternal Qualities of Rebecca	128
The Virgin Mary and The Virgin Sophia	135
Arogynous Adam and Supernatural Sophia	139
Androgyny: Wisdom's Children	143
CHAPTER SEVEN - Mystical Marriage	151
Sophia's Manufactory and Merchandise	152
The Bridal Mysticism of the Virgin Sophia	158
Qualities of a Bride	164
CHAPTER EIGHT- Philosophia	169
The Diversity of Sophia	170
Visions of Wisdom: Crucified Sophia	172
Sophia's Looking Glass: Imagery of the Mirror, Eye and Globe	179
Scholarship on Sophia	190
CONCLUSION	199
BIBLIOGRAPHY	219

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The year has been taken to begin on 1 January, not 25 March as in the Julian calendar (which was used until 1752).

Throughout, I have used Jane's married surname spelled Lead (without an `e') as after her first publication in 1681 she no longer used Leade.

As Jane Lead used the Authorised King James version of the Bible, all biblical quotations are taken from it, including the apocrypha.

In quotations from primary sources, spelling and punctuation have been cited verbatim, with corrections only for modern typology.

ABBREVIATIONS

CSPD - Calendar of State Papers Domestic

DNB - Dictionary of National Biography

MS Rawl. - MS Rawlinson

PRO - Public Records Office

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1	John Pordage	24
1.2	Ann Bathurst	31
1.3	Process of the Kingdom of Christ, Richard Roach	40
3.1	The Earth as Nurse	80
4.1	Three Doves and Noah's Ark, Jacob Boehme	99
4.2	Jacob Boehme, Aurora	104
8.1	Christa	175
8.2	The Councils of Wisdom	177
8.3	Sapientia	181
8.4	The Trinity, Jacob Boehme	183
8.5	The Birth of the Trinity, John Pordage	185
8.6	Jane Lead, 'God's Love' in <i>A Fountain of Gardens</i>	187
8.7	A Vision of God's Flaming Eye	188

INTRODUCTION

The day is not far away when the prophecies and my written work will serve a great purpose.¹

Jane Lead (1624-1704) was probably the most prolific woman author and important female religious leader in late seventeenth-century England. Although Phyllis Mack described Lead as 'the most eminent female visionary of the 1690s', she still remains relatively unknown.² Lead was the leader of a Protestant group in London, known as the Philadelphian Society.³ During her lifetime, at least fourteen of her works were published in English and were translated into Dutch and German circulating among European Philadelphian circles and German pietists. This thesis seeks to remedy some of this comparative neglect and to highlight and explore the distinctiveness of her visionary and prophetic writings and especially of her theology. It argues that Lead's form of experiential religion has particular relevance and interest today because of recent interest among feminist theologians in the female aspects of the divinity and in the figure of Sophia.

Lead had great confidence that her 'written work' revealed God's plan and felt divinely ordered to disseminate God's will. Her writings, however, were not systematic, they revealed an inner world of shifting and complex visions. Through this introspective method she experienced an immediate awareness of God and she wrote, 'I introverted more into my own Inward Deep, where I did meet with that I could not find elsewhere.'⁴ Like most mystics, Lead's goal can thus be seen as a 'Mystical Union, by returning back into the Infinite

¹ Jane Lead, 'Lebenslauff der Autorin', in *Sechs Unschatzbare Mystische Tractlein* (Amsterdam, 1696), p. 422. I am grateful to Marianne Jahn for translating Lead's 'Life of the Author' into English.

² Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 409.

³ The Philadelphian Society was a religious society 'for the advancement of piety and the universal love towards all', named after the sixth of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 1:4 and 3:7. Her followers were mainly well-educated Anglicans. See Francis Lee, *State of the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), p. 7.

⁴ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure* (3 vols, London, 1696-1701), vol. 1, p. 6.

Being'.⁵ Lead's mysticism, however, was typically individual and her writing is difficult to categorise.

Lead recorded many visions from 1670 until her death in 1701. The most significant were visions of the Virgin Wisdom, or Sophia. Lead recorded that, 'in the midst of a most bright Cloud, a Woman of a most Sweet and Majestick Countenance, her Face shining as the Sun, and her Vesture of Transparent Gold, who said, 'Behold! I am God's Eternal Virgin Wisdom.'⁶ The vision depicted a personification of God's wisdom, known as Sophia.⁷ While Lead's visions of Sophia were not unique, they were extremely unusual in the seventeenth century. Lead developed a less explicitly patriarchal and more gynocentric form of Christianity, presenting an emphatically female dimension to the Christian mystical tradition.

This thesis hopes to fill a gap in scholarship. Understandably focusing on the religious and theological mainstream, and often working with denominational categories, historians concerned with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have not explored the image of Sophia at this time. Feminist theologians, meanwhile, have neglected the significance of Lead's interpretation of Wisdom and the way in which it highlights the divine feminine. Lead emphasised the figure of Sophia more than any of her contemporaries. The central concern of this thesis, therefore, is not with Lead's style, as is the case in Smith's study, but with the understanding of Lead's prophecies and the gender dynamism of her mysticism and spirituality. For, as Elaine Hobby points out, Lead's 'vision is a wholly spiritual one'.⁸ A thematic approach will be used to examine Lead's theology, focusing, for example, on her use of purification, redemption and salvation. The overriding preoccupation in the thesis will be to examine how Lead figured in the relationship between herself and Sophia. The intention however, is not to provide a comprehensive account of her complex theology, but to offer one interpretation.

Many of Lead's prophetic utterances were concerned with the millenarian idea of

⁵ Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (London, 1998), p. 154.

⁶ Jane Lead, *The Laws of Paradise* (London, 1695), sig. A2r.

⁷ Sophia is Greek for Wisdom and in addition to appearing in several places in biblical literature, Sophia is found in many Gnostic scriptures which date from about 4 a.d. I use Wisdom and Sophia interchangeably as Lead did.

⁸ Elaine Hobby, 'Prophecy' in Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, 2002), p. 278.

Christ's second coming, when Sophia would also be apparent. She anticipated the imminent arrival where Christ would return as predicted in the Book of Revelation and where everyone would undergo a spiritual and inward transformation in the End Days. This thesis will also examine the gendered configuration of her mystical experiences to show how she guided her Philadelphian members with millenarian visions of a future world. Lead prophesied an imminent apocalypse which would result not from God the Father's inexorable judgement, but from Wisdom's love and intuitive wisdom. This relationship is especially interesting for the exploration of themes surrounding mysticism, millenarianism and the divine feminine because of the quantity of Lead's surviving publications.

Lead's theology was informed by the ideas of the sixteenth-century German theosopher Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), who claimed to have visions and wrote books and treatises on complex philosophical and theological concepts. Boehme's theosophy, however, differs from contemporary theosophy which incorporates eastern philosophies. He drew from a complex range of philosophies including Hermeticism, the Cabbala, Gnosticism, and sophiology.⁹ Drawing on her published works, and in particular her spiritual diary, this thesis will show how Lead developed a relationship with Sophia to a greater extent than Boehme, and show that her theology was an experiential and mystical expression of the divine feminine which consisted almost entirely of an interior visualisation.

Lead, of course, was not unique as a prophetess. As part of the evolution of the critical interest in early modern women writers, there is a rich scholarship concerning seventeenth-century women prophets.¹⁰ Particular attention has been paid to early Quaker

⁹ For information about Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), see Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660*, pp. 185-225; Robin Waterfield, *Jacob Boehme: Essential Readings* (Northamptonshire, 1989, repr. Berkeley, 2001); B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge, 1996).

¹⁰ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), p. 410-12; Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 165-211; Sue Wiseman, 'Unslient Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in Seventeenth-Century Women's Prophetic Discourse', in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London, 1992), pp. 176-96; Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (Michigan, 1989), pp. 26-53; Christine Berg and Philippa Berry, 'Spiritual Whoredom': An Essay on Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century' in Francis Barker and others (eds), *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, (Essex, 1981), pp. 37-54, and Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century', in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London, 1992), pp. 139-226.

women, for as Mack has observed in the Civil War period, 'Of the nearly three hundred visionary women who wrote and prophesied during that early period, over two hundred belonged to the Society of Friends'.¹¹ We also know far more, for example, about the prophecies of Anna Trapnel, the Fifth Monarchist, and the Baptist, Anne Wentworth than we do of Jane Lead even from non-traditional genres, such as autobiography.¹² I first came across Lead in Phyllis Mack's, *Visionary Women* where she is mentioned as a rather minor figure because, as Mack saw her, Lead's 'writings were silent on the political and social issues that had engaged the prophets of the Civil War period'.¹³ She has been perceived as being apolitical, and thus assumed to be passive. Scholars have often placed their emphasis on active women and on the secular implications of their statements, including those who challenged the Pauline interdict.¹⁴ Feminist scholars have often launched their own re-evaluations building on and critically responding to the work of, for example, Keith Thomas,¹⁵ and Bernard Capp.¹⁶ In *God's Englishwomen*, Hilary Hinds acknowledged Christopher Hill's *God's Englishman* (1971) to which the title of her publication referred, but replaced the evaluation of men's achievements with a focus on women.¹⁷ Hill, for example,

¹¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 1.

¹² Elspeth Graham and others (eds), *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (London, 1989). See also, Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, 2002).

¹³ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 409. See also, Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Harlow, 2001) who argues that women were engaged centrally with many of the major ideas and controversies of their time. See also Mary Burke and others (eds), *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (New York, 2000).

¹⁴ See Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Southern Illinois, 2000); pp. 143-160. Clarke, *Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing*, pp.123-86.

¹⁵ Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', in T. Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660* (New York, 1965), pp. 317-40.

¹⁶ Bernard Capp, *Fifth-Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London, 1972). See also Rufus Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Boston, 1959).

¹⁷ Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester and New York, 1996), p. vi. Christopher Hill, *God's Englishmen: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London, 1970); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972). See also Carol

has been reluctant to recognise a separate sphere of activity in which women as prophets played a unique role. He has been blinkered in his analysis of gender regarding female prophecy, subsuming the category of woman within that of class. Also, he has denied that women made any distinctive contribution to sectarian politics and has rejected female prophecy having a special significance for women.¹⁸ In contrast, however, Elaine Hobby has argued that early modern women prophets can be viewed as 'proto feminists' because 'they actively and deliberately transcended the bonds of true feminine self-effacement, using the ideas and structures of contemporary thought to negotiate some space and autonomy'.¹⁹

Hobby has also suggested that after the Restoration, 'women were driven back into their newly private homes, where they retreated to an espousal of virtue. Of necessity, they made themselves virtuous'.²⁰ Mack has also noted that by the closing decades of the seventeenth century, 'Public prophets were muzzled, women more than men'.²¹ After 1690 moreover, Quakers actually opposed public prophecy.²² This thesis challenges the general assumption that after the Civil War all women retreated to their households. Lead was at her most active, as both a prophet and an author, in the 1680s and 1690s. The lack of social authority accorded to the majority of women of her time could be circumvented by prophetesses; their close association with God could legitimate and authorise their public and spiritual activities.²³ In the late seventeenth century, Lead was *still* utilising this way to maintain her position, long after the censoring of the Quaker Margaret Fell who wrote *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666).²⁴ In contrast, the Philadelphian Society actively encouraged their women members to speak, and wrote a set of constitutions as a guide: 'If

Churchill, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (London, 1989).

¹⁸ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972), pp. 89-92.

¹⁹ Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 356.

²² Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth Century England* (Berkeley, 1980), p. 52. See also Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 364-71.

²³ For a useful discussion of prophecy see, Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp. 10-12, and Mack, *Visionary Women*.

²⁴ Mack notes that as early as 1672, all Friends' writings, including those of George Fox and Margaret Fell were censored, Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 365.

a Woman Pray or Prophecy let it be with all Sobriety and Modesty, to speak forth her own experience, Sensation, or Manifestation in the Divine Matters'.²⁵ This tenth constitution challenges the general assumption made today, that women's involvement in the public sphere was decreasing. Lead, moreover, remained highly visible.

The literary critic Paula McDowell is one of the few scholars who has written extensively about Lead. However, in her work she presents Lead's literary career as one aspect of the rise of the independent female author in commercial literary production in the later seventeenth century.²⁶ Yet, in Lead's case, her authorship was not simply an autonomous act. Men, as well as women, played an important, if not crucial role as aides, editors and publishers, which allowed her access into the world of print. This collaborative relationship between men and women is underplayed by Paula McDowell. As this thesis will argue, there would not have been a Philadelphian Society without the assistance, organisation, and co-operation of men that knew and supported Lead. It argues that the spiritual and theological content of Lead's writings are at least as important as the fact of their publication.

This thesis builds upon the existing scholarship of Brian Gibbons, Desiree Hirst, and Nils Thune who have all studied Lead in reference to her links with Behmenism.²⁷ Although Thune provided an extensive study of the Behmenists and Philadelphians acknowledging that Lead played a crucial part, his historical and psychological study is now over fifty years old. Hirst and Gibbons have made convincing studies of the esoteric sources of English Romanticism which owe a substantial debt to Boehme. Gibbons's examination of Lead and Sophia, however, still comes out more or less patriarchal, as he writes that Lead's 'feminisation of God is more restrained than that of other Behmenists', and 'Insofar as Sophia is a feminine figure, her role is stereotypical'. That is, 'As with human females, childcare is

²⁵ *Theosophical Transactions by the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), pp. 221-23, and Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, 'Propositions Extracted from the Reasons and the Foundation and Promotion of the Philadelphian Society', fol. 11.

²⁶ Paula McDowell, *Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford, 1998).

²⁷ Desiree Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London, 1964); Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948).

Wisdom's proper sphere of competence'.²⁸ These observations are over-simplified, and as this thesis will show Sophia was much more and, indeed, became a powerful redemptive symbol to Lead. Some European historical accounts such as those by Serge Hutin and G. Hochhut have also seen Lead as a link in the transmission of Behmenist ideas.²⁹ Yet, Lead did not just transmit them, she departed from the ideas of Boehme, in favour of developing her own. She has not been considered as a central and pivotal figure in her own right.

There is no published in-depth study, however, which focuses on Lead. Few scholars, for example, have recognised that Lead was a spiritual alchemist, even though she used alchemical ideas to signify the key to eternal life - a way of transmuting not base metal into gold, but the spirit into God.³⁰ Indeed, few scholars have noticed that she departed from the Behmenist tradition, upholding instead the authority of her own revelations which she deemed were from God. D. P. Walker, for example, assimilated Lead to more important figures in the Behmenist tradition in his study of millenarianism.³¹ Yet he failed to notice changes in Lead's soteriology. Lead advocated the doctrine of apocatastasis, or universal salvation which clearly departed from Behmenist ideas, and moreover, influenced the eighteenth-century cleric, William Law, who wrote *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) - one of the central spiritual texts of the eighteenth century. Lead's emphasis on God as love and the indwelling of Christ in the soul also appealed to Law's mystical sensibilities. The Reverend John Blunt stated that the Philadelphian Society 'contributed largely to the spread of that mystical piety which is so conspicuous in the works of the good and learned William Law, which affected in no small degree the early stage of Methodism'.³²

In many studies, then, Lead has been discussed in relation to the central male, in this case Boehme. To de-centre the male figure would, however, produce a very different picture through the focus on women's spirituality. In her biographical study, Joanna Sperle, for

²⁸ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 150.

²⁹ Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVII et XVIII Siecles* (Paris, 1960); G. W. H. Hochhut, 'Jane Leade und die Philadelphische Gemeinde in England', *Zeitschrift fur Historische Theologie* (1865), pp. 171-290.

³⁰ See Chapter Three, *Searching for Gold*.

³¹ D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London, 1964).

³² John Blunt, *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought* (London, 1874), p. 425.

example, has considered Lead to be a conventionally orthodox Christian, rather than positioning her within the Behmenist tradition. Sperle stressed Lead's 'warmth', 'compassion' and 'embracing love' as a practising Christian whilst minimising her occult influences, including Behmenism, thereby reducing her heretical teachings to conventional Christian belief.³³ This thesis will highlight Lead as the pivotal figure, and in this way she can be seen as the Philadelphians saw her, as an important and influential religious leader and undoubtedly their leading light.

However, gender critics, such as Diane Purkiss have commented on Lead by drawing on the notion of 'écriture feminine'. Purkiss questions whether Lead transcends gender, in terms of the maternal body, by arguing that Lead's desire was to situate herself outside or beyond the body.³⁴ She suggests that Lead wanted to rewrite the specificity of the female body in metaphysical terms, by 'the transmission of mystical knowledge in terms of female reproduction'.³⁵ Yet, as Thomas McCray-Worrall has suggested, Lead's gendered figurations 'systematically incorporate the bodily associations they ostensibly disavow'.³⁶ For Lead, however, prophetic utterance becomes a form of delivery. Lead wrote, it was 'as a *Bodily Birth*, going forth from me in Outflowing Acts of Power'.³⁷ Lead thus articulated her inner space as a means of communication with the divine thus challenging conceptions of her self as a passive, empty vessel. She appears filled with the Spirit of God and her conventional use of rhetoric merely masked her identity as a proactive visionary.

Feminist theology has still much to do in recovering and re-evaluating women's contribution to the Christian tradition. One of the aims of this thesis is to remedy some of that neglect. It will suggest that Lead's writings have ramifications for feminist theology, and also for women's history, and women and writing. This is not to say that Lead has been totally overlooked by scholars. Interestingly, New Age proponents, such as Caitlin Matthews, have acknowledged Lead's prophetic utterances, but in doing so have placed Lead

³³ Joanna Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel: A Biography of Jane Ward Lead' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Kent State University, 1985), p. 99 and passim.

³⁴ Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice', p. 152.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

³⁶ Thomas M. McCray-Worrall, 'Wisdom's Body: The Prophetic Writings of Jane Lead' (unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1999), p. 6.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 324.

in a tradition by depicting her as a goddess worshipper of the seventeenth century.³⁸ This suggestion is, however, highly contentious. Although the figure of Wisdom clearly became Lead's important informant about how God's plan would be realised, Lead did not record rituals of any kind associated with Goddess worship. Indeed, it would be problematic to equate Lead's sophiology with Goddess worship today, as New Age adherents do not necessarily believe in a 'God' but may draw on a host of ideas available from a global repertoire.³⁹

Similarly, there is yet another strand of scholarship that sees Lead as being part of an esoteric tradition. Using comparative theology, it locates Lead's mysticism in a theosophic tradition which began with Boehme. Arthur Versluis claims that this is the Christian equivalent of Muslim Sufism and the Jewish Kabbalah.⁴⁰ Yet, to incorporate Lead into an assimilation of global ideas and beliefs is problematic. Instead of trying to make Lead fit into certain traditions, this thesis will examine Lead's work to show that her innumerable influences, and her vast resource of imaginative ideas are indeed difficult to categorise. Drawing from such eclectic resources and adding her own revelations makes her spirituality difficult to define and indeed unique.

My interest in Lead, then, is strongly shaped by concerns within feminist theology and places the emphasis as an historical study of a Christian woman in the early modern period, and uses a close examination of her texts. It will show how certain experiences in Lead's life helped to shape her theological concerns. This approach is influenced by Barbara Newman's study of the twelfth-century mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, and Ester Cope's study of the prophetess Lady Eleanor Davies, which have recovered and re-evaluated important, but neglected, religious women writers.⁴¹ The thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach, which without doubt, will not be theological enough for some theologians, and not fully satisfy

³⁸ Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine From Black Goddess to World Soul* (London, 1992).

³⁹ Thealogy, denotes a feminist discourse on thea (the Goddess) instead of theo (God), see Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Promise and Protest* (Hampshire, 1993), pp. 126-27; Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess* (Cleveland, 2000), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology* (St. Paul, 2000), pp. 1-26.

⁴¹ Barbara Newman, *Voice of the Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, 1998); Ester Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, Never Soe Mad a Ladie* (Michigan, 1992).

literary critics, historians or feminists. Indeed, Lead wrote that her work was 'not from History, but from the revealed Mystery'.⁴² However, by using a variety of approaches and methodologies, I will show how her theological ideas have ramifications for current feminist scholarship, especially in the areas of early modern women and writing, and women and religion. The thesis will explore the question of how Lead was able to act as a potential agent of change through writing on religious topics. It will examine the nature of her writing by a close reading of the texts, including her use of imagery, allegory and metaphor.⁴³ It will examine her strategies of empowerment as a female prophet and leader of the Philadelphian Society in relation to religion, considering the association of the 'woman figure' and the role of gender in religious discourse; and throughout will examine Lead's complex and intimate relationship with Sophia. It will consider how Lead's religious ideas straddled the crossroads of heterodoxy and orthodoxy in the seventeenth century. For example, Lead's limited acceptance of Mary corresponded with the prevailing Protestant ideology of the time. It is clear, however, that her reassertion of Sophia did not. Lead's highlighting of Sophia can be seen as providing a counterbalance. Indeed, as part of the Behmenist tradition she had attempted to fill a void, in terms of representing more forcefully the divine feminine in the godhead. By emphasising Sophia within the overwhelmingly male godhead, she can be seen to be challenging seventeen hundred years of patriarchal suppression of the feminine aspect of the Wisdom of God. Yet, as the female leader of the religious group of Philadelphians, she would have positioned herself in a radical position - in opposition to the orthodox (male) clergy.

The effect of Lead's writing can be determined by the interest taken in her by subsequent generations, and by how widespread her influence became. In America, Lead's ideas may have reached William Penn, with whom she shared the same publisher, Andrew Sowle. Penn corresponded with the German pietist Joanna Petersen, who expounded Lead's doctrine of universal salvation throughout Germany. Penn tried to persuade Petersen and others to leave their pietist circles.⁴⁴ His appeal was 'couched in phraseology of special

⁴² Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1695), p. 61.

⁴³ The scholarship of autobiographical writing in the early modern period is a developing area, see Graham, *Her Own Life*, and Estelle Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston, 1986).

⁴⁴ William Hull, *William Penn and the Dutch Quaker Migration to Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 134-35.

meaning to the Boehmist 'Philadelphian Society'.⁴⁵ Lead's influence did reach America via John Kelpius and his followers who emigrated from Germany to Pennsylvania to found the 'Wissahickon Mystics' in 1694, after he spent considerable time with Jane Lead and her Philadelphians in London en route.⁴⁶ The Reverend John Blunt suggested that Swedenborg become acquainted with the Society's tracts after they were translated into Dutch.⁴⁷ Serge Hutin also noted that the knowledge of Boehme had passed from the Philadelphians to the Camisards and then to the Shakers and Ann Lee by 1758.⁴⁸

However widely Lead's publications became known, they were only of interest to minority groups or individuals. Lead's publications were reprinted by John Thomson in Glasgow in the early nineteenth century which shows that there was some interest in her works. Jung also mentions her,⁴⁹ and Eastern writers Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) and Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), who were deeply influenced by the Behmenist tradition recognised Lead's importance.⁵⁰ Today, Lead is venerated in certain circles and her writings are read as part of a liturgy on a daily basis in the mystical community known as the Order of Sancta Sophia in Wales, which regards itself as part of a growing international network of like-minded groups and spiritual communities.⁵¹ All her publications are currently available on the internet.⁵² She is yet, however, to be included in the The Brown University Women Writers Project, which is dedicated to publishing works by women from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. It is an attempt to 'dispel the myth that women wrote little of real

⁴⁵ Albert Bell, *The Life and Times of George de Benneville* (Boston, 1953), p. 6.

⁴⁶ Julius F. Saxe, *German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania* (New York, 1895, repr. 1970), p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁴⁸ Hutin, *Les Anglais Disciples*, pp. 120-23.

⁴⁹ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* (18 vols, London, 1957), vol. 16, p. 295.

⁵⁰ See for example, Samuel Cioran, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Ontario, 1977), and Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia: The Wisdom of God* (Lindisfarne, 1993).

⁵¹ Geraint ap Iorwerth, *Honest to Goddess: Russia, Sophia and the Celtic Soul* (Hampshire, 1998).

⁵² The most extensive collection of Lead's works can be found at Pass the WORD Services, *Jane Lead: Seventeenth Century Prophetess of God 1624-1704*, 2000, <<http://www.passtheword.org/Jane-Lead/index.html>>(16 August 2002).

value before the Victorian period'.⁵³ The website of the Women Writers Resource Project at Emory University makes seventeenth-century texts by women more readily available, but Lead's works are not yet listed.⁵⁴ This does, however, mean that the texts of women authors in this period are at least surfacing and being published, often for the first time.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis examines Lead in her own right, by contextualising her, drawing out the nature of her devotions to draw attention to her as a figure in her own right to map out the development of her ideas and beliefs to show that she did not conform to any one particular tradition. The thesis does this in three sections. The first section comprises of two chapters which provide details of Lead's biography, outline the changing material and familial circumstances of her life, and then examine the nature of Lead's entry into print. The first chapter, *The Philadelphians' Prophetess* describes how Lead's life story permits an exploration of how a woman could gain and exercise a position of leadership in collaboration with male authors and divines. It examines her strategies of empowerment as a female prophet and leader of the Philadelphian Society in relation to religion, considering the role of gender in religious discourse.

The second chapter, *The Pen of An Angel*, shows that her prolific writings were not simply independent utterances. Instead it argues that they were facilitated by a network of male supporters who financially underwrote her. They enabled her to gain access into the world of print. Lead was not a literary hack, nor a denizen of 'Grub Street', and she was not overtly political in her writing style in the same way as, for example, the early Quakers or Fifth Monarchists. She did not direct her anger at positions of authority using scriptural sources as her basis. Her publications not only influenced her Philadelphian members at home, they also influenced Philadelphian circles abroad - people were certainly reading them in the Netherlands and Germany.

The second section comprises of chapters three, four and five, and explores important themes in the writings of Jane Lead, such as purification, redemption and salvation. They consider how, for example, her prophecies draw together to reveal

⁵³ See for example, Ester S. Cope (ed.), *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies* (New York and Oxford, 1995), p. xi.

⁵⁴ There are numerous websites dedicated to women's seventeenth-century writing. See, for example, Sheila Cavanagh, *Emory Women Writers Resource Project*, 14 February 2000, <<http://chaucer.library.emory.edu>>(8 August 2002).

overwhelming millenarian concerns involving redemption. Chapter Three, *Searching for Go(l)d: Spiritual Alchemy*, examines Lead's use of alchemical discourse. Her complex ideas were influenced by Boehme and result in a complex recipe drawn from alchemy, magic, Hermeticism, the Cabbala and Gnosticism. It will attempt to elucidate some of her complex ideas and examine her vision of 'The Glassy Globe' to demonstrate her application of alchemical imagery. Her works can be read as mystical alchemical texts, as she applied spiritual alchemy to unlock the secrets of eternal life - a way of transmuting not base metal into gold, but the spirit into God. Her search for the Philosopher's Stone, the key to transmutation of the spirit, could, she insisted, be found by looking within.

Chapter Four, *The Divine Ark: A Vision of the Second Noah's Ark* examines how Lead re-interpreted the story of Noah and the Flood. The Ark, which was imbued with alchemical symbolism, symbolised the Church by which God would save all souls when it returned in the end times. Lead's vision of the second Ark was a story of redemption and not damnation in the setting of the predicted end of the world. This millenarian idea is also explored in Chapter Five, *Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and the New Jerusalem*. It focuses on Lead's millenarian ideas. These concern the coming of Sophia as well as the expected return of Christ in the end days. Lead viewed herself as one of God's chosen individuals or 'First Fruits' to carry out God's will which was linked to the idea of the imminent second coming of Christ in the Book of Revelation. This millenarian idea was not uncommon during the seventeenth century but Lead differed from others in the way in which she applied it through the concept of Sophia, who became Lead's divine guide and her personal inspiration. Lead developed an experiential view of revelation whereby she saw divine disclosure operating by degrees and considered herself as 'a Heavenly Spy to behold the pattern of those Heavenly Things'.⁵⁵ Heaven being the expected New Jerusalem as depicted in Revelation 21. By adopting the role of the 'Heavenly Spy', Lead was guaranteed a virtual monopoly over the interpretation. Her ideas were influenced by the Behmenist expectation of a return to a prelapsarian paradise. She believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent and the world would change to what it was like before the Fall - a place where humanity and God lived in harmony.

The third section contains the final three chapters of the thesis and examines the gender dynamism of Lead's visions of Wisdom, or Sophia, and her ideas concerning redemption through sophiology. Chapter Six is entitled *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*

⁵⁵ Jane Lead, *A Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking* (London, 1681), p. 39.

and it explores the idea of spiritual maternity by tracing and elucidating maternal images to show how Lead's representations were deeply imbued with Behmenist influences. It will also consider how she translated her experiences as a mother into spiritual ideas. It will ask questions such as, how does Lead represent Sophia as a maternal deity? Does the maternal imagery she use intersect with other discourses? It is concerned with maternal figures who have influenced Lead, including the Virgin Mary and Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Isaac.

The theme of mystical marriage is discussed in Chapter Seven which discusses how Lead translated her earthly experiences as a married and then widowed woman into spiritual ideas. It also examines Lead's representations of Sophia as God's bride, which was a metaphor of the marriage of the soul to God.

Chapter Eight is entitled *Philosophia*, the term Hellenists gave to the striving for instruction, which is said to bring one closer to God with Sophia. This chapter explores sophiology and examines how Sophia figured in Lead's visions, many of which were biblically inspired. By examining Lead's interpretation of God and Sophia in relation to her Trinitarian belief, it will reveal how Sophia, being divine and indescribable, becomes practically tangible. The chapter also draws on the current debate within feminist theology and New Age religion to examine the resurgence of interest, and the ongoing re-evaluation and reclamation of, the figure of Sophia as both a goddess and as a divine feminine principle. Christian feminist theologian, Ninna Beckman has suggested that, 'Sophia has appeared as an attractive open-ended alternative'.⁵⁶ Also, some New Age and Goddess worshippers have shown an interest in Sophia, as a goddess that can be found within.⁵⁷ Lead's relationship with Sophia thus has ramifications for contemporary scholarship.

Yet, before we can appreciate the uniqueness of Lead's writing, it is necessary to consider who she was, where she came from, and who and what was known to have influenced her. The next section will therefore introduce these important aspects of her life.

⁵⁶ Ninna Edgardh Beckman, 'Sophia: A Symbol of Christian and Feminist Wisdom', *Feminist Theology*, 16 (1997), p. 49.

⁵⁷ The re-evaluation of Sophia in Western thought has been taken up by various feminist theologians including Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London, 1994); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, 1998); and Mary Grey, *Prophecy and Mysticism: The Heart of the Postmodern Church* (Edinburgh, 1997). See also Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul* (London, 1992), and Carol Christ, 'Why Women need the Goddess', in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco, 1992).

CHAPTER ONE - The Philadelphians' Prophetess

Norfolk's Child to 'Bride of Christ'

This chapter will explore the interplay between the spiritual life of Jane Lead and her material and familial circumstances, and will discuss the extent to which her relationship with God and Sophia gave her a degree of autonomy, agency and power. By the end of the seventeenth century Jane had become a prolific author of some international repute and her life story thus permits an exploration of how a woman could gain and exercise a position of leadership in collaboration with male authors and divines.

Jane was born into an influential gentry family in 1624 at Letheringsett, north Norfolk.¹ Her father, Hamond Warde, served as a justice of the peace.² Her mother, Mary Calthorpe, the daughter of Sir James Calthorpe, bore seven sons and three daughters.³ When Hamond Warde died in 1650, the family were wealthy enough to afford a large funeral and monument in his honour in St Andrew's Church, Letheringsett, as a visible symbol of their importance in the local community.⁴ In his will dated 26 February 1650, he left his daughters

¹ Letheringsett Register Bills (Archdeacon's Transcripts) show that Jane was baptised on 9 March 1624. I am grateful to Diana Spelman for her genealogical research. Jane's diary contained conflicting statements about her age. On the 5 February 1681, she wrote, 'Come next March, I am fifty-seven years of age', and on the 5 February 1682, she stated, 'I do count my age to be fifty-eight', Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1696-1701), vol. 2, pp. 261 and 303-04. This confusion has been compounded by a number of inaccuracies which have also crept into modern accounts of Lead's life. For example, the lifespan of Jane Lead is listed as 1686-1761 by Desiree Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism: From the Renaissance to Blake* (London, 1964), p. 343.

² The DNB describes Jane's father as Schildknap, not Hamond Warde because Jane's autobiography, which is extant only in German, refers to her father as 'Schildknap' which is German for Squire. Hamond Warde's work as a justice of the peace is detailed in J. Howell, 'Norfolk Quarter Sessions Order Book', *Norfolk Record Society*, 26 (1955), 3-19.

³ Her siblings were Charles, William, Edward, Philip, Richard, James, Hamond, Reade, Suzanna. Charles became the rector of Acle, Norfolk; Susan married Henry Ferrour; James, married Sarah Wright of Kilverston, Norfolk; and Hamond married Sarah Scott of Norfolk. Catherine Smith suggests that Jane was the twelfth and youngest child, Catherine F. Smith, 'Jane Lead's Wisdom', in Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain (eds), *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature* (London, 1984), p. 57. Joanna Sperle suggests the nine above in 'God's Healing Angel: A Biography of Jane Ward Lead', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Kent State University, 1978), p. 56.

⁴ F. Blomfield, *An Essay toward a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (London, 1808), p. 413. Hamond Warde was recorded as the owner of the

Jane and Suzanna fifty shillings each, but he bequeathed his servants much greater sums; William Allen, for example, was left six pounds, thirteen shillings and four pence.⁵ Jane's husband, William Leade, on the other hand, inherited one hundred pounds, while Jane's brother, James, received two hundred and thirty pounds. However, Richard Warde's widow, Jane's sister-in-law, was willed the same amount as her brother, being regarded as the head of the household with a family to support. Those who Warde perceived as having the greater family responsibilities received a cash sum accordingly.

Jane's ability as a writer can be traced back to her early life. As Margaret Ezell has observed, 'the most significant factor in whether a girl was educated in the seventeenth century was her family'.⁶ In her autobiography Jane wrote, 'my father brought me up with dignity and good manners, according to his standing'.⁷ Hamond Warde employed a resident cleric to teach academic subjects, such as mathematics, theology and classical languages.⁸ Although he would have been employed as a tutor to her brothers, the cleric may have also taught Jane and her sisters, although it is unclear how far her classical and other skills were developed.⁹ It appears that she had access to the Chaplain's books, even if only clandestinely, as he 'surprised her reading in his study'.¹⁰

original hall of the manor of Letheringsett Laviles in 1624, which is now Hall Farm. Two fields on Hall Farm are known as 'Warde's Fields'. B. Cozens-Hardy, 'Some Norfolk Halls', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 32 (1924), p. 192. I am grateful to the villagers of Letheringsett, especially Mrs Ethel Fish, the Churchwarden of St Andrew's Church, who shared her knowledge of local history with me. The whereabouts of the monument dedicated to Hamond Warde is unknown.

⁵ Hamond Warde's will was dated 26 February 1650. Norfolk County Council Records Office, Norwich, 1651 Warde, Hamond, Letheringsett, N., fols 81r-84v. Mary Warde, Jane's mother, was buried on 30 March 1657, Letheringsett Parish Register.

⁶ Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, 1987), p. 13. See also Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (London, 1995), pp. 165-80; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 89-90.

⁷ Jane Lead, 'Lebenslauff der Autorin', in *Sechs Unschatzbare Mystische Tractlein* (Amsterdam, 1696), p. 413. I am grateful to Marianne Jahn for translating Lead's 'Life of the Author' into English.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁹ There is no evidence of Latin in Jane's writings until after 1694 when she had met Francis Lee.

¹⁰ Jane Lead, *The Wars of David*, (London, 1700, repr. 1816), p. 22.

As Jane was to develop radically individual religious and theological views, it is clearly important to find out as much as possible about her religious upbringing. She was 'baptised, and educated in the Church of England,' and this upbringing undoubtedly helped to shape her views.¹¹ However, it is not sufficient simply to stress that she belonged to the Church of England, as Sperle has done, for it contained a diversity of theological strands.¹² Unfortunately, we may never know for certain in which of these she was raised. Nevertheless, her family seem to have been parliamentarian in sympathy as her grandfather, James Calthorpe, subscribed one hundred pounds to the parliamentary cause.¹³ This might lead us to suspect that she had a Calvinist, or even godly, upbringing, as the Puritan gentry of East Anglia were important in the parliamentary cause. This suspicion is further supported by the fact that members of Jane's family were involved in colonial trade. Her cousin Christopher Calthorpe emigrated to Elizabeth City, Virginia, aged seventeen, in 1622 and accumulated over one thousand acres in Charles River (now York County).¹⁴ It was common for younger sons of gentry to go into trade and it was likely that Jane's brother, Hamond, a merchant in London, was also a trader in Virginia tobacco by 1630.¹⁵ This early involvement in Virginia trade is suggestive, for, as Robert Brenner has shown, there were strong links between the godly and trade to Virginia.¹⁶ There is, however, important contrary evidence. Her family celebrated Christmas with singing and dancing, and thus they are very unlikely to have been Puritan.

Regardless of how her upbringing shaped her, her adolescence concluded with a religious crisis which set her apart from her family. During their Christmas celebrations in 1640 Jane's life was transformed by a religious experience which was recorded many years

¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹² Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel', p. 56. See also, K. Hylson-Smith, *The Churches of England 1558-1688* (2 vols, London, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 142-86, and Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 53-69.

¹³ R. Ketton-Cramer, *Norfolk in the Civil War: A Portrait of a Society in Conflict* (London, 1969), p. 152.

¹⁴ Nell Marion Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants* (Richmond, 1934), pp. 1, 12, 26, 34, 39, 44.

¹⁵ Smith, 'Jane Lead's Wisdom', p. 57, citing PRO, E190/35/4, fol. 27, Port of London Book. Overseas Imports. Christmas 1629 to Christmas 1630: 8 February 1630.

¹⁶ Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders 1550-1653* (Cambridge, 1993).

later:

In the sixteenth year of her age and so to give an evidence that the voice of the external Word of God ... is real and substantial, not imaginary ... when this voice spake first to her: which was very suddenly and surprisingly. For it was in a time of great festivity, at the celebration of the nativity of Christ ... with music and dancing, in the house of her father ... when a sudden grievous sorrow was darted as fire into her bowels, and she was made to consider that this was not the way to be conformed to CHRIST, or to remember his birth aright; and a soft whisper gently entered into her, saying CEASE FROM THIS, I HAVE ANOTHER DANCE TO LEAD THEE IN; FOR THIS IS VANITY.¹⁷

Francis Lee, the editor of Jane Lead's *Wars of David*, which appeared in 1700, when she was seventy-seven years of age, wrote this account. It thus recorded events which had occurred over sixty years beforehand. However, Lee was concerned to stress that both the external Word and Jane's experience were 'real and substantial, not imaginary,' and so the phrasing and description are likely to have been Jane's. The powerful and penetrative imagery, such as the 'sudden grievous sorrow' which 'darted as fire into her bowels,' contrasted with the 'soft whisper' which 'gently entered into her,' suggests an intimate experience which had sexual connotations.¹⁸ Jane may have used this conventional erotic imagery in an attempt to express an ineffable mystical experience. Indeed, as John Stachnieweski has observed, 'Calvinist conversion involved God's simultaneous and irresistible seizure of all the faculties in a divine rape'.¹⁹ No matter how accurately this episode was remembered, it clearly marked a dramatic and transformative moment in her life. Jane's pointed withdrawal in the midst of Christmas celebrations suggested that she wanted to separate herself from her family, which would have been a disruptive action. Even if she said nothing, it marked a declaration of personal autonomy, and throughout the remainder of her life she rejected her family's interference in her personal concerns.

Subsequently, she was 'wholly taken up in the consideration of her interior state' having 'no liberty to converse as formerly in the family, or to mind any concern of it'.²⁰ She

¹⁷ Lead, *Wars of David*, p. 21.

¹⁸ See Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Basingstoke, 1999).

¹⁹ John Stachnieweski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, 1991), p. 269.

²⁰ Lead, *Wars of David*, p. 22

was tormented by the memory of a lie she had told, and she experienced intense spiritual anguish which centred on the words 'whoever loveth and maketh a lye cannot enter the New Jerusalem'.²¹ Her guilt led her to perceive herself as sinful and unable to attain salvation. She diligently concealed the cause of this suffering from her family, except the Chaplain in the house. He was supportive and 'bade her be of good courage, and believe God had some great good to bring about, by all this conflict of the soul she was in'.²² Nevertheless, because of her acute sense of sinfulness 'nothing was able to give her any satisfaction or rest, or to ease her wounded spirit ... which continued for the space of three years with very great anguish and trouble'.²³ She also faced an additional predicament, as her experience could have derived from a divine or diabolical source.²⁴ Her subsequent withdrawal could have 'betrayed her as a being whose fragile mental and moral powers had been submerged beneath a tidal wave of occult energy'.²⁵

Although her family does not seem to have been especially godly, there are parallels between Jane's experience and puritan narratives of conversion especially as she ostentatiously rejected communal festivities.²⁶ Many of the godly had acute periods of doubt during their youth or adolescence. There are parallels between Jane's description of her anguish and other seventeenth-century women's accounts of their spiritual searches. Indeed, there *was* a degree of cultural patterning in such experiences. Sarah Wight, a Baptist and visionary, wrote:

But if you knew how desperate my condition is, you would be afraid to change place

²¹ Ibid. The New Jerusalem is the goal of the mystic quest elaborated by St. Augustine, and used by Medieval mystics, such as Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London, 1911), p. 129. This passage clearly draws on Revelation 22:15, 'whosoever loveth and maketh a lie'.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing (eds), *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England. A Sourcebook* (London, 2000), p. 266.

²⁵ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley and London, 1989), p. 89. See also James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (London, 1996), pp. 190-210.

²⁶ Richard Baxter (1615-91), the well-known nonconformist minister, was raised in a Puritan household that rejected popular festivities. See K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp. 183-84.

with me, for you *know* not my sad sorrows. None in the world can compare with mine. Except that you would desire to be in hell, you would not desire to be in my condition.²⁷

In *Satan his Malice Baffled*, the Presbyterian Hannah Allen similarly stressed the extremity and uniqueness of her despair before her sense of assurance, 'Therefore my condition is unparalleled. There was never such an one since God made any creature, either angels or men, nor never will be to the end of the world'.²⁸ Anna Trapnel, the Fifth Monarchist prophet, was even younger when she experienced despair. She described having visions from the age of nine, and she was certain that she was damned and as a consequence suffered suicidal thoughts. She tried to resolve her anguish and despair, by attending several Puritan congregations.²⁹ Like Jane Lead, all these women experienced a period of doubt followed by a sense of resolve.

During the succeeding three years Jane sought a solution to her spiritual turmoil. In 1642, she 'secretly wrote a letter to her brother Hamond in London to ask him to obtain permission from their father for her to visit'.³⁰ She spent six months with Hamond and his wife, Sarah, and thus lived in the capital as the country moved into civil war and London was convulsed with godly fervour.³¹ She frequented many public and private religious meetings, including Independent conventicles in 1643. She recorded in her autobiography a profitable meeting with Tobias Crisp, not long before his death, and the profound effect he had in resolving her inner turmoil. Crisp was an antinomian who believed in emotional conversion by God's free grace.³² He argued that God's grace was offered to all through Christ, so that

²⁷ Henry Jessey, *Grace Advanced by the Spirit of Grace in an Empty Nothing Creature, Viz. Mrs Sarah Wight* (London, 1647), sig. A2v-A3r.

²⁸ Hannah Allen, *Satan his Methods and Malice Baffled. A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian* (London, 1683), p. 12.

²⁹ Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints, Being Several Experiences of the Dealings of God* (London, 1654), Introduction.

³⁰ Lead, *Lebenslauff*, p. 6.

³¹ See K. Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Hampshire, 1997), pp. 198-255.

³² Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1989), p. 311 ff.

sin was entirely and universally 'blotted' out.³³ Jane recorded that Crisp's 'free-grace sermon was quite different from the others I had heard so that I decided to tread no other path'.³⁴ Crisp, moreover, had an undoubted influence in the development of Jane's theological ideas. It was through him that Jane encountered a different style of religious rhetoric and theology. Crisp stressed the freeness of God's redemptive love and the blotting out of sin, not the doctrine of predestination. All of these themes can be found in Jane's writings and in her prophecies and visions. His sermons clearly had a great impact on her, reinforcing her faith and transforming her theology, as not long after that meeting, she received 'the form of a pardon, signifying her transgressions had been blotted out, and that she was sealed by the Spirit, for the promise of the Father'.³⁵ She was 'sealed' at the point of commitment by the Holy Spirit and entered into a covenant with God. Possibly influenced by the millennial fervour of the meetings she attended, it was then that she was determined to become a 'Bride of Christ'.³⁶ For the previous three years she had wrestled with the notion of sin from which the second vision released her. It signified a change from an obsession with guilt to an assurance of salvation.³⁷

Jane was not alone in declaring that Crisp's sermons had influenced and shaped her theology in positive ways. Crisp had a profound effect on others like Lead who moved towards antinomian forms of religion and stressed God's love and rejected predestination. The antinomian, Laurence Clarkson wrote, 'under Doctor Crisp's Doctrine, in which I did endeavour to become one of those that God saw no sin'.³⁸ In debates provoked by the republication of Crisp's works in the 1690s focusing on the controversial reputation of his

³³ Tobias Crispe. *Christ Alone Exalted: In Fourteene Sermons Preached In and Neare London* (London, 1643), p. 326.

³⁴ Lead, *Lebenslauff*, p. 417.

³⁵ Lead, *Wars of David*, p. 23.

³⁶ 'Bride of Christ' is a common trope, and was used by seventeenth century Quakers, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London, 1998), pp. 140-41. The major theologian of the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen, described herself as a 'Bride of Christ', Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 141-42.

³⁷ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 89.

³⁸ Laurence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found: or, The Prodigal Returned to his Father's House, After Many a Sad and Weary Journey Through Many Religious Countreys* (London, 1660), p. 9.

work and the allegations of antinomianism, a number of testimonies were published which showed how he had transformed people's lives.³⁹ A supporter of Crisp reported that, 'There has been a great deal of Talk about *Dr. Crisp*, but I look upon him to have been a Godly, Holy Man, and that he was Sound and Orthodox, and that he brought in more Souls to Christ than any of us'.⁴⁰ Crisp had offered an alternative to oppressive Calvinism, instead advocating the controversial doctrine of universal salvation in which everyone would be saved.⁴¹ It was a set of teachings that Jane was to develop and promulgate over the course of her life.⁴² Furthermore, as we shall see, it led her to develop her own life independent of her family.

Throughout the late medieval and early modern period, the Christian religion, it can be argued, justified the subordination of women. However, a significant number of women were able to find in divine illumination space for self-determination and purpose. Caroline Walker Bynum has emphasised the emotional fulfillment found among women, such as Julian of Norwich, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴³ Like other godly women and female prophets in the seventeenth century Jane also was able to use religion as a source of empowerment. Although her doubt was painful, the message from God allowed her to focus on herself. It also permitted her to pursue a deep quest within herself, and to reflect on her own life and to construct her particular vocation. As Michael MacDonald has observed, a new sense of the social self developed from the individual's struggle between God and Satan.⁴⁴

³⁹ See for example, T. Beverley, *A Conciliatory Judgment Concerning Dr Crisp's Sermons* (London, 1690).

⁴⁰ Hananiel Philalethes, *Christ Exalted and Dr Crisp Vindicated in Several Points called Antinomian* (London, 1698), sig. A1v.

⁴¹ See Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy' and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford, 2001), pp. 40-49.

⁴² See Chapter Five - *Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and the New Jerusalem*.

⁴³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 110 ff; see also Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (Basingstoke, 1993), p. 106; Alcuin Blamires and others, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992).

⁴⁴ Like John Bunyan's, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Francis Spira's popular and enduring story became a warning to Protestants about the perils of apostasy and an influential depiction of religious despair, see M. MacDonald and T. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 42-76; M. MacDonald, 'The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira', *Journal of British Studies*, 31, (1992), 56-59; and King, *Women and Spirituality*, p. 113.

Jane's change of religious outlook separated her from her family. Her adolescence was clearly a period of stress and, like other religious women and men, ambiguous relations and rebelliousness were expressed through religious turmoil. At sixteen, Jane was entering into a new stage in her life, one of sexual maturity.⁴⁵ Her change in religious attitude, however, gave her confidence and independence through a sense of divinely ordained authority. Some time after her visit to London, Jane's father announced a prospective bridegroom for her, and she agonised over the offer. Her contemporaries, Mary Astell, Aphra Behn and other ambitious women, struggled with the fear of becoming 'old maids' and the prevailing ideology of gender that 'women were assigned sweet beauty not supple brains'.⁴⁶ In her autobiography, Jane commented that gentlemen were more interested in her outward appearance than her inner worth. With a strengthened faith in God, her beliefs clearly gave her the strength to refuse to marry as her parents wished. She refused the marriage on the grounds that it would be repulsive for her to be bound to an earthly individual as she was now a 'Bride of Christ'.⁴⁷ She was adopting the ancient female Christian role of being married to Christ and rejecting the Protestant orthodoxy that women should be married.⁴⁸ She also developed an understanding from conversations she had with God. However, this divine voice also legitimated her will. As Jane intended to devote her life to serving God, anything she saw as impeding her spiritual life was rejected. She found that a higher spiritual authority could override earthly patriarchal restrictions or, as we shall see, at least, produce an acceptable compromise.

Whilst visiting her brother in London, possibly at one of the prayer meetings she attended, Jane met a new acquaintance whom *she* wished to marry. Her parents, however, thought the match was unsuitable.⁴⁹ By 1644, Jane had returned to her parents' home in Norfolk, and after a good deal of 'negotiation and strife' she eventually married a distant cousin, William Leade. He seemed to meet the demands she made of a husband because he

⁴⁵ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 75 ff.

⁴⁶ Foreword by Catherine Stimson in Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago, 1986), p. xi.

⁴⁷ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', pp. 417-18. For Protestant marriage teaching, see Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 126-48.

⁴⁸ Negotiation of marriage partners played a particular role in the middling ranks, see Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 112-13.

⁴⁹ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', p. 417.

shared her spiritual devotion and she described him as 'pious and godfearing'.⁵⁰ William Leade, the son of John Leade, a King's Lynn merchant, was a sole heir, and had inherited wealth which included 'what rentes shall be made of his house and alsoe what profittes may arise from the shippes' and all the goods, chattels, and plate.⁵¹ Whilst married it appears that Jane was largely subsumed under her husband's jurisdiction and very little is known about her life. After their marriage the couple lived in London for about twenty-five years, and Jane bore four daughters, two of whom died in infancy and one as an adult married woman.⁵² Barbara, who was a close and devoted daughter, was the only offspring to survive her mother.

It was during her marriage to William Leade that Jane met John Pordage who was to be one of the most influential figures in her life and who evidently encouraged her to write. She wrote that 'my first Acquaintance with him was in the Year 1663'.⁵³ In her autobiography, she described Pordage as an enlightened man 'who understood the deepest of God's secrets'⁵⁴ (See Fig. 1.1).



Figure 1.1. John Pordage, *Gottliche and Wahre Metaphysica* (Frankfurt and Leipsig, 1715), in Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, p. 193.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 418.

⁵¹ John Lead's will, dated 1 November 1638, is PRO, PROB 11/180, fols 47r -v.

⁵² Charlotte Fell-Smith greatly shortened Lead's marriage and stated that she had only one child, DNB, s.n.

⁵³ John Pordage, *Theologica Mystica: or the Mystic Divinitiee of the Aeternal Invisibles* (London, 1683), p. 2, preface by Jane Lead.

⁵⁴ Lead, 'Lebenslauff,' p. 421.

Pordage had formerly been the minister of Bradfield, Berkshire. There he had been at the centre of a religious community of 'spiritual thinkers'. Richard Baxter noted that 'Dr *Pordage* amid his Family ... live together in Community, and pretend to hold visible and sensible Communion with Angels, whom they sometime see, and sometime smell'.⁵⁵ Whilst at Bradfield, Pordage had been charged with heresies which included 'denying the Scriptures to be the Word of God, denying the divinity of Christ, and communing with the spirits,' and he was also charged with 'fathering a bastard child'.⁵⁶ Pordage was clearly an antinomian like Crisp. Forced out of the ministry altogether when the Act of Uniformity was introduced in 1662, he moved to London and gathered around him his own religious group. He maintained a connection with the Church and recruited those of any religious persuasion to join him.

It was in 1668 when Jane joined Pordage's London group. She wrote, 'I was again visited by a wonderful apparition of God as I had not experienced before'.⁵⁷ Her visions were valued by the group, and she was described as being favoured with, 'a Most Wonderfull Series of Manifestation and Revelation, Especially Declared to be from the Principle and Treasury of God's Virgin Wisdom, giving forth her peculiar Discoveries, Directions, Advices, and Cautions Adapted to the Present Season'.⁵⁸ It was clear however, that Lead was troubled by these revelations before she joined Pordage's coterie, as she wrote:

The more I found myself in the service of this blessing and the prophecy and the revelation the more I lost hope of finding people who would understand of what had been revealed to me. Eventually, through my ceaseless looking out for such people I found such a community whose leading men were Dr Pordage, Mr T. Bromley, Mr T. Sabberton. They were enlightened men who understood God's secrets.⁵⁹

If William Leade was aware of the friendship between his wife and these other men, including Pordage, it may testify to his sympathetic nature or tolerance towards them. Lead described her husband as 'an excellent man', but perhaps he did not share, or understand his wife's religious enthusiasm. He may have been aware of her despair, as she clearly had 'lost

⁵⁵ Richard Baxter, *Reliquae Baxterianae: or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times* (London, 1696), p. 77.

