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Brian John Gibbons

"Gender in British Behmenist Thought"

Ph. D. Thesis

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Abstract

In the early modern period, women were commonly regarded as unruly and morally suspect beings. During the period, however, there was a revision in the moral status of women. Behmenism is representative of the process whereby women were raised to the status of morally elevating beings. In Jacob Boehme's theosophy, both the godhead and prelapsarian man have a feminine element, the Virgin Sophia; women are a sort of fallen counterpart to Sophia. The emphasis of early Behmenists, such as John Pordage, was on Sophia's passivity and chastity. Some Behmenists, notably Richard Roach, advanced the notion of women's special eschatological role, based on their relationship to Sophia. Others, such as William Law, were more conservative in their attitude to women. By the mid-eighteenth century, Behmenism as a movement disappears, but traces of Boehme's thought can still be found in several writers of the period. By this time, there is less emphasis on both chastity and the other-worldly feminine principle. Relationships between the sexes tend to be regarded as sacramental, and women are seen as performing a morally elevating role in life.

GENDER IN BRITISH BEHMENIST THOUGHT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the arrival of the "second-wave" of feminism in the 1960s, several writers have re-examined both the role of women in religion and the gender-identity of God.¹ The new feminism was itself part of a broader cultural phenomenon within which other, partly complementary and partly contradictory, trends were occurring. One such trend was the so-called "sexual revolution", to which the new feminists have an ambivalent attitude.² Another trend was the emergence of "New Age" spirituality, involving a broad religious eclecticism, ranging from Eastern religions to neo-paganism and the Western occult tradition. Inevitably, the meeting of the new feminism and the New Age produced a crop of books devoted to the cult of the Goddess.³

¹There are a number of works dealing with the history of women's role in religion, including Rosemary Radford Ruether ed., *Religion and Sexism. Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1974); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1979); Joyce L. Irwin ed., *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism* (New York 1979). For theological discussions of the issue, see for example, Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female. A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids 1975); Susanne Heine, *Christianity and the Goddess. Systematic Criticism of a Feminist Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London 1988); Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred* (London 1989).

²For a good overview of the complexities of feminist thought on sexuality, see the essays in Anne Snitow, Christie Stansall and Sharon Thompson eds., *Desire. The Politics of Sexuality* (London 1983).

³See, for example, Pamela Berger, *The Goddess Obscured. Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint* (London 1988); Shirley Nicholson ed., *The Goddess Re-Awakening. The Feminine Principle Today* (Wheaton, Ill., 1989); Caitlín Matthews, *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom. The*

Like feminist scholarship in general, much feminist theology has been concerned with seeking roots and precedents. The present study is concerned with the followers of a man who, in some ways, seems to be a precursor of the cultural trends of the last three decades, Jacob Boehme. Behmenism is itself a system of beliefs involving a revaluation of divine gender. If its emphasis on chastity is incompatible with the "sexual revolution", it might at least claim some affinity with radical and separatist feminism. Behmenism is also deeply rooted in the occult tradition which has influenced New Age spirituality. Behmenism, moreover, might be taken as a test-case for the thesis that perceptions of divine gender bear a direct correlation to the status of women in society. More generally, it offers an opportunity to investigate the complex relationship between religion, sexuality and gender in the evolution of modern society.

I

Jacob Boehme is little known in twentieth-century Britain beyond those circles interested in the occult philosophy, Interregnum radicalism and William Blake. This is probably due to the difficulties of his style. It is easy for the unprepared student to sympathise with Lichtenberg's remark, that Boehme's works were "a kind of picnic, in

Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World Soul (London 1991). Edward C. Whitmont's *Return of the Goddess* (London 1983) belongs to a different (Jungian and non-feminist) category.

which the author provides the words and the reader the sense".⁴ The obscurity and apparent eccentricities of Boehme's style might also give the impression that his work was purely idiosyncratic. His style, however, is merely an example of what Jung calls the "impetuous language" of the occult,⁵ and Boehme was very much a part of a group of interrelated traditions whose vitality in early modern European culture has been rediscovered recently by students of the history of science, literature and art. Frances Yates, for example, has argued that modern science is deeply rooted in the Hermetic tradition.⁶ If there is some doubt about Yates's theory with regard to science, there can be little question that occult thought continued to exert an important influence in cultural life. Fred Gettings has demonstrated that major artists into our own century have worked against a background of occult philosophy and symbolism.⁷ The

⁴Cited in Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, in the *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. viii (London 1962), p. 86.

⁵C.G. Jung, "Paracelsus", in *idem.*, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, (London 1966), pp. 3-12, p. 8.

⁶Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London 1964); see also Allen G. Debus, *Man and Nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge 1978); Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton. Magic and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge 1982). For a more cautious approach to the relationship between esotericism and modern science, see Brian Vickars ed., *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge 1984). John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion. Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge 1991), pp. 63 ff., provides a brief but balanced view of the subject.

⁷Fred Gettings, *The Hidden Art. A Study of Occult Symbolism in Art* (London 1978).

indebtedness of French Romantic writers to esoteric traditions has been established by Auguste Viatte.⁸ Although there is a need for further study on the occult sources of English Romanticism, such writers as Desirée Hirst and Ernest Tuveson have demonstrated that the debt was substantial.⁹ The Romantics' attitude to Nature, for example, is deeply rooted in occult spirituality. This study will seek to show that the origins of that other great idol of Romanticism, Woman, are to be found partly in occult thought, more specifically in Behmenism.

To judge by the extent of his influence, Jacob Boehme was one of the outstanding figures of the early modern period. The impact of his ideas was felt among various religious movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as the Pietists in Germany.¹⁰ Hegel thought that Boehme was "the first German philosopher",¹¹ and both Schelling and Schopenhauer traced their

⁸Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme*, 2 vols. (Paris 1928).

⁹Desirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches. Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London 1964); ch. 3 deals specifically with Behmenist influence. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Avatars of Thrice-Great Hermes. An Approach to Romanticism* (Lewisberg 1984).

¹⁰F. Ernst Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden 1973), pp. 108-25, 152, 177.

¹¹G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in Hegel's *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main 1971), vols. xvii-xx, vol. xx, p. 94: "Jacob Böhme ist der erste deutsche Philosoph; der Inhalt seines Philosophierens ist echt deutsch".

intellectual ancestry back to the cobbler of Görlitz.¹² In our own century, Boehme has been cited as an important source of existentialist philosophy.¹³ Boehme also seems to have played a significant role in English literature. The poet Henry Vaughan and his brother Thomas were both interested in his works.¹⁴ It has been argued that Boehme influenced what might be called the proto-Romantic elements of Milton's poetry,¹⁵ and his influence on William Blake is well-established.¹⁶ For historians of early modern England, however, Boehme is perhaps best known in association with the Interregnum radicals. Since this association is somewhat misleading with regard to the nature of English Behmenism, a brief introduction to the movement is necessary.

¹²Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Allison Park, Pa. 1983), pp. 10-14; Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling. The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809-1815* (Lewisburg 1977).

¹³Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas* xii (1942), 5, pp. 44-70, p. 58.

¹⁴Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (New York 1967), *passim*.

¹⁵Margaret Lewis Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme. A Study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York 1914).

¹⁶Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, especially ch. 3; Bryan Aubrey, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Works of William Blake", unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Durham (1981).

Webster asserts that interest in Boehme's works was largely felt by Puritans and separatists;¹⁷ such interest, however, was far from confined to these circles. As Bolle has observed, Renaissance mysticism involved a respect for liturgical propriety,¹⁸ a characteristic which was inherited by the occult spiritualism of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Many of the most prominent occult writers of the period were members of the established churches of their homelands, including Boehme himself. Politically, the Behmenists tended to be moderate or conservative. Samuel Pordage welcomed the Restoration; he subsequently supported the Whigs during the Exclusion Crisis, but was careful to condemn both "Pharisees" (Puritans) and "Baalites" (Catholics).²⁰ Later Behmenists included a number of Nonjuring churchmen, and the Scottish

¹⁷Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: science, medicine and reform 1626-1660* (London 1975), p. 498.

¹⁸Kees Bolle, "Structures of Renaissance Mysticism", in Robert S. Kinsman ed., *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance* (Berkeley 1974), p. 127.

¹⁹ The ideological orientation of spiritual alchemy was nevertheless complex, ranging from moderate Anglicanism to radical Puritanism; see Robert M. Shuler, "Some Spiritual Alchemies of the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of the History of Ideas* xli (1980), pp. 293-318; J. Andrew Mendelsohn, "Alchemy and Politics in England 1649-1665", *Past and Present* 135 (May 1992), pp. 30-78. Michael Hunter has pointed out that occultists were as likely to be Royalist as Parliamentarian in sympathy, and that there were strong parallels between the heraldic and Hermetic views of the universe; Hunter, *Elias Ashmole 1617-1692. The Founder of the Ashmolean Museum and his World* (Oxford 1983), pp. 5, 12.

²⁰Samuel Pordage, *Heroick Stanzas on His Majesties Coronation* (London 1661); *idem.*, *Azaria and Hushai, A Poem* (London 1682).

Bourignonists "were all of the episcopal party" and "mostly Jacobites".²¹ We might also note that it was no less a person than Charles I who told John Sparrow that *XL Questions* was "one of the best inventions that I ever read",²² and Hartlib mentioned a rumour that Charles II was "a Teutonicus and lover of Chymistry", which was probably a reference to Boehme.²³

While Behmenists and conservative spiritualists in general were characterised by an attachment to established liturgical forms, they also distinguished themselves from radicals in that their tolerationism was essentially ecumenical rather than separatist. The constant burden of Sparrow's prefaces to Boehme's works is that Behmenism provides an antidote to "the sectarian Babel" of the times;²⁴ this anti-sectarianism was an enduring feature of Behmenist thought. The English Behmenists shared the hopes of Abraham von Frankenberg, Boehme's disciple and earliest biographer, that "the world would no longer be called

²¹Henderson, "Quietist Influences in Scotland", in *idem, Religious Life in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Cambridge 1931), pp. 220-231, p. 229.

²²Preface to *XL Questions*, 2nd edn. (London 1665). There is no evidence to support the eighteenth-century tradition that Charles I actually financed the publication of Boehme's works; see "An Account from London concerning the Writings of Jacob Boehme published in English; sent in 1716", appended to vol. 7 of the MS translation of Johann-Georg Gichtel's *Theosophia Practica*, Walton MS 1135.

²³Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme*, p. 78.

²⁴John Sparrow, preface to *Mercurius Teutonicus* (London 1648), sig. A2v.

Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist or Reformed".²⁵ A number of later Behmenists and Bourignonists, including Francis Lee and George Garden, were admirers and acquaintances of the Catholic Quietist, Mme. de Guyon.²⁶ Such people seem to have had less difficulty accepting each other's liturgical preferences than in being accepted by fellow members of their own denominations. As with the German Pietists, an emphasis on godliness and the spirit helped them transcend their own confessional loyalties.²⁷

As a social phenomenon, the Behmenists were similar to the Familists as described by Christopher Marsh: mystically-inclined, socially conservative and anti-sectarian, a movement of the prosperous rather than the poor, occupying the middle-ground between popular and élite culture.²⁸ The communism of Pordage's "family" had little to do with that of more socially minded radicals; it was essentially a private return to the purity of the Apostolic church. Most of the leading Behmenists were clerics, physicians, or men of letters; Behmenism, that is, was a movement of the professional middle-class. Theirs was a radicalism of compassion rather than of subversion, based

²⁵Abraham von Frankenberg, "Gründlicher und Wahrhafter Bericht", in *De Vita et Scriptis Jacobi Böhmii* (n.p. 1730), 1:56.

²⁶Henderson, "Quietist Influences", p. 224.

²⁷Ernst F. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden 1965), pp. 8-9.

²⁸Marsh, "The Family of Love in English Society 1550-1630", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge 1991, ch. 10.

not on the desire to level, but on a determination to fulfil God's command to love our neighbour.

II

Behmenist thought on gender has received surprisingly little attention. Kielholz has contributed a psychological study of Boehme,²⁹ but his narrowly Freudian perspective limits its value as an investigation of the cultural significance of Boehme's sexual imagery. There is a remarkable similarity between Boehme's thought on gender and that of Carl Jung; nevertheless, the Swiss psychologist fails to mention this aspect of Boehme's work in his references to the Silesian theosopher.³⁰ Caitlín Matthews recognizes the importance of Behmenist Sophiology, but her account of both Boehme and Lead is virtually useless to the serious student.³¹ Other twentieth-century students of Boehme's works have tended to marginalise the role of gender in his writings. When Hobhouse came to edit Martensen's classic study of Boehme, he omitted those passages regarding "Adam's sexual nature" because they were "so incredible and fantastic as to be out of place in

²⁹Arthur Kielholz, *Jacob Boehme. Ein pathographischer Beitrag zur Psychologie der Mystik* (Leipzig and Vienna 1919).

³⁰C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (London 1952); *idem.*, *Alchemical Studies* (London 1967).

³¹Matthews, *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom*, pp. 268-274. Matthews says nothing about Sophia's relationship to the rest of the godhead, and clearly misunderstands Behmenist anthropology: both Adam and Eve become androgynous beings before the Fall (p. 271).

serious reading".³² Rufus M. Jones has nothing to say on the role of gender in Boehme's thought, and Howard M. Brinton virtually confines himself to asserting that the Virgin Sophia is a universal rather than a particular.³³ Margaret Bailey referred to the Virgin Sophia as "the divine element in humanity",³⁴ which is true, but this formulation understates the theological significance of the concept. It is possible that Boehme's gendered images are mere metaphors, having little bearing on the substance of his thought. This is the implication of Brinton's criticism of Kielholz's Freudian analysis of Boehme, that "it is hardly fair to make so much of the figures of speech which Boehme commonly uses".³⁵ When placed in the context of Boehme's account of the Fall and Redemption, however, it becomes clear that such images are more than mere "figures of speech": they refer to a godhead which in a literal sense is regarded as having feminine characteristics.

The literature on Boehme's English followers is also inadequate in its treatment of Behmenist thought on gender. Wilhelm Struck noted that the Behmenists' and

³²Hobhouse's introduction to Hans L. Martensen, *Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). Studies in His Life and Teaching*, trans. T. Rhys Evans, 2nd edn., (London 1949), p. xxii; cf. Hobhouse's appendix, pp. 153-4.

³³Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London 1928), chs. 9-11; Howard H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will. Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme*, pp. 182-4.

³⁴Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme*, p. 156.

³⁵Brinton, *Mystic Will*, p. 64 n.

Philadelphians' "sensory mysticism" (*Gefühlsmystik*) led them, and above all Jane Lead, into "the realm of the erotic", binding the spiritual world and the world of experience together with "sensual fantasy" (*mit sinnlicher Phantasie*). For Struck, "a pronounced nuptial mysticism governs the Philadelphians' thought", but he offers nothing in the way of extended analysis.³⁶ Nils Thune observes that "in Dr. Pordage we have a fully developed Sophia-mysticism", and he relates Lead's Sophiological visions,³⁷ but again in neither case is anything like a sustained analysis offered. Serge Hutin mentions that belief in Adamic androgyny is a characteristic of Behmenist thought, but pays little attention to this. Nor does Hutin support with evidence his assertion that Pordage and Lead developed the supposedly feminist aspects of Boehme's theology.³⁸ Christopher Hill refers in passing to the Pordages' belief in Adamic androgyny, almost as a curiosity.³⁹ The only thing approaching a study of Pordage's Sophiology is to be found in a work on Gottfried Arnold by Roger Friedrich.⁴⁰

³⁶Wilhelm Struck, *Der Einfluss Jacob Boehmes auf der englische Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1936), pp. 137-9.

³⁷Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala 1948), pp. 49, 174.

³⁸Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris 1960), pp. 31 ff., 106.

³⁹Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat. Milton and Some of his Contemporaries*, paperback edn. (Harmondsworth 1985), p. 231.

⁴⁰Roger Friedrich, *Studien zur Lyrik Gottfried Arnolds* (Zürich 1969), pp. 76-85.

Although a valuable contribution to the study of Pordage, Friedrich's aims preclude him from providing a thorough account of his thought on gender. Catherine Smith has paid some attention to Jane Lead's works, but her attempt to transform the Philadelphian prophetess into an early modern feminist is thoroughly misleading.⁴¹

The present study will attempt to rectify the neglect of Behmenist sexual philosophy by providing an account of gender in occult spirituality generally, and in Boehme's own thought in particular. The main part of the study will be concerned with Boehme's British followers. Boehme's impact on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought was extensive, and it would have been possible to pursue his ideas in several directions. The present study will be largely confined to those who can be regarded as Behmenists in the strictest sense. Accordingly, Behmenistic influences among the Quakers, French Prophets, and Shakers have been treated summarily, relying heavily on secondary sources; and the possibility of similar influences among the Methodists and Moravians has not been pursued.

The contribution of Boehme's early English disciples to Behmenist thought, especially that of John Pordage, was to

⁴¹Catherine F. Smith, "Jane Lead: The Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic", in Ruether and McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit*, pp. 183-204; *idem.*, "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), pp. 3-18.

emphasise the role of chastity in spiritual life. Pordage's work will be considered before making a brief excursion into the vexed question of the Silesian theosopher's influence among Interregnum radicals. The leading English Behmenist in the late seventeenth-century was Jane Lead. After Lead, English Behmenism developed in two directions. Richard Roach emphasised the feminist elements which were implicit in Behmenist theology, a trend which culminated in the female messianism of the eighteenth-century Shakers. Against this feminist tendency, there was a more conservative strand of Behmenism, represented by such figures as Francis Lee and William Law. Behmenism as a movement disappeared in the eighteenth century, but Boehme's ideas continued to fascinate a number of writers. In contrast to the earlier Behmenist stress on chastity, these writers tended to emphasise the almost sacramental nature of relationships between the sexes. Behmenist idealization of the feminine was translated from the divine realm to the mundane, and Woman became a spiritually elevating figure in human life. Before examining the evolution of Behmenist thought on gender in detail, however, the wider trends in the history of gender and sexuality will be sketched in the following chapter.

2. GENDER, SEXUALITY AND POWER IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

In the predominant view of the feminine in the early modern period, women were regarded as passive, sexually voracious and morally suspect, both in their own behaviour and in their effects on men. Inherently irrational, representing the flesh and its snares, women were assigned a subordinate status in the prevalent ideology. By the nineteenth century, these perceptions of the feminine had been revised in women's favour by the rise of "Victorian sexual ideology",¹ involving what might be called the Romantic notion of women. The key element in this process was the desexualization of the image of women, accompanied by a general repressive attitude to sex.² Women were still

¹Nancy F. Cott, "Victorian Sexual Ideology 1790-1850", *Signs* iv, 2 (Winter 1978), pp. 219-236.

²This argument does not necessarily run counter to Michel Foucault's rejection of the "repressive hypothesis" in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. I. An Introduction* (Harmondsworth 1984), if that rejection is interpreted in the narrow sense proposed by Jeffrey Weeks. Sexuality is admittedly an "historical construction", rather than "a head of steam" or "a gushing energy" (Weeks, *Sexuality*, London 1986, pp. 25, 36). If it is true that human beings are not endowed with a particular form of sexuality, they are nevertheless sexual beings. While the period under discussion witnessed a "multiplication of discourses" about sexuality, these discourses involved a coercive curtailing of sexuality; in plain English, they were themselves repressive. The Victorians, for example, produced an abundance of erotica which attests to their interest in sex; what is equally significant is that it was also the Victorians who created the "modern notion of pornography" (Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived. Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America*, London 1988, p. 5), redefining erotica as essentially illicit.

perceived as essentially passive, but a new notion of female passionlessness had arisen, enabling the feminine to be regarded as spiritually elevating. The middle-class woman in particular was now an "agent of salvation", "a desexualized Madonna".³ These changed perceptions were potentially empowering for women, laying the groundwork for the rise of feminism.⁴

It should be emphasised that these remarks are intended to describe only the dominant trends in sexual ideology. Attitudes to gender and sexuality are complex and often contradictory. The grossest misogyny and an excessive adulation of women can be found in all ages; the reader of *Nunnery Tales* (a popular pornographic magazine) is likely to form a different impression of Victorian women's sexual reserve than the reader of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*. Sara Heller Mendelson's remarks on the process of mate selection might be applied more generally: "Romanticism and cynicism could dwell side by side in the same milieu, the same family, even the same breast".⁵ It was the Ruskin who exalted the "purity" of women in writing who also

³Leonore Davidoff, "Class and Gender in Victorian England", in J.L. Newton, M.P. Ryan and J.R. Walkowitz eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London 1983), pp. 17-71, p. 21.

⁴Cf. Cott, "Victorian Sexual Ideology", pp. 221, 228 ff.

⁵Sara Heller Mendelson, "Debate: The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-Century England", *Past and Present* 85 (November 1979), pp. 126-135, p. 133.

contracted venereal disease from a prostitute. Such complexities and contradictions pose a major methodological problem. The history of gender and sexuality can scarcely be written without recourse to an impressionistic use of sources, and such impressionistic accounts are necessarily based on the subjective judgement (not to say prejudices) of the historian. This was one of the main methodological issues in the "Gentry debate". The difference is that, whereas a history of the gentry might plausibly be based on a purely statistical analysis of various data, statistics can give only a superficial account of the history of gender and sexuality. We can tell at what age people married, the degree of endogamy involved, and so on; but if we want to know why they married, what affective value they placed on the institution, we must rely on what they said. Unsatisfactory as it might be to those who would make history an exact science, the best that can be achieved in this area is an "essay" in the Burckhardtian sense: a possible interpretation of the known facts that does not claim to preclude the legitimacy of alternative interpretations.⁶

I

The people of the early modern world, like their ancient and medieval ancestors, thought of the masculine as the

⁶Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 2nd. edn. (1868), trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York 1960), p. 39.

end or goal, and the feminine as the means. It was generally accepted that woman as well as man was created in God's image, but, like Calvin, many writers felt compelled to add the qualification "though in the second degree".⁷ Matthew Poole, a Presbyterian, expressed the received opinion in saying that woman was "created for the honour of the man": "Now it is a rule in Reason, That whosoever or whatsoever is made for another person or thing, is less excellent than the person or thing for which the other is made".⁸ Milton gave voice to the same idea in his famous line, "He for God only, she for God in him".⁹ Complementing this view of women as secondary in purpose to men, the male was understood as active and associated with form, while the female was passive and formless.¹⁰

⁷John Calvin, *A Commentarie upon the first booke of Moses called Genesis*, trans. Thomas Tymme (London 1578), p. 72.

⁸Matthew Poole, *Annotations Upon the Holy Bible*, 2 vols. (London 1683), vol. i, sig. B2v.

⁹John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv:299.

¹⁰This view can be traced back to Aristotelian thought, in which the male-female duality is complemented by such other dualities as active-passive, form-matter, act-potency, perfection-imperfection, completion-incompletion and possession-deprivation. See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge 1980), p. 8; Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1988), p. 37. These stereotypes were sufficiently internalized to function on an apparently unconscious level; in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, for example, Shakespeare tends to employ images of formlessness in reference to Cleopatra and ones of form in reference to Anthony. In popular culture, heroines were passive, "admired not so much for what they did as what

These stereotypes were also incorporated into medical discourse. In Aristotelian reproductive theory, both the male and female produced seed, but the female seed was purely passive, providing the material for conception, while the male seed was active, providing form. This theory survived into the seventeenth century. Women's seed, we are told, "is not hot and quickening, but a dead Stuff, onely fit to receive Life and Fashion".¹¹ The female seed might have "a power of acting, yet it receives the perfection of that power from the seed of the man".¹² The male seed "carries a greater stroak in Conformation, and is more virtuall then the Feminine".¹³ By the late seventeenth century the ovum theory had generally replaced the two-seed theory.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the belief that the female role in reproduction was passive was to survive the demise of this theory. Thus, the author of *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, who adhered to the ovum theory, still thought that "The Active is the Man's Seed...The Passive is an Ovum or Egg"; similarly, sexual appetite "in

they suffered". See John Armstrong, *The Paradise Myth* (London 1969), pp. 45 ff.; Peter Burke, *Popular and Elite Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978), p. 164.

¹¹Elias Ashmole ed., *The Way to Bliss* (London 1658), p. 102.

¹²T.C., I.D., M.S. and T.B., Practitioners, *The Compleat Midwives Practice* (London 1656), p. 26.

¹³Anonymous, *Anthropologie Abstracted: Or the Idea of Human Nature* (London 1655), p. 74.

¹⁴Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London 1982), p. 32.

Men...proceeds from a desire for Emission, and in Women from a desire of completion".¹⁵

In line with this view was the belief, inherited from antiquity, that the vagina was an inferior, inverted penis:

The members, whereby the sexes differ, are the same in number, site and form, and differ in nothing almost unless it be in regard of *exterius* and *interius*: to wit the greater force of heat in the male thrusting the genitals outward, but in the female by reason of the weaker heat the said members conteining themselves within.¹⁶

Women's sexuality was largely a matter of being penetrated. The clitoris, a proper understanding of which might have enabled a more active construction of female sexual biology, was widely misunderstood in anatomical theory before the "discovery" of its sexual function by Fallopio; it was generally held to exist for urination, or as a uvula-like protective device.¹⁷ By the seventeenth

¹⁵Anonymous, *Aristotle's Master-Piece* (London 1694), pp. 15, 91.

¹⁶Joannes Amos Comenius, *Naturall Philosophie Reformed by Divine Light; Or, A Synopsis of Physicks* (London 1651), pp. 200-1. Hence the plausibility for early modern readers of Montaigne's story of a woman who turned into a man after jumping (Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes*, trans. John Florio, ed. Henry Morley [London 1886], p. 36). Since female genitals "are restrained and kept within meerly through defect of naturall heat", a woman who over-heated herself with erotic passion might also "put forth those her genitall parts" and become a man; Jacques Ferrand, *Erotomania, Or A Treatise Discoursing of the Essence, Causes, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love, Or Erotique Melancholy* (Oxford 1640), p. 14.

¹⁷Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, pp. 45-6. Eccles has doubted that Fallopio's argument that the clitoris "was the chief seat of sexual pleasure in women

century, the clitoris was generally recognized as "the seat of venereal pleasure" in women, exhibiting a complete parallelism with the penis.¹⁸ Strangely, an anatomical theory which was better suited to underpin the traditional belief in female voluptuousness than the Galenic view rose to dominance in an age that witnessed a growing challenge to the stereotype of the libidinous female. Stranger still, the Galenic view that women's genitals were inverted male ones persisted into the eighteenth century, even in authors who recognized the clitoris-penis parallelism.¹⁹

The view of women as naturally passive was to be an enduring feature of sexual ideology, persisting to our own times.²⁰ It occurs, for example, in nineteenth-century

came as a great revelation", *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, p. 34. Ignorance of the sexual function of the clitoris, however, can still be found today, even among well-educated women, despite the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s and the availability of numerous explicit sex-manuals. See, for example, Anne Dickinson, *The Mirror Within. A New Look at Sexuality* (London 1985), pp. 1-2.

¹⁸T.C. et al., *Compleat Midwives Practice*, 26; Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London 1651), p. 28.

¹⁹*Aristotle's Master-Piece* treats female genitalia as inverted male ones on p. 93, but recognizes the clitoris as equivalent to the penis on pp. 99, 109; cf. *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece* (London 1725, 1749 edn.), pp. 16, 23.

²⁰On the construction of the feminine as passive in modern psychology and sociology, see for example Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Harmondsworth 1988), pp. 52-5; Marcia Millman, "Images of Deviant Men and Women", in Mary Evans ed., *The Woman Question: Readings on the Subordination of Women* (Oxford 1982), pp. 334-343.

scientific theories. Geddes and Thomson argued that a male was produced by "a hungry, active cell" and a female by a "quiescent, well-fed cell", making men rational and aggressive and women intuitive and passive.²¹ Once tied to an ideology which rigorously excluded women from the public sphere, perceived female passivity now underlay a willingness to enlarge "the sphere in which women's sex determined mentalities could operate".²² This is because the cultural context of this female passivity had changed over the previous centuries. In particular, there had been a revision of the view that women were morally inferior to men, a view closely connected with perceptions of women's biology and sexuality.

Linda Pollock has argued that there was "no essentialist notion of female nature" in seventeenth-century England, and that people recognized that men and women were made, not born.²³ Humoural medicine might be cited in support of this view: men and women were on a sliding scale, differing in temperature rather than

²¹Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (1899), cited in Jill Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution", in Martha Vicinus ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London 1980), pp. 140-154, p. 143; cf. Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science. The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass. 1989), pp. 89 ff.

²²Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity", p. 153.

²³Linda Pollock, "Teach her to live under obedience: the making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England", *Continuity and Change* iv, 2 (1989), pp. 231-258, p. 248.

essence. Although this might be a logical implication of humoral medicine, it is hard to escape the impression that views on the nature of gender were underpinned by an extreme biologism. It is true that it was thought necessary to inculcate feminine qualities in women, rather than passively wait for their spontaneous emergence.²⁴ This necessity was itself based on an essentialist notion: women were naturally wayward and irrational, prone to rebel even against their own nature. The belief in women's moral inferiority was supported by early modern medical opinion. Because of their cold humours, women were less rational than men and naturally prone to be disorderly.²⁵ The womb, particularly if unproductive, was a potential source of mental instability for women.²⁶ Although Thomas Willis in the seventeenth century had demonstrated the lack of physical damage to the uterus in hysterics, it was

²⁴Powell's view, that perceived female moral inferiority legitimated the lack of educational provision for women, might thus be turned on its head; see Chilton Latham Powell, *English Domestic Relations, 1487-1653* (1917, New York 1972), p. 149.

²⁵Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 44-6; Natalie Zemon Davies, "Women on Top", in *idem.*, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London 1975), pp. 124-151, p. 124.

²⁶See, for example, Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London 1603), p. 1: "The palsiue condition of womankind is subject to more diseases and of other sortes and natures then men are: and especially in regarde of that part [the uterus] from whence this disease [hysteria] which we speake of doth arise".

not until the nineteenth century that a gender-specific somatic etiology was finally abandoned.²⁷

Women's biology was potentially dangerous, situating them "at the intersection of life with death".²⁸ The ritual churching of women after childbirth can be seen as a purification rite.²⁹ Menstruation also occasioned widespread anxieties. One writer thought that "Menstrues"

²⁷Even Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), who demonstrated the psychological etiology of hysteria, continued to regard the ovarian region as peculiarly hysterogenic; see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London 1987), pp. 147, 150. For a general history of the disease, see Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: the History of a Disease* (Chicago 1965).

²⁸Robert Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France 1400-1750*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Baton Rouge 1978), p. 66.

²⁹William Coster, "Purity, Profanity, and Puritanism: the Churching of Women 1500-1700", *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), pp. 377-87. This view has been challenged by Adrian Wilson, "The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation", in Valerie Fildes ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London 1990), pp. 68-107. Wilson argues that churching was popular among women themselves because it created a purely female space, and that the only people who regarded it as connected with ritual impurity were male Puritan opponents of the custom. It may be true, however, both that women used the ritual for their own purposes and that it was regarded as connected with pollution. With reference to Puritan women, Wilson cites three cases to prove that they did not share their menfolk's attitudes. In the case of Katherine Whitehead, we know that the new mother came to the church, made some sort of protest, and left; we might infer that she was protesting against the ritual, rather than follow the clerk's (and Wilson's) assumption that she came "to give thanks for her childbearing". The same might be said of Jane Minors who, after showing herself in the church, left "unchurched, unto the tavern again". Only Wilson's third example appears to support his argument; the first two cases seem more like women demonstrating that they needed no ritual to restore them to purity.

were "a thing more grievous and noisom, in truth, than Beauty is delightsome".³⁰ Menstrual blood had many magical properties. When a hair from a menstruating woman was planted in dung, it became a serpent.³¹ Sex during menstruation could prove fatal to the man. Menstruating women were credited with the ability to kill babies in their cots simply by looking at them - such "overlooking" also being a favourite *modus operandi* of witches.³² Children conceived during menstruation were likely to be monstrosities,³³ and sexual intercourse was forbidden during this time³⁴ because "it was very prejudicial to the children then begotten, who were commonly weak, or leprous or otherwise disordered".³⁵ Women's alleged greater proneness to headaches was a result of the "moist,

³⁰Ashmole ed., *Way to Bliss*, p. 102.

³¹Anonymous, *Aristotle's Book of Problems* (1710, 30th edn. London 1776), p. 7.

³²On early modern beliefs about menstruation, see Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England", *Past and Present* 91 (May 1981), pp. 47-73. On witches' overlooking, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (paperback edn., Harmondsworth 1973), p. 437.

³³Anonymous, *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, pp. 46 ff.

³⁴Leviticus 15:24.

³⁵Poole, *Annotations*, vol. i, sig. Cc3v; cf. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises*, 3rd edn. (London 1634), p. 226. This taboo on sex during menstruation was not always observed; Arthur Stanhope, for example, advised his nephew (the Earl of Huntingdon) to remedy his sexual difficulties by "fingering" his wife at this time; see Linda Pollock, "Embarking on a rough passage: the experience of pregnancy in early modern society", in Fildes ed., *Women as Mothers*, pp. 39-67, p. 42.

venomous fume" produced by menstrual blood; it was the impurity of this blood that enabled menstruating women to stain mirrors by looking at them.³⁶

The moral inferiority of women reflected their biological status in Aristotelian theory as imperfect men. Aristotle's eighteenth-century avatar thought that women are "unapt in good things, and most prompt in naughty" because of their natural "privation". This is why women rather than men "desire to go fine and deck themselves", in an attempt "to supply imperfection by art".³⁷ As imperfect men, women were suspended in a permanent state of childhood, a fact which was given symbolic expression in their retention of a form of children's dress into adulthood.³⁸ Poole links women and children in his exposition of the notion of women as weaker vessels³⁹: "weak Vessels must be gently handled; the infirmities of Children bespeak their Pardon when they offend".⁴⁰ Similarly, an eighteenth-century author writes about the natural affection of "the superior creature" (men) "towards the inferior parts of the creation", specifically

³⁶Anonymous, *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, pp. 15, 20.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁸Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth 1986), p. 51.

³⁹I Peter 3:7.

⁴⁰Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. 5L1r.

women and children.⁴¹ This cultural equation between femininity and childhood was to survive into the nineteenth century and beyond.⁴² Spencer posited "a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men".⁴³ Women, according to G. Stanley Hall, were people who had failed fully to leave their adolescence behind them.⁴⁴ Freud propounded a similar theory, believing that femininity was the product of an incomplete dissolution of the Oedipus complex, resulting in a failure to develop the superego (i.e. moral conscience) properly.⁴⁵

II

The moral inferiority of the feminine and its association with the flesh are closely related to perceptions of sexuality. The feelings associated with sexuality in the early modern period were often ones of fear, contempt and

⁴¹Anonymous, *Considerations on the Causes of the Present Stagnation of Matrimony* (London 1772), p. 26, n.

⁴²Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 54 ff.

⁴³Cited in Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity", p. 141.

⁴⁴Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London 1981), p. 122. On Hall, see Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 57 ff.

⁴⁵Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), and "Female Sexuality", in *idem.*, *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth 1977).

disgust.⁴⁶ True, the literature of the period affords many robust and apparently uninhibited expressions of the pleasures of the body. Malheureuse in Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* extolled the simplicity of animal sexuality as "nature's highest virtue".⁴⁷ To this we might add any number of poems, such as Donne's verses "To his Mistress on Going to Bed", or Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress". This was largely a literary matter, and one very much associated with the élite at play. There was no question of a "sexual revolution" in the sense of an unabashed advocacy of free love; at most, this is a matter of clandestine affairs behind closed doors. The popularity of the *double entendre* is more suggestive of prurience than unalloyed sexual pleasure, and the bar-room snigger may be as indicative of sexual malaise as is the prude's forthright condemnation.⁴⁸

Generally, couples were advised to show moderation in their sexual appetites. "As a man may be drunken with his own wine", John Robinson claimed, "so he may play the

⁴⁶One indication of this is the strength of the social injunction against nakedness. One writer, for example, cautioned his readers: "In putting off, or putting on thy clothes, beware that thou uncover not any part of thee which nature would have hidden"; W[illiam] F[iston], *The schoole of good Manners: Or, A new Schoole of Virtue* (London 1609), sig. Dvii^r.

⁴⁷John Marston, *The Dutch Courtesan*, II:i:78.

⁴⁸Cf. Odette de Mourges, "Love in Molière and in Restoration Comedy", *The Seventeenth Century*, i, 1 (1986), pp. 57-67.

adulterer with his own wife".⁴⁹ In pre-Reformation thought, emphasis had been placed on the procreative rather than pleasurable aspects of sex. Pope Gregory I told Augustine of Canterbury that "Lawful intercourse should be for the procreation of offspring, and not for mere pleasure; to obtain children and not to satisfy lust".⁵⁰ Protestants like Hooker and Herbert continued to emphasise the virtues of celibacy;⁵¹ as we shall see, this is also true of the Behmenists. Nevertheless, as various historians have argued, in some circles there was a validation of marital sexuality.⁵² A common motive for

⁴⁹Cited in Charles H. George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640* (Princeton 1961), p. 277; cf. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 225; Robert Abbott, *A Christian Family Builded by God, Directing all Governours of Families how to act* (London 1652), p. 36. See also Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England* (abridged edn., Harmondsworth 1979), p. 314.

⁵⁰Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth 1968), p. 81.

⁵¹George and George, *Protestant Mind*, p. 266.

⁵²See, for example, Levin L. Schücking, *The Puritan Family, A Social Study from Literary Sources* (1929), trans. Brian Battershaw (London 1969), pp. 38 ff.; Edmund Leites, "The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage", *Journal of Social History*, xv, 3 (Spring 1982), pp. 383-408; *idem.*, *The Puritan Conscience and Modern Sexuality* (New Haven 1986). For similar trends on the Continent, see Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Women and the Continental Reformation", in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds., *Religion and Sexism. Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1974), pp. 292-318. The distinctiveness of Puritan thought on marriage has been challenged by Kathleen M. Davies, "The Sacred Condition of Equality: how original were Puritan doctrines of marriage?", *Social History* 5 (May 1977), pp. 563-80; see also Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge 1987), ch. 4.

this was a concern for depopulation,⁵³ but there was also a genuine appreciation of sexuality for its own sake. Agrippa expressed the common view that spouses' duty to service each other sexually was so binding that continence rather than copulation was dependent on consent. In contrast to those writers who emphasised sexual temperance, Agrippa asserted that marital sex was "without faute" even if "the requeste be immoderate, and not because to gette children".⁵⁴ Matthew Poole thought that marital sexuality was "the mutual duty of husband and wife under due circumstances"; consequently, "marriage takes away from each person the power over his or her own body, and giveth it to their correlate".⁵⁵ Lucy Hutchinson disapproved of "the ungodly chastity" of Edward the Confessor, a married celibate.⁵⁶ Milton was one Puritan who believed in the joys of married sex,

Whatever hypocrites austere talk
Of purity, and place, and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares

⁵³See e.g. Simon Fish, *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars* (c.1529), in A.C. Ward ed., *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets*, pp. 3-17, p. 8; Slingsby Bethel, *The World's Mistake in Oliver Cromwell* (London 1668), p. 16; anonymous, *The Levellers: A Dialogue between two young Ladies concerning Matrimony* (London 1703), *passim*.

⁵⁴H.C. Agrippa, *The Commendation of Matrimony*, trans. David Clapham (London 1534), sigs. B5v-B5r.

⁵⁵Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Bbbbbb4v. This assumption was enshrined in the legal refusal to recognize marital rape until as recently as October 1991.

⁵⁶Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, with a Fragment of an Autobiography*, ed. J. Sutherland (London 1973), p. 280.

Pure...⁵⁷

More graphically, Sir John Harrington entreated his wife to "be as wanton, toying as an ape" when he climbed into her "undefiled bed".⁵⁸ Thomas Salmon, grandson of the regicide Bradshaw, thought that "Lust or Desire, taken simply, when it has nothing in it irregular or inordinate,...[is] the most harmless, if not the most generous Passion, that ever inspired the Breast of Man". Salmon believed that sexuality persisted in heaven, a view which was unusual for his time, but which was to be a feature of much nineteenth-century thought.⁵⁹ Roger Williams thought that "a chaste wife" would "abhorre to be restrained from her husbands bed".⁶⁰ The implicit assumption here is that married sexuality is in itself chaste. As Middleton put it, "She's part virgin whom but one man knows".⁶¹

This validation of marital sexuality was both pronuptialist and pronatalist, accompanied by a campaign against various forms of nonmarital sexuality. There was

⁵⁷Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv:744-7.

⁵⁸In E. Lucie-Smith ed., *The Penguin Book of Elizabethan Verse* (Harmondsworth 1965), p. 153.

⁵⁹Thomas Salmon, *A Critical Essay Concerning Marriage* (London 1724), pp. 17, 5.

⁶⁰Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenant of Persecution* (1644), in S.L. Caldwell ed., *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, 7 vols. (New York 1963), vol. iii, pp. 63-4.

⁶¹Thomas Middleton, *A Mad World My Masters*, IV:iv:72.

widespread concern over adultery, culminating in the ineffective Act of 1650 making this a capital offence.⁶² Acts of 1576 and 1610 imposed whipping and detention in the House of Correction on the parents (especially the mothers) of illegitimate children,⁶³ and a "sustained attack" on popular culture in the early seventeenth century led to a decline in illegitimacy.⁶⁴ The Infanticide Act of 1624 may have been as much concerned with sexual immorality as child-killing.⁶⁵ A shift was occurring in the social conceptualization of homosexuality, which in the sixteenth century was still considered as merely one effect of incontinence rather than as an alternative to heterosexuality. Sodomy itself

⁶²Keith Thomas, "The Puritans and Adultery: The Act of 1650 Reconsidered", in D. Pennington and K. Thomas eds., *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford 1978), pp. 257-282.

⁶³Thomas, "Puritans and Adultery", p. 267.

⁶⁴David Levine and Keith Wrightson, "The Social Context of Illegitimacy in Early Modern England", in Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard M. Smith eds., *Bastardy and its Comparative History. Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformity in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan* (London 1980), pp. 158-175, p. 172.

⁶⁵J.M.Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Princeton 1986), p. 113. Infanticide at this time was almost exclusively an offence committed by unmarried mothers; see Keith Wrightson, "Infanticide in Earlier Seventeenth-Century England", *Local Population Studies*, xv (1975), pp. 10-22; R.W. Malcolmson, "Infanticide in the Eighteenth Century", in J.S. Cockburn ed., *Crime in England 1500-1800* (London 1977), pp. 187-209.

had become a felony in 1534.⁶⁶ In the late sixteenth century, prosecution for sexual offenses soared.⁶⁷ One indicator of the level of concern can be found in the steep rise in sexual slander cases in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁶⁸ The frontiers of heterosexual monogamy were being policed more rigorously, and in this context the validation of marital sexuality represents not so much a liberating as a constricting movement. The urban middling sort remained resolutely repressed in their attitude to the body and its pleasures, especially if those pleasures were located outside marriage.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Retha M. Warnicke, "Sexual Heresy at the Court of Henry VIII", *Historical Journal*, xxx, 2 (1987), pp. 247-268. Homosexuality excited considerable hostility, both official and popular; see, for example, Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth* (St. Albans 1976), p. 51, on the brutal, semi-judicial murder of two homosexuals in 1780. It was a homosexual passage in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (Fanny Hill)* that led to the author's prosecution. It is perhaps one indicator of the strength of the taboo against homosexuality that, until Peter Sabor's edition (Oxford 1986), this passage was deleted from all subsequent issues of the book, including the self-proclaimed "unexpurgated" versions (see Wagner, *Eros Revived*, p. 241).

⁶⁷See Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England* (Cambridge 1987), ch. 8.

⁶⁸J.A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England. The Church Courts at York*, Bothwick Papers 58 (York), pp. 3-4; Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, p. 299; Miranda Chaytor, "Household and Kinship: Ryton in the late 16th and early 17th centuries", *History Workshop Journal* 10 (Autumn 1980), pp. 25-60, pp. 25-6. The defamation of women in particular was overwhelmingly sexual in character.

⁶⁹For a radically different view of popular sexuality, see G.R. Quaipe, *Wanton Wives and Wayward Wenches. Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth-Century England* (London 1979).

When people came to think seriously about sexuality, they frequently betrayed a sense of anxiety or disgust. This is evident even in the sex-manuals of the period. *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, for example, tells us that God made sex pleasurable in order to induce people to engage in an act that was "a base and contemptible thing in itself"; "every living creature abhors it", hence the frequency of post-coital melancholy.⁷⁰ Adam Smith thought that "all strong expressions" of sexual passion are indecent, "even between persons in whom its most complete indulgence is acknowledged by all laws, both human and divine, to be perfectly innocent".⁷¹ David Hume asserted that "Kindness or esteem, and the appetite to generation, are too remote to unite easily together. The one is, perhaps, the most refin'd passion of the soul; the other the most gross and vulgar".⁷² So gross and vulgar, that Hume speaks euphemistically of "the appetite to generation" when he clearly means the desire to copulate rather than a yearning for offspring. This revulsion from

⁷⁰Anonymous, *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, pp. 63, 78. This is admittedly a more anti-sex and misogynist work than the other pseudo-Aristotelian sex-manuals. In contrast, *Aristotle's Last Legacy* (1720, London 1776, pp. 2, 37) expresses a sacramental vision of sex, which may be connected to the author's acceptance of the doctrines of God and Chaos and Adamic androgyny; cf. Roy Porter, "The Secrets of Generation Display'd: Aristotle's Master-Piece in Eighteenth-Century England", in Robert Purks Maccubbin ed., *'Tis Nature's Fault. Unauthorized Sexuality During the Enlightenment* (Cambridge 1987), pp. 1-21, pp. 6-7.

⁷¹Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford 1976), p. 28.

⁷²David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), ed. Ernest C. Mossner (Harmondsworth 1969), p. 443.

sexuality was commonly expressed by the feeling that sexual desire was "an appetite...in common with the vilest branch of the creation", reducing human beings to the level of "the lowest animals".⁷³ Sexuality was both metaphorically and literally brutal.⁷⁴

Death and sexuality are the poles of animal existence. In the early modern period, this was expressed symbolically in the "overtly sexual imagery" of wakes and the use of a similar floral symbolism for funerals and weddings.⁷⁵ The connection between death and sexuality surfaces in several forms in early modern culture. Orgasm was referred to as a "little death". In continental art of the period, there is a marked sexualization of the theme of Death and the Maiden; whereas earlier representations had shown a skeleton loitering in the vicinity of a young woman gazing in a mirror, by the sixteenth century Death is caressing the maiden's genitals.⁷⁶ Often death and sexuality appear as competitors. Marvell's "To his Coy

⁷³Squire Allworthy, in Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones* (1749), ed. R.P.C. Mutter (Harmondsworth 1966), p. 67.

⁷⁴Cf. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London 1983), p. 38.

⁷⁵Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London 1984), pp. 106, 111.

⁷⁶Joseph Klaitz, *Servants of Satan: the Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, 1985), p. 73. An example of 1517 by Nicolas Manuel Deutsch (Kunstmuseum, Basel) is reproduced in Philippe Ariès, *Images of Man and Death* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

Mistress" is but the best known example of the centuries-old theme of *carpe diem*. Death "deflowers her that was ne'er deflower'd", we read in Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters*,

Fools then are maids to lock from men that
treasure
Which death will pluck, and never yield 'em
pleasure.⁷⁷

Death and sexuality might also appear as colleagues, working together towards man's destruction. The theme then becomes the very reverse of seizing the day:

Methinks it should strike earthquakes in
adulterers
When ev'n the very sheets they commit sin in
May prove, for aught they know, all their last
garments.⁷⁸

This aspect of the theme was rarely treated in as gender-neutral a way as in this passage: more frequently, death is associated not simply with sexuality, but specifically with women and men's desire for them. Joseph Swetnam tells us that women "lay out the folds of their hair to entangle men into their love; betwixt their breasts is the vale of destruction; and in their beds there is hell, sorrow and repentance".⁷⁹ Bawds, Marston informs us, wear "a death's

⁷⁷Middleton, *A Mad World My Masters*, III:i:23-8. The image of death deflowering the virgin was common; cf. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* IV:v:37.

⁷⁸Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, I:i:22-4.

⁷⁹Joseph Swetnam, *The Arraignment of Lewd, idle froward and unconstant women* (1615), in Henderson and McManus eds., *Half Humankind*, p. 201. Cf. Shakespeare's *Lear*, IV:vi:126-8: "But to the girdle do the gods inherit,/ Beneath is all the fiends'-/ There's hell, there's darkness, there's the sulphurous pit".

head most commonly on their middle finger".⁸⁰ The skull is an image often employed to link women, death and the decay of sexual allurement. The most familiar example is Hamlet's address to Yorick's skull.⁸¹ Similarly, Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* contemplates his mistress's skull:

Does every proud and self-affecting dame
Camphor her face for this? And grieve her maker
In sinful baths of milk when many an infant
starves
For her superfluous outside, all for this?⁸²

The literature of the period is replete with examples of the association of women, sex and death:

Does the worm shun her grave?
If not (as your soul knows it) why should lust
Bring man to lasting pain, for rotten dust?⁸³

The "beautifi'd body" of "a glorious dangerous strumpet" is like "a goodly temple/That's built on a vault where carcasses lie rotting".⁸⁴ More subtly, we have the irony of Faustus's address to the diabolic Helen of Troy: "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss".⁸⁵

⁸⁰Marston, *Dutch Courtesan*, I:ii:51-2.

⁸¹William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V:vi:211-14.

⁸²Anonymous, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, III:v:83-6.

⁸³Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, IV:i:48-50; cf. *idem.*, *A Mad World My Masters*: "Thou wretched unthrift, that has play'd away/ Thy eternal portion at a minute's game.../To dote on slime, corruption, woman!" (IV:i:4-5).

⁸⁴Middleton, *Women Beware Women* III:i:95-9.

⁸⁵Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr Faustus*, xviii:101.

The association of sex and death had some support not only from the prevalence of venereal disease, but also from contemporary views of the etiology of various "Disorders of Body, as Aches, Gout, and many Diseases", all of which could be caused by engaging in sexual intercourse before properly digesting one's meals.⁸⁶ While moderate and lawful sexual intercourse was healthy, over-indulgence in sex damaged the eyes and brain, caused fevers, and shortened life.⁸⁷ This was to say nothing of the stunted growth, gonorrhoea, priapism, impotence, sterility, epilepsy and hysteria caused by masturbation.⁸⁸ That the "Emission of seed weakens all bodies" was one of the received opinions of Galenic medicine which the Paracelsians chose not to reject: "This experience tells us, for men that are addicted to this intemperance, have the most nice and tender constitutions, easily offended, and seldome fruitfull".⁸⁹ Similarly the author of *The Way to Bliss*, accepting Aristotle's assertion that the elephant lives to three hundred years, ascribes its longevity to sexual temperance, since it "comes but once

⁸⁶Anonymous, *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, p. 51.

⁸⁷Anonymous, *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, p. 62; cf. Ferrand, *Erotomania*, p. 60: both the "want of convenient evacuation of seed" and its "immoderate evacuation" endangered health.

⁸⁸Anonymous, *Onania; Or, The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution*, 8th edn. (London 1723), pp. 17 ff.

⁸⁹Henry Nollus, *Hermetical Physick: Or the right way to preserve and to restore Health*, trans. Henry Vaughan, in L.C. Martin ed., *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, pp. 547-92, p. 558.

in two years to ventry".⁹⁰ On the other hand, "The sparrow for his lechery liueth but a yeare".⁹¹

In early modern thought, sexuality is valid only insofar as it is confined to the marriage bed. Much English Renaissance drama is an object lesson in the dire consequences of marital infidelity: adultery is one sure way to leave the stage littered with corpses. The dramatists also expended much ink in extolling the virtues of fidelity.

The modest pleasures of a lawful bed,
The holy union of two equal hearts,
The undoubted issues, joys of chaste sheets,
The unfeigned embrace of sober ignorance

were preferable to "the unhealthful loins of common loves,/The prostituted impudence of things".⁹² Against adultery, Marston cites three factors: disease, then as now a major weapon for advocates of sexual repression; the principle of legitimacy, an important consideration in a society in which status is ascribed rather than acquired;⁹³ and "impudence", which, contrasted with

⁹⁰Elias Ashmole ed., *The Way to Bliss* (London 1658), p. 45.

⁹¹Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), in Ronald B. McKerrow ed., *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, rvd. edn., 5 vols. (Oxford 1958), vol. ii, p. 225.

⁹²Marston, *Dutch Courtesan*, V:i:67-73.

⁹³Rose Laub Coser and Lewis A. Coser, "The Principle of Legitimacy and its Patterned Infringement in Social Revolutions", in Rose Laub Coser ed., *The Family. Its Structure and Functions* (London 1974), pp. 94-109, p. 95.

"modest pleasures", seems to mean unrestrained sexual enjoyment.

There is a decided feeling of the double standard in the treatment of adultery: "'Tis a greater shame/ For women to consent then men to aske".⁹⁴ It is not that male fornication is justified, but simply that female wantonness preoccupies the writers' minds.⁹⁵ Insofar as the age took cognizance of men in adultery, it reserved its censures not for the adulterer, but for the one person who would seem to be unimpeachably innocent, the cuckolded husband. Milton observed that "the generosity of our nation is so, as to account no reproach more abominable than to be nicknamed the husband of an adulteress".⁹⁶ The cuckold's crime, like Adam's before him, was one of dereliction of patriarchal duty; it lay not so much in transgressing himself as in failing to prevent his wife from transgressing.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Anonymous, *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*, II:79-80.

⁹⁵Odette de Mourgues, however, suggests that in Restoration drama women were expected to guard their "honour" at all costs, while men were expected to "snatch that honour from them"; "Love in Molière and in Restoration Comedy", p. 62. There was thus a contradiction between female chastity and a supposed male sexual imperative.

⁹⁶John Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), in J.A. St. John ed., *The Prose Works of John Milton* 5 vols. (London 1848-1853), vol. iii, pp. 169-273, p. 257.

⁹⁷S.D. Amussen, "Gender, Family and the Social Order 1570-1640", in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson eds., *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge 1985), pp. 196-217, p. 207; David Underdown, "The Taming of the

The ideal of womanhood in the seventeenth century, no less than in the nineteenth, was one of chastity. A woman's chastity defined her moral worth: "severe modesty is women's virtue".⁹⁸

What is there good in woman to be lov'd
When only that which makes her so, has left
her?⁹⁹

Fielding's Squire Allworthy was to express the same sentiment over a century later: a woman who has lost her chastity has sacrificed "all that is great and noble in her, all her heavenly part".¹⁰⁰ The same thought can be found in the nineteenth-century; a prostitute, according to William Acton, is "a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevated her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity".¹⁰¹ If women "cannot offer to mankind the spectacle of purity and righteousness", opined Sidney Smith, "they have nothing else to offer which is great and estimable".¹⁰²

Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England", *ibid.*, pp. 116-136, pp. 127-8; Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, p. 165.

⁹⁸Marston, *Dutch Courtesan*, III:i:46.

⁹⁹Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, III:ii:331.

¹⁰⁰Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 67.

¹⁰¹William Acton, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, social and Sanitary Aspects* (London 1857), p. 166.

¹⁰²Sidney Smith, "On the Sin of Adultery", in Paul A. Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society. An Anglican Anthology* (Harmondsworth 1970), pp. 215-20, p. 218.

Yet, unlike the society in which Smith and Acton lived, female chastity was seen as prescriptive rather than descriptive in the seventeenth century. There was a widespread perception in the early modern period that women were the very reverse of chaste. The "Womb", we are told, is "as greedy as the gaping Tomb"; it will

Take Men, Dogs, Lions, Bears, all sorts of
Stuff,
Yet it will never cry - there is enough.¹⁰³

This passage is unusual for its obscenity rather than its sentiment. Women, according to one writer, are gossipy and promiscuous; they provide the church courts with a good trade in defamation cases because of their "too much talking and lying (I meane) on their backes".¹⁰⁴ Virginity might be "the Boast and Pride of the fair Sex; but they generally commend it to put it off".¹⁰⁵ Since the early Middle Ages it had been believed that women were naturally more libidinous than men.¹⁰⁶ "Most women have small waist

¹⁰³[Robert Gould], *Love given o're: Or, A Satyr Against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy of Woman* (London 1682), p. 5.

¹⁰⁴[Richard Overton?], *The Proctor and the Parator* (London 1641), sig. B1r.

¹⁰⁵Anonymous, *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 14. As the physician, Jacques Ferrand, noted, there was a contradiction here between cultural perceptions and medical theory. Since "a Hot complexion...is much more prone to dishonest or irregular Love, then any other Complexio[n]", we would expect men to suffer more from excessive libido. Love, however, "is a Motion of the Minde, that is irrefragable, & opposeth it selfe against the power and rule of Reason". We may therefore safely ignore medical theory and "conclude, that without all doubt a Woman is in her Loves more Passionate and more furious in her follies, then a man is". Ferrand added that

the world throughout", we read in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, "But their desires are thousand miles about".¹⁰⁷ "She that tastes not sin before [marriage], twenty to one but she'll taste it after".¹⁰⁸ Women, joked Middleton, are like German clocks, "They'll strike to ten when they should stop at one".¹⁰⁹ According to De Flores in *The Changeling*, a woman who once errs sexually

spreads and mounts then like arithmetic,
One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand,
Proves in time a sutler to an army royal.¹¹⁰

It is impossible to read the literature of this period without being struck by the apparent ubiquity of men with horns on their heads. "He that hath a fair wife", thought Joseph Swetnam, also had "a whetstone everyone will be wetting on".¹¹¹ Anxieties about maintaining wifely fidelity were not confined to intentional misogynists like Swetnam. Even more serious writers on marriage could advise men not to wed attractive wives, lest "every

"Men appeare outwardly to be more prone to Lust", but this was only because women "cunningly dissemble [their desires] as much as possibly they can"; Ferrand, *Erotomania*, pp. 213-4, 217.

¹⁰⁷Anonymous, *Revenger's Tragedy*, IV:iii:15-16.

¹⁰⁸Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Wise One*, V:ii:127.

¹⁰⁹Middleton, *A Mad World*, IV:i:20-24.

¹¹⁰Middleton and Rowley, *The Changeling*, II:ii:60-4. Even outwardly chaste women could not escape censure, since a woman will reject sexual advances "when inwardly she longs for it"; I.H., *A Strange Wonder Or A Wonder In A Woman* (London 1642), p. 2.

¹¹¹Swetnam, *The Arraignment of...Women*, 198.

goatish disposition shall level to throw open thy inclosures".¹¹²

III

Women were particularly vulnerable with regard to reputation. In the eighteenth century Lady Sara Pennington, herself the victim of scandal, thought that "the crystalline purity of female reputation is almost sullied by the breath even of good report".¹¹³ A woman's sexual honour was irrecoverable once lost:

Lands mortgag'd may return, and more esteem'd,
But honesty once pawn'd is ne'er redeem'd.¹¹⁴

Adam Smith was later to observe that "Breach of chastity dishonours irretrievably", even when (as in rape) the breach was involuntary.¹¹⁵ These sentiments belong to a

¹¹²Alexander Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (1615), in the *Harleian Miscellany*, vol. vii (London 1810), pp. 251-288, 259.

¹¹³Lady Sara Pennington, *A Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters: With an Additional Letter on the Management of Infant Children*, 8th edn. (London 1817), p. vii.

¹¹⁴Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, I:i:33-4. Cf. Anonymous, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, IV:iv:76-7: "Ask but the thriving'st harlot in cold blood,/She'd give the world to make her honour good".

¹¹⁵Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 332. Cf. Thomas Overbury's poem, "The Wife": "in part to blame is she,/ Which hath without consent been only tride;/ He comes too neere that comes to be denide"; cited in Margaret Olofson Thickstum, *Fictions of the Feminine. Puritan Doctrine and the Representation of Women* (Ithaca 1988), p. 40. Similarly, in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740, ed. Peter Sabor, Harmondsworth 1980), the heroine assumes throughout that she herself would incur moral guilt should she fall victim to Mr. B.'s repeated attempts at rape.

campaign against the perceived sexual predacity of women. Contempt for the promiscuous female mingles with the threat of disgrace; women who have lost their chastity are "driven like lepers of old, out of society".¹¹⁶ Sidney Smith was later to remind adulterers that "the partner of your crime is forever abandoned, for ever infamous, a penitent, an outcast, and a wanderer; that no future regularity can restore her to the world, or replace her in the rank of virtuous women".¹¹⁷

The double standard was not universally accepted. "Both sexes equally should bear the blame; for both offend alike".¹¹⁸ If Milton was unusual in seeing lack of chastity as "much more deflowering and dishonourable" in men than women,¹¹⁹ the Puritan sexual ethic might be seen as an attempt to impose a single standard on both sexes. Preachers like Sidney Smith continued to denounce tolerance of male sexual misdemeanour as "monstrous",¹²⁰ but by the eighteenth century Puritan insistence on a single standard was giving way to the attempt to justify the double standard rationally. Hume wrote a chapter "Of Chastity and Modesty", qualities "which belong to the fair

¹¹⁶Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 67.

¹¹⁷Smith, "On the Sin of Adultery", p. 217.

¹¹⁸Anonymous, *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*, II:12-13.

¹¹⁹Cited in Edward Le Comte, *Milton and Sex* (London 1978), p. 18.

¹²⁰Smith, "On the Sin of Adultery", p. 216.

sex".¹²¹ This he attributed to the principle of legitimacy: no man would accept "the fatigues and expenses" of childrearing unless he were certain that the child was biologically his own.¹²² An interesting feature of Hume's analysis is that he accepts that "there is no foundation in nature for all the exterior modesty, which we require in the expressions, and dress, and behaviour of the fair sex".¹²³ The rigour with which immodesty is suppressed is a result of the fact that "All human creatures, especially of the female sex, are apt to overlook remote motives in favour of any present temptation".¹²⁴

Hume still inhabits a world in which women can be seen as sexually active; already, however, some writers were voicing the opinion that sexual desire in men was greater than that in women.¹²⁵ Philogamos, who seems to be torn

¹²¹Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 620.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 621. George Saville, Marquess of Halifax, had already justified the double standard on this basis in 1688: "The root and excuse of this injustice is the preservation of families from any mixture which may bring a blemish to them; and whilst the point of honour continues to be so placed, it seems unavoidable to give your sex the greater share of the penalty". Halifax also advised his daughter to turn a blind eye to adultery in her husband: "next to the danger of committing the fault yourself the greatest is that of seeing it in your husband"; *The Lady's New Year's Gift; Or, Advice to a Daughter*, in J.P. Kenyon ed., *Halifax. Complete Works* (Harmondsworth 1969), pp. 271-313, p.279.

¹²³*Ibid.*, pp. 620-1.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 622.

¹²⁵Anonymous, *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, sig. A4r.

between the older perception of women as more libidinous and the newer perception of them as inherently chaste, thought that women had "stronger Inclinations" to sexual passion than men, but also asserted that they had "a natural Modesty and Check upon them, which we have not".¹²⁶ By the late eighteenth century it was becoming a commonplace that women were naturally "disposed to be affectionate, faithful, and happy", in contrast to "the common licentiousness of men".¹²⁷ "Chastity is so natural to our Sex", wrote Juliana-Susannah Seymour, "that I hope it is very rarely violated".¹²⁸ Women's interest in sex was determined by a desire for children rather than "any Delight or Satisfaction they take therein".¹²⁹ Nineteenth-century phrenology supported this view; because of the larger male cerebellum, men had a greater degree of "amativeness" and women of "philoprogenitiveness".¹³⁰ By the Victorian era, it was possible to believe that sexual desire in women is "dormant, if not non-existent, till

¹²⁶Philogamos, *The Present State of Matrimony, Or, The Real Causes of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages* (London 1739), p. 21.

¹²⁷Anonymous, *Letters on Love, Marriage, and Adultery; Addressed to the Right Honourable the Earl of Essex* (London 1789), p. 93.

¹²⁸Juliana-Susannah Seymour, *On the Management and Education of Children* (London 1754), p. 173.

¹²⁹Anonymous, *Aristotle's Compleat Master-Piece*, p. 42; cf. Philogamos, *Present State of Matrimony*, pp. 67; cf. Patricia Crawford, "The construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England", in Fildes ed., *Women as Mothers*, pp. 3-38, p. 6..

¹³⁰Russett, *Sexual Science*, p. 19.

excited...by undue familiarities; almost always till excited by actual intercourse".¹³¹ The sexually voracious woman whose sexuality must be controlled had given way to the passionless female who must be protected from the sexuality of men.

The period witnessed a further development in this direction, based on a rearrangement of domestic space. Laslett has described an early seventeenth-century baking household in which "sex and age were mingled together".¹³² Such, more or less, seems to have been the case in all households during the Middle Ages. The early modern period witnessed a "revolution in housing" among the more prosperous sectors of the population. The sharing of quarters gave way to a new separateness as living space was divided into several rooms, and as the space within rooms became occupied by items of furniture (chairs, beds) appropriated to individual members of the household.¹³³ This development was the physical precondition of new customs, one of which was expressive of the shifting relations between the sexes: the élite practice of women retiring after dinner. Images of the sexes enjoying the

¹³¹W.R. Gregg, "Prostitution", *Westminster Review* 53 (1850), facsimile reprint in Keith Neild ed., *Prostitution in the Victorian Age. Debates on the Issue from 19th Century Critical Journals* (Farnborough 1973), p. 457.

¹³²Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost Further Explored* (London 1983), p. 11.

¹³³W.G. Hoskins, "The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640", *Past and Present* 4 (November 1953), pp. 44-59.

conviviality and companionship of table-talk¹³⁴ are replaced by the customary exodus of "the ladies" from the dining room.¹³⁵ This post-prandial separation of the sexes occurred in a period in which there was a desegregation of the sexes in church;¹³⁶ it is as if the sacred and profane spaces available to women were in inverse proportion to each other.

The psychological effects of this distancing of the sexes can only be surmised; no doubt it added to the mystique that each held for the other. Socially, it was certainly an aspect of the evolution of dual standards of behaviour: men were to be allowed the liberty of unrestrained discourse, and women were to be protected from the "liberties" to which this would subject them. In the eighteenth century it was already believed that women were easily offended by explicit references to sex. The author of *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece* apologises for

¹³⁴See for example John Lyly, *Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), in Paul Salzman ed., *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (Oxford 1987), pp. 83-150, pp. 105 ff.; Ester Sowerham, *Esther Hath hang'd Haman* (1617), in Simon Shepherd ed., *The Woman's Sharp Revenge: Five Women's Pamphlets from the Renaissance* (London 1988), pp. 85-124, p. 87.

¹³⁵Against the view expressed here, see John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse. British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York 1985), ch. 1. Gillis argues that social relations in the early modern period were "homosocial", but the "innocent polygamy" which he discerns in country dances and other customs appears to contradict this.

¹³⁶See Margaret Aston, "Segregation in Church", *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990), pp. 237-294, for a comprehensive survey of this topic.

discussing copulation, but promises to do so in such a way as not to "put the Fair Sex to the Trouble of Blushing".¹³⁷ Adam Smith observed that "To talk to a woman as we would to a man is improper".¹³⁸ Women should at least affect an incomprehension of ribaldry: "let 'em either show their innocence by not understanding what they hear, or else show their discretion by not hearing what they would not be thought to understand".¹³⁹ The custom of women withdrawing simply gave concrete expression to this view, enshrining both the moral superiority and the moral frailty of women. There are some indications that at first it was regarded with disdain by those who would lay claim to respectability. It was Squire Western, Fielding's incarnation of all that was low and unpolished in the country gentry, who believed "that women should come in with the first dish, and go out after the first glass".¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, it was Goldsmith's personification of all that was fine and noble in a life of rustic gentility, the Vicar of Wakefield, who was concerned "to prevent the ladies from leaving us" once the meal had been finished.¹⁴¹ That by the nineteenth century the practice

¹³⁷Anonymous, *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece*, p. 30.

¹³⁸Smith, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, p. 28.

¹³⁹William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700), I:ii, in Norman Marshall ed., *Three Restoration Comedies* (London 1953), p. 24.

¹⁴⁰Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 309.

¹⁴¹Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766; New York 1961), p. 14.

was regarded as unexceptional is perhaps indicative of the defeat of the Puritan sexual ethic, an ethic involving both a companionate ideal of domestic life and an insistence on a single standard of moral propriety.

A similar trend can be traced in the evolution of attitudes to prostitution. Prostitution was long regarded as a necessary defence of the double standard, and was accordingly tolerated.¹⁴² Until the reign of Henry VIII, the stews of medieval Southwark had operated openly under licence.¹⁴³ The early modern period witnessed a series of attempts to curtail prostitution.¹⁴⁴ At the same time there developed a more sympathetic attitude to the prostitute herself: she was increasingly seen as victim rather than sinner.¹⁴⁵ By the nineteenth century, woman had become "that most sensitive of God's creatures", needing protection from male sexual predacity. Of the offending couple, the prostitute was "the least to be

¹⁴²Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard", *Journal of the History of Ideas* xx, 2 (April 1959), pp. 195-216, pp. 197-8; Gamini Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London 1977), p. 51.

¹⁴³John Stow, *A Survey of London* (1603), ed. C.L. Kingsford, 2 vols. (London 1971), vol. ii, pp. 54-5.

¹⁴⁴P.F. Hughes and J.F. Larkin eds., *Tudor Royal Proclamations* 3 vols. (New Haven 1964-9), vol. i, p. 113; Salgado, *Elizabethan Underworld*, 52; Vern L. Bullough, "Prostitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century England", in Maccubbin ed., *'Tis Nature's Fault*, pp. 61-74, pp. 66-7.

¹⁴⁵Bullough, "Prostitution and Reform", p. 61.

blamed and the most to be pitied".¹⁴⁶ She could offer her client only "a reluctant and loathing submission",¹⁴⁷ and was widely regarded as the victim of seduction.¹⁴⁸ In the nineteenth century, the prostitute was seen as typically a young, lower-class virgin who had fallen prey to the snares laid by older, higher-class rakes. In fact, prostitutes were generally of the same class as their clients and many had a history of serial monogamy or promiscuity before entering the profession.¹⁴⁹ This discrepancy between reality and perception is testimony to the powerful impulse to make the image of all women conform to that of desexualized purity. Far from undermining the double standard, the nineteenth-century assault on the traditional bulwark of this principle reinforced the new Romantic stereotype of woman. The campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s gave birth to the first feminist movement. It did not, however, champion women's right to define their own

¹⁴⁶Josephine Butler, "An Appeal to the People of England on the Recognition and Superintendence of Prostitution by Governments" (1870), in Sheila Jeffreys ed., *The Sexuality Debates* (London 1987), p. 121; *idem.*, "Letter to my Country women, dwelling in the Farmsteads and Cottages of England" (1871), *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁷Gregg, "Prostitution", p. 450.

¹⁴⁸E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke, "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Disease", in Vicinus ed., *Suffer and Be Still*, pp. 77-99, p. 84.

