Durham University

Durham E-Theses

UNIO MYSTICA AND THE AURORA CONSURGENS: MYSTICAL THEOLOGY IN A LATE MEDEIVAL ALCHEMICAL TREATISE

WILLIAM WALKER CHRISTIAN

How to cite:

CHRISTIAN, WILLIAM WALKER (2022) UNIO MYSTICA AND THE AURORA CONSURGENS: MYSTICAL THEOLOGY IN A LATE MEDEIVAL ALCHEMICAL TREATISE. Doctoral thesis, Durham University.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/14918/ is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the full Durham E-Theses policy for further details.

Academic Support Office, The Palatine Centre, Durham University, Stockton Road, Durham, DH1 3LE
e-mail: e-theses.admin@durham.ac.uk Tel: +44 0191 334 6107
https://etheses.durham.ac.uk

UNIO MYSTICA AND THE *AURORA CONSURGENS*: MYSTICAL THEOLOGY IN A LATE MEDEIVAL ALCHEMICAL TREATISE

WILLIAM WALKER CHRISTIAN

Abstract

This thesis examines a late medieval alchemical treatise known as the *Aurora Consurgens*, which is ascribed to the early decades of the fifteenth century. The *Aurora* was among the first of its kind in a tradition of poetico-rhetorical alchemy that became popular in the late middle ages and early modern period. While it is indisputable that early Latin alchemical texts contained allegorical language and religious symbolism, the *Aurora* heralded a new form of alchemical literature, where mysticism became thoroughly and inseparably interpolated with the operations of the laboratory. The *Aurora* is framed as a dialogue between an unnamed alchemist and *Sapientia*, a female embodiment of God's wisdom, which in the text, is conflated with the philosopher's stone. This thesis focuses on a series of visions that appear throughout the document. These visions invoke the unitive imagery of late medieval mystical theology and contain many of the themes that appear in medieval contemplative literature. These are, namely, the image of the 'cloud' that appears in the tradition of pseudo-Dionysian mystical theology, motifs of darkness and illumination, purgation, and union with the divine. The principal argument contends that the author of the *Aurora Consurgens* used the motifs of mystical theology to elucidate his understanding of the alchemical work.

Unio Mystica and the *Aurora Consurgens*: Mystical Theology in a Late Medieval Alchemical Treatise

William Christian

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

Durham University

2022

Contents

List of Illustrations……………………………………………………………………………….6

List of Abbreviations……………………………………………………………………… 7-8

Acknowledgements…………………………………………………………………………………9

Introduction 10

1.1 Introduction to the *Aurora Consurgens* and its significance 10

1.2 Scope of the Study, Thesis Statement and Chapter Structure 15

1.3 Historiography and Literature Review: Alchemical Scholarship and the Academy 18

1.4 Principe and Newman: The 'New Historiography' of alchemy...25

1.5 Why the *Aurora* is a Theological Text: Methodology, and Evidence 31

Chapter 1: Sources, Themes and Theory in the *Aurora Consurgens* 35

1.1 Plato, the Hermetic Tradition and the Origins of Alchemical Practice.................................35

1.2 Hellenistic Alchemy...38

1.3 Islamicate Alchemy..41

1.4 Latin Alchemy and the influence of Astrology on the Practice 44

1.5 Colour Change Theory and the Operations of the Alchemical Work 51

1.6 *Mercurius*: The Spirit of the Philosopher's Stone..55

1.7 Theology, Secrecy and Medicine in Late Medieval Alchemy 60

1.8 Late Medieval Alchemy in England and Middle English Alchemical Poetry 65

Chapter 2: The Foundations of Mystical Theology in the Western Latin Tradition 69

2.1 Mysticism, Mystical Theology, and Mystical Union: Some Definitions...............................69

2.2 The Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Medieval Mystical Theology..................79

2.3 Cataphatic and Apophatic Mysticism: Modes of Thought in Mystical Theology 84

2.4 The Purgative Journey in Mystical Theology 88

2.5 *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Middle English Mystics 93

Chapter 3: The Cloud, Illumination, and Union in the Aurora Chapter VI....................................101

3.1 The Cloud: Mortification, Purgation and Union in the *Aurora* Chapter VI..........................101

3.2 *Unitas Spiritus* and *Unitas Indistinctionis* in the *Aurora* Chapter VI 114

3.3 Illumination Imagery in the *Aurora* 121

3.4 Senior and *De Chemia*: The Origin of the Nigredo in Chapter VI 129

3.5 Conclusions 137

Chapter 4: *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Mystical Imagery in English Alchemy 139

4.1 Prayer and Images of Ascent in English alchemy...139

4.2 Spiritual Food, the Virgin's Milk, and Purgation 146

4.3 Apophasis, Desolation, Reduction and the Cloud...154

4.4 Conclusions 160

Chapter 5: *Sapientia*, The Song of Songs and the Dark Night of the Soul 162
5.1 Representations of *Sapientia* in the *Aurora* 162
5.2 Desolation, the Tempest, and the Revelation of *Sapientia* 167
5.3 Darkness and the Song of Songs in the *Aurora*: Painful Dissolution or Stillness?..............174
5.4 The Kiss and Union With *Sapientia* in Alchemy and Mystical Theology...........................187
5.5 Conclusions 195
Conclusion 197
Appendix 1. 202

List of Illustrations

Image 1: Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 172: *Aurora Consurgens*, f. 3r- 7

'Hermes, the Two Suns, and the Waxing Moon in a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *Aurora'* 135

Image 2: Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens: Hoc Est, Emblemata Nova de Secretis Naturae Chymica* (Bärenreiter, 1618), Epigramma XXVI, 113.

'The alchemical *Sapientia* embodied in Emblema XXVI of the *Atalanta Fugiens* entitled 'Sapientiae humane fructus Lignum Vitae Est' 194

Image 3: Tractus III Seu Basilica Philosophica', in Johann Daniel Mylius, *Opus Medico-Chymicum: Continens 3 Tractatus Sive Basilica; Quorum Prior Inscribitur Basilica Medica, Secundus Basilica Chymica, Tertius Basilica Philosophica*, vol. 2 (Lucas Jennis, 1618).

'The descent of the philosopher's stone through the cloud' 204

Image 4: Malachias Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus* (Lucas Straub, 1652), 394.

'The celestial hierarchy partitioned through clouds' 206

Image 5: Malachias Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus* (Lucas Straub, 1652), 423.

'The descent of the stone through clouds via celestial rays' 207

List of Abbreviations

AC	Marie-Louise Von Franz, R. F. C Hull, and A. S. B Glover. *Aurora Consurgens: A Document Attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy, a Companion Work to C.G. Jung's Mysterium Coniunctions* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000.
AH	Eric John Holmyard, *Alchemy* (New York: Dover Publication, 1990).
COU	James Walsh, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).
COUT	Patrick J. Gallacher, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997).
LAD	Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
MTG	McEvoy, James, ed. *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia*. Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 3 (Paris: Peeters, 2003.
MEAP	Anke Timmermann, *Verse and Transmutation: A Corpus of Middle English Alchemical Poetry*, History of Science and Medicine Library, volume 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
OOC	Robert Multhauf, *The Origins of Chemistry* (London: Oldbourne 1966).
SUSO	Heinrich Seuse and Frank J. Tobin, *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).
SUSOG	Karl Bihlmeyer, *Heinrich Seuse: Deutsche Schriften* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1961).
SJC	John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Rev. ed (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 1991).
SJP	*Vida Y Obras de San Juan de La Cruz* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1960).

SP	Walter Hilton, John P. H. Clark, and Rosemary Dorward, *The Scale of Perfection*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).
SPT	Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Bestul, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000).
TCB	Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (Georg Olms Verlag, 1652).
TTA	Frank Sherwood Taylor, *The Alchemists* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1976).

All biblical citations are drawn from the Douay-Rheims vulgate version, accessed from www.drbo.org

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my father Lee Christian, my mother Margaret, and my brothers Robert and Forrest. Sincere gratitude is due to my supervisor Giles Gasper, whose tough but fair criticism pushed me to grow as a scholar. I would also like to thank my supervisor Graeme Small for helping me to expand my knowledge of the late middle ages, and Corinne Saunders, who joined late in the writing process and served as an invaluable help in the final stages of organisation and editing. I would also like to thank my friends Giorgio Di Michino, Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn, and especially Fergus Walsh for their assistance in translating some very difficult passages of Latin. Many thanks are due to all of my friends at St John's College. In particular, I would like to thank the Porter family, Joelle Lucas, Matthew and Anna Lumley, Alice Keith, and especially Kjetil Kringlebotten for their companionship and support through some very difficult times of lockdown.

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the *Aurora Consurgens* and its significance

Despite being one of the earliest examples of poetico-rhetorical alchemy in the Latin alchemical tradition, the late medieval treatise the *Aurora Consurgens* remains an understudied text. Dated to the early decades of the fifteenth century, the obscurity of the document persisted until the twentieth century, when it was uncovered and reintroduced to the academy by Carl Jung.[1] The *Aurora* was written before the invention of the printing press and seemingly did not enjoy a wide circulation, as the original copies of the manuscript are few in number.[2] The only printed edition of the text appears in a rare alchemical compendium edited by the seventeenth-century German alchemist and printer Johannes Rhenanus.[3] This collection, known as the *Harmoniae inperscrutabilis Chymico-Philosophicae sive Philosophorum antiquorum consentientium,* was a compilation of Latin medieval alchemical poetry edited in 1625.[4]

The *Aurora* is spuriously attributed to Thomas Aquinas, though some commentators maintain that the attribution is in fact credible.[5] The text circulated in two parts, a highly poetico-rhetorical dialogue, and a technical commentary.[6] The dialogue is comprised of twelve chapters, seven of which are parables. The first five chapters consist of an introduction, a definition of wisdom, a rebuke of the critics of alchemy, an 'admonition of

---

[1] For a detailed account of the text and its legacy see Aksel Haaning, 'Jung's Quest for the Aurora Consurgens', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 59 (2014): pp. 8–30.

[2] The most legible surviving manuscript of the *Aurora* can be found in the following: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 14006 ff. 1r–30r. Another manuscript, similar to the one found in Paris, is preserved in Vienna at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB), Cod. 5230 ff. 239r–248r. Closely affiliated with these is a manuscript found in Venice with the Biblioteca nazionale marciana and G. Valentinelli, Bibliotheca Manuscripta Ad S. Marci Venetiarum, vol. 5–6 (ex typ. Commercii, 1872), 155, ff. 65r–161r. The oldest manuscript is of high quality, but incomplete. It is preserved in Zurich with the Zentralbibliothek Ms. Rh. 172. Elsewhere in central Europe, are two copies found in Prague with the Univerzitní knihovna, MS. VI. Fd. 26 and the Chapitre Métropolitain, Ms. 1663. O. LXXIX. Likewise there are two manuscripts preserved in Germany with the Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS. Germ. qu. 848 and the Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS. Vossiani Chymici ff. 29. There is a poorly preserved copy at the university of Bologna entitled N. 747. Finally, there is a high quality copy preserved in Scotland at Glasgow University library with the MS. Ferguson 6. These are the main manuscripts, though there are a few scattered and incomplete copies of the *Aurora* found elsewhere. On these sources see AC, 25–27.

[3] AC, 5.

[4] Didier Kahn, 'Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part I — Preliminary Survey', *Ambix*, 57 (2010): 249–74, 250.

[5] See 'Was St. Thomas Aquinas the Author of the Aurora Consurgens?', in AC 407–430.

[6] The commentary does not share in the first section's rhetorical style, and is rather, more akin to other didactic texts of Latin alchemy.

the foolish', and a chapter introducing the name and title of the text. These are then followed by seven parables that engage with alchemical theory almost entirely through scriptural references.[7]

The earliest known manuscript is preserved in Zurich in the partially complete Ms. Rh. 172. While the manuscript is dated to the 1420s, some scholars contend that the first part of the treatise (the dialogue) is derived from an older original.[8] There is evidence for this in the text itself, because alchemical authors that commonly appear in fifteenth-century treatises such as those of Arnauld of Villanova and Ramon Llull are conspicuously absent from the dialogue.[9] Likewise, all of the works cited in the first part of the *Aurora* are either early Latin treatises on alchemy, or translations of Islamicate alchemical texts. These facts, in combination with the canonisation and subsequent fame of Thomas Aquinas in the fourteenth century, make an attribution to the mid-fourteenth century a plausible estimate.[10] Therefore, while the text probably dates to the early decades of the fifteenth century, it is possible that the rhetorical section was written sometime in the late middle ages in a range between c. 1250–c. 1420.[11]

While the identity of pseudo-Aquinas remains unknown, the content of the *Aurora* and the quality of its manuscripts provide clues to the circumstances of its creation. One of the copies preserved in Prague (Univerzitní knihovna, MS. VI. Fd. 26) is a faithful reproduction of the manuscript in Zurich. It is richly illuminated, and of a superb quality. Barbara Obrist has proposed that the lavish properties of the Prague manuscript denote wealthy patronage. It was, she argues, commissioned for royal benefactors in the eastern Holy Roman Empire, principally in the cities of Plauen, Törring, or Salzburg.[12] This also

---

[7] AC*, 33*.

[8] C. G. Jung et al., *Psychology and Alchemy*, 361: 'Since Thomas was canonized in 1323 and was thus at the height of his fame, it was worth while ascribing texts to him from that time on. We shall probably not be far out if we put the date in the first half of the fourteenth century.'

[9] In his manuscript research, Lynn Thorndike assigned the *Aurora* to the fifteenth century, but left the question of chronology open. See Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, vol. 4, A History of Magic and Experimental Science (Columbia University Press, 1934), 335.

[10] On the dating of the text see C. G. Jung et al., *Psychology and Alchemy*, vol. 12, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 361.

[11] AC, 5–6.

[12] Barbara Obrist, *Les Débuts de l'imagerie Alchimique: XIVe-XVe Siècles*, Féodalisme (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1982), 188–189.

suggests that text's patrons were interested in both the material applications of alchemy and the religious symbolism that permeated the practice in the late middle ages.

In the modern era, the *Aurora* was first published by Carl Jung as a companion to his seminal work on psychological alchemy, the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. With the help of fellow Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, the work was published between 1955 and 1957. After Jung's death, von Franz continued work on the text, and published the modern critical edition of Part I (the dialogue) in 1966. Unfortunately, part II was omitted from this edition because von Franz saw it as an addendum to the text at a later date by another author.[13]

It was through his early research in European alchemy, during the early 1930s, that Jung happened upon the *Aurora* by chance. Through the course of his studies, he came into contact with an early-modern alchemical compendium called the *Artis Auriferae* (*The Art of Bringing forth Gold)* which was published in 1593 by the early-modern Swiss printer and publisher Conrad Waldkirch (1549–1616).[14] In the collection, Jung noticed a comment in the margins of the text that referred to an alchemical treatise called the *Aureahora*. In the comment, the publisher wrote that while the text had appeared in the original hand-written compendium from which the printed edition was derived, he would not print it in his own modernised collection. This was owing to the text's conflation of alchemy with the Song of Songs and Biblical Wisdom. This reluctance to publish the *Aurora* caught Jung's attention, and led him to pursue a complete copy of the text. [15]

Jung eventually located a complete seventeenth-century edition of the manuscript in London. While subsequent research elucidated the *Aurora's* manuscript lineage, Jung's initial rediscovery of the treatise in the twentieth century was a decisive moment in its historiography.[16] This is because Jungian psychology has shaped the way in which the document has been studied. It is a text that was, and currently is, read through a very specific psychological framework.[17]

---

[13] AC, 5.
[14] Haaning, op. cit., 14.
[15] *Idem*, 15.
[16] *Idem*, 19.
[17] More will be said of this in the coming section on historiography.

The *Aurora* is a peculiarity among medieval alchemical texts because it is entirely conveyed through scriptural citations. These citations (which are mostly derived from the Psalms and Sapiential books) are used to hint at various aspects of alchemical theory. The author's encyclopaedic knowledge of the vulgate and fluent command of Latin suggests that he was trained as a cleric.[18] A priest authoring an alchemical text may seem strange to modern sensibilities, but it would not have been uncommon in the late middle ages. As Richard Kieckhefer has demonstrated, ceremonial magic in the late middle ages was largely practiced by clergymen. He notes that it was not at all uncommon for ecclesiastics to have, at the very least, a rudimentary knowledge of the occult. These clerics, he argues, formed an extensive network of priests who practiced magic in an illicit 'clerical underworld'. Similarly, the English historian of medieval magic Sophie Page has shown that the same phenomenon existed in monastic settings, and that monks were not at all reticent to practice the occult arts.[19]

On the phenomenon of the 'clerical underworld', Kieckhefer notes that: 'few laypeople would have had the command of Latin and of ritual necessary to work the "experiments" contained in [medieval necromantical manuscripts and ceremonial magic].'[20] While alchemy is neither necromancy or ceremonial magic, it is still a highly complex art that required familiarity with Aristotelian elemental theory, knowledge of Latin, and the financial means of obtaining alchemical implements (such as alembics, chemical substances, minerals, metals). To pseudo-Aquinas, scriptural knowledge and alchemical knowledge are equipollent. He cites the luminaries of alchemy alongside Biblical prophets and Christ himself, thereby portraying alchemy as an act of devotion.[21]

The *Aurora* is a treatise emblematic of late medieval alchemy because it conceals the operative components of the art in religious metaphor. In the fourteenth century, for a variety of reasons, alchemy took a turn to religious allegory. The *Aurora* is no exception, as its enigmatic style makes it a difficult text to contend with. This may be the main reason

---

[18] Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 361.

[19] On the 'clerical underworld' of the late middle ages see the chapter 'Necromancy in the Clerical Underworld', in Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 151–175. On the practice of magic in monastic settings see Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

[20] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 175.

[21] Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 23.

it was largely forgotten to posterity. Art historians have studied its images, and psychologists have analysed its symbolism, but few have made any effort to make sense of the mystical theology that shaped the mind of its author.[22] It is clear that pseudo-Aquinas intended it to be an exposition on alchemy through the medieval religious concept of *Unio Mystica,* the soul's union with God. When the text is read in light of this understanding, the seemingly impenetrable style of Part I becomes clear. It is a dialogue between a soul seeking God and divine Wisdom.

The text likens the creation of the philosopher's stone (the objective of the alchemical work)[23] to a mystical exposition of the Song of Songs, and the title of the treatise itself is derived from the *Canticle*.[24] It is framed as dialogue between pseudo-Aquinas and the 'Wisdom of God' (*Sapientia Dei*), an effusion otherwise unknown to the alchemy of the late middle ages. As the treatise develops, the two speakers take on the role of opposites, with the alchemist calling out to *Sapientia* and *Sapientia* returning the call. The pair form a series of dualities, such as father and son, brother and sister, and most importantly, as lovers. Alchemically, their relationship can be interpreted as a dialogue between the 'king' sulphur, and the 'queen', mercury. This is a basic component of alchemical theory, where the creation of the philosopher's stone involves a series of purificatory procedures that see the matter in the crucible (sulphur + mercury) cleansed through a continuous process of distillation and condensation.[25]

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to read the *Aurora Consurgens* in a new light. This is not a Jungian analysis of the text, but an analysis of the mystical influences that inspired its author. It will argue that various aspects of mystical theology underpin the text's religious allegory, and that its author drew upon these motifs to formulate a synthetic vision of

[22] See historiography subsection below.
[23] The philosopher's stone is perfected matter. In medicinal contexts, it was described as a tincture or an elixir. It is the end goal of all alchemical pursuits and the substance that was thought to transmute base metals into gold.
[24] Cant. 6:9 (DRBO): 'Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terriblis ut castorum acies ordinate?'
[25] Alchemy is the art of uniting opposites. The philosopher's stone is formed when a perfect balance is struck between the polarities of hot/cold, masculine/feminine, sulphur/mercury, fixed/volatile, terrestrial/celestial, active/receptive, bodily/spiritual etc. The alchemist must address imbalances in the metallic substance by uniting its constituent parts. This unity is what forms the stone. The pursuit of this union was exemplified in the oft cited alchemical maxim *solve et coagula* (dissolve and coagulate).

alchemy, where mystical theology interpenetrates alchemical practice to frame the mystery of the philosopher's stone as a pursuit of wisdom.

1.2 Scope of the Study, Thesis Statement and Chapter Structure

There is a confluence in imagery and nomenclature between the *Aurora Consurgens* and mystical theology. The mystics of the middle ages, in their accounts of contemplative prayer, described the ascension of the soul to God through a series of stages. The phases of purgation, illumination, and union were said to take the soul through a sequence of perfection that culminates in its union with Christ.[26] These same elements are found in the *Aurora*. Like in mystical theology, the *Aurora* describes experiences of darkness, desolation, and purification. These motifs reach a high point in the final chapter, where after a purgatorial journey, the creation of the philosopher's stone is likened to a mystical union with the wisdom of God, the *Sapientia Dei*.

This dissertation is a close reading of the *Aurora Consurgens* against the backdrop of medieval mystical theology.[27] More specifically, it compares the *Aurora's* usage of mystical nomenclature to the theology of the late-fifth early-sixth century philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius.[28] In the Dionysian tradition of mystical theology, a series of literary tropes are used to articulate the soul's journey to God. These include, but are not limited to, dark and smothering clouds, rays of light that illumine the intellect, purificatory procedures that rid the soul of sin, suffering and purgatorial trials, darkness, and the mystical ascent of the soul to heaven.[29] These very same images appear in the *Aurora,* where they are used to articulate an alchemical union with divine wisdom.

This dissertation is not a manuscript study *per se*. Rather, it is an evaluation of the text in the *Aurora* part I. The striking similarities between the *Aurora* and mystical theology may not reflect a direct textual relationship in manuscript sources, but they do show a parallel creative response to a set of ideas that became popular in northern Europe at the end of the

[26] See chapter two, subsection 2.3, 84–88.
[27] While it is true that von Franz makes reference to elements of mystical theology in her commentary on the text, this is done in service of Jungian psychoanalysis. This dissertation is a comparative reading that does not engage substantively in any kind of psychological theory.
[28] For background information on Pseudo-Dionysius and his importance see chapter two, subsection 2.2, 79–84.
[29] On these ideas and their prevalence in mystical theology see the same section in chapter two referenced in the footnote above.

middle ages. In other words, the *Aurora* was formed through its participation in a culture that valued a shared set of religious images. Pseudo-Aquinas wrote like a mystic because his mind was shaped by the same influences that inspired mystical authors in the waning years of the middle ages.

The sources consulted will elucidate a relationship between mystical literature and the *Aurora*. While the context and chronology of the references are largely confined to the late middle ages, certain exceptions are made where there are thematic parallels that are particularly striking. That is to say, most of the literature cited comes from northern Europe between c. 1250 – c. 1500, the theological and intellectual context in which the *Aurora* was written. There are certain cases where texts from late antiquity and the early-modern period are cited, when thematic parallels are too profound to be ignored.

This thesis does not examine catalogues or manuscript iconography. Such studies of the *Aurora* have already been done (see historiography subsection below). Where pictures do appear, they are used to make theological arguments. Furthermore, the scope of the study is limited to the ideas expressed in the *Aurora* Part I, and the parallels they have with mystical theology.[30] This does not mean that the alchemical analysis is strictly confined to the *Aurora*. Where appropriate, alchemical texts other than the *Aurora* are consulted to help elucidate its theology and vice versa.

To put it another way, the *Aurora* is the nucleus that grounds the discussion. However, where applicable, points of connection are drawn between a variety of texts and the *Aurora* itself. This is done to better reveal the conceptual and etymological framework of the text, and to uncover the potential influences that shaped the mind of its author. The *Aurora* is a text infamous for its heavy usage of spiritual allegory. The comparative method elucidates a close reading by way of contrast.

The discussion that follows is concerned less with theological dogma, and more with a shared set of symbols that appear in both alchemy and mystical theology. On a doctrinal level, the images that manifest themselves in the *Aurora* do not always fulfil the same function as in the writings of pseudo-Dionysius. For example, the cloud is an important

[30] The mystical symbolism is far less pronounced in the technical commentary.

symbol that appears in the foundational work of the Dionysian theological tradition, the *Mystical Theology*. It appears again in the fourteenth century in a work of contemplative prayer known as the *Cloud of Unknowing*. The cloud plays a pivotal role in the *Aurora's* sixth chapter, where it shares attributes with certain principles of mystical theology, but is not *completely* doctrinally identical with it. The important thing considered here is the *image* itself, and what it tells the reader about the symbols pseudo-Aquinas chose to represent alchemy. These symbols will be examined across five chapters.

Chapter One: examines the themes and sources that went into the creation of the *Aurora Consurgens*. It evaluates both alchemical theory and the historical context of alchemy's development in Latin Europe. The chapter is a contextual foundation for the entire thesis, as the *Aurora* cannot be approached without first understanding the basic components of alchemical theory and history.

Chapter Two: fulfills the same function as chapter one, but for mystical theology. It introduces the reader to the mystical theologians cited in this work and provides the context necessary to understand the tradition's development in western Europe. It elucidates the fundamental role of Pseudo-Dionysius in medieval mystical theology, and it introduces the basic tenets of mystical theology, like the purgation of the soul and its union with God.

Chapter Three: presents a close reading and comparative analysis of the *Aurora* chapter VI. In this chapter, pseudo-Aquinas describes a vision wherein a black cloud descends over the narrator. In this state of darkness, the narrator describes his experience in the cloud and the process of purification that allows him to unite with his lover, holy Wisdom. This chapter compares and contrasts this event (and the image of the cloud) with similar themes found in mystical theology. It shows how chapter VI encapsulates the purgatorial journey of medieval contemplative literature, by drawing on the same themes and doctrines to explicate alchemy.

Chapter Four: this chapter develops the thematic elements introduced in chapter three by contrasting the *Aurora* with another late medieval text, the fourteenth-century English treatise of contemplative prayer, the *Cloud of Unknowing*. The central image of both texts

is that of the cloud. The analysis here examines the usage of the symbol in both texts, and shows how two seemingly separate traditions of alchemy and mystical theology make use of the same symbols. Where chapter three focuses on continental sources, this chapter focuses on England to demonstrate a series of shared images that appeared in mystical and alchemical texts at the end of the Middle Ages.

Chapter Five: examines chapter XII of the *Aurora*, the 'Confabulation of the Lover With the Beloved.' This chapter is the apex of the text, wherein the creation of the philosopher's stone is depicted as a mystical union between the alchemist and the Wisdom of God. It is structured, largely, as a paraphrase of the Song of Songs. While it is the apogee of the text, it begins, like chapter VI, with an all-encompassing experience of abyssal darkness, where the figure *Sapientia* is trapped in a night likened to Solomon's bride in the Song of Songs. This chapter examines the figure of *Sapientia*, and the themes of desolation in early-modern alchemy. It argues that the *Aurora* was a precursor to a tradition of alchemy in the sixteenth century that saw alchemy as an experience that begins in despair and ends in ecstasy.

1.3 Historiography and Literature Review: Alchemical Scholarship and the Academy

It is extraordinarily difficult to separate scholarship on the *Aurora* from Jungian influence. The text's critical edition was edited by Jung's colleague Marie Louise von Franz, and the majority of academic interest in the treatise has traditionally come from psychologists. The first major study of the *Aurora* came in Jung's aforementioned magnum opus the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*.[31] Recent scholarship has followed this trend with the publishing of Jeffery Raff's the *Wedding of Sophia* in 2003, a psychological reading of the figure of Sophia (*Sapientia*) in the text.[32] Von Franz psychoanalyses the *Aurora* in lectures eight and nine in her book *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*.[33] Likewise, a master's thesis written in 2010 also foregrounds a psychological reading of the text.[34] A

---

[31] The seminal work on psychology and alchemy in Jungian theory is C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1977).
[32] See Jeffrey Raff, *The Wedding of Sophia: The Divine Feminine in Psychoidal Alchemy*, Jung on the Hudson Book Series (Berwick, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 2003).
[33] See Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts 5 (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), 207–272.
[34] See Barrie Davis, 'Jung, Aquinas, and the Aurora Consurgens: Establishing a Relationship with God' (M.A. Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010).

notable exception to this trend is Barbara Newman's study *God and Goddesses: Vision, Poetry and Belief in the Middle Ages*, where the figure of *Sapientia* in the *Aurora* is examined as a part of a larger study of the divine feminine in medieval literature.[35] This is only a partial study, however, and not a full commentary.

While Jungian commentaries have produced valuable scholarship on the *Aurora*, they view the text through a very specific contextual lens that sometimes emphasises psychoanalytical theory over the practical elements of alchemical practice. Jung and the psychoanalysts held the *Aurora* in high esteem because the text conflates the exoteric practice of alchemy with an internal mystical experience of the divine, a process they likened with the individuation of the conscious and subconscious mind.[36]

In short, the psychoanalysts interpreted the symbols that appear in alchemical literature as parts of the subconscious, made perceptible to the conscious mind. The Jungian reading of alchemy sees the practice, and the symbolism that accompanies it, as a projection of subconscious 'dream content' into the realm of matter. Therefore, they approached the subject for what they could glean about their theories. That is, alchemy is read in light of what it can tell the psychologist about the personality and unconscious mind, while the specific details of laboratory practice are subordinated. This dissertation acknowledges the important scholarship that the Jungians contributed to the *Aurora*, however, it breaks with the psychoanalyst to read the text through a historical, and not a psychological lens.

Outside of the realm of depth psychology, the *Aurora Consurgens* has interested scholars with its richly illuminated manuscripts and pictorial depictions of the alchemy. The *Aurora*, alongside three other alchemical works known as the *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit,* the *Rosarium Philosophorum,* and the *Ripley Scrolls,* comprise some of the most important and earliest texts of the alchemical emblem tradition. Emblematic alchemy thrived in early modern Europe, where it conveyed alchemical exposition through a series of ornate

[35] See chapter five 'Sapientia: The Goddess Incarnate', in Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
[36] On individuation and its applications in alchemy in Jungian theory see Edward F. Edinger and Joan Dexter Blackmer, *The Mystery of the Coniunctio: Alchemical Image of Individuation*, Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1994).

images.[37] The *Aurora* was probably the earliest alchemical text to include pictorial elements.[38]

One such example is the manuscript reproduced in Glasgow's MS Ferguson 6. This rendition is a wordless copy that captures the entire text through pictorial symbolism, and it is probably derived from the manuscript found in Zürich. This copy has been studied by Alexandra Marraccini for its gendered depiction of the alchemical process.[39] Abbreviated pictorial representations of this kind were not uncommon in the early modern period, and in copies of the *Aurora*, the pictorial detail is particularly pronounced.[40] The Zürich manuscript possesses both text and lavishly coloured images representing the operations of alchemy.[41]

Richly illuminated alchemical manuscripts were emblematic of the late middle ages, wherein the initial circulation of the texts began just before the advent of the printing press. Beginning in the fifteenth century with the *Aurora,* the tradition carried on into the late-sixteenth century, with copies of the ornately illustrated *Splendor Solis* still circulating in manuscript form well after the advent of printing. Historians have determined that images found in texts like the *Rosarium Philosophorum* and the *Splendor Solis* were inspired by earlier depictions found in the *Aurora Consurgens*. Notably, the work of M.E. Warlick has evaluated these images for the sexual imagery found in the *Aurora* and other late medieval alchemical manuscripts.[42] Among artists, interest in this imagery has persisted into the present day, with the publication of a modern art-deco reimaging of the *Aurora's* images in 2015.[43]

---

[37] On the early modern emblem tradition in alchemy see Aaron Kitch, 'The Ripley Scrolls and the Generative Science of Alchemy', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 78 (2015): 87–125.
[38] See chapter three, subsection 3.4, 129–137.
[39] See Alexandra Marraccini, 'Fleshly Wisdoms: Image Practices, Bodies, and the Transmission of Knowledge in a Sixteenth-Century Alchemical Miscellany', *Word & Image*, 33, (2017): 339–61.
[40] *Idem*, 346.
[41] The Zürich manuscript is digitised and available online. See Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 172 : Aurora Consurgens', Parchment, 100 ff., 20.4 x 13.9 cm, 1400, https://doi.org/10.5076/E-CODICES-ZBZ-MS-RH-0172.
[42] The sexual imagery found in these manuscripts has to do with the balancing of elemental qualities. In alchemical theory, the 'masculine' quintessence of sulphur merges with the 'feminine' quintessence of mercury. This will be elucidated in chapter one. On sexuality and gender in the *Aurora Consurgens* and late medieval alchemical mansucripts see M.E. Warlick, 'Gender Reversals in Alchemical Imagery' in *Art & Alchemy*, ed. Jacob Wamberg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006).
[43] See Aviva Brueckner, *Aurora Consurgens: Wisdom Is Female* (Place of publication not identified: Lulu, 2015).

A critique of the Jungian position worth noting is that of Barbara Obrist in her focus on the pictorial representations of alchemy in the Aurora. She contends that the complex prose found in the treatise can be interpreted purely through the elucidation of alchemical symbolism. The text, she argues, does not require Jungian psychoanalysis to penetrate its intricate usage of allegory.[44] Such readings have been important in the development of alchemy's historiography, which is itself a complex subject.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, alchemy was not yet far enough removed from chemistry to be studied from a historiographical perspective, as many alchemical precepts were debated right up until the dawn of the nineteenth century. These include, but were not limited to theories of transmutation, and the belief that metals were formed through exhalations of sulphur and mercury within the earth.[45] Then, the polemical triumph of chemistry in the eighteenth century alienated alchemy from what was considered legitimate science.[46] By the 1730s the lines of demarcation between chemistry and alchemy were mostly defined. The word 'alchemy' was used to refer to metallic transmutation, and 'chemistry' was used for the study of chemical analysis and synthesis.[47] At the end of the century, the etymological links between chemistry and alchemy were completely severed, and the practices drifted apart.[48]

Like astrology, the history of alchemy has, until very recently, either been overlooked or treated with abject derision by the academy.[49] For example, the chemist and historian

---

[44] See Barbara Obrist, *Les Débuts de l'imagerie Alchimique: XIVe-XVe Siècles*, Féodalisme (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1982).

[45] For specific examples see Jost Weyer, 'The Image of Alchemy in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Histories of Chemistry', *Ambix*, 23 (1976), 65.

[46] It is a historiographic error to assume that the differences between alchemy and chemistry were clearly demarcated before the eighteenth century. The separation of chemistry from alchemy was a linguistic project taken by early-modern writers to separate terms that had previously been synonymous. This divorce in meaning was largely attributed to etymological errors made by seventeenth century textbook authors in their definitions of alchemy. Thus, alchemy became separated from chemistry on largely semantic grounds. See William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, 'Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake', *Early Science and Medicine*, 3 (1998): 32–65.

[47] *Idem*, 39.

[48] *Idem*, 63.

[49] The close association of alchemy with astrology may be why the practice was disparaged in scholarly circles. Rationalist materialism in the 18th century dismissed astrology as superstition. It did the same to alchemy. For a defence of astrology in the academy see Lynn Thorndike, 'The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science', *Isis*, 46, (1955): 273–78, 275. For a similar survey of the historical reception of alchemy in the academy and the current debates that surround its historiography, see Lawrence M. Principe, 'Alchemy Restored', Isis, 102, (2011): pp. 305–312. Also consult: William R. Newman, "What Have We Learned from the Recent Historiography of Alchemy?," *Isis*, 102 (2011): pp. 313–321.

George Sarton, who is remembered as a 'founding father' of the history of science in the twentieth century, derided alchemists as 'fools and knaves'. He attributed the decline of alchemical practice in the seventeenth century to the publishing of Robert Boyle's *Sceptical Chemist*.[50] This positivist attitude was not uncommon in the first half of the twentieth century, when historians of science invoked the materialist sensibilities of the enlightenment in their critiques of alchemy. The academic study of the practice suffered as a result.[51]

There were, however, instances of alchemy receiving fair historiographic treatment in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Ferdinand Hoefer, the early nineteenth-century French-German lexicographer, was among the first to write against presentism (a bias towards contemporary attitudes) in the historical scholarship of chemistry and alchemy. His work *Histoire de la chimie*, published between 1842 and 1843, was an early example of an unprejudiced historiography. In it, Hoefer argued that alchemy was unfairly scrutinised through the lens of contemporary scholarship, and that a fair evaluation of alchemy must evaluate the practice in its own historical context. Hoefer contended that the esoteric elements of alchemy, derided as superstition in the nineteenth century, were in fact the methodologies alchemists used to approach their art. In this way, they acted as precursors to the scientific method because they outlined the parameters of the alchemical work.[52]

In many ways, modern scholarship on alchemy began in the late nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century under the tutelage of three notable figures. These were the French chemist Marcellin Berthelot (1827–1907) and two German historians of science Edmund Oscar von Lippmann (1857–1940) and Julius Ruska (1867–1949). Berthelot, Lippmann and Ruska were the first scholars to assemble, edit, and translate several important collections of alchemical texts. Marcellin Berthelot was an accomplished chemist, and in the nineteenth century he was considered one of the most prominent scientists in the world. He was not a historian by profession or training, yet his

[50] While Sarton rejected alchemical imagery as superstitious, he did find the basic postulation that transmutation was possible to be reasonable. See George Sarton, 'Boyle and Bayle the Sceptical Chemist and the Sceptical Historian', *Chymia*, 3 (1950), 161–162.
[51] Principe, 'Alchemy Restored', 307.
[52] Weyer, 'The Image of Alchemy in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Histories of Chemistry', 68. See also Marco Beretta, 'The Changing Role of the Historiography of Chemistry in Continental Europe Since 1800', *Ambix*, 58 (2011), 260–261.

contributions to the study of alchemy and chemistry are considered invaluable. Late in his life, he took an interest in the history of chemistry and alchemy and surveyed the history of the chemical sciences from antiquity to the nineteenth century.[53]

While his writings on alchemy are extensive, two particular compendiums stand out.[54] The collection *Collections des anciens alchimistes grecs* was published in Paris in 1888 and is a compendium of ancient Greek alchemical texts. It was followed in 1893 by a survey of alchemy in the Middle Ages, *Chimie au Moyen Âge* (*Chemistry in the Middle Ages*).[55] These compendiums rendered ancient and medieval alchemical texts in modern French and made previously obscure alchemical texts available to scholars. E.O. Von Lippmann followed Berthelot in 1919 with his three-volume work *Entstehung und Ausbreitung der Alchemie (Origin and propagation of Alchemy)*, which built upon Berthelot and Hoefer's efforts to situate alchemy as forerunner to modern chemistry. These editions and translational efforts were further developed by Julius Ruska in the first half of the twentieth century.

Ruska's primary focus was on Islamicate alchemy, and it was through his efforts that the origins, genealogies and stemma of Islamicate manuscripts were clarified. This was especially pertinent in his study of the Persian alchemist and polymath al-Razi.[56] Ruska was also notable for his contributions to the methodologies of alchemical scholarship, wherein he emphasized an approach to the study of alchemy that was philologically critical. This textual criticism helped to demarcate the murky lines between Islamicate alchemy and early Latin alchemy, and it was through his work that many elements of the Latin reception of Islamicate alchemy were elucidated.[57] In short, Ruska was foundational for the emergence of textual criticism in alchemical scholarship, and his work helped to dispel misconceptions and errors in the study of alchemy and early chemistry.

---

[53] Berthelot's historical writings are important in the historiography of alchemy, but they have been criticised. Methodologically, they have been condemned for their uncritical analysis of texts and sources. Nonetheless, no history of chemistry is complete without noting his contributions. On his historical works, their significance and some of the criticisms that surround them see Arion Roşu, 'Marcelin Berthelot, Historien Des Sciences', *Sudhoffs Archiv* 74, (1990), 186–209.
[54] For a complete bibliography of Berthelot's alchemical writings see Beretta, op. cit., 265, fn 31.
[55] *Idem*, 264.
[56] See Rudolf Winderlich, 'Ruska's Researches on the Alchemy of al-Razi', *Journal of Chemical Education*, 13 (1936), 313.
[57] See Julius Ruska, 'Methods Of Research in the History of Chemistry', *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 21–29.

Ruska's efforts were followed in the first half of the twentieth century by several English historians of science who were among the first authors to produce broad yet methodologically rigorous surveys of alchemy. Frank Sherwood Taylor (1897–1956) in his 1952 book *The Alchemists*, and Eric John Holmyard (1891–1959) in his 1957 work *Alchemy*, set the stage for alchemical scholarship in the twentieth century.[58] Both men were influential founding figures in the academic journal AMBIX (the Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry), a prominent organ devoted to the study of alchemy that persists to this day.[59] These historical surveys were further developed in 1966 with the book *The Origins of Chemistry* by the American historian of science Robert P. Multhauf (1919–2004). In their surveys, Taylor, Holmyard, and Multhauf endeavored to trace the roots of alchemy and chemistry from their ancient origins to the present day. These books remain invaluable surveys of alchemy and its history.

No analysis of alchemy is complete without mentioning the contributions of Pierre Duhem (1861–1916), Lynn Thorndike (1882–1965) and George Sarton (1884–1956) who were instrumental figures in founding the 'history of science' as a legitimate field of inquiry. Duhem substantively developed the concept of medieval cosmology in his ten-volume epic *Le Systéme du Monde*, first published in 1913.[60] Thorndike in his voluminous *History of Magic and Experimental Science* made many important bibliographic contributions to the study of alchemy, magic, and the history of medieval and early modern science.[61] And finally, Sarton, who founded the academic journal *Isis* in 1913, created one of the first academic avenues dedicated solely to the study of the history of science.[62] The study of alchemy as a legitimate subject in the history of science, however, truly began in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the works of Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman.

---

[58] On Frank Sherwood Taylor's life and works see the obituary written by Holmyard. E. J. Holmyard, '*Obituary* Frank Sherwood Taylor (1897–1956)', *Ambix*, 5 (1956): 57–58. On Holmyard's life and works see D. McKie, '*Obituary* Eric John Holmyard (1891–1959)', *Ambix*, 8 (1960): 1–5.

[59] Taylor served as the journal's editor from its formation in 1937 to his death, and Holmyard was the societies' chairman form 1947 until his death in 1959.

[60] The most accessible English rendering of the work is Pierre Maurice Marie Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, trans. Roger Ariew (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).

[61] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science.*, 1923, 8 vols (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970).

[62] See George Sarton, 'The History of Science', *The Monist*, 26 (1916): 321–65.

1.4 Principe and Newman: The 'New Historiography' of Alchemy

Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman are the contemporary historians of alchemy perhaps most associated with recent historiography of the subject. Their basic contention is that Victorian occultism in the nineteenth century, and Jungian psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, alienated alchemy from its original laboratory context. They argue that these ideas have shaped the understanding of alchemy in both popular culture and in scholarship on the subject. New Age beliefs in the twentieth century alienated alchemy from its experimental origins to such an extent that the goal of metallic transmutation became an afterthought.[63]

In their essay *Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy*, Newman and Principe outline and critique the ahistorical influences that have hitherto shaped the study of alchemy within the academy.[64] In particular, their critique covers the three twentieth-century historiographies that divorced alchemy from the history of natural philosophy and chemistry. First, they examine the aforementioned study of alchemy in Victorian occultism. The main subject of this criticism is the 1850 text *A Suggestive Inquiry Into the Hermetic Mystery* published by the English author Mary Anne Atwood (b. 1817). This text, they argue, was largely responsible for the lingering perception that alchemy was only nominally interested in chemical processes, and that the transmutation of base metals was a metaphor for the spiritual transmutation of the self. This perception of alchemy is ubiquitous in occult and New Age circles, and persists in the study of the practice to this day.[65]

---

[63] This problem has lead historians of science to elucidate alchemical methods by recreating alchemical experiments. This has given historians greater insights into what alchemists were doing in laboratory settings, and has helped to dispel the anachronistic claim that alchemy was purely a spiritual exercise. See Hjalmar Fors, Lawrence M. Principe, and H. Otto Sibum, 'From the Library to the Laboratory and Back Again: Experiment as a Tool for Historians of Science', *Ambix*, 63 (2016): 85–97; Frederic Lawrence Holmes and Trevor Harvey Levere, eds, *Instruments and Experimentation in the History of Chemistry*, Dibner Institute Studies in the History of Science and Technology (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000) and Lawrence Principe, '"Chemical Translation" and the Role of Impurities in Alchemy: Examples from Basil Valentine's *Triumph-Wagen*', *Ambix*, 34 (1987): 21–30.

[64] See Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, 'Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy', in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. William Royall Newman, 1. MIT-Press paperback edn, Transformations (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

[65] Atwood was not the only Victorian to interpret alchemy as a wholly spiritual practice. Notably, Ethan Allen Hitchcock (c. 1798 – c. 1870) made a similar argument in his book *Remarks Upon Alchemy and the Alchemists* (Boston: Crosby Nichols and Company, 1857). In the twentieth century A.E. Waite made published books on spiritual alchemy, but later recanted in his book *The Secret Tradition in Alchemy: Its Development and Records* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926) wherein he endorses a material view of alchemy.

Second, they examine the psychoanalytical, or Jungian approach to alchemy, which they argue is derivative of Victorian occultism. This reading of alchemy sees the practice of alchemy and the imagery associated with it as projections of unconscious symbolism into the realm of matter. This, they argue, is an ahistorical interpretation of alchemical symbolism, as even the most enigmatic images in alchemical manuscripts are related to chemical operations. The perplexing images in alchemical manuscripts are not merely 'projections' of dream content into matter but are rather coded references to chemical operations. They essentially function as the alchemical equivalent of modern-day laboratory manuals.[66]

The third historiography of alchemy critiqued by Principe and Newman is that of Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), the historian of religion who suggested that alchemy was a 'replaying' of mythical symbols and archetypes in a laboratory setting, and that the ultimate goal of the practice was spiritual illumination. This assertion, Principe and Newman note, is derivative of both Jungian theory and Victorian occultism.[67] The problem with all three of these historiographies is that they lose sight of what alchemy was in its original context. While alchemy was undeniably suffused with religious metaphor, its prime mode of expression was always in the laboratory. Principe and Newman note:

> We do not deny that alchemical thought often embodied cultural and intellectual presuppositions and intents that are far different from those typical of the modern age; we do, however, deny the validity of interpretations that artificially, unwarrantably, and most of all, ahistorically introduce a chasm between "alchemy" and "chemistry".[68]

Therefore, the new historiography of alchemy seeks to restore the links between alchemy and chemistry that were obscured by the historiographies of nineteenth and twentieth-century occultism. While Principe and Newman have reoriented the practice of alchemy away from Victorian occultism and resituated it in the contextual setting of the laboratory, they vehemently deny charges of positivism.[69] They acknowledge that while alchemical

---

[66] This problem is particularly evident in the Hull and Glover translation of the *Aurora Consurgens* used in this dissertation. The psychoanalytical commentary of Marie Louise von Franz, while exhaustive, sometimes makes little reference to the actual alchemical operations written in the text. Instead, it concerns itself first with an explication Jungian theory, and leaves much of the *Aurora's* puzzling use of metaphor unexplained.
[67] Principe and Newman, *Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,* 418.
[68] *Idem*, 418.
[69] *Idem*, 412–415.

imagery was suffused with religious metaphor, it was not the only practice to be so in the history of natural philosophy and science. The connection between alchemy and religious motifs are a byproduct of a medieval and early modern culture where the methods of science and theology were not yet separated. Therefore, alchemy contains religious and spiritual symbolism, but this symbolism in no way overrides what alchemists were principally doing, the physical and applied manipulation of chemicals in pursuit of metallic transmutation:

> Thus it goes without question that alchemy and religion (or spirituality of various kinds) interpenetrated one another in the medieval and early modern periods, and that each borrowed terms and concepts from the other. This fact is not, however, remarkable in itself, nor is such interpenetration with religion unique to alchemy.[70]

Principe and Newman's historiography has been critiqued for what some scholars of religious studies see as exclusivism. This criticism contends that despite its proclaimed rejection of positivism, the new historiography of alchemy narrowly confines study of the practice to a naturalistic scientific worldview. To Principe and Newman, the enigmatic esoteric and Christian imagery that appears in alchemical manuscripts is almost always 'decknamen', the coded language used to conceal the chemical implements of the laboratory. They argue that the religious imagery found in alchemical manuscripts is the product of a shared Christian culture, and not necessarily an indicator of any hidden spiritual metaphor.[71] This position has been critiqued by both psychoanalysts and historians of western esotericism as being inflexibly rigid in its analysis of 'spiritual alchemy'.[72]

Wouter Hanegraaff has noted that this may not be entirely intentional, and that Principe and Newman are in a difficult position in their historiographical assessment of alchemy. They had to engage in what he identifies as a 'battle on two fronts' against the old historiography of alchemy that sees the practice as an 'occult pseudoscience', and the

---

[70] *Idem*, 400.
[71] See, for example, William R. Newman, 'Decknamen or Pseudochemical Language?' Eirenaeus Philalethes and Carl Jung', *Revue d'histoire Des Sciences*, 49 (1996): 159–88.
[72] Scholars who have critiqued Principe and Newman on these grounds include Hereward Tilton, Florin George Calian, Aaron Cheak and most notably Wouter Hanegraaff. For a detailed discussion of these issues see Stanton Marlan, 'The Philosopher's Stone: Alchemical Imagination and the Soul's Logical Life' (PhD Diss., Duquesne University, 2014), 17–36.

Jungian/spiritualist interpretation that sees the practice as an 'essentially spiritual' act.[73] While Hanegraaff recognises the utility of the 'new historiography', and sees the legitimisation of alchemy as an early modern science as an important historiographical development, he notes that there is an important 'subtle shift' in meaning that is sometimes lost in the new interpretation of alchemy. This subtle shift, he suggests, must consider alchemy to be a natural science while also acknowledging and studying its religious components without prejudice.[74]

The historian of western esotericism Hereward Tilton has raised a similar criticism. He critiques Principe and Newman's 'simplistic either-or logic',[75] in relation to alchemical symbolism. He argues that alchemical symbols have *both* a chemical meaning and a mystical meaning. The presence of religious motifs in alchemical symbolism does not preclude it from having a chemical meaning. While Tilton does not endorse a Jungian view of alchemy, he notes: '[T]he notion that a symbol may possess more than one significance is as integral to psychoanalysis as it was to seventeenth-century alchemy [. . .] certain symbols in the history of alchemy have borne explicit religious or mystical significance alongside their narrowly chemical meaning.'[76]

In recent scholarship, this position has been further developed by Mike A. Zuber in his book *Spiritual Alchemy: From Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood* published in 2021.[77] This study evaluates spiritual alchemy on its own terms, seeing the tradition as a hybrid amalgamation of pre-modern science and Christian mysticism. Zuber argues spiritual alchemy grew out of medieval manuscript sources, and that it is neither ancient occult knowledge nor a bastardization of alchemical doctrine originating in the Victorian era. Rather, the religious metaphor drawn from spiritual alchemy functions as its own tradition

---

[73] Wouter J Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 196.
[74] See also the critique of Hereward Tilton in Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569–1622)*, Arbeiten Zur Kirchengeschichte 88 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 11: '[B]y exaggerating the weight of evidence in favour of their own ideas, newcomers to the subject are liable to gain a false impression concerning the acceptability of certain conceptions in the academic milieu. And here we must emphasise the importance of utilising an inclusive and ideally value-neutral language when dealing with the history of alchemy.'
[75] Tilton, op. cit., 14.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Mike A. Zuber, *Spiritual Alchemy: From Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood, 1600–1910*, Oxford Studies Western Esotericism Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021).

and writing it off wholesale as ahistorical is to ignore important components of alchemical history.

In other words, the emphasis on alchemy as a ‘science’, despite the supposed anti-positivism of the new historiography, marginalises the religious content that does appear in alchemical texts as either ‘unimportant’ or ‘wholly irrelevant’.[78] In the case of the *Aurora*, this scientific perspective is rendered completely untenable. The text is so derived from religious metaphor, scripture, and symbolism, that it cannot be studied outside of the theological references that form the very structure of the document.[79] Consider the very opening lines of the text, where the practice of alchemy is defined as an act of spiritual enlightenment and a science given by God:

> Come ye to me and be enlightened, and your operations shall not be confounded; all ye that desire me shall be filled with my riches. Come (therefore), children, hearken to me; I will teach you the science of God.[80]

It is difficult, in light of the *Aurora's* definition of alchemy, to sustain Principe and Newman’s contention that spiritual alchemy has ‘very little reference to the historical reality of the subject’.[81] However, one must be careful not to misrepresent their position. They do acknowledge that alchemy is ‘replete with a lushness of symbolism and overlapping levels of meaning’[82] they simply deny that this springs from a spiritual impulse separate from the context of the laboratory. In an interview given in February 2020, Principe acknowledged that ‘spiritual alchemy’ was indeed a reality in the practice, but qualified this statement by suggesting that it was never in the mainstream of alchemical thought.[83]

---

[78] Hanegraaff, op. cit., 196.
[79] See George-Florin Calian, ‘Alkimia Operativa and Alkimia Speculativa: Some Modern Controversies on the Historiography of Alchemy’, *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, 16 (2010): 166–90, 174: ‘What makes the ideas of Principe and Newman not fully justified? First, their attitude seems to be dramatically inflexible in the rejection of spiritual alchemy which is difficult to sustain in the case of many alchemical texts, as for example, the *Aurora Consurgens,* the *Ripley Scroll*, or authors such as Michael Maier or Jakob Böhme, to name only some works and authors who cannot fit into the thesis of those two historians of science.’
[80] AC, 32–33: ‘Accedite ad me et illuminamini et operations vestrae non confundentur omnes qui concupiscitis me divitiis meis adimplemini. Venite (ergo) filii, audite me, scientiam De docebo vos.’
[81] William Royall Newman and Lawrence M Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chemistry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 37.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Earl Fontainelle, ‘Introducing Alchemy with Lawrence Principe’, The Secret History of Western Esotericism Podcast: Exploring the Forgotten and Rejected Story of Western Thought, n.d., https://shwep.net/podcast/introducing-alchemy-with-lawrence-principe/.

The intention here is not to unfairly mischaracterize the approach to alchemy forwarded by Principe and Newman, rather, to note the methodological pitfalls in adopting a method that is *only* concentrated on the material components of alchemical practice. To that end, it is important to acknowledge the invaluable work Principe and Newman have done in decoding the exoteric and applied laboratory operations of the alchemical process.

It is possible that the problem is a semantic one, and that scholars of religious studies and the history of science are talking past one another. One must note, however, that Principe and Newman have been accused of either misrepresenting, or not fully understanding the works of Jung and Eliade, basing their criticisms on dubious bibliographic grounds.[84] Whatever the case may be, to write off the spiritual aspects of the *Aurora Consurgens* would, as one contemporary commentator suggests, create 'serious methodological' issues that would render the text incomprehensible.[85] The best way to read the *Aurora* is through a conceptual middle ground.

The *Aurora Consurgens* is *not* a document of purely spiritual alchemy, and it is *not merely* some deeply veiled metaphor for spiritual illumination. The *Aurora* is first and foremost a document of emblematic alchemy that describes the chemical operations of the alchemical work. However, Principe and Newman's insistence that alchemy is a rudimentary precursor to chemistry should not rule out the study of religious content where, in texts like the *Aurora*, it very clearly appears. Hanegraaff writes: 'Acknowledging the presence of religious elements throughout the alchemical corpus does not commit us to occultist or Jungian ideas of 'spiritual alchemy', and emphasizing alchemy as a scientific pursuit does not need to imply that religious references are marginal or secondary to what alchemy is 'really' all about'.[86]

This thesis follows Hanegraaff's assertion that alchemy is a multifaceted 'cultural and historical phenomenon' that does not have a 'conceptual core', but rather, merely describes the act of transmutation.[87] As Hereward Tilton has argued, there is simply no need to divorce the material aspects of alchemy from spirituality. Such distinctions are not

---

[84] Calian, 'Alkimia Operativa and Alkimia Speculativa: Some Modern Controversies on the Historiography of Alchemy', 188.
[85] *Idem*, 178–179.
[86] Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, 197.
[87] Ibid.

emblematic of premodern thought, rather, they are representative of modernity.[88] What follows is a study of the premodern mind. It argues that the *Aurora Consurgens* draws upon, consciously or not, the philological and thematic elements of mystical theology to explicate the chemical phenomenon of metallic transmutation.

1.5 Why the *Aurora* is a Theological Text: Methodology, and Evidence

The *Aurora's* invocation of mystical theology can be seen in three specific ways: First, the *Aurora* is framed as a dialogue between its author and the *Sapientia Dei* (wisdom of God) that, in the final chapter, takes the personified form of the philosopher's stone. This stone is unambiguously described as the object of the alchemist's affection, and in the final chapter, it becomes a lover who signifies the completion of the alchemical work and the creation of the philosopher's stone through the language of sexual consummation. These very same ideas are common in the mystical theology of the middle ages. For example, descriptions of *Sapientia* as a 'lover' appear in the mystical theology of Henry Suso, a fourteenth-century German priest who wrote in the same cultural milieu that produced the *Aurora*.[89]

Second, throughout the course of the dialogue, the text frequently blurs the lines between the author and *Sapientia* herself. In many instances it is not at all clear who is talking, and the voices meld together in a paradox. This is evocative of mystical theology, where the 'self' is described as 'melting' into God. Furthermore, the text constantly invokes the imagery of darkness and illumination. These are common tropes in mystical theology, that appear in the works of Christian theologians from Pseudo Dionysius, to the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, to St John of the Cross.

Third, the final chapter of the *Aurora Consurgens* is almost entirely comprised of references to the Old Testament book, the Song of Songs. As Denys Turner has demonstrated, the Latin commentary tradition on the Song of Songs was always and *without exception* read through the prism of religious and spiritual metaphor.[90] The

---

[88] Tilton, op. cit., 34: 'Such an assertion [that alchemists worked on material substances for material ends] merely begs the question as to the nature of matter itself in the early modern worldview, and displays precisely the presentism and positivism Principe and Newman claim to disown, by which contemporary notions of matter are unconsciously elevated to the realm of the definitive.'

[89] See chapter five, subsection 5.2, page 171, footnote 28.

[90] See Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 156 (Kalamazoo, Mich; Spencer, Mass: Cistercian Publications, 1995).

implications of this cannot be ignored. The author of the *Aurora Consurgens* is likening the physical practice of alchemy and the creation of the philosopher's stone with mystical union and an intimate experience of the divine.

When evaluating texts like the *Aurora,* it is important not to pivot too far in a positivist direction that undermines, undervalues, or ignores theological, religious, and mystical motifs when they appear. Ignoring the clear usage of religious and mystical metaphor in the *Aurora* would be a disservice to the text and render a fair evaluation of its themes either confused or impossible. Alchemy is not a monolith, and alchemical texts should be examined on a case-by-case basis for what they say and how they are written. In the case of the *Aurora*, it is both unwise and unreasonable to undermine the spiritual and religious connotations in fear of making the same conceptual mistakes of Victorian occultism. A fair historiography makes room for nuance.

This dissertation evaluates the *Aurora Consurgens* through what the text says about itself. Early histories of alchemy were biographical in nature and framed their analysis of alchemical lore through the evaluation of famous personages. The works of Taylor, Holmyard, and Multhauf were, first and foremost, concerned with alchemy's cast of notable characters (Jabir, Ramon Llull, George Ripley etc.). Principe and Newman's methodology is less biographical and seeks to recreate alchemical experiments through an analysis of decknamen. This thesis follows Anke Timmerman's alternative methodology, alchemical history written 'through the lives of texts'.[91]

Timmerman's method is used in the analysis of large bodies of alchemical *anonyma*, that is, pseudographical texts that have no discernable author. Anonymous texts, Timmerman, argues, require special attention as their 'role in the communication of knowledge can, and needs to be told, separately from other histories of alchemy'.[92] The *Aurora's* author is anonymous, and its style is atypical. It is a text best understood when put into a critical conversation with other late medieval alchemical texts, and theological tracts that share its rhetorical style.

[91] See 'Writing History Through the Lives of Texts: An Alternative Approach', in MEAP, 5–8.
[92] MEAP, 8.

This dissertation is primarily a critical reading. When passages from the *Aurora* are cited, a practical alchemical interpretation of the symbolism is always provided (i.e. what is happening in the text chemically). The theological allegory is then put into a comparative dialogue with other mystical texts of the late middle ages and early-modern period. The language of the *Aurora* itself is the driving factor behind this method. Such a study necessitates an interdisciplinary method. This dissertation is one part a history of science, and one part a study of the signs and symbols used by mystical authors in the late middle ages. The 'life' of the *Aurora* as a text is explicated through the sources selected for the project. Chapter one focuses on alchemical sources stemming from the earliest days of Latin alchemy to the early-modern period. These sources acquaint the reader with how alchemical theory operates and how alchemical authors thought. The same approach is followed in chapter two, which follows the same method, but with medieval tracts of mystical theology.

Chapter three cites late medieval alchemical texts and mystical literature that employ apophatic and purgatorial imagery.[93] Such sources include Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, and the *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius, where the presence of God is said to settle upon mystics like a cloud. A comparison is drawn between these texts and the *Aurora* chapter VI, that describes the same phenomenon. Victorine, Beguine, and monastic literature are also cited in this chapter to elucidate the *Aurora's* view of mystical union.

Chapter four develops the cloud motif further by examining the late medieval contemplative text the *Cloud of Unknowing*, where the symbol of the cloud reaches its highest level of sophistication. Other sources considered are Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and the *Book of Privy Counseling*, late medieval English contemplative texts that also draw upon the symbolism of desolation, darkness, and incomprehensibility. Ecstatic imagery found in texts like Richard Rolle's *Fire of Love* also appears in the chapter, as well as a number of English alchemical and literary sources that make reference to the idea of 'spiritual nourishment'. These motifs are contrasted to similar themes in the *Aurora* and are contextualized through citations of late medieval English alchemical poetry.

[93] Apophatic refers to that imagery in theological literature most associated with darkness, and the incomprehensibility of God. It is defined in chapter two. See chapter two, subsection 2.3, 84–88.

Chapter five ventures into the early-modern period. It focuses on the embodiment of a personified figure of Wisdom in the *Aurora* and connects the incarnation of the deity to experiences of travail, tempests, and desolation. It considers early-modern German alchemical texts like *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz, The Atalanta Fugiens,* and *The Golden Age Restored,* who, like the *Aurora*, make reference female entities that appear during the alchemical work. In the *Aurora*, the appearance of Wisdom is inextricably linked to suffering. This chapter shows that the same motifs appears in the mystical theology of the late medieval author Henry Suso, and that such appeals to suffering are emblematic of early-modern alchemical narratives. They share this tenor with early-modern mystical theology, in the writing of the tradition's most well-known representative, St John of the Cross. This chapter compares and contrasts the themes of union, wisdom and despair across several texts. It argues that all of these themes form a nexus where mystical theology and alchemy overlap.

Chapter 1: Sources, Themes and Theory in the *Aurora Consurgens*

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the themes and primary sources that contributed to the formation of the *Aurora Consurgens*. This will be done by examining alchemical theory and practice. The analysis will start with the art's theoretical origin in Platonism and Greek philosophy. It will then turn to Hellenistic alchemy, alchemy as it developed in the Islamicate, and medieval Latin alchemy. It will culminate in the late middle ages when the *Aurora* was written. Each period of alchemical history surveyed here will elucidate the many influences that formed the *Aurora Consurgens* and show how the ideas explicated in the text developed over ten centuries. This context is critical to understand the *Aurora* as a product of the late middle ages.

1.1 Plato, the Hermetic Tradition and the Origins of Alchemical Practice

The origin of alchemical metaphysics is unclear. From the very earliest days of the practice, alchemy was a messy amalgamation of folk belief, natural philosophy, and religious ritual. It was a practice defined by its syncretism, and when the first alchemical texts were written in Roman Egypt at the end of the second century, they drew ideas from a variety of sources found in classical antiquity.[1] One such idea pertained to matter and its relationship to the elemental world. The idea that base metals can be converted into gold (transmutation) is only possible when elements are malleable. Alchemists reasoned that by changing the elemental conditions that produce base metals, they could change the *form* of the metal itself. This concept came from the classical elemental model first espoused in Greek philosophy by Empedocles (444–443 BC) and Plato (423–348 BC).

In the middle ages, Plato was routinely cited as a preeminent alchemical authority.[2] Despite his supposed (and erroneous) standing as a master alchemist, actual knowledge of Platonic philosophy was scant in the medieval Latin west. What scholars knew of him largely came from a partial Latin translation and commentary on the *Timaeus* written by the Roman Calcidius (fl. c. 350). [3] This was as the only major Platonic work known until the bulk of the corpus was recovered in the late-fifteenth century.

---

[1] See chapter I, 'Ancient Hellenistic Sources of Western Esotericism', in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15–32.
[2] See Dorothea Waley Singer, 'Alchemical Texts Bearing the Name of Plato', *Ambix*, 2 (1946): 115–28.
[3] For the translation and commentary see Calcidius, *On Plato's Timaeus*, ed. John Magee, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 41 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Nevertheless, the *Timaeus* gave alchemy a working theoretical background. In the text, the material world is formed through the interaction of four elements; earth, air, water, and fire. The elements merge, intermingle, fluctuate and dissolve into one other. This vacillation is what forms the basis of material reality. Matter is not fixed in its nature because the elements are interconvertible. Therefore, it follows that the 'form' of material things can be changed, or transmuted, just as elements can. The elements are not considered real in and of themselves, rather, they are receptacles of divine images, or archetypes. Like a radio picking up a frequency, material reality receives its composition from the realm of forms. Plato writes: '[elemental reality is] the receptacle of all that comes to be, a kind of nurse, as it were'.[4]

Plato goes on to defend the interconvertibility of the elements by way of analogy. He draws the reader's attention to the malleable attributes of water. When frozen, water exhibits the form of a solid and takes on the hard elemental quality of earth. Similarly, when heated, it takes on the vaporous nature of air. All four elements are able to pass on their qualities in this way. Of the four elements, only fire is given a stable and fixed essence: 'We should also suppose, therefore, that the fire which is forever the same exists in the true sense, and so too in the case of everything that is possessed of a permanent property.'[5] Fire is also described as having two natures, one that is generative, and one that is destructive: 'Fire I suppose, has two powers, one consuming and destructive and the other soothing due to its harmless light'.[6]

All of these ideas are found in the alchemical theory of transmutation. The basic idea was based upon the presupposition that a base metal's form can be changed through the manipulation of fire. The first manipulation comes through an intense fire that dissolves the metallic substance in the alchemical crucible. The matter is then cultivated with a

[4] Calcidius, *On Plato's Timaeus*, 105; [O]mnium quae gignuntur receptaculum est, quasi quaedam nutricula.]
[5] *Idem*, 107–108; [Igitur ignem quoque eum esse vere putandum qui semper idem est, et omne cuius proprietas manet.]
[6] *Idem*, 90–91: 'Duae sunt, opinor, virtutes ignis, altera edax et peremptoria altera mulcebris innoxio lumine.'

temperate flame that was compared to the nurturing warmth of a 'brooding hen'.[7] Through the mastery of fire, the alchemist takes the base metal through an elemental 'cycle' where it adopts the qualities of earth, air, water, and fire. By doing this, the metal comes to represents elemental reality in its *totality*. This was thought to engender the quality of transmutation within the substance. The fire in the crucible ignites within the metal an inner 'secret fire' that is used to create the philosopher's stone: the sacred objective of the alchemical work.

With the *Timaeus*, therefore, the theory of transmutation was given a theoretical foundation. While its direct historical influence on alchemy is murky, scholars of the practice have recognised its importance in forming a coherent worldview that allowed practitioners of the art to speculate on the various aspects of chemical change.[8] Another source from classical antiquity that informed alchemical theory was the enigmatic 'Hermetic' tradition. The Hermetic tradition, or Hermeticism, is loosely defined as a system of metaphysical philosophy and religious ritual closely associated with Platonism and the magical traditions of late antique paganism.

Hermeticism is centred around a collection of texts ascribed to a mythical figure named Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes thrice great). These texts were popular in late antiquity and over time, they became closely associated with alchemy. [9] In alchemical lore, this mysterious personage was identified as an ancient Egyptian king or high priest who was said to be a contemporary of Moses. He was also associated with the Egyptian wisdom deity Thoth and the Greek God Hermes because of the affiliation of these deities with magic.