⁵⁶ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, fols 63r-65r, Richard Roach, 'An acct. of ye Rise and Progress of the Philadelphian Society'.

⁵⁷ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', pp. 419-20.

⁵⁸ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, fol. 58r.

⁵⁹ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', p. 420.

hope of finding people who would understand' her. Nevertheless, William was happy, or possibly resigned to the fact that Jane was actively searching out like-minded people.⁶⁰ He must have realised how important it was for her spiritual development to share her experiences in this way, and it shows the degree of trust that must have developed during their married life. Jane wrote that 'we were together for twenty seven years in great love and unity'.⁶¹

The death of William Leade on 5 February 1670 brought with it both a new life and financial distress:

So that when God did cast my lot to be a Widow, which was in the year 70, this change bringing me first into manifold trials, did drive me into a more Intimate Union with mine Eternal Spiritual Husband, upon whose Care I wholly cast myself. And then I resolved to make the choice of Anna, to wait in the Temple of the Lord day and night: and to be a Widow indeed, after I had been the wife of a Pious Husband about five and twenty years. For after his Dicease I ceased, as much as possible, from all Business and care, setting myself free by all means for the Heavenly Calling only.⁶²

Now aged about forty-six, Jane was concerned that her spiritual life would be stifled by the concerns of her new earthly role as a widow. As Margaret Hunt has observed, 'In good times middling women might prosper, but any woman was only a man away from being seriously de-classed, and the system offered her few opportunities to regain her former status'.⁶³ As Peter Earle has commented, 'Most widows, however independent they might be, suffered a considerable fall in income and life-style from what they had been used to in marriage'.⁶⁴ Lead's 'right of dower', the right to one third of her husband's estate once his debts had been paid, offered her little opportunity to maintain her former status. Born into the gentry, she married a merchant, whose death left her a penniless single parent. More seriously still, William Leade died intestate and Jane reflected upon how she became destitute. William had entrusted most of his worldly possessions to a factor overseas who did not relinquish anything, leaving the widow and orphans stripped of their rights. Due to these circumstances, she wrote, 'I was left in dire and extreme want, which forced me even more to place my

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 419.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1696-1701), vol. 2, p. 19.

⁶³ Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1780* (Berkeley, 1996), p. 165.

⁶⁴ Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London 1650-1750* (London, 1994), p. 154.

assets into Heaven. I decided to remain a widow in God'.⁶⁵

Lead turned to God in contemplation and prayer, just as she had done at the age of sixteen. In April 1670, two months after her husband's death, she began to have visions of the Virgin Wisdom, Sophia. She witnessed 'an overshadowing bright Cloud and in the midst of it a figure of a Woman'. Three days later it gently commanded, 'Behold me as thy Mother,' and six days later came the promise, 'I shall now cease to appear in a Visible Figure unto thee, but I will not fail to transfigure my self in thy mind; and there open the Spring of Wisdom and understanding'.⁶⁶ The ending of the relationship with her husband signalled the beginning of a spiritual relationship with the female figure of Sophia that lasted throughout the remainder of Lead's life.

As we shall see, sophiology was to be the key to her authority, as it was based on an experiential theology which she could expound through her visionary experiences.⁶⁷ These ideas developed under Pordage's influence, who almost certainly introduced her to the writings of the Silesian theosopher, Jacob Boehme, which were influential in England from the 1640s.⁶⁸ Boehme's search for divine wisdom led him to explore occult philosophy, Gnosticism, the Cabbala, alchemy and magic. He believed that there were three principles of the godhead manifested in creation through the seven fountains, which were the material counterpart to the Virgin Sophia, the divine feminine companion of God.⁶⁹ Foregrounding Sophia as an element of the godhead became the most influential factor in Lead's religiosity and will be examined in more detail later. As Nigel Smith has shown, religious radicals like Pordage used Boehme's ideas extensively, noting 'it is possible to see how such an interest shaped epistemological concepts and expressive language of several versions of English separatist and spiritualist thought'.⁷⁰ It is clear that Pordage and Lead embraced many of Boehme's ideas, symbolism and language.

In the years after her husband's death Lead developed another relationship, this time

⁶⁵ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', p. 419.

⁶⁶ Ibid., *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, pp. 18-21.

⁶⁷ See Chapter Eight, *Philosophia*.

⁶⁸ Nigel Smith remarks that 'It is possible to demonstrate Boehme's influence upon Pordage from the 1650s', in Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 189.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 213. See also Robin Waterfield, *Jacob Boehme: Essential Readings* (Northamptonshire, 1989), pp. 82 ff.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 186.

with Christ as her second husband and described its unfolding in her spiritual diary. On 7 November 1674, she wrote of 'the Preparation of the Second marriage' and 'the death of the First Husband which so long hindered my marriage with the Lamb'.⁷¹ She mentioned her marriage each year by reflecting on her first 'earthly' husband and the desire instead to be married exclusively to Christ. In a dream or vision of her dead husband, she told how she concluded her relationship with him, preferring instead to develop her ties with Christ:

This Night somewhat before the break of day, I did verily believe there lay one by me in the Bed. At which I was put into some fear: But then it appeared to be the Figure of my deceased Husband. Who discoursed many things to me, challenging Conjugal love, and renewing of that old affinity, which was betwixt us ... I told him I feared to have Union with any inferior Spirit ... But still I beheld him magically hovering about me.⁷²

Finally, she told him that 'since his decease, I had made a choice of an unchangeable Mate ... Upon which he disappeared'.⁷³ As property passed from her father to her husband, Jane declared herself to be divinely owned. By so doing, she could release her inner resources to face and resolve these conflicts. She had the power of personal, spiritual and political choice through a determined will to break free of patriarchal restrictions. She was no longer bound by any mortal or 'inferior Spirit' - her solution to widowhood was thus remarriage to God. Moreover, this declaration not only enabled her to resist offers that she considered would hinder her spiritual development, but it eliminated the problem of sexuality. As Olwen Hufton has argued, theologians and moralists recommended the seventeenth-century 'widow to live a life of chastity'.⁷⁴ For Lead, chastity also proved to be a move nearer to a promise of release from her earthly burdens. Her decision to remain a widow in worldly terms, but married in her spiritual life, gave her a double-edged authority of outward and inward purity. It created a 'freedom' from the sexual and emotional demands of a man and a much craved for space for her own spiritual needs. As Barbara Todd has suggested, in the seventeenth century 'continued widowhood was not an irresponsible

⁷¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁷² Ibid., p. 372. The entry is dated 25 August 1677.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 373.

⁷⁴ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: The History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (London, 1995), p. 222.

indulgence in liberty; it was the balanced duty of a Christian woman'.⁷⁵ It allowed the widow a chance to remain 'free' in part because of the 'special opportunities widowhood gave them to fulfill their roles as mothers, as Christians and as members of their society'.⁷⁶ By declaring herself as a 'Bride of God', Lead was now better placed to face conflicts of an individual, familial, societal and religious nature.

Lead may have been released from her bonds to her earthly husband, but her transformation into a spiritual figure was profoundly influenced by her relationship with Pordage. She wrote, 'I never met anyone like him'.⁷⁷ In 1674, she moved into his household as his spiritual partner and 'mate'.⁷⁸ It is unclear where Lead was living beforehand, but in doing so, it meant that she could give priority to her spiritual devotions. As we have seen, Pordage and his followers shared an interest in visionary experiences and were able to express themselves freely in their own community. Pordage thus provided Lead with material sanctuary and gave her the impetus and means to enter a 'public' arena, where she could speak forth.

It is clear that after she entered Pordage's home, her family tried to persuade her to leave. In 1676 she recorded:

About Four of the Clock in the Afternoon, my Daughter *R.* came to me, with a Message, that there was a letter came from my Sister *Re.* to Cousin *Rob. Wa.* that now there was an opportunity opened for my Redemption out of all Straits and Cares, being privately ordered by my Brother to send for me down to her House, and so to come to him, and abide during his Life, where all things should be provided, and need not have any other dependence'.⁷⁹

Again she was in a predicament: should she accept her brother's offer and stay with her sister, but become beholden to her family, and possibly sacrifice *her* spiritual life? It was a generous offer, and we are told that her brother was a 'Gentleman of an Handsom Estate' about one hundred miles from London.⁸⁰ She commented that everyone who knew of the

⁷⁵ Barbara Todd, 'Demographic Determinism and Female Agency', *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), p. 430.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁷⁸ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 328.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-28. The entry is dated 30 August 1676. The brother may have been Hamond, with whom she stayed in London in 1643.

⁸⁰ Jane Lead, *The Revelation of Revelations* (London, 1683), pp. 170-71.

offer argued with her to accept it and that her friends would neither pity nor aid her if she did not. Even her daughter, Barbara Walton, cautioned her mother 'against slighting such Providence'.⁸¹ Lead wrote:

Upon consideration hereof, it was said within me, Thou art in a great strait, yet nevertheless stand by thy Vow and solemn Engagement, whereby thou hast given away thy Right, as to the disposal of thy self. Now thou art the Lord's, who hath given to thee a binding Earnest, for to go on forward jointly with thy appointed Mate to that Work, which this present offer is much too low to retard.⁸²

Remaining in control, her accounts of these episodes foreground her relations with God and her family. Despite the many arguments to persuade her to accept her brother's financial help, she refused this offer which would have made her dependent on him. If her family had collaborated to allow her to move out of the Pordage household, the attempt failed miserably, as she was resolute in her decision to stay with her spiritual 'mate' - Pordage, and to keep her vow to God. She believed that she was entirely in the hands of God and she refused to submit herself to her brother. She was determined to flee from the restrictions of her earthly life to a spiritual one which endorsed 'Divine Grace' and assisted her in 'Faith, and the Abandon of the World'.⁸³ In doing so, she rejected the male-owned wealth of fraternal support and the possibility of re-marriage in favour of spiritual devotion.

As a member of Pordage's household, Lead was immersed in the world of prophecy, mysticism and the development of spiritual life. For Pordage gathered about him a group of like-minded mystical and pious Christians who shared and developed forms of emotional religion. His community attracted some well-educated people, such as Philip Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, and the Oxford educated Edward Brice and Thomas Bromley, who wrote *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* (1655).⁸⁴ There were also several visionary women in his circle, including Mary, his first wife.⁸⁵ Looking back at the Philadelphian Society and its antecedents, Richard Roach commented that 'the fresh Concurrence and Holy Gale of Divine

⁸¹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 328.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Lead, *Revelation*, p. 171.

⁸⁴ Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, p. 109. See also B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 116-117; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 190 and Christopher Hill, *Experience of Defeat: Milton and some Contemporaries* (London, Chicago and Melbourne, 1984), p. 222.

⁸⁵ Mary Pordage died in 1668.

Life opened first and Principally in Mrs Pordage'.⁸⁶ Margaret Pinder had visions which were often induced by fasting, and Mrs Flavel reported seeing the 'Philosopher's Stone ... which she knew to be the Divinity in the Humanity'.⁸⁷ Roach noted that 'These visions's ware when [Ann Bathurst] did live with dr pordich' (see fig. 1.2).⁸⁸ Lead recorded that she had frequent meetings with Pordage, 'We were happy to have found each other and delighted in our daily service to the Lord'.⁸⁹ Yet they also seem, on occasions to have had some kind of public meetings. On 6 May 1676, Lead wrote, 'This being the publik Day of our Meeting'.⁹⁰



Figure 1.2. Ann Bathurst, mystic, 1707, (Bodleian Library, Oxford) in Crawford and Gowing, *Women's Worlds*, p. 45, and Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 110.

⁸⁶ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, fols 63r-65r, Roach, 'An Acct of ye Rise and Progress of the Philadelphian Society'.

⁸⁷ John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing Through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (London, 1655), p. 17.

⁸⁸ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D1338, fol. 67v.

⁸⁹ Lead, 'Lebenslauff', p. 419.

⁹⁰ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 123.

Despite such apparent publicity, Lead rarely entered into debates about contemporary events and her writings consist almost entirely of a record of interior states, visions and dreams. However, she was not entirely unaware of events happening in London, or indeed, of other prophets. On 29 December 1677 Lead wrote: 'Upon the Consideration of *A.W's* Prophecy, it was advised me, that we should have no part with her in divine Justice, nor be Agents in the avenging property, in desiring Plagues and Vials of Wrath to come so immediately upon the Formal Churches. It was shewn me, that it was not the Time, nor the Manner revealed yet, how they should be overturned'.⁹¹ A.W probably stood for Anne Wentworth, as *A True Account of Anne Wentworths Being cruelly, unjustly, and unchristianly dealt with by some of those people called Anabaptists* was published in 1676, and *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* in 1677.⁹² Supporters of Wentworth also referred to her as 'Our friend Mrs A.W'.⁹³ Thomas Barnes declared in a letter that, 'The predictions of Mrs A.W. are to be heard next week by some in town'.⁹⁴ All of Wentworth's writings were autobiographical, vindicatory and vilifying.

Scholars have shown that Wentworth's own negative life experiences of suffering associated with fears of God's anger and punishment pervade her theological ideas.⁹⁵ Wentworth wrote that Christ 'revealed to me, (what I did not then know) that my *oppression* and *deliverance* had *Public Ministry* and *meaning* wrapped up in them'.⁹⁶ The conflation of the private and public thus became intrinsically linked with her prophecies. She also wrote

⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 520.

⁹² Wentworth also published *England's Spirituall Pill* and *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* both in 1679.

⁹³ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1677* (Hereford, 1911), p. 478. The entry is dated 30 November 1677.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 411. The entry is dated 21 October 1677. Other letters mentioning Wentworth are dated 26 December 1677, pp. 528-29; 31 July 1677, pp. 279-80; October 1677, pp. 434-35.

⁹⁵ See for example, Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1646-1688* (London, 1988), pp. 49-53; Dorothy Ludlow, 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundation: Sectarian Women in England, 1641-1700', in Richard Greaves (ed.), *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History* (Connecticut, 1983), pp. 93-123; Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 102-7; Elspeth Graham and others, *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth Century Englishwomen* (London, 1989), pp. 180-96.

⁹⁶ Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* (London, 1677), p. 12.

that Christ `revealed to me that wrath shall fall upon the *same spirit* throughout the nation, which everywhere oppresses the true seed, as I have been oppressed by it'.⁹⁷ Using the authority from God she directed *His* wrath at *her* persecutors:

And when it cometh to pass, that you Slanderers are found not only false Accusers and Persecutors, but also Rebukers, Controlers and Blasphemers against the Holy Ghost, and that therefore God shall make your Name to stink and rot upon the Earth, and put you to eternal shame for what you have done and falsly said of me since you well know yourselves, that whosoever loveth and maketh a Lye, must stand without with the Dogs and Sorcerers, and Whoremongers, and Murderers, and Idolaters.⁹⁸

Her writings malign her enemies and include God's retribution against her persecutors. She wrote that they:

shall feel the Rod of an angry God, as there is *Hanserd Knollys* 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 they go on to blame and defame me, and say, that I am run away from him!⁹⁹

Wentworth refers to biblical passages to express anger against her persecutors: `After I had written this, the Word of the Lord came to me, and said: My anger is greatly kindled, against all thy malicious lying Enemies, and I will appear a swift Witness against them, and pour out the Vials of wrath upon them'.¹⁰⁰ Wentworth thus struggled to overturn her role of being the oppressed and her argument is a defensive one. Lead, on the other hand sought to transcend her position to an eternal union with God, in whom she put all her trust. Lead prophesied to enlighten, lead and refresh others with `Love-Visitations from the Spirit of my Lord'.¹⁰¹ In contrast with Lead, Wentworth's prophetic utterances are infused with defamatory and retaliatory remarks towards her husband, her persecutors and the ungodly inhabitants of England against whom she wreaks revenge. Lead however, has no such agenda and does not vindicate herself in such a manner.

Moreover, Wentworth's theological message can be seen as projecting the personal vendetta onto a wider audience. In `A Cry to the City of London' her desperation for

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

⁹⁸ Anne Wentworth, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London, 1679), p. 19. The quote taken from Revelation XVI was dated 14 August 1677.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰¹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 14.

recognition of the wrongdoing inflicted upon her is expressed as God's anger with the people of London. Wentworth conflates her personal anger with God's, warning her persecutors will be punished for their abuse of her:

A Lamentation for a sort of people in the nation, who the Lord saith unto me, *are a proud, blind, scornful, lying, oppressing, persecuting, hard-hearted people in England. And the Lord let me see, who they are, and I know them by Name. And the Lord said unto me further, Now out of my favour they are gone they are gone; undone, undone is this poor bleeding Nation; thou must weep, and mourn for them, mock and laugh at them that reject my Word, and abuse my Messengers, my own Children, and make light of me, and will take no warning: for this I the Lord am angry, and I remember, what they have done to thee.*¹⁰²

Wentworth's claim is that *her* persecution is a sign that England is in its 'Last Days'. When contrasted with Lead's address to the inhabitants of London there is a shared sense of millenarianism: 'O City of *London!* A Mighty Angel doth fly, with this Thundering Cry, saying, Do not despise Prophecy, neither decry down the Ark of the Living testimony; from which the Spirit, as a flowing Stream, must renew Paradise upon the Earth'.¹⁰³

Lead, however, dismissed Wentworth's promulgation of divine Justice. She rejected outright the 'Doctrine that hath been preached of an endless Misery and Torment' that Wentworth promulgated, as it had 'wrought little effect in frightening or terrifying 'em from their evil Courses.'¹⁰⁴ Instead, she suggested that 'if Love's Center were rightly and duly opened, and made manifest, it would have worked far more naturally and kindly, to gain the Will of those who are Perverse and Obstinate.'¹⁰⁵ Unlike Wentworth, Lead preferred an all-embracing model based on God's love rather than God's wrath and retribution. Written in 1677, Lead's diary entry concerning Anne Wentworth was not, in fact, published until 1697. By then, there had been several other important developments in Lead's life that assisted her reputation as a prophetess and her eventual role as the leader of the Philadelphian Society.

¹⁰² Wentworth, *Revelation*, pp. 12-13. Revelation XI is dated 15 July 1677.

¹⁰³ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1695), p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Lead, *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel Message* (London, 1697), p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13. For a more detailed analysis of Lead's millenarian views, see Chapter Five.

The Philadelphian Society

The Philadelphian Society came into existence many years after John Pordage's death in 1681. Yet, there were important links between what happened in the intervening years and the actual formation of the Society. First, Lead entered into the world of print for the first time.¹⁰⁶ In 1681, she wrote the preface to Pordage's *Theologica Mystica*, and published her own treatise, *A Heavenly Cloud now Breaking*. These publications promoted Behmenist ideas she had shared with Pordage.¹⁰⁷ In addition, she also took over the leadership of Pordage's religious circle which had grown to 'more than a hundred'.¹⁰⁸ However, Lead wrote, 'After his [Pordage's] death, our community became dispersed. Very few of the other leading men were left'.¹⁰⁹ The diminished group continued to meet for three years, but eventually support dwindled until there only remained Pordage's younger brother, Francis, rector of Stanford-Dingley in Berkshire, and Francis's wife. In 1692, after Francis and his wife had died, Lead withdrew completely for two years.

Lead was one of the first of ten women to enter Lady Mico's College in Stepney, a refuge for widows.¹¹⁰ She advertised it as her home address in *The Enochian Walks with God* in 1694.¹¹¹ She was paid an annual pension of eight pounds a year by the Mercers' Company, even though it had found out that she had not resided in the refuge for a number of years.¹¹² Indeed, it was noted that Lead, 'almost blind and very decrepitate and infirme, lives with her daughter amongst her friends purposely for their help and assistance without which she cannot possibly subsist, whereupon the Court in compassion to her were pleased to order

¹⁰⁶ John Pordage was buried in St Andrews, Holborn on 11 December 1681, see DNB s.n. His will dated 28 November 1681 and proved 17 January 1682, was witnessed by Jane Lead, PRO, PROB 11/ 369, fols 59r-59v.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Two, *The Pen of an Angel*, for a more detailed exploration of Lead's publications.

¹⁰⁸ Lead, *Lebenslauff*, p. 422.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

¹¹⁰ Mercers' Company Archives, Acts of Court 1687-93, fol. 162v, 18 March 1692. I am grateful to Dr Mark Jenner who provided the transcript.

¹¹¹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fols 132r, and 167r; Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated and Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1854), pp. 226-27.

¹¹² Mercers' Company Archives, fol. 101r, 24 September 1703. Lead was paid the pension from the Mercers' Company until September 1703.

that she receive the allowance during her life tho' she does not reside in the said house'.¹¹³ However, as we shall see, Lead was paid another pension which ran concurrently, allowing her to pay the rent for the house she and her family lived in at Hoxton Square.

Meanwhile, in 1694, the Behmenist, Loth Fischer of Utrecht, had translated *The Heavenly Cloud now Breaking* into German.¹¹⁴ Baron Freiherr von Knyphausen, an administrator in the court of Frederick III Elector of Brandenburg, read the treatise and wrote to her, and a correspondence developed between the two.¹¹⁵ When he realised that this was not all she had written, he offered to publish all her writings in English *and* have them translated and published in German. The following year the German edition of *The Revelation of Revelation* appeared. Lead admitted that her two publications 'had a powerful influence in Germany, where they brought about her acquaintanceship and correspondence with many, who had a greater understanding in spiritual and mystical things than others'.¹¹⁶ Encouraged by this relative success, Lead rented a house 'for the purpose of seeing what God would do, and if He would send her such souls as were fitting for devoting themselves to a holy commission and had forsaken themselves in order to wait with her on God'.¹¹⁷ Now aged 70, she embraced the doctrine of universal salvation and was concerned that she might die before communicating God's will of inward redemption to a wider audience.

The other turning point in Lead's life also occurred in 1694 when a young scholar and physician, Francis Lee, approached her. Lee, or 'Rabbi Lee' as he was known at St John's College, Oxford, had studied medicine at Leiden and Padua, and was a Hebrew scholar. As a non-juror, he had been forced to give up his position at Oxford - a point that grieved him sorely, and left him in financial hardship. He had travelled from Leiden to meet Lead,

¹¹³ Ibid, fol. 83r, 12 February 1703.

¹¹⁴ See Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 509; D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*, (London, 1964), p. 220; and Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), pp. 84-5.

¹¹⁵ Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 86.

¹¹⁶ Thune, *Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 82 quoting, *Apparatus ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam Novam. Facsimilia Collecta Opera Ernesti Salomonis Cypriani* (Coburg, 1711), p. 16. Johann Dittmar, the Philadelphian missionary, handed over Lead's letters and documents about the Philadelphian Society to fellow Philadelphian, Ernst Salomon Cyprian.

¹¹⁷ Thune, *Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 81 quoting, *Apparatus ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam Novam*, p. 16.

because he was so impressed by *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*. Lee stayed, and decided to cast himself 'entirely and blindfold upon God's most wise direction in all things'.¹¹⁸ Lead had no son and regarded Lee as a 'spiritual son given to her in her old age', and Lee looked upon her as a 'spiritual mother'.¹¹⁹

In 1696, Lead had a vision in which Sophia told her that Lee should marry her widowed daughter Barbara Walton. Lee suggested that those who knew Lead intimately knew that the vision 'could not have been the product of her own mind because it seemed to contradict it, but that it originated entirely from the Spirit of Christ'.¹²⁰ Lee was convinced of Lead's 'great disinterestedness as to externals, for the sake of the invisible glories of Christ to be manifested' and he desired 'to be passive in this and all that God designs upon him'.¹²¹ Yet he encountered opposition from friends and particularly from his brother who, we are told, 'leaves no stone unturned to break asunder this knot. But all in vain: for Lee acts nothing, but leaves all to be acted by Lead ... if all this can be but a satanical delusion, then is the marriage between himself and Barbara the most miserable that ever was in the world. But if it is not, then it is blessed, and is holy to God'.¹²² However, it appeared that the predicament was resolved by a biblical passage. Lee 'was to his greatest surprise, directed to a strange passage in the Book of Tobit, so it was concluded in the fear of God by observing the counsel of the angel to young Tobias'.¹²³ Lee may also have noted the similar circumstances in the Book of Tobit to the situation in which he found himself. Indeed, he may have identified himself with the figure of Tobias - the son who helped his blind 'mother', and married her daughter Barbara, 'who had suffered much in the world'.¹²⁴ Thus, Lee accepted that Lead's vision was an indication of the will of God, and clearly believed that there was no other motive involved.

¹¹⁸ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, pp. 508-9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 509. See Chapter Six, *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*, for an examination of Lead's ideas of motherhood.

¹²⁰ Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel' p. 26, citing F. Lee, *Der Seelig und aber Seeligen* (Amsterdam, 1705), p. 27.

¹²¹ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 227.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. The Book of Tobit is one of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament. Tobias, the son of Tobit, aided by the angel Raphael, rescued his kinswoman, Sarah, from the power of a demon and married her and also healed Tobit of his blindness.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

All three then lived together in a house in Hoxton Square at Baron von Knyphausen's expense.¹²⁵ The Mercers' Company records show that 'the said widow Leeds was a housekeeper and gave sixteen ponds a yeare for a house' and Lee stated 'that he was only a Lodger at her house'.¹²⁶

It was in this house at Hoxton during the years 1694-96 that Lead started to hold meetings which were the beginnings of the Philadelphian Society. Members of the Philadelphian Society applied to those who were 'led forth ... under the conduct of Mrs Lead'.¹²⁷ Although the size of the group that developed around her is unclear, it reassembled some of the old Pordage circle, including Ann Bathurst.¹²⁸ Lee's friend, Richard Roach, who was to become an influential member and eventual leader of the Philadelphian Society, also began to frequent their meetings, as he had begun to be 'visited from above with extraordinary Communications'.¹²⁹ From his ordination in 1690 until his death in 1730, Roach was the rector of St Augustine's, Hackney. Roach showed that it was also possible, as a practising Church of England cleric, to have a position both within the Established Church and the Philadelphian Society.¹³⁰ As D. P. Walker has commented, 'In the late 1720s he was faithfully expounding the Philadelphian message,' which showed a 'remarkable tolerance of the Church of England'.¹³¹ Roach later moved into Lead's house along with her daughter Barbara, and Lee.¹³²

In addition to these initial gatherings of the Philadelphian Society, Lead held private meetings with her family at eleven o'clock every day, 'Every Sunday since 1695, they

¹²⁵ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 220.

¹²⁶ Mercers' Company Archives, fol. 101r, 24 September 1703.

¹²⁷ Richard Roach, *The Great Crisis: The Mystery of the Times and Seasons Unfolded* (London, 1725), p. 99.

¹²⁸ Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 96.

¹²⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 133r.

¹³⁰ Roach was summoned before the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Thomas Tenison, to defend himself against accusations of 'religious enthusiasm', Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 88.

¹³¹ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 220.

¹³² Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 87.

celebrated the resurrection of Christ'.¹³³ She was undoubtedly the leading light at such meetings. Roach recorded that they also:

met in Baldwin Gardens in the house of Mrs. Joanna Oxenbridge wt whom Mrs A. Bathurst Combined who were Two Principal Persons in carrying on ye Spiritual Work: and both Enlightened Persons and both having great and Wonderful Experiences and Manifestations fro ye Heavenly World.¹³⁴

The increase in numbers and the illness of Ann Bathurst, however, meant that they were constrained to take a larger Place, 'ye Room where they met not being but a private Chamber and Mrs Bathurst then Aged and Sickly not being able to bear so Great Conc. and ye Disorders attending it'.¹³⁵ Roach recorded that 'The Philadelphian Society wch first appeard publicly in London in the year 1697, were Part of a Society of Spiritual people who for about 50 Years had met together after the Primitive way of Attendance or waiting for the Holy Spirit'.¹³⁶

The Philadelphian Society was named after the sixth of the seven churches in Asia mentioned in Revelation 1:4 and 3:7, and the members believed in the imminence of the millennium and the concept of universal salvation. Figure 1.3 shows a diagram from *The Imperial Standard of Messiah Triumphant* by Richard Roach. The numbers one to seven beneath the circles denote the seven churches of Asia. The Roman numerals above the circles represent the stages of Christ's process from his birth to the emergence at the end times, and then again to the beginning.

¹³³ Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, quoting *Apparatus ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam Novam*, p. 178.

¹³⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 132r.

¹³⁵ Ibid., D833, fol. 65r.

¹³⁶ Ibid., D833, fol. 82r, Richard Roach, 'An Acct. of the Philadelphian Society'.

The Philadelphia Society declared themselves to be a 'Religious Society for the Reformation of Manners, for the Advancement of an Heroical Christian Piety, and Universal Love towards All.'¹⁰⁷ Very little is known about their origin or how many members they had.¹⁰⁸ They were mainly supported by middle or upper-class, well educated Protestants, although they embraced people of any religious persuasion. Indeed, so many women attended the Philadelphia Society and were 'practical both as believers and as prophets', that it was known as the 'Tallia Meetings'.¹⁰⁹ This may have been due to Lead's leadership skills and the emphasis on Sophia, and also because women could express themselves freely there.

The Philadelphia Society encouraged women and men to prophesy openly. The twelfth article of their constitution stated that the 'Manifestation of the Spirit, which is given to every one, whether Male or Female' should not be hindered, 'though attended with Weakness,' which meant that 'the Weak may at last be made Strong in the Power and Might of the Holy Spirit'.¹¹⁰ Their radical rejection of the Puritan interdict legitimised Lead's position as a prophet and prophetess, and as a gender atypical.

Indeed, Richard Roach developed the idea of



Richard Roach, *Scheme of the Kingdom of Christ* (London, 1697), p. 7

Roach wrote this book after the Society had been well established in its own right by the end of the century of the Philadelphia Society.

Roach, *Opus*, p. 7.

The 'Process of the Kingdom of Christ', in *Theological Transactions of the Society of Friends* (London, 1774), vol. 4, p. 224.

Roach, *Opus*, p. 7.

Figure 1.3. 'The Process of the Kingdom of Christ', Richard Roach, *Imperial Standard* (London, 1727), p. 27.

The Philadelphian Society declared themselves to be a 'Religious Society for the Reformation of Manners, for the Advancement of an Heroical Christian Piety, and Universal Love towards All'.¹³⁷ Very little is known about their origin or how many members they had.¹³⁸ They were mainly supported by middle or upper-class, well educated Protestants, although they embraced people of any religious persuasion. Indeed, so many women attended the Philadelphian Society and were 'prominent both as believers and as prophets', that 'it was thence call'd the Taffeta Meetings'.¹³⁹ This may have been due to Lead's leadership skills and the emphasis on Sophia, and also because women could express themselves freely there.

The Philadelphians encouraged women and men to prophesy openly. The twelfth article of their constitution stated that the 'Manifestation of the Spirit, which is given to every one, whether Male or Female' should not be hindered, 'though attended with Weakness,' which meant that 'the Weak may at last be made Strong in the Power and Might of the Holy Spirit'.¹⁴⁰ Their radical rejection of the Pauline interdict legitimised Lead's position as a prophetess and challenged gender stereotypes. Indeed, Richard Roach developed the idea of women's importance in the last days, to a greater extent than any other Philadelphian, including Lead. Roach thought that, 'some of ye Female Sex have been Chosen & Distinguished with Admirable Talents for ye Information of ye Age'.¹⁴¹ Clearly, the importance of Roach and Lee cannot be underestimated in creating an environment which allowed women to prophesy. From within the Philadelphian Society then, Lead was their legitimate leader and prophetess which also gave her a degree of autonomy and independence.

Roach recorded that others, including Mary Sterrell, also read certain tracts at the meetings of the Philadelphian Society.¹⁴² Sterrell's publication, *A New Year's Gift*, reflected many shared Behmenist ideas such as a paradisaical garden, the Rose of Sharon, and imagery

¹³⁷ Francis Lee, *State of the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), p. 7.

¹³⁸ Roach provided details after the Society had been well established in *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Philadelphian Society*.

¹³⁹ Roach, *Great Crisis*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Philadelphian Constitutions', in *Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society* (5 vols, London, 1699), vol. 4, p. 224.

¹⁴¹ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 55v, Richard Roach, 'Wt are the Philadelphians & wt is ye Ground of their Society'.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, fol. 92r.

of holy warfare.¹⁴³ The *State of the Philadelphian Society* recommended her three-part work.¹⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, Lead also enjoyed such support by her members from her writing and as their leader. Her authority as the leading prophetess was used by her followers as the basis of their own spiritual authority; yet, this experience was legitimised only when it was authenticated by them.

The Philadelphian Society developed at the same time as other societies of the later seventeenth century. These included the Society for the Reformation of Manners; the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge which was founded in 1698; and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, of which Archbishop Thomas Tenison (1636-1715) was a founder member. The Philadelphians, however, were anxious not to be sectarian or confrontational, but sought to develop forms of spirituality on what must have been the Church's outer limits. *The State of the Philadelphian Society* set out a constitution which declared that the Philadelphians were, 'not for turning the World upside down as some have Represented 'em: they are not Enemies to the Civil or Ecclesiastical Rights of any,' and 'they do not condemn the Externals or Rituals of the Christian religion'.¹⁴⁵ The Philadelphian Society was interdenominational and actively promoted the doctrine of universal salvation, which they believed would be achieved through the internal regeneration of churches.¹⁴⁶ Lee emphasised the ecumenical nature of the Philadelphian Society by suggesting that 'our *Quakers*, and *Philadelphians*, as well as the *Quietists* and *Pietists* abroad, are from the same Kidney, and do all stand upon the same foundations'.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, Lee was concerned to distinguish the Philadelphians from the Quakers criticising the latter for their outward show:

they [the Philadelphians] were not so silly as to place Religion in Thouing and Theeing, in keeping on their Hats, or in a sad countenance, as the Hypocrites had in our

¹⁴³ Mary Sterrell, *A New Year's Gift* (London, 1693) quoted in Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel', p. 243. I have not been able to locate a copy.

¹⁴⁴ Lee, *State of the Philadelphian*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Other MS concerning the Philadelphian Society include, 'Reasons for the Foundation and Promotion of a Philadelphian Society', which can be found in London, Lambeth Palace Library MS. 942/130 and Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawl., D833.

¹⁴⁷ *State of the Philadelphian Society*, p. 39. See also John Cockburn, *Bourignianism Detected: or the Delusions and Errors of Antonia Bourignon and her Growing Sect* (London, 1698), preface.

Saviour's turn. These [Philadelphians] have no external Badge or Mark of distinction, but are above those little Affectations or Superstitions.¹⁴⁸

The Philadelphian's rejection of the external paraphernalia of religion thus complemented the emphasis they placed on the power of an inner theology. In an attempt to challenge the distinguishing habits of various religious groups, which invariably led to 'sin' and 'schism,' they thought that by *not* distinguishing themselves from other Christians, they would more readily effect 'an Universality, and generous and noble Parity' between all.¹⁴⁹ They were thus keen not to separate themselves by any outward show, but instead, sought international connections in both Catholic and Protestant countries, so that their members would 'gladly embrace a more Spiritual Religion, overlooking the Outward Strength and Pomp of a Church State in Comparison with the Inward Life and Spirit of the Gospel'.¹⁵⁰

The Philadelphian Society produced several publications in their own right, under the auspices of Lee and Roach. Among them was a periodical entitled *Theosophical Transactions*, which contained an eclectic mixture of items. Their aim was to publish various secret memoirs and small pieces which demonstrate a 'proper tendency ... to some great work of God, which is not yet known to the World'.¹⁵¹ Their aim was to gain followers for the Philadelphian Church in preparation for Christ's second coming. They emphasised the ecumenical nature of their society in *Theosophical Transactions*, wishing to promote God's love among all and overcome divisions between Christians. Five issues were published from March to November in 1697 which consisted of reports, letters, musical theory, divine philosophy, poetry, serialised stories, inquiries into piety, and they contained excerpts and advertisements about their leader. They also included articles from European Philadelphians.¹⁵² The publications ranged in price from 6d. to 1s.3d. according to size, and because of the price difference it was hoped that the publications would appeal to a wide

¹⁴⁸ *State of the Philadelphian Society*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵¹ *Theosophical Transactions*, editorial. 'Propositions Extracted' is contained in vol. 4, (1699), p. 203 and pp. 229-32 and, Lambeth Palace Library, London, MS 942/129.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 142. For an examination of the links between the German Philadelphians and Lead's Philadelphian Society see, Walker, *Decline of Hell*, pp. 231ff.

range of people.¹⁵³

We are told that the influence of the periodicals not only generated 'Encouragement from Persons of Candour and Judgment, both in this and other Nations,'¹⁵⁴ but they also gave such an 'Alarm to the world, so that their Meeting at Baldwin Gardens began to be crowded with such Numbers that they were constrained to become more Public and to divide the meeting'.¹⁵⁵ In 1697 the Philadelphian Society applied to license these venues as places of worship under the Toleration Act. It appeared that with lay female leadership, the Philadelphian Society thrived, so new venues were sought.¹⁵⁶ The Philadelphians gathered at Hungerford Market, West London, 'in a large Convenient Place'.¹⁵⁷ Because of its distance from Hoxton, it proved difficult for Lead to attend, so she started simultaneous meetings at Westmorland House, nearer to Hoxton, as there were enough followers to carry on the meeting at Hungerford without her.¹⁵⁸ There were however, disturbances at their meetings at Westmoreland House as there had been at the meetings held at Hungerford Market. In 1699, we find them also at Lorimer's Hall, where they also met with opposition. They were buffeted by a mob and prevented from meeting there 'where they had a vast concourse of people'.¹⁵⁹ They were forced to re-convene in private because of 'great Opposition Violence from ye rude Multitude' and chronic schisms amongst the members.¹⁶⁰ The meetings were invaded by the group called the 'French Prophets' who were *emigres* from the Cévennes War

¹⁵³ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 246.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁵⁵ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 83r.

¹⁵⁶ Although the exact numbers in the Philadelphian Society is unknown, the increasing numbers appear to be indicated by their need to move from private houses to larger public venues; their demand for publications; an attempt to formalise the Society with its own constitution, and the developing connections abroad, especially in Amsterdam and Germany. See Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁷ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, fol. 134r.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 170r.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 65r, Richard Roach, 'Rise and Progress of the Philadelphian Society.'

in France and fired with emotional enthusiasm.¹⁶¹ Despite the Philadelphians applying to the chief magistrate of London for a warrant to suppress the 'Tumults and Profaneness' from 'Wicked and Dissolute Persons,' the problem persisted.¹⁶² Their success in achieving greater numbers and holding public meetings had backfired, and under the terms of the Toleration Act they had no powers to stop undesirable behaviour. Lead and the Philadelphian Society retreated from public view and cautioned, 'Let us watch, one and all, for snares and nets are spread everywhere; on all sides there are stratagems of the Prince of Evil'.¹⁶³

Lead was blind and in her mid-seventies when the Philadelphians were forced to withdraw from holding public meetings. They moved to Twister's Alley in Bunhill Fields and finally to Hoxton, probably holding their meetings in Lead's house.¹⁶⁴ She was, however, still concerned to continue publishing, having to be assisted by the editorial and organisational skills of Lee and Roach.¹⁶⁵ They played an enormous part in handling the public activities of the group by organising activities and indeed published material for the Philadelphian Society, and for Lead. Although Lead was undoubtedly regarded as the leader of the Philadelphian Society until her death, it is clear that certain members played key roles in the Society. It therefore raises questions about the kind of leadership she enjoyed. By the end of her life it can be seen that the Philadelphians were effectively marketing Lead as a commodity. Undoubtedly revered and in awe of her piety and religiosity, they put Lead on a pedestal, produced her at meetings and gathered her work to publish, or assisted her to write new material that she would have to dictate.

When the aged Lead had started to go blind with cataracts, Lee, however, who was trained as a doctor, regarded her blindness as a result of her devotions and other-worldliness, writing that her affliction was 'occasioned by the intense exercise of her head in meditation

¹⁶¹ Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth Century England* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 85-87. Enthusiasm was used as a derogatory term against radicals who opposed the Church, rejected established institutions, threatened the social and political order etc. See Michael Heyd, *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995), p. 5 and p. 163.

¹⁶² Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 65r.

¹⁶³ Roach, *Great Crisis*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶⁴ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fols 115r, 167r, and 170r.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter Two, *The Pen of an Angel*, for an examination of the role of Lee and Roach in publishing Lead's works.

and recollection and by much writing'.¹⁶⁶ He described how her writing became a collaborative process:

A [Jane Lead] grows dark in her sight very fast, by a cataract falling into her eyes; which renders her unable to *carry* on the foreign correspondence which was now begun, and was daily also increasing ... A [Jane Lead] dictates to the pen of C [Francis Lee] all that she had a mind to write, either for herself, or for others: in which C [Francis Lee] was very exact.¹⁶⁷

Lee's occasional editorial comments testify to the problems that occurred during the preparation of the diary for print, such as the discovery of undated entries.¹⁶⁸ He wrote, 'there is a great Part lost of what She had Written in loose Shredꝯ of Paper, for the sake of her own Memory, and for Monitions and Encouragements to some few Particular Friends, not thinking of their Publication in the Least'.¹⁶⁹ Lee commented, 'And not withstanding all the Defects and Ruptures in it, tis' not to be reckon'd Incompleat'.¹⁷⁰ In the Publisher's Address to his Readers, Lee wrote of Lead that 'greater proofs cannot be given of the integrity of a person, than what is here to be found'.¹⁷¹ Lee, especially was in awe of the extraordinary revelations she had, which he claimed were an unfamiliar experience to himself. He wrote, 'For I am more subject to feel the sudden irradiations upon my Intellect ... than I am to receive any sensible Commotion from any Images or Ideas darted into me'.¹⁷² Indeed, the Philadelphians regarded Lead as an inspired figure with genuine illumination.

As already mentioned, however, extraordinary revelations were by no means

¹⁶⁶ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated and Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1854), p. 203.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 509. Francis Lee omits the use of names in this passage. I have used brackets to insert - A to refer to Jane Lead and C to stand for Francis Lee.

¹⁶⁸ See for example the 'Advertisement' in Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, sig. A2 which states the reason for the scant entries in the last six years was due to the demise of a 'pious and honourable woman' (possibly Ann Bathurst) who was entrusted with a manuscript copy of Lead's diary.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Many other diaries were also written on loose sheets of paper and then written up, including those by Samuel Pepys. Pepys' diary covered 1 January 1660 until 31 May 1669, when, like Lead, his eyesight began to fail. See R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (11 vols, London, 1971-1983).

¹⁷⁰ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, sig. A2r.

¹⁷¹ Lead, *Wars of David*, p.20.

¹⁷² *Theosophical Transactions*, vol. 1, p. 219. Lee was the main editor and publisher of this periodical.

unfamiliar to some other Philadelphian members, including Roach. The Philadelphians, moreover, appreciated Lead's divine revelations because they could address actual problems. When any of her friends were experiencing difficulties, Lead often received revelations of consolation and hope. Lead wrote, 'Having been to visit a distressed Christian, whose Complaints much entered into me ... I had this Word sprang, saying, *I will make thee Steward over the Household of Faith*'.¹⁷³ Indeed, the belief that 'she had endeavoured to her utmost, to be faithful to the gift committed to her' was endorsed by the Philadelphians.¹⁷⁴ She wrote, 'The LORD hath chosen me to move in a particular sphere', in which she gave encouragement and help to others assisted by her divine revelations. The Philadelphians regarded her in high esteem, by acknowledging that her revelations not only gave authority to her theological opinions, but could be applied on a practical and day-to-day basis.¹⁷⁵

Lead's status as a prophetess and author undoubtedly helped to maintain her leadership of the Philadelphian Society. It also provided evidence to a public audience of her heightened religiosity. The Philadelphians almost certainly used the term 'prophetess' to describe Lead, yet it was a title she was not comfortable with. Lee noted that 'She always rejected the title of prophetess, when it was applied to her, and said that she had no pleasure in it, but that it was burdensome to her to be called so, because she did not deserve such a name or title'.¹⁷⁶

Lee wrote that she considered herself to be 'a mere nothing in the hand of God,' not important enough to carry the title of prophetess.

Lee wrote many of Lead's editorial prefaces and was concerned to position her as a blind, aged seer. He wrote, 'For nothing can be more Absurd or Ridiculous than to Imagine that a Person daily expecting to be Dissolv'd from this Mortal Tabernacle, being Aged near Fourscore Years, and Depriv'd of the Light of the World but enjoying the Perfect Use of the Mind ... if it be not *Reality*'.¹⁷⁷ Even in Lead's final year Lee was concerned to depict her

¹⁷³ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 354. The entry is dated 20 September 1684. See also similar entries in Lead's diary recorded on 5 November 1676 in vol. 1, p. 427, and 18 December 1676, vol. 1, pp. 478-79.

¹⁷⁴ Lead, *Wars of David*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁵ Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, pp. 208-09.

¹⁷⁶ Dr Williams' Library, London, Walton, MS. C. 5.30, 'The Last Hours of Jane Lead by an Eye and Ear Witness' (Francis Lee).

¹⁷⁷ Jane Lead, *A Living Funeral Testimony: or, Death Overcome* (London, 1702), sig. A1v.

inner strength despite her physical deterioration, in an attempt to show that she must be deriving strength and sustenance from God for a purpose. Indeed, her blindness and advanced years were emphasised to show her ability to transcend any physical problems. In her final years she suffered ill health and had to be cared for by others. He wrote, 'There was nothing but the decay of her sight to afflict her: and this made it inconvenient for her to be alone'.¹⁷⁸ Lee gave a very detailed account of Lead's physical deterioration. Aged seventy-nine, she fell downstairs and fractured her arm and 'her body had been there for some time before entirely infected and corrupted so that she compared it to a rotten sack, or sack of corruption'.¹⁷⁹ Lead called her body 'her burden, her load, her prison, her cage, her old and ragged dress'.¹⁸⁰ Lee wrote, 'At first she was seized with some wasting and wearying attacks of fever, which were accompanied with violent internal pain ... until they became almost daily ... she violently vomited up everything that she took for her outward sustenance'.¹⁸¹ Despite her ill health, Lee emphasised Lead's enduring compassion and kindness towards others. He wrote, 'it is very remarkable, concerning the end of her life - above all, during the last two years. Indeed, she was more compassionate than what could be expected by a just person'.¹⁸² Lee reported Lead having said, 'There are many angels of Judgment, but healing angels are few'.¹⁸³

Lee was concerned to record how her piety in the face of this extreme physical suffering was witnessed by onlookers. They appeared to experience a collective vision which depicted Lead and a mystical crucifixion. Thus was the heightened religious nature she communicated to them even on her death-bed. Lee wrote:

we thought she would die because she was seized with the most dreadful agonies of death, which made her several times exclaim 'My God! My God!' And sometimes 'O eternal God! And some who attended her saw her thus really hanging on the Cross, and expected the hour of her dismissal from these most dreadful pains, she answered very readily that she not only hung on the Cross then, but had already done so for sixteen weeks.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 509.

¹⁷⁹ Dr Williams' Library, London, Walton, MS. C. 5.30.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 213, citing Lee, *Der Seelig*.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Walton, MS. C. 5.30.

In 1704 Jane Lead died. Her epitaph in the non-conformist cemetery at Bunhill Fields in London reads, 'Exuvias Carnis hic deposvit Venerabilis Ancilla Domini JANE LEAD, anno Peregrinationis suae lxxxii' - 'Here is Deposited the outer Garment of the Flesh, of the Venerable Handmaid of the Lord, Jane Lead, in the year of her pilgriimage, 81.'¹⁸⁵ The stone was inscribed with a cross at the top, an Alpha on one side, an Omega on the other, and a skull with a crown of glory above it. Lee carefully recorded that she died on the 19th August 1704 between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of her eighty-first year.

A letter dated 14 August 1704 and addressed to Lee, described Lead's physical characteristics, which also correspond with Lee's depiction of her as being 'heavy in body'.¹⁸⁶ The letter also described a premonition of her demise:

At late between the 14th and 15th August by the Night, I saw in a dream a wonderful Vision. I saw a Matron sitting, who seemed very Pious and modest, of a grave deportment, and graceful in her Looks. She was very Aged, not very tall, and she appeared to me in a sitting posture, but big and fat of flesh. She was of a pale dead colour, she was cloaked and lightly covered over with a black Habit, or it were a Riding Hood or rain Cloak, from head to foot. The cloak was ... black silken Veil, as being in mourning. But under this silk veil she was wholly naked: and upon her Breast it was open. At which I wondered greatly, beholding such a Pious and Grave Matron ... methought she was, so very naked at her head ... for methought it was contrary to decency I much approved her and beheld her well, and thus see what way upon her Heart. Then I did cast my eye on her Breast: and behold I saw the Crucified saviour, there hanging on the cross, with his Blessed Mother on one side, and John on the other ... I saw Alive, or Living, not painted on. But when I began to pray in earnest, then the matron did open her eye. On 30th August I was told that 'Madam Lead' had died ... upon the 5th day after my dream had deceased.¹⁸⁷

The letter expressed concern about Lead's death by describing a visionary experience the author wished to share. After Lead's death, Lee stressed that Lead wanted her members not to be 'staggered by her death or to incline to doubt previous spiritual experiences'.¹⁸⁸ Yet, even 'Jane Lead's visits in spirit form to Joanna Oxenbridge and Richard Roach could

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Lambeth Palace Library, London, MS 1559, 'Dr Lee's Letters.' The authorship of this letter is not clear.

¹⁸⁸ Dr Williams' Library, London, Walton MS, 186.18 (2).

not forestall the divisions'.¹⁸⁹ Roach was convinced Lead wanted him to lead the Philadelphians after experiencing a vision which he described as follows:

a small Globe beginning to descend from the Highest region, which grew larger and larger as it came nearer to the Earth; not only large from its being near to the Eye, but as Dilating itself in its Descent. And I heard this word, the still Eternity displays itself.¹⁹⁰

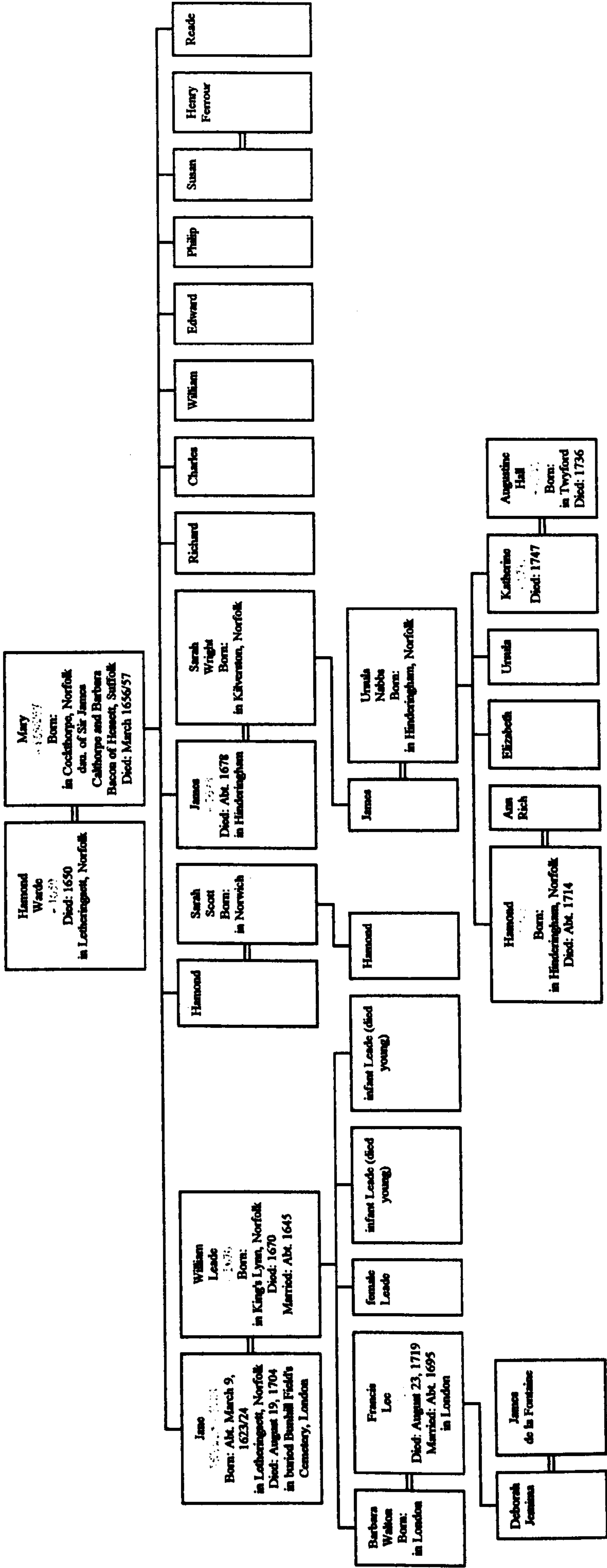
Roach struggled to keep the Philadelphian Society active for some years and he wrote that the aim of the society was 'to carry on Inwardly and in Spirit, the davidical Wars against the Powers of Darkness'.¹⁹¹ Lead's decease however, heralded the death knell of the society. The fact that the Philadelphian Society collapsed after Lead's death certifies her absolute centrality to their activities. Lead left a legacy which included her prolific published works, and the next chapter will examine these works and consider their mixed reception.

¹⁸⁹ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 7v.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Roach, *Great Crisis*, p. 59.