¹⁴⁹Judith Walkowitz, "The Making of an Outcast Group: Prostitutes and Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Plymouth and Southampton", in Martha Vicinus ed., *A Widening Sphere. Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (London 1980), pp. 72-93, pp. 73, 75.

sexuality. On the contrary, it involved an attempt to impose "a particular regime of domesticity", furthering the desexualization of women through an emphasis on the dangers of sexuality.¹⁵⁰ By the nineteenth century, prostitution could be regarded as a radical subversion of women's role in elevating men, making them "a source of disease instead of health, of vice instead of purity".¹⁵¹ It prevented women from occupying their proper place as "the chief agents" ennobling "the sexual relation" in order "to exalt and bless its objects".¹⁵²

The double standard in Western culture can be traced back to antiquity.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, it should not be regarded as simply a constant factor of social life, but as one working within a specific historical context. Its meanings and implications depend on this context. With the seventeenth-century perception of women as unruly and

¹⁵⁰Nancy Wood, "Prostitution and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Britain", *m/f* 7 (1982), pp. 61-77, p. 76; Linda Gordon and Ellen Dubois, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Sexual Thought", *Feminist Review* 13 (1983), pp. 42-54; Judith Walkowitz, "Male Vice and Female Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain", in Anne Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson eds., *Desire. The Politics of Sexuality* (London 1983), pp. 47-50.

¹⁵¹Annie Besant, "The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England" (1876), in Jeffreys ed., *Sexuality Debates*, p. 94.

¹⁵²John Chapman, "Prostitution in Relation to the National Health", *Westminster Review* 36 (1869), facsimile reprint in Neild ed., *Prostitution in the Victorian Age*, p. 181.

¹⁵³Thomas, "Double Standard".

sexually voracious, the double standard is part of a policing mechanism, requiring the repression of certain aspects of women's behaviour. By the nineteenth century, the double standard had been internalized; women were perceived, and perceived themselves, as desexualized embodiments of spiritual value.¹⁵⁴ In this latter context, the double standard is not so much a matter of policing as "protecting" women.

IV

Complementary changes can be traced in the evolution of attitudes to dress. Natalie Davis has suggested that "sexual inversion...was a widespread form of cultural play in literature, in art, and in festivity". Such inversion had little to do with "homosexuality or disturbed gender identity".¹⁵⁵ It was (pace Davis) essentially the same phenomenon that can be found in many traditional societies, a way of affirming and clarifying boundaries by turning everything upside down. Ritual inversion was one thing; male and female cross-dressers walking the streets outside this ritual context was quite another. Sometimes

¹⁵⁴One indication of the extent to which notions of female sexual passivity have been internalized can be found in women's sexual fantasies, which commonly involve an element of coercion. As Nancy Friday points out in her study of the subject, one function of the rape fantasy is to allow women to express their sexuality without being responsible for it; *My Secret Garden. Women's Sexual Fantasies* (London 1976), p. 27. There is, of course, no way of determining whether this particular aspect of women's fantasies is an historical phenomenon.

¹⁵⁵Davis, "Women on Top", p. 129.

men were accused of effeminacy, as by James I's chaplain John Hoskins in a sermon preached at Paul's Cross:

[M]en have almost denied their sex to please women... Most men so form and fashion themselves to the variable excess of outlandish attire that women shall have much ado to be more vain and fantastical.¹⁵⁶

Bishop Pilkington asserted that "many men are become so effeminate, that they care not what they spend in disguising themselves, ever desiring new toys, and inventing new fashions".¹⁵⁷ William Harrison complains in like manner that women are dressing to look like men:

I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women. Thus it is now come to pass, that women are become men, and men transformed into monsters.¹⁵⁸

Such complaints occurred with increasing frequency in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁵⁹ In 1620 James I instructed preachers "to inveigh vehemently" against women adopting male attire,¹⁶⁰ and Charles I was

¹⁵⁶John Hoskins, in Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society*, pp. 99-101, p. 101.

¹⁵⁷[Bishop Pilkington], "Excess of Apparel", p. 313, in G.E. Corrie ed., *Certain Sermons Appointed by the Queen's Majesty to be declared and read by all Parsons [The Book of Homilies]* (London 1850).

¹⁵⁸William Harrison, *Description of England* (1587), reprinted as *Elizabethan England*, ed. F.J. Furnivall (London 1876), p. 110.

¹⁵⁹Cf. Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*", *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984), pp. 367-391; Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (London 1986), p. 72.

¹⁶⁰Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist theory and the Querelle des Femmes, 1400-1789", in *idem.*, *Women, History and Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago 1982), p. 90. John Chamberlain reported that the preachers entered the

to issue a proclamation in 1643 forbidding woman "to counterfeit her Sex by wearing mans apparell".¹⁶¹ One of the main complaints about the female adoption of male fashions was that it suggested an unwonted assertiveness on the part of women.¹⁶² The author of *Hic-Mulier* informs us that a woman who is "man in body and attire" would also be "man in behaviour by rude complement, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons, man in using weapons".¹⁶³ Richard Overton was later to link "womens imperious thoughts, irrational commands, usurped government and metamorphosed apparel".¹⁶⁴ One woman in Middleton's *A Mad World* remarked that "we're all male to th' middle, mankind from the beaver to th' bum. 'Tis an Amazonian time, you shall have women shortly tread their husbands".¹⁶⁵ Women treading their husbands conjures up not only the idea of female domination, but also that of sexual assertiveness, since the cock "treads" the hen in sexual intercourse. This was the other major anxiety expressed in criticisms of female cross-dressing. This is in part due to what counted as dressing like a man, which

campaign with enthusiasm.

¹⁶¹Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p. 84.

¹⁶²Cf. Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory", p. 90.

¹⁶³Anonymous, *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman* (1620), in Henderson and McManus eds., *Half Humankind*, pp. 264-276, 270.

¹⁶⁴Richard Overton, *Vox Borealis* (1640), in the *Harleian Miscellany*, vol. iv (London 1809), pp. 422-441, p. 434.

¹⁶⁵Middleton, *A Mad World*, III:iii:105-8.

had no necessary connection with what men actually wore. The author of *Hic Mulier*, for example, includes "bared breasts" and "naked arms".¹⁶⁶

What was at issue in the condemnations of fashionable cross-dressing was a perceived threat to gender roles, or rather, a desire to enforce more rigid boundaries between the sexes. That such condemnations reached their peak in a period in which the social order was in crisis is not a coincidence. As in the Ranter sensation of 1650-1, gender relations were a symbolic representation of the social order as a whole.¹⁶⁷ By the early eighteenth century, there was a new confidence in both the stability of the social order and the security of gender boundaries.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶Anonymous, *Hic Mulier*, p. 271. As can be seen, Joan Kelly was mistaken in asserting that the pamphlets stemming from James I's campaign against women dressing like men were exclusively concerned with "the independence of 'masculine' women" and did not criticise "the dress of other ladies of fashion which exposed their breasts", "Early Feminist Theory", p. 90. Both the wearing of doublets and the bearing of breasts, however, amounted to the same thing: over-assertive women.

¹⁶⁷Cf. J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History. The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge 1986), pp. 105-6. The link between the "crisis of order" in gender relations and in society as a whole is a recurrent theme of David Underdown's *Revel, Riot and Rebellion. Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford 1985).

¹⁶⁸For the growth of political stability, see J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (London 1967); J.H. Shennan, *The Origins of the Modern European State 1450-1725* (London 1974); Theodore K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (London 1975). For the cultural aspects of this process, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols. (Oxford 1978); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978).

These boundaries were, moreover, becoming more clear-cut. In the early modern period, male dress, particularly among members of the *élite*, was as flamboyant as female dress. By the late nineteenth century, male sartorial sobriety had become a virtually universal characteristic. Such sobriety, according to the psychologist J.C. Flügel, symbolises duty and self-control,¹⁶⁹ virtues prized by the middling sort. The long, slow demise of the fop marked a fundamental shift in gender relations; women were eventually to have a monopoly of the realm of ornament, while men were to inhabit a world of responsibilities taken seriously.¹⁷⁰

In the early modern period, women's fashions were often associated with wanton sexuality. "The greatest provocations of lust", thought Richard Burton, "are from our apparel".¹⁷¹ Women "trim themselves every day", wrote Edward Gosynhill, "And all that ever they imagine/ Is to

¹⁶⁹Cited in Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁰James Fordyce thought that "none but the most contracted, or the most prejudiced, will deny that women may avail themselves of every decent attraction,...and that, should they by any neglect render themselves less amiable than God has made them, they would so far disappoint the design of their creation". Fordyce, however, insisted on a sartorial double standard: "In affairs of this kind, it is but just to allow women a degree of curiosity and care, which the laws of good sense, sound philosophy, and masculine virtue, refuse to men"; James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols. (London 1767), vol. i, pp. 6, 44.

¹⁷¹Richard Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, cited in Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p. 74.

lure the masculine".¹⁷² "If not to tempt and be thought worthy to be tempted", asked Thomas Nashe, "why dye they & diet they theyr faces with so many drugges as they doe".¹⁷³ Pug, in Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, has the same thought:

For why is all this rigging, and fine tackle,
mistress,
If you neat handsome vessels of good sail
Put not forth ever and anon, with your nets
Abroad into the world? It is your fishing.¹⁷⁴

Moralists frequently warned men that their wives' preoccupation with their appearance was an open invitation to adultery. "Beware, therefore, good husbands", advised one preacher, "that you set not your wives and daughters so to sale, for fear lest harm come of it".¹⁷⁵ Such complaints were age-old; Pilkington cites Tertullian to the effect that "there is left no difference in apparel between an honest matron and a common strumpet". "[A]s though an honest woman could delight to be like an harlot for pleasing of her husband", Pilkington continues,

Nay, nay, these be but vain excuses of such as go about to please rather others than their husbands. And such attires be but to provoke her

¹⁷²Edward Gosynhill, *The Schoolhouse of Women* (c. 1541), in Henderson and McManus eds., *Half Humankind*, pp. 136-155, p. 145.

¹⁷³Thomas Nashe, *Christs Teares over Ierusalem* (1593), in McKerrow ed., *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. ii, pp. 136-7.

¹⁷⁴Ben Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, II:i:291-4.

¹⁷⁵Richard Edgeworth, in Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society*, p. 51.

to show herself abroad, to entice others: a worthy matter.¹⁷⁶

John Hoskins complained in like manner: "And can they say that it is to please their husbands? No sooner are they varnished, but they forsake their home".¹⁷⁷

Women's fashions, thought the moralists, should express their humility and chastity. John Mayer, in his funeral eulogy on Lucy Thornton, praised her for having "despised the ornaments of vanity which other women so much delight in; her outward habit did show the inward lowliness and modesty of her mind".¹⁷⁸ The ideal was expressed by Roger Edgeworth in an early sixteenth-century sermon:

So let the dressing of your heads, and the apparelling of your bodies be chaste, clean, after a sober fashion, not like the players, disguised after any wanton manner, lest the lightness of your dressing show the lightness of your conditions.¹⁷⁹

The author of *Hic Mulier* informs us that God made Adam and Eve "coats of several fashions...the man's coat fit for

¹⁷⁶Pilkington, "Excess of Apparel", p. 315.

¹⁷⁷John Hoskins, in Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society*, p. 100. Thomas Nashe made the same point with greater flourish: "Euen as Angels are painted in Church-windowes with glorious golden fronts besette with Sunne-beames, so beset they theyr fore-heads on eyther side with glorious borrowed gleamy bushes; which, rightly interpreted, shold signifie beauty to sell, since a bushe is not else hanged forth but to inuite men to buy"; Nashe, *Christs Teares*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁸John Mayer, *A Pattern For Women* (1619), in Henderson and McManus eds., *Half Humankind*, pp. 335-342, p. 338.

¹⁷⁹Roger Edgeworth, in Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society*, pp. 49-52, p. 50.

his labour, the woman's fit for her modesty".¹⁸⁰ Women, Matthew Poole tells us, should be particularly moderate on the Sabbath, and should always take care that their clothes do not "speak an unchast, or an immodest heart".¹⁸¹

Some women writers early in the period defended their sex from the charge of wantonness in dress. Jane Anger pointed out that "If we clothe ourselves in sackcloth and truss up our hair in dishcloths, Venerians will nevertheless pursue their pastime".¹⁸² Ester Sowernam asked if a woman should not be commended for having "as carefully and as curiously as she may set out what she hath received from Almighty God, than to be censured that she doth it to allure wanton and lascivious looks?"¹⁸³ The anonymous pamphlet *Haec-Vir* defended women more generally from the charge of sartorial rebellion against God:

To alter creation were to walk on my hands with my heels upward, to feed myself with my feet, or to forsake the sweet sounds of the sweet words for the hissing noise of the Serpent. But I walk with my face erect, with a body clothed, with a

¹⁸⁰Anonymous, *Hic Mulier*, p. 270.

¹⁸¹Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Bbbbbb3v.

¹⁸²Jane Anger, *Her Protection for Women* (1589), in Shepherd ed., *Women's Sharp Revenge*, pp. 29-46, p. 38. As Anger suggests, responsibility for male sexual desire was habitually projected onto its object; one satirist, for example, condemns women because "Their very sight our youthful Blood enrage,/ And prove as fatal to declining Age"; [Richard Ames], *The Folly of Love; Or, An Essay Upon Satyr Against Woman* (London 1691), p. 4..

¹⁸³Ester Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman* (1617), in Shepherd ed., *Women's Sharp Revenge*, pp. 87-117, p. 109.

mind busied, and with a heart full of reasonable and devout cogitations, only offensive in attire, inasmuch as it is a Stranger to the curiosity of the present times and an enemy to Custom. Are we then bound to be Flatterers of Time, or the Dependents of Custom?¹⁸⁴

Anger, Sowernam, and the author of *Haec-Vir* were vindicating women's interest in fashion; later champions of women tended to accept the moralists' values, seeing a concern for appearance as a betrayal of the woman's potentialities. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concern for one's appearance was seen as involvement in the vanities of this world at the expense of one's proper spiritual concerns. One Puritan declared that any adorning of the hair was unlawful because it showed a woman to be "halfe for God, halfe for the world".¹⁸⁵ Bishop Pilkington warned woman that "the more thou garnish thyself with these outward blazings, the less thou carest for the inward garnishing of thy mind".¹⁸⁶ A woman's "outward apparell", observed one of Snawsel's characters, "onely sets out the body, and many times makes us forget both God and our selues".¹⁸⁷ Women's preoccupations with fashion made them "inattentive to mental qualifications, both in their own, and in the male

¹⁸⁴Anonymous, *Haec-Vir: Or the Womanish Man* (1620), in Henderson and McManus eds., *Half Humankind*, pp. 277-289, p. 282.

¹⁸⁵T.H., *A Looking-Glasse for Women, Or, A Spie for Pride* (London 1644), p. 2.

¹⁸⁶Pilkington, "Excess of Apparel", p. 316.

¹⁸⁷Robert Snawsel, *A Looking-Glasse for Married Folkes* (London 1631), p. 2.

sex".¹⁸⁸ Sara Pennington advised her daughters to "leave the study of the toilet to those who are adapted to it - I mean that insignificant set of females, whose whole life, from the cradle to the coffin, is but a varied scene of trifling, and whose intellects fit them not for anything beyond it".¹⁸⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft warned that "when the main pursuit is trivial, the character will of course become insignificant".¹⁹⁰

By this time the argument is being used to support the development of women's intellectual capacities rather than simply to confine them to godliness. Bathsua Pell Makin declared that

Moerly to teach Gentlewomen to Frisk and Dance, to paint their Faces, to curl their Hair, to put on a Whisk, to wear gay Clothes, is not truly to adorn, but to adulterate their Bodies; yea, what is worse, to defile their souls.¹⁹¹

The argument here hardly differs from Bishop Pilkington's; its context, however, is within *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*. Mary Wollstonecraft thought that, in the light of the perpetual childhood

¹⁸⁸Anonymous, *Considerations on the Causes of the Present Stagnation of Matrimony*, p. 29.

¹⁸⁹Sara Pennington, *A Mother's Advice to her absent Daughters. With an additional Letter on the Management and Education of Children*, 8th edn. (London 1817), p. 38.

¹⁹⁰Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life; With Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, 2nd edn. (London 1791), p. 99.

¹⁹¹Bathsua Pell Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (London 1673), p. 22, cf. p. 26.

foisted on women by men, it was no wonder if they neglected "the duties that reason alone points out", exerting themselves only "to give their defects a graceful covering, which may serve to heighten their charm in the eye of the voluptuary, though it sink them below the scale of moral excellence".¹⁹² Wollstonecraft echoes the thoughts of the Elizabethan homilist:

But visiting to display finery, card-playing, and balls, not to mention the idle bustle of morning trifling, draw women from their duty to render them insignificant, to render them pleasing, according to the present acceptation of the word, to every man but their husband.¹⁹³

The arguments that were once used by moralists to buttress a patriarchal order had been co-opted by women in their search for empowerment. By the end of the seventeenth-century, however, such arguments had become "old-fashioned".¹⁹⁴ In a strange exchange of discourses, it is the defenders of the sexual status quo who were now vindicating women's right, or insisting on their duty, to be frivolous and decorative.

The attitude of the moralists of the period to "excess of apparel" derived from a pattern of beliefs which functioned to maintain patriarchal society. They did this in a general way by stressing the need for the hierarchical structure of society to be made visible. With

¹⁹²Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792; Harmondsworth 1975), p. 153.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁹⁴Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p. 92.

regard to women in particular, they were concerned with maintaining men's sexual property in women's bodies and ensuring the proper workings of the patriarchal family. Such beliefs can be viewed as an aspect of the repression of women's sexuality, condemning frivolous and playful attitudes to the body. The acceptance by the end of the eighteenth century of women's right to adorn themselves is symptomatic of their desexualization: it was now safe for them to be alluring.

V

The companionate ideal of marriage might be summed up in Agrippa's words, "in one agreeable minde, two bodies, in two bodies one minde and one consent".¹⁹⁵ The question is, whose mind and whose consent? According to Sibbes, "The Spouse hath no will of her owne, but her Husbands will is her will".¹⁹⁶ Elyot's Zenobia tells us that "Iustyce teacheth vs womenne, to honour our husbandes nexte after God".¹⁹⁷ In Ascham's words, words which were more cliché than hyperbole, "Within a mans owne house he is a perfect kinge and Soueraigne".¹⁹⁸ "A Wife should always have her

¹⁹⁵Agrippa, *Commendation of Matrimony*, sig. A7r.

¹⁹⁶Richard Sibbes, *The Brides Longing for her Bridegroomes second coming* (London 1638), p. 14. Sibbes, however, is speaking primarily about the relationship of Christ to the church.

¹⁹⁷Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women*, ed. E. Johnstone Howard (Oxford, Ohio, 1940), p. 56.

¹⁹⁸Sir Anthony Ascham, "Of Marriage", ed. J.M. Perlette, *English Literary Renaissance* iii, 2 (1973), pp. 284-305, p. 290.

Will", thought Philogamos, "yet that Will should be her Husband's".¹⁹⁹

It was obvious to the vast majority of observers that women not only were, but should be, subordinate to men. Women, thought John Knox, are "weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment".²⁰⁰ Female subordination was a direct result of the moral inferiority of the first woman. Writers sometimes tried to maintain both that Eve was more culpable than Adam and that Adam was equally culpable.²⁰¹ The fact that "Adam was not first deceived", however, and that Eve "was both first in the transgression in order of time, and principal in it" was used to remind woman of "that lower order wherein God hath fixed her".²⁰² John Brinsley may be taken as typical in noting that Eve was

¹⁹⁹Philogamos, *The Present State of Matrimony*, p. 48. In More's *Utopia*, marital tensions are resolved by monthly confessions of their faults by wives to husbands; reciprocal action by the husbands simply did not occur to More; Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. P. Turner (Harmondsworth 1965), p. 126.

²⁰⁰John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1588), reprinted in A.C. Ward ed., *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets* (London 1927), pp. 21-88, p. 31.

²⁰¹It was even possible to argue, on thoroughly patriarchal grounds, that "Adam most did of the Guilt partake"; S[arah] F[ige], *The Female Advocate: Or, An Answer to a Late Satyr Against the Pride, Lust and Inconstancy of Woman* (London 1686), p. 3.

²⁰²Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Bbbbbb3v.

"the Author and Originall of all Transgression".²⁰³ Women, thought one eighteenth-century writer, have an "original tendency to transgression,...like their mother Eve".²⁰⁴

The extent of Eve's subordination before the Fall was a disputed question. Luther believed that Eve "would have been the equal of Adam in all respects" had she not succumbed to the temptations of the Serpent.²⁰⁵ Latimer agreed that before the Fall "the man and the woman were equal".²⁰⁶ An assumption that Eve was at least less subject to Adam before the Fall than after can be traced in subsequent Protestant thought. Calvin accepted Eve's prelapsarian subjection, but noted that "that subjection was free and nothing so harde".²⁰⁷ Henry Ainsworth believed that the injunction laid upon Eve "implyeth a further rule, then man had over her by creation, and with more grief unto womankind".²⁰⁸ "By Creation we find her equall unto man", according to one writer, "By

²⁰³John Brinsley, *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* (London 1645), p. 4.

²⁰⁴Anonymous, *Considerations on the Present Stagnation of Matrimony* (London 1772), p. 44.

²⁰⁵Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, in Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann eds., *The Works of Martin Luther*, 40 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia 1957-86), vol. i, p. 70.

²⁰⁶Hugh Latimer, sermon preached before Edward VI, in Welsby ed., *Sermons and Society*, p. 42.

²⁰⁷Calvin, *Commentarie...upon...Genesis*, p. 110.

²⁰⁸Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations vpon the fiue bookes of Moses* (London 1627), p. 17.

Degeneration we find her his inferiour".²⁰⁹ Kidder thought that the curse on Eve consisted "In her more helpless condition, by reason of which she would need to have recourse to her Husband, and be more subject to him, and his corrupt Will".²¹⁰

Women's subordination was a religious duty. Calvin thought that the obedience of wives was a precondition of their salvation: "To refuse that subjection, in which they can be saved, is to choose destruction".²¹¹ "Unruly wives", thought John Mayer, "may have hope indeed, but their hope is presumption, the end of which is damnation".²¹² Poole told women that subjection to Christ was impossible without subjection to husbands.²¹³ Biblical history could also be used to support a more liberal position with regard to women. The story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib was used to assert a sort of sexual equality. Being created from Adam's side rather than his head or foot, Eve was "neither to be her husbands

²⁰⁹Anonymous, *A Spirit Moving In The Women-Preachers: Or, Certaine Quaeres* (London 1646), p. 4.

²¹⁰Kidder, *Commentary on the Five Bookes of Moses*, p. 16.

²¹¹John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh 1965), p. 205.

²¹²Mayer, *A Pattern for Women*, p. 339.

²¹³Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Ooooo2v.

Mistress...nor yet to be his slave".²¹⁴ If religion enjoined subordination on women, it also limited that subordination by their duty to God. Many writers, like Poole, observed that Sapphira as well as Ananias was condemned,²¹⁵ "Her subjection to her husband not excusing her partaking of his sin and punishment".²¹⁶ Rachel Speght wrote that "if a wife fulfil the evil command of her husband, she obeys him as a tempter, as Sapphira did Ananias".²¹⁷ Women's souls "are nothing inferior to those of Men", observed Bathsua Pell Makin, "and equally precious to God in Christ, in whom there is neither Male nor Female".²¹⁸ Makin was an advocate of women's educational opportunities, but it was generally agreed that the sexes were spiritually equal: "though there be a difference betwixt a man and a woman in other things; yet when we come to consider them, as to their spiritual state, there is no difference".²¹⁹ Women, moreover, were widely regarded as more religious than men; they were "the truest Devotionists, and the most Pious".²²⁰ According to James Fordyce, "in Female nature there are certain

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, vol. i, sig.

²¹⁵Acts 5:22.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, vol. ii, sig. Nnn3r.

²¹⁷Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melostamus* (1617), in Shepherd ed., *Women's Sharp Revenge*, pp. 57-80, p. 49.

²¹⁸Makin, *An Essay*, p. 42.

²¹⁹Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Dddddd4v.

²²⁰F[ige], *The Female Advocate*, sig. A2v.

Qualities, which seem peculiarly calculated, by the grace of God, to dispose it for the reception and culture of this divine principle [piety]".²²¹ "There are three Maries to one John", observed Cotton Mather wryly.²²²

Nevertheless, women were excluded from the realm of the spirit by an insistence on their silence in spiritual affairs. The Reformation might even be seen as inimical to the position of women. For Catholics, it was permissible for women to perform priestly functions in emergencies - to administer baptism, for example, if the child were at the point of death and there were no men available. For Protestants, Bishop Matthew claimed, this was "an ancient heresy".²²³ Although the early Reformation had enlisted the active support of women, the establishment of a denominational status quo in the late sixteenth century led to a Protestant retreat into patriarchalism.²²⁴

²²¹Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, vol. ii, p. 111.

²²²Cited in Roger Thomson, *Women in Stuart England and America. A Comparative Study* (London 1974), p. 11. Women's religiosity was also the subject of much hostile comment; it was often noted that separatists were "for the most part females", [Richard Overton?], *The Proctor and the Parator* (London 1641), sig. A3r. John Brinsley's *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* (London 1645), for example, was occasioned by the predominance of women among the Yarmouth separatists. In Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, it is the women of the Bramble-Melford household who turn Methodist (Angus Ross ed., Harmondsworth 1967), p. 169.

²²³Cited in Nicholas Tyacke, *The Anti-Calvinists. The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (1987), p. 19.

²²⁴Colin Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "Subordinating Women: Thomas Bentley's Use of Biblical Women in *The Monument of Matrones* (1582)", *Church History*, lx, 3 (Sept.

Generally, writers distinguished between women in the public and private spheres. Poole noted that the Scriptures specifically forbade women to teach,²²⁵ unless "endued with extraordinary gifts of the spirit"; they nevertheless had a "Dutie to instruct their Children and Families at home, especially in the absence of their Husbands".²²⁶ Wives, thought Gervase Markham, should be "at the most but modest persuaders" of the word of God; they should not "utter forth that violence of spirit which many of our (vainly accounted pure) women do".²²⁷

Markham's reference to Puritan women draws attention to the fact that there was, in some circles, an attempt to challenge the spiritual muting of women. Women have played an active role in dissident religious movements throughout the history of Christianity. In England, there was a tradition of such activism reaching back to the Lollards, and by the early fourteenth century there were already complaints about women preachers.²²⁸ Among the sixteenth-century Familists, women could occupy the first rank of

1991), pp. 289-309, 299.

²²⁵I Timothy 3:12.

²²⁶Poole, *Annotations*, vol. ii, sig. Bbbbbb3v.

²²⁷Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife*, ed. M.R. Best (Kingston and Montreal 1986), pp. 5, 7.

²²⁸John Fines, "Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1511-12", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* xiv (1963), pp. 160-174; Roy M. Haynes, "'Wilde Wittes and Wilfulnes': John Swetstock's Attack on those 'Poysunmongeres', the Lollards", *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972), pp. 143-153, 152.

the priestly hierarchy.²²⁹ The number of women involved in dissenting groups varied; the impression sometimes given by contemporaries and later historians that women were numerically preponderant in the sects is not always accurate.²³⁰ What is significant, however, is not the numbers of women involved, but their activism.²³¹

The issue of female preaching came to prominence in America with the "Antinomian controversy" over Anne Hutchinson in the 1630s.²³² With the outbreak of civil strife and the collapse of ecclesiastical controls in England in the next decade, the problem also arose on this side of the Atlantic.²³³ Women in some of the gathered churches had a relatively independent position. In John

²²⁹Jean Dietz Moss, "The Family of Love and its English Critics", *Sixteenth Century Journal* vi, 2 (April 1975), pp. 35-52, p. 46. At least two Warwick women were important enough among the Marian Familists to receive a letter (dissuading them from courting martyrdom) from Hendrik Niclaes himself; Alistair Hamilton ed., "Three Epistles of Hendrik Niclaes", *Quaerendo*, x, 1 (Winter 1980), pp. 47-69.

²³⁰Margaret Spufford, "The Social Status of Some Seventeenth-Century Rural Dissenters", *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972), pp. 203-210, 207, 209.

²³¹Cf. Clare Cross, "'Great Reasoners in Scripture': The Activities of Women Lollards 1380-1530", *Studies in Church History, Subsidia I. Medieval Women* (1978), pp. 359-380.

²³²Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power. The "Weaker Sex" in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana 1980), pp. 219 ff.

²³³Keith Thomas, "Women and the Civil war Sects", *Past and Present* 13 (April 1958), pp. 42-62. See, for example, the anonymous *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers* (London 1641).

Goodwin's congregation, for example, women could be members despite their husbands' opposition and could take part in discussions, although they were not allowed to vote or hold office.²³⁴ Many women, like Dorothy Hazzard in Bristol, were active both in founding and in organizing separatist churches.²³⁵ This sectarian feminism went furthest among such radical spiritualists as the Quakers.²³⁶ Phyllis Mack has identified over three hundred "women visionaries" in Interregnum England, more than two hundred of them being Quakers.²³⁷

The women preachers of the Civil War have been called "an early manifestation of feminism".²³⁸ There is a tendency for some historians to disparage this feminism of the sects in favour of the literary feminism of figures

²³⁴Ellen S. More, "Congregationalism and the Social Order: John Goodwin's Gathered Church 1640-1660", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1987), 2, pp. 212-235, 223.

²³⁵Clare Cross, "'He-Goats Before the Flocks': A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches", *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972), pp. 195-202.

²³⁶See for example Elaine C. Huber, "'A Woman Must Not Speak': Quaker Women in the English Left Wing", in R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1979), pp. 154-81.

²³⁷Phyllis Mack, "Women as Prophets during the English Civil War", in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London 1984), pp. 214-230, p. 218. As Mack suggests, the heavy representation of Quakers may reflect the high quality of the Friends' record-keeping.

²³⁸Ethyn Morgan Williams, "Women Preachers in the Civil War", *Journal of Modern History* 1 (1929), pp. 561-9, p. 561.

like Mary Astell.²³⁹ While it is unlikely that the feminism of the salons was more significant for women than that of the streets, sectarian feminism was nevertheless limited in scope. Even among the radicals, women's role as divine mouthpieces was seen as resulting from a special gift of the spirit rather than being a normal and acceptable part of everyday life.²⁴⁰ Mack has observed three strands in the justification of women preachers: since women were despised, they were less prone to pride than men; for the same reason they could exemplify the Christian paradox of "the last first"; and their recognized irrationality and emotionality rendered them more "receptive" to divine influence.²⁴¹ Perhaps the most important of these strands was the second, the inversion involved in Christian folly, an inversion which served both women and mechanics as a vindication of their right to speak on divine matters. One of Anna Trapnel's admirers

²³⁹See for example Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples. Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana 1982), pp. 53 ff.; Joan K. Kinnaird, "Mary Astell: Inspired by Ideas", in Dale Spender ed., *Feminist Theorists* (London 1983), pp. 28-39, p. 38.

²⁴⁰Mack, "Women as Prophets", p. 219.

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 216-7. As was later to be observed, a benevolent providence had compensated women for their lack of rationality with greater intuitive powers (Anonymous, *Aristotle's Book of Problems*, p. 99). Female receptiveness could account for women's closeness both to God and the Devil. The authors of the classic witchcraft treatise tell us that "women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit; and that when they use this quality well they are very good, but when they use it ill they are very evil"; Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London 1928), p. 44.

uses this argument: "far be it from us, who have seen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...to bind up the goings forth of the most free and Eternal Spirit at any time".²⁴² In the heady atmosphere of the Civil War, this feminism of the sects came close to spilling out from the religious to the political sphere (if indeed such a distinction is meaningful for this period). The Leveller women petitioners, for example, were claiming a public voice, arguing that "God is ever ready and willing to receive the petitions of all".²⁴³

It is not quite true "that women as the source of any spiritual authority...had virtually disappeared from the public arena by 1700".²⁴⁴ Women were prominent among the Philadelphians, the French Prophets and, later in the eighteenth century, the Shakers. These, however, may have been exceptional. While many of the most prominent women writers of the seventeenth century were religious visionaries, those of the eighteenth century were considerably more secular in outlook. The spiritual role of women, however, did not disappear with its expulsion from the public sphere; it was simply domesticized. For Evangelicals like Hannah More and the Clapham Sect, women

²⁴²Preface to Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (London 1654), sig. a2r.

²⁴³Petition of 1653, cited in Patricia Higgins, "The Reaction of Women, with special reference to women petitioners", in Brian Manning ed., *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War* (London 1973), pp. 179-224, p. 216.

²⁴⁴Mack, "Women as Prophets", p. 224.

retained a central role as moral regenerators, a role which was to be exercised above all in the home.²⁴⁵

The vision of woman as a spiritualising influence is implicit in the centuries-old tradition of personifying moral qualities as female. Sometimes such personifications approach the status of a cult; this, according to Howard Patch, was the case with Fortuna in the middle ages.²⁴⁶ There was, moreover, a congruence between Christian and feminine virtues;²⁴⁷ the Christian man who sought to be modest, humble and self-denying was in fact seeking to conform to the ideal of womanhood. By the mid-eighteenth century the idea that women are "that Sex which merits all your [men's] Admiration and Reverence"²⁴⁸ had established itself sufficiently to become the object of satirical comment. There is a comic intention to Smollett's

²⁴⁵Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology", in Sandra Burman ed., *Fit Work for Women* (London 1979), pp. 15-32, p. 25.

²⁴⁶Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (London 1927); interestingly, Fortuna was even to acquire some of the qualities of the Virgin Mary, *ibid.*, pp. 61-3.

²⁴⁷This point has been argued by students of New England religious history. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature 1668-1735", *American Quarterly* xxviii (1976), pp. 20-40; Margaret W. Masson, "The Typology of the Female as a Model for the Regenerate: Puritan Preaching 1690-1730", *Signs* ii, 2 (1976), pp. 304-15; Mary Maples Dunn, "Saints and Sisters: Congregational and Quaker Women in the Early Colonial Period", *American Quarterly* xxx, 5 (1978), pp. 594-601.

²⁴⁸Arabella in Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford 1989), p. 107.

observation that the "ease and spirit, and delicacy, and knowledge of the heart" shown by female novelists is morally elevating.²⁴⁹ Laurence Sterne declared himself "firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one [amorous] passion and another".²⁵⁰ There is an element of humour in this, but similar views were expressed in all seriousness.

The notion that women exerted a morally beneficial influence on men was already current in the sixteenth century. Bacon, whose opinion of matrimony was not of the highest, thought that bachelors were more likely to be "cruel and hard hearted (good to make severe inquisitors), because their tenderness is not so oft called upon."²⁵¹ Two centuries later, such thoughts were commonplace. Women were "designed by Nature to soften the Ruggedness" of men.²⁵² For Francis Douglas, the natural charm of woman "calls forth, even in the soul of the meanest clown, sensations the most tender and agreeable".²⁵³ Sidney Smith wrote that "we turn to women for the best spectacle this

²⁴⁹Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth 1967), p. 160.

²⁵⁰Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Graham Petrie (Harmondsworth 1967), p. 57.

²⁵¹Francis Bacon, *Essayes or Counsellis Civill & Morall* (1628), ed. Oliphant Smeaton (London 1906), p. 23.

²⁵²Philogamos, *The Present State of Matrimony*, p. 27.

²⁵³Francis Douglas, *Reflections on Celibacy and Marriage* (London 1771), p. 24.

world can afford of purity, innocence and peace".²⁵⁴ With the Evangelical revival, women became closely identified with godliness.²⁵⁵

Such ideas culminated in the extravagance of nineteenth-century views on women. Charles Kingsley spoke of "woman's divine vocation, as the priestess of purity, of beauty, and of love". He was careful to note that this vocation was to be achieved "not by renouncing their sex, but by fulfilling it;...by educating their heads for the sake of their hearts, not their hearts for the sake of their heads".²⁵⁶ If this ideology had feminist implications, it was by virtue of emphasising feminine stereotypes. This is also true of Ruskin's thought on gender, which might be regarded as the classic statement of Victorian sexual ideology. Ruskin asserted "an eternal truth - that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it".²⁵⁷ Even

²⁵⁴Smith, "On the Sin of Adultery", p. 219.

²⁵⁵Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London 1984), p. 126.

²⁵⁶Charles Kingsley, "On English Literature", in *idem., Literary and General Lectures and Essays*, 3rd edn. (London 1898), pp. 245-265, p. 265. Kingsley is thinking within the framework of the traditional moral division of labour, in which "woman ought to be the heart of the man and not the head" (Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *The Life of Adam*, trans. J.S. [London 1659], p.17). Kingsley and his contemporaries, however, were willing to allow a significantly larger role for the "heart".

²⁵⁷John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies. Two Lectures Delivered at Manchester in 1864*, 2nd. edn. (London 1865), pp. 143-4.

women's physical charms, often seen as lures to sin, might be regarded as promoting spiritual values. Ruskin argued that the perfection of female beauty was a major consideration in the education of women, since "it cannot be too powerful, nor shed its sacred light too far".²⁵⁸ If Ruskin's lectures represent the validation of womanhood, they also indicate the limits within which feminine moral worth was to operate. It is men who are the doers in Ruskin's world, and the role of a woman is merely to inspire men to greatness: "Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest".²⁵⁹ The price that a woman pays for this "great function" is that "She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation".²⁶⁰ Women, moreover, carry the ultimate responsibility for all the suffering of this world: "There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered".²⁶¹ This projection of responsibility for men's actions onto women did not provoke an indignant rejection by them. On the contrary, it was adopted by the

²⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

²⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 186.

feminists of the late nineteenth century, who translated the duty to hinder into a right to be heard.²⁶²

VI

Knox's attack on *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* was an unfortunate blunder which few people after 1558 would be willing to repeat; nevertheless, the theoretical perception of Elizabeth I's reign conformed to the model of female subordination. Sir Thomas Smith believed that it was necessary for queens regnant to have "the counsell of such able and discreet men as be able to supplie all other defaultes".²⁶³ A century later, Lucy Hutchinson fondly believed that "the felicity of [Elizabeth's] reign was the effect of her submission to her masculine and wise Councillors".²⁶⁴ The historian may well suspect that Burghley's perception of his queen's submissiveness differed from Hutchinson's.²⁶⁵ In this case we may apply

²⁶²The Puritans had also indulged in "a certain sentimentalizing of the role of the woman both as wife and mother"; Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints. A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, paperback edn. (New York 1976), p. 192. The Puritans' emphasis on patriarchal authority, however, precluded the development of even a sentimental feminism, and made their concept of women's role (in Walzer's words) much more clearly an aspect "of repression, softening its impact, perhaps, but deepening its effects".

²⁶³Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. M. Dewar (Cambridge 1982), pp. 64-5.

²⁶⁴Hutchinson, *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, p. 48.

²⁶⁵Elizabeth, of course, turned her femininity to good account, converting "her reign through the perpetual love-tricks that passed between her and her people into a kind of romance"; James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (London 1887), p. 60. In the "Cult of Elizabeth", the

the Hermetic principle "as above, so below": throughout society, there was a rift between precept and practice.²⁶⁶ Whatever might be said about women's subordination in ideological pronouncements, it is clear that there were a number of contexts, from work and leisure to social protests, in which women could develop an independent voice.²⁶⁷ Women might even use perceptions of their moral weakness or irrationality to empower themselves. Their role in popular disturbances may have been due partly to a tacit legal immunity derived from their acknowledged

Queen astutely made her greatest disadvantage into one of her greatest assets. See Elkin Calhoun Wilson, *England's Eliza* (1939; New York 1976); J. Hurstfield, "Queen and State: the Emergence of an Elizabethan Myth", in J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossman eds., *Britain and the Netherlands*, vol. v (1975); Alison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power", *Signs* i, 1 (Autumn 1975), pp. 31-55; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth. Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London 1977); Robin Headlam Wells, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth* (London 1983); Constance Jordan, "Representing Political Androgyny: More on the Sienna Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I", in Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky eds., *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print. Counterbalancing the Canon* (Amherst 1990), pp. 157-176.

²⁶⁶This is not intended as an endorsement of Ferdinand Mount's view that the ideological prescriptions of Church and State had no bearing on the family or gender relations as experienced by "ordinary" people; see Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family. An Alternative History of Love and Marriage* (London 1982). On the contrary, such prescriptions had been internalized to such an extent that, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, people adjusted their perceptions of reality to accord with these ideological imperatives. This was the case with the cult of Elizabeth; another example, discussed earlier, is the image of the nineteenth-century prostitute.

²⁶⁷R.A. Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life and Common Action in England from the Fifteenth-Century to the Eve of the Civil War", *Continuity and Change* i, 2 (1986), pp. 171-189.

irresponsibility.²⁶⁸ That most seventeenth-century charivaris were concerned with female subversion of male authority suggests the impossibility of subordinating women to the ideologically required degree.²⁶⁹

Writers like Anthony Ascham might claim that a man was sovereign in his own house, but popular opinion held different views on the *de facto* distribution of power between the sexes. Writers in the seventeenth century frequently passed comment on the "frowardness" of women. Middleton observed that it is "th'upper hand...Which women strive for most".²⁷⁰ Such remarks were no doubt intended to solicit censorious agreement, but writers also allowed their characters to voice relatively liberal views with regard to female subordination. "Marriage is but a chopping and changing", quips Middleton and Dekker's *Roaring Girl*, "where a maiden loses one head and has a worse i'th'place".²⁷¹ Marston's *Crispinella* denounced the

²⁶⁸The law with regard to women's responsibility was ambiguous; see Houlbrooke, "Women's Social Life and Common Action", pp. 181 ff.; Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts. Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1604* (Oxford 1988), pp. 96-7. According to John Bohstedt, in the late eighteenth century, women rioters were as likely to be punished as men, "Gender, Household and Community Politics", *Past and Present* 120 (August 1988), pp. 88-122.

²⁶⁹Martin Ingram, "Ridings, Rough Music and the 'Reform of Popular Culture'", *Past and Present* 105 (November 1984), pp. 79-113, pp. 86, 97.

²⁷⁰Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, III:ii:208-9.

²⁷¹Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, II:i:43-4.

way in which a man becomes "a stiff, crooked, knobby, inflexible, tyrannous creature" after marriage, and thought that "our husbands, because they may and we must, care not for us".²⁷² Both Crispinella and the Roaring Girl are sympathetic characters; their views were not to be taken as merely the ludicrous outpourings of unruly females. English writers also commented, with a mixture of regret and pride, on the peculiar degree of freedom enjoyed by English women. One of Middleton's characters observes that Italians keep their wives "under lock and key: we Englishmen are careless creatures".²⁷³ Fielding's Mrs. Western told her brother that English women were "not to be locked up like the Spanish and Italian wives", having as much right to liberty as English men.²⁷⁴ "It is a proverb abroad", asserted Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose, "that if a bridge were built across the sea, all the Ladies of the Continent would come over to take pattern from ours".²⁷⁵

²⁷²Marston, *Dutch Courtesan*, III:i:69; IV:i:38. Marston's main point, however, may be the sexual double *entendre* rather than Crispinella's complaint.

²⁷³Middleton, *A Mad World*, I:ii:23-4.

²⁷⁴Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 296.

²⁷⁵Goldsmith, *Vicar of Wakefield*, p. 84. The remark had been made as early as 1686 by an Italian called Gemelli, cited in Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth*, p. 105. Only Dutchwomen could rival the Englishwomen's reputation for freedom, the prosperity of the United Provinces being widely regarded as due partly to the relatively high status granted them; see e.g. Makin, *An Essay*, pp. 28, 35; Sir Josiah Child, *A New Discourse of Trade* (London 1693), pp. 4-5; A Lady, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London 1696), p. 35.

These beliefs, insofar as they are more than mere prejudices, indicate a sort of domestic feminism, making no great ideological claims on behalf of women, but insisting on the practical recognition of women's voice. The same might be said of the advocacy in domestic ideology of the wife's role as counsellor and confidante.²⁷⁶ Vives had asserted that a wife should be "a most faithful secretary of [her husband's] cares and thoughts, in doubtful matters a wise and hearty counsellor".²⁷⁷ Lucy Hutchinson echoed Vives' words when she described herself as "the faithful depository of all [Colonel Hutchinson's] secrets".²⁷⁸ Agrippa thought that a wife should be held "in all trust and counsail", treated "not as a drudge, but as maystresse of the house".²⁷⁹

By the eighteenth century, the philosophical foundations of a more robust feminism were being laid, but it was long before the edifice itself rose to completion. There was, for example, the Romantic re-evaluation of nature.²⁸⁰ Given the symbolic connection which has always

²⁷⁶Edmund Leites (*The Puritan Conscience*, p. 119) argues that the role of wife as counsellor became more important with the Protestant rejection of confession.

²⁷⁷Cited in P.N. Siegel, "Milton and the Humanist Attitude to Women", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xi, 1 (1950), pp. 42-53, p. 49.

²⁷⁸Hutchinson, *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, p. 7.

²⁷⁹Agrippa, *Commendation of Matrimony*, sigs. C2v-C3r.

²⁸⁰Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, is an excellent introduction to changing attitudes to nature. If the Romantics were to inherit much of the occult understanding

existed between women and nature,²⁸¹ this in itself may be significant; as Mircea Eliade has observed, "The sacrality of woman depends upon the holiness of the earth".²⁸² It is perhaps no coincidence that for the Romantics both Woman and Nature were pathways to the sublime. Nature, moreover, was increasingly substituting for God in early modern thought. The author of *Letters on Love, Marriage, and Adultery* appeals throughout to "the pleasing and beneficent dispositions of nature".²⁸³ True, this writer belongs to a radical Enlightenment culture, hailing "the glorious revolution in France", and showing sympathy for deism and anticlericalism.²⁸⁴ But the same appeal to nature can be found in other, less radical writers. The Earl of Warrington thought that "Nature" gave women responsibility for "the Care and Education of Children", and that women were "by Nature appointed to a more

of the natural world, the rise of scientific discourse was to lead simultaneously to a new desacralization of nature. This is a theme explored provocatively in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature. The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (1968), paperback edn. (London 1990).

²⁸¹See, for example, Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", in Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere eds., *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, Ca. 1974).

²⁸²Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (San Diego 1959), p. 144. Similarly, June McDaniel has argued that immanent religions accord women a higher status than transcendental ones; June McDaniel, "The Embodiment of God among the Bauls of Bengal", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, viii, 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 27-39, p. 38.

²⁸³Anonymous, *Letters on Love, Marriage, and Adultery*, p. 67 and *passim*.

²⁸⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 2, 52 ff.

Domestick Life" than men.²⁸⁵ Philogamos observed that marriage was "as old as the Origin of our Being"; but where a seventeenth-century writer would probably have referred to marriage as God's first ordinance, Philogamos sees it as "one of the most sacred Laws of Nature".²⁸⁶ Nature in the eighteenth century, like God in the seventeenth, was the upholder of various anti-feminist stereotypes. Nature, however, was an area which ultimately could be contested; the anti-feminism of the Bible, on the other hand, could only be accepted or ignored. The appeal to nature was inherently less confining to women than the appeal to God.

Thought about the political relationship of the sexes was ultimately to be transformed by the growing ideology of "possessive individualism" and its concomitant, the victory of contract theory over patriarchalism.²⁸⁷ For Thomas Salmon, "no Man can say that this or that particular Woman is subject to him, until she has made herself so by Compact".²⁸⁸ Salmon's opinion can be traced back to Locke's attack on patriarchalism in *Two Treatises*

²⁸⁵George Booth, Earl of Warrington, *Considerations upon the Institution of Marriage* (London 1739), p. 7.

²⁸⁶Philogamos, *Present State of Matrimony*, p. 1.

²⁸⁷On possessive individualism, see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford 1964); on the decline of patriarchalism after c. 1690, see Gordon J. Schochet, *The Authoritarian Family and Political Attitudes in Seventeenth-Century England*, 2nd. edn. (New Brunswick 1988), ch. 14.

²⁸⁸Salmon, *Critical Essay Concerning Marriage*, p. 73.

of Government (1689-90). For Locke, the injunction on Eve was not a grant of authority to Adam, but simply a prediction of her subjection.²⁸⁹ Like Hobbes, Locke believed that women had a greater title to dominion if generation was the criterion employed.²⁹⁰ Marriage is "a voluntary Compact between Man and Woman".²⁹¹ Yet the full implications of possessive individualism and contract theory were not immediately apparent. Locke, for example, believed that since "the Rule should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the Man's share, as the abler and stronger".²⁹² It was to be another two centuries before the political philosophy of the sexes caught up with the political philosophy of the state.

There were, however, already demands being made on behalf of women. As Coryl Crandall has suggested, "The Swetnam controversy reflects very well a transition from a previous literary obsession with praise or dispraise of woman *qua* woman to a concern with woman's mundane stature as a partner of man". While Swetnam's *Arraignment* was preoccupied with asserting the superiority of men, the replies it provoked were concerned with establishing a

²⁸⁹John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge 1967), p. 192.

²⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 198; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth 1968), p. 254.

²⁹¹Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 357.

²⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 339.

degree of equality.²⁹³ "We are as freeborn as men", declared the author of *Haec-Vir*, "have as free election and as free spirits, are compounded of like parts and may with like liberty make benefits of our Creation".²⁹⁴ Such rhetoric was deceptive, and the "equality" proposed was extremely limited, centring on demands for wider educational opportunities for women. Linked with these demands was the assertion that women were not the whores men took them for, but essentially passionless beings. In order to claim the attainments of the mind, women first had to deny the demands of their bodies.

The call for improved female education was not made primarily in terms of the benefits accruing to women themselves. It was to enable them to better serve their husbands in all the offices of life that humanists and their Protestant successors advocated the education of women.²⁹⁵ Elyot's Zenobia justifies her own learning in this way:

[D]urynge the lyfe of my noble husbände of
famouse memory, I was never harde or sene, say
or do any thyng, which mought not contente hym,

²⁹³Coryl Crandall, "Introduction" to *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*, p. 3. On the *Swetnam* controversy, see Ann Rosalind Jones, "Counter-Attacks on 'the Bayter of Women'. Three Pamphleteers of the Early Seventeenth Century", in Haselkorn and Travitsky eds., *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*, pp. 45-62.

²⁹⁴Anonymous, *Haec-Vir*, p. 284.

²⁹⁵Cf. Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples. Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana 1982), p. 40.

or omytte any thyng, which shulde delite
hym.²⁹⁶

This was a note which, with varying degrees of sycophancy, can be found throughout the writings of those who wished to improve women's lot, from Christine de Pisan²⁹⁷ down to and including Mary Wollstonecraft. Time and again, those who championed women's right to education disavowed any ambition to subvert the established order between the sexes. "My intention is not to equalise Women to Men", declared Bathsua Pell Makin, "much less to make them superior".²⁹⁸ Even in terms of intellectual attainment, the aims of these so-called "first feminists" were extremely limited. "The very Make and Temper of our Bodies", according to one woman, "demonstrate that we are chiefly intended for Thought and the Exercise of the Mind". Nevertheless, religion, business, "Points of Learning, abstruse Speculations, and nice Politicks" were all unsuitable subjects for mixed conversation.²⁹⁹ Even

²⁹⁶Elyot, *Defence of Good Women*, p. 58.

²⁹⁷Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (London 1983). Christine's book established the broad outlines of "feminist" writing for over three centuries. For a moderate defence of its "plausible kind of feminism", see Beatrice Gottlieb, "The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century", in Julius Krishner and Suzanne F. Wimple eds., *Women of the Medieval World. Essays in Honour of John H. Mundy* (Oxford 1985), pp. 337-364.

²⁹⁸Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*, p. 29.

²⁹⁹A Lady, *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex* (London 1696), pp. 36, 51.

the redoubtable Mary Astell did not advocate women's entry into public life.³⁰⁰

This way of thinking was inherited by Mary Wollstonecraft; if Wollstonecraft is indeed the mother of modern feminism, it is by virtue of being the offspring of the "Enlightenment domesticity" of the eighteenth century.³⁰¹ The radicalism of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has been generally exaggerated by both her contemporary critics and her later admirers. The *Vindication* is part of a centuries-old tradition whose main demand was for a cultural rather than a political emancipation of women.³⁰² Apart from reiterated remarks on the need for economic independence, there is only one passage in Wollstonecraft's work which goes beyond the traditional advocacy of wider educational opportunities, by "dropping a hint...that women ought to have representatives".³⁰³ Like her earlier works,³⁰⁴ the

³⁰⁰J.K. Kinnaird, "Mary Astell: Inspired by Ideas", in Dale Spender ed., *Feminist Theorists* (London 1983), p. 35.

³⁰¹This "distinctive culture of rational friendship" which "stressed sociality over sexuality" is discussed in Irene Q. Brown, "Domesticity, Feminism and Friendship: Female Aristocratic Culture and Marriage in England, 1660-1760", *Journal of Family History* 7 (Winter 1982), pp. 406-424. Brown argues that although the aristocracy were to abandon this domesticity, the middle-classes were to inherit it.

³⁰²Cf. A.H. Upham, "English Femmes Savantes at the end of the Seventeenth Century", *Journal of German and English Philology* 12 (1913), pp. 262-276, p. 276.

³⁰³Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, pp. 259-60. The "hint" is apparently confined to "women of a superior cast".

Vindication is concerned primarily with education. This is, moreover, a class-specific concern. Wollstonecraft proposes that girls of the lower orders should be instructed in traditionally female occupations, "plain work, mantua-making, millinery, etc."³⁰⁵ The heroine of Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* declared that "The marriage state is certainly that in which women, generally speaking, can be most useful".³⁰⁶ If Wollstonecraft laments that "The few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial",³⁰⁷ it is not because she wishes to release women from the domestic sphere or abolish the sexual division of labour in general, but merely to open up some liberal professions to middle-class women.

The central idea behind Wollstonecraft's work is that women are rational beings and should be treated accordingly. Far from being "an attack on the idea of femininity",³⁰⁸ the *Vindication* is founded on the same

³⁰⁴*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1786), *The Female Reader* (1789), and a fragment of a book of *Letters on the Management of Infants*. I have consulted only the selections from these works in Janet M. Todd ed., *A Wollstonecraft Anthology* (Bloomington 1977).

³⁰⁵Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 287.

³⁰⁶Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), in Gary Kelly ed., *Maria and the Wrongs of Woman* (Oxford 1976), p. 157.

³⁰⁷*Ibid.*,

³⁰⁸Margaret Walters, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, Simone de Beauvoir", in Juliet Mitchell and Annie Oakley eds., *The*

Romantic notion of femininity which formed the basis of Victorian sexual ideology. As Cora Kaplan has argued, Wollstonecraft "is arguably as interested in developing a class sexuality for a radical, reformed bourgeoisie, as in producing an analysis of woman's subordination and a manifesto of her rights".³⁰⁹ As with her predecessors, the insistence on women's rationality is accompanied by the dissociation of women from sexuality. Wollstonecraft tells us that "women are more chaste than men", and that "men are certainly more under the influence of their appetites than women".³¹⁰ She believes that "indecent allusions" are bad enough when made in anyone's presence, but worse when made before women, "for then it is a brutality".³¹¹ Women's sexuality, as represented in the *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, is passive: "It has ever occurred to me, that it was sufficient for a woman to receive caresses, and not bestow them".³¹²

Wollstonecraft's life was not free from sexual scandal; nevertheless, the structure of her ideas is surprisingly

Rights and Wrongs of Women (1976), pp. 304-378, p. 305. William Godwin stressed Wollstonecraft's femininity and rational domesticity throughout his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London 1798).

³⁰⁹Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights: Pleasure/ Sexuality/ Feminism", in *idem.*, *Sea Changes. Essays on Culture and Feminism* (1968).

³¹⁰Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, pp. 231, 247.

³¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 232.

³¹²Todd ed., *A Wollstonecraft Anthology*, p. 36.

similar to that of her Evangelical critic, Hannah More.³¹³ For both, the desexualization of women functioned as an empowerment by limiting the legitimate area of male sexuality. Wollstonecraft is in fact one of the great exponents of the Romantic notion of woman, concerned more with establishing her sex's moral influence than with seizing political power on their behalf. Nevertheless, in her work we find the faint dawning of a new age: the "hint" that women's moral influence might one day shine forth in the political sphere.

VII

"The Love of Voluptuousness", opined the author of *Onania*, "is inconsistent with Spiritual Delights".³¹⁴ It follows from such a belief that women's presumed sexual voraciousness was a major bar to their ability to be taken seriously as moral beings. The historical process we have observed in the early modern understanding of gender has two salient features: the desexualization of women and the validation of their moral, intellectual and spiritual status. Both in effect may be reduced to a reversal of the traditional association of the female with flesh and the male with spirit. In some ways, women were to benefit from this process. J.M. Beattie has argued that women's increasing willingness to prosecute for rape in the eighteenth century may have reflected greater sympathy for

³¹³For More, see Cott, "Victorian Sexual Ideology".

³¹⁴Anonymous, *Onania*, p. 24.

them in the courts as a result of their revised moral status.³¹⁵ The revaluation of women's moral worth did not entirely abolish their special relationship to the realm of evil, however; the Virgin and the Whore were the polar extremes to which women were conformed, admitting no middle ground. Francis Douglas tells us that

While under the influence of virtue and principle [woman is] the most amiable, and most respected part of the creation; unrestrained by these, and the rein given to her passions, the meanest, and most despised of all rational beings.³¹⁶

Women are "the most refined part of this lower Creation", wrote Philogamos, but "when they are wicked, generally exceed the men".³¹⁷ With regard to the public status of the sexes, the significance of the revision in the moral status of womanhood is ambiguous. It was recognized that women had a valuable contribution to make, but this contribution was limited in scope as the secularisation of society expelled the spiritual from the public sphere. The continued insistence on the passivity of the feminine was a further limitation on the potential of women. If women's virtue was a means of empowerment, inspiring the emergence of modern feminism, it was also a means of constriction;

³¹⁵J.M. Beattie, *Crime and Courts*, p. 130. The courts' growing sympathy for women is also indicated by their disregard of the Infanticide Act of 1624 and the "stiffening penalties" for wife-beating, *ibid.*, pp. 118, 136.

³¹⁶Douglas, *Reflections on Celibacy and Marriage*, p. 75.

³¹⁷Philogamos, *The Present State of Matrimony*, pp. 2, 10.

Christine de Pisan's citadel for ladies all too easily became a prison. Ferguson has argued that Jane Anger "forged a path that led to Behn, who was the first to maintain that women were legitimate heirs to their own sexuality".³¹⁸ This may be true of the exceptional Aphra Behn, but those writers who have most claim to the title of "first feminists" were seeking to deny rather than legitimate female sexuality.

Parallel to the desexualization of women, there was also a marginalization. Domestic ideology in the seventeenth century insisted on the high responsibilities of all women as their husband's helpmeets. The family, thought Sir Thomas Smith, was an "Aristocratia" in which "sometime and in some thing one, and sometime and in some thing another doth beare the rule".³¹⁹ This view had some credibility in an age in which public and private spheres and male and female roles were inextricably linked. In the seventeenth century, the vast majority of women played an important economic role, beyond that which Marxists call "reproducing the labour force". As one satirist put it, "a Woman who is married to a Shopkeeper is as it were also wedded to the Counter".³²⁰ By the end of the eighteenth

³¹⁸Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists. British Women Writers, 1578-1799* (Bloomington 1985), p. 10.

³¹⁹Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 59.

³²⁰T. Marsh [Aphra Behn?], *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage and the New Married Couple*, ed. J. Harvey (London 1922), p. 150.

century, the women of the *élite* had withdrawn from active participation in the economic sphere, and the women of the lower orders were beginning to aspire to a similar domestic destiny for themselves.³²¹ Girls were taught that their highest values lay in "service and self-sacrifice",³²² but these values were now firmly embedded in a domestic context. Willingly or otherwise, women of the *élite* were to find their highest good in what Sidney Smith called "the ordinary circle of frivolous amusement".³²³

³²¹Olive Schreiner, *Women and Labour* (1911, London 1978). Schreiner's work contains little in the way of documentation, a task which was left to her disciple, Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919, London 1982). See also Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930, London 1981); Eric Richards, "Women and the British Economy since about 1700", *History* 59 (October 1974), pp. 337-357; Jean Gardiner, "Women's Work in the Industrial Revolution", in S. Allen, L. Sanders and J. Wallis eds., *Conditions of Illusion* (1974); Eric Hobsbawm, "Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography", *History Workshop Journal* 6 (Autumn 1978), pp. 121-138; Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion. The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660* (New York 1987). As Maxine Berg notes, however, women's economic marginalization was partly a process of "women's low-paid cash-earning activities" becoming "increasingly associated with household duties", *The Age of Manufactures. Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (1985), p. 158. For a challenge to Hobsbawm's views on working-class women's aspirations to withdraw from the workplace, see Sally Alexander, Anna Davin and Eve Hoestler, "Labouring Women: a reply to Eric Hobsbawm", *History Workshop Journal* 10 (Autumn 1978), pp. 174-182; cf. Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in London, 1830-1850", in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (1976), pp. 59-111.

³²²Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up*, p. 26.

³²³Smith, "On the Sin of Adultery", p. 218.

As we shall see, English Behmenism reflects the transformation of sexual stereotypes in the early modern period. The Behmenists emphasised the passivity of the feminine. Because of their emphasis on resignation and self-denial, which they regarded as not only prescriptive for man, but also descriptive of God, the Behmenists gave this stereotype a new meaning. The feminine was exalted because of its passivity. In their emphasis on chastity, the Behmenists were to run counter to the tendency for the validation of marital sexuality. This rejection of sexuality was related to a reversal of the traditional male-spirit/female-flesh polarity. The feminine in Behmenist thought was more closely associated with the goal of spiritual endeavour. In the works of Jacob Boehme and his followers, we can discern a first sketch of the Romantic notion of woman.

3. GENDER IN MYSTICAL AND OCCULT THOUGHT

Alongside the masculinist tradition in Judaeo-Christian theology there has always existed a counter-tradition, traces of which can be found as far back as the Old Testament writings. The triumph of Yahweh was accomplished by the assimilation of other deities, rather than their elimination. It seems likely that the divine name El Shaddai in Genesis represents the assimilation of Canaanite fertility goddesses, endowing the God of the pre-Deuteronomic Jews with certain female characteristics.¹ Although this particular tradition was suppressed by the Deuteronomic reforms, there are several passages in the Old Testament in which feminine images are applied to God, most notably in the Wisdom literature. New Testament writers tended to avoid such images, but traces of the feminisation of the deity persisted in Christian thought, especially in the Greek Fathers.² Clement of Alexandria spoke of "the Father's loving breasts" supplying milk to those who "seek the Word".³ Tertullian referred to the Holy Spirit as the Mother in the Trinity.⁴

¹David Biale, "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible", *History of Religions* xx, 3 (February 1982), pp. 240-256.

²Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982), pp. 125-9.

³Cited in Biale, "God with Breasts", p. 256.

⁴Cited in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature 1688-1735", *American Quarterly* 28 (1976), pp. 20-40, p. 35.



While the use of such terms seems to have declined in the early Middle Ages, the twelfth century saw a marked revival of maternal imagery applied to God, most notably in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux.⁵

Apart from this use of feminine images with regard to God, the myth of the androgyne (divine and human) has recurred throughout Judaeo-Christian thought. The duality of divine gender and the original androgyny of humanity are ancient and widespread religious conceptions, symbolising "the perfection of a primordial, non-conditioned state".⁶ The myth of creation in Genesis asserts that both male and female were created in God's image, a text which has led some commentators from the early Talmudic period onwards to believe in the original

⁵Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 113-125. Medieval writers, however, consistently denied the possibility of Christ's incarnation in a female body; see Joan Gibson, "Could Christ Have Been Born A Woman?: A Medieval Debate", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* vii, 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 35-52.

⁶Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries. The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. Philip Mairet (London 1960), pp. 174-5. See also Herbert Silberer, *The Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism*, trans. Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York 1917), pp. 71 ff.; Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God* 4 vols. (London 1960-5), vol. i, pp. 103 ff. The roots of this phenomenon may be found in the fact that the acquisition of gender necessarily involves a psychological loss. As Gayle Rubin has argued, "Far from being the expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities...The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women"; Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", in R. Reiter ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York 1975), p. 180.

androgyny of Adam and the duality of divine gender.⁷ It has been suggested that the idea of an androgynous Adam forms the mythical basis of the baptismal formula cited by Paul in Galatians 3:28.⁸ The androgyny of Christ is a theme which can be found in heterodox Christian thought. The Montanist prophetess Priscilla dreamt of Christ as a female figure.⁹ John Scotus Erigena anticipated Boehme in seeing the Fall as a loss of androgyny which Christ was able to repair because he "united the masculine and the feminine in his single person".¹⁰

The myth of the androgyne was more important in Gnostic thought than in mainstream Christianity, providing the

⁷Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Early Christianity", *History of Religions* xiii, 3 (1974), pp. 165-208, p. 185.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 183 ff. The potentially radical implications of this passage for Christian sexual politics were often dealt with by turning an unflinching blind eye. Both Luther and Calvin comment on the Jew/Gentile antithesis of the passage, but omit all reference to the male/female antithesis. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, *Martin Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 55 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia), vol. xxvi, pp. 353-6; John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh 1965), p. 69.

⁹Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities", in Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1979), pp. 30-70, p. 41.

¹⁰John Scotus Erigena, *De divisione naturae* II:x, cited in M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London 1971), p. 153.

sexual dynamic of the cosmic drama.¹¹ From Gnosticism, the myth passed into the Western occult tradition.¹² It is interesting to observe that one student of Gnosticism has hailed Jacob Boehme as "the new Valentinus", standing "at the origin of the modernization of Gnostic esoteric traditions".¹³ Space does not permit a full discussion of the genealogy of Behmenist thought, but it should be noted that neither historical continuity nor similarity in symbolism constitute an identity between Behmenism and Gnosticism. As Anders Nygren has warned in another context, an "idea or belief may have exactly the same form

¹¹On Gnosticism, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd edn. (London 1992); Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London 1979), especially ch. 3; Stephen A. Hoeller, "Sophia: the Gnostic Archetype of Feminine Soul-Wisdom", in Shirley Nicholson ed., *The Goddess Re-Awakening. The Feminine Principle Today* (Wheaton Ill. 1989), pp. 40-55; Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, trans. Anthony Alcock (Oxford 1990), especially pp. 59 ff. Of the plentiful supply of translated Gnostic texts, those consulted for this study are Robert Haardt ed., *Gnosis, Character and Testimony* (Leiden 1971) and Bentley Layton ed., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London 1987).

¹²The historical continuity of Gnosticism and modern occultism cannot be doubted. Ancient alchemy blossomed in Gnostic circles; Cabalism was clearly of Gnostic provenance; Gnostic thought was preserved in such medieval heresies as those of the Bogomils and the Cathars. In addition to this, the essential source texts of Renaissance occultism, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, were themselves documents of pagan Gnosticism. In these texts we read that God is "Male and female, Life and Light", and that man is an "Hermaphrodite, or Male and Female,...subjected to a Father that is both Male and female" (*The Divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus*, trans. John Everard [London 1650], p. 22).

¹³Filoramo, *History of Gnosticism*, p. xvi.

without having at all the same meaning".¹⁴ If Boehme was a Gnostic, he was a Gnostic standing on his head.¹⁵ Of direct relevance to this study is the generally negative, or at best ambiguous, attitude to the feminine developed by Gnosticism, an attitude bequeathed to much subsequent occult thought. In Justin's *Book of Baruch*, for example, the female divine hypostasis (Eden) is characterised as "wrathful in type" and is symbolised as "a virgin above and a serpent below". It is Eden's anger at her abandonment by the male hypostasis Elohim that introduces sin (specifically adultery and pederasty) into the world.¹⁶ Boehme, on the other hand, developed a generally positive, or at worst ambiguous, attitude to the feminine. The Valentinian Sophia is Sophia Prunikos, Sophia the Whore, who has foolishly forsaken her divine origins to

¹⁴Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London 1982), p. 35.

¹⁵Both Gnosticism and Behmenism, for example, emphasise the utter transcendence of the godhead, and both evolved complex emanational systems. The whole function of the Gnostic Aeons is precisely to preserve God's transcendence intact by placing him at the greatest possible remove from this world (Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, pp. 51-4.). Boehme's "fountain spirits" perform exactly the opposite function: they show how the transcendent godhead becomes manifest in and through the world. Boehme wrote that "Thou wilt find no better book, in which the Divine Wisdom can be found, than a green and blooming meadow" (*Concerning the Three Principles* [London 1648], 8:12). There can be no greater contrast to the anti-cosmic revolt of Gnosticism.

¹⁶Haardt ed., *Gnosis*, pp. 108-9, 112-3. The serpent was also an alchemical symbol for the *prima materia* or Chaos, which corresponds to Justin's Eden. The sexual cosmogony of the *Book of Baruch* is discussed in Robert M. Grant, "Gnosis Revisited", *Church History* xxiii, 1 (March 1954), pp. 36-45.

wallow in the mire of this world.¹⁷ Boehme's Sophia is a "heavenly Virgin" who has abandoned man because of his adulterous dalliance with the world. Boehme's achievement in occult thought on gender was precisely this revised attitude to the feminine. It was an achievement based on blending various discourses available to him: medieval Mariology and mysticism, Cabala and alchemy.

I. Mariology

The High Middle Ages witnessed a marked growth in the cult of female saints. In the late eleventh century, barely a tenth of the saints were women; by the early fifteenth century, this proportion had risen to nearly a third.¹⁸ One female Saint stood out above all others: the Virgin Mary. The cult of the Virgin had provided a feminine gloss to medieval Christianity. As Marina Warner has observed in this context, "a[ny] goddess is better than no goddess at all" for those who find an exclusively masculine face of divinity too severe.¹⁹ The Reformation had led to a decline in Mariological fervour in Northern Europe,²⁰ but

¹⁷Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp. 176-7.

¹⁸Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 137.

¹⁹Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London 1976), p. 338.

²⁰Hilda Graef, *Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (London 1963-4), vol. ii, ch. 1. Seventeenth-century Anglicans were not entirely devoid of Mariological interests, but their concern focused more on Mary as a guarantor of the Incarnation (that God had indeed become "true man") than on the person of Mary herself. See A.M. Allchin, *The Joy of All Creation. An Anglican Meditation on the Place of Mary* (London 1984).

the cult of the Virgin was nevertheless important for Behmenist speculation. Much Behmenist thought on gender can be interpreted as an attempt to fill the emotional vacuum created by the decline of Mariological piety. More specifically, it is probable that the imagery and beliefs associated with the Virgin Mary were exploited by Boehme and his followers in constructing their own system.²¹

From the time of Justin Martyr (d. c. 165 A.D), it had been a commonplace that Mary was the second Eve, restoring to humanity what the first Eve had forfeited.²² "In her was restored what had been lost in Paradise", Tauler asserted, "that noble Image which the Father had fashioned after His likeness and which was destroyed by sin".²³ Boehme applies this conception of the Virgin Mary to Christ and the Virgin Sophia, who was the "noble Image" forfeited at the Fall. Even closer to Boehme's understanding of Sophia is Mechtild of Magdeburg's treatment of Mary as a sort of "preëxistent humanity of Christ".²⁴ Some medieval churchmen thought that Mary governed the realm of mercy, while Christ ruled that of justice: the Virgin's intercession was necessary to turn

²¹Cf. Peter Erb's "Introduction" to his translation of Boehme's *The Way to Christ* (New York 1978), p. 277 n.

