

Figurative Visions in Jane Lead's *A Fountain of Gardens*❖

Hui-chu Yu*

ABSTRACT

Jane Lead, a prominent visionary known for her feminist theosophy in the Philadelphia Society, illustrates in *A Fountain of Gardens* her visions that explicate divine knowledge to secure individuals' enlightenment and universal salvation. This present research aims to scrutinize the figurative visions in the series of spiritual journals to examine how Sophia Wisdom initiated Lead into a profound understanding of her relationship with God and the celestial kingdom. Writing about her visionary experiences, Lead extensively employs metaphors to render the divine revelations more accessible to her readers. Her visions present a clear view about the connection between humanity and divinity, the means to achieve spiritual perfection, as well as the mystical union between one's soul and Heavenly Wisdom. Depicting a propitious world under the governance of divine wisdom, Lead conflates Virgin Wisdom with Christ into an androgynous celestial being that can restore humans to a prelapsarian state to endorse women's spiritual identity—receptive to divine inspiration and qualified for the ministry. Such a depiction conforms to some early modern female mystics' pursuit of gender equality in the Christian belief.

KEYWORDS: Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, Virgin Wisdom, metaphor, visionary, androgyny, feminist theology

❖ This article is a result of a research project sponsored by National Science Council, coded as NSC 99-2410-H-153-019-MY3.

* Received: January 5, 2021; Accepted: November 4, 2021

Hui-chu Yu, Associate Professor, Department of English, National Pingtung University, Taiwan (hcyu@mail.nptu.edu.tw).

The prophetic career of Jane Lead (1624-1704) manifested her spiritual progress and theological conviction.¹ The association with John Portage initiated her into self-exploration. In widowhood, she started to have visions that affirmed her prominent role as a divine agent. After the demise of her spiritual partner in 1681, Lead assumed the leadership of the Philadelphian Society in London. Under the financial support of generous patrons, Lead's spiritual writings published in English and translated into German and Dutch enjoyed great popularity among continental readers who savored mystical writings (Hessayon, "Lead's Life" 54-56). Her publications had a wide readership for her inspiring visions feature a millenarian spirit and apocalyptic nature, as demonstrated in her *Revelation of Revelations* and other writings.

Though a productive female visionary in seventeenth-century England, Lead received less critical attention than she deserved because it was hard to put her into a specific category (Hirst 2-3). More scholars have devoted themselves to exploring Lead's mysticism and contribution to gendered theology in broader historical and cultural contexts. In *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy*, Ariel Hessayon offers several essays focusing on different stages of Lead's life and her association with the Philadelphian Society, supplementing Julie Hirst's edition with substantial archival materials. To illustrate Lead's connection with particular religious movements, Amanda L. Capern underscores Lead's correlation with the tradition of Puritan pastoral theology in envisioning an "imaginative visual landscape of worship" (97). In contrast, Warren Johnston emphasizes Lead's relationship with apocalyptic prophecy in early modern England. Based on the correspondence of Johann Georg Gichtel, Lucinda Martin features Lead as "a lightning rod figure among religious dissidents on the continent" to highlight her influence on German Pietism to help with the spread of Behmenism to other German-speaking territories (188). Philip Lockley underlines how key figures in the Southcottian movement in the nineteenth century integrated their teachings with Lead's prophetic visions. At the same time, Bridget M. Jacobs accentuates how Mary's City of David and the Latter Rain Movement in the twentieth century treated Lead in distinct ways. Moreover, in a cross-cultural study that associates Lead with Eastern philosophy, Chao Tien-yi discerns the parallel between Lead's thought of Sophia Wisdom and the Taoist view of the androgynous existence

¹ The surname of Jane Lead is also spelled as Leade.

of *yin-yang* (83). The studies on Lead mentioned above enrich the diversity of the research topic.

The extent of radicalism as well demarcates the earlier and the most recent studies on Lead. Some scholars claimed the female visionary to be a complacent leader of the Philadelphian Society, which was deemed to be a less aggressive religious group. Nevertheless, Hessayon claims that Lead's published thoughts would have been more militant without the interventions of amanuenses and editors ("Jane Lead" 33). Despite the stylistic and editorial interventions, Lead's overwhelming contribution to the founding philosophy of the Philadelphian Society should not be underestimated. Some readers even criticized Lead's writings for their "popish enthusiasm" and "were contrary to the spirit of the Reformation" (Hessayon, "Lead's Life" 59). Nonetheless, the criticism deserves reinvestigation against Lead's metaphors for representing her spiritual visions.

A Fountain of Gardens is a series of journals documenting Lead's visions from 1670 to 1686 as the reminiscence of her private life and the prophetic writings about her transcendent enhancement. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson assert, human conceptual systems tend to represent thinking patterns, experiences, and daily activities in various forms of metaphors (10). Furthermore, they believe that symbolic metonymies could serve to be "links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures" (22). The paper thus purports to peruse Lead's spiritual diaries to examine how she envisions her relationship with the celestial kingdom of God and how her extensive metaphors explicate the divine knowledge that brings forth enlightenment and salvation, particularly for women. Scrutiny into Lead's celestial visions manifests how the innovative metaphors counteract orthodox Christian tradition tainted with androcentric imagery of the divine and how Lead appeals to a more egalitarian approach to women's spirituality and ministry.

Spiritual journals saturated with metaphorical language are often claimed to be the outcomes of believers' direct conversation with God through meditation and prayers that solidify an intimate relationship with God (Botonaki 44). To buttress perceptual sensitivity, Lead articulates her mystical experiences through spiritual diaries to justify women's legitimacy to be both believers and ministers. The Philadelphian Sibyl highly values the "Supersensual Philosophy . . . from the Incorporating fire-breath of the Holy

Ghost” (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 5). Such stress on super-sensuality displays a profound influence from German mystic Jacob Boehme, who was devoted to the topic in many of his treatises. In *The Way to Christ*, Boehme asserts that “the false and dazzling Light of the outward Reason of the Soul” is so elusive that man takes human reason to be divine” (38). Similarly, for Lead human reason is purely corporeal, so it is not a justifiable agency to elicit substantial truth about God. In her appraisal, the exploration of human knowledge is insufficient for illuminating Heavenly Wisdom.