Hermetic texts coalesce around the themes of ritual magic, astrology, and alchemy.[10] They come in two varieties. The first variety is theoretical Hermetica, which is devotional in

---

[7] Alchemists identified varying degrees of heat necessary to induce transmutation. See J. Read, *Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy Its Literature and Relationships* (Cambrdige, MA.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 143–144.
[8] On the *Timaeus* and alchemy see Stanton J. Linden, ed., *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.
[9] It has been argued that The Hermetic tradition was the culmination and synthesis of Hellenistic Philosophy with Greek and Egyptian mystery religions in late antiquity. See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Mythos (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[10] For an English translation of the Corpus Hermeticum See Brian P. Copenhaver and Hermes, eds, *Hermetica: The Greek 'Corpus Hermeticum' and the Latin 'Asclepius' in a New English Translation, with*

nature. This mode of Hermetic thought is less concerned with magical practice, and more concerned with cosmology and the cosmological components of the universe. The second type is technical Hermetica, which is didactic and intended to teach the reader how to conduct magical rituals.[11] While alchemy was considered a technical art, Hermeticism gave it a kind of creation narrative. Alchemists often made reference to Hermes Trismegistus, and sincerely believed that he was a real semi-divine figure who created the art in remote antiquity. They routinely referred to the practice as the '*Ars Hermetica*' (Hermetic art).[12] Hermeticism legitimised alchemy, in the minds of its practitioners, as an ancient and sacred practice. While alchemists were right to recognise Egypt as the birthplace of alchemy, the practice was not founded during the life of Moses as they thought. Rather, the first alchemical texts appear in the historical record in Egypt at the beginning of the Christian era. This 'Hellenistic' alchemy was the root of all alchemical practice in the middle ages.[13]

1.2 Hellenistic Alchemy

In 30 B.C., the Roman Empire under Caesar Augustus annexed Egypt and declared it a Roman province. With the occupation came the city of Alexandria, founded between 331 and 332 BC by Alexander the Great and rapidly one of the major intellectual centres of the ancient world. Under the Ptolemaic dynasty scholarship flourished.[14] It was in this intellectual milieu that Greco-Egyptian, or Hellenistic alchemy first appeared as the earliest texts of Greek alchemy were written in Roman Egypt in the latter part of the second century.[15] Here, alchemy was practiced openly until 250 A.D. when the emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305 A.D.) ordered the burning of alchemical books. After this initial persecution,

Notes and Introduction, Reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The introduction to this volume also provides an invaluable resource on the tradition.

[11] *Idem*, xxxii.

[12] F. Ebeling, D. Lorton, and J. Assmann, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times* (Cornell University Press, 2011), 70.

[13] An alchemical tradition also arose independently in China. Some have suggested that there is a tenuous link between the traditions. See H. J. Sheppard, 'Chinese and Western Alchemy: The Link Through Definition', *Ambix*, 32 (1985): 32–37.

[14] Intellectual activity in Alexandria was centred around the Museum (Mouseion, or Institute of the Muses), a legendary community of academics who were based in the city. These scholars operated within the Great Library of Alexandria, one of the largest and most important libraries of antiquity. On the Ptolemies and the Great Library see Andrew Erskine, 'Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria', *Greece & Rome*, 42 (1995): 38–48.

[15] On Roman Egypt and the formation of alchemy see *AH,* 24–26.

many alchemists fled the city, and knowledge of alchemy spread throughout the Greek world.[16]

The earliest Alexandrian alchemists make reference to an author who wrote under the pseudonym 'Democritus'. This is not Democritus the pre-Socratic philosopher, but rather, a figure named Bolos of Mendes who flourished in the Nile river delta around the year 200 B.C. His works were not properly alchemical in and of themselves, but in them, the rudiments of proto-alchemical thought begin to emerge. One such example is his text *Physika kai Mystika*, an early exposition of chemical theory widely cited by Alexandrian alchemists. It is a work mostly concerned with the artisanal preparation of gold and gems. That is to say, the text is largely concerned with the methods taken to dress metals so that they appear to be gold. In most respects, the text looks like the recipe book of an artificer.[17]

Nevertheless, in the text, Bolos does acknowledge the possibility of metallic transmutation. This inference signals an ontological shift that separates the *Physika* from a work of pure artisanry, as its author associates the colour change metals experience during alloying with an inherent capacity for transmutation.[18] The concept of colour change is ubiquitous in alchemy, and represents one of the most important theoretical bedrocks of the practice. The idea that metals undergo changes in colour during the course of transmutation is a hallmark of alchemical literature that appears in texts from ancient Greece to early-modern Europe.

In addition to Bolos of Mendes, Hellenistic alchemy is replete with texts ascribed to a variety of personages, both real and mythical. These pseudonymous writings appeared under the names of both historical figures and gods such as Isis, Moses, Cleopatra, Agathodaimon, and naturally, Hermes Trismegistus.[19] The first verifiable Greco-Egyptian alchemist to leave behind a prolific body of work was Zosimos of Panopolis (fl. c. 300). With Zosimos, a discernible connection appears between Greek philosophy and alchemical

[16] This was part of a larger persecution of Christians and Manicheans. See Lorne D. Bruce, 'A Note on Christian Libraries during the "Great Persecution," 303–305 A.D.', *The Journal of Library History (1974–1987)*, 15 (1980): 127–37.
[17] *OOC,* 95.
[18] *AH,* 25–26.
[19] *OOC, 102.*

theory. He engages with the Corpus Hermeticum in a way that connects the metaphysics of Hermetic cosmology to the material operations of alchemical practice.[20]

Zosimos saw the chemical reactions of evaporation and sublimation as being intimately connected to the Stoic concept of *pneuma* or spirit. Alchemical sublimation entails the action of sublimated sulphur or arsenic sulphides on a metallic body, as gasses penetrate the base metal, causing it to change colour. Zosimos was the earliest alchemist to suggest that this was a mystical event, and that the metal was taking on a new spiritual form through the interpenetration of these gasses. The central idea here is that metals resemble living things. They have spirits that can be slain, reformulated, and resurrected. This is not the artisanal dressing of metals to appear like gold, it is a complete transmutation of their nature.[21]

Two other noteworthy Hellenistic alchemists were Maria the Jewess (fl. c. 200) and Stephanos of Alexandria (fl. c. 580–c. 640). Though no works of Maria survive, she is referenced in the works of Zosimos, pre-dating him by at least two generations.[22] Maria is notable for the contributions she made to alchemical technology. She is credited as being the first to either invent or describe various ovens, vessels, and stills used in the operations of cooking, distillation, and sublimation. Among these, a prominent tool was the *Kerotakis*. The *Kerotakis*, whose name is derived from the expression 'painter's palette' in Greek, was used to soften alloys by mixing them with 'colouring agents'.[23] This was done with the intent to change, or transmute a metal's spirit by changing its colour. The vessel allowed an alchemist to fix a base metal in place while subliming sulphur or arsenic sulphide which sat on a plate just above a heat source. These vapours would work their way into the metal, thereby changing its composition.

In the figure of Stephanos of Alexandria, Greek alchemical thought reached its highest level of sophistication. While Stephanos was not a particularly innovative character, he was among the first authors to collect and codify the works of Greco-Egyptian alchemy

[20] On Zosimos and religion see William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29–33.
[21] Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature*, 31.
[22] Raphael Patai, 'Maria the Jewess–Founding Mother of Alchemy', *Ambix*, 29 (1982): 177–97., 178.
[23] *Idem*, 179.

that preceded him. It is through his efforts that extensive, complete, and non-fragmented tracts on Hellenistic alchemy have survived to posterity. It has also been suggested that he was the first alchemist to associate psycho-spiritual development with the material transmutation of base metals.[24]

Stephanos was known to Islamicate authors, where references to Stephanos (Istafanus) appear in the body of work belonging to the Islamicate alchemist Jābir ibn Hayyān (fl. c. 721–c.815).[25] References to Stephanos also appear in Latin alchemy, where passages and longer sections of his work appear in the early Latin alchemical treatise the *Turba philosophorum*. Stephanos served as an important link in the transition of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy to Islamicate alchemy through his systematisation of the practice.

In summation, Hellenistic alchemy contributed four major ideas to the art. The first idea was that transmutation was predicated on changes in metallic colour. Second, that chemical substances were comprised of *pneuma*, or spiritual essences. Third, that there was a psycho-spiritual component to alchemical practice. Finally, Hellenistic alchemy saw the creation of alchemical technology (stills and crucibles) that were formative to, and enduring within, the practice.

1.3 Islamicate Alchemy

Islamic alchemy was pioneered by three figures who lived at the height of the faith's golden age. These three personages were Khālid ibn Yazīd (c. 668–c. 704), Jābir ibn Hayyān (c. 721–c. 815) and Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (c. 854–c. 925). The earliest of these, Khālid, was a Sultan of the Umayyad caliphate and a celebrated figure in alchemical folklore. He supposedly learned the secret of transmutation from a Greek Christian monk known as Morienus who travelled to his court with the hope of converting him to Christianity. Their discussions formed a dialogue that became deeply influential in both Islamic and Latin alchemy, as it gave both traditions a foundation

[24] For information on Stephanos, as well as a translation of his work in the original Greek see F. Sherwood Taylor, 'The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria', *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 116–39.

[25] References to a Stephanos also appear in the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (*The Book Catalogue*) of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995-998), though these likely refer to another Stephanos who helped translate Greek alchemical texts for the Umayyad prince and alchemist Khalid ibn-Yazīd. (d. c. 704). See Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi, eds, *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Colloquium, Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2006), 171–173.

narrative.[26] While the mythical Khalid is considered a progenitor of Islamic alchemy, the validity of the historical figure's interest in alchemy is a source of speculation.[27]

By far the most influential Islamicate alchemist was Jābir ibn Hayyān. Jābir, who practiced medicine at the court of the Abbasid Caliph Hārun al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), and noteworthy for making several original contributions to alchemical philosophy.[28] The most important of these is the sulphur-mercury theory. Jābir stipulated that metals were created by the union of planetary influences and vapours released from the core of the earth. Drawing from Aristotle, he reasoned that one of these gaseous 'exhalations' was hot and dry, while the other was cold and moist. He connected the dry exhalation with the 'quintessence' of sulphur, and the moist exhalation with the 'quintessence' of mercury.[29]

In Jabir's model of metallic generation, the various metals of the material world are formed by astrological influences and disproportionate balances of sulphur and mercury. A metal influenced by an 'impure' or lopsided combination of sulphur and mercury would form (in conjunction with the influence of a specific planet) a base metal.[30] Therefore, it is the objective of the alchemist to bring these influences into equilibrium. By breaking down base metals through a rigorous process of sublimation and distillation, sulphur and mercury are purified and brought into proportion. This perfect ratio is what creates the alchemical 'elixir', a chemical substance that transmutes base metals and creates gold.

The operations required to create the elixir in Jabirian alchemy are comprised of these basic steps: 1. The selection of an astrologically propitious time to conduct the work. 2. An arduous process of distillation that draws the four elements out of organic matter. The elixir is created when biological material (typically vegetables or animal products) are distilled and redistilled up to seven hundred times. This process reduces the material to its

---

[26] OOC, 124. This dialogue was the first text translated from Arabic into Latin.
[27] Mohamed Yahia Haschmi, 'The Beginning of Arab Alchemy', *Ambix*, 9 (1961): 155–61, 156.
[28] Jābir enjoyed a sterling reputation among both Islamic and Latin alchemists. In Latin alchemy, he was known under the Latinised title 'Geber'. The body of work attributed to him is vast, and includes numerous pseudographical attributions. The most relevant texts are the *Kitāb al rahma* (*Book of Mercy*) and two compendiums known as *Seventy books* and *Hundred and twelve* books. See OOC, 129.
[29] On the Sulphur-Mercury theory in the Jabirian corpus see Adib Hamdani B Rosli and Amir A. Shafie, 'Jabir Ibn Hayyan's Work on Sulphur-Mercury Theory', in Abdi Omar Shuriye and Waleed F Faris, *Contributions of Early Muslim Scientists to Engineering Sciences and Related Studies* (Gombak, Selangor: IIUM Press, 2011).
[30] This was the predominant theory of metallogenesis in pre-modern science. See John A. Norris, 'The Mineral Exhalation Theory of Metallogenesis in Pre-Modern Mineral Science', *Ambix*, 53 (2006): 43–65.

barest elemental form and separates pure matter from impure matter. 3. The purification of elements by reducing them to their basic natures (i.e. drawing coldness out of water, heat out of fire, dryness out of earth, humidity out of air). When each element is purified to its most unadulterated essence, the qualities of each element (heat, coldness, dryness etc.) are extracted and balanced. 4. Weighing out the elements evenly. 5. Mixing them together to create the elixir.[31]

Jabir's formula went on to influence the alchemy of Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, known colloquially as al-Razi. Al-Razi, a Persian, was born in the middle of the ninth century; a polymath who was known first and foremost as a physician and not an alchemist. In addition to alchemy, his interests included mathematics, astronomy, logic, philosophy, poetry, natural philosophy and most importantly medicine.[32] He enjoyed an unparalleled reputation as a curative thinker throughout the middle ages, and was cited as an authority in medicine well into the early-modern period. He lived and worked in Baghdad for much of his adult life, where his reputation as a healer came in his mastery of Indian, Persian and Greek systems of medicine.[33]

His alchemy has been described as 'straight-forward', 'systematic, and 'methodical'. The methodology employed in his writings resembles a modern laboratory manual, and contains little of the esoteric and spiritual content so often associated with alchemical literature. His most notable work, the *Kitab al-Arar* (*Book of Secrets*), is systematic in its approach to alchemy as it is designed to create repeatable results in a controlled setting.[34] Al-Razi expanded and developed the sulphur-mercury theory, and along with the writings of Jabir, transmitted the concept to Latin alchemy.

Not all Islamic polymaths believed that metallic transmutation was possible. The theory was criticised by Abū-ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn-Sīnā (c. 980–c. 1037) known to

[31] This is a simplified version of the formula presented by Paul Kraus, the notable 20th century Arabist. See chapter one in Paul Kraus, *Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l'histoire Des Idées Scientifiques Dans l'Islam: Jābir et La Science Grecque*, Collection Sciences et Philosophie Arabes (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986).
[32] AH, 85.
[33] On the life and works of al-Razi see A. S. Bazmee Ansari, 'Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Yahya Al-Razi: Universal Scholar and Scientist', *Islamic Studies*, 15 (1976): 155–66.
[34] See Gail Taylor, 'The Kitab Al-Arrar: An Alchemy Manual In Tenth-Century Persia', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 32 (2010): 6–27. See also her translation of the *Book of Secrets*. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā Rāzī, *The Alchemy of Al-Razi: A Translation of the 'Book of Secrets'*, ed. Gail Marlow Taylor, 2014.

the Latins as Avicenna. Ibn-Sīnā's theory of metallic formation closely follows that of Jābir. Like Jābir, he contends that metals are created through the combination of mercury and sulphur. However, while he espoused the sulphur-mercury theory, he believed that the 'species' of metallic substances were unchangeable. He did, however, acknowledge that imitations of a high quality were possible.[35]

Ibn-Sīnā's wider significance has important implications in terms of the dissemination of ideas. Also a Persian, he systematised the works of Aristotle and incorporated them into Islamic theology making him one of the most celebrated and consulted of golden age thinkers. The works of Ibn-Sīnā became the basis for scientific and philosophical speculation throughout the entirety of the Islamic world, and later translations in the twelfth century in the Latin West.[36] Islamicate alchemy introduced concepts that become mainstays in the art. Its emphasis on distillation, the balancing of elemental qualities, and the sulphur-mercury were the basic theoretical building blocks of Latin alchemy. The purification and subsequent union of sulphur and mercury is the most enduring symbol in alchemical lore. The 'chemical wedding', as it was called, was the basis of mystical speculation in late medieval alchemy.[37]

1.4 Latin Alchemy and the influence of Astrology on the Practice

In the twelfth century, the works of Aristotle and Islamic scientific treatises were translated from Arabic into Latin. Latin Christendom received alchemy through this process, which was known as the Arabo-Latin translation movement and involved a massive transferral of knowledge. The transmission of Arabic texts into Latin was centred in regions of particular contact between Latin Christian and Latin and Islamic culture. These regions included Sicily and the crusader states of the Levant.[38] For instance, an early translator of Arabic texts, Adelard of Bath (c. 1080–c. 1152), travelled to Sicily, and the Levant to recover and translate Islamicate knowledge. However, the pre-eminence in this field belongs to Iberia, where the translation movement coincided with the first stages of Christian reconquest of

[35] AH, 95.
[36] On Avicenna and the speculative precedent he left for theological and scientific discourse in the Islamic world see Ahmed H. Al-Rahim, 'Avicenna's Immediate Disciples: Their Lives and Works' in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, v. 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).
[37] LAD, 35–39.
[38] On the role of Spain in translating Arabic science, see David C. Lindberg, *Science in the Middle Ages*, The Chicago History of Science and Medicine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 62–70.

Iberia in the latter half of the eleventh century.[39] In 1085, the Castilian king Alfonso VI captured the city of Toledo, an event which would go on to have a direct impact on the importation of alchemical texts to the Latinate.[40]

In Iberia, Latin translators, principally from northern Europe or northern Italy, were assisted by Jews, Berbers, Arabs and native Iberians like John of Seville (fl. c. 1133-1153).[41] Among these were the Mozarabs, Christians who had lived under Islamic rule but kept the Visigothic liturgy of Pre-Islamic Iberia alive. The Mozarabs spoke both Arabic and a romance vernacular dialect. They were active in Latin translation efforts.[42] The earliest reference to alchemy in Latin Europe came from this cultural milieu. In the middle of the twelfth century, Hugo of Santalla (fl. c. 1140–1150), a translator who lived and wworked in the north Iberian city of Tarazona, translated the *kitbab al-masia'il (Book of Questions)* of Umar ibn al-Farrukhān (fl. c. 762–812) into Latin. While the *kitbab al-masia'il* is an astrological text, it makes reference to the practice of alchemy in its seventy-ninth chapter.[43] The first Latin translation dedicated exclusively to alchemy was the *Liber de compositione alchimiae,* otherwise known as the *Book of Morienus* (this is the aforementioned dialogue between Khalid and Morienus). The text was translated between 1141–1144 by two men known as Robert of Chester (sometimes conflated with Robert of Ketton fl. c. 1141–1150), and Herman of Carinthia (c. 1100–c. 1160).[44]

---

[39] On the Reconquista see Derek W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London; New York: Longman, 1978). On the Reconquista as a Latin ideology see R. A. Fletcher, 'Reconquest and Crusade in Spain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 37 (1987): 31–47 and Roberto Marin-Guzman, 'Crusade in Al-Andalus: The Eleventh Century Formation of the Reconquista as an Ideology', *Islamic Studies*, 31 (1992): 287–318.

[40] On the importance of Toledo as a translation centre, see Charles Burnett, 'The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century', *Science in Context*, 14 (2001): 249–88.

[41] John of Seville was best known for his exposition on astrology. It was he who first translated the *Introductorium in astronmiam* (*Introduction to Astronomy*) by Abu Ma'shar in the 1130s. He both translated from Arabic into Latin and wrote, in Latin, his own original works on the subject. On the personage of John of Seville and his role in the translation movement see Lynn Thorndike, 'John of Seville', *Speculum*, 34 (1959): 20–38.

[42] Burnett, 'The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century', 249.

[43] On the earliest references to Latin alchemy see Charles Burnett, 'The Astrologer's Assay of the Alchemist: Early References to Alchemy in Arabic and Latin Texts', *Ambix*, 39 (1992): 103–9.

[44] Hermann and Robert were drawn to Toledo to translate works on geometry and astronomy, with the ultimate goal being a Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*. In the course of their work they translated a large body of Arabic literature, including the Quran. On their efforts see C. S. F. Burnett, 'A Group of Arabic–Latin Translators Working in Northern Spain in the Mid-12th Century', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 109 (1977): 62–108. On the identity of Robert of Ketton and his conflation with Robert of Chester see Charles Burnett, *Ketton, Robert of (Fl. 1141–1157), Astronomer and Translator*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2004).

In the years that followed, a number of important Islamic alchemical texts were rendered in Latin including the *Turba philosophorum* and the *Tabula smaragdina* (*Emerald Tablet*), a work of alchemical allegory detailing the process of transmutation in relation to Hermetic cosmology. The *Emerald Table* was cited well into the Renaissance, with references and commentaries on the text spanning the entirety of alchemical history (For instance, Isaac Newton wrote a translation of the text). [45] The *Turba* describes a convention of ancient philosophers who meet to discuss the precepts of alchemical practice.[46] It too had a long-lasting influence on Latin alchemy. Both of these texts were instrumental in shaping the theoretical components of Latin alchemy. In them, Latin alchemists were introduced to the sulphur-mercury theory and the astrological speculation that is instrumental to alchemical practice.

A major example of astrological influence in alchemy can be detected in the writings of Artephius (fl. c. 1150). A mainstay in alchemical compendiums well into the seventeenth century, Artephius was one of the most broadly cited alchemists from the twelfth century to the apogee of alchemical practice in the early-modern period. He was thought to be either an Arab or a Jew who converted to Christianity, though his identity is a subject of debate.[47] A number of influential pseudonymous texts were attributed to him as well, including the popular *Liber Secretus*, a sixteenth treatise that outlines the creation of the philosopher's stone from antimonial water.[48] In his *Clavis Sapientiae*, Artephius

[45] The *Emerald Table* was initially drawn from the *Kitāb sirr al-khalīqa* (*Book of the Secret of Creation*) which was rendered in Latin as the *Liber De Secretis Naturae* (*Book of the Secrets of Nature*) of Pseudo-Appollonius. It was among the earliest alchemical texts cited by Latin authors, as references to it appear in Herman of Carinthia's *De Essentis* an important commentary on Aristotelian categories. See William R. Newman, 'From Alchemy to "Chymistry', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, 1st edn, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 502; Burnett, 'The Astrologer's Assay of the Alchemist: Early References to Alchemy in Arabic and Latin Texts', 105; Burnett, 'A Group of Arabic–Latin Translators Working in Northern Spain in the Mid-12th Century', 64. Newton's translation of the *Emerald Table* is preserved at Cambridge. See 'Keynes MS. 28' (King's College Library, Cambridge, 1680).

[46] The *Turba Philosophorum* was composed sometime between c. 800 – 1000 and is attributed to Jabir. See Georges C. Anwati, *Arabic alchemy*, in Rushdī Rāshid and Régis Morelon, eds, *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1996), 869-870. See also See M. Plessner, 'The Place of the Turba Philosophorum in the Development of Alchemy', *Isis*, 45 (1954): 331–38.

[47] On the identity of Artefius see Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 141–143.

[48] On the creation of the *Liber Secretus* see Robert Halleux, 'Le Mythe de Nicolas Flamel, Ou Les Mechanisme de La Pseudépigraphie Alchimique', *Les Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences*, 33 (1983): 234–55, 251.

comments on the influence planetary bodies have on minerals.[49] He describes the pre-modern model of metallogenesis by attributing metallic diversity to the influence of the planets:

> And unless there were diverse actions and influences from the celestial bodies on lower [bodies] all mineral bodies would be gold [. . .] Their diversity, therefore, are from the diversity of the celestial bodies influencing lower [bodies], just like their number follows the number of the seven planets; from [the planets'] nature [they get their] colours and smells and tastes and all the other accidents. For lead is from part of the planet Saturn, its nature is of its nature [Saturn].[50]

The idea presented here is rooted in the astrological notion that celestial bodies bring metals to completion through the emanation of rays that are received by terrestrial bodies. For example, the metal iron germinates in the earth as iron because of the astrological influence of the planet Mars, which shares in iron's nature. If not for the influence of Mars, iron, and indeed all of the other planetary metals would be gold. This astrological law is found at the very heart of alchemical practice, where the seven classical planets correspond to the seven metals known to the ancient world. Each planet has dominion, or lordship over a metal, with the metal being the celestial reflection of its tutelary planet on earth. These were the planets and their metallic pairings:

The sun rules over gold.
The moon rules over silver.
Mercury rules over quicksilver.
Venus rules over copper.
Mars rules over iron.
Jupiter rules over tin.
Saturn rules over lead. [51]

[49] For a recent survey of the *Clavis Sapientiae* that concerns variances in two versions of the text see Nicola Polloni, 'A Matter of Philosophers and Spheres: Medieval Glosses on Artephius's *Key of Wisdom*', *Ambix*, 67 (2020): 135–52.
[50] Artefius, 'Clavis sapientiae' in Jean-Jacques Manget, *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702), 504: 'Nisi essent diversae actiones & influentiae corporum coelestium in ipsa inferiora, omnia corpora mineralia essent aurum [. . .] Diversitas igitur eorum cum ex diversitate influentiarum corporum coelestium in ista inferiora sicut etiam numerus eorum est secundum numerum septem planetarum, a natura colores, & odores, & lapores, &accidentia caetera. Plumbum enim de parte Saturni sua natura est ut sua natura.'
[51] See Vladimír Karpenko, 'Systems of Metals in Alchemy', *Ambix*, 50 (2003): 208–30. See also George B. Kauffman, 'The Role of Gold in Alchemy. Part I', *Gold Bulletin*, 18 (1985): 31–44.

Astrology also, in part, explains the theory of transmutation. Alchemists believed that they could break down base metals and replace their *planetary spirits* with a new and superior form, the influence of the sun.[52] However, while it is undeniable that astrology shaped alchemical practice, the direct lines of influence are shadowy and not well understood. The idea was probably present in the art from the inception of the practice. Astrology was a fundamental cosmological principle in the premodern world and the association of base metals with planets had an origin in remote antiquity.[53]

Beginning in the seventh century, the spread of Islam introduced Islamic scholars to the practices of pre-Islamic Anatolian religions. Northern Mesopotamian cities such as Nisibin, Harran, and Edessa acted as avenues through which astrological knowledge was diffused into the Islamicate. The most notable settlement among these was the ancient city of Harran, a city that had been continuously occupied since the bronze age.[54] Located in northern Mesopotamia in what is now modern-day Turkey, the city has, since antiquity, had the reputation of being a great religious centre. The most notable of the pre-Islamic pagan religions found in Harran was that of the Sabians, a religious sect whose traditions were centred around the worship of planets, stars, and celestial objects.[55]

It was partly through the mediation of Sabianism that metals and stones came to have astrological associations. Through ritual, and the veneration of the seven classical planets, the Sabians believed that they could capture the ‘spirits’ of celestial objects in matter, and then use these forces in the pursuit of magic.[56] It was, however, the Persian astrologer Abū Maʿshar Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Balkhī (c. 787–c. 886) who had the greatest

---

[52] On this concept see Arthur John Hopkins, *Alchemy, Child of Greek Philosophy* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014), 25–26, 94.
[53] See Lynn Thorndike, ‘The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science’, *Isis*, 46 (1955): 273–78.
[54] For archaeological data pertaining to Harran see Andrew T. Creekmore III, ‘Landscape and Settlement in the Harran Plain, Turkey: The Context of Third-Millennium Urbanization’, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 122 (2018): 177–208.
[55] See David Pingree, ‘The Sābians of Harrān and the Classical Tradition’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 9 (2002): 8–35.
[56] See Tamara M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, v. 114 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 183: ‘[H]eavenly bodies have souls that affect the terrestrial world by both their souls and the nature of their bodies [. . .] each planet has a sympathetic bond to terrestrial matter, especially to various metals and stones, that may be called upon through a combination of astrological knowledge and “natural” acts (i.e., talismans and the like) to gain what one needs from that particular planet.’

influence on Latin astrology.[57] Abū Maʿshar, whose name was latinised as Albumasar, was the most well-known authority on astrology in the middle ages. Born in what is now modern day Afghanistan in the eighth century, he came to work as a court astrologer in Baghdad under the Abbasid caliphate, where he was lauded as the greatest of all the royal astrologers.[58] The first rendition of Abū Maʿshar in the Latin west was an abbreviated translation of his great work the *Kitab al-madkhal al-kabir ila 'ilm ahkam al-nujum* (*The Book of the Great Introduction to the Science of the Judgements of the Stars*) conducted by Adelard of Bath.[59]

This translation, *The Smaller Introduction to Astrology*, known in Latin as *Ysagoge Minor* (*The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology*) was practical in nature, and was concerned mainly with the applications of astrology, and not astrological philosophical discourse. The greater, or complete *Introductorium in astronomiam* (*Introduction to Astrology*) was translated into Latin twice in the 1130s and 1140s by John of Seville and Hermann of Carinthia respectively.[60] Astrology, therefore, entered Latin Europe alongside alchemy and Islamic Aristotelianism.[61]

Abū Maʿshar presents a clearer picture of metallogenesis than the *Clavis Sapientiae.* He explains that mineral bodies receive both their genus (class of metal) and their species (a particular type) from the planets. Sometimes, multiple planets instil their influences in one mineral body to differentiate it from other minerals of the same genus. In one example, he describes the creation of a sapphire in this way:

> Another example is the single sapphire. It has a nature, a size, a shape, a colour, and ⟨a degree of⟩ clarity, its hardness or softness is greater than that of another gemstone of its genus, and it has a proper act. One planet has the indication of the gemstone, which is its

---

[57] Abū Maʿshar was considered an authority on the Sabians and their rituals. See the introduction in *Abu Ma'sar, the Great Introduction to Astrology: The Arabic Original and English Translation*, ed. Keiji Yamamoto, Charles Burnett, and David Pingree, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, volume 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 2, fn. 7.

[58] On Abu Ma'shar and the reception of his work in the Latin west see the classic study on the subject: Richard Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*, Oriental Series 38 (American University of Beirut, 1962).

[59] Adelard of Bath was among the earliest translators of Islamicate science in the Latin west. On Adelard's travels, life, and works see Charles Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*, 2nd edn (Harvard University Press, 1927), 21–24.

[60] Giles Gasper et al., eds, *The Scientific Works of Robert Grosseteste,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 169.

[61] Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*, 16.

> genus, another for the species of sapphire, and another for something else, until its parts are completed by the sharing of the planets in them.[62]

The idea here is that mineral bodies receive their mode of being and specific form from the planets. Metals, therefore, are brought about through the combination of matter and celestial rays that come down into material bodies from above. This idea comes with the inference that terrestrial bodies possess an inbuilt receptivity designed to accept and receive celestial influences. Abū Maʿshar describes this as a kind of magnetism between the heavens and the earth.[63]

He defends this assertion by arguing that celestial bodies, in their courses over the earth, produce changes in terrestrial elements through an innate bond that exists between the stars and earthly objects. This, he argues, occurs at a distance. As an example, he cites magnet-stones that have the power to move iron through the mediation of the air. Celestial bodies induce changes on the terrestrial world in a similar way, i.e. at a distance:

> It is in accordance with the third way that the celestial bodies move, change, and transfer the terrestrial bodies from one to another. This is because of the power in the celestial bodies, which moves, alters, and changes the terrestrial bodies, and the receptivity to movement, alteration, and change by the celestial bodies which is in the terrestrial bodies, because of their natural connection one to the other. Since these terrestrial bodies shift one into another by the power of the movements of the celestial bodies, and coming-to-be and passing-away arise in them, then natural changes in these four elements and coming-to-be and passing-away may result from the natural movements over this world and, since coming-to-be and passing away in this world result from their movements, they bear the indication over what comes to be and passes away.[64]

Here, there is a 'power' in celestial bodies that moves terrestrial bodies and induces changes in the earth. The movement itself, however, is *received* by a principle contained within terrestrial bodies. Both the heavens and earth are in a sense, moulded to fit together.

---

[62] *Abu Ma'sar, the Great Introduction to Astrology*, 102–103: 'وكذلكالياقوتة الواحدة لها طبيعة وكميّة دلالتها كلهّا في تمام أجزائها بكيفياتها باشتراكها كلهّا فيها وشكل ولون وصفاء ولها إنّها أشدّ صلابة واسترخاء من جوهر آخر من جنسها ولها خاصّية فعل فلبعضالكواكبدلالة الجوهر الذيهو جنسها ولآخر دلالة نوع الياقوتولكوكبآخر دلالة أجزاؤها باشتراك الكواكبفيها شيء من الأشياء حتىّ تتم.'

[63] On magnetism between the and celestial bodies in the writings of Abu Ma' shar see John David North, 'Celestial Influence – the Major Premiss of Astrology', in *Stars, Minds, and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology* (London; Ronceverte, WV: Hambledon Press, 1989), esp. 252 and 269–270.

[64] *Abu Ma'sar, the Great Introduction to Astrology*, 86–87: 'فعلى هذا النحو الثالث يكون تحر يك الأجرام السماو ية للأجسام الأرضية وتغييرها إ ياّهاوإحالتها لبعضها إلى بعض وذلك لما في الأجرام السماو ية من القوةّ المحركّة المغيرّةالمحيلّةللأجسام الأرضية ولما في الأجسام الأرضية من قبول الحركة والتغيير والاستحالة منحركةهذهالأجرام العلو ية لاتصّالها بها بالطبيعة وإذا كانت بقوةّ حركات الأجرام السماو يةتنتقلالأجسام الأرضية بعضها إلى بعضويحدث فيها الكون والفساد فقد انفعلت عن حركاتهاالطبيعية على هذا العالم في هذه الأركان الأربعة الاستحالات الطبيعية والكون والفسادوإذاانفعل عن حركاتها الكون والفساد في هذا العالم فقد صارتلها الدلالة على ما يكون ويفسد.'

The growth and development of natural things, like mineral bodies and plants, arise from this interaction.

Alchemists often made reference to 'receiving' the philosopher's stone from the stars, and described the alchemical vessel as the 'earth' that collects light from the heavens. In the early-modern period, a rich tradition of iconography arose depicting the interconnected alchemical cosmos, wherein the stone's descent to earth was represented pictorially.[65] A recurring image that appears in the literature is the symbol of a tree whose roots penetrate the earth and whose fruits are the seven planets. The idea here is that the earth (the crucible) gives birth to the stone. Thus, alchemists saw the work as a cosmic activity, and not a mere temporal expression of material science.

1.5 Colour Change Theory and the Operations of the Alchemical Work

All alchemy is defined by a single trait, the generation of change in a mineral substance through the utilisation of heat. Alchemical texts describe the manipulation of a wide range of chemical implements, from lead, tin and copper alloys to biological materials like wine and even urine.[66] Alchemical formulas are diverse, but the general recipe used to create the philosopher's stone (like with the formation of naturally occurring metals) called for an amalgamation of common sulphur and mercury. When the ingredients had been collected, they were sealed in a glass container called the *ovum philosophicum* (philosophical egg). The vessel was then cast into a furnace for several months.[67]

The chemical change that resulted from this signified a transformation in the stone's form. A successful transmutation hinged upon the manifestation of a series of colours that were thought to appear within the alembic as the work progressed. Each successive 'sequence', or chemical activity in the work, was marked by the appearance of a new colour.[68] The alchemist would know the work was a success if colours appeared in this order: *nigredo*

[65] See the appendix.
[66] LAD, 207.
[67] For more details on the ingredients needed to create the philosopher's stone, see chapter five 'The Golden Age: Practicing Chymistry in the Early Modern Period' in Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 107–136.
[68] For a more extensive look at colour change in medieval alchemy, see H.J. Sheppard, "Colour Symbolism in the Alchemical Opus", *Scientia*, 58 (1964): pp. 232–235, 233.

(black), *albedo* (white), *citrinitas* (yellow) and *rubedo* (red).[69] By the late middle ages, the colour sequence was shortened to black, white, and red.

While there was never a universal consensus on how these colours were produced, historians of alchemy now have a general understanding that they were created through the chemical manipulation of sulphur and mercury.[70] The presence of corrosive sublimates and the scorching of chemical materials in the furnace probably accounts for the blackening of the nigredo. The whitening has been attributed to the action of purificatory compounds (boraxes, alkalis) on mercury, as well as its treatment with lye, vinegar, and liquors.[71] The appearance of yellow and red is harder to explain, though they too were associated with the sublimation of mercury and its treatment with salts. For example, in the *Book of Morienus*, the whitening and the creation of the red stone is attributed to borax (sodium borate):

> [B]lackness is first; according to this maxim then, after we have removed the blackness and achieved whitening with salt and natron, and a cold and dry substance, you call it "borax," and when it is whitened with salt, which is air, and natron, which is fire, it is made red before it is finally whitened, which removes its blackness so that it is changed to a very clear red.[72]

The primary colour sequence of black-white-red corresponded to as many as twelve operations that were foundational to the work. These stages were codified by the fifteenth-century English alchemist George Ripley (c. 1415–1490), in his influential text the *Compound of Alchemy* (1471).[73] While there was no operational standard in alchemy, Ripley's account became highly influential in the later middle ages and early-modern period. It consists of the following steps:

---

[69] Things could go awry if the procedure did not follow this order. See John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry: an Outline of Alchemy, Its Literature and Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 10: 'The appearance of red before black showed that the material had been overheated and had to be started afresh.'

[70] For a discussion on the treatment of mercury and sulphur in medieval alchemy see William R. Newman, 'Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists: From Rāzī and Avicenna to Albertus Magnus and Pseudo-Roger Bacon', *Ambix*, 61 (2014): 327–44. See also chapter six 'unveiling the secrets', in Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 137–171.

[71] Newman, 'Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists: From Rāzī and Avicenna to Albertus Magnus and Pseudo-Roger Bacon', 339.

[72] Lee Stavenhagen, ed., *A Testament of Alchemy. Being the Revelations of Morienus to Khālid Ibn Yazīd.* (Hanover, N.H: Published for the Brandeis University Press by the University Press of New England, 1974), 20: 'primis est nigredo, et tunc faciunt illud album cum sale i.e. aere, et anatron, i.e. igne, quoniam fit rubeum in primis et in postremis album factum est, et aufert ab eo suam nigredinem, et postea vertitur in rubeum multum lucidum.'

[73] Ripley will inform much of the discussion in chapter three.

1. *Calcination*. The reduction of matter to a non-metallic form through the introduction of acids or sulphides. This is the stage where matter is burned in the alchemical crucible.

2. *Solution* or *dissolution*. The action of distilled alcohol upon dry substances in the alchemical vessel. The burned matter, or ash, from the state of calcination is dissolved in a solution.

3. *Separation*. A continual process of distillation treating metallic residue found in the burned matter. The residue is filtered and impure or unusable matter is separated from the remaining matter. This process is repeated seven times until pure metallic particles are isolated.

4. *Conjunction*. The amalgamation or recombination of the filtered metallic residue. The alchemical vessel is said to consist of varying minute 'grains' of metal particles that are combined and heated at a low temperature over a long period of time.

5. *Putrefaction*. The matter becomes blackened and putrefied. Plant matter or dung was then added to the mixture to induce fermentation. The process nears its end when a series of luminous colours develop. This marks the end of the nigredo.

6. *Congelation*. The matter in the alchemical vessel thickens and then becomes dry. This produces a white stone that marks the end of the first stage. This is achieved by boiling the fermented matter to purify it. This stage is associated with the albedo.

7. *The making of the red stone in the stages of cibation, sublimation, fermentation, exalation, multiplication, and projection*. The first six steps of the opus represent the chemical operations taken to create the 'infant' philosopher's stone, which is attained through the dissolution, coagulation, and perfection of sulphur and mercury. The result of this process is the white stone, which while purified, still requires development to form the perfected 'red' philosopher's stone. Variations of the previous six steps are taken to further dissolve, purify, and coagulate the white stone. The colour yellow may appear at some point here.

The steps taken to create the red stone are that of *Cibation* (feeding of the stone). *Sublimation* (refinement of spirit through vaporization). *Fermentation* (the chemical merger of the stone's soul with its body). *Exaltation* (an additional purification of the stone through surplus vaporization). *Multiplication* (the penultimate stage of dissolution and coagulation wherein the 'spirit' of the stone reaches a state that is close to its final spiritual potency). *Projection* (the final stage of the opus where the tincture is complete and the base metal is transmuted). [74] In this final stage of projection, the alchemist transmutes the base metal by heating it in a crucible until it is molten. A small portion of the red stone is then added to the mixture which, supposedly, transmutes the base metal to gold.[75]

In the late middle ages, the twelve operations and the black-white-red colour sequence were inextricably linked to Christian allegory. The nigredo was conflated with death, mortification, darkness, melancholy and blackness, while the albedo and rubedo were associated with purification, illumination, refinement and rebirth. [76] These spiritual associations are very strongly expressed in the *Aurora* itself. In chapter four of the text, the entirety of alchemical theory is presented in outline:

> Now the title of this book is baptized *Aurora Consurgens*- The Rising Dawn- and that for four reasons: Firstly, it is called Dawn as one should say the Golden Hour, for so hath this science an hour with a golden end for them that rightly perform the Work. Secondly, the dawn is midway between night and day, shining with twofold hues, namely, red and yellow; so likewise does this science beget the colours yellow and red, which are midway between white and black. Thirdly, because at dawn they that labour under all the infirmities of the night are relieved and have rest; and so at the dawn of this science all evil odours and vapours that infect the mind of the laborant fade away and weaken, as the psalm saith: In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness. Fourthly, and lastly, the dawn is called the end of the night and the beginning of the day, or the mother of the sun, and so our dawn at its greatest redness is the end of all darkness and putting to flight of night, of the long-drawn-out winter wherein he who walketh, if he take not heed, shall stumble. For of this indeed it is written: And night to night showeth

[74] The processes described here are an account of Ripley's method derived from the *Compound of Alchemy*. See also *TTA,* 112–114 and C.J.S. Thompson, *Alchemical Symbols and Secret Alphabets* (Sequim, Washington: Holmes Pub Group LLC, 2001). The formula given in the *Compound* can be found in TCB, 109–193.

[75] Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 125.

[76] On the spiritual associations of colours with metals in alchemy see Spike Bucklow, *The Alchemy of Paint: Art, Science, and Secrets from the Middle Ages*, 1st edn (London ; New York: Marion Boyars, 2009).

knowledge, day to day uttereth speech, and night shall be light as the day in its pleasures.[77]

The chapter begins with an exposition of the text, its name, and an account of the parameters of the work. The 'golden hour' and 'golden end' of the 'work' refer quite plainly to the final objective of the alchemical opus, the transmutation of gold. The next image to appear is the dawn and rising of the sun. The hues of 'red and yellow' that the science 'begets' that are 'midway between white and black' refer to the four alchemical colours and the operations of the work. The rising dawn that removes the 'infirmities of the night' and the 'evil odours and vapours' refers to the process of purgation that follows the stage of putrefaction. Finally, the 'greatest redness' of the final parable denotes the colour of the transmuted philosopher's stone.

1.6 *Mercurius*: The Spirit of the Philosopher's Stone

Alchemical texts are replete with references to an enigmatic substance concealed within matter. Throughout the course of the work, this substance takes on many forms, and is variously described as a fire, burning water, or light. Alchemists also conflate it with 'aether', the Aristotelian 'fifth element' that comprises stars and the super-lunary region.[78] In alchemical lore, this mysterious light essence suffuses the material world, and is omnipresent (though not immediately discernible) in metallic substances. Antoine Faivre described it as: 'a light or an invisible fire whose nature is that of the Word who created light on the first day'.[79]

---

[77] *AC*, 50–51: 'Huius autem voluminis titulus Aurora consurgens baptizatur, et hoc quatuor de causis: Prime aurora dicitur quasi aurea hora, sic haec scientia habet horam in finem aurem recte operantibus. Secundo aurora est medium inter noctem et diem rutilans in colore duplici, scil. Rubeo et citrino, sic haec scientia dat colores citrinos et rubeos, qui sunt medii inter nigrum et album. Tertio quia in aurora ab omnibus infirmitatibus nocturnalibus patientes allevantur et quiescent, sic in aurora huius scientiae omnes odores et vapores mali mentem laborantis inficientes deficient et senescent, ut Psalmus ait: Ad vesperum demorabitur fletus et ad matutinum Laetitia. Quarto et ultimo aurora dicitur finis noctis et principium diei vel mater solis, sic nostra aurora in rubedine summa est finis totius tenebrositatis et fugatio noctis, longiturnitatis hiemlis illus, qui in ea ambulat, si non caverit, offendetur. De illa namque scriptum est: Et nox nocti indicat scientiam, dies diei eructat verbum et nox sicut dies illuminabitur in deliciis suis.'

[78] In the cosmology of Aristotle, the earth is formed through the interaction of the four elements. However, heavenly bodies beyond the sphere of the moon are comprised of aether, an incorruptible and eternal translucent light.

[79] Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: a Concise History* (New York: State University Press, 2010), 6. Holmyard makes a similar observation. AH, 23: '[confidence in this fire] led to the belief that the universal spirit could somehow be pressed into service either through the stars or by concentrating it, so to speak, in a particular piece of matter– the philosopher's stone.'

The capture and subsequent utilisation of this 'fire', or 'light' informs the entire alchemical work and the transmutational qualities of the philosopher's stone. It is everywhere, ubiquitous, and yet, said to be of no great value. Alchemists likened it to common matter, and even dung that is 'cast out' and 'trampled' in the streets.[80] This theme held true from the earliest days of Latin alchemy to the early-modern period. For instance, in the *Liber Secretus*, pseudo-Artephius says that the *ignis noster* (our fire) is a humid fire that participates in the nature of sulphur. It is a 'compendious' substance acquired without cost, or at least very little expense.[81]

He also, quite paradoxically, identifies it with the qualities of mercury, conflating it with the 'living water', or 'fountain of life' said to appear during the albedo. This is the 'virgin's milk', a form of liquid mercury that cleanses the king and queen (sulphur and mercury) of impurities.[82] Most importantly, however, he says that utilising the humid fire is sufficient for accomplishing the entirety of the work, and that the beginning, middle, and end of alchemy consists of the manipulation of this one thing: 'This humid fire is enough for you in the whole work in the beginning, middle, and end, because the whole art consists of it.'[83]

Alchemists often made this observation. For all of its variance, alchemy is in reality the manipulation of *one* chemical substance. The *Emerald Table* calls it the *miracula rei unius*, the miracle of one thing.[84] This single substance is mercury. It is not, however, common mercury (Hg), but what alchemists referred to as '*Mercurius*' (our mercury), or philosophical mercury. *Mercurius* is synonymous with the invisible fire referenced above. It is the spirit of this '*Mercurius*' that acts as a mediator between the hot, dry, and masculine aspects of sulphur, and the moist, receptive, and feminine aspects of mercury. Paradoxically, *Mercurius* is also born, nurtured, and brought to form through this union.

---

[80] The source of this idea comes from the *Book of Morienus.* See Stavenhagen, *Testament of Alchemy,* 26: 'Non est hoc nisi sicut sapiens dixit, ad divitem et pauperem, et ad largum et amarum, et ad ambulantem et sedentem, et hoc in viis pericitur et in sterquiliniis calcatur,et caveant ut extrahatur. Et sepe stulti in sterquiliniis studuerunt ut eum extraherent, et desipuerunt.'

[81] *Artefii Arabis Philosophi: Liber Secretus* (Francfurti: Jennisius, 1685), 42: 'Ignis noster [. . .] de sulfure participat [. . .] & compendium sine sumptu, etiam saltem paruo.'

[82] *Idem*, 42: 'Est fons aquae viuae quod circuit, & continent locum ablutionis regis, & reginae.'

[83] *Idem*, 42: 'In toto opere ignis iste humidus tibi sufficit, in principio medio, & sine, quia in ipso tota ars consistit.'

[84] This is uniform across all of the text's translations. See E. J. Holmyard, 'The Emerald Table', *Nature*, 112 (1923): 525–26.

It is a paradoxical substance whose role constantly changes during the work. It is both a fire and a water. When sublimed it is incombustible, yet it burns. It breaks metals down by digesting them, yet it transforms into a 'living water' that cleanses the king (sulphur) and the queen (mercury) of imperfections during their 'bath'. The philosopher's stone derives its qualities from the Mercurial spirit, that in its fully realised form, represents a complete rectification between the masculine qualities of sulphur and the feminine qualities of the moon.[85]

Mercurius was also thought to unite the body and soul (of metals and living things) with the heavens and the earth. For example, in a widely published seventeenth-century text known as the *Sophic Hydrolith*, it is likened to the world-soul, the Platonic universal principle that unites all living things in the cosmos. The text reads:

> For it itself is the universal and sparkling flame of the light of Nature: this is fire in which the heavenly Spirit in itself dwells, through which it was animated at first by God, Who pervades all things, and is called by Avicenna, the Soul of the world. Just as the soul lives and moves all members of the body, so that spirit lives and moves in all elementary creatures, and is the indissoluble bond of body and soul, the purest and most noble essence in which lie hid all mysteries in their inexhaustible fullness of marvellous virtue and efficacy.[86]

In this citation, the mercurial spirit is associated with the 'light of Nature'. This is a trait that was emblematic of early-modern alchemy, where in the seventeenth century, *Mercurius* became concomitant with the spirit of God that hovers over the waters and the

[85] *Mercurius* was often spoken of as the mediating principle between Sulphur and mercury.

[86] A.E. Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, vol. 1 (London: J. Elliott, 1893), 78; *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Frankfurt: Apud Hermannum à Sande, 1678), 84–85: 'Ipse enim universalis ac scintillans Luminis naturae: Ignis est:, qui Coelestem Spiritum in se habet, quo ab initio à Deoanimatus fuit, qui Omnia penetrans ab Avicenna Anima mundiappellatur. Quemadmodum anima in omnibus humani corporis membris invenitur, & sese movet: ita invenitur & movet sese etiam spiritus iste in omnibus Elementaribus creaturis, qui praeterea indissolubilis Copula eft corporis & animae, atque adeo purissima & Nobilissima Essentia, in qua etiam omnia mysteria latiant mirabilis efficaciae & virtutis plenissima.' Citations drawn from the Hermetic Museum are based upon the nineteenth century English translation of A.E. Waite. The Waite translation is, however, problematic, as it was made using corrupt editions. On this issue see Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, 'Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy', in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. William Royall Newman, 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 395. In subsequent citations of the *Hermetic Museum*, the Waite edition is used as a template to create a new and more accurate English translation. The location of the passages in Waite's edition will be provided, but the new translation is made using the Latin in the 1678 edition.

earth in the book of Genesis.[87] This is explicated further in the text:

> Moreover, they ascribe to it infinite divine power when they say that it is the Spirit of the Lord who fills the sphere of the earth, and in the beginning moved upon the face of the waters. They also call it the spirit of truth that is hid in the world and cannot be understood without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or the teaching of those who know it. It is found *potentially* everywhere, and in everything, but in all its perfection and fullness only in *one* thing. In short, it is a Spiritual Essence which is neither celestial or infernal, but an aerial, pure, and precious body, in the middle between the highest and lowest, the choicest and noblest thing under heaven. But by the ignorant and the beginner it is thought to be the vilest and meanest of things.[88]

Alchemists understood the Mercurial essence as a universal agent of transmutation. In the *Aurora Consurgens*, the mercurial spirit is the object of the author's desire and the subject of mystical union in the text. *Mercurius* takes an embodied form in the Biblical figure of *Sapientia*, a female expression of God's wisdom. Pseudo-Aquinas yearns for her as he participates in the purgation and eventual union of sulphur and mercury. He also makes reference to the way this spirit illumines the intellect.

It is not clear how belief in a universal principle of light entered into alchemical discourse. While it is certainly plausible that the idea arose independently, there are sharp parallels between the concept of *Mercurius* and Greek philosophy. For example, in Stoic physics, the world is permeated by a fiery principle known as *pneuma* (breath). Like *Mercurius*, pneuma is omnipresent, and it binds material reality together. It has been argued that alchemy inherited the idea through this channel, though the direct lines of transmission are unknown. It is possible that permutations of 'pneumatic' theory survived in alchemy and resurfaced in the early-modern concept of 'phlogiston'.[89]

---

[87] See William Newman, 'Thomas Vaughan as an Interpreter of Agrippa Von Nettesheim', *Ambix*, 29 (1982): 125–40, 132.

[88] Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, 78; *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 85: 'Illi porro infinitam potentiam divinamque virtutem adtribuunt, dum inquiunt: Esse illum spiritum Domini, qui terrarum Orbem implead & ab initio aquis supernatarit. Spiritum veritatis quoque illum appellant, qui mundo absconditus, absque inspiratione Spiritus Sancti, vel informatione eorum, qui illum norunt, comprehendi nequeat. Qui quidem in quovis loco ex re quavis potentialiter, in unico vero hoc subjecto perfectè ac plenarie tantum reperiatur. In summa esse spiritualem substantiam. Quae neque coelestis, neque infernalis sit, sed aereum, putum, praestansque corpus, medium inter summum & infimum, electissimum item & pretiosissimum sub toto coelo. Vice versa quoque ab iis, qui rem non intelligent, vel primum discere incipient, pro re vilissima & quasi abjectissima, aestumari.'

[89] See Gad Freudenthal, 'The Problem of Cohesion Between Alchemy and Natural Philosophy: From Unctuous Moisture to Phlogiston,' in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17–19 April 1989*, ed. Z. R. W. M. von Martels, (International Conference on the History of Alchemy) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 108–116, 115: 'the notion

Similar arguments have been made by Michela Pereira, a prominent historian of medieval alchemy. Pereiras' survey of the relationship between alchemy and medieval cosmology concluded that alchemy's idea of a 'subtle essence' put it at odds with Aristotelian cosmology. She reasons that the source of the idea is Hermetic and Stoic in origin, and while it was rejected by the scholastic movement, it survived as an 'undercurrent' in alchemical thought.[90] Stoic thought and alchemy has provoked some further historiographical interest, for example in a recent examination of the works of Zosimos of Panopolis.[91] Its author points to the curious presence of Stoic ideas in his alchemical corpus, in which Stoic concepts appear, but specific authors are never explicitly mentioned. The author observes that Stoic conceptions of matter bear a resemblance to the alchemical theory of metallogenesis: 'Put simply, for a Stoic, a metal or a stone could be no more than unqualified matter which gains its "identity" through the penetration of pneuma.'[92] Most importantly, this article shows that in Greek alchemy, the pneuma is drawn out from metals through sublimation and distillation.

The attributes of *Mercurius* are what form the characteristics of the philosopher's stone. Despite having a dual nature (sol and luna/masculine and feminine/sulphur and mercury), *Mercurius* was often spoken of as a triad by virtue of its powers of arbitration.[93] The stone is the third term between heaven and earth, and it mediates between both. This makes it a physical object, yes, but in reality it is a *negation* of the material world. In the *Turba philosophorum* it is called the 'stone that is not a stone' (*lapis est, ac non lapis*).[94] Invariably, these comparisons led to the interpolation of alchemy with theology. The stone's ternary nature (heaven/mediator/earth) is a material reflection of the Christian Trinity. Christ is wholly man and wholly God, the stone is wholly material and wholly

---

of pneuma as interpenetrating other substances and making them cohere flowed into Medieval alchemy and thence into medieval and later natural philosophy and chemistry.'

[90] See Michela Pereira, 'Heavens on Earth. From the Tabula Smaragdina to the Alchemical Fifth Essence', *Early Science and Medicine*, 5 (2000): 131–44.', 139, esp. fn. 33.

[91] On the manifestation of stoic materialism in Alchemy see Athanasios Rinotas, 'Stoicism and Alchemy in Late Antiquity: Zosimus and the Concept of *Pneuma*', *Ambix*, 64 (2017): 203–19.

[92] *Idem*, 207.

[93] On triad imagery and *Mercurius* see C. G Jung et al., *Alchemical Studies*, vol. 13 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 221.

[94] *Theatrum Chemicum*, vol. 5 (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1622), 11: 'Una res in unoquoque introit regimine, quam ubique inveniunt: quae lapis est, ac non lapis, vilis & pretiosa, obscurate, & celata, & à quolibet nota: unius nominis [. . .] Hic igitur lapis non est lapis eò quod pretiosus est, fine quo natura nihil operator unquam.'

spiritual. In alchemical literature, this kind of language began to blossom, principally, in the fourteenth century.

1.7 Theology, Secrecy and Medicine in Late Medieval Alchemy

Late medieval Latinate alchemy bore witness to several notable innovations that influenced the practice in the early-modern period. While there had been admonitions to secrecy in Greek and Islamic alchemy, the early texts of Latin alchemy like the *Summa Perfectonis* and the *Liber de compositione alchimiae* were straightforward and didactic in nature.[95] For a variety of reasons, alchemy in the late middle ages saw a marked increase in pseudonymous texts that were veiled in cryptic language and esoteric symbolism.

At the same time, alchemy became theological. In the fourteenth century, a body of work arose that associated the Hermetic art with Christian millenarianism and the death and resurrection of Christ. Alchemists began to associate the transmutation of base metals with the renewal and perfection of both the world and the self. With this, came new applications in the realm of medicine.

One of the first texts responsible for this shift in emphasis was the *De Consideratione Quintae Essentiae* (*On the Consideration of the Fifth Essence*), a treatise on medicinal alchemy written by the French Franciscan alchemist John of Rupescissa (b. 1310). Written between 1351 and 1352, the treatise describes the distillation of wine alcohol and its application in the creation of medicinal elixirs. In the text, John argues that human bodies can be treated against disease and premature aging by drawing a substance he calls 'quintessence' out of biological matter and then ingesting it in the form of an elixir. [96] He compares the substance with the '*aqua ardens*', a solvent of mercury that appears in the stage of albedo.[97] He also associates the substance, which he calls the *aqua vitae* (water of life), with the Aristotelian fifth essence.

---

[95] Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 62.
[96] Robert P. Multhauf, 'John of Rupescissa and the Origin of Medical Chemistry', *Isis*, 45 (1954): 359–67, 364.
[97] John of Rupescissa was likely the first alchemist to associate distilled alcohol with quintessence in the sublunary world, and while he attests to aqua ardens as the purest form of distilled quintessence, he acknowledges that it is possible to extract it from herbs, animal matter, and even minerals. See OOC, 211. See also Zachary A. Matus, *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life: Religion and Science in the Later Middle Ages*, 1st edn, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 63, especially fn 145.

The *Liber Quintae Essentiae* enjoyed a wide circulation in the fourteenth century, with historian Robert Halleux having identified over 140 manuscript copies of the text.[98] While the treatise appeared in French, Catalan, German, and Swedish editions, it was particularly well received in England, where it played a major role in the development of English alchemy.[99] The *Liber Quintae Essentiae*, in combination with one of Rupescissa's other books, the *Liber Lucis*, were among the most common alchemical texts found in manuscripts dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[100]

Rupescissa is credited as being one of the first Iatro-alchemists.[101] Iatro-alchemy was a form of alchemical practice that was first and foremost concerned with the production of medicine. As a form of early medical chemistry, its proponents saw the production of gold as secondary to the creation of life-giving elixirs. [102] This shift was an important one for alchemy because it expanded the role of the practice beyond the external transmutation of base metals. Alchemy became something that was done to the *body* and for the benefit of human health.[103] Symbolically, it also demonstrates a growing tendency in late medieval alchemy to *internalise* the work, where the human form becomes the subject of the art and the 'base metal' to be transmuted.

It was the English alchemist Roger Bacon (c. 1220–c. 1292) who was the first to suggest that potable gold (the alchemical elixir), when ingested, could not only restore physical

[98] See R. Halleux, 'Les Ouvrages Alchimiques de Jean de Rupescissa', *Histoire Littéraire de La France* 41 (1981): 241–84.

[99] See the unpublished dissertation: Marguerite Halversen, 'The Consideration of Quintessence: An Edition of a Middle English Translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de Consideratione Quintae Essentiae Omnium Rerum with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary' (PhD Diss., Michigan State University, 1998).

[100] Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 64.

[101] On Rupescissa and his formational role in Iatro-alchemy see Robert P. Multhauf, 'John of Rupescissa and the Origin of Medical Chemistry', *Isis*, 45 (1954): 359–67.

[102] The major contribution to the study of John of Rupescissa in recent scholarship is Leah DeVun, *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupescissa in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). DeVun's contention is that Rupescissa's alchemy fit into a framework of fourteenth century Franciscan apocalyptic writings, and that his alchemy had both spiritual and material connotations for the redemption of matter.

[103] The most notable pioneer of Iatro-alchemy was Theophrastus von Hohenheim, otherwise known as Paracelsus (c. 1493 – c. 1541). Paracelsus was known for his medical alchemy, and for his important theoretical contributions to the practice of alchemy. Most notably, he added salt to the traditional binary structure of the sulphur-mercury theory. The new ternary combination of sulphur, mercury, salt came to be known as the *tria prima*. This left a lasting influence on early modern alchemy. For an introduction to Paracelsus and for a collection of his essential writings see Paracelsus and Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541) Essential Theoretical Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

health, but help to perfect Christian moral virtues.[104] Bacon, in conjunction with Rupescissa who made similar arguments in the fourteenth century, associated alchemy with the perfection of both the body and spirit. Similarly, both Bacon and Rupescissa were among the first alchemists to concretely associate alchemy with and defend its credibility through the lens of theology.[105] All of these themes coalesce in the *Book of Quintessence*, where Rupescissa associates the *aqua vitae* with the preservation of both the body and the earth. He uses terms that invoke heaven and longevity to describe it, calling it *caelum nostrum* (our heaven) and the *caelum humanum* (human heaven).[106]

Rupescissa's vision of alchemy was eschatological. He believed that the art would be an asset to the Church during the apocalypse, and that in the new millennium, Christians would employ the practice to perfect and deify the sublunary world.[107] His association of alchemy with the sacred was also expressed in prophetic visions. In a statement before a papal curia in 1354, Rupescissa compared the ability of prophetic foresight to the purgative imagery and the whitening of the albedo.[108] Human beings tried in the crucible of spiritual struggle would die, be purged, and rise again like a transmuted base metal. This register of language is typical of late medieval alchemy.[109]

Another important development in alchemy's turn towards medicine and theology came in the texts attributed to the Majorcan polymath Ramon Llull (c. 1232–c. 1316). In the second half of the fourteenth century, a large body of work bearing Llull's name appears in the manuscript record. The most important and earliest treatise in the corpus is the *Testamentum*, one of the earliest alchemical texts to draw connections between the philosophers stone and medicinal regeneration. Written around 1332, the *Testamentum* acted a nucleus from which over 140 texts Llullian alchemy grew.[110]

---

[104] Zachary Matus, 'Resurrected Bodies and Roger Bacon's Elixir', *Ambix*, 60 (2013): 329–330.
[105] See Athanasios Rinotas, 'The Interplay among Alchemy, Theology and Philosophy in the Late Middle Ages: The Cases of Roger Bacon and John of Rupescissa', *Vegueta. Anuario de La Facultad de Geografía e Historia* 17 (2017).
[106] Leah DeVun, *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupescissa in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 106.
[107] *Idem*, 4.
[108] *Idem*, 2.
[109] This kind of language, used in alchemy, was of particular interest to the Franciscan order. See Zachary A. Matus, *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life: Eeligion and Science in the Later Middle Ages*, 1st edn, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).
[110] On the Llullian corpus see the work of Michela Pereira: Michela Pereira, 'Ramon Llull and the Alchemical Tradition', *Catalónia* 43 (1995): 40–43; Michela Pereira, 'Lullian Alchemy: Aspects and

Whoever the anonymous author of the *Testamentum* was, it is known that he travelled the continent, and that his works were well received.[111] This is particularly true in England, where his influence was palpable in the writings of the fifteenth century alchemist George Ripley.[112] Little is known of the Llullian tradition's development in the fourteenth century, though it became exceedingly popular in the fifteenth century where it went on to influence the religious tenor of early-modern alchemy.[113] Michela Pereira, commenting on the importance of the *Testamentum*, notes that the text was largely responsible for 'the development of alchemy from a metallurgy imbued with religious and/or philosophical values to an art of perfecting the entire realm of matter'.[114]

Late medieval alchemy in the Latinate also became secretive. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the art's relatively forthright vernacular became increasingly bizarre. This occurred for several reasons. In the late thirteenth century, mendicant orders fearing the development of unorthodox religious views and the fraudulent production of alchemical gold, began to censure members who practiced alchemy. For example, the Narbonne provincial chapter of Franciscans forbade members from practicing the art in 1272.[115]

This was followed by the Dominican order issuing prohibitions against the practice in 1272, 1287, 1289, and 1323.[116] The most notable censure of the art came in 1317, when pope John XXII condemned the practice on the grounds of counterfeiting. These censures did not mean that alchemy's practitioners ceased engaging in the art, rather, it merely meant that alchemy went underground.[117] This, in part, explains the inscrutable character of late medieval alchemy.

Problems of the Corpus of Alchemical Works Attributed to Ramon Llull (XIV–XVII Centuries)', *Catalan Review* 4 (1990): 41–54.
[111] Pereira, 'Ramon Llull and the Alchemical Tradition', 42.
[112] Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London: the British library, 1994), 41.
[113] Another text in the corpus, the *Liber de secretis naturae seu de quinta essentia* is derivative of Rupescissa's work. The two others were read in close conjunction with one another, and the two traditions merged into one another.
[114] Pereira, 'Ramon Llull and the Alchemical Tradition', 43.
[115] Chiara Crisciani, 'The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara', *Ambix*, 20 (1973): 165–81, 178.
[116] William Newman, 'Technology and Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages', *Isis*, 80 (1989): 423–45, 440.
[117] On alchemy and the mendicant orders see Andrew Campbell, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Neil Tarrant, 'Alchemy and the Mendicant Orders of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Ambix*, 65 (2018): 201–9.

Then there is the cultural explanation. The way medieval people thought of nature (and their relationship to it) was drastically different from how it is understood now. The secrets of the natural world were thought to be concealed within the Bible and Christian allegory. Everything in the cosmos was a reflection of scripture and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Historians of western esotericism have called this concept the microcosm-macrocosm principle, or the law of universal interdependence. This is the law that underlines the logic of astrology, where what happens in the greater universe is reflected on earth.[118]

Alchemists expressed their work through similar terms. The earliest comparisons drawn between alchemy and theology came in a body of texts ascribed to the Catalonian physician Arnauld of Villanova (c. 1240–1311).[119] The Arnauldian corpus was widely read in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, consisting of fifty-seven mostly spurious texts.[120] Among these, the pseudo-Arnaldian *Tractatus Parabolicus* is the earliest known document to compare the alchemical work to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[121] Other early forays into theological alchemy include the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella*, a text that compares Christ to the philosopher's stone, and the *Aurora Consurgens*.[122]
Thus, the intermingling of alchemy and theology began chiefly in the fourteenth century, and then reached a fevered pitch in the early-modern period.[123]

---

[118] Antoine Faivre likened the concept to a 'theatre of mirrors', where the entire universe is made up of hidden symbols. See Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10–11.
[119] There are earlier linkages between alchemy and theology, like in the works of Roger Bacon, but the works of Villanova were the first to dedicate extended treatises to the unification of alchemy and theology.
[120] On the Arnaldian corpus see Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, 37–38.
[121] Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 68.
[122] On the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* see chapter three, subsection 3.3, page 127.
[123] For a recent survey of the interpolation of alchemy with theology in late medieval Europe see Tara Nummedal, 'Alchemy and Religion in Christian Europe', *Ambix*, 60 (2013): 311–22. Lynn Thorndike demonstrated that the conflation of mercury with the crucifixion of Christ was particularly evident in the alchemical corpus of Arnald of Villanova. See Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Vol. 3: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 52–84. This assertion has been maintained by modern scholars. For contemporary work on Villanova consult the works of Antoine Calvet. See Antoine Calvet, *Les Oeuvres Alchimiques Attribuées à Arnaud de Villeneuve: Grand Oeuvre, Médecine et Prophétie au Moyen-Âge*, Textes et travaux de Chrysopoeia 11 (Paris: S.É.H.A, 2011).

1.8 Late Medieval Alchemy in England and Middle English Alchemical Poetry

Beginning principally in the fourteenth century, a literary trend of alchemical poetry written in the vernacular languages of Europe arose in Iberia, the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, France, and most predominantly, England.[124] In late medieval and early modern England, this tradition of alchemical poetry came to occupy a prominent position in the discourse of English alchemical circles. The tradition in England came to overshadow similar poetic traditions found in continental Europe, where Latin-Islamicate alchemical texts were still the primary mode of alchemical discourse. Of all the scientific subjects written on in verse (a common mode of didactic instruction in the late middle ages), alchemy was the most popular in England.[125]

While alchemical poetry did exist on the mainland, it was not as popular or ubiquitous as it was in England, where verse became the favoured method of transmitting alchemical knowledge. One of the more famous examples of alchemy appearing in Middle English poetry comes in Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, an account of alchemical satire found in the *Canterbury Tales*. So accurate is Chaucer's account of alchemical method, that it has been argued he himself was a practicing alchemist.[126]

The two major luminaries of late medieval English alchemy were the Augustinian canon and alchemist George Ripley (c. 1415–1490) and his contemporary the poet and alchemist Thomas Norton (c. 1433–c. 1513). Ripley, a canon regular at Bridlington priory in Yorkshire, was said to have learned alchemical practices in continental Europe, where he studied in Leuven and in Italy. Actual fifteenth century bibliographic information on

---

[124] On alchemical poetry in the late middle ages and early modern period see the works of Robert M. Schuler and Didier Kahn: Robert M. Schuler, *English Magical and Scientific Poems to 1700: An Annotated Bibliography*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities; v. 169 (New York: Garland Pub, 1979) and Robert M Schuler, *Alchemical Poetry, 1575–1700: From Previously Unpublished Manuscripts* (London: Routledge, 2013). See in two parts Didier Kahn, 'Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part I — Preliminary Survey', *Ambix*, 57 (2010): 249–74 and Didier Kahn, 'Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part II — Synthesis', *Ambix*, 58 (2011): 62–77.

[125] The authoritative study of middle English alchemical poetry is that of Anke Timmerman. The book contains both studies and critical editions of late medieval and early modern alchemical poetry centred around a poem Timmerman identifies as *Verses Upon the Elixir*, more will be said on this momentarily. See Anke Timmermann, *Verse and Transmutation: A Corpus of Middle English Alchemical Poetry (Critical Editions and Studies)*, History of Science and Medicine Library, volume 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2013). This corpus will henceforth be abbreviated as *MEAP*.

[126] See the article Robert M. Schuler, 'The Renaissance Chaucer as Alchemist', *Viator*, 15 (1984): 305–34. See also the doctoral dissertation Kathryn Langford, 'Alchemical Discourse in the "Canterbury Tales": Signs of Gnosis and Transmutation.' (PhD Diss., Rice University, 1988).