²²Cf. Graef, *Mary*, vol. i, pp. 37 ff.

²³Johannes Tauler, *Sermons*, trans. Maria Shrader (New York 1985), p. 158.

²⁴Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 233.

aside Christ's wrath.²⁵ A fourteenth-century Franciscan *Exemplum* asserts that Mary "like a mother, will come between thee and Christ, the father who wishes to beat us".²⁶ Mary here plays a role in relation to Christ which Boehme's Christ plays in relation to the Father.

At times, medieval Mariology almost deifies the Virgin. In the thirteenth century, Richard of St. Laurent applied to the Virgin scriptural texts which were proper to the Father: "Our Mother who art in heaven", he prays, "give us our daily bread".²⁷ As Jung observed, Mariology added "a fourth, feminine principle to the masculine Trinity",²⁸ and there was an almost conscious impulse towards the creation of a quaternity involving Mary as its fourth Person. Peter of Celle (d. 1183) addressed the Virgin in this way: "If the Trinity admitted in any way of an external quaternity, you alone would complete the quaternity".²⁹ As we shall see, the Virgin Sophia performs much the same function in Boehme's godhead.

Interest in Mary seems to have been particularly prominent among male writers, medieval women religious

²⁵Graef, *Mary*, vol. i, pp. 171 ff.

²⁶Cited in Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 285.

²⁷Cited in Graef, *Mary*, vol. i, p. 266.

²⁸C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 2nd edn., trans. R.F.C. Hull (London 1989), p. 496.

²⁹Cited in Graef, *Mary*, vol. i, p. 253.

writers preferring the image of Christ the Bridegroom.³⁰ Male Mariology might therefore be regarded as a substitute for *Brautmystik*, and in some aspects of medieval Mariology a highly erotic imagery was developed.³¹ Bernardine of Sienna speaks as if the Incarnation was the result of God's falling in love with a beautiful and seductive young woman, rather than part of a great divine plan for the redemption of humanity: "One girl, I do not know by what caresses, pledges or violence, seduced, deceived and, if I may say so, wounded and enraptured the divine heart".³² The erotic aspects of the cult of the Virgin were heightened in the Middle Ages by the fusion of secular and religious love lyrics.³³ One twelfth-century Latin poem on the *Maria lactans* theme addresses Mary in the following words: "Your breasts are fragrant as wine; their whiteness whiter than milk and lilies, their scent lovelier than flowers and balsam wood".³⁴ Such erotic sensibilities were transferred by some Behmenists to the Virgin Sophia, facilitating the characteristically Behmenist reversal of mystical sex roles.

³⁰Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 140.

³¹Graef, *Mary*, vol. i, pp. 247 ff.

³²Cited *ibid.*, p. 317.

³³Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 149 ff.

³⁴Cited *ibid.*, p. 192.

II. The Mystical Tradition

We know that Boehme moved in circles that were thoroughly versed in Christian mysticism, and it was partly in the light of this tradition that his followers understood his ideas.³⁵ The list of names given by Abraham von Frankenberg, Boehme's disciple and first biographer, to place his writings in context includes such figures as Pseudo-Dionysius, Tauler, Ruysbroek and Cusanus.³⁶ Similarly, Boehme's English translator, John Sparrow, traced the achievements of the Reformation back to the "*Theologia Germanica*, and Taulerus his Sermons".³⁷ Boehme may have been introduced to this tradition by Martin Moller, in whose Conventicle of the Real Servants of God Boehme took part. Moller, who was Primarius of Görlitz from 1600 until his death in 1606, was himself a mystical writer whose works included an anthology of texts from earlier mystics.³⁸ Precisely how important this mystical tradition was as a source for Boehme's ideas is uncertain. There is a tendency for some commentators to emphasise his independence from earlier mystical thought. It is claimed,

³⁵Boehme was to play a pivotal role in the evolution of medieval mysticism into German Idealism; see Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Allison Park, Pennsylvania, 1968), esp. pp. 10-14.

³⁶Abraham von Frankenberg, "Gründlicher und Wahrhafter Bericht", in *De Vita et Scriptis Jacobi Boehmii* (n.p. 1730), section 20.

³⁷Preface to *Boehme's Concerning the Election of Grace* (London 1655), sigs. A7v-A8r.

³⁸John Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity. A Study of Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia 1957), p. 50.

for example, that medieval mysticism aspired to the negation of the self, while Boehme sought to preserve human personality in the union with God.³⁹ Boehme was, nevertheless, linked to medieval mysticism in his conception of sin as a turning away from God through self-will, and of redemption as involving a conforming of the will to God's.

Within the mystical tradition, erotic imagery has often been used to describe the soul's union with God, a usage based on such texts as the Song of Solomon, Matthew 25:6 and Ephesians 5:22. Origen had been concerned to avoid sexual references in expounding the theme of Christian love, preferring the term *agape* to *eros* for this reason. The Pseudo-Dionysius, however, had asserted that *eros* was a higher form of love than *agape*, and it was from this Pseudo-Dionysian tradition that Western mysticism was to grow.⁴⁰ The erotic overtones of much mystical writing are inescapable. Rupert of Deutz related his vision of Christ in this way:

I took hold of him whom my soul loved. I held him, I embraced him, I kissed him for a long time. I felt how deeply he appreciated this sign of love when in the midst of the kiss he opened

³⁹Alexandre Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (Paris 1929), p. 315; Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity*, pp. 300-4.

⁴⁰Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford 1981), pp. 67, 173.

his mouth so that I could kiss him more deeply.⁴¹

Gertrude of Helfta addressed Christ as a "Most ardent lover,/ Sweetest spouse,/ Most pure pursuer".⁴² The imagery of Mechtild of Magdeburg (1207-1282) is thoroughly steeped in the idiom of profane love. Expressing the transience of mystical experience, her words recall the custom of night visiting: "Where two lovers come secretly together, they must often part without parting".⁴³ In words which are redolent of the chase as an erotic image, Mechtild's Love tells the soul that

I hunted thee for my pleasure,
I caught thee for my desire,
I bound thee for my joy,
Thy wounds have made me one,
My cunning blows, me thine.⁴⁴

"Love seems to be working violently in the soul", Beatrijs of Nazareth (c. 1200-1268) tells us, "relentless,

⁴¹Cited in Bernard McGinn, "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism", in Steven T. Katz ed., *Mysticism and Language* (New York 1992), pp. 202-235, p. 203. Cf. Thomas Michael Tomasic, "Neoplatonism and the Mysticism of William of St. Thierry", in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany, New York, 1984), pp. 53-76, p. 74.

⁴²Cited in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 188.

⁴³Mechtild of Magdeburg, "The Flowing Light of the Godhead", trans. Lucy Menzies, in Elizabeth Petroff ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York 1986), pp. 212-221, p. 220. For a study of eroticism in the works of Mechtild, Hadewijch of Anvers and Beatrijs of Nazareth, see Ulrike Wiethaus, "Sexuality, Gender and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* viii, 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 83-103; also Georgette Epiney-Burgard, "Hadewijch d'Anvers, Mechtilde de Magdebourg. Thèmes communs", *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 66 (March-June 1992), pp. 71-87.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 214.

uncontrollable, drawing everything into it and devouring it".⁴⁵ Meister Eckhart wrote that Christ's birth within us was the result of God's kissing the soul: "there mouth comes to mouth: there the Father gives birth to the Son in the soul".⁴⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux had written that Christ's kiss was so potent "that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness of conception".⁴⁷

Brautmystik seems to have been more characteristic of women writers than of men⁴⁸ and nuptial imagery is conspicuously absent from the mystical works which Boehme was most likely to have encountered personally, Tauler's and Eckhart's sermons and the *Theologia Germanica*.⁴⁹ Bridal imagery was commonly used in religious writing, as when Thomas à Kempis advises the soul to "prepare your heart for your Divine Spouse",⁵⁰ but the image is not

⁴⁵Beatrijs of Nazareth, "There Are Seven Manners of Loving", trans. Eric Colledge, in Petroff ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, pp. 200-206, p. 203.

⁴⁶Meister Eckhart, *Breakthrough. Master Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, trans. M. Fox (New York 1980), p. 59.

⁴⁷Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 9 on the Song of Songs, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, Michigan 1976), vol. ii, p. 58.

⁴⁸Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 140.

⁴⁹The frequency of erotic imagery in mystical texts may have been exaggerated; cf. Mary Anita Ewer, *A Survey of Mystical Symbolism* (London 1933), p. 132.

⁵⁰Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth 1952), p. 67.

elaborated. Even Ruysbroek's *Spiritual Espousals*, an exposition of Matthew 25:6, fails to provide any truly erotic passages.⁵¹ It is nevertheless significant that Boehme's mentor, Martin Moller, wrote a text employing erotic imagery. Boehme's own eroticism should also be seen in the context of the remarkable flowering of bridal mysticism in seventeenth-century Germany, most notably among the followers of Johann Arndt.⁵² This Arndtian eroticism suggests that Boehme's work reflects widespread psychological and social forces in early modern Germany.

The image of Christ the Bridegroom was frequently used in seventeenth-century England. Often it appears as a mere Biblical figure of speech. The tracts on the theme by Thomas Draxe and Richard Sibbes avoid a mystical interpretation of the marriage of Christ and the soul.⁵³ In these works, the emphasis is on Christ's marriage to the Church, a marriage that will be fully consummated only at the Last Judgement: "It is a time of longing here, while wee live. It is the time between the Contract and the Marriage".⁵⁴ This reflects a marked disinclination to

⁵¹John Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, trans James A. Wiseman (New York 1985); cf. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 135.

⁵²F. Ernst Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden 1965), pp. 213-4.

⁵³Thomas Draxe, *The Lambes Spouse, or the Heavenly Bride* (London 1608); Richard Sibbes, *The Brides longing for her Bride-groomes second coming* (London 1638).

⁵⁴Sibbes, *The Brides longing*, p. 94; cf. Draxe, *The Lambes Spouse*, sig. G5v.

elaborate nuptial imagery in mainstream, non-mystical Protestantism. Neither of the great mentors of Protestant Europe showed much interest in the spiritual implications of the bridal image. For Luther, the Song of Songs was not so much an allegory of the Church's relation to God as "an encomium of the political order, which in Solomon's day flourished in sublime peace".⁵⁵ Similarly, the nuptial imagery in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is hardly apparent in Calvin's commentary on Matthew 25, and Ephesians 5:21-8 becomes simply an occasion for discussing the necessity of wifely obedience for salvation.⁵⁶

The mystical aspects of the theme were, however, explored by Francis Rous (1579-1659). Rous's emphasis is on the marriage of the individual soul to Christ, a marriage which can be enjoyed in the present life. Rous's language is frequently erotic, and the author has little concern with disguising this eroticism: "Look on him [Christ] so, that thou mayest lust after him, for here it is a sin, not to look that thou mayest lust, and not to lust having looked".⁵⁷ Rous's book treats the nuptial

⁵⁵Martin Luther, "Lectures on the Song of Songs", in *Works*, vol. xv, pp. 191-264, p. 195.

⁵⁶John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance eds., 3 vols. (Edinburgh 1972), vol. iii, pp. 109-111; *idem.*, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, Torrance and Torrance eds. (Edinburgh 1965), p. 205.

⁵⁷Francis Rous, *The Misticall Marriage, Or, Experimentall Discoveries of the heavenly Marriage betweene a Soule and her Saviour* (London 1653), p. 13.

theme at greater length than earlier mystical writings, including Ruysbroek's inappropriately titled *Spiritual Espousals*. The standard topics of mystical discourse are dealt with: the union with Christ, the "dark night of the soul" when the mystic feels bereft of God, the marks of authentic mystical experience. Rous approaches each of these themes in terms of the nuptial image. The theme of resignation, for example, is understood through the image of widowhood: the soul must be "a widow" to her "old husband" (i.e. "concupiscence") before she can marry Christ.⁵⁸ At times, the relationship between Christ and the soul seems to exemplify the advice of contemporary conduct books. The soul-wife must be obedient, humble, patient; her will "must be melted into the will of the husband", whose needs are given absolute priority.⁵⁹ The tone of Rous's bridal mysticism is as domestic as it is erotic. This perhaps reflects the growing interest in domestic life which is suggested by the popularity of the conduct books themselves. It may also reflect the fact

This eroticism is in marked contrast to some other, genuinely mystical, expositions of the nuptial union of God and the soul. Mary Penington, for example, records a long dream in which she witnessed the mystical marriage. The most remarkable aspect of Penington's account is its sober quality; the service is reminiscent of a Friends' Monthly Meeting, with both Christ and his bride clad in Quaker grey; Mary Penington, *Some Account of Circumstances in the Life of Mary Penington* (London 1821), pp. 37-40. As we shall see, Jane Lead's nuptial mysticism has a similar mundane quality.

⁵⁸Rous, *Misticall Marriage*, pp. 18-19. The Biblical source of this image, Romans 7:1-6, contrasts Christian freedom with the Law rather than flesh with spirit.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 75, 133, 152, 273-4, 276.

that Rous, unlike many earlier mystical writers, had experienced the trials and joys of matrimony for himself. His writings suggest much of the intimacy of married life, as when he says that "in the bed of love" Christ will "murmure things inutterable".⁶⁰

Marriage for Rous is not so much a source of a convenient image as itself an image, instituted in order to express in earthly terms the union between God and the soul. Bunyan was also to make this point; providing a "figure" for understanding the relationship between Christ and the Church was "one of Gods chief ends in instituting Marriage".⁶¹ A similar view is implicit in Draxe's belief that marriage rather than celibacy was "a type of the perfection of eternall life".⁶² Luther had earlier asserted that the union of the faithful with Christ was "the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage".⁶³ Thomas Vaughan gave the spiritual typology of marriage a deeper significance by internalising its reference; marriage pointed to the structure of the individual's being, since it was "a Comment on Life, a meere Hieroglyphick or

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

⁶¹John Bunyan, *Christian Behaviour; Being the Fruits of True Christianity*, 3rd edn 1663, in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, 10 vols. (Oxford 1987), vol. iii, ed. J. Sears McGee, pp. 9-62, p. 27.

⁶²Draxe, *The Lambes Spouse*, sig. G5v.

⁶³Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Works*, vol. 31, pp. 327-77, p. 351.

outward representation of our inward vitall Composition".⁶⁴ This interlocking of religious and domestic discourses transformed both. The paradigmatic spiritual relationship was no longer that of lord and servant or father and child (though both these models continued to flourish), but that of husband and wife: there was a new sense of intimacy in man's relation to God. On the other hand, this was to accord matrimony a sacramental value, paralleling the view that can be found in Cabalist thought that the union of man and wife was an actualization of divine love.

In connection with the English Behmenists, the possibility should be considered of influence not only from the German mystics, but also from English mystics of the fourteenth century. Although Bailey appears to be correct in asserting that the German mystics were better known in seventeenth-century England than their English counterparts,⁶⁵ the writings of this latter group were certainly known in Behmenist circles. The Flemish Behmenist Pierre Poiret, who was in close contact with the English and Scottish mystical movements, owned a copy of

⁶⁴Thomas Vaughan [Eugenius Philalethes], *Anthroposophia Theomagica: Or a Discourse on the Nature of Man and his state after death* (London 1650), pp. 30-31. This idea can also be found in Marsilio Ficino and anticipates one of the hypotheses of Jungian psychology; Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago 1987), pp. 31-2.

⁶⁵Margaret Lewis Bailey, *Milton and Jacob Boehme. A Study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York 1914), p. 32.

The Revelations of Julian of Norwich and was an admirer of her work.⁶⁶ English Behmenists may also have been familiar with this text either in manuscript form or through the first printed edition, edited by Serenus de Cressy in 1670. The most interesting aspect of Julian's work from the point of view of Behmenism was her exposition of the theme of God's Motherhood. In Julian's work, God's relationship to humanity is understood in terms which encompass all the major roles of family life:

And thus I saw that God enjoyeth that he is our fader, and god enjoyeth that he is our moder, and god enjoyeth that he is our very spouse, and our soule his lovyd wyfe. And Christ enjoyeth th[at] he is our broder, and Jh[es]u enjoyeth that he is our saviour.⁶⁷

Christ is the Mother partly because "We have our beying of hym, where the ground of moderhed begynnyth".⁶⁸ Christ's Motherhood also rests on an understanding of his divine nature in terms of gender stereotypes. He is the Mother because he is Love: "All the feyer werkyng and all the swete kyndly officis of dereworthy motherhed is in propred to the seconde person".⁶⁹ Christ's Motherhood is also connected with his identity to the divine Wisdom. He is "the wysdom of the fader", and while "the almyghty truth

⁶⁶Pierre Poiret, *Bibliotheca Mysticorum Selecta* (Amsterdam 1708). Poiret describes Julian's *Revelations* as "Theodactae, profundae, ecstaticae", p. 327.

⁶⁷Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich, Part II: The Long Text* (Toronto 1978), Edmund Colledge and James Walsh eds., p. 546.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 589.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 593.

of the trynyte is oure fader,...the deepe wysdome of the trynite is our moder".⁷⁰ Such an understanding of the godhead is in perfect accord with that of Behmenism.

III. The Cabala

One of the more important sources of Behmenist thought on gender is to be found in the Jewish mystical tradition.⁷¹ The medieval Jewish texts known as the Cabala were to achieve some importance among the intellectuals of Renaissance and early modern Europe.⁷² Pico della Mirandola introduced the Christian interpretation of the Cabala at the close of the fifteenth century, but the most important figure in this respect was undoubtedly Johann

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 537, 563.

⁷¹The indispensable works on Jewish mysticism are those of Gershom Scholem, including *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York 1954); *idem.*, *Kabbalah* (New York 1974). There are two informative essays in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Alabany 1984): Arthur Green, "The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain", pp. 97-134; and David Biale, "Jewish Mysticism in the Sixteenth Century", pp. 313-329. See also Christian D. Ginsberg, *The Kabbalah. Its Doctrines, Development and Literature*, 1st edn 1863, reprinted with *idem.*, *The Essenes. Their History and Doctrines* (London 1956); Denis Saurat, *Literature and Occult Tradition* (London 1930), part III, ch. 2; Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York 1987). For a comparative study of eroticism in Jewish and Christian mysticism, see Bernard McGinn, "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism", in Steven T. Katz ed., *Mysticism and Language* (New York 1992), pp. 202-235.

⁷²J.L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York 1944); Blau contests the "lasting significance" of Christian Cabala because it was eventually to give way to "the development of scientific thinking" (p. vii), but nevertheless argues that "some knowledge of cabala was part of the equipment of every scholar in every part of Europe" (p. 100).

Reuchlin (1455-1522).⁷³ The work of later Christian Cabalists was largely based on that of Reuchlin and, through Reuchlin, on the pre-Zoharic Cabalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilia (c. 1247-1305).⁷⁴ In Northern Europe, seventeenth-century Christian Cabalism was to acquire a distinctly Boehmian flavour.⁷⁵ Boehme himself studied the Cabala with Balthasar Walter in the years which separate his first work (*Aurora*) from his subsequent writings.⁷⁶ The Cabala was replete with gendered and erotic imagery, and this increased familiarity with it may help to explain the marked growth of such imagery in Boehme's later works. Since Walter had spent some years in the Middle East, it is probable that he was acquainted with not only the medieval tradition, but also the Lurianic Cabala which originated in Safed in the early sixteenth century, and which was to become the dominant form of Cabala in the Jewish world.⁷⁷

In the theology of the Cabala, a totally transcendent godhead (the *En-Sof*) manifests itself through a series of ten divine powers (*sefirot*). There are three higher

⁷³Blau, *Christian Interpretation of the Cabala*, chs. 2, 4.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁵Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 200.

⁷⁶Frankenberg, "Gründlicher und Wahrhafter Bericht", §20.

⁷⁷Like the *Zohar*, the Lurianic Cabala was noteworthy for its "striking use of sexual imagery", Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 110.

powers, two of which (Binah and Hokhmah) are referred to as the Mother and Father who generate the lower *sefiroth*.⁷⁸ This duality of divine gender is reiterated in the Tetragrammaton (YHVH), which in Cabalist thought is associated with the Mother (Binah).⁷⁹ The Yod of the Tetragrammaton has a phallic quality, and was thought to be imprinted on the penis by circumcision.⁸⁰ The Yod "opens the womb", and the first *He* is the womb itself.⁸¹ The *sefiroth* form the body of Adam Kadmon, the primal cosmic man. The three higher *sefiroth* (Kether, Binah and Hokhmah) are the head, Hesed and Din the arms, Tifereth the torso, Netsah and Hod the legs and Yesod the phallus. The last of the *sefiroth* (Malkhuth) is seen as either the totality of Adam Kadmon, or as the female principle necessary to complement the male Adam Kadmon.⁸² The powers to the left of Adam Kadmon's body (Binah, Din, Hod) are female, those to the right (Hokhmah, Hesed, Netsah) are male. Malkhuth is known as the Bride; the six *sefiroth*

⁷⁸Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 110. Although Hokhmah is the Father in Cabalist thought, it is also the Wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, conceived as "the loving consort and co-architect with the YHVH"; Rabbi Leah Novick, "Encountering the Schechinah, the Jewish Goddess", in Nicholson ed., *The Goddess Re-Awakening*, pp. 204-214, p. 205.

⁷⁹Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 107.

⁸⁰Elliott R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol", *History of Religions*, xxvii, 2 (1987), pp. 189-215.

⁸¹[Moses de Leon], *The Zohar*, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London 1931-4), 4. vols., vol. i, pp. 57-8.

⁸²Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 106-7.

between the Bride and the Mother are sometimes seen as forming a male being whose potency is concentrated in the phallic *sefirah* Yesod before overflowing into Malkhuth.⁸³

The Fall is seen as occurring through an unbalanced outgrowth of the *sefirah* Din ("strict judgement"). This results in the emergence of a realm of evil parallel to both the *sefiroth* and the material world. While Din is usually identified as a female principle, in some accounts it is seen as a male principle needing "sweetening" by the female principle of mercy (*Hesed*).⁸⁴ This necessary balance of male wrath and female love within the godhead was the essence of Boehme's theology. In the Cabala, however, the crisis occurs within the godhead itself.⁸⁵ Boehme avoids this basically Gnostic conception, emphasising the role of Adam. The Fall is also mythologized as the rape of Malkhuth, the divine presence on earth or *shekhinah*, by the demonic Samael, an act which disrupts the harmony of the divine powers. Malkhuth is rightfully married to the male *sefirah*, Tifereth, and this harmony will be restored only when the *shekhinah* is reunited with Tifereth.⁸⁶ Circumcision reunites Malkhuth and Tifereth, giving access through the *shekhinah* to all

⁸³Green, "The Zohar", p. 119.

⁸⁴Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 116-7.

⁸⁵This is the defining characteristic of Syrian-type Gnosticism; see Jonas *The Gnostic Religion*, pp. 105, 132-3, 174 ff.

⁸⁶Dan, *Gershom Scholem*, ch. 8.

the other *sefiroth*.⁸⁷ The Covenant between God and man is understood in terms of a sexual union in which man penetrates "the divine feminine",⁸⁸ a reversal of the conventional sex-roles of nuptial mysticism which can also be found in Behmenist thought. Conversely, circumcision may be regarded as ritual castration, feminising the sons of Abraham. The twelfth-century *Numbers Rabbah*, for example, interprets "daughters of Zion" (Song of Songs 3:11) as circumcised men.⁸⁹ Similarly, the *Zohar* understands the "maidens" of Proverbs 31:15 as signifying "Israel here below".⁹⁰ Circumcision approximates man to both Hokhmah and Binah, Father and Mother:

Blessed he that resembles these his mother and father. The holy seal is therefore set upon him on the eighth day that he may resemble his mother (who is the eighth grade⁹¹), and the flesh is turned back to show the holy seal in order that he may resemble the father.⁹²

The original androgyny of Adam plays an important role in the Cabala. "The word *adam* (man)", according to the *Zohar*, "implies male and female,...the two being combined so that man should be unique in the world and ruler over all".⁹³ Adam had "two faces (male and female combined)".⁹⁴

⁸⁷Wolfson, "Circumcision", pp. 199, 203.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

⁹⁰[de Leon], *Zohar*, vol. ii, p. 220.

⁹¹I.e., ascending upwards from Malkhuth.

⁹²[de Leon], *Zohar*, vol. i, p. 125.

⁹³[de Leon], *Zohar*, vol. i, p. 147.

At first these existed "side by side"; they were separated in order that they might exist "face to face". This was necessary to complete the union of the higher and lower worlds: "When the lower union was perfected and Adam and Eve were turned face to face, then the upper union was consummated".⁹⁵ In contrast to Boehme, who saw the origins of sexuality and gender as part of the Fall, the Zohar regards this as part of the perfecting of the emanative process. For the Zohar no less than Boehme, redemption is bound up with androgyny: "It is incumbent on a man to be ever male and female, in order that his faith may be firm, and that the Shekhina may never depart from him".⁹⁶ In the Zohar, however, this remains a matter of sexuality, since the relations of man and woman are a means to this goal. Women are closely connected with the *shekhinah*: "When a man is at home, the foundation of his house is his wife, for it is on account of her that the Shekhina departs not from his house".⁹⁷ The *shekhinah* "abides with one who has a wife, but not with one who has none".⁹⁸ It is in recognition of the fact that his wife has "procured for him this heavenly partner", that a man has a "duty to give his wife some pleasure [on the Sabbath]...by performing

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 332.

with gladness the religious duty of conjugal intercourse in the presence of the Shekhina".⁹⁹

In the Zohar, the spiritualising influence of women is closely associated with notions of racial and religious purity. The intermarriage of Jews and Gentiles results in the emergence of "unclean spirits".¹⁰⁰ Such inter-racial contacts create greater distance between Jews and the *shekhinah*. Thus, although Solomon's "dream-medium" was second to none, "darkness fell upon him" in old age "because he observed not the holy covenant and gave himself up to strange women".¹⁰¹ The doctrine of the spiritual value of marriage might be interpreted as a defense of the cultural identity of a racial minority; sin is associated with racial impurity, righteousness with a racially exclusive sexuality. The doctrine is also deeply rooted in the high status accorded to sexuality in the wider Jewish and Arabic culture. A twelfth-century medical text by a Jewish convert to Islam, for example, recommends coitus as a spiritual activity, since it enables "the soul

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 158-9. The close connection between sexual intercourse and religious duty is highlighted by the Zoharic belief that men and women should abstain sexually on all days except the Sabbath. This is a striking contrast to the tendency of Christians to regard Sunday as a day of sexual abstention; see, for example, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edn., Harmondsworth 1979), p. 314.

¹⁰⁰[de Leon], *Zohar*, vol. ii, p. 20.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 225.

to take its flight from this prison", the body.¹⁰² Such ideas may have been one of the sources of the cult of courtly love in Western Europe,¹⁰³ a cult which anticipated Behmenism in the spiritual idealization of the feminine.

While they were greatly indebted to Cabalist thought, it should be noted that Christian occultists generally rejected the spiritual validation of sexual relations. There was a tendency in Christian occult circles to exalt the value of chastity.¹⁰⁴ Paracelsus regarded chastity as a divine gift,¹⁰⁵ and the fictional Rosicrucian fraternity were supposedly "all batchellors of vowed virginity", although we are also told that some nevertheless had children.¹⁰⁶ Occult interest in chastity was perhaps as much concerned with the magical powers conferred by seminal retention as it was with the traditional value of virginity in pre-Reformation Christian thought. This, at

¹⁰²As-Samau'al ibn Yahya, *Book of Conversation with Friends on the Science of Sexuality*, cited in Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1988), p. 125.

¹⁰³Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 16 ff.

¹⁰⁴The tendency for alchemists to prefer chastity was widely enough recognized to become a part of Ben Jonson's satire; the alchemist, Surly observes, should be "A pious, holy, and religious man,/ One free from mortall sinne, a very virgin"; *The Alchemist*, II:ii:99.

¹⁰⁵Jolande Jacobi ed., *Paracelsus. Selected Writings* (London 1951), p. 109.

¹⁰⁶Anonymous, *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R.C.*, trans. Eugenius Philalethes [Thomas Vaughan] (London 1652), pp. 13, 40.

least, seems to have been the case with Giordano Bruno and Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont.¹⁰⁷ Some alchemists may have worked with female partners, and the twentieth-century adept Armand Barbault did so on principle.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, there is little evidence to support Christopher McIntosh's suggestion that Rosicrucian (or any other Western) alchemy may have involved sexual techniques comparable to those of Eastern alchemy, Tantric yoga and Taoism.¹⁰⁹ The Behmenists retained the Gnostic view of the loss of androgyny as a principle of death,¹¹⁰ which generally led them to share the occult preference for chastity.

The Christian Cabala was primarily concerned with appropriating a secret tradition of supposedly Adamic or Mosaic provenance, in order to demonstrate that the

¹⁰⁷Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 101-2.

¹⁰⁸Cherry Gilchrist, *The Elements of Alchemy* (Shaftesbury 1991), p. 59.

¹⁰⁹Christopher McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians. The History, Mythology, and Rituals of an Occult Order*, rvd. edn. (Wellingborough 1987), p. 80. From a comparative point of view, the Bauls of Bengal are particularly interesting in this respect, since they are similar in some ways to one occult-minded English group which may have practised sexual rituals, the so-called Ranters. On the Bauls, see Charles H. Capwell, "The Esoteric Belief of the Bauls of Bengal", *Journal of Asian Studies* xxxiii, 2 (1974), pp. 255-264; June McDaniel, "The Embodiment of God Among the Bauls of Bengal", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* viii, 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 27-39. Ranter ideas on sexuality are discussed in ch. 6, below.

¹¹⁰The Behmenist vision might be summed up in verse 70 of *The Gospel According to Philip*: "If the female had not separated from the male, she and the male would not die"; in Layton ed., *Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 343.

promised Messiah had already appeared in the person of Jesus. The emphasis was on numerology and the analysis of divine names rather than the emanative theology of the Cabala as such.¹¹¹ Perhaps because of this, and the pre-Zoharic sources of much Christian Cabalism, some Christian Cabalists seem to have lost all sense of the role of gender in Cabalist thought. Agrippa, for example, understood the *sefiroth* in purely male terms.¹¹² Other Christian Cabalists retained something of the Cabala's sense of the erotic and the feminine. Paul Ricci, a converted Jew whose knowledge of the Jewish Cabala was more intimate than that of most Christians, outlined the theory of a "Threefold Man", "carnal", "corporeal" (cosmic) and "archetypal". Each of these forms of man was both male and female, and full enlightenment was possible only when this truth was realized:

If you observe the male or female of any one of these men by itself, you complete either male or female in nine excellent or perfect members. If, however, you judge the male with the female (as these things really are) you will distinguish it to be divided into ten excellent and perfect members, just as both Law and the sacred name of God are.¹¹³

¹¹¹As Blau has argued, the Cabalist theory of emanation filled a gap in Jewish theological thought (*Christian Interpretation*, pp. 2-4). No such gap existed in Christian thought, since the Neoplatonic tradition mediated through the pseudo-Dionysius provided an emanational theology of supposedly Apostolic authenticity.

¹¹²H.C. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. J.F. (London 1651), pp. 366-370.

¹¹³Paul Ricci, "Introduction to the Lore of the Cabalists or Allegorizers" (2nd edn. 1515), translated in Blau, *Christian Interpretation*, pp. 67-74, p. 70. The "members" are, of course, the *sefiroth* in the form of Adam

Thomas Vaughan expounded the Cabalist theory of the *shekhinah's* exile from earth. Before the Fall, there had been "a more plentiful and large Communion between Heaven and Earth", a communion mediated by the *sefirah* Malkhuth. The Fall is understood as Malkhuth's alienation, after which "her Breasts were so sealed up that she could not dispense her Milk to Inferiors in that happy and primitive Abundance".¹¹⁴ Vaughan was aware of the Cabalist identification of the moon with Malkhuth, and calls this *sefirah* "the Invisible, Archetypall Moone, by which our Visible Caelestiall Moone is governed and impraegnated".¹¹⁵ We might note that the alchemical understanding of sun and moon as "a King and Queen Regents"¹¹⁶ employs imagery which in the Cabala is applied to Tifereth and Malkhuth.

An important source of Christian Cabalism was Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*, a popular work throughout sixteenth-century Europe. The *Dialoghi* themselves are closer to Neoplatonism than Jewish Cabalism, but they were thereby able to convey Cabalist ideas in a way readily accessible to Renaissance Christian intellectuals. Ebreo

Kadmon's body.

¹¹⁴Thomas Vaughan [Eugenius Philalethes], *Magica Adamica: Or The Antiquitie of Magic proved* (London 1650), pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁶*idem.*, *Anima Magica abscondita: Or a Discourse of the Universall Spirit of Nature* (London 1650), p. 29.

argued that the myth of androgyny in Plato's *Symposium* was of Mosaic provenance.¹¹⁷ The Genesis story of creation revealed that Adam "combined in himself male and female without division".¹¹⁸ The main difference between the Mosaic account and the Platonic was that, whereas Plato saw the origins of separate genders as a consequence of sin, Moses correctly viewed it as a divinely intended improvement in Adam's lot.¹¹⁹ The male Adam is intellect and the female Adam is "body and matter". While the body should be subordinate to the intellect, it too has its legitimate needs; the separation of genders refers to granting the body a degree of independence from the intellect in order to ensure that these needs are met. The Fall occurred when the body overstepped its bounds and began to dominate intellect.¹²⁰ The Genesis myth also has a reference to the divine realm. The world was created through a combination of "Divine formality", which was its father (God), "and its mother, chaos". Both of these existed "from eternity", chaos being brought out of God in the same way that Eve was brought out of Adam.¹²¹ The analogous dualities male/female, form/matter and

¹¹⁷Leone Ebreo, *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'Amore)*, trans. F. Friedberg-Seeley and Jean H. Barnes (London 1937), pp. 345 ff.; Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth 1951), pp. 60-3.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 350.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 354-6.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 285, 302.

intellect/ body are thus the basic structure of both the divine and human realms.

Ebreo's *Dialoghi* were the obvious source of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More's Cabalism. Adam had been created with both male and female qualities. The "more perfect and masculine Adam" was his intellect or reason; the feminine Adam was his affections or "the natural Joy of the Body", "the Woman that God himself bestowed upon him for an help and delight".¹²² Although the feminine Adam was inferior to the masculine, she was nevertheless essential to his well-being, since she was both a "faculty of being united to the matter, as well as of aspiring to a union with God himself".¹²³ It was this ambiguity of the feminine principle, oriented to both the material world and God, which led to the Fall: the Serpent "befooled Adam through the frailties of his Womanish Faculties".¹²⁴ Henceforth, Adam "should descend down to be an Inhabitant of the Earth", while "his Feminine part, his Affections should be under the chastisement and correction of his Reason".¹²⁵ The union of male and female faculties remained necessary, and in Christ these different aspects

¹²²Henry More, *Conjectura Cabalistica, Or, A Conjectural Essay of interpreting the minde of Moses according to a threefold Cabala* (London 1653), pp. 41, 70, 73.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p.41.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

of Adam were restored to their original unity. Christ was the perfect image of God, "And this Image is Male and Female", consisting of "a clear and free Understanding and divine Affections".¹²⁶

IV. Alchemy

Apart from Christian and Jewish mysticism, Behmenism was also deeply rooted in alchemy and the Neoplatonic-Hermetic tradition into which alchemy merged.¹²⁷ Alchemy has always

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

¹²⁷Ethen Allen Hitchcock, *Remarks Upon Alchemy and the Alchemists* (Boston 1857) is of interest as the first study to argue that the alchemists' goal was not the transmutation of metals, but of themselves. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London 1964) is a useful introduction to Renaissance Hermeticism. There are several historical works on alchemy, including F. Sherwood Taylor, *The Alchemists. Founders of Modern Chemistry* (London 1951); E.J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Harmondsworth 1957); Robert P. Multhauf, *The Origins of Chemistry* (London 1966). These historical works tend to be written from the point of view of the history of science, neglecting the religious aspects of alchemy. Although not specifically concerned with alchemy, Charles Webster's *The Great Instauration. Science, Medicine and Reform* (London 1975) is an indispensable guide to the interlocking of religious and scientific discourse in England. The mystical dimension of alchemy is given greater attention in various psychological studies: Silberer, *Problems of Mysticism*; C.G. Jung, *Myterium Coniunctionis. An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London 1963); *idem.*, *Psychology and Alchemy*; Johannes Fabricius, *Alchemy. The Medieval Alchemists and their Royal Art* (Copenhagen 1976). These works tend to neglect the historical dimension, a criticism which can also be levelled at such modern expositions of the alchemical philosophy as Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy. Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, trans. William Stoddart (Shaftesbury 1986). Pictorial representation was an important part of alchemical thought, and Stanislas Klossowski de Rola's *Alchemy. The Secret Art* (London 1973) is a colourful introduction to this aspect of alchemy. For a discussion of the Hermetic background to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, see Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London

been characterised by a complex interweaving of empirical knowledge and practical technique with mystical speculation. From the sixteenth century onwards, the mystical strain of the Art became more pronounced,¹²⁸ and in the writings of the seventeenth-century "Epigoni" alchemy was severed from its links with empirical science to become exclusively religious in outlook.¹²⁹ Against this purely spiritual alchemy there emerged a purely empirical chemistry, encouraged by the growth of scientific societies and the introduction of chemistry into the universities.¹³⁰

1980), and John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age. The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1989). Mark Haeffner, *The Dictionary of Alchemy. From Maria Prophetissa to Isaac Newton* (London 1991) is a useful companion while reading alchemical texts.

¹²⁸Cf. Chiara Crisciani and Claude Gagnon, *Alchimie et philosophie au moyen âge. Perspectives et problèmes* (Quebec 1980), p. 36. Alan G. Debus dates the growth in allegorical interpretations of alchemy from the twelfth century; see his *The Chemical Philosophy. Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols. (New York 1977), vol. i, pp. 14 f.

¹²⁹Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p. 423. There were nevertheless several alchemists who continued to attempt the transmutation of metals into gold.

¹³⁰For an excellent account of the bifurcation of alchemical/ chemical thought in the early seventeenth century, see Owen Hannaway, *The Chemists and the Word. The Didactic Origins of Chemistry* (Baltimore 1975); see also, Multhauf, *The Origins of Chemistry*, ch. 12. The occult philosophy tended to disappear even in works of a clearly esoteric provenance; cf. Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre*, p. 69. See, for example, George Starkey's *Natures Explication and Helmont's Vindication. Or A short and sure way to a long and sound life* (London 1657).

Boehme himself denied that he was "a Chymist", but he also claimed to know how to turn base metal into gold if he so desired,¹³¹ and his works employ an alchemical vocabulary throughout. Boehme's circle was closely connected with the Hermetic tradition, and included the Glogau mintmaster Johann Huser, a relative of the man who edited an edition of Paracelsus's works.¹³² English Behmenism emerged in a period which might be called a high point of the Hermetic tradition in England,¹³³ and later Behmenists maintained a close connection with alchemy and Hermeticism. John Ellistone excused Boehme's obscurity as the common practice of "the Sons of Hermes, who have commenced in the High school of true Magick",¹³⁴ which implies that he himself viewed Boehme from an Hermetic perspective. We do not know which alchemical texts formed part of Boehme's own reading,¹³⁵ but he cannot have

¹³¹Jacob Boehme, *Aurora; That is, The Day-Spring*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1656), 22:104.

¹³²Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity*, p. 170.

¹³³The half century after the Civil War seems to have been the main period for the reception of Paracelsianism in particular; see Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London 1965), pp. 49 ff., 181. As with the occult in general, English Paracelsianism declined in the eighteenth century; the most vigorous period of English Behmenism thus coincides exactly with that of English Paracelsianism.

¹³⁴John Ellistone, preface to Boehme's *Signatura Rerum* (London 1651), sig. A3r.

¹³⁵The only title mentioned by Boehme is the *Wasserstein der Weysen* (1619), probably by Johann Siebmacher of Nuremberg; this has been translated into English as *The Sophic Hydrolith*, in Derek Bryce ed., *The Glory of the World and Other Alchemical Tracts* (Llanerch 1987), pp. 86-136.

proceeded far in such works without encountering references to the hermaphroditic Adam, to Mercury as a virgin, or to marriage as a symbol of the union of opposites which was essential for achieving the alchemical goal, whether conceived literally or spiritually. Gendered terms in occult writings sometimes seem to have little significance, as when geomantic figures are referred to as *Matres* and *Filiae*,¹³⁶ or when Crollius understands the necessity of every physician also being a surgeon in terms of bride and bridegroom.¹³⁷ The sheer cumulative impact of such images, however, is itself striking. Gendered imagery, moreover, was of fundamental significance in the spiritual interpretation of alchemy.

The alchemist sought to produce the Philosophers' Stone, a wonderful substance whose precise meaning is hidden in secrecy. Spiritual alchemists identified the Stone with Christ the Cornerstone.¹³⁸ It was "the Spirit of the Lord which fills the Universe", "in part heavenly, in part earthly, and in its natural state a mere confused chaos".¹³⁹ The Stone was a compound, and the relationship between its composite substances was frequently understood

¹³⁶H.C. Agrippa, *His Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, trans. Robert Turner (London 1655), pp. 5-6.

¹³⁷Oswald Crollius, *Philosophy Reformed and Improved*, trans. Henry Pinell (London 1657), p. 32.

¹³⁸See, for example, "The Sophic Hydrolith", p. 109; John Ellistone, preface to his translation of Boehme's *Signatura Rerum*, sig. A4r.

¹³⁹Anonymous, "Sophic Hydrolith", pp. 94-5.

through gendered images. In Norton's *Ordinal*, the "white Stone" is composed of "Magnetia" and "Litharge", which are said to be related as "the Mother and the childe may be", as "Male and Female", or as brother and sister. After the white Stone is produced, it is united with the red Stone: "The faire white Woman/ [is] Married to the Ruddy Man". The Stone's "Cheefe nutrition" is "liquor", the vivifying effects of which are understood as promoting a marriage:

Liquor conjoyneth Male with Female Wife,
And causeth dead things to resort to Life.¹⁴⁰

Edward Kelley expressed the Stone's *unio oppositorum* in terms of Adam's relation to Eve:

Even as Eva, Adams Wife I wisse,
Flesh of his Flesh and Bone of his Bone,
Such is the Unionhood of our precious Stone.¹⁴¹

Similar nuptial imagery was frequently employed by alchemists. "The secret of our Art", according to a sixteenth-century German text, "is the union of man and woman".¹⁴² A poem appended to a work by Pierce the Black Monk describes the generation of the Stone in these terms:

With *hic* and with *haec* thus may ye do,
As Husband and Wife togeather them wed;
Put them in a chamber both two,
And shet fast the dore when they be a bed.
The woman is both wanton and wilde,
Till she hath conceived a child;

¹⁴⁰Thomas Norton, "The Ordinall of Alchemy", in Elias Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London 1652), pp. 1-106, pp. 41-3, 90, 76.

¹⁴¹Edward Kelley's "Worke", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 324-331, p. 325.

¹⁴²Anonymous, "The Book of Alze", in Bryce ed., *Glory of the World*, pp. 181-190, p. 185.

Of all his kin he shall be best.¹⁴³

Describing the same process, Sir George Ripley spoke of making "a marriage the Body and Spirit betwixt"; not surprisingly, he understood the stage known as conjunction as "Copulacyon".¹⁴⁴ One anonymous author asserts that the Stone is "Two and One in kinde,/ Married together as Man and Wife".¹⁴⁵ Paracelsus wrote that "even as a Man loveth his Wife, and the Woman loveth her Husband, so do the Philosophers Mercury and the quick Mercury".¹⁴⁶ Paracelsus also expressed the relation of microcosm to macrocosm with nuptial imagery: "the things beneath are so related to the things above as Man and wife".¹⁴⁷ This nuptial imagery in alchemical works, as much as any purely Christian sources, provided the background for Behmenist *Brautmystik*.

Gendered imagery is also a prominent feature of esoteric accounts of the creation. Originally, everything in the created world had existed in Chaos,

A Masse confused, darkeley clad,
That in it selfe all nature had.

¹⁴³Postscript to Pierce the Black Monk's "Book on the Elixir", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, p. 432.

¹⁴⁴Sir George Ripley, "The Compound of Alchemy", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 106-192, pp. 115, 144.

¹⁴⁵Anonymous poem in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 352-4, p. 352.

¹⁴⁶Paracelsus, *Of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature*, trans. R. Turner (London 1655), p. 23.

¹⁴⁷Paracelsus, *His Archidoxes*, trans. J.H. (London 1661), p. 154.

This was "The first Matter, Mother of all".¹⁴⁸ Paracelsus, identifying this *prima materia* with the waters of Genesis on the face of which the Spirit of God moved, called it "the matrix of the world and all its creatures".¹⁴⁹ Some writers regarded this *prima materia* as part of the created order, but Paracelsus thought that this "Great Mystery" was uncreated,¹⁵⁰ elevating it to the status of a coeternal, but passive and feminine, counterpart to God. Chaos was brought to form by a process of division. From the primordial waters God formed a "superior Water" (heaven), which was "to be accounted as a Masculine Sex to the inferiour, more gross Water". The inferior waters were then subdivided into the elements known as earth and water.¹⁵¹ In Thomas Vaughan's cosmogony, it is Light, which "is properly the life of everything", that impregnates the *prima materia*, and this is thereby "condens'd to a Crystalline moisture, unctuous and fiery,

¹⁴⁸Anonymous, "Experience and Philosophy", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 336-341, p. 339.

¹⁴⁹Jacobi ed., *Paracelsus*, p. 87. Cf. "The Three Treatises of Philalethes": "in the beginning the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, i.e. penetrated them with His heavenly quickening power"; in Derek Bryce ed., *Concerning the Secrets of Alchemy and other Tracts from the Hermetic Museum* (Llanerch 1989), pp. 174-218, p. 189. Symbolising "the universal sum of all virtualities", water represents the primordial chaos in mythologies throughout the world; see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. William R. Trask (San Diego 1959), p. 130.

¹⁵⁰Paracelsus, *Three Books of Philosophy Written to the Athenians* (London 1657), p. 2.

¹⁵¹Paracelsus, *Archidoxes*, pp. 154-5.

of nature Hermaphroditical".¹⁵² This view may be related to the renewed spiritual value accorded to the sun in early modern thought.¹⁵³ In Vaughan's cosmogony, Light is understood as an active and masculine principle. In contrast, Behmenists associated Light with their Second Principle, which is understood in more passive and feminine terms.

In Hermeticism, creation is not so much a once-and-for-all event in the past as an ongoing process of generation. The dominant forces in this process are the sun and moon, which are traditionally assigned to the male and female sex respectively.¹⁵⁴ Asserting that everything comes from "one", the *Emerald Table* of Hermes Trismegistus informs us that "His Father is the Sun, His Mother is the Moone, the

¹⁵²Thomas Vaughan [Eugenius Philalethes], *Aula Lucis, Or, The House of Light* (London 1651), p. 6.

¹⁵³Religious considerations as much as scientific evaluation of the evidence influenced the heliocentrism of Copernicus and Kepler, and it is possible to discern a theology of light underlying the Copernican revolution; see Brian Easlea, *Witch Hunting, Magic and the New Philosophy. An Introduction to the Debates of the Scientific Revolution, 1450-1750* (Brighton 1980), pp. 59 ff; cf. Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, p. 205. Richard Overton was later to assert that God "hath drawne a veile (the body of the Sun) before our eyes, that we may stand in his shadow and live"; the sun was the present abode of Christ. Overton believed that "all beings had their beginnings" in the "true light"; Overton, *Mans Mortalitie*, ed. Harold Fisch (Liverpool 1968), pp. 50-2.

¹⁵⁴The proper relationship between man and wife, for example, was commonly explained in terms of that between sun and moon, as in Jeremy Taylor's "The Marriage Ring", in R. Heber and C.P. Eden eds., *The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor, D.D.* 10 vols. (1848), vol. iv, p. 221.

Winde bore it in her belly, the Earth is his Nurse, the Father of all the Telesme [perfection] of this world is heere".¹⁵⁵ Citing Basil Valentine, George Thor tells us that "The Spirit of Luna is appropriated to the Spirit of Sol, as a woman to a man".¹⁵⁶ "The Sun and Moon are two Magicall Principles", according to Thomas Vaughan, "the One active, the other passive; this Masculine, that Feminine".¹⁵⁷ The theoretical basis of alchemy was that "Metals have their own seed, like all other created things. Generation and parturition take place in them as in everything else that grows".¹⁵⁸ Metals were "vegetable things (which have a Being and life)"; they were generated by the sun.¹⁵⁹ God had concentrated the power of begetting in the sun, but this needed to be "tempered with the moisture of the Moon his Wife, to make it apt for Generation".¹⁶⁰ Vaughan believed that there was "a little Sun, and a little Moon" in everything;¹⁶¹ in their

¹⁵⁵Prefixed to H.P. ed., *Five Treatises of the Philosophers Stone* (London 1651), sig. A4v.

¹⁵⁶George Thor, *Cheirogogia Heliana. A Manduction to the Philosophers Magical Gold* (London 1659), p. 51.

¹⁵⁷Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 24.

¹⁵⁸Anonymous, *The Glory of the World*, in Bryce ed., *Glory of the World*, pp. 7-85, p. 24.

¹⁵⁹"Gerrard Malynes Philosophy about the Essence or Existence of Metals", in *Chymical, Medicinal, and Chyrurgical Addresses to Samuel Hartlib, Esq.* (London 1655), sigs *1v-*2r, *3r.

¹⁶⁰Elias Ashmole ed., *The Way to Bliss* (London 1658), pp. 29, 31.

¹⁶¹Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 25.

intercourse, these solar and lunar principles "do *emittere semen*, which seed is carried in the womb of nature": "for this is the conjugall mystery of Heaven and Earth, their Act of Generation, a thing done in private between particular Males and Females".¹⁶² The alchemical *opus* consisted of duplicating the actions of sun and moon through Sulphur (the sun) and Mercury ("the Philosophers Moon").¹⁶³ The union of sun and moon is necessary to the work: "Sun and moon must have intercourse, like that of a man and woman: otherwise the object of our art cannot be attained". This union is Mercury: "For Sun and Moon are the mercury in our Matter...This mercury represents an harmonious mixture of the four elements, hot and dry, Sun and Moon".¹⁶⁴ The Stone "is the soul and shining substance of the Sun and Moon".¹⁶⁵

Mary Ewer has provided a simple key to the conjunction of sun and moon in spiritual alchemy. The sun represents God, the moon humanity, and the product of their union (Mercury, the Stone) is Christ, perfect God and perfect man.¹⁶⁶ While this is true in itself, such a simplified

¹⁶²Vaughan, *Anima Magica abscondita*, p. 28.

¹⁶³Anonymous, "Arcanum: Or The Grand Secret of Hermetick Philosophy", in James Hassole [Elias Ashmole] ed., *Fasciculus Chemicus: Or Chymical Collections* (London 1650), pp. 176-7.

¹⁶⁴Anonymous, "Glory of the World", pp. 20, 39.

¹⁶⁵Anonymous, "The Golden Tract", in Bryce ed., *Glory of the World*, pp. 137-180, p. 169.

¹⁶⁶Ewer, *A Survey of Mystical Symbolism*, p. 71.

glossary obscures the unorthodoxy and complexity of much alchemical thought. What is symbolised in the great *conjunctio* is a series of analogous polarities: God and man, spirit and flesh, male and female. The spiritual alchemist conceived both poles as eternal. Perfection, moreover, is not the exclusive province of one pole. "The male without the female", according to Basil Valentine, "is looked upon as only half a body, nor can the female without the male be regarded as more complete".¹⁶⁷ Perfection is achieved in a union which transcends the polarity, the divine and the human being joined "into one indissoluble whole".¹⁶⁸ As in the Cabala, man is accorded a role in perfecting his Creator.¹⁶⁹ Not only is man dependent on God, God is dependent on man: "I know that without me God could not exist for a moment. Were I brought to naught He would yield up the Ghost for lack (of me)".¹⁷⁰ God and man, spirit and flesh, male and female

¹⁶⁷Basil Valentine, "The Twelve Keys", in Derek Bryce ed., *The Book of Lambspring and the Golden Tripod* (Llanerch 1987), pp. 52-85, p. 64.

¹⁶⁸Anonymous, "Sophic Hydrolith", p. 116.

¹⁶⁹Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 273-5.

¹⁷⁰Angelus Silesius (a Catholic who had been influenced by Boehme), cited in J.G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (1948), p. 88. The profound religious insight of this notion can be expressed in the words of a modern Jewish mystic: "You know in your heart that you need God more than everything; but do you not know too that God needs you - in the fullness of His eternity needs you?", Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Robert Gregor Smith (Edinburgh 1937), p. 82. Something of the interdependence of the divine and human realms was, however, lost in Christian occult thought. While Christian Hermeticists translated the key clause of *The Emerald Table* as "as

are superseded by a composite whole which is implicitly superior to either of its antecedents alone.

Christian alchemists repeatedly refer to the Stone's prelapsarian origins; we are told that it is a rich ruby "whyche wosse send owt of Paradyce".¹⁷¹ The Stone refers back to the spiritual wholeness of man before the Fall, a wholeness which was also expressed through the idea of androgyny. The union of genders symbolises the union of the human and the divine, as in the concluding lines of Donne's "To Mr. Tilman After He Had Taken Orders":

And so the heavens which beget all things here,
And the earth our mother, which these things
doth bear,
Both these in thee, are in thy Calling knit,
And make thee now a blest Hermaphrodite.¹⁷²

In his commentary on the *Emerald Table*, John Everard spoke of "Adam & Eve before their separacion, or Plato's Hermaphrodite, a man & a woman joyned together back to back".¹⁷³ Dorn called Mercury "the true Hermaphroditic

above, so below", the Arabic version of the text reads "The highest comes from the lowest and the lowest from the highest"; see Burckhardt, *Alchemy*, p. 197.

¹⁷¹Anonymous, "Hermes Bird", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 211-226, p. 211.

¹⁷²John Donne, *Poems*, ed. Hugh I'Anson Fausset (London 1958), p. 273.

¹⁷³Cited in R.M. Schuler, "Some Spiritual Alchemies of Seventeenth-Century England", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (1980), pp. 293-318, p. 314.

Adam".¹⁷⁴ Paracelsus spoke of "Adam, who beareth his occult and hidden Eve in his own body".¹⁷⁵

Alchemical Mercury symbolism is of particular importance in understanding the role of gender in Behmenist thought. Paracelsus had supplemented the traditional theory of the four elements with three primary elements, Sulphur, Mercury and Salt. Already in Paracelsian thought, these *tria prima* were associated with the Trinity: Sulphur corresponded to the Father, Mercury to the Son and Salt to the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁶ In Behmenist thought, this trinitarian understanding of the *tria prima* is adopted, and adapted to Boehme's Three Principles. The god Mercury's role as intermediary between the gods and man, and the planet's astrological linking of the sublunar and celestial worlds, made this a fitting symbol for Christ.¹⁷⁷ In alchemy, Mercury is the transforming substance and symbolises the Stone. Its supposed role in the alchemical process made a comparison with Christ

¹⁷⁴Cited in C.G. Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", in *idem.*, *Alchemical Studies* (London 1967), pp. 191-250, p. 219.

¹⁷⁵Paracelsus, *Of the Chymical Transmutation of Metals*, trans. Robert Turner (London 1657), p. 27.

¹⁷⁶On the *tria prima*, see for example Koyré, *Mystiques, spirituels alchimistes*. Schwenckfeld, Seb. Franck, Weigel, Paracelsus (Paris 1955), pp. 62 ff.; Hannaway, *Chemists and the Word*, pp. 34 ff.

¹⁷⁷Fred Gettings, *The Hidden Art. A Study of Occult Symbolism in Art* (London 1978), p. 59.

inevitable in an age which regarded the universe as a congeries of analogies:

Wyth thys Water Mercuriall,
We wash the fylth Originall
Of our Erth tyll yt be whyte.¹⁷⁸

The association between Christ and Mercury is also expressed in the alchemical hieroglyph for the latter, which combines the symbols of the sun and moon with the addition of a cross.¹⁷⁹ In alchemical works Mercury is characterised as *duplex*, forming the basis of an analogy with Christ as both God and man.¹⁸⁰ Mercury's duality might alternatively be understood as a union of body and spirit.¹⁸¹ This duality also encompassed gender, and in

¹⁷⁸Pierce the Black Monk, "Elixir", p. 429.

¹⁷⁹Silberer, *Problems of Mysticism*, p. 164. The sun and moon were part of the iconography of the crucifixion from earliest times. A Renaissance example can be found in Raphael's *Crucifixion* (National Gallery, London), where a sun and moon appear above the cross at the right and left of the canvas. Gettings believes this symbolism relates to "the struggle between angelic and demonic forces" (*Hidden Art*, p. 74), but this is a misreading of the nature of solar and lunar symbolism. The sun represents the divine, the moon the human, and Christ represents their union. What we have in paintings like Raphael's is a non-occult representation of the alchemical *hierogamos*. The iconographic interlinking of Christ and Mercury is preserved in the seventeenth-century design for the Tarot known as the Marseilles pack. Key XXI (The World) represents an ostensibly female figure which is in fact an hermaphrodite (Joseph Campbell, "Symbolism of the Marseilles Deck", in Joseph Campbell and Richard Roberts, *Tarot Revelations* (San Anselmo, Ca., 1987), pp. 9-25). The figure holds a wand, recalling Mercury's caduceus, and is placed in a mandorla surrounded by Ezekiel's tetramorphs, iconographic features associated with Christ. The Anima Mercurii was also represented within a mandorla.

¹⁸⁰Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", p. 217.

¹⁸¹J.A. Comenius, *Naturall Philosophie Reformed by Divine Light* (London 1651), p. 51.

alchemical texts Mercury is personified as an hermaphrodite or female rather than as the ithyphallic god of classical mythology. According to Agrippa the number five was assigned to Mercury because it is composed of two and three, "the first even, and the first odd [number] as of female and male, both sexes". Mercury is "male with males, female with females, most fruitfull in both sexes".¹⁸² Paracelsus asserted that "a natural Conjunction of Sol and Luna" endowed Mercury with a "Masculine and Feminine force and virtue". Mercury was "the true Hermaphrodite, Adam, and Microcosme".¹⁸³

Mercury is also frequently represented as female rather than androgynous: "Our Sulphur is our Masculine,/ Our Mercury is our Feminine".¹⁸⁴ Mercury is "our Moon", "the Spouse of Sol".¹⁸⁵ In the *Liber Patris Sapientiae*, "Mercury is called *Flos Florum* and worthiest Prynness", the "very Mother of every Mettall".¹⁸⁶ Edward Kelley calls Mercury "the trew Wife,/ That killes her selfe to bring

¹⁸²Agrippa, *Three books of Occult Philosophy*, pp. 238, 336.

¹⁸³Paracelsus, *Of the Chymical Transmutation of Metals*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁸⁴Anonymous poem in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, p. 352.

¹⁸⁵Eirenaeus Philoponos Philalethes, *The Marrow of Alchemy. The Second Part* (London 1657), pp. 23-4.

¹⁸⁶Anonymous, "Liber Patris Sapientiae", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 194-209, p. 197.

her Child to life",¹⁸⁷ recalling the image of Christ as a mother who dies in order to give birth. Mercury is also frequently identified with Venus,¹⁸⁸ an association which helps explain such curious passages in Boehme as when he speaks of the spirit putting "on the image of Christ internally, viz. Venus's body in the Love".¹⁸⁹ In the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, vulgar mercury (quicksilver) is seen as a masculine representative of the dead body, while the philosophical Mercury is a feminine, life-giving substance.¹⁹⁰ This idea was repeated in a later alchemical work: "Our Mercury is not common Mercury; for all common Mercury is male, that is corporal, specific and dead; while our Mercury is spiritual, female and living".¹⁹¹ This inverts the conventional association of male with spirit and female with flesh, an inversion which also occurs in Behmenism.

¹⁸⁷Kelley, "Worke", p. 326.

¹⁸⁸Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", pp. 213, 216, 226; *idem.*, *Psychology and Alchemy*, pp. 293, 383.

¹⁸⁹Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, 11:55. The planet of love is an apt symbol for Christ; and, as Joseph Campbell has pointed out, Venus "as evening and as morning star is the herald both of night-sleep-death and of dawn-rebirth" (*The Masks of God*, vol. i, p. 411).

¹⁹⁰Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", p. 219.

¹⁹¹Anonymous, "An Open Entrance to the Closed Palace of the King", in Bryce ed., *Concerning the Secrets of Alchemy*, pp. 60-97.

Mercury was associated with both water and fire,¹⁹² yet another way of expressing the alchemical *unio oppositorum*. An anonymous poem expresses this in terms of the myth of Phoebus and Daphne:

Daphne is a Water Nymph,
And hath of Moysture store,
Which Phoebus doth consume with heate,
And dryes her very sore.¹⁹³

Van Helmont had a vision in which he was given a bottle of "Fire-Water", "as being in one word: A name altogether simple, singular, undeclinable, unseparable, unchangeable, and immortal".¹⁹⁴ Similarly, it is as fire and water that Thomas Vaughan speaks of the "twofolde Mercurie": "this fire, and this water are like two Lovers, they no sooner meet, but presently they play and toy, and this Game will not over till some new Babee is generated".¹⁹⁵ Mercury is not only "Our living water", it is also "our fiery Mercury".¹⁹⁶

While the conception of Mercury as both fire and water served to express the union of opposites, there was particular emphasis in alchemical writings on its

¹⁹²Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", pp. 207-10.

¹⁹³Anonymous, "A Description of the Stone", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, p. 420.

¹⁹⁴F.M. van Helmont, *Potestas medicaminum*, sections 2-3, cited in Debus, *Chemical Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 325.

¹⁹⁵Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, pp. 85, 90.

¹⁹⁶Philaletes, *Marrow of Alchemy*, pp. 11, 23.

associations with water.¹⁹⁷ "For Mercury was in the beginning water", Basil Valentine tells us, "and herein all the sages agree with my dictum and teaching".¹⁹⁸ "The Mercurie of the Wisemen", says Thomas Vaughan, "is a waterie Element,...the Dew of the heavenly Grace, the Virgins Milk".¹⁹⁹ Mercury was the *aqua permanens*: "Our Water permanent forsooth yt ys".²⁰⁰ As the first matter, the Philosophers' Mercury was "the blessed Water, the Water of the Wise".²⁰¹ Water was "the first Element we read of in Scripture, the most ancient of Principles, and the Mother of all things among visibles".²⁰² Van Helmont believed that Mercury's presence in gold explained the constancy of the latter metal, since Mercury was closely associated with the primal waters.²⁰³

The hieroglyphs for fire and water form a star of David when combined; in Cabalist thought, this symbol represents

¹⁹⁷This especially aquatic nature of the fiery-watery Mercury simply parallels the emphasis on the feminine identity of the hermaphroditic Mercury.

¹⁹⁸Basil Valentine, "The Twelve Keys", p. 81.

¹⁹⁹Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, p. 98.

²⁰⁰Pierce the Black monk, "Elixir", p. 429.

²⁰¹Synesius, "The True Book of Synesius...Concerning the Philosophers' Stone", appended to *Basil Valentine His Triumphant Chariot of Antimony* (London 1678), pp. 161-176, p. 168.

²⁰²Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 18.

²⁰³Debus, *Chemical Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 321.

the union of male and female.²⁰⁴ Fire and water are given a similar sexual identity in alchemy. Water is "the mother of all things, and over it broods the spirit of fire. When fire acts on water, and strives with it, the first matter is evolved".²⁰⁵ The theory of the four elements assigned each to a particular gender; fire and air were usually regarded as active, physically higher and masculine, while water and earth were passive, lower and feminine.²⁰⁶ Paracelsus regarded water and earth as feminine, fire as masculine and air as hermaphroditic.²⁰⁷ Fire therefore has male associations; it is "the Masculine part" of "the Vegetable Stone" that has a "Solar Quality" which will "burne up and destroy any Creature, Plant, &c."²⁰⁸ As in mythologies throughout the world, water has corresponding feminine associations.²⁰⁹ The Stone is water and "a good

²⁰⁴Silberer, *Problems of Mysticism*, p. 186.

²⁰⁵Michael Sendivogius, "The New Chemical Light", in Bryce ed., *Concerning the Secrets of Alchemy*, pp. 98-174, pp. 121-2.

²⁰⁶E.M. Tilyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Harmondsworth 1972), p. 69. This allocation of gender to the elements has its moral implications; it is the hot and the dry (fire and air) which help the soul rise to the One, and the cold and the moist (earth and water) which drag it down into the phenomenal world; Synesius, "On Visions", in G.R.S. Mead, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*, 2nd edn. (London 1967), pp. 68-81, p. 73.

²⁰⁷Paracelsus, *Of the Chymical Transmutation of Metals*, p. 6.

²⁰⁸Ashmole, "Prolegomena" to *Theatrum Chemicum*, sig. Blr.

²⁰⁹Water is a motif commonly associated with birth, rebirth and the figure of a goddess; Campbell, *The Masks of God*, pp. 62 ff. In the Neoplatonic mystical tradition,

mother".²¹⁰ Valentin Weigel, speaking of baptism, tells us that "the water is the mother, and the Spirit is the Father".²¹¹ Ripley associated water with "the fiery Woman Mercury":

For where the Woman is in presence,
There is much moysture and Accidence:
Watery humours that in her be
Will drown and devoure our qualitye.²¹²

Like Paracelsus, Ripley seems to have thought of water as a primal source of being, a feature which he associates with amniotic fluid:

And Water ys the secret and lyfe of every thyng
That ys of substance in thys world y found:
For of the water eche thyng hath begynnyng,
As showyth in Woman when she shallbe unbound
By water which passyth afore, if all be sound,
Callyd Albyen, fyrst from them rennyng,
With grevose throwys afore ther chyldyng.²¹³

Vaughan believed that plants and minerals were asexual because "God hath allowed them no female, but the universal one, namely water".²¹⁴ These feminine

"the moist principle was that which conditioned all genesis, generation, or birth-and-death", Mead, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body*, p. 47. It thus symbolised the transient world of illusion which the mystic sought to escape.

²¹⁰Anonymous, "Glory of the World", p. 15.

²¹¹Cited in Steven E. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent. Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven 1973), p. 232.

²¹²Sir George Ripley, "A Dialogue Betwixt the Father and the Sonne, Concerning the Two Principles of the Blessed Stone", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, pp. 365-7, p. 366.

²¹³Ripley, "Compound", p. 164.

²¹⁴Thomas Vaughan [Eugenius Philalethes], *Euphrates, Or the Waters of the East* (London 1655), p. 110.

associations of water are particularly important in understanding Behmenist thought on gender, since Boehme's Second Principle is referred to through this image.

The duality of Mercury's gender is paralleled by its elemental duality as both fire and water. Like male and female in reproduction, fire and water in alchemy are both necessary for producing the Stone:

And were not hete and moysture contynuall,
Sperme in the wombe myght have noe abyding,
And so ther shold therof no frute uprysing.²¹⁵

Fire and water are apparent contraries sharing an ultimate identity: a *unio oppositorum* symbolised by marriage or androgyny.²¹⁶ The marriage of male and female substances transforms both; they are "clensed of their complexions".²¹⁷ Both the masculine (hot) and feminine (cold) aspects of "the Vegetable Stone" are "made out of one Natural Substance yet in working they have contrary Qualities"; their opposition conceals their complementarity.²¹⁸ Alchemical fire-water symbolism contains an important element of Behmenist theology, the

²¹⁵Ripley, "Compound", p. 150.

²¹⁶Cf. Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius", p. 232; *idem.*, "The Philosophical Tree", in *Alchemical Studies*, pp. 251-349, p. 295; F. Sherwood Taylor, *The Alchemists. Founders of Modern Chemistry* (London 1951), pp. 148-50.

²¹⁷John Dastin, "Dastin's Dreame", in Ashmole ed., *Theatrum Chemicum*, p. 259.

²¹⁸Ashmole, "Prolegomena", sig. B1r.

androgyny of Christ.²¹⁹ Whatever the general validity of Stoudt's view that Boehme outgrew his alchemical sources in his mature period,²²⁰ they remained an essential background to this aspect of his thought throughout his career.

Behmenist thought in general was much indebted to Paracelsus, and Boehme borrowed many of his ideas on gender from this source. Paracelsian thought on gender, however, still exhibits the disdain for women of traditional occult spirituality. The Paracelsian theory of creation from the matrix of the *prima materia* has been examined above.²²¹ This process was related to the forming of sexes: having created man from the original matrix, God "gave him a matrix of his own - woman".²²² Man and woman are necessary complements to each other: "A man without a woman is not whole, only with a woman is he whole".²²³ Man and woman seek each other because at one time they formed a single body:

For if Lady Eve had been formed otherwise than from the body of man, desire would never have been born from both of them. But because they

²¹⁹Fire-water symbolism is, of course, traditionally applied to Christ: "You, Lord, are the Fountain, ever full and overflowing; You are the ever-burning Fire that can never be extinguished", à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, p.193.

²²⁰Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity*, p. 22.

²²¹See p. 135.

²²²Jacobi ed., *Paracelsus*, p. 97.

²²³*Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

are of one flesh and one blood, it follows that they cannot let go of each other.²²⁴

Because man and wife were in a real sense one body, Paracelsus believed that adultery was impossible if the spouses were truly complementary.²²⁵ In Paracelsian thought, the processes of reproduction and creation are assimilated. Man is an analogue of the divine and woman is an analogue of nature, corresponding to the primordial substance or matrix:

Woman in her own way is a field of the earth, and not at all different from it. She replaces it so to speak, she is the field and garden of mould in which the child is sown and planted, then growing to be a man.

Just as nature exists so that God may become manifest, so woman exists that man may be brought into being: "A woman is like a tree bearing fruit. And man is like the fruit that the tree bears".²²⁶ Although as a matrix woman is a counterpart of the natural order, she is placed below man in the hierarchy of cosmic correspondences: "Man is the Little World, but woman...is the Littlest World... For the world is and was the first creature, man the second, and woman the third".²²⁷ This hierarchy is one of ontological rather than moral precedence, since man is superior to both woman and the world. It can be reduced to analogous polarities, with God and man as active beings and ends in

²²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 107.

²²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 109.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 100.

²²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 110.

themselves, and the world and woman as passive beings and means to these ends.

