(Keynote paper and publication from the Oxford University Conference.)

Radical Reformation and the Anticipation of Modernism in Jacob Boehme[1]

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The Nobel Prize-winning post-war German author Günter Grass once wrote a novel that re-imagined the seminal post-war German writers' conference Group 47. Instead of 1947, his *Meeting at Telgte* takes place at the end of the Thirty Years' War. The parallel suggests that thinking people in either era were shipwrecked by history: they were forced to recover a lost culture and restore a language debased by ideological or confessional propaganda. As a *roman à clef*, Grass's *Meeting* requires Baroque counterparts for the Modernists and Realists of his own period. Who could stand in for Franz Kafka as the guiding light of a resurgent German Modernism? In Grass's novel, it is Jacob Boehme who inspires the Baroque Modernists.

The analogy is appealing. Modernism departs from Realism in rendering invisible things visible, as in Paul Klee's dictum, "Art does not reproduce the visible but rather makes visible".[2] Boehme articulated invisible metaphysical realities that made his readers see with the eye of the mind. The mystic as Modernist is a literary joke with a profound meaning. The intricate images that adorn early editions of Boehme's books evoke the world as a symbolic mystery. The puzzle of his life and

[1] This chapter is based on the revised version of a keynote lecture at the 2010 Oxford conference on Jacob Boehme.
[2] Paul Klee, *Schöpferische Konfession* (1920), cited in Max Huggler, *Paul Klee: Die Malerei als Blick in den Kosmos* (Stuttgart: Huber, 1969), 19 ("Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar").

work encourages us to seek coherence among the seemingly incoherent elements in his writings and between the work, its author, his time, and our own.

The incoherence begins with our image of the shoemaker-mystic. He wants us to believe that his writing is as simple as his self-representation. Yet nothing in German Baroque literature is as complicated. His life, as we know it, was ordinary. Of prosperous peasant origin, he learned the craft of a shoemaker and established a family. Around 1600, his experience of illumination and sense of religious calling propelled him to write for himself and others like him.

We need to un-couple the dual aspects of his paradox: his anomalous status as a simple shoemaker and the incommensurate complexities of his writing with its threefold worlds, seven divine spirits, and vast array of arcane concepts. From the start, Boehme attracted a lay readership consisting of the middle class of his time. How could such daunting expositions serve ordinary readers? To reconcile the discrepancy between his simple person and his intricate mode of expression, we need to understand how simplicity and complexity – tantamount to the anticlericalism and Paracelsism in his work – were in reality two sides of the same coin.

A shoemaker practicing theology violated the prerogatives of the clergy. Boehme did so within a long tradition of medieval and Reformation anticlericalism. There has been much recent interest in the rebellion of the lay folk against the power, authority, and privilege of the clerical estate or office. Though there were certainly various motives for early modern anticlericalism, Hans-Jürgen Goertz states convincingly in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* that, "Anticlericalism then was much more a matter of criticizing those holding office in the church out of a

deep, fundamental religious need."[3] Nineteenth- and twentieth-century anticlericalism is associated with atheism and materialism. Medieval and early modern anticlericalism typically reacted to the failure of religious institutions to measure up to their religious principles. Though more religious than its post-Enlightenment manifestations, Reformation anticlericalism was not less strident. Empowered by Luther's doctrine of the universal lay priesthood and his verbal attacks on the pope and the monastic estate, it culminated in revolutionary violence, in excesses we might associate with atheistic Bolshevism or radical Islam. Images were destroyed, graves desecrated, sacred objects defiled, churches degraded to stables, and the religious harassed and persecuted.[4] Luther retreated from the lay priesthood of the believer,[5] condemning peasant revolt and doctrinal dissent, but radical reformers maintained the anticlerical thrust of his doctrine even against Luther himself.

Anticlericalism also lay at the heart of a Reformation tendency opposed to externals in religion. The tendency is referred to in German as *Spiritualismus*. The Spiritualists raised the spirit above the letter and disdained what they called the "church of walls."[6] They condemned Pharisees and false teachers. In Luther's German, Pharisees are "Schriftgelehrten," scholars of scripture. The Spiritualists considered them unregenerate authoritarians who imposed the dead letter of

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[3] H.-J. Goertz, "Anticlericalism," *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 46-51...
[4] Johannes Janssen, *History of the German People*, trans. A. M. Christie (New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. 6, 204-5.
[5] Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert T. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 182.
[6] The term had been anticipated by Luther's pejorative "Geisterei," but its use is integrated into the social history of the church by Ernst Troeltsch in *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1923), 863-64, 898.

doctrine from above. Throughout his writings, Boehme asserted himself in opposition to authoritarian pastors and scholars. *Aurora* denounced the arrogance of "Doctores" who forbid him his theological speculation, while instigating conflict with their incessant quarrelling.[7] He pilloried them as "Maul-Pfaffen" (mouth-priests) who know only the letter of scripture.[8]

The Spiritualists were dissenting individualists with diverse ideas and beliefs. Despite their shared influences and similarities, they constituted something more like a tendency than a tradition. Caspar Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Franck, and their kindred spirit Paracelsus were all born prior to 1500. The notorious revolutionary and mystic Thomas Müntzer is sometimes included, though he was exceptional in advocating force. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Spiritualist thought matured in Valentin Weigel (1533-1588). The more reflective Spiritualists did not plunder monasteries, harass priests, or circulate woodcuts of monks emerging from the devil's anus. With some justification, they indicted the clergy as the source of strife and dissension. Boehme even blamed the clergy for the exploitation of the poor and the aggression of the secular princes. In his usage, "der Laye" or lay person is both the clerically unanointed and the materially oppressed.[9] The Spiritualists reinforced their opposition with elaborations of theory that included the paradoxes of Franck, the epistemology and cosmology of Weigel, and the metaphysical speculations of Boehme.

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[7] Jacob Böhme, *Aurora,* oder *Morgenröthe im Aufgang, Sämtliche Schriften,* ed. Will-Erich Peuckert, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1955), p 325, 326.. Subsequent citations of Boehme refer to this edition by volume and page.

[8] Böhme, *Beschreibung der Drey Principien, Schriften,* 2, 468.

[9] Böhme, *Aurora,* 154. The victim of exploitation by the rich or oppression by the aggressive prince suffers it as a "layman".

