

Gerrard Winstanley and Jacob Boehme

ARIEL HESSAYON

Goldsmiths, University of London

Abstract: Given, firstly, justifiable claims made by the editors of the complete works of the Digger leader Gerrard Winstanley, that he was not just the ‘foremost radical of the English Revolution’ but also one of the ‘finest writers’ of a ‘glorious age of English non-fictional prose’, and secondly, the important suggestion that Winstanley was a forerunner of Quakerism, indeed that his writings shaped the formation of Quaker thought, Winstanley’s potential reading of the German Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme deserves close attention. For more than a century scholars encompassing a range of backgrounds and ideological commitments have, with varying degrees of caution, drawn a number of rarely convincing and, unfortunately, usually ill-informed parallels between Boehme and Winstanley. As I will show, it seems certain that Winstanley did not consult any of Boehme’s works while writing his own. It also appears very probable that he never read Boehme. The disparities between them are far too great. Indeed, there is no analogue in the relevant texts by Boehme for a number of Winstanley’s doctrines and exhortations. Furthermore, Winstanley never quotes, paraphrases or alludes to Boehme. His prose style differs from the way in which Boehme’s translators rendered him into English. Nor does Winstanley adopt any of the neologisms introduced by these translators. Consequently I will suggest that since Winstanley most likely possessed only a handful of printed works or else a modest library, greater consideration needs to be given to how ideas were transmitted – not textually but orally, because it is probable that some of the seeds that germinated into Winstanley’s mature philosophy were sown in this manner.

I

1. On Sunday, 1 or Sunday, 8 April 1649 – it is difficult to establish the date with certainty – five people went to St. George’s Hill in the parish of Walton-on-Thames, Surrey and began digging the earth. They sowed the unfertile ground with parsnips, carrots and beans, returning the next day in increased numbers. The following day they prepared more land for cultivation by burning at least ten acres of heath, much to the displeasure of several locals. By the end of the week between twenty and thirty people were reportedly labouring the entire day at digging. It was said that they intended to plough up the soil and sow it with seed corn. Yet they also apparently threatened to pull down and level all park pales, thereby evoking fears of an anti-enclosure riot (a familiar form of agrarian protest).¹ Their leaders were two former

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apprentices of the Merchant Taylors' Company, William Everard (1602?–fl.1651) and Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1676). Everard seems to have been a Parliamentary spy during the Civil War, was implicated in a plot to kill Charles I, gaoled and subsequently cashiered from the army. Thereafter he was imprisoned by the bailiffs of Kingston in Surrey, accused of blasphemously denying God, Christ, the authenticity of the Scriptures and the efficacy of prayer, and then charged with interrupting a church service in a threatening manner. He also called himself a prophet and was portrayed as a mad man.² Winstanley came from Wigan and had learned his trade in London, where he can be connected with resolutely Presbyterian networks during the early 1640s. His business, however, had been severely disrupted by wartime, reducing him to bankruptcy. Afterwards with his wife Susan he relocated to Cobham in Surrey, supporting himself as a grazier by pasturing cattle, harvesting winter fodder and digging peat on waste land – for which he and several others were fined by the local manorial court (as inhabitants they lacked the customary rights of tenants to take fuel from the commons).³

2. Everard justified the new communal experiment with a vision,⁴ while Winstanley declared that during a trance he had heard the words '*Worke together. Eat bread together*'.⁵ St. George's Hill was revealed as the place where by their righteous labour and the sweat of their brows work should begin in making the Earth '*a common Treasury of livelihood to whole mankind*'.⁶ Nonetheless, complaints were soon made to the authorities against these supposedly distracted, crack brained, 'disorderly & tumultuous sort of people' and fearing a royalist rendezvous gathered under cover of the commotion caused by such 'ridiculous' activities, the Council of State dispatched

unless otherwise stated, is London. The year is taken to begin on 1 January and English dates are 'old style'. I alone am responsible for any mistakes or shortcomings.

1 Charles Firth (ed.), *The Clarke Papers. Selections from the Papers of William Clarke, Secretary to the Council of the Army, 1647–1649*, Camden Society (4 vols., 1891–1901), vol. 2, pp. 209–11; *CSPD 1649–50*, p. 95; *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daies iournall in Parliament*, no. 120 (13–20 April 1649), p. 450; *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, no. 3 (14–21 April 1649), p. 20; *A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages in Parliament*, no. 298 (16–23 April 1649), p. 2441.

2 Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, vol. 2, pp. 210, 212; *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (17–24 April 1649), sig. A3; Ariel Hessayon, 'Everard, William (bap. 1602?, d. in or after 1651)', ODNB.

3 J.D. Alsop, 'Ethics in the Marketplace: Gerrard Winstanley's London Bankruptcy, 1643', *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), pp. 97–119; R.J. Dalton, 'Gerrard Winstanley: the experience of fraud 1641', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), pp. 973–84; J.D. Alsop, 'Gerrard Winstanley: A Reply', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 1013–15; J.C. Davis and J.D. Alsop, 'Winstanley, Gerrard (bap. 1609, d. 1676)', ODNB; John Gurney, *Brave community. The Digger movement in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 49–53, 62–89; Thomas Corns, Ann Hughes and David Loewenstein (eds.), *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (2 vols., Oxford, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 9, 10–11.

4 Anon., *The Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England* (1649), p. 2; *A Perfect Diurnall of Some Passages in Parliament*, no. 298 (16–23 April 1649), pp. 2448–49, reprinted in Joad Raymond (ed.), *Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England 1641–1660* (Moreton-in-Marsh, 1993), pp. 392–93; *The Moderate Intelligencer*, no. 214 (19–26 April 1649), pp. 2001–02.

5 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 513.

6 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, p. 80.

two cavalry troops to investigate.⁷ Brought before Lord General Thomas Fairfax at Whitehall on 20 April, Everard and Winstanley refused to remove their hats in deference. Everard, moreover, allegedly asserted during questioning that he was of the race of the Jews and that the people's liberties had been lost since the Norman Conquest. Though the Diggers adhered to the Golden Rule (to do unto others as they would have done unto them), intending to perform gospel injunctions by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, Walton's inhabitants were predominantly hostile to their message.⁸ Opposition took various forms: the Diggers' plantation was trampled down,⁹ their wooden houses burned, cart sabotaged, a draught horse maimed and cattle driven away;¹⁰ clothing, linen and food was stolen; men and a boy were victims of physical violence;¹¹ enemies filed suits for trespass against them in Kingston's court; several were imprisoned in Walton church and one in Kingston gaol.¹² These obstacles proved insurmountable and after less than twenty-one weeks the Diggers reluctantly abandoned their efforts. A new colony established on the Little Heath in neighbouring Cobham sometime in late August endured for approximately thirty-four weeks until mid-April 1650 when the Diggers were forcibly evicted. Other communities founded at Iver (Buckinghamshire) and Wellingborough (Northamptonshire) were also short-lived, while too little is known of alleged Digger activity at Barnet (maybe Friern Barnet, Middlesex), Dunstable (Bedfordshire) and Enfield (Middlesex), or at unidentified locations in Gloucestershire (possibly

7 *The Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout*, no. 13 (20–27 April 1649), p. 97, reprinted in David Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War: A Study of the Social Philosophy of Gerrard Winstanley* (1940; reprinted, Stroud, 1995), p. 164, and in Raymond (ed.), *Making the News*, p. 394; *A Perfect Summary of an Exact Diary of some Passages of Parliament*, no. 13 (16–23 April 1649), pp. 131–32; *Mercurius Pragmaticus (for King Charles II)* (17–24 April 1649), no pagination; *The Impartiall Intelligencer, containing A Perfect Collection of the Weekly Passages in Parliament*, no. 8 (18–25 April 1649), pp. 60–61; Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, vol. 2, pp. 209–12; BL, Add. MS 37,344 fol. 283r, printed in Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English affairs* (1682; 1732 edn.), p. 396; *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 29.