Ripley's life is quite scant. Much of what is known of him and the large corpus of alchemical writings that fall under his name was written posthumously in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[127] Jennifer Rampling, an authority on the Ripley corpus, notes that the catalogue of works attributed to him acts as an important intermediary step between the traditions of late medieval and early modern alchemy.[128] It was Ripley who helped to codify late medieval English alchemy. This, along with his own original contributions, brought the tradition into vernacular English.[129] Norton, who lived in the middle of the fifteenth century, belonged to a wealthy family in Bristol.[130] He is most known for his text the *Ordinall of Alchemy,* an important centrepiece in the *Theatrum Chemicum Brttannicum*. Norton's contribution to alchemical theory comes in what he labelled the 'gross' and 'subtle' works. This concept stipulates that the gross work entails the preparation of chemical materials and the separation of the elements whereas the subtle work involves balancing their qualities in the attainment of conjunction.

Late medieval alchemy in England was a synthesis between Latin alchemy with its Pseudo-Lullian accretions and alchemical poetry written in the vernacular. These trends define the works of Ripley and Norton.[131] Both Ripley's *Compound* (1471) and Norton's *Ordinall of Alchemy* (1477), while existing in earlier manuscripts (and later in printed editions), achieved their greatest prominence in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, an alchemical compendium written in middle English and published in 1652 by the English antiquarian and student of alchemy Elias Ashmole.[132] While recent scholarship has seen

---

[127] For contemporary research on Ripley and the corpus of writings attributed to him, see the works of Jennifer Rampling in Jennifer M. Rampling, 'The Catalogue of the Ripley Corpus: Alchemical Writings Attributed to George Ripley (d. ca. 1490)', *Ambix*, 57 (2010): 125–201, and Jennifer M. Rampling, 'Transmission and Transmutation: George Ripley and the Place of English Alchemy in Early Modern Europe', *Early Science and Medicine*, 17 (2012): 477–99.

[128] Rampling, 'The Catalogue of the Ripley Corpus: Alchemical Writings Attributed to George Ripley (d. ca. 1490)', 126: 'The corpus of works attributed to Ripley provides a unique lens for studying developments in English alchemy, acting as a point of mediation between late medieval alchemical texts and early modern audiences. As a commentator on medieval alchemical traditions, Ripley reformulated his authorities in the light of textual exegesis and his own practical findings.'

[129] Rampling notes that pseudography is a major component of the Riplean corpus, and there is still much work to be done in distinguishing between his own texts and the large body of work attributed to him. See *Idem*, 128.

[130] On Norton's identity and life see the works of John Reidy in J. Reidy, 'Thomas Norton and the Ordinall Of Alchimy', *Ambix*, 6 (1957): 59–85. See also Reidy's introduction in his edition of Norton's *Ordinal*. Thomas Norton, *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, ed. John Alexander Reidy, Early English Text Society [Original Series] 272 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), xxxvii–lxxv.

[131] Rampling, 'Transmission and Transmutation: George Ripley and the Place of English Alchemy in Early Modern Europe', 480.

[132] *Idem*, 481.

several important contributions to the primary source material in the form of critical editions, the study of late medieval and early modern English alchemical verse is still very much dependent on printed editions, with the *Theatrum* acting as the most vital.[133] On its significance, Rampling writes: '[M]ore than 350 years later, [it] remains the preeminent compilation of English alchemical verse.'[134]

In England, alchemical poetry written in the vernacular, surpassed the older Latin-Islamicate tradition of alchemical knowledge passed down in documents like the *Liber de compositione alchimiae*.[135] This is not to say the two traditions were in any way divorced. As a phenomenon of the fifteenth century, English alchemical poetry imitated Latin alchemy in its themes, style, and content. This new poetic style was didactic in nature and meant to convey aphorisms that would allow the reader to commit the stages of alchemical procedure to memory. It has also recently been argued that Middle English alchemical poetry also conveyed moral, religious, and philosophical truths as an exemplar of late medieval morality.[136]

Middle English alchemical poetry, while often allegorical in nature, was emblematic of the workshop. It was distinct from the mainline Latin alchemical tradition that was increasingly seen as the theoretical vocation of academics and manuscript collectors.[137] It was practical in nature, with the majority of the texts acting as recipes for the creation of the philosopher's stone. Anke Timmerman, an expert on the subject, contends that its popularity was emblematic of widespread literary trends in the late middle ages and early modern period, which are the themes of 'vernacularisation' and 'versification'- trends also seen in the writings of the English mystics.[138] Thus, the predominant text of this literary tradition is an anonymous poem named *Verses on the Elixir*. Verses, in combination with a large corpus of poems attached to it, was so popular that it enjoyed a wider distribution than Ripley's most popular work *The Compound of Alchemy*.

---

[133] On these editions and their significance see Jennifer M. Rampling, 'The Englishing of Medieval Alchemy', *Ambix*, 63 (2016): 268–72.
[134] *Idem*, 268.
[135] *MEAP*., 16.
[136] See Curtis Runstedler, 'Alchemy and Exemplary Narrative in Middle English Poetry' (PhD Diss., Durham University, 2018).
[137] *MEAP*, 16.
[138] *Idem*, 19.

While this literary tradition flourished in late medieval and early modern England, the roots of alchemical poetry extend backwards to late antiquity. There are examples of alchemical poetry in sixth century Byzantium, as well as in Islamicate alchemy.[139] However, the tradition in England seems to have arisen independently. The only example of an Islamicate poetical treatise rendered in Latin is, as demonstrated in chapter three, the *De Chemia* of Ibn Umail.[140] Accordingly, Dider Kahn, the French historian of alchemy has demonstrated that the first fully extant alchemical texts written in verse were almost entirely a by-product of the fourteenth century.[141] The *Aurora,* with its highly poetico-rhetorical style, fits neatly into this framework of alchemy in the late middle ages. Middle English alchemical poetry represents a major developmental link between alchemy in the middle ages and alchemy in the early modern period, and the biggest development in alchemy in the fourteenth century.

---

[139] For specific examples see Kahn, 'Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part I — Preliminary Survey', 250.
[140] *Idem*, 250.
[141] Ibid.

Chapter 2: The Foundations of Mystical Theology in the Western Latin Tradition

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the formative influences that the Christian tradition of mystical theology had on the *Aurora Consugens*. It will introduce concepts like contemplation, the *unio mystica* (mystical union), apophatic darkness, and the threefold path of contemplative progression found in mystical theology and identified as purgation, illumination and union. In the *Aurora*, these ideas appear in tandem with alchemical theory, and form the very basis of the text. A basic understanding of this historical and thematic context is necessary to understand how the *Aurora* inherited these ideas and how it makes use of them in its exposition of alchemy together.

2.1 Mysticism, Mystical Theology, and Mystical Union: Some Definitions

Mystical theology is best understood as an immediate encounter with divinity, or the direct action of the divine upon human cognition. If theology is defined as the study of religion, God, and his actions in the world, mystical theology is the direct experiential manifestation of his presence upon human perception.[1] This includes experiences of visions, revelations, and a growing sense of intimacy with Him and his will. A modern lexicon, and the academic study of religions, refers to these encounters as the 'mystical experience'.[2]

The expression 'mystical experience', or more generally, the word 'mysticism', is derived from the Greek word '*mystikos*', which means to conceal. The word was used in Greek mystery religions to refer to the ineffable experiences of the divine conveyed in ceremonial rites. Likewise, in Christianity, the word '*mystērion*' (mystery) appears throughout Paul's epistles, and refers to the mystery of the Church's communion with Christ.[3] The word 'mysticism', however, was not used in the middle ages. Rather, mystics referred to their experiences of the divine as 'contemplation', the effect of prayer in drawing the soul closer to God. The etymology of the word 'mysticism' is a product of modernity, and when

---

[1] For some definitions and a contemporary reading of mystical theology's role in the Church see Mark Allen McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 8.

[2] For a survey of the various interpretations of the mystical experience in the contemporary field of religious studies see F. Samuel Brainard, 'Defining "Mystical Experience"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, (1996): 359–93. Also see the classic study of mystical experiences: Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[3] See David A Ackerman, *Transformation in Christ: Paul's Experience of the Divine Mystery*, 2019.

understood as a category for analyzing contemplative texts, it was not used until the seventeenth century.[4]

In popular imagination, the word 'mysticism' invokes images of the occult, psychedelic experiences, and anything construed as bizarre. In reality, mysticism, as it is understood in its medieval context, is no different from 'contemplation'. The two words describe the same thing, the most secret manifestation of God's presence on the mind through prayer. Bernard McGinn, the preeminent scholar of medieval mysticism, describes it as 'that part, or element of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God.'[5]

The mystics of the middle ages conveyed their experiences of this presence through symbolism. One of the most prominent symbols they used to articulate the soul's communion with God was that of marriage, a rite that represented not just intimacy and the fulfilment of erotic love, but faithfulness and commitment. Marriage was emblematic of a mindset (beginning in late antiquity, and later, in the middle ages) that interpreted the institution of marriage as an earthly metaphor of the soul's union with God. The use of matrimonial imagery to portray God's love for humanity has Biblical precedent in both the covenantal theology of the Old Testament (between God and Israel) and Jesus and the Church in the New Testament.[6] In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus identifies himself as a bridegroom.[7] Likewise, in the parable of the ten virgins he describes the virgins as waiting on their spouse in the kingdom of heaven.[8] In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist

---

[4] Even in the seventeenth century, the term 'mystical' was largely defined in relation to the 'mystical sense' of scriptural exegesis. It was only through a gradual process that the adjective 'mystic' supplanted 'contemplative' when referring to ineffable experiences of God in the inner life. On the adoption of the term 'mystic' in early-modern literature see Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael Smith, vol. 1 (Chicago London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 94–95. For a discussion of the word 'mysticism' and the utility of the term in contemporary scholarship see Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 71 (2003): 273–302.

[5] Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, Modern Library pbk. edn, Modern Library Classics (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xiv.

[6] In the Old Testament, Yahweh is depicted as a bridegroom and Israel as his bride in (Is. 62:5), (Hos. 1–3) 3) and in the Book of Isaiah (49:18), (61:10), (62:4), and in the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 2: 13) and (3: 1–5).

[7] Mark 2:19 (DRBO): 'Et ait illis Jesus : Numquid possunt filii nuptiarum, quamdiu sponsus cum illis est, jejunare? Quanto tempore habent secum sponsum, non possunt jejunare.'

[8] Matthew 25:1 (DRBO): 'Tunc simile erit regnum caelorum decem virginibus : quae accipientes lampades suas exierunt obviam sponso et sponsae.'

describes Christ as a bridegroom made ready for his bride.[9] In Ephesians, Jesus is portrayed as the head of the Church and likened to its spouse. [10] Similarly, the Church that is united with God in Revelation (21:2) is depicted as a bride prepared for her spouse.[11] In 2 Corinthians St Paul describes the church at Corinth as being wed to Christ.[12]

While the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and Paul's epistles all make reference to the spiritual significance of marriage, it was the nuptial imagery found in the Song of Songs that most effectively captured the imagination of medieval authors.[13] The Song of Songs became the most treasured book of spiritual allegory in the middle ages. More than any other book of the Bible, it was held up as a model of Christendom's mystical communion with Christ, where the bride (the soul) seeks her lover (Christ) in the avenues of Jerusalem. Upon finding him, the lovers come together in an ecstatic union that signified the culmination of the spiritual life.[14]

To medieval exegetes, the Song of Songs was not understood as Hebrew love poetry, the original context in which it was written. Rather, it was seen as an allegory for Christ's love for the Church, his saints, and his contemplatives. Allegorical interpretations of the Song of Songs were practised by both Jewish and Christian commentators alike, and in both traditions, non-allegorical interpretations of the text were a rarity in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.[15] The allegorisation of the Song of Songs served a specific purpose, to sanctify erotic love by centring it in God.[16] This sublimation of sexual love reread eros as

---

[9] John 3:29 (DRBO): 'Qui habet sponsam, sponsus est : amicus autem sponsi, qui stat, et audit eum, gaudio gaudet propter vocem sponsi. Hoc ergo gaudium meum impletum est.'
[10] Ephesians 5: 23–26 (DRBO): 'Sed sicut Ecllesia subjecta est Christo, ita et mulieres viris suis in omnibus. Viri, diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea.'
[11] Et ego Joannes vidi sanctam civitatem Jerusalem novam descendentem de caelo a Deo, paratam sicut sponsam ornatam viro suo et audivi vocem magnam de throno dicentem: Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus, et habitabit cum eis. Et ipsi populus ejus erunt, et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus.'
[12] 2 Corinthians 11:2 (DRBO): 'aemulor enim vos Dei aemulatione. Despondi enim vos uni viro, virginem castam exhibere Christo.'
[13] The important surveys of the Song of Songs in the middle ages are Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 156 (Kalamazoo, Michigan; Spencer, Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1995); E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, 1. printing, Cornell paperbacks, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990).
[14] On the role of the *Canticle* in mystical theology see Paschal P. Parente, 'The Canticle of Canticles in Mystical Theology', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 6 (1944): 142–58.
[15] See Bernard McGinn, 'The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism' in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 206.
[16] *Idem*, 210–211.

God's love for the soul and the Church.[17] Following this interpretation, the mystics of the middle ages framed their experiences of God through the language of love, marriage, sexual congress, and union.

In the Christian tradition, the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs was first espoused by the early Christian theologian Origen (c. 184–c. 253), who produced the earliest surviving complete commentary.[18] Origen's commentary, when translated from Greek, gave the Latin world a framework for interpreting and utilising erotic imagery.[19] This came primarily in the way he framed the parameters of his commentary, as both a metaphor for the soul's love of Christ through scripture and Christ's love for the Church.[20] Origen understood the purpose of the Song of Songs as a means to transmute a human understanding of sexual congress into a divine one.[21]

Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs established the standard method of interpretation for the high and later middle ages. An example of this comes in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which was an enormously popular compilation of biblical glosses and commentaries derived primarily from the Church Fathers.[22] In the preface of the *Glossa*'s

---

[17] Bernard McGinn, 'God as Eros Metaphysical Foundations of Christian Mysticism', in John Meyendorff and Bradley Nassif, eds, *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 195.

[18] Origen wrote the earliest complete commentary on the *Canticle* in the first half of the third century. This commentary, written between 240 and 244 was supplemented with two homilies that were written in 244. See Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, 26. A commentary by Hippolytus of Rome may be either earlier or contemporaneous with Origen's translation, however the text only survives in fragments. An English translation is rendered in Yancy Smith, 'Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Context' (PhD Diss., Texas Christian University, 2009). Origen's commentary on the *Canticle* was translated into Latin by St Jerome and Rufinius beginning in the late fourth century and early fifth century. See Joseph R. Jones, 'The "Song of Songs" as a Drama in the Commentators from Origen to the Twelfth Century', *Comparative Drama*, 17 (1983): 17–39, 25.

[19] Mcginn, 'The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism', 212.

[20] Origen, *Origenes Werke Bd. VIII: Homilien Zu Samuel I, Zum Hohelied Und Zu Den Propheten. Kommentar Zum Hohelied, in Rufins Und Hieronymus' Übersetzung*, ed. Wilhelm A. Baehrens, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller 33 (J.C. Hinrichs, 1925), 61: 'Epithalamium libellus hic, id est nuptial carmen, dramatis in modum mihi videtur a Solomone conscriptus, quem cecinit instar mubentis sponsae et egra sponsum suum, qui est sermo Dei, caelesti amore flagrantis. Adamavit enim eum sive anima, quae ad imaginem eius facta est, sive ecclesia. Sed et magnificus hic ipse ac perfectus sponsus quibus verbis usus sit ad coniunctam sibi animam vel ecclesiam.'

[21] On Origen's interpretation of the *Song* see Louise Nelstrop, 'Erotic and Nuptial Imagery', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, by Louise Nelstrop, ed. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 327–46, 332.

[22] The *Glossa* had no single author, but was in actuality a collection of works derived from Bede, Gregory the Great, Anselm of Laon and other intellectual luminaries of late antiquity and the middle ages. Redaction on the compilation began in the Carolingian period and extended well into the twelfth century, with the compilation becoming a standard used exegetical reference tool in the late middle ages. On the manuscript tradition and sources that went into forming the *Glossa*, see the various articles and editions of Alexander

commentary on the Song of Songs, which was taken from St Jerome, the saint takes note of the transmutative aspects of eros. It is, he argues, part of the journey of purification a Christian must take before arriving at a coherent understanding of the text.[23]

Jerome describes the Song of Songs as a book intended for those who have ‘crossed the red sea’ of sin. To read the song properly, an individual must have progressed to a spiritually advanced state where eros does not invoke images of the flesh, but rather, a spiritually transcendent love of Christ and the Church. This transcendent understanding of eros comes when a human conception of love is transmuted into a heavenly one:

> ‘God the creator’ established all the impulses of the soul for good [ends], but in our usage it often happens that things which are naturally good lead us to commit sins when we evilly abuse them. One of these impulses of the soul is love, which we use well if we love wisdom and truth, but ill if [we love] flesh and blood. You therefore [o reader], ‘as a spiritual being’ spiritually hear sung [these] words of love, and learn to transfer the impulse of your soul and the fire of natural love to better things.[24]

The exposition continues in the next paragraph:

> If you wish to ascend to the Song of Songs, it is necessary to go forth ‘from Egypt’ so that after the crossing of the red sea, and after your enemies have been drowned, you may be able to sing the first of the songs. But because up to now you are a long way from the song of songs, traverse the desert land spiritually and it follows that, situated on the bank of the Jordan, you sing the second song. And when you have crossed the whole world climb up to the heights so that you, a beautiful soul, may be able to sing with the bridegroom this Song of Songs.[25]

Andrée, for example, ‘The Glossa ordinaria on the Gospel of John: A Preliminary Survey of the Manuscripts with a Presentation of the Text and its Source’, *Revue Bénédictine* 118, (2008), 109–134 and 289–333; Lesley Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009). E. Ann Matter, ‘The Church Fathers and the Glossa Ordinaria’, in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Dorota Backus (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997).

[23] On Jerome’s influence on the *Glossa* and Song of Songs see *Idem*, 95.

[24] *Glossa Ordinaria in Canticum Canticorum*, ed. Mary Dove, Corpus Christianorum 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 74–75: ‘Omnes animae motiones uniuersitatis *conditor Deus* creauit ad bonum, sed usu nostro sepe fit ut res quae bonae sunt per naturam dum male his abutimur nos ad peccata deducant. Unus ex animae motibus amor est quo bene utimur si sapientiam amemus et ueritatem, male autem si carnem aut sanguinem. Tu igitur *ut spiritualis* audi spiritualiter amatorial uerba cantari et disce motum animae tuae et naturalis amoris incendium as Meliora transferre.’

[25] Ibid: ‘Si uis ascendere ad Canticum Canticorum necesse est egredi *de Egypt out* post transitum maris rubric submerses inimicis primum possis canere canticum. Sed quia adhuc longe es a cantico canticorum, perambula terram deserti spiritualiter et sequiter ut Iordanis ad ripam constitutes secundum canticum canas. Et cum uniuersa transieris ad altiora conscende ut possis anima decora cum sponso et hoc canere Canticum Canticorum.’

In these excerpts, it is the proper ordering of human impulses, and the love of wisdom that transforms a human understanding of erotic desire into a spiritual one. When an individual truly loves wisdom, and is 'made beautiful' through the purgation of sin, that individual may participate in the eros of the Canticle and 'sing along' with the bridegroom. The soul's purgative journey, and the imagery of ascent expressed in these examples are the central motifs of mystical theology, where the soul embarks on a contemplative quest that takes it from the 'desert' of sin to the marital ecstasy of the Song of Songs.

In this context, the image of marriage was used as a human parallel to what mystics experienced at the heights of prayer and contemplation. The soul, cleansed of sin and deified in eros, is bonded to God in spiritual matrimony. In Latin, this concept was referred to as the *unio mystica*, or 'mystical union'. In the Christian tradition, the concept of mystical union (*unio mystica*) began developing as early as the Patristic age, where Alexandrian and Cappadocian Fathers, drawing from the Song of Songs, Pauline, and Platonic sources, described the soul's progression towards and union with God through erotic terminology.[26] The concept of mystical union was given special attention at the end of the fifth century by the anonymous author Pseudo-Dionysius, who married the philosophy of the last great neoplatonist of antiquity, Proclus (c. 412–c. 485), to Christian theology. It was in the twelfth century, however, the idea of one becoming *oned* with God became commonplace.[27]

Before the high middle ages, the *unio mystica* was not the standard mode of thought when describing an 'immediate experience' of the divine. For much of the history of late antiquity and the early middle ages, the idea of a 'mystical union' with God was largely foreign to theology. While Augustine spoke of 'touching' or 'beholding' God's wisdom, the concept of being *oned* with the Almighty was absent in his philosophy, as it was in the early writers of Latin mysticism, such as Gregory the Great. [28]

[26] See Louis Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', *The Journal of Religion*, 69 (1989): 1–13.
[27] See Bernard McGinn, 'Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries', *Church History*, 56 (1987): 7–24.
[28] As suggested above, the encounter with the divine presence may entail the manifestation of visions, smells, or sensory phenomena, but traditionally these sensory formulations of the 'mystical experience' were approached with suspicion. In Christian contemplation, union with God is seen more as a confluence of love and will between Christ and the contemplative. See Jonathan Garb, 'Mystics' Critiques of Mystical Experience', *Revue de l'histoire Des Religions*, 221 (2004): 293–325. The modern fixation on 'experience' in mystical theology is called 'experientialism', which was not necessarily the primary goal of medieval mystical thought. See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge;

The roots of *unio mystica* as a concept grew out of the affective piety of the high middle ages. Beginning with St Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) and later with St Francis of Assisi (c. 1181/82–1226), a new type of devotional piety arose that emphasized introspection, solitude, and meditative practices. This 'affective piety' called Christians to empathise with Christ's humanity through emotional meditations on his, life, struggles, and most importantly, his suffering on the cross.[29] Passion meditations of the period considered not just the corruptibility of the human condition, but also the possibility of perfection in human identification with the risen Christ: even in this vale of tears unity with Christ was possible through love.

At the advent of the twelfth century, the idea of the *unio mystica* matured into a fully formed concept in spiritual literature. The notion that the soul is united with Christ in contemplation through love was espoused by the Victorines and among the Carthusian and Cistercian orders with figures like Hugh of Balma (fl. 1246–1297) and Marguerite d'Oingt (c. 1240/41–1310). The most notable of these was St Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153) who developed the idea in his sermons on the Song of Songs (*Sermones in Cantica*).[30] In this St Bernard was followed in the thirteenth-century by the Victorine abbot Thomas Gallus (c. 1200–c. 1246) who promoted the idea that the soul, in the act of contemplation, is united with Christ at a 'high point' of affection (*apex affectionis*). [31]

What followed in the late middle ages was a proliferation of literature that articulated the union of the soul with God through affective terminology. In the low countries and Holy Roman Empire, such language was particularly prevalent among the women's religious lay-order of the Beguines in which 'mystical union' controversially asserted that the self is

---

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5 and 8. See also Michael Anthony Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), which makes a reading similar to Turner's.

[28] McGinn, 'Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries', 8.

[29] The rise of affective piety in middle ages is most often affiliated with Richard Southern. See chapter 5, 'From Epic to Romance', in Richard William Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 1993, orig. publ. 1953), 219–257.

[30] On the development of these ideas see Louis Bouyer, Jean (Theologe) Leclercq, and François Vandenbroucke, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (Turnbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1986).

[31] See Bernard McGinn, 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism', *Studies in Spirituality*, 8 (1998): 81–96.

'lost' in erotic love with Christ.[32] Notable Beguines who wrote on the concept included the thirteenth-century Flemish mystic Hadewijch (c. 1200?–c. 1248–60?), and the German Mechtilde of Magdeburg (c. 1207–c. 1282/1294).[33] Similarly, the enormously influential late medieval Dominican mystic from the Rhineland Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328), identified the 'ground' (*grund*) or essence of the soul as being essentially the same as God's essence. His vision of mystical union sees the Son (Christ) as being eternally born within the soul, and since the soul and God are grounded in the same source, mystical union occurs when the self is reformed in this common ground.[34] Eckhart was among the most important late medieval mystics, and his influence can be detected in the writings of the Dominican friar, Henry Suso (1295–1366), the priest and theologian Johannes Tauler (1300–1361) and the Flemish mystic and Augustinian canon John van Ruysbroeck.[35]

The writings of both the Beguines and the German mystics were also significant because they represented another, stronger shift towards affect in late medieval mystical theology. By the end of the middle ages, affective love moved from the ancillary of mystical theology to form the very basis of its theological speculation. This was partly because by the fourteenth century, contemplative literature migrated from strictly monastic contexts into the wider world of European society. Before the thirteenth century, Latin mysticism was biblical, exegetical, and largely expressed within cloistered communities whose emphasis was on flight from the world (in the case of the Cistercians for example), or providing the tools for its reform (in the case of the Victorines).[36]

---

[32] The Beguines, and their male counterparts, the Beghards, were religious orders comprised of laymen that operated outside of the authority of the Church. The communities were comprised of primarily women who lived communally in the pursuit of Christ. The order flourished in Germany and the low-countries in the thirteenth century. On the Beguines and their creation in the middle ages see Carol Neel, 'The Origins of the Beguines', *Signs*, 14 (1989): 321–41. See also Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)*, The Presence of God, a History of Western Christian Mysticism; Vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1998), chapters four and five.

[33] On the Beguines and the mysticism of indistinction see Juan Marin, 'Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 103 (2010): 89–109.

[34] On Eckhart and his model of mystical union see Bernard McGinn, 'The God beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart', *The Journal of Religion*, 61 (1981): 1–19.

[35] On these figures and their intellectual milieu see Oliver Davies, *God within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006).

[36] See Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', *Church History*, 65 (1996): 197–219.

In the late middle ages mystical experience became available to the laity. Depictions and accounts of mystical experiences became increasingly common among untrained and amateur theologians, like the Beguines. These treatises were highly visual in nature, and often written in the vernacular.[37] This phenomenon is what Bernard McGinn labels the 'vernacular theology' of the late middle ages, a branch of theological discourse that is separate from both scholastic and monastic theology.[38] Vernacular theology, written in the languages of ordinary European peoples, signalled a growing interest in theological discourse among a newly literate laity. This was a laity that sought deeper connections with religion, without having to commit to more regulated forms of religious life.

The true novelty, then, of contemplative spirituality in the late middle ages was its shift in emphasis from rhetorical questions pertaining to the nature of God (that is, the Trinity, Grace, and Christ) to issues relating to the internal psychological concerns of contemplation and the idea that the soul can be united with Christ through contemplation in this life.[39] Consequently, the affective turn in thirteenth-century mystical theology intensified in the fourteenth century, as devotional texts were written in the vernacular and: '[thrown] open to all men'.[40]

Late medieval mystical theology was concerned with the love of God and the soul's union with him. However, contemplatives disagreed on what happens to the soul once its union with the divine was complete. One view saw mystical union as a coming together of God and the contemplative in a distinct alignment of will and spirit. This means that neither party ever truly loses their distinct identity in the union, though they may appear to do so at times. Bernard of Clairvaux used the metaphor of a piece of iron submerged in flame, or a drop of water in a vat of wine. The flame and wine may appear to dissolve in the original substance, but in reality, they never truly lose their distinct form.[41] This is what is known as a union of spirit (*unitias spiritus*).

---

[37] Mystical texts were among the earliest examples of literature written in the vernacular languages of Europe. *Idem*, 208.
[38] *Idem*, 206.
[39] Bouyer, Leclercq and Vandenbroucke, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, 408.
[40] Ibid.
[41] St Bernard's views on mystical union are discussed in chapter three. See subsection 3.2, 114–120.

This view of union is contrasted with the idea of substantial union, or a union of indistinction (*unitas indistinctionis*). In this interpretation of union, the self is portrayed as being completely annihilated and totally subsumed into God's being. In this union, any sense of self vanishes, leaving no trace of its personhood behind.[42] This was the particular mode of mystical union associated with figures like Meister Eckhart, the French mystic Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), and the Beguines. This form of thought (*unitas indistinctionis*) was referred to as the 'heresy of the free spirit' by its critics, and it was condemned in a papal bull at the Council of Vienne in c. 1311.[43] The 'free spirits' wrote in a way that invoked 'liquid' imagery, wherein they described union with God as a kind of 'melting' into his essence. This conflation of the human soul with God was considered heretical as the boundaries between soul and Christ were made indistinct. This concept will be examined in chapter three.

These views of mystical union refer to the ultimate unknowability of God when encountered by the soul. In mystical theology, this is the language of 'mystical darkness', otherwise known as 'negative' or 'apophatic' theology. Negative theology is a nebulous concept, that broadly defined, refers to the indescribable and transcendent nature of the most high God. If Christ is understood as God revealed in his human nature, negative theology refers to those aspects of God the father that transcend all definitions and lingual barriers. This is not a suggestion that God's nature is at all *dark*, but rather, rendered 'dark' through an excess of light.

To understand this, a helpful metaphor is the action of staring at the sun. Anyone who looks at the sun too long has their vision overwhelmed, plunging the sense of sight into darkness. Negative theology might be likened to the incomprehensibility of God arising from such an experience.[44] It stands in contrast with 'cataphatic', or positive theology, which is the mode of mystical thought that balances what can be known, or positively stated about God with his most high incomprehensible nature. In the Christian tradition,

---

[42] The union of indistinction was most infamous with Meister Eckhart, who was posthumously censured by pope John XXII at the papal bull of 1329 on the grounds that the 'grund' or 'ground' of the soul was essentially indistinct from God, i.e. derived from the same source. See Oliver Davies, 'Why Were Eckhart's Propositions Condemned?', *New Blackfriars*, 71 (1990): 433–45. See also Bernard McGinn, 'Mystical Union', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, (Oxford University Press, 2020), 403–21, 406.
[43] The classic treatment of the free spirit heresy is Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, Corr. & reprint. with permission (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972).
[44] For a more detailed description of this see Turner, *The Darkness of God,* 18.

the concept of the *unio mystica* and apophatic theology have a common source, but the ideas do not originate in the middle ages. Rather, they are accredited to a series of figures who wrote in late antiquity.[45] Chief among these was an enigmatic figure known as Pseudo-Dionysius, who became the most preeminent founding figure of mystical theology.

2.2 The Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Medieval Mystical Theology

Originating in Syria, the body of works that fell under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite were enormously influential theological tracts dated to the late-fifth and early-sixth centuries. The writings are self-attributed by the author, pseudonymously, to Dionysius, the Athenian member of the Areopagus council and convert of Saint Paul portrayed in Acts 17:34.[46] The corpus includes five texts, two of which discuss hierarchy among the clergy and angelic order respectively (the *Ecclesiastical* and *Celestial Hierarchy*), ten epistles, and two texts which are concerned with apophatic theology – the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*.[47] The writings of Dionysius are, in their broadest definition, a synthesis of Christian theology and Neoplatonic philosophy. While Dionysius styles himself as a contemporary of Saint Paul, this cannot be the case as he was heavily indebted to Proclus, a Neoplatonic philosopher who lived in the fifth century.[48]

Through its use of Christianized Neoplatonism, the writings of Dionysius were particularly important in disseminating the motifs of apophatic 'darkness'.[49] The mystical experience espoused by his philosophy, in its original context, was communal. It described the corporate movement of the Church community as an 'ascent' into the mysteries of the

---

[45] These include Gregory of Nyssa, who will be introduced in greater detail below and Clement of Alexandria. On the origins of Apophaticism in the Christian tradition see Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[46]Acts 17:34 (DRBO): 'Quidam vero viri adhaerentes ei, crediderunt: in quibus et Dionysius Areopagita, et mulier nomine Damaris, et alii cum eis.'

[47] The apophasis of Dionysius is compared to the *Aurora* in chapter three.

[48] A close association between the writings of Dionysius and Proclus was demonstrated by the scholars Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr at the end of the nineteenth century. See Hugo Koch, 'Der Pseudo-Epigraphische Character Der Dionysischen Schriften', *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 77 (1895): 353–421 and J. Stiglmayr, 'Der Neuplatoniker Proclus Als Vorlage Des Sogen. Dionysius Areopagiten in Der Laehre Vom Ubel', *Historiches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895).

[49] The extent to which Dionysius' Christology is first Christian or Platonic is a matter of debate, with some scholars relegating his Neoplatonism to an entirely subsidiary role. Gregory Shaw argues that the Dionysian corpus is a kind of Christianised theurgy, while Golitzin and Louth characterize it as Christian first, but sharing in a common Greek culture with pagan Neoplatonists. Therefore, they see attempts to remove the theurgic aspect of the Dionysian corpus as a reflection of protestant bias. On these polemics see Gregory Shaw, 'Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7 (1999): 573–99.

liturgy which are hidden in the imagery of the black cloud of Sinai that appears in Exodus, 40.[50] The church and its liturgy are a reflection of the celestial hierarchy, and the method of apophatic ascent applies to the entire congregation. The priest who is associated with Moses approaches the mountain peak to receive and bring back sacramental mysteries. The black cloud that covers the mountain peak is a metaphor for apophasis, while the mountain peak represents the church altar. This communal manifestation of negative theology mirrors the organization of the Church in a self-contained microcosm.[51]

The Corpus Dionysiacum, as it was understood in this form, was met with an instantaneous and widespread acceptance in the Byzantine Empire.[52] The immediate acceptance of this tradition in the Christian east is contrasted by a slower migration and reception in the Latin west, primarily because the writings of Dionysius were not translated into lucid Latin until the twelfth century.[53] The corpus was first translated in the ninth century by Hilduin, Abbot of St Denis, whose translation was overtly literal, obscuring much of the symbolic meaning of the works, and then by John Scotus Eriugena whose translation, though more readable, has many of the same problems. A more interpretative translation was made in 1167 by John Sarrazin, a scholar who possessed fluency enough in Greek to convey far more clearly the original meaning of the text in Latin.[54]

With this new translation in hand, a tradition of commentary emerged, spearheaded by Hugh, Abbot of St Victor in the first third of the twelfth century, and expanded rapidly in

---

[50] In the *Aurora*, this same image of the cloud appears in chapter VI. See chapter three, subsection 3.2, 101-114.
[51] See Alexander Golitzin, "The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?," *Mystics Quarterly*, 19 (1993):98–114.
[52] *Idem*, 98.
[53] The Dionysian corpus was disseminated through two manuscript traditions, one Syriac and one Greek. Gallus, and the Latin tradition was influenced by the Greek manuscript tradition, which included notes, glosses and scholia from various theologians that eventually found their way into the Parisian manuscripts that formed the Latin Dionysian tradition of the high middle ages. This tradition, which Blakenhorn calls the *Parisian Scholia* most notably included glosses from John, bishop of Scythopolis (c. 536–550), Maximus the confessor, and later John Scotus Eriugena along with his translation of the corpus, as well as excerpts from his *Periphyseon.* It is the influence of Eriguena, that may very well have been the impetus for the development of the affective Dionysian tradition. As it pertains to mystical union, the *Parisian Scholia* 'recovers' the role of the intellect in mystical union and makes the human being an active participant in mystical union. In other words, it steers the tradition away from passivity and towards participation, a prominent feature of mystical union in the affective Dionysian tradition. On the *Paris Scholia* see Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union With God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert The Great and Thomas Aquinas*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series, Vol. 4 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 30–44.
[54] See Craig Tichelkamp, 'Mystical Theology and Translation: Re-Veiling the Latin *Corpus Dionysiacum*', *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 29 (2020): 41–53.

the thirteenth: Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, all cited and commented upon the corpus in their writings. These commentaries heralded a shift in focus in the Dionysian tradition of mystical theology. The central images of the corpus changed from a corporate and liturgical movement of the Church into the mysteries of God, to a personal experience of God's love mediated through contemplative prayer. This was the major innovation of the Latin medieval tradition of Dionysian mystical theology.

None of this is to say that elements of affective love were not already present in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. One of the more prominent examples comes in chapter four of the *Divine Names*, where Dionysius speaks of divine love as producing an 'ecstasy' that makes one belong to God, and not the self. [55] However, this love is liturgical, communal, and written in a context focused on the speculative structures of the ecclesiastical and angelic hierarchies. Medieval contemplatives read Dionysius in a slightly different light. They understood ecstatic love as acting on the faculties of one's consciousness, uniting the individual with God, through love, in the dark cloud of unknowing.

It was the commentary of Hugh of Saint Victor on the Dionysian corpus that opened the door for a personal affective interpretation of mystical theology in the thirteenth century. In his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Hugh wrote: 'Love surpasses knowing, and is better than intelligence',[56] a new interpretation of the corpus that emphasized the role of love, and not the mind, in uniting the soul with Christ. This stands in stark contrast to the Byzantine east, that had interpreted the writings of Dionysius as a lifelong process of prayer and liturgical devotion. [57] Hugh's reading laid the foundation for a rereading of Dionysius that was an ecstatic and intensely personal experience of mystical union.

This interpretation was followed by Thomas Gallus and the English polymath Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253), who are known to have corresponded, in their commentaries

---

[55] Phillipe Chevallier, *Dionysiaca: Recueil Donnant L'ensemble Des Traductions Latines Des Ouvrages Attribués Au Denys de L'areopage* (Desclée, de Brouwer, 1937), 215: 'Faciens exstasim divinus amor, non dimittens sui ipsorum esse amatores, sed amatorum.'
[56] Hugh of St Victor, 'Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagite', Migne, PL 175, 1038D: 'Dilectio supereminet scientiae, et major est intelligentia.'
[57] Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, Re-issued, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Continuum, 1989), 27: 'Denys's understanding of [mystical union] is a matter of a lifetime's experience of prayer and worship within the bosom of the church.'

on the *Mystical Theology*.[58] In this enterprise they were joined by the Dominicans Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.[59] Later developers of the tradition include the Carthusians, notably Hugh of Balma, who wrote at the end of the thirteenth century and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous guide to contemplative prayer written in England's East Midlands in the middle of the fourteenth century (see subsection 2.5 below). In the fifteenth century, the Flemish monk Denis the Carthusian (1402–1471) commented on the Dionysian corpus, routinely citing his twelfth and thirteenth-century predecessors Hugh and Gallus.[60] Jean Gerson (1363–1429), chancellor at the University of Paris and the polymath and humanist Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) were two other scholars who wrote on the tradition at the end of the middle ages. They played a significant role in shaping approaches toward the corpus at the end of the middle ages.[61] All of these authors emphasised the primacy of love in facilitating the soul's union with God, though the extent to which the intellect participated in the formation of this union became a subject of debate in the fifteenth century.[62]

Arguably the figure most involved in the development of affective Dionysian thought was Thomas Gallus.[63] While the exact date and location of his birth is unknown, he was born somewhere in France late in the twelfth century. He then became a canon at the Abbey of Saint-Victor before moving to Italy in 1219.[64] In Italy, he helped found a Victorine abbey in Vercelli, and in 1226 was elected abbot, and it was here that he authored the majority of his works. Gallus was primarily known for his commentaries on Dionysius and his exegetical writings on the Song of Songs. While he did not found the affective Dionysian tradition of mystical theology, the influence he exercised over the scholars who followed

[58] On affect in the medieval Dionysian tradition see Boyd Taylor Coolman, 'The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008): 615–32.
[59] On Albert, Aquinas, and their interpretations of Dionysius see David Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, 'Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008): 633–49.
[60] On the Carthusian contribution to mystical theology see the introduction in Dennis Martin, trans., *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1–65.
[61] See Matthieu van der Meer, 'Divus Dionysius: Jean Gerson, Nicholas of Cusa, and the Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius's Mystical Theology', *Viator*, 44 (2013): 323–42.
[62] The debate was over 'affective' versus 'intellectualist' readings of mystical theology, which questioned whether or not the mind or love alone was joined with God at the apex of mystical union. On the debate see Denys Turner, 'Dionysius and Some Late Medieval Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe', *Modern Theology*, 24, (2008): 651–65.
[63] On the contributions of Gallus to medieval mystical theology see McGinn, 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism', 81–96.
[64] *Idem*, 84.

him was considerable.[65]

An important aspect of thirteenth-century mystical theology of relevance to the current discussion was the theme of apophatic theology, the articulation of which was associated with the Franciscan Minister-General St. Bonaventure (1221–1274). This is most strongly expressed in his *Itenarium Mentis in Deum* (*Journey of the Mind into God*), which sets out a stage-by-stage analysis of contemplation, and the path the mind takes *en route* to union with God. While Bonaventure's theories on contemplation fell out of vogue in the late middle ages, the *Itenarium* remains a hallmark text of mystical theology.[66] Written in 1259, two years after the saint was elected minster-general, the treatise was written as a spiritual guidebook for the order.[67] In short, it describes the contemplative life, and the road a spiritual person must take to be purified of vice and united with God in love. The text provides a series of cataphatic and apophatic opposites, culminating in the mystical death of the soul, where worldly thoughts are annihilated in the mystical darkness of Christ crucified. [68] Where the Victorines added a component of love to Dionysian mystical theology, St Bonaventure's innovation was the addition of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.[69]

Bonaventure's treatment of apophasis (darkness/ignorance) in contrast with cataphasis (illumination/revelation) as diametrically opposed terms that cancel one another out are important images that are inherent to mystical theology.[70] Also appearing in the *Itinearium* is the idea that the individual must be purified of vice before being united with God. These

---

[65] It was Gallus, not Hugh of Saint Victor who was the first major systematiser of the Latin Dionysian corpus. On Gallus's influence in the tradition see Coolman, 'The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition', 619.
[66] See Ignatius Brady, 'St Bonaventure's Doctrine of Illumination: Reactions Medieval and Modern', *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (1974): 27–37.
[67] Elizabeth A. Dreyer, 'Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey Into God', in *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*, ed. Arthur G. Holder (London: Routledge, 2010), 113.
[68] St Bonaventure in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* was the first author to articulate the darkness of negative theology through an interiorised lens. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote the *Mystical Theology* in the context of the liturgy, whereas Bonaventure, drawing from Augustine, wed the corporate theology of Dionysius with an internalised experience of contemplation. See chapter five, 'Hierarchy interiorised: Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*', in Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 102–134.
[69] Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 220.
[70] The primary text that engages with this dialectic is the *Divine Names*, where the various parts of the Godhead are named and subsequently unnamed. God's being is identified as the indescribable space existing between this cancellation. Bonaventure's *Itenarium* is a text that operates within this tradition. See Peter Harris, 'The Idea of God: On the Divine Names', *Analecta Hermenuetica*, 9 (2017), 3–5.

motifs of darkness, illumination, purgation, and union are all central aspects of mystical theology; it is to these theoretical elements of contemplative practice that this chapter now turns.

2.3 Cataphatic and Apophatic Mysticism: Modes of Thought in Mystical Theology

In the spiritual practices of both Christian and non-Christian religious traditions, mysticism manifests in two distinct descriptive modes. These are the aforementioned categories of *apophatic* and *cataphatic* mysticism.[71] *Cataphatic* mysticism, derived from the Greek 'to affirm', describes an encounter with God through the proliferation of images, or *positive* attributions. Cataphatic components of religious thought include symbols like iconography or rituals like the eucharist.[72] In its more transcendent form, this category of the mystical encounter includes the manifestation of visions, hallucinations, and sensory phenomena like smells and auditory experiences.[73] A cataphatic conception of divinity is defined by what can be said to be true about it. It is said to be *positive* because in this state, God is made perceptible to and acts upon the senses. Cataphatic mystical experiences are associated, in this way, with light and illumination.

The second mode of mystical experience, *apophasis*, derived from the Greek 'to deny', is the mysticism of darkness, or *negation*. Negation is the absence of perception, where divinity is approached by what it is *not*. It is, as highlighted above, the overpowering of the senses through the superabundance of God, where all earthly constructs and human conceptions of the divine are cleared away. Apophatic mystical experiences deny the idea that the ultimate mystery of God can be known through symbols or images. This version of mysticism can be understood, then, in contrast to cataphasis, as an 'emptying' of all sensations, archetypes and experiences of the divine. The sense of 'absence' does not preclude the appearance of visual elements in apophatic mysticism.[74]

Apophatic imagery is often expressed through metaphors of the infinite or smothering. These include references to fog, the sky, the sea, clouds, or more generally, experiences of

---

[71] On the psychology of cataphatic and apophatic religious experiences among various religious traditions see R.K.C. Forman, 'What Does Mysticism Have to Teach Us About Consciousness?', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5 (1998): 185–201.
[72] Peter Kügler, 'Denys Turner's Anti-Mystical Mystical Theology', *Ars Disputandi*, 4 (2004): 176–82, 176.
[73] Forman., op. cit., 74.
[74] For examples see Garb, 'Mystics' Critiques of Mystical Experience', 295, 306.

‘darkness’ and obfuscation.[75] With the Spanish Carmelite St John of the Cross (1542–1591), perhaps the best-known representative of mystical theology in the Christian tradition, apophatic imagery took on depressive components, where the imagery of ‘darkness’ came to be associated with intense experiences of purgatorial suffering.

Apophatic mysticism is pre-Christian in origin, though it was readily practiced by Gnostics and Christians alike.[76] In the Christian tradition, negative theology took the interest of Origen (c. 184–c. 253) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) in the second and fourth centuries respectively.[77] Gregory developed a mysticism that drew upon the imagery of both darkness and light in order to describe the ‘divinisation’ of the soul.[78] He pictured the light of God as a kind of knowledge that illumines those who receive it, while God’s body is not directly perceptible to the senses, and covered in the darkness of a cloud.[79] His *De Vita Moysis* (*The Life of Moses*) used the allegory of Moses at mount Sinai and the associated imagery of light, darkness and the appearance of the cloud to articulate a shift from the ‘darkness of ignorance to the truth of light’.[80]

It is possible also that *The Life of Moses*, in its narrative structure and focus on the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai, exercised a direct influence on Pseudo-Dionysius. [81] His treatise the *Life of Moses* predates the *Mystical Theology* by two centuries, and its narrative structure is also largely concerned with the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai. The *Life of Moses* is divided into two halves, a straightforward history of the prophet’s life and an exegetical commentary. While some sections of Moses’s life are omitted, the text focuses on three Old Testament theophanies: the burning bush, the water Moses drew from the rock in Numbers 20, and the dark cloud that hovers over the holy mountain. Of all these theophanies, the image of Mt. Sinai’s cloud, and the story of Moses’ journey into mystical darkness became

[75] Kügler, ‘Denys Turner’s Anti-Mystical Mystical Theology’, 176.
[76] Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, 10.
[77] Henri Crouzel, *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A.S. Worrall, 1st edn (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 206.
[78] See Martin Laird, ‘Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration’, *The Journal of Religion*, 79 (1999): 592–616.
[79] *Idem*, 596.
[80] *Idem*, 611.
[81] It has been argued that the *Mystical Theology* was based upon this work. See Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis: L’union à Dieu Chez Denys L’Aréopagite*, Philosophia Antiqua, v. 71 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

essential to the development of mystical theology, making the *Life of Moses* a foundational text in the tradition.[82]

While the church fathers contributed to the usage of apophatic imagery in the Christian tradition, it was the enormously influential *Mystical Theology*, and the complementary body of works attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius that brought negative theology and the themes of darkness and light to the mainstream of Christian theological discourse in the middle ages.[83] The far-reaching influence of this creed cannot be understated. To Pseudo-Dionysius, the fundamental nature of God was incomprehensible to any power of human reasoning or intellect. His contention was that the ultimate nature of God was unintelligible, and could not be ascertained through cataphatic, or 'named' terminology. Cataphatic theology, as opposed to apophatic theology, designates aspects of God's being through positive attributions. In contrast, apophasis contends that human language is limited in its capacity to describe the divine. Even in the most beautiful prose, human beings lack the ability to articulate or comprehend the ultimate nature of the divine.

Thus, the *Mystical Theology* establishes a dialectic between what can be said to be true about God (cataphasis) with what is unknowable about him (apophasis).[84] Describing God as love, goodness, or luminosity limits him to these narrowly articulated designations which are constructs of human language. It is not that God lacks the attributes of love, luminosity or goodness, rather, he possesses these attributes in more abundance than can be described through any lingual designation. In other words, God is *above* all descriptions of light, luminosity, goodness and being. He is the ultimate culmination of these labels and more. In the *Mystical Theology*, the darkness Moses experiences at the peak of Mount Sinai is the darkness of negation: the ultimate incomprehensible nature of the divine that transcends all labels.

As suggested earlier, apophatic language can be been applied also to the terrible effects of

[82] On the importance of the image in mystical theology and its treatment in both the *Mystical Theology* and the *Life of Moses*. See Ann Conway-Jones, 'Exegetical Puzzles and the Mystical Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 75 (2020): 1–21.
[83] See 'The Early Latin Dionysius' in Paul Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*, Mapping the Tradition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 79–100.
[84] For an analysis of Negation in the *Mystical Theology* see Janet Williams, 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite – I', *The Downside Review*, 117 (1999): 157–72.

purgation on the soul as it is drawn out of sin. The association of purgation with melancholy, depression, and darkness was most firmly expressed in the poem and commentary on the *Dark Night of the Soul* of St John of the Cross.[85] While it is with him that the stage of mystical development referred to as 'purgation' becomes most strongly associated with melancholy, depression, and emotional barrenness, the melancholic components of St John's apophatic theology were anticipated by medieval forerunners.[86]

Nevertheless, it is worth briefly reviewing St John's experiences to contextualise that continuity, perhaps all the more striking because his own writings are so distinctive. St John of the Cross was born in Castille under the name Juan de Yepez in the year 1542. Born to a poor family, the young saint was educated at a Jesuit school under the patronage of a certain Don Alonso, an administrator at a local hospital who recognized his talent for ministry. It was here, during his teenage years, that he was educated in a Jesuit school. In the year 1563, he entered the mendicant Carmelite order, and in 1567 he was educated in philosophy and theology and the university of Salamanca.[87] While St John was an accomplished student, his true interest was contemplative prayer. This inclination was bolstered through his friendship with the great mystic and reformer Teresa of Avila (1515 –1582) who worked closely with him to reform the Carmelite order. Teresa and John's reforms were designed to return the order to its contemplative roots, and together, they formed the first convent of Discalced Carmelites in 1568. The reforms soon spelled trouble for St John as political strife between the reformed and observant Carmelites led to his arrest and abduction in 1577. While imprisoned by the Carmelites of Toledo, he was tortured continuously for nine months until his escape in 1578. [88]

[85] The extent to which St John's 'dark nights' can be compared to (or are based upon) the Dionysian divine darkness is a subject of wide debate. This is examined in chapter five. See subsection 5.2, 167–174.

[86] On St John's importance in the apophatic tradition see Bernard McGinn, 'The Carmelites in the History of Western Mysticism', in Kevin G. Culligan and Regis Jordan, eds, *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, Carmelite Studies (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 2000).

[87] For bibliographic information on St John of the Cross see Fr. Bruno, *St. John of the Cross* (Sheed & Ward, 1932); C. de Jesús Sacramentado and *The Life of Saint John of the Cross* (London: Longmans, 1958). For more recent accounts see 'Life and Reception', in Bernard McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain: 1500–1650*, *The Presence of God*: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, vol. 6, part 2 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 230–239. See also Richard P. Hardy, *John of the Cross: Man and Mystic* (Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2015).

[88] While in prison, John penned a number of poems, which included a reinterpretation of the Song of Songs in his *Spiritual* Canticle. Following his escape, he wrote his most famous poems the *Dark Night* and its expository commentary the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* between 1578 and 1581. In the years that followed, he added explanatory commentaries to his poetry at the behest of nuns and friars who took an interest in his work. On the chronology of John's works see McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of* Spain, 241–242.

John's suffering during this time left a lasting impression on his mystical theology, which is defined by its intensely melancholic and tempestuous nature. This is seen particularly in his vision of apophasis, which is intimately linked to the idea of suffering and the purgation of the soul.[89] Negation in St John is a violent stripping away of all forms that are not God. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, the eminent twentieth-century theologian, described it as the apophasis of 'reduction'.[90] Similarly, Bernard McGinn has called it the 'negativity of dereliction'.[91] While St John's mystical theology is rife with the apophasis of suffering, it culminates in the ecstasy of union with Christ, an experience he conveys in his poem *Cántico Espiritual* (*The Spiritual Canticle*). This understanding of mystical theology is based upon the tripartite path of spiritual development that St Bonaventure called the *Triplici Via* (the threefold path).[92] This threefold path of *purgation*, *illumination*, and *union* is the typical structure of medieval and early-modern contemplative literature. St John followed his medieval predecessors, namely Bonaventure, in outlining the path toward union with God through his association of apophasis with the suffering Christ crucified.[93]

2.4 The Purgative Journey in Mystical Theology

In mystical theology, the particular expressions of the path to *unio mystica* took on different forms, but it was almost always represented as a kind of purgative journey where the soul gradually matures in holiness and virtue. The *triplici via* was merely a symbolic representation of the Christian life in microcosm. The experience of a penitent Christian is defined by a series of stages, or developments, that demonstrate the soul's spiritual growth as it turns away from sin and grows in holiness. The sources for such imagery are biblical.

---

[89] McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of* Spain, 233–235.
[90] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. John Kenneth Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1986), 127: 'Throughout all of St John's works there runs a massive *negation*, or more precisely, reduction.'
[91] McGinn, *Mysticism in the Golden Age of* Spain, 267.
[92] See St Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, ed. Philotheus Boehner and M. Frances Laughlin, trans. Zachary Hayes, Works of St Bonaventure (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002), 22. On the threefold path in the writings of St John of the Cross see John J. Murphy, 'St John of the Cross and the Philosophy of Religion: Love of God and the Conceptual Parameters of a Mystical Experience', *Mystics Quarterly*, 22, (1996): 163–86.
[93] On the connections between Bonaventure and St John of the Cross see Timothy A. Mahoney, 'Understanding the Christian Apophaticism of St. John of the Cross', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 7 (2004): 80–91.

The Bible is replete with symbols that picture spiritual growth as an ascent (for instance, Jacob's ladder) or a journey from the exodus to Jacob's exile before his dream. The spiritual progression of the soul is a quest that unfolds like the travails of the Hebrew people in Exodus. It begins with the bondage of sin in Egypt and progresses towards the austerities of repentance in the desert. Finally, it culminates in an encounter with God on Mount Sinai. Such purgative phases of ascent are also seen in the sacraments. The Christian life starts with the purgation of Baptism. It is infused with an influx of deepening grace in the sacrament of confirmation, and it is spiritually nourished in the Eucharist. All of these symbols, the 'journey', the 'ascent' and spiritual 'nourishment' are important themes in both mystical theology and the broader Christian life in general.[94] In medieval and early-modern contemplative literature, the purgative journey of the soul is outlined as follows:

1. Purgation. The first stage of the contemplative life is the practice of austerities in the act of purgation. In order to come into a deeper and fuller communion with God, and enter into the spiritual marriage, the individual must be cleansed of the corrupt power of sin that holds sway over the soul and mind. The biblical basis for the purgative phase of contemplation comes in Romans 6, where St Paul compares baptism to a spiritual death and resurrection in Christ. The Christian community 'dies to sin' in order to be raised again: 'So do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.'[95] Purgation, or 'mortification', is modelled on Paul's exhortation to die to sin. The old sinful self dies and fades away. This spiritual death makes the soul ready and able to receive an inpouring of light and reforming grace. In the tripartite path of the *triplici via,* the purgatorial journey is often paired with cataphatic and apophatic imagery. The images that accompany mortification in the purgatorial stage are those of desolation, corruption, depression, death and darkness.

2. Illumination. The second level of the mystical life is the stage of illumination. Having passed through the terrible death of purgation, the soul is made privy to a portion of God's

---

[94] On ascent and journey motifs in Christian spirituality see chapter three, 'The Spiritual Journey', in Lawrence Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes From the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 47–83.
[95] Romans 6:11 (DRBO): 'Ita et vos existimate vos mortuos quidem esse peccato, viventes autem Deo, in Christo Jesu Domino nostro.'

light. This is not the final union of the soul with Christ, but an elevated and purer mode of being. On a psychic level, this marks a new birth in the contemplative's interaction with a divine wisdom. The experience of illumination is marked by an inpouring of grace and divine light that more closely aligns with the will of God. This may be thought of as the cataphatic phase of mystical development. In the course of mystical theology, this experience was often represented by the symbolism of a beam of light piercing the veil (cloud) that separates ordinary human consciousness from God's eternal splendour. This image in particular is one that appears in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the *Cloud of Unknowing*.

After pseudo-Dionysius, Medieval authors received the idea of cognitive illumination from St Augustine, who makes reference to the mind receiving divine light from God throughout his *Confessions*.[96] With the advent of Thomism, the popularity of the concept declined in late medieval scholastic theology.[97] However, it thrived in mystical literature, where personal accounts of illumination abound in late medieval and early-modern texts. One of the more noteworthy accounts of the illuminative experience comes in a tale provided by the early-modern Lutheran mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1624).[98] A shoemaker by trade, one day while in his workshop, Boehme focused his vision upon a beam of light caught in a pewter dish. As he admired the beam, the heavens were opened before him and his consciousness perceived the innermost workings of God and the cosmos as he was 'introduced into the innermost ground or center of the recondite or hidden nature'.[99] While the illuminative stage of the mystical journey does indeed represent a new visionary form of awareness and a new higher perception of reality, it is not the final stage of the process.

3. Union. The unitive stage of mystical development is the aforementioned spiritual marriage, or *unio mystica*. It represents a confluence in love and will between the contemplative and Christ. It is ineffable, and unlike the temporary moments of ecstasy

---

[96] On Augustine and illumination see Rudolph Allers, 'St. Augustine's Doctrine on Illumination', *Franciscan Studies* 12 (1952): 27–46.
[97] On the medieval reception of Augustine's theory of illumination and its decline see Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
[98] On Boehme, his life, and writings, see Ariel Hessayon, ed., *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, Routledge Studies in Religion 31 (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).
[99] Francis Okely, *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings, of Jacob Behmen* (T. Dicey, 1780), 7–8.

experienced in the stage of illumination, its bond is permanent. It is the highest union with eternal wisdom possible in this life and represents a prelude to the full perfection experienced in heaven. The contemplative may toil for years, oscillating between many purgations and illuminations before coming into this complete union with God.[100] The dark night of the soul, for instance, is the last and most intense purgation experienced in the illuminative stage that burns out any remaining impurities separating the soul from the divine.

In the medieval period, the purgative struggle of mystical theology was perhaps best encapsulated in the enormously influential sermons and commentaries St Bernard of Clairvaux wrote on the Song of Songs.[101] St Bernard was a figure renown in both the secular and ecclesiastical realms. Under his leadership as abbot at the abbey of Clairvaux, the Cistercian order expanded across Christendom, and his political activism helped settle a disputed papal election and inspire the second crusade. His fame and reputation within and outside his order accorded an authoritative status to his theological literature. His commentaries on the *Canticle* were particularly important, as they laid the methodological groundwork for the ideas of purgation and ascent in mystical theology for subsequent medieval thinkers and held influence into the early-modern period.[102]

St Bernard began writing his sermons and commentaries on the Song of Songs in 1135, and work continued until his death in 1153. By the time of his death, he had completed eighty-six sermons but had reached only as far as chapter 3 in the *Canticle* and it was left to later Cistercian writers to complete the sequence.[103] Preaching in a monastic context, he suggested that union with Christ moves through a series of purgative 'kisses' that begin at Christ's feet and end with a kiss upon his mouth. The upward movement from the 'filthy'

---

[100] The oscillation between corruption and fleeting glimpses of perfection is a recurring image in alchemical literature. In the stage of circulation, the material is purified through a continuous process of sublimation and distillation. Scholars have noted parallels between the alchemical stages of purification (*nigredo, albedo, rubedo)* and the stages of purgation, illumination, and union in mystical theology. The semi-perfect white stone, for instance, corresponds with the illuminative stage in that it represents a higher mode of being, but is yet to embody the full perfection of the unitive life represented in the perfected red stone. See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 167–177. For a more recent survey based on the same line of reasoning see Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 13.
[101] On the topic see Duncan Robertson, 'The Experience of Reading: Bernard of Clairvaux "Sermons on the Song of Songs", I', *Religion & Literature*, 19 (1987): 1–20.
[102] Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes From the Tradition*, 54.
[103] Robertson, 'The Experience of Reading: Bernard of Clairvaux "Sermons on the Song of Songs", I', 3.

kiss of the feet to the unitive kiss of the mouth demonstrates the purgative ascent of the contemplative journey:

> Though you have made a beginning by kissing the feet, you may not presume to rise at once by impulse to the kiss of the mouth [. . .] It is a long and formidable leap from the foot to the mouth, a manner of approach that is not commendable. Consider for a moment: still tarnished as you are with the dust of sin, would you dare touch those sacred lips? Yesterday you were lifted up from the mud, today you wish to encounter the glory of his face? No, his hand must be your guide to that end. First it must cleanse your stains, then it must raise you up.[104]

Here, the kiss of the feet signifies the initial turning away from sin, whereas the kiss of the hand is supportive, and represents the reception of grace as a means to reject sin itself. The kiss of the mouth indicates the highest level of affection and union attainable between Christ and the soul. St Bernard takes special care to emphasise the culmination of this union in sermon four, when he accentuates the particular features of the mouth's kiss. He argues that specific references to the mouth in the *Canticle* 1:1 symbolise a climax of affective love that cannot be surpassed:

> And I should be surprised if you did not see that she who said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," wished to make a distinction between the kiss of the mouth and another or several other kisses. It might have been enough for her to have said simply: "let him kiss me." Why then should she distinctly and pointedly add: "with the kiss of his mouth," a usage that is certainly not customary? Is it not that she wished to indicate that this kiss at the summit of love's intimacy is not the sole one? [. . .] We have here three stages of the soul's growth in love, three stages of its advance toward perfection that are sufficiently known and intelligible to those who have experienced them. There is first the forgiveness of sins, then the grace that follows on good deeds, and finally that contemplative gift by which a kind and beneficent Lord who shows himself to the soul with as much clarity as the bodily frailty can endure.[105]

---

[104] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh, vol. 2, Cistercian Fathers Series 4 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 18–19; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum*, ed. J. Leclercq, C.H. Talbot, and H.M. Rochais, vol. 1 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), 15: 'Sumpto itaque ad pedes primo osculo, nec sic quidem praesumes statim ad osculum oris assurgere [. . .] Longus saltus et arduus est de pede ad os, sed nec accessus conveniens. Quid enim? Recenti adhuc respersus pulvere, ora sacra continges? Heri de luto tractus, hodie vultui gloriae praesentaris? Per manum tibi transitus sit. Illa prius te tergat, illa te erigat.'

[105] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, 21–22; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones Super Cantica*, 18–19: 'Mirum vero si non et vos advertitis oportere revera esse aliud, sive alia oscula, a quibus illud oris distinguere voluit ille qui dixit: *Osculetur me osculo oris sui*. Cur enim, cum sufficere poterat dixisse simpliciter: *Osculetur me*, praeter morem tamen usumque loquendi, distincte et signanter adiecit: *Osculo oris sui*, nisi ut ostenderet ipsum quod petebat osculum summum esse non solum? [. . .] Sunt ergo hi tres animarum affectus sive profectus expertis dumtaxat satis noti et manifesti, cum aut de actis malis indulgentiam, aut de bonis agendis gratiam, aut ipsius etiam indultoris et benefactoris sui praesentiam, eo quidem modo quo in corpore fragili possible est, obtinent intueri'.

St Bernard's three stages of ascent correspond to the *triplici via*. The forgiveness of sins parallels to purgation, the reception of grace represents illumination, and the kiss signifies the fulfilment of the unitive life. Bernard interprets the kiss of the mouth as the 'summit' of affective love, and typifies it with language that is characteristic of mystical union. It is the 'contemplative gift', the highest apogee of grace attainable in this life where the mortal body assimilates as much of God's essence as it can in its fallen form.[106]

2.5 *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Middle English Mystics

The purgative journey of mystical theology, and more specifically, the depiction of the 'cloud' derived from the *Mystical Theology*, were themes that left a lasting impression on medieval contemplative literature. In the late middle ages, the most notable text to utilise Dionysian imagery was the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Its anonymous author is associated with a group of mystics whose members span nearly a century, c. 1330–c. 1440 and whose works include important expositions of speculative theology and contemplative prayer.

The Middle English mystics are identified traditionally as the hermit and ecstatic author Richard Rolle (c. 1290/1300–c. 1349); Julian of Norwich (c. 1342/43–c. 1416) author of the famous *Revelations of Divine Love*, a text derived from a series of visions derived from a near-death experience in 1373; Walter Hilton (d. 1396), whose *Scale of Perfection* was one of the most popular devotional texts of late medieval England, Margery Kempe, known for her autobiographical hagiography the *Book of Margery Kempe,* and finally, the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.[107]

The English mystic best-known to posterity is Julian of Norwich. Julian is an important figure in both English literature and theology as the first author (and the first woman) to write extensive speculative theology in English. In May of 1373, at the age of thirty, Julian fell seriously ill and nearly died. In this state between life and death, she experienced a

---

[106] The final union between sulphur/mercury and alchemist/wisdom in the *Aurora* is also expressed through the symbolism of a kiss. See chapter five, subsection 5.4, page 187, footnote 79.

[107] For an introduction to the English mystics see Nicholas Watson, 'The Middle English Mystics', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace, The New Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 539–65. For the purposes of this thesis, only three of the these authors are considered. Hilton, for his usage of apophatic, purgatorial and illuminative metaphors in the *Scale of Perfection*. The works of the *Cloud* author, for his musings on Dionysian mystical theology, and Richard Rolle's ecstatic visions of mystical union. These authors were selected because they most accord with the themes and expressions of union in the *Aurora*.

series of visions or ‘shewyings’ that formed the basis of her treatise *Revelations of Divine Love*. The text is comprised of an original *Short Text*, and a longer addendum called the *Long Text*. The shorter exists in one document, and the longer in four post-reformation manuscripts.[108]

While little is known of Julian’s life, it is known that she was enclosed as an anchoress sometime before 1394, and that she was well respected as a spiritual counsellor in her later years. Her theology might be described as boundlessly optimistic. She emphasises God’s love and mercy and is well known for portraying Christ as a mother, accentuating the female attributes of the Godhead. To Julian, Christ is a mother who lovingly suffers for his flock and feeds it with the spiritual milk of his blood.[109]

Perhaps the next best-known English mystic to modern audiences is the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. The exact date of the *Cloud’s* composition is uncertain. The oldest manuscript is dated to the early fifteenth century, however, it is clear that the original text was much older. Contemporary scholarship dates the text between 1362 and 1390. Linguistic analysis of the text suggests that the language used locates it to the north-east midlands at the end of the fourteenth century, and that its author knew the works of Richard Rolle. Textual evidence suggests that the *Cloud* was itself known to Walter Hilton.[110]

The *Cloud’s* author, who was possibly a Carthusian, has hitherto only been identified through a small corpus of texts that share a common rhetorical style and address issues related to prayer and the solitude of contemplative life.[111] These texts make up what is

---

[108] For bibliographic information and data on the manuscripts see the introduction in Julian, *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love: The Short Text and the Long Text*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[109] On Julian’s theology see Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

[110] It has been recognised that this places the text within the same general vicinity as Walter Hilton. See B. A. Windeatt, ed., *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.

[111] On the possibility of the author being a Carthusian priest see COU, 3–9. Walter Hilton was thought to be a candidate for the authorship of the *Cloud* until Phyllis Hodgson’s 1955 article lead many scholars to drop this line of inquiry. See Phyllis Hodgson, ‘Walter Hilton and “The Cloud of Unknowing”: A Problem of Authorship Reconsidered’, *The Modern Language Review*, 50 (1955): 395–406. Hogdson argues that despite similarities in language and style correspondences in language and themes between the *Scale* and *Cloud* are cursory and not as developed as they first appear. The debate however is not settled, and some scholars still believe Hilton is a viable candidate. See Wolfgang Riehle, ‘The Problem of Walter Hilton’s Possible

known as the *Cloud* corpus and include two letters, translations (of sermons and mystical theology), and a commentary on the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Of the letters, *The Epistle of Prayer* and *The Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings* are guides to prayer and the contemplation that appear to be addressed to the same individual.[112] These are accompanied by English translations of Richard of St Victor's *Benjamin Minor*, as well as a translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* entitled *Deonise Hid Divinite*. Another text, known as *Of Discerning Spirits* is a summary of two sermons given by St Bernard of Clairvaux. [113] Finally, a text known as the *Book of Privy Counselling* is a commentary and elaboration on the *Cloud of Unknowing*. While *Benjamin Minor* and *Of Discerning Spirits* are commonly ascribed to him, there is some doubt that the attributions are credible.[114]

Aside from its usage of apophatic imagery, the *Cloud* (in conjunction with the works of the other English mystics) was the first text to treat the idea of *unio mystica* in an English context. Before the fourteenth century, English piety largely rejected Bernardine and Victorine notions that the soul can be united with Christ through love in this life.[115] In its appeals to Dionysian theology, the *Cloud* is heavily indebted to Thomas Gallus in the idea that the soul is united in the cloud through love. Likewise, the way its apophatic imagery is framed corresponds with Gallus's notion that the experience of the mystic in the cloud is a cessation of sensory phenomena.[116] To the *Cloud* author, the self is dissolved into the darkness of the cloud through the annihilation of the intellect:

> When I say "darkness," I mean a privation of knowing, just as whatever you do not know or have forgotten is dark to you, because you do not see it with your spiritual eyes. For this reason, that which is between you and your God is termed, not a cloud of the air, but a cloud of unknowing.[117]

Authorship of 'The Cloud of Unknowing" and its Related Tracts', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 78 (1977): 31–45.