Writing during an early English Enlightenment, Lead might sound superstitious to the thinkers who regard rationality as a supreme means to acquire divine knowledge. Lead’s theosophy features anti-rationality, which intellectuals characterized as insanity in that era (Jasper 92). As a staunch Anglican, Mary Astell (1666-1731) trumpets the advantages of rationality to women’s faith rather than affective sensitivity. Hailed as “the first English feminist,” Astell proclaims in *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* that true piety derives from the intelligence to perceive God’s goodness and wisdom. She discloses a great apprehension about the “old By-paths of obscure and unintelligible Doctrines” and the use of languages unfamiliar to most people, such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Persian (Astell 47). Therefore, she asserts that the truth in Holy Scriptures is straightforward when delivered in the vernacular language. Astell’s concern directly addresses the possibility of misrepresentation and appropriation when delivering doctrines in an obscure language. This suspicion is consistent with that of Lead, though they recognize language in quite divergent ways. The vernacular is the means to communicate and sanction God’s Word, while human language for Lead could be more a hindrance to the mediation of divine wisdom.

Lead often takes advantage of metonymic metaphors to address ontological issues. The cloven tongue in Lead’s vision also displays the supreme means for transmitting God’s message and implies an instinctive capability to witness the presence of the Holy Spirit (*Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 493). A cloven tongue in Lead’s vision displays the supreme means for transmitting God’s messages. The distinct shape of the tongue and the peculiar sound it makes manifest a transcendental medium that mediates God’s knowledge in a form that is distinct from ordinary speech and language. The cloven tongue metaphor antagonizes the restrictive demand for speech by showing that

profound repercussions in the universe could be more inspiring than human languages—both spoken and written—since it can transmit multiple meanings simultaneously through unspeakable pulsation and silence (*Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 102). The oxymoron of an inspiring tongue yielding no voice indicates a super-sensual approach to the perception of divine knowledge purely through deific inspiration, rather than rationality and reasoning. Symbolizing a superior medium for spiritual communication, the cloven tongue accordingly celebrates divine enlightenment through instinctive perception, not doctrinal knowledge.

For Lead, vision is a superior form of revelation to the letter. She refers to medieval male theologians' ambiguous language and metaphysical discourse for revealing God's Truth to show their differences. Instead of explicating divine knowledge in detail, some theologians' interpretations might shroud God's wisdom with ambiguity to boost ecclesiastical authority. On the contrary, Lead prefers an instinctive perception of God's presence instead of scholasticism, since divine knowledge interpreted in dead languages might turn out to be distortion. Therefore, in "The Epistle to the Reader" she reckons it impossible to interpret God's Word rationally, because it cannot be accomplished by "Knowledge, Wisdom, or Understanding from without, but . . . from the fresh rising upsprings of the Holy Spirit which plentifully opened themselves Within" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 4). Without divine inspiration, it is totally beyond human capacity to perceive and illustrate the presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, visions should not be treated merely as hallucinations arising out of superstitious zeal, but rather as:

a true proof of [one's] ministry, refined from the Dreggs of all mixed and muddy Springs, attending upon that great Angel of the everlasting Covenant's moving in the pure Pool and Centre of the Soul's Essence, wherefrom may arise and flow the fresh Anointings: as true Priests, that may feed and nourish your Auditors with sound Wisdom and Knowledge in the Divine Mysteries, and then right Evangelists you will be: reviving that Apostolical Doctrine. (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, "Epistle")

Lead hails vision as a superb form through which to gain access to profound knowledge of God. On the other hand, the quoted passage verifies her wish to be a figure delivering apostolic messages.

Lead favors highly visualized imagery such as a crystalline figure and the Sea of Glass to represent the transparency of God's knowledge. In one of her visions, a crystal figure is formed and compared to a new bottle that contains "the holy acting power" composed of all "Celestial Matter," admitting no cloudy matters to blemish God's glory (*Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 5). The "cloudy matters" refer to varieties of verbal interpretation that might mislead people into idolatry and disbelief. Lead vividly illustrates with concrete embodiment how a mortal body imbued with the Spirit transforms into a celestial body of high clarity and transparency. Such ontological metaphors reveal the broad spectrum and easy accessibility of divine illumination.

Lead formulates different approaches to impart esoteric knowledge into people of distinct temperaments—"the Unlearned and Ignorant in this Method and Way of the Spirit's Manifestation" and those who have been "initiated into . . . Mystick and Supersensual Wisdom" (*Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 14). For each type, there are proper ways for them to claim divine grace. Those who are illiterate have to "become Simple and Child-like, and adventure upon the Conduct and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit," while she warns the initiated of the danger of pride. She alerts her readers to keep very low when entering into a self-annihilation so that "the All-Deifick Unction may arise as an overflowing Tide," for there is still a growing Tree of Life, that reneweth all Variety of Wisdom" (vol. 1, pp. 14-15). Because Lead believes that one has to empty herself before spiritually fulfilled, she hails nothingness and emptiness as a crucial mode in one's union with God. This view bears a striking similarity with Anna Maria van Schurman's principle that self-denial is essential to participation in the spiritual process through which the soul is embraced by God's comprehensiveness until it ultimately "become[s] immersed, surrounded, penetrated, and filled with divinity" (Lee 208). The two female mystics' thoughts concerning self-denial resonate with Meister Eckhart's theological philosophy.

