

Ariel Hessayon, ed., *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Hardcover, 304 pp., € 69,99.

Since the 1980s, there is one subject no study of early modern Christian mysticism can—or should—avoid: feminism. Ultimately, it was scholarship inspired by second-wave feminism that fostered the study of female religious in general and of female mystics in particular. This should not come as a surprise given the peculiar appeal early modern mysticism seemed to exercise among women. In an effort to explain the rise of the female mystic as a pivotal figure since the high Middle Ages, scholars usually turn to the symbolism of women being “empty vessels,” ready to be filled with God’s message. Due to their innate passivity, women were ascribed an exceptional receptivity to divine inspiration and by speaking and writing about their transcendental experiences in some cases even became spiritual leaders, thus sidestepping the Pauline exhortation that “women should remain silent” in public (1 Cor. 14:34). Hence, in addition to their debt to a feminist agenda, gender historians are required to explain these women’s relative agency. Speaking very superficially, older research in early modern women’s studies tends to portray female mystics as forerunners of twentieth-century feminism, who strategically chose to exploit patriarchal contradictions and, authorized by godly speech, to turn patriarchy against itself. This universalization of female self-assertion is no longer convincing. Instead of merging the female religious into a timeless struggle between male oppressors and oppressed females, more recent studies target the particular historical conditions in which these comparatively powerful women emerged.

Although it hardly engages in the discussion of theory and methodology, the collection *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy*, edited by Ariel Hessayon, could be seen as making this shift vivid. Jane Lead (1624–1704) was one of the most prolific female writers in early modern England. In her autobiography, Lead recalls her spiritual awakening on Christmas Day 1640 at the age of 16. However, she did not become widely known until the 1680s, assuming leadership of the Philadelphian Society for the Advancement of Divine Philosophy, a London-based congregation of followers of Jacob Boehme (c. 1575–1624). Widowed in 1670, she supposedly started publishing her own work in 1681—an activity that she pursued despite going blind in 1695, eventually having authored at least a dozen printed titles by the time of her death. “In the wake of Second Wave Feminism,” Hessayon states in his introductory essay, “it is unsurprising that within the last 20 years Lead’s reputation has undergone a remarkable ascent from the

depths of disdain to the peaks of veneration" (4). Rather than emphasizing Lead as an individual, this edited collection focuses on the larger contexts of her life. Whether discussing social relations with kin, friends, and neighbors or spiritual circles of mystics, prophets, and theosophists; whether analyzing the dissemination of letters, manuscripts, and books or the dispersal of ideas, concepts, and discourses, virtually all the contributors to the present book seem to be guided by the paradigm of the network.

In three chapters, Hessayon fleshes out the idea of the network. By unfolding Lead's life in three chronologically divided parts, he sets the biographical ground for the rest of the book. The first of these chapters spans Lead's birth to the death of her husband in 1670, the second the beginning of her widowhood to her blindness in 1695, and the third considers Lead's time at the center of the Philadelphian Society until her death in 1704. In what Hessayon says has been a "painstaking reconstruction" (14) of both well-known printed sources and newly discovered archival material, the chapters, taken together, demonstrate Lead's embeddedness in a variety of ramified networks. Admittedly, the enthusiasm aroused by the sources occasionally allows the narrative to drift off course. For instance, the account of the father of Lead's future husband, who served as a witness in a court proceeding against an alderman and former mayor of King's Lynn and who was charged with the sexual assault of two ship-boys, will scarcely yield a deeper understanding of Lead. Notwithstanding, it is precisely this rigid contextualism that provides important insights. Hessayon depicts Lead as a blatant religious dissenter in spite of the attempts to disguise her ties with radicalism in her autobiography, as well as in the biographical writings authored by contemporaries. Or, as Hessayon concludes in a reversal of the imagery Lead herself used extensively: "Lead was not a woman alone in the wilderness" (48).

The chapter written by Sarah Apetrei links Lead's massive textual production with a commonplace of mysticism, the ineffability of the mystical experience. Firmly grounded in apophatic theologies, mystical writers since at least Pseudo-Dionysius have refused to relate their encounter with the divine in an affirmative way, consequently arguing that transcendent experiences were impossible to articulate by means of worldly language. Mystical theology therefore privileged "ignorant sages"—visionary women, for instance—who distanced themselves from erudite theological writing and stressed that it was the divine guiding their pen. On the basis of two manuscript discoveries that in all likelihood can be attributed to Lead, Apetrei adds to the understanding of her attitude toward writing. Contrary

to what one might suspect, Lead seems to have seen writing as a spiritual exercise and ignored questions of wider circulation while recording her visions. From seven journal entries dated 1676, found in the British Library Sloane manuscripts, Apetrei convincingly deduces a certain haphazardness in Lead's writing and collecting practices. Apparently, Lead left the publication and preservation of her texts to the men surrounding her.

Amanda L. Capern explores the "domestic and feminised worship under charismatic female leadership" (109) that Lead aimed to promote among her followers. Capern situates Lead's teachings at the intersection between Puritan pastoral theology and Behmenism. The latter provided feminine imagery that Lead expanded to salvation in the feminine, but the success of Lead's gendered thinking at least in part depended on the former. Specifically, according to Lead, Calvinist covenant theology helped to downplay the consequences of sin, which so frightened Evangelical Protestants. In a similar vein, Warren Johnston anchors Lead in convictions that prevailed in late seventeenth-century England, while at the same time embracing Lead's exceptionality. Relying on mystical inspiration, she did not shy away from adding new revelations to scriptural prophecies; moreover, diverging from more common apocalyptic interpretations, she believed that apocalyptic prophecies would be realized exclusively within individual believers and would thus remain unavailable for the majority of the world.

