

*Alchemical Poetics in Seventeenth-Century
Women's Writing*



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Abstract

This thesis explores how four female poets—Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645), Hester Pulter (1607-1678), Katherine Philips (1632-1664), and Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673)—conceptualise poetry as an alchemy of the mind that nonetheless has real, practical implications for themselves and for their readers. The ‘alchemical poetics’ of these women writers thus exhibit a lively interest in, and radical transformation of, alchemical thought that grapples variously with the saving of souls, healing of the body, and transmutation of matter. More crucially, I contend that this grouping of women writers is actively participating in the evolution of alchemical thought through poetry.

Over the course of this thesis, I present the ‘alchemical poetics’ of Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish as creatively engaging with, and rethinking, a wide range of alchemical authors and ideas in ways that have hitherto been underappreciated by literary critics as well as historians of science. In this regard, my thesis integrates recent shifts in the history of science and the role of women, but also fruitfully extends them into new and exciting territory. The promotion of the importance of women in histories of alchemy, now widely recognised as important to a range of scientific activities in the early modern period, has occurred alongside renewed interest in female writers of the early modern period; yet only a handful of critics have actually seen how these fields are mutually informative—a missed opportunity that this thesis aims to redress.

In four chapters, each dealing with a single author, I reveal hitherto uncovered connections between alchemical communities and draw on newly identified alchemical source material to address the deeply-rooted interconnections between alchemical practice and its poetic representation. I interrogate what this alchemical material generates in a specifically poetic context, and map how this distinctly poetic engagement shifts over the seventeenth century. The content of this thesis as well as chronological arrangement therefore seeks to reveal new perspectives not only on how these female poets engaged with the *substance* of early modern alchemical thought,

theology, politics, and literary culture, but also how serious their contemporaries also understood that engagement to be.

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Notes on the Text

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Quotations from the Geneva Bible are taken from *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1560 edition* (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

Quotations from manuscript sources follow the principles of semi-diplomatic transcription. Scribal contractions and superscriptions have been silently expanded and lowered. Deletions are shown with a line through the cancelled text and insertions are indicated by triangular brackets: <...>.

Abbreviations

<i>Bod.</i>	Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>CWKP</i>	Katherine Philips, <i>The Collected Works of Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda</i> , vol. 1, <i>The Poems</i> , ed. Patrick Thomas (Stump Cross, Essex: Stump Cross Books, 1990)
<i>NLW</i>	National Library of Wales
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> Online edition at < http://www.oxforddnb.com/ >
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> Online edition at < http://www.oed.com/ >
<i>PF</i>	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Poems, and Fancies</i> (London, 1653)
<i>Phil.F.</i>	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophicall Fancies</i> (London, 1653)
<i>PL</i>	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical letters, or, Modest reflections upon some opinions in natural philosophy maintained by several famous and learned authors of this age, expressed by way of letters</i> (London, 1664)
<i>PMLA</i>	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America

Introduction: Alchemy, Poetry, and the Early Modern Imagination

There is no Arte deliuered to mankinde, that hath not the workes of Nature for his principall obiect, without which they could not consist, & on which they so depend [...] onely the Poet, disdayning to be tied to any such subiection, lifted vp with the vigor of his own inuention, dooth growe in effect, another nature, in making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe, formes such as neuer were in Nature [...] Nature neuer set forth the earth in so rich tapistry, as diuerse Poets haue done, neither with pleasant riuers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers: nor whatsoever els may make the too much loued earth more louely: her world is brasen, the Poets only deliuer a golden.

The Defence of Poesie (1595)¹

At the close of the sixteenth century, Philip Sidney deployed the imagery of metallurgy to express how the poet elevates and perfects a feminised Nature through his Art, thereby enacting a metaphorical transmutation of materials, as brass turns to gold. Sidney's opposition of Art and Nature, which enters into a debate that remained important throughout the seventeenth century, had its roots in antiquity: Aristotle had argued, for instance, that art can function in two different ways—'either, on the basis of Nature, carry[ing] things further (*epitelei*) than Nature can, or they imitate (*mimētai*) Nature.'² Sidney's metaphor runs on the idea that alchemy and poetry have certain things in common, both delighting in what Peggy Muñoz Simonds has termed the 'shared transmutational powers' of these arts.³ As is well known, Sidney conceives of the poet as a creator (the English word, 'poet', derives from the Greek *poiein*, meaning 'to make').⁴ Through *poesis* (the process of making or fashioning), the poet takes the elements of poetic form—structure, rhythm, and meter—and creates Forms after a (Neo-)Platonic sense, 'making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe, formes such as neuer were in Nature'.⁵ Poetic art, in other words, captures—but also has the ability to change words on the page into—the perfect essences

¹ Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie* (London, 1595), sigs. Cr-v.