Although the connection between Eckhart von Hochheim (also known as Meister Eckhart [c. 1260-1328]) and Lead has not received sufficient critical attention, Lead's theology finds a striking parallel in Eckhart's notion of

existence.² Both mystics perceive the importance of self-annihilation before merging with God's spirit. A detached heart reposed in "a naked nothingness" is the most receptive (Eckhart 292). Perception of God's existence is beyond a sensory experience or intellectual pursuit, but is instead a transcendental unification with the divine spirit. As Meister Eckhart does, Lead envisions two kinds of Man. One is the outer Man with the five senses serving him. The other is the inner Man referring to one's inwardness. The former refers to sensuality, while the latter works through the spiritual power of the soul. Lead's metaphors that connote detachment are similar to those of Meister Eckhart's. Similarly, the tree of life in Lead's visionary garden keeps growing and multiplying since the divine knowledge is infinite and as unfathomable as "the Ocean of what is Mysterious and Wonderful for Knowledge" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 14). Therefore, the pursuers of divine knowledge should first empty themselves before entering into union with God to be fully receptive to God's Word and Spirit. Both mystics know well the magnitude of unity with God for acquiring the supreme divine knowledge.

Nonetheless, when Eckhart emphasizes outer Man's sensuality and inner Man's spirituality, Lead further accentuates the androgynous nature of the inward eternal Man. Being well aware of the theological tradition to associate men with the spiritual and women with the corporeality, Lead undertakes to blur the distinction between the body and spirit to modulate the unjust polarity. Unlike male theologians, Lead does not have a negative view against the body nor does she take it as an unchangeable form.³ Instead, it is more like "[t]rees of a new Plantation" that will grow into fruitfulness with "the first and second Birth degrees of Regeneration" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, pp. 7-8). The interdependence of the body and the spirit endows the corruptible entity a transcendental existence. In contrast to the image of mortality and corruption, the body nourished with "Blood of the New-Testament" turns into an

² Ronald Pietsch highlights the unity in the theosophy of three German mystics in "The Spiritual Vision: Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius" (*Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol. 13, nos. 3 & 4, 1979, www.studiesincomparativereligion.com, accessed 12 May 2021). Though there is little evidence of Lead's reading Meister Eckhart, it is reasonable to speculate that the connection of the two mystics might be derived from her knowledge of Jacob Boehme and testifies to the influence of the European mystical tradition on Lead.

³ Suffering from ailments and blindness in her old cage, Lead often likened her body to a "filthy receptacle, her burden, her prison, her age and her old torn dress" (Hirst 125). See F. Lee, "Der Seelig" 4-7, cited in N. Thune, *The Behmenists and The Philadelphians* 213-16 (Almquist & Wiksells Boktrycker Ab, 1948); for a full exploration of Lead's view of physical infirmities, see Hirst, *Jane Leade* 124-36.

ever-developing organism capable of positive development. Consequently, the body is not necessarily an embodiment of sinful corruption but a vital entity for absorbing nutrients from the Spirit to reach a perfect union with it. Instead of polarizing the physical and the spiritual, Lead envisions a mutually compatible relationship like the one between *yin* and *yang* in Taoism as demonstrated in Chao's study aforementioned. The concept of complementary makes the feminine qualities indispensable to get rid of the offensive elements in humanity.

Based on the idea of evolution rather than a dichotomy, the body in Lead's vision represents distinct levels of spirituality. In the representation of Christian piety, the body was often "a site of tension, the locus of sensual and erotic pleasure" as well as "the earthly pattern of God's image, the representation of what lies beyond representation, the mirror that renders visible the invisible" (Wolfson 84). Stefania Salvadori illustrates how Lead takes advantage of the metaphor of rebirth to assert that material corporeality and spirituality should not "be reduced to mere opposition and mutual exclusion" (144). Lead envisions that body and spirit are in perfect union as a twofold Body. Instead of being polarized elements that are mutually exclusive, they are inseparable; thus, the essence of one's spirit may sabotage the quality of his/her body. A vile body indicates that "corruptible Humanity in its fleshly Figure is too mean for the high Birth degree of the Eternal Spirit" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, pp. 10-11). The Body of Sin is different from the Body of Mortality, the corporeal form of Christ assumed before ascension. After his resurrection, Christ assumes various forms such as a Body of Celestial Clarity, Eagle-Body, and Sapphire Body (vol. 2, pp. 12-15). The assorted forms manifest how Jesus in Lead's vision goes through a transformation of various degrees, showing the possibility for "a voluntary, mystical Transformation" that involves an act of volition to unify the body and the bright spirit to achieve salvation (vol. 2, p. 16). Lead dissociates women from despicable corporeality to make divine grace an accessible approach for women's redemption.

Unlike Neoplatonists, Lead rarely expounds Christian mysticism in a dark language since she does not see her mystical experiences from the perspective of negation. Most medieval Christian Neoplatonists employed the metaphors of "interiority, ascent, light and darkness, oneness with God" to describe their mystical experiences by focusing on "negativity" (Turner 4). With the same set of metaphors, Lead's mystical writings virtually twist them around.

Her description of God's union and her soul portrays it as the blissful matrimony of a perfect match. One of the methods that Lead promotes for perceiving God and Christ is "[t]ransportation in Spirit, and yet alive in the Body" in order to receive

the Highest Vision-Ministration, the full extent of his Will and Mind . . . as if we were out of the Body of Corporeity, while yet in the body; as Supersensualized to know, and behold purely, through the Organical Properties of the Spirit, according as every Object in Heavenly Places in their Order do move in reference to our Cohabitation with those Circulations through the Spiritual Body. (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, pp. 12-13)

The emphasis on the body/spirit union rebuffs the disparaging view that associates women with negative qualities such as sensual yearnings and emotional instability. This argument demonstrates a unique way to perceive divine knowledge to upgrade human qualities to be receptive to divine revelation. In this case, feminine qualities become the stepping-stone to deliver women from everlasting condemnation.