[112] COU, 7.

[113] On the *Cloud Corpus* and its influences see David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), 67.

[114] Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350–1550)*, vol. 5, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012), 398.

[115] Watson, op. cit., 546.

[116] For a discussion on the similarities of Gallus with the *Cloud* author see Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Western Christian Mysticism*, 186–194. Gallus's understanding of the cloud will be elucidated in the next chapter.

[117] COU (IV), 128; COUT, 35: 'For when I sey derkness, I mene a lackyng of knowing; as alle that thing that thou knowest not, or ells that thou hast forgetyn, it is derk to thee, for thou seest it not with thi goostly ighe.

This is the classic way of interpreting ‘darkness’ in mystical theology, where the cloud immobilises both sensory experience and the intellect. An analysis of the *Cloud* author’s influences renders this interpretation unsurprising, as his vernacular translation of the *Mystical Theology*, the *Deonise Hid Divinite* (the first of its kind in the vernacular), shows evidence of interpolation from Thomas Gallus and Hugh of Balma, as well as references to ‘affection’ eisegetically inserted into the text.[118] The cloud author’s contemporary, Walter Hilton, interprets ‘darkness’ slightly differently. In his magnum opus, the *Scale of Perfection*, Hilton attributes purgatorial qualities to what he identifies as a ‘night’ of luminous darkness. Hilton’s apophatic imagery, and its association of darkness with pain and ablution is relevant, because this is how darkness is articulated in the *Aurora*.

Among the four major figures of the late medieval English mystical tradition, Walter Hilton was the most methodical in his treatment of the contemplative life. While the exact date and place of his birth remains unknown, he was probably born between 1340 and 1345 somewhere in the northeast midlands of England. Like the *Cloud* author, Hilton wrote in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, though the cloud author’s works may predate his slightly.[119] Early in his life, Hilton pursued the study of canon law, possibly at Cambridge. This course of study lasted until the early 1380s, where he elected to become a hermit, probably under the inspiration of Richard Rolle.[120] This life he abandoned after a few years and returned to university where he most likely studied theology.[121]

Hilton’s most significant work was the *Scale of Perfection*, which is a systematic guidebook to spiritual life. The text was probably written between 1386 and 1385 when he was serving as an Augustinian canon at the priory of Thurgarton near Southwell Nottinghamshire, where he lived, worked, and wrote as a spiritual advisor.[122] The text was enormously popular among the English laity, a fact attested to by its preservation in over

---

And for this skile it is not clepid a cloude of the eire, bot a cloude of unknowing, that is bitwix thee and thi God.’

[118] McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism,* 398.

[119] Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, 173.

[120] See H.L. Gardner, “Walter Hilton and the Mystical Tradition in England” in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, ed. Helen Darbishire, vol. 22 (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1937).

[121] David G Kennedy, *Incarnational Elements in Hilton’s Spirituality.* (Universität Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1982), 34.

[122] Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, 180.

45 manuscripts. No other English devotional text enjoyed such a sterling reputation or wider influence than the *Scale* in the late middle ages and early-modern period. It was also the first English mystical text published, in 1494.

Among the English mystics, Hilton was the most theologically rigorous from a scholastic perspective, and his style is unwaveringly orthodox. His sources were primarily biblical, derived principally from Paul's epistles and the Psalms. He was also a devoted Augustinian, and in the *Scale*, he cites the Saint by name.[123] Aside from these sources, he knew works of the Victorine authors Hugh and Richard, as well as Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. More than any other member of the late medieval English mystics, Hilton approaches the subject of contemplation from a foundation of scholastic theology.

The *Scale of Perfection* is a text principally concerned with the purgation of the soul so that it might remove the 'Image of sin' instilled within it during the fall of Adam. Hilton describes this process as a work of both reformation and faith, where the 'dark' image of sin in the soul's fallen state is replaced with the 'light' of Christ. The imagery deployed is that of a ladder, reaching up from the mundane sin of common human nature to the perfection and illumination of a life lived in the light of Christ. Hilton makes the case for the soul in this life as illumined by the false light of the world, but that through a process of prayer and spiritual purgation, it may come in to relationship with the true light of God. This purgative work is demarcated by contemplation. To Hilton, contemplation is the reformation of the soul to recapture, partially (and what can be recovered in this life), the dignity and grace of the soul that was lost in the fall of Adam. It is the purgation of the soul that steers its focus to the image of the Trinity and away from the false light of the image of sin, which is the default condition of humanity. In Book One, chapter forty-five of the *Scale of Perfection* Hilton writes:

> Although we could never acquire it here [in this life] in its fullness, yet we must desire while living here to recover a figure and likeness of that dignity, so that by grace our soul

[123]See J.P.H. Clark, 'Augustine, Anselm, and Walter Hilton', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. M. Glasscoe, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (University of Exeter, 1982), 102–126.

> might be reformed – as it were in a shadow – to the image of the Trinity, which we had by nature and afterward shall have fully in glory. For that is the life which is truly contemplative to begin here, in that feeling of love and spiritual knowledge of God, by opening of the spiritual eye; and it shall never be lost or taken away: but the same shall be fulfilled in another way in the bliss of heaven.[124]

What Hilton articulates here is the definitive essence of mystical theology. The movement towards perfection, though never fully realised in mortal life, is the goal of contemplation. The final, and complete union, comes in the bliss of heaven. Among the English mystics, the figure who wrote the most on the role of bliss, affect and ecstasy in the contemplative life was the Yorkshire-born hermit Richard Rolle.

Rolle was born near Thornton in Pickering North Yorkshire in the year 1300, and educated at Oxford under the patronage of Thomas de Neville, an archdeacon of Durham who held the office in the 1340s.[125] At Oxford, Rolle took an interest in the study of scripture, at times neglecting his secular scholarship. After three to four years spent in study at Oxford, Rolle abruptly left the university, where he returned to Yorkshire and adopted the life of a hermit. The details of Rolle's life in his own writings are scant. Therefore, the primary source of information on his career comes in a document known as the *Officium et Miracula*, a text created after his death with the hope that the stories found therein would qualify him for canonisation.[126] Aside from the *Officium et Miracula*, it has been suggested

---

[124] For the sake of clarity, the modern translation of the *Scale of Perfection* conducted by John P.H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward will be used in this thesis with the middle English referenced in the footnotes. See Walter Hilton, John P. H. Clark, and Rosemary Dorward, *The Scale of Perfection*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991). This book will henceforth be abbreviated as *SP*. The Middle English translation is the TEAMS middle English translation of Thomas H. Bestul abbreviated as *SPT* with the book and chapter heading of the *Scale* appearing subsequently in parenthesis. So the citation of this passage is from the *Scale of Perfection,* Book One, Chapter 45 abbreviated as *SP, 117; SPT* (1.45), 82: 'And though we myghten nevere geete it here fulli, yit we schulde desire that we schulde desire that we myght recovere here lyvand a figure and a likenesse of that dignité, that oure soule myght be reformed, as it were in a schadewe, bi grace to the ymage of the Trinité, whiche we hadden bi kynde and aftir schullen have fulli in blisse. For that is the lif that is veri contemplatif, unto bigynne here in that felynge of love and goosteli knowynge of God bi openyng of the goostli iye, whiche schal nevere be loste ne bi taken awey, but the same schal be fulfilled othirwise in the blisse of hevene.' The same method of abbreviation will be followed with other texts frequently cited in this thesis, including the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*. Consult the abbreviations page for bibliographic information on these texts.

[125] See Arnould, 'On Richard Rolle's Patrons: A New Reading', *Medium Ævum*, 6 (1937): 122.

[126] The *Officum* was edited in the early twentieth century. See R.M. Woolley, *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle of Hampole, Ed* (London: SPCK, 1919).

that Rolle underwent theological training at Paris, though this does not seem at all likely, or even possible.[127]

Rolle was the most eremitical of the English mystics tied to the *Cloud* corpus, and in many respects stands apart from Hilton and the *Cloud* author in his eschewing of a mixed life (both in the world and contemplative) in favour of single-minded contemplation. He wrote prolifically in both Latin and English, and penned commentaries on the Song of Songs, the book of Job, and the Psalms.[128] His most popular texts, however, were discourses written on his own personal mystical experiences. The chief among these is the *Incendium Amoris* (*The Fire of Love*), a treatise outlining Rolle's experiences with physical and auditory sensations encountered in the act of contemplation.[129]

Rolle's works were extremely popular, in both England and on the continent. His popularity on the continent is attested to by the fact that his vernacular treatises were translated into Latin. Furthermore, his works survive in over five hundred manuscripts, making him the most popular mystic of the late middle ages, next to Henry Suso. While Rolle's readership in the middle ages was vast, his status as a mystic has been criticised. In the middle of the twentieth century, Rolle was criticised for his lack of spiritual development in the act of spiritual introspection. Most notably, a prominent historian of the English mystics, David Knowles, critiqued Rolle as a 'beginner' in the life of contemplation. Knowles attributed Rolle's spiritual immaturity to his reliance on bodily sensations (smells, visions, auditory experiences) as an insufficient marker of inward grace. These were the activities of the subconscious mind, or an 'unusually vivid and lasting sensible devotion', and were in actuality, only indicators of the earliest stages of

---

[127] Rolle is mentioned in four manuscripts outlining the history of Sorbornne. In one manuscript, MS.1228 of the Paris Biblothèque de l'Arsenal, he is mentioned a total of seven times. Scholars are split on the authenticity of these attributions with some claiming that they are forgeries. For a summary of the debate see Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 171 n. 29, n. 30, and n. 31.

[128] Oliver Davies, *God within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006), 162.

[129] For information on Rolle's life and interpretations of his mysticism see Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Claire Elizabeth McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle* (Boydell & Brewer, 2004); Denis Renevey, *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and the Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2001) and Carmel Bendon Davis, *Mysticism and Space: Space and spatiality in the Works of Richard Rolle, the Cloud of Unknowing Author, and Julian of Norwich* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

spiritual life.[130] Knowles contrasted this with the more measured approach of the *Cloud* author and Walter Hilton, who were more cautious in their scepticism of bodily sensations.

Similarly, this association of God's presence with bodily sensations was criticised by Rolle's successors, Hilton and the *Cloud* author. For example, in the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Rolle is never explicitly critiqued, but the author warns against reliance on bodily sensations in the act of contemplation. The author reasons that smells, sounds and sensations alone have the capacity to lead the immature contemplative astray. In chapter forty-five of the *Cloud*, he warns that the heart of a young adept may be 'enkindled with an unnatural fervour' which is thought to be a 'fire of love' derived from the holy spirit, but is in actuality an illusion sent from the devil.[131] He concludes this caveat with cautionary advice, warning that: '[T]he devil hath his contemplatyves, as God has His.'[132]

[130] For Knowle's critique, see Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, 54–55.
[131] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997): 'theire brestes outher enflaumid with an unkyndely hete of compleccion in theire bodiuly brestis in the tyme of this feinid beastly and not goostly worchyng.'
[132] *Idem*, 73.

Chapter 3: The Cloud, Illumination, and Union in the Aurora Chapter VI

One of the most prominent images in mystical theology is that of the ‘cloud of unknowing’. This cloud of mystical darkness is the apophatic obscurity contemplatives are submerged in at the heights of contemplation. The concept is drawn from Pseudo-Dionysius’s text, the *Mystical Theology*. In the *Aurora*, a similar phenomenon occurs in chapter VI, where Pseudo-Aquinas describes the descent of a cloud upon an anonymous speaker. The parable is called ‘Of the Black Earth Wherein the Seven Planets Took Root.’ In this text, Pseudo-Aquinas depicts a vision in which the speaker’s soul is overcome by a cloud. After undergoing a period of purgation, the speaker is united with the object of his love, ‘*Sapientia*’, a feminine manifestation of God’s wisdom in the form of the philosopher’s stone. The cloud is subsequently dispersed by heavenly forces that act upon it from above. This chapter argues that these events are patterned on the cloud found in the mystical discourse of the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition of mystical theology.[1]

In what follows a series of themes and images common to both alchemy and mystical theology will be explored. These include the motifs of death and resurrection, the mortification of sin and the cleansing of impurity, the interactions of darkness and illumination, and the various forms of mystical union articulated in late medieval mystical theology. All of these themes appear in the *Aurora* chapter VI, allowing the argument to be made that the chapter acts as a microcosm of the purgative journey espoused in mystical theology.

3.1 The Cloud: Mortification, Purgation and Union in the *Aurora* Chapter VI

Lynn Thorndike described the creation of the philosopher’s stone in the simplest of terms: ‘In the process of obtaining it decay must come first, then purification.’[2] For all the myriad of chemical operations and complex symbolism that informs the great work of alchemy, this simple definition captures the heart of the practice. In alchemical theory, the mortification of a metallic substance frees a metal’s ‘spirit’ from its tainted confines in a base metal. The goal of putrefaction is to ‘kill’ the metallic body so that this spirit, trapped

[1] The *Aurora* is not so much describing a cessation of mental activity as is the case with a more traditional reading of negative theology in the Dionysian tradition. Rather, it relays an experience of self-dissolution and dereliction akin to the purgatorial ‘dark nights’ of St John of the Cross.
[2] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Vol. 2: During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (New York London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970, orig. publ. 1923), 217.

in the prison of matter, may be freed and worked upon by the alchemist. This image of decay, darkness, and death corresponds with the stage of nigredo.

No purification, or transmutation, can occur without first suffering the darkness of nigredo, and it is precisely from this darkness that the bourgeoning philosopher's stone is purged of impurities. In the *Aurora*, the beginning of this putrefaction is described in chapter VI with the descent of a frightful cloud upon the earth. The author writes: 'Beholding from afar off I saw a great cloud looming black over the whole earth'.[3] The speaker in this passage is '*Sapientia*', the wisdom of God trapped in matter and the spirit that is freed from the base metal in the act of mortification. This is synonymous with the spirit of '*Mercurius*' identified in the previous chapter. The idea that there is a divine principle, or universal spirit of life hidden in the darkness of a cloud is Biblical in origin, where the concept appears in the book of Exodus. In 19:16–18, the Lord appears to the Israelites as divinity wrapped in the darkness of a cloud:

> And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared: and behold thunders began to be heard, and lightning to flash, and a very thick cloud to cover the mount, and the noise of the trumpet sounded exceeding loud, and the people that was in the camp, feared. And when Moses had brought them forth to meet God from the place of the camp, they stood at the bottom of the mount. And all mount Sinai was on a smoke: because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace: and all the mount was terrible.[4]

The *Aurora*'s narrator in chapter VI who 'beholds the cloud from afar off' repurposes both biblical language and its liturgical invocation for alchemical purposes. The passage is a paraphrase of the *Aspiciebam*, a responsory prayer sung during the office of matins in medieval liturgies. In medieval breviaries, the chant was recited on the first Sunday of Advent in the darkness of early morning hours: 'Looking from afar, behold, I see the power of God coming and a cloud covering the whole earth.'[5] There are multiple layers of allegory at work in the *Aurora's* recapitulation of this passage. The suggestion is that the

---

[3] *AC*, 56-57: 'Aspiciens a longe vidi nebulam magnam totam terram denigrantem'.
[4] Exodus 19:16-18 (DRBO): 'Jamque advenerat tertius dies, et mane inclaruerat: et ecce coeperunt audiri tonitrua, ac micare fulgura, et nubes densissima operire montem, clangorque buccinae vehementius perstrepebat: et timuit populus qui erat in castris. Cumque eduxisset eos Moyses in occursum Dei de loco castrorum, steterunt ad radices montis. Totus autem mons Sinai fumabat, eo quod descendisset Dominus super eum in igne: et ascenderet fumus ex eo quasi de fornace, eratque omnis mons terribilis'.
[5] As cited in British Library Add. 'Ms. 52359' (c. 1300–1319), f.4r: 'Aspiciens a longe ecce video dei potentiam veniente et nebulam totam terram tegentem.'

power of God is imminent, not just in the cloud, but in the very symbolism of the coming morning (*aurora consurgens*).[6] The illumination of Christ's nativity is close in the season of Advent, as is the light of the morning during the hymnal of matins.

Pseudo-Aquinas claims that the cloud 'looms black' over the whole earth, a reference to the Israelites in Exodus 20:21 who observe the presence of God on Sinai from afar while Moses enters the cloud: 'And the people stood afar off. But Moses went to the dark cloud wherein God was.'[7] The notion that the divine presence is concealed within the cloud on Mount Sinai is an important concept in mystical theology. In the *Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius states that the cloud incomprehensibly masks God's presence. After undergoing a series of purificatory rituals, he ascends the mountain and enters the cloud where he is united with divinity:

> Yet it is not for nothing that the Bl. Moses is commanded first to be purified himself and then to be separated from those who are not pure. And after the whole purification he hears the many-voiced trumpets; he sees the many lights with the flash, emitting pure and abundantly-streaming rays. Afterwards he is segregated from the crowd and reaches the summit of the divine ascents with the chosen priests [. . .] And then [Moses] is set free from what is seen and sees, and enters into the darkness of ignorance. This darkness truly is mystical.[8]

The themes of darkness and illumination presented here portray the Pseudo-Dionysian model of mystical union. In Pseudo-Dionysian thought, the mind is said to wait in a cloud, or 'fog' of darkness (*caligo*). This darkness signifies a cessation of being, where the idea of the 'self' dissolves in apophatic darkness. Juxtaposed to the image of the cloud is the 'divine ray' (*divinus radius*), a proliferation of light that represents enlightenment. These two terms, one cataphatic and one apophatic, work together to unite Moses with divine wisdom.[9]

---

[6] In an alchemical sense, the power of God refers to the mercurial spirit, released in the act of sublimation and contained within the cloud.
[7] Exodus 20:21 (DRBO): 'Stetique populus de longe. Moyses autem accessit ad calignem in qua erat Deus.'
[8] MTG, 28–29: 'Etenim non simpliciter divinus Moyses mundari ipse primum precipitur et rursus a non talibus segregari, et post omnem mundationem audit multarum vocum buccinas, et videt lumina multa cum fulgore emittentia mundos et multum effusos radios. Postea multis segregator, et cum electis sacredotibus ad summitatem divinarum ascensionum pertingit [. . .] Tunc et ab ipsis absolvitur visis et videntibus, et ad calignem ignorantie intrat, que caligo vere est mystica.'
[9] This is the most basic principle of union with God first espoused in the *Mystical* Theology, and it is a common image used throughout the tradition. See Steven P. Marrone, *The Light of Thy Countenance: Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, v. 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 107–108.

In the development of both Christian and Jewish theology, the motif of the cloud figured prominently as a symbol that denoted apophasis. In both traditions, it came to represent both the manifestation of and the 'veiling' of God's presence.[10] The cloud, which has been variously interpreted as a 'mist', 'fog', 'smoke', or 'thick darkness', is a concept that was originally derived from ancient Israel. The Hebrews understood it as a covering, or a protective barrier that enclosed the incomprehensible light of God's body, which was referred to in Hebrew as the *Kabod*, or 'glory' (כבד).[11] This is the same cloud that hovers over the Tabernacle of the Covenant in Exodus 40.[12] It was also spoken of as the dwelling place of the divine. In the book of 2 Chronicles, King Solomon identifies it as the darkness where God lives: 'Then Solomon said: The Lord promised that he would dwell in a cloud.'[13]

This covering or 'dwelling place' was intended to protect the Hebrew people by preventing them from gazing upon God's body. The logic was that in its fully unveiled 'glory', God's presence would vaporise a human being. In the Bible, the destructive power of this presence is quite prominently referenced in Exodus 33, where Moses pleads with God to see his full majesty at the Tabernacle of the Covenant. He enters into the Tabernacle where God's essence is concealed within the cloud, and he asks to see the fully unveiled majesty. God responds to the request by telling Moses that looking upon his face would destroy him: 'And again he said: Thou canst not see my face: for man shall not see me and live.'[14]

Two attributes can be identified especially in the biblical motif of the cloud and the events that surround its manifestation. First is the formation of the cloud itself, which is portrayed as a frightful event of great power. Second, Moses enters into the cloud, an encounter with divinity that involves a kind of spiritual self-dissolution. God's presence, concealed within, is a power so dreadful that the human form cannot encounter it and live. The self is annihilated in the presence of the divine. However, it is precisely this annihilation that unites the soul with God. The ego, and its mental constructs are broken down and rendered ineffable, and it is this ineffability that unites the self with an indescribable deity.

---

[10] For a history of the cloud motif and its usage in mystical theology see Sarah Coakley, 'On Clouds and Veils: Divine Presence and 'Feminine" Secrets in Revelation and Nature' in *Knowing the Unknowable: Science and Religions on God and the Universe*, ed. John Bowker (London: Tauris, 2009), 123–45.

[11] On the cloud and God's body in ancient Israel see Benjamin D Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68.

[12] Exodus 40: 32 (DRBO): 'operuit nubes tabernaculum testimonii, et gloria Domini implevit illud.'

[13] 2 Paralipomenon 6:1 (DRBO): 'Tunc Salomon ait : Dominus pollicitus est ut habitaret in caligine.'

[14] Exodus 33: 20 (DRBO): 'Et iterum: Ecce, inquit, est locus apud me, et stabis supra petram.'

An early patristic text to engage with this symbolism was Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory also comments on the Sinai narrative, and the unitive experience Moses undergoes within the cloud.[15] In book one of the text, Gregory captures both the severity of the event's purificatory rituals, and the frightful power of the cloud's descent:

> Here Moses guided them in a most secret initiation. The divine power itself by marvels beyond description initiated all the people and their leader himself in the following manner. The people were ordered beforehand to keep themselves from defilements of all kinds which pertain to both soul and body and to purify themselves by certain lustrations. They were to keep themselves pure from intercourse for a stated number of days so that pure of passion, they might approach the mountain to be initiated, cleansed of every emotion and bodily concern. (The name of the mountain was Sinai.) Persons alone were allowed at that time to approach the mountain, and of them men alone, and of them, in turn, those purified from every pollution. Every safeguard and precaution was taken against the approach of any animals to the mountain. If somehow it did happen that any animal at all showed itself at the mountain, it was stoned by the people.[16]

After they undertake purification rites, the cloud descends upon the mountain:

> Then the clear light of the atmosphere was darkened so that the mountain became invisible, wrapped in a dark cloud. A fire shining out of the darkness presented a fearful sight to those who saw it. It hovered all around the sides of the mountain so that everything which one

---

[15] Both Gregory and Dionysius frame Moses's ascent into the cloud as a communion with God and use the image as an allegory for the soul's association with him. However, they disagree on what happens to the soul once it is submerged in darkness. Pseudo-Dionysius claims that after undergoing purification, Moses is united with God in the cloud. Gregory also believes Moses is purified upon entering the cloud, in his vision of the spiritual life, the soul is not united with God, but rather, on a continual ascent into his mysteries. There is no final ecstatic union, but a constant continuous journey into darkness. Prior to Pseudo-Dionysius, apophatic theology was largely 'epektetic', or as Paul Rorem calls it 'progressive apophatic.' Rooted in *the Life of Moses*, this manifestation of negative theology describes an endless ascent into the heart of God. The adherent moves ceaselessly into the darkness of unknowing through an endless series of negations. There is no final moment of ecstatic union, only a deeper unfolding of the mystery in darkness. The ascent is a perpetual process of growth between the mystic's soul and the object it desires. With the theology of Dionysius, apophatic theology finds a new expression in the form of 'complete apophaticism'. In this model, negation culminates in an ultimate apex See Paul Rorem, 'Negative Theologies and the Cross', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 101 (2008): 451–64.

[16] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 42; Jean Danielou, *La Vie De Moïse* (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 1955), par. 42, 18–19: ''Εν τούτφ δέ και τίνος αύτοϊς άπορρητοτέραζ μησεωζ ό Μωθσης καθηγείτο αύτίς τής θείκ δυνάμεως διά των ύτέρ λόγον θαυμάτων τόν τε λαὸν πάντα και αύτὸν τὸν καθηγεμόνα μυσταγωγούσης.'Η δέ μυσταγωγία τούτον έπετελείτο τὸν τρόπον. Προείρητο τφ λαφ τε άλλων μολυσμάτων έκτὸς είναι πάντων, όσα περί τε σώμα καί ψυχήν καθοράται, καί περιρραντηρίου τισιν αφαγνισασθαι, καί αύτοϋ δέ τοϋ γάμου έν ρητω τινι ήμερων αριθμέ καθαρεΰσαι, ώς πασής έμπαθοϋς τε καί σωματικής διαθέσεως έκπλυθέντα καθαρόν πάθους προσβήναι τω άρει μυηθησόμε νον Σινά δέ ήν τδ του ορούς όνομα ' δ μόνοις άνείθη κατά τον καιρόν έκεΐνον τοϊς λογικοϊς εις έπίβασιν καί τούτων τοϊς άνδράσι μόνοις καί τούτων πάλιν τοϊς παντός άφαγνισθεϊσι μιάσματος ' φυλακή δέ πάσα ήν καί προμήθεια του μηδέν των αλόγων έπιβατευσαι του ορούς, εί δέ που καί γένοιτο, καταλευσθήναι παρά του λαού παν δτιπερ ήν της άλογου φύσεως κατά τό όρος φαινόμενου.'

> could see smouldered with the smoke from the surrounding fire. Moses led the people to the slope, not without fear himself at the sight. His whole being so trembled with fright that his faintness of soul was not concealed from the Israelites, but he was terrified, as they were, at what he saw and his body shook violently.[17]

Like Exodus 19, the *Mystical Theology*, and the account of the cloud presented here, the cloud that descends upon the earth in chapter VI is a frightful manifestation of divine power. Pseudo-Aquinas draws upon the biblical tropes of Exodus to develop a highly allegorical reading of the alchemical nigredo. Consider, again, the vision of chapter VI in a more complete context:

> Beholding from afar off I saw a great cloud looming black over the whole earth, which had absorbed the earth and covered my soul, [because] the waters had come in even unto her, wherefore they were putrefied and corrupted before the face of the lower hell and the shadow of death, for a tempest hath overwhelmed me.[18]

The nigredo is caused by the chemical operations of calcination and sublimation. Calcination is the initial destruction of a base metal through the addition of acids and extreme heat, whereas sublimation is a chemical reaction that immediately transforms a substance from a solid to a gas.[19] In alchemical practice, sublimation was used to dissolve base metals. In this passage, the cloud is associated with a volatile acidic 'soul' that is contained within the base metal and released during the act of sublimation.

In other words, in the act of sublimation, the mercurial 'soul' of the metal rises to the top of the alembic alongside common sublimated mercury, where it forms a black cloud like the one described in chapter VI.[20] After the release of the 'soul', the matter in the

---

[17] Ibid; Ibid: ' par. 43, 19: 'Εῖτα τό έναέριον φως έκ καθαράς αιθρίας ζόφω κατεμελαίνετο, ώς αόρατον γενέσθαι το όρος, έν κύκλω τω γνόφφ διει-λημμένον. Πυρ τε έκ του γνόφου διαφαινόμενον φοβέραν έποίει τοῖς όρώσι την οψιν, πανταχόθεν την περιοχήν του ορούς έπιβοσκόμενον, ώς καί καπνω διά της του πυρός περιδρομής άπαν τό φαινόμενον ύποτύφεσθαι. Ηγείτο δε του λαού ό Μωϋσης προς την άνοδον, ούδέ αύτός θαρσών τό όρώμενον, άλλά κατεπτηχώς την ψυχήν ύπό δέους καί τό σώμα τω φόβω κραδαινόμενος, ώς μηδέ προς τούς Ίσραηλίτας τό πάθος της ψυχής έπικρύπτεσθαι, όμολογεϊν δε προς αύτούς τό καταπεπλήχθαι τοῖς φαινομένοις καί μή άτρεμεϊν τω σώματι.'

[18] *AC*, 56–57; 'Aspiciens a longe vidi nebulam magnam totam terram denigrantem quae hanc exhauserat meam animam tegentem et <quia> aquae intraverant usque ad eam, quare putruerunt et corruptae sunt a facie inferni inferioris et umbra mortis, quoniam tempestas dimersit me.'

[19] The metallic ingredients were treated with sublimated vapour as a means to yield a soft malleable alloy. In Greek alchemy, the blackening of the metallic substance was known as melanosis, and in Latin alchemy the process was associated with the nigredo. See Daniel Merkur, 'The Study of Spiritual Alchemy: Mysticism, Gold-Making, and Esoteric Hermeneutics.' *Ambix*, 37 (1990): pp. 35–45, 140.

[20] Sublimated mercury, otherwise known as *Argent Vive*, rises with the soul of the metal to the top of the alembic. As it embodies the elemental aspects of mercury, the cold, moist, and humid aspect of the metallic spirit rises and subsequently condense along the sides of the vessel. In alchemy, the release of this metallic

alchemical vessel was made to putrefy, usually with the addition of rotten plant matter or dung. This putrefied material acted like a fertilizer, wherein the 'seed' of metal would germinate and multiply, much like a flower growing from manure.[21] The idea here is that this 'seed' would eventually germinate and form the white stone in the next stage of the opus. The prevailing metaphor is of vegetation, and new life springing forth from decay and death.

The nigredo-cloud of chapter VI is, then, a highly allegorical representation of the chemical processes of calcination through putrefaction, wherein the base metal is treated with sublimated vapour, and then made to putrefy with the addition of rotting biological matter. The passage itself articulates the chemical operations through a paraphrase of Psalm 68: 2–4, which in the Vulgate reads: 'Save me, O God: for the waters are come in even unto my soul. I stick fast to the mire of the deep: and there is no sure standing. I am come into the depth of the sea: and a tempest hath overwhelmed me. I have laboured with crying; my jaws are become hoarse: my eyes have failed, whilst I hope in my God.'[22]

What stands out about this is not the citation of the psalm itself, but the way in which it is internalised. The *Aurora* draws an explicit connection between the nigredo and suffering, not as a peripheral event in the alchemical crucible, but as a personal experience of bodily torment. There is strong apophatic element to the suffering. The cloud smothers the entirety of the earth and 'covers' the narrator's soul. It veils the divine presence (*Sapientia*) and confuses the identity of the narrator so that the true identity of the speaker is rendered ineffable. The cloud functions as it does in mystical theology, it terminates and confuses sense perception.

---

spirit is known as 'radical humidity', which is a 'moisture' or 'dew' that forms the cloud mentioned in the nigredo of chapter VI. Humprhey Locke, (fl. 1560–1570) an early-modern English alchemist, describes the release of this spirit in unambiguous terms. See Humfrey Lock, *Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite: An Edition and Study of Humfrey Lock's Treatise on Alchemy*, ed. Peter Grund, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 367 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 182: 'For the soulle beinge dissolued from the body is made spiritualle and flying into the ayer. For the water, opening the flyers gate, maketh the bodye spirituall like vnto itself, and by reason thereof they areise bothe together into the ayer'.

[21] See J. Read, *Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy Its Literature and Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 138.

[22] Ps. 68: 2–4 (DRBO): 'Salvum me fac, Deus, quoniam intraverunt aquae usque ad animam meam. Infixus sum in limo profundi et non est substantia. Veni altitudinem maris; et tempestas demersit me. Laboravi clamans, raucae factae sunt fauces meae; defecerunt oculi mei, dum spero Deum meum'.

In alchemical literature, the nigredo was often represented through the terminology of torture and death, but in the corpus Latin alchemy, the psychological internalisation of it was a novelty.[23] The earliest association of the nigredo with self-torture appears in the writings of Zosimos. In the text *On Virtue*, Zosimos describes the death of a base metal in vividly graphic terms. In a dream, Zosimos takes the form of a priest who is flayed and mutilated in a temple:

> I am Ion, the priest of the sanctuary, and I have survived intolerable violence. For one came headlong in the morning, dismembering me with a sword, and tearing me asunder according to the rigour of harmony. And flaying my head with the sword which he held fast, he mingled my bones with my flesh and burned them in the fire of the treatment, until I learnt by the transformation of the body to become a spirit.[24]

Here, the sanctuary represents the alchemical crucible, whereas the priest who is dismembered is the base metal. The passage describes the mutilation of an 'alchemical body', which is murdered and converted to a spiritual form. Like the *Aurora's* account of the nigredo, the act of violence portrayed here is one experienced by the self. In addition to the motifs of torture and violence, the nigredo was said to have a melancholic humoural component that corresponded to the crucifixion darkness that covered the earth during Christ's passion.[25]

In all of this darkness, suffering, and death, the hope was that the metallic spirit drawn out from the nigredo would 'rise again' in the form of the philosopher's stone. Appropriately therefore, Alchemists pictured the process of decay (death) and purification (resurrection) as an allegory for Christ's life, where the philosopher's stone was created by the suffering, death and rebirth of base metal.[26] In the form of Jesus there is a model of one who dies,

---

[23] On the motifs of torture, death, and resurrection in alchemy see C. G Jung et al., *Alchemical Studies*, vol. 13 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 328–337.

[24] The English translation is that of F. Sherwood Taylor in F. Sherwood Taylor, 'The Visions Of Zosimos', *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 88–92, 89. The original Greek is preserved in Marcelin Berthelot, *Collection Des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs*, vol. 2–3 (Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1888), 108: 'Ἐγώ είμι ό "Ι ω ν δ ιερεύς των άδυτων, και βίαν άφόρητον υπομένω. Ήλοεν γάρ τις περί τον ορρον δρομαίως, και έγειρώσατό με μααίρη οιελών με, και όιασπάσας κατά σύστασιν άρμονίας. Και άποδερματώσας τήν κεφαλήν μου τω ξίφει τω ύπ ' αύτου κρατουμένω, τά δστέα ταῖς σαρξῑ συνέπλεξεν, και τω πυρι τω διαχείρως κατέκαιεν, εως αν εμαθον μετασωματούμενος πνεύμα γενέσθαι. Και αύτη μου έστιν ή αφόρητος βία.'

[25] See Noel L. Brann, 'Alchemy and Melancholy in Medieval and Renaissance Thought: a Query into the Mystical Basis of Their Relationship,'*Ambix*, 32 (1985): pp. 127–148,135.

[26] This view of alchemy was most thoroughly developed by Mircea Eliade, who argued that the alchemical work was preceded by and mirrored in the creation myths and religious rites of antiquity. See Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 150: '[T]he alchemist

and like mercury, rises to heaven only to return again with a divinising power that saves (or transmute) the corrupt (sinners/base metals). In one such text, the *Clavicula quae et apertorium dicitur*, a stark parallel is drawn between Christ, and the death and resurrection of base metals:

> Therefore, son, hold in your mind the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died, was buried and entombed, and on the third day rose again, on earth everlasting. Son, you should hold in your mind that nothing can exist in perpetual life unless it has first died. Receive therefore your black body and calcinate it in the same vessel for three days.[27]

Here, the nigredo is compared to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mercury's body is described as a blackened and dead mass, entombed in the crucible for the three days after the operation of calcination. Another late medieval alchemical text, the pseudo-Arnaldian *Tractatus Parabolicus*, says that the practice of alchemy itself is based upon the example Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection:

> Sons of wisdom understand that the art of the philosophers is called by the philosopher Hermes the 'art of arts' and in that, it can refer to the passion of Christ. And Christ was for us an example in that art. In Christ we have an example in his death, in his suffering, in his resurrection and the transmigration [of this soul].[28]

In both examples above, the new life experienced in the philosopher's stone comes about through the 'suffering' experienced in the phase of putrefaction. In the *Aurora,* the mortification the speaker experiences in the cloud of chapter VI is likened to a 'night' where a beleaguered pseudo-Aquinas waits in desperation for salvation. This is the calcination of the base metal and the putrefaction of the nigredo personified:

> Therefore there is no health in my flesh and all my bones are troubled before the face of my iniquity. For this cause have I laboured night by night with crying, my jaws are

---

treats his matter as the God was treated in the mysteries; the mineral substances suffer, die or are reborn into another mode of being.'

[27] The *Clavicula* belongs to the corpus of alchemical texts belonging to Arnauld of Villanova, *Theatrum Chemicum*, vol. 2 (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1602), 50: 'Idcirco fili, mente teneas diuiniam coenam Domini nostri Ieusu Christi Domini nostri iesu Christi, qui mortuus fuit, sepultus & tumulatus, & et luce tertia resurrexit, in terram permanentem. Fili mente teneas, quod nullum ens potest vita perpetuari, nisi prius mortiuum fuerit. Rec. igitur tuum corpus nigrum, & calcine in eodem vase pet tres dies.'

[28] Antoine Calvet, 'Tractatus Parabolicus', *Chrysopoeia* 5 (1996), 164: 'Fili sapientium intelligite quod ars philosophorum nuncupatur a philosopho Hermete ars artium et in ea potest referri passio Christi. Et Christus fuit nobis exemplum in hac arte. In Christo habemus exemplum morte sua, passione, resurrectione et transmigratione.'

> become hoarse; who is the man that liveth, knowing and understanding, delivering my soul from the hand of hell?[29]

The speaker suffers a kind of death wherein the metallic soul, caught in the tempest, is condemned to hell and is acutely aware of the corruption this state entails, citing the 'iniquity' that saps the 'health' of the 'flesh' and 'troubles' the bones. In the previous chapter, it was argued that through ascetic practice, contemplatives were thought to mortify their carnal nature when following the threefold path of mystical union. Through prayer, austerities, and a general abnegation of sinful desires, the mystic kills the old sinful 'self', making it ready to receive Christ's illuminating light.

The *Aurora* shares in such purgatorial language. For example, in the *Viae Syon Lugent*, Hugh of Balma writes that a contemplative must suffer a purificatory procedure before coming into communion with divinity and receiving the divine ray of illumination. All of the familiar images found in the *Aurora*'s nigredo-cloud are present; a suffering sinner, 'groans', 'tears', and even the symbol of a cloud that envelopes the soul:

> By the path of cleansing the human spirit is lifted directly to the path of illumination, according to the rule enunciated by the Psalmist: *In his heart he has disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears*. For through groans and tears the soul dissolves the rust left behind by sins and is thereby directly prepared to receive divine rays of light [. . .] Therefore there ought to be some sort of assimilative conformity when the human spirit is united to the brightness of eternal light through the union of true love. To this end, having removed from herself every obscuring cloud, the human spirit should be formed into a spotless mirror, instantly ready to receive more divine splendours of light. Purified in this way, she is shaped to conform to eternal wisdom.[30]

Balma continues, noting that purgation makes the soul ready for the spiritual marriage:

---

[29] *AC*, 56–57; 'Ideo non est sanitas in carne mea et a facie iniquitatis meae conturbata sunt Omnia ossa mea. Ergo laboravi per singulas noctes clamans, raucae factae sunt fauces meae: quis est homo, qui vivit sciens et intelligens, eruens animam meam de manu inferi?'

[30] Dennis Martin, trans., *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 81-82; Hugh of Balma, *Théologie Mystique*, ed. Francis Ruello, vol. 1, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1995), 177–178: 'Per viam purgativam immediate mens ad illuminativam erigitur, secundum illam regulam Psalmistae dicentis: *Ascensiones in corde tuo disposuit in valle lacrimarum*. Et quia, per gemitus et lacrimas, anima a rubiginibus peccatorum relictis abluitur, et per hoc immediate ad susceptionem divini radii [. . .] oporet ergo quod sit aliqua assimilative conformitas, quando per veri amoris unionem, mens humana candori aeternae lucis unitur, ut, prius semota ab ipsa omni obtenebrante caligine, speculo sine macula conformetur. Unde primo oportet quod sit mens quasi speculum sine macula, et statim ad suscipiendos splendores lucis divinores disponitur, et sic, cum fuerit curate, aeternae sapientiae conformatur.'

> No matter what virtues she already has, as long as the human spirit lacks the most efficacious virtue, that is, purgation, the splendidly blooming Beloved will not yet fully indwell in her, since her discorded powers and her unbridled delight in the senses darken her with a cloudy mist [. . .] [God] does not find her pleasing and acceptable as a bride to whom he might indivisibly join himself.[31]

Then there is the matter of spiritual death conveyed through the symbolism of Christ's passion. In the *Aurora* above, the mortification of the base metal's soul envelops it in darkness, and in the *Clavicula quae et apertorium dicitur* and *Tractatus Parabolicus* this darkness is tied to the death and resurrection of Christ. Mystical theologians, like alchemists, compared the mystical death of a soul to the darkness that descended upon the earth during Christ's crucifixion on calvary. Take for instance St Bonaventure's account of the mystical death in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*:

> Only that person who says: *My soul chooses hanging, and my bones death* can truly embrace this fire [spiritual fervour] Only one who loves this death can see God, for it is absolutely true that *no one can see me and live*. Let us die, then, and enter into this darkness. Let us silence our cares, desires, and imaginings, Let us pass over with the crucified Christ *from this world to the Father*.[32]

The emulation of Christ's suffering on the cross was also seen as the gateway to uniting with eternal Wisdom, an integral motif in the *Aurora Consurgens*. In his *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* (*Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*), Henry Suso framed the purgative stages of the contemplative journey as an imitation of Christ's suffering, where the soul aches and dies to its old ways in order to be made ready for mystical union.[33] Like the *Aurora*, the text is framed as a dialogue, where Christ, embodying the form of eternal wisdom, commands his servant (Suso) to suffer and die to his old ways:

---

[31] *Idem*, 88 and 206: 'Cum enim virtutes efficaciori virtute sive purgation indigeant, nondum plene mentem floridus et praeclarus dilectus inhabitat, cum inordinatio virium et immoderate delectation sensum mentem caligine nubilosa obtenebrent [. . .] [Deus] non est accepta acceptatione gratissima aeterno [. . .] ut ab ipso in copulam desponsationis individuam adsumatur.'

[32] St Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, ed. Philotheus Boehner and M. Frances Laughlin, trans. Zachary Hayes, Works of St. Bonaventure (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002), 138–139: '[Q]uam solus ille vere percipit, qui dicit: Suspendium elegit anima mea, et mortem ossa mea. Quam mortem qui diligit videre potest Deum, quia indubitanter verum est: Non videbit me homo et vivet – Moriamur igitur et ingrediamur in calignem, imponamus silentium sollicitudinibus, concupiscentiis et phantasmatibus: transeamus cum Christo crucifix ex hoc mundo ad paterm.'

[33] The *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was better known by its Latin translation, the *Horologium Sapientiae*, which became one of the most popular devotional works of the late middle ages. On the text, see Cora E. Lutz, 'The Clock of Eternal Wisdom', *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 53 (1978): 79–85.

> Response of *eternal wisdom*: No one can reach the heights of divinity or unusual sweetness without first being drawn through the bitterness I experiences as a man. The higher one climbs without sharing the path of my humanity, the deeper one falls. My humanity is the path one takes; my suffering is the gate through which one must pass who will come to what you are seeking [. . .] Stir yourself to boldness, because your heart must often die before you overcome your nature and must in fear pour out bloody sweat because of much painful suffering in which I will make you ready for me.[34]

In the generation following Suso's death, Jean Gerson, in his guide on the contemplative life *La Montagne de Contemplation* (*The Mountain of Contemplation*), argues that the spiritual death must occur within the cloud itself. The soul that loves God and hates the world, he says, must be closed off from the world by submerging itself in darkness. Only by immobilising its worldly senses in the cloud, can the soul be made ready to unite with God:

> In this state the person is said to be dead to the world, for she feels no attachment to any part of the world and is united to God. She is asleep to the vanities of this world and awake to everlasting goods. All the senses of her body are, as it were, closed off and slumbering and darkened from all that is done by worldly persons. She is open only to the joys of the saints. This is why the holy doctors say in the figurative language that when Moses wanted to speak to God, he entered into a dark cloud, signifying that whoever wants to have in his or her contemplation this love of which I speak must enter into this dark cloud, in order to forget and not see or perceive other worldly things.[35]

These citations demonstrate that both the alchemists and contemplatives of the late middle ages drew on the imagery of darkness to articulate the soul's purgation and spiritual demise. This was done through terrible visions of divine power (the cloud) and in appeals to spiritual death in the form of Christ's crucifixion. These are, however, only the first purificatory steps in the mystical ascent. The spiritual death is always followed by

---

[34] SUSO, 214; SUSOG, 205: 'Entwúrt der Ewigen Wisheit: Es mag nieman komen ze gôtlicher hocheit noch ze ungewonlicher sûzikeit, er werde denn vor gezogen dur daz bilde miner menschlichen bitterkeit. So man ane daz durchgan miner menscheit ist der weg, den man gat, min liden ist daz tor, durch daz man gan mûz, der zû dem wilk omen, daz du da sûchest [. . .] Setze dich vorhin uf ein verwegenheit, wan din herz mûz dik ersterben, e daz du din natur úberwindest, und von angsten den blùtigen sweis switzen von mengem pinlichem lidenne, in dem ich dich mir wil bereiten.'

[35] Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire, Classics of Western Spirituality, 92 (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 93; Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Mgr. Glorieux, vol. 7 (Paris; Tournai; Rome; New York: Desclée & Cie, 1966), 30: 'Et en cest estat est ditte la personne morte au monde por ce qu'elle n'y scient riens qui luy tiengne, et est unie a Dieu; est dormant aux vanités de ce siècle et veillant aux biens pardurables. Elle a tous ses sens de son corps comme clos et endormis et obscurcis a tout ce qui se fait par les mondains, et les a ouvers aux joys des sains et des saintes. Et c'est ce que li sains docteurs dient par figure que quant Moyse voulut parler a Dieu il entra en une nue obscure, en significant que qui voelt avoir ceste amour de quoi ie parle en sa contemplation, il doibt entre ren ceste nue obscure qui luy face oublier et non veoir ou appercevoir les aultres choses mondaines.'

experiences of illumination, and unitive expressions of affective love. The *Aurora* is no different in this regard. In chapter VI, After the narrator expresses torment in the nigredo, the effects of the cloud diminish, and the speaker is mystically united with a lover that saves his soul from death.[36] Alchemically, this event heralds the arrival of the *albedo*, or the whitening of the stone:

> They that explain me shall have (eternal) life, and to him I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in paradise, and to sit with me on the throne of my kingdom [. . .] he for whose love I languish, in whose ardour I melt, in whose odour I live, by whose sweetness I regain my health, from whose milk I take nourishment, in whose embrace I am made young, from whose kiss I receive the breath of life, in whose loving embrace my whole body is lost, to him indeed I will be a father and he shall be to me a son.[37]

The prose here is unambiguously unitive. The terror and suffering of the nigredo is replaced with a set of vivid affective images that herald the *unio mystica*. Having been 'killed' and dissolved into dead matter, the soul of the base metal waits in the cloud until it receives a 'kiss' and 'breath of life' where it undergoes a process of purgation and vivification by the alchemical 'virgin's milk [*lacte nutrimentum*]'. The 'virgin's milk' is associated with the dry white stone of the congelation stage, and in alchemical literature it was otherwise known as the 'aqua vitae' or 'mercurial water'.[38] It had a variety of functions, such as acting as a 'purifying' agent used to cleanse the metallic body of corruption and bringing the infant stone to 'maturity' by increasing its potency. It was also said to be the liquid responsible for dissolving metallic substances, hence the allusion to 'melting' in the passage above.[39]

---

[36] There are multiple layers of meaning here. The surface level meaning is that sulphur and mercury are conjoined. On a deeper level, the union here indicates that the alchemist is united with 'sapientia', the feminine manifestation of God's wisdom in the philosopher's stone.

[37] *AC, 59*; '[C]uius amore langueo, ardore, liquesco, odore vivo, sapore convalesce, cuius lacte nutrimentum suscipio, amplexu iuvenesco, osculo spiraculum vitae recipio, cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero ero in patrem et ipse mihi in filium.'

[38] The actual chemical composition of this substance is a subject of debate, though in most alchemical texts it broadly refers to white mercury sublimate, a substance Alchemists created through the sublimation of salts with sulfuric acid and mercury It has also been described as lead monoxide dissolved in vinegar and treated with alkaline salts.

[39] Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London: The British Library, 1994), 109.

In the passage, however, the unitive language heralds the union of sulphur and mercury in the formation of the white stone. Descriptions of union in the *Aurora* chapter VI like 'loving embrace', 'kiss', '[he] in whose ardour I melt', and '[my] body is lost to him' demonstrate a series of terms that straddle the line between a union of spirit (*unitas spiritus*) and a union of indistinction (*unitas indistinctionis*). These descriptors were typical of late medieval references to the *unio mystica*. Their presence here in the *Aurora* suggests that pseudo-Aquinas knew and used them to explicate his version of a mystical alchemical union.

3.2 *Unitas Spiritus* and *Unitas Indistinctionis* in the *Aurora* Chapter VI

In the union of sulphur and mercury above, it is a 'kiss' that breathes the 'breath of life' into cloud. In the mystical theology of this period, allusions to the 'kiss' were most frequently used to refer to the *unus spiritus/unitas spiritus*. The source of the term was Ephesians 4:4 in the Vulgate, where St Paul, writing on unity in the Church, uses the word to describe how the Church must conduct itself with a single will: 'One body and one Spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling.'[40] This was the primary meaning of the term, from the fourth to the twelfth century, where it indicated either unity between members of the Church, or harmonious relations between communities of religious.[41]

Pseudo-Aquinas also describes the soul as 'melting' in the ardour of love and the body as being 'lost'. This is characteristic of the dissolutive literature found in the Beguine houses of north-western Europe. Take for example the vision of *Oneness in the Eucharist* articulated by the thirteenth-century Beguine Hadewijch (c. 1200?–c. 1248–60?), in which she compares the taking of the eucharist to dissolution in God:

> Then it was to me as if we were one without difference. It was thus: outwardly, to see, taste, and feel, as one can outwardly taste, see, and feel in the reception of the outward Sacrament. So can the beloved, with the loved one, each wholly receive the other in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of the one in the other. After that I remained in a passing away in my Beloved, so that I wholly melted away in

[40] Ephesians 4:4 (DRBO): 'Unum corpus, et unus Spiritus, sicut vocati estis in una spe vocationis vestrae.'
[41] William of St Thierry was the first to use the term in a context that denotes spiritual union with God. See 'Unitas Spiritus and the Originality of William of Saint-Thierry' in E. Rozanne Elder and F. Tyler Sergent, eds, *Unity of Spirit: Studies on William of Saint-Thierry in Honor of E. Rozanne Elder*, Cistercian Studies Series, 268 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press, 2015).

him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself; and I was changed and taken up in the spirit, and there it was shown me concerning such hours.[42]

In the fourth stanza of Hadejwich's strophic poem number seven, the imagery of the abyss of dissolution is even more explicitly stated:

My soul melts away
In the madness of Love;
The abyss into which she hurls me
Is deeper than the sea;
For Love's new deep abyss
Renews my wound.[43]

In the *Aurora,* a specific reference to abyssal imagery appears in chapter XII. *Sapientia* calls out from the darkness, likening it to the depths of the sea and an abyss: 'Wherefore out of the depths have I cried, and from the abyss of the earth with my voice to all you that pass by the way.'[44] In this passage, the 'earth' represents the elemental confusion of the Mercurial spirit as it is dissolved in the nigredo. The apophatic language pseudo-Aquinas uses also appears in the sermons and literature of the German and Low Country mystics, who allude to the soul's experience of the abyss when it is united with God.[45]

A good example is to be found in the *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (*De Ornatu Spiritalium Nuptiarum*) of the fourteenth-century Flemish mystic Jan Van Ruysbroeck, the mystic Comments on the soul's ability to receive and incorporate the virtue that emanates from the Godhead. Ruysbroeck says that God's abyss takes root within the soul, causing it to unite with him in a union of indistinction. The language used to describe this conjunction is properly Dionysian in the tension drawn between cataphatic (light) and

---

[42] Hadewijch, *Hadejwich: The Complete Works*, trans. Colomba Hart (London: SPCK, 1980), 281–282; Hadewijch, *Hadewijch Visioenen*, ed. Jozef Van Mierlo, 2 vols (Leuven: Vlaamsch Boekenhalle, 1924), 78–79: 'Mi was op die vre ochte wi een waren sonder differencie. Dit was al van buten in siene, in smakene, in gheuoelne, Alsoe men smaken mach van ontfane inden sacramente van buten, Jn siene ende in gheuoelne van buten, Also lief met lieue ontfaen mach in aller voller ghenoechten van siene ende van hoerne, van veruaerne deen inden anderen. Hier na bleef ic in enen veruaerne in mijn lief dat ic al versmalt in heme ende mi mijns selues niet en bleef; ende ic wart verwandelt ende op ghenomen inden gheeste, ende mi wart daer vertoent uan selker hande vren.'

[43] Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, 145; Hadewijch, *Hadewijch: Strophische Gedichten*, ed. Jozef Van Mierlo, 2 vols (Antwerpen/Brussel/Gent/Leuven: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1942), 45: 'Mi smelten mine sinne. In minnen oerwoede; Die afgront daer si mi in sende. Die es dieper dan de zee; Want hare nuwe diepe afgronde Die vernuwet mi die wonde.'

[44] AC, 132–136: 'Proptera de profundis clamavi et de abysso terrae voce mea ad vos omnes, qui transistis per viam.'

[45]On the usage of abyssal imagery among the German mystics see Johannes Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, ed. Maria Shrady (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 25–34.

apophatic (darkness) terms, with the final union being an unmediated dissolution into the darkness of the Godhead:

> And the abyss of God calls the abyss inward: that is, all who are united with the Spirit of God in enjoyable love. This inward call is an overflowing of essential brightness. And this essential brightness, in an embrace of a fathomless love, causes us to lose ourselves and to stream away (from ourselves) into the wild darkness of the Godhead. And thus united, without intermediary one with the Spirit of God, we can then meet God with God, and with Him and in Him abidingly possess our eternal blessedness.[46]

Not every mystic was as eager to depict the soul's unitive experience with God in such dissolutive terms. The two modes of union (spirit and indistinction) often melded into one another, and some writers used them interchangeably. Nevertheless, some authors were more careful to delineate the boundaries between the soul and God. Mechtilde of Magdeburg is one such figure. In her most famous work *Das Flissende Licht Der Gottheit (The Flowing Light of the Godhead)*, she uses both terms of union, but more often than not, describes the soul as abiding in God without being dissolved in him. In one section of the text, she describes how the soul is immersed in God's love while retaining its own nature. The soul as bride, and Christ as bridegroom are still distinct entities:

> A fish in water does not drown. A bird in the air does not plummet. Gold in fire does not perish. Rather, it gets its purity and its radiant color there. God has created all creatures to live according to their nature. How, then, am I to resist my nature? I must go from all things to God, Who is my father by nature, My brother by his humanity, my Bridegroom by love, and I his bride from all eternity.[47]

In another example, Mechtilde describes the union of the soul and Christ with language that seems to combine the models of indistinction and spirit. In a vision of the soul's

---

[46] Jan van Ruusbroec, *De Ornatu Spiritalium Nuptiarum*, ed. J. Alaerts, trans. H. Rolfson, Corpus Christianorum: Continvatio Mediaevalis 3 (Turnhoult: Brepols, 1988). 524–526: 'Invocat autem abyssus Dei, abyssum, id est, omnes cum spiritu De fruitivo Amore coniunctos et unitos, quae quidem, ut sic dicam, invocation sive introrsum vocation, essentialis cuiusdam claritatis abundans perfusio est: eademque claritas immensi amoris complex nosipsos amittere, et in vastissimam divinitatis calignem profluere nos facit. Sic vero spiritui Dei absque medio uniti, Deo cum Deo occurrere, et cum ipso et in ipso aeternam salute ac beatitudinem nostrum perenniter possidere poterimus.'

[47] Mechthild, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, ed. Frank J. Tobin, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 61; Mechthild, *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. Hans Neumann and Gisela Vollmann-Profe, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, Bd. 100 (München: Artemis Verlag, 1990), 30–31: 'Der visch mag in dem wasser nit ertrinken, der vogel mag in dem lufte nit versinken, das golt mag in dem fúre nit verderben, wand es enpfat da sin klarheit und sin lúhtende varwe. Got hat allen creature das gegeben, das si ir nature pflegen, wie möhte ich miner nature widerstan? Ich müste von allen dingen in got gan, der min vatter ist von nature, min bruder von siner mönscheit, min brútegom von minnen und ich sin brut ane anegenge.'

communion with Jesus, the soul is placed in Christ's heart, where it merges with him. In a paradoxical fashion, it is simultaneously reduced to nothing while retaining its identity:

> He [Christ] places her [the soul] into his glowing heart. When the exalted Sovereign and the little waif thus embrace and are united as water and wine, she turns to nothing and is transported out of herself. When she has no strength left, he is as lovesick for her as he always was; for he neither increases or decreases.[48]

In this example, the soul is 'turned to nothing' and 'transported out of the self', which seems to indicate her complete immersion in Christ. The union, however, depicts Christ as retaining his love for the soul, and in his substance, neither 'increasing' or 'decreasing'. Christ is united with her while maintaining his own distinct identity, as he does not incorporate the soul completely into his being. The allusion to water uniting with wine is a reference to the offertory of the mass, wherein the two substances are mixed together. In the offertory, a droplet of water enters the chalice, and is completely submerged in it, while retaining the characteristics of water.

This reference has its origin in St Bernard's depiction of *unus spiritus* in his epistolary essay *On Loving God* (*De diligendo deo*). In the essay, St Bernard sets out how and why the soul is to love God, and the degrees of ascent that perfects this love. In the fourth and highest degree of love, Bernard explains how the soul that is united with God seems to lose its form, but in reality, is so closely united in will with him, that it only appears to take on his qualities to the point of annihilation:

> O pure and sacred love! O sweet and pleasant affection! O pure and sinless intention of the will, all the more sinless and pure since it frees us from the taint of selfish vanity, all the more sweet and pleasant, for all that is found in it is divine. It is deifying to go through such an experience. As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine's taste and color; just as red, molten iron becomes so much like fire it seems to lose its primary state; just as the air on a sunny day seems transformed into sunshine instead of being lit up; so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God. Otherwise, how will God be all in all if something human survives in man? No doubt, the substance remains though under another form, another glory, another power.[49]

---

[48] Mechthild, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, 43–44; Mechthild, *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, 10–11: 'So tut er si in sin glügendes herze. Alse sich der hohe fúrste und die kleine dirne alsust behalsent und vereinet sint als wasser und win, so wirst si ze nihte und komet von ir selben. Alse si nút mere mögi, so ist er minnesiech nach ir, als er ie was, wan im gat zu noch abe.'

[49] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 30; Bernardus Claraeuallensis, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais, vol. 3 (Romae: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 119–154, par. 28, 143: 'O amor sanctus et castus! O dulcis et suavis affectio! O pura et

Even in this carefully crafted metaphor, where God and the soul remain distinct (albeit in a deceiving manner), St Bernard describes the soul's union with Christ using liquid imagery. The soul 'melts in a mysterious way', and 'flows into the will of God in such a way that the line between distinction and indistinction is blurred. There is no doubt that the 'substance' remains, as does the polarity between God and the soul, but the initial appearance of this division is not immediately clear. Bernard's younger contemporary, Richard of St Victor (d. 1173), in treatise *The Four Degrees of Violent Love* draws on a similar metaphor in his account of *unitas spiritus*. He likens the soul, enraptured in the highest degrees of God's love, (like St Bernard) to a piece of iron submerged in a blacksmith's flame. The soul is set ablaze by Christ's love until it grows hot and liquefies, where it is still metal (a distinct soul), but has now taken on the qualities of God:

> For when iron is cast into fire, without a doubt it first appears as black as it is cold. But after it has spent some time amid the flames, little by little it becomes hot, and little by little it lays aside its blackness. Gradually glowing, little by little the iron draws into itself the likeness of the fire, until at last it liquefies entirely: it departs fully from itself and takes on a completely different nature. And so having in this manner been swallowed up on the pyre of divine flame and into the fire of inmost love (amoris), having been completely surrounded by the mass of eternal desires, the soul first grows hot, then glows, and finally it liquefies entirely and passes away from its prior state completely.[50]

The soul that is made a 'liquid metal' by the fiery love of God is then in a fluid state, and ready to be fashioned into a new form. Richard articulates this 'molten' state of the soul through a citation of Sg. 2:5. He writes:

---

defaecata intentio voluntatis, eo certe defaecatior et purior, quo in ea de proprio nil iam admixtum relinquitur, eo suavior et dulcior, quo totum divinum est quod sentitur! Sic affici, deificari est.Quomodo stilla aquae modica, multo infusa vino, deficere a se tota videtur, dum et saporem vini induit et colorem, et quomodo ferrum ignitum et candens igni simillimum fit, pristina propria que exutum forma, et quomodo solis luce perfusus aer in eamdem transformatur luminis claritatem, adeo ut non tam illuminatus quam ipsum lumen esse videatur, sic omnem tunc in sanctis humanam affectionem quodam ineffabili modo necesse erit a semetipsa liquescere, atque in Dei penitus transfundi voluntatem.'

[50] See Andrew Kraebel, 'On the Four Degrees of Violent Love', in *On love: a Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St. Victor*, ed. Hugh Feiss (New York: New City Press, 2012), 292; Richard of St. Victor, *Épître à Séverin Sur La Charité: Les Quatre Degrés de La Violente Charité*, ed. G. Dumeige, Textes Philosophiques Du Moyen Age (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955), 167: 'Cum enim ferrum in ignem projicitur, tam nigrum quam frigidum procul dubio primo videtur. Sed dum ignis incendio moram facit, paulatim incalescit, paulatim nigredinem deponit, sensimque incandescens paulatim in se ignis similitudinem trahit, donec tandem totum liquefiat et a seipso plene deficiat et in aliam penitus qualitatem transeat. Sic itaque sic anima divini ardoris rogo intimique amoris incendio absorpta eternorumque desideriorum globis unique circumsepta, primo incalescit, postea incandescit, tandem autem tota liquescit et a priori statu penitus deficit.'

> In this state, as has been said, the soul is liquefied entirely into the one whom it loves and "it becomes completely languid" in its very self, whence it also says: Prop me up upon flowers, encircle me with apples, for I grow languid with love [. . .] Therefore, when the soul has in this manner been melted away in the divine fire, inwardly softened and thoroughly liquefied, what will remain except that "the good will of God, pleasing and perfect," be displayed to the soul, as if that divine will were a certain mold of consummate virtue to which it might be shaped? For when metals have been liquefied and the molds have been set up, the metal workers shape any image through a decision of their will and produce whatever vessels they wish in accordance with the proper shape and intended form. So too does the soul in this state easily adapt itself to every wish of the divine will.[51]

In both St Bernard and Richard's view of mystical union, the soul is liquefied, and made to resemble Christ by taking on his qualities. Still, the soul maintains a form that is necessarily distinct from God, albeit moulded by him. This view of mystical union endured from the twelfth century to the closing years of the middle ages. For instance, Denis the Carthusian, who wrote in the middle of the fifteenth century, concluded that mystical union is both a conjunction of will with God and a dissolutive event, where the self melts in his love. In book three, section sixteen of his *De Contemplatione*, he writes:

> Right to the Lord of majesty it [the soul] flies, and there it is united with Him, transformed into Him, dissolved into Him. Immediately and intimately He gathers to Himself the soul that He has perfected. There He dwells and informs it. So much so, that between the Uncreated Will and the created will there is perfect conformity. What one desires, the other desires; what One does not desire, the other does not desire. For now the loving soul might be said to be one with God. This love of God creates for Him friends and children. When this love is acute and penetrating, it can pierce the very entrails of the beloved, uniting it immediately to God; so that it holds God closely and strives to bind Him to itself within This is the fire that consumes vice, expels demons, conquers passion, and melts the soul in God.[52]

---

[51] Ibid., 293; Ibid., 169–171: 'In hoc statu, ut dictum est, anima in illum quem diligit tota liquescit et in seipsa *tota languescit,* unde et dicit: *Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore langueo* [. . .] Cum igitur anima in hunc modum divino fuerit igne decocta, medullitus emollita penitusque liquefacta, quid jam supererit nisi ut ei proponatur que sit *voluntas Dei bona, beneplacens atque perfecta*, quadi quedam ad quam informetur consummate virtutis formula? Sicut eninm exclusores, liquefactis metallis propositisque formulis, quamlibet imaginem pro voluntatis arbitrio excludunt et vasa quelibet juxta modum congruum formamque destinatam producunt, sic anime in hoc esse ad omnem divine voluntatis.'

[52] Denis and Riain, *The Spiritual Writings of Denis the Carthusian*, 178; Denis the Carthusian, *Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, vol. 41 (Cologne: Typis Cartusiæ S.M. de Pratis, 1912), 274: 'Usque ad dominum majestatis volat ac pervenit, illiunit, in illum transformat, illi indissolubiliter, immediate ac intime colligat mentem quam perficit, incolit et informat; tantamque demum inter voluntatem increatam et creatam efficit conformitatem, ut earum sit eadem velle ac nolle, ita ut jam spiritus amans cum Deo unum dicatur. Hic amot Dei amicos et filios facit. Quumque acutus ac penetrativus exsistat, usque ad intima dilectio ingredisatagit, Deo immediate uniri, eum amplecti et intra se stringere nititur; ipse ignis quo vitia consumuntur, daemones propelluntur, passions vincuntur, mensque in Deum resolvitur.'

Denis, like his intellectual forebears, combines the qualities of 'melting' with the harmony of two distinct 'wills'. Both God and the soul exist in perfect harmony, despite being distinct entities. With these examples in mind, consider again the moment the narrator is united with *Sapientia* (sulphur/mercury) in chapter VI. The boundaries between distinction and indistinction are pushed to their limit. The speaker is made to 'melt' in the 'ardour' of love, and she describes her body as being 'lost'. The union appears to be one of indistinction, but the two terms reassert themselves at the end of the citation, where the *unio mystica* is framed as a relationship between father and son. It is a union that appears to be completely dissolutive, but in reality, two distinct wills remain:

> [H]e for whose love I languish, in whose ardour I melt, in whose odour I live, by whose sweetness I regain my health, from whose milk I take nourishment, in whose embrace I am made young, from whose kiss I receive the breath of life in whose loving embrace my whole body is lost, to him indeed I will be a father and he shall be to me a son.[53]

In the chemical wedding of chapter VI, the union vacillates between distinction and indistinction. While the language of distinction seems to be derived from Hebrews 1:5,[54] it is not clear what scriptural reference (if any) underlines the melting metaphor. It is possible that the image is taken from the Song of Songs chapter five verse six: 'I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved: but he had turned aside, and was gone. My soul melted when he spoke: I sought him, and found him not: I called, and he did not answer me.'[55] Other mystical theologians used this passage to describe unions of indistinction. Most notably, the picture of a soul 'melting in ardour' appears in St John of the Cross's *Living Flame of Love*. Like in the *Aurora*, it is the 'ardour' of love that melts the soul and grants it divine life:

> That is, that with your ardor tenderly touches me. Since this flame is a flame of divine life, it wounds the soul with the tenderness of God's life, and it wounds and stirs it so deeply as to make it dissolve in love. What the bride affirmed in the Song of Songs is fulfilled in the soul. She was so moved that her soul melted, and so she says: *As soon as*

---

[53] *AC, 59*; '[C]uius amore langueo, ardore, liquesco, odore vivo, sapore convalesce, cuius lacte nutrimentum suscipio, amplexu iuvenesco, osculo spiraculum vitae recipio, cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero ero in patrem et ipse mihi in filium.'

[54] Hebrews 1:5 (DRBO): 'Cui enim dixit aliquando angelorum : Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te? Et rursum : Ego ero illi in patrem, et ipse erit mihi in filium?'

[55] Cant. 5:6 (DRBO): Pessulum ostii mei aperui dilecto meo, at ille declinaverat, atque transierat. Anima mea liquefacta est, ut locutus est; quaesivi, et non inveni illum; vocavi, et non respondit mihi.'

he spoke my soul melted [Sg. 5:6]. For God's speech is the effect he produces in the soul.[56]

3.3 Illumination Imagery in the *Aurora*

The previous chapter argued that the classical tripartite path of mystical theology consists of three stages: purgation, illumination, and union. The cloud and the mystical union elucidated above demonstrate salient features of two of these categories, purgation and union. While the intermediary term of illumination is not present in the *Aurora* chapter VI, the text is replete with appeals to illumination and spiritual enlightenment.