Spiritualist theory responded to the contradictions of a Reformation which had set out to simplify and purify faith but instead created an unresolvable perplexity of contending doctrines. The second half of the sixteenth century was dominated by Protestant internecine quarrels. The Gnesio-Lutheran controversies and the disputes between Lutherans and Calvinists raged on in the shadow of a Catholic resurgence. These quarrels were Weigel's point of departure.[10] He was a dissenting Lutheran pastor who read Paracelsus, Franck, and the medieval mystics. Weigel not only raises spirit above letter. He attempts to transcend the superficial understanding of nature which appears to be a correlative of the superficiality of biblical literalism. His objective is not to propound some new doctrine. He criticizes the terms of theology and the relationship of the knower to the known. Reality itself cries out for spiritualization. Authorized by certain biblical passages (among them 2 Corinthians 3:6, the killing letter and life-giving spirit; Luke 17:21, the kingdom of God within us; and John 1:1-3, the divine creator Word), the theorizing dissent of the Spiritualists seeks the living spirit not only beneath the letter of the Bible and within the believer, but even inside the inert elements of physical nature. The Spiritualist receptiveness to alchemy, nature philosophy, and introspection takes shape in Boehme's complicated positive objectives.

But first we need to consider yet another aspect of his anticlericalism. This was the age of *cuius regio, eius religio*. Dynastic successions resulted in the imposition of new doctrines on territorial populations. Boehme's Lutheran Lusatia was not only

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[10] On his sources and range of thought, see A. Weeks, *Valentin Weigel (1533-1588): German Religious Dissenter, Speculative Theorist, and Advocate of Tolerance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). Weigel's main theoretical works are available as Valentin Weigel, *Selected Spiritual Writings,* in *Classics of Western Spirituality,* trans. A. Weeks (New York: Paulist Press, 2003). Weigel recounts his seminal consternation in ch. 24 of *The Golden Grasp,* 205-06.

threatened by the Catholicism of its Habsburg overlord. It was destabilized by Lutheran, Crypto-Calvinist, or Philippist rulers who traded places and insults in neighbouring Saxony. In the confessional free-for-all of the late sixteenth century, a stable orthodoxy was more elusive than later. In many regions, Lutheranism was considered an achievement of the popular will. The people clung to it. Calvinism was more thorough in eliminating vestiges of Roman Catholicism and imposing discipline on communities, but those tendencies also made its followers more confrontational. When the Calvinist territorial rulers imposed their rational doctrine of the bread and wine, substituting baker's bread for the sacred host, their Lutheran subjects resisted. There were spectacular riots and insurrections.[11]

These events help to explain Boehme's outspoken defence of the controversial Lutheran doctrines of Christ's corporeal presence in Communion and the ubiquity of Christ's body. The Calvinists ridiculed the doctrine of the real bodily presence in the bread and wine and its corollary doctrine of ubiquity. Modern thinking brushes aside such doctrines as residual pre-modern dogma. We should instead ask what they meant to their defenders. Boehme defends the real presence, but protests against all quarrelling theologians. Divine corporeal presence in the bread and wine confirmed the immediate relationship of the layperson's being to God.[12] In Boehme's Lutheran community surrounded by confessional rivals, these beliefs were more than just doctrine. They embodied personal and popular

[11] J. Janssen, in *History of the German People*, vol. 10, 283, 290, 291, gives examples of Lutheran popular resistance to Calvinism during the years in which Boehme was at work on *Aurora*.

[12] *Aurora* pillories "Calvinus" for restricting Christ's body in place (294). The next work is even more explicit in its reasoning: Christ has promised to be with the faithful until the end of the world (Mat 28:20); his body and blood, as the true food and drink, are his promise of eternal life (John 6:54-55). Only those who still suffer the illness of Adam could imagine an absent Christ. See *Beschreibung der Drey Principien*, 402.

freedoms, the salvation of the individual soul and the autonomy and experience of the community.

Boehme's vision of a God omnipresent resonated with Lutheran Lusatians surrounded on three sides by Catholic and Calvinist powers on the eve of the Thirty Years' War:

Therefore you human child, is it not so that the false shepherds without calling perpetually quarrel, and each of them says: "Come hither to me: Christ is here, Christ is there"; and each of them condemns the other and consigns him to the devil, destroys harmony, and extinguishes the love, in which the spirit of God is born; and engenders nothing but bitterness, and seduces the laity into believing that Christ is a shepherd of quarrelling, attacks his opponents, instigates war and murder: this is supposed to be the spirit of God. This is supposed to be the path to Paradise.[13]

Those exclaiming, "Christ is here, Christ is there!,"[14] are the Catholic and Calvinist dogmatists who would impose their exclusive path to salvation. Against their injunctions, Boehme reaffirms the omnipresence of the invisible God.divine flesh. Christ's body with all persons of the Trinity is everywhere, because the seven divine source-spirits which constitute nature as the body of God inform all things.

Boehme's simple negatives are balanced by his complex positives. His anticlericalism is complemented by his view of nature as revelation. His *Rising Dawn* or *Aurora* (written in 1612) begins with a tree metaphor. Like the branches of a tree,

[13] Böhme, *Beschreibung der Drey Principien, Schriften,* 90-91.
[14] This trope echoes the Spiritualist *locus classicus* drawn from Luke 17:21. It is significant for the Spiritualists that the last two words were once translated "within you" (King James Version) or "inwendig in euch" (Luther).

knowledge of God (the theology of the subtitle) and the knowledge of nature (exemplified by astrology and philosophy, which study the celestial and terrestrial worlds respectively) possess a common mother or root. Theology and natural science sprout from this same root, and the growth of the tree is the unfolding totality of knowledge. First comes revealed truth. It is falsified by a venal merchant (the pope), who profits from the tree's fruit. When the truth is restored (by the Reformation), bitter disputes commence over the root. These are the doctrinal quarrels of the present time. As the tree grows toward the final stage in the life of the world, one last green branch sprouts, not from the proud heights of learning, but from the very root itself. In this last green branch, the final revelation proceeds from all nature. What is revealed in this last greening is nothing other than the content of Boehme's work itself.