The second half of the present collection of essays is dedicated—as the title makes clear—to the complex circulation of Lead's writings that transcend simple notions of borders between national territories. More than any other chapter, Lucinda Martin's essay unravels the transnational genealogy of Lead's work. Concentrating on Johann Georg Gichtel (1638–1710), a German exile in Amsterdam known for editing Boehme's theosophical works in the 1680s, she challenges standard accounts of how Lead became popular among German radical Pietists. Whereas the Pietist couple Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727) and Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724) are usually perceived as the promoters of Lead's writings in Germany, Martin argues it was through the epistolary network around Gichtel that her writings were disseminated, earlier than previously assumed. Moreover, Gichtel claimed to have indirectly influenced Lead's work, spurring her to write *Everlasting Gospel* in reaction to some of his considerations. Far from being a "one-way transfer of ideas from Lead to the Petersens" (206), Martin suggests that a more appropriate term for the exchanges between Lead and Pietism would be "a multi-party conversation" (205).

Stefania Salvadori takes a closer look at the currents in radical Pietism that aspired not only to spiritual purification but also to the material restitution of the first man's paradisiacal perfection—the return to Adam's uncorrupted body already in earthly life. Salvadori emphasizes a “transcultural process” (149) in which this conceptual framework was transmitted from Boehme to the German Pietists. For the most part, German readers of Boehme did not access his writings directly. Instead, Boehme's ideas reached German-speaking audiences through the works by English Behmenists. Salvadori states that one of the Behmenists contributing to radical Pietist debates was Lead, who construed and adapted Boehme's soteriology. Lead radicalized his doctrine, which did not postulate the restitution until Christ's second coming. Even though she did not go as far as to imply a complete corporeal transformation before the end of time, she still developed a four-stage mystical ascent in which elected believers, with the help of the heavenly Wisdom Sophia and the Bridegroom Christ, could at least set their corporal refinement into motion.

Lionel Laborie's essay attests to the meticulousness of current research into female mysticism. Laborie covers the time after Lead's death, in which the Philadelphian Society and the French Prophets—an English off-spring of the Camisard movement, French rather by its name than by its composition—united for a short period of time. Building upon the evidence that, irrespective of their close association with the Philadelphians, the French Prophets never mentioned Lead or her work, Laborie re-evaluates Lead's role in the congregation. He warns against inflating her significance, for it was to a large extent Richard Roach (1662–1730), a Church of England minister, who shaped Lead's image as a unifying maternal force. In lieu thereof, Laborie argues, “Lead had left behind a chaotic community” (231).

The two chapters concluding the book examine Lead's legacy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is, Philip Lockley concedes, “a hazardous historical exercise” (242) to uncover the roots of millenarian cultures. For obvious reasons, prophets, who claim to be inspired by God, do not usually give credit to the traditions that have influenced them. Focusing on the English Atlantic, Lockley retraces how the followers of the influential English prophet Joanna Southcott (1750–1814) created a distinctive prophetic tradition, gradually incorporating Lead into an evolving Southcottian history during the course of the nineteenth century. Bridget M. Jacobs turns to twentieth-century North America, demonstrating the remarkably varying statuses of Lead's legacy. Members of Mary's City of David, a Southcottian communal group, succeeded in acquiring the better

part of Lead's work in the 1930s and 1940s. They viewed themselves as the guardians of Lead's writings and aimed at conserving them in veneration, while the Pentecostal Latter Rain movement did not treat them as authentic testimony but as "an anonymous voice to which they could add their own voices" (284).

Lumped together, the contributions in *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy* follow the lines of Lead's different networks, thereby not only correcting flaws of older scholarship but also illuminating connections in the often confusingly fragmented field of religious dissent in early modern England and, chronologically and geographically speaking, beyond. Certainly, the risks of emphasizing one single person are high. The authors, however, manage to focus on Lead without aggrandizing her for the sake of their own specialized interest. They achieve the balancing act of both centering on Lead as well as decentering her—as a mystic, as a writer, and, first and foremost, as a woman.

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Charles K. Telfer, *Wrestling with Isaiah: The Exegetical Methodology of Campegius Vitringa (1659–1722)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016). Hardcover, 219 pp., €100.

Campegius Vitringa was a leading scholar in eighteenth-century biblical studies. He had a wide influence not only during his life but also afterwards, long into the nineteenth century. Franke, Bengel, Delitzsch, Gesenius, and the Princeton theologians, among others, appreciated him greatly. In the twentieth century Vitringa was largely overlooked. In the postmodern climate of recent decades, however, growing attention has been paid to pre-critical biblical scholarship. Postmodernism has made people aware that everyone has his own prior understanding and that the Enlightenment claim of neutral scholarship is unfounded. Scholars—whatever their personal convictions—are rediscovering the value of the history of interpretation to biblical studies.

Convinced that the insights of a scholar such as Vitringa—who was the heir of centuries of Renaissance scholarship as well as of the theological heritage of the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy—may help us to understand the Bible better today. Charles K. Telfer, associate professor of Biblical Languages at Westminster Seminary California, has written a