Boehme's thought on gender is a departure from this view, but his theories of reproduction and character formation are borrowed wholesale from Paracelsus. The Swiss physician taught that the child is formed jointly of the seeds of the man and woman, giving a greater role to the latter than in Aristotelian obstetrics.²²⁸ Whichever of these seeds is dominant determines the child's character, although the dominant seed is itself modified by the influence of the weaker.²²⁹ If the seed is good, the fruit will be good; if bad, the fruit will be bad. The good seed is God, the bad seed is the devil.²³⁰ The goodness or badness of the seed is determined by the role of imagination in conception and gestation. Imagination in the Paracelsian and Behmenist sense refers to a faculty whose ontological significance is altogether different from the twentieth-century notion of fantasy.²³¹ It is an active and creative faculty, the image formed giving rise

²²⁸For Aristotelian obstetrics, see p. 18, above.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 101.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 103.

²³¹Cf. Koyré, *Mystiques, spirituels alchimistes*, pp. 58-9. For primary accounts of the creative nature of imagination, see Pierre Poiret, *The Divine Economy. Or, An Universal System of the Works and Purposes of God Towards Man, Demonstrated*, 6 vols. (London 1713), vol. i, pp. 360 ff.; Francis Oakley, "A Brief Explication of some Latin and other Words used by this Author [Boehme] in a peculiar Sense", in *idem.*, ed., Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ discovered* (Bath 1775), pp. 395-433, pp. 417-8.

to the phenomenal world rather than *vice versa*. Conception is impossible without imagination, since the seed can be produced only by desire, and desire itself is a function of the imagination. The imagination endows the child with its reason, and "the imagination of man - like the stars - has a course, and makes the child's reason turn to higher and lower things". The mother's imagination is particularly important:

The imagination of a pregnant woman is so strong that it can influence the seed and change the fruit in her womb in many directions. Her inner stars act powerfully and vigorously upon the fruit, so that its nature is thereby deeply shaped and forged.²³²

Henry Nollius was to express the same idea more forcefully: pregnant women, "by force of an inflamed or exalted imagination,...impress into the very child, the perfect form and figure of it".²³³ This is because the mother bears the same relationship to the foetus as the stars do to man: "The child in the maternal body lives in the inner firmament, and outside the mother's body it lives in the outer firmament".²³⁴ In emphasising the role

²³²Jacobi ed., *Paracelsus*, p. 106. This notion was widespread, and by no means confined to occult thought; see, for example, Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes*, trans. John Florio, ed. Henry Morley (London 1886), p. 40.

²³³Henry Nollius, *Hermetical Physick: Or the right way to preserve and restore Health*, trans. Henry Vaughan, in L.C. Martin ed., *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, pp. 547-92, p. 574. J.B. van Helmont thought that not only was the mother's imagination capable of imprinting a cherry-like birth-mark on her child, but that this would be "a certaine reall production, which buds, blossomes, and ripens in its due season"; J.B. van Helmont, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, trans. Walter Charleton (London 1650), p. 70.

²³⁴Jacobi ed., *Paracelsus*, p. 99.

of the mother's "inner firmament" and imagination, Paracelsian obstetrics rejects the Aristotelian view that the form of the foetus was imprinted by a quality of the male semen. Paracelsian obstetrics also provided the theoretical framework for the concept of imaginative procreation, which was to be an important part of the Behmenist theory of Adamic androgyny.

V

The Middle Ages seem to have witnessed a rising tide of Christian erotic fervour, examples of which can be found in nuptial mysticism and Mariology. The *ostentatio genitalium* in depictions of Christ might also be cited in this context.²³⁵ To some extent, this tide of eroticism was checked in the age of Reform and Counter-Reform. The fate of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* (Sistine Chapel) reminds us that the early modern period was the great age of the over-painted loincloth in religious art. Erotic sensibilities survived more successfully in mystical discourse than in Mariology. Protestant Europe tended to confuse Mariology with Mariolatry, and avoided both as much as possible, while the post-Tridentine Catholic Church had learnt to frown on Mariological excesses.

The decay of religious eroticism may reflect wider forces in the sexual culture of early modern Europe. The

²³⁵Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York 1983).

Protestant validation of marital sexuality did nothing to weaken the age-old association of sex with death and disease. A psycho-cultural phenomenon of such importance as eroticism, however, is not easy to exorcise. The treatment of sexuality in Continental demonological works may be regarded as a pathological expression of this eroticism once healthier outlets had been blocked. Kramer and Sprenger's belief that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable"²³⁶ was elaborated by later writers through the construction of the Sabbat as a demonic sexual orgy.²³⁷ Witchcraft, of course, was a predominantly female affair. In the witch, the derogation of women as socially unruly, sexually voracious and morally suspect reached its culmination.²³⁸

²³⁶Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London 1928), p. 47.

²³⁷Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan. The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985), p. 57.

²³⁸For historians like Chaunu and Muchembled, the predominance of women in witchcraft reflects their role as the main transmitters of popular culture, making them the natural victims of the elite attack on this culture; P. Chaunu, "Sur la fin des sorciers au XVII^e siècle", *Annales E.S.C.* xxiv, 4 (July-August 1969), pp. 895-911; Robert Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France, 1400-1800*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1978). This theory somewhat implausibly reduces male peasants to the status of passive recipients of a culture forged by their womenfolk. In a work of practically no scholarly merit, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English combine this argument with the view that witches were the victims of "an active takeover by male professionals" of health services; *Witches, Midwives and Nurses. A History of Women Healers* (London 1976). Ehrenreich's and English's thesis involves several difficulties, including a chronological hiatus between the persecution of witches and the male takeover of midwifery. James Hitchcock, Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane, confining themselves to the unique circumstances of English witchcraft, argue that

The Behmenists shared the disdain for sexuality of their wider culture, but also retained much of the other-worldly eroticism of mysticism and Mariology. By drawing on both the mystical and Mariological traditions, the Behmenists were able to avoid the general derogation of the feminine which usually accompanied this sexual revulsion. The concept of God's Motherhood survived in mystical writings, and by drawing on Mariological traditions the Behmenists were to partly feminise the godhead in the person of the Virgin Sophia. The understanding of gender in the Western occult tradition, as in its Gnostic sources, was fundamentally negative. By the seventeenth century, parts

women predominate as witches merely because they dominate the demography of despair; it is as elderly beggars, rather than as women, that they become victims of witchcraft accusations; James Hitchcock, "Popular Religion in Elizabethan England", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University (1965), ch. 6; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth 1973), chs. 14-18; Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. A Regional and Comparative Study* (London 1970). Some of the wider issues are discussed in Alan Anderson and Raymond Gordon, "Witchcraft and the Status of Women: the Case of England", *British Journal of Sociology* xxix, 2 (June 1978), pp. 171-84. For a sceptical view, see J.K. Swales and Hugh McLaughlin, "Witchcraft and the Status of Women: A Comment", *British Journal of Sociology* xxx, 3 (September 1979), pp. 349-358; Swales and McLaughlin point out that the significance of women's predominance in witchcraft varies according to whether we are considering accusations, convictions or executions. See also William E. Monter, "The Pedestal and the Stake: Courtly Love and Witchcraft", in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz eds., *Becoming Visible. Women in European History* (1977), pp. 121-136; Clarke Garrett, "Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis", *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, iii, 2 (1977), pp. 461-70; Christina Larner, *Enemies of God. The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Oxford 1981). There is a brief, but balanced, discussion of the issue in Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London 1987), pp. 124-7.

of this tradition had been reformed in various ways. The Cabala still tended to associate the feminine with evil, but also made the feminine aspect of God an intermediary between man and the divine being. Behmenism was to accept this latter principle, but reject the former. The Behmenists also rejected the Cabalist validation of sexuality. Although there are some ambiguities, the feminine in traditional alchemy was characterised generally as passive, sexually appetitive and venomous. In alchemy, the start of the process (the *prima materia* or Chaos) was feminine, and its end (God) was masculine. The Behmenists rejected the sexual characterisation of the feminine, associating it more closely with chastity. They did, however, accept the association of the feminine with the passive, turning this into a virtue applicable to all; the mystical goal of resignation (*Gelassenheit*) is also the "female" quality of passivity. By emphasising the sapiential element of occult theology, and by borrowing from medieval Mariology and the Cabala, they also posited a feminine end (the Virgin Sophia) to the human spiritual quest. In this way, Boehme and his followers took elements from various traditions and welded them together, creating the distinctive system which is the object of this study.

4. GENDER IN THE WORKS OF JACOB BOEHME

Boehme belongs to the spiritualist tradition of German Reformation thought, represented by such figures as Caspar Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Franck and Valentin Weigel.¹ Above all, this tradition bequeathed him a sense of the immanence of God, and an understanding of redemption as a turning inward towards God through the renunciation of self-will. Had Boehme confined himself to this emphasis on spiritual religion, tinged with Hermeticism and Cabala, there would be little to distinguish him from countless other spiritualists of the period. Boehme's spiritualism, however, was constructed in the framework of a distinctive metaphysics. Since his thought on gender is inextricable

¹For sixteenth-century spiritualism in general, see Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London 1928). Alexandre Koyré connects spiritualism with the occult tradition in *Mystiques, spirituels alchimistes. Schwenckfeld, Seb. Franck, Weigel, Paracelse* (Paris 1955). Steven E. Ozment examines the mystical background to spiritualism in *Mysticism and Dissent. Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven 1973). The social and political context in which Behmenism arose is discussed in J.B. Neveux, *Vie spirituelle et vie sociale entre Rhin et Baltique au XVII^e siècle de J. Arndt à P.J. Spener* (Paris 1967). Neveux, however, is a little too eager to relate religious thought to socio-political realities; in his account, Behmenism becomes an ideology of those seeking to preserve Lusatian autonomy. For the eschatological excitement that fuelled the search for esoteric knowledge in Germany, see Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis. Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, California, 1988). See also Russell H. Hvolbek, "Being and Knowing: Spiritualist Epistemologies and Anthropology from Schwenckfeld to Boehme", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* xx, 1 (1991), pp. 97-110.

from this metaphysics, a brief exposition of his philosophy of God and nature is a necessary preliminary to this more specialised study.²

I

For Boehme, there is no creation *ex nihilo*, since "where nothing is, there nothing can come to be".³ Everything derives from a totally transcendent godhead, which Boehme calls the Abyss (*Ungrund*). This is a "Liberty without source or Quality", "a stilness without substance".⁴ The Abyss is a "nothing" which, in order to become manifest,

²The best introduction to Boehme's thought remains Alexandre Koyré's *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (Paris 1929). See also Hans L. Martensen, *Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). Studies in his Life and Teaching*, trans. T. Rhys Evans (London 1949); Howard H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will. Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme* (New York 1930); John Joseph Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity. A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, 1957); David Walsh, *The Mysticism of Innerwordly Fulfilment* (Gainesville, 1983). For Boehme's biography, the main source is Abraham von Frankenberg's "Gründlicher und Wahrhafter Bericht", in *De vita et scriptis Jacobi Böhmi* (n.p. 1730), in vol. x of the facsimile reprint of *Theosophia Revelata. Oder Aller Göttliche Schriften Jacob Böhmens*, 11 vols. (Stuttgart 1955-61). The hagiographical misrepresentations of this work were corrected in Hermann Adolph Flechner, "Sketch of the Life of Jacob Boehme", *Neues Lausitzsches Magazin* (1855-6), trans. John Rolleston Earle in his edition of Boehme's *De Electione Gratiae and Quaestiones Theosophicae* (London 1930). The standard modern biography is Will-Erich Peuckert's *Das Leben Jacob Boehmes*, reprinted in vol. x of *Theosophia Revelata*.

³Jacob Boehme, *The Aurora, That is, the Day-Spring*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1656). Unless otherwise stated, all references to Boehme's works are to chapter and paragraph numbers of the Interregnum translations, which differ slightly from those of the German original.

⁴*Idem.*, *The Fifth Book of the Author*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1659), 2:1:15,29. Henceforth referred to as *Incarnation*.

"bringeth it selfe into a will".⁵ This Will, corresponding to the Father of the Trinity, is itself incomplete, since all manifestation requires contrariety. It therefore calls forth an opposing principle, the Desire, corresponding to the Son. These are Boehme's first two Principles, those of the fire-world and the light-world, "God's wrath-spirit" and "a Meek love-source". These, Boehme insists, are "not parted asunder" since "the Light dwelleth in the Fire".⁶ The interrelationship between these two produces a third Principle, corresponding to the Holy Spirit, in which the godhead becomes complete.

Here Boehme has added a dynamic aspect to traditional trinitarianism; he has made it into a doctrine of dialectical progress. This dialectical structure of his thought recurs in Boehme's discussion of the way God becomes manifest in the creation. First, however, Boehme introduces an important new element to the godhead, the Virgin Wisdom, or Sophia. Boehme tells us that "The Will conceiveth the wisdom in the mind", Will and Mind referring to the Father's and Son's Principles respectively. Wisdom is "the *Eternal Word* of all Colours, Powers, and Virtue".⁷ Sophia stands eternally before God,

⁵*Idem.*, *XL Questions Concerning the Soule*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1647), 1:178.

⁶*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:1:38-41, 52.

⁷*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum: Or, An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John Ellistone and John Sparrow (London 1655), 1:6.

a mirror in which he sees the wonders of his own Being. What God sees is the seven "fountain-spirits" (*Quellgeister*), or qualities, which are to provide the structure of the created world. The first of these is a process of contraction, a principle of particularity which may be compared to the original Will of the godhead. Counteracting this is a process of expansion, comparable to the Desire of the godhead. These form "a wrestling Combate",⁸ pulling in different directions to produce the rotary movement of a third quality, "the great anguish".⁹ The tension of this rotary movement produces the "Flash" of a fourth quality, "the Spiritual Fire". This is "the end of nature in this world", the point at which "the dark and the light World do Sever".¹⁰ The dialectical movement of the first (lower) ternary is now reversed. A fifth quality, "the Love-desire", arises out of the Flash; this is a property of coherence pertaining to all the qualities, for it is in the fifth quality that all the others "embrace each other in their holy Conjunction".¹¹ The fifth quality generates a sixth quality, the "understanding, voyce, Sound, speech",¹² a property of comprehensibility. Finally, the whole process is completed

⁸*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum. The Signature of All Things*, trans John Ellistone (London 1651), 9:10.

⁹*Ibid.*, 2:31.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 4:8; *idem.*, *The Clavis or Key*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1647), 87.

¹¹*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 5:4.

¹²*Ibid.*, 5:11.

by the emergence of a seventh quality, which is "the Body", "the very Spirit of Nature", "the substance, that is, the subjection or house of the other six".¹³ It is the summation of all the qualities, lacking any real characteristic of its own; in this, the seventh quality is comparable to Malkhuth in the Cabala. The seven qualities form Eternal Nature, providing a material counterpart of the Virgin Wisdom.¹⁴

The seven qualities are also a recapitulation of Boehme's three Principles. The first four qualities form Boehme's First Principle, that of the Father, a principle of wrath. The fifth and sixth qualities are Boehme's Second Principle, that of the Son, a principle of love. The seventh quality forms the Third Principle, that of the Holy Ghost. It is through the Third Principle that the Abyssal Will becomes manifest in creation, since it is the

¹³*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 11:1-2; *idem.*, *Clavis*, 122.

¹⁴Martensen (*Jacob Boehme*, p. 112) identifies Eternal Nature with the lower of the seven qualities and the Virgin Wisdom with the higher ones. This appears to be a misreading of Boehme's ideas. Boehme tells us that "The Eternall, and Temporall Nature is especially understood in the dark and fire world, viz. in the *four first formes*" (*Mysterium Magnum* 7:1); but this is especially, not exclusively. That all seven qualities constitute Eternal Nature is certainly how the relationship is generally understood in English Behmenist thought. The Moravian Behmenist, Francis Okeley, however, believed that "Nature is in itself merely a *Desire*, made up of the *three first Forms* or *Properties*"; Francis Okeley, "A Brief Explication of some Latin and other Words used by this Author [Boehme] in a peculiar Sense", in *idem.*, ed., *Jacob Boehme, The Way to Christ discovered* (Bath 1775), pp. 395-433, p. 398.

"magia" of the godhead.¹⁵ The three Principles constitute "a tripartite apportionment of divine will: pure unmanifested energy (Father), reflected energy within matter (Son) and matter itself (Holy Spirit)".¹⁶

Boehme is at pains to point out that the dialectical evolution through seven qualities is illusory in so far as the godhead is concerned. "God is without Beginning, and hath an Eternal Beginning and an Eternal End".¹⁷ Seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, none of the seven qualities "is the first, neither is any of them the last".¹⁸ It is only in the created world that the eternal harmony is disrupted. It is this broken harmony which differentiates the creation, giving everything its own "signature" or characteristic in accordance with whichever quality is dominant.¹⁹ This is also the origin of evil, since "Nothing is evil which remaineth in Equal Accord".²⁰ Because of it everything in nature possesses both good and

¹⁵Boehme, *Incarnation*, 1:1:60.

¹⁶Steven A. Konopacki, *Descent into Words. Jacob Boehme's Transcendental Linguistics* (Ann Arbor 1979), p. 41.

¹⁷Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, 3:1.

¹⁸*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 10:3; cf. *idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 9:2.

¹⁹*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 2:29; 9:7, 16, 26.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 16:6.

evil aspects.²¹ The redemption of creation, the Apocalyptic "restoration of all things", lies in regaining the divine harmony.²² Man stands between Heaven and Hell, between the higher and lower ternaries.²³ His task is to turn his will from the corporeal being of the outer world to the spiritual being of the inner world. He must experience the Flash of the fourth quality for himself, and proceed through the higher ternary to the "Eternal Sabbath of rest" of the seventh quality.²⁴

Theodicy was a major concern of Boehme's works. He absolves God from the authorship of sin by making evil synonymous with a disharmony of the seven qualities. Walker is mistaken in thinking that Boehme is Manichaeism.²⁵ For Boehme the principle of divine wrath is totally harmonised in the godhead.²⁶ He tells us that "the

²¹The moral ambiguity of the material world was a common theme of occult writing; cf. Paracelsus, *His Dispensatory of Chirurgery*, trans. W.D. (London 1656), p. 386; Valentin Weigel, *Astrologie Theologized* (London 1649), p. 91.

²²Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, 12:30.

²³*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 11:137; 12:159.

²⁴*Idem.*, *Clavis*, 18.

²⁵D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London 1964), p. 120. Cf. Martensen, *Jacob Boehme*, p. 82. As Alice Miller has observed, Boehme avoids Manichaeism by treating the divine Wrath as a "dynamic moment" in the unfolding of the godhead; "The Theologies of Luther and Boehme in the Light of their Genesis Commentaries", *Harvard Theological Review*, 63 (1970), pp. 261-303, p. 283.

²⁶Jacob Boehme, *The Tree of Christian Faith* (London 1645), 3:1-2.

meek light [of the Second Principle] maketh the stearn nature of the Father, meek, lovely and merciful",²⁷ and that the Divine Being is called God "not from the Fires property, but from the Lights property".²⁸ "The Father is onely called an holy God in the Son".²⁹ God is characterised in terms of a feminine stereotype rather than the severely masculine stereotype of Calvinism: "he is the greatest meeknesse and humility".³⁰ Boehme tells us that "God is love, and the Good, in him is no angry thought, and Mans punishment was not but from himselfe".³¹ Boehme accordingly speaks of "the anger of the Father which was kindled in us" rather than against us:³² man's relationship to the divine wrath is as subject rather than simply as object.

The Fall, whether of Lucifer or Adam, is simply a turning away from God towards the self: "Thus the devil maketh (or causeth) in himself his Darkness; for he went

²⁷*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:1:71.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 1:1:45.

²⁹*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 7:14.

³⁰*Idem.*, *Concerning the Election of Grace*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1655), 1:57.

³¹*Idem.*, *The Second Booke. Concerning the Three Principles Of the Divine Essence Of the Eternall, Dark, Light and Temporary World*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1648), 10:25; henceforth referred to as *Three Principles*. Cf. *idem.*, *177 Theosophical Questions*, 3:27.

³²*Idem.*, *The Way to Christ Discovered* (London 1648), p. 12.

with his Desire into himself...and forsook the Eternity".³³ The emphasis on self-will determines Boehme's understanding of the fundamental human vices. Although he occasionally mentions sexuality in this connection, as when he castigates adultery in *The Incarnation*,³⁴ Boehme's conception of sin is more usually asexual. He concentrates his attention on what might be called the more social vices, "base covetousness, pride, and wanton luxurious stateliness".³⁵ In contrast to this rather asexual understanding of sin, his works as a whole display a "systematic sexual metaphor".³⁶

II

One of the commonest images in Boehme's works is that of motherhood. The fountain-spirits are "seven Mothers, out of which the substance of all Substances originally arises".³⁷ The seventh quality encompasses the other six as a pregnant woman does her foetus, "and they receive their nourishment power and strength alwayes, in their mothers Body or Womb".³⁸ The image of motherhood is also

³³*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 7:10.

³⁴*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:6:56 ff.; 1:7:73.

³⁵*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 4:6.

³⁶Catherine F. Smith, "Jane Lead: the Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant", in Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1979), pp. 184-203, p. 88.

³⁷Boehme, *Incarnation*, 2:4:12.

³⁸*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 16:8.

applied directly to God. God's rights over people are compared to those of a mother over her children, rather than to those of a father.³⁹ We are told that just as

even a child knoweth its Mother, so everyone that is born of God again knoweth his Mother, not with Earthly Eyes, but with divine, with the Eyes of the Mother from whom he is born.⁴⁰

Similarly, "As a child continually longeth after the breasts of the Mother, so must its hunger continually enter into the love of God".⁴¹ God brings forth man "as a Mother bringeth forth a childe out of her owne substance".⁴² The "Eternal Word" is identified as a "the first mother whereof the life of man is sprung".⁴³ Man's turning away from God is seen as surrendering to "the care of a strange mother. We have taken the world as mother, we have been faithless to the inner mother".⁴⁴ Boehme's use of such images is not consistent, and he occasionally appears confused, as when he speaks of the Three Principles as having "One Mother...which is called the Father of Nature".⁴⁵ There can be no doubt, however, about the strength of this tendency in Boehme's thought. The

³⁹*Ibid.*, 14:105-7.

⁴⁰*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:4:11.

⁴¹*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, 2:1:21.

⁴²*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, sig. alv.

⁴³*Idem.*, *Two Theosophical Epistles: Wherein the Life of a true Christian is described* (London 1645), 1:4; cf. *idem.*, *Of Christs Testaments*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1652), 1:1:10, 13, 19, 21.

⁴⁴*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, 3:55.

⁴⁵*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 2:31.

Will of the godhead is itself "the Mother" which generates the seven qualities.⁴⁶ Similarly, the Abyss is referred to as "the one and onely mother"; it is "rightly called the Woman; for in the Nothing... consists the Birth of the Holy Trinity of the Deity".⁴⁷ Boehme speaks of "the eternal Pregnatress" (*die ewige Gebärerin*) which "moved itself and enkindled its own form",⁴⁸ and the term *pregnatrrix* is also applied to the First and Second Principles.⁴⁹ Similarly, the stars are called an "under-pregnatrix [*eine Nach-Gebärerin*] of the eternal mystery"⁵⁰ and "the mother of all things".⁵¹ It would be wrong, however, to place too much emphasis on Boehme's use of the term "mother" in itself. The motherhood image can have different nuances in different writers. For Anselm of Canterbury motherhood was a fitting image for God because mothers sacrifice themselves for their young. Bernard of Clairvaux concentrated on the nurturing role of mothers; Christ suckles his children as does a mother. Gertrude of Helfta viewed divine motherhood in terms of maternal

⁴⁶*Idem.*, *The Third Booke of the Authour being High and Deepe Searching out of the Threefold Life of Man, Through or according to the Three Principles*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1648), 1:28. Henceforth referred to as *Threefold Life of Man*.

⁴⁷*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 3:12, 7:29.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 3:32.

⁴⁹*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:2:15.

⁵⁰*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 16:5.

⁵¹*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 2:26.

discipline.⁵² There are elements of all these views in Boehme's use of the mother image in reference to God, but most often he uses the term simply as a metaphor for the origin of something.

Feminine terms are applied to both Christ and the Father. Boehme tells us that Christ overcomes temptation and conforms his will to the Father's:

This being done, the young man with his Virgin-like heart [*jungfräulichen Herzen*] will wholly give himself up unto the Mother, when the Tempter comes and assaults him, and the Mother will wholly swallow him up into herself through the Devils wrath.⁵³

We are told that "the sweet water [i.e. the Second Principle] is the Mother, in which all spirits are conceived".⁵⁴ The relationship between the First and Second Principles is conceived in terms comparable to Hokhmah and Binah in the Cabala; the creative process results from a relationship between these two Principles which is understood in terms of the sexual desire of man and woman.⁵⁵

In the Middle Ages maternal imagery applied to God, nuptial mysticism, and the cult of the Virgin tended to be

⁵²Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982), pp. 113-8, 189-90.

⁵³Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, 10:65.

⁵⁴*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 14:109.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 26:113-4; *idem.*, *Three Principles*, 8:40.

mutually exclusive: writers who employed one of these idioms avoided the others.⁵⁶ This is far from the case with Boehme; not only did he employ maternal imagery, he also had a well-developed *Brautmystik* and his own cult of the Virgin - not the Virgin Mary, but the Virgin Sophia. It has been suggested that male writers in the Middle Ages preferred maternal to nuptial imagery because *Brautmystik* involved viewing themselves as female.⁵⁷ This did not present a problem to Boehme, since his use of the mystical marriage theme provided him with a further opportunity to feminise Christ. In bridal mysticism, Christ is generally seen as the groom while the soul is the bride. Boehme sometimes conforms to this pattern: "Take me in your arms", he prays to Christ, "like your own dear bride".⁵⁸ Boehme also uses bridal imagery conventionally when he speaks of his first mystical experience: "I was embraced with the love as a bridegroom embraces his dear bride".⁵⁹ Frequently, however, he reverses these usual sex-roles, speaking of Christ as "the Love-Virgin" or "Wife" and the soul as "the Noble Bridegroom".⁶⁰ Thus,

When the Virgin [Christ] doth again receive her
Bridegroom, who hath been faithless, then is he
prepared and fitted to the work [of regeneration].⁶¹

⁵⁶Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 141.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁸Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 3:44.

⁵⁹*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 19:11.

⁶⁰*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:9:92.

⁶¹*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 12:32.

This reversal of mystical sex-roles is unusual, but not unique. It has parallels, for example, in the Cabala and in Suso.⁶²

As we might expect, Boehme's bridal mysticism results in some of the more erotic passages in his works. He tells us that "the Virgin casteth her love upon" the "artist" (the soul seeking regeneration), "and inviteth him; if he receiveth it with desire and giveth his Will thereinto, then she giveth him her heart and will wholly".⁶³ Then the artist

hath nothing to do, the Bride is in the bridegroom, they are already married, he need only make their Bed ready, they will warm it well enough themselves; the Bridegroom embraceth the Bride, and the Bride the Bridegroom; and this is their food and pastime until they beget a Child.⁶⁴

Boehme's use of the term "artist", of course, betrays the alchemical basis of his bridal mysticism.

Another aspect of Boehme's feminisation of the deity can be seen in his understanding of the divine Wisdom. Personified as the Virgin Sophia, it was this which the Primarius of Görlitz, Gregorius Richter, condemned as a

⁶²Elliott R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol", *History of Religions* xxvii, 2 (1987), pp. 189-215, p. 190; Mary Anita Ewer, *A Survey of Mystical Symbolism* (London 1933), pp. 175-6.

⁶³Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, 7:63.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 7:66.

fourth element added to the Trinity.⁶⁵ As Thune has observed, the marriage of the soul and Sophia is Boehme's commonest image for man's union with God.⁶⁶ At times, Boehme associates the Virgin Sophia with his Third Principle, corresponding to the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is "the Substantiality of the Spirit", "the Spirits Corporeity".⁶⁷ Unlike the first two Principles, neither the Spirit nor Wisdom has existed substantially from all eternity, and both are referred to as "looking-glasses" of the divine.⁶⁸ The Virgin Sophia herself arises in some sense from the Third Principle: "it is not God the eternity it selfe; for it taketh its beginning in the Spirit";⁶⁹ it is God's "Wisdome wherein the Spirit discerneth it selfe, and alwayes and in Eternity openeth the wonders therein".⁷⁰ Here the relationship between Sophia and the Spirit is a nuptial one comparable to Binah and Hokhmah in the Cabala: "It is a Virgin-like Matrix wherein the Spirit openeth it selfe".⁷¹ God creates through "the Modell in the Glasse of the Virgin-like

⁶⁵Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity*, p. 177.

⁶⁶Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala 1948), p. 29.

⁶⁷Boehme, *Threefold Life of Man*, 5:50.

⁶⁸*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:1:75. Nevertheless, "the Virgin is Eternally uncreated and ungenerated", *idem.*, *Threefold Life of Man*, 11:12.

⁶⁹*Idem.*, *XL Questions*, 1:75.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 1:77.

⁷¹*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 2:1:47.

Wisdom".⁷² The Virgin Sophia is a heavenly counterpart of the Virgin Mary: "Christs heavenly Body...was born out of God in the dear and beautiful Virgin of his Wisdom".⁷³ The Virgin Wisdom is also comparable to the *shekhina*, the Cabalist divine presence.⁷⁴ Boehme tells us that the divine Wisdom is "the manifestation or revelation of God, a Virgin, and a cause of the divine substantiality".⁷⁵ The Virgin Sophia is related to the primordial substance or matrix of Paracelsian thought. "She is the true Divine Chaos, wherein all things lye".⁷⁶

The divine Wisdom is regularly identified with the Second Principle, that of the Son. Boehme thus refers to "*Sophia*, viz. the Second Principle".⁷⁷ The Father and the Virgin together are "the Mans and Womans Tincture; the two loves which in the Temperature are divine".⁷⁸ Adam inherited the Virginity of God's Wisdom "not out of the Earthly part of the Third Principle, but out of the

⁷²*Idem.*, *XL Questions*, 1:77.

⁷³*Idem.*, *Tree of Christian Faith*, 4:25.

⁷⁴Cf. Desirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches. Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London 1964), p. 93.

⁷⁵Boehme, *Incarnation*, 1:1:62.

⁷⁶*Idem.*, *Clavis*, 43.

⁷⁷*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 25:10.

⁷⁸*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 3:47. Boehme's term *Temperatur* means harmony.

Heavenly holy part of the Second Principle".⁷⁹ The "wedding of the Lamb" occurs "when the Virgin Sophia (as the worthy humanity of Christ)" is wedded with the soul.⁸⁰ Sophia "manifesteth her selfe in the deare name JESUS with Christ the treader upon the Serpent", and Christ's words about forsaking all for his sake (Matt. 10:37-39) are applied to the manner in which the Virgin should be courted.⁸¹

III

Boehme paints a picture of Adam's prelapsarian life as one of playfulness and freedom.⁸² Adam himself existed on a spiritual rather than material plane, and had dominion over the four elements.⁸³ He was formed of "heavenly Flesh" and ate "Paradisicall fruit", and "needed no teeth for that".⁸⁴ Being spiritual, "his body could go through Earth and Stone, uninterrupted by anything".⁸⁵ This body was androgynous: Adam was at first "a Man, and also a woman".⁸⁶ He was "Neither Man nor Woman, but both, viz. a

⁷⁹*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:9:19.

⁸⁰*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, 2:16.

⁸¹*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, p. 37.

⁸²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:4:59-60.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 1:2:51-2.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 1:2:50; 1:4:55.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 1:2:53.

⁸⁶*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 18:2; *Incarnation*, 1:4:16.

Manly or Masculine Virgin [*männliche Jungfrau*]].⁸⁷ His virginal aspect was the divine Wisdom: "the true woman from the heavenly worlds Substance, when she was yet in Adam,...was Virgin Sophia".⁸⁸ Adam was both a "young man" and a "young maid", "in one onely person"; "the Spirit which was breathed into him from God" was "the chaste virgin", and "the Spirit which he had inherited out of nature, from the world, was the young man".⁸⁹ Boehme has reversed the traditional association of womanhood with a lower and less spiritual sphere than manhood; it is the "young man" who represents humanity and "the virgin" who represents the divine.

For Boehme there are two Falls of Adam. The first of these, when Adam turns his imagination from the heavenly to the earthly, is characterised by a loss of androgyny.⁹⁰ This is seen as the consequence of an act of adultery against the divine Wisdom: "thou hast committed much sinne and wickednesse", Sophia tells the soul, "and broken thy will off from my love, and set thy love and affection upon

⁸⁷*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 5:116.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 7:90.

⁸⁹*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 12:39.

⁹⁰Boehme is not a consistent thinker. In *The Clavis* (140), we are told that gender originated on the third day of creation, when the fiery Mercury was separated from the watery Mercury, "whence arose the Male and Female kinde, the Male in the fiery Mercury, and the Female in the watery". It is hard to reconcile this statement with the theory of prelapsarian androgyny, or even with the order of creation given in Genesis.

a stranger".⁹¹ This act of adultery was apparently precipitated by the female Adam's rejection of the male Adam's sexual advances. The "young man" and "young maid" had been created to converse with and embrace each other, but not to experience desire or to copulate. When the maid rebuffed the young man's attempts at seduction, he reached "back after the Worme in his own Centre" and turned towards the material world.⁹² No longer able to stand, Adam entered into his forty days' sleep, foreshadowing both Israel's sojourn on Mount Sinai and Christ's temptation in the wilderness.⁹³ During this time God removed the image of the heavenly Wisdom from Adam's being: "in Adam the Virgin did disappear, for the Soul departed out of its Love-will".⁹⁴ In its place Adam was given an earthly virgin, Eve.⁹⁵ The Fall is a fall into matter,⁹⁶ separating Adam from "Gods Love-spirit".⁹⁷ Adam "was gone out from the Love of the Second Principle into

⁹¹*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, p. 61.

⁹²*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 12:54.

⁹³*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:5:28.

⁹⁴*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 11:44. There is no basis for Miller's assertion that Boehme's "basic conception is that within the soul lives the noble virgin Sophia" ("The Theologies of Luther and Boehme", p. 293). For Boehme, the essential characteristic of man's fallen condition is precisely that he is deprived of Sophia's in-dwelling.

⁹⁵Boehme, *Incarnation*, 1:7:13.

⁹⁶Cf. Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, p. 93.

⁹⁷Boehme, *Incarnation*, 1:6:8.

the Third",⁹⁸ into the Principle in which the Abyssal will became manifest in the corporeality of "the Starres and the Four Elements".⁹⁹ In a sense, this is also a fall from the feminine, as represented by the Second Principle, into the masculine, as represented by the Third. It is notable that by representing the fall into matter as a fall from the feminine Boehme is again reversing the traditional male-spirit/female-flesh polarity.

The androgynous Adam had been the complete image of God, representing the unity of what Boehme calls both Tinctures, the fiery and the watery:

According to the Fathers and Sons property,
which together are but one onely God, undivided;
so also he created his Image and similitude, in
one onely Image.¹⁰⁰

Rightly considered, we are to "ascribe the *male* to God the Father" and "the *Female*...to God the Son".¹⁰¹ After the Fall Eve inherits the watery Tincture and Adam inherits the fiery one.¹⁰² Here again we find a feminisation of Christ: the watery Tincture, a property of the Second Principle, corresponds to the feminine aspect of Adam. Since this aspect is also the divine Wisdom, there is an intimate connection between Christ and the Virgin Sophia:

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 1:7:33.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 1:6:9.

¹⁰⁰*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 6:6.

¹⁰¹*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 23:45.

¹⁰²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:2:61; *idem.*, *XL Questions*, 8:9:9-10.

"in the Sonnes property consisteth the Noble Imaging of Sophia, viz. the Eternal Virginitie in Christ".¹⁰³ Sophia is "the substantiall wisdom, or the body of Christ".¹⁰⁴

Joseph Campbell has suggested that the male-female and life-death dualities are "mythologically related".¹⁰⁵ In conventional accounts of the Fall and Redemption, Eve is the bringer of death and Christ the giver of eternal life. For Boehme, the male-female duality has a more complex relation with that of life-death. Fallen man is, in one of Boehme's favourite phrases, "half dead"; he is half dead because he is in fact only half a being. The duality of gender is itself a principle of death; life can be lived fully only when this duality is transcended spiritually. Consequently, the Redemption is a process of regaining the androgyny lost at the Fall. Regeneration consists "not in Adams Manhood, neither in the Woman Eva, but in the Virgin, being neither Man nor Woman".¹⁰⁶ God's covenant is a promise that male and female will become "One onely"

¹⁰³ *Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 7:129.

¹⁰⁴ *Idem.*, *Two Theosophical Epistles*, 1:38.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 4 vols. (London 1960), vol. i, p. 121.

¹⁰⁶ Jacob Boehme, *A Consideration Upon the Book of Esaias Stiefel* (London 1653), 76.

again,¹⁰⁷ since man "cannot stand in the Eternity in a twofold Life, viz. in a Masculine and Feminine":¹⁰⁸

You must reconcile or lovingly betroth the man with the woman; for the man is angry, yet give him his dear spouse in his arms; but see that the spouse be a virgin, wholly chaste and pure.¹⁰⁹

This is "*the wedding of the Lamb...wherein Virgin Sophia, viz. the humanity of Christ is married to the soul*".¹¹⁰

Christ is as much the second Eve as the second Adam:

When we find him, we find our help or salvation; as in like manner Adam should have found him, but he suffered himself to be seduced, and found at length a Woman.¹¹¹

Christ's sacrifice is explicitly linked to the creation of Eve; it is because "Adam was broken in the Side by the Rib for the Woman" that Christ's side was pierced by a spear at the Crucifixion.¹¹² Similarly,

the Word of Life took the Tincture of Venus, with the heavenly and earthly Fiat, from Adam, also a Rib or Bone out of his Side as also the half Cross in the Head.¹¹³

Or again,

the Woman hath the one halfe of the Crosse and the Man the other halfe; which you may see in

¹⁰⁷*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:7:57.

¹⁰⁸*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 6:6; cf. *XL Questions*, 30:67-8.

¹⁰⁹*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 10:56.

¹¹⁰*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, Appendix, 48.

¹¹¹*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:9:88.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 1:6:42.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 1:6:33.

the skull: as also in the Essences; and therefore Christ must dye upon the Crosse, and destroy Death, on the Crosse.¹¹⁴

In Christ, "the Virgin's blood changes the Humane, dead as to God, into an Heavenly Blood".¹¹⁵ This is the meaning of the covenant of circumcision: "through the bloodshed of Christ [man would] be again brought into the eternal virginity".¹¹⁶ The "true Life in the Light of the Majesty...is the Tincture of the Virgine", characterised by the stereotypically feminine qualities of love, meekness and humility. The soul is restored to "an incorruptible life,...for it is in the Abygge it selfe, it is in the Centre of it".¹¹⁷

The importance of the feminine in the process of redemption is signalled at a linguistic level by Boehme's choice of substantive: the virgin denizen of God's Kingdom is not a *jungfräuliche Mann*, but a *männliche Jungfrau*.¹¹⁸ "There will be neither husband nor wife [in heaven], but all will be like the Angels of God, viz. Masculine

¹¹⁴*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 25:33. Boehme is referring to the T-shaped configuration of the coronal and sagittal sutures of the skull when viewed from above.

¹¹⁵*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 11:35.

¹¹⁶*Idem.*, *Christs Testaments*, p. 15.

¹¹⁷*Idem.*, *XL Questions*, 1:30.

¹¹⁸The decision of Boehme's translators to render *Jungfrau* as "virgin" rather than "maiden" has, of course, obscured the gender aspect of the concept in favour of an emphasis on chastity.

Virgins".¹¹⁹ The Redemption is based on a subordination of the fiery Tincture, that of wrath, to the watery Tincture, that of love:

the chief of the work is in the beginning to give the Fire-hunger a Love-virgin out of its kind for its Consort, that so his wrathful Hunger may be changed into a Love, and then they sleep together in their own Marriage Bed.¹²⁰

The androgyny of Christ is central to the Redemption. "This Champion or Lyon is no Man or Woman, but he is both".¹²¹ In Christ the masculine and feminine aspects of Adam are united again: "In the Child JESUS were both Tinctures perfect, just as in Adam".¹²²

Christ had such flesh in the Inward Man, as Adam had before Eve when he stood in the Divine Image in Purity; and therefore none can enter into Paradise except they obtaine that flesh againe that Adam had before the Fall, and Christ in his Incarnation.¹²³

It is because he is the second Adam in the sense of duplicating the first Adam's androgyny that Christ can redeem humanity, since the Redemption is a restoration of the heavenly Virgin to the children of Adam: in Christ "the eternal virginity has espoused itself with the young man, viz. with the humanity".¹²⁴

¹¹⁹Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 4:48.

¹²⁰*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 7:50.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 11:43.

¹²²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:8:17; cf. *Mysterium Magnum*, 23:31.

¹²³*Idem.*, *XL Questions*, 1:125.

¹²⁴*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 10:72.

In a sense the restoration of the heavenly Virgin to mankind had begun with Mary. In consenting to her role in the Incarnation, Mary had been raised from the state of an earthly virgin characteristic of the daughters of Eve to that of the heavenly Virgin. "*Maries Essences*" were "the Virgin-like Essences, which perished in Adam".¹²⁵ This does not mean, as Hilda Graef implies, that Mary was the Virgin Sophia incarnate in the same sense that Christ was God incarnate.¹²⁶ It is true that the "pure chaste virgin of God, put it selfe into Mary, in her Incarnation".¹²⁷ Boehme, however, emphasises that Mary was "truly the Daughter of Joachim and Anna, according to the Outward Flesh";¹²⁸ Joachim was "her true bodily father", while Christ had only a single human parent, Mary.¹²⁹ Mary was fully human and not born of "a strange Seede".¹³⁰ There is, nevertheless, a correspondence between the two Virgins: "the virgin [Wisdom] in *Ternario Sancto*, giveth the Heavenly Body [to Christ], and Mary the Earthly (Body)".¹³¹ Mary's assimilation to the divine Wisdom was

¹²⁵*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:8:15.

¹²⁶Hilda Graef, *Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (London 1963-5), vol. ii, pp. 62-3.

¹²⁷Boehme, *Three Principles*, 22:31.

¹²⁸*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:8:9.

¹²⁹*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, 3:3:77.

¹³⁰*Idem.*, "The First Apologie to Balthasar Tylcken", in *The Remainder of books written by Jacob Behme*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1662), 248-252.

¹³¹*Idem.*, *Threefold Life of Man*, 6:81.

an act of God's grace rather than a fundamental fact of her existence:

This came not out of her ability, but out of God's ability; unless the Center of God had moved it selfe in her; she would have been no otherwise, then all Eve's Daughters.¹³²

At first sight, the assimilation of Mary to the Virgin Sophia lays Boehme open to one of the objections to the trend in Mariology which emphasises Mary's perfection: the more divine the Mother of God is, the less need for Christ. For Boehme, however, it is essential that the Redeemer is biologically male. The object of the Redemption is not simply to restore the earthly virginity to its heavenly purity, which was achieved in Mary, but to reunite the feminine and masculine aspects of Adam:

For [the Redemption] was not to be done through Adams fiery Tincture, but through and in that part of the Adamical Lights Tincture, wherein the Love did burn; which was parted into the woman, that is, into the Genetrix of All Men.¹³³

Therefore Christ "must take on him the masculine Forme, though inwardly he stood in a virgin-like Image"; "the Word became Man in the feminine Essence, but became a Man that his love might quench the anger and fierce wrath of his Father".¹³⁴ Boehme tells us that

Christ was borne of a virgine, that he might sanctifie the Womans Tincture againe, and change it into the Mans Tincture, that the Man and the Woman might be One Image of God, againe, and no

¹³²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:8:31; cf. *idem.*, *Three Principles*, 22:34.

¹³³*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 7:50.

¹³⁴*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:7:59, 1:9:56.

more Man and Woman, but Masculine Virgins, as Christ was.¹³⁵

It is in Christ that the divine Wisdom is realised: "in the Sonnes property consisteth the Noble Imaging of Sophia, viz. the Eternal Virginity in Christ".¹³⁶ Thus it was "in the form or signature of the young man and virgin" that Christ had power to heal diseases, "for the Eternal Virginity had espoused it self with the young man, viz. with the humanity".¹³⁷

IV

Boehme's interpretation of the Fall as a loss of androgyny provides him with a mythical basis for understanding gender and sexuality in society. Man and woman together form a whole; separated, their being is only partial. Adam's loss of androgyny is used to explain heterosexual desire: "Therefore the man now greatly desires the woman's matrix, and the woman desires the mans limbus".¹³⁸ That heterosexuality is inspired by a yearning for lost wholeness can be seen from the "longing will and desire of Man and Woman to Copulate, and yet the fruit is not alwayes desired", a phenomenon which can be found not only in prostitution, but "also indeed in the State of

¹³⁵*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 58:46.

¹³⁶*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 7:129.

¹³⁷*Idem.*, *Signatura Rerum*, 10:72.

¹³⁸*Idem.*, *Way to Christ*, 3:2:55.

Marriage".¹³⁹ Because of their complementarity, man and wife are "one Body" in an almost literal sense, "And therefore ought to continue together, if they Once Mix". Adultery is a treason against the self.¹⁴⁰

Before the Fall Adam, like the angels, had "heavenly" rather than "beastiall" genitals.¹⁴¹ God had intended Adam to procreate through his imagination, in the Paracelsian sense, that is, "Magically".¹⁴² The proposed fruit of Adam's imagination was Eve, who should have been "generated out of himselfe, in great modesty (purity) and holinesse".¹⁴³ After the Fall, God gave Adam "a *bestiall form* and shape of Masculine Members".¹⁴⁴ The resurrected body will also have "Privy Parts", although "these shall be in another manner of form".¹⁴⁵ Boehme's concept of heavenly genitals is obscure, but he may have hermaphroditism in mind. He tells us that "the knowledge of the marks of distinction will remaine in the figure, but in the *Limbus* and the *Matrix* not several, as now they are".¹⁴⁶ Imaginative procreation was only possible while

¹³⁹*Idem.*, *Threefold Life of Man*, 9:42.

¹⁴⁰*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:6:52-3.

¹⁴¹*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 10:7.

¹⁴²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:10:13.

¹⁴³*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 20:80.

¹⁴⁴*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:6:38-9.

¹⁴⁵*Idem.*, *Aurora*, 20:79.

¹⁴⁶*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 10:18.

Adam contained the matrix of the Virgin wisdom within himself.¹⁴⁷ Procreation in the fallen world was to be by way of sexual intercourse. Boehme's view of sexual reproduction is negative:

the irrationality of the body in the unreasonable creatures, knoweth not what it doth; the body would not if it had reason, move so eagerly towards propagation.¹⁴⁸

Boehme thought that loss of love accompanied the sexualization of a relationship:

Behold two young people,...how very hearty, faithfull, and pure love, they beare one towards another,...but as soone as ever they take one another, and copulate, they infect one another with their inflamation (or burning lust)... and so they are many times at deadly enmity (or have venemous spitefull hatred) one against another.¹⁴⁹

The fact that Eve's first child was Cain demonstrated "that God did abominate the bestiall propagation".¹⁵⁰ Even the godly could not be free from guilt in sexual intercourse: "That a right true Regenerate Christian Man, should beget his Children totally Holy without Guilt...is Babell and a great Error".¹⁵¹

Boehme accepted the contemporary view of the passivity of women in the procreative process: "in the female kinde,

¹⁴⁷*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:3:69.

¹⁴⁸*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 8:44.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 15:34.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 13:6.

¹⁵¹*Idem.*, "An Apology Concerning Perfection", in *The Remainder of Books*, 42.

no life can proceed out of their Tinctures, but the Matrix must get the Tincture from the seede of the Male".¹⁵² Nevertheless, men and women make different contributions to the child: "the Man soweth Soul, and the Woman Spirit; and both sow flesh, viz. *Sulphur*".¹⁵³ Curiously, the male contribution to reproduction is the traditionally feminine soul, while women contribute the traditionally masculine spirit. After the Fall, the reproductive role of imagination is confined to character formation, a theory derived from Paracelsus. Like Paracelsus, Boehme believed that good parents produced good children and bad parents produced bad ones. This is not a theory of the hereditary transmission of good and evil in the sense that the orthodox theory of original sin is an hereditary theory. Unlike the Muggletonian doctrine of the two seeds, which may have been derived in part from a misreading of Boehme, the disposition of the child is not determined simply by a property of the seed from which it grows. Although a decisive imprint is made in the womb,¹⁵⁴ Boehme's theory is in fact a peculiar species of social environmentalism. The child receives a magical imprint from the moral character of its parents while still in the womb. Unlike Paracelsus, Boehme does not place special emphasis on the role of the mother in this, and even extends the child's susceptibility to the imagination of others beyond the

¹⁵²*Idem.*, *Threefold Life of Man*, 9:47.

¹⁵³*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:6:52.

¹⁵⁴*Idem.*, *XL Questions*, 14:11-12.

parental couple and beyond birth. The neonate remains impressionable to the magical influence of the characters of those around it, hence the importance of having godly baptismal witnesses: "If the Parents and Witnesses be faithfull they reach forth the Childe with their faith to the Covenant".¹⁵⁵

Boehme's ideas on divine gender might lead us to see him as a precursor of feminist theology:

More than any other writer of his time, he seems to have anticipated, if unintentionally, the present feminist demand for reconsideration of the sexual identity of God.¹⁵⁶

We should note, however, that the feminine aspects of Boehme's godhead are constructed in terms of passivity, comparable to early modern obstetrics and gynaecology.¹⁵⁷ Thus, "the woman hath the Tincture of Light, which cannot awaken Life, the Life arises in the Tincture of Fire".¹⁵⁸ Similarly, "The Wisdome is the passive, and the Spirit of God is the Active, or Life in her, as the soule in the Body".¹⁵⁹ The Virgin Sophia "generateth no Image, but receiveth the Image".¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵*Idem.*, *Christs Testaments*, 4:23.

¹⁵⁶Joyce L. Irwin ed., *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism 1525-1675* (New York 1979), Introduction, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷See p. 18, above.

¹⁵⁸Boehme, *XL Questions*, 8:10.

¹⁵⁹*Idem.*, *Clavis*, 41.

¹⁶⁰*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:1:65.

The recognition that God may be seen as both feminine and masculine does not lead Boehme to an endorsement of a social or political feminism. In the divine realm the First Principle is subordinated to the Second. Boehme reverses this subordination, without explanation, once he comes to what are in effect the embodiments of these Principles, man and woman.¹⁶¹ The views he expresses in one of his rare discussions of actual gender relations are the familiar stock of any domestic conduct book of the period. Woman "should be humble; as a member serveth the Body, so should the woman serve the man and love him as herself". Eve "is part of Adam; therefore *should every Woman be subject to the Man or Husband, and he should be Lord*". Man, however, is to exercise his authority moderately, because woman is a part of him.¹⁶² The relationship between male and female is constructed in terms of the joint exercise of power, the man compelling the woman through strength, and the woman exacting an obedience from the man through love:

For the Mans property, viz. the Fires, *must Rule*: and the Womans property, viz. the Lights, *must allay his Fire*: and bring it into the Meek Image of God.¹⁶³

Boehme's use of this theme, however, goes beyond the conventional allocation of power through strength and

¹⁶¹*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 5:118-9.

¹⁶²*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:7:63-6.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 1:7:60.

beauty, foreshadowing the Romantic notion of woman as a spiritualising influence on man.

Boehme's view of the proper place of the feminine hovers between the pedestal and the stake. He speaks of Adam's feminine aspect as "his Rose-Garden of Paradise within him",¹⁶⁴ but the separated Eve is "an Evil, Earthly, Opposite Woman".¹⁶⁵ Eve "was created to this corruptible life, for shee is the Woman of this world".¹⁶⁶ Boehme tells us that "Eves Essence was heavenly, but already somewhat poysoned and infected by Adams Imagination",¹⁶⁷ which implies that it was Adam who corrupted Eve. While Boehme's account of the Fall exculpates Eve from primary responsibility for sin, it is she who inherits the "infection of the Devil", since "it pressed on from Adam into Eve".¹⁶⁸ It was her role in the second (i.e. conventional) Fall that "introduced an Evil malignant venome and poyson into Man in the science or root of his Body".¹⁶⁹ The subjection of humanity to the dominion of the material world was the result of Eve's eating "the Earthly fruit".¹⁷⁰ Woman was very much a part

¹⁶⁴*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 6:11.

¹⁶⁵*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:7:13.

¹⁶⁶*Idem.*, *Three Principles*, 17:10.

¹⁶⁷*Idem.*, *Mysterium Magnum*, 20:23.

¹⁶⁸*Idem.*, *Election of Grace*, 7:47.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 6:134-5.

¹⁷⁰*Idem.*, *Incarnation*, 1:6:68.

of the fallen order of things.¹⁷¹ Whatever their disadvantages for women, more orthodox interpretations of the Fall at least accorded them a place in the original divine plan.

v

Boehme's theosophy was the culmination of the occult tradition in terms of the theological consideration of gender. His anthropology provided a fully elaborated account of Adamic androgyny and its theological implications. By adapting Paracelsian obstetrics, Boehme added the theory of imaginative procreation to this traditional concept. His most important contribution, however, was in developing the Sophiological framework of primordial androgyny. In doing so he validated the feminine in the divine, if not the mundane, realm. Boehme's English followers adopted the basic structure of his thought on gender with only minor modifications, but within this structure they developed Behmenist speculation in significant ways. For the most part, the English Behmenists had a more favourable attitude to women. Some, at least, also adopted relatively advanced views about the role of women in society. At the same time, they laid stress on the role of chastity in spiritual life. It is to these developments that this study will now turn.

¹⁷¹Cf. Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, p. 174.

5. THE RECEPTION OF BEHMENISM IN ENGLAND

The Interregnum witnessed a remarkable growth of interest in occult and mystical thought. Astrology, which William Lilly complained had languished in the previous decades, revived as people tried to chart a clear course for themselves in troubled times.¹ Men like Elias Ashmole turned to alchemical studies, apparently as a refuge from the turmoil around them.² The Familist tradition resurfaced with the republication of several works by Hendrik Niclaes.³ Basic texts of German occult thought

¹Katherine M. Briggs ed., *The Last of the Astrologers. Mr. William Lilly's History of his Life and Times from the Year 1602 to 1681* (London 1974), p. 23; cf. C.H. Josten ed., *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692). His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work*, 5 vols. (Oxford 1966), vol. i, p. 22.

²Michael Hunter, *Elias Ashmole 1617-1692. The Founder of the Ashmolean Museum and his World* (Oxford 1983), p. 5.

³H[endrik] N[iclaes], *The First Epistle. A crying Voice of the Holy Spirit of Love* (1648), *An Introduction to the Holy Understanding of the Glasse of Righteousnesse* (1649), *The Revelation of God* (1649), *A Figure of the True and Spiritual Tabernacle* (1655) and *The First Exhortation of HN to his Children and to the Family of Love* (1656). The occult connections of Familism are discussed in Jan van Dorsten, "Garter Knights and Familists", *Journal of European Studies* iv, 2 (June 1974), pp. 178-188. On English Familism, see Julia G. Ebel, "The Family of Love: Sources of its History in England", *Huntington Library Quarterly* xxx, 4 (August 1967), pp. 331-43; Lynnewood F. Martin, "The Family of Love in England: Conforming Millenarians", *Sixteenth Century Journal* iii, 2 (October 1972); Jean Dietz Moss, "The Family of Love and its English Critics", *ibid.*, vi, 1 (April 1975), pp. 35-52; J.W. Martin, "Christopher Vitel: An Elizabethan Mechanick Preacher", *ibid.*, x, 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 15-22; *idem.*, "Elizabethan Familists and English Separatism", *Journal of British Studies* xx, 1 (Fall 1980), pp. 53-73; Christopher Marsh, "'A Gracelesse and Audacious Companie?': The Family of Love in the Parish of Balsham, 1550-1630", *Studies in*

appeared with the translation of works by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Valentin Weigel.⁴ It was at this time, moreover, that a number of occult and mystical classics were made available to the English-speaking public. The two leading figures in this enterprise were Giles Randall and John Everard (1581-c.1650),⁵ both of whom were known to the leading

Church History xxiii (1986), pp. 111-129; *idem.*, "The Family of Love in English Society 1550-1630", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Churchill College, Cambridge 1991; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed. Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford 1989), ch. 4. As Smith points out, there are iconographic links between Behmenism and Familism, but the precise nature of the connection is unclear. John Pordage was labelled a "Familist" by his critics, but this is little more than anti-sectarian abuse. The eighteenth-century Moravian Behmenist, Francis Okeley, however, was an avowed admirer of the Familist schismatic Hiël, publishing a short commendatory essay on him in his edition of Frankenberg's *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial and Wonderful writings of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton 1780), pp. 144-153.

⁴Paracelsus, *Of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature* (London 1655), *His Dispensary of Chirurgery* (London 1656), *Of Chymical Transmutation* (1657), *His Archidoxes* (London 1661); H.C. Agrippa, *Three books of Occult Philosophy* (London 1651), *The Glory of Women* (London 1652), *His Fourth Book of occult Philosophy* (London 1655); Valentin Weigel, *Astrologie Theologized* (London 1649). In the 1640s, one German Behmenist spiritualist, Ludwig Gifftheyl, made a personal visit to England; see Gifftheyl, *Two Letters to the King, concerning the present calamities* (London 1643) and *Concerning the present Cain in his generation* (London 1648).

⁵For Everard, see T. Wilson Hayes, "John Everard and the Familist Tradition", in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London 1984), pp. 60-9; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, ch. 3, deals informatively with both Everard and Randall. Everard translated a number of occult and mystical works, including passages from Tauler, pseudo-Dionysius and Sebastian Franck. These circulated in manuscript and were published posthumously with his collected sermons, *Some Gospel-Treasures Opened: Or the Holiest of all unvailing* (London 1653). Everard's most important contribution, however, was undoubtedly his translation of *The Divine*

Interregnum Behmenist, John Pordage.⁶ It was against this background of occult spiritual revival that much of English radicalism took shape; in particular, it was this revival which prepared the way for the reception of Behmenism in England.

I. Boehme's Early Popularisers

The high point of Boehme's popularity in England came in the revolutionary years of the mid-seventeenth century. While the movement that bears his name belongs mostly to the post-Restoration period, it was during the Interregnum that his influence was at its most widespread, if not at its deepest. Between 1645 and 1662, a complete edition of Boehme's works appeared in print, translated by John Sparrow (1615-1670), his cousin John Ellistone (d. 1652), and Humphrey Blunden. In addition, two short biographies of Boehme, one by Durant Hotham (1619-1691), and an

Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus (London 1649), making the source texts of Hermeticism available to the English-speaking public. Randall published a translation of Nicholas Cusanus' *The Single Eye* (London 1646), Benet of Canfield's *A Bright Starre* (1646) and the great classic of Rhenish mysticism, the *Theologia Germanica* (1649). Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London 1928), has attributed Randall with the authorship of *Divinity and Philosophy Dissected, and set forth by a mad Man* (Amsterdam 1644); but this attribution has been convincingly questioned by Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 56-7, note.

⁶John Etherington, *A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familisme* (London 1645), p. 10.

exposition of his ideas by Charles Hotham (1615-1665) were published.⁷

John Sparrow was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and entered the Inner Temple in 1633. He was subsequently to play a part in the movement for law reform.⁸ Sparrow had served in the Army in Ireland and became a colonel in the Eastern Association. Little is known of John Ellistone apart from his family connection with Sparrow.⁹ Sparrow and Ellistone have been described somewhat misleadingly as "devout Anglicans".¹⁰ It is in fact impossible to be precise about their denominational

⁷Anonymous, *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen* (London 1644); Durant Hotham, *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (London 1655); Charles Hotham, *Ad Philosophiam Teutonicam Manductio, seu Determinatio de origine animae humanae* (London 1648), translated by Durant Hotham as *An Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie, Being a Determination Concerning the Original of the Soul* (London 1650); Charles Hotham also translated Boehme's *A Consolatory Treatise of the Four Complexions* (London 1654).

⁸Sparrow thought that reading Boehme would contribute to the reform of law "according to that Spirit of Love, the Holy Ghost"; preface to his translation of Boehme's *Concerning the Three Principles* (London 1648), sigs. A2r-A4v, sig. A4v. In the Interregnum, Sparrow was a Commissioner for Prize Goods, a trustee for the sale of the King's property, and a member of the Hale Commission on law reform; see Donald Veall, *The Popular Movement for Law Reform 1640-1660* (Oxford 1970), pp. 80-1.

⁹R.R.A. Walker, "John Ellistone and John Sparrow, the English Translators of Jacob Behmen", *Notes and Queries* clxvii (7 Nov. 1934), no. 18, p. 315. Walker's note establishes not only the descent of both men from Capt. John Sparrow of Gestingthorpe, but also the correct date of Sparrow's death.

¹⁰Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris 1960), pp. 39, 41.

loyalties, but Sparrow's interest in Boehme was partly as an antidote to "the sectarian Babel" he saw around him.¹¹

Humphrey Blunden had been a bookseller and publisher in London since 1635. Before the Civil War his publishing interests were centred on plays, but with the 1640s he began publishing political pamphlets, including the news-sheet *Speciall Passages and Certain Informations from several Places* (1642 onwards). Blunden was also associated with John Partridge in the publication of several of William Lilly's works.¹²

Charles and Durant Hotham were sons of the Civil War governor of Hull, Sir John Hotham.¹³ Durant was involved in his father's downfall, having his letters and papers seized and being summoned before Parliament in June 1643. Durant subsequently retired to Yorkshire, where he became famous to historians of the Quakers as the Justice who told George Fox in 1651 that "if God had not raised up

¹¹Preface to *Mercurius Teutonicus* (London 1648). The theme is reiterated throughout Sparrow's prefaces. Like his cousin, John Ellistone also expected Behmenism to "settle all Sects and Controversies in Religion"; preface to Jacob Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Boehme*, trans. John Ellistone (London 1649), sig. a3r.

¹²Henry R. Plomer ed., *A Dictionary of the Booksellers and Printers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1641 to 1667* (London 1907).

¹³There is a study of the Hotham family by A.M.W. Stirling, *The Hothams of Scarborough and South Dalton from their hitherto unpublished Family Papers*, 2 vols. (London 1918); this, however, makes scarcely any mention of the Behmenist brothers.

this principle of light and life [Quakerism], the nation had been overspread with Ranterism".¹⁴ Charles Hotham became a fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1644, and immediately fell into a dispute with the Master and the Committee for the Reformation of the Universities.¹⁵ Despite providing character witnesses to testify to his "strictness in Religion" and his support for Parliament,¹⁶ the dispute led to his deprivation in 1651. Hotham became rector of Wigan in 1653, but was ejected from his rectory in 1662. In addition to the works already mentioned, Charles's oeuvre includes some commendatory verses suffixed to Joseph Rigbie's *Drunkards Prospective*.¹⁷ Charles's chemical interests are indicated by the laboratory he kept in his college rooms at Peterhouse, and by his Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1667. He may, however, have retreated from his occult interests in later life, since in his will Charles ordered his astrological books to be burnt "as monuments of lying vanity and remnants of heathen idolatry".

¹⁴John L. Nickalls ed., *The Journal of George Fox* (London 1975), p. 90.

¹⁵Charles Hotham, *Corporations Vindicated in their Fundamental Liberties* (London 1651); *idem.*, *The Petition and Argument of Mr. Hotham, Fellow of Peterhouse in Cambridge* (London 1651); *idem.*, *A True state of the Case of Mr. Hotham, Late Fellow of Peter-House* (London 1651); *idem.*, *To every Member of Parliament, Charles Hotham of Peterhouse in Cambridge* (London 1655).

¹⁶Hotham, *A True state*, p. 14.

¹⁷Joseph Rigbie, *An Ingenious Poem, called the Drvnkards Prospective, Or Burning-Glasse* (London 1655), pp. 30-31.

This small band of popularisers show no great appreciation of Boehme's thought on gender. This may be because their writings are primarily brief editorial additions to Boehme's own works, functioning more as advertisements than expositions. The two biographies are but the briefest summaries of Boehme's life, with no attempt at expounding his ideas. Even Charles Hotham's *Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie* is limited in intent to a discussion of the origin of the soul. Several of these writers, however, make incidental remarks which suggest a familiarity with Behmenist thought on gender. Durant Hotham refers briefly to "this chaste Virgin of the heavenly wisdom".¹⁸ John Ellistone praises Sophia, "that Wisdome which dwelleth in Nothing, and yet possesseth All things".¹⁹ It is not clear what status Ellistone accords to Sophia, but his words encapsulate some of the ambiguity of Sophia in Boehme's thought, as both the *Ungrund* of which the Trinity is a manifestation and herself a manifestation of the Trinity.²⁰ Sparrow refers to Christ's being pierced in the side by the spear, which was "effectual, to the healing of the Breach made in Adams Side in his sleep, when it was become *not good* for Man to

¹⁸Durant Hotham, *Life of Jacob Behmen*, sig. B2r.

¹⁹John Ellistone, preface to Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, sig. A2r.

²⁰Cf. Alexandre Koyré, *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (Paris 1929), p. 345.

be alone".²¹ It can be inferred from this that Sparrow accepted the theories of Adamic androgyny, the fall into sexuality and Christ's redemptive action as in some sense transcending the duality of gender.

Amongst Boehme's early popularisers, only Charles Hotham provides anything like a discussion of Behmenist ideas on gender. Hotham identifies the Abyss as the *prima materia*, which is "the Body of the Deity, or more fitly, the eternall habitation of the Godhead".²² The Abyss is also the mother of the divine Wisdom, whose Father is God himself. Wisdom is the spirit of the Eternal Unity, just as the Abyss is its body and soul. Wisdom is God's means of self-manifestation, being like "a glasse [in which] God hath from all eternity had a lively and most delightful prospect of his own lovely visage, and incomprehensible beauty".²³

Hotham proceeds by describing the fall of Lucifer, which was caused by his looking "downward, for the sustenance of his life, to the menstruous efflux of the Nurse and Mother of his two inferior Principles" rather than feeding on "the Milk of Gods divine Breast".²⁴ This

²¹John Sparrow, preface to *Several Treatises* (London 1661), sig. A2v; cf. p. 174, above.

²²Hotham, *Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie*, p. 34.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

caused a disharmony in the properties of the Abyss, bringing Chaos into existence. God, however, has mercifully created "this sensible World out of that disordered heap".²⁵ The world was not created *ex nihilo*, but out of the three Principles of the godhead. The first and second of these are identified with the Abyss and Wisdom respectively. Hotham asserts that whatever arises out of the first two Principles is "finally eternal and immortal; but what proceeds or is created out of the third Principle, is as it self, frail and mortal".²⁶ Adam was created to replace Lucifer, but Hotham declines to discuss "the sleep of Adam, and the formation of Eve, [because] they concern not the matter in hand".²⁷ He does, however, speculate on the manner of Adam's conception. He tells us that "the Earth [was] impregnated by the spirit of this world lodged in the vehicle of the Elements and influences of the Stars". Adam was in fact conceived "in the womb of some dark cave".²⁸

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 47-8. Hotham is here departing from Boehme's use of the term "Chaos", which is practically synonymous with the Abyss as reflected by the Virgin Wisdom: "all colours, powers, and virtues are contained in this only CHAOS, or wonder-eye; which CHAOS is God himself" (*Signatura Rerum*, 3:38). Thus the emanative process in Boehme's thought proceeds Chaos(Abyss)-Wisdom-Eternal Nature. Hotham's use of these terms is similar to that adopted by William Law, reversing this progression: the Virgin Wisdom contains the forms of existence on an ideal level; Eternal Nature manifests these forms in their purity; Chaos is the condition to which Eternal Nature is reduced by Lucifer's Fall.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

Hotham's understanding of the process of creation is thoroughly procreationist; even Adam's creation is seen as an act of impregnation. More significantly, in his *Introduction*, we find a feminised understanding of the godhead, which is seen in effect as a trinity with two feminine elements (the Abyss and Wisdom). Nevertheless, it is only with the work of John Pordage and his associates that we find a full articulation of Behmenist ideas on gender.

II. John Pordage

The son of a London grocer, John Pordage (1608-1681) obtained his M.A. at Pembroke College, Oxford. He subsequently studied medicine at Leiden, returning to England before completing his studies.²⁹ In England, he became vicar of St. Lawrence's, Reading. Shortly after this he was installed in the rectory of Bradfield, where his patron was later to be Elias Ashmole. Ashmole presented Pordage with a copy of his *Fasciculus Chemicus*,

²⁹It may be significant that, shortly after its foundation in 1575, several major positions at Leiden University were occupied by Familists: the historian Hadrianus Junius, the lawyer Dirk van Egmond vander Nyenberg, and the Professor of Medicine, Johannes Heurnius. The University was served in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the bookshop of the English Familist emigré, Thomas Basson, and his son, Govert; the Bassons specialized in publishing occult works and, under Govert, Arminian ones. See Van Dorsten, "Garter Knights and Familists". In going to Leiden, Pordage was entering what may still have been the leading academic centre of occult and Familist studies. Pordage was also in contact with the Hartlib-Dury circle about this time, since Dury wrote from Amsterdam in July 1641 that he had performed some errand for Pordage; see G.H. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius. Gleanings from Hartlib's Papers* (London 1947), p. 220.

but there is no evidence of a close relationship between the two men.³⁰ Ashmole, however, often commended him "for his Knowledge in, or at least his great affection to, Astrology".³¹

By 1645 Pordage was being accused of Familism, in connection with Giles Randall and John Everard.³² Some six years later, Pordage was again cited obliquely as an instance of the "double tongues" with which equivocating Familists spoke.³³ The "Familists" with whom Pordage was now associated included William Everard, Thomas Tany and Abiezer Coppe; he was also said to have expressed approval

³⁰C.H. Josten ed., *Elias Ashmole*, vol. i, p. 109. Bradfield came into Ashmole's hands through his marriage to Lady Manwaring in 1649, but owing to legal difficulties he did not take full possession of the rectory till 1652.

³¹Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis* (London 1691), vol. ii, p. 450. The biographical details given above are based on Wood, whose source was apparently Ashmole; Josten ed., *Elias Ashmole*, vol. i, p. 292. Pordage's work is discussed in Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala 1948), *passim*. See also Desirée Hirst, "The Riddle of John Pordage", *Jacob Boehme Society Quarterly* 1, 6, pp. 5-15. For a brief discussion of Pordage's Sophiology, see Roger Friedrich, *Studien zur Lyrik Gottfried Arnolds* (Zürich 1969), pp. 76-85. John Pordage's supposed Ranterism is discussed in Jerome Friedman, *Blasphemy, Immorality and Anarchy: the Ranters and the English Revolution* (Athens, Ohio, 1987), ch. 16; Friedman, however, seems to be oblivious of the theosophical side of Pordage's thought. See also Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat. Milton and some Contemporaries* (Harmondsworth 1985), pp. 220-242, for both John Pordage and his son, Samuel Pordage.

³²John Etherington, *A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familisme* (London 1645), p. 10.