To know what is revealed, we therefore have to read his work. After reconstructing the coherence of its elements, I will offer practical suggestions for reading Boehme: where to begin and what to expect. One key component is the new heliocentric cosmology.[15] *Aurora* heralds it ecstatically. Much like anticlericalism, heliocentrism turns the world upside down. It also calls for recognition of force fields which assure order in the free-floating cosmos. However, in the final revelation of nature, one can scarcely overestimate the role of the speculative Paracelsism which Boehme presumably knew from physicians or scholars in his region, which was a center for collecting and editing his writings. Though Boehme's Paracelsism has long been recognized, it is now becoming more accessible through

[15] Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 5, 54-57.

the edition of the theological writings of Paracelsus by Urs Leo Gantenbein and the translation of the main theoretical writings into English.[16] Just as Luther had placed the Bible in lay hands, Paracelsus appeared to promise a fresh and more direct access to nature.[17] Lutheran anticlericalism and Paracelsian nature theory are therefore two sides of the same paradigm shift toward a new and unmediated knowledge.

Paracelsism made grandiose claims; it is hardly a direct empirical approach to nature. The Paracelsian concepts of microcosm and macrocosm, of the doctrine of signatures, and of the three principles which embody an essential fire in nature, have medieval origins.[18] The notion of divine powers in nature is Neo-Platonic and patristic. The Augustinian *rationes seminales* might differ in characterization from the "seeds" and divine influences of Paracelsus, which differ in turn from Boehme's seven source spirits in God, but all these concepts of divine power in nature are vindicated by biblical tropes of God as all things in all and the Word through which all things are created according to the Prologue of the Gospel of John. By whatever name, they confirm that divine powers inform created nature. Nor are Boehme's multiple worlds new. Nicholas of Cusa, Johannes Reuchlin, and Agrippa von Nettesheim could have served as precedents.

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[16] Urs Leo Gantenbein (ed.) in collaboration with Michael Baumann and Detlef Roth, *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim): Theologische Werke*, vol. 1 (*Vita Beata – Vom seligen Leben*), in *Neue Paracelsus-Edition*, I (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008); Paracelsus, *Essential Theoretical Writings*, trans. A. Weeks(Leiden: Brill, 2008). Subsequent references to this volume are cited as W by page.

[17] Nature can be immediately intuited as a mirror image of the invisible world known in and through the human being: "What is philosophy other than the invisible nature"(W 113). Knowledge proceeding from the light of nature by virtue of divine illumination supersedes human books. See Paracelsus, *Labyrinthus medicorum errantium*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Karl Sudhoff (Munich and Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1928), vol. 11, 201.

[18] On the medieval sources of Paracelsus see W 62-63, 89, 112-13, 316-17, 356, 359; cf. A. Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 30-32.

This brings us to a pivotal distinction which emerges with Paracelsus and breaks ground for Boehme: the displacement or inversion of medieval hierarchy. Typical for the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* reproduces a multi-storied hierarchy of worlds: the terrestrial, celestial, and divine worlds. Knowledge of their ascending powers is reserved for a hierarchy of elite scholars who hold philosophical, mathematical, and theological qualifications respectively. The symbolic medieval or Neo-Platonic hierarchy is an architecture of ascending dignity. The spatial and metaphysical hierarchy suggests a pyramid of authorities, crowned by clerical and theological supremacy. This is as true of the canonical hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius as it is of the thirteenth-century Dominican preacher Bertold of Regensburg. Bertold's popular sermons projected ten celestial choirs which betokened the ordered ranking of the estates and professions. First and highest was the clergy.[19]

Luther cast scorn upon these celestial and ecclesiastic hierarchies.[20] In the same vein, Paracelsus disputed the special authority of both the learned humanists and the clergy. Teaching and writing in the vernacular, he confidently took up matters of theology, medicine, magic, and astronomy (though the latter is transformed in his hands into something without resemblance to the mathematical science of Copernicus or Kepler). Paracelsus explicitly reclaimed all provinces of knowledge, first for the physician in *Opus Paragranum* (H 2:53; W 191),[21] and

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[19]"Von zehen körn der engele und der cristenheit: simile est regnum celorum," in Berthold von Regensburg, *Vier Predigten* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983). Hierarchy is manifest in the pseudo-Dionysian visions of power and authority with the worldy and ecclesiastic realms in parallel ascent.

[20] Martin Luther, *Werke* 42 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1908), 174-75.

[21] Theophrastus Paracelsus, *Bücher und Schrifften*, ed. Johannes Huser (Basel: Waldkirch, 1589; reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1971), cited as H by volume and page.

subsequently for every human being in his influential *On the Foundation of the Sciences and Wisdom* (*Liber de fundamento scientiarivm, sapientiaeque*, H 9:414). In his worldview, the elements, the *astra* or stellar powers, and the spirit-like influences of God all inhabit an accessible realm of nature.[22] Paracelsus insists that knowledge of nature is immediate. Nowhere in his writings do we find the hierarchy of higher worlds, intelligible only to learned elites. For Weigel as well, knowledge that had been higher now lies deeper within us. The ascending order of elements, astral powers, and God has shifted to an inner hierarchy accessible to the inspired seeker.

For many readers, then and now, the result has seemed dauntingly opaque. Yet in casting off the "fool Aristotle," Paracelsus promised to do for nature what Luther had done for the Bible. The problem was to discover from his widely circulating writings what this meant. Weigel and Boehme were among those attempting to sort out Paracelsus's ill-defined alchemical and astral forces. *Aurora* follows the lead of Martin Ruland by consolidating the Paracelsian forces into a sequence of seven prime qualities.[23] In implicit fulfilment of its subtitle, *Aurora* associates the seven planetary influences with Ruland's seven alchemical spirit qualities. Earthly elements and celestial stars are integrated into the flexible formula of the seven eternal source-spirits and their dynamically intermingling qualities. The atom-like paradigm of the seven evokes both the astral powers and the alchemically disclosed inner forces in the elements and, by extension, heaven and earth, the angels

[22] W 26, 172-75, 330.
[23] Weeks, *Boehme*, 73; cf. Martin Ruland, *Lexicon Alchemiae* (1612) (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 442.

in the former and the elemental entities in the latter. Common to all spheres are the divine source-spirits and their dynamically ordered qualities.[24]