Descendants of Hamond Warde



CHAPTER TWO - The Pen of an Angel

Jane Lead was one of the most prolific, if not the most prolific, female authors in late seventeenth-century England. This chapter will examine the nature of Lead's authorship and consider the reception of her published works. It will thus build on the scholarship by feminist historians and literary critics who have produced much work uncovering the extent of women's writing in the seventeenth century.¹ Elaine Hobby, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, for example, have shown that many seventeenth-century writings by women were forms of religious utterance and devotion. Other scholars have stressed the explosion of women's writing during the English Civil War and Interregnum, especially among radical sects like the Quakers.² Lead, however, still remains a minor figure in the canon of seventeenth-century women's writing.³ One reason may be that she does not easily fit into 'women and literature' or 'women's history' paradigms. Much recent scholarship has been preoccupied with 'proto-feminists'. More is known, for instance, about Mary Astell, Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn than the spiritual illuminations of prophetesses.⁴

¹ Jane Donawerth and Adele Seff (eds), *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women* (Newark and London, 2000); Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (eds), *'This Double Voice' Gendered Writing in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2000); Elspeth Graham and others, *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (London, 1989, reprinted 1994); Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction* (London, 1989); Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (London, 1988); Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester and New York, 1996); Helen Wilcox, *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700* (Cambridge, 1996); S. Trill, K. Chedgzoy and M. Osborne (eds), *Lay by your Needles Ladies, Take the Pen: Writing Women in England, 1500-1700* (London, 1997).

² Printed literature by women rose significantly after 1640, see Nigel Smith, 'Writing during the Civil War', (September 1999), <<http://textbase.wwp.brown.edu>> (10 May 2002); see also, Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1989, reprinted London, 1994); Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*; Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London, 1998), and Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century* (York, 1995).

³ Lead is mentioned briefly in Patricia Crawford, 'Anglicans, Catholics, and Nonconformists after the Restoration, 1660-1720', in Susan E. Dinan and Debra Meyers, (eds), *Women and Religion in Old and New Worlds* (New York and London, 2001), pp. 157-185.

⁴ Many of the works of Cavendish, Behn, and Astell have been reprinted recently, see for example: Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson (eds), *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader* (Ontario, 2000); K. Lilley (ed.), *Margaret Cavendish, The Blazing*

Indeed, Stevie Davies has argued that 'the future of women's liberty lay with Mary Astell and education reform rather than Jane Lead's mystical feminism'.⁵

Furthermore, feminists have focused on women who exhibited political agendas and there has been a reluctance by scholars to recognise the importance of certain forms of religious expression such as prophecy and mysticism at the end of the seventeenth century. Lead, however, fits uneasily into feminist studies. She is problematic for secular feminists because her mystical and prophetic utterances, unlike Quakers and Fifth Monarchists, did not contain explicit references to the secular politics of the day. Instead, Lead's experiential view of revelation allowed for divine disclosure which operated by degrees, and she also developed a form of knowing that has tended to be disparaged in favour of reason.

Like many religious radicals, much of Lead's writing was millenarian and was concerned with waiting and preparing for the second coming of Christ.⁶ Her works were overwhelmingly pietistic, and they are not as dramatic as some of the radical prose to be found in other sects, including the Quakers. Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, for example, expressed their anger at the denial of women's right to preach in *To the Priests and People in England* (1655).⁷ The vivid polemic of Hester Biddle produced *Woe to Thee, City of Oxford* and *Woe to Thee, City of Cambridge* in 1655 as a warning to the ungodly, or non-Quakers, calling them to repentance.⁸

World (London, 1994); Melinda Zook, 'Contextualising Aphra Behn: plays, politics, and party 1679-1689', in Hilda Smith (ed.), *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 75-93; Janet Todd (ed.), *The Works of Aphra Behn* (7 vols, London, 1992-96); C. Gallagher and S. Stern (eds), *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* (Boston, 2000); Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke, 2001); Elaine Hobby, 'Not Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6 (1999), 113-127; P. Springborg (ed.), *Mary Astell, Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1996); P. Springborg (ed.), *Mary Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (London, 1997); Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, 2002).'

⁵ Davies, *Unbridled Spirits*, p. 289.

⁶ Lead, however, viewed herself as one of God's chosen individuals or 'First Fruits' - a concept derived from Joachim of Fiore (AD 12). It was also linked to the second coming of Christ depicted in the Book of Revelation.

⁷ See Paul Salzman (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Writing: An Anthology 1560-1700* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 142-166.

⁸ See Elaine Hobby, "'Oh Oxford Thou Art Full of Filth': The Prophetic Writings of Hester Biddle', in Susan Sellers (ed.), *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), pp. 157-70.

Indeed, Lead's style of writing both engages the reader and bewilders at the same time. There have been a variety of responses to Lead's published material from critics and scholars. Historians, such as Rufus Jones, have been critical of her style, suggesting that her use of language was 'ungrammatical, of involved style, and full of overwrought and fanciful imagination'.⁹ Christopher Walton called her writings 'a huge mass of parabolicalism and idiocratic deformity' and claimed she was 'a far too voluminous writer'.¹⁰ D.P. Walker was also disparaging towards Lead's style, noting that its 'oddly Germanic word-order, is unnatural, ungrammatical and often obscure'.¹¹ So, must the prophetic writings of Jane Lead be merely evidence of her idiosyncrasy?

In contrast, however, Catherine Smith and Patricia Demers have viewed Lead's writing as a development of a feminine language or way of expression set apart from patriarchal discourse. After the advent of feminism in the early 1970s, feminist literary scholars such as Smith claimed that Lead's writing provided a celebratory account of a unique feminine grammar. Smith suggested that Lead used a 'special, integrative language built from occult thought by creative discontent'.¹² Demers acknowledged Lead's 'breathlessly honorific style',¹³ while Christina Berg and Phillipa Berry identified Lead as contributing to 'feminine' epistemologies that challenge the linguistic hegemony of dominant male culture.¹⁴ They see Lead as a woman writing from a separate sphere who was able to articulate her experiences in a way that men could not.

In addition, Smith and Demers have focused on Lead's spirituality. Demers has attempted to recover a tradition of women's writing which emphasised women's creative

⁹ Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Boston, 1959), p. 230.

¹⁰ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated and Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1864), p. 238.

¹¹ D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London, 1964), p. 229.

¹² Catherine F. Smith, 'Jane Lead: Mysticism and the Woman Cloathed with the Sun' in Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar (eds), *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington, 1979), p. 406.

¹³ Patricia Demers, *Women as Interpreters of the Bible* (New York, 1992), p. 89.

¹⁴ Christina Berg and Philippa Berry, 'Spiritual Whoredom: An Essay on Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century', in Francis Barker and others, (eds), *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century* (Colchester, 1981), pp. 37-54.

interpretations and has placed Lead within it.¹⁵ Smith considers Lead as a female link in a female chain of ideas. Commenting on Lead's mysticism she stated, 'as the importance and historic range of women's imaginative writing is re-examined, new perceptions of women's ways of knowing and expressing necessarily follow'.¹⁶ The epistemology she claims comes the closest to these new perceptions is 'womanknowing' which 'has been a women's tradition, carried on importantly by Protestant women mystics whose resources were occult philosophy, radical theology, and their own dreams'.¹⁷

Such ideas have been developed by feminist theologians who have produced ever more complex accounts of women and religion. In an attempt to 'rediscover' women mystics, scholarship has tended to concentrate on the Middle Ages,¹⁸ or, on aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition, especially in France and Spain.¹⁹ With the exception of early Quakers, English mystics of the early modern period have been far less studied. One reason is that they were rare, possibly because Protestant reformers' abandonment of the monastic life caused the contemplative tradition to die out. Protestantism, however, was 'committed to reading the Bible, to prayer and to reflections about one's own soul which it was perfectly proper to commit to paper'.²⁰ Lead contributed to the genre of spiritual autobiography which continued from the Middle Ages.²¹ As a mystic, Lead recorded her religious experiences as images of inwardness which pictured the divine. As Aaron Hughes has noted, there has been

¹⁵ Demers, *Women as Interpreters*, pp. 72-89.

¹⁶ Catherine Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in D. Hiller and R. Sheets, *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power* (Cincinnati, 1977), p. 410.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 406

¹⁸ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Promise and Protest* (2nd edn, Basingstoke, 1993), p. 97. For studies on medieval mysticism see for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982) and Monica Furlong, *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (London, 1996).

¹⁹ King, *Women and Spirituality*, pp. 130-68. King mentions only two Protestant mystics of the early modern period, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), and the founder of the Quakers, George Fox (1624-1691), King, *Christian Mystics*, pp. 154-165.

²⁰ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: The History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (London, 1995), p. 424.

²¹ Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (London, 1998), p. 154. King, *Women and Spirituality*, p. 101.

a lack of study of the role of the imagination in reflecting upon and visualising the divine. Hughes writes that the imagination is 'responsible for translating the incorporeal divine world into corporeal material images. These images, in turn, represent an integral part of the mystic's experience'.²² If the imagination is responsible for diverse visual activities such as dreaming, visions, and prophecy then Lead certainly falls within this understudied area. Lead's writings thus offer an important and rare insight into the mind of a singular early modern mystic and visionary, and are thus all the more worthy of our attention.

*'The whole Process of a Soul, under such Divine Communications'*²³

Although it is not known when Lead started to write, the first entry in her diary, *A Fountain of Gardens*, is dated April 1670. The diary covered the years 1670 to 1686, and is the fullest record of her progression as a mystic. Lee wrote that 'This Spiritual and Wonderful Diary is here presented Compleat' portraying 'the whole Process of a Soul, under such Divine Communications'.²⁴ Lee later wrote of Lead's ability to describe mystical experiences which, he suggested, 'to write fundamentally and distinctly, would require the Pen of an Angel'.²⁵ In keeping a spiritual record Lead was following a common practice in her and Pordage's circles. Pordage also kept a record of his visions and his spiritual development; *Sophia* was based on his own experiences and consists of twenty-two daily journal entries from 21 June to 10 July and biographical data from 1675.²⁶ Indeed, as a published author since 1654, Pordage may have encouraged such record-keeping among his coterie. Ann Bathurst, for instance, also kept a diary which covered the period from 11 June 1679 to 20 September 1697.²⁷ She too, made the connection between the act of writing and divine inspiration. She wrote, 'if my pen's liquor is to be from Eternity, it cannot be written

²² Aaron Hughes, 'Imagining the Divine: Ghazali on Imagination, Dreams, and Dreaming', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70 (2002), p. 33.

²³ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, (3 vols, London 1696-1701), vol. 3, pt 2, sig. A2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. A2.

²⁵ Francis Lee, *Apoleipomena or Dissertations, Theological, Mathematical, and Physical* (London, 1752), p. xxiv.

²⁶ John Pordage, *Sophia* (Amsterdam, 1699) cited in Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology*, (Minnesota, 2000), p. 66.

²⁷ See Bodleian, Oxford, MSS Rawl. D.1262, D1263 and D1338. Ann Bathurst later joined Lead's Philadelphian Society.

dry'.²⁸ Although she thus drew on divine jurisdiction for her authorisation to write, her diary remained unpublished. Furthermore, members of Pordage's circle were used to exchanging, reading and copying material among themselves. Indeed, Lead wrote the preface for Pordage's *Theologica Mystica* in 1681. The Advertisement in her diary mentioned that she had written 'for Monitions and Encouragements to some few Particular Friends; not thinking of their Publication in the least,' including 'a Book Written in her own Hand, which was lent to an Honourable Lady, that soon after Deceased'.²⁹

Survey of Lead's Works

As this thesis draws consistently from the oeuvre of Lead's works, it is important to outline some of the ideas she expressed in these writings as an introduction to later, more detailed chapters. Because of the extent of Lead's published writings, the following section will outline her works in chronological order to give an insight into the nature of her entry into print. Two publications published in 1680, have, however, been incorrectly ascribed to Lead. The Library of Congress, Washington DC, lists Lead as the author of *A Treatise of a Soul's Union with Christ* by J. L., and the Folger Shakespeare Library credits *The Christian Warfare* to her authorship. I have examined both copies. *A Treatise of a Soul's Union with Christ* could not have been written by Lead, for several reasons. Lead's first publication was consistently advertised as *A Heavenly Cloud* and she did not mention publishing before 1681. Furthermore, its style, language and content differs from Lead's work. *A Treatise of a Soul's Union with Christ* is entirely Christocentric and is concerned not with the Virgin Church but with 'The Apostle taking care of the Church of Ephesus'.³⁰ It was probably by a contemporary of Lead, the mystic John Lougher. Similarly, *The Christian Warfare* by J.L. Theophilus, is a work of biblical exegesis rather than a mystical treatise. Unlike Lead's work, Latin and Hebrew were used in *The Christian Warfare*, and thus it is not consistent with her style.

Lead's first two authentic treatises, *A Heavenly Cloud* and *The Revelation of Revelations*, published in 1681 and 1683 respectively, are particularly important as they were published before Lead went blind and was compelled to rely on others for assistance. The Philadelphians were always keen to emphasise the authenticity of Lead's work, and to

²⁸ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl. D.1262, 24 January 1693 (unpaginated).

²⁹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt 2, sig. A2.

³⁰ J. L., *A Treatise of the Soul's Union with Christ* (London, 1680), titlepage.

deny any interference from themselves or others in altering her texts.³¹ Lee wrote that *A Heavenly Cloud* was 'printed off from her own hand, and never transcribed by him [John Pordage], nor indeed so much as revised as to the prose'.³² Also, the poetry which appears in these two treatises is more likely to have been written by Lead, as they were published before she met Richard Roach, who supplied some poems for her later works.

A Heavenly Cloud documented the subject of mystical death by examining a fourfold process of inward spiritual death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. Each section was illustrated by a poem and the work culminated in the description of a feast. When *The Revelation of Revelations* was reprinted in London in 1701, the edition states that Lead wrote this work first, but published *The Heavenly Cloud now Breaking* as an introduction to it.³³ *The Revelation of Revelations* is a mystical commentary on the Book of Revelation and the hidden mystery of God in the soul. It depicts a sevenfold process of purification and refining of the soul represented by the seven seals, and a sevenfold process of mystical resurrection under the seven thunders, which would eventually lead to paradise or the New Jerusalem state. It was in this work that Wisdom or Sophia was first mentioned as Lead's guide.³⁴

After publishing two works privately in the early 1680s, eleven years elapsed before her third work, *The Enochian Walks With God*, was published. This was followed in quick succession by all her subsequent works, making the 1690s her most prolific decade of publication.³⁵ The 1690s was indeed a period of great activity for Lead and the Philadelphian Society, for as discussed in the previous chapter, the association with Lee and Roach greatly assisted Lead's literary output. We should recall, however, that the publication of Lead's works after 1694 was funded from Germany, under the auspices of Baron von Knyphausen, and Lead's works were being published and circulated almost simultaneously in Germany, the Netherlands, and England. In 1695, *The Laws of Paradise* and *The Wonders of God's*

³¹ See Chapter One, *The Philadelphians' Prophetess* for an examination of the extent of collaboration between Lead and her male counterparts.

³² Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 203.

³³ *The Revelation of Revelations* was also reprinted in London in 1804, and in Glasgow in 1884.

³⁴ See Chapter Seven, *Mystical Marriage*, which examines Lead's poem about Sophia from *Revelation of Revelations*, pp. 55-56.

³⁵ See Chapter One, *The Philadelphians' Prophetess*, for an explanation of some of the reasons behind this, including her connection with Francis Lee, her editor and amanuensis from 1694.

Creation were published, followed by the first volume of her spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens*, in the following year. We are told, however, that it was Lee 'at whose expense principally the whole of [Jane Lead's] valuable works were published, and it was him who brought forth her diary in three volumes, and entitled it *A Fountain of Gardens*'.³⁶ Other publications in 1696 included Lead's autobiography 'Lebenslauff der Autorin' which appears to be extant only in German. It was no coincidence, however, that *The Tree of Faith* and *The Ark of Faith* were published in the same year as *A Fountain of Gardens*, as Lead's papers had been gathered together for the compilation of her diary, and these companion treatises can be read as a continuation of her diary.³⁷

Publications specifically addressed to the Philadelphian Society also began in 1696, and included *A Message to the Philadelphian Society*, containing 'A Second Message to the Philadelphian Society'. In 1697, Lee published the monthly periodical, *Theosophical Transactions*, and Lead's treatise, *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel Message*. *The Messenger of an Universal Peace: Or a Third Message to the Philadelphian Society* followed in 1698. In 1699 two more treatises by Lead were published, *The Signs of the Times* and *The Ascent to the Mount of Vision*, and *The Wars of David* followed in 1700. The third and final volume of *A Fountain of Gardens* was published in 1701, and in 1702, Lee also published Lead's treatise, *A Living Funeral Testimony*.

It is important to note, however, that the dates of publication were not always the dates of composition. As we have noted above, Lead's spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens*, was published between 1696 and 1701 as three volumes, with the third volume in two parts. Volume 1, however, included entries which dated from April 1670 to 28 December 1676. Volume 2 covered one year from 1 January to 30 December 1677. The entries for volume 3, part 1, were dated 1 January 1678 to 24 December 1678; and part 2 covered 1 January 1679 to 2 August 1686. The entries are usually one or two pages in length, though some entries can be four or five pages long. Entries are often recorded on consecutive days but others have many days or months in between.

The publication of Lead's diary was unusual because of its considerable length and content. Lead recorded her real and imaginary life, a complex web of philosophical and psychological concepts; the content varies from the reasons why she could not accept her brother's financial offer, to the alchemical rebirth of the soul, and visions of the Virgin

³⁶ Jane Lead, *The Wars of David*, (London, 1700, reprinted 1816), p. 28.

³⁷ The first diary entry for the *Tree of Faith* commences in 1686.

Wisdom, Sophia.³⁸ Moreover, the diary described much more than Lead's own spiritual progress. By including conversations, arguments, and the interpretation of her visions and dreams, it also provided an insight into her thoughts. Indeed, Roach commented that Lead's diary could not be understood in isolation from her other works.³⁹

Other treatises assembled from earlier manuscript sources include *The Tree of Faith* and *The Ark of Faith* (1696). These companion treatises provide a sense of a secret unfolding and a renewed and refreshed vision, which was an attempt by Lead to reaffirm the Christian message of redemption. They record Lead's visions from 1687 until 20 February 1696, and consist of recollections of her spiritual travels. *The Ark of Faith* includes four diary entries - the first dated 21 February 1687, and three others, nine years later, on the 18, 19 and 20 February 1696. This had not been a straightforward process as Lead wrote, 'many other of my papers had been lost'.⁴⁰ By 1696, she had reached seventy-two years of age and was concerned about her memory, as she wrote, 'I am not able to recall what either went before, or followed after it'.⁴¹ Yet, she had invested much of her time in consideration of the Ark, 'For little more than a Year after that, I had this free Communication with my Lord concerning it'.⁴² However, despite problems she associated with her age, she wrote, 'as the Natural Term of my Years seems to be expir'd in order hereto, again reminded of some former Prophecies, that were altogether by me forgotten'.⁴³ So, she suggested it was by divine assistance that she was able to overcome the problems she incurred when preparing her work for publication. She wrote, 'the Spirit of Wisdom hath now presented them afresh to me, telling me that they were in this Day to be looked into'.⁴⁴ With the time right for publication she wrote, 'the same Divine Spirit that was present with me, and ready to dictate what was requisite by me to be known, hath now (after many Years) revealed, and brought

³⁸ Lead's brother's financial offer is noted in Chapter One; see Chapter Three for a discussion about the alchemical rebirth of the soul; Chapter Eight examines Lead's visions of the Virgin Wisdom, Sophia.

³⁹ Lambeth Palace Library, London, MS142/141, 'Letter by Richard Roach'.

⁴⁰ Jane Lead, *The Tree of Faith* (London, 1696), p. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

again to my Internal Sight, this Ark of Faith, in the ensuing manner; which I am commanded to declare and publish, for the Information and Encouragement of all those that seek to be redeemed from the Earth'.⁴⁵

There is a clear distinction, however, between the publications which were actually assembled out of earlier manuscript sources, and other publications, such as those directed towards the Philadelphian Society from 1696 onwards. *A Message to the Philadelphian Society* was a more immediate vision concerning Protestant churches that were refused entry on the Day of Judgement.⁴⁶ The treatise contained 'A Second Message to the Philadelphian Society' which recorded Lead's revelations on 1 and 6 January 1696. In it, she described the 'New Modelled Virgin Church which has been so long prophesied of'.⁴⁷ Two years later, in *A Third Message to the Philadelphian Society*, she highlighted the distinguishing characteristics of the Virgin Church, or true Philadelphian church which would be visible at the end times. *The Wars of David* (1700) is a compilation, and the most eclectic of all Lead's publications. It contains many extracts of her previous work, including several diary entries and poetry originally published in the first volume of *A Fountain of Gardens*. The 'Publisher's Address' by Lee contains some biographical information about Lead, 'Sixty Propositions of the Philadelphian Society', and Thomas Bromley's 'Divine Explication on the Seven Nations' is also included.⁴⁸

Nature of Lead's 'Authorship'

As we have discussed above, there was a marked difference in Lead's publishing practices in the 1680s and 1690s. The image of the woman author in a room of her own, is inappropriate for Lead and for many, but not all, of her writings. Like many women writers of the seventeenth century, Lead used both male *and* divine authority to validate her authorship. For example, prefatory material by a male author could be appended to the works of a female author as an attempt to add 'credence to their work'.⁴⁹ Lead had such male

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶ These included the Church of England, Presbyterians, Independents or Congregationalists, Baptists, Fifth Monarchists and another unnamed group, in Jane Lead, *A Message to the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1696), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Lead, *Message to the Philadelphian Society*, p. 85.

⁴⁸ Lead, *Wars of David*, pp. 18-29

⁴⁹ Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, pp. 57-60.

endorsements in the form of editorials by Lee, poems by Richard Roach, and letters of testimony, such as those by John Pordage and Thomas Bromley, appended to *A Fountain of Gardens*.⁵⁰ It was a way of deflecting worldly criticism and, at the same time, investing greater powers of authority in her writing. She also drew upon divine authority as a way of strengthening her position as a writer. It was thus not Lead writing; she claimed instead, 'The Hand of Love and Power [Christ] ... did guide me to record it, in Writing'.⁵¹ Lead, in common with many of her female contemporaries, saw herself as a subordinate author, a medium through which God's will could be disseminated. In *The Enochian Walks with God* Lead wrote, 'For I wrote here from no other ground than what the spirit of CHRIST, in the glass of Wisdom, hath presented to mine inward eye, which pierceth into the deep of God's mind'.⁵² She drew upon a Christly mandate when she wrote:

Christ, the bright Banner of Glory stood before me, and said Keep in Record the Journal of the new and raised Life, according to the Progression thou art going on in ... Forbear not writing ... Seeing it hath pleased the Lord to over-rule my Resolution ... I shall no longer be backward to reveal what is of, great weight and importance.⁵³

Again in the Epistle of *Revelation of Revelations* she noted a similar idea:

then I could hear and distinctly know the Voice of his Mouth, which came as a soft melting Fire-breath, and said, Record what since October 1679 hath been seen, heard, tasted and felt and shun not to declare it, for it hath a peculiar service on God's behalf to do, though at present hid from thee.⁵⁴

So, with divine authorisation she moved from writing to publishing. In *The Enochian Walks with God* she declared with increasing boldness, 'Yet, it is the Truth, that I have received from a good Hand; therefore I am bold to publish it'.⁵⁵ Her visionary experiences of the divine, she wrote, were 'not for my private use, Joy and consolation alone: But for

⁵⁰ The poem 'Solomon's Porch' is by Onesimus, or Richard Roach, and the Editor's Address to the Reader in *A Fountain of Gardens* is thirty-four pages in length written by Timotheus, known to be Lee. Pordage and Bromley were both dead when *A Fountain of Gardens* was published - Pordage died in 1681, and Bromley's death occurred on 13 April 1691.

⁵¹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 50.

⁵² Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God* (London, 1694), p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, sig. A3v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

those, who have been earnest seekers, and hard persuers for the Manifestation of his [God's] Kingdom'.⁵⁶ A note appended to the same publication was concerned that Lead's authorship should be distinguished and identifiable and issued a warning which preceded a list of her published books:

This Book is to be Sold by the Author, Jane Lead, living at the Lady Mico's Colledge, right against Stepney Church; and at her Daughters Barbary Walton, at Mr Mileman's in New Street, at the end of Dean Street, right against the 3 Tuns. And if any one be dissatisfied in any Point handled in this Book, the Author is ready to give answer thereunto, while she is yet Living.⁵⁷

A contemporary of Lead's, Henry Dodwell, a theologian and friend of Francis Lee, rose to this challenge. As we shall see, publishing proved to be a different matter to writing and exchanging material amongst Lead's group. For when Lead entered the public sphere of print, it was inherently controversial, especially for a woman. In this next section, we shall examine how Lead's published writing raised questions about the authenticity of her authorship.

Henry Dodwell addressed several letters to Lee, and not to Lead, about the nature of her authorship. Dodwell insinuated that Lead's authorship was the result of being manipulated by someone else; he was clearly questioning how a woman could have such knowledge and be the author of such material. Lee, however, went to some pains to defend the authenticity of her writing. Lee did concede that Pordage had transcribed her writing 'for his own private use' but stressed that he had copied her grammatical errors and left spaces for the words he could not read, some of which were 'filled up by her own hand'.⁵⁸ Lee asked Dodwell to compare *The Heavenly Cloud now Breaking*, which had been written in her own hand, and *A Fountain of Gardens* which had been transcribed by Pordage. He assured Dodwell that he would then see that the style was the same in both works and realise that they both belonged to Lead. Dodwell wrote sceptically in a letter dated 1698, 'I know not how your mother-in-law is qualified to write the style in which her books are penned. But this I have observed, that there are many things ingredient in that style, which are quite out of the way of the education, or conversation, or even reading of women'.⁵⁹ He continued:

⁵⁶ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 198.

⁵⁷ Lead, *Enochian Walks*, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 202.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

It consists of Latin terms, of terms of art, of the old Platonic mystical divinity, of all the MODERN enthusiasts of JACOB BEHME, of the judicial astrologers, of the magic oracles, of all the alchymists ... I very much doubt whether she would be able to give an account of the terms used in the writings which go under her name, if she were critically examined concerning them.⁶⁰

Although Dodwell thought Lead's writings were 'not to be altogether despised,' and did not complain about her incursion into print per se, he did have serious doubts about the capacity of a woman to use the language and ideas that she did. Yet, Lee contended that he 'had daily proofs of her capacity to write in such a style',⁶¹ and that he 'obtained to have the sight of all her writings which consisted for the most part of loose papers, like sibylline leaves, occasionally penned for her own private memory and recollection, unless what had thence been transcribed by an ancient friend of hers'.⁶² Lead certainly wrote regularly and profusely, but as Dodwell questioned, exactly what Lead's authorship consisted of, and how far she had control over her publications is less clear. Lee and Roach certainly sorted her writings into some coherent order for publication.

Lead's writings also had a powerful influence on some mystics abroad, where they brought about her acquaintanceship and correspondence with many 'who had a greater understanding in spiritual and mystical things than others'.⁶³ Assisted by Lee, Lead built up a pan-European epistolary network. As Margaret Ezell has stressed, 'Through manuscript circulation and epistolary exchange, channels did exist for women to cultivate their intellectual and literary interests'.⁶⁴ This method also provided women with the opportunity of readership outside their own families, without losing control over their productions as they would in print.⁶⁵ Lead thus gained a growing reputation through her writings and publications which were read by German and other European pietist groups. Hillel Schwartz has noted

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 202-03.

⁶² The 'ancient friend' being John Pordage.

⁶³ MSS collection 'Apparatus ad historian ecclesiae novam', I, p. 16, cited in Thune, *Bebmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 81.

⁶⁴ Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, 1987), p. 83.

⁶⁵ See James Daybell (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Writing, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke, 2001).

that, 'By 1697, Philadelphian circles had gathered in Holland, Germany and Switzerland' obtaining links between Lead's Philadelphian Society in London. The term 'Philadelphian' was widely used within German pietism and was, as Geoffrey Rowell pointed out, 'largely as a result of the circulation of German translations of the works of the Philadelphian Society. The attraction of these works, lay, as one might expect, in their esoteric revelations and particularly in the speculations of the Philadelphians' prophetess, Jane Lead'.⁶⁶

Lead's works were read by European pietists including Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), Pierre Poiret (1646-1709), Johann Gichtel (1638-1710) and followers of Antionette Bourignon.⁶⁷ Indeed, Roach wrote that after Lead's death her writings were 'now overlook'd by the wise of the world & almost unknown in her own Country; [they are] high valued in others & Testified to by Numbers of all ranks and Quality as to their Blessed & Powerful operation upon their Souls in such manner as no Product of these Latter Ages has been'.⁶⁸ In the early seventeenth century, the translations of Boehme were re-worked and re-introduced into Europe.⁶⁹ In the latter end of the seventeenth century, Lead's publications, heavily influenced by Behmenism, in turn were published by subvention and by translation from English into other European languages, which was very rare.

Several works by Lead were reprinted during her lifetime, including a 1701 edition of *Revelation of Revelations*, which included several extra features, and was demanded, we are told, because of the rarity and high price of the 1683 edition.⁷⁰ Lee also published *A Living Funeral Testimony* and *The First Resurrection in Christ* in 1702 and 1704 respectively. Other works may have been lost or survive only in translation. The University of Amsterdam, for example, has eleven works by Lead in German. Lee's, *Der Seelig und aber Seeligen* (The Most Blessed Jane Lead's Last Hours of Life) described in the DNB as being no longer

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Rowell, 'The Marquis de Marsay: A Quietist in Philadelphia', *Church History*, 14 (1972), p. 64.

⁶⁷ Antionette Bourignon (1616-80). Bourignonism survived in Scotland until about 1720.

⁶⁸ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D833, fol. 56r.

⁶⁹ F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1973), p. 211. Stoeffler located many European Philadelphian Societies which were modelled on Lead's London group.

⁷⁰ Lead's publication *Revelation of Revelations* included an advertisement to the reader, the author's preface to the second edition, forty propositions to assist in understanding the text, and a twenty-one page appendix.

in existence, is available as a retranslation in English in the Dr Williams' Library, London.⁷¹ Lead's German editions were published at the same time as Pordage's works. They were translated by Loth Fischer of Rotterdam and published in German in Amsterdam, by Heinrich Wetstein. Lee was probably instrumental in organising this connection, as he arranged for the publication of his own work in this way - a detail overlooked by scholars.

Lead's voluminous works were not, therefore independent utterances, they were clearly enmeshed in, and facilitated by, a network of male supporters who financially underwrote her. That she became such a prolific author was by virtue of the marshalling of loyal followers throughout her publishing years. Her writing was more a result of male collaboration and her international reputation came out of sponsored translation. Female agency was possible for Lead when she pushed forward into the public sphere of print, because she used not just divine validation, but also the testimony of *men*, and *men of quality*. Also, the stamp of P. J. De Louthembourg appeared on several of Lead's works which suggests that her works were purchased by a limited number of people.⁷² As we have seen, Lee and Roach undoubtedly provided an invaluable source of literary help, from editing to organising her works for publication.

A Prophet in Grub Street?

This account of Lead's authorship raises fundamental questions about the most extensive and recent discussion of Lead's writings in Paula McDowell's, *Women of Grub Street*. Lead's voluminous works have caused McDowell to assimilate her to the rise of the independent author who had 'unprecedented female political involvement through print'.⁷³ McDowell argues that a rapid expansion of the English press in the 1640s and the growth in literacy in the seventeenth century saw the emergence of women as independent authors. McDowell firmly places Lead as a denizen of 'Grub Street', redefining the term 'Grub Street' for her study as a 'rhetorical tool' and 'a form of social action'. She considers 'Grub Street' as a tool used to attack, marginalise, and diminish the threat of a new, more pluralistic gender and class inclusive literary marketplace in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

⁷¹ Dr Williams' Library, London, MS Walton C.5.30, Francis Lee, 'Last Hours of Jane Lead'.

⁷² P. J. De Louthembourg is stamped across *A Fountain of Gardens* (1696), *The Enochian Walks with God* (1694), and *The Signs of the Times* (1699)

⁷³ Paula McDowell, *Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford, 1998), p. 5.

centuries.⁷⁴ The contemporary meaning of 'Grub Street', however, still has a connotation of literary hackwork. This derogatory meaning has survived because elite Augustan scholars such as Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and modern scholars have tended to use 'Grub Street' as a noun.

Lead was not engaged in the literary marketplace in the manner of Quakers or Fifth Monarchists. Lead was not overtly political in her writing and she did not direct her anger at positions of authority using scriptural sources as her basis. Yet, McDowell states that, Lead's spiritual convictions enabled herself and some "dispicable, poor, and indigent" men and women like her to reject the passive roles assigned to them by their society and to engage in purposeful activity on behalf of a revolution they believed they would finally win'.⁷⁵ She argues that Lead 'saw contemporary religious controversy as a summoning to public political activity',⁷⁶ and that 'Lead published several thousand pages of writing consciously aimed at transforming personal and political history in the public sphere'.⁷⁷ McDowell thus conflates religion as a form of social protest with a Habermasian and secular notion of politics, arguing that the rise of the independent female author has more to do with political activism.⁷⁸ Yet, Lead's aim, however, was to seek a personal union with God which she expressed in terms of mystical language. As we shall see, Lead's religious writings simply do not fit into this notion of political activism.

As we shall discover, Lead's venture into the public sphere was non-confrontational and her use of religious expression does not conform to secular and modern notions of the 'political'. Lead did not intentionally wish to transform personal and political history, she merely recorded God's truth by following His will, and she mapped out her personal spiritual journey, as did many other religious men and women in keeping with the convention of the time. She was anxious *not* to challenge state or political authority. For example, her Philadelphian Society applied for a licence to hold public meetings under the Toleration Act, thus adhering to the laws of the land. Their desire to transcend rather than challenge the

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 10. McDowell's romanticised use of the term 'hack' as a rhetorical tool rather than a noun is not convincing.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 179.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-11.

status quo was unreservedly declared: 'this Society of Philadelphians are not for turning the World upside down, as some have Represented 'em: they are not Enemies to the Civil or Ecclesiastical Rights of Any ... and had rather chuse to Acquiesce under some burthensome Impositions, than to run the Risque of disturbing the Peace and Rest of the Publick, either as to Church or State'.⁷⁹ Lead was apolitical in the sense that she was not involved in secular politics per se.

Yet, McDowell states that publishing for women was not without its dangers as 'women in all three sections of this book were arrested for their involvement in the production and circulation of political ideas through print' and that the criminal justice system attested to their being viewed as 'scandalous and reflecting', 'low indigent', 'seditious', 'fanatick' and 'crackbrained'.⁸⁰ How disappointing then for McDowell, that Lead does not fit into this picture of impolite, radical or anarchical women who were imprisoned or incarcerated in mental institutions. Lead was never arrested and the most abusive term directed against her was that of being an 'enthusiast', which did not result in any further allegations or prosecutions being made. Her contemporary, Henry Dodwell was her fiercest critic and suspicious of her authorship though he also considered her writing 'not to be altogether despised'.⁸¹

McDowell focuses on a certain period in Lead's lifetime when, after the death of her merchant husband, William Leade, she was left financially impoverished. It suits McDowell's purpose to take this snapshot of Lead's life as a destitute widow and she creates a picture of her as a struggling plebeian female author. However, for Lead this was not always the case, and McDowell's notion of Lead as a 'less privileged' woman is rather romantic and misleading.⁸² Lead was born into a wealthy gentry family in Norfolk. Her mother was the daughter of Sir James Calthorpe and her father was a Justice of the Peace who served on the prestigious Court of Quarter Sessions. Thus, she could hardly be described as 'plebeian'. When she did fall on hard times financially, after her husband died, her brother offered to assist her 'where all things should be provided'.⁸³ Clearly she came

⁷⁹ *State of the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), p. 9.

⁸⁰ McDowell, *Women of Grub Street*, p. 11.

⁸¹ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 192.

⁸² McDowell, *Women of Grub Street*, p. 19.

⁸³ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 328.

from a gentry background and moved within educated circles throughout her lifetime.⁸⁴ McDowell excluded Astell, and Cavendish from her study, because they were not struggling plebeian authors, yet, she curiously includes Lead, wrongly identifying her, in my opinion, as a 'less privileged' woman.⁸⁵

Apart from her first two publications *A Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, and *The Revelation of Revelations*, which Lead wrote and published privately in 1681 and 1683 respectively (she could not have been that financially impoverished!), the publication of her subsequent voluminous writings was as a result of collaboration with men of education. Lead's survival as a female author was dependent upon others. For example, her subsequent works were published in High and Low Dutch, and German, and were financed by a German benefactor, who also paid the rent on her house in London. McDowell thus incorrectly subsumes Lead within a strand of plebian political radicals and commercialism, instead of highlighting the (male) support she gained from the Philadelphian Society. Lead was clearly not the independent author McDowell portrays her to be. Lead's position was entirely different to that of Elinor James, who McDowell upholds as an entrepreneur in the print trade. Lead was elderly and blind by the time the majority of her works were published. How many times would *she* have visited the print shop to oversee her work, as Elinor James is reputed to have done?

Far from being a literary hack in Grub Street, Lead was a pensioned prophetess surrounded by a coterie of well-educated men and women who also financially underwrote her. The complexity of gender relations clearly played an important part in the relationship between authorship and the book trades. Men, as well as women, played an important, if not crucial role as aides, editors and publishers, often in complementary and supportive ways which enabled women to gain access into the world of print. This collaborative relationship between men and women is underplayed by McDowell, and Lead's works should be set in a wider European context as she certainly influenced Philadelphian circles abroad. Her publications were not only confined to London - people were certainly reading them in the Netherlands and Germany, and so there were a network of people producing Lead's works abroad. Far from being a denizen of 'Grub Street', Lead's important theosophical works were written by an intelligent, literate and dignified woman who felt encouraged by God to

⁸⁴ The major figure in Jane Lead's life at the time of her widowhood in 1670 was Dr John Pordage, an ejected Church of England minister. Lead eventually joined his household as his 'spiritual mate'.

⁸⁵ McDowell, *Women of Grub Street*, p. 19.

publish her mystical and introspective experiences as a guide to others. She showed how piety and devotion could lead to an important, developing and eternal relationship with God. McDowell fails to understand Lead's theological position, misrepresents her genealogy, and misconstrues her. Lead was not only privileged in her upbringing, but also with the continued support she gained from her family and friends, she was encouraged to write by her loyal followers, including (male) physicians, theologians and practising clergymen. As I will show in the next chapter, Lead was far more interested, however, in the symbolism of gold than she was in the search for cash.

CHAPTER THREE - Searching for GO(L)D: Spiritual Alchemy

The following three chapters will examine how Lead imagined and represented purification, redemption and salvation and her role in these processes. This chapter will focus on how Lead used alchemical symbolism as a way of describing the purification and illumination of the soul. It is important to remember, however, that it is almost impossible to separate her use of alchemical symbolism from the other occult sciences, such as magic and numerology. Indeed, to try to do so would obscure the complicated nature of Lead's writing. As we shall discover, she strategically placed words to offer multi-meanings, drawing on a rich tapestry of tradition involving her idiomatic use of symbols and figurative language from a particular strand of alchemical thought.

It is only recently that scholars, such as Jayne Archer, have observed that 'the early modern housewife was an important producer and consumer of chymical literature and knowledge in early modern England'.¹ Scholarly enquiry has generally ignored the larger subject of women and alchemy, which has often been seen as a preserve of male activity. Archer, however, has shown that many women writers did use alchemical ideas and vocabulary. For example, Mary Astell was familiar with alchemical terms and used them in her poem 'Awake my Lute',² as did Lucy Hastings in her poem on the death of her son.³ Likewise, Katherine Philips was familiar with alchemical language, and wrote 'Epitaph On her Son', which contains the following reference to alchemy, 'So the subtle alchemist/ Can't with Hermes' seal resist/ The powerful spirit's subtler flight'.⁴

Scholars have overlooked many of Lead's occult sources and they have failed to recognise her frequent use of alchemical imagery. Catherine Smith has concentrated on Lead's role as a mystic and visionary within a discourse of feminism, but failed to give a

¹ Jayne Archer, 'Women and Alchemy in Early Modern England', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999), pp. i-lxxvii.

² Germaine Greer and others, (eds), *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse* (London, 1998), p. 340, lines 100-03.

³ Lucy Hastings, 'Lachrymae Musarum' in Greer, *Kissing the Rod*, lines 7-16, pp. 9-10. Lucy Hutchinson recorded that her mother, wife of Sir Allen Apsley, lieutenant-governor of the Tower, paid for experiments conducted by Sir Walter Raleigh, a practitioner of Paracelsian medicine, whilst he was imprisoned in the Tower, in Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 105.

⁴ J. R. Tutin (ed.), *Katherine Philips, The Matchless Orinda: Selected Poems* (Hull, 1904), p. 23. (My thanks to Gweno Williams for this reference).

more nuanced understanding of other influences in her writings.⁵ Whilst scholars such as Joanna Sperle have stressed Lead's Christian orthodoxy, playing down her unorthodox Behmenist source, others such as Brian Gibbons and Arthur Versluis identify only John Pordage and Edmund Brice as spiritual alchemists in Lead's circle.⁶ Indeed, while Gibbons and Versluis have acknowledged Lead's Behmenist influences, they have not considered her use of alchemical imagery.⁷

When she started writing in 1670 Lead's knowledge of an alchemical vocabulary was already considerable.⁸ Lead almost certainly derived her alchemical knowledge and its idiomatic application from John Pordage and his associates and from the works of Jacob Boehme. In 1683 Lead wrote the preface to Pordage's *Theologica Mystica*. In this work Pordage declared his interest in nature, and provided a key to understanding and uncovering the hidden truths of divinity:

When the *Love-fire-tincture* enters into the *dark-fire-forms*, and comes to penetrate the burning *Sulphur*, poisonous *Mercurie* and *Salt-Nitre* of the *Fire-spirit*, and to change them into its own Nature, there ariseth such triumphing Joy, charming Pleasure, ravishing Extasie and Exultation, as none can imagine but those that have felt them This *Love-fire-Tincture* (as *Jacob Behme*) declares proceeds from the

⁵ Catherine Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in D. Hiller and R. Sheets, *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power* (Cincinnati, 1977), pp. 398-408.

⁶ Joanna Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel: A Biography of Jane Ward Lead', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Kent State University, 1985), p. 99. B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 167-68. Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany, 1999), p. 243.

⁷ Brice translated and probably wrote Ali Puli's alchemical treatise, *Centrum Naturae Concentratum* (London, 1696), and Pordage's work was suffused with alchemical imagery, see Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 75, and Versluis, *Wisdom's Children*, pp. 242-43.

⁸ In the first volume of her spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens, Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure* (London, 1696), Lead used the words *gold* or *golden* 111 times and *stone* 96 times; many of these usages can be interpreted as alchemical references. On 30 April 1675, Lead wrote, 'an earthen Pot set upon a soft Fire, in which was a Liquor of melted Gold, boiling with scum on it, which was an Idea of my present State ... this gentle Fire, that will not crack the Vessel, but Refine the Golden Matter in it' (p. 81). On 24 September 1676 she wrote, 'ye have not wrought in the Furnace, where this Golden Wedge is to be melted down, to run into every part of your Body' (p. 364).

Union of the Fire and Light, and it is the joy and end of *Eternal Nature*.⁹

Pordage described the transmutation of elements from a Behmenist understanding of nature. Here we are not looking at Pordage hunched over an alembic; instead his imagery represented a process of spiritual regeneration. Pordage also had connections with Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), whose works were also an important source of occult information. Ashmole was an early member of the Royal Society of London, yet he remained a staunch believer in astrology, alchemy, and magic.¹⁰ He considered Pordage to be a fellow initiate and became his patron in Bradfield. Ashmole collected and published over thirty alchemical documents in *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. He also gave Pordage a copy of his translation of Arthur Dee's *Fascilus chemicus* in 1650.¹¹ It is thus likely that Lead had access to these and other alchemical texts belonging to Pordage and his associates. In addition to Brice and Pordage, Lead probably knew of Thomas Bromley's treatise, *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* (1655) which also discussed alchemy and spiritual transmutation.¹²

Alchemy, however, had its critics. Joan Baptista van Helmont (1580-1644) vehemently attacked the mystical aspects of alchemy as 'heathenish, and metaphorical, but not natural or true'.¹³ By the end of the seventeenth century there was a growing sense of hostility towards alchemy, and until recently interest in the subject was thought to have declined in intellectual respectability after 1660.¹⁴ Lawrence Principe, however, has shown the extent to which Robert Boyle was interested in spiritual, textual and experimental

⁹ John Pordage, *Theologica Mystica, or the Mystic Divinitie of the Aeternal Invisibles* (London, 1683), pp. 146-47.

¹⁰ Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, (London, 1967, reprint of 1652), pp. xxvi-xxxvii.

¹¹ J. Andrew Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics in England 1649-1665', *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), p. 40.

¹² Thomas Bromley, *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* (London, 1655) was included in Jane Lead, *Wars of David* (London, 1700). See Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, pp. 116-17; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1989), p. 190; Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, p. 51 and pp. 66-67.

¹³ J. B. van Helmont, *Oriatrike or Physick Refined* (London, 1662), p. 323.

¹⁴ J. Stanton Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Kentucky, 1996), pp. 260-93; A. E. Waite (ed.), *Collectana Chemica: Being Certain Select Treatises on Alchemy and Hermetic Medicine* (Washington, 1991).

alchemy.¹⁵ Principe has overturned the argument by Debus and Multhauf who saw Boyle's *The Sceptical Chymist* pointing to 'a new direction to the science by demolishing the arguments of the alchemists and establishing chemistry as one of the firm experimental pillars of the new mechanical philosophy'.¹⁶

A significant number of people, however, were interested in alchemy at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁷ In fact, as J. Andrew Mendelsohn has noted, even within royal circles 'After 1660, far from being rejected, alchemy found a new home at court'.¹⁸ Indeed, Charles II sanctioned alchemy within his royal circle by employing alchemist Nicaise Le Febure in his laboratory.¹⁹ Robert Plot, former secretary to the Royal Society, was appointed first professor of chemistry at Oxford and founded 'a new Colledge' in the 'Hermeticke' and 'Paracelsian traditions'.²⁰ The discovery of Isaac Newton's deep interest in alchemy, has caused historians to reconsider the cultural and intellectual climate of that period by reassessing the influence of Renaissance occult thought up to the end of the seventeenth century and beyond.²¹ As Charles Webster has written, 'authors like Paracelsus, authors

¹⁵ Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 138-213.

¹⁶ Allen G. Debus and Robert Multhauf, *Alchemy and Chemistry in the Seventeenth Century* (Los Angeles, 1966), p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261. John Milton, John Donne, Sir Philip Sidney and his sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, and Henry and Thomas Vaughan were among many others consciously expressing spiritual truths in alchemical symbolism. See Introduction to Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. xv-xxii. For an interpretation of the occult sciences employed by Giordano Bruno, see Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago and London, 1964). For criticism of Yates, see Robert S. Westman and J. E. McGuire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution* (Los Angeles, 1977).

¹⁸ Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics', p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ R. T. Gunther (ed.), *Early Science in Oxford* (15 vols, Oxford, 1920-1967), vol. 12, pp. 411-13. Plot's selling point was that the Philosopher's Stone would provide the king with money to circumvent parliament, Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics', p. 74.

²¹ Newton possessed a copy of Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* which was heavily annotated, see Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton: Magic and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 64. For studies on Newton's interest in alchemy see, B. J. T. Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy or 'The Hunting of the Greene Lyon'* (Cambridge, 1975); Richard S. Westfall, 'Newton and Alchemy', in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*

belonging to the tradition of Neoplatonism or hermeticism, remained an integral part of the intellectual resources of the educated elite into the late seventeenth century'.²² Mendelsohn has also noted that 'Between 1650 and 1680, more alchemical books were published in England than before or since'.²³ It is perhaps not surprising then, given the influence of Pordage and his followers, plus the availability of texts, that Lead was able to develop sophisticated alchemical images which became an integral part of her belief system.

Although there is no direct evidence that Lead had access to the works of Robert Fludd (1574-1637), it is quite possible that she would have been aware of his ideas through her associates. For the mystical alchemist Fludd, 'the real meaning of chemistry was based upon the divine and mystical chemical separation which resulted in the created universe'.²⁴ The work of Fludd 'had been taken quite seriously in the second quarter of the seventeenth century and it had resulted in a major confrontation between the supporters of the mystical neo-Platonic universe and representatives of what we would call a more modern outlook'.²⁵ There remained an important and influential set of beliefs, which undoubtedly convinced Lead, that alchemy provided not only the key to medicine, but also to the divine secrets of the universe.²⁶

One important aspect of alchemy was colour. Alchemists used colour to differentiate

(Cambridge, 1984), pp. 315-35, and B. J. T. Dobbs, 'Newton's *Commentary on the Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus: Its Scientific and Theological Significance', in I. Merkel and A. Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1988), pp. 182-92.

²² Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton*, p. 3. The Hermetic tradition emerged in the fifteenth century with the translation by the Florentine circle of Marsilio Ficino of Neo-Platonic texts, including the 'Corpus Hermeticum', attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus. *Fama fraternitatis* (1614) and *Confessio fraternitatis* (1615), two Rosicrucian Manifestos, 'spread throughout Europe with extraordinary speed and effectiveness during the second decade of the seventeenth century', Karin Johannisson, 'Magic, Science, and Institutionalization in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Merkel and Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, p. 254.

²³ Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics', p. 72. Charles Webster also states 'The tide of translations of Paracelsian and alchemical works which began in the 1650s continued uninterrupted after the Restoration', see Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton*, p. 64. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (Middlesex, 1971), p. 270.

²⁴ Debus and Multhauf, *Alchemy and Chemistry*, p. 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ Allen Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London, 1965), pp. 13-15.

the *opus alchymicum*, or circular work of nature, by identifying various stages in alchemical processes.²⁷ Up until the sixteenth century the opus was divided into four main stages represented by black (*nigredo*), white (*albedo*), yellow (*citrinitas*) and red (*rubedo*), which were linked to four main elements and alchemical processes.²⁸ After blackness (*nigredo*), many colours were said to appear, like the colours of the rainbow, a stage which was known as the *cauda pavonis* or 'peacock's tail'. This stage heralded the coming of the *albedo* where all the colours merge into white.²⁹ However, though the four main ones listed above formed the basis of many alchemical descriptions, sometimes without *citrinitas*, there was no consensus of opinion about colours. Lead would have certainly derived much of her alchemical knowledge from a tradition characterised by its shifting symbolism. George Ripley emphasised the importance of colour change in the alchemical procedure:

But hyt hath Names I say to the infynte,
For after each thyng that Blacke ys to syght;
Namyd hyt ys tyll the tyme that hyt wex Whyte,
For after blacknesse when ty wexeth bryght,
Then hath hyt name of more delyght:
After Whyte thyngs, the Red after the same,
Rule of Red thyngs, doth take hys name.³⁰

Thomas Norton wrote of the significance of colours in alchemical processes, 'In our suttil warke of Alkimy/ Shall be all Colours that hath beene seen with Eye: An hundreth Colours in certeyne'.³¹ Indeed, colours added to the complexity of the process, 'Whie in our warke so many Colours be: Therefore it causeth in this *Arte* great doubt'.³²

Colours also symbolised the essence of all beings combined with mercury, the central symbol in alchemy, known as the universal agent of transmutation. Boehme, for example, made an analogy between colours and aspects of divinity: red represented the Father in the

²⁷ Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1994), pp. 55-63.

²⁸ Black symbolised dissolution and earth, white denoted reduction and water, yellow represented air, and red signified fire.

²⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 45.

³⁰ George Ripley, *A Compound of Alchymy*, sig. T3v, in Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 133.

³¹ Thomas Norton, *The Ordinall of Alchimy*, sig. K, in Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 57.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

brilliance of fire; green denoted life; yellow depicted the Son, and white suggested the brilliance of God's majesty as a quintessence.³³ Boehme, Pordage and Lead were convinced that colours had a special significance in the alchemical stages which demonstrated a spiritual transformation by representing a connection to aspects of life.³⁴ As will be discussed below, colour figured prominently in Lead's use of alchemical language as it signified various stages in the process of purification of the soul.

Vision of the Glassy Globe

Lead's vision of the 'Glassy Globe' is a dramatic example of how alchemical colour imagery structured her visionary insight, as it is thoroughly imbued with the language and imagery of alchemical transmutation. The vision also demonstrates how she envisioned the purification process of the soul in order to come closer to God:

I did see a round Glass like a Globe, and at first sight it was all full of Matter, that was like putrified Blood, black and ill coloured. Then I saw the Globe turned with black and ill coloured. Then I saw the Globe turned with the Vent downward, and it was all discharged of that corrupt matter. Then arose a Spring that filled it again, as with Water, which emptied itself out again. And I beheld the Figure of a Heart with an Engraving thereupon within the Globe. And I marvelled how it came there, and no sight of any Person to put it in; and all this was acted, as without any visible Hand. Further, there arose a golden Liquor in the Globe, and the Heart fluttered up and down in it and shined as Gold. This was a wonderful Presentation; into which my Spirit enquired and I heard a Voice sound, This shews what the Oracle will be, that it is filled only with the clear and true Unction; there will be arising Spring with all floating Joy. Consider, oh my Soul, what Wisdom may open, for a further Instruction herefrom: for deep is the Globe of Wonders.