³³John Tickell, *The Bottomless Pit Smoaking in Familisme* (Oxford 1651), sig. A6v.

of Richard Coppin's writings.³⁴ Pordage was thus in contact with some of the leading spiritualist thinkers of his day. It seems to have been about this time that Pordage received his own spiritual enlightenment. Like all spiritualists, Pordage found God when he ceased looking outside himself and began looking within. Significantly, what Pordage discovered, as he later described it, was not so much Christ or the Holy Spirit as "the principle of Wisdom", which he found to be "the root of my life".³⁵

Pordage gathered around himself a small band of enthusiasts whose activities soon aroused the suspicions of their more orthodox neighbours. The religious tenor of Pordage's circle can be gauged from the witnesses on his behalf at the proceedings for his ejection from the ministry. Christopher Fowler charged them with a variety of offensive beliefs, including anticlericalism, denying the Scriptures to be the word of God, baptism, anti-Sabbatarianism, Arminianism and mortalism. One, Richard Stockwell, was an "Erburist", another, John Tench, was "one of John Tawney's followers" and "a late abettor of the Anti-scripturall Quakers at Reding".³⁶ The Reading

³⁴Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum. Satan at Noon, Or, Antichristian Blasphemies, Anti-scripturall Divilismes, Anti-Morall Uncleanesse, Evidenced in the Light of Truth, and Punished by the Hand of Justice* (London 1655), pp. 60-1.

³⁵John Pordage, *Sophia: das ist Die Holdseelige ewige Jungfrau der Göttlichen Weisheit* (Amsterdam 1699), pp. 3 ff.

³⁶Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, pp. 11-15, 31-2.

"Quakers" seem to have been particularly sympathetic to Pordage; Fowler, at least, believed that his own harassment at their hands was due to his having opposed Pordage.³⁷ Fowler's account is hostile, but the general impression that Pordage's associates were deeply imbued with spiritualist thought is probably accurate.

A series of charges were brought against Pordage, including denying the divinity of Christ, communing with spirits, and fathering a bastard child. As we shall see, some of the charges clearly related to Behmenist ideas on gender, and it was almost certainly with Pordage in mind that Richard Baxter attacked Behmenism for such errors as belief in prelapsarian androgyny and an advocacy of celibacy.³⁸ Eventually Pordage was ejected from his rectory in December 1654.³⁹ At the Restoration, Pordage was reinstalled at Bradfield, but was finally to leave the

³⁷Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum. Sathan at Noon The Second Part* (London 1655), p. 2. It is impossible to tell whether or not Fowler was using the term "Quaker" merely as a generalized term of abuse. There was a group of Friends active in Berkshire at this time; Joseph Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers*, 2 vols. (London 1753), vol. i, pp. 11-12.

³⁸Richard Baxter, *For Prevention of the Unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost* (London 1655), pp. 155-6. The passage was reprinted in Thomas Underhill's *Hell Broke Loose: Or An History of the Quakers Both Old and New* (London 1660), pp. 15-16.

³⁹The events leading to Pordage's ejection are detailed in his earliest works, *Truth Appearing through the Clouds of Undeserved Scandal and Aspersion* (London 1655) and *Innocencie Appearing through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (London 1655). See also Fowler, *Daemonium Meridanum*.

ministry after the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Subsequently he moved to London, returning to Bradfield from 1665 to 1668. In London he was at the centre of a small Behmenist coterie.

Pordage's London circle included Ann Bathurst and Joanna Oxenbridge; Oxenbridge's house in Baldwins Gardens was one of the Behmenists' meeting-places. In 1663, Pordage's circle had been joined by another female visionary, Jane Lead,⁴⁰ who was to inherit the leadership of the group after Pordage's death in 1681. Even in his Bradfield days, many of Pordage's entourage were women. Whether we regard them as women of heightened spiritual sensibility or merely as people with marked hysterical tendencies, Pordage's female followers no doubt found Bradfield a sympathetic environment. This is perhaps an early manifestation of the potential of Behmenism to act as a spiritually empowering ideology for women, a potential which was later to come to fruition in the female messianism of the American Shakers.

Women seem to have been prominent among the Reading Quakers associated with Pordage. One of them declared that she was "*I am that I am*; and being further demanded,

⁴⁰Jane Lead, preface to John Pordage's *Theologia Mystica, Or the Mystic Divinitie of the Aeternal Invisibles* (London 1683), p. 2. Lead's family was connected with Thomas Bromley, and it was no doubt this connection which first brought her into contact with Pordage and Behmenism.

whether she did put her self in Gods room? she replied yea".⁴¹ This particular woman remains anonymous, but others in Pordage's circle can be identified. A certain Margaret Pinder experienced a number of visions which were, like Anna Trapnel's, apparently induced by fasting.⁴² Another female visionary at Bradfield was Mrs. Flavel, reputedly the mother of Pordage's illegitimate child. Flavel saw "the Philosophers Stone,...which she knew to be the Divinity in the Humanity".⁴³ Mary Pocock, a witness for Pordage at the proceedings for his ejection, was, according to Fowler, "a woman formerly of troubled spirit" and "one of the Drs. family".⁴⁴

Pordage and his companions were noted for their eccentric behaviour. One of the anti-Ranter tracts relates an incident allegedly occurring at Bradfield. One day, while Pordage was preaching in his church, "he fell into a Trance, running out of the Church, and roaring like a Bull, saying that he was called and must be gone". He was followed home by Sir Henry Foster's son, who witnessed the ensuing scene. Mrs. Pordage was discovered "cloathed all in white Lawn, from the Crown of her head, to the sole of

⁴¹Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum...The Second Part*, p. 2.

⁴²For several days Pinder "did not eat one piece of bread, but sometimes a little water and sugar"; Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 16. Cf. Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (London 1654), pp. 1, 4.

⁴³Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 17.

⁴⁴Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, p. 15.

her foot, with a white Rod in her hand". A certain Mrs. Chevil entered, "fell on her knees, and taking Mrs. Pordich by the feet", said "That she was to meet with her spouse and her Prophetess". Pordage, his wife and Mrs. Chevil then "fell to dancing the Hay about 3. Flower-Pots". Foster asked Pordage the meaning of this strange behaviour, to which he replied:

It was a rejoycing because they had overcome the Devil: With that Mrs. Pordich cries out for Elijahs Mantle and then comes up Mrs. Chevil, and Mrs. Pordich fell adoring of her, kissing her knee.

A certain Goodwife Puckridge then entered the room, bowed and kissed Mary Pordage's knee. The latter told Goodwife Puckridge "*That there was a place prepared for her in Heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Virgin Mary*". Foster, by now thoroughly shocked, departed, leaving the company "dancing of the Hayes and Trenchmore, expecting every hour when they should be taken up to Heaven, forsooth".⁴⁵ The tale has a number of interesting features. The reference to Mrs. Chevil's coming to meet her spouse is ambiguous; it may refer to Christ, Mrs. Pordage, Pordage himself or, more mundanely, even Mr. Chevil. The participants were predominantly women, and Mary Pordage is evidently recognised by her circle as a prophetess.⁴⁶ Goodwife Puckridge is promised a seat in

⁴⁵M. Stubbs, *The Ranters Declaration* (1650), in J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History. The Historians and the Ranters* (Cambridge 1986), pp. 175-8, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁶Richard Roach was later to record that the "fresh Concurrence & Holy Gale of Divine Life" opened "first & Principally in Mrs Pordage"; MS Rawlinson D833, fos. 63-4.

heaven not at Christ's right hand, but at the Virgin Mary's. Like all the anti-Ranter tracts, however, the source for this story is unreliable, although Stubs does cite seven witnesses by name.

Pordage's purely theosophical works were only published posthumously, mostly in German translations, the original English manuscripts of which are no longer extant. He was, however, already being accused of Behmenism in 1655, in reference to the belief that the male represented the divinity and the female the pure humanity. According to Fowler, this implied that human beings partook of the divine nature, which was "the euangle of Henry Nicholas and Jacob Behmen".⁴⁷ The outlines of a Behmenist understanding of God and the world, moreover, can be discerned in Pordage's account of his ejection, and there can be no doubt that Pordage was engaged in theosophical speculation at this time.

One of the charges leading to Pordage's ejection was maintaining "the unlawfulness of having children" even in wedlock.⁴⁸ The rector of Bradfield also allegedly told one of his parishioners that marriage itself was "a very wicked act".⁴⁹ Pordage (himself a father) did not deny the first of these charges, merely arguing that this belief

⁴⁷Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, pp. 34, 36.

⁴⁸Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 9.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 19.

was not a ground for insufficiency for the ministry.⁵⁰ The belief that procreation was unlawful was based on the theory of Adamic androgyny: "Adam was made male and female in himself, and had he not fallen, he had brought forth children himself".⁵¹ Adamic procreation should have been through Wisdom, who was Adam's inner bride:

God blessed Adam in his marriage, in his union with Wisdom, whom he had attained as his bride within himself, and said to him: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the paradisiacal earth with a race out of your own loins.⁵²

For Pordage, Adamic androgyny was an expression of prelapsarian union with God, "the male representing the Deity, the female the pure Humanity, or regenerated part of the soul, which by union is made partaker of the Divine nature".⁵³ Regeneration itself was, of course, a question of regaining androgyny. As Pordage was later to advise one of his correspondents, "Only discern the seed and matter of your Stone. Only discern your little man and your

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵²John Pordage, "Von dem Paradies". in *Göttliche und Wahre Metaphysica, Oder Wunderbare und durch Erfahrung erlangte Wissenschaft Der Ewigen und Unsichtbaren Dinge* (Leipzig 1715), vol. iii, pp. 614. "Gott segnete Adam in seiner Ehe/ in seiner Vereinigung mit der Weissheit/ die er zu seiner Braut erlangt hatte in ihm selbst/ und sagte zu ihm: Sey fruchtbar und mehre dich/ und fülle die Paradiesische Erde mit einem Geschlect aus deinen eigenen Lenden"

⁵³*Innocencie Appearing.*, p. 44.

little woman, your man and your woman, your King and your Queen".⁵⁴

As far as his critics were concerned, Pordage's alleged disapproval of matrimony was not necessarily an advocacy of celibacy. Fowler asked Pordage why he called Christ "the eternal virgin? is it not to possesse your people against marriage?".⁵⁵ He also charged that Pordage "asserted he knew nothing to the contrary but that a man might company with more than one woman, being taxed with keeping carnal company with a woman in London".⁵⁶ Both views represented Pordage's twofold "uncleanness in Doctrine".⁵⁷ Presumably, Foster was accusing Pordage of the view allegedly held by Thomas Webbe, "That there's no Heaven but women, nor no Hell save Marriage".⁵⁸ Pordage's own answer to the charge of justifying sexual promiscuity is ambiguous. He admitted that he had made just such a remark to a Mrs. Grip, but claimed that he did so to test "whether or not she might not be tainted with some notions

⁵⁴John Pordage, "Ein gründlich Philosophisch Sendschreiben vom rechten und wahren Steine der Weissheit", in Friedrich Roth-Scholtz ed., *Deutsches Theatrum Chemicum*, 3 vols. (Nuremberg 1728-32), vol. ii, p. 592. "Erkennet nur die Saamen und Materie Eures Steins. Erkennet nur Euer Männlein und Euer Weiblein/ Eueren Mann und Euer Weib/ Euren König und Königin".

⁵⁵Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, p. 126.

⁵⁶Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 14. The woman was Mrs. Flavel.

⁵⁷Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum*, sigs. a4v-A1r.

⁵⁸Edward Stokes, *The Wiltshire Rant* (London 1652), p. 4.

of Rantism".⁵⁹ Pordage also claimed to advocate "Christian Eunuchism", declaring that

I prefer Virginitie before Matrimony, The single state before the conjunct; and that persons though in a married state, yet assured by grace of the gift of Continency, may by consent abstain from the enjoyments of that state, and so be in it; as though they were not in it, living as single though in a united form.⁶⁰

It was necessary to "clearly distinguish betwixt those marriages that are Idolatrous, Adulterous, and Bestial, and those that are Holy, Pure, Divine".⁶¹ Pordage did not, however, indicate the relevant criteria for this distinction.

Chastity for Pordage was an *imitatio Christi*, since Christ "was born of a Virgin, so lived in virginity, and the single devoted life, leaving an example to all that are able to tread in his steps and follow him".⁶² One of the charges laid against Pordage was the assertion that Christ was born "not only in or through a woman, but out of the substance or nature of the Virgin".⁶³ The precise meaning of this charge is uncertain. Pordage's accusers may have understood him to be denying the divinity of Christ, another charge laid against him.⁶⁴ To those

⁵⁹Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 25.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 2.

familiar with Boehme's works, however, these words seem rather to refer to Christ as an incarnation of the Virgin Sophia.

Virginity in Pordage's thought was not simply a matter of chastity. Pordage explained that when he used the words "Virgin" and "Virginity" he was not simply referring to a woman "who never knew a man", but to "the virginal nature which Eve had in Paradise before the Fall, but afterwards lost".⁶⁵ The "Virgin Life", which is "the Life Eternal", is not "meerly to abstain from the concupiscible lustings of Venus". Virginity expresses *Gelassenheit*, the resignation of the self which is at the heart of mystical theology:

For the Virgin life is not attained till the Will of the soul is brought through death to be so passive as to will, desire and act nothing but what the Essential essence of love wills, moves, and acts thorow it; for till then the soul cannot be a pure Virgin, nor live without all desire, lust and imagination, which must all cease, before the pure life of God can come to be all in all.

This is called "the Virgin life" by "Wisdom that eternal virgin".⁶⁶ For Pordage, divine Wisdom is self-denial. As one of his admirers was later to characterise it, Wisdom is "pacific, quiet, not rigid for its own right, moderate,

⁶⁵Pordage, "Von der äussern Gebuhr und Fleischwerdung Jesu Christi", in *Vier Tractätlein Des Seeligen Johannes Pordädschens* (Amsterdam 1704), p. 62: "die Jungfräuliche Natur/ welche Eve in Paradiese vor dem Falle hatte/ nach demselben aber sie verlohrt".

⁶⁶Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing*, p. 77.

obsequious, persuasibl[e], yielding".⁶⁷ Pordage tells us that:

This Eternal Love, which is the unchangeable Nature of God, is a most pure Virgin, it is Love without lusting or desire....It is the Eternal Liberty, being free from all things, it is a meer passive nothing.⁶⁸

The divine Wisdom expresses the Behmenist understanding of God as *agape*.

The Virgin Wisdom has a prominent place in Pordage's thought. She "flows out of God's eternal Eye, as out of her root and primeval beginning. She has there her seat, where God's eternal Mind and Will have their seat".⁶⁹ Sophia is clearly an integral part of Pordage's godhead. In Behmenist thought, God's Will and Mind correspond to the Father and Son; Sophia has almost replaced the Spirit in Pordage's Trinity. Will, Mind and Wisdom

exist in God in one another, and penetrate one another, and flow out of one another, so that they only make up a united, inseparable and indivisible Power under themselves....[T]he Will (the true determination or resolution of the

⁶⁷E[dward] H[ooker], "The Praefatori Epistl" to Pordage's *Theologia Mystica*, p. 58. This has separate pagination to Pordage's text. Hooker was also the author of two works which survive in manuscript: "A Preface or Introduction to the Understanding of the mystical parts of Scripture" (Walton MS I.1.1) and "The Triple Crown of Glory from above" (Walton MS I.1.2).

⁶⁸Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, p. 44.

⁶⁹John Pordage, "Von der Ewigen Welt", in *Göttliche und Wahre Metaphysica*, vol. ii, pp. 266-7. Sophia "fleust aus GOTTes ewigem Auge/ als aus ihrer Wurtzel und uranfänglichem Ursprung. Sie hat allda ihren Sitz/ wo GOTTes ewiges Gemüth und Wille ihren Sitz haben".

Will), goes out of the Mind (the true desire),
the Mind out of the Wisdom out of the Eye.⁷⁰

Wisdom, however, can be identified with none of the Persons of the Trinity, but is also to be found in all of them. In one of his visions, Sophia told Pordage that

They are foolish philosophers, who confound me, Wisdom, with the Father, and with the Son, or with the Holy Spirit. For I am a Power and Spirit distinct from the Holy Trinity, and yet one with the Holy Trinity.⁷¹

The "Globe of Eternity" encompassing the godhead is "the glass of [God's] Wisdom".⁷² It is the seat of "the Eye of the Abyss" from which "flow forth the senses of the Deity".⁷³ The divine Wisdom is "the immense deep of the Abyssal Globe of Eternity", which is the body of God.⁷⁴ Wisdom is one of the five wonders of the "still Eternity", which is the "Most Holy Place" in the godhead.⁷⁵ Wisdom's

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 268-9. They "bestehen in Gott in einander/ und durchdringen einander/ und fliessen aus einander/ so dass sie nur eine einige unzertrenliche und untheilbare Krafft unter sich ausmachen...[D]er Wille (die wirklichen Determinirung oder Entschliessung des Willens) gehet aus dem Gemüth (dem wirklichen Begehren)/ das Gemüth aus der Weissheit aus dem Auge".

⁷¹Pordage, *Sophia*, p. 123. "Diejenigen sind thörichte Philosophi/ die Mich Weissheit mit dem Vatter/ und mit dem Sohne/ oder mit dem H. Geiste confundiren. Denn Ich bin eine/ von der H. Trinität unterschiedne/ Krafft und Geist/ und doch Eins mit der H. Trinität".

⁷²Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, p. 23.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 66-7. The other wonders are "the Spirit of Eternity" (the ineffable godhead), the Trinity, "the Seven Spirits of God" (cf. Boehme's seven qualities), and "the Inhabitants of the most Holy Place" (impersonal spirits distinct from angels, the latter being the first order of created spirits).

relationship to the Son (the Heart of the Trinity) is a nuptial one:

This flaming heart of Love is the sole object to which her regard is fastned continually: She espouseth her self to nothing, inclineth her self to nothing, but only to this essential Love, the Word of God, fixed in the Heart of the Deity.⁷⁶

Her relationship with the Holy Spirit is also nuptial: it is Wisdom and the Holy Spirit who generate the impersonal spirits which are "the Inhabitants of the Most Holy Place".⁷⁷ Wisdom is coeternal and coessential with the Trinity, but she is not coequal. This is because Wisdom is completely passive: "I do nothing of myself, for the Holy Trinity works in me".⁷⁸ Sophia's passivity is her defining characteristic, constituting her "Virgin Purity, which consists in this, that she is free from all desire, will and motion of her own".⁷⁹ Wisdom is God's own *Gelassenheit*.

One of Wisdom's principal functions is as the key to the process of God's manifestation in the world and to Himself. She exists "to manifest and reveal all things" and "to give Light to the deep Abyss of the still Eternity".⁸⁰ In this respect, Wisdom would appear to be

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁸Pordage, *Sophia*, p. 123. "Ich thue Nichts von mir selbsten/ es würcke denn die H. Trinität in mir".

⁷⁹Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, p. 68.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 69-8.

the same as "God's Divine Chaos, wherein God's Eternal Eye doth see all things lye hid"; Pordage also speaks of Wisdom bringing forth the "seven working Powers" of Eternal Nature out of the divine Chaos, which implies a distinction between the two.⁸¹ It would be a mistake to impose too much analytical consistency on Pordage's thought.

Wisdom plays an important role in the process of creation. It is she who mingles the four Eternal Elements, the archetypes of the material elements, to produce Eternal Nature, the archetype of the visible world.⁸² Eternal Nature, which is also Eternal Humanity, is itself given a feminine identity as "the Mother of all beings" which, since "a Woman cannot bring forth without a Man...would have continued barren, without the Active power of the Deity had impregnated her".⁸³ It is the union of the Trinity with Eternal Nature which produces "the Divine Nature of Love".⁸⁴ Since God is essentially Love, the implication is that the fullness of the divine being is only completely achieved in this union of God and Eternal Nature.⁸⁵ Eternal Nature is attributed with many of the qualities of the Virgin Wisdom. She is not only a

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸⁵Cf. p. 139, above.

nuptial partner of the deity, but also "the body of the Holy Trinity".⁸⁶ Here again we meet the analytical confusion of Pordage's thought: he speaks of Wisdom, Chaos and Eternal Nature as distinct entities, but endows them with the same attributes.

As Thune has observed, "in Dr. Pordage we have a fully developed Sophia-mysticism".⁸⁷ Although Boehme had clearly felt the working of the divine Wisdom in his mystical experiences, there is no suggestion in his writings of an anthropomorphic, visionary apparition of Sophia. This may also have been the case with Pordage. Thune doubts that his experiences of Sophia reflect a genuine auditory and visionary experience, since "it is very striking how pale and bloodless his revelations are".⁸⁸ This, however, may be simply a reflection on the poverty of Pordage's literary abilities. Pordage tells us that:

As I now turned my eye inwards to my new earth, and thought to see how the work of renewal progressed, Sophia quickly passed before me, and revealed herself to me with these words: I have come with my cleansing and purifying fire into my earth, to cleanse your earth of all uncleanness, dross and tin.⁸⁹

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸⁷Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala 1948), p. 49.

⁸⁸Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 155.

⁸⁹Pordage, *Sophia*. "Als ich nun mein Auge einwärts auf meine Neue Erde gekehrt hatte/ und zu sehen gedachte wie das Werck der Erneuerung fortgieng/ gieng Sophia schnell vor mir vorbei und offenbahrte sich mir selbst mit

Such passages suggest that Pordage's Sophia was a more personal figure than Boehme's.

There are some indications in Pordage's writings of a feminisation of Christ. The Son in the Trinity is called "the Glory of the Eye [i.e. Father]",⁹⁰ which recalls the Pauline view of woman as "the glory of the man". After telling us that it is Wisdom who brings forth the "simplified Spirits" who inhabit the godhead, Pordage informs us that this "Mother of theirs is the Eternal Heart of Love, which is the Centre of the Blessed Trinity".⁹¹ Since the Heart of the Trinity is the Son, the Son is identified here with the Virgin Wisdom. Like Boehme, Pordage identifies the Father with Fire and the Son with Water,⁹² the latter being "the Womb of the Meek Light".⁹³ Water conforms to a feminine stereotype, being "a Meek, Mild, Soft, Gentle Essence".⁹⁴ Wisdom, Pordage tells us,

foresaw that the Fire-life with its fierce properties would be but an ill Governor, therefore she made the elder, viz. the Fire-

diesen Worten: Ich bin in meine Erde kommen/ deiner Erde von aller Unreinigkeit/ Schlacken und Zinn zu reinigen".

⁹⁰Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, p. 11.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 119.

Spirit, to serve the younger, viz. the Water and Light-Essence.⁹⁵

As with Boehme, it is the subordination of a masculine principle to a feminine one which guarantees divine benevolence.

III. Pordage's Disciples

John Pordage's circle included a number of figures who have left works showing traces of Behmenist influence. Richard Roach recorded that both Ann Bathurst and Joanna Oxenbridge had "great & Wonderful Experiences & Manifestations fro[m] y^e Heavenly World",⁹⁶ but only the first of these has left any record of her visions.⁹⁷ In these, Bathurst demonstrates an erotic sensibility,⁹⁸ but her mysticism is primarily Christ-centred. One might expect a Behmenist to provide a Sophiological context for her vision of the Rose of Sharon declaring "the Trinity manifested in all things",⁹⁹ but Bathurst here, and elsewhere, declines the opportunity to indulge in

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁹⁶MS Rawlinson D 833, fo. 65r.

⁹⁷Bathurst's visions of 1679 can be found in MS Rawlinson D1338, which records that "Thise visions ware when [Bathurst] did live with dr pordich" (fo. 67v). Both the 1679 visions and others up to 1693 are recorded in MSS Rawlinson D1262, D1263.

⁹⁸In September 1679, for example, she "hoped at night that I might ly in his [God's] arms" again; God subsequently came to her, "compassing me as I lay in a Bed of his love-presence & security, & loving Embraces"; MS Rawlinson D1262, p. 45.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 68*.

Sophiological speculation. The Glory of God, for example, which in occult circles was usually identified with his *shekhinah* or Sophia, is given a male identity by Bathurst.¹⁰⁰

A pamphlet of 1649, written by a woman signing herself as M.P., may also have been the product of one of Pordage's female associates.¹⁰¹ Previously attributed to Mary Penington, Nigle Smith has pointed out the pamphlet's proximity in thought and language to Pordage's circle. Smith suggests Mary Pocock as the possible author, on the basis of her testimony at the proceedings for Pordage's ejection.¹⁰² It is even possible that the pamphlet was written by another M.P. among the Bradfield Behmenists, Mary Pordage.¹⁰³ The author treats the Fall as a double adultery:

O King [i.e., man], thou hast broken wedlock with God, and thy wife, even *Eve*, the mother of all that was living in thee; but thou shouldst have dwelt with thy *Eve*, or Reason, as a man of knowledg[e], to have ruled with justice, through the power of Christ thy head, and thou the head of the woman.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 82: "The Glory opened his heart to us..."

¹⁰¹M.P., *The Mystery of the Deity in the Humanity; Or The Mystery of God in Man* (London 1649).

¹⁰²Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 211.

¹⁰³The year of the pamphlet's publication was also that of Mary Pordage's first visionary experience, of which this work may be the fruit.

¹⁰⁴M.P., *The Mystery of the Deity in the Humanity*, p. 20.

In justifying her own right as a woman to speak on spiritual affairs, M.P. also foreshadows Richard Roach's emphasis on the "female embassy" of the Last Days: "the time is coming, that the Lord, who is no respecter of persons, will pour down his Spirit on the servants of his handmaids, and they shall prophesie, and be serviceable in their measure, with their talent, for the use of the Body [of Christ]".¹⁰⁵

The vegetarian ascetic Roger Crab (c. 1621-1680) seems to have become a "*Philadelphian, or Sweet Singer*" after moving to Bethnal Green (c. 1657),¹⁰⁶ and may have belonged to Pordage's circle. Whatever influence Pordage had on Crab resulted in nothing more than an incidental and thoroughly garbled Behmenism.¹⁰⁷ Crab was an advocate of celibacy, but recognised the validity of "The pure

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

¹⁰⁶John Strype, "An Appendix of Certain Tracts, Discourses, and Other Remarks, Concerning the State of the City of London", in *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster by John Stowe, Corrected, Improved, and very much Enlarged by John Strype*, 2 vols. (London 1720), vol. ii, p. 99. To call Crab a "Philadelphian" is, however, an anachronism.

¹⁰⁷There are no traces of Behmenism in Crab's *The English Hermite, or, Wonder of the Age* ((London 1654), but Crab was later to write of the "seven Ruling-Spirits", which are a curious blend of the traditional seven vices and Boehme's seven qualities; *idem.*, *Dagon's Downfall; Or, the Great Idol digged up Root and Branch* (London 1657). For Crabb, see Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution. Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution in the 17th Century* (paperback edn., London 1968), pp. 303-10.

Marriage of Nature only for Generations sake".¹⁰⁸ His hostility to sexual intercourse during pregnancy was possibly based on this view that procreation was the sole justification for marriage, but the emotional fervour with which it is expressed suggests less rational psychological roots.¹⁰⁹ Crab is reminiscent of Tany in his disapproval of the marriage-market, asserting that people "bargain and swop like Horse-Coursers".¹¹⁰ His disapproval of marriage was also rooted in his sympathy for women. In matters of property, Crab complained, "the Womans Power stands in no force without the Man; but the man may dispose of it by Law without the Woman".¹¹¹

Thomas Tryon (1634-1704) had been a spinner and shepherd before becoming a hatter like Crab.¹¹² As a young man, he tells us, "The blessed Day-Star of the Lord began to shine in my Heart and Soul, and the Voice of Wisdom continually and most powerfully called upon me for Separation and Self-denial".¹¹³ Given his Behmenism, this suggests that Tryon interpreted his conversion in

¹⁰⁸Crab, *Dagons-Downfall*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 15; cf. pp. 253-4, below.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

¹¹²There is no concrete evidence that Tryon was a Philadelphian, but given that both he and Crab were Behmenist, vegetarian hatters living in London, it would seem likely that the two men at least knew each other.

¹¹³Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Tho. Tryon, Late of London, Merchant* (London 1705), p. 26.

Sophiological terms. Wisdom, however, is not a clearly defined figure in Tryon's writings, and the Behmenistic reference of the term easily escapes notice. When Tryon tells us that madness is caused by entertaining the passions because of a failure to listen to "the voice of *Wisdom*",¹¹⁴ most readers would understand him to be referring to something like Reason. Like Crab, Tryon was a vegetarian, and he developed a peculiarly gastronomic Behmenism. Tryon's works are mostly devoted to arguing that people are "digging their Graves with their own Teeth".¹¹⁵ Gender is not a prominent aspect of Tryon's thought, but he does reveal some typically Behmenist attitudes. He was wary of sexuality, believing that "visiting too frequently the *Shades of Venus*" was "the chief Cause and Original of most *Consumptions*, especially in the *Males*".¹¹⁶ Tryon seems to associate women with a sanguine rather than saturnine temperament. He tells us that "even the fair Sex" will "be quickly tainted with the infection of the envious and spiteful Powers" if they

¹¹⁴Thomas Tryon, "A Discourse of the Causes, Natures and Cure of Phrensie, Madness or Distraction", appended to *idem.*, *A Treatise of Dreams & Visions* (London 1689), p. 253. A Behmenist interpretation of Wisdom in this passage is confirmed by the subsequent analysis, which treats madness as a disharmony wrought in "the seven *Forms of Nature*", Boehme's *Quellgeister*.

¹¹⁵Phylotheus Physiologus [Thomas Tryon], *Monthly Observations for the Preserving of Health, with a Long and Comfortable Life, In this our Pilgrimage on Earth* (London 1688), p. 3.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

engage in saturnine employments.¹¹⁷ By implication, women enjoy an inherent moral superiority. Tryon thought that women are more prone than men to "Vapours, and Fainting or Trembling Fits", especially "such as Live Easily, Fare Deliciously, without Labour or proper Exercise". Tryon notes that "Country Women" who work hard and "live on mean simple Foods" are generally free from such nervous distempers.¹¹⁸ This idea was further developed in the eighteenth-century by another of Boehme's admirers, George Cheyne, whose *English Malady* was influential in the rise to fashion of nervous disorders.¹¹⁹

Pordage's circle included Philip Herbert, fifth earl of Pembroke (1619-69), who was President of the Council of

¹¹⁷Thomas Tryon, *Letters Upon Several Occasions* (London 1700), p. 78. The saturnine employments are such as naturally tend to corrupt: Tryon's list includes butchering, herding, carting, seafaring, mining and brick-laying.

¹¹⁸Tryon, *Monthly Observations*, pp. 19-20. One would expect from this that Tryon would favour women engaging in relatively strenuous work, but one of the precepts concluding his *Memoirs* legislates that "No Girl, nor Woman, shall carry Burthens, do any Field Labour, sell nor cry anything about the Streets, nor do any dirty Work. All Robustick Labour, shall be done by Man: The Fair Sex, are naturally unfit for dirty mugling Imployments"; Tryon, *Some Memoirs*, p. 127.

¹¹⁹For Cheyne, see ch. 10, below. The possibility of Tryon's influence on Cheyne has been generally overlooked. Tryon's Behmenism would have been congenial to Cheyne, and his dietary regime was similar to (but more strictly vegetarian than) that recommended by the Aberdonian doctor; like Cheyne, Tryon was interested in mental disorders. Here, however, their interests diverged; Tryon was attempting to validate the irrational in human experience, while Cheyne wanted to cure hysterical disorders.

State in June and July 1651; he was also the "Quaking Lord" who amused Charles II's court by predicting the immanent end of the world. It is probable that he is the author of *The Internal and Eternal Nature of Man*,¹²⁰ a work which hints obscurely at Behmenist ideas on gender. The author refers to "the Spirit of Mary" as "the Bride in our Souls" who will fall "before Christs feet the Bridegroom".¹²¹ Possibly this "Spirit of Mary" is the divine Wisdom. The pamphlet also speaks of "the Virgin-fire that is in every mans soul" which "must consume all its wisdom and selfishness". This may be the Love-fire of Boehme's second principle which must subordinate the Wrath-fire of the first principle, but the only explicit specification made by the author is that it is "the Virgin-fire of faith" and "the Cross" which we must bear to become regenerate.¹²²

¹²⁰Anonymous, *Of the Internal and Eternal Nature of Man in Christ* (London 1654). On the title page, Thomason has recorded the work as "Written by the Earle of Pembroke". The catalogue of the Thomason collection takes this to refer to William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke. Given that William Herbert was long dead, that Philip Herbert was the earl at the time of the pamphlet's publication, and that the work's Behmenist flavour accords with the latter's known associations, Thune must surely be correct in ascribing it to the fifth earl's pen (Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, pp. 52-3, note)

¹²¹Anonymous, *Of the Internal and Eternal Nature of Man*, pp. 3-4.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 12. This is the sum total of the pamphlet's references to gender; Struck is therefore misleading in asserting that Pembroke "proclaimed Boehme's teaching of the New Birth with representations of Boehme's anthropology and of Sophia together"; Wilhelm Struck, *Der Einfluss Jacob Boehmes auf der englische Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1936), p. 131, note.

Among Pordage's disciples were Edward Brice¹²³ and Thomas Bromley (1629-91). After hearing Pordage preach in the church of St. Mary's, Oxford, the two young men had sought the rector's guidance. This was on the very day Bromley was to be elected Fellow of All Souls,¹²⁴ but he in fact abandoned the University to become "the chief Person of the Doctor's Family Communion".¹²⁵ Bromley's main work is *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest*, a book which ran into two English editions and was translated into Dutch (1682), German (1685) and Swedish (1740). It is largely concerned with advocating ascetic spiritualism,¹²⁶ but also includes passages which demonstrate an interest in Behmenist thought. Just as God is "our Father, in the Spirit", the divine Wisdom is "our true Mother".¹²⁷ Bromley clearly believed that women were in some sense a fallen counterpart of the divine Wisdom, since in heaven

¹²³Brice translated (and probably wrote) Ali Puli's *Centrum Naturae Concentratum* (London 1696), an alchemical work of little relevance to the present subject.

¹²⁴Henry Bromley (Thomas's brother), letter to Henry More, 5 November 1666, in Marjorie Hope Nicolson ed., *Conway Letters. The Correspondence of Anne, Viscount Conway, Henry More and their Friends, 1642-1684* (London 1930), p. 279.

¹²⁵Matthew Sylvester ed., *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London 1696), vol. i, pp. 77-8. Bromley's mother had asked Baxter to dissuade her son from his adherence to Pordage.

¹²⁶As Thune notes (*The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, pp. 53-4), Bromley is more concerned with pastoral care of souls than speculative Behmenism.

¹²⁷Thomas Bromley, *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest. Or, The Souls Progress in the Work of Regeneration* (London 1655), p. 26.

those that have Wives, are as though they had none: returning from Idolizing, and desiring the Woman of the World, to the Virgin *Sophia*, who is the unspotted mirrour of the eternal World.¹²⁸

This is the Cabalist view of woman as associated with the *shekhinah*, but given a negative twist. In this, it illustrates the transformation of Behmenist thought on arrival in England. Boehme's own attitude to women was ambivalent, but at its most positive women were a residual embodiment of the Virgin lost by Adam; as in the Cabala, marriage was a sort of hierophany. For Bromley, women were not so much embodiments of the Virgin *Sophia* as idolatrous substitutes for her. The only valid marriage is the marriage of the soul to the heavenly Virgin. In Bromley's thought, there is a rejection of sexuality as a hindrance to regeneration:

the dying to, and crucifying of that root, whence the enjoyment of that state [marriage] comes, is a real mean to the growth and encrease of Gods Kingdom in our souls; which are to be presented as Chaste Virgins to Christ.¹²⁹

There is no hint here of the duty to be fruitful and multiply in order to increase the population of heaven; on the contrary, it foreshadows the Shakers' adoption of strict chastity.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 17.

John Pordage's son, Samuel, was the author of a Behmenist epic poem called *Mundorum Explicatio*.¹³⁰ The cosmogony in this work includes the marriage of heaven and earth: "The Heav'n impregnates then the female Earth." The "Earth" here seems to refer to the *anima mundi* or Chaos, since Pordage goes on to distinguish the earth itself and "the Earth's own Mother".¹³¹ This is simply the occult doctrine of the creative union of God and Chaos. Samuel Pordage also refers to the duality of divine gender through the image of a spousal relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinity; Christ, "the Water of Eternal Life", is described as "The everlasting Fire's most happy wife".¹³²

Samuel Pordage referred to the prelapsarian androgyny of Adam, telling us that

Man once was whole-man, but now broke alas!
Is but the half of what at first he was.

Samuel Pordage followed Boehme in seeing this fall from androgyny as not in itself involving a fall into original sin: that came only with the second fall, when Eve was

¹³⁰Thune attributes the authorship of this work to both John and Samuel Pordage, since there are no traces of Behmenism in Samuel's other works; *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, pp. 79-80. The only concrete evidence we have for its authorship is the title page, which tells us that the book was written by "S.P., Armig."

¹³¹S[amuel] P[ordage], *Mundorum Explicatio Or, The Explanation of an Hieroglyphicall Figure* (London 1661), p. 239.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 262.

tempted by the serpent.¹³³ Unlike Boehme, however, Samuel Pordage pays no attention to the correspondence between Eve and the Virgin Wisdom. As with Bromley, Samuel Pordage seems to have little sense of women as an embodiment of Adam's lost Virgin. The aspect of the loss of androgyny that preoccupies him is the inability to procreate asexually which it entailed.¹³⁴

This introduces the characteristic emphasis of Samuel Pordage's thought on gender: it is overwhelmingly concerned with sexuality rather than other aspects of gender. He surmises, for example, that Eve succumbed to the blandishments of Satan through lust, by choosing to eat "Concupiscence which is a fruit of the forbidden tree".¹³⁵ In Book II of *Mundorum Explicatio*, Pordage describes a spiritual pilgrimage in which the protagonist encounters several personified virtues, including Chastity:

Of all the Nymphs the Pilgrim yet had seen,
This in his eyes for Beauty seemed the
Queen.¹³⁶

Chastity tells the Pilgrim

Unlesse thou with my mantle cover'd be,
Thou never shalt the heav'nly Salem see.¹³⁷

¹³³Cf. p. 190, above.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 69, note.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 180.

Chastity is "Heav'ns Queen", "a Deitiesse" and the Pilgrim's "heav'nly Bride".¹³⁸ She is, in fact, none other than the Virgin Sophia.¹³⁹ Pordage is thus insistent on the literal significance of the Virginity of the divine Wisdom.

Sophia is portrayed by Pordage as Love,¹⁴⁰ the essential divine attribute in Behmenist thought. Like Malkhuth in the Cabala, it is through Sophia that man gains access to the divine:

APOKALYPSIS she Commission'd is
To ope his Sences with her Crystal Key.

These are man's "inner senses", through which he perceives "th'internal World".¹⁴¹ The Pilgrim's journey culminates in the union with Sophia, and "This is the marriage of the Lamb".¹⁴²

IV. Conclusion

Boehme's first translators and popularisers have left too little of their thought on gender for any meaningful assessment to be made of their ideas. There is, however, a good deal of material relating to John Pordage and his associates. In Hutin's opinion, John Pordage and Jane Lead

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 190 (mispaginated as 191).

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 190-2, 258.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 254 ff.

developed "the feminine aspect of God" to a greater degree than Boehme.¹⁴³ This judgement may well underestimate the extent to which this feminisation of the Deity had already been achieved in Boehme's works, but it is true that the Virgin Wisdom stands out more clearly in the work of Pordage and his associates. On the other hand, Pordage and his circle seem to have lost some sense of the soteriological importance of gender in Behmenist thought. If these early English Behmenists did in fact develop "the feminine aspect of God" more fully than Boehme, they also confined this aspect more rigorously to the godhead. Unlike Boehme, they did not regard women as in some sense an embodiment of the Virgin Sophia. This might lead us to suppose that the early English Behmenists were less "feminist" than their mentor. On the contrary, while we have hardly a mention of women in Boehme's circle, in Pordage's group women were prominent both as believers and as prophets.

The most noticeable difference between Boehme and Pordage's group is to be found in the latter's emphasis on chastity. The asexuality of Boehme's understanding of sin is replaced by a more sexually oriented conception. It is difficult, however, to assess the precise role of chastity in John Pordage's thought. Even if we dismiss the charge of fathering a bastard child as a malicious fabrication, Pordage's love of "Christian Eunuchism" does not fit well

¹⁴³Hutin, *Disciples anglais*, p. 106.

with his two marriages and eight children. Nevertheless, the emphasis on chastity is an unmistakable feature of both Pordage's work and that of his associates. It was to remain an important feature of English Behmenist thought, ultimately forming the basis of a new validation of the spiritual role of women.

6. BEHEMENISM AND THE INTERREGNUM SPIRITUALISTS

The Interregnum was a high point in the history of English spiritualism. Seekers, Ranters, Diggers and Quakers all emphasised an "experimental knowledge" of God and appealed to the Spirit within.¹ The impact of occult thought can be

¹For the Ranters, see J.F. McGregor, "The Ranters, 1649-1660", unpublished B. Litt. thesis (Oxford 1968); *idem.*, "Seekers and Ranters", in J.F. McGregor and Barry Reay eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford 1984), pp. 121-139; Norman Cohn, "The Ranters: The Underground in England of 1650", *Encounter* xxxiv, 4 (1970), pp. 15-25; G.F.S. Ellens, "The Ranters Ranting", *Church History* xl, 1 (March 1971), pp. 91-107; A.L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters. Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London 1970); Anne Lawrence, "Two Ranter Poems", *Review of English Studies*, new series, xxxi (1980), pp. 56-9; Jerome Friedman, *Blasphemy, Immorality and Anarchy. The Ranters and the English Revolution* (Athens, Ohio 1987). J.C. Davis has questioned the existence of a Ranter movement in his *Fear, Myth and History. The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge 1989); *idem.*, "Fear, Myth and Furore: Reappraising the Ranters", *Past and Present* 129 (Nov. 1990). The most important Ranter tracts have been reprinted in Nigel Smith ed., *A Collection of Ranter Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (London 1983). On the Diggers, see Paul Elman, "The Theological Basis of Digger Communism", *Church History* xxiii (Sept. 1954), pp. 207-18; Richard L. Greaves, "Gerrard Winstanley and Educational Reform in Puritan England", *British Journal of Educational Studies* xvii, 2 (1969), pp. 166-176; J. Sanderson, "The Digger's Apprenticeship: Winstanley's Early Writings", *Political Studies* xxii (1974), pp. 453-62; George Juretic, "Digger No Millenarian: The Revolutionising of Gerrard Winstanley", *Journal of the History of Ideas* xxxvi, 2 (April-June 1975), pp. 263-280; C.H. George, "Gerrard Winstanley: A Critical Retrospect", in C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody eds., *The Dissenting Tradition. Essays for Leland H. Carlson* (Ohio 1975), pp. 191-225; J.C. Davis, "Gerrard Winstanley and the Restoration of True Magistracy" *Past and Present* 70 (1976), pp. 76-93; Lotte Mulligan, John K. Graham and Judith Richards, "Winstanley: A Case for the Man as He Said He Was", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* xxviii, 1 (January 1977), pp. 57-75; Christopher Hill, *The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley*, *Past and Present Supplement* (Oxford 1978); G.E. Aylmer, "The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley", in McGregor and Reay

found throughout the writings of these spiritualists, and occasionally a specifically Behmenist influence can be discerned.² This milieu also provided the environment in which English Behmenism was to grow, and the ideas of Boehme's English disciples may owe something to the non-Behmenist aspects of spiritualist thought. For these reasons, a brief survey of Interregnum spiritualist thought on gender is necessary in order to contextualize the development of Behmenist ideas in England.

I. Gender in Interregnum Spiritualist Theology

An important aspect of the spiritualists' indebtedness to occult thought is the emphatic dualism of their works. As is frequently the case, the opposition of spirit and matter is symbolised in terms of male and female. The polarisation of male/spirit and female/flesh is generally derogatory to the feminine. Winstanley sees "the powers of the curse in the flesh" as "the Feminine part" of humanity, while "the power of the righteous Spirit which

eds., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, pp. 91-119; T. Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger. A Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass. 1979); Nicola Baxter, "Gerrard Winstanley's Experimental Knowledge of God: The Perception of Spirit and the Acting of Reason", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* xxxix, 2 (April 1988), pp. 184-201; Andrew Bradstock, "Sowing in Hope: the Relevance of Theology to Gerrard Winstanley's Political Programme", *The Seventeenth Century* vi, 2 (August 1991). For the Quakers, see W.C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London 1923); R.T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1655-1755* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969); Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (New York 1985).

²For a short discussion of the question of Behmenist influence among the Interregnum radicals, see Appendix I.

is Christ, [is] the Masculine power". It is because of their domination by the former powers that people are "but the shadows of men and women"; as the moon is secondary to the sun, so female/flesh is secondary to male/spirit.³ Bauthumley described the belief in an external hell as "carnal, & women-like".⁴ As Jerome Friedman notes, Salmon's *Anti-Christ in Man* refers to evil almost exclusively through feminine pronouns. Although it may be an exaggeration to conclude that "The identification of femininity with evil is the single point made in this treatise",⁵ there is a clear association of the feminine with the fallen. Similarly, while Coppin speaks of both the Amelekite men and women (meaning governors and government), it is the latter, blended with the image of the Whore, who dominate his censure.⁶ "What is woman", asks Coppin, "but mans nature, weakness and flesh?"⁷ Tany tells us that "till you are in Christ, you are woman, that is weakness; in Christ you are man, that is, a strong conqueror..."⁸ Coppe repeatedly has recourse to feminine

³Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness Budding Forth* (1649), in G.H. Sabine ed., *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (Ithaca, N.Y.), pp. 149-244, p. 157.

⁴Jacob Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God* (London 1649), p. 21.

⁵Friedman, *Blasphemy, Immorality and Anarchy*, p. 142.

⁶Richard Coppin, *Saul Smitten for Not Striking Amalek According To the severity of the Command* (London 1653), especially pp. 8 ff.

⁷*Idem.*, *A Man-Child is Born* (London 1654), p. 7.

⁸Thomas Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal: Or, Gods Light declared in Mysteries* (London 1651), p. 12.

images in reference to the reprobate. In his *Second Fiery Flying Roule*, "the wel-favoured Harlot" represents "the young man void of understanding" who fails to recognize that true religion is the practice of Christian charity.⁹ More paradoxically, in *Divine Fire-Works* the "Daughter of Sion" is condemned "For not remembering her sister Sodom in the day of her Pride".¹⁰

If the spiritualists generally distance themselves from the Behmenist validation of the feminine, there are nevertheless some aspects of their thought that reveal a more positive evaluation. Coppin identifies Mary as "the flesh or human nature" and Joseph as "the wisdom of this flesh". Mary bears God a son, but Joseph initially repudiates her, doubting its divine paternity. It is not the (female) flesh which errs, but its (male) wisdom.¹¹ There is a similar, if implicit, association of evil with the masculine in Erbery's use of the term "weaker vessel" to refer to the saints in their relationship, not to God, but to the "King, lords, and all the Commons" who oppress them.¹² The most positive evaluation of the feminine in spiritualist thought occurs in Winstanley's writings. Eve

⁹Abiezer Coppe, *A Second Fiery-Flying Roule* (London 1649), p. 22.

¹⁰*Idem.*, *Divine Fire-Works* ((London 1656), s.sh.

¹¹Coppin, *A Man-Child is Born*, p. 29.

¹²William Erbery, *The Lord of Hosts: Or, God guarding the Camp of the Saints, and the Beloved City* (London 1648), p. 13.

is conspicuously absent from Winstanley's Eden, and consequently plays no part in his understanding of the Fall.¹³ Winstanley in fact tends to shift the mythical basis of the fall from the story of Adam and Eve to that of Cain and Abel.¹⁴ When he does mention Eve, Winstanley's allegory tends to transfer primary responsibility for the Fall to Adam:

Covetousness, or self-love, is the man of sin, that appears first. The imagination arising from that covetous power is the woman, or Eve, which like the Ivie, clings about the tree; and so covetousnesse and imagination, does beget between them a supposed joy, pleasure and delight; but it proves a lie.¹⁵

Winstanley also assigns morally positive and negative values to the feminine and masculine in a way reminiscent of Boehme. This is partly a result of the congruence of Christian and feminine virtues: thus Winstanley refers to "the meeke in spirit" as "the woman" who is to be helped.¹⁶ As T. Wilson Hayes has pointed out, for Winstanley "The masculine side of human nature corrupts the feminine and holds it in bondage".¹⁷ The flesh, which Winstanley regards as feminine, is a source of sin because of its subjection to "the evill masculine powers of created man in his poysoned estate". These powers are "man

¹³Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 14.

¹⁴Elman, "The Theological Basis of Digger Communism", pp. 209-10.

¹⁵Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, p. 203.

¹⁶*Idem.*, *Fire in the Bush* (1650), in Sabine ed., *The Works*, pp. 445-497, p. 465.

¹⁷Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 69.

pride, man covetousness, man hypocrisie, man self-love, and King imagination" - a list which partly parallels Boehme's typical itemisation of human sinfulness. These "rule over the created flesh, which is the feminine part, and leads it captive in unrighteousness, and will not suffer it to obey the King of righteousness, which is called conscience likewise in the creation, man".¹⁸ If man would "cleanse himself of these wicked masculine powers that rule in him", there would "speedily be a harmony of love in the great creation, even among all creatures".¹⁹

Maternal imagery was sometimes applied to God in spiritualist writings. The Quaker missionary John Perrot refers to God in a way which recalls Boehme; he wished that "the least in the Land... might suck of the Breasts of my Mother which bare me".²⁰ Coppe pictured God's activities with regard to the unregenerate in terms of the everyday tasks of child-care:

And thou be plagued back again into thy mothers womb, the womb of eternity: That thou maiest become a little child, and let the mother Eternity, Almightynesse, who is universal love, and whose service is perfect freedome, dresse

¹⁸Gerrard Winstanley, *The Saints Paradise* (London 1648), p. 75.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁰John Perrot, *A Visitation of Love, And Gentle Greeting Of The Turk* (London 1660), p. 10; cf. *idem.*, *A Wren In The Burning Bush, Waving the Wings of Contraction* (London 1660), pp. 7-8; *idem.*, *To The Suffering Seed Of Royalty, Wheresoever Tribulated upon the Face of the whole Earth* (London 1661), p. 6.

thee, and undresse thee, swadle, unswadle, bind,
loose, lay thee down, take thee up, &c.²¹

Morgan Llwyd refers to "the heavenly nature and angelical world" as "the mother", and Erbery applies this term to the New Jerusalem; in both cases there may be a Sophiological reference, but this cannot be established with certainty.²² Maternal imagery was, of course, not confined to spiritualist circles. The Particular Baptist Paul Hobson, for example, spoke of "the spirit which is within" as being "conceived in the womb" of Christ. Each time he used this image, however, Hobson was careful to add that he was expressing himself "metaphorically, and [was] not to be understood carnally".²³

There are some indications in spiritualist writings of the duality of divine gender and the spiritual androgyny of humanity. Gilbert Roulston accused the Ranters known as "Seleutian Donatists" of believing "that the Mosse whereof God made the Elements, was coeternal with him".²⁴ Roulston's work is almost pure fabrication, but the occult doctrine of a coeternal Chaos can be found in Ranter

²¹Coppe, *Second Fiery Flying Roule*, p. 12.

²²Letter from Morgan Llwyd to William Erbery, in Erbery, *A Call to the Churches; Or, A Packet of Letters to the Pastors of Wales* (London 1653), p. 22; letter from Erbery to Henry Walter, *ibid.*, p. 29.

²³Paul Hobson, *A Garden Inclosed, and Wisdom justified only by her children* (London 1647), pp. 80-1, 94.

²⁴Gilbert Roulston, *The Ranters Bible* (1650), in J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History. The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge 1989), pp. 169-73, p. 171.

writings. This doctrine may underlie the frequent use of maternal and womb imagery in the Ranter milieu. Bauthumley speaks of "the wombe wherein all things are conceived and in which all creatures were formed and brought forth".²⁵ Salmon tells us that "Unity is the Father, the Author and begetter of all things; or (if you will) the Grandmother in whose intrinsecal womb, variety lies occult, til time orderly brings it forth".²⁶ "Though two Powers", Clarkson said of Light and Darkness, "yet they have but one womb, one birth".²⁷ Tany tells us that both Jehovah "and the Creation issued forth from the womb of the Deity". Interpreting the story of Adam and Eve, Tany makes Christ the masculine counterpart of a feminine creation: "Now what is the woman intended in that state [of innocence], 'tis the creation of God, what is the man, 'tis Christ". "The creation is Christs spouse", and "the woman is shee, out of whom is produced the whole of the appearance in Creation".²⁸ In a passage the meaning of which is far from clear, Coppin tells us that

that woman which first brought us forth, and is the mother of us all, will come down and appear among us as a bride adorned for her husband; and

²⁵Bauthumley, *Light and Dark Sides of God*, p. 6.

²⁶Joseph Salmon, *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights* (London 1650), p.

²⁷Lawrence Clarkson, *A Single Eye All Light, No Darkness* (London 1650), p. 6; this is very reminiscent of Boehme.

²⁸Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal*, pp. 12, 23, 27, 55.

we shall enjoy both her and her husband the Lord himself.²⁹

This "woman" might possibly be Malkhuth of the Cabala, or something like Boehme's Wisdom. Some such notion is suggested in Coppin's *A Man-Child is Born*, where he tells us that "Eternity is the father of all things, the glory of the father, or womb of eternity, is the mother of all things". Coppin asserts that Abraham and Sarah are types of God and his "glory". God is not "without his glory, nor his glory without him, but they are as man and wife, and so but one flesh, one spirit, one God, one All".³⁰ Occult cosmogony also underlies Winstanley's use of the idea of the marriage of sun and earth:³¹

as the Sun in the skies moves upon the great Earth and makes that fruitful which seemed dead,...Even so the Son of universal Love, who is the Spirit and power of universal Freedom, he moves upon the living waters mankind, and makes him, who all the dark time past was a Chaos of confusion, lying under Types, Shadows, Ceremonies, Forms, Customes, Ordinances, and heaps of waste words,...to bring forth fruit of Righteousness in action.³²

Winstanley speaks of honouring "our Father, the Spirit" and "our Mother the earth".³³ He also refers to "the mother Earth mankinde" whose offspring is the "Imaginary

²⁹Coppin, *Saul Smitten*, p. 11.

³⁰*Idem.*, *A Man-Child is Born*, pp. 8-9.

³¹Cf. Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 149 ff., 191-2.

³²Gerrard Winstanley, *A New-Yeers Gift* (1650), in Sabine ed., *Works*, pp. 353-396, p. 377.

³³*Idem.*, *A Letter to Lord Fairfax and his Councell of war* (1649), in Sabine ed., *Works*, pp. 281-292, p. 283.

power".³⁴ Winstanley's understanding of Chaos is negative, stressing its formlessness, in contrast to Boehme's conception of a limitless wealth of forms.

In affirming the Trinity, Salmon uses an image which recalls the creation of Eve: "The Father will not therefore be without the Son, without the Spirit: It is not fit the man should be alone". Salmon adds that "to contemplate variety without Unity, is to be over-much expensive upon the weakness, and to set up the woman against the man, which are indeed two, but one in Christ".³⁵ This may suggest the androgyny of Christ, an idea which also seems to underlie a very confused passage in Tany's *Theousori Apokolipikal*. Speaking of Mary, he says "Now the Virgin is Jesus; Christ the Son is the Virgin"; "he himself is Virgin, birth and bringer forth of himself".³⁶ The passage makes little sense, unless Tany was confusing the Virgin Mary with the Virgin Sophia. Sophiology, however, is nowhere fully developed among the non-Behmenist English spiritualists. John Perrot seems to have had a fourfold conception of the divine attributes, consisting of "Life, Power, Wisdom, and Glory", and the divine Wisdom is identified with Christ, but there is no suggestion of a fully articulated Sophiology in any of his

³⁴*Idem.*, *Fire in the Bush*, p.456.

³⁵Salmon, *Heights in Depths*, p. 54.

³⁶Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal*, p. 28.

writings.³⁷ Perrot does, however, write intriguingly of "the Virgin-daughter of Sion" who excels "all of her Sex that ever were before her":

This is she which was born of the Virgins womb, in which also was conceived the Man-child. Behold, I speak in a Riddle, for these three are Twins; and the Twins suck at one Breast, and the Breast is the man's mouth, and the Milk is the Father's Voice, and the man's strength is the Father's might, & the Man, the Son, & the Father is One; and the Father hath married the Son to the Virgin, and the Virgin Daughter.³⁸

The riddle is impenetrable, but seems to identify both Christ (the Man Child) and the regenerate soul (the Virgin Daughter) as the offspring of a Virgin (Wisdom?), who also has a spousal relationship with Christ.

There is a more substantial hint of Behmenist Sophiology in Peter Sterry's understanding of Christ as Wisdom. As with Boehme, Wisdom is the creative matrix of the godhead: "Our Saviours Person is the Word, in which all things are exprest: the Wisdome, in which all things have their form, and fulnesse".³⁹ The "Eternal Forms, which were to frame and sustain every shape or state,...were brought forth in the Divine Wisdom".⁴⁰ As

³⁷John Perrot, *Beames of Eternal Brightness, Or, Branches of Everlasting Blessings* (London 1661), pp. 4, 17.

³⁸*Idem.*, J.P. *The Follower Of The Lamb To The Shepherds Flock Salutation* (London 1661), pp. 3-4.

³⁹Peter Sterry, *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule* (London 1648), p. 39.

⁴⁰*Idem.*, *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man* (London 1683), p. 7.

"the Idea of Ideas", the Divine Mind, or Wisdom, is the "Mother of us all".⁴¹ As can be seen from the Platonic vocabulary, this is not necessarily a Behmenist conception. Sterry also relates the Cabalist concept of the *shekhinah* to this creative matrix. He tells us that the *shekhinah* is referred to as a Throne in Revelation 4: "And out of the Throne proceeded Lightnings and Thundrings, and Voyces. By these are represented the Severall Orders, or Rankes of things in the Creation, together with all their Various Workings".⁴² Sterry's Sophiology is clearly an occult eclecticism rather than a Behmenism pure and simple.

The spiritualists, like their wider culture, often feminise humanity in relation to the divine. John Perrot's God addresses the soul as the "Daughter of my own Beloved", and a "Damsel of my hearts delight".⁴³ For Coppe, "Man is the Woman, and thou [Christ] art the Man".⁴⁴ Webster thought that the injunction against women speaking in church really meant "let not man speak anything in the Church in the presence of the Lord"; "All

⁴¹Idem., *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, p. 49.

⁴²Idem., *The Commings Forth of Christ In the Power of his Death* (London 1650), p. 24.

⁴³John Perrot, *Two Epistles, Written to all Friends in the Truth* (London 1661), p. 7.

⁴⁴Abiezer Coppe, *Some Sweet Sips, of Some Spirituall Wine* (1649), in Smith ed., *A Collection of Ranter Writings*, pp. 42-72, p. 69.

the men in the world, be they of what *parts, learning, strength, or excellencie* can be named, are but WOMEN in this respect".⁴⁵ Erbery devoted a short pamphlet to elaborating the image of "the weaker vessel" as "the weakest Saints who dare not go forth of their God".⁴⁶ Erbery is not speaking in disparagement, for "None but the women, the weakest Saints, see the resurrection at hand". Their "*former husband* (the flesh) being dead, like widows they are waiting to be married to the Lord alone".⁴⁷

Man's spiritual motherhood is another recurrent image in spiritualist writings, based on Revelation 12:2. For Peter Sterry, Christ is the offspring of a nuptial union between God and man: "Jesus Christ is a Seed. God is the *Father*, this heavenly Woman is the *Mother*, the Spiritual State of the Creature".⁴⁸ Tany asserts that "The Virgin" who bears Christ "is the womb of our souls".⁴⁹ Another writer defined the Virgin Mary allegorically, as "a soul gathered from the pleasures of the flesh"; the glory of

⁴⁵John Webster, *The Judgement Set, And the Booke Opened* (London 1654), pp. 83-4.

⁴⁶Erbery, "The Woman Preacher: Or, The Man of War", printed with *The North star: Or, Some Night-Light Shining In North Wales* (London 1653), pp. 77-86, p. 78.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 15, 85.

⁴⁸Sterry, *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God*, p. 36.

⁴⁹Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal*, p. 8.

the creature; to God".⁵⁰ Coppin calls man "the wife or spouse of God, and mother of Jesus"; the Virgin Mary "was but a sign or shadow" of Christ's true mother, the spirit of man.⁵¹ Winstanley uses the Biblical image of "every man with his hands upon his loins, like a woman in travel" to refer to the coming of the Spirit within.⁵² He tells us that "plaine heartednesse" is "the Virgine-state of Mankinde; And this Virgine is she that must beare a sonne, and call his name Emanuell, God with us". Winstanley reminds us of Behmenism in insisting that "this is a chaste state"; the Virgin "hath no outward lover", enjoying union with "the Sonne of righteousness alone".⁵³ Erbery tells us that "the Church or people of God are as the woman in heaven, who travels in paine to be delivered of the Man child". Intriguingly, Erbery ends this passage by citing an anagram by "a Suedish Scholer":

*Christina Regina Sueciae.
Hic est in viragine Caesar.
Here's Caesar in a manly woman.*⁵⁴

Erbery has transformed this piece of political satire into a spiritual epigram, using a phrase very reminiscent of Boehme's *männliche Jungfrau*.

⁵⁰I.F., *John the Divine's Divinity: Or The Confession of the General Assembly, or Church of the First-born in Heaven* (London 1649), p. 21.

⁵¹Coppin, *A Man-Child is Born*, p. 10.

⁵²Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, p. 189.

⁵³*Idem.*, *Fire in the Bush*, p. 480.

⁵⁴William Erbery, *The Babe of Glory, Breaking forth in the broken Flesh Of The Saints* (London 1653), sig. B3v.

From the perspective of male writers, it is a relatively short step from the feminisation of humanity to the concept of spiritual androgyny. Tany believed in Adamic androgyny:

Now minde, Addam you say was man, so say I, with the woman, for know that a man is not a man without the woman; for they two are but one flesh, nay but one spirit, if they be once brought to be man....The Addam is Eve, and the Eve Addam.⁵⁵

It is possible that the author of *A Justification of the Mad Crew* was referring to spiritual androgyny when he speaks of those who experience the indwelling of God as "these men (that are male and female)".⁵⁶ Those who

have attained the resurrection of the flesh...shall be no more twain, but one flesh; note the word, they were twain, a man and a woman, the marrying and the married before the resurrection...but now they be risen from the dead, they twain shall be one flesh, one body, one life, one spirit.⁵⁷

Winstanley does not refer specifically to the androgyny of Adam, but he did clearly believe in the idea of a primordial cosmic man,⁵⁸ an idea usually associated with duality of gender. The author of the Buckingham Digger tracts seems to have accepted Adamic androgyny: man was "created male and female after God's own Image or

⁵⁵Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal*, pp. 23-4.

⁵⁶Anonymous, *A Justification of the Mad Crew* (London 1650), p. 4.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸Winstanley, *Truth Lifting Up its Head*, in Sabine ed., *The Works*, pp. 94-146, pp. 116-8.

likeness, viz. his Son Jesus".⁵⁹ Sterry may also have accepted the theory of Adamic androgyny; he tells us that

the Law against Adultery is Moral: as it is rooted in the Primary Constitution of Man, who was made Male and Female: and they Two made One flesh: as a Figure of Christ in the Trinity, in the Church.⁶⁰

The remark is incidental, and Sterry's line of thought is not altogether clear. Sterry appears to be putting forward the Paracelsian-Behmenist view that monogamy derives from prelapsarian androgyny, rather than the conventional view that monogamy was based on the fact that originally only one of each sex had been created. There is also a clear suggestion of the androgyny of Christ. The Behmenist notion that it requires both genders to form a complete image of God seems to be suggested in one of Sterry's later works: "Man and Woman are each to other, the Image of God, which is One".⁶¹

II. Sexual Politics and Sexuality

Sectarian feminism was most thorough-going in the spiritualist milieu from which Behmenism emerged. The Quakers are well-known for their sympathetic attitude to women.⁶² From his earliest days as a "publisher of the

⁵⁹Anonymous, *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1649), *ibid.*, pp. 627-640, p. 627.

⁶⁰Sterry, *Commings Forth of Christ*, sig. alv.

⁶¹*Idem.*, *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God*, p. 17.

⁶²For Quaker women's own assertion of religious equality, see [Margaret Fell], *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and allowed by the Scriptures* (London 1667); Milton

Truth", George Fox was concerned with vindicating the spiritual authority of women, and his first interruption of a religious gathering was over this issue.⁶³ Thomas Ellwood argued that women were only forbidden to speak in church if they were "disorderly, asking Questions unseasonably, and out of place".⁶⁴ What mattered was not the sex or social status of people, but their conformity with the Light. "I am not ashamed to sit under the teachings of women and mechanics", wrote Samuel Crisp in 1702, since such people can "instruct me more perfectly in a divine life, than all the studied, elaborated sermons and discourses that ever I heard at the universities".⁶⁵ For Fox, although men were "elders in the Fall, ruling over their wives", this dominance is abrogated by regeneration.⁶⁶

Sectarian feminism can be discerned in other spiritualist writers. In *Some Sweet Sips*, Coppe prints a letter from a Mrs. T.P., who had said

D. Speizman and Jane C. Konick eds., "A Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration", *Signs* i, 1 (1975), pp. 231-45.

⁶³George Fox, *The Journal*, p. 24. A preacher had asked for questions from his audience, but refused to answer a female questioner because of the injunction against women speaking in church.

⁶⁴Thomas Ellwood, *An Answer to Some Objections of a Moderate Enquirer* (London 1714), p. 9.

⁶⁵Samuel Crisp, *Two Letters* (London, 1801 edn.), pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶Fox, *Journal*, p. 667.

What though we are weaker vessels, women, &c. yet strength shall abound, and we shall mount up with wings as Eagles; we shall walke, and not be weary, run, and not be faint; When the Man-Child Jesus is brought forth in Us.⁶⁷

This claim that women will be empowered by the Spirit does not go far enough for Coppe. "Deare friend", Coppe asks,

why doest in thy letter say, (what though we be weaker Vessels, women? &c.). I know that Male and Female are all one in Christ, and they are all one to me. I had as live heare a daughter as a son prophesie.

Coppe continues with a passage the meaning of which is not immediately apparent:

I know, that women, who Stay at Home, divide the spoyle - whilst our younger brethren, who are (as we were) abroad, and not yet arrived at our Fathers House, or are at Home, are spending Their Substance in riotous liveing, and would faine fill their bellies with huskes.⁶⁸

Coppe had defined his imagery, which derives from Psalms 68:12, in an earlier passage. "They that are at Home, are such as know their union in God, and live upon, and in [God], and not upon any thing below, or beside him". Those who are abroad, however, "cannot live without Shadows, Signs, Representations".⁶⁹ Women are not simply the spiritual equals of men, but their superiors. While most men live in the "riotous living" of formalism, most women are already at home in the Spirit.

⁶⁷Coppe, *Some Sweet Sips*, p. 64.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 49.

Coppe does not indicate whether he is willing to extend his spiritual feminism into the social sphere, but Winstanley clearly did so. For Winstanley, the Spirit of Reason within abrogates the need for political authority for both men and women. He tells us that "Every single man, Male and Female, is a perfect Creature of himself....therefore need not run abroad after any Teacher and Ruler without him".⁷⁰ Winstanley is willing to reform the politics of daily life:

Many husbands, parents, masters, magistrates, that lives after the flesh, doe carry themselves like oppressing Lords over such as are under them; not knowing their wives, children, servants, subjects are their fellow creatures, and hath an equall priviledge to share with them in the blessing of liberty.⁷¹

This Digger feminism should not be exaggerated. Of the names subscribed to the various Digger pamphlets, none belong to women. By 1652, with Winstanley's retreat from spiritualist anarchism, almost all traces of feminism have disappeared from the Digger utopia. Office-holding in Winstanley's last programme is apparently confined to men. The protection of women remains an important aspect of Winstanley's sexual ethic; he recognized that rape was "robbery of a womans bodily Freedom", and thought that it should be punishable by death. In Winstanley's draft legal code, there is freedom to marry whom one pleases, but "If any man lie with a maid, and beget a child, he shall marry

⁷⁰Gerrard Winstanley, *The True Levellers Standard Upraised*, in Sabine ed., *The Works*, pp. 247-66, p. 251.

⁷¹*Idem.*, *New Law of Righteousness*, p. 158.

her".⁷² This may be simply a recognition that the responsibility for pregnancy should be born by both sexes; as Hill remarks, without effective birth control sexual freedom "tended to be freedom for men only".⁷³ Winstanley, however, was not interested in sexual freedom. His utopia provided a perfect supportive environment for single parents of either sex, but this possibility did not occur to him. Winstanley's treatment of adultery suggests that his sexual ethic was altogether conventional. His concern concentrates on wifely adultery, suggesting a desire to preserve male sexual property in women.⁷⁴

Winstanley's views are typical of the conservative sexual ethic which can be found in much spiritualist thought. He denounces the "unclean lusts" which seek "to embrace strange flesh" and repudiates the accusation that community of goods means community of wives. God made "male and female in the singular number", implicitly enjoining monogamy; one man and one woman are, moreover, "enough to encrease seed".⁷⁵ Promiscuity leads people to focus on the "vanishable" things of the world rather than their spiritual contentment. It causes diseases, adds to

⁷²*Idem.*, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*, in Sabine ed., *Works*, pp. 501-602, p. 599.

⁷³Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, paperback edn. (Harmondsworth 1974), p. 319.

⁷⁴Winstanley, *The Law of freedom*, p. 599.

⁷⁵*Idem.*, *New Law of Righteousness*, pp. 174, 185.

the pains of childbirth and produces sickly offspring who are likely to be "furious and full of rage". Based on egoism, "the Ranting practice is the proper Kingdom of Covetousness"; it disrupts social relations, whereby "whole Families, nay, whole Nations are distempered".⁷⁶

Thomas Tany approaches Behmenism in his advocacy of sexual asceticism. He was aware of the view that marriage reflected the spiritual constitution of the individual, but rejected the Cabalistic interpretation of this, that marriage was therefore a means to spiritual fulfilment:

This hieroglyphicy of man and woman, holds forth more than can be fetched out with mans learning, but not such matches as we make, for we in our blindness make a trade in matching;...this is not the man and woman spoken of in unione, but tis of the devil, and unlawful.