The source-spirits are a utopian model of unity in diversity. Their pattern is a microcosm of all divine and created being. The regenerative harmony of the source spirits is sublimated in the political concord of the angelic kingdoms. The love play of the source spirits is paralleled by the benevolent diplomatic exchanges of the angelic hosts. Without subjugation or banishment, the angels enjoy both freedom of movement and a natural right, "ein Naturrecht," each to its own place of birth. No angelic kingdom begrudges any other its particular qualities. Lest we miss the point, the author cautions us that the angelic world is the mirror of an ideal earthly justice.[25]

The surviving autograph of *Aurora* is dated in the author's own hand. It was written out in the first six months of 1612. This coincided with the interval between the transfer of power in Bohemia and Lusatia from Rudolph II and the crowning of Matthias as the new emperor. During this interval, the Lusatians could hope for an extension to their homeland of the Bohemian letter of religious tolerance, for which they had been lobbying since 1609. When Matthias is crowned without fulfilling their hopes, the *Aurora* fragment breaks off after a note of sombre prophecy.[26]

Nevertheless, the universalism of *Aurora* has a cosmic authority, with the source spirits as a microcosm of all divine and created being. The creating, ordering, and transforming power of the source-spirits and their associated qualities gives

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[24] Weeks, *Boehme*, 70-74, 106-09.

[25] Weeks, *Boehme,* 79-80; "Die Welt der Engel als Utopie des Friedens in Böhmes *Aurora*," *Festschrift für Ernst-Heinz Lemper* (1999):63-69.

[26] Böhme, *Aurora*, 401.

meaning to Boehme's assertion that the terrestrial and celestial worlds are all of a piece. He claims to have experienced the universality of heavens and earth with his senses aided by the Holy Spirit. The ubiquity of the divine spirits or "essences" negates the cosmic, metaphysical, clerical, and academic hierarchies with a single stroke. Recognition of the sun as the centre of the cosmos reconfirms the homogeneity of the all-encompassing heavens and thereby highlights the divine forces. Without them, the order of the free-floating cosmos would be inconceivable. In scholastic-Aristotelian cosmology, the heavens were substantially distinct from the sublunary realm. Boehme's seminal illumination of 1600 recognizes that "the true heavens are everywhere." He claims that everything else follows from this. Indeed, we can connect the dots in a logical order from his interpretation of his recounted illumination, to the stated program of *Aurora* with its heliocentrism and alchemy, its penetration of celestial and elemental realms, to the ubiquitous order of divine spirit and the ecstatic sense of revelation pervading his work. The problem for the reader is that there seems to be no end to the dots: his concepts and terms multiply as if there were strength in numbers.

His vast arsenal of concepts and symbols supports the simple idea that nature, witnessed by the untutored human being inspired by the Holy Spirit, is a second Bible: a divinely-authored Book of Nature. The light of nature augments scripture. It offers a new revelation which should resolve all disputes. The reader is induced to seek out the harmony between the terms of nature and the truth of scripture. This is somewhat like searching for hidden treasures that have been cleverly concealed for children in places they are sure to look. The contrived mystery is more urgent than the correlation of terms. In Paracelsus, key concepts

had been associated with the Bible.[27] Boehme refines their biblical associations. Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt, found already in the fifteenth-century *Book of the Holy Trinity*, had been likened by Paracelsus to the three divine persons.[28] Boehme redeems their latent potential, just as his "signatures of things" expand upon a medieval thinking that had recognized divine signs and vestiges in nature.[29] Medieval alchemy had hardly been foreign to Christian symbolism, nor to the exercise of parsing nature in terms of microcosm and macrocosm. Even Luther had no problem with these terms.[30]

Boehme extends their pattern so that even the smallest circle of nature is said to contain the entire being of the divinity. If this seems unbiblical, it conforms to the Pauline trope of God as all in all.[31] This commonplace of so-called mystical writing captures the facets of his vision and echoes his tradition. The erudite Nicholas of Cusa handled this trope as a syllogism. If all things are in God and God in all, then all things are in all other things.[32] This makes for a vastly enriched conception of divine ubiquity. In search of the complex in the simple and vice versa, the artisan polishes a lens for contemplating nature through faith by construing all things in all.

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[27] A. Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the German Reformation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 118-23.
[28] Theophrast von Hohenheim, genannt Paracelsus, *De genealogia Christi*, in *Sämtliche Werke, 2. Abteilung (Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften*), vol. 3, 63.
[29] F. Ohly, *Zur Signaturenlehre der frühen Neuzeit*: *Bemerkungen zur mittelalterlichen Vorgeschichte und zur Eigenart einer epochalen Denkform in Wissenschaft, Literatur und Kunst* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1999).
[30] Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1908), vol. 42, 51. Luther did not object to the concept of microcosm.
[31] 1 Cor 12:6; 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 1:23; Col 3:10-11.
[32] A. Weeks, *German Mysticism* (1993), 107-14, 178-84.

Boehme applies the lens of *omnes in omnibus* to the elements, vegetation, bodies, human or angelic, and to the heavens. He applies it to our conscious or subliminal inner life of desire, anxiety, unrest, and equilibrium. This results in what can be aptly called a metaphysics of will. Schopenhauer cited pertinent passages in Boehme's *Vom irdischen und Himmlischen Mysterio*, before he discovered the ancient Hindu thought which he preferred to claim as his philosophical precursor.[33] Boehme's work imagines a primal cosmic will materializing out of vain longing to grasp the light. His speculative *tour de force* is intentionally mysterious. It has its antecedents.

The first will is called the *matrix* of all being. The Paracelsian medical treatise *On the Matrix* had recycled a medieval gynaecology which equated gestation and birth with the creation of the world: macrocosm and microcosm *in statu nascendi*.[34] And what about the light shining in the darkness? We know this trope from John 1:5. Boehme's metaphysics of will adapts and develops the Paracelsian *matrix* to elaborate a riff on the Prologue of John. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot grasp the light.[35] The self-absorbing concentration of the blind darkness, the reification of its frustrated longing and incomprehension, materializes in the birth of the elemental world, out of which stuff we are made. Boehme's cosmic puzzles reward the simple lay reader who knows Luther's Bible chapter and verse.

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[33] A. Weeks, "Schopenhauer und Böhme," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 73 (1992): 7-17.
[34] W 616-18 ; cf. Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: Karger, 1958), 238.
[35] Weeks, *Boehme*, 105; *German Mysticism*, 22.