Presenting the threefold state of Man, Lead lays bare the process in which the creation of a New Adam takes place. The first state refers to the dejected Adam, who suffers from toiling upon a rocky ground, which yields no fruit of any sort. Like a mirror, the barren land reflects the spiritual chaos and hollowness in Adam, who has been changed inwardly "into a Confused, Barren, and dead Life" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 31). In the second state, Adam enjoys fruitfulness through tough work and spiritual tillage. Assuming a mortal form, Adam is still doomed to suffer all worldly qualities before they rise "in a Body of Clarity, Joy, Renown, and Honour" (33). Nevertheless, in this state, mortality persists. "The Holy Grain" will become "the Root of an Immortal Spirit, Soul, and Body, to make all in one Being intire in one incorruptible Figure: All Pure, Clear, Light, Glorious in Spirit, and Glorious in Body" (36). The imagery pervasive in this vision is tillage, which reminds readers of the parable of grains of wheat. Despite its barrenness, Christ assures his apostles that the death of the grain of wheat brings forth the resurrection of a purer self. After filtering all the gross elements, Adam becomes a celestial "bride" for Christ. Feminine qualities make Adam's soul wholesome and comprehensive.

Julian of Norwich might be considered an inspiration for Lead's expansion of the imagery of Virgin Wisdom from a feminist perspective. Acutely aware of the pervasive presence of male imagery in the exclusive theological language of the Christian tradition, Lead counters against it in various ways. Julian of Norwich addresses God as the unity of "strength and goodness of fatherhood," "the wisdom of motherhood," and "the light and grace of holy love" (139). Unlike most male Christian theologians who were reluctant to elaborate on God's motherhood due to the church's fundamentally patriarchal structure, Julian of Norwich disregarded the conventional notion of women's satanic nature and causes. She took after a popular trend in the twelfth century to project God in the image of a mother (McNamer 21). Virgin Wisdom, a metaphor fundamental to Julian's theosophy, represents God as a supreme divinity that features masculine and feminine qualities. In terms of motherhood and fatherhood, Julian envisions the juxtaposition of the masculine and feminine qualities in God. The imagery characterizes Sophia Wisdom as the embodiment of divine reason and supersensual perception.

Adopting the same tradition, Lead visualizes her relationship with Virgin Wisdom as mother and daughter to encourage women's active involvement in spiritual pursuits. She compares those who need spiritual consolation to children "[w]eaned children from every other Breast." The eternal mother bestows her babies with "all Wisdom and Understanding [that] doth stream forth Intellectuality, which is growing Nutriment, as it doth pass Radically into the Soul, as the Blood doth into the Veins" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 8). Both males and females gain benefits from their mothers' nursing; therefore, this universal experience makes it evident that both men and women can be divinely inspired. By comparing spiritual nourishment to breastfeeding, Lead shows that receiving divine grace from God is a boon as natural as suckling milk from a mother's breast. Divine grace, instinctive and attainable effortlessly like maternal affection, is thus for both sexes, not just for the male. Without accusing the ecclesiastical authorities of being patriarchal, Lead readily elevates women to a higher position to sanctify their legitimacy to receive God's favor.

Moreover, Lead derives the imagery of mystical marriage between Christ and Virgin Wisdom from a predecessor, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). In *The Threefold Life of Man*, the Teutonic prophet portrays Sophia as a driving force to initiate Christ into the Trinity (Boehme 138). Under the guidance of His bride, the corporal Christ gradually transmutes into a celestial being.

In *The Suprasensual Life*, the mystic presents worldly lust, Sophia's sensuous intimacy with her bridegroom, and the love of Divine Wisdom in a dialogic form (Boehme 175-79). Boehme explicates spiritual intimacy from a third-person perspective. In contrast, Lead identifies herself with not only the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12.5 but also the daughter of Virgin Wisdom to verify her apocalyptic figure. At the onset of *A Fountain of Gardens*, Lead envisions the visitation of Sophia, the Virgin Wisdom, who instructs her in the divine knowledge. She describes herself as spiritually desolate as "a parched Desert" that needs "the Waters of the Sanctuary." She likens Virgin Wisdom to a fountain delivering her "the Essential Word" to quench her spiritual yearning in her widowhood (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 7). Due to her experiential encounter, Lead speaks of Sophia in a tone more ardent than that of Boehme.

Instead of encoding divine knowledge with metaphysical discourse, Lead consistently associates it with other metaphors related to daily experience. Going to the market—a typical daily activity—is seldom recognized as an essential metaphor to perceive God's existence. However, as an ontological metaphor, going to the market in Lead's journal embodies the process of divine perception. To manifest easy access to God's wisdom, Lead instead compares the process of getting to know God to going to the "Heavenly Mart, that is Stocked and all fully Replenished with Goods, brought out from Wisdom's Land" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 173). Nonetheless, it is not that easy to purchase the celestial goods with earthly currencies. To perceive His Wisdom, the believers must possess "the Currant Coyn of the Great King of Heaven" which could be procured only through staunch faith and benevolence (174). The metaphor displays Lead's creativity in deploying elements of ordinary secular experience as a means to explicate her mystical experiences and evoke a sense of involvement in her readers.

Similarly, the Philadelphian prophet conjoins her numinous experiences with other quotidian activities to expand the prime sense of the mystical marriage between Christ and Virgin Wisdom—an approach aimed at engendering faith in people who may not have had a personal encounter with the divine in a mystical sense. Weaving serves as a metaphor that refers to the formative process of a pure spirit to strengthen "the stereotype of the virtuous woman accomplished in the art of weaving" and to display the mystical marriage between the human soul and Virgin Wisdom (Hirst 85). Due to the

transforming power of the marriage, prudent selection of materials for the bridal dress is a prerequisite, whereas careful artistry is equally essential:

it must not mingle its Stock with the stuff of Egypt. No more is it to Weave in the worldly Spirit, with the Spirit of Faith's interest, lest it makes a rent in Christ's seamless Robe. Which is singly spun out from the Golden Fleece of the Lamb of God. Who is to shine forth free from all mixture, upon those who are to make no other Web, but what the Shuttle of Faith can strike through, for substantiality Be though as that Vertuous Woman, whose Candle goeth not out by Night, laying the hand of faith to the spindle of the Spirit and draw out to the longest thread of faith which may make thee fine Linnen and Purple: So Beauty, Strength, and Honour may be thy Cloathing.

(Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 53)

The tools and materials for weaving help to intimate that forming a pure spirit is like weaving a piece of exceptional cloth with unadulterated substance. This common metaphor intensely urges readers to stay away from paganism or pantheism, lest they disrupt their spiritual sanctity. Though the Golden Fleece in Greek mythology represents a substance that possesses strong magic potency to make a country strong and wealthy, it reminds readers of Medea's subsequent murders. The tragedy underlying the mythological story serves as a sharp contrast to "the Golden Fleece of the Lamb of God" that can be woven with "the Shuttle of Faith" into "a Robe . . . to make the Bride look all Comely and Fair" (54). Instilling pure spirit into one is like weaving and tailoring a piece of celestial cloth into a marriage garment for Christ's Bride. Faith is compared to a handicraft and Virgin Wisdom a skillful worker who can tailor a "Vesture of Glory" in "the Work-House, where nothing of the rational Craft can be admitted" (54). In an age when the textile industry was booming, the meticulous weaving metaphor to reveal the transforming power of Virgin Wisdom could be highly appealing to women and the lower social orders for understanding how to cultivate the right belief.

Lead also employs other items of daily use as religious metaphors. White linen and veils connote distinct symbolic meanings, respectively. When a piece of white linen functions to shroud a dead body, it first symbolizes "Pale Death,"

which prevents the enlightenment in human intelligence (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 166). Thus, white linen denotes the divine sanctuary that helps resist the intrusion of paganism and a superficial understanding of God's mystery. On the other hand, linen is a strangling instrument that encumbers the existence of the Holy Ghost. While white linen functions as a medium to gain access to eternity, veils symbolize hindrances, like solid walls in-between that stop humanity from seeing the truth of God (89). In addition, Lead sees a bizarre creature under "a green Cloath-Covering . . . sown over a White Sheet . . . under which there . . . appeared a Lamb pure and white, with sparkling Eyes as Flames of Fire" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 71). The veil signifies Satan's jealousy against the creation of human beings in God's image. Under the green covering, the influence of jealousy renders man so powerless that he cannot bring forth the "Virgin Female property" that Virgin Wisdom bestows (vol. 2, pp. 74-75). Rending the veil consisting of harsh elements in humanity implies stripping off the base nature that debilitates humans from reaching the state of perfection (*Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 89). The metaphors of linen and veil demonstrate a stark contrast to reveal human propensity to wickedness and sanctity.

Furthermore, the trope of clothing insinuates that both men and women have the capabilities to purge the original sin incurred with Adam and Eve's violation of God's law. As Hirst suggests, clothing in Revelation 19.8 is imagery to explicate how humans can turn into celestial beings (86). In the Book of Genesis, clothing symbolizes their loss of innocence and the first stigma of human disobedience. To rid the original sin of womankind, Lead envisages the rise of "a New Generation, that clothed upon will be with such as Mantle, as is interwoven with Light, Wisdom, Knowledge, and Flaming Power" (*Fountain*, vol. 1, p. 15). Additionally, Lead describes the transformative procedure through which the corporeal Eve turns into a Sapphire-like body when Virgin Wisdom draws her Virgin Veil of Purity to personate her. The connection between Christ and the Virgin Wisdom is like an overwhelming outer layer to protect females from Satan's temptation. The metaphor suggests that women equipped with divine knowledge could be in union with God to become a symbol of perfection. The clothing trope illustrates women's potential to garnish their spirits with such gorgeous robes of spirituality. This reasoning offers an antidote to the Biblical allusion to the fig leaves to cover up human shame. Clothing in Lead's visions functions as a symbolic medium of divine

grace that enriches true Christians within and without, thus enacting a thorough spiritual transformation that denies the dichotomy of the body and the soul.

Lead utilizes various kinds of birds in *A Fountain of Gardens* to represent Virgin Wisdom's transforming power to actualize the enactment of universal salvation. In one of her visions, a slain bird placed in her hand instantly turns into a magical fruit that can make its eaters incorruptible. The fruit is no longer the symbol of "unlawful and forbidden temptation," but is instead a fruit that contains "the divine Magia Spirit" to help with the "recovery of the Paradisiacal Sinless Body." The bird's transformation into a fruit epitomizes the death of the physical body and the birth of "some Spiritual and Powerful quality, for Spiritual meat, to feed upon" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 43). The metamorphosis suggests a human potential for redemption. The garden and the fruit are suggestive of the Garden of Eden and the tree of life. Like the bird capable of rebirth, Lead envisions how a sinful body transforms into a pure spirit. She also lays bare the ways to wash away the shameful stigma placed on women for Eve's first wicked bite. With her "Spiritual piercing Eye," that is, her visionary capacity, she is thus qualified to taste the fruit guarded by "the Holy Watcher" (43). As a second Eve purged of the original sin, women are capable of transmuting into spiritual entities safeguarded by divine grace and liberate themselves from the stereotype of iniquitous *femme fatales*. Considered from the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory, the above-mentioned metaphors are notable examples of how a physical substance might be used to signify an inherent spiritual essence.

Lead's visionary imagery, likewise, reflects fundamental ideological differences developed after the Reformation. As Effie Botonaki points out, the most conspicuous changes lie in "the abandonment of most church rites and the elimination of the priest as a mediator between God and His people" (44). Lead's adaptation of the imagery alluding to Catholic rituals manifests an innovative representation of Protestant theology. In *The Tree of Faith*, Lead decries all "Formal Worships" established by humans and "constituted by Rational Invention." Although Lead partially follows the biblical tradition in her employment of metaphors, such as the serpent as the vicious tempter and lily as a symbol of purity, she prefers to coin some new terms to avoid direct references to Catholic symbols and the Eucharist ritual. For example, she refers to the wedding feast that celebrates the high Matrimonial Unity between the Lamb and his Bride to "the Banqueting Feast of Bread and Wine" (Lead,

Fountain, vol. 2, p. 23). Furthermore, the magical cup in her vision resembles the Holy Grail, the chalice receiving Christ's blood. These metaphors show a Protestant imagery system. Comparing the mystical union between Virgin Wisdom and the soul to the nuptial consummation between Christ and the New Jerusalem-Bride, Lead envisages that all those beings involved are drawn into "the High Celestial, and Spiritual Pasture and Fold" under the protection of the "kingly Shepherd" (*Wars* 35). As a result, whoever believes in Christ's teachings could enter a harmonious union with God. The detailed description encourages all readers to foster a sense of belonging, regardless of gender. The universal life experience displaces the male supremacy in traditional theological interpretation.