8 Anon., *Declaration and Standard of the Levellers*, pp. 2–3; *Modest Narrative of Intelligence* (14–21 April 1649), p. 23; *Perfect Diurnall* (16–23 April 1649), pp. 2448–49; *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, no. 308 (17–24 April 1649), pp. 1333–34; *The Moderate*, no. 41 (17–24 April 1649), sig. ff; *Perfect Weekly Account* (18–25 April 1649), pp. 454–55; *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daies iournall in Parliament*, no. 121 (20–27 April 1649), pp. 987–88; *Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout* (20–27 April 1649), pp. 97–98, 101; Anon., *The Speeches of Lord General Fairfax and the Officers of the Armie to the Diggers at St Georges Hill in Surrey* (1649), p. 40.

9 *Perfect Diurnall* (16–23 April 1649), last page; *Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout* (20–27 April 1649), p. 100; *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, no. 4 (21–28 April 1649), p. 32; J. Gurney, 'Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger movement in Walton and Cobham', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), pp. 775–85; Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 153–65.

10 *Mercurius Republicus*, no. 1, (22–29 May 1649), p. 5; Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 153.

11 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 59–61; *The Moderate Messenger*, no. 8 (11–15 June 1649), pp. 58–60; Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 157–58.

12 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 32–34; *The Perfect Weekly Account* (18–25 July 1649), p. 352, reprinted in Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy*, p. 172 n. 1; *The Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout*, no. 26 (20–27 July 1649), p. 213; Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 161–63.

Slimbridge and Frampton), Kent (plausibly Cox Heath, Cox Hall or Cock Hill), Leicestershire (perhaps Husbands Bosworth) and Nottinghamshire.¹³

3. Unlike the Levellers, whose memory was invoked and appropriated by radicals in the late eighteenth century as part of their republican heritage, traces of the Diggers almost vanished. Indeed, not until the growth of bourgeois Liberal, Socialist and Marxist inspired historical studies did they begin to merit extensive discussion. Since then the Diggers have been successively appropriated, first by campaigners for public ownership of land and Protestant nonconformist believers in peaceful co-existence, subsequently in the service of new political doctrines that have sought legitimacy partly through emphasizing supposedly shared ideological antecedents. Recently they have even been insensitively incorporated within a constructed Green heritage.¹⁴ All of which is a remarkable legacy for a defeated movement and for Winstanley himself, whose extant writings were published (several in more than one edition) between 1648 and 1652.

4. Indeed given that Winstanley was – in Mark Kishlansky's memorable if somewhat facile formulation – 'a small businessman who began his career wholesaling cloth, ended it wholesaling grain, and in between sandwiched a mid-life crisis of epic proportions', there is a case to be made that his significance has been overinflated.¹⁵ Moreover, the Diggers' long-term political, religious, economic, social and literary impact was negligible – at least until the late nineteenth century. These views sit comfortably with the so-called revisionist interpretation of early modern England, whose practitioners have stressed consensus and contingency rather than class or ideological conflict in their analysis of political and religious instability. One outcome of this approach has been the attempted marginalisation of radicalism during the English Revolution. Thus prominent figures within what might be termed the canonical English radical tradition (itself largely a twentieth-century historical construction) have been regarded as unrepresentative of the conforming, traditionalist, uncommitted majority; their extreme opinions apparently advocated for only a brief period of their lives; their influence upon society supposedly exaggerated both by panicked political elites and skilled propagandists preying on fears of property damage or cautioning against introducing religious toleration and its corollary, moral dissolution (abhorrent beliefs begat aberrant behaviour). And yet there is a strong argument to be made that Winstanley's heterodox religious views were not an unexpected aberration but the product of a spiritual journey with distinct puritan and General Baptist phases. Recoverable through reminiscences, citations, allusions, suggestive parallels and circumstantial evidence, this indicates that Winstanley's religious radicalism was more deep-rooted and of longer duration than the brief hiatus currently allowed by revisionists.¹⁶ Likewise, the importance of

13 Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 184–90.

14 A. Hessayon, 'Restoring the Garden of Eden in England's Green and Pleasant Land: The Diggers and the Fruits of the Earth', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 2, no. 2 (2008), pp. 1–25.

15 Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed. Britain 1603–1714* (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 196.

16 A. Hessayon, 'Early Modern Communism: The Diggers and Community of Goods', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 3, no. 2 (2009), pp. 1–49; A. Hessayon, 'Gerrard Winstanley, radical reformer', in

Winstanley's death and burial as a Quaker – something once questioned – cannot be understated. Several contemporary critics even believed that Winstanley's works shaped the formation of Quaker thought.¹⁷ So given the justifiable claims made by the editors of *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (2009) that he was not just the 'foremost radical of the English Revolution' but also one of the 'finest writers' of a 'glorious age of English non-fictional prose', his potential reading of the German Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme (c.1575–1624), also known as 'Teutonicus Philosophus', deserves close attention.¹⁸

5. Between 1645 and 1662 most of Boehme's treatises and the majority of his letters were printed in English translation at London. Moreover, two shorter pieces were rendered from English into Welsh by Morgan Llwyd of Wrexham in 1655.¹⁹ These translations need to be located within the broader framework of a loosely co-ordinated effort to issue and disseminate writings by continental European Anabaptists, alchemists, astrologers, mystics, spiritual reformers and radical theologians during a crucial moment of English history, and elsewhere I have discussed at greater length why Boehme's writings were turned into English and shown the mechanisms behind this process.²⁰ Among his followers there circulated a garbled story that Charles I had been the main patron of the venture before his execution in January 1649. Some also maintained, probably correctly, that after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the remaining works were brought out under the auspices of Philip Herbert, fifth Earl of Pembroke. In their eyes this tradition of royal and aristocratic support gave the undertaking prestige. Yet it simplifies developments, obscuring the involvement of a number of people with common aims. Actually there were three overlapping phases. Initially several individuals with knowledge of Latin or German received abstracts of Boehme's teachings or selected treatises from their associates in Amsterdam. Then manuscript translations were made from German and Latin versions of works published at Amsterdam, as well as from copies of the original texts. These circulated privately in much the same way as had the writings of the German-Dutch mystic Hendrik Niclaes (1502?–c.1580) and other conspicuous members of his heretical sect known as the Family of Love.

Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English radicalism in context* (Aldershot, 2011), pp. 87–112.

17 Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 134–35, 217, 221; *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 23, 59, 71.

18 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 65.

19 Margaret Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme: A study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York, 1914); Reginald Maxse, 'The reception of Jacob Boehme in England in the XVII and XVIII centuries', unpublished Oxford University B.Litt. thesis, 1934; Wilhelm Struck, *Der Einfluss Jakob Boehmes auf die Englische Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1936); Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, trans. G.E. Björk (Uppsala, 1948); Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1960); Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 185–225; Brian Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996); A. Hessayon, 'Jacob Boehme and the early Quakers', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 60 (2005), pp. 191–223; Ariel Hessayon, 'Gold Tried in the Fire'. *The Prophet TheaurauJohn Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 284–324.

20 A. Hessayon, "'The Teutonicks writings": translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh', *Esoterica*, 9 (2007), pp. 129–65 <<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIX/EsotericaIX.pdf>>.

Finally there was an organized scheme for publishing the extant corpus. While some of the cost was met by the translators themselves, it is clear that Samuel Hartlib, a Prussian émigré resident in London since 1628, and members of his circle acted as go-betweens by using agents to purchase books, subsequently shipping them to England.

6. Hartlib's circle, as is well known, promoted reconciliation between the Protestant churches and planned to establish a University in London with a College for Oriental studies to assist with the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. They also advocated educational and medical reform, as well as disseminating the Moravian exile Johannes Amos Comenius's theories concerning universal knowledge (pansophy) and the importance of translation as a first step towards establishing communication through a common tongue.²¹ Although it had gone unheeded by many of his compatriots, Boehme's announcement of the dawn of a new reformation thus chimed with the Hartlibians' vision of universal reformation. Similarly, Boehme's principal English translator, the barrister and linguist John Sparrow (1615–1670), had hoped his public-spirited efforts would be rewarded with the settlement of religious controversies and the disappearance of sects and heresies. It was, however, to prove a vain hope. Instead of the promised 'Day of Pentecost', when the *'true sence and meaning of all Languages'* would be united into one tongue, there was a new Babel.²² Indeed, Boehme's readers responded in largely unforeseen ways: sometimes with enthusiasm but on other occasions with exasperation, ambivalence and even revulsion. A handful were convicted of blasphemy, others formed spiritual communities, while others still fulminated against what they regarded as Boehme's incomprehensible nonsense and vile falsehoods.