The identity or congruity of theogony, cosmogony, birth, and spiritual rebirth is not set out discursively. It is intimated, as in poetry or music, by the repetition of motifs: the first will, darkness and light, the spiritual photo-generation of whatever is good in nature. We can only guess in a leap of faith. The correct association might be found in a nearby passage. The inner and outer, spirit and nature, are everywhere allegorical of one another. This leads to an ultimate revelation. The creation of the world and the human being, the fall, the torment of birth, death, and rebirth, and the final resolution of things: these are the alpha and omega of Holy Scripture. Applying his mystical lens of *omnes in omnibus* to the Bible brings Boehme's Spiritualism full circle. His late, massive treatise *Mysterium Magnum* interprets Genesis chapter by chapter in the light of Paracelsian nature philosophy. His exegesis surmounts the despised historical faith by transfiguring each event in ever richer combinatory codes and coordinates. *Mysterium Magnum* surveys all nature temporal and divine. In a manner of speaking, the quickening spirit resurrects itself from the tomb of the dead letter. Riddles latent from the very beginning of the world are to be clarified in the end of time.

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How can we classify Boehme's writings and how should we read them? He has certainly been a source of religious inspiration and philosophical insight. One could also place him in the sphere of popular religion studied by Robert Scribner.[36] In Boehme, there is a fine line between the naïve and the sublime. Circulating by hand, his writings would have appealed to a popular culture of symbol that

flourished without higher learning or codification. Numerology and sacred symbols were important both in popular religion and Boehme's work. But the same habits of mind, the same symmetries and sacred numbers that make him appear naïve and popular, infuse Dante as well. Boehme was influenced both by lay piety and learned theological disputation.

Our term "mysticism" is an anachronism which offers little insight into the intentions or thinking behind such writing. No matter how complex and difficult, Boehme's texts can hardly be read as transcripts of spontaneous, passive, or ecstatic experiences (except of course insofar as any intense inspiration can be ecstatic and illuminating even to the most secular writer or reader). Though much can be learned from social history and much gained for the study of the history of philosophy and religion, his writings are a kind of creative literature and must be appreciated as such. Grass's conceit of the Baroque mystic as Modernist was more than whimsy. Boehme had an impact on German Baroque poetry. The attraction of the Baroque for Modernists is borne out by the appeal that John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets held for T.S. Eliot and of Góngora for the avant-garde Spanish Generation of '27. My remaining remarks are advice for the prospective reader and suggestions about what the student of literature might hope to find in his work.

Readers should take the author at his word. Of course, we must understand his words in his sense (bearing in mind, for example, that not only Boehme but others of a more practical bent of mind would have claimed the Holy Spirit as the source of whatever was true and good in their efforts). We should respect the sequence of his treatises, beginning with his first, progressing to his second, and so

on. Titles, subtitles, and tables of contents reveal much about structures and objectives without which his work might seem like a trackless labyrinth. Passages taken out of context and offered as oracular pronouncements are not the best guide to his meaning. Like other writers, he has stronger and weaker moments. He has formulae that become depleted. There are lapses and inconsistencies. His sources of inspiration are transformed into extended compositions through what appears to be an experimental trial-and-error process.

I would suggest that the patient reader of *Aurora* begin with the first twenty-six sections of chapter nineteen, roughly its first four pages. They can be read as an account of the seminal experience which he implies took place in 1600 (twelve years prior to his actual writing in the first half of 1612). In his region, those years were a time of dangerous tensions between Saxon Lutherans and Philippists or Crypto-Calvinists. The first six months of 1612, in which Boehme wrote out the long fragment of *Aurora*, coincided with the interregnum between the death of Emperor Rudolph II and the accession of his rival and brother Matthias as the crowned head of the Holy Roman Empire. Several chapters are devoted to the vision of the peaceful and tolerant angelic kingdoms which the author calls exemplary for the human world.

The broader historical-eschatological perspective is outlined in the beautiful parable in the Preface to *Aurora*: "I will compare all of *philosophia*, *astrologia*, and *theologia*, together with its mother, to a fine tree which grows in a pleasure garden." The symbolic tree, which grows and bears the fruit of revealed truth, despite repeated assaults by the forces of the devil, incorporates three biblical sources (the

tree of knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2-3; the root of Jesse in Isa 11:1; and the parable of the wheat and weeds in Matt 13). The tree alludes to three main intellectual sources of *Aurora*: 1. nature theory derived from alchemical philosophy; 2. cosmic speculation which encompasses astronomy and astrology; and 3. Lutheran theological speculation centred in the doctrines of real presence and divine ubiquity.

Aurora is nothing less than the ultimate fruition of revealed truth. In comprehending the theological convergence of the heavenly and earthly nature, the reader brings about God's final revelation of the eternal secrets of the creation. The self-referential preface, which embodies the knowledge it announces, calls to mind the self-referential meta-narratives of Modernist authors. In *Aurora*, however, the telling of the tale is not about the telling of the tale. Rather, the comprehending of what is being told creates the revelation that it treats of, which is nothing less than the ultimate age of knowledge itself. The prophecy does not predict: it institutes.

After the memoir of chapter nineteen and the parable of the preface, the first few chapters of *Aurora* offer an entirely new mode of writing: Boehme appears intent upon composing a philosophical treatise based on definitions and stated premises. In order to understand what God is, one must regard the forces in nature. Doing so, one recognizes that everywhere on, in, and above the earth there are two qualities: good and evil. Next comes his definition of "Qualität" as "the agitation, emanation, or driving force of a thing" ("die Beweglichkeit, Quallen oder Treiben eines Dinges"). Immediately he enumerates qualities. He begins like an objective physical observer with the qualities of warmth and cold, but soon it becomes evident that the qualities are personalised and theologised, divided up into mirroring good and evil

versions and compounded, insofar as warmth can issue in light and the life-force, or exhibit grim, dark destructiveness. The enumeration soon resolves itself into the dual substance referred to as the *Salitter*, the Trinitarian pattern of three, and the no less significant pattern of seven source-spirits or qualities. Not unlike a modern experimental narrative, the play of the seven source-spirit qualities takes on a life of its own in an inner drama which is as erotic as it is eschatological.