It is difficult to make precise sense out of Tany's words. He was clearly venting his anger against the marriage market which made matches "no more then buying and selling one another"; but he also seems to be suggesting that celibacy is the proper inference to be drawn from the "hieroglyphicy of man and woman".⁷⁷ In either case, the passage is reminiscent of two of Pordage's associates, Roger Crabb and Thomas Bromley.⁷⁸ Some Quakers also favoured sexual abstinence.⁷⁹ When John Perrot declared

⁷⁶*Idem.*, *A Vindication of those...called Diggers*, in Sabine ed., *The Works*, pp. 399-403; cf. *idem.*, "England's Spirit Unfoulded", ed. G.E. Aylmer, *Past and Present* 40 (1968), pp. 3-15, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁷Tany, *Theousori Apokolipikal*, p. 41.

⁷⁸See pp. 221-2, 226-7, above.

⁷⁹Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution*, p. 36.

that he would not let armies, wine or women "defile the bed of my Marriage", he was referring to the mystic marriage of his soul with God:

Alas! should I defile the bed of my Spouses
Virginity, with the Daughters of Jesabels attire
and beauty, then would the curtains of my love
be as the flame of the Lake, and her bed fall as
vengeance upon me.⁸⁰

Perrot's erotic sensibilities are sublimated, and directed towards his God and his coreligionists.⁸¹

Sexual asceticism was, however, far from typical of the spiritualist milieu as a whole. Most Quakers held matrimony in high esteem. Bridget Story, for example, regarded her marriage as "the greatest of temporal mercies".⁸² Fox's doctrine of marriage suggests a link with nuptial mysticism. He justified his own marriage "as a testimony, that all might come up into marriage as it was in the beginning, and as a testimony that all might come out of the wilderness into the marriage of the

⁸⁰Perrot, *A Wren in the Burning Bush*, pp. 3, 6. The passage is also noticeable for the Behmenistic reversal of the typical sex-roles of the divine nuptials.

⁸¹Perrot addresses his fellow Quakers in the language of the mystic marriage. He tells them that he is "married to you as a Virgin wife", and greets them "with one everlasting adhering kisse of my lips glued unto your lips, with the indissoluble glue of God's grace". John Perrot, *John, To all Gods Imprisoned People For His Names-Sake* (London 1660), p. 3; *idem.*, *John, The Prisoner, To The Risen Seed of Immortal Love* (London 1660), p. 6.

⁸²"The Testimony of Bridget Story", prefixed to *A Brief Account of the Life of Christopher Story* (London 1820), p. iii.

Lamb".⁸³ Fox writes that "God did join man and woman together before the Fall. And man had joined in the Fall but it was God's joining again in the restoration".⁸⁴ Marriage is thus a fundamental aspect of the regenerate life.

George Foster rejected the received opinion that sexuality would no longer exist in heaven. Christ had said that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven".⁸⁵ According to Foster, this did not refer to heavenly chastity, but to a liberalisation of sexual relations. Men and women are free to divorce each other since "the time is at hand when those that are married are as if they were unmarried". Living "in pure and perfect enjoiment" of God, the regenerate "shal have the use of one another" as God chooses.⁸⁶

Peter Sterry's ideas on marriage are close to nuptial mysticism. As Pinto has observed, for Sterry marriage "is nothing less than an image of God Himself, and the love of the sexes is one of the keys to the mystery of the

⁸³Fox, *Journal*, p. 557.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁸⁵Matthew 22:30.

⁸⁶George Foster, *The Poring Forth of the Seventh and Last Viall*, pp. 26-7, 47.

universe".⁸⁷ Erotic imagery comes readily to Sterry's mind.⁸⁸ Advocating a religious pluralism, he conjures up a vision of something like a divine seraglio:

The Lord Jesus hath his *Concubines*, his *Queenes*, his *Virgines*; *Saints* in *Remoter Formes*; *Saints* in higher *Formes*; *Saints* unmarried to any *Forme*, who keep themselves single for the immediate imbraces of their Love.⁸⁹

The future relationship between heaven and earth will be like the "two Sexes, one the Image of the other".⁹⁰ Nor is such imagery confined to the relationship between God and His Saints: that between the Persons of the Godhead is also conceived in nuptial terms.⁹¹ Sterry extends his erotic sensibility to the actual relations between the sexes. In a letter to his wife, he writes:

As you come into my minde...a sweet Spring presenteth it self to me, with A new heaven, and a new Earth, in which at once all things, sing, shine, send forth their sweetest odours together, flowers, Birds, y^e Sun, y^e holy Angells.⁹²

This is an association of sexuality with cosmic renewal which can also be found in some Ranter writings.

⁸⁷Vivien de Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry. Platonist and Puritan* (1934), p. 93.

⁸⁸Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁹Peter Sterry, *England's Deliverance From the Northern Presbytery, Compared With its Deliverance from the Roman Papacy* (London 1652), sig. A6r.

⁹⁰*Idem.*, *The Appearance of God in Man*, pp. 164-5.

⁹¹Cf. Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, p. 92. See, for example, Sterry, *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, p. 32.

⁹²Cited in Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, p. 44.

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⁹¹Cf. Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, p. 92. See, for example, Sterry, *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, p. 32.

⁹²Cited in Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, p. 44.

Theologically, Ranter promiscuity is usually seen as a consequence of "practical antinomianism", the acting out of sin as a transcendence of sinfulness. Nigel Smith suggests a more spiritual interpretation: "the desire for mystical union is seen as an excuse for the physical union [of sex]".⁹³ The libertine Ranter sexual ethic is in fact a peculiar form of practical nuptial mysticism. This is hinted at in one of Clarkson's equivocations when accused of adultery: "I say I lye with none but my wife, according to the Law, though in the unity of the spirit, I lye with all the creation".⁹⁴ Clarkson seems to be associating sexuality with cosmic unity, an association which is also to be found in Abiezer Coppe's writings.

That Coppe had some notion of cosmic renewal can be seen from his analysis of Mrs. T.P.'s dream in *Some Sweet Sips*. He tells his correspondent that the "beasts of all sorts" which she had seen "proceed out of the river, the Living God, the Fountain of Life". The vision as a whole signifies that "The enmity within, and without shall be slaine", all things will "return to the Fountaine, from whence they came: recreating themselves there", and Coppe refers his readers to Romans 8:19-24.⁹⁵ Earlier in the

⁹³Smith, Introduction to *A Collection of Ranter Writings*, p. 19.

⁹⁴Lawrence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found* (London 1660), p. 30.

⁹⁵Coppe, *Some Sweet Sips*, p. 69.

same work, Coppe had expressed a vision of cosmic renewal based on the Song of Songs 2:10-12:

Rise up, rise up, my Love, my fair one; for lo,
the Winter is past, the raine is over and gone,
the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the
singing of birds is come, and the voice of the
Turtle is heard in our land.⁹⁶

Such imagery is the sort of fare with which mystics commonly nourish their souls. In the Christian tradition, it is more frequently associated with the sublimation rather than the utilisation of erotic impulses to achieve spiritual goals. The development of Coppe's nuptial mysticism in *A Second Fiery Flying Roule*, however, goes beyond the boundaries of mainstream nuptial mysticism, suggesting a practical rather than a merely symbolic orientation. Speaking of divine beauty, Coppe says:

Which transcendent, unspeakable, unspotted
beauty, is my crown and joy, my life and love:
and though I have chosen, and cannot be without
BASE things, to confound some in mercy, some in
judgement, Though also I have concubines without
number, which I cannot be without, yet this is
my spouse, my love, my dove, my fair one.⁹⁷

"Base things", specifically Coppe's sexual promiscuity, have become an integral part of the nuptial image:

And then again, by wanton kisses, kissing hath
been confounded; and external kisses, have been
made the fiery chariots, to mount me swiftly
into the bosom of him whom my soul loves (his
excellent Majesty, the King of Glory).⁹⁸

For Coppe, as in the Cabala, sexuality is a means to spiritual attainment. Unlike the Jewish Cabalists,

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹⁷*Idem.*, *A Second Fiery Flying Roule*, p. 14.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 13.

however, Coppe extends the spiritual role of sexuality beyond the monogamous union of man and wife to the relations of all men with all women.

Sexuality has a similar spiritual significance in the anonymous *A Justification of the Mad Crew*. Commenting on the fact that those in heaven (the spiritually regenerate in this world rather than the afterlife) "neither marry nor are given in marriage", the author condemns monogamy as "setting up an idol in my heart;"⁹⁹ it is a condition in which people "are estranged to the other part of the world, who are really theirs, flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone as they".¹⁰⁰ At the wedding of the Lamb, the mystical union of the soul with Christ, "there is but one Husband, and one Wife...made up of many thousands". On their marriage bed, there is

but one stretching, one stretched, one loving, and one loved; the same kissing, and the same kissed and all creatures are singing and dancing at this wedding, there was never a creature in heaven and earth but dances and leaps from that fulnesse of joy that is in him living in this house and being made one of this family.¹⁰¹

This is clearly a reference to Revelation 5:13, a key text for the doctrine of the restoration of all things. It also recalls Hosea 2:18-20, where a vision of cosmic renewal is blended with the image of God's nuptial relationship to humanity. That this is the context in which the passage

⁹⁹Anonymous, *A Justification of the Mad Crew*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

should be read is confirmed by the prominence of the doctrine in this pamphlet. The author announces at the outset that "upon us is come the times of the restitution of all things",¹⁰² a theme which underlies the whole tract. The implicit promiscuity of the passage expresses cosmic renewal attained through the divine nuptial union; the disharmony of creation, on the other hand, is maintained by monogamy:

There is such a unity in this diversity, and such a diversity where there is this unity, that they cannot kisse one but they kisse all, and love one but they love all, and cannot take one into bed with them and leave out another, but they destroy this unity and diversity.¹⁰³

The author has simply transferred Winstanley's analysis of the fall and redemption of nature from the material appropriation of the earth to the sexual appropriation of people. The divine nuptials also transcend the duality of flesh and spirit, a duality which is the fundamental manifestation of cosmic disharmony. Sensuality and spirituality are one, and it is in the joyous round of the senses that the divine is disclosed: "in outward sporting, dancing, playing, and kissing and bodily embracing one of another have I clearly seen him that is invisible".¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 24.

III. Conclusion

The Interregnum spiritualists were deeply indebted to the occult tradition, but how much of this debt they owed to Boehme in particular is less clear. Winstanley and Coppin have a tendency to share Boehme's validation of the feminine, but this falls far short of a truly Behmenist association of the feminine with the divine. Some spiritualists tended to go beyond Boehme's conservative views on the proper relations between the sexes, possibly encouraging the feminist trend in English Behmenist thought. Winstanley's sexual ethic would be unremarkable in any Puritan, but Tany's asceticism comes close to the Behmenist attitude. Generally, however, the spiritualists tended to have a positive evaluation of sexuality, or even a sacramental and mystical one. The Behmenist emphasis on chastity was not simply a departure from the general Protestant validation of matrimony, it was also a repudiation of the sexual theology of the Behmenists' immediate cultural environment.

7. THE FEMALE EMBASSY: JANE LEAD, RICHARD ROACH AND THE SHAKERS

I. Jane Lead

Jane Lead, née Ward, was born in Norfolk in 1624.¹ She experienced her first religious crisis at the age of fifteen. Three years later, she moved to London, where she came under the influence of Tobias Crisp's sermons. Here she married a relative, William Lead; the couple were to have four daughters, only two surviving beyond infancy. Lead was left destitute after her husband's death in February 1670, and this crisis in her external circumstances coincided with her emergence as the leading Behmenist prophetess. In April of the same year she had a series of visions of the Virgin Wisdom, who called her to live a virginal life.² Lead subsequently withdrew from all society, except "one Person that was highly Illuminated".³

¹For Jane Lead, see G.W.H. Hochhut, "Jane Lead und die philadelphische Gemeinde in England", *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* (1865), pp. 171-290; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala 1948); 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), pp. 3-18; *idem.*, "Jane Lead: the Feminist Mind of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic", in Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds., *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1979), pp. 183-204.

²Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens, Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure*, 3 vols. (London 1696-1701), vol. i, pp. 17 ff.

³*Ibid.*, p. 20.

This person was John Pordage, whom Lead had known since 1663, and whose house she was to share after 1674.

Thune has argued that Lead was the leading figure among the Behmenists even before Pordage's death,⁴ but the quality of her leadership can be doubted. In 1670, Pordage's private congregation numbered about a hundred people, but after his death it declined to just three - Jane Lead, Francis Pordage (John's brother) and his wife. Lead's writings, however, had an undoubted appeal. In 1694 they attracted the attention of a German admirer, Baron von Knyphausen, who offered to publish them in both English and German. Knyphausen also provided her with a house in London.⁵ Lead was to acquire an extensive German following, and she also began to gather a new group around her in England, meeting privately in Joanna Oxenbridge's house in Baldwins Gardens. In 1697 Lead and other members of this group began to hold public meetings, calling themselves the Philadelphian Society. The majority of the Baldwins Gardens group refused to join the Philadelphians in their public testimony; this group was later to suffer schism when a "Bow Lane Party" established itself

⁴Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, pp. 62, 71.

⁵This could have been either Dodo von Knyphausen or George Guillaume Knyphausen. Dodo, the Brandenburg *Geheimerath* and *Kammarpresident*, was a Bourignonist. George Knyphausen was the author of *Entretiens solitaires d'une âme dévote avec son Dieu*, dedicated to William III and Mary II. See Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 86.

separately. These objected to the continued friendly relations between the Baldwins Gardens group and the Philadelphians, and were "particularly ag^t y^e Manifestation from y^e Divine Sophia w^{ch} opened chiefly among those" of the Philadelphian Society.⁶

From the spring of 1697 the Philadelphian Society began to expand, despite popular hostility, and a set of "Philadelphian Constitutions" governing the society were drawn up in that year.⁷ In June 1703, however, the Society suspended its public meetings. As an organised group, the history of the Philadelphians was effectively ended with Jane Lead's death in 1704, although there was a brief revival of public meetings under the leadership of Richard Roach in 1707.

The major turning point in Lead's religious life was her visionary experience in April 1670. While walking in a friend's garden in the country, she saw "an overshadowing bright Cloud and in the midst of it the Figure of a Woman", who said, "Behold, I am God's Eternal Virgin-Wisdom, whom thou hast been enquiring after". Three days later, "the same Figure in greater Glory did appear with

⁶MS Rawlinson D833, fos. 55r, 58r, 59v. The Bow Lane group were still meeting in 1712-15, when the German Behmenist emigré, Dionysius Andreas Freher, became involved with them. See Freher's letters to and about the group, Walton MS I.1.4.

⁷The Constitutions are printed in *Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society* 4 (August 1697), pp. 221-224.

a Crown upon her Head, full of Majesty".⁸ Lead then returned to London, where she encountered Wisdom for a third time. Wisdom told her that "I shall now cease to appear in a Visible Figure, but I will not fail to transfigure my self in thy Mind; and there open the Spring of Wisdom and Understanding".⁹ Nevertheless, Lead continued to have highly personalized visions of the divine Wisdom. In February 1696, for example, she and her companions experienced a collective vision in which Sophia descended, accompanied by St. Paul, St. Elizabeth, and other figures.¹⁰

Lead's Wisdom is clearly as personal a figure as the Virgin Mary in traditional Christian belief, and much of her thought on the Virgin Wisdom has a strong Mariological flavour. Lead applies to Sophia the standard Mariological argument, that just as sin was brought into the world by a woman, so the new birth will be brought in by Sophia. She identifies the Woman clothed in the Sun (Revelation 12), often seen as representing Mary, with the Virgin Sophia.¹¹ In her *Enochian Walks with God*, Lead describes

⁸Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, pp. 18-19.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

¹⁰*Idem.*, *The Tree of Faith: Or, The Tree of Life Springing up in the Paradise of God* (London 1696), p. 105. The vision occurred at a gathering on 14 February 1696.

¹¹*Idem.*, *The Revelation of Revelations, Particularly as an Essay Towards the Unsealing, Opening and Discovering the Seven Seals, the Seven Thunders, and the New Jerusalem State* (London 1683), p. 38.

a vision of the Virgin Mary, "who is the Figure of the Eternal Virgin".¹² Thus the association between the Virgin Wisdom and Virgin Mary, always latent in Behmenist thought, is made much more explicit by Lead.

Like male Behmenists, Lead employed nuptial imagery in reference to Wisdom; "Wisdom", she tells us, "hath made choice of Eve, for to be her mate".¹³ Lead's Sophia mysticism even has an erotic quality which is frequently lacking in her Christ mysticism. She tells us that, having seen the

lustrous Presentation of her [Wisdom's] perfect Comeliness and Beauty into one Spirit I was all inflamed, making complaint, bemoaning our selves, how we might possibly compass the obtaining this matchless Virgin-Dove for our Spouse and Bride, who with her piercing fiery Arrow of Love, had us wounded so deep, as no Cure throughout the Circumference of this lower Sphere could be found.¹⁴

For Lead the relationship with Wisdom is also a maternal one. In her visions of April 1670, Sophia instructed Lead to "Behold me as thy Mother". The maternal relationship is reciprocal, Wisdom being both mother and daughter to Lead's regenerate soul:

Out of my womb thou shalt be brought forth after the Manner of a Spirit, conceived and born again; this shalt thou know by a new Motion of Life, stirring and giving a restlessness, till

¹²*Idem.*, *The Enochian Walks with God, Found out by a Spiritual-Traveller Whose Face Towards Mount Sion Above Was Set* (London 1694), p. 26.

¹³*Idem.*, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. ii, p. 106.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 119.

Wisdom be born in the inward parts of thy
Soul.¹⁵

While male Behmenists strove for nuptial union with Sophia, Lead tends to seek existential identity; the aim of her spiritual project is to regain "one's own Native Country and original Virginity".¹⁶ Lead's Sophiological mysticism thus places her outside the context of Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of female mysticism.¹⁷ Lead is not simply seeking "the exaltation of her narcissism" in becoming the *object* of divine love;¹⁸ her mysticism is not a particular instance of "the Other" that is woman defining itself in terms of "the Subject" that is man.¹⁹ As with the medieval women mystics who personified divine love as Lady Minne, Lead's Sophiology permitted a positive construction of femininity in which womanhood itself achieves subjectivity.²⁰

Lead employs the theory of prelapsarian androgyny, making the standard Behmenist identification of Wisdom with Adam's prelapsarian feminine part:

¹⁵*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 19.

¹⁶*Idem.*, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 47.

¹⁷Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth 1972), pp. 679-687.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 683.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰See Ulrike Wiethaus, "Sexuality, Gender, and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* viii, 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 83-103.

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 him Male and Female in himself".²¹

Sophia is Adam's "Supercelestial Element and his true Virgin",²² "his Virgin Body" in which his strength lay.²³ Adam's androgyny was a representation of "God himself, the High and Divine Masculine, Male and Female".²⁴ Lead's thought on Eve's place in the divine plan is relatively conservative. Like Boehme, she treats the loss of androgyny as a consequence of the Fall; if it became necessary to give Adam "a Terrestrial help", this was in order to make procreation possible.²⁵ As we shall see, this emphasis on Eve's procreative function was superseded in the eighteenth century by the typically Bourignonist notion that Adam's feminine part was divided from him in order to recall him to the spiritual realm through the contemplation of Eve.

The process of redemption is intimately connected with the regaining of androgyny. Christ himself is androgynous.

²¹Lead, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 38.

²²Idem., *The Messenger of An Universal Peace: Or A Third Message to the Philadelphian Society* (London 1698), p. 16.

²³Idem., *The Wonders of God's Creation Manifested, In the variety of Eight Worlds, As they were made known Experimentally to the Author* (London 1696), p. 36.

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵Idem., *The Messenger of An Universal Peace*, p. 16.

We are told that "the Man-God cannot be without his Virgin Female".²⁶ "Wisdom hath recreated and formed another Adam, being Male and Female, a Production of her own Virgin-Nature".²⁷ The new Paradise "will begin, as it was in the First Paradise, in Male and Female, through the Restoration of the lost Eternal Virgin-Nature". This is represented as the "eternal Marriage of the Male and female".²⁸

Lead thought that "the Nativity of the Virgin" will be renewed under the planetary influence of Sol and Venus.²⁹ Venus is, of course, the planet of Love, and Lead later tells us that Love

is known for to be the most holy and pure Generation of the immaculate Virgin of God, for which is prepared a Virgin-Womb, that this Birth might be the choice and undefiled One of her that brings it forth.³⁰

In defending Lead's views on "the Nativity of Wisdom", Francis Lee argued that "Sol" and "Venus" were not intended to refer to the visible planets of that name, but to "the superior and invisible ones". These invisible planets are the powers or energies of God, and it is clear that for Lee they represent Boehme's seven qualities. Sol

²⁶*Idem.*, *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 125.

²⁷*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 79.

²⁸*Idem.*, *The Signs of the Times: Forerunning The Kingdom of Christ, And Evidencing When It Is Come* (London 1699), p. 13.

²⁹*Idem.*, *The Revelation of Revelations*, p. 42.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

and Venus correspond to the fourth and fifth qualities, and "We may call one of them *Light*, and the other *Love*, or *passive Love*".³¹ This is to say that Wisdom is born at the point where, in Boehme's scheme, the First Principle is transformed into the Second; where, in fact, the godhead becomes divine.³²

Lead's Wisdom is an integral part of her godhead. She speaks of "the Tri-une-Deity, wherein is included the Virgin-Wisdom".³³ Lead tells us that "a Virgin hid in Him [God] from all eternity".³⁴ According to Lead, the fifth Law of Paradise was that

thou art required to honour thy Eternal Father,
and wisdom thy true Natural Mother, which hath
brought thee forth, and up, to that state and
degree in which thou now art.³⁵

Heaven is referred to in terms of a court presided over by a divine king and queen; the New Jerusalem is "the Royal and Principal Seat of God the Father, with the Eternal

³¹Francis Lee, letter to Henry Dodwell, 9 April 1699, in Christopher Walton ed., *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law* (London 1852), p. 209. Sol and Venus are generally placed fourth and fifth in alchemical-astrological representations of the planets.

³²See p. 165, above.

³³Jane Lead, *A Living Funeral Testimony: Or, Death Overcome, And Drown'd in the Life of Christ* (London 1702), p. 36.

³⁴*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 31.

³⁵*Idem.*, *The Laws of Paradise, Given Forth by Wisdom to a Translated Spirit* (London 1695), p. 11.

Virgin Wisdom, and the Seven Spirits".³⁶ The Virgin Wisdom is described as coeternal with the other elements of the godhead, "being the Co-essential creating Power in the Deity".³⁷ She is "the eternal Goddess".³⁸ Her "Organicall Faculties", or five senses, are all turned towards God.³⁹ It is the Virgin Wisdom who maintains the harmony of the Light and Dark Principles of the godhead: "The Divine Wisdom kept all in their Place and Station Unviolated in Himself".⁴⁰ Significantly, the birth of Wisdom is more important than that of Jesus: "The Birth of Jesus was great and marvellous, but this shall far excel it".⁴¹

Sophia's relation to the rest of the godhead is a nuptial one. Wisdom is "Gods Spouse and Mate, from whom the highest birth, the Eternal Word of Wisdom did go forth".⁴² We are told that "a Glorious Female Figure was brought forth" from God, who "was so commixed and mingled with the Deity, as she became God's Spouse and Bride, being Spirit of his Spirit".⁴³ The marriage of God and Sophia is a fertile one. It is "the Father in Union with

³⁶*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 6.

³⁷*Idem.*, *The Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 43-6.

⁴⁰*Idem.*, *The Enochian Walks*, p. 35.

⁴¹*Idem.*, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 468.

⁴²*Idem.*, *Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

⁴³*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 32.

his Virgin Wisdom" who produces the New Jerusalem.⁴⁴ This means, at an anthropological level, that the new birth of the soul is the product of the internal nuptial relationship of the godhead, "For in whom ever this [power of regeneration] comes to be witnessed, it is no less then the Seed of the Trinity, retained in the pure Matrix of the Virgin Wisdom, which driveth forth, till it cometh into Transubstantiation".⁴⁵ God's union with Sophia is also a theogonic principle, since Mary "was but a Type of the Eternal Virgin who brought forth the Son of God before all Time".⁴⁶ God and Sophia have yet more offspring. Lead speaks of "simplified Spirits" who "will sublime, and make Bodies to become All-Divine"; they are born "From God the Father, in Conjunction with the Eternal Virgin Wisdom who brought them forth".⁴⁷

On New Year's Day 1696, the Virgin Wisdom informed Lead "that this present year should be the beginning of a new Race of Life".⁴⁸ This is typical of the chiliastic fervour of the Philadelphians, as is Lead's tendency to express

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁵*Idem.*, *The Tree of Faith: Or, The Tree of Life Springing up in the Paradise of God* (London 1696), p. 85.

⁴⁶*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, p. 32.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 42. These are Pordage's "Inhabitants of the Most Holy Place" of the godhead; see p. 214, above.

⁴⁸*Idem.*, *A Message to the Philadelphian Society, Whithersoever dispersed over the whole Earth* (London 1696), p. 81.

her millenarian expectations in Sophiological terms. The prophetess asserts that

The Splendorous Deity may for a time under a shade of contemptible Humanity lye obscured; but 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.⁴⁹

In Philadelphian writings generally, millenarian expectations centre as much on Sophia's return to earth as Christ's.

In Lead's writings, sexuality is generally contrasted with the regenerate life. In the *Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*, the fallen condition is perceived in terms of lost virginity:

Wisdom shall in the Spirit and Soul lay its Platform in order to the restoring that Virgin Nature, and Godlike Simplicity, that hath been deflowered through the subtilty of Reason.⁵⁰

In *The Laws of Paradise*, the fall is seen as "the Effect of the Adulterous Eye and Ear" turning to the creation rather than God.⁵¹ In another passage, Lead seems to envisage that the regenerate male and female will retain a separate identity:

The Male has his Virgin in himself, and so from hence may multiply a Spiritual Offspring, as was proposed in the first Adam. And on the other Hand, the Female Virgin shall have her Male Power and Spirit in her self, to bring forth in

⁴⁹Idem., *The Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁰Idem., *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking, The Lord Christs Ascension Ladder sent down* (London 1681), p. 22.

⁵¹Idem., *The Laws of Paradise*, p. 23.

the like manner, according to the excellent might of the God-Man so incorporating with the Virgin-mind. So that here will be no dependency upon what is without themselves, each one having the Deified Seed, to procreate these Angelical births from themselves.⁵²

This suggests that regeneration is a perfection of distinct male and female beings, a perfection which is represented as a freedom from the constraints of sexual procreation, and hence a mutual independence of one from the other.

Struck believed he could detect a sensuality in Lead's mysticism,⁵³ while Thune asserted that Lead's bridal mysticism "never turns into intense sensuality".⁵⁴ Lead's *Brautmystik*, in fact, displays both the "sensual fantasy" indicated by Struck and the rather prosaic quality emphasised by Thune. Lead speaks, for example, of grasping "with love-violence, this my fair, wise rich and noble Bride", Wisdom.⁵⁵ Christ "will as a most intimate Lover make frequent Visits".⁵⁶ Christ's "risen Life in the Soul"

⁵²*Idem.*, *The Signs of the Times*, p. 15.

⁵³Wilhelm Struck, *Der Einfluss Jacob Boehmes auf der englische Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1936), p. 138.

⁵⁴Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 186. Thune surmises that this may be because, unlike other female mystics, Lead was a mother and a woman in her forties at the time that her revelations began; hence she would be no longer possessed of a sexual sensibility. This, of course, tells us more about Thune than about Lead.

⁵⁵*Idem.*, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 118.

⁵⁶*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 37-8.

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⁵⁵*Idem.*, *Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 118.

⁵⁶*Idem.*, *The Wonders of God's Creation*, pp. 37-8.

is "a Love-kiss whereby Christ doth sweetly and seceretly [sic] draw, and p[a]rt the Soul from all dregs and relicks that appertain to a lapsed Nature".⁵⁷ On the other hand, Lead also employs the nuptial image in a way which is dominated by marital property arrangements rather than the emotional fervour of an enraptured lover. She speaks of two marriages, the first to the "Body of Sin", the second to Christ:

being discharged from the Law of the first Husband, to which we were married, after the Law of a Carnal Command... 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 Invisible or Visible: all Power in Heaven and Earth is committed to her".⁵⁸

Christ's bride "will be put into a Joint-possession [of the creation], with the Lord her Bridegroom, as her Property".⁵⁹

Like several female writers of her age, Lead has been seen as a sort of seventeenth-century feminist. According to Catherine Smith, in Lead's works we can see "the outlines of an implicit visionary feminism. Hers is a gynocentric vision that perceives universal spiritual transformation, modeled on her own, in predominantly

⁵⁷*Idem.*, *The Tree of Faith*, pp. 22-3.

⁵⁸Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 68.

⁵⁹*Idem.*, *The Tree of Faith*, p. 25.

female, not male, terms".⁶⁰ Serge Hutin speaks of Lead's "feminist profession of faith" and asserts that she carried the feminisation of the divinity further than Boehme.⁶¹ It is true that this aspect of Lead's thought gives it a certain feminist tone, theologically at least. In her vision of the Virgin Mary in heaven, the Virgin is found "betwixt the Supream Majesty of the Father, and the Throne of Glory of the Lord Christ".⁶² She is thus given the traditional place of honour, in the centre; we might also note that while Father, Son and Virgin are to be found in this vision, the Holy Ghost is absent. In *The Laws of Paradise*, the first commandment is rendered with a Sophiological emphasis: "Thou shalt own, and bear witness to the True God, manifested through his Virgin Wisdom...".⁶³

Some of the Philadelphians emphasised the importance of the feminine. The author of the Anglo-German Creed of 1703, for example, seemed to want to elide the masculine aspect of Adam altogether: "we also rightly call him a

⁶⁰Smith, "Jane Lead: The Feminist Mind and Art of a Seventeenth-Century Protestant Mystic", p. 190.

⁶¹Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme* (Paris 1960), pp. 103, 106.

⁶²Lead, *The Enochian Walks*, p. 26.

⁶³*Idem.*, *The Laws of Paradise*, p. 4.

manly or better a paradisiacal virgin".⁶⁴ In Lead's own works, however, there is greater emphasis on the transcendence of gender at the anthropological level than the acquisition of spiritual androgyny. "Male and Female are alike" in the regenerated state,

therefore the Holy Ghost doth include both in one, swallowing up all in the Newness, Strength, Power, and Glory of his own springing new Birth.⁶⁵

If Lead's spiritual ideal is not itself a "feminism", it nevertheless suggests a yearning to overcome the limitations imposed by gender.

In some ways, however, the Behmenist feminisation of God is more restrained in Lead's work than in that of other Behmenists. Whereas male Behmenists tend to dwell on the soul's nuptial relationship with Wisdom, there is perhaps greater emphasis in Lead's writings on its filial relationship. The soul achieves conformity with Christ by being born of the Virgin, just as he was.⁶⁶ Moreover, the Virgin Wisdom's gender identity is not unambiguously female; she is androgynous. Wisdom "is not limited to Male or Female, for she may assume either according to her good pleasure, for she is both Male and female for Angelical

⁶⁴Cited in Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 123: "wir ihn auch mit Recht eine männliche oder besser paradisische Jungfrau nennen". The Creed is preserved in the *Apparatus ad historiam ecclesiasticam novam*, Herzögliche Bibliothek, Gotha; I have been unable to consult this document personally.

⁶⁵Lead, *The Revelation of Revelations*, pp. 105-6.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 12.

Generation".⁶⁷ Insofar as Sophia is a feminine figure, her role is stereotypical. There is a division of labour in the divine supervision of the process of regeneration:

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, where only we shall find winged Power and Shelter, and who will be a glorious Banner over us".⁶⁸

Like a human female, childcare is Wisdom's proper sphere of competence. This is literally true of her work in heaven. In a passage which anticipates Swedenborgian thought, Lead asserts that children who die before the age of twelve go to "the Childrens Sphear or Kingdom" to be educated, a part of heaven which "was appropriated to *Wisdom*; to be under her Government and Dominion".⁶⁹

Nor can any great claims be made for Lead's feminism on the basis of her role as seer. Richard Roach certainly accorded her a high status, asserting that "for y^e Singularity of her Call, Revelations, & Work" Lead "was denominated by the Spirit y^e Representative of Wisdom".⁷⁰ Lead may even have been addressed as "Mother" by some of her followers. She herself subscribed a letter to Roach as

⁶⁷*Idem.*, *The Revelation of Revelations*, p. 39.

⁶⁸Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. i, p. 137.

⁶⁹Lead, *The Ascent to the Mount of Vision: Where many Things were shewn* (London 1699), pp. 8-9.

⁷⁰MS Rawlinson D833, fo. 57.

"Mother of Love".⁷¹ Another letter to Roach recalls that "the Spirit of Wisdom in our Mother appropriated to you that Mystical Name, by which you subscribe yourself";⁷² this name was "Onesimus", given to Roach by Lead. According to Francis Lee, however, Lead herself always refused the title of prophetess.⁷³ Thune mentions a rumour in German Pietist circles that Lead claimed to be the "mulier apocalyptica" of Revelation 12; since this is attached to the patently absurd story that she had given birth to a bastard child in Bayreuth, calling it the son of Christ, the rumour can be safely dismissed.⁷⁴ Dodwell's accusation that Pordage was the real author of Lead's works can also be discounted, as can George White's similar charge in relation to Pierre Poirot and Antionette Bourignon.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Lead's thought is dominated by Pordage's, differing in emotional rather than intellectual content. Throughout her religious career Lead worked in a symbiotic relationship with men: John Pordage, Francis Lee

⁷¹MS Rawlinson D832, fo. 57.

⁷²*Ibid.*, fo. 58.

⁷³Francis Lee, *Der seelig und aber seeligen Jane Leade letztere Lebensstunden* (Amsterdam 1705), p. 26.

⁷⁴Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians*, p. 128. Lead, who had never left England, would have been seventy-three years old at the time of this alleged bastard-bearing.

⁷⁵Letter of Henry Dodwell to Francis Lee, 23 August 1698, in Christopher Walton ed., *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law* (London 1852), pp. 191-4. George White, *An Advertisement Anent the reading of the Books of Antonia Borignon* (Aberdeen 1700), p. 21.

and Richard Roach. There is a sense in which she understood this relationship as a sort of spiritual marriage. In one of her visions, she was told "That 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 be mutually made able to strengthen one anothers Hands, to carry on this great Work, as Male and Female in one Person, or Spirit".⁷⁶ Lead's relationship with her male supporters was typical of that enjoyed by other female prophets. On the one hand, her experience as a seer was exploited by the men in her circle as the basis of their own spiritual authority; on the other hand, this experience was valid only insofar as it was authenticated by her male colleagues.

The Philadelphians did, however, recognize the validity of female prophecy. Although this was in itself radical, for the Philadelphians as a whole the perception of women prophets was permeated by gender stereotypes. The tenth article of the Philadelphian Constitutions of August 1697 enjoins that "If a Woman Pray or Prophecy, let it be with all Sobriety, and Modesty, to speak forth her own Experience, or Manifestation in the Divine Matters". The

⁷⁶Jane Lead, *The Ark of Faith: Or A Supplement to the Tree of Faith, &c.* (London 1696). The vision is recorded as occurring on 21 February 1687, a date which would exclude Pordage, Lee and Roach as the person "known by Name". The date may, however, be an error; the accompanying visions are recorded as happening in 1695, a date which would make it possible for this vision to refer to either Lee or Roach.

twelfth article returns to the same subject. The "Manifestation of the Spirit, which is given to every one, whether Male or Female" should not be hindered, "though attended with Weakness". It is to "be encourag'd in the Inferiour Degrees", in order that "the Weak may be at last made Strong in the Power and Might of the Holy Spirit...without the Alloy of their own Natural and Creaturely Imperfections".⁷⁷

II. Richard Roach

Richard Roach (1681-1727) had been a school-fellow of Francis Lee at the Merchant Taylor's School, London. Like Lee, he entered St. John's College, Oxford, in 1685, receiving his M.A. and Fellowship of the College in 1689 and his B.D. in 1695. In 1690 Roach had become rector of St. Augustine's, Hackney. Despite his heterodoxy, he was to remain undisturbed in his rectory until his death; unlike his friend Lee, Roach was evidently not a Nonjuror.⁷⁸ It was in the 1690s that Roach was introduced to Jane Lead. About 1695, Lead wrote to Roach that she had received a revelation from the Virgin Wisdom, who had

⁷⁷"The Philadelphian Constitutions", in *Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society* 4 (August 1697), pp. 222-3.

⁷⁸Roach's sympathies were in fact Hanoverian. His manuscript writings include a poem "To K George (y^e First) On His Thanksgiving", "A Welcome to His Royal Highness Frederick; Prince of Wales" and "A Gratulatory Poem on y^e Coronation of K George And Queen Caroline" (MS Rawlinson D832, fos. 239-40, 246, 263-4). The first of these poses the question, "In whom shou'd Wisdom's Crown again be shown,/ But Him who has 't Innate SOPHIA'S SON[?]" (fo. 240r).

commissioned him as "a priest in her orb".⁷⁹ Roach had, however, been endowed from "y^e peculiar Treasury of y^e Eternal Wisdom" even before meeting Lead.⁸⁰

Roach was clearly a man of heightened erotic sensibilities. In his poetic dialogue between the Church and Christ, for example, the Church pleads for the consummation of her union with Christ in unmistakably erotic tones:

Come now, my Royal Love, you must Relieve me,
Long promis'd, now you can no more bereave me;
Ah, now Perform, Now, now, now, Receive me.⁸¹

Roach's eroticism, however, is entirely sublimated. He himself lived a celibate life, and he had a low opinion of sexuality. Sexuality was one of the reasons that the existence of God's Virgin Wisdom is so little known: "the more clear and general Manifestation hereof has been withheld, on Account of the Degradation and Shame attending the Act of Love in fal'n Nature".⁸² Roach does, however, recognize the validity of marriage, since it "had its

⁷⁹MS Rawlinson D832, fo. 51.

⁸⁰MS Rawlinson D833, fo. 57r.

⁸¹[Richard Roach], "The Cyrus Gate", in Jane Lead, *A Living Funeral Testimony: Or, Death Overcome, And Drown'd in the Life of Christ* (London 1702), pp. 53-67, p. 67; the poem also appears under the title "The Key of the Kingdom" in Roach's *The Imperial Standard of Messiah Triumphant; Coming Now in the Power, and Kingdom of His Father* (London 1727), pp. 147-160; it can also be found (attributed to Francis Lee) in Christopher Walton ed., *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law* (London 1852), pp. 181-5.

⁸²Roach, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 187.

first Institution and Blessing, as a Representation of the Unity, and therein the *Fecundity* of the Divine Love".⁸³

Roach is one of the more interesting of the Behmenists with regard to his doctrine of the Trinity and its relation to the divine Wisdom. He tells us that "The First and General Distinction in the Divine Essence is that of the *Divine Masculine*, and the *Divine Virgin* or *Feminine Nature*".⁸⁴ According to Roach, the Persons of the Trinity had an "*Inferior Bride*, the *Perfected Church*", and a "*superior Bride*, the *Divine Virgin Nature* in themselves".⁸⁵ Thus, the "woman clothed in the sun" of Revelation 12 had a double reference: "The Woman signifies indeed, in a lower Sense, the Church; But in the Higher, it is the Virgin of God's Wisdom, the Wisdom of the Father; as now opening her principle and concurring in Preparation of the Kingdom".⁸⁶ That there is a Virgin Wisdom in the godhead can be "inferred from the Terms of *Father* and *Son*", since these imply a Mother. Moreover, since humanity is "made in the Image of God, Male and Female", it follows that "the Female Nature also, as the

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19.

Image in Part, must have its Prototype or Original in God after which it was form'd".⁸⁷

For Roach, the "Distinction [of gender] runs thro' each of the Persons of the Trinity".⁸⁸ The duality of divine gender, however, manifests itself differently in each Person of the godhead: "the Third Person in the Trinity, tho' Primarily in the Divine Feminine, has in it the Divine Masculine Nature, and acquires, *secondarily*, the Masculine Denomination also: whereas the Father and the Son have *Primarily* the Divine Masculine Nature, and *Secondarily* the Divine Feminine".⁸⁹ This distribution of gender in the godhead is the result of the way in which the Holy Spirit is generated. Both the Father and Son have male and female aspects: the Father's female element is "the Divine Intellect, or Wisdom in the *Feminine* Nature", and the Son's is "the Wisdom Derivative" of the Father's.⁹⁰ It is these feminine aspects of themselves that the first two Persons of the Trinity contribute to the formation of the Holy Spirit. Since "these two Processions" from the Father and Son are "in the *Feminine* Capacity", the Holy Spirit itself "is to be consider'd as existing *Primarily* in the *Feminine* Property and

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 275, 277.

Denomination".⁹¹ It is because of its basically feminine character that "the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*...bears so deep a Dye", since it is a "malicious Opposition to, and Outrage against the Softest and tenderest Emanation and Manifestation of His Divine Love".⁹²

Both the Father and Wisdom, working through Christ, are part of the redemptive process: "the *Father*, together with his Virgin WISDOM, or the Divine *Virgin-Nature*, as originally in himself, flow forth in the Holy Powers of their Own Sphere or Principle, and concur in the Redemption-Work of the Son".⁹³ Here, Wisdom's relationship to the Son is a maternal one. She is "the Womb in which the divine Word is generated, and from whence it is brought forth".⁹⁴ As the offspring of the Father and Sophia, Christ is androgynous, assuming whichever sex is appropriate for the nuptial union with humanity:

I possessed while on Earth the Bride in my self, ...even the Eternal Virgin of God's *Wisdom*; in which I come now in a heavenly Manner to meet the Males, and the Females as Male; and combine all together in such a Unity of Triumphant Joy, as all the Marriages on Earth if joined together, would be but a faint shadow of it.⁹⁵

This would imply a continuation of distinct genders, but elsewhere Roach clearly suggests that androgyny is an

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 187.

essential aspect of regeneration: "the *Perfected Saints*, are *Virginiz'd* or made Masculin-Virgins".⁹⁶ "For as the Male and Female in Me are *One*", his Christ declares, "so it must be in every Soul thus made *One with Me*".⁹⁷ Roach believed that "in order to represent their Archetype [God], Male and Female Nature are...to be consider'd together as *One*, or as in Marriage Unity".⁹⁸

The Virgin Wisdom "was the *Heavenly Bride*, the Blessing which the *First Adam* lost in the Fall,; but which the *Second Adam* possess'd in himself".⁹⁹ Christ has "in Himself the whole Human Nature restor'd, viz. in the *Female Property* as well as the *Male*".¹⁰⁰ If Christ contains Sophia within himself, Roach tends to associate the divine Wisdom with the Father rather than the Son. Wisdom is not the Son or Word, but "the *Original Wisdom* of and in the Father, the divine *Intellect*, or first Reflection of himself to himself; standing to his divine *Will* as in the *Female Property*".¹⁰¹ Wisdom does not, however, constitute "a Fourth Personality" in the godhead, since the concept of a "person" implies both will and

⁹⁶*Idem.*, *The Great Crisis: The Mystery of the Times and Seasons Unfolded* (London 1725), p. 95.

⁹⁷*Idem.*, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 187.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁹⁹*Idem.*, *The Great Crisis*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰¹*Idem.*, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 20.

understanding.¹⁰² Roach tells us that Christ "possesses the *Virgin-Nature*, the *Wisdom of God*, the *Bride* in himself; as *John iii.29*. But this *derivatively*, according to his *Filial Nature*: whereas it is here to be understood also, and chiefly of the *Original Wisdom*, or *Divine Intellect in the Father*".¹⁰³ In terms of Behmenist thought, this represents something of a rehabilitation of the Father. For Boehme, the Father has generally negative associations. While Roach emphasises the feminine element of the godhead, his understanding of the moral status of the masculine element is much more balanced.

Wisdom has an eschatological role as the herald of the millennium:

The Mystery of y^e Lily, or y^e Virgin Wisdom of God travailling in y^e Church & bringing forth y^e Manchild or Second Birth of Christ viz in Spirit & in y^e Power of y^e Father, is y^e Central Point to w^{ch} all Scripture Types, Prophecies, Movem^{ts} & Operations tend.

The millennium will be inaugurated by Wisdom, since "The Day of y^e Mother must precede that of the Birth".¹⁰⁴ Roach tells us that "the *First Call* [of the Last Trumpet], on the present Advent, is the previous Call of *Wisdom*, as the Beginning of the Ways of God, as in a *Feminine*, i.e. more Acute or *Treble Tone*". This is "like the Voice of *Mary Magdalen*, signifying the Resurrection of Christ to the

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 165-6.

¹⁰⁴MS Rawlinson D833, fo. 55v.

Disciples". The millennium would only be consummated, however, with the second blast of the Trumpet, "where the Breath of the King himself gives the Blast, in which the whole Harmony of the whole Scale concurs".¹⁰⁵ Like Jane Lead, Roach was convinced that the millennium was already commencing, an expectation which he expressed in Sophiological terms: "the Virgin-Wisdom of God...is now opening her Treasures, appearing in her Beauty and her Bounty".¹⁰⁶ "SOPHIA flames, and shines in the Light World, and displays her Beams even into the Outbirth: which is expected outwardly in the World".¹⁰⁷ Wisdom was "the Astraea of this Golden Age", who shall shortly "have again Her Delights with the Children of Men".¹⁰⁸ This "Manifestation of the Heavenly Bride, the Virgin-Wisdom of God" was "the Great Mystery Reserv'd for the peculiar Blessing of the latter Day".¹⁰⁹

Roach also gave a decidedly Sophiological emphasis to the Joachimite theory of the three Dispensations. The first of these is that of the Old Testament period:

The Virgin Wisdom, in y^e First Ministration shadowd in a female Conductress of y^e People

¹⁰⁵Roach, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷[Richard Roach?], "The Sentiments of a Friend upon the book of the Revelation of Revelations", *Theosophical Transactions by the Philadelphian Society* 4 (August 1697), pp. 253-5, p. 254.

¹⁰⁸Roach, *The Great Crisis*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁹*Idem.*, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 165.

joind with Moses & Aaron in y^e wise & Formall Constitution of their Morall Judiciall & Ceremoniall Law, & order of their whole outward Oeconomy, the mysticall construction of y^e Tabernacle &c, the Promises of temporall Blessings & under this Dispensation of y^e signal manifestation of her self in y^e Glorious & Typicall Reign of Solomon.

If there is some difficulty in identifying "a female Conductress of y^e People" for this period, the second Dispensation naturally lends itself to a Mariological context: "In y^e second Ministration [Wisdom worked by] opening her Centre in y^e Virgin Mother of God for Conception of y^e Deity". The third Dispensation is distinguished by what Roach called the "female embassy", the special role given to women in the Last Days; now Wisdom was to be found "Constituting Female Representatives & Commissioning them to Joyn in y^e Preparation Work of y^e K'dom of & in Spirit, giving forth y^e Mystery of y^e Law according to y^e Originall in y^e Heavenly Mount y^e Paradise & Mount Sion World".¹¹⁰

Roach observed with satisfaction that "so many of the *Female Sex*" attended the Philadelphians' first meeting "that it was thence call'd the Taffata [sic] Meeting".¹¹¹ He believed that, because of their close relationship with the Virgin Wisdom, women were about to play a special soteriological role:

standing in the *Female Denomination* [Wisdom]
will in an Extraordinary Manner Excite and

¹¹⁰MS Rawlinson D832, fo. 82r.

¹¹¹*Idem.*, *The Great Crisis*, p. 99.

Animate that Sex whereby she is Represented; and endow them with her Peculiar Graces and Gifts, in such Degrees, that they shall Out-run and Exceed the Males themselves.¹¹²

Roach tells us that "some of y^e Female Sex have been Chosen & Distinguished with Admirable Talents for y^e Information of y^e Age".¹¹³ Women's role in the fulfilment of history was a function of their special relationship to the essential divine attribute, Love:

And as the vehement flaming Love, (the great Qualification and Preparation for the Kingdom) is in Nature more *their* Property; so, as it shall be rightly plac'd, they will be found generally most *Forward* in the Ministration of Love; and be made *Embassadresses* of the Resurrection, to declare the good Tidings of Christ's coming to his glorious Kingdom".¹¹⁴

According to Roach, "Favours will be indulged to the Females of this Day, both Virgins and others, of a like Nature to the *Virgin Mary*; but in a more Internal and Spiritual Way".¹¹⁵ It was a woman who had tempted man to fall, but now the female would "draw the Male *Upwards*, in Order to the *Recovery* of *Paradise* again, even on earth".¹¹⁶ Roach claimed that "This Spirit and Power of the Kingdom thus centrally opening, appeared first in a *Female*, the *Wife* of Dr. Fordage [*sic*] of *Bromfield* [*sic*] in *Barkshire*".¹¹⁷ He also cited Jane Lead, Antoinette

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹¹³MS Rawlinson D833, fo. 55v.

¹¹⁴*Idem.*, *The Great Crisis*, p. 96.

¹¹⁵*Idem.* *The Imperial Standard*, p. 187.

¹¹⁶*Idem.*, *The Great Crisis*, p. 97.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 98.

Bourignon and Madame de Guyon as examples of the fulfilment of "the *Female Embassy*" prophesied in Psalms 68:12.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Roach warned that it was "a peculiar Stratagem of the Enemy" to delay the millennium by exciting people to think of themselves "as the Representative of Christ: Or, in the Female Sex of the *Eternal Wisdom*".¹¹⁹ Perhaps his encounters with the French Prophets had taught him that there were false Sophias as well as false Christs.

III. The French Prophets and the Shakers

From March 1707, when Roach renewed the Philadelphians' public testimony, the group were in close contact with a new millenarian group, the French Prophets. In the late summer of the previous year, a number of Camisard prophets had arrived in London. Originally all male, the group rapidly became dominated by women as it acquired an English membership. By the summer of 1709, the membership of the group as a whole was predominantly both female and English. The women, moreover, were taking a leading role, possibly under the influence of the Philadelphians.¹²⁰ By

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 96. Psalms 68:12 merely tells us that "she that tarried at home divided the spoil".

¹¹⁹*Idem.*, *The Imperial Standard*, p. 171.

¹²⁰Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets. The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley 1980), p. 102.

December 1706, fourteen of the twenty-three *inspirés* of the group were female.¹²¹

Roach's attitude to the French Prophets was ambivalent. He regarded the group as authentic representatives of God's Wrath, but, in line with Behmenist theology, they were to be subordinated to the Philadelphians as representatives of God's Love. He proposed unsuccessfully that both his own Society and the French Prophets should dissolve as formal bodies, in order to merge informally. In his witness for and against the new Prophets, Roach was joined by "a Young Gentlewoman", Sarah Wiltshire. Roach and Wiltshire were also involved in what they regarded as the miraculous cure of a young lunatic, Mary Hall.¹²² Roach recorded that Wiltshire "speaks in y^e Person of God; but wth out Agitation";¹²³ it is probable that he regarded her as yet another of the Virgin Wisdom's female representatives.

The French Prophets were subsequently to acquire something of a Ranterish complexion. One of the group's female members (possibly the actress, Elizabeth Grey) is said to have stripped naked and preached in the Roman

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹²²MS Rawlinson D832, fos. 77 ff. Wiltshire's own account of the Mary Hall case can be found in MS Rawlinson D833, fos. 38 ff.

¹²³MS Rawlinson D832, fo. 77r.

Catholic chapel in Lincoln's Inn Fields.¹²⁴ In 1711, a leading light of the group, John Lacy, received a divine command to leave his wife in order to live with Elizabeth Grey.¹²⁵ Roach wrote a slightly bawdy poem on this affair, claiming that it was inspired by the Virgin Wisdom.¹²⁶ That Sophia could inspire a bawdy satire might seem strange, but one of the most attractive features of Roach's understanding of the divine Wisdom is his belief in her sense of humour: "she has in various ways her sports and delights among the children of men".¹²⁷ The Prophets seem to have been able to accommodate Lacy's and Gray's unconventional behaviour, but between 1708 and 1712 there were to be six schisms, all led by women. In at least two of these cases, the schism involved claims to special spiritual status by its female leader. The first of the schisms was led by Dinah Stoddart, who had told Fatio that she should be received as "the Saviour of womankind".¹²⁸ A year later, Dorothy Harling was claiming

¹²⁴Anonymous broadsheet, *The French Prophetess turn'd Adamite* (n.d.), transcribed by W. Sparrow Simpson, "Lincoln's Inn Fields: The French Prophetess, Notes and Queries, 6th series, vol. xi (Jan.-June 1885), pp. 21-22.

¹²⁵Schwartz, *The French Prophets*, pp. 144 ff.

¹²⁶"Marriage A la mode. Or The Camisar Wedding", two versions of which can be found in MS. Rawlinson D832, fos. 192 ff, 200 ff.

¹²⁷MS. Rawlinson, D832, fos. 60-1. The French Prophets themselves were one of God's jokes, "sent as the *Flout of Heaven*, and in *Mockery from the Divine Wisdom*"; Roach, *The Great Crisis*, p. 38.

¹²⁸Schwartz, *The French Prophets*, p. 135.

to be the woman clothed in the sun of Revelation 12.¹²⁹ There was clearly a trend towards female messianism among the French Prophets, a trend which was to be inherited by the Shakers.

In 1747, two Bolton tailors and religious enthusiasts, James and Jane Wardley, moved to Manchester, where they founded a small sect of some thirty people. The group, which acquired the name of "Shaking Quakers", was joined in 1758 by a young mill-worker, Ann Lee.¹³⁰ From childhood "she had a great abhorrence of the fleshly cohabitation of the sexes", narrowly escaping a whipping at her father's hand for having "admonished her mother against it".¹³¹ Ann Lee's distaste for sexuality may have been confirmed by her own tragic experience of motherhood: of her four children, three died as babies, the fourth dying at the age of six. This was the background to the religious revelation experienced by Ann Lee in 1770, while

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹³⁰On the Shakers, see Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth. Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880* (London 1951), chs. 2-3; Henri Desroche, *The American Shakers. From Neo-Christianity to Presocialism* (1955), trans. John K. Savacool, (Amherst 1971); John McKelvie Whitworth, *God's Blueprints. A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects* (London 1975), chs. 2-3; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality. The Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Community* (Urbana 1984); Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Bloomington 1982). There is a useful anthology of Shaker writings edited by Robley Edward Whitson, *The Shakers. Two Centuries of Spiritual Reflection* (London 1983).

¹³¹Benjamin Youngs, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, cited in Desroche, *The American Shakers*, p. 44.

imprisoned for profaning the Sabbath. The purport of her revelation was that

no soul could follow Christ in the regeneration,
while living in the works of natural generation,
or in any of the gratifications of lust.¹³²

In 1774, Mother Ann (as she was called by her followers¹³³) broke away from the Wardley group, possibly over the issue of celibacy,¹³⁴ and was directed by God to America. A party of eight, the Shakers experienced defections on arrival, but were soon to grow rapidly.¹³⁵

The Shakers, like other sectarians, were sometimes accused of sexual immorality. A Baptist minister, Isaac Backus, for example, recorded that Ann Lee's "husband at New York found her to be a common prostitute, and rejected her".¹³⁶ Such accusations of Shaker sexual licentiousness are almost certainly unfounded,¹³⁷ and the Shakers themselves identified sin with sexuality. On the fall of Adam and Eve, Mother Ann observed that "Their eating the

¹³²Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells, *A Summary View of the Millennial Church*, cited in Desroche, *The American Shakers*, p. 29.

¹³³Jane Lead may have been addressed as "Mother" (see p. 282, above); Jane Wardley had also been addressed in this way by her group, and like Ann Lee took confession from her followers; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 25.

¹³⁴Desroche, *The American Shakers*, p. 29.

¹³⁵By 1823 there were about 4,000 Shakers; the group reached its peak c. 1860, when there were 6,000, declining thereafter; Desroche, *The American Shakers*, pp. 127 ff.

¹³⁶W.G. McGloughlin ed., *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, 3 vols. (Providence 1979), vol. ii, p. 1097.

¹³⁷Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 43.

fruit was the very act by which Adam knew his wife".¹³⁸ The Shakers accordingly rejected the biblical command to "Go forth and multiply";¹³⁹ this was, in fact, a Satanic interpolation.¹⁴⁰

If the Shaker insistence on celibacy had its psychological roots in a sort of Malthusian resignation among the Manchester mill-workers, and in Mother Ann's own tragic experience,¹⁴¹ it also had its intellectual roots. Shaker views on celibacy were deeply embedded in a theology of the duality of divine gender and an anthropology of prelapsarian androgyny. Shakerism, in fact, bears all the hallmarks of a popular Behmenism. Not that the early Shakers were directly influenced by Jacob Boehme. They were uneducated, and at best semi-literate; with the early Shakers we are dealing with an oral transmission of Behmenist ideas.¹⁴² The channel through

¹³⁸Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, cited in Desroche, *The American Shakers*, p. 150.

¹³⁹Genesis 1:28.

¹⁴⁰Desroche, *The American Shakers*, pp. 154 ff.

¹⁴¹Desroche, *The American Shakers*, pp. 44 ff; Lawrence Foster rightly questions the connection between Shaker celibacy and industrialization, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 26. Insofar as Shaker celibacy was a sort of popular Malthusianism, it contrasts with the general hostility to birth control of the emerging working-class movement, including many Owenite feminists; Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London 1978), ch. 3.

¹⁴²The Shakers committed very little to writing before c. 1800, and most Shaker sources on the early phase of the movement are retrospective accounts written several decades after the events related. This problem of sources

which the Shakers probably received their Behmenism can be identified, since they themselves acknowledged their indebtedness to the French Prophets.¹⁴³

Along with their advocacy of celibacy, the Shakers also developed a doctrine of female messianism curiously similar to that of the medieval Guglielmites.¹⁴⁴ Robley

is exacerbated by the fact that Shakerism undoubtedly changed over time. The sect became less charismatic and more highly organized and Shaker communism, adopted originally on grounds of expedience, became a matter of principle. Later members of the sect, especially Elder Frederick Evans, increasingly supplemented the Shaker theology of gender with rationalistic and scientific arguments. See Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 15-17, 55-6; Desroche, *American Shakers*, p. 162 ff. The present discussion is based on the assumption that the duality of divine gender, Adamic androgyny, the insistence on celibacy and female messianism are all authentic doctrines of the early Shakers.

¹⁴³Desroche, *The American Shakers*, ch. 1. Desroche perhaps exaggerates the influence of the Cevenole French Prophets, since the characteristics he supposes they bequeathed to Shakerism were all long-established in the English sectarian tradition. It is surely among the English "French" Prophets, with their Philadelphian contacts, that the roots of Shakerism are to be found. The American Shakers also had some contact with the remnants of a German group called "The Woman in the Wilderness" (*Das Weib in der Wüste*). Celibate and communist, like the Shakers themselves, the group was led by a student of Boehme, Johannes Kelpius; Holloway, *Heavens on Earth*, pp. 37 ff.

¹⁴⁴See Stephen Wesley, "The Thirteenth-Century Guglielmites: Salvation through Women", *Studies in Church History, Subsidia I: Medieval Women* (Oxford 1978), pp. 289-304. It is possible that some memory of the Guglielmitic heresy had been preserved in the occult tradition. The Tarot Major Arcana card known as the "High Priestess" or "Papess" seems to have first appeared in the fifteenth-century Visconti-Sforza deck, with the figure dressed in the habit of the Umiliata order. Since the iconography of the deck refers repeatedly to the Visconti and Sforza families, it is probable that this card represents Sister Manfreda, a Visconti member of the Umiliata order who became the Guglielmitic Papess after the

Whitson has argued that the belief that Ann Lee was an incarnation of Christ is a misunderstanding of Shakerism.¹⁴⁵ As the texts in his own anthology show, however, the Shakers were divided on this issue. Calvin Green claimed that Mother Ann "did not pretend that she was Christ; but only that through his spirit, the same divine anointing was revealed in her".¹⁴⁶ Sarah Kendall, on the other hand, asserted that "As soon as would I dispute that Christ made his first appearance in the person of Jesus of Nazareth as I would that he had made his second appearance in the person of Ann Lee".¹⁴⁷ According to H.L. Eads,

It is our ineradicable faith and understanding that Jesus and Ann were the chosen ones, as vice-regents of God, to inaugurate the Gospel plan of Christ's First and Second Coming.¹⁴⁸

It is not clear how far Ann Lee regarded herself as partaking in the divine nature, but there is evidence that at least some of her followers thought she had "the fullness of the God Head" in her as early as 1780.¹⁴⁹

death of Guglielma of Bohemia in 1281. See Stuart R. Kaplan's introduction to his replica of the Visconti-Sforza Tarot (U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1975), p. 12.

¹⁴⁵Whitson ed., *The Shakers*, Introduction, pp. 3, 28.

¹⁴⁶Calvin Green, "Atheism, Deism, Universalism and Fatalism Refuted", MS (1830), in Whitson ed., *The Shakers*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁷Roxalana Grosvenor ed., *Sayings of Mother Ann and the First Elders* (1823), *ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁸H.L. Eads (1881), *ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁹Valentine Rathbun (a Shaker apostate), cited in Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 32. For a discussion of early Shaker perceptions of Ann Lee, see Jean M. Humez,

According to Benjamin Youngs, the great systematiser of the Shaker theology of gender, the necessity for a male and female Christ was related to the loss of Adamic androgyny; just as the separation of Adam and Eve was necessary for generation, so a separate male and female Christ was necessary for regeneration:

Therefore, as there was a *natural* Adam and Eve, who were the first foundation pillars of the world, and the first joint parentage of the human race; so there is also a *spiritual* Adam and Eve, (manifested in Jesus and Ann, the first joint visible Parentage) who are the first foundation pillars of the Church, and the invisible parentage of all the children of redemption.¹⁵⁰

Christ's manifestation as male and female also reflected the duality of divine gender itself: "He [Jesus] represented the Fatherhood of God, she [Ann Lee] the Motherhood of God".¹⁵¹ Youngs declared

That in the ALMIGHTY BEING, whom we call God, there existed, before man was created, and before the worlds were formed, an ETERNAL TWO IN ONE SPIRIT; who, in plain Scripture language, are termed ALMIGHTY POWER and INFINITE WISDOM. That the first holds the seat or throne of the ETERNAL FATHER; and the second, that of the ETERNAL MOTHER; and that by the union of these ETERNAL TWO, the heavens and the earth were created and set in order; and by their united power and wisdom they are sustained.¹⁵²

"'Ye Are My Epistles': The Construction of Ann Lee Imagery in Early Shaker Literature", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, viii, 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 83-103.

¹⁵⁰Youngs, *The Testimony of Christs Second Appearing*, in Whitson ed., *The Shakers*, pp. 227-9.

¹⁵¹Thomas Smith (1881), *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁵²Youngs, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, *ibid.*, p.230.

Although he rejected the idea of Mother Ann as the second Christ, Calvin Green believed that Genesis 1:27 made it clear "that there exists in the DEITY, the likeness of male and female":

The Almighty is manifested as proceeding from everlasting, as the *first source* of all power, and the *fountain* of all good, the *Creator* of all good beings, and is the ETERNAL FATHER; and the Holy Spirit of Wisdom, who was the Co-worker with him, from everlasting, is the ETERNAL MOTHER, the *bearing Spirit* of all the works of God.¹⁵³

The debt is probably indirect, but both Youngs and Green are clearly expounding the Behmenist doctrine of Wisdom as the creative matrix of the godhead.

The Shakers were predominantly female. In 1819 the sect's Central Bishopric included 421 women and 312 men, and by 1875 there were nearly twice as many women as men.¹⁵⁴ This preponderance of women may have been due to greater female longevity and to the greater disincentives for women to leave the safe confines of the sect's paramonasticism. It is probable, however, that the Shakers also exercised a positive appeal to women, possibly due to the sect's feminism; the Shakers were willing not only to reconsider the gender of God, but also to translate their theological conclusions into social practice. Although Foster's judgement that Ann Lee's "sense of the injustice

¹⁵³Green and Wells, *A Summary View of the Millennial Church*, *ibid.*, pp. 214-5.

¹⁵⁴Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 54. Desroche, *The American Shakers*, p. 132.

of the role that sexual relations forced on women" was deeper than "her sense that excessive sexual impulses were evil" is questionable, Shaker feminism was nevertheless related to Shaker ideas on celibacy. Sexual abstention not only freed women's time and energy from being absorbed by reproductive functions, it also provided a way of evading the Pauline injunctions on wives.¹⁵⁵

The tendency to revert to male domination after Ann Lee's death was successfully countered by Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright,¹⁵⁶ and at almost every level of the Shakers' administrative structure, both men and women shared functions on principle. The Ministry of a typical Shaker community consisted of two men and two women; similarly, the Elders and Deacons were both male and female.¹⁵⁷ There were, however, limits to this feminism. The Trustees, who were responsible for economic and financial management, were exclusively male. The force of this exception, however, is lessened by the fact that the Trustees were strictly controlled by the Ministry, and that the position was so unpopular that it was occasionally left vacant. There was also a conventional sexual division of labour in Shaker communities.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁵⁷Desroche, *The American Shakers*, pp. 211 ff.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 216, 224; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, pp. 40-1. Foster notes that the conventional sexual division of labour was maintained more in the female

Nevertheless, the Shakers were clearly far in advance of their contemporaries in terms of securing positions of power and responsibility for women. This Shaker feminism was based on the messianic role of women. An anonymous writer spoke of

the necessity for the second appearance of Christ, or rather, the manifestation of the second Christ, 'the Comforter', in her own order, to restore to woman, not only her long-lost rule (of herself), but a power in addition, enabling her to preserve and employ her charms in a far more noble cause than that of generation, ...to wit, in that of regeneration.¹⁵⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century some Shakers were explicitly associating their faith with feminism. Paul Tyner, for example, linked Mother Ann with Mary Wollstonecraft.¹⁶⁰

IV. Conclusion

If no great claims can be made for Jane Lead's own "feminism", she nevertheless stands at the head of a tradition which accorded women an important eschatological role. Richard Roach, more than any other Behmenist, developed the "feminist" implications of the notion of women as in some sense a representative of the divine Wisdom. Through Roach, Behmenist ideas were introduced into the milieu of the French Prophets, and were to become

dominated Shakers than in the more male dominated Oneida Perfectionists and Mormons.

¹⁵⁹Anonymous (1872), in Whitson ed., *The Shakers*, p. 176.

¹⁶⁰Paul Tyner (1896), *ibid.*, p. 137.

part of the heritage of the Shakers. This latter group evolved a doctrine of female messianism and, by the late nineteenth century, were advocating more secular feminist ideals. Interesting though these trends are, they are of admittedly marginal historical import. The main significance of Behmenism for the evolution of modern sexual culture lay not in the millenarian and utopian impulses of the radical Behmenists, but in Boehme's wider impact on eighteenth-century thought. Before surveying this latter area, however, we shall examine the more conservative trends in sexual ideology exhibited by some Behmenists.

8. CONSERVATIVE BEHMENISM: EDWARD TAYLOR, FRANCIS LEE AND WILLIAM LAW

The trend towards female messianism which was discussed in the last chapter was not universal among Boehme's disciples. On the contrary, some Behmenists seem to have reacted against the "feminist" trend in Behmenist thought. Three figures are particularly noteworthy in this respect - Edward Taylor, Francis Lee, and William Law.

I. Edward Taylor

Little is known about the life of Edward Taylor (d. c. 1684), an English gentleman living "in much Privacy and Retirement" in Dublin. Taylor, we are told, was "in the Communion of the Church of England", but abhorred "a bare outside Formality". He spent his time in the study of Boehme, producing what might be regarded as a Behmenist textbook.¹

There is nothing particularly noteworthy about Taylor's Behmenist Sophiology and Christology. He identifies

¹Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (London 1691). The biographical details given above are from "The Publishers Preface to the Reader". Taylor's work includes a short glossary of Behmenist terms, an expository essay, answers to Boehme's 177 *Theosophic Questions*, summaries of Boehme's writings and Frankenberg's biography of Boehme. It is possibly the clearest exposition of Behmenism to have been written before the present century, and was partly reprinted in *A Compendious View of the Grounds of the Teutonic Philosophy* (London 1770).

Boehme's second principle as "the Majestick, Sweet, Divine Love, Meek Light, and the Chast Virgin of God's Wisdom".² The Virgin Wisdom is also identified as Christ's "Heavenly Humanity".³ Adam had exchanged the love of the Virgin "for the Lust of a Woman, which soon sway'd him to Mortality". In Christ, however, "the Word of Wisdom which Adam turned from...became the Bride to the Humane Soul".⁴ Taylor's most interesting contribution to Behmenist thought is his anthropology. In some ways, this is typical of the anthropology we have found in other Behmenists. Male and female represent the tinctures of Fire and Light, both being necessary for Adam to "have been God's compleat Image".⁵ Taylor tells us that "The Man [has] more of the first, or Souls Principle, the Woman more of the second or Spirits Principle".⁶ This would lead us to expect that for Taylor, as for other Behmenists, the feminine was closely associated with divinity. On the contrary, Taylor was the most misogynistic of the English Behmenists.

Taylor seeks to demonstrate the original androgyny of Adam with a variety of arguments. Magical, asexual reproduction may seem impossible, but just as glass does not obstruct light, "Adam's Pure Body" did not obstruct

²Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy*, p. 28.

³*Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 67, 81.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 95.

"his Magical Will". Similarly, "Fiery Atoms" are known to penetrate metal pots, evaporating the liquid within. Evacuated blood, if "treated kindly abroad...dispatcheth quick Messengers to impart the Vertue thereof". The vestiges of magical procreation can still be seen in the impress of the mother's imagination on the child in her womb. Androgynous procreation, moreover, continues to exist "in Shell-fish, Trees, Flowers, Herbs".⁷ That the prelapsarian Adam was intended to procreate magically can be deduced from the fact that "Rending of the body" in childbirth is incompatible with a state of perfection. Even in its depraved state, the soul is naturally ashamed of "the Bestial Genitals", which are a "Monstrous filthy Brutish Deformity". Circumcision was intended as a sign of "God's displeasure at That New-gotten way" of procreating. Through sexual procreation Eve gave birth to Cain. Christ preferred "the Chast Virgin Life", and was born of a Virgin. Sexual reproduction "is defiled with much Immodesty and Lust".⁸

Taylor's arguments for prelapsarian androgyny are marked by a pathological distaste for sexuality. This distaste recurs in his list of ten indications of man's fallen condition. About a third of the space Taylor devotes to this subject is taken up by sexual intercourse

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 24-6.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

with devils.⁹ This may be seen as an extreme form of the Behmenist preference for chastity; where Taylor departs from the general trend in Behmenism is in his marked misogyny. Prelapsarian androgyny can be deduced from "The disregard God sheweth towards That Divided Image", "Viz. *The Woman*". This "disregard" can be seen throughout the Scriptures. Women are subordinated to men. God did not favour them with any "Token" comparable to circumcision for men, and women were not enjoined to worship at Jerusalem. Women are scarcely mentioned in sacred history before the Flood, and in the whole of the Old and New Testaments only one woman (Sarah) has her age recorded. After childbearing, the period of ritual impurity lasted fourteen days for "a Maid child", "Whereas seven days sufficed for cleansing a Leper, or one who had an Issue".¹⁰

Eve, Taylor tells us, should have been "that Child which Adam should have gloriously produced". Instead of being the product of magical procreation, however, Eve was separated from Adam with "violence and force" and "without consent and concurrence". Eve was brought forth "passively and unknowingly", the product of Adam's sleep, and was "therefore less vigorous and perfect than his own Structure".¹¹ In Taylor's thought, it is clearly Eve who

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

has prime responsibility for the fall. The devil chose to tempt Eve first because she was "her self a kind of Temptation", since it was Eve who had "drawn Adam from his pure, chaste, precious, dear Virgin-state". For Taylor, Eve was separated from Adam "as a Chirurgeon impresseth an Incision to save a maimed Limb from Gangrene".¹²

II. Francis Lee

Francis Lee (1660-1719) was educated at St. John's College, Oxford, where he became a Fellow in 1682. After a period as tutor to the future Archbishop of York, Sir William Dawes (1671-1724), and the Hon. John Stowell, Lee toured the Continent, travelling through Holland, Germany and Italy (1691-4). He studied medicine at Leiden and practised as a physician in Venice; he was later to become a member of the Royal College of Physicians in London (1708). It seems to have been during his tour of the Continent that he came into contact with Pietist and Quietist circles, notably the Behmenists Johann-Georg Gichtel (1638-1710) and Pierre Poiret (1646-1719). A Nonjuror,¹³ he nevertheless shared the ecumenical spirit

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 99, 68. This is in marked contrast to the view, found in Bourignonist circles and in William Law's writings, that Eve was created to limit the extent of Adam's fall.