7. All the same, as I am in the process of suggesting elsewhere, engagement with Boehme's teachings was more extensive than has usually been recognised even if his influence was neither straightforward nor always easy to untangle from the wider tradition of continental mystical, prophetic and visionary writing that he epitomised.²³ The contribution of various intermediaries, patrons, translators, biographers, printers, publishers and booksellers was crucial in facilitating the project through which Boehme's texts were copied, rendered into English, issued and transmitted. Furthermore, uncovering the translators' social networks discloses their ties through kinship and friendship, as well as shared professional and commercial interests. Indeed, these extensive connections, which included sympathetic publishers, largely explain why Boehme's works were acquired so readily in printed English translations and later selectively rendered into Welsh. Moreover, it should be remembered that this was at a time when legislation empowered civil and military

21 George Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius. Gleanings from Hartlib's papers* (Liverpool, 1947); Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626–1660* (1975); Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib & Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication* (Cambridge, 1994).

22 Jacob Boehme, XL. *Questions Concerning the Soule*, trans. J[ohn] S[parrow] (1647), 'To the Reader'; Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, trans. J[ohn] Ellistone (1651), sig. A3^r2.

23 Ariel Hessayon, *Jacob Boehme's theology and the reception of his writings in the English-speaking world: the seventeenth century* (forthcoming).

officials to fine or imprison the authors, printers, publishers and booksellers of unlicensed material. This repressive element of post-publication censorship doubtless prompted strategies to avoid punishment: spurious imprints, anonymity, pseudonymity and varying degrees of self-censorship. While Boehme's writings were not suppressed – the copyright of seven books was entered in the Stationers' Register – it is worth emphasising that a few of his readers were punished by authority.²⁴ Among the most notable was Dr John Pordage, ejected out of the rectory of Bradfield, Berkshire, whom we shall encounter later.²⁵

II

8. Like Boehme, who claimed he had not received instruction from men nor knowledge from reading books, but had written instead 'out of my own Book which was opened in me, being the Noble similitude of God', Winstanley too insisted that he had been moved to write and speak by the inner light rising up within him. These 'inward workings' of the Holy Spirit were freely received and everything that he had written concerning 'Digging' he had neither read 'in any book' nor heard from someone's mouth.²⁶ Elsewhere Winstanley prefaced or interspersed his writings with similar avowals.²⁷ Another comparison can – and has – been made with the Quaker leader George Fox's exultant recollection of being shown by the Lord how those who were 'faithful to him in the power and light of Christ' would 'come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell'. Despite evident differences between them, the Quaker historian Rufus Jones felt that Winstanley and Fox shared enough in common to propose that both men bore 'the marks of direct influence from Boehme'.²⁸ Jones's later work envisaged the Quakers as 'one of the great historical results' of a 'slowly maturing movement' initiated on the continent in the sixteenth century by assorted individuals characterised by their love of mysticism and devotion to what they variously comprehended as God's indwelling presence. The most notable of these so-called Spiritual Reformers were Hans Denck (*d.*1527), Sebastian Franck (1499–1542), Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561), Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563), Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) and Boehme. Since Jones deemed Winstanley an important forerunner of Quakerism he accordingly positioned Winstanley within this tradition.²⁹

24 G.E. Briscoe Eyre, H.R. Plomer and C.R. Rivington (eds.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers from 1640 to 1708* (3 vols., privately printed, 1913–14), vol. 1, pp. 248, 268, 281, 309, 459, vol. 2, p. 91.

25 Ariel Hessayon, 'Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681)', ODNB.

26 Jacob Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen*, trans. J[ohn] E[l]listone (1649), 2.10, 14, pp. 20, 21; *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 98–99.

27 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 104, 513, 567, vol. 2, p. 80; Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1909), pp. 493–94; Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 94.

28 George Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, ed. John Nickalls (Cambridge, 1952; reprinted, London, 1986), p. 27; Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 495.

29 Rufus Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (1914; reprinted, Gloucester, MA, 1971), pp. xxix–xxxi, 337; cf. Eduard Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism. Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution* (Stuttgart, 1895), trans. H.J. Stenning (1930; reprinted, Nottingham, 1980), p. 230;

9. The outlines of Jones's fully developed thesis – which owed something to his predecessors' suggestions – were widely accepted until the mid-1940s. In particular, it seems to have prompted Margaret Bailey to assert that Winstanley's writings clearly showed 'the strong influence of Boehme' and David Petegorsky to acknowledge it may be possible to detect Boehme's 'particular influence' on Winstanley. All the same, it proved harder to demonstrate the precise nature of this relationship. Instead, Petegorsky pointed to 'the environment of the age', arguing that the vibrant atmosphere of the English Civil War was charged with 'currents of mystical, pantheistic and humanistic thought' which had their origins in the Spiritual Reformers' vivifying writings. Supposedly these had been transported to England by radical Protestant German refugees fleeing religious persecution in their homeland, circulated in manuscript, and then popularised through printed English translations and sermons by John Everard (c.1584–1640/1), Doctor of Divinity and sometime lecturer at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Westminster and then St. Mary Abbots, Kensington.³⁰ George Sabine of Cornell University, editor of most of *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (1941), agreed: 'Winstanley certainly did not stand alone'. Rather he was the product of a distinctive milieu; what John Gurney has more recently termed a 'radical and heterodox tradition of religious mysticism' which included, along with Boehme, texts by the Family of Love's founder Hendrick Niclaes, Sebastian Franck's *The Forbidden Fruit: or, a treatise Of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil* (1640, 1642), the anonymous *Theologia Germanica* (1646, 1648), and *The single Eye* (1646) by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464).³¹

10. While *The Forbidden Fruit* was issued by Benjamin Allen, *Theologia Germanica* by John Sweeting and *The single Eye* by John Streater (c.1620–1677), Tom Hayes has suggested that Winstanley may have become familiar with works by Boehme and Niclaes through a common publisher.³² This was Giles Calvert (1615–1663), a freeman of the London Stationers' Company who by May 1644 was working as a bookseller at the sign of the 'Black-spread-Eagle' at the west end of St. Paul's Cathedral. Calvert issued or sold, individually or in partnership, more than 475 known different publications, or an estimated 813 titles in all, which was almost 9% of the published output of London booksellers from 1641 to 1662.³³ His name

Lewis Berens, *The Digger Movement in the Days of the Commonwealth as revealed in the Writings of Gerrard Winstanley* (1906), p. 43 n. 1.

30 Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, pp. 112–14; Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy*, pp. 64, 125–26.

31 George Sabine (ed.), *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley. With an appendix of documents relating to the Digger Movement* (Ithaca, NY, 1941), pp. 22, 28–30; Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 90–91, 94; cf. P. Elmen, 'The theological basis of Digger Communism', *Church History*, 23 (1954), p. 215; Robert Kenny (ed.), *The Law of Freedom in a Platform or, True Magistracy Restored* (New York, 1973), pp. 22–23.

32 Thomas W. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger. A Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 24, 67; cf. M. Brod, 'A Radical Network in the English Revolution: John Pordage and His Circle, 1646–54', *English Historical Review*, 119 (2004), p. 1235; Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 114 n. 31.