In chapter nine, *Aurora*'s focus and tone shift to deliver an anticlerical manifesto. The lay and the learned are integrated into a sweeping eschatological perspective and insinuated into the sequence of the seven qualities in nature. No mere digression, the thematic turn of chapter nine embodies the revelatory triumph of the humble and thus fulfils the promise couched in the title. What was hidden is dawning. As in Modernism, this experimentalism is revolutionary and utopian. The author proceeds to the angelic utopia and its admonitory contrast with the infernal realm. Later chapters of the fragment discuss the planets. Their coherence in the scheme of the seven qualities confirms the harmonies of the philosophy, astrology, and theology in the subtitle.

Since the *Aurora* manuscript is a fair copy, representing the premature discontinuation of a decade-long compositional process, we are justified in respecting its order of chapters. We are not justified in supposing that their order divulges the chronology of his interests. Even chapter nineteen, which stands out in its presentation of an experience twelve years prior, cannot be read as a psychological report. It is far too saturated with terms derived from Boehme's reflections and sources to be read as psychological description.

The reader would do well to consider that the various modes of writing found in *Aurora* can be seen as several treatments of the same problem. The memoir recounts how the author had been deeply depressed by his sense of the remoteness of the heavens from the earth, and of himself from God and the heavenly world. Heavens and heaven in his remembered depression appear as one, as indeed they are designated by the same word in German. The seminal illumination of the author – that the true heavens are everywhere – was therefore an intuition of the object pursued speculatively in the theory of the qualities and forces, a pursuit placed in eschatological context by the Preface parable. In yet another sense, the gulf between the heavens and earth is closed in *Aurora*. The qualities of the alchemically disclosed earthly elements discussed in the first eight chapters coincide with the planetary qualities explicated in the penultimate ones. They implicitly surmount the Aristotelian and scholastic distinction between the qualities of the celestial and terrestrial worlds: everywhere the dynamic pattern of the seven and the Trinitarian three prevail in the substance of nature, in human life, and in the key to all, the divine being.

The Three Principles of Divine Being begins by boldly inquiring after the nature of God: "If we want to speak of God, what He is and where He is, then we indeed must say that God is himself the being of all beings: for from Him have all things been born, created, and proceeded; and everything has its first beginning in God."[37] This expanded corollary of monotheism enables the author to do several things. It allows him to construe Paracelsian alchemy as an allegory of the divine nature while

[37] Böhme, *Beschreibung der Drey Principien*, 9.

spiritualising and psychologising the dynamics of the three principles. It permits him to construe as variants of a single archetypal pattern or event the eternal birth of the divinity, the cosmic birth of the natural world, and the birth and spiritual rebirth of the human being. It licenses him to interject the narrative of "angelic Adam" whose wholeness as a true image of the divine being is to be restored by divine knowledge and rebirth at the end of time.

Aurora and *The Three Principles of Divine Being* are the workshops in which the reader can attend to the concepts and materials which are shaped and adapted for all writings to come. However, the extended substance of his writings also articulates biblical sequences and doctrinal and philosophical concepts. In *Mysterium Magnum* the entire Book of Genesis is explicated; in *Aurora* and *Three Principles* its initial chapters. The latter work explicates the Paracelsian three "principles." *Aurora* also devotes considerable attention to microcosm and macrocosm, and *De Signatura Rerum* to a meditation on the concept of its title. Writings are directed to devotional matters and to controversial doctrines such as the Lord's Supper, Incarnation, baptism, spiritual rebirth, and the election of grace. Astronomy and the theories of alchemy and nature philosophy enter into a spiritualized synthesis, uniting celestial and elemental realms and yielding what the author himself regards as a new style of discourse. Revealing God everywhere and in all things validates the Lutheran doctrine of real presence and reinforces the notion of lay priesthood.

We only hear the peculiar music of his writing when we are attuned to how, as one theme sounds, others become audible as its harmonies or overtones. This lends Boehme a unique style and voice, or actually several of them, each with its own

peculiar authority. The voice of *Aurora* combines that of a lay preacher, teller of folk tales, and master of riddles, with that of a shrewd Socratic ironist, philosophical inquirer, and ardent people's advocate, lodging protests against the powers that be. The voice of the subsequent writings is more sombre, oracular, and at times pretentious. The colour and resonance usually echo the historical circumstances and atmosphere of the catastrophic junctures in which he wrote. Boehme's invention of his "language of nature," for interpreting sounds and syllables allegorically, might strike us as a whimsical concoction, but it reinforces his poetic attention to the harmonies of sound and sense.

Written in 1620 when the Bohemian phase of the Thirty Years' War was in full swing in his Lusatia, *The Threefold Life of Man* begins with a note of universal introspection that calls to mind the coincidence of the Gnostic with the Existentialist in Hans Jonas. The objectification of despair or hope in extreme images can resemble German Expressionism.

If we consider the beginning of our life and want to hold it up against the eternal life which is promised to us, we cannot say or conclude that we are at home in this external life. . . . And if we consider life, and [inquire] what it is, we observe that it is a burning fire which consumes; and when it has nothing left to consume, it goes out, as can be seen from all fires. . . . We see clearly that the elemental life is in a state of seething, that it is that very seething; and when it ceases to seethe, it goes out. We also know that the stars ignite the elements and are the fire of the elements; and the

sun ignites the stars, thereby causing them to flow forth and seethe into one another. Yet the elemental life is finite and perishable, and the life of the soul eternal.[38]

The exposition of *The Threefold Life of Man* resolves and clarifies the seething cauldron of elements and stars into which the human being is thrust. The complexities of alchemical and astronomical theory again reveal that beneath the puzzle of being, the triune body and spirit of God are omnipresent: "But it is the corporeality of nature in which all seven forms of all nature stand, and in them are the seven spirits of God, manifest as seven burning torches . . ." (3:83). This alchemical-astronomical vision evokes the Book of Revelation (4:5), where seven torches burn before the throne of God. The apocalyptic omnipresence of God offers the antidote to the literalistic "Pfaffen" (clerics) who cry out, "God is here, God is there!" (3:224-25). Of course, divine omnipresence re-confirms that the believer receives the flesh and blood of Christ in the sacrament (3:261).