Now it was testified, and thus opened to me, that some were Elected to be fixed Oracles, who are to be clarified for this purpose with pure Water from the Glassy Sea. Whose operation should be all forcible to work out the impure Matter of the Bloody Issue, which is the Spring of Sin, that only can be fully cleaned with this Water-Baptism, from the rising Scum of putrefied Nature. Which once was as a clear Glass in the first Formation, as it came out of the Hand of the Great Creator, but now so muddied with Strange Mixtures, that all the Crystalline Beauty of the Globe of Nature is turned into such a swarthy blackness and Dimness, that nothing is left clear for the Spiritual Seeing ... the holy separating Water of Life enters in for clarifying of; that so Nature may come to be refined, and made all Crystalline for God's own Heart to move in.

The name JESUS doth become all-saving, because as water is poured into a

³³ Jacob Boehme, *Des Gottseeligen Hoherleuchteten Jacob Bohmens Alle Theosophische Werke*, (Amsterdam, 1682) in Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* (Koln, 1997), p. 687.

³⁴ For various diagrammatic representations of colours, see Roob, *Hermetic Museum*, pp. 682-89.

Vessel to rinse and cleanse it, so the Spirit of Christ is poured in, as perfuming Water for Life renewing, that nothing of the old scent might be felt, for to send forth an evil savour ... after we are baptised with this Water of Life renewing ... then no more dead and putrified Flesh is to remain. This is the Wonder of all Wonders, whereby God will yet magnifie his anointed one, by whom all things are to be restored.³⁵

Although the vision was structured by a sequence of alchemical stages, Lead's description was not a systematic exposition. Lead drew on conventional colour theories of the alchemical process: black, white, yellow and red. The first 'black' stage was putrefaction and was represented by the globe 'full of Matter, that was like putrefied Blood, black and ill-coloured'. When the globe was discharged of its 'corrupt matter', the process of purification took place, as the 'spring filled it', developing the second stage of white representing water. When the spring water changed into the mercurial philosopher's oil symbolising the universal agent of transmutation, Lead described it as 'a Golden Liquor in the Globe'. Mercurius, a central symbol in alchemy, was present at all times during the *opus* as the *prima materia*, or 'mother' of metals.³⁶ It was a symbol for the alchemists' magical *arcanum*, or the transformative substance without which the *opus* cannot be performed and thus, in Lead's vision, the golden liquor was a fluid representing the third or yellow stage.

The heart has biblical as well as alchemical significance. In the Bible the heart is the source of wit, understanding, love, courage, grief, and pleasure.³⁷ However, in Lead's vision the production of the heart as part of the alchemical process also had special interest. The water transformed the content inside the globe into its primal state through a process known as tincturing. This allowed the 'figure of a heart' inside the globe to form by a process of coagulation. It represented the red stone in alchemical terms. Lead ' marvelled ' at how the heart came to be there, 'without any visible hand', as if by magic. Lead, moreover, may, as we have seen, been familiar with Arthur Dee's *Fasciculus chemicus* which says, 'The Water approaching, that is the Argent vive in the Earth encreaseth, and is augmented because the Earth is whitened, and then it is called impregnation, then the Ferment is coagulated, viz.

³⁵ Jane Lead, *A Message to the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1696), pp. 46-51.

³⁶ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 125.

³⁷ See, Robert A. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart, 1600-1750* (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 25-60. The heart is mentioned 858 times in the King James Bible, see A. Cruden, *A Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testament* (3rd edition, London, 1769), pp. 221-24.

Joined with the imperfect body.³⁸ This impregnation of the white matter (body) with the seed (soul) thus brought about the final stage of the *opus*, known as the *rubedo*.³⁹ The appearance of the red sacred heart represented God as Love, and the love of God was infused into the believer.⁴⁰ It can also be seen as the maturation of the Philosopher's Stone. Lead translated the alchemical transmutation of the Philosopher's Stone into spiritual alchemical terms: if the material world symbolised the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone, the goal of the *opus*, then the projection from the red heart of God onto His subjects signified the attainment of the consciousness of God. In this *rubedo* stage the 'Heart fluttered up and down in it and shined as Gold'. So 'At the rubedo the silvery moonlight and the dawn light of the albedo phase develop into the golden illumination of the midday sun',⁴¹ which was represented by the shining of 'gold' in Lead's vision. In other words, this outpouring and final stage represented by the heart signified the restoration of humankind and a union with God. In searching for gold, Lead had found a way of expressing a relationship with God.

Lead's 'Vision of the Glassy Globe' probably represented her most comprehensive attempt to reproduce the spiritual aspect of alchemical experimentation. She adopted the idea of the Platonic notion of the world-soul, where the human soul is considered to be a microcosm of God. If the globe represented the (al)chemists alembic or vessel, then the transmutation of matter into the Philosopher's Stone could therefore be produced in miniature. Reading Lead's 'Vision of the Glassy Globe', feminist issues are clearly apparent. The globe symbolised the alchemist's alembic as a womb - a world in miniature in which the matter of the Stone could be created, a motif that was commonly applied. In 'Loves Alchemy' John Donne referred to the alchemical vessel as the 'pregnant pot'.⁴² In Ripley's 'Cantilena', the gestation of the child (or stone) inside the pregnant mother's womb transformed the shape of the bed in which the mother lay, from square to spherical:

The Mother's Bed which erst stood in a Square
Is shortly after made Orbicular;
And on each side the Covering (as Round)

³⁸ A. Dee, *Faciculus Chemicus and the Arcanum* (London, 1650), pp. 66-67.

³⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 219.

⁴⁰ Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, 1991), pp. 36-37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁴² Herbert J. C. Grierson (ed.), *The Poems of John Donne* (Oxford, 1980), p. 90.

With Luna's Lustre Rightly doth Abound.
Thus from a Square, the Bed a Globe is made.
Fair, white, and cleare emerges from the shade.⁴³

Thus the child inside the womb transformed what was on the outside - the bed becoming a globe. The 'womb' of the alchemist's alembic was also represented emblematically in Michael Maier's *Emblema* which depicted the Earth as a Nurse, and Mother Nature as a globe.⁴⁴ (See Figure 3.1. below.)



Figure 3.1. The Earth as Nurse. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (Oppenheim, 1617), in Stanton Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphics*, p. 25.

⁴³ George Ripley, 'Cantilena' or 'Song', II, lines 108-13, in F. Sherwood Taylor, 'George Ripley's Song' *Ambix*, 2 (1946), 177-81.

⁴⁴ H. M. E. de Jong, *Michael Maier's Atalanta fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems* (Leiden, 1969), p. 176. See also Sally G. Allen and Joanna Hubbs, 'Outrunning Atalanta: Feminine Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation', *Signs: Journal of Women, Culture and Society*, 6 (1980), 210-27.

However, when it came to the representations of women's reproductive systems, the idea was more dangerous. It challenged not what women were expected to do, but how they were represented - as symbols of uncleanliness and pollution. Feminist scholars such as Sally Allen, Joanna Hubbs, and Carolyn Merchant, have argued that alchemical images seem to express a desire to bring the wonders of maternity under male control as the alchemical *opus* works to displace the female part in biological creation through a male-directed technology.⁴⁵ As Melissa Raphael has noted, 'The laboratory, with its furnace and vessels, displaces the female womb in which female energy turns food and blood into flesh'.⁴⁶ In alchemical discourse, alchemists recognised that women's bodies were both an explanation of and an obstruction to the process.⁴⁷ In her 'Vision of the Glassy Globe' Lead utilised this notion of the uncleanliness of women's bodies to show how the process of purification operated. Her description of the 'impure matter of the Bloody issue' as the 'Spring of Sin' can be interpreted as referring to the idea that menstruation was a sign of sinfulness. Scriptural sources upheld the idea of menstruation being a state of uncleanliness and in alchemical symbolism this could be represented by the *menstruum* - as a stinking fluid.⁴⁸

Patricia Crawford has argued that menstrual blood was referred to as excrement, and in *Aristotles Complete and Experienc'd Midwife* (1697) the process itself was known as a 'Monthly flux of Excrementitious and Unprofitable Blood'.⁴⁹ The 'putrefied blood in the globe' in Lead's vision was thus imbued with connotations of uncleanliness as the alchemical metaphor represented the *menstruum*, the mercurial solvent of the philosophers. The solvent was named the *menstruum* because it released the seed or sperm from the dissolved metal. From this seed the Philosopher's Stone and gold were generated in the womb of the alembic, often known as the blood of the green lion, the Hermetic stream, and the fountain. Colson's

⁴⁵ Allen and Hubbs, 'Outrunning Atalanta', pp. 210-21. See also Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York, 1980).

⁴⁶ Melissa Raphael, *Theology and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality* (Sheffield, 1996), p. 293.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See Isa. 30: 22: 'thou shalt cast them away as a menstrual cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence'; Lamm. 1:17: 'Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them', and Ezek. 18:6: 'neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman'.

⁴⁹ P. Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), p. 49

Philosophia maturata mentioned that when the green lion was heated in a sand-bath a white fume arose, 'and therewith shall also ascend a most red oyl, called the philosophers aureal Gold, a stinking *menstruum*, the Philosopher's Sol, our Tincture, Burning Water, the Blood of Green Lyon'.⁵⁰ In addition, the lochia, or bleeding discharge after childbirth, also had connotations of uncleanness. The churching ceremony, a requirement by Protestant churches, was based on a Jewish rite of Purification (Lev. 12:6). It was said by some to represent a process of 'purification' of the 'unclean' mother after childbirth, and others regarded it as a thanksgiving for a safe delivery.⁵¹ However, as Diane Purkiss has suggested, Christ's virgin birth was 'contrasted with the polluting normalities of women's reproduction'.⁵² Although post-menopausal, Lead, a mother herself, clearly made links to her own experience of conceiving and giving birth.

Woman as pollutant and unclean, however, was clearly contrasted in Lead's same vision, 'by the perfuming Water for Life renewing, that nothing of the old scent might be felt'. In alchemical terms, the appearance of the sweet fragrance was the sign of resurgent life, demonstrating that the matter, or woman, was cleansed and purified by mercurial waters. It meant that the *albedo* had developed from the malodorous putrefaction of the *nigredo*. Norton's *Ordinall* said of the *albedo*: 'All sweete smelling things have more puritie,/ And are more spirituall than stinking maie be'.⁵³ The late seventeenth-century physician Sir John Floyer, a staunch advocate of the benefits of cold bathing, offered his view of baptism as representing 'the death, resurrection of Christ, dipping, and Emersion'.⁵⁴ He argued that the

⁵⁰ L. Colson, *Philosophia maturata: an Exact Piece of Philosophy containing the Practick and Operatives part thereof in gaining the Philosopher's Stone* (London, 1662), p. 31.

⁵¹ David Cressy, 'Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993), 106-46. Cressy argues that churching was an occasion of female social activity and looked forward to. Crawford however, suggests it was an unpopular practice, see Patricia Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England', in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, (London and New York, 1980), p. 5 and p. 25.

⁵² Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century', in Elizabeth Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London, 1992), p. 157.

⁵³ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 69.

⁵⁴ Mark Jenner, 'Bathing and Baptism: Sir John Floyer and the Politics of Cold Bathing', in K. Sharpe and S. Zwicker, (eds), *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and*

sacrament of baptism combined physical as well as spiritual benefits. As Mark Jenner has noted about Floyer, 'In other words, cold bathing prepared the mind for spiritual illumination by helping to harness and restrain the animal spirits and unruly appetites'.⁵⁵ For Lead, 'Water-Baptism' meant that the soul could unite with the spirit and become illuminated by it, thus resulting in a reunion with a new, purified body bringing the being into a holy state assuring that 'Nature may come to be refined'. In Lead's vision therefore, 'Water-Baptism' as a purification rite and Christian sacrament, also took on an important role, especially in the case of women's life cycles which left them 'fully cleaned' and a step closer to God.

Lead's desire to refine the body, soul and spirit using spiritual alchemical transmutation was crucially important in her search to find God inwardly. During the process of purification which included 'Water Baptism', Lead states that 'all Souls must pass through the Refining, and Calcining Regions, so prepared for their Purifying'.⁵⁶ In the vision of the 'Glassy Globe' it meant that 'no more dead and putrefied Flesh is to remain'. In her version of spiritual alchemy then, the separation of the soul from the body followed so it was free and could transcend matter. It represented an important stage whereby the soul could unite with the spirit. This crucial step allowed the soul to become spiritually aware of its own true nature and to distinguish between the 'inward and outward man'.⁵⁷

Alchemists believed in the body, soul and spirit as distinct entities.⁵⁸ When the body coagulates with the spirit, the spirit can dissolve and penetrate the body. The soul then has the power to transfigure the body and spirit in perfect harmony. Lead wrote:

I can give no other Direction, than what my self have been taught in, and in some degrees have put into practice so, as whereby I have found this All-Secret Pass, (or way) for my Spirit to enter, and abide, in the Inward Tabernacle of GOD'S delightful Presence, which is as a foregoing Pledge of what I may hope, and expect to take up in, when my Body shall break away.⁵⁹

The critical point in the transfiguration of the body was linked with her understanding of

Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution (Berkeley, 1998), p. 205.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God*, (London, 1694), p. 17.

⁵⁷ See 2 Cor. 4:16.

⁵⁸ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, pp. 146-47.

⁵⁹ Lead, *Enochian Walks*, p. 2.

Christian theology; she wrote that 'the name JESUS became all-saving'.⁶⁰ The association of Mercury with Christ linked the stages of spiritual alchemy with the redemption of humanity.⁶¹ For Christian spiritual alchemists like Lead, it meant 'That to be marked with the Father's Name, is no less than to be transformed into a Virgin Body'.⁶²

For Lead, then, alchemical discourse was also a means of expressing how the spirit could return to a prelapsarian condition, a pure 'Virgin Body' equivalent to the Adamic state prior to the Fall. Lead suggested in order to attain this prelapsarian state 'whosoever shall eat of this golden Apple, shall be transmuted into a Body as of fine Gold'.⁶³ Her use of alchemical imagery was imbued with millenarianism and referred to the coming of the second Adam. The first Adam was referred to by alchemists as the *prima materia*, Mercurius - the first adept and natural philosopher, yet Lead adopted this idea for 'second' Adam or Christ.⁶⁴ Lead is likely to have drawn upon Ashmole's description of Adam who, 'before his *Fall*, was so absolute a *Philosopher*, that he fully understood the true and pure knowledge of *Nature*'.⁶⁵ She clearly considered that the answers to divine secrets would be revealed by the re-emergence of the second Adam, who would regain his former pure state, in a world where everyone would be in spirit form. She wrote that 'the Third Day is come, in which the Holy Ghost will have His, which will Excel all before it, to Unseal and Reveal what yet never was known or understood'.⁶⁶ The secret of the Philosopher's Stone was said to have been divinely revealed to Adam and then taken from paradise and handed to the twelve patriarchs.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 409.

⁶¹ Mercury, being the symbol of the magical transforming substance in alchemy, changed shape and name during the many different phases through which it passed in the process of the *opus*.

⁶² Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 409. The entry is dated 29 September 1677.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁶⁴ Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy*, p. 13.

⁶⁵ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 443.

⁶⁶ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1696), pp. 8-9. See Chapter Five, *Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and the New Jerusalem*.

⁶⁷ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 3.

One of the most famous of alchemical ideas was the search for the Philosopher's Stone. The elusive Philosopher's Stone was thought to be found within humankind, which as a microcosm of the divine was thought to represent a duplication of God's own macrocosmic creation in miniature. Lead would have been familiar with the Paracelsian macro-microcosm analogy where humans were said to be a reflection of the divine.⁶⁸ In Pordage's London community Lead would have been aware of a fellow member, one Mrs Flavel, who claimed to have seen the Philosopher's Stone 'which she knew to be the Divinity in the Humanity'.⁶⁹ Lead may also have known of the work of Thomas Norton, who wrote in *The Ordinall of Alkimy*, 'Noble Auctors men of glorious fame,/ Called our *Stone Microcosmus* by name'.⁷⁰ The Philosopher's Stone could be achieved through the ancient art of transmutation. Practical experimentation was one way. This involved the purification of various materials and the application of heat while materials were in an enclosed container, resulting in changes of colour and the formation of the Philosopher's Stone which was then believed to transmute base metals into gold.⁷¹

Robert Boyle also considered other occult influences to be involved in the quest for the Philosopher's Stone, and he believed that 'the acquisition of the Philosopher's Stone would facilitate communication with angels and rational spirits'.⁷² As Deborah Harkness has concluded in her study of the angel conversations or 'shows' of John Dee, 'Many of the shows, then, may be seen as a theatrical expression of philosophical ideas mediated through a figural language of signs, colors, and symbols'.⁷³ As Harkness has pointed out, 'The

⁶⁸ H. Pachter, *Paracelsus: Magic into Science* (New York, 1995), pp. 79-89.

⁶⁹ John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing Through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (London, 1655), p. 17.

⁷⁰ Norton, *Ordinall*, N3.

⁷¹ Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 170-200.

⁷² Principe, *Aspiring Adept*, p. 187.

⁷³ Deborah Harkness, 'Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49 (1996), p. 727. See also, Deborah Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy and the End of Nature* (Cambridge, 1999).

angels, in essence, were delivering the philosopher's stone that could perfect all things'.⁷⁴ Dee used crystals which he termed 'showstones' in order for scryers to see visions, yet there is no evidence to suggest that Lead practised with crystals (crystallomancy) or with mirrors (catoptromancy). Yet, unlike the 'angel conversations' of John Dee and his assistance of scryers, Lead does not record conversations involving other people. Lead's visions moreover, were also experiential, but unlike those of Dee, were not mediated through others. Lead's visions, however, also consisted of a web of signs, colours and symbols which were associated with spiritual alchemy.

Lead, however, advocated that the Philosopher's Stone could be found by looking within to perfect imperfection in all things.⁷⁵ Once found therefore, the Philosopher's Stone had the power to transform the earthly man into an illumined philosopher. She described how the process of spiritual alchemy could transmute the body, mind and spirit into gold, producing the Stone within:

And the Apostle John, who was the chief Magician, said, Come and see, what is here to be done also. And he had in his Hand a little Vial, containing a Liquor like to Gold, and he dropped some Drops of this upon each Metal; and they were all immediately transmuted into Lustrous Gold. Then I was led to another Place, where there was nothing but a reddish Mould cast up: and then by the Word of the Power, which he spake forth, this earth was changed into Forms after our Human shape, but clarified and bright, standing up as a great Army. And he said, These are the Fire-Stones, that are to walk in this New Paradisical region, as Glorified Figures, like unto such as were here before them. Then I Queried how could it possibly be, that such Effects could be produced by any in a Mortal Image did now upon the Earth appear. Upon which the beloved John answered me, All this that thou hast seen, is possible again to be done by Wisdom's White Tincturing Stone formed within.⁷⁶

Lead's quest for the Philosopher's Stone can be seen as a process of spiritual perfection, represented on the material level by the transmutation of base metals into gold. The Philosopher's Stone becomes a metaphor for spiritual transformation and salvation. On 9 December 1676, Lead recorded in her spiritual diary the word of God saying, 'in you is intombed a Precious Stone, a White Stone, that hath the Virgin's Name engraven on it'.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 729.

⁷⁵ The spiritual component of looking within was a 'tradition that was inherited by medieval alchemists and the alchemists of Renaissance Europe', in Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 147.

⁷⁶ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, pp. 62-63.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 461.

This clearly drew on Revelation 2:17, Christ's message to the churches of Asia, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it'. The 'White Stone' was therefore consistent with biblical exegesis, but for Lead, its application into alchemical meaning was assimilated as the Philosopher's Stone and its related colour symbolism. It thus signified a stage in which her body was whitened and spiritualised, represented by the *albedo* stage in alchemical terms. It meant that her soul had been prepared to receive illumination from the spirit. The *albedo* is symbolised by all things pure and Philalethes wrote when 'the colour changeth to white, they call it their Swan, their Dove, their white stone of Paradise, their white Gold, their Alabaster, their Smoak, and in a word whatever is white they do call it'.⁷⁸ In February 1680, Lead recorded in her diary that the twelve gates of Jerusalem 'are to be Studied by every Child of Hers [Wisdom's], that seeks to attain her Wonderful *Pearl*: being that *Stone* which is rejected by Wise Men of this World'.⁷⁹ Lead considered the Philosopher's Stone to be Wisdom's 'pearl'.

The location of Wisdom's 'pearl' was linked to Lead's understanding of numerology as a way of explaining divine secrets. She associated the twelve gates of Jerusalem (Rev. 21) with Wisdom's twelve gates, represented in alchemy by the twelve fundamental processes (calcination, solution, separation, conjunction, putrefaction, congelation, cibation, sublimation, fermentation, exaltation, multiplication, projection). Lead wrote that the 'Magical Gates of Wisdom'⁸⁰ led 'from one to the other, where the hidden track of the Virgins Way may be found'.⁸¹ At the twelfth 'Gate of Projection', Lead declared that Wisdom's 'Wonderful Pearl' or 'Stone' could be found, which represented the spiritual aspect of the alchemical projection, or transmutation.⁸² It was the point at which the

⁷⁸ Eirenaeus Philalethes, *Ripley reviv'd: or an Exposition upon Sir George Ripley's Hermetico-Poetical Works* (London, 1678), in Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 151. Philalethes means 'lover of truth'. Eirenaeus Philalethes was possibly George Starkey (1628-65); Thomas Vaughan (1621-65) published as Eugenius Philalethes.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸⁰ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 230. The entry is dated February 1680. Lead first mentions the 'Twelve Gates' in *A Fountain of Gardens* and expands upon the idea in *The Revelation of Revelations*.

⁸¹ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 46.

⁸² Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 230.

transformation of the soul was possible. The inner feminised world containing Wisdom's pearl was clearly more highly prized than the outer world and capable of transmuting every pious soul.⁸³ Lead had access to Sir George Ripley's influential *Compound of Alchemy* which had an equally famous subtitle, the *Twelve Gates* and was published in Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*.⁸⁴ As Allen Debus has noted 'Renaissance cabbalistic studies encouraged a mystical numerological investigation of the Scriptures with the hope that far reaching truths could be found'.⁸⁵

Lead also drew on other occult sources, including magic. She considered the Magia, or the operation of the Holy Spirit, to have a crucial role in achieving the purification of the soul. It required a rejection of rationality in favour of faith in God. Lead wrote, 'now take heed and fly away from our Mortal senses ... each one according to his Gift in this high and supernatural *Magia*'.⁸⁶ Indeed, Lead asked, 'For what is so great an enemy to the divine Magia, as the rational Wisdom, which is a strong Combination with the humane sense? ... the thick dark Body of the Mortal Sense, which hath long been the grand Adversary of Virgin Wisdom's Magicians'.⁸⁷ Lead's understanding of magic concerning the power of the Holy Ghost was far-reaching. She wrote 'but sure I am, that this Magical Power of Faith is in a manner quite lost, for the re-attaining of which, the Holy Ghost is awakening Wisdom's slumbering Virgins'.⁸⁸ This highly gendered idea of Wisdom's offspring energised by the Holy Ghost was a prophecy and concerned the key to discovering divine secrets. Lead wrote:

until there come a breaking off from the old traditional knowledge, and a weaning from the breasts of a strange mother, that so they, as new born spirits, may draw from the Eternal Word of Wisdom, fresh unction, that giveth light unto the understanding, and by which the counsel of the Most high is made known, and all the secrets that can be desired are manifested.⁸⁹

⁸³ See Chapter Seven, *Mystical Marriage*; the section, 'Sophia's Manufactory and Merchandise' examines Wisdom's inner riches.

⁸⁴ This has recently been reprinted, see Stanton J. Linden (ed.), *George Ripley's Compound of Alchemy (1591)*, (Aldershot and Vermont, 2001).

⁸⁵ Allen Debus, *Man and Nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 11.

⁸⁶ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁸⁹ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 9.

Lead clearly drew on imagery which went beyond the standard christological concept of Christ within, as Wisdom was also a source of divine knowledge for Lead.⁹⁰ She believed in a world view dominated by natural magic and neo-Platonic mysticism which was fundamental to astrology and traditional alchemy. 'The universe had been created by divine magic, and man, through Grace, might properly learn of his Creator by pious investigation of his Creation'.⁹¹ Where scientists strove to decode nature, to understand and describe it, magic strove to transcend it - magic being the art and having the power to change and transmute.⁹² As Ashmole commented, '*Naturall Magick* [is] the *Doore* that leads to this *Blessed Stone*'.⁹³ Magic was thus an integral part of the process of purification of the soul which allowed its release, and resulted in spiritual illumination and liberation. It pertained to the process after conversion or initiation into Christ which, according to Lead, was assisted by the power of Wisdom and the operation of the Magia. Thus for Lead, the combination of alchemy and magic promised a magical rebirth of the spirit, centring on the attainment of the inner and highly prized Wisdom's Pearl, or Philosopher's Stone.

As we have seen, Lead used alchemical discourse as a way of signifying how God's truth could be found by searching within. Her belief in transmutation was expressed in alchemical terms to show that the outer dross of corporeality (flesh/sin) could be transformed into an inner realisation of the divine, which she described as the fifth gift of Wisdom to her children, 'such as are Baptised with the Holy Ghost ... be inspired from such a virtual Fiery touch, and therefrom be so highly Illuminated and Deified, as to be made New Creatures in very deed. From this Ruby-Tincturing Dye, a God-like Purity and Power, may suddenly arise, to Anatomize, and burn up the gross, corrupt, and earthly part'.⁹⁴ Lead's visions thus revealed a series of powerful alchemical symbols and signs as a way of transmuting and purifying the soul. Thus, her search for 'gold' symbolised her search for God.

The next section will examine Lead's vision of Noah's Ark, which was clearly

⁹⁰ See Chapter Eight, *Philosophia* which examines Lead's relationship with Wisdom.

⁹¹ Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. xii.

⁹² Johannisson, 'Magic, Science, and Institutionalization', p. 252.

⁹³ Ashmole wrote that the 'pure knowledge of Nature (which is no other than what we call *Naturall Magick*)', Ashmole, *Theatrum*, p. 443.

⁹⁴ Lead, *Enochian Walks with God*, p. 29. See Chapter Six, *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*, for more information about spiritual motherhood and Wisdom's children.

influenced by the Bible, and deeply entwined with biblical metaphor. Lead's vision of Noah's Ark was a story of redemption. She did not, however, translate the Bible literally. Instead, as we shall see, by placing her emphasis on her personal revelations she produced a unique and interesting interpretation which was also imbued with alchemical imagery.

CHAPTER FOUR - The Divine Ark: A Vision of the Second Noah's Ark

By Faith Noah being warned of God, prepared an Ark to the saving of his House; by the which he condemned the World, and became Heir of Righteousness which is by Faith.¹

Jane Lead was clearly inspired by the biblical story of Noah and of his steadfast faith in God which is found in Genesis 6-7, and reiterated in Hebrews 11:7 and Matthew 24:37-38. The story of Noah's Ark was, as now, culturally embedded, yet for Lead it possessed special significance. Her visions of a second Noah's Ark increased her sense of a renewed surge of Faith, 'But the Spirit of Wisdom hath now presented them afresh to me, as telling me they were in this Day to be looked into, for Faith to be thence revived, and Prayer envigorated.'² Lead thus saw Noah as a figure and a story which were particularly relevant for her times and her mission. Indeed, her diary entry for 21 February 1687 recorded that God told her that she would become the second Noah: 'Thou hast been learned and taught as another Noah to prepare and build an Ark of Faith in this Invisible World.'³ Just as God favoured Noah (Gen. 6:8) Lead felt herself singled out to inform others of God's plan and she sought to prepare herself and others for the imminent appearance of a second Noah's Ark. However, her personal revelations and her reinterpretations of the Noah story deviate in fascinating ways from biblical sources.

Lead's visions were highly unusual because she adopted alchemical imagery in her interpretation of the Noah story as a way of conveying her belief that an inner transformation could occur through the art of transmutation. Lead thus used the process of alchemical transmutation as a way of signifying the change from a state of sinfulness, through stages of purification, to find divinity within the individual and also inside the Ark. Thus there are several levels of meaning in Lead's visions. In addition, the Ark also represented an inner sanctuary where God revealed his will, and it offered salvation as a church; the Ark flew to a 'Land of Paradise' following the deluge symbolising God's

¹ Jane Lead, *Tree of Faith or The Tree of Life Springing up in the Paradise of God From which All the Wonders of the new Creation, in the Virgin Church of the First-born of Wisdom must proceed* (London, 1696), titlepage.

² Lead was referring to the vision she had of 'Preparing and Building an Ark' 'several Years past,' possibly the vision she recorded on 21 February 1687, in Jane Lead, *The Ark of Faith* (London, 1696), pp. 1-2.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

forgiveness and his new covenant with humanity. This chapter looks at how Lead used the figure of Noah, and in particular, at how her visions and imagery of the Ark expressed the themes of redemption, rescue and reconciliation with God which were so central to her religious thought.

This analysis will broaden our appreciation of Lead's writing, for this dimension of Lead's writings and imagery has not been discussed by previous scholars. The one person who has noted Lead's visions of the second Noah's Ark is Catherine Smith. However, she wrote that they were 'flights of fantasy' and that they suggested 'the Gothic stories that were beginning to entertain popular imagination in Lead's age and the centuries to follow'.⁴ By anachronistically categorising Lead's visions as quasi-Gothic, Smith fails to appreciate the depth of Lead's religious message concerning the second Noah's Ark. She also missed the extent to which such Noahic imagery was rooted in a previous tradition of biblical exegesis and that Lead's 'fantasies' were highly meaningful.

This discussion will also add to the literature on the cultural history of Noah's flood in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not least because scholars examining the reception and interpretation of Noah have been more concerned with the history of science than with the continuing prophetic meanings of the Genesis story.⁵ At the end of the seventeenth century natural philosophers strove to prove that the flood was universal using reason rather than revelation.⁶ As Norman Cohn has noted, in their search for traces of the flood several authors controversially interpreted Noah's flood in terms of cometary interference.⁷ In December 1694, Edmund Halley read a paper at the Royal Society, entitled 'Some Considerations about the Cause of the universal Deluge,' in which he speculated the

⁴ Catherine Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (eds), *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, 1979), p. 194.

⁵ The universality of the flood had been established by the number of marine fossils found inland. Allen argues that geological and paleontological investigations can be found in the late seventeenth-century publications of Thomas Burnet, John Ray, John Woodward and William Whiston, in Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science and Letters* (Urbana, 1963), p. 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-112.

⁷ Norman Cohn, *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven and London), p. 69.

Flood was caused by the effect of a comet.⁸ In *New Theory of the Earth* (1696), William Whiston also suggested that a comet was the means by which God had brought about the flood which descended into the Garden of Eden, allowing Noah enough time to build an Ark 'before the earth's rotation brought him in to full torrent'.⁹

In *Arca Noe* (1675), the German Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), considered Noah's Ark to be 'the greatest edifice to pure knowledge ever built, greater than the Temple of Solomon and more successful than the infamous Tower of Babel'.¹⁰ According to Kircher, Noah's son, Shem, 'moved to Egypt and became the source of all wisdoms as captured in the hermetic writings', or Egyptian hieroglyphics.¹¹ He also regarded Noah's Ark as the first museum of natural history. The Ark representing humanity's first attempt to collect nature for God. Indeed, the contents and proportion and of the Ark were a matter of much speculation in the seventeenth century. Francis Lee explored the practical dimensions of Noah's Ark in one of his tracts 'On Naval Architecture, as Applied to Noah's Ark, showing how it was Accommodated to Live in a Tempest of Waters'.¹²

Lead, however, was not concerned with speculating about scientific evidence relating to the story of Noah. She wanted to discern and promulgate God's truth from her revelations. Lead's first recorded vision of Noah was 1 May 1676,¹³ and she developed the story of Noah in more detail in her companion treatises *The Ark of Faith* and *The Tree of Faith* (1696) in entries dated 18, 19, and 20 February 1696.¹⁴ In a reappraisal of the story she admonished 'all those who in this Noah's Age are asleep in their dark Prison-Houses'.¹⁵

⁸ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁰ Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1994), p. 88. See also, Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, pp. 182-91.

¹¹ Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* (Koln, 1996) p. 592.

¹² Francis Lee, *Apoleipomena or Dissertations, Theological, Mathematical, and Physical with a Critical Commentary on the Most Difficult Places of the Book of Genesis* (2 vols, London, 1752), vol. 1, pp. 219-79.

¹³ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1696), vol. 1, p. 206.

¹⁴ Lead, *The Tree of Faith*, pp. 8, 11, 16.

¹⁵ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 210.

Her millenarian prophecy warned that 'Noah's Spirit would yet return again to condemn this present world'¹⁶ in his 'coelestial Ark' before 'Christ's third coming'.¹⁷ In this passage she was clearly drawing from Matthew 24:37-38: 'But as the days of Noe were, so also the coming of the Son of man shall be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark'. Noah, it can be said, blocked out 'all knowledge of the carnage that was being perpetrated' around him, obeying God's will to save only himself, his immediate family and a selection of animals.¹⁸ Lead's version of the Noah story, however, rejected God's favouritism which singled out Noah's family as the only humans worthy of the gift of life (Gen. 7:22-23).

Moreover, Lead saw herself as part of a redeemable community, not merely the few who could be saved in a re-enactment of Noah's story.¹⁹ Indeed, in Lead's vision the flood was not a tragedy which involved the destruction of the world's inhabitants; rather the Ark, a vehicle of faith and as a means of transportation imbued with supernatural powers, was capable of conveying *all* humanity to God. Although Lead drew from the story of Noah as a warning to humanity, she concentrated on the way the Ark was a haven and did not envision the destruction of the flood. Instead, she predicted an imminent new 'Gospel Ministration, (which is all Love, Grace, Mercy and Peace)'.²⁰ Lead represented God as love, offering redemption to everyone, not as a destroyer of life. Thus, her vision of a second Noah's Ark was of a vehicle for the faithful, who could then be transported to the 'New Paradisiacal Earth'.²¹ Her attempt to elucidate the 'Secret and Hidden Divine Life,' by providing a sense of a secret unfolding and a renewed and refreshed vision reaffirmed the Christian message of redemption.²²

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 401.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 44.

¹⁸ Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Reading of the Book of Genesis* (London, 1996), pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 401.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 210.

²¹ Lead, *Tree of Faith*, p. 28.

²² Lead, *Ark of Faith*, sig. M6v.

A Second Ark of Redemption

Like the first Noah, Lead was under a direct command from God and about to take on a leading role as rescuer. Her faithfulness towards God was rewarded with help: 'There was One known by Name, that should have of the same Spirit of Faith to concur, and build with me, and so we should mutually be made able to strengthen one anothers Hands, to carry on this great Work, as Male and Female in one Person, or Spirit, to enter first this Golden Ark of the Presence'.²³ She wrote, 'Pray, that we may be the First Fruits, of those that are Risen with him; that so we are admitted into Faith's Flying Ark here Described, which will transport us into the New Earth of Wonders, delivering us from the Deluge of the Curse, that is from Infidelity'.²⁴ Although redemption was intended primarily for members of the Philadelphian Society, as the 'first fruits' drawn from Revelation 14:4, it was actually available to everyone, in accordance with Lead's doctrine of apocatastasis.²⁵ Admittance to the Ark was the first step in a process of selection, according to the degree of purity of each soul. She wrote, 'none else can have admittance into this Holy Ark, but such as are fully and wholly Purified by Faith'.²⁶ She stressed that, although admittance to the second Noah's Ark was selective at first, it was nevertheless open to everyone and metaphorically, the second Noah's Ark had the capacity to transport all souls. Indeed, in a reversal of the creation story, Lead's vision of the second Noah's Ark was a story of redemption for *all* humanity. Once the Philadelphians had joined together in a shared faith and embarked upon the journey in the Ark, it would travel to the four corners of the earth to collect *all* God's children. When boarding had been completed, the Ark would carry its passengers, not to Mount Ararat, but to the 'Paradaisical Land', thus re-uniting humankind into a cohesive group.

Lead predicted a surge of interest from others wishing to join the Ark, 'For they flocked to the utmost parts of the Earth as Doves to the Windows of this Ark'.²⁷ The purpose of the Ark was 'to take in, and receive such as have looked for the Redemption, to

²³ Ibid., p. 6. This person may have been John Pordage, Lead's 'spiritual partner and mate. See Chapter One, *The Philadelphian's Prophetess*.

²⁴ Lead, *Ark of Faith*, sig. M6.

²⁵ See Chapter Five, *Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and the New Jerusalem*.

²⁶ Lead, *Tree of Faith*, p. 15.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

be Saved from the Violence and Curse of the Old Earth'.²⁸ As God had saved humankind in the first Noah's Ark, the second Noah's Ark symbolised the church by which God saved Christians. Indeed, Lead wrote of the urgency to board the Ark, 'A loud Cry and Call then came out of the Ark, saying, Come, Hasten, and escape for your Lives, for here is a Shelter prepared for you, while those who do slight this Call, and have not Faith to fly away, must in another Deluge be swallowed up, which will be as the Waters in Noah's Day'.²⁹ Lead's vision also made allowances for free will: 'Children of Wisdom's Kingdom, who have obeyed her Voice' by contrast, 'shall here be kept, having the Wings of Power ... given to them, that they might fly into this Ark'.³⁰ The choice was either to go to the 'New found Paradisiacal Land' or to remain in 'the Land of the Curse'.³¹

The second Noah's Ark that Lead saw was more elaborate than the biblical description. Not confined to sailing on the waters, Lead's Ark had the power and speed to fly. Her vision dated 9 February 1678 noted that it came 'in the form of a large ship with Wings' which 'being like varnished Gold, it came down with the greatest swiftness imaginable' illustrating God's strength and power.³² Lead depicted it as a flying 'Golden Ark' and 'our Body-Ark of invincible might and strength'.³³ On 19 February 1696, she wrote that the Ark did 'float and fly with great force, with outspread Banners: and a mighty Angel that was in it, did sound forth his Trumpet'.³⁴ In this later vision, a sense of urgency was signalled by the sound of the trumpet heralding the impending event draws on Revelation 8:6. However, unlike biblical descriptions, Lead's Ark was of 'most diaphanous fine Gold, with Six Wings on each side branching forth from it; so that it did Fly as well as Swim: which Wings were full of Eyes'.³⁵ Revelation 4:8 stated that, 'four beasts had each of them six wings about him: and they were full of eyes within: and they

²⁸ Lead, *Tree of Faith*, pp. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³² Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 66.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁴ Lead, *Ark of Faith*, p. 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is and is to come,' also may well have influenced Lead.

Lead recorded her vision of 20 February 1696 of how this Ark descended into Paradise. It was on Paradise that Lead directed her readership to focus on their inward spiritual development. The rules of admittance to Paradise included: lowliness, meekness, attendance at the holy inward court, Abel-like self-sacrifice and a growth in faith.³⁶ The Philadelphians as the 'first fruits' were to be privileged in being the 'First Resurrection-Body'.³⁷ Lead prophesied that they would make 'a Glorious Spotless Church upon the Earth to appear, as a Flying Ark with Banners, whose Eyes as lamps of Fire may go forth, to gather in the whole Priestly and Heavenly Host, from all Quarters and Parts of the Earth,' and thereby become the 'Triumphant Church' mentioned in Revelation 3:7.³⁸ Lead concluded *The Ark of Faith* with a jubilant rhyme, 'Shall we the Song of our Redemption Sing/ Glory, Glory, Glory to the Triune King,'³⁹ based on Psalm 111.9: 'He sent redemption to His people, holy is his name,' and Hebrews 9:12: 'Having obtained eternal redemption for us'. Thus the *Ark of Faith* was a prophetic declaration of a new age and afforded the opportunity for redemption.

As Norman Cohn has observed, Noah as a 'type' of Christ was a theme which flourished throughout the Middle Ages.⁴⁰ Noah's 'survival and his emergence from the Ark were interpreted as prefiguring the resurrection of Christ and his emergence from the tomb'.⁴¹ Lead wrote that the Ark included 'Faith's great Conqueror Christ Jesus; with Abraham, Noah, and all the High Elders of the Faith'.⁴² The Ark as the body of faith was represented by Christ as the head, of whom the Church that was to be gathered was the Bride, the Lamb's wife, 'the Great Captain of the Ark of Faith, Christ Jesus, did steer the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁰ Cohn, *Noah's Flood*, p. 24.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴² Lead, *Ark of Faith*, p. 9.

Ark'.⁴³ The story of Noah was 'analogous to God's own creation and to His subsequent supervision of nature and also to the most sacred mysteries of faith'.⁴⁴ By introducing Christ into the story of the second Noah, Lead thus suggested that Noah was a 'type' of Christ - the chief of a new, regenerated race.⁴⁵

As should be clear already, the Ark was a vehicle of transformation as well as transportation. This should not be entirely surprising as Lead was informed by alchemical, magical and Behmenist readings of the Ark. In addition to scriptural sources, Lead probably had access to Boehme's exposition of Genesis, *Mysterium Magnum*.⁴⁶ It contained information about Noah's descent from Adam, and how Noah's son, Shem became the source of all wisdom, thereby continuing the covenant between man and God, in a similar way to his account of Rebecca and Jacob.⁴⁷ It was a story of redemption which depicted God's will and used alchemical imagery to describe the inner spiritual meaning of the story. For example, Boehme wrote of the rainbow that 'Sulphur and Mercury doe sever themselves, and produce distinct, various and Several Colours, which are betoken unto us the inward and spirituall worlds'.⁴⁸ Illustrated in Boehme's *Theosophische Werke* was Noah's dove with an olive branch, a messenger pigeon, and above them the Holy Ghost (See Fig. 4.1.) It represented the threefold spirit, of God, nature and art.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁴ Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1994), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Cohn, *Noah's Flood*, pp. 24-25. Noah as a 'type' of Christ was a theme that flourished throughout the Middle Ages.

⁴⁶ Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum: Or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (2 vols, London, 1656), vol. 1, chapters 31-35 and 43.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Six, *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*.

⁴⁸ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Roob, *Hermetic Museum*, p. 355.

In order to appreciate the process of transmutation, however, it is necessary to consider the alchemical imagery in Lead's visions of the second Noah's Ark. The Ark, in addition to its meanings detailed above, was also said to be the alchemists' secret vessel in which the matter of the Stone underwent dissolution and purification leading to the generation of the Philosopher's Stone.

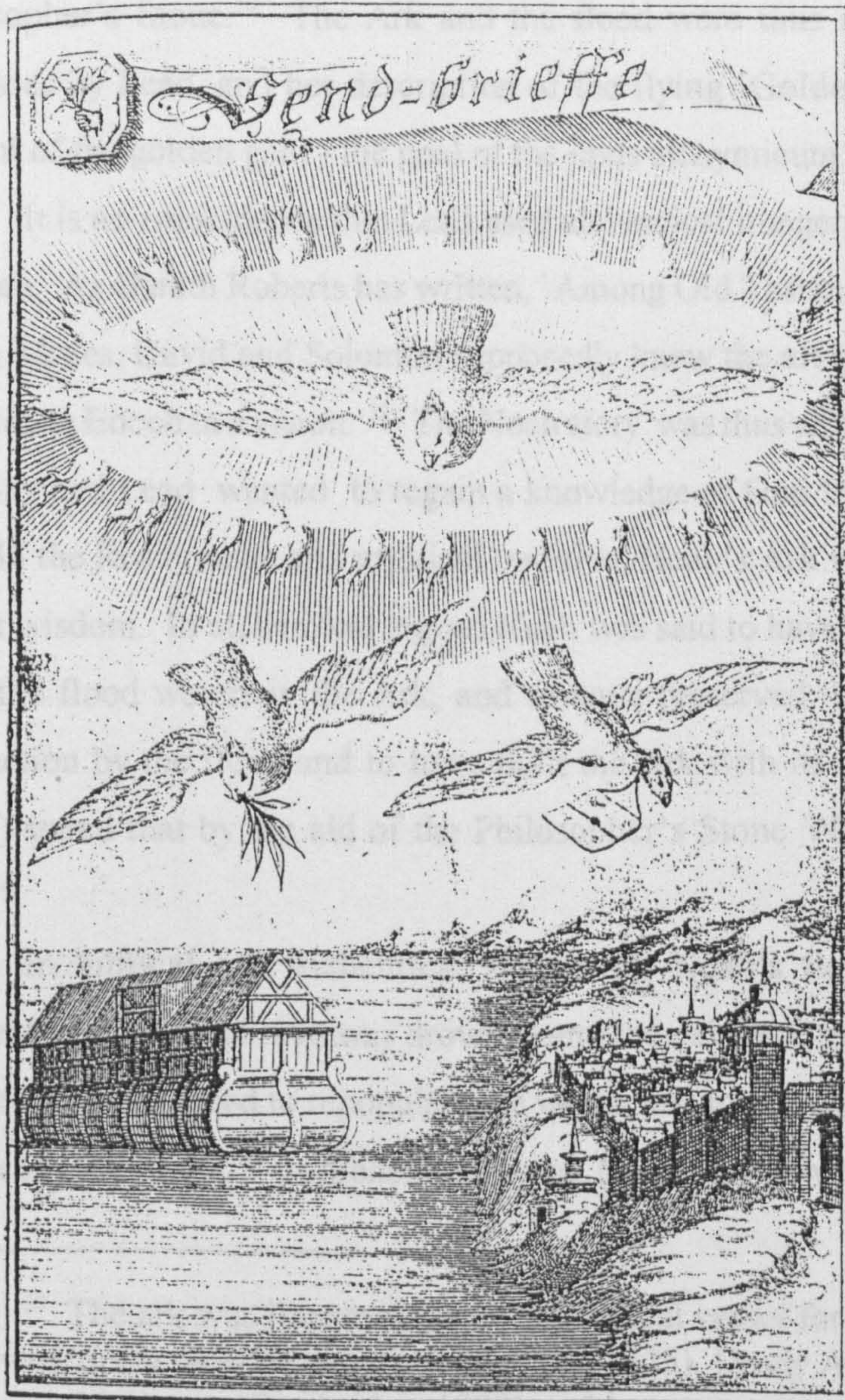


Figure 4.1. Three Doves and Noah's Ark, Jacob Boehme, *Des Gottseeligen Hoherleuchteten Jacob Bohmens Alle Theosophische Werken* (Amsterdam, 1682), titlepage.

In order to appreciate the process of redemption, however, it is necessary to consider the alchemical imagery in Lead's visions of the second Noah's Ark. The Ark, in addition to its meanings detailed above, was also said to be the alchemists' secret vessel in which the matter of the Stone underwent dissolution and putrefaction leading to the generation of the Philosopher's Stone.⁵⁰ The Ark and the flood were thus assimilated into alchemical processes by Lead, and her description of the flying 'Golden Ark'⁵¹ can be seen as the symbol of the golden goal - the goal of the opus alchymicum.

It is no coincidence that Lead used alchemical imagery in her retelling of the story of Noah. As Gareth Roberts has written, 'Among Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, Noah, Moses, David and Solomon supposedly knew the art [of alchemy], and it was also revealed to Enoch in a vision.'⁵² The Noah story was thus already imbued with alchemical meaning and Lead wanted to regain a knowledge of God that had been forfeited by the Fall. In the Rosicrucian and mystical tradition, Noah's Ark was both a sign and a source of lost wisdom. In alchemical legend Noah was said to have kept the Emerald tablet safe from the flood waters in the Ark, and to have preserved the Philosopher's Stone from destruction by the flood and to have built the Ark with its aid.⁵³ The *Sophic Hydrolith* (1678) stated that by the aid of the Philosopher's Stone 'Noah is said to have built the Ark.'⁵⁴

In biblical and alchemical symbolism Noah's flood was both destructive and regenerative. The old race was drowned and the new race generated from the Ark. This new race was intended to repopulate the world, and thus alchemists viewed the story as 'a matrix of generation'.⁵⁵ In alchemical terms, Noah's flood was analogous to the alchemical

⁵⁰ The ark was illustrated as an alchemical vessel for example, by Goossen van Vreeswijk in *De Goude Leeuw* (Amsterdam, 1675), Lyndy Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 11.

⁵¹ Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 72.

⁵² Roberts, *Art of Alchemy*, p. 16.

⁵³ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 69. The Emerald Tablet is one of the most important sources of medieval alchemy, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus or the Egyptian Thoth, and said to be inscribed in Phoenician characters. Legend has it that Noah carried the tablet with him in the ark during the flood, and that Sarah, Abraham's wife, found it in the hands of Hermes Trismegistus as he lay in his tomb in a cave.

⁵⁴ A. E. Waite (ed.), *Hermetic Museum*, (Maine, 1991), p. 86.

⁵⁵ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, p. 10.

process of the dissolution of the Stone's matter into the prima materia during the Nigredo stage, the original or first matter from which it was believed the universe was created. The black waters of dissolution (mercury) threatened to drown every living creature, and yet, the deathly waters are miraculously transformed into the waters of life, which wash the blackened body of the Stone at the bottom of the alembic and resurrect it into life.⁵⁶

After the deluge, the emergence of the rainbow held, and holds, a special significance for Christians as a sign of God's forgiveness.⁵⁷ For Boehme, it signified a critical point at which God entered into a covenant with man. Boehme wrote of the rainbow that it 'hath the colour of all the three Principles' of the divine: red representing the dark and fire worlds, white and yellow signifying God's love, and green and blue from the chaos which produce several more colours symbolising the inward spiritual worlds.⁵⁸ The drying up of the flood waters after the rainbow thus represented a stage where the earth or body has passed through the nigredo or peacock's tail. It is transformed into the white foliated earth of albedo.⁵⁹ For Lead, the dawning of the albedo meant that purification was nearly complete and the soul was ready for illumination. This white foliated earth was also symbolic of Lead's final destination in the Ark, the 'Paradaisical Land'.

Lead placed her emphasis on an expected utopia and did not dwell on the Fall and loss of paradise. The Paradaisical Land of Lead's visions represented a form of female utopia and it can be seen as an attempt to address a gender imbalance where male figures of power traditionally have had the ultimate monopoly. For in Lead's vision the 'Princess and Governess of this Land' was the Virgin Wisdom or Sophia.⁶⁰ Lead wrote: 'The Virgin Wisdom sounded a joyful Cry, saying, Come and see what an Ark is prepared for them that are Born into the Faith, as mighty Hero's to act the Wonders of the new Creation; which Ark is made in my new Paradise, that hath not yet been inhabited'.⁶¹ Of paradise, Lead wrote:

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

⁵⁷ Francis Lee wrote about 'The Symbol of the Rainbow' in *Apoleipomena*, vol. 2, pp. 1-30.

⁵⁸ Boehme, *Mysterium*, p. 207.

⁵⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical*, pp. 78-79.

⁶⁰ Lead, *Ark of Faith*, p. 17.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 8.

we were lead out to view the pleasant Trees and Groves for delight and recreation: and the Trees did seem to be as of pure Gold, and the Branches to be laden with Diamonds, and all the variety of Precious Stones. Besides which there were Trees also laden with sorts of precious Fruits for Food: and Rivers with Fountains flowing with spiced Wine, and Cups and Flagons round about the Fountain. So we were all called to drink at these Fountains, and to eat of these Fruits, being entertained by these Magi.⁶²

Lead's description is both worldly and otherworldly. Paradise as a land of plenty clearly echoed the biblical Garden of Eden. However, images of trees of 'pure Gold' and branches 'laden with diamonds' intensified the symbolic resonance of the Bible, yet also served to highlight the richness of Lead's creativity. Once in the 'Paradaisical Land' Lead wrote that followers would find the 'Climate was of a Transmuting Property, which would put another kind of Body upon them, that should be of such Agility, Purity, and Clarity, as the Old Body should in all its Infirmities be swallowed up into this.'⁶³ The climate thus accomplished a transformation from a corporeal or earthly to a celestial or divine configuration. In an attempt to transcend the body and mortality she wrote, 'what hath lain under the Death, that is to say, a Resurrection Body of pure Spirits in a new springing Paradise, which is the New Earth so much Prophesied of'.⁶⁴ It is at this point that Lead conflated biblical and alchemical metaphors. I Cor. 15:51-52 states, 'Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' Echoing the biblical passage, Lead thus used alchemical language as a means of expressing how the dross of sin and death could be transmuted to reveal the original pure form akin to the divine.

This inward transformation would occur in Paradise. Lead described how an aged body riddled with infirmities could be transmuted to a body imbued with 'Agility, Purity and Clarity'.⁶⁵ Indeed, she depicted the growth of Trees, with trunks 'of such fine Gold' as 'Representative Figures of those that were brought into the Ark'.⁶⁶ Here, she suggested that a process of change would purify the soul leading to perfection, or gold. It represented

⁶² Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

the transmutation of the earthly into the illumined being, whose purified body and soul reflected the gold of the divine spirit. Lead further believed that this transmutation was imbued with magical powers and she promised immortality when she wrote:

But there is an Age coming, as this Tree of Faith grows up in Persons in their inward ground to its full ripeness, when the Fruit being eaten thereof Magically, will Transfigure the very Elementary Body, and give it a Radical Ruby Glory; so that Mortality shall be hid in Immortality; which is the Garment that may last the Thousand Years Reign of Christ.⁶⁷

This chiliastic message anticipated an imminent age in which an inward transformation would occur. The phrase 'Radical Ruby Glory' suggests in alchemical terms the final stage of the opus, the 'rubedo' which had the power to transmute base metals into gold and the earthly being into the enlightened philosopher, who could attain the consciousness of God. Indeed, *The Aurora* by Boehme includes in its title 'Morning Rednesse Sun That is the Root or Mother of Philosophie, Astrologie and Theologie', suggesting the powerful symbolism associated with red (rubedo) and the sun (gold). The Aurora contained a woodcut which showed a triangle on a throne, symbolised the Trinity with rays emanating from it. (See Fig. 4.2.) Lead probably had access to *The Aurora*, which contained Boehme's first memoirs of his ideas, and thus was able to develop her own alchemical notions.