33 Ariel Hessayon, 'Calvert, Giles (bap. 1612, d. 1663)' [sic], ODNB; Mario Caricchio, *Religione, politica e commercio di libri nella rivoluzione inglese. Gli autori di Giles Calvert* (Genoa, 2003); M. Caricchio, 'News from the New Jerusalem: Giles Calvert and the Radical Experience', in Hessayon and Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of English radicalism*, pp. 69–86.

appears on the first edition title-pages of three of Winstanley's five pre-Digger tracts, and he also published a second corrected edition of all five works as *Several Pieces Gathered into one Volume* (preface dated 20 December 1649), together with the majority of Winstanley's Digger writings.³⁴ By the beginning of the old style year 1652 (25 March), when Winstanley's extant published literary activities ceased, Calvert had issued more than 260 titles.³⁵ Of these two were by Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen* (1649) and *Signatura Rerum* (1651); and two by Niclaes, *Revelatio Dei* (1649) and *The prophecy of the spirit of love* (1649).³⁶ Boehme, in other words, constituted a tiny fraction of Calvert's output during the period under discussion. Indeed, it was not Calvert but rather Humphrey Blunden (1609–*fl.*1654) who was then Boehme's main publisher; a man, it must be emphasised, with whom Winstanley cannot be linked.³⁷ Furthermore, even if Winstanley had acquired a copy of the Teutonic Philosopher's writings published by Calvert in the manner, for example, of Blunden's gift of *The High and Deepe Searching out of The Threefold Life of Man* (1650) to the astrologer William Lilly,³⁸ then we need only consider how Boehme's *Epistles* may have influenced Winstanley's Digger writings, and *Signatura Rerum* his final work *The Law of Freedom* (1652).³⁹ But as Sabine and scholars who followed his outlook recognise, there were other ways in which Winstanley could have encountered Boehme beyond his association with Calvert.⁴⁰

11. In August 1649 William Everard materialized at Bradfield, Berkshire where John Pordage (1607–1681) was rector – although Pordage was to claim that Everard appeared in his bedchamber in the middle of the night in the form of a fully dressed spirit. Pordage, previously accused of publicly teaching Niclaes's Familist doctrines in London, was Boehme's principal seventeenth-century English interpreter and on 16 August 1649 he appeared at Reading before the Committee of Berkshire charged with blasphemy against 'Christ, God the Son'. The following summer Everard reappeared at Bradfield, this time in the guise of a harvest worker (much in the manner of his former comrade Winstanley, who was to find employ as a wheat

34 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 69–94.

35 Carolyn Nelson and Matthew Seccombe, *Short-Title Catalogue. Volume IV. Indexes* (New York, 1998), pp. 175–76. The London bookseller George Thomason dated his copy of Winstanley's last work *The Law of Freedom* 20 February 1652.

36 Thomason dated his copies of *Signatura Rerum* 2 July 1651, and *Revelatio Dei* 26 September 1649.

37 Ariel Hessayon, 'Blunden, Humphrey (b. 1609, d. in or after 1654)', *ODNB*

38 Henry Huntington Library, shelf-mark 88271, title-page.

39 Winstanley's last pre-Digger work *The New Law of Righteousnes* has a preface dated 26 January 1649 and so was probably completed before Calvert issued Boehme's *Epistles*. *Signatura Rerum* appeared after all Winstanley's works had been published, with the exception of *The Law of Freedom* which Thomason dated 20 February 1652. Even part of this tract, however, had been written more than two years before its dedication (5 November 1651); see Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 211–14.

40 Sabine (ed.), *Works of Winstanley*, p. 104 n. 1; cf. Hutin, *Disciples anglais de Boehme*, p. 83; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (1972; Harmondsworth, 1984 edn.), pp. 284–86; Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 88; David Mulder, *The Alchemy of Revolution. Gerrard Winstanley's Occultism and Seventeenth-Century English Communism* (New York, 1990), pp. 65, 312; J.A. Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics in England 1649–1665', *Past & Present*, 135 (1992), p. 39 n. 42; Brod, 'Radical Network', pp. 1238–41.

thresher on Lady Eleanor Douglas's estate at Pirton, Hertfordshire). Further events place Everard together with Pordage and TheaurauJohn Tany, self-proclaimed High Priest and Recorder to the thirteen tribes of the Jews, at the rectory in Bradfield on or about 1 September 1650. Pordage later admitted that he had received Everard into his house for almost three weeks, though Everard was alleged to have been at Bradfield 'oftentimes' before. It must be stressed, however, that Everard had left the Diggers sometime after being questioned by Fairfax at Whitehall on 20 April 1649 (mistaken press reports in May placed him with the Leveller mutiny in Oxfordshire). Nor can it be shown that he knew Pordage before he became a Digger, despite a 'William Everet' having taken the protestation oath on 20 February 1642 in St. Lawrence, Reading – a parish where Pordage was to become successively curate and vicar.⁴¹ Thus notwithstanding all unsubstantiated speculation to the contrary, there is no evidence to connect Winstanley with Pordage through Everard. It is possible they knew each other, but this remains conjecture and on balance it seems more likely that Pordage had heard Everard speak of Winstanley's practise of community of goods.⁴²

12. What then of similarities between Boehme and Winstanley – which, with other possible influences, Perez Zagorin warned against over-emphasising lest it diminish from Winstanley's greatness and the uniqueness of his ideas.⁴³ For more than a century various scholars encompassing a range of backgrounds and ideological commitments have, with varying degrees of caution, drawn a number of rarely convincing and, unfortunately, usually ill-informed parallels. Aspects of Winstanley's thought exhibiting suggested Behmenist resonances include his belief in human beings as microcosms or epitomes of the macrocosm;⁴⁴ his understanding of the nature of evil;⁴⁵ his conception of an inner light in conflict with darkness;⁴⁶ his conviction that the risen Christ would save all humanity and restore the creation to its former prelapsarian condition;⁴⁷ his identification of flesh with the feminine part of human nature which is subordinate to and corrupted by evil masculine powers;⁴⁸

41 John Etherington, *A Brief Discovery of the Blasphemous Doctrine of Familisme* (1645), p. 10; John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing Through the dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (1655), pp. 5, 6, 11–12, 68–70, 72; Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium Meridianum: Satan at Noon* (1655), pp. 9, 11–13, 57, 79–80, 85–87, 91–94; Hessayon, 'Everard, William', ODNB; Ariel Hessayon, 'Pordage, John (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1681)', ODNB; Ariel Hessayon, 'Gold Tried in the Fire'. *The Prophet TheaurauJohn Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 194–200.

42 Cf. *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 15 n. 50.

43 Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (1954), p. 46.

44 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 495; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 68.

45 Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, p. 113; Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, p. 125; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 67–68.

46 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 495; Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, pp. 112, 113; Maxse, 'Reception of Boehme in England', p. 33; Sabine (ed.), *Works of Winstanley*, p. 104 n. 1; Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 67.

47 Struck, *Einfluss Jakob Boehmes*, pp. 96–97; Arthur Williamson, *Apocalypse Then. Prophecy and the Making of the Modern World* (Westport, CT, 2008), p. 150; cf. Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, p. 113; Brod, 'Radical Network', pp. 1240–41.

48 Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, pp. 129, 130–31; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 69; Mulder, *Alchemy of Revolution*, pp. 59, 288.

his usage of the Virgin as a figure representing mankind's plain-heartedness;⁴⁹ his likening God the Father to a consuming fiery orb which burns up the dross within man and envisaging this spiritual purification as akin to an alchemical process;⁵⁰ his appeal to universally shared reason;⁵¹ his apprehension of imagination as 'a morally suspect counterpart to the spirit of Reason';⁵² his preference for allegorical readings of Scripture;⁵³ and the anticlericalism which imbued his reformist zeal.⁵⁴ In addition, it has been pointed out that Winstanley originated from Wigan, a large Lancashire parish where Charles Hotham (1615–1672), who published an abbreviation of Boehme's philosophy and then translated Boehme's *A Consolatory Treatise Of The Four Complexions* (printed by Thomas Wilson for Humphrey Blunden, 1654), was rector. Winstanley, however, had left Wigan at the age of twenty-one to take up a London apprenticeship in 1630 whereas Hotham, formerly Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, was not presented to the rectory of Wigan until 1653.⁵⁵

13. Clearly not all the parallels adduced above carry the same weight and at first glance some appear relatively compelling; especially those dealing with specifics rather than commonplaces. But, as we shall see, Brian Gibbons's sense that 'there is little evidence of substantial Behmenist influence in the Digger milieu' will prove an understatement.⁵⁶

III

14. Since there is no reason to suppose that Winstanley owned or ever saw a Boehme manuscript – among those extant are English renderings that predate printed versions of the latter part of 'Mysterium Magnum' and 'The Way to Christ' – the chronology of Boehme's publications in translation needs examining. Three works were issued at London before Winstanley finished his first tract: *Two Theosophicall Epistles* (printed by Matthew Simmons for Benjamin Allen, 1645); *XL. Questions Concerning the Soule* (printed by Simmons for Blunden, 1647); and *The Way to Christ*

49 Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, p. 134.