After rejecting factional adherence to Luther, Calvin, Schwenckfeld, or the pope (3:130), the later chapters of *The Threefold Life* rise to an anticlerical crescendo in exalting the lay-priest (3:254) and condemning "falsche Bischöfe" and "Pfaffen-Teufel," the clergymen-devils whose quarrelling has now become religious war (3:277, 278). *The Threefold Life* thus begins with the mystery of human existence, magnifies it into the conundrum of the cosmos, and finally resolves it by re-affirming Boehme's universalistic articles of faith in opposition to all partisan authorities of the time. It can be objected that the author remains partisan while claiming universality.

[38] *Vom dreyfachen Leben des Menschen,* in *Schriften,* vol. 3, 3, 4.

The Threefold Life is indeed at once partisan in its Lutheranism and universalistic in declaring even the Indians of remote America better Christians than those ruling Christendom (3:228).

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Like Modernism, the literary vision of Boehme is conditioned by the confusions and catastrophes of his age. He is akin not only to the Romantics, whom he influenced, but also to such Modernists as Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke or Paul Celan. Like them, though without the modern scepticism in religious matters, Boehme shifts the locus of transcendence inward, into the human psyche and the hidden inner life of the world. He creates hermetic symbols and systems of symbols which draw upon, yet transcend, the conflicts and conundrums of his world.

Boehme is a master of ambiguity, allusion, symbol, and neologism. Consider a passage such as this one from *Aurora*:

And the seven spirits of God are all together God the Father: for no spirit exists without the other; rather, they give birth to all seven one after the other. If not for the one, the other would not be. Yet the light is a different person [of the deity]: for it is perpetually born from the seven; and the seven perpetually ascend [or rise in force] in the light; and the forces of the seven spirits perpetually proceed out in the radiance of the light into the seventh nature-spirit, and form and shape everything in the seventh spirit; and this going out is the Holy Spirit (1:146).

We notice first of all how he accommodates the Trinity: the totality of the nature spirits is the Father, the light perpetually born from the Father the Son. The

Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* Son. So far, so good. This is simply Western Trinitarian orthodoxy. Yet the plurality of the seven is also pluralistic and integrative. It takes all kinds to make a divine whole. It takes the darkness of the Father and the light of the Son to generate the third person of the Trinity. Darkness and light hold keys to the synchronous understanding of the world. The order of spirits is the order of revelation in time. The seventh is the author's ultimate knowledge. As in Johannes Scotus Erigena, history unfolds out of God.

The divine ubiquity is extended in depth. The layers of meaning descend to the opposite end of the Great Chain of Being, from the sublime to the physical and the sensual. We took note that the paradigm of seven spirits resembles the heliocentric world. Boehme is also thinking of the alchemy of nitre or potassium nitrate, which he calls *salitter*. Nitre was a banal gunpowder ingredient and an object of intense speculation around 1600. In the Latin of Pliny, *nitor* meant splendour or brilliance. The spirit forces in the *salitter* release light and warmth, embodying the solar heart of the cosmos and the Son of God. But it is not all sweetness and light in the inner world of the elements. Benign or malignant forces arise from the mixture of the spirit qualities. Nature is nowhere neutral. Good and evil powers, literally Paradise and Hell, are present in the inert element. There are the powers of light and healing balm, but there are also powers which are dark, explosive, pestilential, destructive. All of this had been anticipated by Paracelsus.

One of the nitre-related qualities hints at how experiential his alchemy might indeed have been. He refers to a triumphant, rising source of laughter, associated with a sweet smell (1:88). These aspects would fit the properties of nitrous oxide or

laughing gas which is thought to have been synthesized only much later. The "all in all" of the source spirits is raised back up, from the lowly element to the exalted heights of angelic bliss:

Observe the depth: Just as when the flash of life rises up in the midst of the divine force, when all the spirits of God receive their life and highly rejoice, there proceeds a loving and holy embracing, kissing, tasting, feeling, hearing, seeing, and smelling; [and] thus it is too with the angels: when the one sees, hears, and feels the other, in its heart the flash of life rises up, and one spirit embraces the other within the divinity (1:152).

After this orgy of love, the life of the spirits is replicated in the harmonies of the angelic world: "Every angel is created like the entire divinity, and is like a small god. For when God created the angels, he created them out of himself. Now God is in one place as he is in the other: everywhere he is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (1:152). This passage introduces a pivotal theme. The angels, their kingdoms, and pristine Adam all replicate the divine ubiquity in depth. Boehme rejects the *creatio ex nihilo* in favour of a *creatio ex se*: God creates everything out of his own being. This explains why we are free and not doomed, as in his caricature of Calvinist theology. It is also why the angels, elements, and human being reproduce within their respective beings the tensions and dynamics of the divine nature. Everything is created in God's image and out of his being. Everything has God's DNA, so to speak, though the paths of "evolution" were bifurcated in Satan's fall. Yet only an inner, spiritual turn separates the base from the exalted.

In *The Three Principles of Divine Being*, Boehme explains how God created everything out of his own being. We can revisit the theme and see where it takes us: "The true heavens in which God dwells are everywhere, in all places: He encompasses Hell, in which the devil dwells; and there is nothing outside of God … all things have been born from him; and God is called God because he alone is the good, the heart, or the best, the light or power, from which nature arises."[39] God is only God because the eternal light of the pure divinity overcomes the darkness in the divine being. Evil is unregenerate or relapsed darkness. So is God everything? Or is God only the good? The author wants to have it both ways. This leads to his theodicy of the *Ungrund* which influenced Friedrich Schelling and Nikolai Berdyaev who incorporated the term in their thought. A common response is to declare him a certified mystic and forget about him. We should instead see where his contradictions lead us.

The art of his riddles and paradoxes shifts the focus. Like Weigel, or for that matter like Montaigne, Boehme directs us to regard our inner life. To recognize how nature arises, we have to imagine the eternal darkness outside of God: "[the darkness] has a great yearning for the light, since the light is mirrored in the darkness and shines within itself" (68/721:22). The darkness is nowhere and nothing. Yet, oddly, this nothingness yearns for the light: its yearning becomes the foundation of the world. The author tells us that we can experience this yearning in the depth of our soul. "Depth" is often his key word and signal direction. We know deep down

[39] Böhme, *Beschreibung der Drey Principien*, 68.

that we are nothing and therefore crave enlightenment. This of course makes a different and more modern sense.