⁶⁷ Lead, *Tree of Faith*, p. 91.



Figure 4.2. Jacob Boehme, *Aurora, That is, the Day-Spring* (London, 1656), frontispiece.

Lead also may have read alchemical works by Sir George Ripley including *A Compound of Alchemy*. Ripley wrote of Noah's Ark, in connection with the alchemical stage of rubedo, 'The Waters of Noyes flud/ On Erth, whych were a hundred dayes contynuate/ And fyfty, away or all thys Waters yode, /Ryght so our Waters as wyse men understode/ Shall passe.'⁶⁸ He compared the growth of the Philosopher's Stone into the red elixir to Noah's cultivation of grapes, 'Sone after that Noe plantyd hys Vyneyard, Whych really floryshed and brought forth Graps anon ... For in lykewyse shall follow the floryshyng of our Stone:/ And some upon that thyrtty dayes overgone,/ Thou shalt have Graps ryght as the Ruby red.'⁶⁹ The rubedo stage was thus as an important part of the alchemical process, which symbolised the possibility of transmutation from a sinful condition to one of illumination, and allowed a reconciliation with God. Alchemical imagery thus played an important role as a way of expressing Lead's theology of redemption.

Lead's idea of the Ark was intimately connected with the idea that God's inner sanctuary provided the opportunity to find the divine within, and that souls could enter Paradise. Her vision of the 'Golden Ark' has further meanings, for it can be associated with the Ark of the Covenant, or the Holy of Holies. Both contained the inner sanctuary where God revealed His will. Both the second Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant were vessels containing mysteries of the divine. Noah's Ark was like a sealed box with only one skylight giving access to the outside world, and The Ark of the Covenant was a portable sanctuary symbolising God's dwelling place on earth.⁷⁰ Drawing directly from Revelation 11:19, 'And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament,' Lead prophesied a new covenant where the secret of God would be made more common and familiar than formerly. Lead's vision of these Arks symbolised a

⁶⁸ George Ripley, *The Compound of Alchymie*, sig. X4, in Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁷⁰ The Ark of Covenant is described as being covered with gold and carried on poles. The lid or 'mercy seat', was a gold plate topped with two cherubs with outspread wings. It contained the two stone tablets inscribed with the ten commandments (Dt. 10.1ff.), a pot of manna and Aaron's rod (Heb. 9:4f.). It consisted of a set of 10 violet-blue, purple and scarlet linen curtains. The interior was divided into 2 compartments with a veil (Ex. 26:31ff.) The first compartment was 'the holy place' containing the 'altar of incense' (Ex. 30:1ff), the second 'the holy of holies' which housed the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10ff.).

refuge or sacred space signifying a place where secrets are kept, including God's strength, described in Psalm 132:8: 'Arise, O LORD, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength'.

Lead's visions showed that access to God was available to anyone who 'would come out of the Babylonish confusion', i.e. the ungodly world.⁷¹ Lead wrote that, 'the Ark was not to rest, but to Fly and Float for more to be gathered in, till the Full Body of the First Resurrection state was completed'.⁷² The Ark was thus an 'Ark of Faith' - a vehicle to transport God's children in anticipation of an intimate union with the divine, based on Revelation 19:7. The 'Paradaisical Land' was the final destination of the Ark just as the Philosopher's Stone was the final outcome of the alchemical process.

The second Noah's Ark symbolised not only the process of purification of the individual soul, but also a collective experience of redemption. The Ark was designed to be a powerful vehicle of transportation, and it combined impressive and extraordinary specifications with the purpose of reuniting humankind with God. As a story of redemption, Lead's version of the Divine Ark offered a way transmuting a sinful condition into celestialty, ignorance of God into illumination, and lead into gold. Thus, Lead's use of alchemical imagery played a crucial role, by investing layers of meaning in her retelling of Noah's story. Of crucial importance was how the second Ark would save humanity. Lead believed that she was living in the Last Days, or End Times, and so the expectation of Christ returning again as prophesied in the Book of Revelation was just as tangible to her as the return of a second Noah, and the return of the Flood.

One of the few areas in which scholars have discussed Lead is in the history of millenarianism. Lead's visionary descriptions were a distinctive rendering of processes by which God acts out the final stages of history, prior to the expected return of Christ. In her rendering of the story of Noah, Lead saw herself as part of the biblical chronology in a new spiritual age where God unsealed and revealed new secrets. The next chapter is concerned with these issues and will examine how, in the 1680s and 1690s, Lead's theological beliefs changed from a form of predestination to the concept of universal salvation. It will also examine her ideas concerning the imminent return of Christ and Sophia and how they would create a utopia, which she visualised as the New Jerusalem.

⁷¹ Lead, *Ark of Faith*, p. 13. Babylon is linked theologically with the broken friendship between man and God.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

CHAPTER FIVE - Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and The New Jerusalem

The last two chapters have discussed some of the ways in which Jane Lead imagined and represented redemption and spiritual purification. As should have become clear in the discussion of Lead's imagery of Noah's Ark, she felt that the end of the world was approaching. Lead declared in the *Wonders of God's Creation* that 'the Mystery of time is now finishing, and ... the everlasting Gospel of the Love is opening',¹ and included a short verse to reinforce the idea that time was running out:

Shake, Shake your Earthly Dust away,
For now it is the Spirit's Day,
That will admit of no delay.²

The idea of the millennium, or a thousand year period, is rooted in the theological doctrine of eschatology, or the last things. Lead saw herself as part of a biblical chronology in a spiritual age where God unsealed and revealed new secrets in the last days. According to Lead, Sophia was to be as important as Christ at the restoration of humankind in the end times and the coming of the New Jerusalem. Lead's vision of the future foretold a universal restoration for all to find God through Sophia. This chapter will therefore analyse Lead's millenarianism, showing how she developed ideas from the Book of Revelation and Boehme's eschatology giving greater emphasis to the role of Sophia. It will look first at Lead's millenarianism in its wider seventeenth-century context and then show how her views about salvation changed over the course of her life, before describing her idea of the New Jerusalem and the role of Sophia.

Yet before we can consider Lead's millenarian ideas, it is necessary to explore some of her social and cultural contexts. Millenarianism was not unusual in the seventeenth century, and scholars have recognised its complex history. As Paul Korshin has noted, there was an 'infinite variety of seventeenth-century millenarianism'.³ Serious Protestant

¹ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1695), p. 54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 55, also published in Jane Lead, *The Wars of David* (London, 1700, reprinted 1816), pp. 36-37. Unable to locate the first edition I use the 1816 edition.

³ Paul Korshin, 'Queuing and Waiting: the Apocalypse in England, 1660-1750', in C. A. Patrides and J. Wittreich (eds), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature, Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions* (Manchester, 1984), p. 116; Richard H. Popkin, (ed.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650-1800* (Leiden and New York, 1988); D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London, 1964); W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to*

scholars from the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century such as 'Joseph Mede, Thomas Brightman, Johann Heinrich Alsted and James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh identified links between biblical symbols and historical persons or events to discern the impending apocalypse'.⁴

It has generally been accepted that millenarian ideas were important in the 1640s and 1650s when they inspired many prophets and prophetesses, and these ideas have been regarded as socially revolutionary. In *Visionary Women*, Phyllis Mack lists thirty-eight women visionaries who published writing during the Civil War and whose millenarian ideas were derived from the books of Daniel and Revelation. They believed that they were living in an apocalyptic time of crisis. The Quakers, with their emphasis on the Spirit, have been considered to be the 'heirs of this spirit of millenarian prophecy during the English Civil War.'⁵ Many of Lead's attitudes towards the millennium were similar to those of the Quakers. As Hillel Schwartz has observed, 'early Quakers were reluctant to assign a decisive date to the approaching millennium and they had a powerful sense of the approaching apocalyptic conversion of the entire world'.⁶ Indeed, Lead did not calculate with any calendrical precision the date of Christ's imminent arrival.

Anna Trapnel and Mary Cary, who were two distinctive Fifth Monarchist prophets of the period, applied the language of biblical apocalypse to English politics.⁷ They predicted the second coming of Christ and the establishment of a New Jerusalem on earth, and in particular in England, a belief also shared by Lead and her Philadelphian Society. Frustrated by a lack of response and repentance in the face of the impending arrival of Christ, Lead's evangelical zeal and her millenarian ideas resulted in an Old Testament style of prophecy as a forecast of the future and as an apprehension of God's intention. She warned:

Take care, O England, lest this Star do from thee glide away: let not the Clouds of

the 1840s (Oxford, 1978); J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (New Jersey, 1979), pp. 11-20; Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1980); Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism* (London, 1968).

⁴ Schwartz, *French Prophets*, p. 37.

⁵ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London, 1998), p. 36.

⁶ Schwartz, *French Prophets*, p. 52.

⁷ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 165-211.

ignorant Suspicion or demuring Jealousie, concerning the true Heir of this New Jerusalem Mother, who discovering that the Glass is now turn'd up, that its Half Hour is running, that the third watch is now to enter upon this Reign, and rule with the Scepter of Faith, hinder thee ... the Golden Cock is thereupon clapping its Wings.⁸

Lead wanted her immediate community to recognise the urgency of her millenarian message: 'Hear and Harken, O *England's* Inhabitants, for unto you a great Light hath shined. Oh let it not cloud, and pass over you; but be ye wise in this your Day ... O *London*, there is hid in thee, them that have a true and right Mission, from the Munition Rock'.⁹ Her concern was directed particularly towards the inhabitants of the capital, 'O City of *London*! A Mighty Angel doth fly, with this Thundering Cry, saying, Do not despise Prophecy, neither decry down the Ark of the Living testimony; from which the Spirit, as a flowing Stream, must renew Paradise upon the Earth.'¹⁰ Indeed, The Philadelphian Society interpreted events to discern a change from the old to the new order and frequently used biblical images of disorder mainly drawn from Daniel and Revelation to predict Christ's second coming. The *Theosophical Transactions by the Philadelphian Society* included sightings of flames of fire over London, eclipses, comets, floods, and 'A Relation out of France, concerning a Black Bitumous Vapour, that arose out of the Earth, and did considerable Mischief', as predictions of the new millennium.¹¹

Although millenarianism in the late seventeenth century has been much less studied in than in the revolutionary decade, it remained a significant intellectual activity, and there was still a lot of millenial fervour around in the 1690s and 1700s. The millenarian sentiment of the Philadelphian Society was shared by many others at the time, most notably the French prophets, whose inspired utterances predicted the end of a sinful world in which Christianity had diminished and places of worship merely parodied religious practices.¹² The leading figure among the French prophets, the Englishman John Lacy, claimed 'the Conversion of all Nations, the Destruction of the Antichrist, an universal Holiness to the Lord, and in fine, the

⁸ Jane Lead, *The Tree of Faith* (London, 1696), p. 2.

⁹ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 54.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

¹¹ *Theosophical Transactions by the Philadelphian Society* (5 vols, London, 1697), vol. 1, pp. 50-52.

¹² John Mullan and Christopher Reid, *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture: A Selection* (Oxford, 2000), p. 86. See also Schwartz, *French Prophets*; Hillel Schwartz, *Knaves, Fools, Madmen, and that Subtle Effluvia* (Gainsville, 1978).

Kingdom of God on Earth'.¹³ William Whiston (1667-1752), a friend and protege of Isaac Newton, underwent a religious conversion to a millenarian faith after hearing Newton lecture and reading his work. Whiston believed the final conflagration would change the earth into a comet in the end times.¹⁴ However, by the 1690s millenarianism had become less specific as its cultural significance was much changed. In particular, in the more general reaction against 'enthusiasm' at the end of the seventeenth century, there was a tendency to disassociate eschatological beliefs from more radical Christian ideas and many millenarians became 'religious moderates'.¹⁵ Millenarian ideas thus became increasingly marginalised and banished from public discussion. Isaac Newton, for example, was obsessed with the millennium but was cautious about publishing his ideas.¹⁶

One of the few scholars to consider Lead's millenarian views is Paul Korshin. He wrongly identified her as a Quaker and his analysis is extremely dismissive. He noted that Lead's 'enthusiastic writings are filled with inspired readings of Scripture, personal revelations, and a certainty that the apocalypse was nigh', and he suggested that the 'inspiration and style' of her complex mystical writing indicated a 'slight touch of mental instability'.¹⁷ He thus equated her 'enthusiasm' with an intellectual dysfunction, relating Lead to Jonathan Swift's satirical analysis, *A Tale of a Tub*, which associates millenarian activities with 'an undesirable level of mental instability'.¹⁸ His main interest was in the decline of elite belief in millenarianism. In a wider framework, Korshin argued that the character of millennial speculation changed in the early Enlightenment, and that predictions of the apocalypse in the age of reason gave way to a 'cautious suspicion of self-styled messianic prophecy'.¹⁹ He dismissed Lead's millenarian interpretation of Revelation, for

¹³ *A Cry from the Desart: Or, Testimonials of Miraculous Things Lately Come to Pass* (London, 1707), p. v. See also, Schwartz, *French Prophets*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Norman Cohn, *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 69. See also, James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹⁵ Bernard Capp, 'The Political Dimension of Apocalyptic Thought', Patrides and J. Wittreich, *Apocalypse in English Renaissance*, p. 116.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115. See also, Michael Heyd, *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995), p. 249; see also, Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720* (Ithaca, 1976).

¹⁷ Korshin, 'Queuing and Waiting', p. 244.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

example, as being 'neither rare or surprising for, by the end of the seventeenth century, the exegetes have universally agreed that St. John's witnessing is a mainly symbolical, predictive narration'.²⁰ He thus failed to notice a change in her millenarian beliefs, notably the unusual appropriation of Sophia as an apocalyptic virgin. This is a great shame for Lead was doing some unusual and original things.

Lead's writings, moreover, can be located within a Joachimite and Behmenist tradition. In her diary entry for 6 June 1678, Lead recorded expectation of the coming of Christ as king. She wrote, 'the Omnipotent King is coming to Reign over all, and neither Flesh, Beast, nor Dragon shall him detain'.²¹ Her message gained a sense of urgency when she predicted that 'Enoch's day is coming verily, the seventh thousand year from Adam is now approaching, and will certainly be shortened ... Therefore expect now daily, the mystery of the Incarnation will begin to work, in some hereunto elected'.²² She sometimes confused the coming of Christ with a third or fourth appearance, writing, 'There will be a Translation at Christ's third coming, before his fourth and last coming to Judgment'.²³ She also stated, 'But now this his third coming is that which is more excellent, and will produce more wonderful Effects, as preceding the great and last Day, when the Universal Judgment shall be passed upon both Quick and Dead'.²⁴

Lead considered that existing hierarchies and hegemonic structures would change, not by confrontation or anarchy, but by an inward transformation.²⁵ In the epistle of the third volume of her diary, published in 1700, Lead wrote that earthly hierarchies would be replaced by a spiritual model. Her message was to 'Allarm all Ranks, Orders, and Degrees of Persons, from the highest to the lowest, that so they may be found in readiness, to entertain the Joyful

²⁰ Ibid., p. 244.

²¹ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1700), vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 192.

²² Ibid., vol. 2, p. 402. Enoch, like Elijah, was received into God's presence without dying (Gn.5:24) and he acquired scientific knowledge on journeys through the heavens with angelic guides. He was also regarded as the initiator of writing and as the first wise man.

²³ Ibid., vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 46.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁵ The Philadelphians are *not* among the sectaries for whom Christopher Hill has made clear the importance of the biblical image 'the world turned upside down' (Ps. 146:9, Is. 24:1-2 and 20-1, Acts 17:1-6), C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Harmondsworth, 1972).

tidings of the Reign and Dominion of Christ in Spirit'.²⁶ She promised the continuation of the power structures into the next age, addressing 'the Imperial Powers of the Earth, Kings, Queens, and all of that Progeny ... so [God] will establish not only your Thrones and Kingdoms here below, but also in the Heavenly places, which are permanent and durable, Crowns that cannot fall away ... when every King shall become a King, Priest and Prophet, unto God'.²⁷ Her second address was to 'the Ecclesiastical Order, and all other Pastors and Teachers, under what Denomination soever'.²⁸ Called upon to account for themselves, Lead declared that they will be transformed into 'true Priests' through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lead thus envisaged a transformation from earthly into spiritual tiers in the end days, 'This face of covering from off the true Ministry is to be rent away, as the Spirit's Day draweth near'.²⁹

There are parallels between Lead's ideas and those of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1184- 1202). Unlike St Augustine who saw history as passing through the last age, Joachim of Fiore interpreted the 'Third Age of the Holy Spirit' as a Trinitarian conception of history which could be interpreted as the three ages of the Father, Son and Spirit or Holy Ghost.³⁰ The third status represented the 'coming of Christ', not in the flesh, but in a new outpouring of the Spirit which was to be clearly distinguished from the final Advent in judgement at the end of this last era in history.³¹ Marjorie Reeves has commented that a general millennial expectation was no proof of a distinctive Joachmist influence on Protestant radicals since it could stem directly from the Apocalypse. Yet, Lead's theology was clearly derived from Joachimism as she outlined the three ages in *The Wonders of God's Creation*:

The Old Testament having been appropriated to the Ministration of the Father, the New to the Son; now the Third Day is come, in which the Holy Ghost will have His, which will Excel all before it, to Unseal and Reveal what yet never was known or understood, that will be communicated to, and by such as are in an extraordinary manner sanctified and set apart for this holy Function.³²

²⁶ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 1, sig. A2r.

²⁷ Ibid., sig. A3r.

²⁸ Ibid., sig. A4r.

²⁹ Ibid., sig. A3r.

³⁰ Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Apocalyptic Future* (London, 1976), p. 142.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 142-43. See also Delno C. West and S. Zimdars-Schwartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington, 1983), pp. 18ff.

³² Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 8-9.

Moreover, the importance of the Spirit operating within cannot be underestimated in Lead's theology. Not only did believers undergo an inner personal transformation into divine nature, but they also anticipated Christ in his second appearance in Spirit form. Lead's diary entry for 7 March 1677 shows this recognition of spirit by spirit. She wrote, 'This Word came also to me, I again will choose a Disciplehood upon the earth, who shall know me in my inward Spiritual Figure, as I was known in former times, by a terrestrial Voice and Shape. Now I will walk again upon an invisible Earth, where none but the Spiritual man can understand my Speech, or my transformed Shape'.³³ So, Christ's return in the form of the Holy Spirit would only be evident to those who had undergone a spiritual regeneration. Lead wrote: 'You will plainly see that the Author was not in any way accomplish'd by Knowledge, Wisdom, or Understanding from without, but meerly from the fresh rising uprisings of the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ Emphasising the power of the Holy Spirit, Lead wrote in the epistle of volume three of her spiritual diary (1700) that, 'A stirring Birth moving it self was now felt, as after the Image and Likeness of Our Jehovah-God, to declare that He is into Flesh descended, there to fulfil and verify this New Law ... because once found weak in Birth of the Letter, but now Strong and Impregnable in Spirit.'³⁵

As W. H. Oliver has observed, millennialists differ strikingly over the continuity, or lack of it, between the world as it is and as it shall be, as well as over the nature of events which are expected to accompany the transition from one to the other. Post-millennialists stress discontinuity, and see an 'abrupt, revolutionary and violent' transition when Christ is returned to power first as Judge, then as King after the millennium.³⁶ In contrast, Lead's millenarianism departed from the cataclysmic portrayal of the apocalypse in Revelation 16 which records the battle at Armageddon, when the seven angels pour out their vials of wrath on humankind. As a pre-millennialist, Lead believed that the second coming would precede the millennium, and that the transition between this world and the next would be 'smooth, gradual and peaceable' and involve a continuity of the present.³⁷ She favoured instead, a spiritual transformation, or quiet revolution, in keeping with pre-millennial thought.

³³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, pp. 100-01.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pt. 1, sig. A3v.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

³⁶ Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists*, p. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Although Korshin has noted that Lead was 'millenarian from first to last',³⁸ he and other scholars have missed the important change in her millenarian outlook between the 1680s and 1690s. Moreover, Lead's change of view involved a major shift in her ideas about redemption which D. P. Walker who presented her as an advocate of universal salvation, for instance, failed to notice.³⁹ Walker recognised that her revelations went against Behmenist principles, 'Indeed, Boehmenism is the main obstacle in her working out a satisfactory theology to support this doctrine'.⁴⁰ In the 1680s, however, Lead's ideas were in accordance with Behmenism and she believed herself to be one of the 'First Fruits' chosen by God - 'redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb' - as one of the last messengers before the second coming, mandated to declare a new system of faith.⁴¹ Basing her ideas on Revelation 7:4, she included herself as one of the chosen one hundred and forty-four thousand souls who would become the 'first foundation of the Virgin Church'.⁴² Her chiliaistic belief that Christ would reign for a thousand years resulted in an opportunity to witness the second coming of Christ. She wrote in her spiritual diary, 'This Word anew was uttered, come and see the Thousand Years Reign of the Lamb by those who are worthy to find a part in the first resurrection'.⁴³

It is clear that in 1683 Lead believed in a selective salvation in which not all souls would be saved. In *Revelation of Revelations*, which described unsealing the mysteries of the biblical book of Revelation, she illustrated her belief in the 'first fruits' - that certain souls, an elect, would be the first to enter Heaven:

the prophecy does not say, That all the dead were raised up to reign with Christ a Thousand Years; but it is expressly declared, that the rest of the dead did not rise till the Thousand Years were expired; from whence it was cleared up to me, that many may be going through this Spiritual dying, and yet continue to be dead, whilst others are raised, according to that Word, Blessed are they that are partakers of this first Resurrection, so that it will not be universal.⁴⁴

³⁸ Korshin, 'Queuing', p. 245.

³⁹ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, pp. 218-30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁴¹ 'The first fruits of the Spirit,' also occurs in Romans 8:23 as an assurance that believers will gain their inheritance in heaven, through the spirit of adoption.

⁴² Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, p. 102.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 320.

⁴⁴ Jane Lead, *The Revelation of Revelations* (London, 1683), p. 7.

The 'one God, who is over all' would only save those whose souls were 'meetly qualified ... They are pure, holy and separated Souls'.⁴⁵ Thus, not all souls would be pure enough to join the first one hundred and forty-four thousand, or the 'first fruits'. Walker thus acknowledged Lead advocating universal salvation, but ignored her earlier writings which were concerned with a form of predestination.⁴⁶

It was not until three years later, however, that Lead fully developed and defended the concept of universal salvation. This coincided with the Philadelphian Society holding public meetings. The change in her millenarian ideas was set out in *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel Message* in 1697. Lead rejected Behmenism, and 'as a prophetess revealing God's will, went beyond scriptural sources writing, 'I had this word sprung in me: Neglect not to look into this Thorough salvation, for though it has been a Mystery from the Ages Sealed up, and unknown; yet now is the Age and Time for its Publication.'⁴⁷ The title page stated, 'Christ's Eternal Judgment shall come' for the 'Restitution of the Whole Lapsed Creation, Whether Human or Angelical'. This powerful and controversial statement, which affirmed God's universal love, brought redemption not only to *all* humanity, without exception, but also fallen angels. It brought her fierce criticism and lost her support, an event she had anticipated. She wrote: 'Now I did expect no less, when ever I published it, but that it would blow up some zealous angry Flames upon me, as being contrary to the common Doctrines preached.'⁴⁸ Although her theological views were endorsed by members of the Philadelphian Society, prominent supporters overseas were unhappy with her radical change. The German theologian, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, denounced her belief in universal salvation as incompatible with Behmenist thought because there was no scriptural basis, though he adopted and promulgated the idea himself after 1700.⁴⁹ Lead's defence lay in declaring that these revelations superseded those of her predecessors, most notably Jacob Boehme:

And whereas some highly illuminated, who have great Veneration for Jacob Behmen's Writing's do object, That he in his Principles seems to contradict this Universality as to the apostatiz'd Angels; I must own, that *Jacob Behmen* did open a deep Foundation of the Eternal Principles, and was a worthy Instrument in his Day. But it was not given to him, neither was it the Time for the unsealing of this Deep. God has in every Age

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁶ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ Jane Lead, *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel Message*, (London, 1697), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁹ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, pp. 11-12 and p. 219.

something still to bring forth of his Secrets, to some one gift, to some another, as the Age and Time grows ripe for it.⁵⁰

Moreover, Lead stated that 'there is no resisting this all-driving power, by which hidden and unknown worlds must be made manifest in this last age of times'.⁵¹ She translated the eschatological process through which God was unveiling and revealing his purpose as the revelation of ultimate salvation in the 'Last Age.' She declared past interpretations were outmoded and also rejected biblical sources which stated that deliberate apostasy was impossible (Heb. 6:4 and 10:26-27). Instead, by advocating the doctrine of universal salvation she was prepared to believe in the deliverance of devils.

The doctrine of universal salvation was linked implicitly to theodicy. Boehme's philosophy put the origin of evil into the dark fiery godhead, before creation, where it was harmonised with light. During creation the dark fire becomes sin, as in fallen angels and men, and God's avenging anger. Thus, sin and punishment have eternal roots, and the eternity of hell has a metaphysical basis.⁵² Boehme absolved God from the creation of sin by making evil synonymous with a disharmony of the seven 'fountain spirits'.⁵³ As Gibbons had noted, 'Walker is mistaken in thinking Boehme is Manichean', because the divine wrath is harmonised in the godhead.⁵⁴ Lead rejected the doctrine of eternal torment that implies a Manichean God. When Lead advocated the doctrine of universal salvation, she suggested that sin began in time, and therefore could not be eternal. She wrote that 'nothing of this evil could be said to be Everlastingly generated from God into the Angelical Principle'.⁵⁵ In a letter to Henry Dodwell, Lee defended Lead's doctrine of apocatastasis by reiterating that universal salvation and dualism are incompatible, 'But if this be a heresy, it is absolutely inconsistent with the origin of good and evil ... I believe the torments of hell, and consequently all evil to be finite'.⁵⁶ The doctrine of universal restoration thus allowed the

⁵⁰ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting*, p. 25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 223.

⁵³ B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 92.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵⁵ Lead, *Revelation of the Everlasting*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated and Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1864), p. 213.

restoration of angels and 'the whole race of our descendants be restored, and one after another come in here to us'.⁵⁷ This was because she believed that 'Death, Darkness, Curse and Punishment, must have unavoidably their end and period. For only that, which has no beginning, as Love, Wisdom and Goodness, that must abide and can have no end, and must drown and swallow up whatever is opposite'.⁵⁸

Lead, moreover, forged her theological arguments from a developing sense of confidence in her relationship with God. She was, she wrote, at first reluctant to consider an idea of comprehensive redemption, and she would not have adopted it, but she thought herself to be God's instrument. She explained, 'For I myself was averse to the taking of this Universal Doctrine: But was always taught by Divine Wisdom, not to oppose, what I could not reach, or comprehend. So I did let it rest for some years after the *Vision* of it.'⁵⁹ Her reluctance to share the idea also rhetorically enforced the message, 'Let none therefore presume to set bounds to the Wisdom and Power of the Immense Being ... or confine the worthy Inquirers and Seekers of his Mind, from fathoming the Treasures of his Wisdom.'⁶⁰ As Walker has suggested, 'whatever Lead's sources, by including the doctrine of universal salvation to her understanding of the last days, she thereby created her own unique millenarian programme'.⁶¹

Lead's belief in redemption without limits can be seen as a move that could transcend religious differences. Indeed, the Philadelphian Society believed in the gradual purification and unification of the Protestant churches through internal spiritual regeneration.⁶² They declared that their members would, 'gladly embrace a more Spiritual Religion, overlooking the outward Strength and Pomp of a Church State in Comparison of the Inward Life and spirit of the Gospel'.⁶³ The unification of Protestantism, however, was part of a larger picture. As Schwartz has noted, broad churchman who were millenarians and lived within the context of

⁵⁷ Lead, *Gospel Messgae*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 51.

⁶¹ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 226.

⁶² *The State of the Philadelphian Society*, (London, 1697), p. 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the New Jerusalem had a desire for the apocalyptic union of Protestantism.⁶⁴

Lead's belief in universal salvation, however, went far beyond the idea of Protestant unification. Although the Philadelphians went to great lengths to distinguish themselves from the external characteristics of the Quakers, they agreed with the general 'Internal Principle of a Light Within.'⁶⁵ It was this inner connection which could transcend outward differences. In 1697 Lead wrote, 'We are not to reject or throw away the soul of Turk, Jew or Papist because it is their opinion. It is very obvious and clear to me, that what the Romanists have in this point owned to be their faith, they have derived from the *Primitive Age* being in that time a pure Gospel-discovery ... but since that time they have corrupted it, and mingled with it their Sorceries; and so have brought the whole thing into disreputation.'⁶⁶ The debate about the conversion of the 'The Turks, Jews and Papists' was part of many apocalyptic schemas; Archbishop Laud and his associates, for example, acknowledged the church of Rome in an act of reconciliation as it shared the fundamentals of Christianity (the Bible, baptism and ministry) though he regarded it as erring and corrupt.⁶⁷ Yet, Lead believed in a universal salvation as proof of God's compassion; His love would allow for such repentance that there would be a sufficient number of purified souls for Christ to begin his millennial reign. As Walker has observed, 'It was both a sign of the nearness of the Parousia and a means of bringing it about.'⁶⁸ Lead rejected the 'Doctrine that hath been preached of an endless Misery and Torment' which had 'wrought little effect in frightening or terryfying 'em from their evil Courses'. Lead proposed instead that 'if Love's Center were rightly and duly openly, and made manifest, it would have worked far more naturally and kindly, to gain the Will of those who are Perverse and Obstinate'.⁶⁹ Her adoption of the doctrine of universal salvation was a move to universalism that included all faiths and non-believers.

⁶⁴ Schwartz, *French Prophets*, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), p. 143.

⁶⁶ Lead, *Gospel Message*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁷ See A. Milton, 'The Church of England, Rome, and the True Church', in K. Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (London, 1993). See also, David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 173-74.

⁶⁸ Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 226.

⁶⁹ Lead, *Gospel Message*, p. 13.

The Eight Worlds

Lead developed a creative plan which allocated human souls, however imperfect, into a hierarchical system of different worlds for the purpose of purgation, advancement and restoration to God. Lead developed this theory in her treatise called the 'Eight Worlds':

there are several Regions or Worlds that do receive the Souls of all Degrees and Ranks, to the Number Eight. The First of this *Mortal Visible* World: The Second is the *Astral* or *Aerial* World: The Third is the *Waterish Elementary* World: And the Fourth is the *Fiery Dark* world ... For the next Four Worlds nothing of Evil or Sin can enter, or in the Inhabitants of them dwell. The First of these is the *Paradisical* World, where there is a growing up to higher degrees of Perfection; to compleat us for the Kingdom of *Mount Sion* ... The Third Heavenly World is the Royal and Principal Seat of God the Father, with the Eternal Virgin Wisdom, and the Seven Spirits. This bears the Title of the Great City, called the *New Jerusalem* ... Then above this is that World called the *Still Eternity*: Out of which were generated all these Worlds.⁷⁰

It was a system of purification in which a world was allocated according to the soul's degree of sin/purity. It may have been a concept based on a Platonic notion of reincarnation of souls which work their way up to purer and higher states of consciousness.⁷¹ It was, however, a method for ensuring that all souls could make their way back to God in a process of salvation which operated by degrees: 'these Elementary Spirits do Cooperate and Qualify with the Elementary Nature of Man, both for Good and Evil, according as the Propensity of the Mind doth either way incline'.⁷² She wrote:

The Second Sort [of soul] is such as are Ignorant of God, and of their own Eternal Being, looking no further than to an Earthly Animal, and Rational Life, in which they are swallowed up; yet do darkly see something beyond, Believing in God and Christ Historically, and are convinced by the Light of Nature that they stand in need of a Saviour, and so falsely do take hold of him. These when they dye, pass no higher than the Airy Region.⁷³

There appears to be a parallel between the experience of this 'Second Sort of Soul' and the notion of purgatory. Here, Lead is bridging the gap between the death of the individual and the Church. The Church at the end times is expected to be 'without spot or wrinkle' (Eph. 5: 27), but the individual is likely to face his own death in a more ambiguous state. The place which the 'second sort of soul' reached was similar to purgatory as it was an interim state of

⁷⁰ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 5-6.

⁷¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston, 1985 reprinted 1996), p. 219.

⁷² Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

purification, and Lead mentioned it being a place where traditionally souls of those who have died underwent punishment still due to unforgiven sins.⁷⁴ In *The Enochian Walks with God* she wrote, 'numerous years may you abide in These Purging and Trying Furnaces; one Day (Here, while in the Body) would have set forward your work more, than Years in those Centers, where you are confined'.⁷⁵ Punishments were graded but Lead, considered the process of the souls' refinement and purification process allowed them to ascend through the eight worlds to the highest place, 'the inmost Place of Purity, which bears the Title of the *Still Eternity*; for that nothing but Everlasting Rest, Stillness, and Silence is to be perceived here'.⁷⁶ Her millenarian expectations thus resulted in an explanation of how mortal flesh could become capable of everlasting life, 'the whole Man being changed into a Deified Nature' through a process of mystical transformation in a succession of higher worlds.⁷⁷

Lead's public declaration of the doctrine of universal salvation in the 1690s can be seen as a rejection of the Pauline interdict, 'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the Law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.' (1 Cor. 14: 34-5). Prevented from practising within ecclesiastical circles of the established church, Lead was unpaid, marginal and subject to suspicion, yet, as a female writer of religious affairs and later as a female leader of the Philadelphian Society, she presented herself as a public figure and as a potential agent of change. She felt chosen by God and her conviction led her to affirm her position as a prophetess. She may have been influenced by Acts 2: 17-18, 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ... and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.' Drawing on her personal revelations from God she consolidated her position as a chosen leader to prepare for the imminent second coming of Christ. She clearly believed that 'women might be both leaders and inspired vehicles of the Spirit at the time when millennial completion of Christ's work in salvation was imminent'.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church* (3rd edn, Oxford, 1997), p. 1349. Walker, *Decline of Hell*, p. 227.

⁷⁵ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Ruether, *Women and Redemption*, p. 148.

The Apocalyptic Virgin

Lead's millenarian expectations were unusual in that her visions of the millennium were highly gendered. As we shall see, it was not only Christ who figured prominently in Lead's millenarian ideas. Sophia's role would also be prominent in the end days. The foregrounding of Sophia, was crucial to Lead's vision of a New Jerusalem. Lead described Sophia as the 'co-essential creating Power in the Deity,' and the importance of Sophia, thus, cannot be overestimated in her theology.⁷⁹ Lead believed in a sophianic millennium, a utopia created through a divine feminine principle, Sophia, who as the second Eve would restore universal harmony through a new spiritual generation. Even though Lead believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent, her millenarian hopes centred as much on Sophia's return as on Christ's.

As we have noted above, Lead's millenarian beliefs drew on biblical and Behmenist ideas. Lead however, developed the feminine divine aspect of Sophia much further than Boehme. As Serge Hutin has argued, Sophia became 'almost a personality' to Lead, through her many personal revelations involving visions, imaginings and dreams. Her writings testify to a frequent communication with the divine by both auditory and visual natures. Lead considered Sophia to be a bridge - a mediator between the earthly and the divine. On 12 July 1681, Lead recorded the Word of God in her spiritual diary, 'There is another Gate I have opened for thee, into which thou shalt enter, and draw Multitudes after who now cannot see their way'.⁸⁰ Indeed, Lead tells us that she passed through the seventh gate of 'Transformation and Transfiguration', a metaphor showing how human essence can pass into the divine and become a partaker of the divine nature.⁸¹

In Behmenist thought the redemption of creation and the apocalyptic restoration of all things in the end times lay in the regaining of harmony.⁸² The task of humanity would be to turn its will from the corporeality of the world to the spiritual being of the inner world, assisted by Sophia. Sophia was considered to be an integral part of the godhead in Behmenism. Although Boehme and Pordage felt the workings of Sophia in their mystical experiences, 'there is no suggestion of an anthropomorphic, visionary apparition' of Her in

⁷⁹ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

⁸⁰ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 275.

⁸¹ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 53.

⁸² Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 91.

their writings.⁸³ Sophia was portrayed, however, as Love, the essential divine attribute in Behmenist thought, and the way that humanity could gain access to the divine and be reunited with God in a pre-lapsarian paradise.

Lead expressed her vision of this prelapsarian paradise as the coming of a new millennium, by highlighting the role of Sophia: 'The Splendorous Deity may for a time under a shade of contemptible Humanity lye obscured; but the Virgin Wisdom's Day will, by her bright *Star* through the dark Pitcher of this Earthly Form shine forth; so as in this time of our Evening-tide her Morning Light shall upon the Earth spread'.⁸⁴ Expressed in a feminised way, Sophia was the light, the illumination of a new dawn, the beginning of a new era - the New Jerusalem. Elevating Sophia to the highest realm, Lead described Her in terms of nuptial imagery and using the idea of a fertile marriage, 'The Father in Union with his Virgin Wisdom' as part of a procreative process which will result in the New Jerusalem.⁸⁵ She considered Sophia to be 'God's Spouse and Mate from whom the highest birth, the Eternal Word of Wisdom did go forth',⁸⁶ who as 'A Glorious Female Figure was brought forth that was so commixed and mingled with the Deity, as she became God's Spouse and Bride, being Spirit of his Spirit'.⁸⁷ As a consequence of the fertile marriage Lead believed that in the forthcoming age a female would be required to conceive and give birth to a male. On April 30 April 1675, Lead recorded that 'Wisdom hath recreated and formed another *Adam*, being Male and Female, a Production of her own Virgin-Nature'.⁸⁸ Lead believed that before the Fall, Adam and Eve were androgynous virgins, and afterwards, Sophia left them. According to Lead, Mary as the mother of Jesus was concerned that 'nothing that is here said tends to the Lessening, but to the Greatening rather, and extending the Merit of JESUS the Son of *God* and of *Mary*, the true Christ'.⁸⁹

The Eternal Word passed into [Mary's] flesh and blood, together with the heavenly Virgin Sophia, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Christ was in a double sense, the son of the Virgin, he was the son of the earthly Virgin Mary and the son of the heavenly Virgin, Sophia, who united herself with Mary ... the heavenly Virgin is wedded to Him

⁸³ Ibid., p. 113.

⁸⁴ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸⁶ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 32.

⁸⁸ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 79.

⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 530.

... She is the same Virgin or idea who departed from Adam when he became unfaithful to her ... This idea has absolutely entered into the Second Adam, who is restore her to us.⁹⁰

This intimate relationship between Christ, the Virgin Mary and Sophia offered a solution to restore universal harmony, or a prelapsarian paradise. Lead envisaged Christ's second return and the procreation of the androgynous second Adam in spirit form, not flesh. Lead thus offered a highly theorised solution that was not intended to be interpreted literally, as a model for the redemption of humanity in anticipation of the New Jerusalem.

Moreover, on 13 December 1676, Lead used more conventional symbolism to predict a restoration of paradise. She described a vision of the 'Woman cloathed with the Sun', from Revelation 12 as a 'great Wonder that is to come forth'.⁹¹ Apocalyptic marriage, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun in Revelation, are common metaphors in the prophetic literary tradition. Lead used these tropes for the hope of salvation and ultimate reward in the divine world in the 'End Times'. Her vision featured Sophia, who played a crucial eschatological role in Lead's visions.

Lead recorded a night vision in her spiritual diary. 'In the night I had a bright shine all about my Bed, which signified to me, that as without, so it should be all Light from the seven Oily Lamps, that should be as a covering Flame to cloath the Virgin Woman who should be impregnated with the Birth of the most Holy Seed of God' who Lead named 'The Wonder of Wonders'.⁹² Lead used 'The Woman Clothed with the Sun' as a prophetic declaration of a new age. Sophia, as the maternal deity, was the key to a new spiritual lineage. Lead wrote, 'For the Mystery of the Creating Word, shall in the Figure of a Woman, now in this latter Day, in the Earth stand Diversely and in Plurality: as shall be known when the Elected Virgin shall have conceived, and brought forth her First-born Son, that must this strange and marvellous Generation multiply.'⁹³

By producing a new spiritual generation, Sophia would lift the curse placed by God upon women in Genesis 3:15, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.' For Lead, Sophia was a creating force in human progress toward a millenarian utopia and she was the second Eve. By providing a feminist

⁹⁰ Caitlin Mathews, *Sophia Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World-Soul* (London, 1992), p. 55.

⁹¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 109.

⁹² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 468.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 344.

interpretation of reclamation through Sophia, 'Woman must reclaim her right, and what was lost in the Fall, Sophia must now provide to bring mankind back to a prelapsarian condition, where universal harmony would be restored with Christ's return' in the New Jerusalem.⁹⁴ Lead's anticipation of the second coming of Sophia, thus reaffirmed that men and women would be spiritual equals. The coming of Sophia signalled the beginning of a new spiritual age. In *The Revelation of Revelations* (1683) Lead wrote:

Oh, great Goddess and Queen of all worlds! Wilt thou, after so long a time of desertion, once appear again! Who is it that hath entreated thy favour, and gained a promise from thee, of a visit ... because nothing now will satisfy, unless thou bestow thyself, with all thy divine senses, as a co-deified life, to 'show that thou art not prevailed upon, to ... restore thy own Virginity, where thou findest humility and importunity in that personality which is all beloved of the highest Wisdom, and only Spouse of God; know and remember us who are brought to thy feet, and have been under thy severe discipline; therefore allot thy self to be our garland and crown.'⁹⁵

For Lead, the expected return of Sophia was as important as the arrival of the second Christ. Lead's originality of thought, however, went beyond a christocentric interpretation of millenarianism, to a more gendered non-anthropocentric notion of religion. Lead expected that Sophia and Christ would have more far-reaching repercussions for humanity in spirit form, than Christ had when he was on earth in human form. She wrote that 'The Birth of Jesus was great and marvellous, but this shall far excell it ... the Mother of the Virgin Birth will be more dignified and honoured, than the foregoing Ministration in the Birth of Jesus was'.⁹⁶

As we have seen, Lead played a crucial role in preparing for the new Church of the Virgin Wisdom by informing the Philadelphians of the imminent arrival of Christ and Sophia's second coming. It is clear that Lead's idea of a New Jerusalem centred upon the role of Sophia as a mediator between the earthly and the divine and promising a union with God. Lead believed in a sopherianic millennium, a utopia created through Sophia, who as the new Eve would restore universal harmony through a new spiritual generation. She adapted biblical sources and sometimes rejected her Behmenist influences, replacing them with her own revelations, as depicted by her dramatic change of millenarian ideas in the 1680s and 1690s, a point that scholars have hitherto missed. Her change from a form of predestination to advocating the highly controversial doctrine of universal salvation is demonstrated by the purification process for all souls that ascended the 'Eight Worlds'. Lead's millenarian views

⁹⁴ Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme* (Paris, 1960), p. 102.

⁹⁵ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 42.

⁹⁶ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 470.

were, however, socially and intellectually marginal, though still important and influential. She is, moreover, important in the history of religious ideas, as being one of the last public millenarians from a gentry family.

The theme of spiritual motherhood was another important aspect of Lead's work. The following chapter will examine how Lead translated her experiences as a mother into religious ideas of spiritual motherhood. It will also consider the unusual symbiotic relationship between the Virgin Wisdom, Sophia as Lead's mother, and wisdom being born within, meaning that Lead's soul was thus both mother and daughter simultaneously.

CHAPTER SIX - Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny

'In our day, it is true, no one perfect in piety seeks to have children except spiritually.'¹

The final three chapters will examine how Lead figured gender, redemption and sophiology. This chapter will examine the significance and nature of maternity and maternal imagery in Lead's life and writings. First, it will consider how Lead was perceived as a mother of Love among her followers. It will then go on to examine Lead's relationship with her own spiritual mother, Sophia, to show how in Lead's visionary world Sophia's procreative abilities provided hope for a future spiritual generation represented by the second coming of an androgynous Adam. This chapter will also consider how Lead's experiences as a mother were translated into religious ideas, and by examining the Behmenist influence on the use of her gendered imagery, it will conclude by showing how she moved beyond these ideas to produce her own individual version of a maternal Christianity.

In the seventeenth century Protestant theologians taught that women were created for motherhood and that their maternal role was an appropriate way to serve God.² Such religious beliefs provided a context and meaning for motherhood, and clergy highlighted biblical texts which promised salvation through maternity. Lead would have been familiar with the scriptural passage in 1 Timothy 2:15 where women are promised salvation in motherhood and 'shall be saved in child-bearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.' Thus, motherhood took on a spiritual significance. The title 'spiritual mother', a popular term of devotion, was used to describe Lead. She was recognised as a spiritual mother-figure and called the 'Mother of Love' within her community. A correspondent of the *Philadelphian*, Richard Roach referred to Lead as 'our Mother', when he wrote, 'the Spirit of Wisdom in our Mother appropriated to you that Mystical Name, by which you subscribe yourself'; the writer was referring to the pseudonym 'Onesimus', which

¹ Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, 17:19, quoted in Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage, Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, 1993), p. vii. For a feminist critique about Augustine, see Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York, 1996).

² Patricia Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England', in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (New York, 1990), p. 23. See also, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 148-64, and Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion 1500-1720* (London, 1996).

Lead gave Roach.³ Francis Lee also regarded his mother-in-law as his 'spiritual mother,'⁴ and in a letter to the Behmenist, Pierre Poiret, he described Lead as his 'venerable and dearest Mother'.⁵ Lead considered Lee to be 'a spiritual son given to her in old age.'⁶ In a letter written during 1695 to Roach, she wrote, 'your most effectinet Mother to Love and Serve you. Jane Lead.'⁷ Her maternal love was not only metaphoric, it was also embodied in her matrilineage. Lead, however, says very little about her own mother, or indeed her experiences of motherhood, yet she did express spiritual concern for her offspring. In 1696, we know that she was living with her daughter, Barbara.⁸ It was during this period that Lead wrote the introduction to *The Fountain of Gardens* which declared: 'there may be some I bear the memorial of a Mother to, natural as well as supernatural, that may possibly succeed in the same spirit'.⁹ This dual idea of motherhood as both 'natural' and 'supernatural' was a pivotal motif in Lead's writing, and will be discussed later. Lead prophesied that a spiritual generation would be born of Sophia, though here she may be referring to her own 'natural' children as well as members of her Philadelphian Society.

Other female religious figures in early modern society were also known as spiritual mothers. The eighteenth-century Shaker leader, 'Mother Ann' Lee, was considered by her followers to be the 'spiritual mother in Christ'.¹⁰ The Southcottians considered Joanna Southcott and John Ward as 'the divine woman and Ward her spiritual son'.¹¹ The

³ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D832, fol. 58r, 'Papers of Richard Roach'. Onesimus was a runaway slave who was converted by Paul (Phm. 10) and became a trustworthy disciple (Col. 4:9).

⁴ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine Theosopher William Law* (London 1854), p. 509.

⁵ Dr Williams' Library, London, MS Walton C.5.30, 'Epistle I, 1701'.

⁶ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 509.

⁷ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D832, fol. 58r, 'Papers of Richard Roach', fol. 57r.

⁸ See Chapter One, *The Philadelphians' Prophetess* for an account of Lead's life.

⁹ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure* (3 vols, London, 1696), vol. 1, p. 16.

¹⁰ Robley Edward Whitson, *The Shakers: Two Centuries of Spiritual Reflection* (London, 1983), p. 10.

¹¹ W. H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millenialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), p. 153.

Buchanites also believed in the 'divinity of Friend Mother Mrs Buchan'.¹² As Phyllis Mack has noted, many Quakers were 'admirers of the spiritual motherhood of Margaret Fell'.¹³ Fell was seen as a caring and attentive mother. Quaker, Thomas Holme, regarded Fell as, 'A nursing mother ... who feeds the hungry with good things, but the fat with judgement.'¹⁴ The Quakers' application of spiritual motherhood, however, was grounded in their theology. As Jeanette Gadt has argued, the Quakers believed God was imbued with maternal and compassionate qualities. As such, He was more powerful than a condemnatory God. Gadt suggests that, 'To Quakers, God was essentially a non-anthropomorphic being, a force of divine love from which radiated mercy and justice, and these attributes were often expressed in a feminine, nurturing way.'¹⁵ Unlike the Quakers, however, Lead did not apply maternal attributes to a male God. Indeed, many of Lead's ideas about God were dualistic. God represented the Father, and Sophia was often portrayed as a mother figure. Maternity was important for Lead's visionary life because Sophia was Lead's new mother figure. The maternal aspect of Sophia is a subject that will be discussed below, but first it is necessary to consider other religious figures who were imbued with maternal qualities that particularly influenced Lead.

The Maternal Qualities of Rebecca

Interestingly, some of Lead's ideas of spiritual maternity figured Sophia as the biblical figure Rebecca, the mother of Esau and Jacob, with Lead placing herself as Jacob, as she had as the second Noah. It can be seen as both gender reversal and gender identification. 'The First Vision' of April 1670 in her spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens* is worth quoting at length on this point.¹⁶ It invoked two role models central to Lead's ideas about spiritual maternity, namely Rebecca and Sophia. Lead wrote:

¹² J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979), p. 34.

¹³ Phyllis Mack, 'Teaching About Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism', *Women's Studies*, 19 (1991), p. 229.

¹⁴ Letter from Thomas Holme to Margaret Fell, Chester Castle, 28 August 1655, SM, 1/197 (11,355), quoted in Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 40.

¹⁵ Jeanette Gadt, 'Women and Protestant Culture: The Quaker Dissent from Puritanism' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999), p. x.

¹⁶ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 17.

there came upon me an overshadowing bright Cloud, and in the midst of it the Figure of a Woman, most richly adorned with transparent Gold, her Hair hanging down and her Face as the terrible Crystal for brightness, but her Countenance was sweet and mild. At which sight I was somewhat amazed, but immediately this Voice came, saying, Behold I am God's Eternal Virgin-Wisdom, whom thou hast been enquiring after; I am to unseal the Treasures of God's deep Wisdom unto thee, and will be as *Rebecca* was unto *Jacob*, a true Natural Mother; for out of my Womb thou shalt be brought forth after the manner of a Spirit, Conceived and Born again: this thou shalt know by a New Motion of Life, stirring and giving a restlessness, till Wisdom be born within the inward parts of thy Soul. Now consider of my Saying till I return to thee again.

Now after three days, sitting under a Tree, the same Figure in greater Glory did appear, with a Crown upon her Head, full of Majesty; saying, Behold me as thy Mother...after six days the Vision appear'd again, with a Train of Virgin-Spirits, and with an Angelical Host; and called to me to come and see the Virgin Queen, with her first-born Children; asking me, Whether I was willing to be joynd amongst this Virgin Company? At which I reply'd, All willing to offer up my self most free: Then immediately I was encompass'd about with this Heavenly Host, and made a Spirit of Light. Then these Words from the Virgin proceeded, saying, I shall now cease to appear in a Visible Figure unto thee, but I will not fail to transfigure my self in thy mind; and there open the Spring of Wisdom and Understanding.¹⁷

In Lead's vision the only reference to non-mystical maternity (besides Mary and Jesus) was her remark about Rebecca and Jacob, '[I] will be as *Rebecca* was unto *Jacob*, a true Natural Mother'.¹⁸ Rebecca's preferential love for her younger son was emphasised, making her 'a true Natural Mother.' In the quote above, Sophia assumed the role of Rebecca, while Lead was Jacob. Yet, in order to understand fully Lead's idea of spiritual motherhood further, it is necessary to examine representations of Rebecca in a wider context and also to be aware of Jacob Boehme's interpretation of Rebecca.

The Quaker, Elizabeth Bathurst, sister of Ann, considered Rebecca worthy of inclusion in her publication *The Sayings of Women* (1695) and portrayed her as a positive role model.¹⁹ Highlighting Rebecca's maternal care and protection for Jacob, she wrote, 'And after the Children were Born, and come to Age, she spoke to her son Jacob, and instructed him how he should obtain the Blessing, which God had promised, Gen. 27.6. and soon

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-21.

¹⁸ Rebecca favoured her youngest twin Jacob, who was more spiritually minded and gentle, over Esau who was bold, daring, strong and her husband Isaac's favourite. Rebecca planned how Jacob could receive Isaac's blessing. She was a devoted mother, prepared to deceive but also to assume responsibility and suffer any consequences of her scheming (Genesis 27:13).

¹⁹ Elizabeth Bathurst, *The Sayings of Women, Which Were Spoken Sundry Occasions, in Several Places of the Scriptures* (London, 1695).

afterwards she took care of her Son Jacob, concerning his Marriage.²⁰ Moreover, Rebecca was invoked as a cultural symbol of faithfulness in marriage. *The Book of Common Prayer* stated, 'Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together.'²¹ Rebecca was thus regarded as a good wife, having caring, nurturing qualities as well as wifely skills as this marriage sermon expressed, 'it is said of Rebecca [Gen.27:9] that she prepared meat for her husband such as he loved: so a good wife is known when her words and deeds and countenances are such as her husband loveth'.²² Rebecca was also upheld as a 'wise' woman in a prayer when a woman was past childbirth.²³ As such she was an example of a central biblical figure who was considered worthy of emulation.