Under the influence of Protestant theology, Lead partially alters the representation of baptismal ritual to subdue its Catholic connotation (Fleming).⁴ Although Lead recognizes baptism as a ritual to purify human souls, she replaces the holy water with sacred fire. She sees how people become stronger after receiving "Fire-Baptism," which testifies to God's saving power in humanity to fulfill a redemption (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 89). The baptism of water "consummates the very real Birth of the Holy Ghost, which will absolutely make a perfect and fixed Change through the whole Nature" only when it is supplemented with the baptism of fire (14). A series of metaphors in Lead's visions further highlight the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of scorching flames to underscore the importance of fire in soul purification. Those who wish to be spiritually refined must suffer "the touch of the Flaming-Bush" (91). In addition, Lead envisions a flaming tent spread to shelter people from devastation. When describing her vision of the altars of earth, brass, and gold, Lead underlines the Holy Spirit's "descent upon the Altar, with Serephick fire, as a Testimony of acceptance" (100). The sacrificial ritual will "bring down "Fire-Celestial upon the Altar, as a Testimony that Christ in Spirit hath slain in us the Earthly-Life afresh" (105). The detailed description shows Christ's presence as fire on the altar and its connection with ministrations.

Although male and female mystics might call attention to women-centered mysticism, they could have distinct perceptions. For example, Swedenborg recognizes male and female as "reflections of this divine duality and

⁴ Steve Fleming asserts that Lead exerted some influence on the Ephrata Cloister in baptizing for the dead.

interconnection of love and wisdom,” although he seems to downplay the importance of Wisdom as the female aspect of God (Ruether 237-38). Lead, in contrast, emphasizes Sophia Wisdom as the feminine aspect of God. The androgynous elements present a perfect balance between the masculine and the feminine. In Lead’s envisioning, men and women are not mutually exclusive but complementary (*Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 118). It is a stratagem for Lead to assert female mysticism without excluding the masculine and justify a worldview encompassing harmonious co-existence of femininity and masculinity, rather than gender polarization. She adopts an inclusive view without expelling men from the world where women exist. To elevate women’s position in the Christian belief, Lead represents Virgin Wisdom as a sapphire-like body. She no longer appears in the form of a bodily substance. Instead, it is “a spotless Lilly . . . sprout[ed] out of the Immaculate Body, and shall be watered from the Heavens so fair and lovely that she will be elected for the Lamb’s Bride and Mate, who raised is to the high Eagle state” (vol. 2, p. 127). By transposing and reconfiguring the corporeal qualities of Virgin Wisdom, Lead further endows women with the legitimacy to preach.

Depicting a propitious world under the governance of divine wisdom, Lead visualizes a novel understanding of the Christian belief. The Virgin Mary had long been a significant and highly revered figure in the rituals of Catholic worship, but such exaltation might seem idolatrous and popish for Protestants; thus, there was a compelling need for an ideal alternative to compensate for the loss of female prominence after the devastation of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Lead illuminates a unique way for women to perceive the existence of divinity. Referring to Virgin Wisdom, Lead conflates the Virgin Mary with Christ to subvert the church’s patriarchal order and to endorse women’s identity as religious beings. The union with Christ imparts to her the divinity the Virgin Mary did not possess. As Christ’s bride, Virgin Wisdom again serves to help devoted female Christians to transcend their secular bodies and roles in the mundane world. Consequently, Virgin Wisdom symbolizes a formidable binding force to facilitate the transformation of sinful Eve into the church’s female builder.

The eagle symbolism prevalent in *A Fountain of Gardens* epitomizes the divine protective power that enables the transformation and redemption of Eve. In Deuteronomy 32.11 (*King James Bible Online*), a simile refers to God as protective as a mother eagle spreading her wing to protect her young when

sheltering Jacob. In Lead's diaries, eagles have similar connotations of strength, aggressiveness, and self-assertiveness. Eve, deprived of her "Virgin Eagle Body" due to the fall, has swooned into "a slumbering Death, in Folly, Weakness, and Dishonour" (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 106). With the help of the Tree of Life, Eve was resurrected as a mighty Eagle "in the Strength and Honour of the Eternal Virgin Wisdom of God" who "will more wisely build her Nest" (vol. 2, p. 106). Her Nest here implies a new Church to be established:

For now she will be dignified with the Spirit of Virgin Wisdom to outvie the Serpents Subtlety, according as it is written, She now will build her House, or Nest, more sure, to wit upon seven Silver Pillars. Which do present, the Seven Eagle Birds, which were seen in vision; they Wisdoms first Brood shall be through Eve's Wombs Restoration, who will bring forth a most glorious Church in the Earth, without Spot or Wrinkle. Wisdom hath made choice of *Eve*, for to be her Mate (that is the lapsed soul of the inward Man,) whose hand must help to build this Nest for her. Thus choice Eagle Spirits, will be raised up, out of old *Eves* [sic] Dust for this use and service, to be Members of this perfect Church on Earth. You may evidently see with an Eagle Eye, that thus, and after this sort, a new Virgin Body must be raised up by Virgin Wisdom in this world, for the Spouse, and Church of Christ, and so for every Member of that Body; and so consequently for every lapsed eternal soul to be cloathed upon with its new Virgin Body.
(vol. 2, pp. 106-07)