Next comes the creation of the human being: Adam was initially created by God as an androgynous creature in the likeness of the angels. Like God, he is whole. This Adam never sleeps. Though androgynous, his impulsive aspect is the male youth who lusts after the female principle within his pristine being: the Noble Virgin of Divine Wisdom. She is the light within his angelic being. He has an improper longing to possess and become pregnant with her. Based on the biblical book of Job, the apocryphal books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), as well as on the Paracelsian reification of wisdom in nature, the Noble Virgin embodies truth and goodness in nature. Wisdom is a female aspect of divinity. Again we find the same motifs: the darkness longs for the light, but cannot possess or comprehend it. The Noble Virgin of Divine Wisdom flees lustful Adam whereupon he sinks into a male darkness and sleeps the sleep of all mankind. By endeavouring to give voice to the inconceivable, Boehme expands the capacity for reflection and self-recognition. Angelic Adam can be interpreted on many different levels.

The struggle of darkness and light recurs in theogony, cosmogony, astronomy, alchemy, and anthropology, always in allusion to Genesis and John. The cosmos is born when the light shines into the darkness which cannot comprehend it. The human mission is to overcome the uncomprehending darkness within ourselves by knowing that we cannot possess the beauty and goodness which are the divine

light toward which all things grow and mature. All of nature is in agony to give birth to the light. The devil's usurping shortcut to radiant bliss leads to hell.

There are more concrete examples of the tendency of Boehme's thought to coordinate life and nature with the Bible. He supplies his readers practical advice for daily devotions. Hour by hour, the devout soul re-enacts the odyssey of the human race. Getting up out of bed on Monday morning, one's prayers recall the nakedness of Adam and Eve after their fall from grace. Setting off to work recalls the human expulsion from Paradise. Preparing for bed at night means putting on angelic garments in preparation for the return to Paradise. Boehme provides practical advice for the spiritually challenged. The melancholy should avoid Calvinist books about the elect and gird themselves to conquer the devil's outlaw castle, from whence the attacks of melancholy are launched. Boehme's exemplary soul is to Adam and Eve as Joyce's Bloom is to Ulysses.

But the same patterns of thought are extended to the tragic current events. Here is how he responds to the religious war in progress: "You persecute one another, revile and despise one another, [you] instigate war and insurrection, devastating the country and the people … [all] for the sake of the true knowledge of God" (which means knowledge disclosed by him): "[Yet] you do not know your own selves. This is why you are furious and fight over God, who is a sustainer and creator of all things, who is the centre in all things…" (3:13). As always, God is ubiquitous. As always, the darkness cannot comprehend the light. And as always, the failed *coup d'état* of darkness to seize possession of the light – "Christ is here!

Christ is there!" – leads to the hellish fire-world of confessional war. Boehme's quixoticism is overshadowed by historical tragedy.

Modernism signals a crisis of nineteenth-century Realism and progressivism. Boehme's thought signals a crisis of medievalism and Renaissance humanism. Agrippa's humanistic *De occulta philosophia* ascends from the lower to the higher, from the elemental to the celestial to the divine. Instead of a rising hierarchy, Boehme projects an inner one which goes ever deeper into worlds within worlds. Though essential to his meaning, this creates a compositional chaos, as if Dante's architecture of worlds had been shattered by the Reformation and commingled. The dark fire-world and the angelic light world, good and evil, heaven and earth, inner and outer, eternity and time, are said to be "in one another like a single thing." Good and evil are distinct, yet inseparable. Our world is heaven and hell in one. Our daily newspaper confirms it.

As for the initial paradox of simplicity and complexity, one might resolve it by assuming that Boehme was only pretending to be simple but was in reality utterly steeped in learning and tradition. One can also take him at his word but understand him properly. When he introduces Paracelsian theory, it is to him neither pharisaic dogma nor mystical lore. It is the experienced wisdom of the lay people harmonized with the Bible. One of the aspirations of the Spiritualists, shared by Weigel and Boehme, is to teach the lay believer how to outsmart the better-educated elite. The purpose is served by the paradoxes of Franck and by Boehme's complex puzzles with their simple biblical keys. His worldview is overly complex, because it oversimplifies nature.

For future study, we need better access to the literary sources so that readers can decide for themselves, and so that we can discern whether "Behmenists" in other countries continued in his path or went off in new directions. We need modern translations with adequate commentary. We need to examine the culture of late-Reformation Germany. Its ambience of polarization and demonization is documented in pamphlets denouncing rival theologians as minions of Satan, in so-called folk songs celebrating the burning of witches, in the *Historia of Dr. Faustus*, and in the compendious *Theatrum Diabolorum*, where everything from natural calamities and peccadilloes to magicians and heretics, represent the devil's carnival masquerade. The predominance of the devil in the age of faith was a precondition for Boehme's dialectic of good and evil in God. His writing is a counterpoint voice in and against the dialectic of destructive polarization in the late Reformation.

Without the horrors of his age, Boehme appears pointlessly overwrought.[40] *Aurora* is one of the most unique and beautiful works in the German language. Like any other great and complex literary work, it must be read also as an expression of its moment. German historian Johannes Burkhardt recently described the propagandistic print battle over the centenary of the *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1617 as a significant factor in polarizing the Germans for war.[41] Arguably, one of the earliest public anti-war campaigns began with the circulation of Boehme's manuscripts together with the posthumous publication of Weigel, and appeals by Bernegger,

[40] J.M. van der Laan and A. Weeks, eds., *The Faustian Century: German Literature and Culture in the Age of Luther and Faustus* (forthcoming, Camden House, 2013).
[41] Johannes Burkhardt, *Das Reformationsjahrhundert. Deutsche Geschichte zwischen Medienrevolution und Institutionsbildung (1517-1617)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), p. 200.

Staricius, Opitz, and Kepler. Unfortunately, it was not destined to have any real impact.

On the last pages of Boehme's *Three Principles of Divine Being* (1618), the Noble Virgin of Divine Wisdom draws the hounded soul out of the thorns of its exile and pledges it to spread truth against hatred and war. Stirring as this is, the influence of Boehme in Germany was more cultural than political. He inspired poets and philosophers from Angelus Silesius and Novalis to Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel. Boehme's work remains liminal between the medieval and the modern, between the lay and the learned. Not by chance, he was a product of the same years and epochal shift that gave us another inspired layman: Don Quixote.