Boehme suggested that Rebecca had received God's blessing and was thus covenanted by God. He described Rebecca as 'a figure of the Virgin Mary, who brought forth Christ, viz. The blessed of God, who should bless Esau, and all the Adamicall children.'²⁴ Rebecca's sons, however, had different natures representing two unequal nations, 'The corrupt Adamicall nature in its Type was represented in the womb in Esau, with the type of Christ in Jacob'; Esau thus represented the 'Adamicall sinfull nature' in contrast with God being manifest in Jacob.²⁵ Moreover, Rebecca's 'woman-like, motherly, natural love' for Jacob was given special significance through the conjoining of God's love. Rebecca:

loved Jacob as to his Originall, which although she might not so well understand externally and rationally, yet the spirit in the Covenant understood it in her, which moved her also to bear such a Love towards Jacob; for there was also a conjunction between the Mother and Son ... For the love-desire in the Mother and Son was from one Originall, and therefore her desire inclined it selfe more towards Jacob, than Esau.²⁶

The bonds of Rebecca's motherly love were thus a scaled-down version of God's greater

²⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

²¹ Joan Larsen Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England 1500-1640* (Chicago, 1992), p. 7.

²² Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591), pp. 69ff., in Kate Aughterson, (ed.), *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook. Constructions of Femininity in England* (London, 1995), p. 83.

²³ Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows*, p. 8.

²⁴ Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum, or, An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called GENESIS* (London, 1656), p. 393.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 374.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 380.

love. So, when the law of primogeniture was overturned by Rebecca, deceiving Isaac to deny Esau his birthright blessing, Boehme declared, 'It was of God that Jacob obtained the blessing' as Esau had 'become depraved in his nature and lost the inheritance of God. The blessing and the filial inheritance resteth only upon [Jacob] the Second New Adam.'²⁷

Recent feminist scholarship has highlighted the ambiguous nature of Rebecca and she is now often depicted as a scheming, deceitful wife forced to play out her role as a victim of circumstance. Catherine Smith has noted that, 'Radically interpreting Biblical accounts, Lead 'raises' Eve, and points to Ruth, Naomi, Rebecca and Mary as types of the goddess. Their disobedience and dependency are recognized as the strategies of victims, disguising their original power and keeping it alive in misleading circumstances.'²⁸ Karen Armstrong has also observed that 'Rebekah was forced to resort to a desperate subterfuge' in disguising Jacob as Esau.²⁹ Susan Niditch, however, describes Rebecca as 'a trickster heroine' who 'formulates the plan and succeeds, moving the men around her like chess pieces'.³⁰ Thus, the ambiguous figure of Rebecca, who was noted not only for being an enterprising and generous mother to her younger son Jacob, but also for tricking her elder son Esau out of his inheritance, and duping her husband in doing so, would appear to be a curious representative of Wisdom - one which emphasised the resourcefulness of female cunning and concern for her offspring, over more unworldly virtues such as chastity and self-sacrifice. However, Rebecca was portrayed by Lead as being neither disobedient nor dependent, nor did she consider her a victim. Yet, Smith's argument is misleading because she does not situate Lead's argument within its Behmenist context, but instead, she interprets Rebecca in a socio-economic situation, as a casualty of circumstance. Both Lead and Boehme chose to distinguish Rebecca as one of God's chosen representatives on earth, believing that her actions were guided by divine authority. Lead's and Boehme's claims about Rebecca were also grounded in biblical terms. Rebecca could be considered as having status conferred upon

²⁷ Ibid., p. 393.

²⁸ Catherine Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in Dana V. Hiller and Robin Sheets (eds), *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power* (Cincinnati, 1977), p. 403.

²⁹ Karen Armstrong, *In the Beginning: A New Reading of the Book of Genesis* (London, 1998), p. 77.

³⁰ Susan Niditch, 'Genesis', in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (eds), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (London and Louisville, Kentucky, 1992), p. 19.

her by God, and being related to God by Covenant (Jn.1:12-17). The example of Rebecca however, has been little used by writers in the early modern period, and the Behmenist interpretation of her was indeed singular. Lead clearly accepted the idea of the transference of God's covenant from Rebecca to her equally spiritually receptive son Jacob, thus offering spiritual continuity from mother to son.

Lead elevated Rebecca, as Boehme had, to the role of a spiritual mother comparable to Sophia. Lead, however, adapted the story so it was applicable to herself. Lead wrote herself into the picture of familial relationships stating that Sophia, 'would be my Mother, and so I should own her and call her, who would now be to me as *Rebecca* was to *Jacob*, to contrive and put me in a way how I should obtain the Birth-right-Blessing'.³¹ Lead also recorded Sophia advising her, 'I will now help thee to it [the Birth-right-Blessing] near at Hand, even in enclosed Ground.'³² Her visions clearly dictated the terms by which Lead wished to emulate Rebecca's role. On 10 November 1673, Lead wrote that Sophia told her that she could obtain the 'Birth-right-Blessing': 'thy Father will come down with his dear Son thy Elder Brother, and I thy Mother, and will hereof take and feed, so that the Fountain of Jacob may be thy Blessing, which the Eternal Father accordingly pronounced, saying From the Upper and Supercelestial Planets let thy Eternal Nativity again renew, as from its own Originality'.³³ Thus, by adopting the role of Jacob, Lead established the blessings of both God and Sophia, which can be seen as an allegorical way of returning to 'one's own Native Country and original Virginitie'.³⁴

Lead's phrase 'one's own Native country and original Virginitie' has been interpreted similarly by Catherine Smith and Brian Gibbons.³⁵ Smith has considered Lead's visionary feminism as a product of the 'writer's imagination to illuminate the human condition by treating the female, not the male, as universal',³⁶ thus downplaying the 'patriarchal

³¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 25.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁴ Jane Lead, *Revelation of Revelations* (London, 1683), p. 47.

³⁵ B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 145. Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism', p. 403.

³⁶ Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism', p. 403.

limitations of mystical thought' and instead, emphasising mystical women's ability to voice 'their reduced condition and their native powers'.³⁷ As such, Smith has interpreted Lead's 'native Country and original Virginity' to mean that 'Sophia guides her daughters, the souls of humanity, to herself. They find her only by looking inward to the Inner Light of their own individual reflections.'³⁸ Gibbons has also suggested that the aim of Lead's spiritual project was 'to seek existential identity',³⁹ and he commented that unlike her male Behmenist followers who strove for nuptial union with Sophia, 'Lead's sophiology permitted a positive construction of femininity in which womanhood itself achieves subjectivity.'⁴⁰

Lead's relationship with Sophia was indeed complementary, Sophia being both mother and daughter to Lead's regenerate soul. Lead anticipated a new angelical generation of multiple births in which she, as a mother both 'natural' and 'supernatural' would be involved. In Lead's vision, Wisdom was Lead's 'true Mother' out of whose womb she would be spiritually or 'supernaturally' reborn. Wisdom, however, was born within Lead's 'inward parts' of her soul by a 'New Motion of Life, stirring and giving a restlessness', hence she was both infant and mother, simultaneously being born and giving birth. Thus, out of Sophia's womb, she would be 'conceived and born again' because 'Wisdom would be born in the inward parts' of her soul.⁴¹ Lead's metaphor of spiritual motherhood was unique; she broke away from the tradition where Christ was represented as a Mother, whose milk, i.e. blood, was the salvation of humanity.⁴²

Yet, before we can consider Lead's phrase 'one's own Native country and original Virginity' in its proper context, it is helpful to outline briefly how Boehme represented 'mother nature'. Boehme was interested in the beginnings of creation, and indeed

³⁷ Ibid., p. 408.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 403.

³⁹ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 146.

⁴¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, p. 19.

⁴² See Chapter Eight, *Philosophia*. For a study of maternal imagery to describe God and Christ in the medieval period see, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 110-69. Bynum states that 'explicit and elaborate maternal imagery to describe God and Christ, who are usually described as male, is so popular with twelfth-century Cistercian monks' (p. 111), yet, 'the theme of God's motherhood is a minor one in all writers of the high Middle Ages except Julian of Norwich' (p. 168).

Mysterium Magnum was his exposition of Genesis. His translator stated that he believed in 'One Mother ... which is called the Father of nature',⁴³ and that 'the Original of everything ... in the beginning all arose out of one Mother.'⁴⁴ He also referred to the 'Abyss', as the 'one and only Mother.'⁴⁵ From the will of the godhead, seven qualities were generated, representing the 'seven Mothers, out of which the substance of all Substances originally ariseth'.⁴⁶ Boehme also used the term 'Pregnatress',⁴⁷ to represent the gestative seventh quality which encompassed the other six, as 'they receive their nourishment power, strength alwayes, in their mothers Body or Womb'.⁴⁸ Ann Bathurst put it more succinctly when she wrote of the possibility of being born again spiritually many times, yet being born 'naturally' only once. She stated that, 'The new birth is the mother of nations: for all must be born again; and we have but one natural mother, but it may be many spiritual mothers and new births, we must pass through before we are born again.'⁴⁹ In effect, spiritual rebirth was considered to be a repetitive process in which the soul could be united with the godhead.

Lead's phrase 'one's own Native country and original Virginity' was taken from her exposition of Wisdom's gates, 'where the hidden track of the Virgins way may be found' leading to the New Jerusalem.⁵⁰ The way was difficult, yet, if temptations could be resisted, entry would be attained through every gate. Every step higher would result in 'Unity in our selves, and with one another.'⁵¹ Lead was trying to explain the process of spiritual rebirth and

⁴³ Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum: The Signature of All Things* (London, 1651), p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Jacob Boehme, *The Fifth Book of the Author, in Three Parts [Incarnation]* (London, 1659), p. 138.

⁴⁷ Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Jacob Boehme, *Aurora, That is, Day-Spring Or Dawning of the Day in the Orient Or Morning Rednesse Sun That is The Root or Mother of Philosophie, Astrologie and Theologie from the true Ground Or A Description of Nature by Jacob Behme Teutonick Philosopher Being his First Book* (London, 1656), p. 359.

⁴⁹ Bodleian, Oxford, MS Rawl., D1263, 'Diaries of Ann Bathurst', dated 3 July 1693.

⁵⁰ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 46. The inscriptions on the seven Gates are, 1. Abnegation or Renunciation of this Outward Principle, 2. Probation, 3. Translation, 4. Bountiful, 5. Wisdom's Factory, 6. Transferring Gate, 7. Projection.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, sig. B1v.

unity with the godhead meant a return to a prelapsarian state of 'Unity, Harmony and pure Liberty'.⁵² In Behmenist terms, then, the eternal 'abyss' from which *all* life comes and to which it is returned to be reunited with the divine was, in Lead's terms, one's 'own Native Country and original Virginité'. The meaning however, does not necessarily lead to 'the universal feminine' suggested by Smith, or Gibbons interpretation of 'womanhood achieving its subjectivity'. For Lead, the 'native country' was not gendered. Males and females had equal access to the prelapsarian harmonious state which accorded with her idea of universal salvation.⁵³ All souls would eventually be saved and would return to the godhead. In Lead's understanding of redemption, Sophia's relationship with humanity was part of the eschatological scheme and there existed a complex relationship between Sophia and Mary. As we shall see, many of the feminine attributes of Sophia had parallels with the figure of Mary.

The Virgin Mary and the Virgin Sophia

The most significant mother-figure in the Christian faith is Mary.⁵⁴ Although Lead was clearly Protestant, some of her thoughts were informed by ideas developed in the first centuries after Christ around the figure of Mary.⁵⁵ This section will elucidate some of Lead's religious beliefs surrounding the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Wisdom to show that they were inextricably linked. Not only was the figure of Sophia imbued with qualities associated with Mary, but in Lead's theology, Mary was a 'type' of goddess who had lesser powers than Sophia.

As Barbara Newman has observed, 'In the Protestant world, where the divine Father and Son were no longer counterbalanced by the figure of Mary the Mother and Ecclesia the Bride, sapiential theology took on more esoteric and heterodox forms.'⁵⁶ Lead produced an unusual

⁵² Ibid., sig. B1r.

⁵³ See Chapter Five, *Millenarianism, Universal Salvation and the New Jerusalem*.

⁵⁴ J. Pelican, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London, 1996). See also, *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies*.

⁵⁵ Ideas about Mary were subsequently incorporated into the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Of the four declared dogmas about the Virgin Mary, her divine motherhood, her virginity, her immaculate conception, and her assumption into heaven, only the first can be traced to biblical sources (Isaiah 7:14, Matt. 1:23).

⁵⁶ Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 261.

account of a female presence in the godhead, recapturing in a different way something that the advent of Protestantism rejected, the figure and power of Mary. Piety associated with Mary clearly survived the Reformation.⁵⁷ For example, Thomas Traherne's devotions to Mary are notable for their extravagant language of praise.⁵⁸ A. M. Allchin has noted that the poetry of Traherne 'has an exuberance, a freedom, a directness, which is not often found in Anglican writing about Mary.'⁵⁹ Marian liturgy also drew heavily on the lyrical descriptions in the Song of Solomon, 'Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun' (Song 6:10). It denoted a pureness of virginity, 'A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (Song 4:12). Indeed, Lead's spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens* also reflected the same source in its title. Newman notes that through the 'intermingling of the Wisdom odes with the sacred love song, the liturgy suffused the veneration of God's Mother as Sophia with the vivid image of her as bride (Prov. 8:15).'⁶⁰ Proverbs 8:22-31 led theologians to formulate a doctrine of Mary's pre-existence in heaven, and by the twelfth century the doctrine was widely taught.⁶¹ Lead also applied the idea of the first born before all creation to the figure of Wisdom. As Gibbons has observed, 'Lead's Wisdom is clearly as personal a figure as the Virgin Mary in traditional Christian belief, and much of her thought on Sophia has a strong mariological flavour.'⁶²

Yet there is very little known about Mary if only the sources from the Bible are used. However, there were four notable views which developed about Mary in the early church which Lead applied to Sophia: the tradition of the 'Ever Virgin'; the role of mediator between humankind and God; the second Eve; and, Mary as the image of the church.⁶³

⁵⁷ See L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature* (New Haven and London, 1962), pp. 96-107. See also, A. M. Allchin, *The Joy of All Creation: An Anglican Meditation on the Place of Mary* (London, 1984), pp. 17-89.

⁵⁸ Allchin, *The Joy of All Creation*, pp. 78-89. See also, A. Bradford, (ed.), *Thomas Traherne: Selected Poems and Prose* (London, 1991); T. Traherne, *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God* (London, 1699).

⁵⁹ Allchin, *The Joy of All Creation*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Newman, 'Pilgrimage of Christ-Sophia', p.23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶² Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 145.

⁶³ The Council at Ephesus in AD 431 proclaimed Mary - *Theotokos* (mother of God), and at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 under Roman Catholic doctrine, Mary was given

Lead, however, claimed Sophia was 'the eternal Goddess'.⁶⁴ So, according to Lead, Mary was one of the emissaries of the greatest heavenly virgin of them all - Sophia. Lead described Mary as 'the Virgin Mary, who was the Representative of the Eternal Virgin.'⁶⁵ She viewed Mary as the human mother of Jesus, who had been privileged by this maternal relationship at the intersection of a particular historical and cultural moment.

According to Lead, Mary was not the mother of God, she was, 'the Virgin that brought forth Jesus in a Fleshly Figure, she remained still the same, no transmutation came upon her, no more than upon others only living a Holy Virgin Life.'⁶⁶ Also, Lead did not consider Mary to be God's spouse or wife, instead Mary was 'a Type of the Eternal Virgin Mother' who had a role to play at a certain time and place, hence Lead's statement:

JESUS CHRIST being the Head, and the First-born of this Royal and Princely Generation, who was after the way and manner of Human Nature conceived in the Womb of that Virgin *Mary*, that was but a Type of the Eternal Virgin, who brought forth the Son of God before all Time: But *Mary's* Womb was sanctified to bring forth in Time, that CHRIST who was the Son of God before all Time.⁶⁷

Mary was a representative of Sophia, as she took on a human form. Christ's incarnation was made possible by Mary, and so the divinisation of humanity could ensue. In Behmenist terms 'the same virgin of the Wisdome of God, in the Word of God, hath in the bosom of the virgin *Mary*, given it selfe to her virgin-Matrix'.⁶⁸ The Cistercian monk and French theologian, St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), suggested that there was a need for another mediator in addition to Christ, which was Mary. He first recognised Mary as a necessary intermediary between humankind and Christ and compared her to 'an aqueduct coursing down through the city of the faithful'.⁶⁹ Lead similarly depicted Sophia as a female intercessor between herself

the official title *Aeiparthenos* (ever-Virgin), and it affirmed her virginity at the conception. In AD 649, Mary's perpetual virginity became dogma of the Church. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, 1976), pp. 65-66. I am grateful to Dr Chris Maunder for these observations.

⁶⁴ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God*, (London, 1694), p. 26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Jacob Boehme, *A Description of the Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (London, 1648), p. 224.

⁶⁹ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 286.

and God, as a bridge between the divine and human. She may have drawn from this earlier tradition of an intercessor besides Christ, but unlike many medieval mystics Lead was not attracted to the idea of Christ as Mother.⁷⁰

The relationship between Mary and Sophia was a subject that interested other Philadelphians. Lee wrote of the relationship between Mary and Sophia in a similar way to Lead, saying that 'Christ, according to the flesh, was conceived of the Holy Ghost by the Virgin Mary (blessed for all generations), not as she was an earthly virgin only, but as the heavenly Virgin of God's Wisdom had chosen her to represent herself outwardly.'⁷¹ Interestingly, Lee converted to Roman Catholicism after the death of Lead. Gibbons, moreover, acknowledged that 'the association between the Virgin Wisdom and the Virgin Mary, always latent in Behmenist thought, is made much more explicitly by Lead'.⁷² Lead, however, was selective in what she chose to adopt or reject when considering the figure of Mary.

Lead clearly regarded Sophia as 'God's Spouse and Bride'⁷³ and as her spiritual 'Mother'.⁷⁴ Drawing on the passage describing when Jesus pointed out his mother Mary to John saying, 'Behold thy Mother' (Jn. 19:27), Lead wrote, 'It is to be observed those Words which our Lord did let fall when he was upon the Cross, to the beloved *John*, saying to him, *Behold thy Mother (which was the Virgin Mary, who was the Representative of the Eternal Virgin)*'.⁷⁵ Thus, when Lead heard the words from Sophia saying, 'Behold me as thy Mother', it consolidated her position as divinely chosen. She wrote that it showed, 'a privilege of

⁷⁰ See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 110-69; Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1991), pp. 236-46; Ulrike Wiethaus, (ed.), *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse, 1993), pp. 112-14, and Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995). For a contemporary feminist re-evaluation of God as Mother, see Deborah F. Middleton, 'God as Mother: A Necessary Debate', *New Blackfriars*, 65 (1984), 319-22, and Kari Elizabeth Borresen, 'God's Image, Man's Image? Female Metaphors Describing God in the Christian Tradition', *Temenos*, 19 (1983), 17-32.

⁷¹ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, pp. 511-12.

⁷² Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 145.

⁷³ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, (London, 1695), p. 32.

⁷⁴ In a vision recorded in April 1670 Sophia instructed Lead to 'Behold me as thy Mother', in Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 19.

⁷⁵ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 26.

Adoption, whereby we may entitle this Virgin for our true Mother'.⁷⁶ The way in which the figure of Sophia was tied in with maternal imagery also included an important account of spiritual rebirth. To complicate things further, spiritual rebirth was closely allied to the configuration of Adam which can also be seen as a reconfiguration of sex difference.

Androgynous Adam and Supernatural Sophia

This section will consider the importance of Sophia's procreative abilities, and examine Lead's ideas concerning Sophia as the mother of the androgynous Adam in the end days. Lead described how, through a spiritual rebirth, souls could recapture the prelapsarian paradise lost at the Fall. The current and future state of humanity rested on the story of Adam and Eve. Lead wrote, 'This Virgin Adam had in himself, before ever *Eve* was taken out of him, but she with-drew as soon as Adam looked outward, as if he were not sufficient of himself to encrease and multiply for the replenishing of Paradise, God having created Male and Female in himself.'⁷⁷ The Behmenist interpretation suggested that the first Adam was an androgynous being, at first 'a Man, and also a woman' - his Fall from an androgynous state being thus into matter and gender.⁷⁸ Lead made the distinction between the physicality of the first Adam after the Fall, and an expectation of a spiritual second Adam, as '*the First Adam and his Posterity were made living Souls, to move Natural Bodies: But the Second Adam, with his Virgin-Spirit, turns Souls into Spirits, and cloaths them with Glorified Bodies*'.⁷⁹ Because Adam looked outward towards the world, the Fall caused a separation between Adam and Eve, and between humankind and God. Thus, Adam and Eve no longer enjoyed a harmonious relationship with God after the Fall.

Lead suggested, however, that Sophia's procreative abilities could offer a solution. While the descendants of Eve were subject to sinful natures, the children born of the Virgin Wisdom, or Sophia, could escape this curse through the regaining of original androgyny.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁷⁸ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, p. 78. For an interesting study of Boehme's ideas of Adam's prelapsarian life, see Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, pp. 95ff.

⁷⁹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 377.

⁸⁰ A Behmenist interpretation of Eve's reduced condition is that, 'Eve unlike Sophia, can no longer be 'a Mother without Generating', that is 'manifesting' images rather than 'generating' fleshy children', in James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage*

Lead wrote that 'the first earthly *Eve*, which is the Mother of all Living in Earthly Property. Her Womb is fruitful, still to bring forth the Viperous Thoughts.'⁸¹ Eve was, however, to be replaced by a spiritual generation conceived and delivered by the Virgin Wisdom. It was through Sophia then, that the children of Eve could be reborn and return to an original state through an inward spiritual transformation. In Behmenist terms it meant a return to a prelapsarian paradise where purity of the soul would triumph over flesh:

God Created *Adam* at first to bear his own Image and Figure, who was to represent God himself, the High and Divine Masculine, Male and Female; so that *Adam* had his Virgin in himself in imitation of his Creator, which in Time was brought forth in a distinct Figure.⁸²

After the fall, the first Adam had 'lost his Virgin Body, wherein his strength did lye'.⁸³ Lead suggested that the 'pure eternal living Soul, thus breathed by God, into an Angelical Image, and formed into an Organical Body from the one pure Element ... was to be seen in the first Paradisical Man' - Adam *before* the Fall.⁸⁴ This prelapsarian Adam was a symbol of purity and union with the godhead. Indeed, Lead considered the second, spiritual, Adam an imitation of God. He was meant to represent how humankind existed before the Fall, in a harmonious relationship with God. Adam was thus the personification of the divine, unlike Christ who was a combination of humanity (from Mary) and the divine. This relationship with God and mankind could be healed by Sophia's assistance, allowing the soul to reunite with the godhead. The impregnation of the Holy Ghost, or God made flesh, thus resulted in Adam, who was originally conceived by God *and* his spiritual mother, Wisdom.

Lead emphasised how the female population was included in this restoration. She wrote of the Word telling her that 'though the holy Scriptures make mention chiefly of the first Adamical Man Restoration; I say the Woman's Restoration, as well as the Man's'.⁸⁵ It was entirely in accordance with Lead's ideas concerning the doctrine of universal salvation, where all souls would be saved. As the leader of the Philadelphian Society however, she

and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton (Oxford, 1987), p. 144.

⁸¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, p. 76.

⁸² Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 31-33.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁴ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, sig. B1r.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 118. This entry is dated 9 March 1676.

would have been aware that she could not be employed in any official position within the established church. However, she did not trouble herself with the thorny issue of the barring of women's full incorporation into the Church of man; she was more concerned with the full incorporation of everyone into the Church of God. She emphasised the internal, homogenous nature of the soul as being the important connection with God. She wrote, 'And as to the outward sex, there shall be no distinction, though the Typical Priesthood admitted none but Males in its day: All that is done away.'⁸⁶ Lead thus posited an egalitarian model which did not distinguish between the outward physicalities of the flesh, which she perceived as a hindrance.⁸⁷

Moreover, by drawing on Galatians 3:28, 'there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus', Lead declared 'Male and Female are alike here...Where there is neither Male nor Female, but Christ is all, and in all...Wisdom's Purity and Power in the Spirit is all that God respecteth.'⁸⁸ At the point of the restoration there would be no distinction between the sexes. For Lead then, those souls who came after Adam would *not* have a gender; her idea of a universal restoration meant there was a place where every soul would be genderless. Lead did not, however, apply the same criteria to the 'gender' of those who comprised the godhead. God and Christ were clearly male, and Wisdom female, while the Holy Spirit was ambiguous, or at times linked with Wisdom.

For Lead however, Sophia was central to this role of restoration because She would be responsible for the procreation of the second Adam. Lead wrote, 'Wisdom hath recreated and formed another Adam, being Male and Female, a Production of her own Virgin-Nature.'⁸⁹ Lead may have been influenced by Behmenist ideas which had resonances with the Cabbala and Gnosticism and suggested that, 'Adam was androgynous [and] could give birth parthenogenically.'⁹⁰ Yet, Lead did not state this idea explicitly in her own writings. She wrote of the spiritual procreation and the reproductive capability of both males and females

⁸⁶ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 106.

⁸⁷ The denial of women's full incorporation into the Church remains a contentious issue today and will not be elaborated upon here. See for example, Karen Armstrong, *The End of Silence: Women and Priesthood* (London, 1993).

⁸⁸ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 106.

⁸⁹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 79.

⁹⁰ A. Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* (Koln, 1997), p. 165. See also Robin Waterfield (ed.), *Jacob Boehme*, (Berkeley, 2001), p. 120.

who could retain their identities:

The male has the Virgin in himself, and so from these may multiply a Spiritual Offspring, as was proposed in the first Adam. And on the other Hand, the female Virgin shall have like manner, according to the excellent might of God-Man so incorporating with the Virgin-mind ... to procreate these Angelical Births from themselves.⁹¹

The implication here was that Sophia was in God, as Eve existed in Adam, and vice versa. Lead's writing however, suggested a paradox: the chaste 'virgin' could also 'procreate angelical births', meaning that reproduction occurred through an androgyne and 'All which is to be restored by the Virgin, who is not limited to Male or Female for Angelical Generation'.⁹² Lead was also concerned to point out that 'the Reign of Christ must be terminated in the Virgin's seed. Eve's lost chastity will produce a new Generation, to whom this Kingdom shall be committed in trust.'⁹³ In this way the offspring of the heavenly Sophia would replace those of the earthly Eve as the 'pure Virgin Spirits, who travel to bring forth Christ spiritually.'⁹⁴ If Eve's fall resulted in a separation of the genders, then redemption by the Virgin Wisdom could be seen as a way of regaining a state of spiritual androgyny.

Lead's visions highlighted the need for the human soul to be acquainted with the Virgin Wisdom, and regain qualities associated with Her, such as purity. According to Lead, 'The New Paradise will begin, as it was in the first Paradise, in Male and Female, through the restoration of the lost Virgin-Nature.'⁹⁵ To become a virgin, however, allowed a move beyond the sphere of sexual polarity, because the soul was created after the image of God, and was constituted of male and female properties, which were virginal. When God begins to consort with the soul, He turns what was human into a virgin again by removing the degenerate and emasculate passions which make humans, restoring virtues such as purity. Thus, the physicality of a human could be transformed into the pureness of virginity once the soul had consorted with God, thus erasing an external identity in favour of the pure soul returning to the essence of God.

Lead asked 'How can Sophia introduce herself into that nature, where her pure chastity

⁹¹ Jane Lead, *The Signs of the Times* (London, 1699), p. 15.

⁹² Jane Lead, *The Wars of David*, (London, 1700 reprinted 1818), p. 39.

⁹³ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 38.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Lead, *Signs of the Times*, p. 13.

hath been violated?'⁹⁶ She suggested that after the restoration of Paradise, the soul would return again to God, having been born again spiritually to regain its lost Virgin-Nature. Lead thus stressed the need for an internal transformation of the inner self that pointed to the true nature of the soul rooted from the beginning in Wisdom. It was thus *from* the Fall into gender and matter that Lead wished to escape.

Catherine Smith has suggested that Lead was a kind of seventeenth-century feminist. She argues that mysticism has given women, such as Lead 'an indirect language for protesting sexual politics.'⁹⁷ Yet, as Gibbons has suggested, 'In Lead's works, sexuality is generally contrasted with the regenerate life.'⁹⁸ Lead considered the fallen condition in terms of lost virginity, and regeneration as a freedom from the constraints of sexual procreation.⁹⁹ For Lead this meant that, 'Wisdom shall in the Spirit and Soul lay its Platform in order to the restoring that Virgin nature, and Godlike Simplicity, that has been deflowered through the subtlety of Reason.'¹⁰⁰ The Fall thus meant turning away from God resulting in a fall into gender and matter. Whereas the offspring born 'From God the Father, in conjunction with the Eternal Virgin Wisdom who brought them forth' would be purified, angelical souls.¹⁰¹ Her revelations were thus a way of revealing God's will. However, as we shall see, she produced her own version of a maternal Christianity.

Androgyny: Wisdom's Children

'Arise, arise, ye virgin daughters, and draw near, having this name inscribed upon you with the finger of your God.'¹⁰²

This section will examine how Lead constructed a sense of self by translating her

⁹⁶ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Catherine Smith, 'The Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic', in R. R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin (eds), *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, 1979), p. 195.

⁹⁸ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult*, p. 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Jane Lead, *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking* (London, p. 1681), p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 32.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

experiences as a mother into spiritual beliefs. Bodily experiences concerning maternity were a common way of describing maternal functions of the divine. For example, Elaine Hobby has argued that there was a difference in the way that the concept of God as a 'nursing mother' was used by men and women: 'God has qualities that are specifically feminine, and women therefore have a privileged access to understanding those aspects of divinity.'¹⁰³ In her imagery of lactation, for example, Bathurst, also a mother, applied the experience she had of the capability of sustenance.¹⁰⁴ Expressing her desire of union with Christ, Bathurst transferred her own milk metaphorically, thereby creating a maternal bond where Christ was the child:

I am as pent milk in the breast, ready to be poured forth and diluted into Thee, from whom my fullness flows with such fullness and plenitude, and pleased when eased. O flow and overflow! O thou milk of the world! To the well of life that springeth up in me as a *fountain*, to reach all the branches...But the word Divine is still too big for me to speak. It fills me with that which is unutterable, sweet and pleasant, yea satisfactory to an excess! O Lord thy fullness is fullness I fill as from a sea, and well I may, when the sea has broke in upon me, upon my understanding.¹⁰⁵

The metaphorical qualities of bodily milk were thus easier for Bathurst to articulate than 'the word Divine'. The milk was an active force which sprang up, spread and filled, representing a mystical connectedness in a symbiotic relationship between herself and divinity.¹⁰⁶ Lead however, reversed the role of 'child' which Bathurst had used, and in contrast, she used lactation as a metaphor for the way Wisdom's Children would gain spiritual sustenance. For Boehme, such hunger for milk could symbolise the striving for a closer relationship with God, 'As a child continually longeth after the breasts of the Mother, so must its hunger continually enter into the love of God.'¹⁰⁷ Thus, in accordance with Behmenism, Lead wrote:

as soon as they [Wisdom's Children] are Spiritually Born, care is to be taken that this holy birth draw the sustenance of Life from no other than its own Virgin Mother, whose

¹⁰³ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (Michigan, 1989), p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ For an examination of the subject of milk, see Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 127-42.

¹⁰⁵ Bodleian, Oxford. MS Rawl D1263, 'Diary of Ann Bathurst', entry dated 1693.

¹⁰⁶ Crawford, *Women and Religion*, pp. 111-15.

¹⁰⁷ Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ Discovered* (London, 1648), p.86.

Breast must at all times satisfie and nourish it. For according to what it sucks in of such a Kind, Nature and Quality the Birth is, for it draws in the Spirit and Life of its Mother. Therefore watch to it, and hang not upon any strange Breast.¹⁰⁸

Again, Lead's description of the birth of her own imaginary child recorded in a night-vision on 20 September 1682, shows how she used the language of androgyny to transcend sex:

it was the Sight of an Infant, new born, that was brought to me; and it was said to be *Mine*. But I wondered at it: for I knew it not When, or How, I brought it forth. Then I Questioned, whether it was Male, or Female? And it being examined, there was no Mark of Distinction upon it. Which was Marvellous, to consider what Manner of Child this would be. And when I call'd it over in the Divine Sense, it was said, *This Figures Out of the Mysterious High Birth, that will be Mighty in Power, and Wonderful in Wisdom and Majesty.*¹⁰⁹

The unsexed baby transcended gender in a platonic way by embodying an androgen. The absence of the baby's sex represented part of the process of purification, as the new-born infant had 'no mark of Distinction'.¹¹⁰ The vision was also prophetic as it indicated Lead's anticipation of spiritual offspring. Her night-vision was thus concerned with the doctrine of God made flesh. Like the Virgin-birth, Lead's visionary birth was also miraculous.¹¹¹ She wrote, 'I knew it not When, or How, I brought it forth'. The vision showed how Lead anticipated an angelical generation as a way of restoring humanity to God. She wrote of a 'Resurrection-Birth Which converts all of the dead Body of Sin in those, who have been baptized with Christ in his Death, into a Life of Child-like Innocency, that derives its new Creaturely Being from the contracted matter of the deity in Humanity, which is its risen Body of Birth.'¹¹² Thus, the soul was imbued with 'child-like innocency' instead of a state of sinfulness.

In another night-vision dated 12 January 1677, Lead saw monstrous, sinful creatures from whom burst beautiful children:

¹⁰⁸ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 311-12.

¹¹⁰ For interesting accounts of attitudes to the body, see David Tripp, 'The Image of the Body in the Formative Phases of the Protestant Reformation', in Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 131-51, and Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994).

¹¹¹ Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-Emergence of the Goddess* (London, 1976), pp. 46-73.

¹¹² Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 212.

In the night there was presented unto me, two Forms very displeasing to my Eye, being Cloathed with Hairy Goats-Skin, where spots and blotches did appear so unlovely, as I was disgusted at the sight of them ... this outward Deformity ... And I beheld two sweet amiable children came forth from within this deformed Figure.¹¹³

There was a similarity between her vision and the story of Esau and Jacob. The 'innocent and all-beautiful Babes' who appeared from the 'Hairy Goats-Skin' had cast off 'that thick and cloudy smothering Body of Sin' which had disguised them.¹¹⁴ Lead illustrated the point that matter, like sin, could be transformed, or, like the body, could be refigured. This conversion process signified the new birth of the soul, or spiritual rebirth as part of the purification which could lead to redemption. The delivery of the infant and the transformation of the 'two sweet children' thus both represented a process of spiritual change. Having undergone a spiritual rebirth, these were now Wisdom's Children.

In order to return to the godhead, the souls of Wisdom's children had to be transformed. Lead believed that souls would be produced by a spiritual rebirth and thus belong to Wisdom who would bear such souls as her own offspring. Of divine parenthood, they were 'to know themselves as to their original Pre-existency in God the Father, and brought forth through the Womb of the Eternal Virgin, a pure Simplified Spirit'.¹¹⁵ The 'Simplified Spirit' thus being androgynous. Lead explained:

That which is born of the Flesh, is Flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit; though this hath been hitherto understood only of the Birth of the Mind, and of the Souls Regeneration, yet a much deeper thing hath been manifested to me: to which I must give ear, to wit, the Flethy Birth brings forth the Flethy Body, but the Spirits Birth brings forth a Spiritual Body.¹¹⁶

Indeed, Lead considered herself to be one of Wisdom's Children whose soul had undergone a regeneration. She wrote that 'Wisdom did conceive us in her Womb, and did bring us forth, and so passed us over in our Minority to our Jesus; we by him having attained to a more grown State, he doth transmit us over to the care and charge of the Holy Ghost.'¹¹⁷

The idea of Wisdom's children was a familiar one which has direct associations with biblical

¹¹³ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹⁵ Lead, *Enochian Walks*, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, pp. 413-14. The entry is dated 29 September 1677.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 137.

material, 'But Wisdom is justified of all her children' (Lk. 7:35) and it appears on the title page of Lead's spiritual diary, in which she kept a record of her spiritual progress as one of Wisdom's offspring. Lead wrote of the relationship between Sophia and her offspring, 'From this our eternal Virgin Mother, that now is very great in Wisdom, Majesty, and Power, who cannot be more naturally sympathising with her Children.'¹¹⁸ She considered that, 'we are to reckon our selves born anew into the unity tending to all Purity of Perfection with Christ our First Born from the Dead, and so to appropriate this Eternal Virgin for our supernatural Mother.'¹¹⁹ Lead's construction of a theology of motherhood was therefore informed by her understanding of her own experiences as a mother and Sophia's spiritual maternity.

Lead's images of maternity have caused Diane Purkiss to question whether she was producing a gynocentric understanding of religion or whether Lead transcended gender.¹²⁰ Purkiss, is one of the few scholars who has written about Lead in terms of the maternal body. Purkiss is clearly influenced by French feminist writers who interrogate the meaning and subversion of linguistic signifiers. Using psychoanalytical theory, they question language and femaleness and its relation to the patriarchal order.¹²¹ As Purkiss suggested, Lead, like many other early modern women including Elizabeth Poole and Anna Trapnel, wrote texts which 'shows the basis for women's desire to situate themselves outside or beyond the body.'¹²² Purkiss quotes Lead's description of the passage of the seventh gate which 'causes an unalterable Transmutation of all gross matter, and the vile Body's shape into heavenly consistency: such a celestial body wisdom's Virgin shall have power to put on.'¹²³ Purkiss has interpreted this as a disavowal of the subject body which is 'encoded in tropes of physical dissolution and disembodiment.'¹²⁴ (The transmutation of matter, clearly signified

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹²⁰ Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century', in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London, 1992).

¹²¹ Annette Kuhn, 'Introduction to Helene Cixous's 'Castration or Decapitation?''', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 36-54.

¹²² Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice', p. 151.

¹²³ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 53.

¹²⁴ Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice', p. 151.

a desire for purification, a theme Lead also expressed in alchemical terms.¹²⁵) Purkiss also suggested that:

such metaphysical transcendences meant that women could foreground their insubordinate souls, and narratively discard their subject bodies. But writings of this kind also operated to reinforce both women's physical subjection and the social inferiority which purported to be based on women's physical weakness. Writing out of the body ultimately reproduced the ideology of women's bodily inferiority, even as it allowed women to construct a more stable sense of self.¹²⁶

Purkiss also argues that 'Elsewhere, women prophets sought to rewrite the specificity of the female body in metaphysical terms. Jane Lead thus represented the transmission of mystical knowledge in terms of female reproduction.'¹²⁷ Yet, as Thomas McCray-Worrall has suggested, Lead's gendered figurations 'systematically incorporate the bodily associations they ostensibly disavow'.¹²⁸ This is apparent when Lead wrote that Christ's 'Glorified Body becomes our Covering; He is in us, and we in Him' causing 'the very Outward Body to shine'.¹²⁹ Such passages suggest a refiguration, and not the reduction of the body. It therefore disrupts the widely accepted understanding in recent scholarship that women prophetic writers simply treat their bodies as empty vessels or passive conduits to receive the Word of God. Lead did deploy this common literary trope and described herself as '*wholly Passive, and the Spirit altogether Active*' and wrote that God '*was to arise, and speak forth himself, through this Earthen and empty Vessel*'.¹³⁰ As a vessel, she was not empty but filled with the Spirit of God. The rhetoric she used showed that her prophetic utterances became a form of delivery, which, she wrote were '*as a Bodily Birth, going forth from me in Outflowing Acts of Power*'.¹³¹ Lead thus articulated her inner space as a means of

¹²⁵ See Chapter Three, *Searching for Gold*.

¹²⁶ Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice', pp. 151-52.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹²⁸ Thomas M. McCray-Worrall, 'Wisdom's Body: The Prophetic Writings of Jane Lead', (unpublished M.Phil. Diss., University of Cambridge, 1999), p. 6.

¹²⁹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 307-08. (Entry dated 3 September 1682).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, sig. A2. For scholarship on women's self-deprecation and self-effacement, see Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 15-44; Hinds, *God's Englishwomen*, and Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*.

¹³¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 324.

communication with the divine thus challenging conceptions of herself as a passive, empty vessel. Her conventional use of rhetoric merely belied her identity as a proactive visionary who actively engaged with the Word of God.

Lead's texts can thus be read as a dialogue between herself and God, and as a record of an embodiment of God's truth. A truth that was produced through a sequence of mystical and revelatory events involving Sophia as Lead's spiritual mother. As we have seen, Lead was not only a 'natural' mother to her offspring, but she was also regarded as a 'mother' by her followers. In addition, Sophia was esteemed by Lead as her 'supernatural' and adopted mother. Lead's representation of spiritual maternity was thus complicated by the fact that such roles were interchangeable. Wisdom was born within Lead's soul and yet, Lead also gave birth to wisdom in the form of revelations of God's truth. Lead also assumed the role of 'supernatural' mother by anticipating Sophia's maternal capabilities in her vision of an imaginary birth. Sophia and Lead were thus both mother and daughter at the same time. As a vessel of the spirit/word, Lead refigured her body and self-identity as a mother, using her maternal experiences, to incorporate them into her spiritual beliefs.

Although Lead's understanding of religion is explicitly gynocentric, with Sophia as a pivotal spiritual mother figure, the importance of androgyny cannot be overlooked. In her images of motherhood and the vision of the unsexed baby, Lead transcended gender boundaries. The absence of signs of sexual difference and desire signified part of the process of purification which could lead to redemption. Lead thus prophesied that Sophia would give birth to such a purified and androgynous generation, and men *and* women would be restored to the state that existed before the Fall, a prelapsarian paradise, and be known as Wisdom's children.

What was unusual in the religious and socio/cultural scene of the late seventeenth century is that Lead believed in a spiritual mother figure at all. It clearly resembles aspects of Marian theology transposed by a Protestant. Many of Lead's ideas have parallels with the early development of Marian devotion and theology and spirituality, and can be seen as 'mystical' when repressed. Lead's view of Trinitarian theology thus became tangled with the feminine in the devotion and spirituality of the pre-reformation period; the piety associated with Mary having clearly survived the Reformation era. Lead's transposing of Marian theology and spirituality into sophiology was unique. It resulted in a depiction of her female soul in a mystical union with Sophia, which in turn gave birth to wisdom from her soul.

Both Mary and Wisdom have been considered as the 'second Eve'. If Eve was responsible for the Fall, then Mary or Wisdom could restore human nature as prophesied in

the Book of Revelation 12 as 'the woman cloathed with the sun'. Lead applied this apocalyptic image only to Sophia, calling her the 'Wonder of Wonders'.¹³² Lead wrote:

according to John's Prophecy, a Virgin Woman is designed of a pure Spirit, and of a bright Sun-like Body, all impregnated with the Holy Ghost, that shall travail and bring forth the First-born, that will multiply and propagate into such a Body, as shall be filled with the Spirit, Power, and Temple-Glory of the Lamb of God. This Church shall be called the Lord of our Righteousness.¹³³

The vision embodied the idea that the congregation represented the 'Bride of Christ'. From the fifth century onwards, it was Mary who was considered to be the image of the Church as the 'Bride of Christ'. Lead, however, also used this metaphor when she wrote of her fellow Philadelphians: 'Knit them in the pure Unity of the Virgin *Philadelphian* Church, that they may be presented as one holy Bride, without the least spot or deformity, by the beloved Bridegroom to his Father.'¹³⁴ Lead, moreover, devoted much of the latter part of the third volume of her spiritual diary to the theme of her visions. These concerned eschatology, or the doctrine of the last things such as the final wedding which predicts the unity of Christ with Sophia and their followers, providing a final peace forecast in the Book of Revelation. It is this idea of mystical marriage that will be explored in the next chapter.

¹³² Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 38.

¹³³ Jane Lead, *A Message to the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1696), p. 12.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

CHAPTER SEVEN - Mystical Marriage

This chapter explores how Jane Lead translated her earthly experiences as a married woman and as a widow into spiritual ideas about salvation. First, it will examine Lead's actual marriage which became a metaphor for her understanding of mystical marriage. It will then show how her calls for people to reject the masculine world of trade in favour of more precious inner wealth was informed by her experiences as a merchant's wife and widow. It will then examine how Lead used the idea of the mystical marriage between Sophia and Christ to signify how the soul could unite with God, and, how strikingly she developed this bridal mysticism in the Behmenist eschatological schema. Although Sophia was expected to reconcile humanity with God, Lead was very unusual because of the identification of her (female) soul in union with Sophia. On the one hand, Lead can be seen as conservative, upholding traditional female skills and virtues in her use of metaphors concerning weaving, and in the qualities she expected in a bride; but on the other hand her theology was quite radical. This chapter will therefore focus on Lead's unique theology and will thus complicate and reject Phyllis Mack's argument that Lead was part of a domestication of religion. Lead was clearly not 'The Mystical Housewife.'¹

Each February Lead commemorated her husband's death by recording in her spiritual diary words of reflection. On 5 February 1682 she wrote, 'I have been in the Outward Widowhood now Twelve Years'.² She still considered herself to be married, writing 'since Mr Lead's Decease, this day by me Commemorated is. Now the LORD my Maker is my true Husband: in whom great Joy and Solacement I have found; and therefore for no other I can ever be, since the loss of my Outward and near Bosom Friend'.³ Her own marital position was thus portrayed in terms of two marriages, one earthly and the other heavenly; both described in economic terms. She wrote:

being discharged from the Law of the first Husband, to which we were married, after the Law of a Carnal Command: Whence we are now free to be Married unto him that is raised from the Dead, and so shall become the Lamb's wife, jointured into all the Lands and Possessions he hath. The Eternal Revenues are belonging to her, whether

¹ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 305.

² Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1696-1701), vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 304.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-04.

Invisible or Visible: all Power in Heaven and Earth is committed to her.⁴

After her husband's decease, Lead once again turned to God, as she had done in her sixteenth year.⁵ Her account dated November 1675, showed how her spiritual vocation was often in direct conflict with her earthly married life. She wished to regain her marital status, but this time by emulating Sophia's position, as the 'Lamb's wife'. The Philadelphians' seventh commandment set out in the *Laws of Paradise* stated, 'Thou art not to break the marriage knot, which is tied betwixt thee, and the Lord thine Husband, to whom thou art betrothed through the eternal spirit'.⁶ In anticipating and imagining her own eternal marriage with Christ, she recorded in detail her expectations of such a conjugal relationship. As will be discussed below, Lead's relationship was confusing, because at times she was both the bride and the bridesmaid of Christ *and* at times, also of Sophia's.

Sophia's Manufactory and Merchandise

This section will examine Lead's imagery concerning marriage and wealth. It will show how Lead turned her attention away from worldly commerce, by which she had been left financially destitute, to focus instead on Sophia and the idea of inner wealth. Consideration will also be given to Lead's reflection upon these circumstances, and it will show how her relationship with Sophia offered a solution. The following poem in Lead's *Revelation of Revelations* (1683) exemplifies very well how Lead saw commerce as highly gendered. The poem was published after Pordage's death and before the intervention of Lee and Roach, and is therefore likely to be Lead's own work.⁷ In the poem Sophia displayed untold riches and offered redemption for the renunciation of (masculine) worldly goods. Lead wrote:

In thy Light, sweet *Sophia* we are come to discovery,
Where long have lain our lost forgotten Doury.
Those Coelestial Gates, which now open stand
Hath given us a view into the wealthy Land,
Where all things in the divine Magia stand;
In that place there is no working with Tool or Hand,

⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 69.

⁵ See Chapter One, *The Philadelphians' Prophetess*.

⁶ Jane Lead, *The Laws of Paradise* (London, 1695), p. 21.

⁷ Lead's first published poem is in Jane Lead, *A Heavenly Cloud now Breaking* (London, 1681).

For all in Spirit there do act from that Power,
Which nought of the Earthly Craft can Severe.

Joy we then now in sight of this blessed Day,
Wherein Wisdom's Wonders so richly display.
But it may be asked, When shall this be?
And who amongst the now Living shall free?
I tell thee for surety, some there are in Corporeity,
To whom she will with her golden Key in Sovereignty,
Thus shall unlock the precious stoney Rock fully,
Where Ocean-Treasury of her Deity lies suddenly.

Oh! Hear Virgin-Wisdom's call and cry,
Who skill'd would be in her Mystery:
A new Way of Manifactory stands open, I see
Such Treasures as the World's Wonder be:
A Ship laden within, that God himself again
Will enter in to seize upon these heav'nly Gems;
Ah, blessed sale for such rich Goods imbark'd here,
For what less than she acting Stone will appear?

Where merchants are as not Transitory,
That under it and Wisdom's Manifactory.
Who hiddenly have increased their Store,
And do studdy these Sciences yet more and more,
That so they might to those eternal Gems reach,
Or else Redemption will not be compleat,
For putting an end to the Toyl, Care and Sweat,
By passing through all of Wisdom's twelve Gates.

Come then away, holy Souls, and separate
From all drossy Things that do captivate;
And you will find such a Pearly Price,
That will make you flourish as in Paradise;
The golden River there-from will flow,
That all the essential Goodness ye will know:
For in Wisdom's Principle there doth lie
That which will make the worldly Craft to flye.⁸

Lead would have been familiar with the biblical texts which compare Wisdom to hidden wealth, such as, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field' (Matt. 13:44), and 'the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls' (Matt. 13:45). The texts indicated that only those who relinquished everything on earth and gave all things up to God would gain Wisdom. In Proverbs 8:19, Wisdom states, 'My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver' (Proverbs 8:19). Lead put

⁸ Jane Lead, *The Revelation of Revelations* (London, 1683), pp. 55-56.

much store by this promise of heavenly riches and insistently contrasted between the male dominated sphere of earthly work, and the feminised spiritual realm in which Wisdom or Sophia governed.

A central motif in the poem concerned the cash dowry. In the seventeenth century the dowry the woman brought to the marriage came under the control of her husband. However, the dowry provided the financial basis of a woman's support should she become a widow.⁹ Hamond Warde, Jane's father, made William Leade a beneficiary in his will. Warde requested that his eldest son James 'pay my son-in-law William Leade, of Kings' Lynn, Merchant ... the sune of one hundred and ten pounds of lawful english money in full recompense and discharge of his wife's porcon accordinge to certain articles between him and myself'.¹⁰ By the time the will was made, Jane was clearly married and it seems that the full dowry, or portion, was not paid in full on her marriage. It is not known, however, whether the specified sum constituted Jane's entire dowry.¹¹ In contrast, William Leade, his father's sole heir, inherited a house, rents and all the 'goods, chattels, plate, ships and their stocks'.¹² William, however, did not leave a recorded will and Jane was made an administrator of her husband's estate after his death. William had exercised his right to use Jane's cash dowry which was never recovered after his death. Jane wrote in her autobiography, that 'he had entrusted a large part of his possessions to a factor overseas, who refused to hand them over and thus robbed his widow and children of what was theirs'.¹³

⁹ Amy Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 1993), p. 24.

¹⁰ Norfolk County Council Records Office, Norwich, 1651 Warde, Hamond, Letheringsett, N., fols 81r-84v. Warde's will dated 26 February 1651, was proved on 28 March 1651.

¹¹ Erickson notes that the portion of brides differed according to class. The portions of county gentry could range from between five hundred to one thousand pounds, and merchants, from between one hundred to five hundred pounds. Erickson, *Women and Property*, pp. 88-89.

¹² John Lead's will, dated 1 November 1638, PRO, PROB 11/180 fols 47r-v. William Leade was his sole heir.

¹³ Jane Lead, 'Lebenslauff der Autorin', in *Sechs Unschatzare Durch Gottliche Offenbarung und Befel ans Licht Begrachte Mystiche Tractlein* (Amsterdam 1696), p. 419. I am grateful to Marianne Jahn for translating into English this sole extant version of Lead's 'Life of the Author'. See also, Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), p. 71.

She thus protested about the loss of her entire inheritance which resulted in her and her two surviving daughters being left 'deep in material poverty'.¹⁴

In her poem, Lead translated the distressing experience of finding herself suddenly impoverished by using the language of commerce as a source of spiritual metaphors. In her autobiography Lead stated 'It was revealed to me that hardship and loss of material things prepared the way for the heavenly powers to enter our soul. We should forget and pay no attention to the troubles of our worldly existence'.¹⁵ She transposed material wealth into the spiritual riches, or 'heavenly gems', which the soul could enjoy. She did not only assign a gendered identity to goods, she also explicitly differentiated between the earthly public (male) practice of commerce and the inner, feminine wealth she so highly prized. Sophia thus had the 'golden Key' to 'unlock' the heavenly treasure. Lead referred to it collectively as 'our lost forgotten Doury', reminding her readership that an earthly dowry could not be relied upon - like other material goods it could be misused or lost. She protested about the finiteness of the earthly dowry, while contrasting it with the heavenly dowry which was eternal. As Catherine Smith has suggested, 'the laws and economics of actual marriage inform the image of the ideal union; a large dowry renders the spiritual transcendence'.¹⁶ Lead stated that the dowry would put 'an end to the Toyle, Care and Sweat', of earthly life. In contrast, in 'that place there is no working with Tool or Hand'. Referring to heaven, she predicted 'a new Way of Manufactory'. Hard physical work was replaced and a worldly striving for riches was contrasted with the justice of heaven. In the Book of Wisdom 1:5, Sophia was the creator of unity, 'love, righteousness, ye that be Judges of the earth' which contrasted with the unrighteous and godless. In Lead's view then, the godless would come to a realisation of the truth, and the righteous man would be rehabilitated in the coming of the Philadelphian Church in the New Jerusalem. As Catherine Smith has suggested, 'Lead's vocabulary of stocks of spiritual goods, increase, saint's business and employment, factors and proprietorship clearly originated in her personal experience. By her transformation of this language, she established links between women's material and spiritual conditions'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Lead, 'Lebenslauff der Autorin', p. 419.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 420.