50 Mulder, *Alchemy of Revolution*, pp. 59–60; cf. J.M. Patrick, 'The literature of the Diggers', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 12 (1942–43), p. 102; Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 63, 66–68, 77–80; Brod, 'Radical Network', p. 1241.

51 Williamson, *Apocalypse Then*, p. 229; cf. Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, p. 113.

52 Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, p. 125.

53 Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 495; cf. Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 95.

54 Bailey, *Milton and Boehme*, pp. 114–15; cf. Williamson, *Apocalypse Then*, p. 150.

55 Hotham was presented by trustees who held the advowson under his father's will, see; Hull UL, DDHO/65/1, lease and release of the advowson of Wigan rectory (12 May 1656); George Bridgeman, *The History of the Church & Manor of Wigan in the County of Lancaster*, Chetham Society, new series, 15–18 (4 vols., Manchester, 1888–90), vol. 3, pp. 472–77, vol. 4, p. 722.

56 Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, p. 125.

Discovered (printed by Simmons for Blunden, 1648).⁵⁷ *Concerning The Three Principles of The Divine Essence* (printed by Simmons for Blunden, 1648) appeared in two editions. One of these heralded the forthcoming *Mercurius Teutonicus, or, A Christian information concerning the last Times* (printed by Simmons for Blunden, 1649), which was published at the beginning of February 1649 – just after Winstanley dated his preface to *The New Law of Righteousnes* (26 January 1649).⁵⁸ There followed *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen* (printed by Simmons for Calvert, 1649), then about mid-May 1650 *The High and Deepe Searching out of The Threefold Life Of Man* (printed by Simmons for Blunden, 1650),⁵⁹ and by early July 1651 *Signatura Rerum* (printed by John Mackock for Calvert, 1651). Hence in theory Boehme's *Two Theosophicall Epistles, XL. Qvestions and Way to Christ* could have influenced any of Winstanley's texts; *The Three Principles* some pre-Digger tracts and all the Digger writings; *Mercurius Teutonicus* the Digger works; *The Epistles* perhaps the bulk of the Digger material; *The Threefold Life* and *Signatura Rerum* only *The Law of Freedom*.

15. Even so, it seems certain that Winstanley did not consult any of Boehme's works while writing his own. And while it is impossible to state definitively that a person never read, heard or discussed a particular text, it appears very probable that Winstanley was not influenced by Boehme's teachings directly, or indeed that he engaged with or reacted against them. The disparities between them are far too great. Winstanley's evolution from religious radical to social critic and utopian projector happened against a background of Civil War in the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, the abolition of episcopacy and the emasculation of the Church of England, petitioning for religious toleration and justice, the emergence of political movements with radical demands, regicide and impassioned apocalyptic speculation, not to mention widespread poverty, harvest failure, desperate food shortages, economic decay and outbreaks of plague. While the Teutonic Philosopher provided occasional political commentary on the progress of the Thirty Years' War, Winstanley was fully engaged with pressing contemporary issues at the height of the English Revolution. Consequently there is no analogue in the relevant texts by Boehme for a number of Winstanley's doctrines and exhortations: his heterodox marriage of universal redemption and particular election; his sense of liberation from the bondage of outward observance of gospel ordinances such as Sabbath observance and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; his antiscriturism; his interpretation of fundamental passages of Revelation; his admiration for Magna Carta; his condemnation of monarchical and manorial exploitation ushered in with the Norman Conquest; his denunciation of buying, selling and hoarding; his vision of the Diggers as a spiritual and temporal community of love and righteousness in which goods but not women were held in common; his

57 Thomason dated his copies of *Two Theosophicall epistles* 2 May 1645, and *The Way to Christ* 25 October 1647, while the copyright of *XL. Qvestions* was entered in the Stationers' register on 15 October 1646.

58 Copyright of *The Three Principles* was entered in the Stationers' register on 20 December 1647, while that of *Mercurius Teutonicus* was entered on 2 February 1649. Thomason dated his copy of *Mercurius Teutonicus* 5 February 1649.

59 *A Perfect Diurnall*, no. 22 (6–13 May 1650), p. 256; *Several Proceedings in Parliament*, no. 33, (9–16 May 1650) p. 486. William Lilly received his copy from Humphrey Blunden on 18 May 1650.

desire to transform the earth into a common treasury, advocating redistribution of its produce to the poor and needy; and his declaration that acts of love consisted in performing gospel injunctions to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Unlike Boehme, moreover, Winstanley eventually called for legal and political reforms together with an equitable distribution of the spoils of war in an ideal republic partly modelled on pre-monarchical ancient Israel.

16. Winstanley never quotes, paraphrases or alludes to Boehme. His prose style differs from the way in which Boehme's translators John Sparrow and John Ellistone rendered him into English. Nor does Winstanley adopt any of the neologisms introduced by these translators. Absent from his texts is a vocabulary of technical alchemical, astrological, cosmological and soteriological terms found in Boehme: abyss, Aether, astral, astringency, astrum, Aurora, constellation, ens, effluence, fiat, genetrix, geniture, limbus, magnetic, materia, matrix, Mercurius, negromancy, quintessence, regeneration, Sophia, sulphur, sydereall, tincture, turba and verbum, as well as the planets Luna, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Venus. Boehme's unmediated influence on Winstanley can therefore be discounted. If Winstanley did appropriate and adapt some of his ideas then this would have been through oral transmission or by engaging with other texts from the same milieu.

17. This is not surprising. Winstanley was neither a university trained scholar or clergyman, nor a rich merchant but a former bankrupt with a financially modest if settled existence when he began writing. So the likelihood is that from 1648 to 1652 he possessed only a handful of printed works, or at most a modest library intermittently supplemented with books borrowed from friends and relations. Indeed, the list of texts Winstanley read or referred to is small. Having once been deeply immersed in puritan modes of worship and instruction he was able to quote the King James Bible mainly from memory. He engaged with scriptural exegesis explaining the significance of 1,260 days in the coming Apocalypse (Daniel 7:25, Revelation 11:3, 12:6) and knew John Foxe's widely circulated Protestant history of the English Church, *Actes and Monuments of matters most speciall and memorable* (popularly known as *The Book of Martyrs*).⁶⁰ He cited the legal commentaries of Sir Edward Coke, former Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench,⁶¹ adopted and developed the notion of a 'Norman Yoke' in his Digger writings,⁶² used the phrase Machiavellian cheats,⁶³ quoted proverbs and perhaps invented some of his own.⁶⁴ He may also have been familiar with an edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*,⁶⁵ with Francis Bacon or

60 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 137, 185, 252 n. 995; T.W. Hayes, 'Gerrard Winstanley and Foxe's Book of Martyrs', *Notes & Queries*, 222 (1977), pp. 209–12; Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 42–45.

61 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 84, 103 n. 32.

62 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 32, 43, vol. 2, pp. 44–45, 67–73, 110.

63 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 307, 315, 357.

64 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 113, 317, 332, 343, 358, 395 n. 162, 396–97 n. 182.

65 Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy*, p. 122; Zagorin, *History of Political Thought*, p. 52; H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (2nd edn., ed. Christopher Hill, Nottingham, 1983), pp. 659, 669;

popularisations of his philosophy,⁶⁶ and with Anthony Ascham's *Of the Confusions and Revolutions of Government* (1649).⁶⁷ Furthermore, Winstanley may have had some medical knowledge, perhaps derived from conversations with his mistress Sarah Gater and father-in-law William King (a prominent member of the Barber-Surgeons' Company), or by consulting their anatomical, herbal, physic, surgery and natural history books.⁶⁸ This is significant because increasingly during this period the teachings of the physician Paracelsus (1493–1541), whose treatises exerted a deep influence on Boehme, were being adopted – sometimes in conjunction with Hermetic philosophy and innovative modifications by Jean Baptiste van Helmont (*d.*1644) – as a challenge to traditional Galenic medicine. Consequently Christopher Hill's assertion that Winstanley was 'certainly acquainted with the Paracelsian tradition' needs assessing in light of supposed resemblances between Boehme and Winstanley.⁶⁹

18. In *The Breaking of the Day of God* (preface dated 20 May 1648), Winstanley mentions the pericardium, a membranous sac enclosing the heart, in his treatment of the spear that pierced Christ's side (John 19:34).⁷⁰ Although the pericardium had been discussed by the French surgeon Ambroise Paré in a work owned by Winstanley's father-in-law, and although Winstanley implies that his knowledge of the pericardium was derived from observation, it appears that he was ultimately indebted to a passage in the Essex clergyman John Smith's posthumously published *An Exposition of the Creed* (1632).⁷¹ Elsewhere and first in *The Saints Paradise* [1648] Winstanley introduced his understanding of the correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm – or 'little world' as he later called it:

The world is man-kind, and every particular man and woman is a perfect creation of himself, a perfect created world ... man is the *world*, a perfect creation...⁷²

Timothy Kenyon, *Utopian Communism and political thought in early modern England* (1989), pp. 198, 200, 204, 212–13, 224, 234.