Lead illustrates Virgin Wisdom's task in rejuvenating Eve to restore the church. After sinning against God, both Adam and Eve suffered a loss more significant than their innocence. They "lost the Life of the Virgin Wisdom of God, and their Virgin Purity in Paradise," which cannot be restored until they achieve reunion with the Virgin Wisdom of God (vol. 2, p. 110). As a lapsed soul of the inward Man, she becomes a chosen helpmate of Wisdom for building a glorious Church. The portrayal of Eve's union with Wisdom suggests their constructive power to facilitate the transformation of the Christian religion. Accordingly, the transformative process is more crucial to Eve than to Adam due to the restoration of her reproductive force. As a mortal sinner, Eve is infertile. After

the Virgin Wisdom sows virgin seeds into the womb of Eve, she will give birth to twin sons and “bring forth a perfect Eagle Off-spring,” who “shall make a perfect Church on Earth” (vol. 2, p. 112). With divine wisdom, Eve will forsake her sinful body to take a superior position. Eve’s metaphorical transfiguration in Lead’s writing endorses women with a higher status in religious belief. The elevation of women’s status challenges the ban on their religious opinions as well as the resistance to women preaching. The prominent portrayal of Virgin Wisdom was widely recognized in the Philadelphian Society. Corresponding to Lead’s view of women, Ann Bathurst likewise engaged in constructing “a female millenarian reformer elected by God” to deliver apocalypse in a time of social and political agitation (qtd. in Bouldin 89). Both Lead and Bathurst were devoted to setting up a female apocalyptic figure to enhance a sense of authority. Endowing women with the power of preaching becomes the means to fulfill the imperative millenarian mission of delivering society from distress and predicaments.

The Glassy Book in Lead’s Vision is a symbolic representation of the ministry to reveal women’s indispensable existence for an apocalyptic mission. With “[l]eaves . . . transparent as the flaming light” (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 245), the Book does not refer to any physical publication, but one undecipherable without the instruction of Seraphim. Awakening from a trance, Lead hears that “there should be a clear and pure Gospel Ministry, not by man, nor after man, but by and according to the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (vol. 2, p. 247). The instruction warns people of a ministry exclusively accessible due to gender difference and supports “unmixed Ministration” as manifested in Paul’s calling (vol. 2, p. 241). This statement is an emphatic assertion to recruit women for the ministry; that is, ministration is not a mission exclusively for males since Christ’s revelation is the principle to follow, not any human interpretations. The contents of the Glassy Book signify the transparent deliverance of God’s revelation instead of the biased explanations in abstruse languages. In Lead’s female-centered vision, Virgin Wisdom endows woman “her original capacity to give birth from herself and bring forth new humanity, no longer split into male and female, soul and body, but united in renewed harmony as God’s image and self-expression” (Ruether 236). Androgyny signifies completeness of the Church, which is regarded as Christ’s body; without women’s participation, the Church is somewhat mutilated and imperfect. Hence admitting androgyny in Christ wedded to Wisdom

pronounces the denial of gender polarization to make Lead's theology more comprehensive and envisages a wholesome ecclesiastical polity.

Lead's visions confirm the authority of *Melchizedek* priesthood. King of Salem is granted authority to officiate in ceremonies as the incarnation of Christ in Flesh (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 2, p. 18). Nevertheless, Lead does not stop short at the justification of the exclusively male ministry. She further demonstrates how God instructs her to abandon her corporeality and "all sensitive Operations" to enter a "slumbering Trance" (vol. 2, p. 25). Transcending from the Body of Sin into "the Heavenly Form of a Powerful Body" helps her become a member of the "Royal Priesthood" (vol. 2, pp. 15-16). The deportation from the nefarious body to the cherubic form symbolizes invigorating purification of the soul in a state of trance. The vision is significant in affirming the possibility for women to be members serving in the Priesthood. Envisioning a more inclusive priesthood, Lead is also aware of the urgent need for a distinct type other than Levitical Priesthood, which sprung from the male line. It upholds a priesthood in faith arising from "a perfect pure Heart" and "a Celestial Ministry" multiplying like stars (Lead, *Fountain*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 26). Therefore, devotion and true belief warrant one's legitimacy to preach, not his/her gender. Without giving men's preaching role a lower profile, Lead mandates full recognition of the crucial role of women in ministry that features a spirit of egalitarianism.

Some visions shown in *A Fountain of Gardens* manifest a correspondence between Lead's religious convictions and those of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen (Petersen von Merlau), one of the leading radical figures in German Pietism, a reform movement that prospered from the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century. This Protestant movement stressed internal transformation of the individual and the Reformed churches. One of the most promiscuous metaphors in Petersen's visions is related to "the father, the mother, and the son as the dove spirit," suggesting that the Holy Spirit in Trinity is replaced with "a feminine gender like a fruit-bearing mother and a hatching dove" (22). This revelation resonates with Lead's vision of Sophia Wisdom as the feminine aspect of divinity. The notions of universal salvation and women's ministry are prominent in Lead and Petersen, thus demonstrating an affinity between Lead and the German Pietist community. Female potency contributing to the spiritual union with Trinity can be a healing power to women who have long been excluded from the patriarchal stronghold.

Lead's visions present a clear view of the connection between humanity and divinity, the means to achieve spiritual perfection, and the mystical union between one's soul and Heavenly Wisdom. Unlike dogmatic theologians who treated intellectual learning as a crucial means to initiate humans into the divine knowledge, Lead does not rely heavily on cryptic theological elaboration or abstract terminologies. Instead, she manipulates palpable similes, parables, and metaphors to render her spiritual meditations more approachable. Through figurative and metaphorical language, the female mystic illustrates God's manifestation of mysteries in her visions as well as the transforming process of spiritual rebirth. With extended attributes, her vivid depictions of the unknown evoke faith in God. The deliberate choices of metaphors reflect her efforts to reveal women's potential spirituality through her first-person experiences with God, a supreme presence beyond ordinary people's perception. To make theology more approachable, Lead emphasizes daily involvement in earthly affairs to create a break from the unintelligible verbal representation of divine-human relationships. Together with like-minded female mystics, the female visionary applies the androgynous image of Christ more vigorously to uphold women's religious identity as believers and ministers. Ridden of the sinful element, the body keeps purifying and refining until it can elevate to a celestial state that transcends physical, mental, and gender boundaries to escape spiritual distress. Lead's symbolic metonymies serve to manifest a dynamic fusion of the human body, mind, and spirit that characterizes the Philadelphian metaphorical system with complete harmony and spiritual restoration.