¹⁶ Catherine F. Smith, 'Jane Lead's Wisdom: Women and Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England', in Jan Wojcik and Raymond Jean Frontain (eds), *Prophecy in Western Literature* (Rutherford, 1984), p. 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

Lead was concerned to direct those who sought the new Church, a search which she depicted as a spiritual journey. Rewriting the twelve gates mentioned in Revelation 21:12 as 'Wisdom's twelve gates', and drawing on Proverbs 1:21, 'she crieth in the chief place of the concourse, in the openings of the gates', Lead wrote in accordance with her chiliastic beliefs, that they 'now stand open'. She further suggested that the route through Wisdom's gates led to the New Jerusalem, where the city was 'garnished with all manner of precious stones'. The 'twelve gates were twelve pearls; every gate was of one pearl', which signified Lead's supreme 'Pearly Price'. Wisdom's invitation to venture through the gates also echoed Revelation 3:20, in which Christ stated, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and he with me'. Lead thus wrote of Sophia as a figure of salvation who would guide ready souls, pointing them in the direction of a 'view into the wealthy Land/ Where all things in the divine Magia stand'. The Magia, or the operation of the Holy Ghost, thus symbolised a divine presence where all things were of the spirit and no earthly form existed. Lead prophesied that she and her contemporaries were 'now in sight of this blessed Day' which would reveal 'Wisdom's Wonders so richly display[ed]'. In the poem, Lead urged her readers, 'Oh! Hear Virgin-Wisdom's call and cry', and prepare for the predicted event which was a promise of imminent salvation.

In addition, Lead focused on the inner wealth as a 'Ship laden within' which could be unlocked by Sophia. The poem emphasised the distinction between Sophia's priceless cargo and the outer, earthly world of overseas trade. When she wrote, 'Where merchants are as not Transitory', it drew on her experience of how fortunes were lost as well as made. Drawing on Matthew 6:24: 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon' she forced her readership to choose between the everlasting God of Love and the finite god of material wealth. Ample associations in the Bible added authority to her writing. Proverbs 3:14-16 stated, 'For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof of fine gold. She is more precious than rubies'. Proverbs 8:19 continued, 'My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver'. The pricelessness of Wisdom, found in Job 28:15-18, also synthesised wisdom's worth.

Lead acknowledged that trade was a masculine affair, 'For thus after the manner of Men, give me leave to Plead with my Lord: where one is Enrich'd with a vast Substance and Riches from this Creation'.¹⁸ Heavenly riches were by contrast a more private and feminine

¹⁸ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 128.

commodity.¹⁹ 'The Coelestial Mart' was Wisdom's treasury, a heavenly place.²⁰ 'The Plea of Wisdom's Factoress' concerned the business of the 'valuable Substance in Sophia's Kingdom', where Sophia provided the key to the heavenly hoard.²¹ Lead described a spiritual journey from an external world of poverty, to heaven and the promise of other-worldly riches and a freedom with God. Thus, deriving solace from the idea of eternal life she wrote that Sophia 'shall unlock the precious stoney Rock fully, Where Ocean-Treasury of her deity lies suddenly.' Sophia thereby became the divine agent of salvation. In the poem, Lead contrasted the bonds of earthly marriage consequent upon the earthly dowry and the freedom that came with Sophia's dowry. She wrote that Sophia's 'Dowry was so great it would ... set me free'.²² It meant that she would be free to be with God.

In *Enochian Walks with God* Lead was concerned about the kind of dowry needed for the betrothal to Christ. She wrote of the need for a heavenly dowry:

it is absolutely needful, that we should be furnished out with such Powers and Gifts, as may qualify for such an High-Marriage Union, with the First-Begotten-Son and Heir to the High God, who doth most willingly give out, and bequeath five golden Talents here mentioned; that so a Stock of Spiritual Goods being taken in, maybe to support, and carry on the Heavenly Calling withal; which if found diligent in, may amount to a mighty Encrease, for the making of a Dowry so great and large.²³

In *The Heavenly Cloud now Breaking* she was also concerned to differentiate between the dowry as material and finite in the earthly sense and a heavenly and everlasting dowry. She wrote, 'the Lilly-time is now here come, that all this kind will be supplied from God's flowing Fountain of precious Store, that will confer such a plenty of dowry Riches and Honours, that cannot be degraded, nor plucked away from the Ascended'.²⁴ In contrast with the above poem from *Revelation of Revelations*, the dowry in this prose version, is a gift given over to her at a marriage associated with Christ, the bridegroom, and not Sophia.

Lead thus prophesied that Sophia would provide salvation as the key to eternal riches

¹⁹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 305-11.

²⁰ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²³ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God*, (London, 1694), p. 30.

²⁴ Lead, *Heavenly Cloud*, p. 31.

'when this Heavenly Mart, presents all its Glorious Rich Goods to view'.²⁵ This would begin when Sophia was perceived by many people. Drawing on the imagery of the 'white stone' in Revelation 2:17, Lead wrote of the adornment of the 'bride of the New Jerusalem with the white stone in her crown' as a warning to people to prepare for the second coming. On 9 July 1679 she recorded in her spiritual diary, 'Lift up the Stone of thy [Wisdom's] Power, as an Ensign to gather together those, who have been touched with her secret Ray, and sparkling influence'. As discussed previously, Lead used the prized Philosopher's Stone to signify the appearance of Sophia.²⁶ This time she expressed the idea as bridal imagery. She wrote, 'the white stone, to which the bride of the New Jerusalem will be joined, and which will be hung in her crown'.²⁷ Lead's ecumenism paved the way for others to unite their souls with the godhead, and thus achieve a virginal state as a way of becoming closer to God.

The Bridal Mysticism (Brautmystik) of the Virgin Sophia

This section will consider how Lead viewed the Behmenist interpretation of mystical marriage between God and Sophia. It will take Lead's suggestion of turning from the outward world to the inner world by elucidating how she envisaged the soul uniting with God. There has been a long tradition of the idea of mystical marriage, with the high point of Christian mysticism perhaps being in the Middle Ages.²⁸ It was a common practice for many medieval female mystics, for example, to depict bridal mysticism with Christ as the groom and the soul as the bride.²⁹ Ann Bathurst also had an intimate relationship between herself and Christ. On 9 September 1679 she wrote against a marginal note, 'The Nuptial with the Transports of Love and Divine Union,' a description of a liaison with Christ, 'O Jesus! I am thine, thou hast ravished me, thou hast taken away my Heart; I am full, wanting words to vent! O the Sweetness and the full Satisfaction! Having such Love as is better than

²⁵ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 173.

²⁶ See Chapter Three, *Searching for Gold*.

²⁷ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1695), p. 80.

²⁸ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (2nd edn, Basingstoke and London, 1993), pp. 98-105. B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult thought: behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 63-64.

²⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 160-62.

wine?'³⁰ Bathurst was traditional in describing her (female) soul in relation to Christ (male), describing Him as 'the Beloved of my Soul' and the 'delight of my Soul.'³¹

Lead explained that the soul could unite with God because humanity was made in the image of God and that this thus offered the possibility of an intimate relationship. She also wrote of God and Sophia as marital partners:

God created MAN AT FIRST, to bear his own image and figure, who was to represent God himself, the High and Divine Masculine Male and Female; so that man had his Virgin in himself in imitation of his creator which in time, was brought forth in a distinct figure. - And this was a Type of the Eternal Virgin Mother that lay hid in God, the centre and Heart of Flaming Love; from whence the production of a glorious female figure was brought forth, that was so commixed and mingled with Deity as she became God's Spouse and Bride, being spirit of his spirit.³²

Lead here drew on Genesis 1:27, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them', as opposed to Genesis 2:20-23, the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the people of Israel were understood as Yahweh's Bride (Hos.1:10) and in the New Testament the Church was understood as the Bride of Christ (Eph.5:21-32). Lead described the origins of Sophia, and her intimate relationship with God as his spouse, or 'spirit of his spirit', and humans who were created to become 'one flesh' as depicted in Genesis 1:24. She recognised Sophia as 'God's Spouse and mate, from whom the highest birth, The Eternal Wisdom did go forth'.³³ It was Genesis 1:27 that suggested that the masculine and feminine qualities found in God were duly reflected in human beings.

In accordance with a Behmenist understanding of Sophia, Boehme and Pordage both identified with the role of the bridegroom and described the union of their souls with Sophia. Nils Thune has observed that the marriage of the soul and Sophia was Boehme's most common image for man's union with God.³⁴ Boehme wrote, 'the wedding of the Lamb was kept and solemnized, with the espousing or contracting of the Noble *Sophia* with the

³⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl., D1263, vol. 2, unpaginated, 9 September 1679.

³¹ Ibid., 12 September 1679.

³² Jane Lead, *The Wars of David* (London, 1700 reprinted 1816), p. 21.

³³ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

³⁴ Thune, *Behmenists and Philadelphians*, p. 29.

Soule'.³⁵ Boehme also used the imagery of a mystical marriage with Sophia to explain the relationship between his soul and Sophia, 'shee came and comforted mee, and married her selfe to mee'.³⁶ Elaborating further, he wrote:

The Virgin Sophia said to the Soul, O noble Bridegroome, stand still with thy countenance towards me, and give me thy Rayes of fire, bring thy desire into me, kindle, and then I will bring the Rayes of my love, from my meekness into thy fiery Essence, and kindle thee forever.

O My Bridegroom, how well am I, now that I am in wedlock with thee! O kisse me with thy desire in thy strength & power, & then I will shew thee all my beauty, and will rejoyce and delight my selfe with thy sweet love and shining brightnesse in thy fiery Life. All the holy Angels doe rejoyce with us, to see us now married.³⁷

Here in a reversal of the usual sex roles, Boehme represented the soul as the bridegroom. As Gibbons has observed, Boehme sometimes spoke of Christ as the wife and the soul as the bridegroom and at other times he 'feminised Christ through his association with Sophia'.³⁸

Similarly, Pordage used language which expressed desire towards Sophia, and wrote about the association with his soul and Her: 'Every soul that thinks to attain Holy Wisdom must first have a strong desire for her ... Hereby the Ground of the Soul will awake a strong and sharp desire [for] this Spirit of Wisdom with all earnest investigation and seeking'.³⁹ He would also have been familiar with Wisdom 7:28: 'For God loveth none, if he dwell not with wisdom'. So, it is clear that by developing a relationship with Wisdom he would become closer to God. What is particularly striking is the eroticism apparent in his, and indeed Boehme's, account of their souls' relationship with Sophia. Pordage wrote, for example, 'Come, most beautiful Love and eternal Bride to test the Soul's Root', which was influenced by the Book of Wisdom.⁴⁰ Indeed, the biblical text tells us that Solomon fell in love with

³⁵ Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ Discovered* (London, 1648), p. 32.

³⁶ Jacob Boehme, *The Second Book Concerning the Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (London, 1648), p. 142.

³⁷ Boehme, *Way to Christ Discovered*, p. 62.

³⁸ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 94.

³⁹ John Pordage, *Sophia*, in Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology* (Minnesota, 2000), p. 76.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Wisdom, was enamoured of her beauty (Wis. 8:1-3), decided to marry her (Wis. 8:9), sleep with her (Wis. 8:16), and tried to take her for himself (Wis. 8:18).⁴¹ The key to beholding God was therefore through a nuptial union with Sophia.

Lead, however, complicated the Behmenist understanding of bridal mysticism. She did not enter into an exclusive spiritual union with Christ, the Bridegroom. Certainly she underwent a mystical marriage. On 14 January 1676, Lead recorded Christ proposing to her, saying, 'Abide patiently til your Salvation be fully wrought out; then you shall be swiftly cloathed with the self-same body - all spiritual bright and airy as my BRIDE, for to unite in one body with me'.⁴² Unusually, however, Lead also depicted Wisdom in union with the soul. She wrote that the eternal soul would be produced by Wisdom 'reuniting her self to the Soul, and thereby becoming again the Souls true Mate and Guide'.⁴³ As Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza has observed, 'the longing of the student of wisdom for Sophia is depicted as an erotic and sexual desire'.⁴⁴ On 10 November 1673, Lead wrote of a mystical union with Sophia, 'O dear Sophia' after 'yielding my self up to Love's flaming sword, I felt a separation was made. Oh how sweet is it to feel the Life's Blood run into the Fountain of the Godhead'.⁴⁵ Lead was thus separated from the earthly life by Sophia depicting the mystical marriage.

As we have seen, Pordage and Boehme portrayed their souls in union with Sophia representing a reversal of Bathurst's gendered description. Depicting their souls in union with Christ, (male), however, was far more commonplace and less radical than Lead, who also described her (female) soul in union with another female, Sophia. The union of these two feminine images, the feminine soul of Lead, and the divine feminine, Sophia, was indeed singular. Lead used nuptial imagery to express her intimate bond with Sophia. Lead became not the 'bride of Christ' but unusually, the bride of Sophia. Although it was more common for men to describe their souls in union with Sophia, it is rare to find a seventeenth-century

⁴¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures* (2 vols, London, 1994), vol. 2, p. 24.

⁴² Lead, *Wars of David*, p. 130.

⁴³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 2, p. 113.

⁴⁴ Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol.1, p. 33.

woman admitting to such a liaison. It is yet another incidence of gender reversal when Lead adopted an opposite sex role which has been discussed as part of Lead's identification as Jacob and Noah.⁴⁶

In accordance with Behmenism, Lead also represented Sophia and Christ whose relationship was so intimate they were marriage partners. Revelation 19:7: 'the marriage of the Lamb hath come, and his wife hath made herself ready', clearly provided a context for Lead's writing on the divine marriage. Lead drew on biblical passages which prophesied of Christ's second coming, preparing herself and her readership as His 'Brides' in waiting. Lead was undoubtedly influenced by Revelation 19:17, 'Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God', and Revelation 19:9, 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb'. The marriage supper represented the hunger and eagerness of Lead's soul to be united with the godhead. On 11 January 1679, a vision entitled 'The Bridal Tent of Sophia. A Union', described Lead's impending marriage to Sophia, and Lead was told to wait in faith until she could be brought as a 'Sophia-Bride'.⁴⁷ Pordage also wrote in anticipation of Sophia and his desire for Her:

She will come with her Holy Principio and Light-world here below according to her promise to satisfy and to still the anxious hunger and thirsty desire that she feels in the souls. Nevertheless, this may take a long time, indeed, continuing so for twenty and more years (in some cases), persevering and proposing marriage to this heavenly Virgin of Holy Wisdom before she really appears and reveals herself to the soul-spirit.⁴⁸

Unlike Pordage, however, Lead did not estimate when this wedding was likely to take place. Lead merely implied that the event was imminent when she wrote by 'celebrating the marriage feast, in the unity of love, where the author of this treatise would in spirit meet, and so never cease to congratulate you, fellow citizens, and there eat with you the feast of love'.⁴⁹ Lead clearly drew strength from waiting and the anticipation of a union between Sophia

⁴⁶ On Lead's identification with Jacob, see Chapter Six, *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*; and her position as the second Noah is discussed in Chapter Four, *The Divine Ark*.

⁴⁷ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Pordage, *Sophia*, in Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Lead, *Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 66.

and Christ. In the vision recorded on 30 June 1679, Lead wrote about 'CHRIST and his Bride: Or, the Resurrection' and described Christ and Sophia as being 'the Strength and marrow of my Life'.⁵⁰ Lead clearly hoped to become one of the brides herself, and to 'be solemnly own'd in Marriage to the Lamb'.⁵¹ Lead's subject position, however, often shifted in a confused way throughout these passages. She appeared to be married to Christ at times, and yet Sophia and Christ seem to be married to another.

Also, in the Epistle of her first treatise, *A Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, Lead introduced herself as a divinely ordained hostess, 'I am commissioned', she wrote, 'as both Servant and Friend to my Lord, and Heavenly Bridegroom, to invite you to the great Supper of God, and the Lamb'.⁵² Here Lead wanted to be a virginal 'Bride of Christ' and she made pleas to God to choose her as His bride. She wrote, 'Many do I see that are of the Children of this Worldly Captivity, do now stand before Thee: and I my self among the rank of these do stand. All of us waiting to see, where thou wilt fix thine Eyes as one upon a single Personality, who may be Impowered to set all her Virgin Companions free'.⁵³ Lead possibly drew on Revelation 14:4, 'These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb withersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb'. It was thus important to Lead to be among one of the one hundred and forty four thousand mentioned in Revelation 14 as the first to be redeemed upon earth. As we have seen Lead was represented in many roles: as supporter, hostess, servant, and friend, but above all she laid special stress on the importance of striving for salvation.⁵⁴ She emphasised the virtues and qualities of a bride who desired to be married to God.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 157.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lead, *Heavenly Cloud*, sig. A2r.

⁵³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 290.

⁵⁴ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), p. 33.

Qualities of a Bride

Lead translated the theological meanings which 'defined the good daughter, wife, mother, and widow' into spiritual assets. She wanted to be transformed in the sight of God. At the end of the seventeenth century 'wifely obedience was not only a duty but a particular scruple for pious women'.⁵⁵ Lead was, however, clearly neither a feminist nor challenging female stereotypes, and she did not uphold a woman's role as subordinate. She upheld some traditional ideas about wifely virtues as being different from those of men. As Mack has argued about Quaker marriages: 'Not only were husband and wife to be spiritual equals (as they were in conventional Puritan marriages); the independent obligation of women as mothers was also respected'.⁵⁶ Although Lead was very conventional in her celebration of attitudes towards women, it did *not* mean however, that she was wholly passive and retreated to a world of domesticity as 'The Mystical Housewife'.⁵⁷ Lead was not entirely concerned with the actual or perceived restrictions of this earthly world, she was more concerned with the next world. Lead's radical theology and sophiology, however, allowed her to transcend any 'boundaries of deliberate self-enclosure within a limited and subordinate public role', which, Mack contends, had constrained female Quakers.⁵⁸ Instead, Lead wanted to be imbued with the spiritual qualities that were associated with Sophia, whom she upheld as a role model, and she turned her attention to the possibilities such a future offered to women and men.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Lead acknowledged Mary as the mother of Christ, but she recognised that Sophia's qualities surpassed those of Mary. Lead wished to emulate the qualities imbued in Sophia to attain an inner spiritual transformation through a mystical marriage of the soul. Lead expected that Sophia would conceive and bring forth the second Christ *and* a new generation of angelical children. Lead wrote, 'Behold, and see, the Virgin-Bride is become the Glory of the God-Man; for She will fill the Heavens with her Off-

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁶ Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 226-32.

⁵⁷ On the contrary, it was in the 1680s and 1690s that Lead was at her most active, see Chapters One and Two. See Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 305 ff.

⁵⁸ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 347.

spring, and Holy Train'.⁵⁹ It was Sophia that was:

looked for as God's fruitful Bride to bring forth Christ's personality in plurality ... Her offspring will appear all Virgins, with her own lustrous Son, who is the first-born amongst the Kings of the earth and heavens ... Eve's conception in Sorrow shall not here be known: for this Virgin was never disobedient, or broke Faith with God, who is her Husband, the fruit of whose travail is Blessing and Joy through the whole Generation that shall be Born of her: She shall be Mother of the true Virgin-Church.⁶⁰

Thus, it was Sophia, and not Mary, to whom Lead looked to achieve a 'virginal life'. Rebirth would thus be spiritual, representing a mystical marriage of the soul with Sophia. In this way, Sophia would become her mother as Lead would be born a child of the Virgin Wisdom.

Lead wished to emulate the qualities found in Sophia, and described Her in the following way, 'that she be the most Wise, Holy, Meek, Patient, Submissive, Obedient, Faithful, Loving, Fearful One; observing all things given by way of Command from Thee, O dear Jesus, that so I may come to excel all in this kind of Beauty, Perfection, and Gracefulness in thine Eyes ... that I may win in thy Heart unto me'.⁶¹ Lead portrayed Sophia as the dutiful, subordinate, unquestioning and passive female, writing, 'The Virgin was never disobedient, or broke faith with God, who is her Husband', and she described the attributions of the 'good wife' whose particular qualities were 'Blessing and Joy'.⁶² Lead was influenced by Ephesians 5:22-33, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord' when Christ will return for His bride, the church. Everyone had a role in the divine household which resulted in complementarity and union, as opposed to separateness and divisiveness.

Lead also reinforced the stereotype of the virtuous woman accomplished in the art of weaving. In early modern England, weaving represented a traditional female skill. Lead translated this into a highly valued spiritual asset, essential for the preparation of the bridal gown of Sophia. In a vision recorded on 28 March 1679, Lead used 'Spiritual Weaving' as an image by which she instructed her readership to cease 'from serving the great Ruler and

⁵⁹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 157.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-92.

⁶² Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 40.

Master of this earthly Family' in favour of turning in faith to Christ, as His bride.⁶³ She also wrote:

Be thou as that vertous Woman, whose Candle goeth not out by Night, laying the hand of Faith to the spindle of the Spirit, and draw out to the longest thred of Faith which may make thee fine Linnen and Purple: So Beauty, Strength, and Honour may be thy Cloathing ... to make the Bride look all Comely and fair, for Love and Delight to her bridegroom.⁶⁴

Lead spun a web of words containing a spiritual message which instructed her readers not to 'Weave in the worldly Spirit, with the Spirit of Faith's interest, lest it makes a rent in Christ's seamless Robe. Which is singly spun out from the Golden *Fleece* of the Lamb of God. Who is to shine forth free from all mixture, upon those, who are to make no other *Web*, but what the *Shuttle of Faith* can strike through'.⁶⁵ Lead suggested that anything other than faith in God would harm the very fabric of Christ. Yet, her attempt to procure a relationship with Christ and His bride, implied a resistance to worldly affairs. In choosing Sophia as Christ's bride, or by emulating that position herself, Lead gave a particular emphasis to a feminine ideal. She was strengthening the connection between herself and a powerful female biblical figure. As Susan Frye has observed, many women textile workers in the seventeenth century chose to embroider scenes of patriarchal Old Testament narratives. Thus, by representing female figures of the biblical past, they not only placed themselves in narratives that they associated with their own time, they 'used these pictures as an imaginative means to push boundaries of acceptable female behaviour'.⁶⁶ The fifth-century patriarch St Proclus described the Virgin Mary using the discourse of weaving:

handmaid and Mother, Virgin and heaven, the only bridge of God to men, the awful loom of the Incarnation, in which by some unspeakable way the garment of that union was woven, whereof the weaver is the Holy ghost; and the spinner the overshadowing from on high; the wool of the ancient fleece of Adam; the woof the undefiled flesh

⁶³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. The 'golden fleece' may refer to the Greek myth of 'Jason and the Golden Fleece', *The Argonautica* by Appolonius of Rhodes. The term 'golden fleece' was used as a critique of the wealth of the wool industry in the seventeenth century, and was also used to distinguish between the godly and ungodly.

⁶⁶ Susan Frye, 'Sewing Connections', in Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds), *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (New York and Oxford, 1999), p. 178.

from the virgin, the weaver's shuttle the immense grace of Him.⁶⁷

Clothing was important and could describe a change of status from earthly to celestial. It suggested the celestial status mentioned in Revelation 35:6: 'seven angels clothed in pure and white linen'. Lead wrote about the implication of a changing clothing during a spiritual encounter, 'as soon as I desired it, I was forthwith imbodyed in the same Glory, and was joynd to the Heavenly Train. I rejoyced greatly that I had made a slip out of the vile Garment, though but for a while, though I was to take it up again, and appear amongst the inhabitants of time, till my course was fulfilled: This bright Clothing is only bearable by *Jerusalem Natives*'.⁶⁸ She described the recognition of her soul by others in the interior place and was to some extent able to control the experience, 'as soon as I desired it, I was forthwith imbodyed in the same glory'. Her desire allowed her to participate in the 'Heavenly Train'. At one level, she wanted to be trained, to join and grow in a spiritually desirable manner. On the other hand, she used 'Heavenly Train' to suggest part of the headdress used in wedding ceremonies, in this case to the marriage of the Lamb. She described changing her own clothes, 'I had made a slip out of the vile garment', into the 'bright Clothing' which was only possible by a 'Jerusalem Native' - an inhabitant of the ideal heavenly city, cited in Revelation 21 and Isaiah 29:1. Thus, by metaphorically changing clothing and wearing a wedding dress, it represented at an inner level, the transformation or marriage of the soul.

In accordance with the Behmenist eschatological schema, Lead also wrote of the restoration of the female sex through Sophia: 'Hearken, O Daughter of Sion, Behold thy Bridegroom cometh no more a servant ... For the daughter of Sion the Dominion shall be restored through the Marriage Union with the Lamb of God'.⁶⁹ It is undoubtedly Lead's identification with Sophia that made her theology radical, especially her preference for Sophia's inner riches, as opposed to the masculine world of trade, and the marriage of *her* soul to Sophia. Lead's theology is therefore distinctly at odds with Mack's contention that there was a 'linkage between female activism and feminine self-effacement; indeed the stress laid on women's modesty in clothing and deportment was in direct proportion to their

⁶⁷ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary' <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15459a.htm>> (4 July 2002).

⁶⁸ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 30.

⁶⁹ Lead, *Enochian Walks*, p. 31.

enlarged sphere of public activity as wives and mothers'.⁷⁰ Lead did not concern herself with outward matters of dress and deportment. Her ideas and experiences usually associated with females, such as wifely qualities and duties, as we have seen, were translated into spiritual metaphors. Lead's depiction of her soul in union with Sophia thus makes the idea of a mystical marriage with God highly unconventional because of the unusual gender configuration.

The next chapter will attempt to elucidate some more of the complicated imagery surrounding Sophia. As we shall see, Sophia was often depicted as one of God's attributes, yet, Lead took the concept of Sophia further than any of her Behmenist counterparts, with Sophia almost becoming a fourth aspect of the godhead. By a close examination of the imagery found in Lead's visions, the next chapter will show how Sophia was a figure of much complexity.

⁷⁰ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 347.

CHAPTER EIGHT - Philosophia

The Spirit of Wisdom at this Day calls aloud to all the Lovers of her, that they stand with open and enlarged hearts to receive her Instructions, and learn her Secrets. She invites and encourages them to proceed in the Quest and Knowledge of her: and at every step and advance they make, she cries, Believest thou this? thou shalt yet see greater things than these.¹

Get Wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee' (Prov. 4: 5-9).

This chapter will examine various ways in which Lead represented Sophia, relating this aspect of her writings to Behmenist ideas and biblical texts about Wisdom.² While it cannot provide an exhaustive account of Sophia, and Lead's relationship with her, it will consider the questions Lead asked about Sophia, 'What is this Virgin?' and 'Whence is she?'³ Lead wanted to understand her relationship with Sophia and God, and this can be seen as 'Philosophia', the term Hellenists used for those who strove for instruction, which is said to bring one closer to God and Sophia. The chapter will thus elucidate some of the most complicated features of Sophia in Lead's writings. First, it will consider how Sophia featured in Lead's complex symbolic language, notably the images of the mirror, the eye and the globe. Secondly, through an examination of Lead's visions, it will show how real Sophia was to Lead and the extent to which Lead identified with and experienced herself as Sophia. For Lead's descriptions of her religious visions are full of syntactical slippages which blur the boundaries between herself and the figure of Wisdom. The final section of this chapter will examine current scholarship on Sophia and how Lead's work has ramifications for contemporary sphiology.

¹ Jane Lead, *The Signs of the Times*, (London, 1699), preparatory epistle by Francis Lee.

² I use Wisdom and Sophia interchangeably, as Lead did.

³ Jane Lead, *The Revelation of Revelations* (London, 1683), p. 39.

The diversity of Sophia

Before we can consider Lead's imagery and visions, however, it is first necessary to examine who or what Sophia was and what kind of image and authority She had. Sophia is mentioned as an significant figure in the Wisdom literature of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and Lead clearly placed enormous importance on Her. Lead would have been familiar with Wisdom's invitations, quoted above and in Proverbs 8: 32-33:

Now hearken unto me, O ye children: for the blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For who findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.

Lead's understanding of Sophia, her roles and identity were closely informed by Proverbs 1-9, Job 28, Ecclesiastes 24: 1-6 and Sirach 1;6;14-15, 24 and 51 as well as by the Book of Wisdom, sometimes called the Wisdom of Solomon.⁴ These biblical sources provided Lead with material which commended a life of introspection and reflection on human existence and which often depicted Sophia, or the Virgin Wisdom, as a feminine attribute of God. Sophia is portrayed in many ways and this multi-faceted nature adds to the confusion about Her identity.⁵ Wisdom is sometimes represented as an abstraction, representing qualities such as joy, help and comfort, dwelling in pious souls and giving immortality to those who unite themselves with Her. She is also described as a friend, bride, mother and teacher. Further confusion has arisen because in the Old Testament 'Wisdom' may be used to describe God himself. The Hebrews resisted abstraction and so dealt with objects as if they had a personality. In Proverbs 8, for example, wisdom appears to be personified, 'Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I *am* understanding; I have strength.'⁶ In the Old Testament the claim is made that true wisdom comes from God: 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Ps. 111:10 and Prov. 1:7). The most important text about

⁴ Lead quoted directly from the 1611 King James Authorised Version of the Bible. The apocryphal books were usually omitted from this version, though some had the apocrypha added as an appendix. In different versions of the Bible, translations varied, for example, Wisdom 7:28 in the Authorised Version reads, 'For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom,' and in the Great Bible 1550, the same passage states, 'for God loveth no man but him in whom wisdom dwelleth'. The Geneva Bible 1560 records, 'For God loveth none, if he dwell not with wisdom,' in Brooke F. Westcott, *A General View of the History of the English Bible* (Hampshire, 1872), p. 230. For other comparisons of biblical translations, see Peter Levi (ed.), *The English Bible 1534-1859* (London, 1974).

⁵ Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield, 1985).

⁶ D. Williams (ed.), *New Concise Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, 1989), p. 582.

Wisdom is the apocryphal Book of Wisdom, which was especially influential for Lead. It can be conveniently considered in three parts to highlight the various ways she perceived Sophia. The first six chapters describe the different destinies awaiting the godly who will be rewarded by blessed immortality, and the ungodly, who will certainly be punished. The second section (6: 9-9: 18) contains Solomon's prayer, and the meditation on Wisdom, who is described as 'the breath of the power of God' (7:25), and as coming forth from God to dwell with humankind to make those who search for her 'friends of God, and prophets' (7:27). In the concluding section (10-19) divine wisdom is manifested in creation and in God's guidance of nations and individuals. For orthodox Protestants, however, the figure of wisdom would have played a very minor role, as wisdom is rarely mentioned in the canonical books of the Bible. As Alistair Hamilton has observed, moreover, in the seventeenth century a minority did take an interest in such apocryphal books.⁷

Lead would also have been familiar with Proverbs 8:22-24 which describes Wisdom's relationship with God: 'The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water'. Proverbs 8:27 further summarises the relationship of Wisdom and God: 'When he prepared the heavens, I was there,' and Proverbs 4:7 describes Her status: 'Wisdom is the principal thing,' meaning that Wisdom was the first in time, place, order and rank, and that She was with God in the beginning. Thus, Lead's response to the hypostates of the trinity - God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, three separate identities being one - was to include the Virgin Wisdom or Sophia within the godhead. Lead wrote of Sophia's relationship to the rest of the godhead as 'The Tri-une-Deity, wherein is included the Virgin-Wisdom'.⁸ She was 'A Virgin hid in Him from all Eternity'.⁹ Lead further used the idea of Sophia to describe her relationship with the divine, presenting Sophia as a bridge between the seen and unseen worlds. Much of Lead's work was thus concerned with Sophia's role as a mediator between the divine and human, and Lead viewed the relationship between Sophia and the Trinity as exemplifying the connection between creation and humanity.

Lead's ideas about Sophia were clearly the result of her familiarity with Behmenist

⁷ Alistair Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1999), p. 266.

⁸ Jane Lead, *A Living Funeral Testimony* (London, 1702), p. 36.

⁹ Jane Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* (London, 1695), p. 31.

ideas as well as from reading biblical texts. Lead would have been familiar with Boehme's suggestion that Sophia co-existed with God, His essence being essential for the creation of all things. Boehme wrote:

The Eternall Virgin of Wisdome, stood in Paradise as a Figure, in which all the Wonders of God were knowne and was its figure an Image in it selfe ... and in that Virgin, God created the Matrix of the Earth, so that it was a visible palpable Image in substance; wherein Heaven, Earth, Starres, and Elements stood in substance, and all whatsoever liveth and moveth was in this one Image.¹⁰

Lead used the Behmenist concept of the duality of divine power which included masculine and feminine attributes. Indeed, she possibly encountered this notion from Pordage, as he also wrote about God and Sophia being dual creators, hailing 'God the Father, who is the Creator of this New Earth, has created in union with Sophia, His own Wisdom: for the Holy Trinity works and creates nothing without eternal Wisdom; and also can Wisdom do nothing without eternal Holy Trinity'.¹¹ Lead's visions of Sophia, however, show how she developed the figure of Sophia in very unusual ways. Lead's visions are theologically significant because of the way in which she placed an emphasis on the feminine, developing the experiential aspect further than her fellow Behmenists.

Visions of Wisdom: Crucified Sophia

Lead had many visions of Sophia in which she and Sophia were both present. Sophia represented a redemptive figure to Lead, and unusually, Lead had a vision of Sophia, not Christ, being crucified. The following vision recorded in November 1674 is important as it highlights the interplay between Lead and Sophia:

While I was in my deep Agony, a Spirit of Prayer came down, which sent up mighty Cries and unutterable Groanings. Which, I did most sensibly feel, pierced and broke through the Gate of the Eternal Deep. So that my Spirit had admittance into the Secret of the pure Deity, where I had Audience, and free liberty to pour out my Grievances, shew my Wounds, and who they were that had pierced me. Every one's Hand was against me, shooting their Bitter Arrows, adding weight and pressure to her, that was

¹⁰ Jacob Boehme, *The Third Booke of the Author Being the High and Deep Searching of the Three-Fold Life of Man*, (London, 1656), p. 163.

¹¹ John Pordage, *Sophia: The Graceful Eternal Virgin of Holy Wisdom, or Wonderful Spiritual Discoveries and Revelations That the Precious Wisdom has Given to a Holy Soul* (1675) in Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology*, (Minnesota, 2000), p. 98.

bleeding upon the Cross already, crying, *crucifie, crucifie! In Dying, let her Dye*'.¹²

Lead's highly gendered vision of the female being crucified was clearly an imitation of Christ. The imagery Lead used has obvious parallels with the account of the crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23:21, 'But they cried, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify him'. Lead's protagonist, however, was unambiguously female. The agony Lead experienced was transferred into the vision of a female who was being tortured. The conflation of herself with Sophia was apparent in the syntactical slippages of the same sentence, 'Everyone's hand was against me ... adding weight and pressure to HER'. Lead was both subject and object, she was 'me' and 'her'. The vision recorded how Lead and Sophia were simultaneously crucified. Lead was not only looking, she was also experiencing emotional and physical agony in mind and body. This experiential aspect of identifying with, and experiencing the mental and physical anguish of the act of crucifixion was a distinct feature of Lead's vision.

The agony portrayed in this scene of a woman being crucified also alluded to the 'Woman Clothed with the Sun' in Revelation 12:2, 'And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered'. Lead depicted loneliness and alienation whilst enduring such suffering, but her vision also offered the promise of salvation, as she wrote, 'I cried and was in strong Travel. Yet every Pang and Throw did open the Birth of Life and give me entrance into the Holy Place'.¹³ The pain and endurance thus signified the way that a sinner could be led by God's grace through the agonies of a spiritual crisis to a new birth and the assurance of salvation. Indeed, enduring such suffering would result in the expunging of sin. Lead wrote that 'The Voice of the Bridegroom' said, 'Only this I require, that thou separate thy self, and touch no more unclean Spirits of this World, for I can endure no Polluted thing to come before me. Therefore holy, harmless, separated from Sin and Sinners thou must be: then in the holy Priesthood thou shalt wait on me'.¹⁴ The bridegroom informed Lead that a 'Total Death of the Body of Sin,'¹⁵ was required before the sinner would be free to witness God. A promise came to Lead from the Bridegroom who offered a marriage, which represented the soul in union with God. The bridegroom said, 'O thou afflicted, tossed and

¹² Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens* (3 vols, London, 1696-1701), vol. 1, p. 66. The account is repeated in Jane Lead, *Wars of David*, (London, 1700 reprinted 1816), p. 167.

¹³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

forsaken one! I will marry thee unto myself. Thou art mine, be not dismayed. Fear none of those things thou art to suffer, for the Power and Presence of the Omnipotency shall be with thee'.¹⁶ It was clearly an offer of redemption and it was designed to serve as a lesson to her readers to put their faith in God.

Lead's vision of the crucified Sophia has resonances with the influential *Of The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, which we know Lead had read. Kempis wrote, 'If thou wilt carry the crosse willingly, the crosse will carry thee even to the desired end, namely where misery hath an end'.¹⁷ He also wrote, 'the more godly a man is the more often doth he suffer adversitie'.¹⁸ Lead's vision of the crucified female was unique, and her account of an agonising condition thus described a mystical union with God which confirmed her desire for transcendence, as an imitation of Christ.

The extraordinary image of the crucified Sophia was also influenced by the portrayal of wisdom in the New Testament. Matthew 16:24 reads, 'deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me'. Her vision, moreover, had a correlation with Paul's letter to the Corinthians which suggests that Sophia/Wisdom is in Christ, 'But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory'(I Cor. 2:7-8). Paul calls Jesus the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). Jesus promised his wisdom when his followers were under trial (Lk. 21:15), and He claimed to have wisdom (Mt. 21:42) and astonished the crowds with it (Mt. 13:54). As the biblical scholar, R. S. Barbour, has observed, 'Christ is indeed the creative Wisdom of God incarnate'.¹⁹ In this way, Christ the redeemer can therefore be seen as 'wisdom crucified'. If Lead's highly gendered vision of the female being crucified was clearly an imitation of Christ, then Lead reversed the imagery to depict a female redeemer. The illustration below depicts Christ as female being crucified (See Fig. 8.1.) It unites the two images, as Lead's vision had, and sees the cross as a symbol of repentance and Sophia as 'a true source of life,

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁷ Thomas à Kempis, *Of The Imitation of Christ* (London, 1636), p. 104. 'De Imit Christ' is listed in the contents page of *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, sig. A3v.

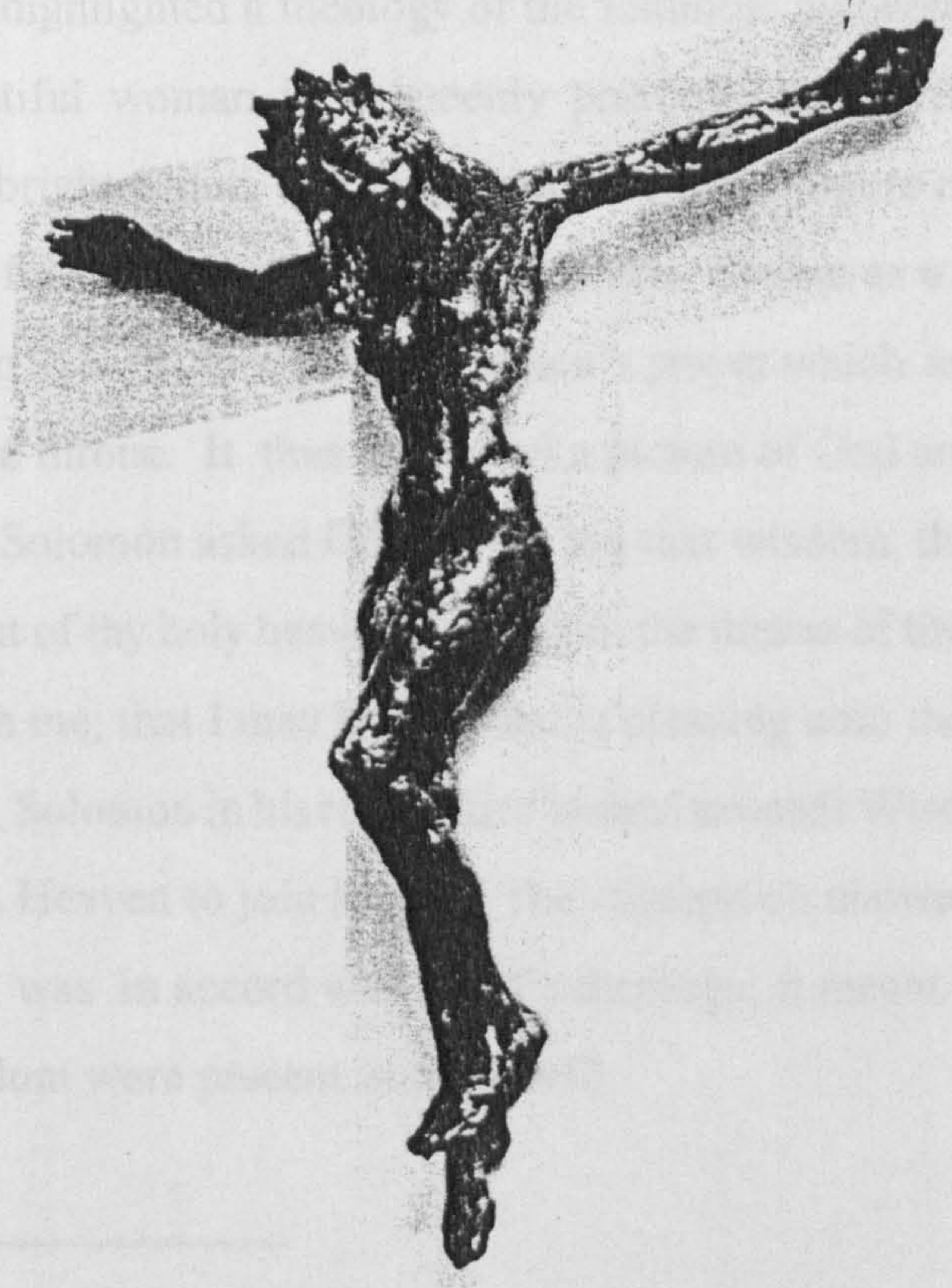
¹⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁹ R. S. Barbour, 'Creation, Wisdom and Christ', in Richard McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ and Culture* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 42.

of revelation, redemption, and future hope'.²⁰

for feminist theology. It is one of the ways that feminist theologians and religious artists have been developing and exploring ways in which the feminine aspects of divinity can be recovered and depicted.²¹ In the 1970s, other artists, such as Monica Sjoo 'represented the most taboo image of the powerful woman' by painting 'God Giving Birth' (1968) to represent her spiritual belief in the Cosmic Mother.²² Ruether argues that the critique of sexist symbols in Christianity continues to reconstruct 'the symbolism for God, Christ, humanity, nature, sin, and salvation, to affirm women's full and equivalent humanity'.²³

Lead also highlighted a theology of the feminine in the figure of Wisdom in regal terms as a most beautiful woman... Lead witnessed an overshadowing by... with a Crown upon her Head... The vision drew on Wisdom... who sat beside the divine throne... and Wisdom sitting enthroned side by side.²⁴ Solomon asked... by thy throne' (9:4) but 'send her out of thy holy temple... the presence of the glory that being present she may labour with me, that I may... (9:10). In the illustration below (fig. 8.2), Solomon is depicted... Wisdom who was personified and descended from Heaven to join... a diffusion of the Book of Wisdom which was in accord... Wisdom's presence and thus God's wisdom were present.



²¹ Gloria F. Osofsky, 'Women and the Cross: Feminist Artists Reclaim the Great Goddess' in N. Brody and M. Brody (eds.), *Women and the Cross: The American Movement of the 1970s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 77.

²² Francis Becker, *Women and the Cross: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 11.

²³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Theology of Christian Feminist Theology' in Susan Paul, *Women and the Cross: The American Movement of the 1970s* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 18.

Figure 8.1 Christa, by Edwina Sandys, 1974 (Bronze 54" x 40" x 8"), in Ruether, *Women and Redemption*, p. 178.

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (London, 1998), p. 202.

Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that this image of a female crucified has ramifications for feminist theology. It is one of the ways that feminist theologians and religious artists have been developing and exploring ways in which the feminine aspects of divinity can be recovered and depicted.²¹ In the 1970s, other artists, such as Monica Sjoo 'represented the most taboo image of the powerful woman' by painting 'God Giving Birth' (1968) to represent her spiritual belief in the Cosmic Mother.²² Ruether argues that the critique of sexist symbols in Christianity continues to reconstruct 'the symbolism for God, Christ, humanity, nature, sin, and salvation, to affirm women's full and equivalent humanity'.²³

Lead also highlighted a theology of the feminine by depicting Wisdom in regal terms as a most beautiful woman in a queenly position. In April 1670 Lead witnessed 'an overshadowing bright Cloud, and in the midst of it the Figure of a Woman' with a 'Crown upon her Head, full of Majesty'.²⁴ She thus saw Sophia as a crowned virgin. The vision drew on Wisdom 9: 1-18, containing Solomon's prayer which asked God for the one who sat beside the divine throne. It thus presented a picture of God and Wisdom sitting enthroned side by side.²⁵ Solomon asked God, 'Give me that wisdom, that sitteth by thy throne'(9:4) and 'send her out of thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory that being present she may labour with me, that I may know what is pleasing unto thee'(9:10). In the illustration below (fig. 8.2), Solomon in his regal attire looked towards Wisdom who was personified and descended from Heaven to join him.²⁶ The illustration showed a diffusion of the Book of Wisdom which was in accord with Lead's theology; it meant that Wisdom's presence and thus God's wisdom were present in the world.

²¹ Gloria F. Orenstein, 'Recovering Her Story: Feminist Artists Reclaim the Great Goddess' in N. Broude and M. Garrard (eds), *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York, 1994), p. 77.

²² Frances Bonner, and others, (eds), *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 180.

²³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology' in Susan Frank Parsons (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 18.

²⁴ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 18.

²⁵ Mary also became the 'sedes sapientia', inheriting from Solomon's throne the seat of wisdom.

²⁶ Michel Boutauld (1604-1689) had several works translated from French into English by The Society of Jesus, which were published in London in the 1680s.

Lead's vision of Sophia who derived its strength of imagery from Revelation 11:19 and 12:1: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven . . . And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." Wisdom 7:29 compares her beauty to the cosmos, "For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars." However, the imagery Lead used was not identified to any particular biblical passage, yet she clearly foregrounded a female presence in the godhead. She did this by contextualizing the beauty of Sophia - Sophia being the breath of beauty - with the "temple of God" and the "crown of stars" and of "the only true Virgin in our time" (Lead, *The Proclamation*, p. 23).



Lead is cited in Wisdom 8:2 where she has "led me out from my youth, I have not known her to forsake me." Leadage also wrote about Sophia: "I say forth out of your hearts, 'Wisdom's beauty was made, sanctified wisdom make things new . . . and goodly than all Things power of God, and a pure for our to desired thing till the universal mirror of the world, but Only she can do all things.'" (Leadage, *Sophia in Verdure*, p. 37).

Leadage's Sophia is often described as an emanation, an outflowing and an overflowance of God. "She is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty." She is the brightness of

¹⁷ Lead, *The Proclamation* (London, 1684), p. 23.

¹⁸ Lead, *Revelation of Revelation*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Leadage, *Sophia in Verdure*, *Wisdom's Book*, p. 37.

Fig. 8.2 M. Boutauld, *The Councils of Wisdom* (Amsterdam, 1683), frontispiece. *Parts of Thomas Knapp's* (London, 1840), p. 23.

Lead's vision of Sophia also derived its strength of imagery from Revelation 11:19 and 12:1: 'And the temple of God was opened in heaven ... And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman cloathed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.' Wisdom 7:29 compares her beauty to the cosmos, 'For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars.' However, the imagery Lead used was not identical to any particular biblical passage, yet she clearly foregrounded a female presence in the godhead. She did this by emphasising the beauty of Sophia - Sophia being the bearer of beauty, writing, 'Her beauty and Comliness being great'²⁷ and of 'the only true Virgin in her beautiful form'.²⁸ Wisdom's beauty is also described in Wisdom 8:2 where Solomon is enamoured of Her and says, 'I loved her, and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty.' Pordage also wrote about Sophia in terms of her beauty and also of personal enlightenment: 'Ray forth out of your beauty and let your sweet light illumine us!'²⁹

In addition to being described in biblical and Behmenist sources, Wisdom's beauty was also a common literary motif. The poet, Thomas Vaughan, for example, personified wisdom as a beautiful lady with self-contained purity and the ability to make things new:

*For Wisdom is more moving than any motion, she passeth and goeth thorow all Things by reason of her purenesse. For she is the Breath of the power of God, and a pure Influence flowing from the Glory of the Almighty, therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightnesse of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodnesse. And being but One, she can do all things and remaying in her self she maketh all things new.*³⁰

Unlike Vaughan, however, Lead portrayed Sophia as an entity within her soul. Her visions are often described in terms of mystical encounters with the divine in which she was connected in a symbiotic relationship.

Wisdom 8:21 describes Sophia as the gift of God and Wisdom 7:25-6 states, 'She is God's power which is breathed out, and the image of God's goodness. She is described as an emanation, an outflowing and an effervescence of God. 'She is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty', 'She is the brightness of

²⁷ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God* (London, 1694), p. 26.

²⁸ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 42.

²⁹ Pordage, *Sophia*, in Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, p. 89.

³⁰ Thomas Vaughan, 'Anima magica abscondita' in Alan Rudrum (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Vaughan* (Oxford, 1984), p. 123.

the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness'. Lead described how she was fed knowledge by a nurturing Father: 'I was ministered to, by the Nurturing Father of my Spirit, that fed me with a white streaming Breath from his own Mouth. Whereby I had open'd in me an understanding deep in Knowledge.'³¹ Divine sustenance was also obtained from Sophia. Lead wrote, 'my Spirit still attended eagerly longing to lay my Mouth to *Wisdom's* Breast, from which the Word of Life so sweetly did flow'.³² The imagery blurred milk and the breath of God suggested by the act feeding. It indicated that God and Wisdom were united in creating and disseminating the Word.

Lead emphasised that it was Wisdom's milk and God's white breath, rather than the sacrificial blood of Christ, which transmitted divine knowledge directly to her. Lead also did not use the image of Mother-Jesus as one of the primary ways of speaking about union with the divine, which had been used in the Middle Ages.³³ Instead then, Lead was concerned with maternal imagery to depict Sophia as a mother. She translated the use of milk into a common spiritual metaphor which was usually applied to the nurturing of children by God or Christ, but unusually, she applied this maternal imagery to Sophia.

Sophia's Looking-Glass: Imagery of the Mirror, Eye and Globe

This section will begin to untangle and elucidate how Lead depicted Sophia using symbols of the mirror, eye and globe. Such symbols were used to denote a link between the physical world and beyond, and this section will examine Lead's use of imagery to show how they functioned to explain light and insight. It might be tempting to reduce Lead's use of imagery to a crude biographical paradox, as she went blind in her seventies. Lead's blindness, however, did not equate with darkness. Indeed, the darkness became the context for light and space. Lead's dense imagery was overwhelmingly concerned with spiritual sight, and she used the words 'glass', 'mirror' and 'globe' to depict degrees of spiritual illumination. Her imagery can thus be understood as a visualisation of 'Inner Light' theology.

In the Behmenist tradition, the symbolism of the mirror, the eye, and the globe was intimately connected with the eye and the godhead to highlight the importance of inner vision.

³¹ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 211.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 162.

These symbols appear in Pordage's *Theologica Mystica* for which Lead wrote the preface.³⁴ The work allied itself closely with 'Mystica Theologica,' the contemplative work on the mind's ability to transcend rational thought through the inner eye of individual experience, addressed to Timothy, St. Paul's disciple. Pordage used these symbols to explain visionary spirituality and the divine illumination. He wrote, 'The sight of God's Attributes from the opening of the Eye in the Abyssal Globe, is both a ravishing and amazing sight'.³⁵ Yet, he suggested that it was Sophia who was 'the revealer of the Mysteries and hidden wonders of the Deity'.³⁶ Wisdom 7:29 states: 'being compared with the light: she is found before it'. Sophia's ability to manifest and illuminate all things was thus intimately connected with the use of such symbols.

Traditionally, Wisdom has a mirror and becomes apparent when She sees herself reflected in it. As Herbert Grabes has observed, 'the Divine is usually found reflected in the world or the soul and, from the end of the sixteenth century, with some frequency in the pristine mirror of the beautiful and virtuous woman'.³⁷ In Lead's case the beautiful and virtuous woman was Sophia who showed Lead the divine reflected in Her mirror. Lead wrote, 'As for seeing in the Glass of Divine Wisdom, what a Wonderful Time is approaching'.³⁸ Lead used this symbolic imagery of the mirror to denote Sophia as a reflection of God, writing, 'The Virgin feels her self in the Centre of the Deity ... A Center-Life that burneth from the Mirror of the Deity'.³⁹ The mirror was an ancient and common image and the illustration (fig. 8.3) below depicts Sapiientia (Sophia) looking in it and showing her divinity as a reflection. Lead also described Wisdom enthroned and looking in Her 'unspotted mirror' as the reflection of the divine. By looking in the mirror, Sophia functioned as the key in the

³⁴ Lead's first description of the concept of an inner globe, however, was dated 12 May 1676, in *Fountain*, vol.1, pp. 221-22.

³⁵ Pordage, *Theologica Mystica*, p. 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

³⁷ Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1982), p. 121. For a study of maternal imagery in the Middle Ages, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982).

³⁸ Lead, *Wars of David*, Epistle.

³⁹ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 45.

process of God's manifestation in the world and of Himself.⁴⁰



Figure 8.3 Sapientia with celestial mirror. From Carolus Bovillus, *Liber de sapiente* (1510).