66 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, p. 342; Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 116, 124–25; C. Hill, 'The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley', in Christopher Hill, *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill. Volume Two* (Brighton, 1986), p. 198; Kenyon, *Utopian Communism*, pp. 237, 240; James Holstun, *Ebud's Dagger. Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (2000), pp. 385–86, 398, 401.

67 Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 179–80.

68 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 236–37; TNA: PRO, Prob 11/254, fols. 150r, 151v, will of Sarah Gater (probate 24 April 1656); TNA: PRO, C 6/26/73, William King v. John Stone (31 January 1659); J.D. Alsop, 'Gerrard Winstanley: what do we know of his life?', in Andrew Bradstock (ed.), *Winstanley and the Diggers, 1649–1999* (2000), pp. 22, 24; Gurney, *Brave community*, pp. 68–69, 217.

69 Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 299; Christopher Hill (ed.), *Winstanley: The Law of Freedom and other writings* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 57; Mulder, *Alchemy of Revolution*, p. 65; N. Smith, 'Gerrard Winstanley and the Literature of Revolution', in Bradstock (ed.), *Winstanley and the Diggers*, p. 52; cf. C. Hill, 'William Harvey and the Idea of Monarchy', *Past & Present*, 27 (1964), p. 61; Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 66.

70 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 119.

71 Ambrose Paré, *The Workes of that famous Chirurghion Ambrose Parey*, trans. Thomas Johnson (1634), pp. 143–44; John Smith, *An Exposition of the Creed* (1632), p. 268; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, p. 29.

72 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 352, 442, vol. 2, p. 85.

He developed this notion in *The New Law of Righteousnes*:

In the beginning of time the whole Creation lived in man, and man lived in his Maker, the spirit of Righteousnesse and peace ... The whole Creation was in man, one within, and walked even with him.⁷³

Paracelsus too conceived of man as the ‘Microcosme, or little world’, believing that humans had a celestial and terrestrial body that separated at their death.⁷⁴ Yet despite his large corpus of writings, not to mention pseudepigraphal treatises, few of Paracelsus’ works were published in an English translation before *Of the Nature of Things* (1650), which appeared after the Diggers had been defeated.⁷⁵ Indeed, while the notion of macrocosm and microcosm was also integral to Boehme’s thinking,⁷⁶ the idea was a commonplace that can be found anywhere from Paré’s medical texts to Shakespeare’s plays and celebrated sermons by the godly preacher Richard Sibbes.

19. More unusual is Winstanley’s belief in *Saints Paradise* in ‘masculine powers’ dominating the soul in man’s post-lapsarian state. These wicked powers reside in unrighteous poisoned flesh and include anger, covetousness, envy, hypocrisy, pride, self-seeking, self-love, subtlety and, governing them all, imagination. Evil ‘masculine powers’ also reign over the ‘created flesh’ or feminine part of human nature.⁷⁷ In *The New Law of Righteousnes*, however, the gendering is reversed: cursed post-lapsarian flesh is identified with the feminine part and Christ’s righteous spirit with masculine power.⁷⁸ The Cambridge Platonist Henry More subsequently discussed in *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653) prelapsarian Adam’s ‘Masculine Powers’ that is, following Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, the soul’s spiritual and intellectual masculine faculties, but there is nothing comparable in Boehme.⁷⁹ On the contrary, *Concerning The Three Principles of The Divine Essence* has a chapter on the creation of Eve out of all of Adam’s essences in which Boehme describes the propagation of the soul and how the tincture is the house of the soul. This tincture differs between men and women, having been generated out of the limbus (heavenly substance from which Adam was created) in men, and the matrix (earthy compound consisting of the four elements) in women. In their mutual longing for the Virgin, whose form governed the soul and which they fancy to be within each other, masculine and feminine copulate ensuring that the tinctures mingle together.⁸⁰ Again, Winstanley’s developed understanding of

73 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 478, 539.

74 Paracelsus, *Of the Nature of Things*, trans. J[ohn] F[rench] (1650), p. 81; Jolande Jacobi (ed.), *Paracelsus. Selected Writings* (1979; Princeton, NJ, 1988), pp. 17–18, 152.

75 Thomason dated his copy 26 June 1650.

76 Jacob Boehme, *The Second Booke. Concerning The Three Principles of The Divine Essence*, trans. J[ohn] S[parrow] (1648), 2.7, 10.4, pp. 7, 78; Boehme, *Epistles*, 23.6, 24.7, pp. 169, 173.

77 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 351–52, 353.

78 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 480; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 114, 238 n.66.

79 Henry More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653), pp. 67–68, 221.

80 Boehme, *Three Principles*, 13.37–41, pp. 123–24.

the five senses is unparalleled in Boehme. According to Winstanley, hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and feeling are aspects of the living soul in paradise, but corrupted by selfish imagination in humankind's post-lapsarian condition. Whereas for Boehme they represent a way of illustrating the complex process of how inward qualities enable the apprehension of outward things.⁸¹

20. Turning to angels, which Winstanley deals with most thoroughly but not entirely systematically in *Breaking of the Day of God* and *Saints Paradise*, his initial concern is with apocalyptic exegesis.⁸² Here the four angels bound in the River Euphrates, which are let loose by the sixth angel with the trumpet (Revelation 9:14–15), represent four spiritual powers of wickedness: subtlety, hypocrisy, envy and cruelty. These evil powers of darkness are 'bound up within the very body of the Serpent'.⁸³ There are three types of evil angel: firstly, those sent by God into the soul, which are powers of darkness to keep humans in bondage; secondly, mighty powers with a divine commission to destroy rebellious peoples; thirdly, envy, covetousness and pride manifest in the wicked. By contrast, good angels enable inward apprehension of God either within the soul, within the heart ('by voice, vision, dream, or revelation'), or through their function as messengers in corporeal male form.⁸⁴ Angels are also central to Winstanley's explanation of Adam's pre- and post-lapsarian state. Before the fall God planted angels in Adam. He had poured several measures of his spirit into these 'sparks of glory', which were love, humility, sincerity, contentment and quiescence. They were alive in Adam (microcosm), and all lived within God, the perfect centre (macrocosm) whose nature they reflected. Adam, however, hearkened to the Serpent's whispering temptation which represented selfishness. As a result, the 'shining Angels of light' placed within human nature fell into darkness and became transformed into devils or evil angels – murderers and deceivers living unrighteously. Sinful conduct caused by human failings happened only through God's consent, but redemption would come through Christ. For God's Saints acted virtuously because of the undimmed sparks of glory within themselves. And on being wholly taken up into God they would apprehend him spiritually through their restored five senses.⁸⁵

21. This is quite different from Boehme, for whom angels had been created in the first principle (new birth, life) out of God's indissoluble band (essence, substance). This gave them the properties of fire and light and those that did not fall continue in paradise where there is love, joy and perfection. Elsewhere Boehme writes of angels inhabiting the second principle in the paradisaical world. The third principle, which is a similitude of the paradisaical world, was created after the fall of the devils. As for the soul it had all three principles within it: the most inward was the worm or brimstone spirit; the second was divine virtue which transformed the worm into an

81 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 2, pp. 4–5, 177–82; cf. vol. 1, pp. 330, 497, 550; Boehme, *Three Principles*, 15.58, 66–71, pp. 168, 170–71.