At the beginning of chapter VII, like chapter VI, there is a distressed personage who suffers in a nigredo. The speaker is saved when a spirit with messianic qualities is infused into the darkness through a proliferation of light. This is likened to the coming of Christ, wherein the text compares him to a 'light' rising in the darkness:

> Herod being angry hath slain many children in Bethlehem of Juda and Rachel hath bewailed all her children and a light hath risen up in the darkness and the Sun of Justice[57] hath appeared from heaven, then the fullness of time shall come when God shall send his Son, as he hath said, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world, to whom he said of old time. Thou are my Son, today have I begotten thee: to whom the wise men from the East brought three precious gifts; in that day, which the Lord hath made, let us be glad and rejoice therein, for this day hath the Lord beheld my affliction and sent redemption, for he shall reign in Israel.[58]

This passage describes the emergence of philosophical Mercury (that is, *Mercurius*) in the alembic through the interaction of darkness and light. The entire citation moves from darkness, to illumination, and salvation as the Christ-Mercury figure drives away darkness and affliction. The association of Jesus with philosophical mercury is a peculiarity of Arnauldian alchemy and may indicate something of the influences that informed pseudo-Aquinas. For example, in the *Tractatus Parabolicus*, the 'awakening' of mercury in the

[56] SJC, 643; SJP, 985: 'Esto es, que con tu ardor tiernamente me tocas. Que, por cuanto esta llama es llama de vida divina, hiere al alma con ternura de vida de Dios, y tanto y tan entrañablemente la hiere y enternece, que la derrite en amor, por que [se] cumpla en ella lo que [con] la esposa en los Cantares, que se enterneció tanto, que se derritió, y así dice ella a[llí]: Luego que el Esposo habló, se derritió mi alma (5,6) ; porque la habla de Dios es el efecto que hace en el alma.'
[57] Cf. Mal. 4:2 (DRBO): 'Et orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum sol justitiae, et sanitas in pennis ejus : et egrediemini, et salietis sicut vituli de armento.'
[58] AC, 66–69; 'Herodes multos pueros in Bethlehem Judaeae occiderit et Rachel omnies filios suos ploraverit et lumen in tenebris exortum fuerit et Sol justitiae de coelo apparuerit, tunc veniet plenitude temporis, in qua Deus mittet filium suum.'

alembic is relayed through messianic terminology. Like the *Aurora*, mercury is a Christlike figure who eradicates darkness. When *Mercurius* 'comes alive' in the alembic, the stone is whitened, and eventually, it reaches its complete form in the rubedo:

> Malchia: 'Immediately, the master will come to his holy temple, the master whom you seek.'[59] That is, Christ when he revives the holy prophets from their chains and from the darkness. [this is] Just like [how we talk about] Mercury, when he comes alive, all darkness flees from him, and he purifies himself and whitens himself, and he is red with the best and pure red [colour].[60]

It is possible that pseudo-Aquinas was influenced by Arnauldian alchemy. The conflation of Christ with Mercury and the invocation of spiritual 'darkness' seems to support this. However, the *Aurora* draws explicit connections between Christ, illumination, and the deification of the mind that are novel in late medieval alchemical literature. The appeals to Jesus in Arnauldian texts are rhetorical embellishments i.e. they fall short of drawing perspicuous connections between alchemy and cognitive enlightenment. The *Aurora* does something much more overt and unique: it claims that the darkness of the nigredo obscures human intellect, and that the practice of alchemy illumines the mind.

The idea that the mind must wait in darkness before receiving divine light is fundamental in Dionysian mystical theology. In the thirteenth century, it was accepted that the *unio mystica* imparts light unto the intellect. This was the mainstream opinion, even though some authors insisted that the soul unites with God through its affective powers alone. For example, Thomas Gallus emphasised the role of affection in the soul's union with God. While he believed that the soul merges with God through love, he also acknowledged that its intellectual functions (while being of lesser importance) were illumined during the *unio mystica*.[61]

In the fifteenth century, Gallus's view of mystical union became a subject of debate. Denis

---

[59] Mal. 3:1 (DRBO): 'Ecce ego mittam angelum meum, et praeparabit viam ante faciem meam : et statim veniet ad templum suum Dominator quem vos quaeritis, et angelus testamenti quem vos vultis. Ecce venit, dicit Dominus exercituum.'

[60] Calvet, 'Tractatus Parabolicus', 164: 'Malachias: 'Statim ueniet ad templus sanctum suum dominator quem uos queritis' id est christus quando suscitauit et extraxit sanctos prophetas de uinculis et tenebris. Sic de mercurio quando uiuificatus omnes tenebre fugiunt ab eo, clarificat se ipsum et albificat et rubet rubore puro et optimo.'

[61] Bernard McGinn, 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism', *Studies in Spirituality*, 8 (1998): 81–96, 89–90.

the Carthusian insisted that within the cloud, the soul is united with God through both its affective powers and the intellect. When the soul is bonded with God through love, the intellect *and* the soul's loving powers participate in the union.[62] In both views, it was accepted that on some level, the intellectual properties of the soul are deified when it takes part in the *unio mystica*. The deification of the intellect comes through the reception of the 'divine ray' that pierces the caligo (cloud). The ensuing inpouring of light from heaven is the 'light' (*cataphatic*) response to the 'dark' (*apophatic*) experience in the cloud of unknowing. It is this light that transmits knowledge of God to the mind. For example, in Robert Grosseteste's commentary on the *Mystical Theology*, mystical theology itself is defined as the reception of supra-celestial light while enduring a period of stasis in darkness:

> These, therefore, are the steps of the ascent to the spiritual darkness. They are signified through the things done historically by Moses and in his regard. And this is the way of behaving in that darkness, until the divine ray may appear mysteriously, truly and without a veil, to the one who is waiting in the darkness, as has been described, and may reveal itself to him as it knows him to be fitting and worthy. And the illumination of this ray and the reception of the illumination is mystical theology, because it is the most secret speaking and talking of God with God.[63]

Like the Christ-Mercurial figure in the *Aurora,* Moses is met by a proliferation of divine light while waiting in darkness. Thomas Gallus adheres to this definition as well. In his *Exposicio*, a commentary written on the *Mystical Theology* completed in 1233, Gallus acknowledges that God's light shines downward into the cloud, enlightening it and the contemplative mind that waits within: 'In that state, [within the cloud] which is very dark

---

[62] This was done as an attempt to unite the fractured spheres of what Denis called speculative (academic) theology and mystical theology. By the late middle ages, the gap between academic theology and texts that were considered 'mystical' had widened. Denis's view of mystical union, as a union accompanied and informed by knowledge, was part of a late medieval monastic debate on the doctrines of Pseudo-Dionysius. He believed that mystical theology was fundamentally an operation of the mind, where at the heights of the intellect (apex mentis), the mind is united with god through the operation of love paired with knowledge. This stood in opposition to the fideistic views of the thirteenth century Dionysian writers (Gallus and Hugh), who believed that the soul was united with God through love alone. On the debate see Meredith Ziebart, 'Laying Siege to the Wall of Paradise', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41, (2015): 41–66. See also See chapter 9, 'Denys the Carthusian and the problem of experience' in Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 211–225.

[63] *MTG*, 84–85: 'Hii sunt igitur gradus ascensionis in spiritalem caliginem significati per facta historice a Moyse et circa Moysen, et is est modus habendi se in illa caligine donec radius divinus vere et incircumvelate superappareat dicto modo in caligine expectant, et ei se revelet ut novit decens et dignum. Et hec huius radii illustration et illustrationis susceptio mistica est theologia, quia secretissima Dei et cum Deo locution et sermocinatio.'

by the transcendence of light, God, who is the most clear light by nature, comes to be shining down upon the mind through the abundance of rays.'[64] Even Gallus, who sees mystical union as being driven by the soul's affective powers, acknowledges that mystical theology consists of waiting in darkness and the reception of divine light in the mind.

Among the Pseudo-Dionysian theologians of the thirteenth century, Hugh of Balma wrote the most discursive treatise on the threefold path of mystical theology and the purgatorial steps the soul must take to unite with God and illumine the intellect. The *Viae Syon Lugent* is divided into three lengthy discourses on purgation, illumination, and union. Hugh's definition of mystical theology is an attack upon scholastic knowledge. He argues that the true purpose of mystical theology is to draw the soul out of 'creaturely knowledge' in order to entrench it in true wisdom. The treatise outlines how one is to pray and repent, so that the soul might attain a transcendent contemplative knowledge rooted in God. In the prologue to the text, Hugh defines mystical theology as an illumination of the intellect fostered by the love of God:

> Mystical theology is written in the heart by divine illuminations and heavenly dews; creaturely knowledge is written on parchment with a goose quill and ink. Mystical theology says "Enough!" for through this this wisdom the human mind finds the source of everything, namely God the Creator, and rests most intimately in the one who is the fountain of all goodness and happiness. Creaturely knowledge, in truth, never says "Enough!" for we rightly conclude that the person who cares not for highest wisdom strays from highest truth, like a blind man enveloped in darkness. Thus the infatuated soul stuffed full of human discoveries takes many detours, Mystical wisdom warms the loving affectus and brightens the intellect; other knowledge, whenever it finds a heart devoid of true wisdom, inflates it and frequently darkens the intellect with varied opinions and diverse errors.[65]

Again, the prevailing theme expressed here is that of waiting in darkness and the illumination of the intellect. Denis the Carthusian uses similar terminology at the end of fifteenth century. In book three, section two of *De Contemplatione,* he writes that the

---

[64] MTG, 21: 'Et in illo statu obsurissimo per execcsum luminis Deus, quo est clarissimus per naturam, fit menti supersplendens per radiorum habundanciam.'

[65] Martin, *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, 70; Hugh of Balma, *Théologie Mystique*, 127–128 'Ista divinis illuminationibus et distillationibus caelestibus scribitur in corde; illa vero penna anseris et atramento scribitur in pelle. Ista dicit: "Sufficit", nam per eam animus causam omnium scillicet Deum, Creatorem suum invenit et in ipso, qui est fons totius bonitatis et beatitudinis, immediatissime conquiescit; illa vero nunquam dicit: "Sufficit", nam iustum iudicium es tut qui, non curando de summa sapientia, a summa veritate deviat, veluti caecus in tenebris involvatur, et sic per serta discurrat. Item ista adfectum inflammat et intellectum illuminat; illa vero quampluries variis opinionibus et diversis erroribus intellectum obtenebrat.'

contemplative soul is united with God when it is plunged into the darkness of the cloud, and then enlightened when met by an influx of light received within the darkness: ‘Through this contemplation, the soul is joined to God in a way that is incomprehensible to it and unknown and plunged into an infinite ocean and a profound unsearchable darkness [cloud].[66] Yet within its own nature, there shines a most splendid light.’[67] Denis assigns great importance to the intellect during contemplation, yet he defines mystical union as the receiving of a light that manifests in the darkness of unknowing.

There is a correspondence between these definitions of mystical theology and the way pseudo-Aquinas conceives of alchemy. He describes alchemy as a spiritual work that hinges upon the reception of divine light. In a citation of an earlier medieval Benedictine monk Notker Balbulus (c. 840–c. 912) he compares metallic transmutation to the illumination of a mind imprisoned in darkness: ‘[H]e enlighteneth, when he taketh away all darkness from the body, of which the hymn singeth: Purge the horrible darkness of our mind, enkindle a light in our senses, and the Prophet: He conducted them all the night with a light of fire, and night shall be light as the day’.[68] Pseudo-Aquinas is suggesting something quite extraordinary here. By ‘body’, he means the alchemical body, or the mineral substance the alchemist works with in pursuit of the philosopher’s stone. The insinuation is that when the alchemist purifies the *body* of the stone, the mind is *illumined*. In other words, alchemy is both a physical and spiritual exercise, wherein the mind receives light while it is in darkness.

This is a major conceptual step in alchemical theory. The idea that alchemy is both a spiritual and physical process is a notion that is much more pronounced in early-modern alchemical literature, and a trait indicative of alchemical texts that were written in Germany after the Italian Renaissance. While this is generally true, connections were drawn between alchemy and mental enlightenment as early as the thirteenth century. In his

[66] The Latin word used here is ‘caligini’ which is a declension of ‘caligo’. In Latin, caligo can mean darkness, gloom, or obscurity, but the word also has connotations of ‘fog’, ‘mist’ or ‘cloud’. See ‘caligo’, in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources*, 2015.
[67] Denis and Riain, *The Spiritual Writings of Denis the Carthusian*, 155; Denis the Carthusian, *Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, 256:‘per hanc quippe contemplationem mens Deo conjungitur tanquam incomprehensibili et ignoto, ac pelago infinito atque caligini sibi penitus investigabili et absconsae, quamvis in sua natura sit supersplendidissimum lumen.’
[68] *AC, 90–91:* ‘[I]lluminat, quando omnes tenebrositates tollit de corpore, de quo canitur: Horridas nostrae mentis purge tenebras, accende lumen sensibus, et Propheta: fuit eis dux tota nocte in illumination ignis et tunc nox sicut dies illuminabitur.’

major defence of natural philosophy, the *Opus Maius*, the English polymath and alchemist Roger Bacon (c. 1219/20–c. 1292) contends that the practice of natural philosophy (which includes alchemy) works in concert with faith to illumine the intellect.[69] He writes:

> It is necessary, therefore, that the intellect of man should be otherwise aided, and for this reason the holy patriarchs and prophets, who first gave sciences to the world, received illumination within and were not dependent on sense alone. The same is true of many believers since the time of Christ. For the grace of faith illuminates greatly, as also do divine inspirations, not only in things spiritual, but in things corporeal and in the sciences of philosophy.[70]

Here, Bacon argues that there is an intrinsic connection between theology, natural philosophy and illumination. The same qualities that illumine the mind apply to the physical operations of material science. He draws no great distinction between spirit, intellect, and matter, and he defines both science and theology as practices that are inherently connected to the enlightenment of the mind. This theology of 'illumination' became popular among Franciscans at the end of the thirteenth century; an order to which Bacon belonged.[71] Similar ideas appear in the writings of Bacon's predecessor, and possible teacher, Robert Grosseteste, who developed a theory of experiential science contingent upon the illumination of the mind.

The basic theory Grosseteste outlines in texts like *De veritate*, *De Luce,* and his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* is that experimental science is a mental recollection of latent divine light concealed within matter from when God created the universe. Science, or 'knowing', is not the falsification of ideas deemed untenable. Rather, *experimentum,* perhaps most appropriately translated as 'experience' rather than

---

[69] In 1266, pope Clement IV issued a series of papal mandates requesting that Bacon provide him with a comprehensive summary of his natural philosophy. This work became one of Bacon's most important works the *Opus Majus,* which was supplemented by two other works *The Opus Minus* and the *Opus Tertium*. In these texts, Bacon discusses the 'practical utility of philosophy', and touches on the sciences of optics, mathematics, and alchemy. See Lynn Thorndike, 'The True Roger Bacon, I.', *The American Historical Review*, 21 (1916): 237–57.

[70] Roger Bacon, 'Pars Sexta: Hujus Persaasionis', in *Opus Majus*, ed. John Henry Bridges vol. 2 of 3, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879–1900), 2.167–222, esp. 169: 'Ergo oporet quod intellectus hominis aliter juvetur, et ideo sancti patriarchae et prophetae, qui primo dederunt scientias mundo, receperunt illuminations interiors et non solum stabant in sensu. Et similiter multi post Christum difeles. Nam gratia fidei illuminat multum, et divinae inspirations, non solum in spiritualibus, sed corporalibus et scientiis philosophiae' English translation from Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus,* trans. Robert Belle Burke, 2 Vols (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), 2. 585.

[71] The major study on this is R. K. French and Andrew Cunningham, *Before Science: The Invention of the Friars' Natural Philosophy* (Scolar Press: Aldershot, 1996).

‘experiment’ with its unhelpful modern valence, is a sensory interaction with this light of creation that dwells within matter. This ‘touching’ up against or contact with divine light allows the mind to recall knowledge of God that was crystallised within matter on the first day of creation. [72]

There are striking similarities between Grosseteste’s theory of light and the alchemical concept of *Mercurius*, which despite the myriad of definitions in alchemical literature, is really just divine light concealed within matter. Indeed, Grosseteste wrote on alchemy and the philosopher’s stone in his text *On the Liberal Arts*.[73] His is a cogent example of the kind of polymathic figure that drew connections between the illumination, mystical theology, and material sciences like alchemy by the end of the thirteenth century.

Such connections between illumination and experimental science begin to appear in alchemical literature in the middle of the fourteenth century. One of the earliest authors to suggest that alchemy is comprised of both an outward material expression, and an inner spiritual illumination was the Lombard Petrus Bonus (fl. c. 1323–1330). In his *Pretiosa Margarita Novella,* he defines alchemy as a composite of physical practice and intellectual illumination. He writes: ‘Our technique is partly natural and partly divine, or above nature.’[74] Bonus goes on to claim that alchemy, like theology, leads the soul through a purgatorial journey that takes it through three stages of mystical development: faith, reason, and illumination.[75]

The *Aurora* endorses this definition of alchemy when at the beginning of the text *Sapientia* says: ‘Come ye to me and be enlightened, and your operations shall not be confounded; all ye that desire me shall be filled with my riches. Come (therefore), children, hearken to me; I will teach you the science of God.’[76] Pseudo-Aquinas conceives of alchemy not as a mere

---

[72] On the theory see Simon Oliver, ‘Robert Grosseteste on Light, Truth and “Experimentum”’, *Vivarium*, 42 (2004): 151–80.
[73] See Giles Gasper et al., eds, *The Scientific Works of Robert Grosseteste, Volume 1: Knowing and Speaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 88–89.
[74] See Petrus Bonus, ‘Margarita Pretosia Novella’, in Jean-Jacques Manget, *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*, vol. 2 (Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702), 1–80, 29: ‘Ars haec [. . .] partim est naturalis, & partim divina, sive supra naturam.’
[75] On Bonus’s method see Chiara Crisciani, ‘The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara’, *Ambix*, 20 (1973): 165–81.
[76] AC, 32–33: ‘Accedite ad me et illuminamini et operations vestrae non confundentur omnes qui concupiscitis me divitiis meis adimplemini. Venite (ergo) filii, audite me, scientiam De docebo vos.’

material science, but as an illumination of the intellect nurtured through the love of divine Wisdom. Contemplatives followed the same logic. True knowledge is imparted unto the mind through divine illuminations, not scholarly practice.

The idea that alchemical wisdom is the marriage of physical practice and spiritual illumination (that is, a reflection of spiritual principles in the material world) was one that reached its apogee in the early modern-period. Its proponents were German Lutheran mystics, and a set of English alchemists who wrote in defence of the Rosicrucian order, a legendary brotherhood of Christian esotercists that published alchemical manifestos in the early years of the seventeenth century.[77] For example, the English alchemist Robert Fludd (1574 –1637) critiqued those in his day who saw alchemy as a mere expression of material science (the proponents of what he called *chymia vulgaris*). He also rebuked those who saw the art as a mere allegory for spiritual transmutation. His text *Truth's Golden Harrow* is a polemical treatise addressed to one such figure.[78]

In his text, Fludd comments on the qualities of the philosopher's stone, and the nature of spiritual light. He argues that the stone is comprised of both a physical body, and a concentrated Mercurial body of heavenly luminescence. Following the steps of his medieval forebears, like Bacon and Grosseteste, he equates this luminosity with the light of intellectual virtue. The stone is a physical manifestation of philosophical and 'theological' light, made manifest in matter:

> This inward and centrall brightness is the golden beame of formall perfection, the glittering seed of the true and simple philosophicall and Theologicall light, which is sowed in the cleare and transparent virgin earth or vessell of purity. It is the simple emanation without any respect unto the creature, ishewing from the fountayne of light. It is the essential or formall centre and circumference, the beginning and the end, the all in all the lif and increated light of the world.[79]

Fludd's account of the stone's spiritual essence is significant for another reason. Later on in the treatise, he explains that in order to be enlightened, the alchemist must draw the

[77] See 'The First Rosy-Cross' in Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, trans. Christine Rhone, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2010), 43–46.
[78] The text is edited in C. H. Josten, 'Truth's Golden Harrow An Unpublished Alchemical Treatise of Robert Fludd in the Bodleian Library', *Ambix*, 3 (1949): 91–150.
[79] Josten, 'Truth's Golden Harrow', 124.

Mercurial 'light' out of its dwelling place in an 'impure' and 'confused' substance. This substance is the dark vapour released in the vessel during sublimation. Like pseudo-Aquinas in chapter VI, he equates this dark and confused state with the Biblical image of the cloud:

> Ezekiell compareth it unto the likenes of amber appearing out of the midst of that fier which ishewed out of the dark clowd comminge from the North. Wher by the dark clowd is ment the impure and confused substance in which this light or fier did dwell, out of which it must be extracted by the pure and undefiled shape of amber he understandeth this centrall light, which dwelleth in the material elixir, as the shape of amber did in the fier which ishewed out of the clowd coming out of the North.[80]

Fludd's usage of the 'cloud' metaphor, and his unambiguous association of alchemy with illumination demonstrates a continuity in thought between early-modern and medieval alchemy. The beliefs expressed here have their roots in late medieval alchemical treatises like the *Aurora* and the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella,* that were the first alchemical works to provide a textual basis for the concept of intellectual illumination in alchemical practice.[81] While the *Aurora* was one of the first Latin alchemical texts to draw such explicit connections between the physical practice of alchemy and spiritual enlightenment, the idea that alchemy illumines the mind was one that was already germinating in the thirteenth century.

3.4 Senior and *De Chemia*: The Origin of the Nigredo in Chapter VI

The usage of emblematic symbolism in the *Aurora Consurgens* is a characteristic that was innovative in Latin alchemy. Only the early fifteenth-century treatise *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* is contemporaneous with it in its usage of pictorial elements.[82] Likewise, the

---

[80] *Idem*, 125.

[81] Barbara Obrist has argued that this trend in alchemy belonged to a set of alchemical texts oriented towards the spiritual Franciscans i.e. John of Rupescissa and pseudo-Arnald of Villanova. The *Tractatus Parabolicus* belongs to this group of texts as well. See Barbara Obrist, 'Visualization in Medieval Alchemy', *HYLE-International Journal for Philosophy of Chemistry*, 9 (2003): 131–70, 156: 'Alchemical documents belonging to this orientation related supra-natural phenomena to the realm of nature and declared artificial trans-formations achieved by alchemist as being natural to a certain point. Beyond this, namely on the level of substantial transformation, they considered changes miraculous and therefore not apprehensible by rational scientific investigation but only by experiment and illumination. As a consequence, explicit parallels were established between alchemical transmutation and the Eucharistic transformation.'

[82] The *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* was one of the first texts written in medieval German. Dated to the early years of the 15th century, the text is seen as the culmination of alchemical texts belonging to the spiritual Franciscans and their association of the alchemical opus with the death and resurrection of Christ. See Herwig Buntz, 'Das "Buch Der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit". Sein Autor Und Seine Überlieferung', *Zeitschrift Für Deutsches Altertum Und Deutsche Literatur*, 101 (1972): 150–60. The text was more popular than the *Aurora*, and survives in a little over twenty manuscripts. Unfortunately, there is no critical edition.

Aurora's dramatization of the alchemical work was a novelty among Latin alchemical texts. The *Aurora* makes reference to Christian symbology, like Arnauldian alchemy, but it takes these references one step further by interpreting alchemy as a grandiose example of mystical union. Such traits were not developed in isolation, rather, they are characteristics the text inherited from an Islamicate alchemist known as Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî (fl. c. 900–c. 960). The *Aurora* chapter VI is, in actuality, an interpretation of one of his works, a tenth-century treatise referred to in Latin as *De Chemia*.

Ibn Umail, who was known to the Latins as 'Senior', was an important figure in Latin alchemy. Senior, which is a Latinised interpretation of the Arabic title '*Sheikh*', lived and wrote in Egypt in the tenth century. His poetico-rhetorical approach to alchemical discourse was a direct influence on the *Aurora Consurgens*, and his text, the *al-Ma' al-waraqi wa-l-ard an-najmiyya* (*The Silvery Water and the Starry Earth*), interprets the purgation of the philosopher's stone during the albedo as an event contingent upon the reception of celestial light.[83] It is one of the first alchemical texts to associate the practice with illumination. The *Silvery Water* is a commentary on another work of Umail, an alchemical poem known as *Risālat al-shams wa-l-hilāl* (*The Epistle on the Sun and the Crescent*). In Latin, the texts were known as the *Tablua Chemica* and the *Epistola Solis ad Lunam crescentem in tenuitate nimia* (Letter from the Sun to the Waxing Moon) respectively.[84] The *Epistle* sometimes appeared separately in manuscripts, but in Latin the texts were often referred to together as *De Chemia.*[85]

De Chemia is, in fact, one of the oldest texts in the Latin alchemical tradition. It was translated from Arabic in the latter half of the twelfth century, or early in the thirteenth century in one of the translational border regions of Latin Christendom (probably Spain).[86]

The only edition available is a diplomatic copy of a single manuscript. See Uwe Junker, ed., *Das 'Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit': in seiner zweiten, alchemistischen Fassung (Kadolzburg 1433)*, Kölner medizinhistorische Beiträge 40 (Feuchtwangen: Kohlhauer, 1986). The text is even more bizarre than the *Aurora* and follows no coherent or discernible structure. This is the primary reason why it has not hitherto been studied with any great detail.

[83] This can be traced through citations and pictorial representations of Senior's alchemy in the *Aurora*. It is particularly obvious in the ways which his prose, and the *Aurora* frame the union of sulphur and mercury as a dialogue between lovers (see below). On the dating and location of Senior and his works see Peter Starr, 'Towards a Context for Ibn Umayl, Known to Chaucer as the Alchemist "Senior"', *Çankaya University Journal of Arts and Sciences,* 11 (2009).

[84] Anawati, *Arabic alchemy,* in Rāshid and Morelon, eds, *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, vol. 3, 870.

[85] Starr,'Towards a Context for Ibn Umayl', 63.

[86] See Julius Ruska, 'Der Urtext der Tabula Chemica', *Archeion* 16 (1934): 273–83.

Traditionally, it circulated alongside a collection of texts that were, in the twelfth century, spuriously ascribed to Artephius.[87] The text had a long-lasting influence, and appeared in a wide range of late medieval and early modern alchemical compendiums.[88]

De Chemia is concerned with correspondences between the terrestrial world and the supercelestial alchemical cosmos. Like the *Aurora*, it is a dialogue that makes use of affective prose.[89] The text begins with an account of an excursion in Egypt in the course of which Ibn Umail enters a pyramid. Upon entering the structure, he is confronted with a statue of Hermes Trismegistus seated upon a chair in the centre of the building's great hall. The statue is portrayed as holding a slab which resembles an open book. On the right side of the book, two birds are depicted as being locked together, preventing one another from flying. The birds are flanked by an illustration of the sun and moon.[90]

Inscribed on the left page is an image of two suns emitting rays into a 'lower' world. One sun emits a ray which is described as the power of 'both suns in one'. This ray is the combined virtue of the celestial bodies, which amalgamate to form a single beam of light. The other sun emits a single ray of its own virtue. Adjacent to the lower world is a moon that is surrounded by a black circle. The moon is described as being a crescent that exhibits the qualities of the combined rays from the combined celestial bodies that emanate into its body:

> However in the other half, at the top of the tablet, next to the fingers of the statue, there was an image of a sun shining forth rays, like an image of two in one. And in the other part, another image of a sun, with one ray going downwards. And these are three, that is to say two lights and the ray of the two in one and the ray of one descending, stretched out towards the bottom of the tablet, surrounding a black sphere, divided across its centre of rotation and the three things are made two plus a third thing.[91]

---

[87] Starr, 'Towards a Context for Ibn Umayl', 66, n11.

[88] The text is preserved in major alchemical compendiums, including the *Theatrum Chemicum* Vol. 5 pages 218–266 and the *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* Vol. 2 pages 216–235. An updated version of the Latin text along with translations rendered from the original Arabic was published in 1933 by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. This translation presents the most cogent Latin translation available Latin references to *De* Chemia will be drawn from this document. See Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî, Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, ed. H. E. Stapleton et al., vol. 12, 1 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1933).

[89] Starr, 'Towards a Context for Ibn Umayl', 67.

[90] This symbolises sulphur, mercury and the universality of prime matter with the birds representing a kind of Ouroboros.

[91] Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî, 'De Chemia', in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 148: 'In alia autem medietate in capite tabulae declinante ad digitos statuae, erat imago Solis emittens radios, velut imago duorum in uno. Et in altera parte alia imago Solis, cum uno radio descendente. Et haex sunt tria, scilicet duo lumina & radius duorum in uno & radius unius descendens, porrectus ad inferius tabulae, circundans sphaeram nigram divisam per circuitum ejus, & factum est duo tertia & tertium.'

The emanation of celestial rays described here is a symbolic reference to the purgation of the philosopher's stone and the chemical wedding. Ibn Umail explains that each ray represents the many characteristics of liquid mercury and sulphur found within the crucible at various stages of the work. The rays are the hot, dry, wet, and moist qualities of the elements reflected in the heavenly partition of the cosmos. He writes: 'But the three higher ones [rays] are the image of the divine spirituality, in which there is water [soul].'[92]

While the allusions to the chemical wedding are not immediately obvious here, the obscurity of the passage is illuminated when contextualized against the first part of the text, the *Epistola Solis ad Lunam crescentem in tenuitate nimia*. The *Epistola* is an account of the astrological qualities of the sun and moon. These powers combine to emanate light downward to the lower world and form the philosopher's stone. The moon that is the beneficiary of the combined rays is 'purged' of its blackness, thereby representing the 'whitening' of the albedo. When we read the text, the dialogue format and rhetorical style are immediately reminiscent of the tenor of the *Aurora* chapter VI:

> In great weakness I will give you light from my beauty till I have reached perfection. [the sun will be exalted to the greatest height.] First the moon says to the sun: You need me as the cock needs the hen, and I need your works, O Sun, without interruption, because you are of perfect character, the father of all lights, the high light, the great Master and Lord. I am the waxing moon, moist and cold, and you are the sun, warm and dry.[93]

This union of celestial bodies is portrayed as a sexual bond between lovers. The analogy of the cock and hen represents a union between the elemental qualities of sulphur and mercury. Astrologically, the mixing of the sun's qualities (hot and dry) with the moon's qualities (moist and cold) denotes the balancing of elemental characteristics during the

---

[92] Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî, 'De Chemia', in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 155: 'tria vero superiora imago est divinae spiritualitatis, in qua est aqua.' The translator of the text rendered the final word of the sentence as 'water', but in the original Arabic, it is 'soul'. See note 2 on the same page.

[93] The English translation here is taken from Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts 5 (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), 111; Umail al-Tamîmî, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 148–149: 'Dabo tibi de pulchritudine mea lumen, quo pervenitur ad perfectionem. Exaltatur enim per hoc ad omne altum. Dixit primo luna soli. Tu mei indiges, sicut Gallus Gallinae indiget & ego indigeo ope tua ô Sol, sine cessation, cum tu sis perfectis moribus, pater luminarium, tu es lumen, dominus excelsus & magnus. Ego luna crescens frigida & humida, & tu sol calidus & siccus.'

chemical wedding. Later in text, the sun responds to the moon, commenting on the transference of its virtue and light:

> [The sun responded] If you do this, and if you do me no harm, O Moon, and if my body will return, then I will give you a new virtue of penetration and after this you will be powerful in the battle of the fire of liquefaction and purgation and there will no longer be any diminishing, or darkness, as it is with the copper and the lead, and you will not fight me anymore because you will not be rebellious anymore.[94]

In this example, the transmission of the sun's 'virtue' gives the moon the power it needs to cleanse itself of darkness and withstand the destructive intensity of the alchemical fire. In alchemical theory, this is known as 'fixation', wherein the volatile metallic 'spirit' is fastened to the stone during the act of sublimation.[95] Ibn Umail does something quite unique here, as he associates the operation of fixation, with spiritual illumination, and a mystical union of sulphur and mercury. The waxing of the moon is a symbol used to represent purgation within the crucible itself. As the moon becomes fuller, it becomes increasingly bright and increasingly white, shedding the darkness of the nigredo.

Ibn Umail associates this 'full' moon with the virtues of philosophical mercury (*Mercurius*). It represents both the perfection of the earthly 'waters' found in the crucible and the image of illumination found in the heavens and supercelestial light. In other words, the brightening of the moon represents both the purification of elemental mercury and the enlightenment of the intellect: 'The full moon is the water of philosophers and the root of knowledge. For the moon is the ruler of the humours and the waxing moon above, and the double moon above are three parts of water [. . .] and this is always the Moon at its perfection, and the fullness of its light.'[96] He also calls this perfect mercury a 'life-giving cloud of the lower world',[97] a possible source for the cloud vision in the *Aurora* chapter VI, albeit without the terrible purgatorial qualities that make that chapter so distinct.

---

[94] von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*, 112. Umail al-Tamîmî, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 149: 'Respondit sol, si feceris hoc & non intuleris mihi nocumentum ô luna, & revertetur corpus meum, postea novam dabo tibi virtutem penetrationis, per quam potens eris in praelio ignis liquefactionis & purgationis, ex quo ibis sine diminution & tenebris [?], sicut aes & plumbum & non impugnaberis, cum non sis rebellis.'

[95] In other words, during fixation, the spirit of mercury that is released during sublimation is affixed to the body of the infant stone, so it may undergo the heat of the purgative flame without evaporating.

[96] *Idem*, 159: ' Luna plena est aquam Philosophorum & radix scientiae. Est enim luna dominatrix humorum & luna crescens superius, & luna duplex superius, sunt tres partes aquae [. . .] et haec semper est Luna apud perfectionem, & plentitudinem sui luminis.'

[97] *Idem*, 155: 'similiter nominant hanc aquam nubem vivificantem, mundum inferiorem.'

Barbara Obrist has demonstrated that the elaborate poetical nature of late medieval alchemy has its origin in *De Chemia*. She has shown that from 1140 until the middle of the thirteenth century, Latin alchemy was largely 'devoid of pictorial elements'.[98] At the beginning of fourteenth century, images began to enter into alchemical discourse. It was *De Chemia*, through the mediation of the *Aurora,* that transmitted these poetical-pictorial elements into Latin alchemy. This transmission came in textual themes, like the courtship of the sun and moon (an image that became ubiquitous in late medieval alchemy) and in pictorial motifs transmitted through the text itself. These motifs also bequeathed to the *Aurora* its rhetorical style. The *Aurora* is a dialogue based on the relationship between sulphur/mercury and alchemist/wisdom. This, in turn, is based upon the courtship of the cock and hen in *De Chemia.*

There is evidence for this in direct citations and pictorial representations of *De Chemia* within the *Aurora* itself. One such example, appearing in the Zurich manuscript, depicts the allegory of the two suns and celestial rays. The scene is found in the original fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Aurora*, the Codex Rhenoviensis 172:[99]

---

[98] Obrist, 'Visualization in Medieval Alchemy', 131.

[99] The image appears in 'Ms. Rh. 172' (Zürich, 15th century), f. 3r–7. For more information on the manuscript see Persis Berlekamp, 'Painting as Persuasion: A Visual Defense of Alchemy in an Islamic Manuscript of the Mongol Period', *Muqarnas*, 20 (2003): 35–59.

Image 1. Hermes, the Two Suns, and the Waxing Moon in a Fifteenth Century Manuscript of the *Aurora*.[100]

The image presented here depicts Hermes Trismegistus holding the tablet mentioned above. The illustration contains the birds locked in flight, the sun (cock) moon (hen) and the waxing moon contained in the lower world. Likewise, it shows the two beams shining light that emanate from the higher celestial bodies unto the lower world. In the *Aurora*, Pseudo-Aquinas makes reference to the *Epistola Solis ad Lunam crescentem in tenuitate nimia* at the end of chapter VI.[101] He claims that the very purpose of the parable is to demonstrate how the purgation of the stone is received through celestial influences. Purgation is mediated through the seven planets:

> But he that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the spirit of the doctrine saith to the sons of the discipline concerning the seven stars, by which the divine work is wrought. And of these Senior treateth in his book in the chapter of the Sun and Moon, saying: After thou hast made those seven <metals> which thou hast distributed through the seven stars (and hast appointed to the seven stars) <and> has purged them nine times until they appear as pearls (in likeness) – this is the Whitening.[102]

In the same breath, he describes the powers of purgation as descending to the earth through a vision of the heavens opening:

> Therefore were the heavens opened above him and there thundered the voice of him who holdeth the seven stars in his hand, which are the seven spirits sent forth into all the earth to preach and bear witness. He that believe and is well baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned.[103]

In both *De Chemia* and the *Aurora*, purgation is portrayed as a spiritual event of cosmic significance. In *De Chemia*, the metallic substance is conflated with the waxing moon as it is it purged of blackness through the reception of solar rays. In the *Aurora*, the same idea is connected to the seven planets and the opening of the heavens. In both instances the creation of the philosopher's stone is expressed through the reception of virtues from

[100] Reproduced from Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 172: *Aurora Consurgens*, f. 3r- 7 (https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/zbz/Ms-Rh-0172).

[101] Cf. Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî, 'De Chemia', in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 149-150: '[D]ivisti per septem stellas, purgasti & hoc tritum minute, donec videantur sicut margaritae in similitudine.'

[102] *AC,* 62–64: 'Qui autem aures habet audendi audiat, quid dicat spiritus doctrinae filiis disciplinae de septem stellis, quibus opus divinum perag1tur. Quas Senior tradit in libro suo, capitulo Solis et Lunae, dicens: Potquam feceris illa septem quae divisisti per septem stellas (et dedisti septet stellis) <et> novices purgasti donne videantur margarina (in similitudine) haec est dealbatio.'

[103] *AC,* 60–61: 'Ideo aperti sunt coeli super eum et vox intonuit illus, qui habet septem stellas in manu sua, qui sunt septem spiritus missi in omnem terram praedicare et testificari. Qui crediderit et bene baptizatus fuerit salvus erit, qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.'

heaven, as alchemy is portrayed as a practice that transcends the temporal limitations of the earth. There are a series of themes here that are congruent between the *Aurora*, *De Chemia*, and mystical theology. Both *De Chemia* and the *Aurora* convey their spiritual alchemy through the motifs of purgation, illumination, and an affective union of lovers. They both (like the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella*) represent alchemy as an art with a dual nature. It is a practice that is both heavenly and physical, and one that surpasses the material confines of a laboratory. As much as the *Aurora* draws heavily upon unitive symbolism found in scripture, it is a text whose theological themes explore the ideas and language found in Ibn Umail's *De Chemia*.

3.5 Conclusions

In the texts above, liberal references to the death and resurrection of Christ, black clouds of mystical darkness, the redemption of sin and corruption, and illuminating rays of light are all heavily symbolic images that transgress the boundaries of alchemy and mystical theology. These images, as the great twentieth-century medieval historian Johan Huizinga observed, were illustrative of the religious culture of northern Europe in the late middle ages: 'Towards the end of the Middle Ages two factors dominate religious life: the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images [. . .] There is not an object nor an action, however trivial, that is not constantly correlated with Christ or salvation.'[104] The pervasiveness of these images in texts like the *Aurora* may, very simply, be the byproduct of the late medieval culture of northern Europe that imbedded Christ (and mystical themes) into every facet of life.

With the *Aurora*, there is still an issue that extends beyond the usage of these images. The author is drawing upon tropes clearly delineated in mystical theology, i.e. the manifestation of dark and terrible clouds, 'melting' metaphors, the illumination of the mind, and unions of indistinction. Furthermore, the *Aurora* participates in all three aspects of the *triplici via*. The cloud of chapter VI represents purgation and affective union, whereas chapter I, chapter VII, and chapter IX demonstrate a belief that alchemy conveys knowledge to the mind through supernatural means. Throughout the history of alchemy, there has always existed a custom of reading the Bible through the framework of alchemical allegory. Scripture was, undoubtedly, a major influence on the text.

[104] Johan Huizinga, *Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976, orig. publ. 1919), 136.

Alchemists believed that the prophets and apostles were privy to alchemical knowledge, with a common idea being that God taught the secret of the opus to Adam who was considered the first master alchemist.[105] The *Aurora* is not simply reading alchemy through the Bible however, the text follows the tripartite path of purgation, illumination, and union. It uses all of the tropes commonly associated with contemplative literature to frame alchemy as a purgative ascent that culminates in a union with eternal wisdom.

On the matter of illumination imagery in the text, like so many conceptual elements of alchemical theory, the exact origin of 'illuminationist' thought in alchemy is nearly impossible to trace. The concept appears initially in the writings of Zosimos, diminishes in Latin alchemy, then appears again almost fully formed in the late middle ages and early-modern period. The *Aurora* and *De Chemia* associate philosophical mercury with knowledge, and later in the early modern period, Robert Fludd connects it to 'theologicall' light. In the case of the *Aurora*, where nothing is known of the author, an examination of the prose will have to suffice.

---

[105] Alchemical readings of the Bible date back to the beginning of the practice. In alchemical lore, great figures of the Bible from Adam, Moses, and Daniel were said to possess the alchemical secret. On alchemical interpretations of the bible see Thomas Willard, 'Alchemy and the Bible', in Eleanor Cook et al., eds, *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). See also Chiara Crisciani, 'The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara', *Ambix*, 20 (1973): 165–81, 171.

Chapter 4: *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Mystical Imagery in English Alchemy

In order to further the previous chapter's discussion of purgation and union, attention turns here to a more detailed exploration of English treatises of alchemy and mystical theology. These provide a detailed case-study for the overlapping frames in concept and language between the two fields. English alchemy in the late middle ages was more insular than the continent, yet the language its practitioners used contains the purgative tropes common to all works of mystical theology. The centrepiece of this analysis comes in the shared cloud motif that appears in both the *Aurora* and the most famous text of medieval mystical theology to engage with the concept, the *Cloud of Unknowing*. This chapter, therefore, offers a more detailed exposition of English alchemy and mystical theology to better understand the historical context that produced the *Cloud of Unknowing*. It queries a set of shared images between traditions on the continent and in England and examines the ways in which two seemingly parallel traditions interpenetrate one another.

4.1 Prayer and Images of Ascent in English alchemy

Ascent imagery has always played an important role in mystical theology. The technical term for the concept is '*anagoge*'(from ἀναγωγή 'climb' or 'ascent').[1] Anagogical imagery pertains to any religious discourse that describes an upward ascent, or rising motion away from vice.[2] The title of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (sometimes given as the *Ladder of Perfection*) is itself anagogical, as it refers to the contemplative ascent as the soul grows in holiness. In the late middle ages and early-modern period, anagogical motifs permeated alchemical symbolism as they became intertwined with theology. In Germany, Martin Luther famously likened alchemy to God's judgement on the last day, where Christian souls ascend upwards to heaven like sublimated vapour. The damned, Luther said, were

[1] Images of the soul's ascent are embodied in the writings of the Neoplatonic theurgists of late antiquity, particularly the Syrian philosopher Iamblichus (c. 242 – c. 325). See John Finamore, 'Iamblichus, Theurgy, and the Soul's Ascent', in *Philosophy and Salvation in Greek Religion*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013). Iamblichus influenced Pseudo-Dionysius, who passed the imagery on to the affective mystical theology of the middle ages. See Paul Rorem, 'Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology' in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, XVIII (Oxford: Pergamon press, 1982).

[2] For example, the purgatorial kisses described by St Bernard in chapter two are anagogical, because they move upward from the feet to the mouth as the sin of the soul abates.

left behind in the 'dross' and 'filth' of hell; an allegorical reading of the nigredo in comparison with Christian eschatology.[3]

The tendency to describe the operation of sublimation through anagogical terms is not an innovation of early modernity. In reality, the idea is attributable to one of the original texts of Latin alchemy derived Arabic sources, the *Emerald Table*. The text's popularity was unrivalled, and by the late middle ages, practitioners of alchemy would have had access to it through a variety of translations.[4] The *Emerald Table* presents what is perhaps the earliest account of alchemical anagoge:

> If it be turned toward earth, it will separate earth from fire, the subtle from the gross. Smoothly, with great ability, it rises from earth to heaven; again it descends to earth and receives the power of things on high and of things below. Thus you will possess the glory of the splendor of the world; therefore all darkness will flee from you.[5]

It may be tempting to read the *Emerald Table* as an elaborate spiritual allegory, but the earliest exegesis of the text invariably interpreted it as a coded portrayal of calcination and sublimation. This was the view of St Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) in his *Book of Minerals* in which the subtle essence that rises to heaven and descends again is one of the central images of the entire alchemical opus.[6]

---

[3] See Martin Luther, *Colloquia Oder Tischreden* (Frankfurt: Anton Lauterbach, 1568), 361. For the English translation see Martin Luther, 'Of the Resurrection' in William Hazlitt, ed., *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (London: Clowes and Sons, 1872), DCCCV, 326. For more on Luther's views on alchemy see Stanton J. Linden, 'Alchemy and Eschatology in Seventeenth-Century Poetry', *Ambix*, 31, (1984): 102–24.

[4] The earliest translation was Hugo of Santalla's twelfth century rendition. In the thirteenth century, the text was again translated into Latin in conjunction with the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum secretorum*. The most widely disseminated copy in the late middle ages came in an anonymous compilation called the *Liber Hermetis, or* the *Liber rebis*. This edition was translated sometime in the late twelfth or thirteenth century. For an edition of the *Liber Hermetis* see Robert Steele and Dorothea Waley Singer, 'The Emerald Table', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 21 (1928): 485–501.

[5] This translation is derived from the Latin rendition of Hugo of Santalla in the *Kitāb sirr al-khalīqa* (*Book of the Secret of Creation*). This version was selected because of the recency of its critical apparatus and the age of the Steele and Singer edition. See M. David Litwa, ed., 'Emerald Tablet', in *Hermetica II: The Excerpts of Stobaeus, Papyrus Fragments, and Ancient Testimonies in an English Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 314–16, 315. For the Latin see Francois Hudry, 'Le *De secretis nature* du Pseduo-Apollonius de Tyane: Traduction latine par Hugues de Santalla du Kitæb sirr al-halîqa' in *Cinq traités alchimiques médiévaux*, Chrysopoeia, 6 (Paris: SÉHA 2000), 152: 'si terra fiat, eam ex igne subtili, qui omnem grossitudinem et quod hebes est antecellit, spatiosibus, et prudenter et sapientie industria, educite. A terra ad celum conscendet, a celo ad terram dilabetur, superiorum et inferiorum vim continens atque potentiam. Unde omnis ex eodem illuminatur obscuritas.'

[6] The *Book of Minerals*, or *De Mineralibus* was likely written between 1261 and 1264 alongside a collection Albert's scientific works See the introduction in Albertus Magnus, *The Book of Minerals*, trans. Dorothy Wyckoff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), xxxv–xlii. For Albert's exegesis on the passage see pg.

In alchemy, this is known as the work of circulation (*opus circulorum*). Circulation is a continual cycle of sublimation and distillation, where the seed of the metal (along with the *Mercurial* essence) climbs to 'heaven' (the top the alembic) and falls downward towards the earth (the bottom of the alembic) repeatedly. The technique took place in a circular distillery apparatus known as a pelican, where it was practiced in order to separate the metallic 'soul' from impure sulphur and mercury. Through a continual rising and falling motion, the body of the stone (the blackened mass) was said to take on the spiritual qualities of the distilled vapour, a process that purified it of pollution. Circulation was thought to move the stone through a cycle of the elements, where it would take on, in perfect proportion, the qualities of earth, air, water, and fire. After a period of purification, the metallic soul would descend again from the top of the alembic (heaven) and unite itself with the previously dead body of metallic dross. Alchemists referred to this entire process with the maxim *solve et coagula* – dissolve and coagulate.

The same ascent imagery appears in medieval contemplative texts, where prayer is portrayed as a fiery essence that rises from earth to the heavens. In the *Emerald Table*, the 'subtle essence' is a 'fire' that is separated from earth. This fire ascends from earth to heaven where it is made spiritual. In the *Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton utilises the very same descriptors to depict contemplative prayer:

> For prayer is nothing but a desire of the heart rising into God by its withdrawal from all earthly thoughts; and so it is compared to a fire, which of its own nature leaves the lowness of the earth and always goes up into the air. Just so, when desire in prayer has been touched and set alight by the spiritual fire which is God, it keeps rising naturally to him from whom it came.[7]

In the *Compound of Alchemy,* Ripley uses anagogical language in his description of 'exaltation'. The operation of exaltation is very similar to sublimation but occurs when the stone has already gone through several distillations and coagulations. It might be thought of as the final elemental circulation needed to increase the spiritual potency of the stone. In

---

17. The fourteenth century alchemists Hortulanus also interpreted the *Emerald Table* in this way. See Steele and Singer, 'The Emerald Table', 488.

[7] *SP*, 98; *SPT* (1.25), 58: 'for praier is not ellis but a stiynge desire of the herte to God bi a withdrawinge of thi mynde from alle ertheli thoughtes. And so is praier likenyd to a fier whiche of the owen kynde leeveth the lowenesse of the erthe and alwei stieth up into the eir. Right so desire in praier, whanne it is touchid and lightned of the goostli fier whiche is God, it is ay upstyande to Hym kyndeli whom it com fro.'

the passage, Ripley discusses the ascent of the mercurial essence as it rises to the top of the vessel. Like Hilton's ascending prayer that is set alight in heaven, the metallic vapour rises to paradise where it is suffused with heavenly virtues:

> Then up to heaven they [sulphur & mercury] must exalted be,
> There to be in bodie and soul glorificate,
> For thou must bring them to such subtiltie,
> That they ascend together to be intronizate,
> In cloudes of clearenes to Angels consociate
> Then shall they draw as thou shalt see,
> All other bodies to their owne dignitee.
>
> If thou therefore the bodies wilt exalt,
> First with the spirit of life thou them augment,
> Till time the earth be well subtilizate,
> By naturall rectifying of every Element,
> Them up exalting into the firmament,
> Then much more precious shall they be than gold,
> Because of quintessence which they doe holde.[8]

Here, the elements are rectified and the earth 'subtilised' when they climb to the 'firmament'. In the *Aurora*, such themes of ascent and deification are expressed in the final chapter after the last union between the speaker and *Sapientia*: 'she may roll back the stone from the door of my sepulchre and give me wings like a dove, and I will fly with her into heaven and then say: I live for ever, and I will rest in her, for she [the queen] stood on my right hand'.[9] In this example, pseudo-Aquinas introduces a unitive quality to the upward motion of ascent. He flies to heaven with his beloved, *Sapentia*. Richard Rolle describes the love the soul feels in contemplation with the same characteristics – ascent and union. In the *Incendium Amoris* he writes:

> So the perfect solitary will burn vigorously in his love for God, and when he is 'above himself', in ecstasy through contemplation, he is lifted up to celestial joy and song and sound. Such a man indeed is like the seraphim: There is an inner blaze of indescribable and unwavering charity. His heart is shaped by the divine fire and, ablaze beyond description, he is borne to his Beloved.[10]

---

[8] Stanton J. Linden, ed., *George Ripley's Compound of Alchymy (1591)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 74.
[9] AC, 132–136: '[U]t revolvat lapidem ab ostio monumenti mei et dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae et volabo cum ea in coelo et dicam tunc: Vivo ego in aeternum et requiescam in ea, quia astitit [regina] a dectris meis.'
[10] Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters, The Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 85; *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: The University of Manchester Press, 1915), 182: 'Perfectus enim solitarius in diuino amore uehementer ardet, et dum supra se in excessum mentis per contemplacionem rapitur, usque ad canorum iubilum et sonum celicum

The vocabulary in these citations consists of the same themes, 'heaven', 'fire', 'deification', and 'ascent'. It is evident that this kind of redemptive language was commonplace in late medieval alchemy. In a middle English translation of the *Book of Quintessence* dated between c.1460–c.1470, mercury in the alembic is described as ascending and descending until it is cleansed of corruption. Through this circulation, it quite literally takes on the nature of heaven itself:

> [It] ascends and once again descends continually all day and night until the burning water [mercury] be turned into quinta essentia. And so, by continual ascensions and descensions the quinta essentia is departed from the corruptible composition of the four elements [. . .] so that by continual ascending and descending by the which it is sublimed to so much highness of glorification, it shall come that it shall be a medicine incorruptible almost as heaven above, and of the nature of heaven.[11]

These accounts of rising and descending souls, again, indicate the purgatorial qualities of circulation. Through the rectification of the elements, circulation makes the 'earth' (the body of the metallic matter) take on the qualities of paradise. There is salvific tenor to the language, the recurrent image is of a journey to heaven, and of heaven coming down to earth. Ripley writes:

> But when these two by Sublimation continuall
> Be laboured so with the heate both moyst and temperate,
> That all is white and purely made spirituall,
> Then heaven upon the earth must be reiterate,
> Untill the soule with the bodie be incorporate,
> That earth become all that before was heaven,
> Which will be done with seven Sublimations.[12]

Images of spiritual circulation can be found in one of Julian of Norwich's 'shewings'. In the twelfth chapter of her long text, she describes the blood of Christ climbing to heaven

---

gaudens subleuatur. Et talis quippe assimilatur seraphym, ardens utique intra se caritati incomparabili atque constantissima, cuius cor configuratur igni diuino urens et lucens superferuide fertur in amatum.'

[11] Fredrick James Furnivall, *The Book of Quinte Essence Or the Fifth Being: That Is to Say, Man's Heaven: Ed. from the Sloane MS. 73, about 1460–70 A.D.*, vol. 16, Early English Text Society (London: Trübner, 1866), 4: '[It] ascendith, and eft descendiþ contynuely day and nyȝt til þe brennynge water heuenly be turned into quintam essenciam. And so bi continuelle ascenciouns and discenciouns þe quinta essencia is departed fro þe corruptible composicioun of þe 4 elementis [. . .] so þat by contynuel ascendynge and descendynge by the which it is sublymed to so myche hiȝnes of glorificacioun. It schal come þat it schal be a medicyn incorruptible almost as heuene aboue, and of þe nature of heuene.'

[12] Linden, *George Ripley's Compound of Alchymy (1591)*, 68.

and descending to hell, where it deifies everything that it touches. The vocabulary is, again, focused on ascent, descent, and deification:

> The precious plenty of his beloved blood descended down into hell and broke their bonds and delivered all those who were there who belonged to the court of heaven. The precious plenty of his beloved blood overflows the whole earth and is ready to wash from sin all who are, have been, and shall be of good will. The precious plenty of his beloved blood ascended up into heaven to the blessed body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is in him there, bleeding and praying for us to the Father – and is and shall be for as long as it is needed. And it flows through all heaven for ever more, rejoicing In the salvation of all mankind who are there and shall be there, making up the number that is lacking.[13]

Analogous motifs appear in the writings of the *Cloud* author and Richard Rolle. In chapter IV of the *Cloud of Unknowing,* and in chapter four of *The Form of Living*, contemplative prayer is again described as a fire that ascends to heaven, leaving behind the corruption of the earth and the lowness of sin. The *Form of Living* will be cited first and then *Cloud*:

> [T]urn yourself absolutely to your Lord Jesus Christ [. . .] so that your thinking , which was entirely downward, wallowing in the earth, while you were in the world, may now be entirely upward, like fire, searching out the highest part of heaven, right up to where your spouse is sitting in supreme bliss. Toward him you are turned when his grace illuminates your heart [so that it] relinquishes all corruptions and models itself on virtues and good qualities.[14]
>
> For when [contemplative prayer is] rightly understood, it is nothing else than a sudden impulse, one that comes without warning, speedily flying up to God as the spark flies up from burning coal [. . .] And equally quickly, after each impulse, [to pray] because of the

[13] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 57–58; Julian and Barry Windeatt, *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love: The Short Text and the Long Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49: ' [T]he pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode descended downe into helle and braste her bands and deliveryd al that were there which longyd to the curte of hevyn. The pretious plenty of his dereworthy blode overflowith al erth and is redye to wash al creaturs of synne which be of gode will, have ben, and shal ben. The pretious plenty of his dereworthy ascended up into hevyn to the blissid body of our Lord Jesus Christe, and there is in him, bleding and praying for us to the Father – and is and shall be as long as it nedith. And evermore it flowtih in all hevyns, enjoying the salvation of al mankynde that arn there and shal ben, fulfilling the noumber that failith.'

[14] Richard Rolle, *Richard Rolle, the English Writings*, ed. Rosamund Allen, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), (IV), 162; Carl Horstmann, ed., *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers*, vol. 1 (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1895), 18: 'turne þe enterely to þi lorde Ihesu Criste. / Þat turnyng till Ihesu es noght els, bot turnyng fra all þe couaytyse & þe likyng & þe occupacions & bisynes of worldly thynges & of fleschly lust and vayne luf: swa þat þi thoght, þat was ay donward, modeland in þe erth, whils þou was in þe worlde, now be ay vpwarde als fire, sekand þe heghest place in heuen, right til þi spows, þare he syttes in hys blys. Til hym þou ert turned, when his grace illumyns þi hert; & forsakes all vices, & conformes il til vertues & gude thewes.'

> corruption of the flesh, the soul falls down again to some thought or some deed done or undone. But what matter? For straightaway it rises again as suddenly as it did before.[15]

The portrayal of a soul rising upwards in mystical theology comes from the glosses of Saint Jerome on Ezekiel, where it is called the *scintilla conscientiae*, a 'spark' or 'kernel' of conscience that in the human being, survives the fall of Adam. This 'spark of conscience' is associated with a concept in scholastic theology known as '*synderesis*', a function of the soul that steers the human spirit towards goodness, and makes it aware of its sinful nature in its fallen state.[16] It is this spark that ascends to God and unites the contemplative with him in this life. In these excerpts, its upward ascent is framed as an event that deifies the mind. Prayer ascends to heaven where it makes contact with Christ himself, who is described as a spouse of the contemplative. Making contact with its lover, it illumines hear heart and purges it of corruption.

In the second excerpt taken from the *Cloud of Unknowing* above, the same categories of ascent and descent are utilized, though the impulse to set one's will towards God is dragged down by the corruption of the flesh. The fallen and mortal component of the human being must, therefore, be transmuted into a higher form. This is a circular motion of purification, where the soul rises with virtue and falls with sin. The appearance of such tropes in alchemical accounts of circulation reveals something of the proclivities of alchemical authors. They consciously portray the transmutation of base metals as something sacred.

Anagogical themes appear in both the mystical theology and alchemical literature of late medieval England. Both traditions use the same compendium of symbols, and the same descriptive categories to give shape to a set of concepts that transgress the boundaries of alchemy and mystical theology alike. This common storehouse of motifs converge in other ways. Another popular metaphor utilized in both traditions was the idea of 'spiritual

---

[15] COU (IV), 126; COUT, 34: 'For yif it be trewlich conceived, it is bot a sodeyn steryng, and as it were unavisid, speedly sprining unto God as sparcle fro the cole [. . .] Bot fast after iche steryng, for corupcion of the flesche, it falleth doune agein to some thought or to some done or undone dede. Bot what therof? For fast after, it riseth agen as soddenly as it did bifore.'

[16] See M. B. Crowe, 'The Term *Synderesis* and the Scholastics', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 23 (1956): 151–64. The concept appears in the writings of Thomas Gallus and again in the *Cloud of Unknowing*. In fact, Gallus was very likely the source that influenced the *Cloud Author*. See Alastair Minnis, 'Affection and Imagination in "The Cloud of Unknowing" and Hilton's "Scale of Perfection"', *Traditio*, 39 (1983): 323–66, 330, fn. 28.

nourishment'. In the middle ages, the refining effect of prayer was expressed through the metaphor of spiritual sustenance. Prayer is as an appeal to divine mercy that rises up to heaven and begins a process of purgation. The process is then sustained through the addition of 'spiritual food'.

4.2 Spiritual Food, the Virgin's Milk, and Purgation

Alchemical authors sometimes spoke of 'feeding' the philosopher's stone milk or meat. These curious victual allusions were usually references to the operation of cibation. According to Ripley, cibation is the seventh step of the opus wherein the 'dry' and 'white' infant stone (after having completed the first six steps of dissolution, putrefaction and coagulation) is fed upon the 'virgin's milk' [white mercury sublimate]. This additional purgation continues to refine the stone and develop its body until it matures into its final form. Ripley notes: '*Cibation* is called a feeding of our matter drie, With milke and meate, which moderately thou doe, Until it be brought the third order unto.'[17] Thus, cibation nourishes the stone while simultaneously cleansing it of any remaining corruption not purged during the first phase of the work. Ripley continues: 'For he [the operation of cibation] shall make darke bodies whole and bright, Clensing their leprosies through his might.'[18]

Alchemists attributed salubrious qualities to the mercurial milk. In a mid-fifteenth-century poem entitled *Verses Upon the Elixir*, 'milke' and 'meate' are said to increase the potency of the white stone until it reaches its final transmutational potential. In lines forty-nine to fifty-five, its author writes:

> Then take thou meate & milke thereto & feede ye child as thou shouldst doe till he be growne into his full age then shall he be strong of courage and turne all bodyes that lawfull be to his owne power & dignite and this is ye making of our stone.[19]

And in lines one hundred eleven to one hundred thirteen:

> But then feede him with thy hand with milke & meate to make him strong and then shalt thou have there a good stone.[20]

---

[17] Linden, *George Ripley's Compound of Alchymy (1591)*, 65.
[18] Ibid.
[19] '*Verses Upon the Elixir': Version B,* lines 49–55, in *MEAP*, 226.
[20] *Idem*, 228.

In these examples, the stone that grows into its mature form 'turnes all bodyes that lawfull be' to its 'owne power & dignite'. This is the penultimate phase of the alchemical opus known as multiplication. In this stage, the stone reaches the height of its spiritual potency. Its power emanates outwards and perfects inferior bodies that come into contact with its 'power' and 'dignity'. While the language found in *Verses* suggests that the stone is a beneficiary of the mercurial milk, it also reinforces the idea that the milk sanctifies imperfect and corrupt metallic bodies. The principal themes at work here are purgation and spiritual growth.

Alchemists chose their symbolism consciously. The association of milk with spiritual growth was an idea immediately recognisable in its religious subtext. The concept is Biblical in origin, and it appears throughout the gospels and Paul's letters. It is most immediately affiliated with purgation in 1 Corinthians 3, where Saint Paul compares the church of Corinth to infants in need of spiritual nourishment: 'And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. As unto little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal.'[21]

As in alchemy, the concept found currency in mystical theology. Among the English mystics, the idea figures prominently in the *Scale of Perfection*. In book one, chapter twenty-seven, Hilton compares spoken prayers to spiritual milk. By attending Matins and Evensong, and by reciting the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria*, a worldly person is given support in the practice of meditation and afforded a spiritual 'staff' with which to stand and resist the corruption of sin:

> [T]he soul of a carnal man who is always falling down into worldly thoughts and affections of the flesh will be lifted up from them and held by them as by a staff. Like a child with milk he will be fed with sweet words of the prayer, and so ruled by it that he will not fall into errors of fantasies by his vain meditation, since in this kind of prayer there is no deceit, if anyone will steadfastly and humbly labor in it.[22]

---

[21] 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 (DRBO): 'Et ego, fratres, non potui vobis loqui quasi spiritualibus, sed quasi carnalibus. Tamquam parvulis in Christo, lac vobis potum dedi, non escam: nondum enim poteratis: sed nec nunc quidem potestis : adhuc enim carnales estis.'

[22] *SP*, 99; *SPT* (1.27), 60: '[The] soule of a fleischli man that is alwei fallynge dounward into worldli though tis and fleschli affeccions schal be liftid up from hem, and holden bi hem as bi a staaf, feed with suete wordis of the praier as a childe with mylk, and rulid bi it that he falle not in errours ne fantasies bi his veyn meditacioun. For in this maner of praiere is no disceite, whoso wole stidefastli and mekeli travaile thereinne.'

The symbol of ‘spiritual food’ recurs throughout the text. Hilton argues that this nourishment comes as a response to the mortification of sin. A person greatly affected by sin demonstrates great inner compunction when embarking on the path of reform, and therefore requires correction in both conduct and inner feeling. Hilton, therefore, attributes affective qualities to the spiritual food. It comes as a comfort to those embarking on the path of purgation:

> For I believe that such a man, particularly who has been greatly defiled by sin, shall not be reformed in feeling without first being burnt and purified beforehand with such great compunctions.[23]
>
> [S]uch comforts and fervors as a soul in the state of beginning or of proficient are as it were his spiritual food, sent to strengthen him in his labor. Just as a pilgrim travelling all day without food or drink and nearly overcome with weariness comes upon a good inn at last, there has food and drink, and is well refreshed for the time: so in the spiritual sense a devout soul eager to forsake the love of the world and to love God [O]ur lord, having pity for all his creatures, sends it [comfort] amid his spiritual food, and comforts it in devotion as vouchsafes, lest it should perish for need or turn to sadness or grumbling.[24]

In Book II, chapter forty, Hilton makes reference to a ‘secret’ manna that feeds and purifies the soul. He says that the soul in love with the world acts outside itself. It is, as he says, ‘blinded’ by its love of sin. Every wicked ‘stirring’ from the flesh and devil ‘sinks’ into it, permeating it completely.[25] God relieves the soul of this sickness by revealing a divine secret that expunges vice. The secret is God’s grace that nourishes the soul in the form of manna, heavenly food:

> My Lord Jesus, your mystery is shown to me and secretly hidden from all lovers of the world, for it is called hidden manna [. . .] our lord Jesus promises it to his lover thus: *Dabo sibi manna absconditum quod nemo novit nisi qui accipit.* That is, I shall give hidden manna that no one knows but him who takes it. This manna is heavenly fare and

[23] SP, 251; SPT (2.29), 203: ‘For I trowe siche a man, nameli that hath ben greteli defouled in synne, schal not come to reformynge in feelinge, but yif he be brent first and purified with sich grete conpuncciouns.’
[24] SP, 251; SPT (2.29), 203–204: ‘siche confortes and fervours that a soule feeleth in the staat of biginnynge or of profitynge aren as it were his goostli foode sent fro hevene, for to strengthen him in his traveile. Right as a pilgrym that traveileth al dai metelees and drynkeles, and is neerhande overcomen with werynesse, falleth at the laste to a good inne, and there hath he mete and drynk and is wel refreschyd for that tyme: right sogoosteli a devoute soule that wole forsake the love of the world, and wolde fayn love God and setteth alle his besines therto, praieth and traveileth al dai gosteli and bodili, andsumtyme feelith no savour ne comfort in devocion. Thanne oure Lord havynge pité over al His creatures, that it schulde not perischen for defaute, ne turne into hevynesse or grucchynge.’
[25] SPT (2.40), 240: ‘For eche a stirynge that cometh of the flesch or of the feende synketh in, and gooth thorugh it. But thanne thorugh grace is it withdrawen into privei chambre into the sight of oure Lord Jhesu, and hereth His pryvy conceiles and is wondirfulli comforted in the heerynge.’

angels' food, as holy scripture says, because angels are fully fed and filled with clear sight and burning love of our Lord Jesus, and that is manna.[26]

A few lines down, Hilton attributes medicinal qualities to this spiritual food:

> This tasting of manna is a lively feeling of grace received through the opening of the spiritual eye [. . .] It is very lively to him, because it wonderfully quickens the soul, making it so sound that it feels no painful disease of the body even if it is weak and sickly, because the body is then at its strongest, most whole and most restful, and the soul as well.[27]

Like Hilton, Richard Rolle attributes medicinal qualities to the concept of spiritual nourishment. In chapter four of the *Incendium Amoris*, he outlines the respective fates of both carnal people and contemplatives. He describes sinful people as perishing from the 'soothing poison' (*blando ueneno*) and 'contagion' (*contagia*) of sin. Contemplatives are rescued from this fate by God's burning love (*Amor enim eius ignis*) that takes the form of heavenly food (*epulas*):

> For his love is a fire which sets our hearts aflame so that they glow and burn; it purges them from all the foulness of sin. This fire blazes in his chosen ones, and makes them (in mind at least) look heavenwards, and to long ceaselessly for the release of death. Meanwhile, so long as there exists a possibility of our sinning, let us set our minds to flee from worldly prosperity, and cheerfully put up with hardship. The evil mind is perishing even in the midst of its joys; it is destroying itself with attractive poison as it searches for happiness in created things. We must try to avoid this contagion by maintaining our appetite for the spiritual nourishment that is reserved in heaven for fiery lovers.[28]

Similar motifs appear in *Revelations of Divine Love*, where Julian speaks of the sacraments as a spiritual food that sustains the health of the soul. In chapter sixty of the long text, she

---

[26] SP, 283; SPT (2.40), 240: '[M]y Lord Jhesu in priveté is schewed to me and pryveli hid fro alle the loveres of the world, for it is called hid manna, that mai lightliere be askid than teeld what it is. And that oure Lord Jhesu bihotith to His lovere thus: *Dabo sibi manna absconditum, quod nemo novit, nisi qui accipit* (Revelations 2:17). That is: I schal geven manna hid that no man knowith but he that taketh it. This manna is heveneli mete and aungelis foode, as Holi Writ seith. For angelis aren fully feed and filled with cleer sight and brennynge love of oure Lord Jhesu, and that is manna.'

[27] SP, 284; SPT (2.40), 240: This tastynge of manna is a liyfli feelynge of grace, had thorugh openynge of the goostli iye [. . .] It is ful lifli to hym, for it quikeneth the soule wondirli and maketh it so hool that he feelith no peynful disese of the bodi, though it be feble or sekely. For whi, thanne is the bodi mightiest, most hool, and most resteful, and the soule also.'