¹³Eighteenth-century Behmenism was closely associated with Nonjuring; besides Lee, the Scottish Bourignonists, George Cheyne, John Byrom, and William Law were all sympathetic to the Nonjurors. For the Nonjurors, see Thomas Lathbury, *A History of the Nonjurors: Their Controversies and Writings; With Remarks on Some of the Rubrics in the book of Common Prayer* (London 1845). Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *The English Church*

of these circles, and we are told that "his chief Aim was for the healing of the Breaches, and for the Reunion of all the divided Branches amongst those that call themselves Christians".¹⁴ On his return to London Lee became involved with the Philadelphians, much to the offence of his Nonjuring colleagues.¹⁵ It was at this time that Lee married Jane Lead's daughter.

Much of Lee's work was either published posthumously or remained in manuscript form, making it difficult to chart the chronological development of his thought with any certainty. Desirée Hirst has observed that Lee "was torn all his life...between his predilection for hidden truths and his straightforward piety as a Christian", and suggests that in the end it was the latter tendency that was dominant.¹⁶ The evidence does indeed suggest a conflict in Lee's personality between the rationalist and

in the *Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London 1878), especially vol i, chs. II, III and IX.

¹⁴Anonymous, "A Short Account of the Author", in Francis Lee, *Dissertations Theological, Mathematical, and Physical*, 2 vols. (London 1752), vol. i, pp. v-xxviii, p. xvii. The source, and possibly the authorship, of this account may be attributed to Lee's daughter, at whose instigation the *Dissertations* were published. The ecumenical spirit of the Philadelphians is clearly expressed in *The State of the Philadelphia Society. Or, The Grounds of Proceedings Consider'd* (London 1697), by "Philadelphus", probably a pseudonym for Lee.

¹⁵See the correspondence between Lee and Henry Dodwell, in Christopher Walton ed., *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated Divine and Theosopher, William Law* (London 1852), pp. 188 ff.

¹⁶Desirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches. Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London 1964), p. 163.

the enthusiast. In a letter to John Wallis he expressed a hope for a natural explanation of "all the arts of magick", but nevertheless thought that "the Kingdom of Light" presupposed "this diabolical art...in order to triumph over it".¹⁷ The tension can be seen clearly in his discussion of the Apocryphal II Ezra, where he vacillates throughout between greeting this work as "a Revelation of the great Divine Mysteries" and seeing it as possibly spurious and certainly containing much dubious material.¹⁸ A notable Cabalist, Lee condemns "Occult Philosophy", accusing "the Superstitious and Over-curious" of circulating pseudo-Esdras "Books of Jewish and Enthusiastic Divination".¹⁹ In the 1690s Lee was defending the continued occurrence of divine revelation. By 1709 he agreed to the publication of his *History of Montanism* along with two works by George Hickes and Nathaniel Spinckes (1653-1727),²⁰ works which are thoroughly

¹⁷Francis Lee, "Letter to John Wallis", January 27 1714/15, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1792), pp. 309-10.

¹⁸Francis Lee, *A Dissertation Upon the Second Book of Esdras*, in *idem., Dissertations*, vol. i, pp. 13-171. The preface of the first edition of this work suggests that it was composed c. 1709-15; *An Epistolary Discourse, Concerning the Books of Ezra, Genuine and Spurious* (London 1722), sig. A8r.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 80 ff.

²⁰George Hickes, *The Spirit of Enthusiasm Exorcised*; Nathaniel Spinckes, *The New Pretenders to Prophecy Examined*. All three works appeared with the title page *The History of Montanism* (London 1709). This was the fourth edition of Hickes's sermon, originally written against the Quakers. The 1709 edition was aimed at the French Prophets. Hickes had intended to write Lee's and Spinckes's contributions himself, but was prevented by sickness ("The Epistle Dedicatory", sig. A3r).

sceptical of the claim "that Prophecy should now be revived, after so long an intermission".²¹

The main difficulty is in dating Lee's *Dissertations Upon the Book of Genesis*.²² In his essay on II Ezra, Lee commends David Humphreys' use of Cabala in the introductory essay to his translation of Athenagoras.²³ Humphreys insists on the allegorical nature of the Cabala, asserting that "Words are mere arbitrary Marks of Ideas, and valued according to the Voice of the People".²⁴ That Lee took a different view of the Cabala in his Philadelphian period can be deduced from his essay "Concerning Wisdom",²⁵ where the Cabala is not treated as being allegorical. Similarly, in the *Dissertations Upon the Book of Genesis* Lee argues that certain words and letters in the Scriptures "bear some sort of Signature of the Thing expressed: So that both Letters and Words are sometimes truly symbolical, and in some sense

²¹Nathaniel Spinckes, *The New Pretenders to Prophecy Examined*, p. 363.

²²In *Dissertations Theological, Mathematical and Physical*, vols. i and ii.

²³Lee, *Dissertation Upon the Second Book of Esdras*, p. 60.

²⁴David Humphreys, "A Dissertation Concerning the Notions of the Jews About the resurrection of the Dead", in *The Apologeticks of the Learned Athenian Philosopher Athenagoras* (London 1714), pp. 1-104, p. 10.

²⁵Francis Lee, "Concerning Wisdom", in Walton ed., *Notes and Materials*, 510-15. Itself undated, it clearly originated during Lee's Philadelphian period, since it is a defence of the status of Wisdom in Jane Lead's works.

sacramental".²⁶ Since this is precisely the view of the Cabala rejected by Humphreys, it seems safe to conclude that Lee's essay on Genesis predates that on II Ezra, and that in the meantime Lee had become much more cautious in his own Cabalism.

That Lee had made something of a retreat from his Philadelphianism by 1709 can be gauged from *The History of Montanism*. Among the Montanist heresies condemned by Lee is one which must have been familiar to him from his earlier association with Behmenism: the original androgyny of Adam and the duality of divine gender.²⁷ We might note that in the biography which his daughter prefaced to his *Dissertations*, no mention was made of his Philadelphian connections. It is probable that Lee moved from his youthful religious conservatism into a period of Behmenistic enthusiasm, subsequently returning to a more conservative stance. Even in his Philadelphian period, however, Lee's thought on gender can be described as a relatively moderate Behmenism, in the tradition which William Law was to inherit rather than that of Richard Roach and later popular movements.

²⁶Lee, *Dissertations Upon the Book of Genesis*, vol. i, p. 231.

²⁷Lee, *History of Montanism*, p. 185. The Montanist version of this doctrine took a slightly different form than the Behmenist one, however, being associated with the distinction between a male Paraclete and a female Holy Ghost.

Not surprisingly for the son-in-law of the leading English prophetess of the day, the question of divine revelation and the spiritual status of women occupied much of Lee's thought in the late 1690s. In 1695, Lee translated Johann Peterson's *Letter to Some Divines*, a book devoted to defending the continued occurrence of divine revelation in general, and the validity of the Countess Rosamunde Juliane von Asseburg's visions in particular.²⁸ Like Peterson, Lee defended the validity of female prophecy in terms of Christian inversion:

I also reckon it a very great Proof of the Truth of a Thing, if it comes certainly from One, that has little Ability to Contrive it, and less to Promote it. And indeed, nothing tends more to the Glory of God, than to make use of Weak Instruments; that so nothing may be attributed to them, but all to Him.²⁹

This was simply the standard argument used by radicals to justify the preaching of both women and mechanics. It is, of course, a two-edged sword, confirming existing antifeminist stereotypes while co-opting them to empower particular women.

The validity of female prophecy was also one of the areas of contention between Lee and Henry Dodwell. Dodwell warned Lee of the dangers of enthusiasm, and especially of female "pretenders to the Spirit". Even genuinely inspired

²⁸Dr. John Peterson, *A Letter to Some Divines, Concerning the Question, Whether GOD since Christ's Ascension, doth any more Reveal himself to Mankind by the means of Divine Apparitions?* (London 1695).

²⁹[Francis Lee], "To the English Reader", in Peterson, *A Letter to Some Divines*, sigs. A2r-b2v, sig. a6r.

women in Apostolic times were excluded from speaking "in the assemblies of men".³⁰ Lee was like Tertullian who, despite his learning and piety, became schismatic because of his "too forward zeal for the prophecies of Montanus and his women prophetesses".³¹ Heretics frequently deluded their "women-disciples" into believing themselves divinely inspired. This, Dodwell suspected, was the case with Jane Lead. Much of the matter in Lead's writings was "quite out of the education, or conversation, or even reading of women": the use of Latin terms, "the old Platonic mystical divinity", Boehme, astrology and alchemy. The probable author of Lead's visions was John Pordage rather than Lead herself.³² Lee's apology for his mother-in-law did not address the question of female prophecy as such. He did, however, deny Pordage's authorship of Lead's visions, although admitting that he had played an editorial role in arranging them. He agreed that Lead used arcane knowledge beyond the capacity of women, but regarded this as tending to confirm the validity of her revelations.³³

In Lee's writings, the word "masculine" is generally used in commendation. He speaks of "an high and masculine faith", and tells us that Ezekiel's visions were "more

³⁰Dodwell to Lee, 12 October 1697, in Walton ed., *Notes and Materials*, p. 188.

³¹Dodwell to Lee, 15 January 1698, *ibid.*, p. 191.

³²Dodwell to Lee, 23 August 1698, *ibid.*, pp. 191-4.

³³Lee to Dodwell, 9 April 1699, *ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

masculine and vivid" than Daniel's.³⁴ On the other hand, Lee's perception of women was conventionally disdainful. Commenting on Genesis 4:19-22, he tells us that

Under the Names of the Three Women of the Cainite Race, are represented three Female Qualifications, for which Women chiefly love to be admired. 1. Dress and Ornament in Adah. 2. Wit, and Pleasantness of Conversation, or superficial Talkativeness, in Zillah. And, 3. Beauty and Harmony, in Naamah.³⁵

The key word here is "superficial", since it could be applied to all three qualities. For Lee, it is in outward show that women chiefly delight. Similar derogatory attitudes underlie Lee's whole thought on women.

Lee's interests as a physician frequently surface in his commentary on Genesis. An example of this is his discussion of the reasons for "Dystocia in Women, more than other Females". The pains of childbirth were, of course, directly attributable to God's curse on Eve; having left Paradise, Eve had lost the "only Refuge" against this dystocia, the Tree of Life.³⁶ Lee suggests that there was a postlapsarian "Mutation" of female anatomy to ensure that the effects of God's curse "must necessarily follow in the Course of Nature".³⁷ Since "all inferior Nature could not but suffer from the original

³⁴Lee to Dodwell, 9 April 1699, *ibid.*, pp. 198, 200.

³⁵Francis Lee, *Dissertations Upon the Book of Genesis*, in *Dissertations Theological, Mathematical and Physical*, vol. i, pp. 208-9.

³⁶*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 196.

³⁷*Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 198-9.

Taint contracted by our first Parents", this still left the question of why women suffer more than the females of "all the under-graduated Animals".³⁸ One of the reasons given by Lee for women's greater susceptibility to dystocia is purely anatomical: the head of the human foetus is relatively large. Lee's other reasons are more indicative of his assumptions about women. They "are generally of a much tenderer Constitution than Man", in contrast to "a great many other sorts of Animals". Most women, moreover, "do ordinarily live a sedentary Life", and those that do "have the hardest Labours".³⁹ Lee's perception of women is thoroughly conventional: they are weaker and less active than men.

Lee's assumptions about women are also revealed in his discussion of the expulsion from Eden. It was only Adam, in fact, who was driven from Paradise; Eve "voluntarily abdicated, ...conceiving the place to be haunted with fiery Apparitions". Eve was not only more superstitious than Adam, she was also less adventurous, and "was not so easily to be attracted by Imagination, or Curiosity, beyond the Bounds of the blessed Garden". It was, however,

³⁸*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 198.

³⁹*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 195. Lee seems to have believed that women's sedentary lifestyle was a historical phenomenon, since he tells us that in Abraham's time, "it was not thought at all beneath the Quality of great Ladies to do such Services, as to carry Pitchers of Water, or to perform any of the Necessary Labours of Life", *ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 157.

necessary to expel Adam forcibly, since he "stood stronger in Nature" than Eve.⁴⁰

Lee was convinced that the advancement of learning in his own day was doing much to confirm the validity of divine revelation. He was impressed by Leeuwenhoek's discovery of spermatozoa, and used this discovery in his commentary on Genesis. The generation of all living creatures begins with "a Principle of Vermination", and "Man himself is at first truly and literally no better than a Worm, before the Ascension of a higher and nobler Life".⁴¹ Since the two seed theory had been replaced by "that of the Multiplication of Mankind ex Ovo", this "late famous Discovery of the Vermicular Original of human life" makes the seed a quality to be found "in the Man, not in the Woman".⁴² It follows that "all that are born of a Woman are universally the Seed of the Man"⁴³. Universally, that is, except for Christ, the "seed of the woman" promised in Genesis; for Lee, modern science proves the

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 197, note.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 173-4. This is not, as Serge Hutin supposes (*Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme*, Paris 1960, p. 264, note), a theory of evolution, since there is no question of one species developing from another. Lee's seven stages, beginning with the vermicular life, chart man's spiritual development from birth. They may owe something to the traditional seven ages of man, but are mainly a recapitulation of Boehme's seven qualities.

⁴²Lee, *Dissertations Upon the Book of Genesis*, vol. i, pp. 192-3.

⁴³*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 194.

validity of the proto-Evangile. Lee continues by arguing that

the promised Person who could properly be called the Seed of the Woman, must be born of an immaculate Virgin; not according to the Will (and Lust of Man), but according to the Will (and Love) of God.

Christ must be "conceived and born without the Knowledge and Will of Man, and without Taint of the polluted Vermicular Life".⁴⁴ It is clear from this that sin is sexually transmitted; it is, moreover, transmitted through men and not through women. For Lee, sexuality and sin are inextricably linked. He did not share Milton's belief in prelapsarian copulation, observing that "upon or after the Fall, Adam is presently said to have had knowledge of Eve"; hence the forbidden Tree is called the Tree of Knowledge.⁴⁵ It was "by Concupiscence" that Eve "fed on the Tree of Knowledge";⁴⁶ if sin was transmitted through the male seed, it nevertheless originated in female sexuality.

Lee understood original sin in terms of the magical transmission of Satan's seed. The Tree of Knowledge was "a true and real Tree" whose "lethiferous Qualities" were the result of "the Impression of [Satan's] strong magical Desire upon the fruit thereof".⁴⁷ Its fruit was fatal to

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 194.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 189.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 199.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 179.

all humanity because "the Seed of the Serpent [was] magically conveyed together with the forbidden fruit".⁴⁸

In discussing Cain's Satanic parentage, Lee tells us that

the Key of the Matter is nothing but the Impregnation of the Imaginative Power, in the superior Will, as descending into Materiality... The Father of Pride may, by spiritual Impregnation, beget his Likeness:...Thus Cain had within the Likeness of his spiritual Father, even as he had without, from his earthly Father, the Image of a Man".⁴⁹

For all his searching of modern science to buttress Scriptural truth, Lee's thought here goes back to Boehme's concept of imagination as a magical faculty. The theory of imaginative procreation also seems to underlie Lee's curious notion of vicarious conception. He tells us that generation is "without doubt the greatest Mystery in all Nature", one "which is impossible ever to account for, but by a spiritual and invisible Principle".⁵⁰ Lee explains that

spirit is the universal efficient Cause in Nature, but more especially in Generation, and in human Generation most of all; so that a Spiritual Conception must necessarily proceed and direct every Corporeal Conception; for there can be no Corporeal Conception without a Spiritual; but there may be a Spiritual without a Corporeal one".⁵¹

This, Lee thinks, explains what he takes to be cases of vicarious conception referred to in Genesis 16:12 and 30:3-9.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 188.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 204-5.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 234.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 237.

Lee cited Gregory of Nyssa in support of the view that the prelapsarian Adam had been intended to procreate like the angels, adding that the precise manner "certainly is unspeakable, and even unconceivable to human Thoughts".⁵² Nevertheless Lee clearly accepted Boehme's view that Adam was originally meant to procreate magically rather than sexually; in fact, he had actually done so. Lee tells us that the Hebrew word *Zelah* as used in the Bible did not refer literally to a rib, but was used figuratively to mean offspring. Adam's sleep was "the Act of Generation":

as Images are used to be formed by us in our Dreams; even so from this Sleep of the Protoplast, and what was consequent thereof, the very true Image of Adam was divinely separated from him in his Sleep.⁵³

Eve, in fact, "was the First-born of Adam, as Cain was the First-born of Eve".⁵⁴ This theory obviously depends on Boehme's idea of Adamic androgyny and its concomitant, imaginative procreation. By making Eve a child of Adam's imagination, however, Lee undermines the Behmenist understanding of the fall as a loss of androgyny. Eve is no longer one half of the prelapsarian Adam, but an independent being. Lee's distinctive approach to prelapsarian androgyny can also be discerned in his account of the fall into matter:

⁵²*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 213.

⁵³*Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 201-2.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 200. In contrast to Lee, Edward Taylor denied that Eve had been created magically; see p. 307, above.

Man really put on the brutish Nature so soon as he began to propagate himself in the brutish Manner, degenerating thereby into the Grossness of Materiality.⁵⁵

This is typical of the English Behmenist distaste for sexuality, but we should note that it is also a departure from Boehme's thought. For Boehme, Adam loses his androgyny and becomes a sexual being because of his fall into matter. For Lee, man becomes a material being through his sexuality.

In his defence of Jane Lead to Henry Dodwell, Lee specifically denied that there was "any diversity of sex in the Deity". Lee told Dodwell that Lead did not even think that human sexual distinctions existed in Paradise, and that these would "again cease to be in the state of the resurrection"; it was therefore improbable that Lead thought such distinctions existed within the godhead.⁵⁶ Lee's account of Lead's thought has transformed the doctrine of Adamic androgyny, with its corollary of the duality of divine gender, into one of prelapsarian and divine asexuality. Nevertheless, Lee goes on to argue that feminine terms are applied to God throughout the Bible, and that

the female doth constitute part of the Divine character in pure and undefiled nature, as well as the male, she being designed the glory and crown of the head.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 214.

⁵⁶Lee to Dodwell, April 9 1699, *ibid.*, p. 208.

Lead, we are told, "supposeth the *glory of God* to have pre-existed in God, as Eve did in Adam".⁵⁷

Writing to Dodwell, Lee seems unwilling to commit himself on the question of divine gender. Elsewhere, however, he is more forthright. He thinks there is an "original distinction...in the Divine Being itself", by which we may

discern likewise the Spirit of God, which is an active and masculine power, from the holy Virgin of Divine Wisdom, which is a passive and feminine power, which therefore by some is called the Divine Corporeity, and also the Vestment of the Deity.⁵⁸

Similarly, Lee told Henry Dodwell that the sacred writers, philosophers and illuminati of the purest age of the Church had referred to Wisdom in various ways, understanding "this holy Divine principle" as that through which God clothed Himself "as it were with Nature".⁵⁹ Just as the earthly Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, so the celestial Christ was brought forth of the Virgin Wisdom, "containing in it the primogenial matter and life, out of which all created beings were afterwards to proceed".⁶⁰ Wisdom is thus God's creative matrix in which the Word and the world are formed.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵⁸Francis Lee, "Concerning Wisdom", p. 514.

⁵⁹Lee to Dodwell, April 9th 1699, *ibid.*, p. 207.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 208.

In his interpretation of the name of Noah's ark (Thebah), Lee elaborates on the nature of Wisdom. The letter Beth, he tells us

denotes the superior Wisdom, or the House of Wisdom, wherein (say the Hebrew Doctors) all Things were, *ab origine*, disposed in their Archetypes, before ever they were brought forth into their proper Forms, or Species.⁶¹

This understanding of Wisdom is basically the same as Boehme's. What is noteworthy, however, is that Lee's account is couched in Cabalist and Neoplatonic terms, rather than Behmenist ones. This is also true of his reply to some queries "Concerning Wisdom".⁶² Wisdom is "the unmanifested Divine intellect" of the Father, being "both in him, and one with him". It is also "the manifest Divine intellect" of the Son, again "both in him, and one with him". It is "the manifestation itself", "the revelation of both Father and Son to the Spirit". Wisdom, however, is more than just the characteristic operation of each Person of the godhead; it is also is "the abstract Idea of the whole Divine Being" manifested in the three Persons.⁶³ Wisdom is the Unity of the Trinity.

Wisdom plays a central role both in the hidden life of the godhead and in the emanative process. To explain this, Lee employs Boehme's eye-mirror analogy. The Father sees

⁶¹Lee, *Dissertation Upon the Book of Genesis*, vol. i, p. 232.

⁶²Lee, "Concerning Wisdom", pp. 510-9.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 511.

the Word in Wisdom, and then images him forth. The Son, that is, is born by the Father's imaginative impregnation of Wisdom. The interaction of Father and Son is the Holy Spirit, and it is through "the virtual powers" of the Spirit, acting on Wisdom, that the light of God's intellect proceeds "into every created image, according to the capacity of each".⁶⁴ Wisdom and the Holy Spirit also play a procreative role in the process of redemption. The Spirit sows the seed for the new birth, and Wisdom provides the "nature" in which the seed is sown:

To this Divine generation of souls, or their new-birth, the seed is properly conferred by the Spirit; and the nature into which the seed is received, and by which it is made to fructify, proceeds from Wisdom.⁶⁵

For all Lee's obstetric modernity, the basis of this idea is clearly the theory that the male seed gives form to the matter provided by the female.

If the new birth of the soul is the product of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom, this is also true of the archetype of that new birth, Christ. For Lee the Virgin Mary was a representative of the Virgin Wisdom:

and thus we are to understand 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 in her to represent herself outwardly.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Lee, "Concerning Wisdom", p. 512.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 513.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 513.

This is not quite saying that Mary is an incarnation of Wisdom, although it is perhaps closer to that view than Boehme. It does, however, have heterodox implications:

Therefore was that Holy One who was born of her, most truly (according to the words of the angel) called *the Son of God*; inasmuch as in this his *temporal* generation he was conceived both of a Divine seed and a Divine nature: even as he was in that which was called *eternal*.⁶⁷

This is a position which is implicitly subversive of Christ's humanity.

Lee is more restrained than his mother-in-law in his personification of the Virgin Wisdom, and also more clearly escapes the tendency to make Wisdom a Person of the godhead. He defends the validity of personifications as emblems enabling us to understand the divine being, but his own interest is in what the emblem means, rather than the emblem itself. His understanding of Wisdom is intellectual rather than personal. Indeed, his understanding of the godhead as a whole is dominated by the divine intellect, in contrast to Boehme, whose godhead is characterised above all by will. Lee was as much a Neoplatonist *manqué* as a Behmenist in the strictest sense.

Weak in body, weak in mind; passive, timorous and concupiscent: such is Francis Lee's perception of women, a perception he shared with the majority of his contemporaries. There is nothing here of the pedestal

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 513.

which other Behmenists and the Romantics were to erect for women. Lee's theology is similarly lacking in an elevation of the feminine. Like Boehme, he believed that wrath was subordinated to mercy in the godhead, but there is nothing in Lee's writings to parallel Boehme's vivid descriptions of this in terms of an angry masculinity being subdued by a meek femininity. Nor, despite the recognition of the duality of divine gender, do we find the Behmenist reversal of the conventional gendering of God and humanity. Lee's thought is a conservative retreat from the feminist tendencies inherent in Behmenist thought.

III. William Law

The son of a grocer who styled himself a gentleman, William Law was born at King's Cliffe, Northamptonshire, in 1686. He entered Emanuel College, Cambridge, as a sizar in 1705, taking holy orders and becoming a Fellow of the College in 1711. He took his Master's degree in 1712, but was degraded to undergraduate status the following year, after giving a speech strongly suggestive of Jacobitism. Law finally abandoned the University in 1716, because of scruples about taking the oath of loyalty to George I. In 1723 Law became tutor to Edward Gibbon (father of the historian), and he was to remain in the Gibbon household until 1738-9. Law then retired to King's Cliffe, where he was followed by Hester Gibbon and a Mrs. Hutcheson. This peculiarly pious *ménage à trois* devoted itself to works of

charity, so much so that their neighbours complained to the local Justice in 1753 that Law and his companions were encouraging paupers to flock to the parish. Law continued to live in King's Cliffe until his death in April 1761.⁶⁸

A keen student of mystical writers from his undergraduate days, it was not until c. 1733 that Law encountered the Behmenist tradition. Although a Nonjuror, Law does not seem to have met any of the Philadelphian Nonjurors. Nor was Law impressed by his later reading of their works, which led him to the conclusion that "Dr. Lee, &c., were strange people".⁶⁹ He was, however, in contact with George Cheyne, who introduced Law to Behmenism in the form of von Metternich's *Fides et Ratio*.⁷⁰ Law was by this time already the author of several works, including his masterpiece, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), a book which has been

⁶⁸Keith Walker, *William Law : His Life and Thought* (London 1973) provides Law's biography and also summarises each of his works, but is conceptually poor. See also William Ralph Inge, *Studies of English Mystics* (London 1906), ch. IV, and Caroline Spurge, "William Law and the Mystics", *Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge 1912), vol. ix, pp. 305-328.

⁶⁹John Byrom, *Private Journal and Literary Remains*, 4 vols. (Manchester 1854-7), vol. iv, p. 365. Law was particularly hostile to Antoinette Bourignon, whom he regarded as "all delusion", *ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 105..

⁷⁰Law told John Byrom "that Dr. Cheyne was the providential occasion of his meeting or knowing of Jacob Behmen, by a book which the Dr. mentioned to him in a letter; Byrom, *Private Journal*, vol. iv, p. 363. The identity of the book in question has been established by Stephen Hobhouse, "*Fides et Ratio*: the Book which introduced Jacob Boehme to William Law", *Journal of Theological Studies* xxxvii (1936), pp. 350-368.

described as the most influential religious text of the century.⁷¹ From the early 1730s onwards, Law devoted himself to a study of Boehme's thought. It is generally agreed that Law was never a slavish imitator of Boehme,⁷² and the best assessment of the relationship between the two men is Inge's; Law was attracted to Boehme not by doctrines that were new to him, but by the forceful expression of doctrines that Law already held. With regard to this, Inge cites the emphasis on God as love with its concomitant rejection of forensic notions of the Atonement; the idea of the *unio mystica*; and "the analogy between the visible and invisible world".⁷³

While there is no evidence in Law's works of a belief in such doctrines as Adamic androgyny before his Behmenist days, his ideas on chastity were also consistent with the main outlines of Behmenist thought. Already in the *Serious Call*, Law is praising virginity as devotion to God.⁷⁴ Virginity, we are told, "frees from worldly cares and troubles, and furnishes means and opportunities of higher

⁷¹Spurge, "William Law and the Mystics", p. 308. Among those who acknowledged the decisive impact of this book on their religious outlook were Samuel Johnson and John Wesley.

⁷²Stephen Hobhouse, *William Law and Eighteenth-Century Quakerism* (London 1927), p. 270; Walker, *William Law*, p. 237; Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 3 vols. (London 1968), vol. iii, p. 187.

⁷³Inge, *Studies of English Mystics*, pp. 144-5.

⁷⁴William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), in *The Works of William Law, M.A.*, 9 vols. (Canterbury 1893), vol. iv, pp. 78 ff.

advancements in a divine life; therefore love, and esteem, and honour virginity".⁷⁵ These are the words of one of Law's model characters, Eusebia, to her daughters. The impression is given that marriage is an affliction to which women may have to submit, but which the fortunate escape. Surprisingly, Law's most positive statement about marriage can be found in one of his later, Behmenist works:

Now Marriage has the Nature of this fallen World; but it is God's appointed Means of raising the Seed of Adam to its full Number. Honourable therefore is Marriage in our fallen State, and happy is it for Man to derive his Life from it, as it helps him to a Power of being eternally a Son of God.⁷⁶

We might note, however, that in this passage Law sees marriage only as a means to populating heaven; he does not say, as many writers did, that man was happy in the enjoyment of marriage, but in having been born in the institution.

Law's preference for celibacy and his distaste for sexuality were to remain features of his outlook in his Behmenist period. We are told, for example, that before the fall, Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their nakedness because it "was concealed and covered from them by their

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁷⁶William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer; Or, The Soul rising out of the Vanity of Time, into the Riches of Eternity*, 2 parts (1749-50), *Works*, vol. vii, p. 90.

paradisiacal Glory".⁷⁷ In contrast to writers like Milton, the implication of this is that nakedness is shameful in itself rather than because of the fall. Law is unwilling to deny the validity of clerical marriage as such, but insists that it should be seen as "an Allowance granted to Weakness".⁷⁸ Should a primitive Christian be reborn in eighteenth-century England, "he must needs be much more shocked at Reverend Doctors in Sacerdotal Robes, *making Love to Women*, than at seeing a *Monk in his Cell, kissing a wooden Crucifix*". For Law, there is a special relationship between celibacy and Christianity:

The Knowledge and Love of the Virgin State began with Christianity, when the Nature of our Corruption, and the Nature of our Redemption were so fully discovered by the Light of the Gospel. Then it was, that a new Degree of heavenly Love was kindled in the human Nature, and brought forth a State of Life that had not been desired, till the Son of the Virgin came into the World.

Virginity "truly fits the Soul for the highest Growth of heavenly Virtue."⁷⁹

If Law's views on chastity were consistent with the Behmenist emphasis on "the virgin life", his work shows little of the validation of femininity to be found in other Behmenist writers. In some ways, Law's thought on

⁷⁷William Law, *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration* (1739), *Works*, vol. v, p. 138.

⁷⁸Law, *Some Animadversions upon Dr. Trapp's late Reply*, appended to *An Appeal to all that Doubt, or Disbelieve The Truths of the Gospel* (London 1740), *Works*, vol. vi, p. 174.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 175.

gender in *A Serious Call* conforms to the negative stereotypes of women found in seventeenth-century preachers. We find, for example, the traditional sartorial censoriousness directed primarily against the "vain and needless ornaments" of fashionable women.⁸⁰ Women's faults are identified as trifling "away their time in the follies and impertinences of a fashionable life", while men's faults consist of resigning "themselves up to worldly cares and concerns".⁸¹ "If lust, and wanton eyes are the death of the soul", Law asks, "can any women think themselves innocent, who with naked breasts, patched faces, and every ornament of dress, invite the eye to offend?"⁸²

Law's position with regard to women preachers is thoroughly conservative. His thoughts on the subject are largely confined to his correspondence with Fanny Henshaw, in an attempt to dissuade her from conversion to Quakerism.⁸³ The five letters and a draft of an unfinished letter were composed between November and December 1736, in the early years of Law's Behmenist period. Law accepts that 2 Timothy 4:3 forbids women preaching.⁸⁴ This

⁸⁰Law, *Serious Call*, p. 13; cf. pp. 16, 40.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁸³The letters are published in Hobhouse, *William Law and Eighteenth-Century Quakerism*, pp. 26-72.

⁸⁴Letter dated 14 December 1736, *ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

injunction was made in Apostolic times, when the Holy Spirit was "in an extraordinary manner poured forth both upon men and women". It is clear from this that, for women, the "liberty of speaking in the publick assemblies" is "a thing unlawfull, shamefull, and against the very order of nature".⁸⁵ Thus, even after having experienced the impact of Boehme's thought, Law maintains a conservative stance on this question; there is nothing here of Lee's defence of female prophecy, still less of the trend towards female messianism found in Roach, the French Prophets and the Shakers. Law's position is consistent with his High Churchmanship rather than his spiritualism. Although both elements can be found in his thought from the 1720s onwards, his spiritualism increasingly undermined his conservative attitude to liturgy and sacraments.⁸⁶ It would not be surprising if this shift in emphasis was accompanied by a more liberal attitude to female preaching, but Law has left no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Nevertheless, Law believes that women do occupy a special moral position. They are, for example, less prone than men to such faults as swearing.⁸⁷ Modesty, by which Law means chastity of thought and deed, is "the peculiar

⁸⁵Undated draft of Law's last letter to Fanny Henshaw, *ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

⁸⁶Cf. Hobhouse, *William Law and Eighteenth-Century Quakerism*, pp. 285 ff. and *passim*.

⁸⁷Law, *Serious Call*, p. 15.

Ornament of their Sex", and "Women are called to a singular Modesty, as Clergymen are to the Duties of their Profession".⁸⁸ If Law accepts that women are forbidden to speak in Church, he nevertheless grants them "some share in the Salvation of the World"; a wife is "supposed equally capable of saving the Husband, as the Husband of saving the Wife".⁸⁹ This, of course, is simply the conventional distinction between women's role in the public and domestic spheres. Because of their strategic role in the socialization process, women have an important role in inculcating moral virtues:

The right education of this sex, is of the utmost importance to human life. There is nothing that is more desirable for the common good of all the world. For though women do not carry on the trade and business of the world, yet as they are mothers, and mistresses of families, that have for some time the care of the education of their children of both sorts, they are entrusted with that which is of the greatest consequence to human life.⁹⁰

Law, however, is not only talking of women's role in the socialising process; he also hints at inherent feminine superiority:

For I believe it may be affirmed, that for the most part there is a finer sense, a clearer mind, a readier apprehension, and gentler dispositions in that sex, than in the other.⁹¹

⁸⁸William Law, *The Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage Entertainment Fully Demonstrated* (1726), *Works*, vol. ii, p. 165.

⁸⁹William Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726), *Works*, vol. iii, pp. 219-20.

⁹⁰Law, *Serious Call*, pp. 191-2.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 192.

Law asserts that women might even excel men in the arts and sciences if men did not merely "turn them over to the study of *beauty and dress*". The argument is reminiscent of that of many women writers of the early modern period, including Mary Wollstonecraft:

mankind seem to consider them in no other view, than as so many *painted idols*, that are to allure and gratify their passions....[W]hatever *littleness and vanity* is to be observed in the minds of women, is like the cruelty of *butchers*, a temper that is wrought into them by that life which they are *taught and accustomed* to lead.⁹²

While women are censured for their vanity, this vanity is itself a response to male demands on women rather than an inherent aspect of feminine nature.

When we read Law's Behmenist works, we are struck by the relative absence of thought on gender. Whereas Sophiology and such doctrines as Adamic androgyny are central to the thought of Boehme, Pordage and Lead, they play a very minor role in Law's works. Apart from his references to the value of chastity, there is hardly a mention of gender in the works written between *A Serious Call* (1729) and *The Spirit of Prayer* (1749-50), or in Law's subsequent works. This is all the more surprising, since the nature of Adam's fall is a constant theme of these works. In his *Appeal to all that Doubt*, Law tells us that Christ took our "fallen Nature...upon him from the Blessed Virgin Mary".⁹³ This is the work's sole reference

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁹³Law, *An Appeal to all that Doubt*, p. 150.

to anything of relevance to Behmenist thought on gender - a reference which implies that Law did not follow other English Behmenists in associating the Virgin Mary with the Virgin Sophia. Later, Law was to refer to Eve's transgression as "the first sin" in a way which gives no hint of Adamic androgyny or Adam's fall before the creation of Eve.⁹⁴

If it were not for *The Spirit of Prayer*, we might conclude that Law totally discounted Boehme's thought on gender. Even in this work, the Sophiological aspects of Behmenist thought are relatively underdeveloped. Law speaks of the

heavenly Materiality of the Angels' Kingdom [being] a glassy Sea, a Mirror of beauteous Forms, Figures, Virtues, Powers, Colours, and Sounds, which were perpetually springing up, appearing and changing in an infinite Variety, to the Wonders of Divine Nature, and to the Joy of the Angelical Kingdom.⁹⁵

This is the sort of language that leads a student of Boehme or his earlier followers to expect a disquisition on the Virgin Sophia. Although Law is clearly referring to the concept of God's creative matrix, he scarcely mentions the divine Wisdom, let alone personify it in the manner of Pordage or Lead. Law's understanding of Wisdom is, moreover, significantly different from that of earlier Behmenists. For his predecessors, Sophia is Adam's

⁹⁴William Law, *An Humble, Earnest, and Affectionate Address to the Clergy* (1761), *Works*, vol. ix, pp. 74-5.

⁹⁵Law, *The Spirit of Prayer*, p. 10. Cf. *idem.*, *The Way to Divine Knowledge* (1752), *Works*, vol. vii, p. 213.

heavenly bride, lost at the fall. For Law, the divine Wisdom is itself, in a sense, fallen. With the fall of angels, "this once glassy Sea" becomes covered by darkness, and "the whole angelic Habitation [is] become a Chaos of Confusion". This is the waters of Genesis on the face of which the Spirit of God moved;⁹⁶ although the nuptial image is not elaborated, Law seems to understand creation as a union of the Holy Spirit with Wisdom, retrieving her from her fallen state of Chaos. This is simply a reversion to Gnostic Sophiology.

The traditional Behmenist understanding of Wisdom, however, is expressed in the commentary to Freher's illustrations, printed in the so-called "Law edition" of Boehme's works. We are told that "Three Things there were that laid a claim to Adam", the Three Principles in which he was created. The First Principle is identified as "SATAN, the uncreated dark Root in the Beginningless Beginning of eternal Nature". The Second Principle is represented by Sophia, who is Adam's "Companion, and the Wife of his Youth". The Third Principle is "THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD". The Fall "was but a necessary Consequence of Adam's wavering, and dealing treacherously with the Wife of his Youth":

SOPHIA has forsaken him, or rather he, having dealt treacherously, has forsaken Her, and the Holy Band of the Marriage-Covenant that was between them is dissolved.

⁹⁶Law, *Spirit of Prayer*, p. 62.

Christ's incarnation and sacrifice are necessary to complete "the great Work of our regeneration and Reunion with *SOPHIA*".⁹⁷

Despite the relative absence of Sophiology, and its peculiar form where it does occur, Law gives a full account of Adamic androgyny. According to Law, Moses tells us that Adam

was made at first both Male and Female in one Person; and that *Eve*, or the female part of him, was afterwards taken out of him. Now this Union of the Male and Female in him, was the *Purity*, or *Virgin Perfection* of his Life, and is the very Perfection of the angelic Nature.⁹⁸

Adam was intended to procreate asexually, "out of himself":

The Manner of his own Birth from God, was the Manner that his own Offspring should have had a Birth from him; all done by the pure Power of a Divine Love.⁹⁹

Separate sexes are thus a consequence of the fall, and "the Birth that we have from Adam divided into Male and Female, is through all Scripture declared to be the Birth of Misery, of Shame, of Pollution, of sinful Flesh and Blood".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷"An Illustration of the Deep Principles of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher, in Thirteen Figures", in *The Works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. iii (London 1772), pp. 30-31. The writings in this volume have separate pagination; that of the illustrations follows on from the *Clavis*, at the end of the volume.

⁹⁸Law, *Spirit of Prayer*, p. 80.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 84; cf. p. 86.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 89.

Although only existing because of the fall, Law stresses that "the Sex" should not be seen as having

brought *all*, or *any* Impurity into the human Nature. No, by no means. The Impurity lies in the *Division*, and that which caused it, and not in either of the divided Parts.¹⁰¹

This does not mean that Law sees the origin of gender as completely negative. On the contrary, Eve was taken out of Adam "as a less Evil, to prevent a greater". This doctrine of Eve as a "lesser evil" contrasts with Edward Taylor's ideas, but can be found in Bourignonist writings.¹⁰² Adam's fall was precipitated by his turning towards the world, and Eve was created in an attempt to stop him from doing this,

for it was a less Degree of falling from his first Perfection, to love the Female Part of his own divided Nature, than to turn his Love towards that, which was so much lower than his own Nature.

The creation of Eve was actually "The first step...towards the Redemption or Recovery of Man".¹⁰³ Eve failed to stop Adam from turning towards the world; in fact, although Law does not make the point, in Behmenist theory she actually completed this process by succumbing to Satan's temptations. Nevertheless, she retained an important soteriological role, since her creation enabled God to "establish the glorious Scheme of a *universal* Redemption

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁰²See ch. 9, below.

¹⁰³Law, *Spirit of Prayer*, p. 85.

to these fallen Creatures, and all their Offspring, by the mysterious Seed of the Woman":

For out of the Female Part, and after the Fall, God would raise, without the help of Adam, that same glorious angelic Man, which Adam should have brought forth before and without his Eve.¹⁰⁴

It is by being born again of this "angelic man", Christ, that we are redeemed. In the Resurrection everyone will

have this angelic Perfection again; to be no more Male or Female, or a Part of the Humanity, but such perfect, complete, undivided Creatures, as the Angels of God are.¹⁰⁵

Christ can achieve this because he has the androgyny forfeited by Adam; he "is to generate us again in that Purity and Divine Power, in and by which we should have been born by the first angelic Adam".¹⁰⁶

Law is something of a curiosity in the history of Behmenist thought on gender. A firm believer in the spiritual value of chastity, his most positive statement on marriage was made during his Behmenist period. Apparently unwilling to concede any spiritual mission to women beyond that conventionally prescribed, his attitude to them nevertheless seems more sympathetic than that of Lee, and is far removed from Taylor's misogyny. Clearly a believer in Adamic androgyny, Law showed little tendency to speculate on its concomitant, the duality of divine

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 88.

gender, and his Sophiology is relatively underdeveloped from a Behmenist perspective. Almost all of Law's distinctively Behmenist thought on gender is confined to a single work, *The Spirit of Prayer*. This, indeed, is the most remarkable feature of Law's contribution to Behmenist ideas on the subject: his lack of interest. If he accepts the idea of Adamic androgyny, it does not play a central role in his theology. Law stands at the head of the tradition which has survived into twentieth-century historiography, and which regards Boehme's ideas about gender as a marginal, and ultimately dispensable, aspect of his system.

9. WIDER BEHMENIST INFLUENCES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In the eighteenth century, Behmenism as a movement disappears, leaving only individuals, many of whom are better described as admirers, rather than disciples, of the cobbler of Görlitz. By the end of the century, the occult world-view which had informed Behmenist thought had largely ceased to be tenable among the educated classes of Europe. It maintained some influence among the Romantics, and literary figures like Walt Whitman, Charles Baudelaire and W.B. Yeats were to feel its attractions to various degrees. There was even something of an occult revival at the end of the nineteenth century, exemplified by A.E. Waite and the Order of the Golden Dawn. The "New Age" spirituality of the late twentieth century can also be connected with the occult tradition. Nevertheless, this world-view was never to regain the dominance over intellectual life that it had achieved in the early modern period. Interest in Boehme's ideas, however, continued throughout the eighteenth century. In addition to the so-called Law edition of Boehme's writings, several other works were printed.¹ Frankenberg's biography of the theosopher was published with a preface by the Moravian,

¹Jacob Boehme, *The Four Complexions* (London 1730); *The Way to Christ* (Manchester 1652); *The Way to Christ* (Bath and Bristol 1775); *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonick Theosopher*, 4 vols. (London 1664-81); *Extracts from Mercurius Teutonicus* (London 1795).

Francis Okeley.² Earlier in the century a number of Continental works related to Behmenism were published, including baron Wolf von Metternich's *Fides et Ratio*.³ Pierre Poiret's *The Divine Economy* was also translated at this time,⁴ as were several works by Antoinette Bourignon.⁵

I. The Scottish Mystical Movement

The Bourignon translations were the work of George Garden, the leading figure in a remarkable flowering of mysticism in North East Scotland.⁶ The group was fairly eclectic in

²Abraham von Frankenberg, *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings of Jacob Behmen*, ed. Francis Okeley (Northampton 1780). The Moravian publisher M. Lewis also published *A Compendious View of the Grounds of the Teutonick Philosophy* (London 1770); this latter work is mostly portions of Edward Taylor's *Jacob Behmen's Theosophic Philosophy Unfolded*, together with John Pordage's *Treatise of Eternal Nature*. For Moravian interest in Boehme, see G.E. Bentley, Jr., "William Blake and the Alchemical Philosophers", B. Litt. thesis (Oxford 1954), pp. 110-111.

³[Baron Wolf von Metternich], *Faith and Reason Compared; Shewing that Divine Faith and Natural Reason proceed from two different and distinct Principles in Man* (London 1713).

⁴Pierre Poiret, *The Divine Economy; Or, An Universal System of the Works and Purposes of God Towards Man, Demonstrated*, 6 vols., (London 1713).

⁵Antoinette Bourignon, *The Light of the World* (London 1696); *An Admirable Treatise of Solid Virtue* (Amsterdam 1698); *The Light risen in Darkness* (London 1703); *A Collection of Letters* (London 1708); *The Confusion of the Builders of Babel* (London 1708); *The Academy of Learned Divines* (London 1708); *The Renovation of the Gospel Spirit* (London 1737); *An Abridgement of the Light of the World* (London 1786).

⁶See G.D. Henderson ed., *Mystics of the North East. Including I. Letters of James Keith, M.D., and Others to Lord Deskford. II. Correspondence Between Dr. George*

its mystical tastes, and cannot be regarded as Behmenist in the strictest sense. Poiret and Bourignon, however, were undoubtedly the main influences on their ideas until the ascendancy of Me. de Guyon after c. 1710.⁷ Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), a Protestant Flemish painter who devoted himself to mystical studies, was at the centre of a network linking British and Continental spiritualists. Francis Lee and Richard Roach were among his correspondents and George Garden's circle were also in close touch with him. Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680), a Catholic from Lille, resisted her father's attempts to arrange her marriage, which she regarded as a fate worse than death.⁸ After a series of adventures, she met Poiret in Amsterdam. Poiret became Bourignon's close associate, and was no doubt responsible for the Behmenisation of her thought. Poiret believed that Bourignon improved on Boehme in a number of ways, including her understanding of the prelapsarian Adam. Unlike Boehme, for example, Bourignon knew what Adam had in place of the bestial members (his genitals) which he acquired at the fall.⁹ As Joyce Irwin

Garden and James Cunningham (Aberdeen 1934).

⁷Henderson, *Mystics of the North East*, p. 38.

⁸Antoinette Bourignon, "Parole de Dieu", in *La Vie de Dam^{11e} Antoinette Bourignon* (Amsterdam 1683), p. 12. This work consists of two autobiographies by Bourignon ("La Parole de Dieu" and "La Vie Extérieure"), and a "Preface Apologétique" and biography ("La Vie Continué"), probably by Poiret; each section has separate pagination.

⁹[Pierre Poiret], "Preface Apologétique pour Mad^{11e}. Antoinette Bourignon", in *La Vie de Dam^{11e}. Antoinette Bourignon*, p. 86.

has observed, Bourignon "never questioned the traditional role of women".¹⁰ Bourignon wished that she was a man in order to be more useful to Christ, but the latter reassured her that he wanted to make use of "the vilest matter to confound the pride of man".¹¹ Although she herself assumed a role of leadership, her attitude to women in general was disdainful, seeing them "not only as the primary but also as a continuing source of sin".¹²

Bourignonist thought on gender is distinguished from its Behmenist roots in a number of significant ways. In purely Behmenist writings, anthropology is a function of Sophiology; in Bourignonist thought, Boehme's prelapsarian anthropology is retained, but its Sophiological context virtually disappears.¹³ Bourignonist anthropology belongs to what Bourignon called the "accessory" truths of religion, *adiaphora*; it ceases to play a central role in understanding the drama of Fall and Redemption. In the Bourignonist system, gender is of marginal importance,

¹⁰Joyce Irwin, "Anna Maria van Schurman and Antoinette Bourignon: Contrasting Examples of Seventeenth-Century Pietism", *Church History* lx, 3 (Sept. 1991), pp. 301-315, p. 312.

¹¹Antoinette Bourignon, "La Parole de Dieu", p. 34.

¹²Irwin, "Anna Maria van Schurman and Antoinette Bourignon", p. 344.

¹³This was not a general feature of Behmenist thought at this time; the year 1700 saw the publication of Gottfried Arnold's Sophiological treatise, *Das Geheimniss der Göttlichen SOPHIA oder Weissheit*, substantial extracts from which can be consulted in Erich Seeburg ed., *Gottfried Arnold in Auswahl herausgegeben* (Munich 1934), pp. 340-376.

most significant for providing incidental targets for the movement's opponents.¹⁴ Andrew Honyman, for example, condemns Bourignon for calling marriage "Carnality", and for implying "that Celibacie is a more holy state than a Married one".¹⁵ Having attacked Bourignon's rejection of sexuality, Honyman also criticised her doctrine of "Generation and Procreation in Heaven" as a promise of "Sensuall Pleasures to be enjoyed both here and hereafter".¹⁶ This is, of course, a complete distortion of Bourignon's doctrine, which is concerned with imaginative rather than sexual procreation. George Garden expressed the precise nature of Bourignon's doctrine in his apology for the Flemish prophetess:

[E]very individual Saint being restored in Body and Soul to the State in which Adam was in his greatest Purity before the Woman was formed out of him; shall produce his like of himself alone through all Eternity, from a Principle of the Love of God, and by an ardent Desire that there may be still more Creatures to love and praise the Divine Majesty.

¹⁴Attacks on Bourignon include John Cockburn, *Bourignianism Detected: Or The Delusions and Errors of Antonia Bourignon, And Her Growing Sect* (London 1698); George White, *An Advertisement, Anent the Reading of the Books of Antonia Borignon* (Aberdeen 1700); Andrew Honyman, *Bourignonism Displayed in a Discovery and brief Refutation of Sundry Gross Errors* (Aberdeen 1710). Cockburn accused the Bourignonists of turning their prophetess into a "God-Woman", and he cast doubt on the purity of Bourignon's advocacy of celibacy; Cockburn, *Bourignianism Detected*, pp. 19, 50. White shows no interest in Bourignon's ideas on gender.

¹⁵Honyman, *Bourignonism Displayed*, p. 28.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7.

The Bourignonist heaven would be no more a Mohammedan Paradise than Eden had been before the Fall.¹⁷

The most interesting contribution of Bourignonism to Behmenist thought on gender is the emphasis on the notion of Eve as a sort of safety-net. Bourignon tells us that "Adam, swimming amidst all sensible Delights,...began to lean too much towards them, and to please himself in them, without turning his Soul so constantly towards God". God therefore separated Adam's feminine principle "to prevent his total Degeneracy". The woman thus created was "form'd more Beautiful than any of the Creatures" and was "a more lively Representation of God", so that Adam "might love her in God as God's Image, and so she might take off his Affections from the other Creatures, and raise them towards God".¹⁸ Similarly, George Garden tells us that Eve was formed when Adam began "to decline from his God, and to delight himself in the Creatures, without referring all to God". Her purpose was to prevent Adam from fully immersing himself in the creation.¹⁹

That Behmenistic influences on the Scottish mystical movement survived into the period of de Guyon's ascendancy

¹⁷George Garden, *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon* (London 1699), p. 181.

¹⁸Antoinette Bourignon, *L'Etoile du Matin*, cited by Garden, *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon*, pp. 47-8. Cf. Poiret, *The Divine Economy*, vol. ii, p. 117.

¹⁹Garden, *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon*, p. 59.

can be seen from the writings of the Chevalier Ramsay.²⁰ Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743), a baker's son who was briefly to become tutor to the Young Pretender, began thinking seriously about religion after meeting Poiret in the Netherlands; he subsequently converted to Catholicism under the influence of Fénelon. Ramsay was by no means an uncritical admirer of Boehme; while praising Poiret and Cheyne for arguing against the "materialism" of Bruno and Spinoza, he condemns Hobbes and Boehme for their conception of the corporeality of spirit.²¹ The Chevalier, however, was clearly influenced by Behmenist ideas in his *Travels of Cyrus*. This essay in comparative religion is based on the premise that there are certain fundamental religious truths, and that "all nations had from the beginning some idea of those principles more or less confus'd".²² Ramsay declares that "all the Pagan Divinities may be reduced to one supreme God, the principle of all beings, a Goddess his wife, and a middle

²⁰For Ramsay, see G.D. Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay* (London 1952).

²¹Andrew Michael Ramsay, "A Discourse Upon The Theology And Mythology Of The Pagans", in *idem.*, *The Travels of Cyrus. To which is annex'd A Discourse Upon The Theology and Mythology of the Pagans* (1727), 4th edn., 2 vols. (London 1730), vol. ii, pp. 91-92. The "Discourse" has separate pagination to the rest of volume ii. Ramsay was evidently not an attentive reader; Boehme's concept of the corporeal spirit is identical to that of Poiret and Cheyne, and has nothing in common with Hobbesian materialism.

²²*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. ix.

God who is his son, his representative or vice-gerent".²³ This is simply a confused version of the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁴ Ramsay believed that "The finest definition of the Deity among all the writings of the ancients, is that of Zoroaster",²⁵ and his account of the Zoroastrian divine triad has a decidedly Behmenist flavour. He tells us that "The ancient Persians ador'd but one sole supreme Deity [Oromazes], but they consider'd the God Mythras and the Goddess Mythra, sometimes as two emanations from his substance, and at other times as the first productions of his power".²⁶ The Chevalier illuminates the relationship between these deities by composing a Zoroastrian hymn to Mythra: Oromazes

beheld himself in the mirror of his own substance, and by that view produced the Goddess Mythra, Mythra the living image of his beauty, the original mother and immortal virgin; she presented him the idea of all things, and he gave them to the God Mythras to form a world resembling those ideas.²⁷

Ramsay's indebtedness to Behmenist Sophiology is apparent; equally apparent is his lack of any sense of Sophia as a separate element in the godhead. Mythra, for Ramsay, corresponds to the Holy Spirit; Sophia has been reincorporated into the Trinity.

²³*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. ix; cf. "Discourse", vol. ii, p. 15.

²⁴*Ibid.*, "Discourse", p. 65.

²⁵*Ibid.*, "Discourse", vol. ii, p. 6.

²⁶*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 119.

²⁷*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 122.

Ramsay accepted the doctrine of Adamic androgyny in a form that was characteristically Bourignonist. Adam "contained in himself the two sexes, or both the principles of fecundity". This, however, should not be understood "in a low, bestial, brutal manner". When Adam began to turn from God towards the world, "God divided the two sexes, and made the woman of man's essence". The purpose of Eve's creation was "to hinder man from a total defection" from God:

she was to be a kind of visible Deity and monitor, to awaken his superior faculties, remind him of his duty, hinder him from being too much immersed in the contemplation and love of the beauties of nature, and thereby relaxing his superior facultys in the exercise of faith, hope, and charity.²⁸

Ramsay believed that Adam and Eve procreated in Paradise, although in a way which was "conform to the innocence and purity of their paradisiacal state". Their offspring was "all the human race that fell afterwards with them". The justice of the doctrine of original sin depends on the fact that all humanity had lived in Paradise and fell from that state with "our first parents".²⁹ The Fall was accompanied by God's curse on Eve, which Ramsay links with sexual pleasure: if "she would have conceived without cupidity, so she would have been delivered without pain".³⁰

²⁸*Idem.*, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2 vols. (Glasgow 1749), vol. ii, pp. 223-4.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 234.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 253.

The most important figure associated with the Scottish mystical movement was George Cheyne (1671-1743), an Aberdonian by birth and education.³¹ Cheyne's early work was intended to demonstrate the compatibility of religion and Newtonian science,³² and his subsequent works are mostly ones of philosophical and sociological medicine.³³ A fashionable physician in London and Bath, he was known and admired by such figures as Alexander Pope and Samuel Richardson. It was probably Cheyne who introduced William Law to Behmenism; he regarded Law as "the greatest and best Man, and the most solid and deep of this island".³⁴ Cheyne himself was not a thorough-going Behmenist, but aspects of his thought suggest Boehme's influence. He

³¹For recent discussions of Cheyne, see G.S. Rousseau, "Mysticism and Millenarianism: Immortal Dr. Cheyne", in Richard H. Popkin ed., *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650-1800* (Leiden 1988), pp. 81-126; Anita Guernini, "Isaac Newton, George Cheyne and the *Principia Medicinæ*", in Roger French and Andrew Wear eds., *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge 1989), pp. 223-245; Roy Porter, "Introduction" to the facsimile reprint of *The English Malady* (London 1991), pp. ix-li.

³²George Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion* (London 1705); 2nd. enlarged edn. 1715.

³³George Cheyne, *An Essay on the Gout; with an Account of the Bath Waters*, 3rd edn. (London 1721); *idem.*, *An Essay of Health and Long Life*, 7th edn. (London and Bath 1725); *idem.*, *The English Malady; Or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* (London 1733); *idem.*, *An Essay on Regimen. Together with Five Discourses, Medical, Moral, and Philosophical* (London and Bath 1740); *idem.*, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body, and the Disorders of the Mind Depending on the Body*, 5th edn. (London 1753).

³⁴George Cheyne, letter to Samuel Richardson, 26 April 1742, in Charles F. Mullett ed., *The Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson, 1733-1743* (Columbia, Missouri, 1943), p. 93.

thought that the world was the divine being "pourtray'd and shadow'd out and drawn forth *ad extra*", and that "universal Nature, or the created Universe, may represent GOD's Body, or his *Sensorium*".³⁵ Cheyne's belief that "The Spirit [is] endow'd with three radical Qualities of *Life, Activity, and Intelligence*"³⁶ may owe something to Boehme's Three Principles. Like Boehme, Cheyne believed in the corporeality of spirit, and that the elements of which the prelapsarian body had been made were of a "celestial and *spiritual* Nature (so to speak) infinitely more subtile and refined than the Matter of *Light*, more elastick than the finest *Ether*".³⁷ He also thought that the Fall had involved a fall into matter, with spirit "degenerating into an *earthly, gross, material* Prison or *Dungeon*".³⁸

Cheyne accepted the theory of Adamic androgyny: "originally, there must have been no Difference of Sexes, because at last, in their restor'd and recover'd State there will be none". He remarks that "it is highly probable the Female was but a *secondary* Intention, or a

³⁵Cheyne, "Philosophical Conjectures on Natural Analogy", in *An Essay on Regimen*, pp. 203, 313.

³⁶Cheyne, "Philosophical Conjectures on Spiritual Nature", in *An Essay on Regimen*, p. 154.

³⁷Cheyne, "Philosophical Conjectures about the Nature and Qualities of the Original Animal body", in *An Essay on Regimen*, p. 6.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 39.

Buttress to a falling edifice".³⁹ Sex is a product of the gross material covering acquired at the Fall:

[A]ll the Difference of the Sexes lies in the different *Configuration* of the superinduc'd Crust or Shell laid over the primitive æthereal Body, which in both is probably pretty near of the same Figure, Size and Materials, originally.⁴⁰

Cheyne does not, however, develop the theory of Adamic androgyny in a Sophiological context. His main interest in this doctrine is in asserting the primacy of the male's role in reproduction. Cheyne tells us that the generation of the "spiritual animal Body" was originally "lodg'd in the Loins of the Male of all Animals",⁴¹ a sort of neo-Galenic rejection of the implications of the ovum theory.

"Might it not be", he asks

that the *organis'd* Bodies of all Animals might be included in the Male of each original Pair?...The original *Stamina*, the whole System of the Solids, the Firmness, Force, and Strength of the Muscles, of the Viscera, and the great Organs, are they not owing to the Male? And does the *Female* contribute any more but a convenient Habitation, proper Nourishment, and an *Incubation* to the seminal Animalcul for a Time, to enable the organised living Creatures to bear the Air, Sun, and Day the sooner?⁴²

³⁹Cheyne, "Philosophical Conjectures on Spiritual Nature", in *An Essay on Regimen*, p. 153.

⁴⁰Cheyne, "A Philosophical and Practical Essay on the General Method of Medicins", in *An Essay on Regimen*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. This, the title essay of the book, has separate pagination from both the preface and the other essays.

⁴¹Cheyne, "Philosophical Conjectures on the Nature and Qualities of the Original Animal Body", in *An Essay on Regimen*, p. 7.

⁴²Cheyne, *English Malady*, p. 95.

Without wishing to press the point, it is possible that Cheyne's conservatism here owes something to Behmenist influence. The inclusion of "the organis'd Bodies of all Animals...in the Male" might be seen as a residual effect of Adamic androgyny. The passivity of the feminine, moreover, is a central theme of Behmenist thought on gender.

As Roy Porter has argued, "*The English Malady*, in Cheyne's astute formulation, became a socially acceptable disorder - even...one that was socially eligible".⁴³ "Fools, weak or stupid Persons, heavy and dull Souls", Cheyne informs us, "are seldom much troubled with Vapours or Lowness of Spirits".⁴⁴ It is "Ideots, Peasants, and Mechanicks" who "enjoy the firmest health", while "very learned, ingenious, and even religious Persons", "Men of Imagination" and those who "excel in the Labours of the Understanding, or the Intellectual Faculties" suffer most from ill health.⁴⁵ Cheyne also observes that "Nature has

⁴³Porter, "Introduction" to his facsimile edition of *The English Malady*. Elaine Showalter, however, overstates the case in asserting that Cheyne "urged his readers to take pride" in their nervous disorders; *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London 1987), p. 7.

⁴⁴Cheyne, *English Malady*, p. 52.

⁴⁵Cheyne, *An Essay on Health*, pp. xiii, 159-160. By the late eighteenth-century, these ideas were commonplace. John Hill, a populariser of medical ideas, associated hypochondriasis with "whatever tends to the ennobling of the soul"; hence it usually afflicts "the grave and learned, those of a sedate temper and enlarged understanding, the learned and wise, the virtuous and valiant"; Hill, *Hypochondriasis; a Practical Treatise On*

formed the Generality of the [female] Sex, of a soft, slender, and delicate Make".⁴⁶ He remarks that pubescent girls are often afflicted by nervous convulsions - a passage that is notable chiefly for adding "that great Affair" to the long list of euphemisms for menstruation.⁴⁷ There was consequently a gender-related aspect to Cheyne's understanding of nervous diseases; as Porter notes, they "were diseases of effeminacy - though of effeminate men as well as women".⁴⁸ Traditionally, there was a symbolic equation between women and the lower orders; through his theory of the etiology of nervous disorders, Cheyne has abandoned this in favour of an equation between women and the cultured élite. The argument is not, of course, specifically Behmenist. The most that can be said in this respect is that it was compatible with the tenor of Behmenist thought and that it may have been derived, in part, from an earlier Behmenist, Thomas Tryon.⁴⁹

Cheyne does not seem to have had a high opinion of physical intimacy between the sexes. In a letter of advice to Samuel Richardson on writing *Pamela*, Cheyne tells the novelist that "You ought to avoid [depictions of] Fondling

The Nature and Cure of That Disorder, Commonly Called the Hyp and the Hypo (London 1766), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁶Cheyne, *An Essay on Health*, p. 190.

⁴⁷Cheyne, *The English Malady*, p. 222.

⁴⁸Porter, "Introduction" to *The English Malady*, pp. xxxii, xli.

⁴⁹For Tryon, see pp. 222-4, above.

and Gallantry, tender expressions not becoming the Character of Wisdom, Piety, and conjugal Chastity, especially in the [female] Sex".⁵⁰ Cheyne also appears to be suspicious of the role played by sexuality in health. He tells us that women's health is often damaged by "being subject to the *Wildnesses* and *Caprices* of debauched Husbands".⁵¹ Cheyne dissented from the received opinion that the cure for "the *hysterical*, and *green biliary Complaints* of the [female] Sex" was "*Concubinage* or *Matrimony*". This could offer only "a short and precarious Reprieve; for after *Child-bearing*, or, what more generally happens, after an *Abortion* [i.e., miscarriage], the same *Symptoms* return with double Violence".⁵² If Cheyne, however, does not believe that sexual intercourse and pregnancy are the cure-all for female hysteria, he places no special value on chastity.

Cheyne thought that the delicacy of the female constitution was the product of both nature and nurture.⁵³ Nurture also played a role in women's moral character. It is partly because women are "tied down by Custom, and the Tyranny of Men, to many Restraints (which men insolently

⁵⁰Cheyne, letter to Richardson 24 August 1741, in Mullett ed., *Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson*, p. 68.

⁵¹Cheyne, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body*, p. 282.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁵³Cheyne, *An Essay on Health*, p. 190.

despise)" that they "are more temperat, abstemious, and modest". Cheyne nevertheless seems to accept that men are naturally more prone to "Licentiousness and Luxury" than women. Women, in fact, occupy a higher place than men in the moral hierarchy. Cheyne told Richardson that "Religion and Seriousness is more the Character of the Women than the Man", and that he had for many years "found 50 Women for one Man at Church and Sacrament".⁵⁴ "I have known ten good Women, for one equally good Man; although I own an abandon'd Woman is extremely bad, for *Corruptio optimi est pessima*".⁵⁵

II. Henry Brooke

Henry Brooke (1703-1783) was born in County Cavan, Ireland. After attending Trinity College, Dublin, Brooke moved to London to study Law. Here he also began his writing career, publishing a poem on *Universal Beauty*.⁵⁶ The poem, the theme of which is that the beauty of the universe reflects the divine order, already shows signs of Behmenist influence. Brooke was to continue his literary career with a number of plays, novels and pamphlets. The

⁵⁴Cheyne, letters to Samuel Richardson, 24 August 1741 and February 1742, in Mullett ed., *Letters of Doctor George Cheyne to Samuel Richardson*, pp. 68, 85.

⁵⁵Cheyne, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body*, pp. 281-2.

⁵⁶Henry Brooke, *Universal Beauty. A Poem* (London 1735).

anti-Jacobite sentiments of one of these⁵⁷ was to mark him out politically from the general outlook of contemporary Behmenists. Both Brooke's anti-Jacobitism and his Behmenism were to be recurring themes in his masterpiece, *The Fool of Quality*. This is a chaotically structured novel in which the improbable narrative is frequently interlarded with Behmenistic philosophising. Brooke's Behmenism is not profound; as Coleridge observed, Brooke "only skimmed the Cream and Sweetmeats of Behmen's system".⁵⁸ *The Fool of Quality* does, however, provide a rare glimpse of a Behmenist descending from the realm of Sophia into a representation of supposedly real men and women.

For Brooke, women are essentially weak, "the more tender and more pitiable sex".⁵⁹ The heroine of Brooke's play *Gustavus Vasa*, for example, is described as "The softest pattern of embodied weakness".⁶⁰ Women are "gifted with defects, with a timidity that called for the aid of

⁵⁷*Idem.*, *The Farmer's Letters to the Protestants of Ireland* (1746).

⁵⁸Samuel Taylor Coleridge, annotations to Brooke's *Fool of Quality*, in George Whalley ed., *Marginalia, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London 1971-), vol. xii, part I, pp. 722-737, p. 731. Coleridge is referring to Brooke's failure to appreciate the role of divine wrath in Boehme's system.

⁵⁹Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality; Or, The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, 2nd edn., 5 vols. (London 1777), vol. iii, p. 175.

⁶⁰Henry Brooke, *Gustavus Vasa, The Deliverer of his Country* (1738; London 1796), p. 37.

courage, with a weakness that commanded the duties of support".⁶¹ One of the characteristics of a true gentleman is "delicacy of behaviour towards that sex, whom nature has entitled to the protection, and consequently entitled to the tenderness, of man".⁶² "Man is born a natural protector of the weakness of woman".⁶³ Women are "gentle saints" who should be cherished, not tyrannized, by their husbands.⁶⁴ In Brooke's novel, women need to be protected by men. What is significant is that they also need to be protected mainly *from* men, rather than from their own moral weakness. Not that Brooke is oblivious to the faults of women. There are women who become prostitutes, although "Most of them have been seduced from native innocence and modesty by the arts of cruel men".⁶⁵ Women are castigated for their foolish addiction to fashion,⁶⁶ and for their uncharitable attitude to erring members of their own sex: "do but cast a little dirt upon the head of any one of them, and the rest of the flock combine, in an instant, to pick out her eyes, and to tear her to pieces".⁶⁷ Such faults are only mentioned incidentally, and are never

⁶¹Brooke, *Fool of Quality*, vol. v, p. 11.

⁶²*Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 141.

⁶³*Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 213.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 192.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 213.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, vol. ii, pp. 202, 207.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 215.

accompanied by a disquisition on the need for women to be governed by men.

Charles Kingsley's observation is perhaps one indication of Brooke's proximity to Victorian values: "Henry Brooke is never more noble, not even when he talks theology, than when he speaks of woman".⁶⁸ Brooke's fundamental vision of women is not of morally flawed creatures, but of spiritually elevating ones. Brooke tells us that

Man is as the rough and crude element of earth,
unmollified by the fluidity of water and light.
Heaven therefore sent WOMAN, gentle, bright and
beauteous woman, to soothe, form, and illumine
the rudeness of his mass.⁶⁹

In *The Fool of Quality*, Arabella Clement saves herself from rape by killing Lord Stivers. Arabella subsequently laments that she had not perished herself rather than send a sinful soul to perdition. Her husband, Hammel Clement, falls on his knees before her, crying, "divine Arabella! supreme excellence of woman, thus let me worship through the purest of all mediums, that GODHEAD who inspires and delights in such perfections!"⁷⁰ Similarly, in Brooke's play, *Gustavus Vasa* (1738), Arvida describes how the heroine Christina released him from prison:

...straight a light
Shone round, as when the ministry of heav'n

⁶⁸Charles Kingsley, Preface to *The Fool of Quality*, ed. Ernst A. Barker (New York 1906), p. xlviii.

⁶⁹Brooke, *The Fool of Quality*, vol. ii, p. 55.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 288.

Descends to kneeling saints. But oh! The form
That poured upon my sight - Ye angels, speak!
For ye alone are like her...⁷¹

Women are associated with the divine or angelic, an attitude which leads Brooke to a sentimental feminism. He tells us that "woman was not merely intended to form and instruct us, to soften and polish the rudeness of our mass; she was also appointed to native empire and dominion over man".⁷² Or again, "To man had been assigned the regency of the world; but then his domain was not sole and undivided; for to woman also was assigned the sceptre of submission that, in meekness, might rule the man who should govern the world".⁷³ It is this sentimental feminism which forms the basis of Brooke's ideas on marriage.