⁴⁰ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 112.

The symbolism of the mirror was used by Lead as a metaphor for discovering the inner self in order to find God within. It was an idea that had been employed by Boehme who wrote, 'In this Looking-Glasse, hath been seen from Eternity, the substance of this world'.⁴¹ It also meant that, 'In this Eternall Looking-Glasse of the wisdom of God, hath also the soul of Man ... been discovered'.⁴² Thus, the reflection of the wisdom of God meant that the human soul was illuminated as 'Holy Wisdom, truly received and brought to light the inward light and paradise world'.⁴³ For Pordage, however, the 'glass' represented God's omnipresent vision, and he wrote, 'it hath pleased God to introduce his Eye into the Globe of Eternity (which Globe is the Glass of his Wisdom) that God hath set this miroir before his Eye, that in it he may see all things'.⁴⁴ Thus, glass denoted God's extensive vision, in addition to the 'clear Chrystalline Glass or mirroure' representing a reflection of divine eternal light.⁴⁵ Drawing on Wisdom 7:26 which states, 'she is the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness', Pordage wrote that Sophia was 'the unspotted mirroure of the glory and excellency of God'.⁴⁶ Sophia thus stood eternally before God, as a mirror in which God saw the wonder of his own being, and the soul of humanity.

Lead's ideas of spiritual illumination also drew on 2 Corinthians 3: 18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord'. Sophia's looking glass thus bestowed the gift of the spiritual or inner eye giving Lead access to another mode of perception, a realm of the soul that appeared to have a reality of its own. The centrality of Sophia as a reflection within the godhead was further elaborated upon when Lead recorded 'we may see her [Sophia] in the Glass of perfection, and come to know and feel her, not as distinct and apart from us, but all Virginized in her essential Deity ... for which end we are also called to look into her Mirror'.⁴⁷ Thus, Sophia carried the freedom from the taint of original sin, She

⁴¹ Jacob Boehme, *The Remainder of Books Written by Jacob Behme* (London, 1662), p. 20. This is 'The First Apologie to Balthazar Tylcken'.

⁴² Ibid., p. 21.

⁴³ Pordage, *Sophia in Versluis, Wisdom's Book*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ John Pordage, *Theologica Mystica, or the Mystic Divinitie of the Aeternal Invisibles* (London, 1683), p. 23.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

represented perfection as the chaste Virgin. By looking in the mirror, Lead added, 'we shall see what shall follow the Harmony of these Senses, which is the Character of the Virgin Nature'.⁴⁸ Thus, God's creation could become visible through Sophia's looking-glass. If Lead's reflection could mirror Sophia's, then the divine could be reflected within Lead's soul. It meant that Lead could become 'all Virginized', - a metaphor which meant that the soul could be united with God, and return to its original virgin nature.

Boehme's works were punctuated with hieroglyphs and although his emblematic illustrations were of a complexity not to be found in Lead's works it is very likely that she was influenced by them.⁴⁹ They included many examples of globes and eyes, such as the illustration representing the trinity done by Wenceslas Hollar (See Figure 8.4.)

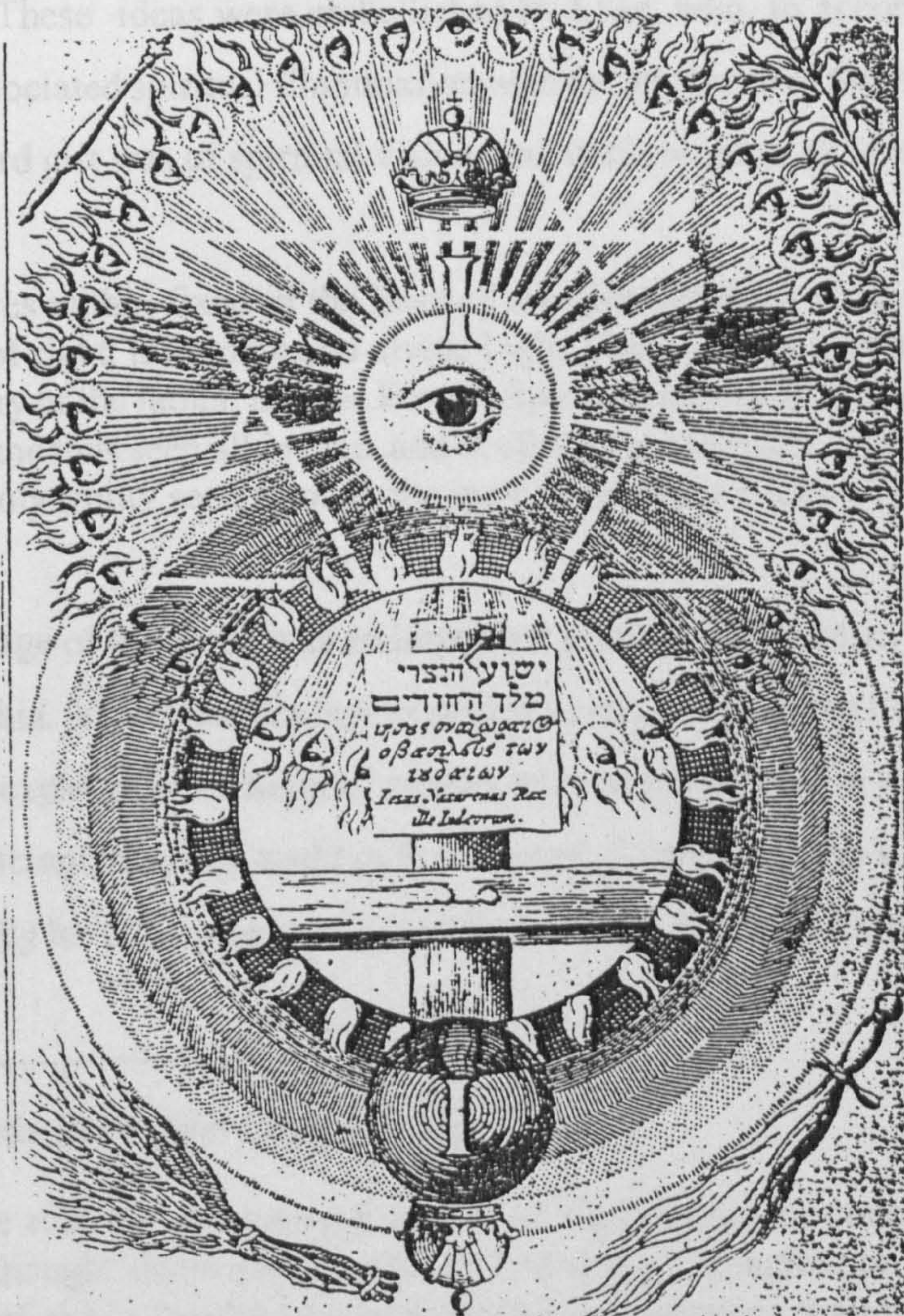


Figure 8.4 The Trinity. Jacob Boehme, *Des Gottseeligen Hoherleuchteten Jacob Bohmens Alle Theosophische Werke* (Amsterdam, 1682), titlepage.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 45

⁴⁹ See Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1989), p. 202.

Commenting on Boehme's illustrations, Nigel Smith has observed that 'the imagery of illumination and emanation was as appealing to the English sectarians as was the language of mystical self-negation'.⁵⁰ Boehme's terminology, cryptic style and illustrations were complex. Boehme believed that three worlds were to be found within humans: the dark, light and outer worlds. Man could choose between the three worlds through the exercise of his free will, or false will.⁵¹ Boehme was concerned for humans to prove themselves in this earthly life and resist the dark and outer worlds where God is not manifest. He suggested that God's light would shine in the soul's spirit, or the soul's eye. Matthew 6: 22-23 states, 'If the eye be light, then is the whole body light'. Boehme used such symbolism to convey the idea that God was all-seeing, and that the soul represented the inner-light to be found in humankind. These ideas were embellished by Lead, who, in accordance with Behmenist ideas, also associated spiritual illumination with the attributes of Sophia. She suggested that Wisdom's third gift was of spiritual vision, and it allowed her children to

have eyes within fixed in the head of a bright and clear Understanding; through this Organ of sight, from pure and divine Light, God in Christ may be seen, and Christ as in the Glory of the father, and the Eternal Spirit streaming forth from both Father and Son. Sometime thus seen all in One, and at other times Distinct, and yet never divided; Thus is the holy trinity seen through the pure Christalline Globe of the Eternal Wisdom.⁵²

The image of the globe was an important motif in Behmenism and connected with the figure of Sophia. In *Sophia*, Pordage recorded an entry concerning Sophia's globe on 10 July 1675.⁵³ He explained that Sophia 'creates this inward globum or earth-sphere ... or named the inward, eternal, magical world or Principium'.⁵⁴ Inner wisdom was thus 'the essence and Being of Godly love; it is the soul's paradise; it is the heavenly blood of the Virgin; it is the

⁵⁰ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 202.

⁵¹ The role of imagination is also of significance in conception and gestation in Behmenist thought determining good or bad seeds: 'Imagination in the Paracelsian and Behmenist refers to a faculty whose ontological significance is altogether different from the twentieth century sense of fantasy. It is an active and creative faculty, the image formed giving rise to the phenomenal world', B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 85-86.

⁵² Lead, *Enochian Walks*, p. 28.

⁵³ Pordage, *Sophia in Versluis, Wisdom's Book*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

heavenly Tincture; it is the seed or land of pure Nature, so it has life in itself; it is the impregnated body'.⁵⁵ Pordage described the archetypal globe or eternal Globe of Nature, as having three courts, outward, inward and inmost, which drew upon the description of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings. In this globe was an eye, which Pordage described as being the 'Eye of the Father' or the 'Abyssal Eye' of eternity'.⁵⁶ From the inward court, or 'holy of holies,' the Holy Trinity was visible from the opening of the eye, which 'no pen can decipher' for it was only the Spirit of the Eye that could open itself.⁵⁷ The eye then 'divides itself into three parts, the first of which is the Abyssal Eye, the second is the Heart, and the third is the outflowing Breath'.⁵⁸ It was 'When the eye opens, then the Heart of the Son, and the Holy Ghost are seen,' the mystery of the trinity was thus revealed.⁵⁹ The triune symbolism of the eye, the heart, and the breath revealed three, yet in essence one, which signified the presence of the Trinity contained within the globe. This notion was further represented in an illustration of the birth of the Trinity which appeared in Pordage's *Theologica Mystica* (See Figure 8.5.)



Figure 8.5 The Birth of the Trinity. Pordage, *Theologica Mystica*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ Pordage, *Philosophical Epistle*, in Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, p. 67.

⁵⁶ Pordage, *Theologica Mystica*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Pordage conveyed the message that God's 'eye in the heart' was how God revealed himself 'face to face' in the soul of the mystic.⁶⁰

This sight of God's Attributes from the opening of the Eye in the Abyssal Globe, is both a ravishing and amazing sight, for you do not behold the Ideas or Similitudes of things, but the things themselves intellectually, which causeth most inexpressible joys, and extasies in the Spirit of the Soul, to which nothing in this world can be compared.⁶¹

This was the 'light-world' to which Boehme referred. It depicted the opening of the inner eye which became alive with the 'outflowing breath' of God. For Lead and Pordage, it represented the spiritual or angelical world that revealed a hidden reality.

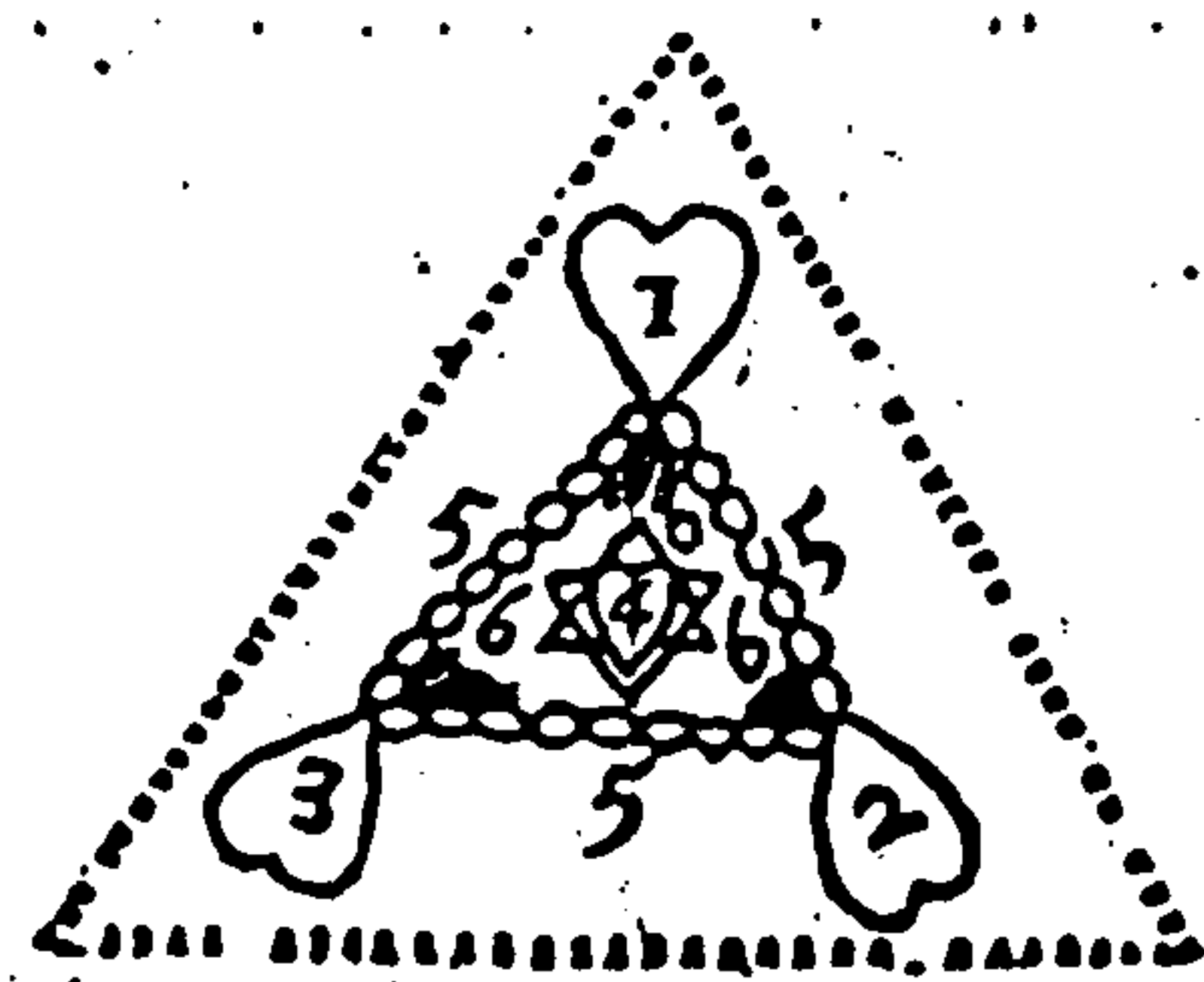
Lead's works had a few illustrations of her visions. If we compare her diagrams with the illustrations of Boehme and Pordage we find the same associations. As noted above, Boehme and Pordage depicted globes, and God's all-seeing eye, for example. In using such diagrammatic images, Boehme, Lead and Pordage were using text and image to complement each other to provide visual representations of things unseen. They depicted a way of seeing which not only informed the reader about a difficult and abstract subject, but also they could aid the reader's own imagination. Therefore, Boehme's illustrations or Lead's diagrammatic representations added extra information, but at the same time they were used to explain the text. Lead's diagrams however, as we shall see below, depicted ideas not altogether explained in the text, and the diagrams themselves required a key to explain them.

Only two diagrams from woodcuts, are present in Lead's works to illustrate visions described in her spiritual diary. In comparison with the illustrations in Boehme's works, Lead's drawings may appear simplistic but they represented symbolically the complexity of ideas to be found in Behmenism. Her illustration of the vision dated 23 September 1676, depicted a triangle which contained three hearts: of love, joy and peace which are linked by a golden chain with seven links connected to the fourth heart, of the bride. It was a diagrammatic attempt by Lead to communicate aspects of God's love.⁶² (Figure 8.6.)

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶² Lead also employed numerology to decode the scriptures. She may have been influenced by Boehme's belief in the three principles of the godhead manifested in creation through 'seven' fountain spirits, and, the Bible notes that God rested on the seventh day (Ex. 20:10; Lv. 25.2ff); the Day of Atonement was in the seventh month (Lv. 16:29); The priests marched round Jericho 7 times (Jos. 6:4) Daniel spoke of 'seven years' to complete God's purposes (Dn.4:23); and John saw seven lampstands and stars, and seven headed beasts (Rev. 1:12, 16, 12:3, 13:1).



- A. The Eye.
- B. The Globe of Light.
- C. C. C. C. C. The Flames.
- D. The Rainbow.
- E. The One Element.
- F. The Supercelstial Moon.

Figure 8.6 Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, pp. 360-61.

Interestingly, the second illustration entitled, a 'Vision of God's Flaming Eye,' dated 16 July 1676, had similarities with Boehme and Pordage's illustrations of eyes and globes.⁶³ Lead's vision of 'God's Flaming Eye' represented divine illumination in a similar way to Boehme's depiction of God's hidden reality. Lead suggested that the 'eye' was 'denominated from the Father, with the Eternal Wisdom, and the Son concurring in the Holy Spirit'.⁶⁴ The vision of 'God's Flaming Eye' was unusually accompanied by an illustration which depicted God's circling eye contained within a globe of light, with flaming streams emanating from it, containing a rainbow of colours and showing the outer firmament and supercelestial moon framed by the globe and its contents. (See Figure 8.7.)

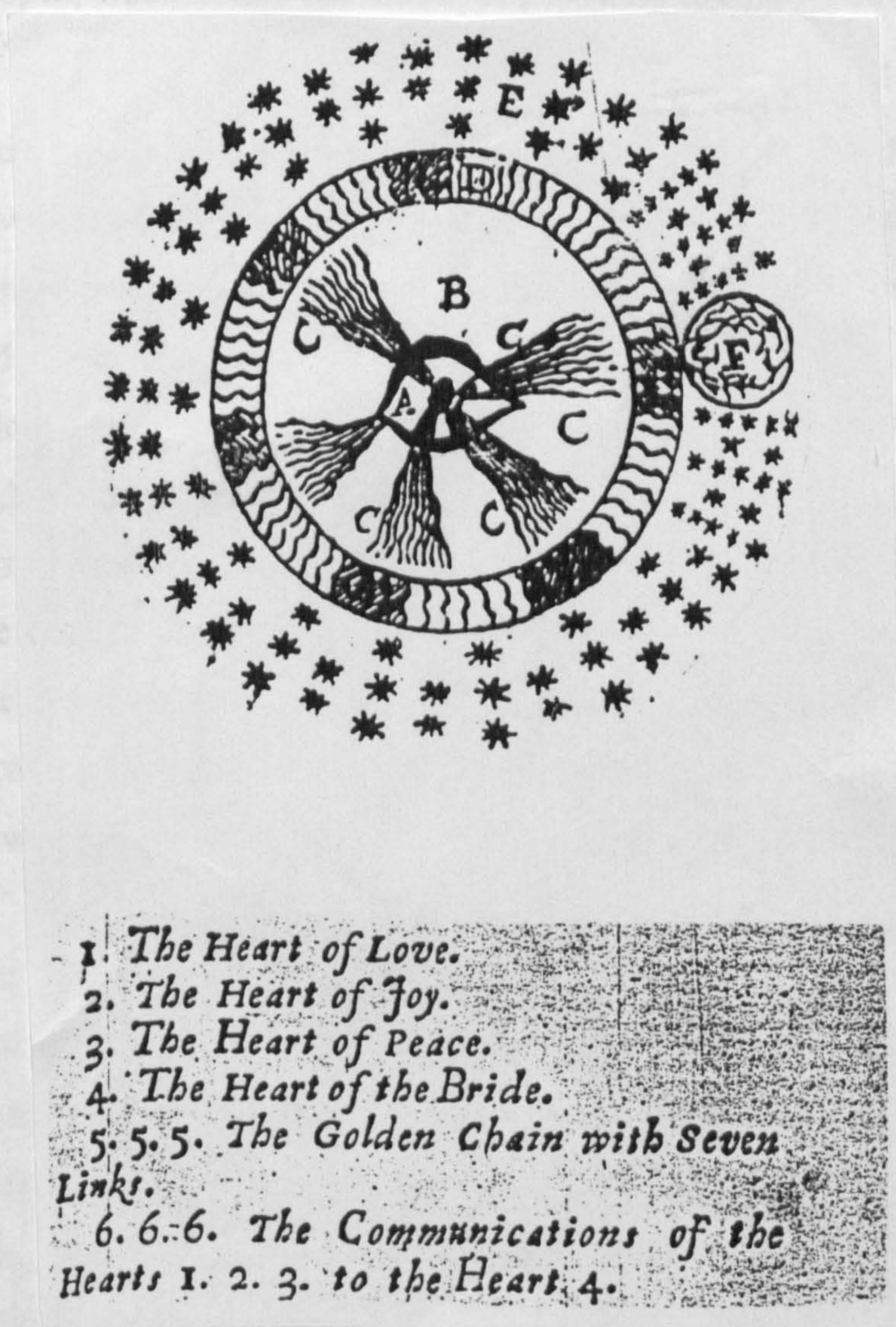


Figure 8.7 'A Vision of God's Flaming Eye', Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 264.

⁶³ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 1, p. 264.

⁶⁴ Jane Lead, *Ascent to the Mount of Vision*, (London, 1699), p. 15.

The vision clearly worked at several levels. The orb depicted God as all-seeing. It also strongly resembled diagrams of the universe, though it is unclear whether it was heliocentric or earth-centred. The circles may refer to Platonic notion of the circular or spherical 'world soul' but, the vision also punned on the notion of orb as an eye or planet. By fusing the symbols of the globe and the eye into the 'Globe-Eye' she posed the question, 'But now the great Question of those who are willing to be Wisdom's Disciples, is, Which way they may ascend up to this Globe-Eye?':

The way to ascend the *Globe-Eye*, is through its descending down into the Root-Essence of the Soul, and contracting with it Philosophically, turning it into a Magick Eye; where then it most easily ascends, and fly to be an Eye, in the *Globe-Eye*, before which all stands open, whatsoever hath proceeded from the Center-Ground of God's Globe of Eternity.⁶⁵

Clothed in a mystical discourse, the inner eye was magically transformed into the 'Globe-Eye' which had the power to ascend. In other words, the soul could transmigrate from an inner centre to a union with the divine, symbolically meaning that the soul could become one with God. Thus, was 'the Holy Trinity seen through the Pure Crystalline Globe of the Eternal Wisdom'.⁶⁶ Lead considered the globe to belong to Wisdom, and Wisdom used the object through which divine seeing could operate. Wisdom thus provided the key to divine seeing. As Nigel Smith has suggested, the 'perception of the divine, the universe, and human cognition are brought together in the simultaneous association of eye, circle, and globe,' which produced the image of absolute sight.⁶⁷ In Lead's case Wisdom brought everything together to produce the 'Globe-Eye'. The symbolic language was clearly Behmenist in origin, and it was a way of expressing figuratively ways of seeing the divine, and the divine as all-seeing.

As we have seen, Lead's understanding of Sophia was informed mainly by Proverbs and the Book of Wisdom in which the figure of Sophia was personified. Lead clearly used Sophia as a theological tool in which she was able to express certain concepts such as redemption, and spiritual rebirth in which Sophia became the mediator between the human and the divine. She was also able to understand and impart God's wisdom by her visionary experiences with divine validation. Sophia spoke directly to Lead as her personal interpreter. Lead's relationship with Sophia was complex yet grounded in an understanding of Behmenist

⁶⁵ Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Lead, *Enochian Walks*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 130.

ideas and of biblical references. The Book of Wisdom for example, considered how to seek Wisdom and attain righteousness, and discussed wisdom as divine agent of salvation. Lead's comprehension of Sophia can thus be summarised in five ways: Sophia preserved and revealed the mysteries of God; she was the Mother for those who belonged to Her spiritually; through spiritual rebirth they became the true children of Wisdom; Sophia expected Her children to live according to a covenant with Her, and all who entered into the covenant comprised the Philadelphian community. The goal of the covenant was the restoration at the end time which would result in a paradisaical state of perfection for humanity and the spiritual marriage with Sophia. Sophia as the Mother, Teacher and Queen to Her children, but also as a spiritual and divine principle implanted into humanity. The essence of the principle was the perfection that humanity would attain for God.⁶⁸

Scholarship on Sophia

How might we read Lead's visions of Sophia in the light of current feminist scholarship and feminist theology? The feminist historian theologian, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, acknowledged that 'scant attention has been paid to the intellectual history of biblical interpretation by women until very recently'.⁶⁹ Recognising that the Bible is a major implement for maintaining the oppression of patriarchal structure, feminist scholarship has looked for evidence of feminine or female presences in the Bible.⁷⁰ Many feminists have found the figure of Sophia in the Judeo-Christian tradition to be extremely important in reconstructing a more equitable and gender-balanced image of the Divine. Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza has made an enormous contribution to the scholarship on Sophia using biblical exegesis.⁷¹ The Wisdom tradition is outlined in the Old Testament, and the Book

⁶⁸ Thomas Schipflinger, *Sophia-Maria: A Holistic Vision of Creation* (Maine, 1998), pp. 222-24.

⁶⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (2 vols, London, 1994), vol 2, p. 2.

⁷⁰ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures; King, Women and Spirituality*, and Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (eds), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield, 1998) for contemporary feminist biblical and historical studies.

⁷¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London, 1995), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh, 1998), Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, 1992, reprinted 1998).

of Wisdom, was clearly an important apocryphal text which gave Lead further insights into the hidden nature of God.⁷² The Book of Wisdom has proved to be an invaluable source for Christian feminist theologians today, seeking to reclaim nascent egalitarian and positive female themes. Just as Lead was influenced by passages such as 'For God loveth none but him that dwelleth in wisdom' (7:28), and 'a great pleasure it is to have her friendship' (8:18), the inclusivity and cosmopolitan emphasis on creation spirituality of the Wisdom tradition has been especially attractive not only to spiritual feminists but also to liberation theologians.⁷³

Feminist historians and theologians have also focussed on women mystics in the medieval period suggesting that the figure of wisdom offers possibilities for feminist theology.⁷⁴ They have turned to the revelations of female mystics to suggest that there was a matrilineage of women, who, through powerful mystical visions and divine revelations, were able to challenge the sexism and misogyny of their own patriarchal societies and religions. As Gerda Lerner has observed, the revelations of female mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, suggest that they often contained imagery of a female aspect of God representing wisdom, or images of the Church as Mother.⁷⁵ Barbara Newman has suggested that for Hildegard, the feminine was 'Wisdom and Love, energy, synergy, and beauty. As consort of the masculine Creator, she is the divine Mother of all living'.⁷⁶ Newman argues that Hildegard produced a 'theology of the feminine' structured around a succession of feminine images, especially Wisdom.⁷⁷ In contemporary theology, Lead's highlighting of Sophia or Wisdom as the divine feminine is very interesting. Like Hildegard, Lead's theology can be seen as a 'theology of the feminine'. This theology was not explicitly feminist, but it can be seen as a theology of

⁷² 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Ester, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Jeremiah, Prayer of Azariah, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 and 2 Maccabees.

⁷³ Schussler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, p. 177.

⁷⁴ See for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1992), and Alcuin Blamires (ed.), *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992).

⁷⁵ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (2 vols, New York and Oxford, 1993), vol. 2, pp. 61-63.

⁷⁶ Barbara, Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 250.

⁷⁷ Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, and Barbara Newman (ed.), *Voice of the Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, 1998).

liberation which foregrounded the divine feminine, Sophia. If there exists a tradition of females highlighting the feminine, then Lead comes closest to Hildegard as her visions also extolled the figure of Wisdom. However, scholars have overlooked representations of Sophia in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, thereby failing to acknowledge Lead's visions of Sophia.

Feminism, however, has strongly critiqued Christianity's male-centred history and misogynist practices by emphasising the feminine over the masculine. This has been developed by either reconstructing traditions which were seen to involve ancient or pagan goddesses,⁷⁸ or by foregrounding the biblical figure of Sophia.⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that it is commonly accepted that the biblical image of Sophia has integrated Goddess language and traditions, and that the divide between feminist biblical theologians and Goddess theologians 'can be bridged by a hermeneutics of desire that searches for female images of the Divine'.⁸⁰ Many contemporary feminist theologians and Goddess theologians are looking for a more prominently positioned female role, and spiritual feminism lives on in many varied guises and diverse forms today.⁸¹ Ninna Beckman has postulated a position for Sophia within a Judeo-Christian tradition by arguing, 'Against a Trinitarian doctrine, seemingly impossible to re-imagine, Sophia has appeared as an attractive open-ended alternative.'⁸² Newman has observed that modern biblical scholars have laboriously reconstructed this theology, but that the presence of Sophia in the scriptures has always been an open secret. A fifteenth-century artist and commentator wrote:

Here at the beginning ... is the Lady Wisdom in the form and figure of a woman, signifying Jesus our Saviour, who is called the power and wisdom of God the Father; she is seated on the throne of majesty as true God. And in her right hand she holds a

⁷⁸ Melissa Raphael, *Introducing Theology: Discourses on the Goddess* (Sheffield, 2000); Shirley Nicholson (ed.), *The Goddess Reawakening: The Feminine Principle Today* (Illinois, 1989); Merlin Stone, 'Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections', in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds), *WomenSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco, 1992), pp. 273-87.

⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*; Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child*, Schussler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*; Johnson, *She Who Is*.

⁸⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, p. 161.

⁸¹ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Promise and Protest* (London, 1993), p. 117. See also Ashphodel Long, 'The Goddess Movement in Britain Today', *Feminist Theology*, 5 (1994).

⁸² N. Beckman, 'Sophia', *Feminist Theology* 16, (1997), p. 49.

book, and in her left, the world, signifying that through her have come all the knowledge and wisdom by which the world is governed and restored.⁸³

Newman has asserted that 'The Sophia Christology of the New Testament is among the stunning rediscoveries of modern scholarship'.⁸⁴ In the New Testament a Sophia Christology has been identified by biblical scholars who argue that Sophia became incarnate in Jesus in the writings of Paul, Matthew and John. Because of Lead's deep knowledge of the Bible, she would have been familiar with the Christ/Sophia references. Lee wrote that Lead called Christ 'the Wisdom of Wisdom, or to say that he is generated out of Wisdom and Light of the Father, though he also rightly be called Wisdom'.⁸⁵ In the biblical texts, Jesus promised wisdom for when his followers were under trial (Lk. 21:15); it was necessary for leaders (Acts 6:3); and all believers (Col. 1:9; Jas. 1:5), and God's wisdom was demonstrated in the life and death of Christ (Rom. 11:33) and manifested in the church (Eph. 3:10). Jesus claimed to have wisdom (Mt. 12:42) and astonished the crowds with it (Mt. 13:54). Paul calls God's wisdom (I Cor. 1:24, 30) and, Jesus is worshipped in heaven for his complete wisdom (Rev. 5:12, Col. 2:3).⁸⁶ It is references such as these that have inspired scholars, such as Schüssler Fiorenza to develop a christology from a feminist perspective to see if they can engender liberating visions today.⁸⁷

There have been many attempts to determine who or what Sophia is. Yet, how Sophia has been represented often says more about the scholar than it does about Lead. Catherine Smith, for example, has included Lead's visions of Sophia in a reconstruction of a female literary history. She argues that the woman figured in many of Lead's visions was 'Lead's revision of Sophia, the Virgin Wisdom of God in esoteric theology and apocalyptic tradition. Recurrence of a similar ideal in poetry by women in the twentieth century - 'I am a pure acetylene/Virgin' - 'I am the woman/ ... whose words are matches' - suggests a pattern

⁸³ Peter Monks, *The Brussels Horloge de Sapience* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 134-35. An illustration appears in Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale, MS. IV, 111, F. 13r, quoted in Newman, 'Pilgrimage of Christ-Sophia', p. 14.

⁸⁴ Barbara Newman, 'The Pilgrimage of Christ-Sophia', *vox benedicta*, 9 (1992), p. 14.

⁸⁵ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 208.

⁸⁶ *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, (Leicester, 1989), p. 583.

⁸⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*.

of vocabulary shared across women's literary history'.⁸⁸ Smith suggests that, 'Lead sees Sophia's submerged presence throughout Christian history, just as she finds her within herself'.⁸⁹

It is the notion of finding the female or feminine within that also interests the New Age writer, Caitlin Matthews. Matthews suggests that Lead's interpretation of sophiology serves as an important disclosure of the manifestation of Sophia and argues that Sophia 'can be everyone's mother, sister or daughter. She is at hand as a living avatara of the Divine Feminine, the Goddess whom we have forgotten and for whom we yearn so urgently'.⁹⁰ Lead however, did not yearn for the 'forgotten Goddess'. New Age adherents do not necessarily believe in a 'God' but may draw on ideas available from a global repertoire. This 'pick and chose' belief system is apparent in Matthews choice of the word 'avatar' which is used to denote the manifestation of a Hindu deity in visible form. Matthews applies a whole host of beliefs about Sophia, or Wisdom, or the Black Goddess, or Isis etc. ascribing them indiscriminately to promote a Sophiannic tradition.

Matthews also claims that Lead was one person who, at a certain point in history, reclaimed the Goddess Sophia for herself.⁹¹ Lead did indeed refer to Sophia the 'eternal Goddess'.⁹² Matthews argues that Sophia is one overarching Goddess who has been dissipated throughout the centuries and across geographical boundaries.⁹³ Sophia, she insists, is 'the fragmentation of the original Goddess mirror whose shards have fallen through time and space to be reassembled in our own time'.⁹⁴ She also argues unconvincingly that the

⁸⁸ Catherine F. Smith, 'Jane Lead: Mysticism and the Woman Cloathed with the Sun', in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (eds), *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington, 1979), p. 3.

⁸⁹ Catherine F. Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in Dana Hiller and Robin Ann Sheets (eds), *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power* (Cincinnati, 1977), p. 403.

⁹⁰ Matthews, *Sophia*, p. 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-74.

⁹² Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 42.

⁹³ Matthews, *Sophia*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3. See also Versluis, *Wisdom's Book*, Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: An Esoteric Tradition* (New York, 1999), and Geraint ap Iorwerth, *Honest to Goddess: Russia, Sophia and the Celtic Soul* (Hampshire, 1998).

spirit of Sophia was incarnated in Lead and then, thirty-two years later, in Ann Lee, the founder of the Shakers.⁹⁵ Drawing on the ceremonials of Shaker communities, Matthew writes that 'in Shakerism, Sophia appears in her most simple guise like a little girl playing before God'.⁹⁶ Also, she claims that the poet William Blake (1757-1827) was 'primarily a prophet of Sophia's creativity'.⁹⁷ Yet, how can we be certain that those who speak of Sophia across the centuries, from different countries and cultures, are speaking of a similar phenomenon or could share a common understanding?

It is thus problematic to equate Lead's interpretation of sophiology with current theology, or Goddess worship because contexts have shifted and individuals' interpretations vary. Susan Cady, Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig have re-evaluated the importance of Sophia for feminist spirituality.⁹⁸ They understandably focus on the figure of Sophia in biblical texts and then provide activities and practical ways for contemporary women to find the goddess within. Exercises, prayers, rituals and meditations, for example, are provided for groups to use to explore the female image of the divine - Sophia.⁹⁹ Lead's representation of Sophia however, was clearly from a Christian perspective, and is distinctly at odds with contemporary ideas of New Age, including the strand which advocates celebrating the Goddess within.

Lead's understanding of Sophia was from a Protestant perspective but specifically informed by Behmenist ideas, and especially from her understanding of the Book of Wisdom. In an attempt to explain the complexity of Sophia, Lee commented that 'The ways and methods of the Divine Wisdom are various, yea infinite'.¹⁰⁰ Yet, according to Lee, Lead did not consider Sophia a goddess *per se*, instead, he suggested that Lead's interpretation was determined by Sophia's 'near relation to the godhead'.¹⁰¹ Lead's theology, however, may

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 274.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 277.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Susan Cady, Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig, *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* (New York, 1989).

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. viii.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1864), p. 224.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 207.

not be as fixed or as orthodox as Lee wanted to claim. It is thus tempting to assimilate Lead's ideas to those who are writing from within a Christian perspective, such as the strand of feminist theology which wants to recapture the marginalised and repressed female spirit in the godhead. In her biography of Lead, Joanna Sperle minimised Lead's Behmenist influences, preferring instead to uphold her as an example of a more conventional Christian woman whose primary understanding was from the Bible.¹⁰² But one has to be cautious about exaggerating Lead's orthodoxy. In accordance with her Behmenist influences, Lee wrote that 'Lead asserts Christ to be born, or manifested in a glorious figure, out of the Virgin nature of the unmanifested Sophia'.¹⁰³ Lead's spirituality was certainly experiential, and not systematic.

Of those scholars who have written about Lead and Sophia in terms of a Behmenist tradition, one of the most notable studies is by Brian Gibbons. Gibbons affirmed that Lead carried the feminisation of the deity further than Boehme which he argued, 'gives it a certain feminist tone, theologically at least'.¹⁰⁴ Yet, he asserts that 'As with human females, childcare is Wisdom's proper sphere of competence,'¹⁰⁵ and 'insofar that Sophia is a feminine figure, her role is stereotypical' making Lead's sophiology sound distinctly unfeminist.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Lead developed a more female-centred theology that Gibbons has recognised and it is clear that Sophia was of great importance to Lead because of Her nearness to God.

Lead's highlighting of Sophia can thus be seen as a experiential form of theology, and Sophia certainly played a crucial role in Lead's prophecies. The figure of Sophia allowed Lead to construct a very distinctive exploration of gender and religion. Phyllis Mack has suggested that female prophets overcame the problem of feminine authority by becoming vessels of the divine, and grounded in the Pauline doctrine that the power of God is strong in weakness. Yet, as Newman has observed, such doctrines victimised women by confirming

¹⁰² Joanna Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel: A Biography of Jane Ward Lead' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1985).

¹⁰³ Walton, *Notes and Materials*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

their socially conditioned 'weakness' as a part of some divine scheme.¹⁰⁷ Lead saw more deeply than neo-conservative theologians who deny women are fully created in God's image, and who tend to define women according to their biological status, which leaves no room for self-determination. The problem with this viewpoint is that it accepts feminine weakness, whereas Lead's beliefs gained her a public voice and her aim was to be united with the divine, rather than subsumed into the divine. What was important to Lead was wisdom, 'Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman' (Proverbs 7:4).

To be sure, Lead's representations of Sophia were almost always metaphorical or allegorical. Lead spoke of Sophia as an activity or attribute of God, who was so intimately linked with Him that they were 'married'. It is difficult however, to construct a feminist sophiology without either magnifying the feminine attributes of the godhead, or replacing God the Father with God the Mother. Lead adopted neither, she merely brought to the attention of her readership what was already present in the canonical and extra-canonical scriptures, whilst her Behmenist influence clearly informed her visions. Yet, to try and position Lead as either heterodox or orthodox is difficult. If Lead's works are seen as a theology of the feminine because of her emphasis of Sophia as a quasi deity, then she comes dangerously close to being heterodox, even though the figure of Sophia is grounded firmly in the Bible. As an orthodox Christian, though, she is clearly writing from the margins. Lead considered Sophia to be a redeemer, and when this was associated with her ideas of universal salvation, then Sophia's powers were enhanced as She becomes more powerful than Christ. Lead thus developed these sapiential influences from Boehme further than any of her counterparts, and they were not to be found in mainstream Protestantism.

Although Lead conducted a spiritual relationship with Sophia, she often did not determine the gender of the Logos, or voice/idea she recorded. Her visions were not exclusively sophiological, and she sometimes described Christ and others, while the Philadelphian Ann Bathurst had visions which were almost entirely Christocentric.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Lead's foregrounding of Sophia does not necessarily equate into treating 'real' women with any more (in)equality than if her visions had been entirely Christocentric. Her experiences as a woman may have been translated into religious ideas, but not necessarily vice versa. She

¹⁰⁷ Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁸ On 14 February 1696, Lead recorded a collective vision in which she and her companions witnessed the descent of Sophia, accompanied by St. Paul and St. Elisabeth and others, Jane Lead, *The Tree of Faith*, (London, 1696), p. 105.

was concerned with the next world in which everything would be in spirit form, and where gender did not exist. It was a place where flesh and the earthly body could be discarded in the 'light' world' where God existed, causing Diane Purkiss to acknowledge Lead's desire to situate herself 'outside or beyond the body'.¹⁰⁹ Lead's concern, however, was to provide a vision of a future where the soul would unite with God. The 'real' world was indeed, a hindrance to the next, and Lead looked forward to escaping the restrictions of her flesh and this world. Lead was able to prophesy of another world because of what she had seen in her visions. She did not offer opportunities for 'real' women to experience equality on this earth, or for them to be released from patriarchal restrictions through a demand for social reforms etc, as the Quakers had done. Instead, Lead promised God's truth by describing a world to come, in which Sophia and Christ would have powerful redemptive roles with *their* second coming.

¹⁰⁹ Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body', in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London, 1992), p. 151. See also Chapter Six, *Spiritual Maternity and Androgyny*.

CONCLUSION

Thus I have given you a true, and single account of what in my Spiritual Travels I have seen, known and understood, by being admitted into that Heavenly Court, at certain times and seasons; and shall leave this living Testimony to the Spiritual-minded, hereof to judge: For no other can receive, or fathom this deep Wisdom of God.¹

This thesis has hopefully highlighted some of the unusual ideas to be found in the prolific works of Jane Lead. Through an examination of mysticism, millenarianism and her visions, a female centredness in Lead's life and works becomes obvious. Not only was Lead the female leader of the London Philadelphian Society, she also had visions of the female counterpart to God - Sophia, through whom God revealed His wisdom. Lead's development of sophiology resulted in a personal experiential theology. By foregrounding the feminine presence within the godhead, Lead addressed gender barriers traditionally found within Christianity, an area which still causes concern to feminist theologians today.²

This conclusion will consider the following three aspects: the need to focus on Lead in her own right; the nature of her collaboration with others, and the reception of her radical theology. As we have seen, over the past decades historians and literary critics have tended to reduce Lead to one example of a wider phenomenon. For example, Paula McDowell has argued that Lead was part of a sub-culture which led to the rise of the woman author.³ Drawing on the notion of 'écriture feminine', Catherine Smith, Patricia Demers and Diane Purkiss have suggested Lead was writing against the dominant hegemonic discourse.⁴

¹ Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God* (London, 1694), p. 19.

² See Chapter Eight, *Philosophia*. Feminist issues in religion and spirituality are being debated in journals, such as *Feminist Theology* and the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, and on discussion lists, for example, 'An Academic Discussion Forum for Christian and Jewish Feminist Theology', 2002, <feminist-theology@jiscmail.ac.uk> (25 September 2002).

³ Paula McDowell, *Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics and Gender in the Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 167-79.

⁴ Catherine F. Smith, 'Mysticism and Feminism: Jacob Boehme and Jane Lead', in Dana Hiller and Robin Ann Sheets (eds), *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power* (Cincinnati, 1977), pp. 398-408; Patricia Demers, *Women as Interpreters of the Bible* (New York, 1992), pp. 79-88, Diane Purkiss, 'Producing the Voice: Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century', In Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740* (London, 1992), pp. 139-226.

Phyllis Mack and Elaine Hobby have seen Lead as part of a prophetic and mystical tradition,⁵ and Caitlin Matthews and Arthur Versluis has argued that Lead played a role in a tradition of worshippers of the Goddess Sophia.⁶ Joanna Sperle has, on the other hand, located Lead within a more orthodox Christian framework,⁷ while Brian Gibbons, Nils Thune and Desiree Hirst have assimilated Lead to a Behmenist tradition.⁸ Although these scholars have differing agendas, paradoxically they share certain intellectual habits, notably a tendency to reduce Lead to a mere step in a tradition.

This thesis has argued that locating Lead exclusively within any single tradition is problematic because of the complexity of her writings. Because much of Lead's theology was experiential, we need to look more closely at Lead, for only then can we map out the development of her ideas and beliefs. Such a woman-centred study shifts the focus from a view of Lead as a link in a chain of ideas, to one where her works defy immediate categorisation. Her spirituality, while clearly influenced strongly by Boehme and Pordage, should not simply be described as, or reduced to, Behmenism. Indeed, Lead rejected outright certain Behmenist ideas. Chapter Four shows that by the 1690s, Lead advocated the doctrine of universal salvation, which had neither a Behmenist nor a scriptural basis. Lead saw herself as revealing and unsealing new revelations of the Last Days by divine messages which superceded all previous revelations, including those of Boehme. To say this does not deny that Lead can be viewed as playing a role in the Behmenist, Christian, and esoteric traditions, nor does it reject scholars' interpretation of her works. While Lead's work was unquestionably Behmenist *and* demonstrated the vitality of the traditions, she went beyond

⁵ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley and London, 1994), pp. 409-10; Elaine Hobby, 'Prophecy' in Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 278-79.

⁶ Caitlin Matthews, *Sophia Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul* (London, 1992), pp. 268-74; Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany, 1999), pp. 57-77.

⁷ Joanna Sperle, 'God's Healing Angel: A Biography of Jane Ward Lead', (unpublished PhD thesis, Kent State University, 1985).

⁸ B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 143-62; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Studies of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), and Desiree Hirst, *Hidden Riches, Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London, 1964).

Boehme.

This, of course, does not mean that we should only consider Lead as an isolated female author. On the one hand, this thesis has placed the emphasis on Lead as an individual, but on the other hand, it has acknowledged that there was undoubtedly a degree of collaboration with men and women who assisted her into print. Francis Lee disseminated much of Lead's religious ideas into the print culture of the late seventeenth century. He was instrumental in editing and publishing at least ten works by Lead in the 1690s and 1700s. He was influential not only in deciding when Lead's writing should be published, but also what writings went to press and under what titles. Such was the collaborative effort that any demarcation lines concerning Lead's publications start to become blurred and complicated. However, rather than resulting in self-autonomy, Lead's authority, although divinely inspired, was due in part to collaboration with her male disciples, who assisted her into print and defended her leadership.

There has, however, been a reluctance by feminist historians and literary critics, in general, to recognise the abiding importance of certain forms of religious expression such as prophecy and mysticism at the end of the seventeenth century. They have tended to focus their attention on seventeenth-century women who exhibited political agendas. Much scholarship has been preoccupied with women who are more often seen as 'proto-feminists', rather than the spiritual illuminations of prophetesses.⁹ Stevie Davies has argued that, 'the future of women's liberty lay with Mary Astell and education reform rather than Jane Lead's mysticism.'¹⁰ Lead is problematic for secular feminists because her mystical and prophetic utterances did not contain explicit references to the secular politics of the day. Phyllis Mack has assimilated her to a strand of social conservatism because she was 'silent on the political and social issues that had engaged the prophets of the Civil War period'.¹¹ If it is important to 'trace a direct line from the earliest Quaker women leaders to the nineteenth-century

⁹ See for example, Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Harlow, 2001); McDowell, *Women of Grub Street*, and Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth Century English Feminists* (Urbana, 1982).

¹⁰ Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London, 1998), p. 289.

¹¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 409.

feminism and peace activism,' then clearly Lead does not fit.¹²

Yet, this thesis has, however, attempted to show just how unusual and radical Lead's theology was. Chapter Five shows that she had unconventional millenarian beliefs which meant that she expected Sophia, as well as Christ, to appear again in the end days. Lead's understanding of Sophia as a goddess was certainly radical and this thesis has shown how difficult it is to position Lead within the orthodoxies of the Christian tradition. In Chapter Eight, *Philosophia*, Lead's vision of the crucifixion of Sophia, in imitation of Christ, was highly unusual in depicting a female redeemer. In Chapter Three, *Searching for Gold*, Lead's visions revealed a series of powerful alchemical symbols and signs as a way of transmuting the soul. Lead described the Philosopher's Stone, or Wisdom's Pearl within, to represent a process of purification and illumination of the soul. Lead was again, highly unusual in adopting this terminology, and scholars have yet to examine her ideas concerning spiritual alchemy.

Lead's foregrounding of Sophia is also of interest to Christian feminist theologians who are looking for ways to reclaim the divine feminine in the godhead.¹³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza has argued that 'feminist theology becomes sophialogy, a speaking of and about Divine Wisdom, whose name oscillates between Divine transcendence and human immanence. It is S/he who accompanies us in our struggles against injustice and for liberation.'¹⁴ Also, New Age proponents such as Caitlin Matthews, are interested in finding the Goddess, Sophia within. Matthews has argued that, 'Goddess religion has established a theology where the practice of the Goddess is personally experienced.'¹⁵ This thesis has therefore tried to juxtapose some of Lead's unusual and radical theological views with the more conservative views she held about women and gender, to indicate how Lead's ideas have ramifications for current scholarship in these areas.

While researching Lead's life and works I became aware that there is an underlying issue that needs addressing. We need to examine our own twenty-first century attitudes to

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

¹³ See, for example, Susan Frank Parsons (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* (New York, 1996), p. xxxiv.

¹⁵ Matthews, *Sophia*, p. 334.

religion, and question why there is a tendency to avoid it, or view it, as outdated or irrelevant.¹⁶ Why does the word religion cause so many students not in religious studies or theology departments to recoil with horror? For many who argue that we are living in a secular society, religion and spirituality are viewed as defunct, as not interesting or challenging. Apart from the openly 'religious' and those who profess to have a living faith, religion and spirituality are often viewed as problematic areas, yet they hold infinite possibilities. The study of the interior mentalities of men and women can offer rich potentialities. They can give an intimate glimpse into the minds and thoughts, ideas and beliefs, reasonings, impulses and motivations behind certain actions, including what and why authors write. In the late seventeenth century when religion was a major paradigm, such studies are indeed essential. Religious ideas were so intertwined in the prevailing culture that they cannot easily be ignored. It is an area that feminists, and indeed those working within Women's or Gender Studies need to confront themselves. Scholars in these fields have been preoccupied with reevaluating the heroic woman figure or women who are associated with secular political activism. Like early modern historians, in general, they downplay the nuances of religious ideas after 1660. Such historians understandably focus on the religious and theological mainstream, and often work with denominational categories, but those concerned with the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have not explored the image of Sophia at this time. As this thesis draws to a close, my aim has been to fill a void left by scholars who have overlooked a woman in the seventeenth century who was the leader of a religious society, a prolific author, and a woman who had visions of Sophia, that were so intimate she felt her soul and Sophia's to be married.¹⁷

The examination of Lead's life and published works set out in this thesis further demonstrates the rich potentialities for further research. The relationship between Lead and other women of the Philadelphian Society remains to be mapped out. Ann Bathurst, for example, wrote an extensive spiritual diary which remains unpublished and understudied.¹⁸

¹⁶ Studies in Britain have been conducted by the Alister Hardy Society, Oxford, see Paul Badham, 'Researching Religious Experience and Spirituality Today', *Alister Hardy Society Religious Experience Research Centre*, 2001, <www.alisterhardytrust.org.uk>(25 September 2002).

¹⁷ See Chapter Seven, *Mystical Marriage*.

¹⁸ Bodleian, Oxford, MSS Rawl., D 1262, D 1263, D 1338, 'Ann Bathurst's Diaries'.

An initial examination reveals that it is as complex and as fascinating as Lead's diary, and covers the same period as Lead, yet, it differs in its focus being almost entirely Christocentric. In addition, Lead's contemporaries, Antoinette Bourignon and Jeanne-Marie Guyon were cited in Lead's *The Wars of David*, as women sharing a commonality of spiritual experiences. They all left substantial published material and led their own religious communities.¹⁹ The editor of *The Wars of David* cited the importance of these 'three heaven-born women' as the 'TRIUNE WONDER OF THE WORLD.'²⁰ The Philadelphian, Richard Roach, used the term 'the Female Embassy' to explain that women would have a special eschatological role and spiritual status in the Last Days. He believed that it would be the female who would, 'Tempt and draw the Male Upwards, in Order to the Recovery of Paradise again; and that in a far more glorious State than that from whence they fell.'²¹ Roach referred to 'this Restoration and Advancement of the Female Sex to the same Freedom and Dignity with the Male shall prove in the Event, the Glory of this Age.'²² There remains to be mapped out a relationship between these religious women and the reasons why the Philadelphians regarded these women as 'spiritually superior'.²³

As we have seen, early modern mystical writers have tended to be overlooked, and the selective literary-historical approach to women's writing has neglected the significance and influence of writing by prolific mystical authors such as Jane Lead. It has also obscured a mystical tradition which denies that this ideology was of particular importance to certain men and women. Scholars have not yet done justice to the complexity of Lead's writing, and the highly original nature of her engagement with Behmenist ideas. Further studies can only be of benefit in our attempt to comprehend the mental worlds of other forgotten and neglected women in the past. Clearly, there remains much more to be discovered from their legacies of writings.

¹⁹ See Sarah Smith, 'Balaam's She-Ass Speaks: Madame Jeanne Guyon and her 'Justifications'' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Emory University, 2001).

²⁰ Jane Lead, *The Wars of David* (London, 1700), p. 132.

²¹ Richard Roach, *The Great Crisis: the Mystery of the Times and Seasons Unfolded* (London, 1725), p. 97.

²² Lambeth Palace Library, London, MS 942/141, 'Papers of Richard Roach', p. 7.

²³ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical*, p. 152.

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