[28] Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters, 57; Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly, 156: 'Amor enim eius ignis est igneas faciens animas, ut sint lucentes et urentes, et expurgat eas ab omni fece peccati. Qui ignis in electis ardens cogit eos sursum semper mentaliter aspicere, et mortem in desiderio indefesse retinere. Proinde pensemus dum adhuc peccare possimus, prospera mundi fugere, aduersa libenter tollerare. Mala namque mens cum gaudet deperit, et seipsam quasi blando ueneno, dum in creatura iocunditatem querit, occidit. Cuius contagia conemur deuitare inspiciendo in internas epulas que.'

compares Christ to a loving mother who feeds his children with the milk of his blood. Like Hilton's manna, and Rolle's fiery sustenance, Christ's blood is identified as the source of all health and life: 'The mother can give her child her milk to suck, but our precious mother Jesus, he can feed us with himself – and does, most courteously and most tenderly with the blessed sacrament that is precious food of true life. And with all the sweet sacraments he sustains us most mercifully and graciously'.[29] Likewise, the *Cloud* author compares the spiritual benefits of contemplation to a nut, whose 'sweet kernel' is to be found not in physical signs, but within the inner spiritual significance of the practice: 'So let us strip off the rough shell and feed upon the sweet kernel.'[30]

The collective tropes alchemists and contemplatives used to convey the perfection of the soul and the perfection of the stone were the themes of spiritual meat, milk, and mana along with nourishment, purgation, and medicine. As the Middle Ages came to a close, the practice of alchemy took on increasingly complex levels of rhetorical significance. One such implication was the way in which alchemists imagined their relationship to nature. In short, they began to think of themselves as the physicians of the natural world.

The logic was essentially similar to that of contemplation, in that the very basic essence of both traditions consists of purification. Alchemy cleanses metallic substances of disease and rids the body of corruption. It regenerates youth, and even restores the natural world to a pristine and holy state. Alchemists and contemplatives pursued the same goal through different means; they both desired perfection through the elimination of impurity. It should come as no surprise, then, that the two streams of thought would often converge in their descriptions of purgation. In an anonymous poem appearing in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, alchemists are depicted as medical practitioners who purify the natural world:

By suddain moving of Elements Nature may be letted,
And wher lacks Decoction no perfection may be,
For some Body with leprosy is infected
Raw watery humors cause superfluity:
Therefore the philosopher in his reason hath contrived

[29] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 130; Barry Windeatt, *Julian of Norwich,* 126: 'The moder may geven hir child soken her mylke, but our pretious moder Jesus, he may fedyn us with himself; and doith full curtesly and full tenderly with the blissid sacrament, that is pretious fode of very lif. And with al the swete sacraments he susteynith us ful merfcifully and graciously.'
[30] COU (LVIII), 233; COUT, 86: 'And therefore late us pike of the rough bark, and fede us of the sweet kyrnel.'

> A perfect Medicine, for bodyes that be sick,
> Of all infirmetyes to be releeved,
> This heleth Nature and prolongeth lyfe eak[31]

In English alchemy, soteriological language of this kind began in the fourteenth century, where accounts of the stone's purgation took on an increasingly religious tenor. In book IV of John Gower's (c. 1330–c. 1408) *Confessio Amantis*, for instance, the cleansing of rust in metal is likened to the eradication of vice. When outlining the attributes of the stone, Gower writes:

> And pureth hem [metals] be such a weie,
> That al the vice goth aweie,
> Of rust, of stink, and of hardness.
> And when thei ben of such clennesse,
> This mineral so as I finde,
> Transformeth al the ferste kynde.[32]

Gower's discourse on alchemy occurs in the context of a larger discussion on the vices. Specifically, alchemy is portrayed as a remedy for the sin of sloth. The word 'vice' itself, along with the term 'stynke', was invariably used in middle English contexts to denote Christian moral teaching. The association of the idea with religious and redemptive language would have been unambiguous.[33]

In another poem ascribed to the English alchemist, John Dastin (c. 1293–c. 1386) the 'seed' of a corrupted metal is portrayed as a cancerous rust, only giving birth to an inferior product. This demonstrates the necessity of purgation in alchemical theory. Impure mineral substances are unable to create to the philosopher's stone because their 'seeds' will only ever yield inferior substances akin to their corrupt nature. In the poem *Dastin's Dreame,* this is described as follows:

> For who may make that seede to be cleane
> That first was conceived in uncleanes,
> For cancred rust may never I meane,
> By noe crafte shew forth parfect brightnes.[34]

---

[31] TCB, 353.
[32] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 237.
[33] This is argument is developed in Clare Fletcher, 'The Science of Himself Is Trewe: Alchemy in John Gower's Confessio Amantis', *South Atlantic Review*, 79 (2014): 118–131, 120.
[34] TCB, 262.

Another example comes in a poem attributed to the late fifteenth century, where the comparison between purgation and sin is even more explicit. The anonymous poem which circulated alongside the Ripley scroll corpus under the incipit *'On the ground*', describes the slaying of a dragon and its subsequent resuscitation. The symbolism used in the poem portrays the operations of the alchemical work as it moves from nigredo to albedo, with lines nineteen to twenty-two describing putrefaction and the nigredo:

> [T]hus you shall goe to putrefaction
> And bring the serpente to redemtion
> First he shalbe blacke as a croe
> And downe in his denne shall ly full low[35]

In this example, the serpent represents the base metal as it is broken down and reduced to prime matter, while the 'croe' represents the colour of the substance during the stage of nigredo. Beginning on line twenty-six, the poem shifts and describes the beginning of the albedo, an event it compares with the cleansing of the serpent's sin:

> [A]nd thus with crafte thy serpent is slayne
> He shall change colours there many one
> And tourney as white whale by the bone
> with water that he was in
> washe him cleane from his sinne
> and let him drinke a lyte and lyte
> and that shall make him fayre and white[36]

The water that the serpent sits in and drinks from is the mercurial water, a synonym for virgin's milk. The base metal, after being 'slain', is cleansed, whitened, and transformed by the water that it ingests. Once again, purgation is tied to nourishment, as the serpent is cleansed of sin when it imbibes the virgin's milk.

Some alchemical texts described the stone's purgation as a journey away from sin. This is well represented in Thomas Charnock's (c. 1524–1581) poem the *Breviary of Philosophy*, an allegorical work preserved in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. In the text, Charnock portrays alchemy as a spiritual journey from vice to piety. This begins in the

[35] '*On the ground',* lines 19–22 in MEAP, 296.
[36] *On the ground',* lines 26–33 in MEAP, 296.

second chapter, when he likens the nigredo to a voyage at sea, comparing the alchemical vessel to a ship that is 'made but of Glasse'. He then relays the coming of the albedo through the allegory of sailing to a fairer climate. These are ideas one might expect to see in mystical theology – purgation, nourishment, deification, and the anagogical ascent of the spiritual journey:

> But shortly we shall passe into another Clymate,
> Where we shall receive a more purer estate;
> For this our Sinns we make our Purgatory,
> For the which we shall receive a Spirituall body:
> A body I say which if it should be sould,
> Truly I say it is worth his weight in Gold:
> Son give theis two, one penny their Journey to drinke,
> And thou shalt speede the better truly as I thinke.[37]

Many of the themes discussed above, especially cibation, figure prominently in the *Aurora* where they appear in chapter VIII. The chapter, which is entitled 'Of the Gate of Brass and Bar of Iron of the Babylonish Captivity', portrays a great feast that moves from putrefaction, to nourishment and purgation. The passage begins with a citation of Isaiah 45: 2–3 where Cyrus breaks the gates of brass during the Babylonian captivity:

> He who brake in pieces my gates of brass and my bars of iron shall also move my candlestick out of its place, and shall break asunder the chains of the prison of darkness and feed my hungry soul, which hasted in thirst for his face, with the fat of wheat and with honey <out of> the rock, and shall prepare a large dining room for my pilgrimage , that I may sleep in peace, and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit may rest upon me, [who hath had mercy upon me]. For they shall gather me together out of all of the countries, that they may pour upon me clean water, and I shall be cleansed from the greatest sin [. . .] Therefore they shall cleanse me from my secret faults and from those of others.[38]

The metaphor of prison is used in alchemical literature to denote the imprisonment of the 'mercurial dragon' (seed of philosophical mercury) in matter.[39] This dragon is the 'serpent' that is 'slayne' in the poem *On the Ground* above. Here, the mercurial vapour is freed from the prison of dead matter exemplified in the 'darkness' of nigredo. The imagery of the

---

[37] TCB, 292.

[38] AC, 72–73: 'Qui portas aereas et vectes meos ferreos confregit candelabrum quoque meum de loco suo moverit nec non vincula carceris tenebrositatis dirupuerit atque animam meam esurientem, quae cucurrit in siti oris sui adipe frumenti et <de> petra melle cibaverit ac peregrinationi meae grande coenaculum praeparaverit, ut in pace dormiam et requiescant super me septem dona spiritus sancti [miseritus]. Quia congregabunt me de universis terries, ut effundant super me aquam mundam, et mundabor a delicto maximo [. . .] Ideo ab occultis et ab alienis sordibus meis mundabunt.'

[39] LAD, 156.

‘feast’, ‘wheat’, ‘honey’, and the ‘hungry soul’ is the cibation of the stone, which is concurrent with the ‘clean water’ of the virgin’s milk that cleanses it of its sin.

4.3 Apophasis, Desolation, Reduction and the Cloud

While the idea of spiritual nourishment is a recurring theme in alchemical discourse and mystical theology, there is still the idea that mortification precedes the work of cibation. As shown in the previous chapter, the *Aurora’s* mysticism of dereliction occurs within a cloud. There are certain strong thematic parallels between this image and accounts of desolation found in the works of the English mystics. Recall that in the cloud of chapter VI, pseudo-Aquinas relays a complete dissolution of the self. The language is unambiguously that of despair as the passage moves from hopelessness to reformulation, and finally, union:

> Beholding from afar off I saw a great cloud looming black over the whole earth, which had absorbed the earth and covered my soul, [because] the waters had come in even unto her, wherefore they were putrefied and corrupted before the face of the lower hell and the shadow of death, for a tempest hath overwhelmed me [. . .] Therefore there is no health in my flesh and all my bones are troubled before the face of my iniquity. For this cause have I laboured night by night with crying, my jaws are become hoarse; who is the man that liveth, knowing and understanding, delivering my soul from the hand of hell? They that explain me shall have (eternal) life, and to him I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in paradise, and to sit with me on the throne of my kingdom [. . .] he for whose love I languish, in whose ardour I melt, in whose odour I live, by whose sweetness I regain my health, from whose milk I take nourishment, in whose embrace I am made young, from whose kiss I receive the breath of life, in whose loving embrace my whole body is lost, to him indeed I will be a father and he shall be to me a son.[40]

The language here, when analysed from a purely emotional perspective, suggests a stripping away or an apophatic reduction of the self. As in this excerpt, Walter Hilton articulates the movement from sin to grace as a reformation of conduct and feeling. In his account of the soul’s movement from darkness to light in Book Two, chapter twenty-eight of the *Scale of Perfection*, the soul longs for Jesus in a state of sorrow. The event is

[40] *AC*, 56–59; ‘Aspiciens a longe vidi nebulam magnam totam terram denigrantem quae hanc exhauserat meam animam tegentem et <quia> aquae intraverant usque ad eam, quare putruerunt et corruptae sunt a facie inferni inferioris et umbra mortis, quoniam tempestas dimersit me [. . .] Ideo non est sanitas in carne mea et a facie iniquitatis meae conturbata sunt Omnia ossa mea. Ergo laboravi per singulas noctes clamans, raucae factae sunt fauces meae: quis est homo, qui vivit sciens et intelligens, eruens animam meam de manu inferi? Cuius amore langueo, ardore, liquesco, odore vivo, sapore convalesce, cuius lacte nutrimentum suscipio, amplexu iuvenesco, osculo spiraculum vitae recipio, cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero cuius condormitione totum corpus meum exinanitur, illi vero ero in patrem et ipse mihi in filium.’

conveyed through the same poignant language of reduction, desolation, and salvation as expressed here:

> For he [Christ] alone stirs a soul through his grace, bringing it first into darkness and afterward into light as the prophet says: *Sicut tenebrae eius, ita et lumen eius* [. . .] Therefore our Lord Jesus, seeing what is good for an obstinate soul, allows it to be troubled and vexed by various temptations, and well tried through tribulations of spirit, until all the rust of impurity can be burnt out of it. And that shall be inward, through fear, doubts and perplexities, so that the soul nearly falls into despair, and it will seem as if forsaken by God and left altogether in the hands of the devil, except for a little secret trust that it shall have in the goodness of God and in his mercy; for however far our Lord Jesus may go from such a soul he leaves in it that secret trust, by which it is borne up from despair and saved from spiritual harms.[41]

These two passages express the same emotion, as both the *Aurora*'*s* speaker and Hilton's soul feel abandoned by divinity. In the *Aurora*, the narrator wonders who (or what force) has the ability to deliver his soul from the 'hand of hell'. With Hilton, the soul is reduced to a very bleak state where it is 'forsaken by God' and 'left altogether in the hands of the devil'. It is tormented by 'fear', 'inward tribulations', 'doubts', 'perplexities', and 'despair'. The general tenor of both passages is *desperation*. It is notable that Hilton associates the soul's desperation with the 'rust of impurity'. While the appeal is not overtly alchemical, it shows that mystics were thinking about purgation in the context of metals and their cleanliness.

In addition to the mysticism of dereliction, the *Aurora's* invocation of the cloud metaphor has apophatic implications that are relevant in another way. Sulphur and mercury are stripped of their identities, purified, and united within the cloud itself. The idea that a soul must wait in the darkness of a cloud before being united with God is unequivocally stated in the *Cloud of Unknowing*. In chapter three of the *Cloud*, the author outlines how one is

---

[41] SP, 247–248; SPT (2.28), 199: 'For He oonli thorugh His grace stireth a soule, and bryngeth it into this myrkenesse first, and sithen into light, as the prophete seith: *Sicut tenebre eius, ita et lumen eius* [. . .] Therfore oure Lord Jhesu, seynge weel what thynge is bihofful to a froward soule, suffrith it to be taried and traveiled with sundri temptacions, and for to be wel examyned thorugh goostli tribulacions til al the ruste of unclennesse myght be brent ought of it. And that schal be bothe withinne, of dredis and doughtis and perplexitees, that it schal neerhande fallen into dispeir; for it schal seemen as it were forsaken of God and left al in the handis of the feend, outaken a litil privei trust that it schal have in the goodnesse of God and his merci. For that privei trust oure Lord Jhesu leveth in siche a soule, goo he nevere so feer fro it, bi the whiche the soule is ai born up from dispeire and saved from goostli myschief.'

to undertake the process of contemplative prayer. As in the *Aurora*, this is conveyed as an apophatic reduction of the self:

> For when you first begin to undertake it, [contemplative prayer] all that you find is darkness, a sort of cloud of unknowing; you cannot tell what it is, except that you experience in your will a simple reaching out to God. This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason, and from experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection. So set yourself to rest in this darkness as long as you can, always crying out after him whom you love. For if you are to experience him or to see him at all, insofar as it is possible here, it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness. So if you labour at it with all your attention as I bid you, I trust, in his mercy, that you will reach this point.[42]

Here, similarly to the citation of the *Aurora* above, both the alchemist and the *Cloud's* contemplative 'cry after God' in the cloud's darkness. All three passages indicate that the soul (or mineral matter), exist in a state of penance, or yearning, and they require a saviour. To Hilton, this is the 'small secret trust' instilled by God that allows the soul to be built up again. It is the germ of spiritual potential in which the soul is 'borne up' from 'spiritual harm'. In the *Aurora*, this salvation comes in the form of the 'kiss' and the 'breath of life' articulated in the form of the tree of life, which is the seed of *Mercurius* formed in the chemical wedding. To the *Cloud* author, it is the 'simple' reaching out to God through the power of will.

The painful element of this darkness is not so strongly emphasised in the *Cloud of Unknowing,* however the *Cloud* author does make reference to it in the *Book of Privy Counselling*. In chapter twelve, the *Cloud* author comments on experiences of spiritual desolation, and elaborates on why God allows them to occur. In his assessment of the phenomenon, moments of spiritual trial act as precursors to union with God. They cleanse the soul and perfectly 'mould' it in order to attain a loving union with him. He writes: '[H]e allows you to feel them [. . .] because he wants you both in consolation and in

[42] COU (III), 121; COUT, 31: 'For at the first tyme when thou dost it, thou fyndest bot a derknes, and as it were a cloude of unknowyng, thou wost never what, saving that thou felist in thi wille a nakid entent unto God. This derkness and this cloude is, howsoever thou dost, bitwix thee and thi God, and letteth thee that thou maist not see Him cleerly by light of understanding in thi reson, ne fele Him in swetnes of love in thin affeccion. And therefore schap thee to bide in this derknes as longe as thou maist, evermore crying after Him thou lovest; for yif ever schalt thou fele Him or see Him, as it may be here, it behoveth alweis be in this cloude and in this derknes. And yif thou wilte besily travayle as I bid thee, I triste in His mercy that thou schalt come therto.'

desolation to be eager for and perfectly moulded for perfection and spiritual union with his own will. Such is a union of perfect love.’[43]

In the same chapter, he describes the barrenness of spiritual desolation in a fashion akin to Hilton and the *Aurora*. Like Charnock’s account of the alchemical voyage, he depicts the soul as being adrift at sea, besieged by tempests and suffering for lack of God’s love. He reasons that God will occasionally withdraw from the soul as a test, only to return again with greater love. The image is the same as in the *Aurora* chapter VI, where a storm descends upon the soul, making it seem as if all hope of union with the divine is lost:

> It seems to me that you are on a spiritual sea, voyaging from an active to a contemplative condition. It is possible for great storms and temptations to assail you during such a transition stage, and you won’t know where to get help. It will seem to you that you have lost everything [. . .] you will be knocked down in your vessel, with that feeling of barrenness and being blown hither and thither, you just don’t know where. Don’t worry. I assure you that he [God] will come again, as soon as he decides to, and will take you out of that desolate state, releasing you from all your distress and worry [. . .] And whenever he returns, he will do so more wonderfully and powerfully and joyfully than ever before.[44]

In all four cases cited above, the soul is reduced to a state of near annihilation, desperation, and longing before it is united with the spirit of God. The material must first be broken down before it can be reformulated. The soul (alchemical or contemplative) must wait in desolation for a beloved other that joins with it and mends the suffering. As the *Cloud* author suggests, the experience of barrenness makes way for a union of perfect love.

Then there is the matter of the plea for salvation in the *Aurora* chapter VI. The speaker, at the height of suffering, makes an appeal to God, begging him for deliverance from the ‘hell’ of the nigredo. The passage then shifts in tone instantaneously and the appeal is

---

[43] Anonymous, *A Letter of Private Direction*, ed. John Griffiths, Spiritual Classics (London: Gill & Macmillan, 1981), 69; Phyllis Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), 169 :[H]e wol make þee in boþe to-gedir so blþely bowyng & so plesauntly pliing to þe perfeccion & þe goostly onheed to his owne wille (þe whiche onyng is parfite charite).’

[44] Anonymous, *A Letter of Private Direction*, 67–68; Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling,* 167–168: ‘For now arte thou in ye goostly see, to my licnes, schipping ouer fro bodelines into goostlines. Many grete stormes & temptacions, parauenture, scholen rise in this tyme, & you wost neuer whether to renne for socour. Alle is awey fro thi feling [. . .] you leuyst bareyn in ye bote, blowyn with blundryng, now heder now theder, you wost neuir where ne wheder [. . .] be not abascht, for he schal come,I behote thee, ful sone, whan hym likiy [. . .] & douȝtely delyuer thee of alle yi dole [. . .] & iche tyme [. . .] wil he come more worthelyer & merilier then other.’

answered with rapturous language. Commentators on mystical theology have called this rapid oscillation between despair and rapture the 'game of love', where divinity hides itself from the suffering soul only to answer its pleas for assistance at the height of despair.[45] In the *Fire of Love,* Richard Rolle expresses the concept in a way that parallels the cloud of chapter VI. Rolle describes himself as being on the verge of death in his suffering; he then makes an appeal to God for salvation, and like the *Aurora*, is met in the darkness by his 'beloved':

> Yet now the fatigues of this deplorable exile press heavily upon me, and their burdens aggravate and nearly kill me. And though within I am glowing with uncreated warmth, outwardly I appear depressed, skulking in misery, with no light at all! So, my God, to whom I offer my heartfelt devotion, will you not remember me in your mercy? I am wretched, and I need your mercy. Will you not bring up into your light the longing which so grips me, that in your own good time I may have what I crave? The toil by which I atone for my sin, you will transform into a dwelling of great sweetness, so that where sadness has dwelt melody may now live, and I see in the splendour of his beauty, my Beloved and my desire. Held in his clasp I would praise him for ever, for after him I long.[46]

Even Rolle, who is so defined by his highly visual mysticism of rapturous 'sweetness' the comments on the 'depression', 'skulking misery', and 'toil' of purgation during the mystical journey. Experiences of desolation are trademarks of late medieval mystical theology. To find them in the *Aurora* is a strong indication of the author's mystical inclinations.[47]

The image of the cloud appears in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, wherein Kempe associates it with apophasis, desolation, and the discernment of God's grace. Kempe, like the *Cloud* author in the book *Book of Privy Counselling*, says that contemplatives will go through

---

[45] On the concept see Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 4th edn (London: Methuen & Co., 1912), 457.
[46] Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters, The Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 154–155; Richard Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: The University of Manchester Press, 1915), 244: 'Nunc uero me deprimunt languores erumpuosi exilii et molescie aggrauantes uix ne subsistere permittunt, et cum intus inardescam calore increato, foris quasi fuscus et infelix sine luce delitesco. Ergo ne, Deus meus, cui deuocionem offero absque ficcione, recordaberis mei in miseracione? Quia miser sum, misericordia indigero; et nonne languorum qui me ligat subleaubis in lucem, ut opportune habeam quod concupisco? Laboremque quoque quo luo quod deliqui, mutabis in mellicum mansionem, ut melodia perseueret ubi demorabatur tristicia, et uideam in uenustate sui decoris dilectum quem desidero, et laudem eum eternaliter tentus tactu eius, quia ad ipsum langueo.'
[47] The mysticism of dereliction and its place in late medieval and early-modern mystical theology will be explored in greater detail in the chapter to come. See chapter five, subsection 5.3, 174–187.

periods where they cannot feel God's presence. This, she says, is on account of his 'hidden' nature: 'And, although I [Christ] sometimes withdraw the feeling of grace from you, either in speaking or in weeping, do not be afraid, for I am a hidden God in you'.[48] The apophatic appeals continue in the next paragraph, where God's ever-present grace is likened to the sun obscured by a cloud – it is always there, but sometimes shrouded in obscurity:

> Daughter, there was never a child so humble to its father as I will be to you, to help you and protect you. With my grace I sometimes act with you as I do with the sun. Sometimes, as you know well, the sun shines broadly so that many people can see it, and sometimes, it is hidden under a cloud so that people cannot see it, and yet it is the sun nevertheless in its heat and brightness. And this is how I act with you and my chosen souls.[49]

Alchemists also used the image of the cloud (and apophatic symbolism in general) to refer to the opaque and mystical nature of alchemical literature. In his treatise on the philosopher's stone, the Elizabethan alchemist Humfrey Lock (fl. c. 1560–c. 1580) argues that the very words alchemists use are rife with spiritual connotations. The alchemical masters of old, he argues, shrouded the art under a veil of supernatural symbolism. This is not a remarkable observation in itself, but what is noteworthy are the apophatic descriptors he uses. In one example, Lock compares the obscurity of alchemical symbolism to a cloud: '[T]he philosofers haue giuen forth this science darkly, as it were vnder a cloude.'.[50] A little later on in the text, he continues to delineate alchemy with apophatic metaphors:

> [T]he palle and obscure wordes by philosofers [are] hidden in the profound depnes of chaos; the which chaos the wise philosofers found not onely to perform the elemente workes of kind, but alsoe to hide in the caverns thereof the same worke beinge performed. For when by great laboure and moste painfull travail the auncient philosofers had attained to the perfecte mastery thereof and then not willing that their labours should be buried in

---

[48] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Anthony Paul Bale, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 32; Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 43: 'And, thow I wythdrawe sumtyme the felyng of grace fro the, eythyr of spech er of wepyng, drede the not therof, for I am an hyd God in the.'

[49] Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Anthony Paul Bale, 32; Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley, 44:'Dowtyr, ther was nevyr chyld so buxom to the fadyr as I wyl be to the to help the and kepe the. I far sumtyme wyth my grace to the as I do wyth the sunne. Sumtyme thow wetyst wel the sunne schynyth al abrod that many man may se it, and sumtyme it is hyd undyr a clowde that men may not se it, and yet is the sunne nevyr the lesse in hys hete ne in hys brytnesse. And rygth so far I be the and be my chosyn sowlys.'

[50] Humfrey Lock, *Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite: An Edition and Study of Humfrey Lock's Treatise on Alchemy*, ed. Peter Grund, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 367 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 153.

> the bottomlesse lake of oblyuion, haue compiled great volums of the same worke, hydinge it vnder shadowe of misticall wordes and names infinite.[51]

Lock is acutely aware of the obscurity of alchemical literature, and while in his own work he very much prefers a straightforward exposition of alchemy, he notes that alchemical prose is most often hidden in a 'cavern', or under the 'shadow' of a 'cloud', and that it is acquired through a 'painful travail' and an exploration of 'deep chaos'. Terms like these would not be out of place in the purgatorial stages of mystical theology. He also makes appeals to the imagery of enlightenment. In another chapter, he argues that the opacity of alchemy can only be understood through divine revelation, or an illumination of the intellect:

> For the philosofers haue in the moste darkeste manner couered and hid all the matter of their working in names and misticall words to thentent it should not be common to any but to philosofers and to wise men. But I mean not those wise men that ar wise in the eye of the worlde, but those that ar made wise by the power of God to understand his secrete misteries comprehended & closed vp in concauity and depenes of nature.[52]

In Lock's account of alchemical symbolism, the work is concealed in shadows and clouds. The inconspicuous nature of alchemy is not readily available to the profane, as the art is only made comprehensible through divine revelation. These shared tropes demonstrate a continued and increasing interpolation of terminology between alchemy and mystical theology in the early years of modernity. This continued in the seventeenth century, where the motif of the cloud and portrayals illumination became conspicuous in pictorial representations of the practice.[53]

4.4 Conclusions

While late medieval English alchemy permeated continental Europe, the *Cloud of Unknowing* and England's mystical theology appear to have been more isolated to Britain. The *Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, was initially not widely circulated in England, and remained relatively obscure until a commentary was written on it by Fr. Augustine Baker (1575–1641) a Benedictine monk who tried to emulate the *Cloud* author's method.[54] This

---

[51] Lock, *Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite*, 160–161.
[52] *Idem*, 148.
[53] See appendix 1.
[54] Steven Chase, 'The Cloud of Unknowing', in *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*, ed. Arthur G. Holder (London: Routledge, 2010), 167.

makes the prevalence of the cloud motif in the *Aurora* and the *Cloud of Unknowing* something of a curiosity. This is all the more remarkable because the cloud serves the same function in both texts: an experience of apophasis that precedes union with the divine. As in the *Aurora's* cloud, appeals to the pain of purgation and apophatic motifs appear in England's alchemy and its mystical theology as do the tropes of spiritual nourishment and ascent. It is possible that such ideas were exchanged between England and the continent. What is far more likely, however, is that these images (including the *Aurora* author's account of the cloud) developed independently from the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Pseudo-Dionysius was everywhere in the imagination of northern Europeans at the end of the middle ages, and Dionysian writings informed both the way authors thought of the cosmic hierarchy and mystical theology. On this culture, Denys Turner writes: 'In their own terms, however, they are but drawing on a common resource as we draw breath from the common air [. . .] Such at any rate, was the standing of Dionysius in relation to the mystical theologies of the late Middles Ages in northern Europe. He is less what you speak about than he is the air you breathe as you speak.'[55] The similarities between alchemy and mystical theology are most likely the result of a shared culture that saw the cosmos through the lens of a Dionysian cosmic hierarchy.

[55] Denys Turner, 'Dionysius and Some Late Medieval Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008): 651–65, 651.

Chapter 5: *Sapientia*, The Song of Songs and the Dark Night of the Soul

Chapter XII of the *Aurora Consurgens* is the highpoint of the text. In it, the exchange between the alchemist and *Sapientia* that appears throughout the treatise is consummated in a final and irrevocable union. Like the nigredo of chapter VI, chapter XII begins with an account of Wisdom's despair. The figure of *Sapientia* once again finds herself mired in darkness where she suffers, is purged of impurity, and united with God. Two things emerge that are definitive to the *Aurora.* These are 1.) the concept of desolation and 2.) the relationship of desolation to a personified embodiment of Holy Wisdom. The passages considered focus primarily on chapter XII, but they also re-examine chapter VI, and other examples of dereliction garnered throughout the text. They argue that the *Aurora* utilises a tone of despair that is commonplace to both sixteenth-century alchemy and the concept of the 'purgative night' that appears in the mystical theology of the late middle ages (and most notably in the thought of St John of the Cross).

While the *Aurora* (along with a series of early-modern alchemical texts it influenced), draws upon the same nomenclature contemplatives used when outlining experiences of the soul's purgation, its final chapter does not focus solely on experiences of barrenness. The final subsection examines the conclusive union between sulphur and mercury – a union made in the form of a kiss mediated through the imagery of the Song of Songs. The *Cancticle* is a major component of the *Aurora's* final chapter, as *Sapientia* is likened to the 'swarthy' bride described in the Song of Songs 1: 4–5. Alongside desolation, the figure of Wisdom, and her relationship to the Song of Songs in chapter XII are the focus of attention here.

5.1 Representations of *Sapientia* in the *Aurora*

The first allusions to the Song of Songs in the *Aurora Consurgens* come in the opening lines of the text where pseudo-Aquinas likens Holy Wisdom to the Queen of the South Christ referenced in Matthew 12:42.[1] He claims that Holy Wisdom itself is tied up in the operations of alchemy, and to yield the philosopher's stone is to make *Sapientia* incarnate:

[1] Matthew 12:42 (DRBO): 'Regina austri surget in judicio cum generatione ista, et condemnabit eam : quia venit a finibus terrae audire sapientiam Salomonis, et ecce plus quam Salomon hic.'

> All good things came to me together with her, that Wisdom of the south, who preacheth abroad, who uttereth her voice in the streets, crieth out at the head of the multitudes, and in the entrance of the gates of the city uttereth her words, saying: Come ye to me and be enlightened, and your operations shall not be confounded; all ye that desire me shall be filled with my riches. Come (therefore), children, hearken to me; I will teach you the science of God.[2]

The comparison of wisdom with the bridal queen referenced in the Song of Songs is even more obvious in chapter V, where a direct comparison is drawn between the Queen of the South and the *Canticle*. This comes in a reference to Cant. 6:9, where the queen is compared to the coming of the morning. In this citation, the title of the *Aurora* itself is shown to be derived from the Song of Songs:

> For the wise man who heareth [the wise] will grow wiser and understand, and understanding this Wisdom he will lay hold upon her. This is Wisdom, namely the Queen of the South, who is said to have come from the east, like unto the MORNING RISING, [desiring] to hear, to understand, yea and to see the wisdom of Solomon.[3]

This is a modification of Cant. 6:9, that in the Vulgate reads: 'Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising [aurora consurgens], fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?'[4] The connection of the Queen of South with the bride in the *Song of Solomon* has a precedent in christian Biblical exegesis that extends backwards to Origen's commentary on the *Canticle*. One passage in particular, Cant. 1: 4–5, was thought to confirm her identity as the Ethiopian queen:

> I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my colour: the sons of my mother have fought against me, they have made me the keeper in the vineyards: my vineyard I have not kept.[5]

---

[2] AC, 32–33: 'Venerunt mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa sapientia austri, quae foris praeicat, in plateis dat vocem suam, in capite turbarum clamitat, in foribus portarum urbis profert verba sua dicens: Accedite ad me et illuminamini et operationes vestrae non confundentur; omnes qui concupiscitis me divitiis meis adimplemini. Venite (ergo) filii, audite me, scientiam Dei docebo vos.'

[3] AC, 52–53: 'Audiens autem sapiens [sapientes] sapientior erit et intelligt, intelligens sapientiam hanc possidebit illam. Haec est sapiential, regina scilicet austri, quae ab Oriente dicitur venisse, ut *aurora consurgens,* audire intelligere nec non videre [volens] sapientiam Salomonis.'

[4] Cant. 6:9 (DRBO): 'Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terriblis ut castorum acies ordinate?'

[5] Cant. 1: 4–5 (DRBO): 'Nigra sum, sed formosa, filiae Jerusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar, sicut pelles Salomonis. Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim, quia decoloravit me sol. Filii matris mea pugnaverunt contra me; posuerunt me custodem in vineis: vineam mean non custodivi.'

In traditional commentaries on the Song of Songs, this passage was typically used to refer to the Church. In book two of his commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen argues that the bride of Cant. 1:4–5 is the church of the gentiles, who despite being born pagans, are nonetheless beautiful having received Christ. He goes on to associate the bride with the Ethiopian wife of Moses in Numbers 12:1[6], and then, the Queen of Sheba who visits Solomon in the 1 Kings 10.[7] He writes:

> We wanted to quote this story somewhat at length, and to insert it in our exposition, because we know that the correspondence between these matters and the person of the Church, who comes to Christ from out of the Gentiles, is so close that the Lord Himself mentioned this queen in the Gospels, saying that *she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.* He calls her *the queen of the south,* because Ethiopia lies in southern parts [. . .] These were the passages from the Holy Scriptures that suggested themselves to me at the moment, as being in accordance with this verse of the Song of Songs which we are now considering – namely, the verse in which it says : 'I am dark (or black) and beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon.'[8]

The *Aurora's* conflation of the Queen of the South with Solomon's bride was well-established in Biblical exegesis. However, this is not the only woman she manifests through in the text. The curious thing about the *Aurora's* depiction of Wisdom is the way in which she is identified with a series of important women found throughout the Bible. After she is introduced as the Queen of the South at the beginning of chapter one, the text pivots to portray her through her goddess-like form in the book of Proverbs and the book of Wisdom:

> Say to Wisdom: Thou art my sister, and call Prudence thy friend: for to meditate upon her is a most natural and subtle understanding, which bringeth her to perfection. And they that constantly watch for her shall quickly be secure. For she is clear to them that have understanding, and shall never fade away nor fail; she seemeth easy to them that have

---

[6] Numb.12:1 (DRBO): 'Locutaque est Maria et Aaron contra Moysen propter uxorem ejus Aethiopissam'.

[7] 1 Kings 10 (DRBO): 'Sed et regina Saba, audita fama Salomonis in nominee Domini, venit tentare eum in aenigmatibus'.

[8] Origene, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ed. R. P. Lawson (New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1957), 94–96; Origen and Wilhelm A. Baehrens, *Origenes Werke Bd. VIII: Homilien Zu Samuel I, Zum Hohelied Und Zu Den Propheten. Kommentar Zum Hohelied, in Rufins Und Hieronymus' Übersetzung*, vol. 33, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller (J.C. Hinrichs, 1925), 115–117: 'Hanc autem historiam paulo latius repetere voluimus et inserere huic exposition nostrae scientes in tantum convenire haec ad personam ecclesiae, quae ex gentibus venit ad Christum, ut ipse Dominus in evangeliis reginae huius faceret mentionem dicens *eam venisse a finibus terrae ut audiret sapientiam Solomonis*. *Austri autem reginam* dicit eam pro eo, quod Aethiopia in Austri partibus iaceat [. . .] Haec interim ad praesens de Canticis Canticorum versiculi mysterium comprobari, in quo dicit *fusca sum, sive nigra sum, et formosa, filiae Hierusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar et sicut pelles Solomonis'.*

knowledge of her, for she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her and showeth herself cheerfully to them in the ways and meeteth them with all providence; for her beginning is the most true nature, whereof cometh no deceit.[9]

She also takes on Marian qualities. In chapter XII, she addresses her lover, the alchemist, from within the confines of the philosopher's stone. She attests to the Mercurial properties of balance found within the stone, going so far as to identify herself as an alchemical manifestation of the Virgin Mary.[10] In the *Aurora*, this alchemical Mary intercedes on behalf of the elements, bridging the gap between spirit and matter:

> I give and not take back, I feed and fail not, I make secure and fear not; what more shall I say to my beloved? I am the mediatrix of the elements, making one to agree with another; that which is warm I make cold, and the reverse; that which is dry I make moist, and the reverse; that which is hard I soften and the reverse. I am the end and my beloved is the beginning, I am the whole work and all science is hidden in me.[11]

This passage is notable for several reasons. The nuptial imagery expressed within implies that Wisdom, in the form of the Virgin Mary, has taken the alchemist as her lover. Second, she intercedes for the elements, balancing their qualities and making them to accord with one another. Finally, the bonds between the alchemist/Wisdom, Wisdom/elements unite the material world, wisdom, and the practitioner in a ternary bond. This is a bond between the alchemist and Wisdom, yes, but the union works to perfect the material world.

Despite the ecstatic and unitive language expressed in this example, the chapter opens with a desperate appeal for assistance from *Sapientia* who, once again, finds herself trapped in darkness. The darkness is expressed through a reference to the Queen of Sheba in Song of

[9] AC, 39–41: '[D]ic Sapientiae: soror mea es et prudentiam voca amicam tuam; cogitare namque de illa sensus est valde naturalis et subtilis eam perficiens. Et qui vigilaverint constanter propter eam, cito erunt secure. Clara est illis intellectum habentibus et numquam marcescet nec deficiet; facilis videtur his, qui eam sapient, quoniam dignos se ipsa circuit et in viis ostendit se hilariter et in omni providentia ocurrit; initium namque ipsius verisimma est natura, cui non fit fraus.'
[10]A medieval reader would have understood this reference as Mary's maternal qualities, and her prayers of mercy spoken on behalf of sinners, pleading for mercy from Christ and God the father. On Mary's depiction as Mediatrix in the middle ages see chapter four 'Theological Motherhood' in Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 101– 44.
[11] AC, 143; 'Ergo do et non resumo, ego pasco et non deficio, ego secure et non paveo, quid plus referam dilecto meo? Ego sum mediatrix elementorum, concordans unum alteri: illud, quod calidum est frigesco et viceversa, et illud, quod siccum est humecto et viceversa, et illud, quod est durum mollifico et vicecersa. Ego finnis et dilectus meus principium, ego totum opus et tota scientia in me occultatur.'

Songs 1: 4–5. The citation is, in essence, a replaying of the nigredo-cloud of chapter VI through the medium of the biblical text:

> Be turned to me with all your heart and do not cast me aside because I am black and swarthy, because the sun hath changed my colour and the waters have covered my face and the earth hath been polluted and defiled in my works; for there was darkness over it, because I stick fast in the mire of the deep and my substance is not disclosed. Wherefore out of the depths have I cried, and from the abyss of the earth with my voice to all you that pass by the way. Attend and see me, if any shall find one like unto me, I will give into his hand the morning star. For behold in my bed by night I sought one to comfort me and I found none, I called and there was none to answer me [. . .] Therefore will I arise and go into the city, seeking in the streets and broadways a chaste virgin to espouse, comely in face, more comely in body, most comely in her garments, that she may roll back the stone from the door of my sepulchre and give me wings like a dove, and I will fly with her into heaven and then say: I live for ever, and I will rest in her, for she [the queen] stood on my right hand.[12]

The alchemical interpretation of this excerpt begins with a comparison of the 'swarthy' bride of Cant. 1:4–5 with a nigredo.[13] This is followed by an appeal for relief and the ensuing chemical union between the speaker and *Sapientia*. Like chapter VI, the speaker in the nigredo references heavenly bodies. The 'morning star' alluded to in the passage is a reference to the Apocalypse of John 2:28,[14] and here, it is reinterpreted to connote the philosopher's stone. The speaker is saying that despite the darkness and putrefaction of the nigredo, the end goal of alchemy is beautiful. If the alchemist persists in the work through difficulty the reward is the morning star, which is a reference to the mercurial qualities of the philosopher's stone.[15]

At the end of the passage, the 'chaste virgin' signifies the purificatory qualities of the virgin's milk, but may also simply refer to the alchemical 'virgin' that is, prime matter, or

---

[12] AC, 132–136: 'Convertiminiad me in toto corde vestro et nolite abiccere me, eo quod nigra sum et fusca, quia decoloravit me sol et abyssi operuerunt faciem meam et terra infecta et contaminate est in operibus meis; quia tenebrae factae sunt super seam pro eo, quod infixa sum in limo profundi et substantia mea non est aperta. Proptera de profundis clamavi et de abysso terrae voce mea ad vos omnes, qui transistis per viam. Attendite et videte me, so quis similem mihi invenerit, dabo manu sua stellam matutinam. Ecce enim in lectulo meo per noctem quaesivi sonsolantem et non inveni, vocavi et nemo respondit mihi [. . .] Surgam ergo et introibo civitatem; per vicos et plateas quaerens mihi unamdesponsare virginem castam, pulchram facie, pulchriorem corpore, pulcherrimam veste, ut revolvat lapidem ab ostio monumenti mei et dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae et volabo cum ea in coelo et dicam tunc: Vivo ego in aeternum et requiescam in ea, quia astitit [regina] a dectris meis.'

[13] In her commentary on the *Aurora*, von Franz expresses amazement that in this final parable, after so many 'purificatory procedures', the chapter begins with a *nigredo* AC., 362: 'Psychologically, it is remarkable that after so many purificatory procedures the parable still begins as before with *nigredo*.'

[14] Apoc. 2: 28: 'sicut et ego accepi a Patre meo: et dabo illi stellam matutinam.'

[15] In alchemical emblems, *Mercurius* was often represented as a six-pointed star.

Mercurius.[16] The opening of the door of the sepulchre denotes the release of the mercurial spirit from matter.[17] Therefore, when the purging of the nigredo in chapter XII is compared to the same process in chapter VI, a common pattern appears. Chapter XII is a reproduction of chapter VI, where the nigredo takes the form of the Queen of Sheba instead of a cloud.

With the cloud of chapter VI, and the abyss of chapter XII, the two nigredos unfold in the same way; they describe a tempestuous darkness wherein the narrator relays feelings of desperation or depression. Some commentaries on the *Aurora* have interpreted this as wisdom's plea (that is, the mercurial spirit) to be saved from the chaos of the nigredo in order to be made complete in the philosopher's stone.[18] Still others see it as a mixture of the alchemist's cognitive turmoil and wisdom's agony.[19] Whatever the case may be, both the nigredos of chapter VI and chapter XII move past this darkness and culminate in ecstatic unions; the idea being that the chemical wedding is preceded by experiences of tribulation, cataclysm, tempests and affliction.

5.2 Desolation, the Tempest, and the Revelation of *Sapientia*

If authors in the late middle ages hinted at a connection between alchemy and theology, the premise was fully borne out in the seventeenth century. By the early-modern period, alchemical literature was not merely *suggesting* a symbolic parallel between Christ and the philosopher's stone, it was arguing that the stone *was* Jesus reflected in the material world.[20] For example, the final chapter of the *Sophic Hydrolith* is a long discourse on alchemy's relationship to the bible and Christian life. After citing a series of scriptural passages comparing the philosopher's stone to Christ the cornerstone, its author makes the following observation:

---

[16] LAD, 210.

[17] The stone being rolled away from the sepulchre represents the release of the mercurial seed of sulphur from the stone after mortification. The speaker flying up with his lover like a dove represents the ascent of the seed with philosophical mercury during the operation of sublimation.

[18] See 'Sophia's Plea' in Jeffrey Raff, *The Wedding of Sophia: The Divine Feminine in Psychoidal Alchemy*, Jung on the Hudson Book Series (Berwick, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 2003), 74–79.

[19] AC, 220: 'The passages from the Psalms make it clear that the nigredo corresponds both to the psychic distress of the alchemist and to the distress of the soul imprisoned in matter.'

[20] The classic study on the Lapis-Christ parallel is found in C. G. Jung et al., *Psychology and Alchemy*, vol. 12, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 344–411.

> By what reason do you relate the precious, blessed, and heavenly stone, since it so skillfully concords with the above mentioned earthly, corporal, and philosophical Stone; which will be demonstrated here from the very foundation, and the description of both, and the one will be compared with the other. From this it will be known and seen how the earthly philosopher's stone will become a true harmony and type of the true, spiritual, and heavenly stone of Jesus Christ, in which he is presented to us by the Deity in a corporeal manner, and is previewed in an invisible form.[21]

If the end goal of alchemy is the creation of the philosopher's stone, and the philosopher's stone is an exemplar of Christ in nature, it follows that the stone's chemical journey would track with his life. This meant that the stone imitated Jesus, not just in his victories and resurrection, but in his travails, suffering, and crucifixion.[22] A common parallel drawn was between the forty days Christ spent in the desert and the (roughly) forty days it took to create the white stone during the nigredo. It was only natural that such tribulations should be extended to the spiritual life.

A good case in point is the *Sophic Hydrolith*, one of many texts printed in the seventeenth century to draw direct parallels between cataclysm and the creation of the philosopher's stone. Many of the most interesting documents appear in the 1678 *Musaeum Hermeticum*, a collection of mostly anonymous alchemical texts first published in German in 1625 and then in an expanded Latin edition in 1678. The 1625 German edition included twelve texts that were expanded to twenty-five in the latter edition.[23] The texts preserved in this anthology exemplify a specific type of Lutheran alchemical mysticism that became popular in Germany at the end of the sixteenth century. They are concerned with the alchemical deification of the cosmos, and allegorically portray the human being as the subject of metallic perfection.

---

[21] A.E. Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, vol. 1 (London: J. Elliott, 1893), 93; *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Frankfurt: Apud Hermannum à Sande, 1678), 105: 'Qua ratione modo commemorates ille pretiosus, benedictus, & coelestis lapis, cum toties ante dicto terreno, corporali Philosophicoque lapide tam artificiose conveniat, id hic ex ipso fundamento, & utriusque description demonstrabitur, & alter cum altero comparabitur. Ex quo cognoscetur & videbitur, quomodo videlicet terrenus philosophicus lapis vera quaedam harmonia & typus fiet veri, spiritualis, & coelestis lapidist JESU CHRISTI in quo nobis à Deoetiam corporali modo proponitur, & specie invisibili praemonstratur.

[22] On the conflation of the philosopher's stone with Christ in early modern alchemy see John Warwick Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), Phoenix of the Theologians*, International Archives of the History of Ideas, 55 (Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1973).

[23] For the German edition see *Dyas Chymica Tripartita* (Frankfurt: Lucas Jennis, 1625).

In the *Sophic Hydrolith*, the affliction of the base metal is linked to the suffering one experiences as a Christian. The prose could appear in any tract of mystical theology:

> Such a man, indeed, is placed by God in the furnace of tribulation, and, like the hermetic compound, for so long a time in all kinds of straits, in various ways; he is oppressed by calamities and anxieties, until he becomes dead to the old Adam, and as a truly new man, who is created according to God, rises again in right and true justice and holiness [. . .] If this is done, and a man dares to sin every day, so that by this reason sin no longer commands him, then with him, as in the earthly works of gold attached to it, the solution takes its origin, and, as was said above, putrefaction, so that it is completely solved in the spiritual manner; be crushed, destroyed, and putrefied: which, however, dissolution and putrefaction usually happens with one more quickly than with another, yet in this temporal life it must still take place. Let him also despair of all his strength, and seek his only solace in the grace and mercy of God: for in the cross, in the furnace, and during the fire, man, like earthly gold, the straight black head [nigredo] is cast down, that is to say, he is of all forms, and before the world, he will be mocked: and this not only for forty days and nights, or years, but often throughout the whole period of his life, so much so that he will have to experience more sorrow than comfort and joy, more sorrow than joy in his life.[24]

In this example, there is promise in the suffering. Like in the spiritual mortification of the contemplatives, the reward in this sorrow is heaven. This is not the heaven of Christ and the saints, but an earthly heaven captured in the philosopher's stone. In other words, tribulation is a good thing, because it means the alchemical work (like the work of the soul in mystical theology) is following the proper course. The author of the *Sophic Hydrolith* writes:

> Indeed, during the digestion and tempering of the dead spiritual body, (as the works of the process of interment), many different colours and signs, that is to say, every kind of misery, anxiety, and tribulation, appear in man in the same way, caused by the devil, the world, and the flesh. But these foretell [a] good thing: that is to say, a man who has been so well tormented will at last achieve a happy and consecrated exit: just as also Holy Scripture is a witness, in which it is read, that indeed all who wish to live happily in

---

[24] Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, 110; *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Frankfurt: Apud Hermannum à Sande, 1678), 129–130: 'Istiusmodi siquidem homo, à Deo in fornacem tribulationis collocatur, & ad inftar Compofiti Hermetici tam diu omnis generis angustiis, diversimodisqu; calamitatibus & anxietatibus premitur, donec veteri Adamo & fiet mortuus, & tamquam vere novus homo, qui secundum Deum creates est, in recta veraque justitia atque Sanctitate iterum resurgat [. . .] Id si factum, & homo cottidie peccare defiant ut hac ratione peccatum ei amplius non imperet, tunc apud eum sicut in terreno opera adjuncti auri solution suam sumit originem, &, veluti supra dictum, putrefaction, ut spirituali more omnino solvatur; conteratur, destruatur, & putrescat : quae tamen solution, & putrfactio apud unum citius, quam apud alterum, fieri solet, attamen in temporali hacce vita adhuc fieri oportet: Hoc est: Talis homo igne tribulationis tam bene digeritur, coquitur, atque mollifcatur, ut etiam de omnibus suis viribus desperet, atque in gratia & misericordia Dei unicum suum quaerat solatium: quia in crucis furnace, & durante igne, homo, instar terreni auri, rectum nigrum corrui caput sortitur, hoc est, omnio de formis sit, atque coram mundo, irridetur: idque non dumtaxat per quadraginta dies ac noctes, vel annos, sed saepenumero etiam per omne vitae suae tempus, adeo ut plus cordolij, quam solatij & laetitiae, plus maeroris, quam gaudij in vita sua experiri necessum habeat.'

> Christ Jesus are forced to suffer [for] perfection, and that we, through many tribulations and distresses, must enter the kingdom of heaven.[25]

In this mode of alchemical mysticism, the notion of affliction becomes associated with a number of symbols. These are, principally, the storm (or tempest), cataclysm, earthquakes, eclipses and clouds. In contrast, the creation of the philosopher's stone is represented by a series of images derived from the Song of Songs including morning stillness, meadows, feasts (oftentimes wine and milk), the dawn, and the rising sun. It is obvious that such themes were modeled on the *Aurora*, or at very least, written in the same tradition of alchemical rhetoric that it pioneered.[26] In the *Aurora,* the tribulations of chapters VI and XII herald the chemical wedding and the alchemist's union with *Sapientia*. There are connections with mystical theology that are overt.

In the *Life of the Servant*, Henry Suso also portrays *Sapientia* as the object of his desire. He argues that union with her (the spiritual marriage) is the end goal of contemplation, just as the chemical wedding is the end goal of alchemy in the *Aurora*. Likewise, in both texts, *Sapientia* manifests through an experience of desolation. In chapter three, Suso laments the purgative struggle of mystical theology. He questions whether or not he possesses the fortitude necessary to take Wisdom as a lover when he writes: 'When was a servant ever faced with such a hard contest? A divine thought countered: It is an ancient law that suffering is part of love. No one can be a suitor unless he is a sufferer, nor can anyone be a lover unless he is a martyr.'[27] In the lines that follow, *Sapientia* materialises in splendour:

> She presented herself to him thus: She was suspended high above him on a throne of clouds. She shone as the morning star and dazzled as the glittering sun. Her crown was eternity, her attire blessedness, her words sweetness, and her embrace the surcease of all desire. She was distant yet near, far above yet low, present yet hidden. She engaged in

[25] Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, 111; *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 131: 'Durante vero etiamnum digestione & coctione spiritualis mortui corporis in homine sese etiam pari modo (veluti interreno opera videre est) multi diversimodique colores & signa, hoc est, omnis generis miseriae, anxietates, atque tribulations (quarum praecipua est ante commemorate ista tentation, quae a Diabolo, mundo, & carne nostra sit, atque caussatur) repraesentabunt: quae tamen monia bonum praenunciant indicium: quod videlicet tam bene vexatus homo tandem aliquando beatum expotatumque exitum consecuturus fiet: quemadmodum etiam & ipsa SS. Scriptura testis est, in qua legitur, quod videlicet omneis, qui beate in Christo Jesu vivere velint perfequutionem pati cogantur, quodque nos, per multas tribulations & angustias, regnum coelorum ingredi necessum habeamus.'

[26] The parallels are very obvious in the *Golden Age Restored*, an alchemical text that interprets alchemy through the Song of Songs. The text is dated to the early decades of the seventeenth. It is cited below.

[27]SUSO, 68; SUSOG, 13: 'Wa wurden ie keinem diener so hertú spil fúr geworfen? Daz widersprach ein götlicher gedank also: der minne von altem recht höret zú liden. Nu ist doch enkein werber, er si ein lider, noch kein minner, er si ein martrer.'

activities with others, but no one could claim her. She towered above the summit of heaven and touched the bottom of the abyss. She spread herself out sovereign from one end of the earth to the other and ordered all things sweetly [. . .] She presented herself to him endearingly, and greeted him smiling, saying kindly ‘*prebe, fili, cor tuum mihi!* Give me your heart, my child.’[28]

The parallels between the *Aurora* and *The Life of the Servant* are not coincidental, as both texts emerged from the same cultural context. In her scholarship on the divine feminine in medieval literature, Barbara Newman has shown that: ‘At the turn of the fifteenth century, chiefly in Germanic lands, we glimpse the beginnings of a genuinely esoteric tradition surrounding Sophia/maria.’[29] Both texts belong to this tradition that sought union with Wisdom through purgative experiences of desolation.

The *Aurora’s* appeals to cataclysm and tribulation are an early example of the spiritual alchemy that reached its zenith in seventeenth-century Germany among a milieu of Lutheran protestant theologians associated with the Rosicrucian order like Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) and Michael Maier (1568–1622). These figures saw alchemy as a symbolic representation of archetypal law and represented the tradition through a deeply ornate symbology.[30] Hereward Tilton has called their usage of allegory an ‘early Baroque love of ornament and the elegant expression of humanist learning.’[31]

In the allegory stemming from this tradition, visions, which were often written from a first-person perspective, became common. This is particularly evident in the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (*Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencrutz*), which is arguably

---

[28] SUSO, 69; SUSOG, 14: ‘[D]o zogte sis ich ime also: si swepte ho hob ime in einem gewúlkten throne, si luhte als der morgensterne und schein als dú splindú sunne; irú krone waz ewikeit, ire wat waz selikeit, irú wort süzzekeit, ire umbfang alles lustes gnuhsamkeit. Si waz verr und nahe, hoh und nider, si waz gegenwúrtig und doch verborgen; si lies smit ir umb gan, und moht si doch nieman begriffen. Si reichete úber daz obrest dez höhsten himels und rürte daz tiefst des abgrundes; si zerspreite sich von ende ze ende gewalteklich und richte richte ellú ding us süsseklich. So er iez wande haben ein schön jungfrowen, geswind vand er einen stolzen jungherren. Si gebaret etwen al sein wisú meisterin, etwen hielt sis ich al sein vil weidenlichú minnerin. Sie bot sich zü im minneklich und grütze in villechelich und sprach zü ime gütlich: “prebe, fili, cor tuum mihi! Gib mir din herz, kind mins!’

[29] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 194.

[30] On the German protestant alchemists see the works of Hereward Tilton in Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569 - 1622)*, Arbeiten Zur Kirchengeschichte 88 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

[31] Hereward Tilton, ‘Alchymia Archetypica: *Theurgy, Inner Transformation and the Historiography of Alchemy’*, in *Transmutatio: la via ermetica alla Felicità; the hermetic way to happiness*, ed. Daniela Boccassini, Quaderni di studi indo-mediterranei 5 (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2012), 207.

the most important work of spiritual alchemy ever written.[32] Like the nigredo of chapter VI, the *Chemical Wedding* begins with the vision of a tempest that is followed by the appearance of an angelic female figure. This being invites the book's protagonist, Christian Rosenkreutz, to witness the union of Sulphur and Mercury:

> One evening before Easter I was sitting at table, having, as was my habit, finished my humble prayer to my Creator, and meditated on the many great mysteries which the Father of Light, in his majesty, had allowed me to glimpse, As I was trying to prepare inwardly a pure unleavened loaf to accompany my blessed Paschal Lamb, there suddenly arose such a terrific wind that I thought the mountain on which my cottage was built was going to split apart.[33]

The vision continues with the materialisation of the Angelic figure:

> There stood a wonderfully beautiful female figure, dressed all in blue, spangled like the heavens with golden stars. In her right hand she held a large trumpet all of gold, on which a name was engraved which I could plainly read, but am forbidden to reveal as of yet. In her left hand she held a great bundle of letters in all languages, which, as I later learnt, she was to take to every land [. . .] For as soon as I turned around, she leafed here and there through her letters and at last pulled out a small note, laying it on the table with a deep curtsy and leaving me without a single word.[34]

---

[32] The treatise is not a traditional alchemical document, as it is not intended to instruct one in the operations of the laboratory. Rather, it is a novel that encapsulates a genre of 'esoteric alchemy', where allegory supplants alchemical practice itself. In other words, the text draws on alchemical images and themes, but repurposes them to describe the deification of the soul. The *Chemical Wedding* is a dream narrative that, while being written in German, was likely derived from Italian vernacular poems that were used as prototypes. These include the *Amorosa visione* and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* written in the middle of the fourteenth century and the end of the fifteenth century respectively. On the *Chemical Wedding's* sources see Everett F. Bleiler, 'Johann Valentin Andreae, Fantasist and Utopist', *Science Fiction Studies*, 35 (2008): 1–30.

[33] Joscelyn Godwin, trans., *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Phanes Press, 1991), 15; Johann Valentin Andreä, *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz Anno 1459:* (Stassburg: Zetzner, 1616), 3: 'An einem Abend vor dem Ostertag saß ich an einem Tisch vnd wie ich mich meiner gewonheit nach mit meinem Schöpffer in meinem demütigen Gebett gnugsam ersprachet: Vnd vielen grossen Geheimnussen: *(*deren mich der Vatter deß Liechts seine Majestät nit wenig sehen lassen) nachgedacht. Auch nuhn mir mit meinem lieben Osterlämblein ein ohngesäurt vnbeflecktes Küchlein in meinem Hertzen zubereitten wöllen kommet einsmals ein solcher grausamer Wind daher das ich nit anders meinte dann es wurde der Berg darein mein Häußlein gegraben vor grossem gewalt zerspringen müssen.'

[34] Ibid; *Idem*, 3–4: 'sihe ich hinvmb da war es ein schönherrlich Weibsbild deren Kleid gantz blaw vnd mit gulden Sternenwie der Himmel zierlich versetzt gewesen. In der rechten Hand trug sie ein gantz guldin Posaun daran ein Nam gestochen gewest den ich wol lesen kund mir aber nochmahlen zu offenbaren verbotten worden: In der lincken Hand hatte sie ein grosses büschel Brieff von allerley sprachen die sie (wie ich hernach erfahren) in alle Land tragen muste [. . .] Dann so bald ich mich vmbgewendet blättert sie jhre Brieff hin vnd wieder vnd zeücht entlich ein klein Briefflein herauß welches sie mit grosser Reverentz auff den Tisch gelegt vnd ohne einig wort.'

The vision concludes with Christian Rosenkrutz reading the letter, where he observes that it is signed *Sponsus et Spona* – Bridegroom and Bride. The *Chemical Wedding* follows the same configuration of the *Aurora* and the materialisation of *Sapientia* in chapters VI and XII. An experience of tempest is followed by the appearance of a divine female being who heralds the conjunction of sulphur and mercury. Moreover, the *Chemical Wedding*'s angel of annunciation is clothed in ornate garments and carries with her letters written in a multitude of languages. This indicates the encounter with wisdom and the invitation to the chemical wedding is one that is intended for all nations and all peoples. Compare these attributes to the description of *Sapientia* in the *Aurora* chapter V:

> [A]nd there was given into her hand power, honour, strength, and dominion, bearing upon her head the crown of the kingdom shining with the rays of twelve stars, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and having on her garments written in golden letters in Greek, in barbarian <Arabic> script, and in Latin: Reigning I will reign, and my kingdom shall have no end for all them that find me and subtly and ingeniously and constantly seek me out.[35]

While it is difficult to know if the *Aurora* was a direct influence on the *Chemical Wedding*, the thematic similarities between these passages suggest that it was an enduring influence on alchemy in the Holy Roman Empire. It is known that the *Aurora* was read in early-modern Germany, as references to it appear in the popular mid-sixteenth-century alchemical anthology the *Rosarium Philosophorum*.[36] Furthermore, the motif of the tempest spread beyond the boundaries of Germany. The idea appears in the works of Thomas Vaughan (1621–1666), a Welsh poet and alchemist who flourished in the middle of the seventeenth century. In the *Magicall Mountaine*, an alchemical allegory that appears in his work the *Lumen de Lumine* (*New Magical Light*), the philosopher's stone appears after the tribulation of a great wind:

> To this Mountaine you shall goe in a certaine Night (when it comes) most long, and most dark, and see that you prepare your selves by prayer [. . .] You need no Sword, nor any other Bodily weapons, only call upon God sincerely, and heartily. When you have discovered the Mountaine, the first Miracle that will appeare, is this. A most vehement, and very great wind, that will shake the Mountaine, and shatter the Rocks to peeces.[37]

---

[35] *AC*, 54–55: '[H]abensque in vestimentis suis scriptum litteris aureis graecis, barbaris et latinis: Regnans regnabo et regnum meum non habebit finem omnibus invenientibus me et perquirentibus subtiliter ingeniose et constanter.'

[36] See page 191, footnote 89 below.

[37] Thomas Vaughan, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, ed. Alan Rudrum and Jennifer Drake-Brockman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 323.

As the great hurricane abates, the dawn breaks, revealing the philosopher's stone:

> After all these things, and neer the Day-break, there shall be a great Calm, and you shall see the Day-star[38] arise, and the Dawning will appeare, and you shall perceive a great Treasure. The Chiefest thing in it, and the most perfect, is a certain exalted Tincture, with which the world (if it served God, and were worthy of such Gifts) might be tinged, and turn'd into most pure Gold.[39]

The association of the philosopher's stone with the coming dawn is a rhetorical device that, in alchemy, first appears in the *Aurora*. In chapter XII after the final union of sulphur and mercury, pseudo-Aquinas writes: 'Come, my beloved, and let us go into thy field, let us abide in the villages, let us go up early to the vine-yard, for the night is past and the day is at hand.'[40] Both Vaughan and pseudo-Aquinas relay the creation of the red stone through the tribulation of a storm, and the reward of the dawn.

The storm is an exemplary symbol that connotes both great power and adversity. As chapter two demonstrated, the Bible and mystical theology used it as an image to convey the coming of God's power concealed in a cloud.[41] All of the images expressed in these citations, the 'night', the 'storm', and the resolute faith that God will see the alchemist through the darkness are symbols commonly encountered in the purgative stages of mystical theology.

5.3 Darkness and the Song of Songs in the *Aurora*: Painful Dissolution or Stillness?

The *Aurora's* darkness is not the peaceful termination of the senses as in the *Cloud of Unknowing*, but rather, a terrible tempest that tortures and dissolves the soul. While its treatment of darkness in the nigredo of chapter VI is par for the course in the rhetorical style of late medieval alchemical symbolism, the nigredo of chapter XII is mediated through terms that are more unconventional, as the appeal to the Song of Songs is an irregular thing to see in a medieval alchemical text. The tempest and cloud that appear in chapter VI are replaced with a citation of Song of Songs 1:4–5, in which *Sapientia* takes the form of the Queen of Sheba. Chapter XII portrays her as being mired in an all-consuming abyssal darkness:

---

[38] Cf. the morning star in the citation of the *Aurora* above. See page 166, footnote 12 above.

[39] Vaughan, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, 324.

[40] AC, 144–147: 'Veni mi dilecta et egrediamur in agrum tuum, moremur in villis, mane surgamus ad vineam, quia nox praecessit et dies appropinquabit.'

[41] Cf. chapter three, subsection 3.1, 101–114.

> Be turned to me with all your heart and do not cast me aside because I am black and swarthy, because the sun hath changed my colour and the waters have covered my face and the earth hath been polluted and defiled in my works; for there was darkness over it, because I stick fast in the mire of the deep and my substance is not disclosed. Wherefore out of the depths have I cried, and from the abyss of the earth with my voice to all you that pass by the way.[42]

As argued above, the language here is fundamentally a replaying of the nigredo in chapter VI through the mediation of the Song of Songs. Wisdom's works are 'polluted' and 'defiled', and she is overwhelmed by the mire of a 'deep' abyss. Like chapter VI, she pleads with the alchemist to rescue her substance from a shadow that covers the entirety of the earth. This plea, or way in which the narrator relates to the darkness, is the most significant parallel between the two nigredos.

The Song of Songs*,* since the time of Origen, was invariably interpreted as the purview of mystical theology. Pseudo-Aquinas knew this and chose his symbolism accordingly. The cloud in chapter VI and the bride in chapter XII are elements of the text that mirror each other in a very precise manner. To think to associate the image of the cloud with the queen of Sheba is atypical, but not without precedent. A potential source for the idea comes in the writings of Thomas Gallus, who was the first to associate the *Mystical Theology's* cloud with the Queen of Sheba in his exegesis on the Song of Songs:

> *I am black*, and she says this from among the Seraphim: she fixes her gaze more steadily, more intently than before. Held in the Bridegroom's embrace and entering upon the cloud which is resplendent beyond all radiances, she speaks out of her experience and says: *I am black*, I am enclosed by the cloud, my powers of understanding are denied, but I am not made unsightly by this cloud, only more beautiful.[43]

Later on in the commentary, the Song of Song's bride again attests to her presence in the cloud through a reference to Cant. 1:4–5:

---

[42] AC, 132–136: 'Convertiminiad me in toto corde vestro et nolite abiccere me, eo quod nigra sum et fusca, quia decoloravit me sol et abyssi operuerunt faciem meam et terra infecta et contaminate est in operibus meis; quia tenebrae factae sunt super seam pro eo, quod infixa sum in limo profundi et substantia mea non est aperta. Proptera de profundis clamavi et de abysso terrae voce mea ad vos omnes, qui transistis per viam.'

[43] This is derived from the English translation of the commentary found in Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, 331. It is translated from the French rendition of Jean Barbet found in Thomas Gallus and Jean Barbet, *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques.*, vol. 14, Textes Philosophiques Du Moyen-age (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 71: '*Nigra sum*, et loquitur in seraphim; fortior quam prius firmius figit aciem. Adstricta sponsi amplexibus et ingrediens supersplendentem caliginem, experientialiter loquitur: *Nigra sum*, id est caligine absorpta et oculis intellectivis subtracta, nec hac caligine deformior sed speciosior.'

> *Do not gaze upon me*: that is, it is hard for you to see me, for I am wrapped in a cloud; and this is to say that I *am swarthy, for the sun has burned me*, it has drained me of all colour and so has made me invisible, since what lacks colour cannot be seen, and, for the sake of these priceless pleasures, I would forever stop here.[44]

The merging of the Song of Song's spirituality with the apophatic images of the Dionysian corpus represented a major innovation in mystical theology, and a potential influence on pseudo-Aquinas in his treatment of darkness in chapters VI and XII.[45] There is still, however, the issue of tone in these chapters. Gallus sees the bride's experience in the cloud as 'pleasurable' and apophatic in the strictest definition of the term. In the cloud she is beautified and united with her bridegroom. She does not suffer, rather, she experiences a cessation of sense perception. This is not at all how the *Aurora* articulates its experience of darkness, which is terrible, painful and purgative.

By the late middle ages, connections were drawn between the desolation of purgation and the 'darkness' of apophasis. The prevailing image in the literature was that of the afflictive 'night'. In his sermons, Johannes Tauler makes reference to an *arbeit der nachte* (work of the night), which signals a kind of mystical dereliction of the soul when it abandons self-will.[46] Likewise, in the *Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton compares the first purgative effects of contemplation to a 'night' that is painful to the soul. As the false image of sin becomes muted through contemplation, the pain of darkness gives way to rest. In other words, the soul cannot find rest in darkness because it has not yet been cleansed of carnal desires. In Book II chapter twenty-four, he writes:

---

[44] Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, 331; Barbet, *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques*, 72: '*Nolite me considerare,* id est incontemplabilis sum vobis quia a caligine absorbeor; et hoc est *quod fusca sum quia decoloravit me sol*, id est abstulit omnem colorem, id est fecit me invisibilem, sicut quod coloratum non est, visibile non est, et propter has inestimabiles delicias semper hic consisterem, si semper possem.'

[45] See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)*, The Presence of God, a History of Western Christian Mysticism; Vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 80: 'Like the Cistercians, especially Bernard, Thomas Gallus sees the Song as a key to unlock the central message of the whole Bible [. . .] What is unique about his reading, however, is the way in which he uses Dionysius as the foundation of the entire program: the Areopagite is the key that unlocks the key. Thus, Thomas's commentaries assume the form of an extended dialogue between the Song text and the Dionysian corpus.'

[46] See '"Die Arbeit der Nacht" Mystische Leiderfahrung nach Johannes Tauler', in *Die Dunkle Nacht Der Sinne: Leiderfahrung Und Christliche Mystik*, ed. Alois M. Haas, 1. Aufl (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1989), 9–40.