Works Cited

- Astell, Mary. *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England*. R. Wilkin, 1705.
- Boehme, Jacob. *The Suprasensual Life*. 1682. Translated by William Law, 1781. *Jacob Boehme Online*, 2018, jacobboehmeonline.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/The_Suprasensual_Life.18691347.pdf. Accessed 16 May 2021.
- . *The Threefold Life of Man*. 1620. Translated by John Sparrow, 1650. Kindle ed., Kraus House, 2014.
- . *The Way to Christ*. 1622. Kindle ed., Postomorrow Books, 2018.
- Botonaki, Effie. *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings: Disclosing Enclosures*. Edwin Mellen, 2004.
- Bouldin, Elizabeth. "'Clothed with the Sun': Ann Bathurst, Behmenism, and Gendered Prophecy." *Women Prophets and Radical Protestantism in the British Atlantic World, 1640-1730*, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 89-118.
- Capern, Amanda L. "Jane Lead and the Tradition of Puritan Pastoral Theology." Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 91-117.
- Chao, Tien-yi. "Representations of the 'Feminine Universe' in the *Laozi* and Jane Lead's Visions of Sophia." *International Communication of Chinese Culture*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, pp. 75-91. *Springer*, doi:10.1007/S40636-017-0086-1.
- Eckhart. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*. Translated and edited by Bernard McGinn and Edmund Colledge, Paulist Press, 1981.
- Fleming, Steve. "Jane Lead and the Restoration; or, In Praise Our Heavenly Mother." *Juvenile Instructor*, juvenileinstructor.org/jane-lead-and-the-restoration-or-in-praise-our-heavenly-mother/. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.
- Hessayon, Ariel, editor. *Jane Lead and Her Transnational Legacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- . "Jane Lead and the Philadelphians." *Early Modern Prophecies in Transnational, National, and Regional Contexts*, vol. 3, edited by Lionel Laborie and Ariel Hessayon, Brill, 2020, pp. 31-157.
- . "Lead's Life and Times (Part Two): The Woman in the Wilderness." Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 39-69.

- Hirst, Julie. *Jane Leade: Biography of a Seventeenth-Century Mystic*. Ashgate, 2005.
- Jacobs, Bridget M. “‘A Prophecy out of the Past’: Contrasting Treatments of Jane Lead among Two North American Twentieth-Century Millenarian Movements: Mary’s City of David and the Latter Rain.” Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 267-89.
- Jasper, Alison. “Female Genius: Jane Leade (1642-1704).” *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces*, edited by Heather Walton, Routledge, 2011, pp. 80-97.
- Johnston, Warren. “Jane Lead and English Apocalyptic Thought in the Late Seventeenth Century.” Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 119-42.
- Julian of Norwich. *Revelation of Divine Love*. Translated by Elizabeth Spearing, Penguin, 1988.
- King James Bible Online*, www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Deuteronomy-32-11/. Accessed 9 June 2022.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Kindle ed., U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Lead, Jane. *A Fountain of Gardens*. Vol. 1, edited by Francis Lee, J. Bradford, 1696. *Early English Books*, name.umdl.umich.edu/A49866.0001.001.
- . *A Fountain of Gardens*. Vol. 2, London. 1697. *Early English Books*, name.umdl.umich.edu/A49867.0001.001.
- . *A Fountain of Gardens*. Vol. 3, Part 1, 1700. *Internet Archive*, 5 June 2018, [ark:/13960/t4jm93q5j](https://www.archive.org/details/13960/t4jm93q5j).
- . *A Fountain of Gardens*. Vol. 3, Part 2, 1701. *Internet Archive*, 5 June 2018, [ark:/13960/t3tv1fz00](https://www.archive.org/details/13960/t3tv1fz00).
- . *The Tree of Faith or the Tree of Life, Springing up in the Paradise of God from which All the Wonders of the New Creation, in the Virgin Church of the First-born of Wisdom Must Proceed*. J. Bradford, 1696. *Early English Books*. Accessed 22 Mar. 2022.
- . *The Wars of David and the Peaceable Reign of Solomon: Symbolizing the Times of Warfare and Refreshment of the Saints of the Most High God*. London, 1816. *Early English Books*, name.umdl.umich.edu/A88859.0001.001. Accessed 22 Mar. 2022.

- Lee, Bo Karen. "‘I Wish to be Nothing’: The Role of Self-Denial in the Mystical Theology of Anna Maria van Schurman." *Women, Gender and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Sylvia Brown, Brill, 2007, pp. 189-216.
- Lockley, Philip. "Jane Lead’s Prophetic Afterlife in the Nineteenth-Century English Atlantic." Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 241-66.
- Martin, Lucinda. "‘God’s Strange Providence’: Jane Lead in the Correspondence of Johann Georg Gichtel." Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 187-212.
- McNamer, Sarah. "The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Divine Love." *Mystic Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1, Mar. 1989, pp. 21-28. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20716905.
- Petersen, Johanna Eleonora. *The Life of Lady Johanna Eleonora Petersen, Written by Herself: Pietism and Women’s Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century Germany*. Translated by Barbara Becker-Cantarino, Kindle ed., U of Chicago P, 2005.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History*. U of California P, 2005.
- Salvadori, Stefania. "The Restitution of ‘Adam’s Angelical and Paradisiacal Body’: Jane Lead’s Metaphor of Rebirth and Mystical Marriage." Hessayon, *Jane Lead*, pp. 143-65.
- Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. *Words: Religious Language Matters*. Edited by Ernst van den Hemel and Asja Szafranec, Fordham UP, 2016.