82 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 134–35, 163–65, 166, 278–79, 286, 290–91.

83 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 166, 370.

84 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 354–55, 538.

85 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 347–55.

angel; the third was of this world. Hoping readers divined his meaning thus far, Boehme then attempted to make Adam's fall intelligible through a recondite account of the temptation.⁸⁶

22. Returning to Winstanley, initially he took prelapsarian Adam to be synonymous with the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). Perhaps alluding to the Hebrew meaning of Eden ('delight'), he explained that Adam, who represented humanity, was a living thing 'in whom God delighted'. Later, however, in *Fire in the Bush* (1650) the Garden of Eden denoted both the uncultivated 'spirit of man' (in which had sprung up the four weeds of self-love, pride, envy and covetousness), and man's heart (the seat of joy, peace, humility, self-denial, patience, sincerity, truth and equity).⁸⁷ Despite this interpretative shift, Winstanley was consistent in reading Genesis allegorically rather than literally. Hence in the same vein, the tree of knowledge of good and evil located in the middle of the Garden (Genesis 2:17, 3:3) existed within Adam. This tree was humanity's imagination. So the forbidden fruit Adam ate was not an actual apple. Instead it signified selfishness and imagination arising within his heart; the Serpent (self-love) enticing Adam's disobedient hand toward it.⁸⁸ Although Boehme likewise discussed the tree of knowledge and its fruit, attributing Adam's fall from his paradisaical condition to the lust that had infected his nature,⁸⁹ a more apposite comparison – as Winthrop Hudson and Nigel Smith have appreciated – is with Sebastian Franck's *The Forbidden Fruit*.⁹⁰

23. First published at Ulm in 1534 as the third in a four-part collection which included German translations of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine & vanitate scientiarum*, Franck's *Von dem Baum des Wissens güts unnd böses* was afterwards issued separately at Augsburg in 1538 and then a century later translated from a Latin version into English by John Everard.⁹¹ Combining elements of Johannes Tauler and *Theologia Germanica* with selective paraphrasing of Agrippa's savage criticism of contemporary moral attitudes and the insufficiency of

86 Jacob Boehme, XL. *Questions Concerning the Soule*, trans. J[ohn] S[parrow] (1647), 1.179, pp. 26–27; Boehme, *Three Principles*, 4.37, 65–67, 5.16–18, 24, 10.8, 11.1–2, 12.56, pp. 24, 30–31, 37, 39, 79, 90, 112; see also, Hans Martensen, *Jacob Boehme, 1575–1624. Studies in his Life and Teaching*, trans. T. Rhys Evans (revised Stephen Hobhouse, 1949), pp. 125–30; John Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity. A Study in Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, PA, 1957), pp. 236–38; Andrew Weeks, *Boehme. An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany, NY, 1991), pp. 78–81.

87 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 259–60, 338, 493, vol. 2, pp. 129, 132, 172, 173, 176–77, 207. Thomason dated his copy of *Fire in the Bush* 19 March 1650.

88 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 260–61, 270, 341, 534, vol. 2, p. 177, 180–81, 188.

89 Boehme, *Three Principles*, 9.6, 10.22–25, 11.5–10, 39–41, pp. 66–67, 82–83, 91–92, 99.

90 W.S. Hudson, 'Gerrard Winstanley and the early Quakers', *Church History*, 12 (1943), p. 179 n. 9; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed. Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 238, 239–40.

91 CUL, MS Dd.XII.68 fols. 2-49, Sebastian Franck, 'The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil', trans. John Everard (1638); Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, pp. 51, 57–58; Steven Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent. Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 146–48; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 114–15, 122, 125.

learning – ‘meer ignorant fables and foolishnesse’ – Franck’s mockery of human wisdom was counterbalanced by his call for humility and self-abnegation:

except ye renounce your selves, and hate your own life, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Accordingly Franck equated the tree with Adam’s nature, will and knowledge. Upon eating its fruit Adam became enamoured of himself. This self-love was a vice and following his banishment from paradise the tree was planted in Adam’s heart. Henceforth it spread throughout his boughs (descendants) so that:

This tree is planted in every one of our hearts, and is nothing else but our own wit, reason, flesh, knowledge, and will, to which as long as we adhere ... we can have no pardon from God.⁹²

Both Franck and subsequently Winstanley envisaged the tree as existing within humanity, its fruit symbolising deleterious attributes that made people love themselves and their empty accomplishments instead of God. Indeed, despite slight variations the resemblances between them are suggestive and while it cannot be proven that Winstanley read Franck he still seems to have been familiar, albeit perhaps indirectly, with his teachings. It is also noteworthy that although Winstanley’s interpretation was not a blasphemous offence other allegorical readings which took the Serpent to mean sexual appetite had aroused the Presbyterian heresiographer Thomas Edwards’s indignation.⁹³

24. A profound consequence of eating the forbidden fruit was God’s cursing the serpent and the ground (Genesis 3:14–18). The latter was usually interpreted as compelling humans to labour for food outside Eden and accounted for the origin of cultivation. For Winstanley, however, the cursed earth had a twofold meaning. Inwardly it represented the power of darkness which held the corrupted flesh of fallen humanity in bondage; outwardly it signified barren wasteland entangled with thorns and briars (Isaiah 10:17). Yet redemption was at hand. Like wheat buried under clods of earth, Christ the son of righteousness was ‘arising and spreading himself again’ within the hearts of his sons and daughters, breaking forth in glory to remove the curse placed upon the Creation (Romans 8:22) – that is, purifying humanity. At the same time fertilising, tilling, digging and ploughing the earth would create a blessed fruitful common treasury akin to Eden.⁹⁴ Boehme on the other hand explained that the curse changed Adam’s nature from a paradisaical into a bestial man. Adam fell into the four elements, becoming a mixture of earth, fire, air and water. In addition, God withdrew his hidden element from the earth so that the root of earthly fruit now consisted of the four elements which nonetheless retained their fierce

92 Augustine Eluthenius [*pseud.* = Sebastian Franck], *The Forbidden Fruit: or, a treatise Of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evill*, trans. John Everard (1642), pp. 5–6, 15, 46–47, 50, 61, 107–08, 150; cf. Valentin Weigel [*pseud.*], *Astrology Theologized* (1649), p. 27.

93 Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (3 vols., 1646), vol. 3, p. 2; cf. Anon., *Divinity and Philosophy Dissected, and set forth, by a mad Man* (Amsterdam?, 1644), pp. 39–40; Anon., *Little non-such* (1646), p. 4; Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), book 7, chapter 1, pp. 339–41.

94 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 263, 268, 279–80, 356, 359–61, 368, 374, 421, 422–24, 473, 474, 475, 478, 480, 482, 509, 513–14.

quality. Animals too became wilder and fiercer thus bringing an end to Adam's dominion over them.⁹⁵

25. Notwithstanding its pernicious legacy, Winstanley believed that the indwelling God would remove the curse. Apprehending God first as a bright and clear burning spirit, then a 'fiery orb' or 'everlasting fire' of love, and finally as 'pure reason', he promised that God's appearance within human hearts would cleanse the poisoned earth – that is, consume the cursed powers of envy, pride, covetousness and self-will that ruled within corrupted flesh. Winstanley likened this process to purging dross from gold in a furnace and recounted how he had been tormented when the enmity of his own nature had been 'scorched and burned' by God's righteous law (the dispensation of his wrath) shining forth upon him.⁹⁶ David Mulder has suggested that Winstanley's ideology was indebted to Hermetic philosophy and that alchemical themes derived from Boehme and ultimately Paracelsus pervade his texts: original sin corresponded to the sulphuric or masculine principle, the four elements to the mercurial or feminine principle, while God equated with salt or the fiery principle.⁹⁷ Even so, Mulder's scheme is too elaborate and cannot be supported with evidence. Certainly comparing cleansing from sin through the transmuting agency of Christ's fiery love with the separation of gold from dross in the refiner's fire was a favoured alchemical simile.⁹⁸ But Winstanley did not appropriate the Paracelsian-Behmenist concept of three primordial substances or principles: Sulphur, Mercury and Salt. Only salt occurs in his writings.⁹⁹ This is because his language was primarily biblical, drawing in these instances on Isaiah 1:25 and Hebrews 12:29. Indeed, the potent image of Christ's appearance as a refiner purging impurities like gold tried in the fire (Malachi 3:2–3, 2 Esdras 16:73, Revelation 3:18) was fairly commonplace in puritan conversion narratives.¹⁰⁰ Alchemical resonances therefore constitute a minor rather than major chord in Winstanley's writings.