> Nevertheless, this night is sometimes painful, and sometimes it is easy and comforting. It is painful at first when someone is very unclean and not accustomed by grace to be often in this darkness [. . .] Therefore this darkness is painful to him, especially when grace does not touch him in abundance [. . .] For you must know, when you want to desire Jesus and think of him alone, and you cannot do this freely for the pressure of such worldly thoughts: you are truly out of the false day and entering this darkness; but your darkness is not restful because of disuse and ignorance and impurity.[47]

The full articulation of the 'spiritual night' was offered by the great Carmelite mystic St John of the Cross. While he wrote in the sixteenth century, St John was firmly entrenched in the mystical theology of his medieval forebears. This was reflected in his usage of the Song of Songs and in his strict adherence to the threefold path of purgation, illumination, and union, which he used to outline the path to mystical union.[48] In many ways, St John is a figure who represents the culmination of medieval Latin mystical theology. His fame is so great, that he often dwarfs lesser-known readings of apophasis in the tradition. This is seen in his association of apophasis with suffering, an idea that reached its most sophisticated and well-known form in the image of the *noche oscura* (dark night).

Like Hilton's 'good night', St John describes a 'night of the spirit', where the soul undergoes its most terrible and intense purgation in prelude to union with God. The soul in the night of the spirit is so radically expunged of sin (and indeed, the egoistic self) that St John says God appears hostile to its very being. The concept of the 'dark night' is an outgrowth of patristic and medieval mystical theology, though scholars disagree on what the saint's sources were, and the specific ways in which they relate to a 'Dionysian' understanding of mystical darkness.[49] It has been argued that St John's concept of the 'night' was derived from the German mystics in a mediated form through the sermons of

---

[47] *SP*, 236; *SPT* (2.24), 186: 'Neverthelees this nyght is sumtyme peynful and sumtyme it is esi and confortable. It is peynful first whanne a man is mykil foule and is nought through grace used for to ben often in this myrkenesse [. . .] therfore is this merkenesse peynful to hym, and namely whanne grace toucheth him nought aboundauntli [. . .] For wite thou wel, whanne thou woldest desire Jhesu and oonli thenken on Him, and thou mai not freli for presynge in of swilk wordli thoughtes, sothli thou are outeward of the fals dai, and thou art entered into this myrkenesse. But thi merkenesse is not restefulle, because of disuse and unconnynge and unclennesse of thiself.'

[48] See A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey, *Mediaeval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross* (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954).

[49] The extent to which St John's 'dark night' differs from the 'divine darkness' of Gregory of Nyssa, and the 'cloud' of Pseudo-Dionysius is a subject of debate. Andrew Louth contends that while St John's 'dark night' is quite obviously derived from Pseudo-Dionysius on some level, the concept of the 'dark night' is alien to the patristic theology of the East. For a survey of the debate see 'Patristic Mysticism and St John of the Cross' in Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 176–185.

Johannes Tauler. Likewise, notable theological parallels have been detected between his theology and the theology of Waler Hilton.[50]

Bernard McGinn identifies the dark night with a 'third kind' of negativity in Christian mysticism that is distinct from both a Dionysian understanding of darkness and the negativity of 'detachment' espoused by mystics like Meister Eckhart. This third kind of darkness, the mysticism of 'dereliction' or 'affliction', reached its most forceful expression in the late middle ages, and was perfected by St John of the Cross. The first kind of negativity McGinn identifies refers to the ineffability of naming God or identifying his attributes. This is best expressed in Pseudo-Dionysius. The second type is the mysticism of 'detachment' found in a variety of religious traditions both eastern and western and is perhaps best exemplified by Buddhism. The third type of negativity is the apophasis associated with God's deliberate withdrawal from the mystic, and the suffering this causes. In mystical literature, all three types of negativity are interrelated and fall under the umbrella of apophatic experience.[51] In popular culture, the 'dark night' is often (incorrectly) thought to be synonymous with any experience of profound depression. St John's treatment of depression in the 'dark night' is not a mere psychological phenomenon, but the dissolution of the egoistic self in the advanced stages of the contemplative life.

St John sees asceticism itself as a kind of self-congratulatory spiritual indulgence, that while necessary for beginners, must be put aside as the mystical life develops. Depression, therefore, comes when the 'self' that wishes to possess God for the purpose of self-satisfaction is annihilated.[52] Thus, the pain experienced in the dark night is a response to

---

[50] See J.P.H Clark, 'The "Cloud of Unknowing", Walter Hilton and St John of the Cross: A Comparison', *Downside Review*, 96 (1978), 296–297. Cf. Bernard McGinn who disagrees with this position. Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350-1550)*, 392: 'Hilton's view of luminous darkness has nothing to do with the Dionysian divine darkness, and, despite the arguments of some investigators, is rather different from John of the Cross's notion of the dark night of the senses and spirit.'

[51] See Bernard McGinn, 'Three Forms of Negativity in Christian Mysticism', in *Knowing the Unknowable: Science and Religions on God and the Universe*, ed. John Bowker (London: Tauris, 2009), 99–122.

[52] St John's apophasis is the reformation of the self through the destruction of the possessing ego. The dark night of the soul destroys both the frustration and guilt of one who is focused on their owns sins, as well as the pride of one who thinks they have already arrived at the summit of holiness. It is the disintegration of an impure self that is either self-pitying or indulgent in its austerity. Ultimately, the key element that separates the dark night from standard depression is the purification of the soul, and the desperation it feels when undergoing this purgation. What the soul experiences is not stillness, but distress. See Denys Turner, 'St. John of the Cross and Depression', *Downside Review*, 106 (1988), 161: 'The nights break down our "ego-dependent agency" and reveal within us a pure and simple capacity to love God that is not dependent on dominating or possessing him.'

God drawing close to the soul. The soul is unable to incorporate the magnitude of God's grace and light, and, therefore, experiences this presence as pain.

More than any other concept in mystical theology, the apophaticism in the *Aurora* most closely resembles the dark night of the soul. The tenor of *Sapientia's* desperation, the terror of the darkness, the sentiment that the soul has been abandoned to oblivion, all of these motifs are defining characteristics of chapters VI and XII. They are also defining characteristics of the dark night. St John elaborates:

> It [the dark night] so disentangles and dissolves the spiritual substance – absorbing it in a profound darkness – that the soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death. It feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly, and it suffers an anguish comparable to Jonah in the belly of the whale. It is fitting that the soul be in the sepulchre of dark death in order that it attain the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes.[53]

St John continues by describing the soul's sorrow when it feels abandoned by God:

> But what the sorrowing soul feels most is the conviction that God has rejected it, and with abhorrence cast it into darkness. The thought that God has abandoned it is a piteous and heavy affliction for the soul [. . .] When this purgative contemplation oppresses a soul, it feels very vividly indeed the shadow of death, the sighs of death, and the sorrows of hell, all of which reflect the feeling of God's absence, of being chastised and rejected by him, and of being unworthy of him, as well as the object of his anger. The soul experiences all this and even more, for now it seems that this affliction will last forever.[54]

The nigredos of chapter VI and XII are the purgative 'nights' of the *Aurora*. They break down the metallic soul, stripping away the 'polluted' and 'defiled works' that prevent *Sapientia* from uniting with the alchemist. In her commentary on the *Aurora*, Marie Louise von Franz expresses surprise that the final parable begins with a purificatory procedure so close to the final moment of union. She writes: 'psychologically, it is remarkable that after

---

[53] SJC, 403–404; SJP, 675: '[D]e de tal manera la destrica y decuece la sustancia espiritual, absorbiéndola en una profunda y honda tiniebla, que el alma se siente estar deschaciendo y derritiendo en la haz y vista de sus miserias conmuerte de espíritu cruel; así como si, tragada de una bestia, en su vientre tenebroso se sintiese estar digeriéndose, padeciendo estas angustias como Jonás en el vientre de aquella marina bestia [. . .] Porque en este sepulcro de oscura muerta la conviene estar para la [espiritual] ressurección que espera.'

[54] SJC, 404; SJP, 675: 'Pero de lo que está doliente el alma aquí más [y lo que más] siente es parecer[le] claro que Dios la ha desechado y, aborreciéndola, arrojado en las tinieblas; que para ella es grave y lastimera pena creer que la ha dejado Dios [. . .] Porque, verdaderamente, cuando esta contemplación purgativa [aprieta], sombra de muerte y gemidos de muerte y dolores de infierno siente el alma muy a lo vivo, que consiste [en] sentirse sin Dios, y castigada y arrojada e [injdigna de El, y que está enojado; que todo se siente aquí, y más, que le parece que ya [es para] siempre.'

so many purificatory procedures the parable still begins as before with a nigredo'.[55] This is not so surprising when the text is read through the prism of mystical theology and not psychology. Much like St John's night of the 'spirit', the nigredo in chapter XII is the final and most painful purgation that clears away any remaining impurities before the soul is united with God. In other words, it is precisely because the soul is so close to union with the divine that it experiences such intense spiritual desolation.

As in the *Aurora*, St John compares the purgation of the dark night to an experience of hell. In the nigredo of chapter VI, *Sapientia* exclaims: '[T]he lower hell and the shadow of death [corrupts the speaker], for a tempest hath overwhelmed me [. . .] For this cause have I laboured night by night with crying, my jaws are become hoarse; who is the man that liveth, knowing and understanding, delivering my soul from the hand of hell?.'[56] St John conveys an indistinguishable experience of anguish in the dark night:

> Sometimes this experience is so vivid that it seems to the soul that it sees hell and perdition opened before it. These are the ones who go down into hell alive, since their purgation on earth is similar to what takes place there. For this purgation is what would have to be undergone there. The soul that endures it here on earth either does not enter that place, or is detained there only for a short while. It gains more in one hour here on earth by this purgation that it would in many there.[57]

He connects this hell to the tempest and the 'shadow of death', the central images of the nigredo in chapter VI:

> One ought to have deep compassion for the soul God puts in this tempestuous and frightful night. It may be true that the soul is fortunate because of what is being accomplished within it, for great blessings will proceed from this night; and Job affirms that out of darkness God will raise up in the soul profound blessings and change the shadow of death into light [. . .] Nevertheless, the soul is deserving of great pity because of the immense tribulation and the suffering of extreme uncertainty about a remedy.[58]

---

[55] AC, 362

[56] AC, 56–59: 'inferni inferioris et umbra mortis [. . .] quoniam tempestas dimersit me [. . .] Ergo laboravi per singulas noctes clamans, raucae factae sunt fauces meae: quis est homo, qui vivit sciens et intelligens, eruens animam meam de manu inferi?'

[57] SJC, 406; SJP, 678: 'Lo cual algunas veces se siente tan a lo vivo, que le parece al alma que ve abierto el infierno y la perdición. Porque de éstos son los que de veras descienden al infierno viviendo, pues aquí se purgan a la manera que allí; porque esta purgación es la que allí se había de hacer. Y así, el alma que por aquí pasa, o no entra en aquel lugar, o se detiene allí muy poco, porque aprovecha más una hora [aquí] que muchas allí.'

[58] SJC, 407; SJP, 679: 'De donde grande compassion conviene teneral alma que Dios pone en esta tempestuosa y horrenda noche. Porque, aunque le corre muy buena dicha [por los grandes bienes que de ella le han de nacer] cuando, como dice Job, levantare [dios] en el alma de las tinieblas profundos bienes, y

St John calls this intensely painful and purgative form of apophasis ‘oscura contemplación’ (dark contemplation), identifying it as the highest form of purgative contemplation available to the soul. Where the senses are purified by sensations of dryness, and the faculties by a negation of perception, ‘dark contemplation’ purifies the soul by smothering it in a thick fog-like darkness. St John attributes cloudlike qualities to this form of apophasis that both terminates sense perception (like in the *Cloud of Unknowing*) and burns out the imperfections of sin. He also attributes metallurgical qualities to this purgation that burns out impurities:

> For the sensory part [of the soul] is purified by aridity, the faculties by the void of their apprehensions, and the spirit by thick darkness. God does all this by means of dark contemplation. And the soul not only suffers the void and suspension of these natural supports and apprehensions, which is a terrible anguish (like hanging in midair, unable to breathe, but it is also purged by this contemplation. As fire consumes the tarnish and rust of metal, this contemplation annihilates, empties, and consumes all the affections and imperfect habits the soul contracted throughout its life [. . .] For the prophet asserts that in order to burn away the rust of the affections, the soul must, as it were, be annihilated and undone in the measure that these passions and imperfections are connatural to it.[59]

St John continues:

> Because the soul is purified in this forge *like gold in the crucible*,[60] as the Wise Man says, it feels both this terrible undoing in its very substance and extreme poverty as though it were approaching its end. This experience is expressed in David’s cry: *Save me Lord, for the waters have come in even unto my soul; I am stuck in the mire of the deep, and there is nowhere to stand; I have come out of the depth of the sea, and the tempest has overwhelmed me. I have labored in crying out, my throat has become hoarse, my eyes have failed while I hope in my God.*[61]

---

produzga n luz la sombra de muerte [. . .] con todo eso, con la inmensa pena con que anda penando y por la grande incertidumbre que tiene de su remedio.’

[59] SJC*,* 405; SJP, 677: ‘Porque la parte sensitiva se purifica en sequedad, y las potencias en su vacío de sus aprehensiones, y el espíritu en tiniebla oscur [. . .] Todo lo cual hace Dios por medio de esta oscura contemplación, en la cual no sólo padece el alma el vacío y suspensión de estos arrimos naturales y aprehensiones, que es un padecer muy congojoso, de manera que a [como] si a uno a [le] suspendiesen o detuviesen el aire, que no respirase; mas también está purgando al alma, aniquilando y purgando, vaciando o consumiendo [en ella] (así como hace el fuego al orín y moho del metal) todas las afecciones y hábitos imperfectos que ha contraído toda la vida [. . .] pues dice el profeta que para que se purifique y [deshaga] el orín de las afecciones que están en medio del alma, es menester en cierta manera que ella misma se aniquile y deshaga según está ennaturalizada en estas pasiones e imperfecciones.’

[60] Wisd. 3:6 (DRBO Tamquam aurum in fornace probavit illos, et quasi holocausti hostiam accepit illos, et in tempore erit respectus illorum.’

[61] SJC*,* 405; SJP, 677: ‘De donde, porque en esta fragua se purifica el alma como el oro en el crisol, según el Sabio dice, siente [en esto] este grande deshacimiento en la misma sustancia del alma con extremada pobreza, en que está como acabando; como se puede ver Por lo que a este propósito dijo David por estas palabras, clamando a Dios: Sálvame, Señor, porque han entrado las aguas hasta el alma mía; fijado estoy en el limo del profundo, y no hay donde ate sustente; vine hasta el profundo del mar, y la tempestad me anegó: trabajé clamando, enronqueciéronseme mis gargantas, des – 'auecieron mis ojos en tanto que espero en mi Dios.’

The citation of Psalm 69:1–3 (Ps. 68:2–4 in the Vulgate),[62] used here to articulate the soul's experience of the dark night is the very same Psalm cited in the nigredo of chapter VI where the speaker is overwhelmed by the cloud: '[the cloud] had absorbed the earth and covered my soul, [because] the waters had come in even unto her.'[63] Not only does St John use the same symbols as pseudo-Aquinas to give shape to his 'dark contemplation' (darkness, pain, smothering, etc.), he grounds his vision of it in the same Biblical source. In all of the *Aurora's* usage of apophatic tropes, there is no greater parallel than the vision of apophasis forwarded by St John of the Cross. Both pseudo-Aquinas and St John describe the purgation of the soul as a dissolution in darkness, and a descent into an abyssal tempestuous hell where the soul feels abandoned by God.

Latin mystical theology of the late middle ages gave birth, then, to a mysticism of 'dereliction' expressed through the vernacular of darkness. At the same time, and in the same historical context, the *Aurora* appears, drawing on the same themes to elucidate alchemy. The cultural milieu that birthed St John's mystical theology birthed the *Aurora*, they are born of the same culture. A further parallel between pseudo-Aquinas and St John comes in their reading of the bride in Cant. 1:4–5. Traditional exegesis of the passage in the Latin tradition equated the bride's darkness with the persecution of the early Church.[64] The *Aurora* does not interpret Cant. 1:4–5 in this way, rather, it connects the bride's darkness to the impurity of the nigredo. In the *Aurora*, the bride describes herself as being 'polluted and defiled' in her works, making an appeal to the alchemist to not cast her aside because she is 'black and swarthy'.

Sapientia's yearning is a plea for perfection. She begs the alchemist to redeem her corrupted body and save her substance from the destructive corruption of the nigredo. Despite her darkness, the beauty of the mercurial spirit is hidden within her body. Through cleansing her, pure sulphur and mercury unite to form the philosopher's stone. Therefore,

---

[62] Ps. 68 2–4 (DRBO): 'Salvum me fac, Deus, quoniam intraverunt aquae usque ad animam meam. Infixus sum in limo profundi et non est substantia. Veni in altitudinem maris; et tempestas demersit me'.

[63] *AC*, 56–59: 'quae hanc exhauserat meam animam tegentem et <quia> aquae intraverant usque ad eam.'

[64] Origen interprets it as the church of the gentiles, rendered black by its ignoble birth but made beautiful by the light of Christ. See Origene, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, 93–93. Saint Gregory the Great interprets the passage as the early church rejected by the Judeans. See Gregorius, *Sancti Gregorii Magni Expositiones in Canticum Canticorum, in librum primum Regum*, ed. Patrick Verbraken (Turnhoult: Brepols, 1963).

Pseudo-Aquinas reads Cant. 1:4–5 as a passage concerned with the necessity of purgation in pursuit of union with the divine. St John also associates the darkness of the bride with sin, purgation, and union in his pastoral eclogue, the *Spiritual Canticle* (*Cántico espiritual)*.

The *Spiritual Canticle* is a lyrical reimagining of the Song of Songs, written in the vernacular and composed near the end of the saint's life. It is concerned with the purgatorial journey of mystical theology and the love of the bride (soul) for its bridegroom (Christ). The text and its commentary are replete with references to the Song of Songs, whose Latin sources were likely drawn from sixteenth-century editions of the Vulgate.[65] In it, St John associates the darkness of the bride with the purgatorial ascent of the soul:

> Do not despise me;
> For if, before, you found me dark,
> now truly you can look at me
> for since you have looked
> and left me in grace and beauty.[66]

The saint explains the stanza in his commentary on the text:

> Since you have looked (rubbed out this dark and wretched colour of sin that made me unsightly), in which you bestowed grace on me the first time, "now truly you can look at me." That is, now I can indeed be seen, and I merit being seen by receiving more grace from your eyes. The first time you not only rubbed out the dark colour with those eyes, but you made me worthy to be seen since you looked with love and left me in grace and beauty.[67]

The idea of the 'lovesick', or the 'wounded' lover appears in the theology of both authors. So in its treatment of apophasis as a sundering of the soul, and in its vision of the bride's purgation, the path to mystical union in the *Aurora* closely aligns with the theology of St John of the Cross. In the *Aurora, Sapientia* yearns for her lover. This is seen at the height

---

[65] See Terence O'Reilly, 'Latin and Vernacular in the *Cántico Espiritual* of St John of the Cross', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 93 (2016): 5–20. See also 'John of the Cross and the Latin Tradition', in Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, 175–200.
[66] SJC, 476; SJP, 835: 'No quieras despreciarme; que, si color moreno en mí hallaste, ya bien puedes mirarme después que me miraste,que gracia y hermosura en mí dejaste.'
[67] SJC, 603; SJP, 948: 'Después que me miraste, quitando de mí ese color moreno y desgraciado de culpa con que no estaba de ver, en que me diste la primera vez gracia, ya bien puedes mirarme, esto es, ya bien puedo yo y merezco ser vista, recibiendo más gracia de tus ojos; pues con ellos no sólo la primera vez me quitaste el color moreno, pero también me hiciste digna de ser vista, pues, con tu vista de amor.'

of darkness in chapter VI: '[W]ho is the man that liveth, knowing and understanding, delivering my soul from the hand of hell?'[68] and in chapter XII: 'For behold in my bed by night I sought one to comfort me and I found none, I called and there was none to answer me.'[69] The idea is again expressed in the second half of the nigredo in chapter XII, where the speaker goes out in search for the beloved:

> Therefore will I arise and go into the city, seeking in the streets and broadways a chaste virgin to espouse, comely in face, more comely in body, most comely in her garments, that she may roll back the stone from the door of my sepulchre and give me wings like a dove, and I will fly with her into heaven and then say: I live for ever, and I will rest in her, for she [the queen] stood on my right hand.[70]

The passage here makes reference to Song of Songs 3: 1–2: 'In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him and found him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and I found him not.'[71] In this passage, the narrator, who appears to be a combination of *Sapientia* and the alchemist, searches for her lover.[72] This is a central motif in the Song

---

[68] AC, 56–59: '[Q]uis est homo, qui vivit sciens et intelligens, eruens animam meam de manu inferi?'
[69]AC, 132–136: 'Ecce enim in lectulo meo per noctem quaesivi sonsolantem et non inveni, vocavi et nemo respondit mihi.'
[70] AC, 132–136: 'Convertiminiad me in toto corde vestro et nolite abiccere me, eo quod nigra sum et fusca, quia decoloravit me sol et abyssi operuerunt faciem meam et terra infecta et contaminate est in operibus meis; quia tenebrae factae sunt super seam pro eo, quod infixa sum in limo profundi et substantia mea non est aperta. Proptera de profundis clamavi et de abysso terrae voce mea ad vos omnes, qui transistis per viam. Attendite et videte me, so quis similem mihi invenerit, dabo manu sua stellam matutinam. Ecce enim in lectulo meo per noctem quaesivi sonsolantem et non inveni, vocavi et nemo respondit mihi [. . .] Surgam ergo et introibo civitatem; per vicos et plateas quaerens mihi unamdesponsare virginem castam, pulchram facie, pulchriorem corpore, pulcherrimam veste, ut revolvat lapidem ab ostio monumenti mei et dabit mihi pennas sicut columbae et volabo cum ea in coelo et dicam tunc: Vivo ego in aeternum et requiescam in ea, quia astitit [regina] a dectris meis.'
[71] Cant. 3:1–2 (DRBO): 'In lectulo meo, per noctes, quaesivi quem diligit anima mea: quaesivi illum, et non inveni. Surgam, et circuibo civitatem: per vicos et plateas quaeram quem diligt anima mea: quaesivi illum, et non inveni.'
[72] The reference to the 'queen' denotes that the passage is referring to Luna (mercury), the receptive cold and moist aspect of the Stone. As the work of circulation entails the amalgamation of the stone's masculine and feminine aspects, the reversal here is neither out of place or particularly odd in and of itself in an alchemical context. The *Aurora*'*s* transgression of gender boundaries is an alchemical allegory, though the amalgamation of male and female characteristics was not outside the norm in late medieval mystical texts. Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, it was not at all uncommon for God to be depicted as having both male and female characteristics in late medieval piety; or for mystics, devotional writers, and theologians to mix and swap gender roles in their writings. See Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1986): 399–439. See also chapter six, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages' in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 181–238.

of Songs, and a definitive aspect of St John's mystical theology. In his commentary on the *Dark Night,* he writes:

> When the bride went searching for her Beloved in the plazas and suburbs, she thought that others were doing the same and told them that if they found him they should tell him she was suffering for love of him [. . .] Such are the traits of these longings of love that the soul experiences when it is advanced in this spiritual purgation. The wounded soul rises up at night, in this purgative darkness, according to the affections of the will as the lioness or she-bear that goes in search of her cubs when they are taken away and cannot be found, it anxiously and forcibly goes out in search of its God. Since it is immersed in darkness, it feels his absence and feels that it is dying with love of him.[73]

This is the exact picture of yearning and purgation in the *Aurora's* nigredos, where the wounded soul suffers and longs for its lover in darkness. Its reliance on these rhetorical devices make it a text that transcends even most texts of spiritual alchemy. This comes in its appeal to the Song of Songs and the theological vernacular of suffering, yearning, and the ecstasy of union. These are not alchemical ideas at all, but rather, themes one would expect to see in a discourse on mystical theology. [74] Therefore its author, whoever he was, was a figure firmly grounded in the same Latin contemplative tradition that reached its apogee in the mystical theology of St John of the Cross.

The *Aurora's* usage of apophatic imagery and the Song of Songs as a rhetorical device clearly had an afterlife in the alchemy of early-modern Germany. There is little doubt that the *Aurora* influenced the *Golden Age Restored*, a mid-seventeenth century-alchemical text that depicts the creation of the philosopher's stone through citations of the *Canticle*. The text is anonymous but attributed to the alchemist Adrian von Mynsicht (1603–1638), who is known solely for the work. Towards the end of the treatise, a gloom likened to the cruxificition darkness [75] covers the earth and envelopes the narrator in a cloud. In the terror, *Sapientia* materialises through the Queen of Sheba:

---

[73] SJC, 427; SJP, 698: '[C]uando la Esposa salió a buscar a su Amado por las plazas y arrabales, creyendo que los demás andaban en lo mismo, les dijo que, si lo hallasen ellos, le hablasen diciendo de ella que penaba de su amor [. . .] A este talle, pues, son las ansias de amor que va sintiendo esta alma cuando ya va aprovechada en esta espiritual purgación; porque de noche se levanta (esto es, en estas tinieblas purgativas) según las afecciones de la voluntad, y con las ansias y fuerzas que la leona u osa va a buscar sus cachorros cuando se los han quitado y no los halla, anda esta herida alma a buscar a su Dios; porque, como está en tinieblas, siéntese sin El, estando muriendo de amor por El.'

[74] Denys Turner has argued that eros, with its polar tension between *expectation* and *consummation* is not a peripheral aspect of mystical theology, but foundational to the very act of contemplation itself. See 'Eros and Ecstasy' in Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs,* 47–70.

[75] Cf. chapter three, page 108 footnote 25.

> A short time later, on the day of the new moon, an eclipse of the sun was visible, which was a horrendous sight: It began with a cloudy greenness[76] somewhat mixed with other colours, until everything became black and the heavens and earth darkened. People were full of fear, but I was elated, recalling the great mercy of God and the mystery of regeneration. For Christ himself told us that a grain cannot produce fruit unless it is first cast into the earth and putrefied. And it happened that the eclipse was covered with clouds and the sun began to shine, nevertheless, three parts [of the eclipse] were still very cloudy. And Behold: An arm pierced the clouds and my entire body trembled at the sight of a letter that was sealed at four corners, on which was written: 'I am black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar and the tapestries of Solomon. Do not look upon me because I am black and have been burnt by the sun'. But as soon as the humidity was fixed to its highest degree, a rainbow stretched out and I was mindful of the most high and the stars who taught and informed me. And behold: With the help of the planets and the fixed stars, the sun overcame the eclipse and shone upon the mountains and valleys.[77]

All of the terms the *Aurora* uses to articulate the nigredo appear here: the mortifying darkness, the terror, the cloud that covers the earth, and the citation of Song of Songs 1: 4–5. As the narrative unfolds, more appeals to the text appear in references to 'foxes', 'wine', 'milk' and 'meadows'. Most importantly, at the end of the text, Mynsicht describes the stone's journey through the circulation of the elements. A red sun rises, denoting the creation of the philosopher's stone, and with it, *Sapientia* appears through a quotation of Cant. 6:9:

> [The] day dawned very clear: then all were fearful and terrified; they ceased: and all who had seen that day rejoiced in the Lord, and said: The winter has passed, the rain has ceased: the flowers have come to the earth: the spring has come, and the turtle is heard in the earth. The fig tree and the palm vines have recovered and spread a pleasant fragrance from themselves. Let us quickly, therefore, catch the foxes, the little foxes, I say, spoiling the vineyard, that we may gather the ripe grapes, and make the wine, and in due season

[76] The colour green indicates the stimulation of the mercurial seed in the alembic and the ripening of the philosopher's stone. It also refers to verdigris, a pigment that appears through the action of acetic acid on copper. It is not one of the primary alchemical colours, but rather, an intermediary colour that must be expunged during the nigredo. See LAD, 91–92.

[77] A.E. Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, vol. 1 (London: J. Elliott, 1893), 64–65; *Musaeum Hermeticum* (Frankfurt: Apud Hermannum à Sande, 1678), 68–69: 'Brevitempore post, in die Novilunii, Eclipsis in Sole conspiciebatur, horrendo aspectu: ab initioso caliginosis viridibus, mixtisque aliquantulum, coloribus, donec tamdem omnio atra fieret, coelumque; terramque; obscurabat: Homins errant anxii, ego autem letabar, ingentemque Dei misericordiam & Regenerationis Mysterium mihi in memoriam revocans, quemadmodum etiam granum trictici nobis ab ipso Christo propositum innuit, quod, nisi terrae injectum putrefcat, nullous profert fructus. Et accidit ut Eclipsis ista nubibus obtegeretur, & sol micare inciperet: nihilominus tamen tres partes adhuc valde caliginosae errant. Et ecce: *Brachium nubes penetrabat, & corpus meum, obspectaculum istud, tremebat, litteras, quatuor dependentibus sigillis inmanu habebat, quibus inscriptum erat: Ater, ast suavis admodum sum, o filiae Hierusalem, velutitabernaculum Kedar, & tapetes Salomonis: Non me intuemini quo dita niger siem, ita enim a Sole combustus sum. Quamprimum vero fixum in humidum ageret, Iris sese extendebat, eramque memor soederis Altissimi, sidelitatisque mei Doctoris atque informatoris. & Ecce: Ope Planetarum, fixarumque stellarum, Sol tamdem Eclipsim superabat, omnibusq; montibus & vallibus.*'

> we shall be fed with milk and honey, and we shall be satisfied; and let us become drunk. But after the day had declined, and dusk had fallen, the whole sky changed its color, and the vines [possibly a reference to the Pleiades constellation], sprung up with yellow rays, completed their natural course through the night, until in the morning they were overshadowed by the red of the sun. And they said: What is it like, like the dawn, breaks forth, elegant as the moon, chosen as the sun, and no spot is found there?[78]

Even if Mynsicht did not know the *Aurora*, the *Golden Age* proves that at a certain point in the late middle ages, alchemists began equating the deification of the soul in mystical theology with the mystery of metallic transmutation. The confluence of alchemical imagery with the Song of Songs is no accident. The same religious culture that produced St John of the Cross produced an ancillary alchemical tradition that borrowed the language of mystical theology to describe the perfection of base metals. The novelty of the *Aurora* is the way in which this tradition is utilized to serve alchemy.

5.4 The Kiss and Union With *Sapientia* in Alchemy and Mystical Theology

The final and irrevocable union in the *Aurora Consurgens* takes place at the end of chapter XII. Having reached a sufficient level of purity, the philosopher's stone is formed in the purest union of sulphur and mercury. The purgatorial tone of the treatise that so often vacillates between ecstasy and despair comes to a close in the form of a kiss as the alchemist and *Sapientia* are united in an unbreakable bond:

> I stretch forth my mouth to my beloved and he presseth his to me; he and I are one; who shall separate us from love? None and no man, for our love is as strong as death [. . .] O beloved yea supremely beloved, thy voice hath sounded in my ears, for it is sweet, and thine odour is above all aromatical spices. O how comely is thy face, the breasts more beautiful than wine, my sister, my spouse [. . .] Let no meadow escape our riot. Let none of us go without his part in our luxury, let us leave everywhere tokens of joy, for this is our portion, that we should live in the union of love and joy with merriment, saying: Behold how good and pleasant it is for two to dwell together in unity.[79]

---

[78] *Idem*, 65; *Idem*, 69: '[D]ies admodum serenus illucescebat: tunc omnis formido terrorque; cessabant: omneisque, qui diem istum viderant, in Domino exultabant, & dicebant: *Hyems transit, pluviacessavit: Flores in terra aprovenerunt: Ver accessit & turtur in terries exauditur. Ficus, vitesque palmites recuperarunt, & gratum de se odorem spargunt. Cito igitur vulpes capiamus, vulpeculas, inquam, vineam corrumpentes, ut maturas uvas colligamus, facto vinopotemur, & justo tempore lacte, mellisque favo cibemur, saturiq; atque ebrii fiamus.* Postquam vero dies inclinasset, & advesperasset, totum coelum colorem suum immutabat, & vergiliae fulvis radiis exortae, naturalem suum cursum per noctem absolvebant, usque dum mane, Rubedine Solis suparatae obumbrarentur Et ecce sapientes, in terra habitants, a somno expergiscebantur, coelum intubebantur, & dicebant: Qualis est, euae, instar aurora, prorumpit, elegans ut luna, electa, veluti Sol, & nulla illic reperitur macula?'

[79] AC, 142–147: 'Ego porrigo os dilecto meo et compressit ipsius ad me, ego et ipse unum summus, quis nos separabit a caritate? Nullus et nemo quia fortis es tut mors dilecto nostra [. . .] O dilecta, immo perdilecta, vox tua sonuit in auribus meis, quae dulcis est, et odor tuus super cuncta unguenta preciosa. O quam pulchra

It is appropriate that the final union of the text should take the form of a kiss on the mouth. This is not just because the kiss of the mouth is a central image in the Song of Songs,[80] but because the mouth's kiss was the final unitive stage in St Bernard's sermon on the book.[81] The kiss represents the completion of the purgative journey as it signifies entrance into the reward of unitive life. The most popular devotional text of the late middle ages, Richard Rolle's *Incendium amoris*, interprets it similarly. The kiss of the mouth is the consummation of the spiritual life that removes all impurities and barriers between the soul and God. The kiss unites the contemplative with God in ecstasy:

> The voice of the soul longing with eternal love and seeking the beauty of her Maker, rings out. *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth*, it says; in other words, let him delight me in union with his Son. Faint with love, I long with my whole heart to see my Love in all his beauty. But meanwhile he may visit me with his sweet love as I toil and struggle on through this pilgrimage [. . .] And when I am deprived of these things [praising God] I sigh in my need, for then I hunger and thirst, and know myself bereft. Yet when I feel the embrace and caress of my Sweetheart I swoon with unspeakable delight [. . .] And when he comes, may he come into me, suffusing me with his perfect love. May he refresh my heart by his continual gifts, and by removing every hindrance to his love make me glow and expand. Who will dare say that a man is going to fall into the foul filth of the flesh, if Christ has designed to refresh him with the heavenly sweetness of celestial vision? This is why such a man sings sweetly something like this [. . .] we rejoice as we remember *your breasts are better than wine*.[82]

Rolle, like St Bernard and pseudo-Aquinas, associates the kiss of the mouth with the most perfect and ecstatic qualities of mystical union. There is no vice or impurity in this kiss, rather it creates a bond that is impervious to corruption:

---

es facie, pulchriora uber atua vino, soror sponsa [. . .] nullum pratum sit, quod non pertranseta luxuria nostra. Nemo nostrum exsors sit luxuriate nostrae, ubique relinquamus signa laetitiae, quia haec est pars nostra, ut vivamus in coitus nostril amore cum gaudio et tripudio dicentes: Ecce, quam bonum et quam iucundum est habitare duobus in unum.'

[80] Cf. Canticle 1:1 (DRBO): 'Osculetur me osculo oris sui; quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino.'

[81] Cf. chapter two, page 92.

[82] Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. Clifton Wolters, The Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1972), 123; Richard Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: The University of Manchester Press, 1915), 216: 'Uox languentis anime amore eterno ac specie querentis sui Conditoris personat. *Osculetur me,* inquit, *osculo oris sui*, scilicet, delectet me unione Filii sui. Ideo enim amore langueo, quia quem diligo in suo decore cernere tota mente concupisco. Interim autem in labore et certamine peregrinacionis mee sui amoris dulcedine me uisitete [. . .] Dumque illis careo quasi fame siti suspirans egens et desolates mihi uideor, cum enim dulcissimi mei amplexus et oscula senico, quasi deliciis inenarrabilibus affluo [. . .] Ueniens ergo in me ueniat, perfectum amorem infundendo, reficiat quoque cor meum perseueranciam danbo, accendatque et impinguet omni impedimentum amoris auferendo. Quis ergo dicet illum ad fetentem carnis immundiciam cadere, quem superne speculacionis superna dulcedine Christus dignatur reficere> Propter hoc in sequentibus suauiter canitur: Letabimur in te memores uberum tuorum super uinum.'

> The soul that is truly separated from vice, and is a stranger to venal and carnal sweetness, the soul that is wholly given to heavenly desire, and is enthralled thereby, enjoys quite remarkable pleasure because she is in some way experiencing the delight of her beloved's love [. . .] Now is the time she demands her Spouse's most gracious lips, and his sweetest kiss [. . .] Love is making me bold to summon my Beloved that he might comfort me, come unto me, and *kiss me with the kiss of his mouth* [. . .] Let him kiss me and refresh me with his sweet love; let him hold me tight and kiss me on the mouth, else I die; let him pour his grace into me, that I may grow in love. Children are fed and nourished with mother's milk; and elect souls, blazing with love, are fed with supernal delights, and so led on to the vision of the everlasting glory.[83]

In the *Spiritual Canticle*, St John of the Cross describes the eradication of vice and the consummation of the spiritual marriage as a kiss; this kiss is also irrevocable and mediated through the Song of Songs. As in the examples above, it signals the end of the purgative struggle and the assumption of the unitive life. St John writes:

> You [God] dried up and subdued in me the appetites and passions that in our flesh are the breasts and milk of mother eve, and an impediment to this state [union] [. . .] And alone there, [the soul will] "kiss you" alone, that is, that my nature now alone and denuded of all temporal, natural, and spiritual impurity may be united with you alone, and with your nature alone, through no intermediary. This union is found only in the spiritual marriage, in which the soul kisses God without contempt of disturbance from anyone. For in this state neither the devil, the flesh, the world, nor appetites molest her. Here we find also the fulfilment of what is said in the Song of Songs. *Winter is now past, the rain is gone and the flowers have appeared in the land*.[84]

The *Aurora's* representation of the chemical wedding as a kiss that is perfect in purity smacks of mystical theology. The creation of the philosopher's stone is not portrayed as a triumph of material science, rather it is conveyed through the language of contemplation. Specifically, this comes in the way pseudo-Aquinas represents the benefits of the

---

[83] Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, The Penguin Classics,123; Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, 218–219: 'Anima equidem a terrenorum uiciis separata, et a carnisuenenosa suauitate alienata celestibus desideriis dedita immo et rapta, mirabilia iocunditate perfruens, quia iam quodammodo amoris leticiam sentit [. . .] eciam in hoc presenti os sponsi suauissimum et osculum eius dulcissimum exposcit [. . .] Amor me facit audacem, ipsum quem diligo inuocare, qui me confortando et implendo *osculetur osculo oris sui* [. . .] Osculetur me dulcore dileccionis sue reficiendo, osculo oris sui me stricte amplectando, ut non defluam; et graciam infundendo, ut iugiter in amore crescam. Sicut lacte uberum nutriuntur et sustentantur infantes: ita electe anime ardenter in amore, supernis deliciis pascuntur, quibus ad uisionem eterne claritatis perducentur.'

[84] SJC, 563; SJP, 912: '[e]njugases y apagases en mí los apetitos y pasiones, que son los pechos y la leche de la madre Eva en nuestra carne, los cuales son inpedimento para este estado [. . .] y allí te besase sola a ti solo, es a saber, se uniese mi naturaleza ya sola y desnuda de toda impureza temporal, natural y espiritual, contigo solo, con tu sola naturaleza sin otro algún medio. Lo cual sólo es en el matrimonio espiritual, que es el beso del alma a Dios, donde no la desprecia ni se le atreve ninguno; porque en este estado, ni demonio, ni carne, ni mundo, ni apetitos molestan. Porque aquí se cumple lo que también se dice en los Cantares: Ya pasó el invierno y se fue la lluvia, y parecieron las flores en nuestra tierra.'

philosopher's stone through unitive terminology. The alchemist is united with it, and bound to holy Wisdom just like the soul that is united with God. The lines between the material world and spirituality are completely blurred.

In other words, the benefits of the philosopher's stone are conveyed through spiritual terms with little reference made to its mineral qualities. Those who are united with Wisdom receive a multitude of spiritual gifts that transcend the mere transmutation of base metals into gold. In a long citation of the book of Proverbs, pseudo-Aquinas lauds Wisdom as the greatest treasure available to humanity, and one that is attained through careful attention to practice:

> Nought is more base in appearance than she, and nought is more precious in nature than she, and God also hath not appointed her to be bought for a price. She it is that Solomon chose to have instead of light, and above all beauty and health; in comparison of her he compared not unto her the virtue of any precious stone.[85] For all gold in her sight shall be esteemed as a little sand, and silver shall be counted as clay; and this not without cause, for to gain her is better than the merchandise of silver and the most pure gold. And her fruit is more precious than all the riches of this world, and all the things that are desired are not to be compared with her. Length of days and health are in her right hand, and in her left hand glory and infinite riches. Her ways are beautiful operations and praiseworthy, not unsightly nor ill-favoured, and her paths are measured and not hasty, but are bound up with stubborn and day-long toil. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and an unfailing light. Blessed shall they be who retain her, for the science of God shall never perish.[86]

This is a near-verbatim citation of Proverbs 3:13–18 with subtle alchemical interpolations:

> Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom and is rich in prudence: The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and her fruit than the chiefest and purest gold: She is more precious than all riches: and all the things that are desired, are not to be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and glory. Her

[85] Cf. Wisdom 7:7–9 (DRBO): 'Propter hoc optavi, et datus est mihi sensus; et invocavi, et venit in me spiritus sapientiae; et praeposui illam regnis et sedibus, et divitias nihil esse duxi in comparatione illius. Nec comparavi illi lapidem pretiosum, quoniam omne aurum in comparatione illius arena est exigua, et tamquam lutum aestimabitur argentum in conspectu illius.'
[86] AC, 32–35: 'Nihil ea aspect vilius et nihil ea natura pretiosius, et Deus etiam eam pretio emendam non posuit. Hanc Salomon pro luce habere proposuit et super omnem pulchritudinem et salutem; in comparatione illius lapidist pretiosi virtutem illi on comparavit. Quoniam omne aurum tamquam arena exigua et velut lutum aestimabitur argentum in conspectu illius, et sine causa on est. Melior est enim acquisition eius negociantione argenti et auri purissimi. Et fructus illius est pretiosior cunctis opibus huius mundi et omnia, quae desiderantur, huic non valent comparari. Longitudo dierum et sanitas in dextera illius, in sinistra vero eius gloria et divitiae infinitae. Viae eius operations pulchrae et laudabiles non despectae neque deformes et semitae illius moderatae et non festinae, cum laboris diuturni instantia. Lignum vitae est his, qui apprehenderint eam et lumen indeficiens, si tenuerint beati, quia scientia Dei numquam peribit.'

ways are beautiful ways, and all her paths are peaceable. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her: and he that shall retain her is blessed.[87]

Pseudo-Aquinas adapts the passage in Proverbs by first relating the 'base' appearance of Wisdom to the Mercurial spirit of the philosopher's stone. Second, he associates the operations of alchemy with the stone's beauty. The diligent practice of alchemy is a 'science' of God, which in its Latin definition, refers to a cognition or 'knowledge' of God rendered through practice, or scholarship.[88] What the author is saying here is that through the practice of alchemy, the alchemist is made wealthy and wise *spiritually*, not materially. In other words, alchemy is a material science, but its benefits are spiritual.

As argued above, the veneration of an embodied *Sapientia* lived on in early-modern alchemy. It was the *Aurora* that transmitted the idea to these later expressions of the art. Evidence for this is born out in the *Rosarium philosophorum*, an alchemical treatise first published in c. 1550, where the *Aurora* is cited directly. It reads:

> King Solomon: This is the daughter for whom the queen of the south is said to have come from the east, rising as dawn, up to hear and understand and see the wisdom of Solomon; power, honor and authority was given in her hand. A blooming crown was put on her head with the brilliance of seven glittering stars, as a bride adorned for her husband, having on her clothes written in golden letters in Greek, Barbaric, and Latin: I am the only daughter of the wise, utterly unknown to the foolish.[89]

The *Rosarium* makes several modifications to the original citation that are not found in the *Aurora*. *Sapientia* is still described as a heavenly being, but the appeals to nuptial mysticism are more pronounced. She is a 'bride' adorned for her husband, the devoted alchemist. She is also the 'daughter of the wise', unknown to the profane who cannot grasp

---

[87] Proverbs 3:13–18 (DRBO): 'Beatus homo qui invenit sapientiam, et qui affluit prudentia.Melior est acquisitio ejus negotiatione argenti, et auri primi et purissimi fructus ejus. Pretiosior est cunctis opibus, et omnia quae desiderantur huic non valent comparari. Longitudo dierum in dextera ejus, et in sinistra illius divitiae et gloria. Viae ejus viae pulchrae, et omnes semitae illius pacificae. Lignum vitae est his qui apprehenderint eam, et qui tenuerit eam beatus.'

[88] 'Scientia', in *Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources*, 2015.

[89] Cyriacus Jacobus, *De Alchimia Opuscula Complura Veterum Philosophorum, Quorum Catalogum Sequens Pagella Indicabit: Rosarium Philosophorum.*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt, 1550), 47: 'Salomo Rex: Hec est filia ob q regina austri ab oriente dicitur uenisse, vt, aurora, consurgens audire & intelligere & videre sapientiam Salomonis, & data est in manu eius potestas, honor, virtus, & imperium, & florens regni coronain capite suo radiis septem stellarum rutilantium, tamque sponsa ornata uiro suo, habens in vestimentis suis scriptum litteris aureis graecis & barbaris & latinis: ego sum unica filia sapientium, stultis penitus ignota.' None of the manuscripts of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* predate the printed edition. The text is mostly studied for its emblematic imagery, which appear to be drawn from the *The Book of the Holy Trinity*.

the alchemical secret. While the *Aurora* is perhaps the earliest example of 'spiritual alchemy' it must not be equated with the spiritual alchemy of the Victorians, and their rejection of alchemy as a material science.[90] The *Aurora* suggests that the material operations of alchemy are the very basis of knowing God. The texts ties material science and spiritual enlightenment together in a cohesive bond, and it portrays the pursuit of Wisdom as the redemption of a lover who is trapped in darkness. Rescuing her, and merging with her in a loving union is the basis of the text's mystical exposition.

In chapter three of *The Life of the Servant*, Henry Suso explains how he came to unite with *Sapientia* in the spiritual marriage. He pontificates on the virtues of Wisdom and identifies her as the object of his desire. Like the *Aurora,* she calls out to him through the book of Proverbs. He returns the call, labelling her as his beloved:

> It happened one morning when he was sitting as usual at table that she called to him in the tones of Solomon and said, "*Audi, fili*! Listen, my son, to the worthy advice of your father. If you wish to devote yourself to sublime love, you should take gentle Wisdom as your dearly beloved, because she bestows on her lover youth and vitality, nobility and abundance, honor and advantage, great power and an everlasting name. She makes him handsome and teaches him courteous behavior and how to win people's praise and fame in battle. She makes him dear to and esteemed by God and man. Through her the earth was fashioned; through her the heavens were put in place and the abyss hollowed out. Whoever possesses her walks with confidence, sleeps untroubled, and lives free from care." As he listened to these beautiful sayings being read to him, his longing heart thought immediately: 'Ah, what a beloved this would be! If you could become mine, I would certainly have all I need!'[91]

Suso portrays Wisdom as a lover who perfects those who unite with her. This is identical to the *Aurora's* understanding of *Sapientia* in alchemy, where the philosopher's stone conveys spiritual benefits to those who find it. Suso, in his engagement with the contemplative life, receives the same reward. The afterlife of this idea is again seen in the alchemy of early-modern Germany. Michael Maier's (1568–1622) *Atalanta Fugiens*

---

[90] See the Introduction, pages 24–26.

[91] SUSO, 67; SUSOG, 12–13: 'Es geschah, so er mornendes aber dar ze tisch gesass, so rûfte si us der wise Salomon und sprach also: " Audi, fili mi! Hör, kint mins, den hohen rat dins vater! Wellest du hoher minne pflegen, so solt du zü einem minneklichen lieb die zarten wisheit nemen, wan si git iren minnern jugent und mugent, edli und richtum, ere und gefür, grossen gewalt und einem ewigen namen. Si machet in minneklich und lert in wesen hoflich, lob vor den lúten, rüm in den scharen; si machet in lieb und werd got und den lúten. Dur si ist daz etrich geschafen, dur si ist der himel gevestnet und daz abgrúnd undergrúndet. Der si hat, der gat gewerlich und schlaffet rüwklich und lept sicherlich. "Do er dis schön rede also hort lessen vor ime, do zehand gedahte sin sendes herz also: "owe, wel ein lieb daz ist! Wan möhti mir dú ze teil warden, wie wer ich den so recht wol beraten!"'

defines wisdom as the marriage of alchemical knowledge joined with laboratory practice. Published in 1617, it is one of the most prominent representations of emblematic alchemy ever crafted.[92] Maier writes:

> For wisdom is nothing else but the true knowledge of Alchymie joined with practice, which is of the greatest benefit to mankind. This is the Wisdom surpassing all thinges, which with her right hand penetrates the East, with her left hand the West, and Embraceth the whole Earth. Tis of this Wisdom that Solomon discourses so excellently in his Book of Wisdom and shows us how They that are acquainted have Eternall perseverance, and Her friends partake of sincere pleasures. And he that diligently enquireth after Her shall receive much Joy, for there is no tediousnesse in her conversation, but to be present with Her is mirth and gladnesse. And though wine and musick cheer the heart of Man, yet Wisdom is pleasanter than both, for she is the Tree of Life to all that lay hold upon Her, and happy is every one that reteineth her.[93]

While it is impossible to know if Maier was directly inspired by the *Aurora Consurgens*, it is known that he spent time in Prague as a palatine in the court of Kaiser Rudolf II, becoming a court physician on the 19th of September 1609. He held the position for two years.[94] Prague was an epicentre of alchemical activity in the Holy Roman Empire, and home to the MS. VI. Fd. 26 and MS. 1663. O. LXXIX, two of the original manuscripts of the *Aurora*. If Maier was influenced by the *Aurora's* depiction of *Sapientia*, Prague was as likely a place as any to encounter the idea.

---

[92] The text is also one of the earliest examples of multimedia, and is comprised of fifty epigrams, discourses, and short 'fuges' (songs) that accompany the narrative. There is a modern English translation, but unfortunately, the discourses are missing. See Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens: An Edition of the Fugues, Emblems, and Epigrams*, ed. Joscelyn Godwin, Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, #22 (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1989).

[93] Michael Maier, *Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems*, ed. H. M. E. De Jong (Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 2002), 77; Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens: Hoc Est, Emblemata Nova de Secretis Naturae Chymica* (Bärenreiter, 1618), discursus XXVI, 114: 'Sed nec quicquam aliud, nisi veram Chymie cognitionem, cum praxi, humano generiutilissima, conjunctam: Haec est sapentia omnibus supereminens, quae dextra ad Orientem, sinistra ad occasum, penetrat, totamque; terram amplectitur: De Sapientia vero salomon in lib. Sapientiae discrete differit [. . .] Qui cognatoiejus sunt aeternam permanentiam habent & qui amici ejus, sinceram voluptate, & qui diligenter eam inquiret, magnum Gaudium capiet: Nam nullu est taediu versari cum sapiential, nec fastidu, illa adesse, sed latitia & Gaudium: Et quamvis vinum & musica quoq, laetiscient cor hominis, tamen sapentia his jucundior est: Est n. arbor vitae omnibus qui apprehendunteam & beati sunt qui servant eam. De sapientia veró Salomon in Liber sapientiae discrete differit Qui cognatiejus sunt aternam permanentiam habent & qui amici ejus sinceram voluptate, & qui diligenter eam inquiret, magnum gaudium capiet: Nam nullu est taedeiũ versari cum sapientia, nec fastidiu, illi adesse, sed laetitia & gaudium: Et qumvis vinum & musica quoqe laetisicent cor hominis, tamen sapientia his jucundior est: Est n. arbor vitae omnibus qui apprehendunteam & beatisunt sui servant eam.'

[94] See Karin Figala and Ulrich Neumann, 'Michael Maier (1569–1622): New Bio-Bibliographic Material', in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17–19 April 1989*, ed. Z. R. W. M. von Martels, 33 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 34–50.

Figure 2: The alchemical *Sapientia* embodied in Emblema XXVI of the *Atalanta Fugiens* entitled 'Sapientiae humane fructus Lignum Vitae Est'.[95]

In Maier's account, Wisdom perfects the soul, guides the alchemist in the work, and drives out all vice.[96] These are the same attributes the soul experiences in the unitive stages of contemplation. Thus, beginning with the *Aurora*, and in a select number of early-modern alchemical treatises, the lines between the perfection of the soul, and the perfection of base metals began to break down. In the image presented here, *Sapientia* stands next to the tree of life. Images familiar to mystical theology appear, as storm clouds part and illuminating rays are received upon the earth.

[95] Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens: Hoc Est, Emblemata Nova de Secretis Naturae Chymica* (Bärenreiter, 1618), Epigramma XXVI, 113.

[96] *Sapientia* holds a banner here which reads 'Longitudo dievum et Sanitas Gloria ac divitia infinitae' (length of days and health, glory and infinite riches). These are the same unitive qualities espoused by Suso above.

The idea that Wisdom perfects the alchemist and eradicates all vice was also seen in early-modern Britain. Thomas Vaughan, in his *Anima Magica Abscondita*, equates Wisdom with the light of the Mercurial spirit. He says that this spirit animates alchemical knowledge, and he argues that the alchemist must 'dwell' within it in order to receive the philosopher's stone:

> *For* wisdom which is the *worker* of *all things taught me*. For in her is an *understanding spirit*, holy, onely begotten, manifold, subtil, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, *loving the thing* that is *good*, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do *good, Kind to Man*, stedfast, free from Care, *having all power*, overseeing *all things*, and *going thorough* all understanding, pure, and most subtill *Spirits*. For *wisdom* is *more moving* then any *motion*, she *passeth*, and *goeth thorow all Things* by reason of *her purenesse*. For *she* is the *Breath* of the *power of God*, and a *pure Influence* flowing from the *Glory* of the *Almighty*, therefore can no *defiled thing* fall into her. For she is the *brightnesse* of the *everlasting light*, the *unspotted mirror* of the *power* of *God*, and the *image* of his *goodnesse*. And being but *One* she *can do all things*, and *remayning in her self* she maketh *all things new*: and in *all* Ages entring into *Holy Souls*, she maketh them *friends* of *God*, and *Prophets*. For God loveth none but *Him* that *dwelleth with wisdom*. For she is more beautifull then the *Sun*, and above all the *Order of stars*, being compared with the *Light*, she is found *before it*. For after this commeth *Night*, but *Vice* shall not *prevail* against *Wisdom.* Thus *Solomon*, and again a *greater* then *Solomon; First seek you the Kingdom of God, and all these Things shall be given you*.[97]

5.5 Conclusions

The Rosicrucian milieu of protestant authors who wrote in northern Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century drew upon a myriad of mystical motifs that are remarkably similar to the theology of St John of the Cross, a Catholic who wrote in Spain in the middle of the sixteenth century. This may at first seem a curious thing, but both the writings of St John and the Rosicrucians were inspired by a common medieval tradition of mystical theology. The depiction of an embodied *Sapientia* in the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* and the *Aurora Consurgens* shows that these texts are late medieval antecedents to a highly ornate tradition of mystical literature that appeared in the early years of modernity. The Rosicrucians used these motifs to elucidate a utopian mysticism that was inspired by alchemy and mystical theology alike.

[97] Vaughan, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, 123.

The shared themes of desolation that appear in the writings of St John, the *Aurora*, and early modern alchemy represent a maturation of ideas drawn from the same the source. This exemplifies the enduring influence of mystical theology in modernity, and the ways in which its central themes of purgation and union survived in both Catholic and Protestant theological traditions.

The *Aurora* was one of the first alchemical texts to blur the lines between alchemy, the acquisition of wisdom, and the perfection of the self. This trend continued in Rosicrucian alchemy, and represents a key attribute of the medieval and early modern mind. The *Aurora* and early-modern alchemy resemble the theology of St John of the Cross precisely because these authors did not draw such rigid distinctions between what counts as alchemy and what counts as theology. This is, perhaps, the key to understanding texts like the *Aurora Consurgens*. It refers to *both* the perfection of base metals and the self. The notion that such themes permeated alchemy shows the true extent to which mystical theology influenced premodern thought. Both the self and the entire world are constantly moving through a continuum of purgation, perfection, and union with divine Wisdom.

Conclusion

This study of mystical theology in the *Aurora Consurgens* has shown that the text exhibits definitive hallmarks of medieval mystical literature. Examples of this come in the way its discourse follows the contemplative pathway of purgation, illumination, and union outlined in manuscripts like the the *Viae Syon Lugent*. Mystical motifs are also well represented in the imagery deployed by its author, the most prominent being the apophatic and unitive characteristics of the cloud in chapter VI. Likewise, to a clerical audience, the text's usage of the Song of Songs would have invariably been understood as a sign of the soul's union with God. In the late middle ages, references to Christianity, and the usage of Christian symbols appear in Lullian and Arnaldian alchemy. The *Aurora* is not unique in its invocation of scripture or Christian allegory, but it is distinct from other medieval alchemical texts in in its dialogue structure, internalisation of the alchemical work, and unitive themes.

The *Aurora* is a mystical text, but it is also an exposition of alchemy's practical applications. These attributes do not need to be compartmentalised. Rather, this tension is what forms the basis of the discourse, as pseudo-Aquinas consciously blurs the lines between mind, matter and spirit. Such attempts at drawing continuity between the 'spiritual' aspects of alchemy and laboratory practice became ever more common in the Italian renaissance and post-reformation Germany, where alchemical language was borrowed by a milieu of Christian cabalists, freemasons, magicians and theurgists to refer to the moral perfection of the soul and union with God.[1]

The very term 'spiritual alchemy' is itself riddled with issues; Freemasons and German-protestant theurgists were still practicing laboratory alchemy in relation to the deification of the soul at the end of the eighteenth century.[2] Likewise, the late renaissance alchemist Robert Fludd carefully delineated the continuity between laboratory practice and mystical union in his own alchemy, a conflation he called 'Alchymia archetypica' (archetypal

---

[1] See Hereward Tilton, 'Alchymia Archetypica: *Theurgy, Inner Transformation and the Historiography of Alchemy'*, in *Transmutatio: la via ermetica alla Felicità; the hermetic way to happiness*, ed. Daniela Boccassini, Quaderni di studi indo-mediterranei 5 (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2012).

[2] *Idem*, 182.

alchemy).[3] As a historical category, the term 'spiritual alchemy', while often used as an expression of convenience, is itself rather limited.[4]

Nevertheless, the *Aurora* is very much the progenitor of a tradition of *spiritualised* alchemy that arose in the Baroque period; that is to say, alchemy that applies the same universal laws of transformation in the laboratory to the transformation of the self through purgation and the attainment of moral virtue. Strong similarities have been demonstrated between it and the *Golden Age Restored* of Adrian Mynsicht; in both its usage of mystical visions and in its appeals to the Song of Songs. Such books depict a union with divinity through clouds, a feature of Dionysian mystical theology that appears in contemplative texts like the *Cloud of Unknowing*.

The *Aurora* (along with the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* in the fourteenth century) was one of the first alchemical texts to compare the practice of alchemy with the illumination of the intellect, a definitive trope of mystical theology. It is possible that its author developed this kind of alchemical illuminism independently, but there is in fact a distant historical relationship between alchemy and mystical theology. Namely, the consanguinity comes through the mediation of Neoplatonism which provided a common cosmological framework to both Dionysian mystical theology and the alchemy of the late middle ages.[5]

In addition to illuminism, the *Aurora* draws from mystical theology in its portrayal of the dissolutive union in chapter VI. The *unio mystica* in this chapter is construed through the melting metaphors distinctive of the Beguines, Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Loving God*, Richard of St Victor's *Four Degrees of Violent Love*, and the late medieval German mystics. So in total, the *Aurora* utilises all of the common elements of mystical theology, apophasis, the cloud, illumination, purgation, and union.

Then there is the embodied *Sapientia* who acts as a didactic figure and lover in the text. As

---

[3] Robert Fludd, *Clavis Philosophae et Alchymiae Fluddanae* (Frankfurt: Wilhelm Fitzer, 1633), 77–78.
[4] Tilton argues that from a historiographical perspective, the term should really only be applied to the Victorian proponents of spiritual alchemy because of the complete divorce of subject from the laboratory in their thought. See Tilton, 'Alchymia Archetypica: *Theurgy, Inner Transformation and the Historiography of Alchemy'*, in *Transmutatio: la via ermetica alla Felicità; the hermetic way to happiness*, ed. Boccassini, 181.
[5] See Walter Pagel, 'Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition', *Ambix*, 8 (1960): 125–66.

chapter five demonstrated, devotion to a female embodiment of Wisdom also appears in Suso's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, a text produced in the same late medieval Germanic cultural milieu as the *Aurora*. Suso's Wisdom, like the *Aurora's Sapientia*, is a consolatory figure who appears through experiences of desolation. The propensity to associate godlike female divinities with consolation during sorrow is a tendency that, in the middle ages, stretches back to the *Consolation of Philosophy*.[6] Permutations of the idea appear in Alan of Lille's (c. 1128–c. 1202/03) *De Planctu Naturae* and *Anticlaudianus* where nature and the virtues take an embodied form.[7]

Likewise, in book VIII of Augustine's *Confessions*, an embodied chastity consoles the saint during his struggle with sin.[8] While the *Aurora's* relationship to this tradition must be clarified with further research, it is clear that pseudo-Aquinas is doing something quite unique with his depiction of Sapientia. It is the alchemist that rescues Wisdom from the nigredo, and not Wisdom who takes the role of a consolatory figure. This inversion of the traditional medieval relationship demonstrates a growing alchemical tendency to see nature as an object to be perfected; it is an early example of the type of alchemical ideology that would reach a mature form in the Rosicrucian movement.

Despite the *Aurora's* seemingly modest manuscript distribution, its influence is palpable in early modern alchemy. The citation of it in the *Rosarium philosophorum* demonstrates direct lines of continuity, while references to the cloud and Song of Songs in the *Golden Age Restored* as well as the embodied *Sapientia* in the *Atalanta fugiens* show that ideas first presented in it survived into the 1600s. There are also points of contact between mystical theology, alchemy and England with the symbol of the cloud, spiritual nourishment, ascent imagery, and English alchemy. The culture of late medieval and early modern Europe produced an assemblage of texts, both theological and alchemical, that described purgation, illumination, and union through a shared set of images and concepts.

---

[6] Cf. book one of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius, 'Liber Primus', in Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae. Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (Munich and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 2000), 3–28.
[7] See Alan of Lille, *Literary Works: Alan of Lille*, ed. Winthrop Wetherbee, Dumbarton Oaks medieval library 22 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[8] This passage influenced medieval authors, particularly in monastic settings. See Paul Rorem, *St. Augustine, His Confessions, and His Influence* (Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2019).

One of the primary features the *Aurora* shares with mystical theology is its invocation of the mysticism of desolation. The text's appeals to longing, searching, despair, and the ecstasy of union with the divine are the same elements that form the theology of St John of the Cross, and a late medieval genre of dereliction mysticism. Ultimately, the *Aurora* and the theology of St John share the same source, as the motifs of searching and finding love are derived from the Song of Songs.

This utilisation of the Song of Songs, arguably the most mystical book of scripture, reveals something about the inclinations of pseudo-Aquinas and his perception of alchemy. Recent scholarship on alchemy has derided the spiritual aspects of the practice. Principe and Newman have gone so far as to call the religious aspects of alchemy an 'embellishment' and 'didactic exemplification'.[9] This may be true to an extent, especially in Arnaldian alchemy, but the *Aurora* is doing something different. The author's consciousness joins in the narrative and travels with the mineral matter through the stages of yearning, purgation, the illumination of the mind, and union with Wisdom in the final chapter. This is not a rhetorical embellishment, it is the definitive core of the text, and it comes from mystical theology.

There is still work to be done on the *Aurora*. Not least, the text requires a new technical commentary. The Jungian inclinations of the von Franz commentary limit the legitimately helpful moments of lucidity, where von Franz engages with the text's alchemical content. Similarly, an updated English translation would be of great utility. The text is already arcane and rendered all the more incomprehensible with the sometimes archaic English encountered in the Glover translation. The text simply requires more attention from medievalists, particularly those scholars who study mysticism and mystical theology. A comparative reading between the *Aurora* and *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* (which desperately needs a critical edition) would also prove useful in comparing the theological influences of two mystical alchemical texts written in the same milieu. It is my hope that this dissertation's small contribution to scholarship on the *Aurora* will alert both students of alchemy and mystical theology to the legitimate confluence of symbols found within its pages.

---

[9] Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, 'Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy', in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. William Royall Newman, 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 398.

In the first chapter of the *Aurora*, pseudo-Aquinas claims that alchemy is the ‘science of God’, which in Latin translates to ‘knowledge of’, or ‘knowing’ God. This is the exact definition of mystical theology knowledge of God through contemplation. The *Aurora* and the broader tradition of medieval (and early-modern) mystical theology frame the accrual of this knowledge, not as a process of reading or study, but as an encounter with God in an intimate and loving union with eternal Wisdom.

Appendix 1.

In the twenty-seventh chapter of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the text's author observes that a complete deification of the soul is impossible in this mortal life. The fall of Adam, and the yoke of original sin means that the mystic will only ever catch glimpses of God in the act of contemplation. Prayer allows the soul to grow in holiness, and at times, it may be bonded to God. However, these experiences are fleeting. As long as a soul is bound to the earth, it will only ever see God through the obscurity of a cloud:

> As long as man lives in this mortal flesh, he will always see and feel this thick cloud of unknowing between himself and God. And not only that, but it is one of the painful results of original sin that he will always see and feel that some of the many creatures that God made, or some of their works, will always be inserting themselves in his awareness, between himself and God.[1]

What the *Cloud* author relays next is an account of illumination. Despite the separation of the flesh, and the obscurity of the cloud, God will sometimes send out a beam of light from the heavens. This beam pierces the cloudy veil between the heavens and earth and reveals something of the divine nature.[2] It deifies the mystic in indescribable ways, and sets the affective powers of the soul alight:

> Then perhaps it will be his will to send out a ray of spiritual light, piercing this cloud of unknowing between you and him, and he will show you some of his secrets, of which man may not or cannot speak. Then you shall feel your affection all aflame with the fire of his love, far more than I know how to tell you.[3]

By the seventeenth century, the pictorial elements of alchemical symbolism that began in the fourteenth century reached a high point of sophistication. In early-modern alchemical compendiums, the work came to be represented in images lush with allegory. Such

[1] COU (XXVIII), 176–177; l, 58–59: 'And the whiles that a soule is wonyng in this deedly flesche, it schal evermore se and fele this combros cloude of unknowyng bitwix him and God. And not only that, bot in pyne of the original sinne it schal evermore see and fele that somme of alle the creatures that ever God maad, or somme of theire werkes, wilen evermore prees in mynde bitwix him and God.'

[2] Cf. the 'divine ray' of Dionysian *Mystical Theology*. Chapter three, subsection 3.1, 104.

[3] COU (IV), 174–175; COUT, 57: 'Than wil he sumtyme paraventure seend oute a beme of goostly light, peersyng this cloude of unknowing that is bitwix thee and Hym, and schewe thee sum of His privete which man may not, ne kan not, speke. Than schalt thou fele thine affeccion enflaumid with the fire of His love, fer more then I kan telle thee.'

depictions appeared in the form of woodcuts that were printed in alchemical books. The engravings portrayed sprawling vistas and were often concerned with the cosmological components of alchemical theory. The idea was that by meditating on a single image, a practitioner of the art could become acquainted with the entirety of alchemical thought. These images were not particular to alchemy, but rather, part of a larger trend in early-modern Europe, where emblem books became a favoured tool for moral and intellectual edification.[4]

Below, three images from central European alchemical texts will be presented. These texts, taken from alchemical books written in the seventeenth century, bear an unusual resemblance to the concepts espoused in the *Cloud of Unknowing* above. The first engraving is taken from an Iatro-alchemical text dated to the first quarter of the seventeenth century.[5] The picture itself is named after the *Emerald Table,* and is known simply as the *Tablua Smaragdinas*. In it, God's wisdom in the form of the philosopher's stone comes down to earth from heaven through a cloud. This symbolises the union of the terrestrial microcosm with the celestial macrocosm and the descent of the philosopher's stone to earth:

[4] See Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). See also K. A. E. Enenkel, *The Invention of the Emblem Book and the Transmission of Knowledge, ca. 1510–1610* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[5] While John of Rupescissa made early forays into medical alchemy, the most notable contributor to the practice was the Swiss Iatro-alchemist Paracelsus (c.1493–c.1541), who challenged the traditional model of the sulphur mercury theory by adding salt to the arrangement. In his model, therefore, metals are formed through mercury, sulphur, and a saline solution. On Paracelsian matter theory and his original contributions to alchemical theory see Dane T. Daniel, 'Invisible Wombs: Rethinking Paracelsus's Concept of Body and Matter', *Ambix*, 53 (2006): 129–42.