Chastity is a recurrent theme of *The Fool of Quality*. In a passage which recalls Milton's *Paradise Lost*, one of the characters stresses the utilitarian importance of female chastity:

The chastity of woman is the only basis upon which the order, honour, and peace of the world can be built: it twists the sacred and endearing cord of society: without it there could be no amity, no brotherhood upon earth.⁷⁴

⁷¹Brooke, *Gustavus Vasa*, p. 37.

⁷²Brooke, *Fool of Quality*, vol. ii, p. 55.

⁷³*Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 211.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, vol. iii, pp. 191-2. Cf. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv:753-7.

Fortunately, women are apparently endowed with an inherent propensity to be chaste:

It is happy, said Mrs. Neighbourly, for our weakly and over-affectionate sex, that God has been pleased to fix a monitor within us, who struggles against our inclinations, who fights against our affections, and is, with difficulty, won over to acquiesce in our desires.⁷⁵

What Brooke is discussing is not celibacy, but sexual fidelity. Unlike earlier Behmenists, Brooke shows no tendency to advocate celibacy as such, although his ideal sexuality is somewhat fleshless.⁷⁶ Speaking about his second wife, the elder Harry Clinton tells us that "Even in conjugal endearment, her manner refined and chastened the sense of possession, and her pudicity awed me in the midst of transport".⁷⁷ There is almost a suggestion in this passage that sexual intercourse is morally uplifting. Brooke has a high opinion of matrimony in general. He tells us that "the sensibilities of mutual love, between those of the sexes who feel that tender and enchanting passion, constitute the principal happiness of which life is capable".⁷⁸ Brooke's main point is that love "is a chaste as well as a tender passion", and that the lover has eyes for the beloved alone.⁷⁹

⁷⁵Brooke, *Fool of Quality*, vol. iii, p. 191.

⁷⁶To judge by his twenty-two children, Brooke himself was far from celibate.

⁷⁷Brooke, *Fool of Quality*, vol. v, p. 180.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 97.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 254.

Brooke's views on marriage are based on the theory of Adamic androgyny. There is a curious symbolic androgyny in three of Brooke's female characters, including the principal loves of the two heroes, the elder and younger Harry Clinton. They first appear, and capture the hearts of their future lovers, while disguised as men. Brooke also expounds the connection between androgyny and marriage explicitly. Adam "retained, for a while, within his single person, all the virtues, excellencies, all the amiableness and attractions that were within the compass of nature to confer".⁸⁰ With the division into sexes, such qualities as superior strength, courage, and reason fell to men's lot, while women were endowed with "the delicate feelings and melting affections":

Hence, man, in seeking woman, seeks a portion of himself; he feels a want, a vacuity, a restless craving without her; and he languishes after his original totality.

But then, to be duly united to her, to be duly fashioned by her, he must feel the sweetness of her influence, the magnetism of her attractions; in short, he must love. The true polish and internal refinement of his manners, cannot be elaborated by the understanding alone; it must fundamentally take its rise from the affections, the touchings and tunings of the heart. Indeed, there lies a kind of covering or icy incrustation over the virtues themselves, till all is thawed, and warmed, and set at liberty by love.⁸¹

This view of marriage, so unlike that of other Behmenists, and essentially that of Victorian sexual ideology, is one which we will encounter again in Swedenborgianism.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 10.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, vol. v, pp. 11-12.

III. William Blake

Boehme is known to have exercised some influence on English Romantic literature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), for example, was a critical admirer. Although he disparaged Behmenism as "a mere Pantheism",⁸² he recognised the need for Theosophy, "despite of all the contempt squandered on poor Jacob Behmen and Law".⁸³ Boehme "was indeed a Visionary in two very different senses of that word", being often deluded, "ast tenet umbra Deum" ("but the shadow contains a God"); he belonged "in the highest rank of original Thinkers".⁸⁴ Coleridge paid little attention to gender in Boehme's thought. In his copious marginal notes to Boehme's *Works*, Coleridge fails to notice the theory of Adamic androgyny and the Virgin Sophia, whether in commendation or condemnation. He does comment on a passage in *The Three Principles* in which Boehme talks of Adam's masculine self lusting after his feminine self, but his interest here is to cast doubt on Boehme's apparent belief in a male sexual imperative: "If J.B. had only had 80 ounces of his Blood drawn off, the possibility of lusting after a woman would have appeared a greater mystery to him, than the difficulty of not doing

⁸²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, letter to C.A. Tulk (24 November 1818), in Earl Leslie Griggs ed., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols. (Oxford 1971), vol. iv, p. 883.

⁸³*Idem.*, letter to William Rowan Hamilton (6 April 1832), *ibid.*, vol. vi, pp. 897-8.

⁸⁴*Idem.*, annotations to Boehme's *Works*, in Whalley ed., *Marginalia*, pp. 553-696, p. 558.

it".⁸⁵ Coleridge was, however, open to some of Boehme's ideas on gender, indicating that Boehme's association of the female with water and the male with fire anticipated a recent theory which "characterized the female by the relative predominance of Hydrogen...and the Man by the rel. predom. of Oxygen".⁸⁶

The most interesting of the Romantics in relation to Boehme was undoubtedly William Blake (1757-1827). Blake's religion may be described as a sort of eclectic occultism. His ideas show some traces of Neoplatonism,⁸⁷ but his relation to Swedenborg is more uncertain. Although Blake was undoubtedly interested in Swedenborg's ideas, the theory of his Swedenborgian upbringing is now untenable.⁸⁸ Blake regarded Swedenborg as having "corrected many errors of Popery, and also of Luther and Calvin. Yet Swedenborg was wrong in endeavouring to explain to the rational

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 658; for the passage in question, see p. 176, above.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 654.

⁸⁷George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill 1961). Blake's Neoplatonism has been questioned by Stuart Curran, "Blake and the Gnostic Hyle: A Double Negative", *Blake Studies* 4 (1979), pp. 117-133, reprinted in Nelson Hilton ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake, 1970-1984* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1986), pp. 15-32.

⁸⁸David V. Erdman, "Blake's Early Swedenborgianism: A Twentieth-Century Legend", *Comparative Literature* v, 3 (Summer 1953), pp. 247-257.

faculty what the reason cannot comprehend".⁸⁹ The poet told Crabb Robinson that "Parts of Swedenborg's scheme are dangerous. His sexual religion is so".⁹⁰ There is, however, some truth in Bryan Aubrey's observation that "in many respects Blake remained a Swedenborgian throughout life".⁹¹ It has been argued that Blake was indebted to seventeenth-century radicalism, especially the Ranters.⁹² There is little direct evidence to support this view, but there was one seventeenth-century writer whose thought was known to Blake, Jacob Boehme.⁹³ It is possible that the

⁸⁹Thomas Sadler ed., *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols. (London 1869), vol. ii, p. 305.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 306.

⁹¹Bryan Aubrey, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Work of William Blake", unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Durham University 1982, p. 18.

⁹²A.L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake* (London 1958).

⁹³References to Boehme's influence on Blake (with varying degrees of enthusiasm or scepticism) can be found throughout the critical literature; see, for example, W.B. Yeats, "William Blake", in John P. Frayne ed., *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, 2 vols. (London 1970), pp. 400-403. Helen C. White, *The Mysticism of William Blake* (Madison 1927), pp. 151 ff.; Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (Princeton 1968), vol. i, pp. 204-18, 360-71, vol. ii, pp. 151-71; Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination. A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford 1970), *passim*. Paley draws some interesting parallels between Blake and Boehme, but misunderstands a fundamental point of the latter's theosophy; the Abyss is not "Boehme's term for what separates our dark reality from its divine source" (p. 119), but the ineffable godhead "without Nature", i.e. beyond manifestation. There are two full-length studies of Blake's relationship to Boehme: G.E. Bentley jr., "William Blake and the Alchemical Philosophers", B.Litt. thesis, Oxford 1954; and Aubrey, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Works of William Blake".

poet encountered Boehme's works early in his life; he was later to tell Flaxman that "Paracelsus & Behmen appear'd to me" in childhood.⁹⁴ Blake told Crabb Robinson that Boehme was "a divinely inspired man",⁹⁵ and in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the poet disparaged Swedenborg in comparison with Paracelsus, Boehme, Dante and Shakespeare.⁹⁶ The nature of Boehme's influence is very uncertain, and Blake's Behmenism was never thorough-going.⁹⁷ As Crabb Robinson observed, "He is not so much a disciple of Jacob Böhme and Swedenborg as a fellow-visionary".⁹⁸ It seems likely, however, that Blake was indebted to Boehme for both his doctrine of contraries and his concept of imagination.

There are some hints of a Sophiological perspective in Blake's thought. From early in his writing career his sensibility towards nature verged on the Sophiological:

Who is this, that with unerring step dares tempt
the wilds, where only Nature's foot hath trod?
'Tis Contemplation, daughter of the grey
Morning! Majestical she steppeth, and with her

⁹⁴William Blake, letter to John Flaxman (12 September 1800), in Sir Geoffrey Keynes ed., *Blake. Complete Writings*, rvd. edn. (Oxford 1972), p. 799.

⁹⁵Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, vol. ii, p. 305.

⁹⁶William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 22; *Complete Writings*, p. 158.

⁹⁷Cf. Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, p. 293 n.; Martin K. Nurmi, *Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study* (New York 1972), p. 28.

⁹⁸Crabb Robinson, letter to Miss Wordsworth (February 1826), *Diary*, vol. ii, p. 323.

pure quill on every flower writeth Wisdom's
name.⁹⁹

This Sophiological element of Blake's thought comes to maturity in the Prophetic Books.¹⁰⁰ His realm of Beulah can be compared to Sophia as the embodiment of the "Eternal Sabbath of Rest":

There is from Great Eternity a mild & pleasant
rest
Nam'd Beulah, a soft Moony Universe, feminine,
lovely,
Pure, mild & Gentle, given in Mercy to those who
sleep,
Eternally created by the Lamb of God around,
On all sides, within & without the Universal
Man.¹⁰¹

Blake's mythology is peopled by male beings, each of which has his female counterpart, or "emanation". Blake's "Universal Man", his version of the cosmic Adam, is Albion, whose emanation, Jerusalem, closely resembles Sophia. In the first chapter of *Jerusalem*, Albion abandons his emanation, just as Boehme's Adam had abandoned the Virgin Sophia. In Boehme's Fall, Adam is seduced by Sophia's material counterpart, the properties of Nature: he lusts after the world, rather than remaining faithful to the divine Wisdom. Jerusalem, representing the spiritual, also has a material counterpart, Vala: "For

⁹⁹Blake, "Contemplation", *Complete Writings*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁰For Blake's indebtedness to Boehme's Sophiology, see Aubrey, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Work of William Blake", pp. 239 ff.; Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1980), pp. 181-191.

¹⁰¹William Blake, *The Four Zoas* (1797); *Complete Writings*, p.266.

Vala produc'd the Bodies, Jerusalem gave the Souls".¹⁰²
 Vala is Jerusalem's "shadow", "buildded by the reasoning
 power in Man".¹⁰³ In Blake's myth it is Vala who is "the
 lovely form/ That drew the body of Man into this dark
 Abyss".¹⁰⁴ Jerusalem addresses Vala:

Albion lov'd thee...
 I redounded from Albion's bosom in my virgin
 loveliness:
 The lamb of God receiv'd me in his arms, he
 smil'd upon us:
 He made me his Bride & Wife: he gave thee to
 Albion.¹⁰⁵

She, like Sophia, has returned to the divine realm. One of
 the consequences of this separation of Albion and
 Jerusalem is an inability to form social bonds,

For Man cannot unite with Man but by their
 Emanations
 Which stand both Male & Female at the Gates of
 each Humanity.¹⁰⁶

Susan Fox remarks about this idea that "The positive
 function of the female is to permit union among males".¹⁰⁷
 Blake is not, however, advancing a theory comparable to

¹⁰²*Idem.*, *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804), plate 18; *Complete Writings*, p. 640.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, plate 44 [39]; *Complete Writings*, p. 675. For both Blake and Boehme, "Reason" has a negative value, epitomising man's fallen way of thinking.

¹⁰⁴*Idem.*, *The Four Zoas*; *Complete Writings*, p. 306.

¹⁰⁵*Idem.*, *Jerusalem*, plate 20; *Complete Writings*, p. 643.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, plate 88; *Complete Writings*, p. 733.

¹⁰⁷Susan Fox, "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry", *Critical Enquiry* 3 (Spring 1977), reprinted in Nelson Hilton ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake, 1970-1984* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1986), pp. 75-90, p. 86.

Claude Levi-Strauss's hypothesis of "the exchange of women" as the basis of social life.¹⁰⁸ He tells us that

Man is adjoin'd to Man by his Emanative portion
Who is Jerusalem in every individual Man...¹⁰⁹

Blake is speaking in psychological terms: the men and their emanations are not the men and women of the external world (although there is probably an understood correspondence between these), but constituents of the psyche, whether that psyche is attached to a male or female body. Blake is also referring to how the individual members of humanity come to form the members of the cosmic man. This is comparable to Swedenborg's *Homo Maximus*, the formation of which is the object of creation. It is through the union of male and female in the soul that this is achieved.

The original union of Blake's male beings with their emanations is broken by the Fall: Los is separated from his emanation, Enitharmon, and

Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment
Petrify the eternal myriads
At the first female now separate.¹¹⁰

The fallen state is characterised by the division into sexes:

¹⁰⁸Levi-Strauss's theory of "the exchange of women" is discussed in Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth 1975), pp. 370-6.

¹⁰⁹William Blake, *Jerusalem*, plate 44; *Complete Writings*, p. 675.

¹¹⁰*Idem.*, *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), plate 19; *Complete Writings*, p. 231.

Two Contraries war against each other in fury &
 blood,
 And Los fixes them on his Anvil, incessant his
 blows;
 He fixes them with strong blows, placing the
 stones and timbers
 To Create a World of Generation from the World
 of Death,
 Dividing the Masculine & Feminine, for the
 commingling
 Of Albion's & Luvah's Spectres was
 Hermaphroditic.¹¹¹

Blake hints at some of Boehme's distaste for the sexual
 consequences of this loss of androgyny:

Eternity shudder'd when they saw
 Man begetting his likeness
 On his own divided image.¹¹²

Blake also associates sexuality and sin in his rejection
 of the doctrine of the Virgin birth:

Was Jesus born of a Virgin Pure
 With narrow Soul & looks demure?
 If he intended to take on Sin
 The Mother should an Harlot been.¹¹³

Despite this, Blake does not share the Behmenist
 admiration of chastity, and his works frequently suggest
 a sacramental attitude to sexuality.¹¹⁴ There is an
 optimistic note to the creation of "a World of Generation
 from the World of Death".

In his 1793 Note-Book there are several vigorous
 assaults on the value of chastity. The concluding couplet

¹¹¹*Idem.*, *Jerusalem*, plate 58; *Complete Works*, p. 690.

¹¹²*Idem.*, *Urizen*, plate 19; *Complete Writings*, p. 232.

¹¹³*Idem.*, *The Everlasting Gospel* (c. 1818); *Complete Writings*, p. 756.

¹¹⁴Cf. J.G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford 1948), p. 150.

associates "Avarice & Chastity",¹¹⁵ an association which was central to Blake's thought on celibacy. As Helen C. White observed, "Blake attacked chastity because he believed that it fettered energy and fortified the selfish isolation of the spiritually incomplete individual".¹¹⁶ In *Jerusalem* Blake condemns "a Religion of Chastity & Uncircumcised Selfishness".¹¹⁷ This is a complete inversion of the usual Behmenist association of virginity with the repudiation of self-will. Blake also departs from Behmenism in his insistence on the prelapsarian origins of sexuality. In his illustrations to *Paradise Lost* and to his own *Milton*, Blake retained the "idea of the pleasure of sex existing before the Fall".¹¹⁸ Similarly, the botanical emblems of the Fall are used to express the tragedy of sexual abstinence:

Then I went to the heath & the wild,
To the thistles & thorns of the Waste,
And they told me how they were beguil'd,
Driven out, & compel'd to be chaste.¹¹⁹

Conversely, sexual union and cosmic renewal are linked:

The harvest shall flourish in wintry weather
When two virginities meet together.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵William Blake, 1793 Note-Book, *Complete Writings*, p. 187.

¹¹⁶White, *The Mysticism of William Blake*, p. 220.

¹¹⁷William Blake, *Jerusalem*, plate 60; *Complete Writings*, p. 693.

¹¹⁸Kathleen Raine, *William Blake* (London 1970), p. 148.

¹¹⁹Blake, 1793 Note-Book, *Complete Writings*, p. 162.

¹²⁰*Idem.*, "Merlin's Prophecy", *Complete Writings*, p. 177.

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake employs a sexual metaphor to express Oothoon's receptiveness to beauty. Castigating Theotormon's "hypocrite modesty", Oothoon describes herself as

a virgin fill'd with virgin fancies,
Open to joy and delight where ever beauty
appears;
If in the morning sun I find it, there my eyes
are fix'd
In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied
with work,
Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this
free born joy.

The literal reference of "happy copulation" is emphasised in the next lines, which condemn chastity for leading to masturbatory fantasies. Theotormon is disparaged for seeking "solitude/ Where the horrible darkness is impressed with reflections of desire":

The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The
virgin
That pines for man shall awaken her womb to
enormous joys
In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth
shut up from
The lustful joy shall forget to generate &
create an amorous image
In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds
of his silent pillow.
Are not these the places of religion, the
rewards of continence,
The self enjoyings of self denial?¹²¹

For Blake, it is chastity rather than sexuality which is a product of the Fall. Towards the end of his life, Blake told Crabb Robinson that

I saw Milton and he told me to beware of being misled by his "Paradise Lost". In particular, he wished me to show the falsehood of the doctrine

¹²¹Idem., *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), plates 6-7; *Complete Writings*, p. 194.

that carnal pleasures arose from the Fall. The Fall could not produce any pleasure.¹²²

Such a view could be accommodated within the conventional Protestant validation of marriage as God's first blessing. In the early 1790s, however, Blake was going far beyond such conventional wisdom. Among the "Proverbs of Hell" we find the assertion that "The lust of the goat is the bounty of God".¹²³ The proverbs are not intended to represent the whole truth, but they are an essential part of the truth.¹²⁴ Blake is attacking sexual exclusivity as much as celibacy:

Love, free love, cannot be bound
To any tree that grows on ground.¹²⁵

The removal of the "marriage hearse", monogamy, is one of the preconditions for the removal of the "ancient curse".¹²⁶

It can be seen that Blake's sexual thought was anything but Behmenist in a strict sense of the term. While for the Shakers generation and regeneration stand in complete contradiction to each other, Blake's Los cries out "O holy Generation, Image of regeneration!". Blake's sexual ethic

¹²²Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, vol. ii, p. 309.

¹²³Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 8, *Complete Writings*, p. 151.

¹²⁴Cf. Nurmi, *Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pp. 35 ff.

¹²⁵Blake, "To My Mirtle", *Complete Writings*, p. 176.

¹²⁶Blake, "An Ancient Proverb", *Complete Writings*, p. 176.

is, however, curiously close to that of the libertine Ranters, a group who may also have been influenced by some aspects of Behmenism. There is also what might be called an unorthodox use of Behmenist ideas underlying Blake's thought. Generation is the "point of mutual forgiveness between Enemies".¹²⁷ Male and female incarnate the contraries without which there "is no progression",¹²⁸ Boehme's First and Second Principles. Nurmi may be incorrect in thinking that Blake departs from Boehme in rejecting the synthesis of opposites. On the contrary, it is Boehme who rejects the possibility of a genuine synthesis by insisting on the subordination of the First (male) Principle to the Second (female) Principle, and it is Blake who accepts the synthesis in the form of sexual union.

Blake's supposed feminism, and its relation to his sexual philosophy, is ambiguous. For the young Blake, female virtue is derivative of male virtue: "Let men do their duty & the women will be such wonders; the female light lives by the light of the male; see a man's female dependants, you know the man".¹²⁹ It has been observed that, with the exception of Oothoon, Blake's female

¹²⁷Blake, *Jerusalem*, plate 7; *Complete Writings*, p. 626.

¹²⁸Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3; *Complete Writings*, p. 149.

¹²⁹Blake, "Annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*", *Complete Writings*, p. 82.

characters "are either passive or pernicious".¹³⁰ The passivity of Blake's good female characters, however, does not militate against feminism as such. On the contrary, it was precisely on such stereotypical foundations that nineteenth-century feminism was to emerge. In Brooke's phrase, it was with "the sceptre of submission" that Victorian women were to hold sway. There was, moreover, an unquestionably feminist element to Blake's thought. He was an admirer of Wollstonecraft, who was probably the subject of his poem "Mary".¹³¹ Blake's thought, as always, is complex and often contradictory.

In one of the most perceptive discussions of Blake's ideas on gender, Alicia Ostriker has distinguished four different Blakeian attitudes. There is "the Blake who celebrates sexuality and attacks repression"; the Blake "who depicts sexual life as a complex web of gender complementarities and interdependencies"; "a Blake...who sees sexuality as a tender trap rather than a force of liberation"; and "the Blake to whom it was necessary...to see the female principle as subordinate to the male".¹³²

¹³⁰Fox, "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry", p. 77.

¹³¹Catherine L. McClenahan, "'No Face Like the Human Divine'? Women and Gender in Blake's Pickering Manuscript", in G.A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins eds., *Spirits of Fire. English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods* (Cranbury, New Jersey, 1990), pp. 189-207, pp. 191 ff.

¹³²Alicia Ostriker, "Desire Gratified and Ungratified: William Blake and Sexuality", *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 16 (Winter 1982-3), pp. 156-165, reprinted in

As Ostriker notes, all of these attitudes can be found "in varying proportions" throughout Blake's work.¹³³ Nevertheless, Ostriker herself arranges the four sets of attitudes in a broadly chronological sequence. The first Blake, in Ostriker's words, asserts "that gratified desire does what religion pretends to do: gives access to vision, the discovery of the infinite".¹³⁴ This might be characterised as a Cabalistic attitude to sexuality, without implying any direct influence of the Cabala on Blake's thought. The Blake of the gender "complementarities and interdependencies", on the other hand, is thinking in fundamentally Behmenistic terms. Blake's use of the theory of Adamic androgyny, for example, is Behmenist rather than Cabalist: "sexual division" is seen as "the prototype of every division within the self, between self and other, and between humanity and God". The fall, moreover, is attributed "to specifically male pride, male competitiveness, or male refusal to surrender the self".¹³⁵ The impression of a general shift from a Cabalistic to a Behmenistic outlook is confirmed by the emergence of the third Blake, with his distrust of sexuality. It is tempting to postulate a Behmenisation of Blake's thought on gender, but it is not possible to adduce any concrete evidence for this. There

Hilton ed., *Essential Articles*, pp. 211-236.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 217.

is also a sense in which Blake's thought runs counter to the general trend in Behmenist thought; the fourth Blake is patriarchal in outlook, and it is the first Blake, with his positive attitude to sex, who is most feminist. We should note, however, that the view that Blake became increasingly conservative in his sexual politics has been challenged.¹³⁶ Moreover, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a work in which Blake specifically commends Boehme,¹³⁷ Blake's aspirations are still towards "sexual emancipation" and "sexual enjoyment".¹³⁸

IV. The Swedenborgians

The occult philosophy inevitably perished with the growth of rationalism. There were, however, attempts to revitalise the tradition by wedding it to the new rationalism. This, in particular, was one of the major contributions of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) to Western culture.¹³⁹ Born to a family with extensive ecclesiastical

¹³⁶See, for example, McClenahan, "'No Face Like the Human Divine'?".

¹³⁷Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 22; *Complete Writings*, p. 158.

¹³⁸Sir Geoffrey Keynes' commentary on plates 3 and 14, in his facsimile edition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (London 1975).

¹³⁹Marsha Keith Schuchard, "Swedenborg, Jacobitism and Freemasonry", in Erland J. Brock, E. Bruce Glenn, Carroll C. Odhner, J. Durban Odhner, Cynthia H. Walker and Jane K. Williams-Hogan eds., *Swedenborg and his Influence* (Bryn Athyn, Pa., 1988), pp. 359-379, p. 359. For Swedenborg, see Edmund Swift, *Emanuel Swedenborg. The Man and his Works* (London 1883); G. Trobridge, *Swedenborg. Life and Teaching* (London 1945).

and mining connections, Swedenborg pursued a course of scientific and mathematical studies. In 1743, however, he experienced a mental crisis which led him on the first of his many journeys into the spirit world. He abandoned his post in the Swedish Board of Mines to devote himself to his religious work, producing a series of remarkable books which described the afterlife in minute detail. Swedenborg soon acquired a number of disciples,¹⁴⁰ and the wider influence exerted by the Swedish mystic spread throughout many areas of Western culture.¹⁴¹ Above all, it was his anthropocentric vision of heaven which was to dominate nineteenth-century thought on the afterlife.¹⁴²

Swedenborg's occult sources appear to have been mostly Cabalist. Swedenborg had not read Boehme during the formative period of his thought,¹⁴³ but it is probable

¹⁴⁰On the English Swedenborgians, see Desirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches. Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London 1964), ch. 8; W.R. Ward, "Swedenborgianism: Heresy, Schism or Religious Protest?", *Studies in Church History* ix (1972), pp. 303-11; J. Samuel Rogal, "Swedenborg and the Wesleyans: Opposition or Outgrowth?", in Brock et al. eds., *Swedenborg and his Influence*, pp. 295-307.

¹⁴¹See the essays in Brock et al. eds., *Swedenborg and his Influence*; Trobridge, *Swedenborg*, pp. 329 ff. Those influenced by Swedenborg include Goethe, Heine, Schelling, Balzac, Emerson, Thoreau, Henry James, sr., and Strindberg. In England, Coleridge, Carlyle, Tennyson and the Brownings all greeted Swedenborg's works with varying degrees of enthusiasm, Elizabeth Browning going so far as to describe herself as a Swedenborgian.

¹⁴²Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven. A History* (New Haven 1988), ch. 7.

¹⁴³Karl-Erik Sjöden, *Swedenborg en France* (Stockholm 1985), p. 27.

that he was acquainted with Behmenism, since his brother-in-law had been introduced to the Philadelphians by Francis Mercurius van Helmont in the late 1690s. Swedenborg's own English contacts were primarily Jacobite and Masonic,¹⁴⁴ from the same milieu as the Philadelphians. In the eclectic world of the occult-minded, moreover, both Boehme and Swedenborg were revered.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it is not as Behmenists that Swedenborg and his followers figure in the story of occult

¹⁴⁴Schuchard, "Swedenborg, Jacobitism and Freemasonry", pp. 362 ff.

¹⁴⁵Sometimes the two writers are regarded as complementary. The Swedenborgian, John Clowes, was a relative of John Byrom and was himself a student of Behmenist writings; see Bentley, "William Blake and the Alchemical Philosophers", p. 116. Schelling's Behmenism seems to have begun with an interest in Swedenborg. Balzac, who regarded Swedenborg as "le Bouddha du Nord", linked him with Mme. de Guyon, St. Theresa, Bourignon and Boehme (Sjödén, *Swedenborg en France*, p. 157). Other writers seem to have thought of them as competitors. Saint-Martin, for example, abandoned Swedenborg for Boehme (*ibid.*, p. 165), while Jacob Duché moved from Boehme to Swedenborg. As Aubrey has observed in his study of "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on the Work of William Blake", there is a need for more research on the relationship between Behmenism and Swedenborgianism. We might note that some ideas that are generally regarded as Swedenborg's distinctive contribution to thought on the afterlife were anticipated by Jane Lead. Lead believed that it was possible to communicate with the dead in heaven, a place which she understood in terrestrial terms, having had a conversation with a deceased friend in a celestial garden (Lead, *The Wonders of God's Creation* [London 1695], pp. 39 ff.). Like Swedenborg, Lead believed that the blessed were not in a static state of perfection, but were eternally progressing in heavenly delights (*idem.*, *Enochian Walks with God* [London 1694], pp. 23-4). If Swedenborg had not read Boehme, he might nevertheless have encountered Behmenist ideas, since there was growing interest in the works of Pordage, Bromley and Lead in Sweden in the 1730s and 1740s (Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* [Uppsala 1948], pp. 150-1).

thought on gender. Swedenborgianism can be seen as a powerful rival system, one which was to supplant Behmenism in European culture. Behmenism might be regarded as the occult philosophy reformed to meet the needs of the early modern period; Swedenborgianism was a further reform in the occult philosophy, tailoring it to the requirements of the modern world. In particular, Behmenism is paradigmatic of a first stage in the development of nineteenth-century thought on gender, the desexualization of women and the validation of their spiritual role. As a sexual ideology, however, it has one great weakness: it is implicitly anti-domestic, more a philosophy for those who wish to renounce the world than those who wish to engage in it. The Swedenborgians were to erect a philosophy which preserved the outlines of Behmenist thought, at the same time domesticating it. Swedenborgianism is, perhaps, the first fully articulated example of "Victorian" sexual ideology.¹⁴⁶

Swedenborg tells us that "the Divine is imaged in two who are in true marriage love"; "marriage love is the very plane into which the Divine flows".¹⁴⁷ For Swedenborg, the

¹⁴⁶Paradoxically, despite their emphasis on chastity, most Behmenists were married; in contrast, Swedenborg, who emphasised the importance of sexuality, was a life-long celibate.

¹⁴⁷Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders, and Hell, From Things Heard and Seen*, 7th edn. (London 1899), §§374, 370. Henceforth, *Heaven and Hell*.

godhead was a unity of Love and Wisdom,¹⁴⁸ and male and female reflected this unity: "In the Word man signifies the understanding of truth, and woman the affection of truth, because by birth man is understanding and woman is affection".¹⁴⁹ Thus, "the male is the wisdom of love, and the female, the love of that wisdom".¹⁵⁰ This is true of what Swedenborg calls a "conjugal" relationship, distinguishing it from common conjugal relationships. Conjugal love "is the fundamental of all loves,...into it are collected all joys and delights from first to last".¹⁵¹ It is the key to spiritual progress, and Swedenborg tells us

that in the proportion in which anyone loves his own married partner alone, he becomes celestial and internal, and that in the proportion in which anyone does not love his own married partner alone, he becomes natural and external.¹⁵²

It is through conjugal love that "a man is a living soul".¹⁵³ Women, according to Swedenborg, play a crucial role in the genesis of conjugal love. He observes "That there is not any conjugal love with the masculine sex,

¹⁴⁸*Idem., The Delights of Wisdom relating to Conjugal Love, after which follow the Pleasures of Insanity relating to Scortatory Love* (1768; London 1891), §84. Henceforth, *Conjugal Love*.

¹⁴⁹*Idem., The Apocalypse Revealed, in which are disclosed the Mysteries there Foretold* (London 1882), §434.

¹⁵⁰*Idem., Conjugal Love*, §32.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, §58.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, §77⁴.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, §457.

but only with the feminine sex, and that from this sex it is transferred into the masculine sex..."¹⁵⁴ This is tantamount to asserting that men would lose their human dignity without women, since "conjugal love makes a human being (*homo*) more and more a human being and a man (*vir*)".¹⁵⁵

The conjugal pair are destined to come ever nearer to complete union. "Married partners...become more and more one man":¹⁵⁶

For the male human being and the female human being have been so created, that out of two they may become as it were one human being, or one flesh; and when they become one, then, taken together, they are a human being in his fullness; but without such conjunction, they are two, and each of them is like a divided half of a human being.

This is a process which continues in the afterlife, since "the mutual and reciprocal love of the sex remains with human beings after death".¹⁵⁷ Swedenborg tells us that "two marriage partners in heaven are not two, but one angel";¹⁵⁸ "Marriage in the heavens is the conjunction of two into one mind".¹⁵⁹ This is an inner union, however,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, §223.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, §432¹.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, §177.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, §37.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, §52.

¹⁵⁹ *idem.*, *Heaven and Hell*, §367.

rather than an external one. Swedenborg's meaning is made clear in one of his heavenly visions:

and when the husband was speaking, he spoke at the same time as from his wife; and when the wife was speaking, she spoke at the same time as from her husband; for such was the union of their minds from whence their speech flowed.¹⁶⁰

The conjugal pair are "two bodies, but one soul".¹⁶¹ Blake's question, "Can that be love that drinks another as a sponge drinks water?",¹⁶² might be applied as a critical comment on this conception. Theoretically, however, this mutual subsuming of the personalities of the spouses results in an egalitarian conception of marriage. Since the partners "will and think mutually and reciprocally", in heavenly marriages "there is not any predominance" of one sex over another.¹⁶³ "The love of dominion of one over the other", Swedenborg warns us, "takes away marriage love and its heavenly delight".¹⁶⁴

Swedenborg contrasts conjugal love with "scortatory love", which is "the love of adultery, when it is such, that adultery is not held to be sin, nor to be evil and wrong against reason, but allowable with reason".¹⁶⁵ The

¹⁶⁰*Idem.*, *Conjugal Love*, §42⁵.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, §75⁵.

¹⁶²Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, plate 7; *Complete Works*, p. 194.

¹⁶³Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §369.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, §380.

¹⁶⁵*Idem.*, *Conjugal Love*, §423.

two types of love "are opposed to each other, as hell is to heaven, and heaven is to hell". Scortatory love is, in fact, virtually synonymous with hell:

All who are in hell are in the connubial connection of evil and falsity, and all who are in heaven are in the marriage of good and truth; and as the connubial connection of evil and falsity is also adultery, hell is also that connubial connection. Hence it is that all who are in hell are in the lust, lasciviousness, and shamelessness of scortatory love...¹⁶⁶

Consequently, "All hell abounds with uncleannesses, and the universal origin of them is shameless and obscene scortatory love". In hell, the "lascivious delights of scortatory love" manifest themselves as "dung and mire", "stinks and stench", "hogs, serpents, and the birds called ochim and tziim". We are told that "heaven represents itself in marriage love, because heaven with the angels is the conjunction of good and truth, and this conjunction constitutes marriage love".¹⁶⁷ The delights of conjugal love are manifested in heaven as "gardens and flowery fields", "sweet smells from fruits and the fragrances from flowers", "lambs, kids, turtle-doves, and birds of paradise".¹⁶⁸

The Cabalist provenance of Swedenborgianism is obvious in its validation of sexuality. There are those who remain celibate in heaven, but these are relegated to a

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, §429.

¹⁶⁷*Idem.*, *Heaven and Hell*, §382.

¹⁶⁸*Idem.*, *Conjugal Love*, §430.

peripheral region because "the sphere of perpetual celibacy infests the sphere of conjugal love, which is the very sphere of heaven".¹⁶⁹ Celibacy is not the same as chastity, and "Truly conjugal love is chastity itself".¹⁷⁰ Swedenborg believed that the "ultimate delights" of marriage continued in heaven. These delights were actually heightened, since "angelic perception and sensation are much more exquisite than human perception and sensation". Angelic sexual intercourse, moreover, is free from post-coital melancholy.¹⁷¹ Swedenborg, however, emphasises the spirituality of conjugal sexuality: "The delightsomenesses of scortatory love commence from the flesh, and are of the flesh even in the spirit; but the delightsomenesses of conjugal love commence in the spirit, and are of the spirit even in the flesh".¹⁷²

Swedenborg regarded men as being more prone to sexual appetite than women. We are informed that "with men there is generally the love of the sex, but with women the love of one of the sex".¹⁷³ Accordingly, conjugal love initially manifests itself in men as a generalized love of "the sex"; "This, however, is said of the male sex, because it has allurements which actually inflame; but not

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, §54⁵.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, §143.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, §44⁸⁻⁹.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, §440.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, §296².

of the female sex".¹⁷⁴ On one of his frequent journeys into the spiritual world, a group of heavenly-educated wives told Swedenborg "that they thought of marriage only from the blessedness of mutual friendship and trust with a consort, and not at all from the delight of any passion". Male and female sexuality are distinguished by their different roles in procreation: "That men have fecundation, and consequently excitement, and that women have not the latter because they have not the former, is evident".¹⁷⁵ For Swedenborg, men are subject to a sexual imperative. Attempts to repress "the love of the sex" in those who "suffer from intense venereal excitement" can only result in "certain diseases of the body, and distempers of the mind, not to mention unknown evils, which must not be named". It is for this reason that brothels are permissible in large cities.¹⁷⁶ Swedenborg also accepts the necessity of "the keeping of a mistress" for unmarried men plagued by intense sexual desire.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, female virginity should be preserved before marriage since "conjugal love with women acts in unity with their virginity, and hence is the chastity, purity, and holiness of that love". From the woman's point

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, §98.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, §219.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, §450-1.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, §459.

of view, "defloration" is a solemn promise to love a man for eternity.¹⁷⁸

V. Conclusion

Writers like Cheyne, Brooke and Blake are not Behmenists in the fullest sense of the word, but they display something of Behmenist influence on their thought about gender and sexuality. In general, they accept the elevation of the feminine, but are more inclined to place this in the context of this world rather than the divine. They also tend to reject the Behmenist emphasis on chastity in favour of a validation of heterosexuality. These tendencies are summarised, as it were, in Swedenborgianism.

Like Behmenism, Swedenborgianism was a system of a small minority. Also like Behmenism, it reflected and magnified aspects of the wider culture within which it operated. The Swedenborgians differed from the Behmenists in emphasising the role of sexuality in the process of regeneration, although this sexuality is somewhat fleshless; sexuality is valid only in so far as it is desexualized. Swedenborgianism adopted the revised view of the feminine with which this study has been concerned, seeing women as inherently chaste. Women, moreover, played a vital role in the spiritual life of men, bringing them conjugal love and hence the true humanity of celestial

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, §460².

life. There is, however, no Sophiological context for Swedenborgian thought on gender. If the Swedenborgians accept the duality of divine gender, no great emphasis is laid on the feminine aspect of the divine. Swedenborg frequently betrays a "she for God in him" mentality, but he is relatively free from the misogyny which occasionally disfigures Behmenist thought. Despite his frequent voyages into the spiritual and celestial worlds, it is not the other-worldly feminine principle which attracts Swedenborg, but the women of this world. As Michael Stanley has observed of Swedenborg's sexual philosophy:

Similar though it might appear in some ways to alchemical teachings concerning the union of masculine and feminine in the soul, it differs in its practical application of deep spiritual fundamentals to the actual situation of men and women faced with sexual urges, eros, and deeper longings for soul union with a mate.¹⁷⁹

Compared with Behmenism, Swedenborgianism represents a shift from preoccupation with the femininity of the divine to a concern with the divinity of the feminine. In Swedenborg's writings, occult speculation on gender has culminated in the Romantic notion of women as inherently chaste and spiritually elevating.

¹⁷⁹Michael Stanley, *Emanuel Swedenborg. Essential Readings* (Wellingborough 1988), p. 24.

10. CONCLUSION

Joseph Campbell has argued for a recognition that "the interplay and mutual spiritual fertilization of the sexes" are a profoundly formative influence on "the metamorphosis of myth":

So that even where the woman may seem to have disappeared from the scene - as, for example, in the patriarchal Aranda and Hebrew images of the first days of creation - we must realize that she is there, even so, and watch for the ripple of her presence behind the curtain.¹

The divine feminine has, in fact, rarely remained behind the curtain in Western culture. If Diana and Isis were to leave the stage with the growth of Christianity, the Virgin Mary was also to make her entrance. The Protestant rejection of Mariology created a divine realm that was overwhelmingly masculine in tone, but this was compensated in some circles by the reintroduction of another manifestation of the divine feminine, 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, becoming bolder in its statements of divine androgyny.²

¹Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 4 vols. (1960), vol. i, pp. 352-3.

²Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom. St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley 1987), p. 261.

At the most general level, Behmenist thought on gender can thus be regarded as a response to a need to conceive the divine in both male and female terms.

It has been argued that the occult philosophy is the precursor, not so much of the physical sciences, as of the social and psychological ones.³ This thesis has its most striking illustration in Jungian psychology. Carl Jung was a keen student of occult psychology, devoting several essays and books to the interpretation of its symbols.⁴ For Jung, the alchemist was not so much a patient who should be occupying the psychiatrist's couch, as a colleague equipped with a special technique for the individuation and integration of the personality. There is a curious similarity between the structure of Jung's thought and that of Boehme, a similarity of which Jung himself was seemingly unaware. For the Silesian mystic, Adam's Fall from his paradisiacal origins is represented by the separation of genders, while the Redemption is seen as a transcendence of gender to achieve a state of spiritual androgyny again. For the Swiss psychologist, the development of consciousness is an achievement won at the

³Herbert Silberer, *The Problems of Mysticism and its Symbolism*, trans. Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York 1917); Johannes Fabricius, *The Royal Art. The Medieval Alchemists and their Royal Art* (Copenhagen 1976); Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago 1987).

⁴C.G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies* (London 1967); *idem.*, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 2nd edn. (London 1989); *idem.*, *Mysterium Coniunctionis. An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Opposites in Alchemy* (London 1963).

expense of psychic wholeness. The conscious mind is barred from the unconscious, a region of the mind inhabited by the other gender: every man has a woman (his anima) in his unconscious, every woman a man (her animus).⁵ Jung's objective is a sort of psychic redemption similar to Boehme's spiritual redemption: wholeness is achieved through the integration of the male and female parts of the psyche.

This would place both Jung and Boehme within what Carolyn Heilbrun has called "the hidden river of androgyny" running throughout Western culture:⁶ the aspiration to transcend gender on a psychic or spiritual level. It is, however, a river which does not necessarily flow in the direction of a social transcendence of gender. "If God is male, then the male is God";⁷ Mary Daly's words are the classic expression of a basic assumption of feminist theology, that the gender-symbolisation of the divine is directly related to the status of the sexes within society. For feminist theologians, as Patricia Doyle has observed, "the task is to find imagery that

⁵See, for example, C.G. Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious", in *Man and His Symbols* (London 1964), pp. 1-94, p. 67.

⁶Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York 1973); the phrase occurs as the title to Part I.

⁷Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (London 1986), p. 19.

transcends sex-specific capacities and awareness".⁸ Marina Warner, however, has challenged the assumption that there is a "logical equivalence... between exalted female objects of worship and a high position for women".⁹ The history of Behmenist thought on gender also calls in question this assumption. From the beginning, Behmenism involved a marked feminisation of the godhead. In the work of Richard Roach, this aspect of Behmenist theology did indeed result in a feminist impulse, and this trend was to reach its climax among the American Shakers. Since the days of Pordage's Bradfield community, moreover, women had been prominent among the Behmenists, and Jane Lead was to assume leadership of the movement after Pordage's death. It is utterly misleading, however, to speak of the majority of Behmenists as in any sense "feminist"; the most important Behmenists - Boehme himself, John Pordage, Jane Lead, Francis Lee and William Law - show no indication of a desire to reform women's position in the world. In assessing the "feminist" aspects of Behmenism, it is useful to apply the reservations made by Bynum in discussing the "feminisation of religious language" in the High Middle Ages. The use of feminine imagery in a religious context originated in male writers, and did not

⁸Patricia Martin Doyle, "Women and Religion: Psychological and Cultural Implications", in Rosemary Radford Ruether ed., *Religion and Sexism. Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York 1974), pp.15-40, p. 32.

⁹Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London 1976), p. 283.

necessarily imply a diminution in misogynistic attitudes even among writers employing such imagery.¹⁰ The central myth of Behmenist thought, telling how Adam loses his heavenly female counterpart and gains an *ersatz* earthly one, is patently directed at a primarily male audience and is scarcely promising material for feminism. As Bynum notes, a male writer's rapprochement with the "feminine aspects of himself is not necessarily an endorsement of what is specifically 'female'".¹¹ Whether we are speaking of Mariology or Sophiology, the feminisation of the Divine has been associated more with patriarchal than feminist milieux. On the other hand, many of the sectaries who did develop what appears to be a proto-feminist consciousness felt no discomfort with a purely masculine image of the deity.

This is not to deny any connection at all between Behmenism and the rise of modern feminism. By the nineteenth century, the image of womanhood had been revised. No longer the subject of an uncontrollable sexuality, the inherently chaste Victorian woman could assume a new role of moral leadership within the world. Hence her involvement in the social purity movements of

¹⁰Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982), pp. 140 ff. Bynum also observes, however, that the use of female imagery had no special appeal to women writers; in contrast to this, Behmenism attracted a number of women, possibly because Behmenist Sophiology validated their own spiritual experience.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 167-8.

the age; hence also her discovery of a new ideology, feminism. Initially, this may have involved little more than an augmentation of what Erik Erikson calls "the secondary gains' of devious dominance", or what Henry Brooke, without the slightest irony, referred to as "sceptre of submission".¹² As John Stuart Mill observed, "we are perpetually told that women are better than men, by those who are totally opposed to treating them as if they were as good".¹³ Mill's wife, Harriet Taylor, criticised the tendency she saw in the contemporary feminist movement to appeal for women's emancipation as "a sort of sentimental priesthood".¹⁴ Nevertheless, it was through exploiting the possibilities offered by the stereotypes which confined them that Victorian women were able to empower themselves.

The roots of Victorian sexual culture are many. The Puritan conduct books and the related defences of women in the seventeenth century were undoubtedly important in this respect. The chivalric revival, exemplified by the mock-medievalism of such writers as William Morris, may also be cited in this context. Victorian sexual ideology can also

¹²Erik Erikson, *Identity. Youth and Crisis*, p. 284, cited in Doyle, "Women and Religion", p. 22; Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality; Or, The History of Henry Earl of Moreland*, 2nd edn., 5 vols. (London 1777) vol. v, p. 211.

¹³John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), published with Harriet Taylor Mill, *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), ed. Kate Soper (London 1983), p. 76.

¹⁴Harriet Taylor Mill, *Emancipation of Women*, p. 42.

be traced back to changes in medical discourse. The English Behmenists were always a small movement, perhaps no more than a few hundred people throughout the first century of their existence. Their appeal, moreover, was somewhat greater in Germany than England.¹⁵ It would be foolish to claim for them an exclusive, or even a decisive, role in the development of nineteenth-century thought on gender. Nevertheless, Behmenism had an impact on the minds of some of the writers who were shaping the emergent sexual ideology of the Victorian age. At the very least, Behmenism can be seen as paradigmatic of the major changes occurring in the sexual culture of the modern world - the desexualization of the image of womanhood, and the elevation of the feminine to its Victorian pedestal. The Behmenists not only reflected these changes, they also anticipated them.

¹⁵Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala 1948), pp. 98 ff.

Appendix I:

Behmenism and English Radicalism

The impression is sometimes given that Boehme had a pervasive influence on Interregnum radical thought.¹ While the extent of Boehme's influence in this sphere is widely recognized, the few attempts that have been made to specify the nature of this influence are generally inadequate. Particular doctrines are ascribed to Boehme's influence without being related to his ideas as a coherent body of thought. Little attempt is made to distinguish what is peculiarly Behmenist (such as the seven fountain-spirits and Three Principles) from what Behmenism shared with its wider occult heritage (such as the tendency for dialectical thinking²). Nor has the question of which radicals were influenced by Boehme been settled. Despite Nigel Smith's recent contribution to this subject,³ the relationship of Behmenism to English radicalism remains obscure.

¹See, for example, Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London 1928), chs. 13-14; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, paperback edn. (Harmondsworth 1974), p. 176.

²Spiritualist dualism may also be indebted to the wider tendency for binary thought discussed in Stuart Clark, "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft", *Past and Present* 80 (1980), pp. 98-110.

³Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed. Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford 1989), ch. 5.

There was a great deal in Boehme's writings that would be congenial to a radical audience. His standard enumeration of human sinfulness concentrates on the social vices: "base covetousness, pride, and wanton luxurious stateliness".⁴ There is in Boehme an apparent sense of class-consciousness: "Those that are in Authority and power suck the very Marrow from the Bones of Men of low Degree and Rank, and feed upon the sweat of their Browes".⁵ Boehme expresses the radical commonplaces that Christ chose the humble for his disciples, and that in the fullness of time the first will become last.⁶ We should remember, however, that Boehme's earliest followers were themselves wealthy and powerful people, and were not entirely free from contempt for the common herd. It would be a mistake to interpret Boehme's apparent class-consciousness as a clarion-call to social revolution; rather, it expresses the asceticism deeply engrained in Reformation thought.⁷

⁴Jacob Boehme, *Aurora, That is, The Day-Spring*, trans. John Sparrow (London 1656), 4:6.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁶Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, trans. John Ellistone (London 1651), p. 125.

⁷The classic study of this "worldly asceticism" is, of course, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, paperback edn. (London 1985). If Tawney is to be believed, this aspect of the Protestant social ethic was more pronounced in Lutheranism than Calvinism; *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, paperback edn. (Harmondsworth 1984), pp. 104, 114-6.

It must have been relatively easy in the turmoil of Interregnum England to take such sentiments at face value, and it is not surprising to find radicals who admired Boehme. Some of these are easily identified, since they openly acknowledged their indebtedness to the German theosopher. Samuel Herring petitioned parliament to establish colleges at each university with a curriculum based on the Scriptures and "the workes of Jacob Behmen, and such like".⁸ Since these colleges were to license preachers, Herring was proposing that Behmenism should become the received theology of the English Church. We know virtually nothing about Herring, however, or the precise nature of his own Behmenism.

Even with those radicals who appear to acknowledge Boehme's influence caution is necessary. This is the case with the Prophets Reeve and Muggleton. Lodowick Muggleton concedes that Boehme's "philosophical Light was above all Men that doth profess religion, untill this Commission of the Spirit came forth". This, however, is praise of the Brutus-is-an-honourable-man variety. Muggleton is exalting his own spiritual status by showing how low even the highest previous attainments are in comparison. He says that Boehme was "utterly ignorant" of the true principles of religion, suggesting that some of the Behmenists are already damned, and that the rest will shortly follow

⁸Samuel Herring, "To the Parliament", in John Nickolls ed., *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell* (London 1739), pp. 99-102, p. 99.

suit.⁹ It is possible, of course, that Muggleton was concealing Boehme's influence on his thinking. Christopher Hill lists several doctrines in Muggletonian writings which may have a Behmenist provenance:

Parallels include the concept of the three dispensations, of the two seeds, the idea that sin is due not to God or man but to Satan, that after the last resurrection the damned will find their hell on this earth, that the universe was created not *ex nihilo* but from pre-existing matter, that the end of the world is imminent, rejection of human learning, that mortalism must not be made an excuse for libertinism, that there will be no resurrection of animals, that we shall all be males in heaven - all these doctrines can be found in Boehme. Both Boehme and Reeve take upon themselves to correct the Bible when they disagree with it.¹⁰

None of these doctrines is specifically Behmenist. The belief "that we shall all be males in heaven" is not Behmenist at all, since the virginal inhabitant of Boehme's heaven is not a chaste man but a maidenly (*jungfräulich*) one, an androgyne. If there is Behmenist influence here, it is influence by misreading.

The same can be said about Boehme's relationship to English mortalism. Serge Hutin refers to Boehme in this connection, citing such writers as Overton, Muggleton and Milton.¹¹ These were all thnetopsychists, whose conception

⁹Alexander Delamaine and Tobiah Terry eds., *A Volume of Spiritual Epistles...by John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton* (London 1755), pp. 12, 28.

¹⁰Christopher Hill, Barry Reay and William Lamont, *The World of the Muggletonians* (London 1983), p. 88.

¹¹Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris 1960), pp. 61-2.

of the soul derives from Hebraic materialism. In contrast, Boehme's own mortalism, based on his emanationist metaphysics, is Hellenistic in provenance, and might more plausibly be compared to the annihilationism of radicals like Winstanley.¹² In fact Boehme, like Luther, was a psychopannychist, believing in the continued, but unconscious, existence of the soul until the Resurrection, after which it would enjoy some sort of personal immortality.¹³

Boehme may have had some impact in the Digger and Ranter milieu. Wilson Hayes confesses his inability to identify any specific Behmenist influence on Winstanley, but proceeds to assume that such influence occurred.¹⁴ It is possible that the Jacob-Esau antithesis in Winstanley's

¹²Overton, Hobbes and Milton each make it clear that they believe the soul cannot subsist without the body; see R[ichard] O[verton], *Mans Mortalitie*, ed. H. Fisch (Liverpool 1968); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth 1968), chs. 38, 44, 46; John Milton, *A Treatise of Christian Doctrine*, trans. C. R. Sumner, in *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London 1853), vol. iv, chs. 7 and 12. For a full discussion of English mortalism, see Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

¹³The soul is "hidden in the word" until the Resurrection, when "Soul and Body shall come together again", but not the "grosse bestiall body of our flesh"; Boehme, *Aurora*, 490-1; *idem*, *Christs Testaments* (London 1652), 44; cf. *idem*, *XL Questions Concerning the Soule* (London 1647).

¹⁴T. Wilson Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger. A Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 24, 224n., 68.

writings derives from Boehme.¹⁵ Winstanley's indebtedness to the occult tradition can also be seen in his use of the term "imagination" in something like the Paracelsian-Behmenist sense of a magical faculty. As with Boehme, the imagination is central to Winstanley's understanding of fallen man: "the imagination of the flesh will not submit itself to God, but is found a chiefe enemy against him".¹⁶ Milton had a similar understanding of the role imagination in the Fall, a fact which Bailey uses to support her case for Boehme's influence on the poet.¹⁷ In Boehme, however, the imagination is a morally neutral faculty capable of turning towards good or evil. For Winstanley, the imagination appears to be part of the fallen order, a morally suspect counterpart of the spirit Reason, and Milton sees the imagination in the same way unless dependent on Reason.¹⁸ If there is a link with Boehme here, it is more one of the adaption than the adoption of an idea. Winstanley's thought may also be linked to Behmenism in his understanding of the problem of evil. Boehme saw evil as resulting from the wrathful First

¹⁵Christopher Hill, *The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley, Past and Present Supplement*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁶Gerrard Winstanley, *The Saints Paradise* (London 1648), p. 29.

¹⁷Bailey, *Milton and Jacob Boehme*, pp. 152-4.

¹⁸Cf. *Paradise Lost*, v:95 ff. The positive value given to Reason by both Winstanley and Milton is, of course, contrary to Boehme's almost invariably pejorative use of the term.

Principle, an integral part of the divine being.

Similarly, Winstanley believed that

this adverse power that troubles the creature, is not a Devill distinct from God, but it is the very power of Gods righteous law...by reason of the enmity of nature that is between God and the sinner.¹⁹

Man's experience of God as wrathful is the result of his alienation from the divine : when "Adam began to delight in himself, he went out of God".²⁰

Some members of the Ranter milieu also adopt this Behmenistic understanding of evil as simply man's experience of God as wrathful. The author of *A Justification of the Mad Crew* says that "the devil is but a part of Gods back-sides", and Bauthumley talks of *The Light and Dark Sides of God*.²¹ The Behmenist understanding of sin as a turning away from God can be found in Coppin:

man himselfe is the cause of his own woe, by going astray from God....[T]hat which makes God seem to be absent from the creature, is the creatures being absent from God: for God never goes from us, but we go from him.²²

Similarly, Salmon contrasts self-will with "a life in the purity of Divine light".²³ The Ranters' habit of

¹⁹Winstanley, *The Saints Paradise*, p. 48.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹Anonymous, *A Justification of the Mad Crew* (London 1650), sig. A2v; Jacob Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God* (London 1649).

²²Richard Coppin, *Divine Teachings* (London 1649), part iii, p. 55.

²³Joseph Salmon, *A Rout, A Rout* (London 1649), p. 5.

presenting "truth as a reconciliation of opposites" may also owe something to Boehme,²⁴ and Hutin has discerned in Ranter writings "a tendentious interpretation of the Behmenist doctrine of the two complementary principles of the Divinity".²⁵ This dualism can be found throughout the works of the Interregnum spiritualists, and it is indeed reminiscent of Boehme's dialectical frame of mind. It may, however, be derived from the *coincidentia oppositorum* of occult thought generally rather than from Boehme specifically. Smith remarks that there were linguistic parallels between Boehme and the Ranters.²⁶ The title of Salmon's *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights* reflects one of Boehme's favourite paradoxes; it was published a year after the second English edition of the *High Deep Searching out of the Threefold Life of Man*. By this time Salmon had undergone a mystical experience which he describes in words redolent of Behmenism: "I appeared to my selfe as one confounded into the abyss of eternitie, nonentitized into the being of beings".²⁷ None of this is peculiarly Behmenist, however, and the evidence is more suggestive than compelling.

²⁴A.L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters. Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London 1970), p. 74.

²⁵Hutin, *Les disciples anglais*, p. 76.

²⁶Nigel Smith, *Introduction to A Collection of Ranter Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (London 1983), p. 24.

²⁷Joseph Salmon, *Heights in Depths, and Depths in Heights* (London 1650).

The extent of Boehme's influence in Quaker circles is difficult to assess. While Jones regarded Boehme's impact as fundamental to the genesis of Quakerism, Nuttall denied that there was any influence at all.²⁸ Braithewaite believed he could discern echoes of Boehme in Fox's *Journal*:²⁹

Now was I come up in Spirit through the flaming Sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the Creation gave another Smell unto me, than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing, but Purenness, and Innocency, and Righteousness, being renewed up into the Image of God by Christ Jesus; so that I say, I was come up to the State of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me: how all things had their Names given them, according to their Nature and Virtue. And I was at a stand in my Mind, whether I should practise Physick for the good of Mankind, seeing the Nature and Virtues of the Creatures were so opened to me by the Lord.³⁰

Fox is clearly claiming an insight, similar to Boehme's, into the prelapsarian *Natursprache*, allowing him to apprehend the "signature of all things". His mystical experience, moreover, involves the sense of smell; this was uncommon in mystical writings, but can be found in Boehme's works. Neither of these arguments appear decisive. Fox did, however, come into contact with at least one Behmenist, Durant Hotham. In his *Journal*, Fox describes Hotham as "a pretty tender man, that had some

²⁸Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 220-6; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford 1947), pp. 16-18.

²⁹W.C. Braithewaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London 1923), p. 40.

³⁰George Fox, *The Journal*, ed. John Nickalls (London 1975), p. 27.

experience of God's working in his heart". Hotham told Fox that "he had known this principle [of the inner light] this ten year, and he was glad that the Lord did now publish it abroad to people". He added that "if God had not raised up this principle of light and life, the nation had been overspread with Ranterism".³¹

Opponents of the Quakers often associated the Friends with Behmenism,³² and one of Pordage's associates was allegedly "a late abettor of the Anti-Scripturall Quakers at Reding".³³ An anthology of extracts from Boehme's writings was published by a Quaker in Philadelphia in 1698.³⁴ Boehme's millenarianism was attractive to Francis Ellington, who regarded the Silesian mystic as a prophet of the Quakers' advent before the millennium.³⁵ Benjamin Furly owned copies of Boehme's works,³⁶ but in itself this is meaningless. John Furly's belief that man experienced

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 75, 90.

³²See, for example, Richard Baxter, *For Prevention of the Unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost* (London 1655), pp. 155-6; Thomas Underhill, *Hell Broke Loose: Or An History of the Quakers Old and New* (London 1660), pp. 15-16.

³³Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum. Sathan at Noon. The Second Part* (London 1655), p. 2.

³⁴Daniel Leeds, *The Temple of Wisdom for the Little World* (Philadelphia 1688); see "A Note on Daniel Leeds", *Jacob Boehme Society Quarterly*, iii, 1 (Autumn 1955), p. 26.

³⁵F[rancis] E[llington], *Christian Information Concerning these Last times* (London 1644), *passim*.

³⁶Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (New York 1985), pp. 16-17.

God's wrath only because of his failure to be obedient to His Light might be given a Behmenist context, but his emphasis on the antithetical nature of Light and Darkness seems to preclude anything like Boehme's understanding of the latter as a constitutive element of the godhead.³⁷ The same might be said about Jones's view that the antithesis of Light and Dark in Fox's writings is evidence of Behmenist influence.³⁸ We might note that some Quakers were openly hostile to the Behmenists,³⁹ a hostility which was reciprocated.⁴⁰ Although final judgement must be reserved until all the available Quaker literature has been examined for Behmenist influences, the present writer

³⁷John Furly, *A Testimony To The True Light, Which is the Way of Life and Righteousness*, 2nd edn. (n.p. 1670), pp. 4-5, 6-7.

³⁸Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London 1919), p. 495.

³⁹See John Anderdon, *One Blow at Babel in those of the People called Behmenists* (London 1660); Anderdon, however, seems to be attacking what he takes to be the Behmenists' misunderstanding of Boehme as much as Behmenism itself: the Behmenists espouse sundry errors "grounded upon misunderstood expressions, or imaginary conceptions of Jacob Behmen's writings, the tendency of whose spirit ye can never fathom, nor see rightlie to judge of, until ye come to the light" (p. 2). Cf. Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme*, pp. 101-2.

⁴⁰John Pordage criticised the Quakers for reducing perfection to external matters of dress and speech; the worldliness that this suggested was confirmed by their being "great tradespeople in the Babylonian Principle"; John Pordage, *Gottliche und Wahre Metaphysica* (Frankfurt and Leipzig 1715), part iii, p. 72. William Law believed that "the Quaker and the Pharisee seem to be very near akin and to have both of them their measure and rule of perfection from outward ordinances"; William Law, draft writing against Quakerism, printed in Stephen Hobhouse, *William Law and Eighteenth-Century Quakerism* (London 1927), p. 208.

is inclined to endorse Nuttall's view, that Boehme's impact among the Friends was minimal.⁴¹

Boehme's work was certainly known in the Erbery-Webster-Llwyd circle. William Erbery cites Boehme approvingly, but only once, and not in a way which suggests any specifically Behmenist influence.⁴² Erbery speaks of Christ as the "out-goings of God", and refers to the Father raising the Son "into his own eternall abisse".⁴³ He also employs one of Boehme's favourite similes, that of man as a branch of a tree rooted in God.⁴⁴ If this language is reminiscent of Boehme, Erbery's understanding of Christ's divinity as "*the Father dwelling in him*"⁴⁵ does not suggest the subordination of Boehme's wrathful Father to the loving Son. John Webster owned several copies of Boehme's works,⁴⁶ and adopted Boehme's

⁴¹The volume of Quaker writings and the limits of the present study have made it impossible to undertake more than a brief survey of this topic. In addition to those texts cited, a number of Quaker writers have been consulted (see works listed in the Bibliography for Samuel Crisp, John Crook, Thomas Ellwood, John Gratton, Charles Marshall and James Nayler). These show no sign of any Behmenist influence.

⁴²William Erbery, *The Testimony of William Erbery* (London 1658), p. 333.

⁴³William Erbery, *The Grand Oppressor, Or, The Terror of Tithes; First Felt, and now Confest* (London 1652), p.26.

⁴⁴*Idem.*, *A Call to the Churches; Or, A Packet of Letters To the Pastors of Wales* (London 1653), p. 2.

⁴⁵*Idem.*, *The Grand Oppressor*, p. 36.

⁴⁶Peter Elmer, *The Library of Dr John Webster. The Making of a Seventeenth-Century Radical* (London 1986).

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⁴⁵*Idem.*, *The Grand Oppressor*, p. 36.

⁴⁶Peter Elmer, *The Library of Dr John Webster. The Making of a Seventeenth-Century Radical* (London 1986).

theory of the relationship of language to the Fall and redemption,⁴⁷ but there is no evidence of any interest in other aspects of his theosophy. Morgan Llwyd provided the first Welsh translations of Boehme's works,⁴⁸ but these are the least characteristically Behmenist of the theosopher's oeuvre. It is debatable how far Llwyd's own writings show traces of Behmenism.⁴⁹

Beyond these radicals, Boehme may have exerted an impact in Cromwellian circles. The Earl of Pembroke, President of the Council of State in June and July 1651, was a known disciple of John Pordage.⁵⁰ John Milton may have felt the impact of Boehme's ideas, although none of Bailey's grounds for thinking so are specifically Behmenist,⁵¹ and Milton appears to be closer to Cabalism

⁴⁷John Webster, *Academiarum Examen, Or The Examination of Academies* (London 1653), pp. 26-32.

⁴⁸Llwyd translated two treatises from *The Way to Christ*, both in 1657: *Y Disgybl ai Athraw o Newydd* (Boehme's "Supersensual Life"), and *Yr Ymroddiad* (Boehme's "True Resignation"). A bibliography of Llwyd's Welsh works can be found in Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, trans H. Idris Bell (Oxford 1955), p. 246.

⁴⁹For Llwyd, see E. Lewis Evans, "Morgan Lloyd and Jacob Boehme", *Jacob Boehme Society Quarterly*, pp. 11-16; *idem.*, "Morgan Llwyd and the Early Friends", *Friends Quarterly Journal* (Jan. 1954), pp. 48-57; R. Tudor Jones, "The Healing Herb and the Rose of Love: the Piety of Two welsh Puritans", in R. Buick Knox ed., *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall* (London 1977). Jones stresses the selectivity of Llwyd's indebtedness to Boehme.

⁵⁰For Pembroke, see pp. 222-3, above.

⁵¹Bailey, *Milton and Jacob Boehme*, especially ch. 5.

than any other form of the occult philosophy.⁵² Cromwell's chaplain, Peter Sterry, was certainly familiar with Boehme's works. Sterry first mentions Boehme in his correspondence with Morgan Llwyd in 1651-2, in which his attitude is one of critical admiration.⁵³ From this date, according to N.I. Matar, Sterry was increasingly influenced by Boehme.⁵⁴ There are, however, traces of Behmenism in Sterry's earlier works, and he seems to have discovered Boehme in 1646 or, more probably, 1647. Sterry's first published sermon, preached in November 1645, has no suggestion of Behmenism,⁵⁵ but a sermon of October 1647 seems to refer to Boehme's seven qualities.⁵⁶ Subsequently, various indications of Behmenist influence can be found in Sterry's works, such as his belief that

⁵²On Milton and the Cabala, see Denis Saurat, *Milton. Man and Thinker*, rvd. edn. (London 1944).

⁵³After detailing his objections to Boehme, Sterry confesses "that the Lord Jesus hath ministered, as much Heavenly Pleasure and Profite to mee by reading him, as of any Discourses, besides those of the Holy Scriptures. I have met with rich Depths, sweet Heights in him", letter of 14 January 1652, National Library of Wales MS 11439 D.

⁵⁴N.I. Matar, "Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme", *Notes and Queries*, new series, 231 (1986), pp. 33-6.

⁵⁵Peter Sterry, *The Spirits Conviction of Sinne* (London 1646).

⁵⁶Commenting on Revelation 1:4, Sterry says "God then As He varies himselfe into all the Distinct Formes of the Creature...is a Sevenfold Spirit". Christ "in the form of a Seven-fold Spirit like a River with seven heads, lets forth the God-head and the Creation, one into another". Interpreting the Book of Seven Seals, the seals become "the Naturall Formes of Things". Peter Sterry, *The Clouds in Which Christ Comes* (London 1648), pp. 5, 17.

"Darkness, and Light, are Both in God".⁵⁷ Sterry tells us that "Darkness is the Ground of this Creation, and all "Light-Colours are laid upon that Ground".⁵⁸ These Behmenist elements in Sterry's thought are definitely subordinate to his general Neoplatonism. Another Platonist, Henry More, is sometimes said to have been an admirer of Boehme's. More, in fact, was generally suspicious of the "pretty conceits" of "Chymists and Theosophers",⁵⁹ and he was later to launch an attack specifically on Behmenism.⁶⁰ His actual assessment of Boehme was that "Honest Jacob is wholesome at the bottom, though a philosopher but at random".⁶¹

Perhaps the most important aspect of Boehme's impact on English radicalism is his millenarianism. This was certainly one of the areas in which Boehme's admirers were most interested, and there were two anthologies of

⁵⁷Peter Sterry, *The Commings Forth of Christ In the Power of his Death* (London 1650), sig. aalr.

⁵⁸Peter Sterry, *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of God in the Soul of Man* (London 1683), p. 7.

⁵⁹Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, pp. 40 ff.; despite More's use of the idea of an androgynous Adam in his *Conjectura Cabalistica*, these "pretty conceits" included the belief "That Adam was an Hermaphrodite", *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁰Henry More, *Philosophiae Teutonicae Censura* (London 1670).

⁶¹Marjorie Hope Nicolson ed., *Conway Letters. The Correspondence of Anne, Viscount Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642-1684* (London 1930), p. 306.

eschatological prophecies culled from his works.⁶² Boehme thought that "the great Day of Revelation and Final Judgement is near, and daily to be expected".⁶³ He shared the widespread belief that the approach of the millennium would be heralded by a revival of learning, and associated this with a revelation of truth to the unlearned rather than with the work of an intellectual élite.⁶⁴ Boehme may also have been important in the transmission of Joachimism to England.⁶⁵ The emphasis in Boehme's writings, however, is on the personal experience of the indwelling God, rather than the external event which was about to bring history to its fulfilment, and it is this aspect of Boehme's thought which may have constituted one of his more significant legacies to English radicalism. A.L. Morton argued that the defeats of 1649 led the radicals to retreat from their secular programmes into religion.⁶⁶ The radicals were never as secular as Marxist historians suppose, nor did the flowering of spiritualism necessarily mean a withdrawal from political activism. Spiritualism could be an ideology supporting a vigorous prosecution of the war, as with Peter Sterry, or the digging of the

⁶²Boehme, *Mercurius Teutonicus*; E[llington], *Christian Information*. There were two editions of the first of these.

⁶³Boehme, *Aurora*, 4:3.

⁶⁴E.g. Boehme, *Aurora*, 8:127, 9:4 ff.

⁶⁵Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 148; Hill et al., *World of the Muggletonians*, p. 26.

⁶⁶Morton, *World of the Ranters*, p. 16.

commons, as with Winstanley. Eventually, however, what Nuttall calls the internalisation of millenarian expectations⁶⁷ did encourage quietism. Among an important body of radicals, a proactive millenarianism envisaging Christ's personal reign on earth gave way to a reactive millenarianism taking comfort in Christ's personal reign in the heart. Providing the basis for a consistently spiritualist millenarianism, Boehme's writings may have played a significant role in this process. It is possible that Boehme's importance in seventeenth-century England was in encouraging a retreat from political activism, rather than in stimulating subversive religious ideologies.

There is no evidence that the Diggers, Ranters or Quakers adopted any of Boehme's distinctive theosophical doctrines. What they may have taken from Boehme, they may have taken equally from other sources. This is not necessarily to deny that Boehme's influence was widespread among Interregnum radicals, but rather to suggest that the depth of this influence should not be exaggerated. The wider impact of Boehme's ideas had more to do with his general spiritualism than his own distinctive ideas; and borrowings from Boehme tended to be by adaptation, or even by misunderstanding.

⁶⁷Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 111-2.

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DCL Durham Cathedral, Dean and Chapter Library

DUL Durham University Library

NCL Newcastle City Libraries

UCL Ushaw College Library, County Durham

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