26. As for Winstanley's concept of an inner light in conflict with darkness and use of expressions also found in Boehme, namely 'children of light' and 'dark world', these too are explicable.¹⁰¹ Children of light is biblical (John 12:36), while dark world was a term used by a number of well-known Church of England clergymen including Arthur Dent, Richard Rogers, William Perkins, John Preston and William Dell.

95 Boehme, *Three Principles*, 18.3–9, pp. 215–17.

96 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 102–03, 266–67, 331, 339, 345, 346, 358–59, 361, 372, 377–78, 413, 431, 440.

97 Mulder, *Alchemy of Revolution*, pp. 52–66; cf. Hayes, *Winstanley the Digger*, pp. 63, 66–67, 77–79, 80; Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 99.

98 Cf. Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ Discovered*, [trans. John Sparrow?] (1648), book 1 pp. 49, 87, book 4 pp. 17, 23; Boehme, *Epistles*, sig.a2^{r3}.

99 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 348, 413, 530, vol. 2, pp. 101, 109, 175, 200, 262, 310, 356.

100 Hessayon, 'Gold Tried in the Fire', pp. 89–90.

101 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 102, 434; Boehme, *Three Principles*, 9.45, 14.31, 19.58, pp. 76, 138, 253 (children of light); *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, p. 313, vol. 2, p. 204; Boehme, *Way to Christ*, book 1 p. 2, book 3 p. 16 no. 46; Boehme, *Epistles*, 1.66, 2.8, 4.105, 5.40, 5.63, 5.67, 5.71, pp. 15, 20, 64, 74, 78, 79 (dark world).

Perhaps more interesting is Winstanley's sense of apocalyptic chronology. He variously maintained that Adam disobeyed, fell or died 'about 6000 years ago'. Significantly, he also believed that this period of time had nearly expired and that the world would therefore continue for 6000 years.¹⁰² Counting each millennium as equivalent to one of God's days (2 Peter 3:8), Winstanley may also have known popularisations of a Jewish prophecy attributed to Elias's progeny or disciples and taken from the Babylonian Talmud. In the Hebraist Hugh Broughton's version these 6000 years of human history were divided into three equal ages: 2000 years before the Law (*Tobu*); 2000 years with Mosaic Law; 2000 years in the days of the Messiah (Christ).¹⁰³ The prophecy also accorded with the notion that following the 6000 years there would be a further 1000 when Christ ruled with his saints. This was the millennium, corresponding to the seventh day (Sabbath of rest) in the creation narrative. Its central theme was also incorporated within several predictions and discussed by, among others, Michael Gühler in *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1651), who calculated that the allotted 6000 years would expire in 1655.¹⁰⁴ Boehme was more cautious. Responding in August 1620 to the visionary Paul Kaym's chiliastic interpretation of scriptural passages concerning the 'Last Times', he warned against attempting to penetrate God's secrets without divine illumination; whether or not the world continued for 'Seven thousand' years (Elias's 6000 added to the millennial Sabbath) was a mystery hidden from mankind.¹⁰⁵

IV

27. In the absence of a library catalogue, ownership inscription, quotations, paraphrasing, allusions, neologisms, linguistic similarities and pronounced affinities of thought, there is no evidence to suggest that Boehme's published writings – either acquired directly from a bookseller, or mediated through friends and acquaintances – had any discernible influence on Winstanley. The same can probably be said of several other translated texts within the same milieu: *Theologia Germanica* and works by or attributed to Paracelsus, Weigel and Cusanus. As we have seen, a significant exception is Franck's *Forbidden Fruit*, while possible Familist parallels need examining further. To ask to what degree Winstanley's thought was indebted to or a reaction against Boehme's philosophy thus poses one question which simultaneously obscures another. Namely, did any Diggers influence certain Behmenists? Reframing this potential relationship yields a more suggestive conclusion. For it is conceivable that the Surrey Diggers, who would send out authorised emissaries in March 1650, spread

102 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 483, 499, 500, 535, vol. 2, pp. 130, 207, 208; cf. William Farmer, *Art thou a Ruler in Israel* (1648), p. 10; Henry Walker, *Beresbit, The Creation of the world* (1649), p. 6; Edward Spencer, *A Breife Epistle to the Learned Manasseh Ben Israel* (1650), p. 8; TheaurauJohn Tany [pseud. = Thomas Totney], *My EDICT Royal* (no date = 1655?), p. 1.

103 Hugh Broughton, *A treatise of Melchisedek, proving him to be Sem* (1591), sig. iir; John Harvey, *A Discursive Probleme concerning Prophecies* (1588), pp. 12–17; see also, Désirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches. Traditional symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (1964), p. 148; Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 150, 156, 161.

104 [Michael Gühler], *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1651), pp. 26, 34; Eleanor Davies, *The Restitution of Prophecy* (1651), pp. 38–39; Anon., *Sundry strange Prophecies of Merline, Bede, Becket* (1652), p. 34.

105 Boehme, *Epistles*, 4.39, 4.50, 4.51, pp. 54–55, 56.

features of their message to the Berkshire Behmenists through the renegade Everard. Tellingly, Pordage and his 'Family' reportedly lived together in 'Community' at Bradfield. One member of this spiritual community, Mary Pocock, adopted the biblical name Rahab (breadth) and was rumoured to espouse community of goods. Another, Thomas Bromley, was apparently 'much against' ownership. Though the minister Richard Baxter alleged that they desired 'all things should be common, and none should own Propriety', he nonetheless conceded that their tenets – like the Diggers – did not extend to polygamy (community of women). Indeed, these Behmenists were said to abhor 'flesh & carnal Relations' and, advocating chastity as an alternative, apparently objected to the lawfulness of marriage; Bromley for example died unwed and childless.¹⁰⁶

28. 'No man is an island, entire of itself' observed John Donne, and this is true of Winstanley too. But beyond the King James Bible and the few works he referred to, it has tended to prove difficult to establish what he read and how it influenced him. The reason, I suspect, is twofold. Firstly, it is easier to demonstrate the presence or absence of textual sources – if not always conclusively, then at least with a degree of confidence – than to ascertain how ideas were disseminated orally. Yet greater allowance needs to be made for the likelihood that some of the seeds that germinated into Winstanley's mature philosophy were sown in this manner. He heard Protestant clergymen preach sermons and seems to have discussed his doctrines privately in conversation and publicly during disputations.¹⁰⁷ Here important work on the interwoven relationship between oral and literate culture may prove a fruitful avenue of future investigation.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, for all the inconsistencies and contradictions within his published writings, it must be recognised that Winstanley had a gift for original thought.¹⁰⁹ Coupled with his undoubted literary achievement this deserves our respect.

106 DWL, MS Baxter, Treatises III 67, fol. 302v; Fowler, *Dæmonium Meridianum*, pp. 15, 65; Richard Baxter, *The Unreasonableness of Infidelity* (1655), part iii, p. 156; Richard Baxter, *A Key for Catholics* (1659), p. 331; Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (1696), book 1, p. 77; Ariel Hessayon, 'Bromley, Thomas (bap. 1630, d. 1691)', ODNB; Hessayon, 'Gold Tried in the Fire', pp. 194–200, 317–23.

107 *Complete Works of Winstanley*, vol. 1, pp. 99, 285, 313–14, 316, 317, 318, 513, 526, 542, 558, 567, vol. 2, pp. 80, 91, 287.

108 Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

109 Cf. John Gurney, quoting Nigel Smith: 'Perhaps ... we should recognise "the capacity for extreme opinions regarding perfection and scriptural interpretation to develop autonomously through Scripture reading and separately from any particular tradition", while at the same time avoiding the temptation to dismiss the possibility of such a link'. See, Gurney, *Brave community*, p. 95; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 108.