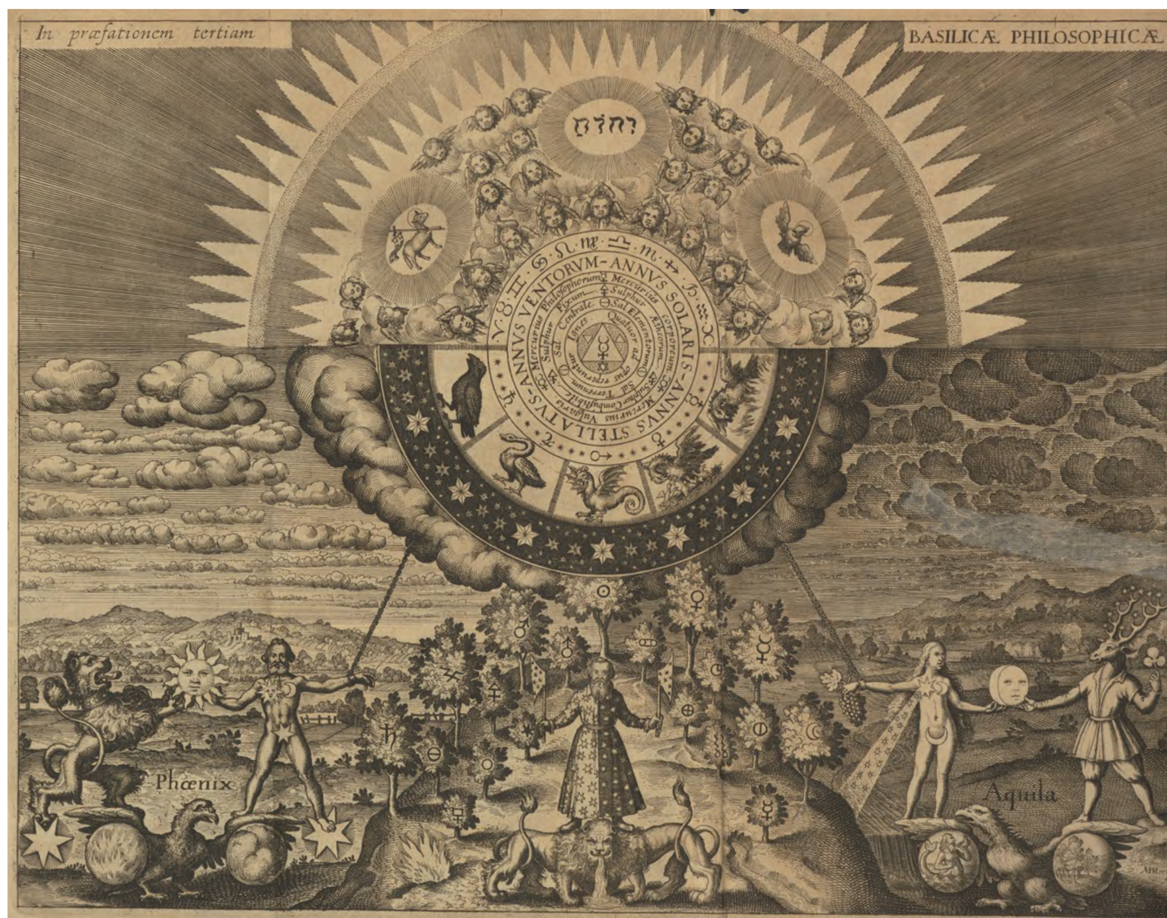

Figure 3: The descent of the philosopher's stone through the cloud.[6]

This image was created by Matthäus Merian Der Äletere (c. 1593–c. 1650), a Swiss engraver who was renowned for his skill in producing alchemical woodcuts. It appears in the *Opus medico-chymicum*, a document of medical alchemy composed by Johann Daniel Mylius (c. 1583–c. 1642), a German theologian and practitioner of medicinal alchemy. It reflects the Iatro-chemical inclinations of Paracelsian alchemy. This is most clearly demonstrated in the centre of the image and in the innermost ring of the circle, where the principle of salt is added to the traditional alchemical duality of sulphur and mercury.

In the upper half of the image, the name of God in the Tetragrammaton, is flanked by the Holy Spirit on the right, and Christ as the sacrificial lamb on the left. Emanating from the centre of the circle is the philosopher's stone, which is encompassed by the stars of the

[6] This emblem can be found in the incipit page of the *Basilica Philosophica* tract of the text. See 'Tractus III Seu Basilica Philosophica', in Johann Daniel Mylius, *Opus Medico-Chymicum: Continens 3 Tractatus Sive Basilica; Quorum Prior Inscribitur Basilica Medica, Secundus Basilica Chymica, Tertius Basilica Philosophica*, vol. 2 (Lucas Jennis, 1618).

zodiac. There is a clear distinction between the top half of the image, which depicts the heavenly division of the cosmos, and the bottom half of the image, that shows the terrestrial tier of creation. On the right side of the engraving, the symbolism is feminine and lunar, depicting philosophical mercury. On the left side of the image, it is masculine and solar, representing the influence of sulphur.

Below the outermost ring of zodiacal symbolism, five alchemical operations are depicted as birds moving left to right. They start with a black crow, representing putrefaction and a swan representing purification. Next comes a rooster in the form of a dragon, signifying the union of sulphur and mercury. This is followed by a pelican nourishing her young as a symbol of cibation, and finally a phoenix, representing the inner fire of the stone feeding on the exterior fire of the alembic which institutes its final form. The seven stars below the birds represent the seven planets, which correspond to their associated planetary signs depicted as trees on the earth.[7]

In another pair of seventeenth-century emblems found in Malchias Geiger's (c. 1606–c. 1671) *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus*, similar engravings are presented. The images, like the one above, present the alchemical cosmos through a distinct hierarchy:

[7] Interpretation of the image's symbolism was in part drawn from Dennis William Hauck, 'Materia Prima: The Nature of the First Matter in the Esoteric and Scientific Traditions', *Rose+Croix* 8 (2011): 75-76.

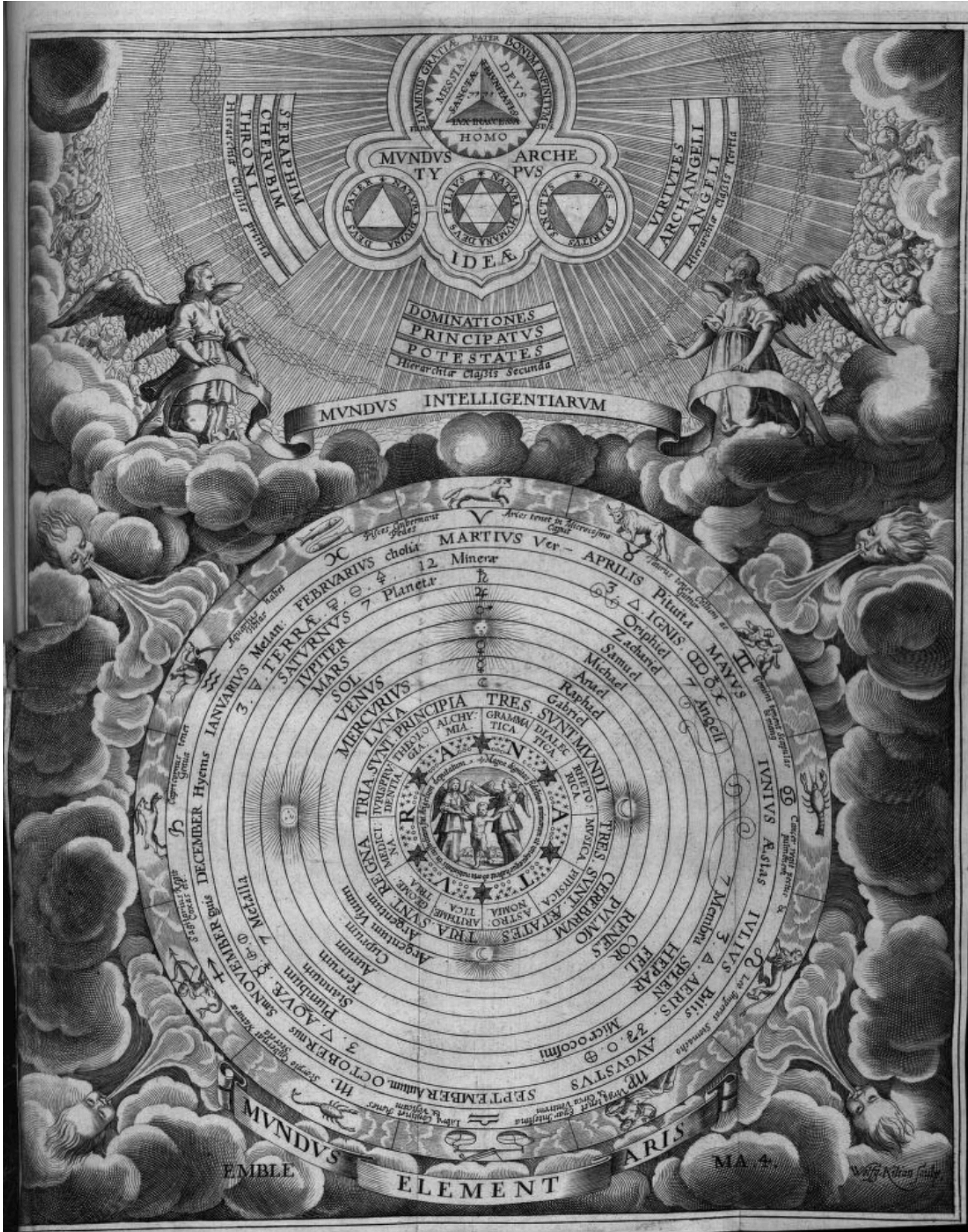

Figure 4: The celestial hierarchy partitioned through clouds.[8]

[8] Image captured from Malachias Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus* (Lucas Straub, 1652), 394.

Figure 5: The descent of the stone through the cloud via celestial rays.[9]

[9] Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus*, 423.

In his commentary on the emblems, Geiger explains the images in relation to one another.[10] In the first emblem, he divides the cosmos into a tripartite partition between the archetypal dwelling place of God in the highest heaven (*Mundus Archetyus*), the dwelling place of the angels, which is envisioned as a realm of the mind (*Mundus Intelligentiarum*), and the world of the lower heavens and the elements (*Mundus Coelestis & Elementis*). He cites Pseudo-Dionysius directly as an authority to explicate this hierarchy.[11] In figure three, the heavens are separated from the lower cosmos by a cloud.

In the second engraving, the philosopher's stone is delivered to earth through beams of light that pierce the clouds separating the heavens and the earth. The woodcut portrays the alchemical cosmos partitioned between three realms or spheres of being. At the uppermost heights of the image, the Godhead is symbolized through the father, in the form of the Tetragrammaton, the Son in the form of the lamb, and the holy spirit in the form of the dove.[12] The Trinity is surrounded by the heavenly host, and appears to occupy its own distinct sphere of influence above the stars below. The Trinity emanates a ray of spiritual light that is mediated downward through the angelic hierarchy to the lower heavens and the earth. The emanation of light from the Trinity, through angels and to the earth is an idea drawn from Pseudo-Dionysius.[13]

In the lower tier of the heavens, two angels receive the light from above and point upwards to the Trinity. They hold a banner that reads: 'Ab uno omnia in uno omnia per unum omnia (All from the one, all in the one, and all through the one.)' The light they receive they pass down to the motionless stars of the zodiac and the seven classical planets. The circle of the zodiac is enclosed by two snakes biting their own tails, representing the ouroboros and prime matter.

---

[10] For his explanation of the emblems see 'Significatio Quarti & Quinti Emblematis', in Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus*, 394–423.

[11] Geiger, *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus*, 400: 'Angelorum honorum ordo dicitur Hierarchia coelestis: est namque triplex Hierarchia, nempe supercoelestis, Deitatis solus: coelestis, anpelorum: Terrestris, militantis Ecclesiae, Secundom Christianos ex D: Dion. Areop. Hierachia coelestis, tres classes, & nouem ordines habebit huiusmodi.'

[12] Interpretation of the woodcut was made through personal observations and with the assistance of Adam McClean's video lecture series on alchemical woodcuts. At the time this was written, the lecture was available online. See Adam McClean, *Alchemical Emblems Alchemical Tree*, n.d., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taAaNuLVWkM.

[13] On the emanation of light and its reception on the earth in Dionysian theology see Dom Denys Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys: An Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). See also William K. Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008).

In the next ring of the sphere comes three ways of measuring the year. The solar year, the year experienced through the seasons, and the year marked by the measurement of the stars. In the next ring comes the three mercuries of alchemy, common, corporeal, and philosophical mercury. Next comes the three sulphurs, common, fixed, and aethereal. These are followed by a ring portraying the three salts of Paracelsian alchemy, common, central, and the salt of the elements.

The final ring of the circle refers to the varying degrees of fire needed in the alchemical work. In the innermost section of the circle the symbol of mercury is presented flanked by three triangles. The upward and downward pointing triangle below mercury represents the Seal of Solomon, and stands for the upward ascent of vapour in the act of sublimation and its downward descent in distillation. It also represents Mercurius and the union of opposites. All in all, the circle is defined by a series of triplicities. The light received by the lower heavens is then projected below through the mediation of the planets. Like in the *Cloud of Unknowing*, these rays pierce a cloud that separates the heavens from the earth.

In the centre of the earthly sphere is set the *Arbor Vitae* (tree of life). Standing next to the tree is Sapientia who holds a scepter which declares in Latin the Hermetic axiom: '*Quod est superius est sicut quod inferius, et quod inferius est sicut quod est superius* (That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above). Sapientia herself says *sapiens dominabitur astris* (the wise man will be master of the stars). In the canopy of the tree, nineteen pieces of fruit are shown representing the seven metals (corresponding to the seven planets) and various chemical substances relevant to the practice of alchemy. Finally, the tree sits on a hill, where three roots grow into the earth. The beams of light that shine forth from the planets, therefore, instil their influences in the tree of life, which sustains them through its roots in the earth.[14]

[14] The *Aurora* uses the same horticultural symbolism when discussing the seven planets and their influence on the alchemical tree of life. It describes the planets as 'taking root' within the earth and yielding fruits. See *AC,* 124–125; [I]n centrum terrae septem planetae radicaverunt et virtues ibi reliquerunt, unde in terra est aqua germinans diversa genera colorum et fructuum et educens panem et vinum laetificans cor hominis nec non producens foenum iumentis et herbam servituti hominum. Haec inquam terra fecit lunam in tempore suo, deinde ortus est sol valde mane una sabbatorum post tenebras, posuisti ante ortum solis in ipsa et facta est <nox>].

The beams of light that pierce the cloud also shine upon various figures in the terrestrial realm. On the left side of the earth, a phoenix carrying the elements of fire and air receives a beam of light from the planet Jupiter. On the right side of the mountain, an Eagle holds spheres representing the elements of earth and water. On the bottom left of the image, a peacock is shown standing on an object that reads: 'Ego sum niger albus citrinus et rubelus (I am the black white yellow and red)'. This represents the colour sequence in alchemy. The birds receive a beam of light from the planet Mars. Behind this, two figures slay a dragon, representing the reduction of metal to prime matter.

On the right side of the terrestrial sphere is a cave that represents an alchemical laboratory. Mercury sits at the entrance of the cave, while sol and luna approach it escorted by two lions. These figures receive rays of influence from the planet mercury. Finally, the image above the cave represents the completed philosopher's stone. In the minutiae of this symbolism, the central concept is that the alchemical opus, and the entirety of the terrestrial sphere itself is illuminated by rays of spiritual light that emanate from the Trinity. These rays pierce the clouds that separate the heavens and the earth, enlightening the mind and informing the alchemical work. Consider again the *Cloud* author's account of spiritual illumination:

> Then perhaps it will be his will to send out a ray of spiritual light, piercing this cloud of unknowing between you and him, and he will show you some of his secrets, of which man may not or cannot speak. Then you shall feel your affection all aflame with the fire of his love, far more than I know how to tell you.[15]

The *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus* and the *Cloud of Unknowing* use the same themes to articulate illumination. Divine rays pierce the clouds that separate the mind from God and the philosopher's stone from the earth. In the *Cloud,* the ray sets the 'affection all aflame' with God's love, uniting the contemplative's love with the affection of heaven. While it is clear that alchemists portrayed the union of sulphur and mercury through nuptial imagery, they also saw their relationship to the greater cosmos as a work of love.

[15] COU (IV), 174–175; COUT, 57: 'Than wil he sumtyme paraventure seend oute a beme of goostly light, peersyng this cloude of unknowing that is bitwix thee and Hym, and schewe thee sum of His privete which man may not, ne kan not, speke. Than schalt thou fele thine affeccion enflaumid with the fire of His love, fer more then I kan telle thee.'

In the *Ordinal of Alchemy*, Thomas Norton provides an example of this when outlining what is required of the alchemist when selecting a workshop. The laboratory must unite the alchemist's love with the astral cosmos:

> To fynde a perfite worchynge place;
> The vth is of concorde & of love
> Bitwen your werkis & the spere above.[16]

Alchemy is a work of *unity*, not just between the elements, but between the partitions of creation. What Norton means here is that the work, attitude, and mental affections of the alchemist must come into alignment with the heavens. The terminology 'spere above' in this context refers to the sidereal cosmos, the celestial and incorruptible tier of creation above the moon. Norton observes that discord between the heavens and earth has the potential to derail the work:

> Towards the matters of concordance,
> Considere there be no variance
> Bitwene such thyngis as shuld accorde,
> For of variance may growe discorde,
> Wherebie your werkis might be lost.[17]

The *Cloud of Unknowing* and the emblems depicted above denote the method one is to take in acquiring divine insight. The origin of wisdom is to be found in the celestial cosmos. The alchemist and the contemplative receive it through illuminations that pierce the veil of obscurity that partitions the heavens and the earth. This results in a union that forms the philosopher's stone and unites the mind with God.

The confluence in imagery between seventeenth-century alchemical emblems and the *Cloud of Unknowing* is a curious thing. It is possible that by the time the *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus* and *Opus medico-chymicum* were written, their authors had been influenced by English alchemy and mystical texts. In the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a fruitful exchange in alchemical manuscripts between England and the continent. For example, Michael Maier visited England between 1611 and 1616, where he collaborated

[16] Thomas Norton, *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, ed. John Alexander Reidy, Early English Text Society [Original Series] 272 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 84.
[17] *Idem*, 83.

with English alchemists and later translated Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* into Latin.[18] Ripley also enjoyed a sterling reputation among alchemists on the continent at this time; in 1571 his *Compound of Alchemy* was translated into Latin under the title *Liber duodecim portarum* along with other texts.[19] In any case, the imagery depicted here demonstrates a shared vision of the cosmos that permeated both the mystical theology and alchemy of Europe in the late middle ages and early modernity.

[18] Jennifer M. Rampling, *The Experimental Fire: Inventing English Alchemy, 1300–1700*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 288–289.
[19] Ibid.

Bibliography

Manuscript sources

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Cod. 5230.

King's College Library, Cambridge, Keynes MS. 28.

Chapitre Métropolitain, Prague, Ms. 1663. O. LXXIX.'

British Library Add. Ms. 52359.

Glasgow MS. Ferguson 6.

Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz MS. Germ. Qu.

Bibliothèque Nationale de France Ms. Lat. 14006.

Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Rh. 172.

Prague, Univerzitní knihovna MS. VI.

University of Bologna, MS N. 747.

Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek Vossiani Chymici F. 29.

Primary sources

A Testament of Alchemy. Being the Revelations of Morienus to Khālid Ibn Yazīd. ed. Lee Stavenhagen, Hanover, N.H: Published for the Brandeis University Press by the University Press of New England, 1974.

Abū Ma'shar. *Abu Ma'sar, the Great Introduction to Astrology: The Arabic Original and English Translation*. Edited by Keiji Yamamoto, Charles Burnett, and David Pingree. Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, volume 106. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Alan of Lille. *Literary Works: Alan of Lille*. Edited by Winthrop Wetherbee. Dumbarton Oaks medieval library 22. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Albert the Great. *The Book of Minerals*. Translated by Dorothy Wyckoff. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

Andreä, Johann Valentin. *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz Anno 1459:* Stassburg: Zetzner, 1616. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TV46AAAAcAAJ.

———. *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*. Translated by Joscelyn Godwin. Magunum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, no. 18. Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Phanes Press, 1991.

Artefii Arabis Philosophi Liber Secretus. Francfurti: Jennisius, 1685. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=o-b1tAEACAAJ.

Artefius. 'Clavis Sapientiae' in Manget, Jean-Jacques. *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*. Vol. 1. Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702. 503-9.

Ashmole, Elias. *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. Georg Olms Verlag, 1652. https://books.google.com/books?id=r-Fnm1WRvvkC.

Aurora Consurgens: A Document Attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy, a Companion Work to C.G. Jung's Mysterium Coniunctions. ed. Marie-Louise Von Franz and R. F. C Hull, trans. A. S. B Glover. Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000.

Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. Monastic Studies 20. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463218287-001.

———. *On the Song of Songs I*. Translated by Kilian Walsh. Vol. 2. Cistercian Fathers Series 4. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1971.

———. *Sancti Bernardi Opera*. Edited by J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais. Vol. 3. Romae: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963.

———. *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum*. Edited by J. Leclercq, C.H. Talbot, and H.M. Rochais. Vol. 1. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957.

Berthelot, Marcelin. *Collection Des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs*. Vol. 2–3. Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1888.

Bihlmeyer, Karl. *Heinrich Seuse: Deutsche Schriften*. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1961.

Boethius. *De Consolatione Philosophiae. Opuscula Theologica*. Edited by Claudio Moreschini. Munich and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 2000. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110950274.

St. Bonaventure. *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. Edited by Philotheus Boehner and M. Frances Laughlin. Translated by Zachary Hayes. Works of St. Bonaventure. New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002.

Bonus, Petrus. 'Margarita Pretosia Novella' in Manget, Jean-Jacques. *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*. Vol. 2. Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702.

Das 'Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit': in seiner zweiten, alchemistischen Fassung (Kadolzburg 1433). ed. Uwe Junker, Kölner medizinhistorische Beiträge 40. Feuchtwangen: Kohlhauer, 1986.

Bridges, John Henry, and Roger Bacon, eds. 'Pars Sexta: Hujus Persuasionis'. In *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, 2:167–222. Cambridge Library Collection - Physical Sciences.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511709678.004.

Calcidius. *On Plato's Timaeus*. Edited by John Magee. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 41. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dumbarton Oaks, Medieval Library, Harvard University Press, 2016.

Calvet, Antoine. 'Tractatus Parabolicus'. *Chrysopoeia* 5 (1996).

Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte. trans. Dennis Martin, The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Cloud Author

The Cloud of Unknowing. ed. Gallacher, Patrick J., Middle English Texts. Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1997.

Walsh, James, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Hodgson, Phyllis. *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling*. Early English Text Society. London: Oxford University Press, 1944. https://books.google.com/books?id=SzwUAAAAIAAJ.

Griffiths, John, ed. *A Letter of Private Direction*. Spiritual Classics. London: Gill & Macmillan, 1981.

Denis the Carthusian. *Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*. Vol. 41. Typis Cartusiæ S.M. de Pratis, 1912. English Translation in Denis, and Íde M. Ní Riain. *The Spiritual Writings of Denis the Carthusian*. Dublin, Ireland; Portland, OR: Four Courts, 2005.

Dyas Chymica Tripartita. Frankfurt: Lucas Jennis, 1625.

'Emerald Tablet', ed. David M. Litwa, in *Hermetica II: The Excerpts of Stobaeus, Papyrus Fragments, and Ancient Testimonies in an English Translation with Notes and Introduction*, 314–16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316856567.

Fludd, Robert. *Clavis Philosophae et Alchymiae Fluddanae*. Frankfurt: Wilhelm Fitzer, 1633.

Josten, C. H. 'Truth's Golden Harrow An Unpublished Alchemical Treatise of Robert Fludd in the Bodleian Library'. *Ambix*, 3 (1949): 91–150. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1949.3.3-4.91.

Furnivall, Fredrick James. *The Book of Quinte Essence Or the Fifth Being: That Is to Say, Man's Heaven: Ed. from the Sloane MS. 73, about 1460-70 A.D.* Vol. 16. Early English Text Society. Trübner, 1866.

Geiger, Malachias. *Microcosmus Hypochondriacus*. Lucas Straub, 1652. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kB5VAAAAcAAJ.

Glossa Ordinaria in Canticum Canticorum. Ed. Mary Dove, Corpus Christianorum 22. Turnhoult, Brepols, 1997.

Gower, John. *Confessio Amantis*. Edited by Russell Peck. Vol. 2. Medieval Institute Publications, 2013.

Gregory the Great. *Sancti Gregorii Magni Expositiones in Canticum Canticorum, in librum primum Regum*. ed. Patrick Verbraken. Turnhoult: Brepols, 1963.

Gregory of Nyssa. *The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

———. *La Vie De Moïse*. Edited by Jean Danielou. Paris: Éditions du cerf, 1955.

Hadewijch. *Hadewijch Visioenen*. Edited by Jozef Van Mierlo. 2 vols. Leuven: Vlaamsch Boekenhalle, 1924.

———. *Hadewijch: Strophische Gedichten*. Edited by Jozef Van Mierlo. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Antwerpen/Brussel/Gent/Leuven: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1942.

———. *Hadejwich: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colomba Hart. London: SPCK, 1980.

Henry Suso, *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*. trans. Frank Tobin. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Hitchcock, Ethan Allen. *Remarks Upon Alchemy and the Alchemists*. Boston: Crosby Nichols and Company, 1857.

Hugh of Balma. *Théologie Mystique*. Edited by Francis Ruello. Vol. 1. Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1995.

Hugh of St. Victor. 'Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii' in Migne, J.P., and A.G. Hamman. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. 175. Apud Garnier Fratres, 1854. https://books.google.com/books?id=JoXYAAAAMAAJ.

Jacobus, Cyriacus. *De Alchimia Opuscula Complura Veterum Philosophorum, Quorum Catalogum Sequens Pagella Indicabit: Rosarium Philosophorum.* Vol. 2. Frankfurt, 1550. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ob76mCHji08C.

Jan van Ruusbroec. *De Ornatu Spiritalium Nuptiarum*. Edited by J. Alaerts. Translated by H. Rolfson. Corpus Christianorum: Continvatio Mediaevalis 3. Tielt: Lannoo, 1988.

Jean Gerson, *Gerson: Oeuvres Complètes*. Edited by Mgr. Glorieux. Vol. 7. Paris; Tournai; Rome; New York: Desclée & Cie, 1966.

Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*. Edited by Brian Patrick McGuire. Classics of Western Spirituality, #92. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

Johann Daniel Mylius. *Opus Medico-Chymicum: Continens 3 Tractatus Sive Basilica; Quorum Prior Inscribitur Basilica Medica, Secundus Basilica Chymica, Tertius Basilica Philosophica*. Vol. 2. Lucas Jennis, 1618.

John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*. trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 1991.

John of Rupescissa

Halversen, Marguerite. 'The Consideration of Quintessence: An Edition of a Middle English Translation of John of Rupescissa's Liber de Consideratione Quintae Essentiae Omnium Rerum with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary'. PhD Diss., Michigan State University, 1998.

Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love: The Short Text and the Long Text*. Edited by Barry Windeatt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

———. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Barry Windeatt. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2015.

Lock, Humfrey. *Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite: An Edition and Study of Humfrey Lock's Treatise on Alchemy*. Edited by Peter Grund. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 367. Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011.

Maier, Michael. *Atalanta Fugiens: Hoc Est, Emblemata Nova de Secretis Naturae Chymica*. Bärenreiter, 1618. https://books.google.com/books?id=VuoQAQAAIAAJ.

Maier, Michael. *Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems*. Edited by H. M. E. De Jong. Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 2002.

Maier, Michael. *Atalanta Fugiens: An Edition of the Fugues, Emblems, and Epigrams*, edited by Joscelyn Godwin. Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, #22. Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1989.

Marciana, Biblioteca nazionale, and G. Valentinelli. *Bibliotheca Nazionale Marciana Sd S. Marci Venetiarum*. Bibliotheca Manuscripta Ad S. Marci Venetiarum, vol. 5-6. ex typ. Commercii, 1872. https://books.google.st/books?id=9IUNAAAAQAAJ.

Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. ed. Lynn Staley. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996. English Translation *The Book of Margery Kempe*. trans. Anthony Paul Bale. Oxford World's Classics. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Martin Luther

Hazlitt, William, ed. *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*. London: Clowes and Sons, 1872.

———. *Colloquia Oder Tischreden*. Frankfurt am Main: Anton Lauterbach, 1568.

Manget, Jean-Jacques. *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*. Vol. 1. Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702.

Manget, Jean-Jacques. *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa*. Vol. 2. Geneva: Sumpt. Chouet, G. De Tournes, Cramer, Perachon, Ritter, & S. De Tournes, 1702.

McEvoy, James, ed. *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia*. Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 3. Paris; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2003.

Mechthild. *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Edited by Frank J. Tobin. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

———. *Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit*. Edited by Hans Neumann and Gisela Vollmann-Profe. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur Deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, Bd. 100. München: Artemis Verlag, 1990.

Migne, J.P., and A.G. Hamman. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. 25. Apud Garnier fratres, 1845. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=jHzYAAAAMAAJ.

Muhammed ibn Umail al-Tamîmî. *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Edited by H. E. Stapleton, M. Turāb ’Alī, I.E.S., and M. Hidāyat Husain. Vol. 12. 1. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1933.

Musaeum Hermeticum. Frankfurt: Apud Hermannum à Sande, 1678. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kX0tRHUzse0C.

Norton, Thomas. *Thomas Norton’s Ordinal of Alchemy*. Edited by John Alexander Reidy. Early English Text Society [Original Series] 272. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Origen, and Wilhelm A. Baehrens. *Origenes Werke Bd. VIII: Homilien Zu Samuel I, Zum Hohelied Und Zu Den Propheten. Kommentar Zum Hohelied, in Rufins Und Hieronymus’ Übersetzung*. Vol. 33. Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller. J.C. Hinrichs, 1925.

Origene. *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*. Edited by R. P. Lawson. New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1957.

Pagel, Walter. ‘Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Tradition’. *Ambix*, 8 (1960): 125–66. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1960.8.3.125.

Pseudo-Apollonius

Hudry, Francois. ‘Le *De secretis nature* du Pseudo-Apollonius de Tyane: Traduction latine par Hugues de Santalla du Kitæb sirr al-halîqa’ in *Cinq traités alchimiques médiévaux*. Chrysopoeia. Paris: SÉHA, 2000.

Pseudo-Dionysius. *Dionysiaca: Recueil Donnant L’ensemble Des Traductions Latines Des Ouvrages Attribués Au Denys de L’areopage*. Edited by Phillipe Chevallier. Desclée, de Brouwer, 1937. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=2wgcAQAAMAAJ.

Rāzī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā. *The Alchemy of Al-Razi: A Translation of the ‘Book of Secrets’*. Edited by Gail Marlow Taylor, 2014.

Richard of St. Victor. *Épître à Séverin Sur La Charité: Les Quatre Degrés de La Violente Charité*. Edited by G. Dumeige. Textes Philosophiques Du Moyen Age. Paris: J. Vrin, 1955. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=UdEWAAAAIAAJ.

———. 'On the Four Degrees of Violent Love', in *On love: a Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St. Victor*, trans. Hugh Feiss. New York: New City Press, 2012.

Richard Rolle, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*. Edited by Margaret Deanesly. Manchester: The University of Manchester Press, 1915.

———. *The Fire of Love*. trans Clifton Wolters. The Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

———. *Richard Rolle, the English Writings*. Trans. Rosamund Allen. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

———. *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and His Followers*. Edited by Carl Horstmann. Vol. 1. London: S. Sonnenschein, 1895.

———. *The Officium and Miracula of Richard Rolle, of Hampole,* ed. R. M. Woolley, London: SPCK, 1919. https://books.google.com/books?id=hde5zQEACAAJ.

Ripley, George

Linden, Stanton J., ed. *George Ripley's Compound of Alchymy (1591)*. Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001.

Robert Grosseteste, *On the Liberal Arts*, trans. Sigbjørn O. Sønnesyn in Giles E.M. Gasper et al. *Knowing and Speaking,* The Scientific Works of Robert Grosseteste, Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Roger Bacon, 'Pars Sexta: Hujus Persuasionis' in *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, ed. John Henry Bridges, Vol. 2 of 3, Oxford and Edinburgh DATES 2:167–222. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511709678.004. English Translation in Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus,* trans Robert Belle Burke, 2 Vols. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928. https://doi.org/10.9783/9781512814064.

Tauler, Johannes. *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*. Edited by Maria Shrady. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.

Theatrum Chemicum. Vol. 2. Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1602. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=GtJLAAAAcAAJ.

Theatrum Chemicum. Vol. 5. Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1622. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=GtJLAAAAcAAJ.

Thomas Gallus, *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques.* Ed. Jean Barbet, Textes Philosophiques Du Moyen-age. Paris: Vrin, 1967.

Timmermann, Anke. *Verse and Transmutation: A Corpus of Middle English Alchemical Poetry*. History of Science and Medicine Library, volume 42. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Vaughan, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*. Edited by Alan Rudrum and Jennifer Drake-Brockman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Vida Y Obras de San Juan de La Cruz. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1960.

Waite, A.E. *The Hermetic Museum*. Vol. 1. London: J. Elliott, 1893. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=3MMLAQAAIAAJ.

Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*. ed. Thomas H. Bestul. Middle English Texts. Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000.

Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*. Trans. John P. H. Clark, and Rosemary Dorward. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

Zosimos of Panopolis

Sherwood Taylor, F. 'The Visions Of Zosimos'. *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 88–92. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1937.1.1.88.

Dictionary sources

Ashdowne, R.K., D.R. Howlett, and R.E. Latham, eds. 'Caligo'. In *Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources*. British Academy: Oxford, 2015.

Ashdowne, R.K., D.R. Howlett, and R.E. Latham, eds. 'Scientia'. In *Dictionary of Medieval Latin From British Sources*. British Academy: Oxford, 2015.

Secondary sources

A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey. *Mediaeval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross*. Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954.

Abraham, Lyndy. *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Ackerman, David A. *Transformation in Christ: Paul's Experience of the Divine Mystery*, 2019.

Allers, Rudolph. 'St. Augustine's Doctrine on Illumination'. *Franciscan Studies* 12 (1952): 27–46.

Al-Rahim, Ahmed H. 'Avicenna's Immediate Disciples: Their Lives and Works' in Langermann, Y. Tzvi, ed. *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*. Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, v. 8. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009.

Andia, Ysabel de. *Henosis: L'union à Dieu Chez Denys L'Aréopagite*. Philosophia Antiqua, v. 71. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

Andrée, Alexander. 'The Glossa ordinaria on the Gospel of John: A Preliminary Survey of the Manuscripts with a Presentation of the Text and its Source'. *Revue Bénédictine* 118 (2008): 289–333. https://doi.org/10.1484/J.RB.5.100573.

Andrew T. Creekmore III. 'Landscape and Settlement in the Harran Plain, Turkey: The Context of Third-Millennium Urbanization'. *American Journal of Archaeology*, 122 (2018): 177–208.

Ansari, A. S. Bazmee. 'Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Yahya Al-Razi: Universal Scholar and Scientist'. *Islamic Studies*, 15 (1976): 155–66.

Arnould. 'On Richard Rolle's Patrons: A New Reading'. *Medium Ævum*, 6 (1937): 122. https://doi.org/10.2307/43626036.

Astell, Ann W. *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*. 1. printing, Cornell paperbacks. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990.

Atkinson, Clarissa W. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Medieval West*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Anawati, Georges C. 'Arabic Alchemy' in *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, edited by Rushdī Rāshid and Régis Morelon. Vol. 3. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. ed. John Kenneth Riches. T & T Clark Ltd, 1986.

Beretta, Marco. 'The Changing Role of the Historiography of Chemistry in Continental Europe Since 1800'. *Ambix*, 58, (2011): 257–76. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582311X13129418299027.

Berlekamp, Persis. 'Painting as Persuasion: A Visual Defense of Alchemy in an Islamic Manuscript of the Mongol Period'. *Muqarnas*, 20 (2003): 35–59.

Blankenhorn, Bernhard. *The Mystery of Union With God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert The Great and Thomas Aquinas*. Thomistic Ressourcement Series, Volume 4. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015.

Bleiler, Everett F. 'Johann Valentin Andreae, Fantasist and Utopist'. *Science Fiction Studies*, 35 (2008): 1–30.

Bouyer, Louis, Jean (Theologe) Leclercq, and François Vandenbroucke. *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*. Turnbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1986.

Brady, Ignatius. 'St. Bonaventure's Doctrine of Illumination: Reactions Medieval and Modern'. *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (1974): 27–37.

Brainard, F. Samuel. ‘Defining “Mystical Experience”’. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64 (1996): 359–93.

Brann, Noel L. ‘Alchemy and Melancholy in Medieval and Renaissance Thought: A Query into the Mystical Basis of Their Relationship’. *Ambix*, 32 (1985): 127–48. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1985.32.3.127.

Bruce, Lorne D. ‘A Note on Christian Libraries during the “Great Persecution,” 303-305 A.D.’ *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)*, 15 (1980): 127–37.

Brueckner, Aviva. *Aurora Consurgens: Wisdom Is Female*. Lulu, 2015.

Bucklow, Spike. *The Alchemy of Paint: Art, Science, and Secrets from the Middle Ages*. 1st edn London ; New York: Marion Boyars, 2009.

Buntz, Herwig. ‘Das “Buch Der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit”. Sein Autor Und Seine Überlieferung’. *Zeitschrift Für Deutsches Altertum Und Deutsche Literatur*, 101 (1972): 150–60.

Burnett, C. S. F. ‘A Group of Arabic–Latin Translators Working in Northern Spain in the Mid-12th Century’. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 109 (1977): 62–108. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X00154644.

Burnett, Charles. *Ketton, Robert of (Fl. 1141–1157), Astronomer and Translator*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23723.

———. ‘The Astrologer’s Assay of the Alchemist: Early References to Alchemy in Arabic and Latin Texts’. *Ambix*, 39 (1992): 103–9. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1992.39.3.103.

———. ‘The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century’. *Science in Context*, 14, (2001): 249–88. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889701000096.

Burrell, David, and Isabelle Moulin. ‘Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius’. *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008): 633–49. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2008.00490.x.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 1991.

———. ‘The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg’. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1986): 399–439. https://doi.org/10.2307/2862038.

Calian, George-Florin. ‘Alkimia Operativa and Alkimia Speculativa: Some Modern CCntroversies on the Historiography of Alchemy’. *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, 16 (2010): 166–90.

Calvet, Antoine. *Les Oeuvres Alchimiques Attribuées à Arnaud de Villeneuve: Grand Oeuvre, Médecine et Prophétie au Moyen-Âge*. Textes et travaux de Chrysopoeia 11. Paris: S.É.H.A, 2011.

Campbell, Andrew, Lorenza Gianfrancesco, and Neil Tarrant. ‘Alchemy and the Mendicant Orders of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’. *Ambix*, 65 (2018): 201–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2018.1512778.

Certeau, Michel de. *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Translated by Michael Smith. Vol. 1. Chicago London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995.

Clark, J.P.H. ‘The “Cloud of Unknowing”, Walter Hilton and St John of the Cross: A Comparison’. *Downside Review*, 96 (1978).

Clark, J.P.H. ‘Augustine, Anselm, and Walter Hilton’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, edited by Marion Glasscoe. Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies. University of Exeter, 1982.

Coakley, Sarah. ‘On Clouds and Veils: Divine Presence and ‘Feminine’ Secrets in Revelation and Nature’ in *Knowing the Unknowable: Science and Religions on God and the Universe*, edited by John Bowker. London: Tauris, 2009.

Conway-Jones, Ann. ‘Exegetical Puzzles and the Mystical Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite’. *Vigiliae Christianae*, 75 (2020): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700720-12341449.

Coolman, Boyd Taylor. ‘The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition’. *Modern Theology*, (2008): 615–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2008.00489.x.

Copenhaver, Brian P., and Hermes, eds. *Hermetica: The Greek ‘Corpus Hermeticum’ and the Latin ‘Asclepius’ in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*. Reprint. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000.

Crisciani, Chiara. ‘The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara’. *Ambix*, 20 (1973): 165–81. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1973.20.3.165.

Crouzel, Henri. *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*. Translated by A.S. Worrall. 1st edn San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Crowe, M. B. ‘The Term *Synderesis* and the Scholastics’. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 23 (1956): 151–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/002114005602300203.

Cunningham, Lawrence, and Keith J. Egan. *Christian Spirituality: Themes From the Tradition*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.

Daly, Peter M. *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem*. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014.

Daniel, Dane T. ‘Invisible Wombs: Rethinking Paracelsus’s Concept of Body and Matter’. *Ambix*, 53 (2006): 129–42. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582306X117870.

Davies, Oliver. *God Within: The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006.

———. 'Why Were Eckhart's Propositions Condemned?' *New Blackfriars*, 71 (1990): 433–45.

Davis, Barrie. 'Jung, Aquinas, and the Aurora Consurgens: Establishing a Relationship with God'. M.A. Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010.

Davis, Carmel Bendon. *Mysticism and Space: Space and Spatiality in the Works of Richard Rolle, the Cloud of Unknowing Author, and Julian of Norwich*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008.

DeVun, Leah. *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupescissa in the Late Middle Ages*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Dreyer, Elizabeth. '"Affectus" In St. Bonaventure's Theology'. *Franciscan Studies*, 42 (1982): 5–20.

Duhem, Pierre Maurice Marie. *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*. Trans. Roger Ariew. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Dupré, Louis. 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union'. *The Journal of Religion*, 69 (1989): 1–13.

Ebeling, F., D. Lorton, and J. Assmann. *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*. Cornell University Press, 2011. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QUgtPuXr9fYC.

Edinger, Edward F., and Joan Dexter Blackmer. *The Mystery of the Coniunctio: Alchemical Image of Individuation*. Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1994.

Elder, E. Rozanne, and F. Tyler Sergent, eds. *Unity of Spirit: Studies on William of Saint-Thierry in Honor of E. Rozanne Elder*. Cistercian Studies Series, number two hundred sixty-eight. Collegeville, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press, 2015.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Forge and the Crucible*. 2nd edn Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Elizabeth A. Dreyer, 'Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey Into God' in *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*, edited by Arthur Holder. London: Routledge, 2010.

Enenkel, K. A. E. *The Invention of the Emblem Book and the Transmission of Knowledge, ca. 1510-1610*. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Erskine, Andrew. 'Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria'. *Greece & Rome*, 42 (1995): 38–48.

Faivre, Antoine. *Access to Western Esotericism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*. Translated by Christine Rhone. SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions. Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2010.

Figala, Karin and Ulrich Neumann. 'Michael Maier (1569-1622): New Bio-Bibliographic Material', in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17-19 April 1989* 33, edited by Z. R. W. M. Martels. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990.

Finamore, John. 'Iamblichus, Theurgy, and the Soul's Ascent', in *Philosophy and Salvation in Greek Religion*, edited by Vishwa Adluri. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110276381.343.

Fletcher, Clare. 'The Science of Himself Is Trewe: Alchemy in John Gower's Confessio Amantis'. *South Atlantic Review*, 79 (2014): 118–31.

Fletcher, R. A. 'Reconquest and Crusade in Spain'. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 37 (1987): 31–47. https://doi.org/10.2307/3679149.

Fontainelle, Earl. 'Introducing Alchemy with Lawrence Principe'. The Secret History of Western Esotericism Podcast: Exploring the Forgotten and Rejected Story of Western Thought, n.d. https://shwep.net/podcast/introducing-alchemy-with-lawrence-principe/.

Forman, R.K.C. 'What Does Mysticism Have to Teach Us About Consciousness?' *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 5 (2) (1998): 185–201.

Fors, Hjalmar, Lawrence M. Principe, and H. Otto Sibum. 'From the Library to the Laboratory and Back Again: Experiment as a Tool for Historians of Science'. *Ambix*, 63 (2016): 85–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2016.1213009.

Fowden, Garth. *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*. Mythos. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Fr. Bruno. *St. John of the Cross*. Sheed & Ward, 1932. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=awnOnQAACAAJ.

Franz, Marie-Louise von. *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology*. Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts 5. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980.

French, R. K., and Andrew Cunningham. *Before Science: The Invention of the Friars' Natural Philosophy*. Aldershot, Hants ; Brookfield, Vt: Scolar Press, 1996.

Freudenthal, Gad. 'The Problem of Cohesion Between Alchemy and Natural Philosophy: From Unctuous Moisture to Phlogiston', in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17-19 April 1989* 33, edited by Z. R. W. M. Martels. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990.

Garb, Jonathan. 'Mystics' Critiques of Mystical Experience'. *Revue de l'histoire Des Religions*, 221 (2004): 293–325.

Gardner, H.L. ‘Walter Hilton and the Mystical Tradition in England’ in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, edited by Helen Darbishire. Vol. 22. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1937.

Golitzin, Alexander. ‘The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?’ *Mystics Quarterly*, 19, (1993): 98–114.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Green, Tamara M. *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, v. 114. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992.

Haaning, Aksel. ‘Jung’s Quest for the Aurora Consurgens’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 59 (2014): 8–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12052.

Haas, Alois M., ed. *Die Dunkle Nacht Der Sinne: Leiderfahrung Und Christliche Mystik*. 1st edn Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1989.

Hägg, Henny Fiskå. *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Halleux, R. ‘Les Ouvrages Alchimiques de Jean de Rupescissa’. *Histoire Littéraire de La France*, 41 (1981): 241–84.

Halleux, Robert. ‘Le Mythe de Nicolas Flamel, Ou Les Mechanisme de La Pseudépigraphie AAchimique’, 33 (1983): 234–55.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Hardy, Richard P. *John of the Cross: Man and Mystic*. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2015.

Harris, Peter. ‘The Idea of God: On the Divine Names’. *Analecta Hermenuetica*, 9 (2017).

Haschmi, Mohamed Yahia. ‘The Beginning of Arab Alchemy’. *Ambix*, 9, (1961): 155–61. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1961.9.3.155.

Haskins, Charles. *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*. 2nd edn Harvard University Press, 1927.

Hauck, Dennis William. ‘Materia Prima: The Nature of the First Matter in the Esoteric and Scientific Traditions’. *Rose+Croix*, 8 (2011).

Hessayon, Ariel, ed. *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*. Routledge Studies in Religion 31. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Hodgson, Phyllis. ‘Walter Hilton and “The Cloud of Unknowing”: A Problem of Authorship Reconsidered’. *The Modern Language Review*, 50 (1955): 395–406. https://doi.org/10.2307/3719273.

Holmes, Frederic Lawrence, and Trevor Harvey Levere, eds. *Instruments and Experimentation in the History of Chemistry*. Dibner Institute Studies in the History of Science and Technology. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.

Holmyard, E. J. ‘Obituary: Frank Sherwood Taylor (1897–1956)’. *Ambix*, 5 (1956): 57–58. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1956.5.3-4.57.

———. ‘The Emerald Table’. *Nature*, 112 (1923): 525–26. https://doi.org/10.1038/112525a0.

———. *Alchemy*. New York: Dover Publication, 1990.

Hopkins, Arthur John. *Alchemy, Child of Greek Philosophy*. Mansfield Centre, CT.: Martino Publishing, 2014.

Hughes, Jonathan. *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2002.

———. *The Rise of Alchemy in Fourteenth-Century England: Plantagenet Kings and the Search for the Philosopher’s Stone*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2012.

Huizinga, Johan. *Waning of the Middle Ages*. 1919. London: Edward Arnold, 1976.

Jones, Joseph R. ‘The “Song of Songs” as a Drama in the Commentators from Origen to the Twelfth Century’. *Comparative Drama*, 17 (1983): 17–39.

Jung, C. G. *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry Into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*. 2nd edn The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, v. 14. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Jung, C. G, Gerhard Adler, Michael S Fordham, Herbert Read, William McGuire, and R. F. C Hull. *Alchemical Studies*. Vol. 13. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *Psychology and Alchemy*. Translated by Herbert Read and R. F. C. Hull. Vol. 12. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953.

Kahn, Didier. ‘Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part I — Preliminary Survey’. *Ambix*, 57 (2010): 249–74. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582310X12849808295788.

———. ‘Alchemical Poetry in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: A Preliminary Survey and Synthesis Part II — Synthesis’. *Ambix*, 58 (2011): 62–77. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582311X12947034675514.

Karpenko, Vladimír. ‘Systems of Metals in Alchemy’. *Ambix*, 50 (2003): 208–30. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.2003.50.2.208.

Katz, Steven T., ed. *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Kauffman, George B. 'The Role of Gold in Alchemy. Part I'. *Gold Bulletin*, 18 (1985): 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03214684.

Kennedy, David G. *Incarnational Elements in Hilton's Spirituality.* Universität Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1982.

Kibre, Pearl. 'Alchemical Writings Ascribed to Albertus Magnus'. *Speculum*, 17 (1942): 499–518. https://doi.org/10.2307/2856445.

Kieckhefer, Richard. *Magic in the Middle Ages*. 2nd edn Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139923484.

Kitch, Aaron. 'The Ripley Scrolls and the Generative Science of Alchemy'. *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 78 (2015): 87–125. https://doi.org/10.1525/hlq.2015.78.1.87.

Knowles, David. *The English Mystical Tradition*. London: Burns & Oates, 1964.

Koch, Hugo. 'Der Pseudo-Epigraphische Character Der Dionysischen Schriften'. *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 77 (1895): 353–421.

Kraus, Paul. *Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l'histoire Des Idées Scientifiques Dans l'Islam: Jābir et La Science Grecque*. Collection Sciences et Philosophie Arabes. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986.

Kügler, Peter. 'Denys Turner's Anti-Mystical Mystical Theology'. *Ars Disputandi*, 4 (2004): 176–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/15665399.2004.10819838.

Laird, Martin. 'Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration'. *The Journal of Religion*, 79 (1999): 592–616.

Langford, Kathryn. 'Alchemical Discouse in the "Canterbury Tales": Signs of Gnosis and Transmutation.' PhD Diss., Rice University, 1988.

Lemay, Richard. *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*. Oriental Series 38. American University of Beirut, 1962.

Lerner, Robert E. *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*. Corr. & Reprint. with permission. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1972.

Lindberg, David. *Science in the Middle Ages*. Unviersity of Chicago Press, n.d.

Linden, Stanton J. 'Alchemy and Eschatology in Seventeenth-Century Poetry'. *Ambix*, 31 (1984): 102–24. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1984.31.3.102.

Linden, Stanton J., ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Lomax, Derek W. *The Reconquest of Spain*. London; New York: Longman, 1978.

Louth, Andrew. *Denys the Areopagite*. Re-Issued. Outstanding Christian Thinkers. London: Continuum, 1989.

———. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. 2nd edn Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Lutz, Cora E. ‘The Clock of Eternal Wisdom’. *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 53 (1978): 79–85.

Magdalino, Paul, and Maria Mavroudi, eds. *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*. Geneva: La Pomme d’Or, 2006.

Marin-Guzmán, Roberto. ‘Crusade in Al-Andalus: The Eleventh Century Formation of the Reconquista as an Ideology’. *Islamic Studies*, 31 (1992): 287–318.

Mahoney, Timothy A. ‘Understanding the Christian Apophaticism of St. John of the Cross’. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 7 (2004): 80–91. https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2004.0036.

Marin, Juan. ‘Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls’. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 103 (2010): 89–109.

Marlan, Stanton. ‘The Philosopher’s Stone: Alchemical Imagination and the Soul’s Logical Life’. PhD Diss., Duquesne University, 2014.

Marraccini, Alexandra. ‘Fleshly Wisdoms: Image Practices, Bodies, and the Transmission of Knowledge in a Sixteenth-Century Alchemical Miscellany’. *Word & Image*, 33 (2017): 339–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2017.1322448.

Marrone, Steven P. *The Light of Thy Countenance: Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*. Studies in the History of Christian Thought, v. 98. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Matter, E. Ann. *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

Matter, E. Ann. ‘The Church Fathers and the Glossa Ordinaria’ in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, edited by Irena Dorota Backus. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997.

Matus, Zachary. ‘Resurrected Bodies and Roger Bacon’s Elixir’. *Ambix*, 60 (2013): 323–40. https://doi.org/10.1179/0002698013Z.00000000037.

Matus, Zachary A. *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life: Religion and Science in the Later Middle Ages*. 1st edn The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

McClean, Adam. *Alchemical Emblems Alchemical Tree*, n.d. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taAaNuLVWkM.

McGinn, Bernard. 'Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries'. *Church History*, 56, (1987): 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/3165301.

———. 'Mystical Union'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, by Bernard McGinn, 403–21. edited by Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh. Oxford University Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722380.013.21.

———. *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain: 1500-1650*. The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism, vol. 6, part 2. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017.

———. 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism'. *Church History*, 65 (1996): 197–219. https://doi.org/10.2307/3170288.

———, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. Modern Library pbk. edn Modern Library Classics. New York: Modern Library, 2006.

———. *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*. The Presence of God, a History of Western Christian Mysticism; Vol. 3. New York: Crossroad, 1998.

———. 'The God Beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart'. *The Journal of Religion*, 61, (1981): 1–19.

———. *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350-1550)*. Vol. 5. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012.

———. 'Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism'. *Studies in Spirituality*, 8 (1998): 81–96. https://doi.org/10.2143/SIS.8.0.2004090.

McGinn, Bernard. 'The Carmelites in the History of Western Mysticism' in *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, edited by Kevin G. Culligan and Regis Jordan. Carmelite Studies. Washington, D.C: ICS Publications, 2000.

McGinn, Bernard. 'Three Forms of Negativity in Christian Mysticism' in *Knowing the Unknowable: Science and Religions on God and the Universe*, edited by John Bowker. London: Tauris, 2009.

McGinn, Bernard. 'God as Eros Metaphysical Foundations of Christian Mysticism' in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, edited by John Meyendorff and Bradley Nassif. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.

McGinn, Bernard. 'The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism' in *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven Katz: Oxford University Press, 1992.

McIlroy, Claire Elizabeth. *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*. Boydell & Brewer, 2004. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/english-prose-treatises-of-richard-rolle/C8B505894EF724A48BEA52CB96593823.

McIntosh, Mark Allen. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*. Challenges in Contemporary Theology. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

McKie, D. '*Obituary* Eric John Holmyard (1891–1959)'. *Ambix*, 8 (1960): 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1960.8.1.1.

Meer, Matthieu van der. 'Divus Dionysius: Jean Gerson, Nicholas of Cusa, and the Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius's Mystical Theology'. Viator, 44 (2013): 323–42. https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.1.103351.

Merkur, Daniel. 'The Study of Spiritual Alchemy: Mysticism, Gold-Making, and Esoteric Hermeneutics'. *Ambix*, 37 (1990): 35–45. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1990.37.1.35.

Minnis, Alastair. 'Affection and Imagination In "The Cloud of Unknowing" and Hilton's Scale of Perfection''. *Traditio*, 39 (1983): 323–66.

Montgomery, John Warwick. *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), Phoenix of the Theologians*. International Archives of the History of Ideas ; 55. Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1973.

Multhauf, Robert. *The Origins of Chemistry*. Oldbourne, 1966.

Multhauf, Robert P. 'John of Rupescissa and the Origin of Medical Chemistry'. *Isis*, 45 (1954): 359–67.

Murphy, John J. 'St John of the Cross and the Philosophy of Religion: Love of God and the Conceptual Parameters of a Mystical Experience'. *Mystics Quarterly*, 22 (1996): 163–86.

Neel, Carol. 'The Origins of the Beguines'. *Signs*, 14 (1989): 321–41.

Nelstrop, Louise. 'Erotic and Nuptial Imagery' in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, by Louise Nelstrop, 327–46., edited by Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh. Oxford University Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722380.013.17.

Newman, Barbara. *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812202915.

Newman, William. 'Technology and Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages'. *Isis*, 80 (1989): 423–45.

———. Decknamen or Pseudochemical Language? Eirenaeus Philalethes and Carl Jung. *Revue d'histoire Des Sciences*, 49 (1996): 159–88.

———. 'Mercury and Sulphur Among the High Medieval Alchemists: From Rāzī and Avicenna to Albertus Magnus and Pseudo-Roger Bacon'. *Ambix*, 61 (2014): 327–44. https://doi.org/10.1179/1745823414Y.0000000004.

———. *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Newman, William R., and Lawrence M. Principe. ‘Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake’. *Early Science and Medicine*, 3 (1998): 32–65.

Newman, William Royall, and Lawrence M Principe. *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chemistry*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005.

Newman, William R. ‘What Have We Learned from the Recent Historiography of Alchemy?’ *Isis*, 102 (2011): 313–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/660140.

Newman, William R. ‘From Alchemy to Chymistry’ in *The Cambridge History of Science*. 1st paperback edition. The Cambridge History of Science, edited by Katharine Park, Lorraine Daston, and David C. Lindberg. General Editors David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, Volume 3. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Norris, John A. ‘The Mineral Exhalation Theory of Metallogenesis in Pre-Modern Mineral Science’. *Ambix*, 53 (2006): 43–65. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582306X93183.

North, John David. *Stars, Minds, and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology*. London ; Ronceverte, WV: Hambledon Press, 1989.

Nummedal, Tara. ‘Alchemy and Religion in Christian Europe’. *Ambix*, 60 (2013): 311–22. https://doi.org/10.1179/0002698013Z.00000000036.

Obrist, Barbara. *Les Débuts de l’imagerie Alchimique: XIVe-XVe Siècles*. Féodalisme. Paris: Le Sycomore, 1982.

———. ‘Visualization in Medieval Alchemy’. *HYLE- International Journal for Philosophy of Chemistry*, 9 (2003): 131–70.

Okely, Francis. *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings, of Jacob Behmen*. T. Dicey, 1780. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PqsBAAAAYAAJ.

Oliver, Simon. ‘Robert Grosseteste on Light, Truth and “Experimentum”’. *Vivarium*, 42 (2004): 151–80.

O’Reilly, Terence. ‘Latin and Vernacular in the *Cántico Espiritual* of St John of the Cross’. *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 93 (2016): 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2017.1298319.

Page, Sophie. *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

Paracelsus, and Andrew Weeks. *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) Essential Theoretical Writings*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004157569.i-975.

Parente, Paschal P. ‘The Canticle of Canticles in Mystical Theology’. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 6 (1944): 142–58.

Partington, J. R. ‘Albertus Magnus on Alchemy’. *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1937.1.1.3.

Patai, Raphael. ‘Maria the Jewess–Founding Mother of Alchemy’. *Ambix*, 29 (1982): 177–97. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1982.29.3.177.

———. *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995.

Pereira, Michela. ‘Heavens on Earth. From the Tabula Smaragdina to the Alchemical Fifth Essence’. *Early Science and Medicine*, 5 (2000): 131–44.

———. ‘Ramon Llull and the Alchemical Tradition’. *Catalónia* 43 (1995): 40–43.
Pingree, David. ‘The Sābians of Harrān and the Classical Tradition’. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 9 (2002): 8–35.

———. ‘Lullian Alchemy: Aspects and Problems of the Corpus of Alchemical Works Attributed to Ramon Llull (XIV-XVII Centuries)’. *Catalan Review* 4 (1990): 41–54.

Polloni, Nicola. ‘A Matter of Philosophers and Spheres: Medieval Glosses on Artephius’s *Key of Wisdom*’. *Ambix*, 67 (2020): 135–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2020.1747307.

Principe, Lawrence. ‘“Chemical Translation” and the Role of Impurities in Alchemy: Examples from Basil Valentine’s *Triumph-Wagen*’. *Ambix*, 34 (1987): 21–30. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1987.34.1.21.

Principe, Lawrence M. *The Secrets of Alchemy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Principe, Lawrence M. ‘Alchemy Restored’. *Isis*, 102 (2011): 305–12. https://doi.org/10.1086/660139.

Principe, Lawrence and William Newman. ‘Some Problems with the Historiography in Alchemy’. In *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by William Newman and Anthony Grafton. Transformations. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001.

Raff, Jeffrey. *The Wedding of Sophia: The Divine Feminine in Psychoidal Alchemy*. Jung on the Hudson Book Series. Berwick, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 2003.

Rampling, Jennifer M. ‘The Catalogue of the Ripley Corpus: Alchemical Writings Attributed to George Ripley (d. ca. 1490)’. *Ambix*, 57 (2010): 125–201. https://doi.org/10.1179/174582310X12719003720322.

———. ‘The Englishing of Medieval Alchemy’. *Ambix*, 63 (2016): 268–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2016.1256108.

———. *The Experimental Fire: Inventing English Alchemy, 1300-1700*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

———. ‘Transmission and Transmutation: George Ripley and the Place of English Alchemy in Early Modern Europe’. *Early Science and Medicine*, 17 (2012): 477–99. https://doi.org/10.1163/15733823-175000A2.

Read, J. *Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy Its Literature and Relationships*. Cambridge, MA M.I.T. Press, 1966. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=_woenQAACAAJ.

Reidy, J. ‘Thomas Norton and the Ordinall Of Alchimy’. *Ambix*, 6 (1957): 59–85. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1957.6.2.59.

Renevey, Denis. *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and the Commentaries on the Song of Songs*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001.

Riehle, Wolfgang. *The Middle English Mystics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.

———. ‘The Problem of Walter Hilton’s Possible Authorship of “The Cloud of Unknowing” and Its Related Tracts’. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 78 (1977): 31–45.

———. *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*. Translated by Charity Scott-Stokes. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Rinotas, Athanasios. ‘Stoicism and Alchemy in Late Antiquity: Zosimus and the Concept of *Pneuma*’. *Ambix*, 64 (2017): 203–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2017.1412134.

———. ‘The Interplay among Alchemy, Theology and Philosophy in the Late Middle Ages: The Cases of Roger Bacon and John of Rupescissa’. *Vegueta. Anuario de La Facultad de Geografía e Historia* 17 (2017).

Riordan, William K. *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008.

Roberts, Gareth. *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*. London: the British library, 1994.

Robertson, Duncan. ‘The Experience of Reading: Bernard of Clairvaux “Sermons on the Song of Songs”, I’. *Religion & Literature*, 19 (1987): 1–20.

Rolle, Richard. *Richard Rolle, the English Writings*, edited by Rosamund Allen. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Rorem, Paul. *St. Augustine, His Confessions, and His Influence*. Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2019.

Rorem, Paul. ‘Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology’, in *Studia Patristica*. XVIII., edited by Elizabeth A. Livingstone Oxford: Pergamon press, 1982.

———. *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*. Mapping the Tradition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

———. ‘Negative Theologies and the Cross’. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 101 (2008): 451–64.

———. *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Rosli, Hamdani B. and Amir A. Shafie, ‘Jabir Ibn Hayyan’s Work on Sulphur-Mercury Theory’, in Shuriye, Abdi Omar, and Waleed F Faris. *Contributions of Early Muslim Scientists to Engineering Sciences and Related Studies*. Gombak, Selangor: IIUM Press, 2011.

Roşu, Arion. ‘Marcelin Berthelot, Historien Des Sciences’. *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 74 (1990): 186–209.

Runstedler, Curtis. ‘Alchemy and Exemplary Narrative in Middle English Poetry’. PhD Diss., Durham University, 2018.

Ruska, Julius. ‘Der Urtext der Tabula Chemica’. *Archeion*, 16, (1934): 273–83. https://doi.org/10.1484/J.arch.3.550.

Rutledge, Dom Denys. *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys: An Introduction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

Sarton, George. ‘Boyle and Bayle the Sceptical Chemist and the Sceptical Historian’. *Chymia*, 3 (1950): 155–89. https://doi.org/10.2307/27757151.

———. ‘The History of Science’. *The Monist*, 26 (1916): 321–65.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. ‘The Making of Modern “Mysticism”’. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 71 (2003): 273–302.

Schuler, Robert M. *Alchemical Poetry, 1575-1700: From Previously Unpublished Manuscripts*. London: Routledge, 2013.

———. *English Magical and Scientific Poems to 1700: An Annotated Bibliography*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities; v. 169. New York: Garland Pub, 1979.

———. ‘The Renaissance Chaucer as Alchemist’. *Viator*, 15 (1984): 305–34. https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.2.301444.

Schumacher, Lydia. *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Sells, Michael Anthony. *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Shaw, Gregory. ‘Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite’. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7 (1999): 573–99. https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.1999.0093.

Sheppard, H. J. ‘Chinese and Western Alchemy: The Link Through Definition’. *Ambix*, 32 (1985): 32–37. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1985.32.1.32.

———. ‘Colour Symbolism in the Alchemical Opus’. *Scientia*, 58 (1964).

Sherwood Taylor, F. *The Alchemists*. Frogmore: Paladin, 1976.

———. ‘The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria’. *Ambix*, 1 (1937): 116–39. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1937.1.2.116.

Smith, Lesley. *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Smith, Yancy. ‘Hippolytus’ Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Context’. PhD Diss., Texas Christian University, 2009.

Sommer, Benjamin D. *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511596568.

Southern, Richard William. *The Making of the Middle Ages*. 1953. London: Pimlico, 1993.

Starr, Peter. ‘Towards a Context for Ibn Umayl, Known to Chaucer as the Alchemist “Senior”’. *Çankaya University Journal of Arts and Sciences,* 11 (2009).

Steele, Robert, and Dorothea Waley Singer. ‘The Emerald Table’. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 21 (1928): 485–501. https://doi.org/10.1177/003591572802100361.

Steven Chase, ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’, in *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*, edited by Arthur Holder. London: Routledge, 2010.

Stiglmayr, J. ‘Der Neuplatoniker Proclus Als Vorlage Des Sogen. Dionysius Areopagiten in Der Laehre Vom Ubel’. *Historiches Jahrbuch*, 16 (1895).

Taylor, Gail. ‘The Kitab Al-Arrar: An Alchemy Manual In Tenth-Century Persia’. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 32 (2010): 6–27.

Thompson, C.J.S. *Alchemical Symbols and Secret Alphabets.* Sequim, Washington: Holmes Pub Group Llc, 2001.

Thorndike, Lynn. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science.* 1923. 8 vols. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970.

———. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Vol. 2: During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*. 1923. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970.

———. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Vol. 3: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. Vol. 3. New York: Columbia University Press, 1923.

———. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. Vol. 4. A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Columbia University Press, 1934.

———. ‘John of Seville’. *Speculum*, 34 (1959): 20–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/2847976.

———. ‘The True Place of Astrology in the History of Science’. *Isis*, 46 (1955): 273–78.

———. ‘The True Roger Bacon, I.’ *The American Historical Review*, 21 (1916): 237–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/1835048.

Tichelkamp, Craig. ‘Mystical Theology and Translation: Re-Veiling the Latin *Corpus Dionysiacum*’. *Medieval Mystical Theology*, 29 (2020): 41–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/20465726.2020.1774171.

Tilton, Hereward. *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569–1622)*. Arbeiten Zur Kirchengeschichte 88. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003.

———. ‘Alchymia Archetypica: *Theurgy, Inner Transformation and the Historiography of Alchemy’* in *Transmutatio: la via ermetica alla Felicità; the hermetic way to happiness*, edited by Daniela Boccassini. Quaderni di studi indo-mediterranei 5. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2012.

Turner, Denys. ‘Dionysius and Some Late Medieveal Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe’. *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008): 651–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2008.00491.x.

———. *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Cistercian Studies Series, no. 156. Kalamazoo, Mich. ; Spencer, Mass: Cistercian Publications, 1995.

———. *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

———. ‘St. John of the Cross and Depression’. *Downside Review*, 106 (1988).

———. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. 4th edn London: Methuen & CO., 1912.

Van Dyke, Christina. ‘An Aristotelian Theory of Divine Illumination: Robert Grosseteste’s *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*’. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17 (2009): 685–704. https://doi.org/10.1080/09608780902986581.

Waite, A.E. *The Secret Tradition in Alchemy: Its Development and Records*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

Waley Singer, Dorothea. ‘Alchemical Texts Bearing the Name of Plato’. *Ambix*, 2 (1946): 115–28. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1946.2.3-4.115.

Warlick, M.E. ‘Gender Reversals in Alchemical Imagery’ in *Art & Alchemy*, edited by Jacob Wamberg. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2006.

Watson, Nicholas. 'The Middle English Mystics' in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, edited by David Wallace, 539–65. The New Cambridge History of English Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521444200.025.

———. *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Weyer, Jost. 'The Image of Alchemy in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Histories of Chemistry'. *Ambix*, 23(1976): 65–79. https://doi.org/10.1179/amb.1976.23.2.65.

Willard, Thomas. 'Alchemy and the Bible' in *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, edited by Eleanor Cook, Chaviva Hošek, Jay Macpherson, Patricia Parker, and Julian Patrick. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

Williams, Janet. 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite – I'. *The Downside Review*, 117 (1999): 157–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/001258069911740801.

Windeatt, B. A., ed. *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Winderlich, Rudolf. 'Ruska's Researches on the Alchemy of al-Razi'. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 13 (1936): 313. https://doi.org/10.1021/ed013p313.

Ziebart, Meredith. 'Laying Siege to the Wall of Paradise': *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41 (2015): 41–66. https://doi.org/10.5325/jmedirelicult.41.1.0041.

Zuber, Mike A. *Spiritual Alchemy: From Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood, 1600-1910*. Oxford Studies Western Esotericism Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021.