² Aristotle, *Physics* II 8 199a15–17. Quoted in William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 17.

³ Peggy Muñoz Simonds, "Love is a spirit all compact of fire": Alchemical Coniunctio in Venus and Adonis,' in *Emblems and Allegory*, ed. Alison Adams and Stanton J. Lindon (Glasgow: Glasgow Emblem Studies, 1998), 133–156 (134).

⁴ Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, sig. B4v-Cr.

⁵ Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, Cv.

of all things (*epiteles*), so that all other material objects become mere imitations (*mimēitai*) of them. In like manner, alchemy in the early modern period was seen as a ‘perfective art’, claiming to perfect nature, and to convert base metals into gold, just as the corrupt soul of man could be transformed to a more spiritual state, as the mortal body acquired everlasting life.⁶ Marrelling a shared language of refinement, transformation, production, and perfection, Sidney evokes the creative potential of the poet in alchemical terms to suggest that the power of creation—once possessed by God—now belongs to the poet-as-maker.

While this language is not distinct to Sidney, his was perhaps the most powerful and influential articulation. In 1593, Sidney’s Cambridge friend at Pembroke Hall, Gabriel Harvey, describes ‘the sturring witt’ as ‘a quintessence of quicksilver’, while Henry Peacham, fellow Cambridge graduate and author of *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), frames the division between the poets of Antiquity and ‘our later and moderne times’, urging one not to ‘imagin[e] nature hath heretofore extracted her quintessence and left vs the dregges’, but to recognise that his poetic counterparts equally ‘produce as fertile wits, as perhaps the other [times], yea and in our *Brittaine*.’⁷ George Puttenham, writer and literary critic, draws a comparison between the methods of poetry and Paracelsianism (a strand of alchemy) in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), arguing that ‘the noble Poets sought by their arte to remoue or appease, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the *Galenistes* vse to cure [*contraria contrarijs*] but as the *Paracelsians*, who cure [*similia similibus*] making one dolour to expell another, and in this case, one short sorrowing the remedie of a long and grieuous sorrow.’⁸ Drawing on the Paracelsian idea that diseases should be treated

⁶ Newman, *Promethean Ambitions*, 25.

⁷ Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces Supererogation Or A New Prayse Of The Old Asse: A Preparatiue to certaine larger Discourses, intituled Nashes S. Fame* (London, 1593), sig. D1v. Henry Peacham, *The compleat gentleman fashioning him absolute in the most necessary & commendable qualities concerning minde or bodie that may be required in a noble gentleman* (London, 1622), sig. N4r. These examples are quoted in Lynn Veach Sadler, “Relations Between Alchemy and Poetics in the Renaissance and Seventeenth Century, with Special Glances at Donne and Milton,” *Ambix*, 24:2 (1977): 69-76. Critics such as Simonds and Lynn Veach Sadler have noted that the richly suggestive parallels between alchemy and poetry pervade the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see Sadler, “Relations Between Alchemy and Poetics,” 69-70; Simonds, “Love is a spirit all compact of fire,” 133-156.

⁸ George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie Contrinued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament* (London, 1589), 39.

with medicines that contain their cause ('like with like'), Puttenham's comparison demonstrates how alchemy intersected with a wide range of early modern disciplines—from medicine to physics—as is now widely acknowledged by historians of science (a point to which I will return shortly).

More broadly, poets—particularly, the so-called 'Metaphysicals'—plundered the rich mine of alchemical language in pursuit of striking—often, violently contradictory images—that framed the transformative powers of love and divine grace in innovative ways, all of which Samuel Johnson would later famously disparage in his *Life of Cowley* for combining 'dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike'.⁹ More to the point, many of these (male) poets made clear the Sidneian connection between the power of the poet to revitalise and create new substances with that of the alchemist: Donne declares, 'I am every dead thing, / In whom Love wrought new alchemy'¹⁰; Vaughan speaks of how, 'We, who are nothing but foul clay, / Shall be fine gold, which thou didst cleanse'¹¹; and Crashaw delighted in 'Those delicious Wounds, that weep / Balsom to heal themselves with'.¹²

While key studies by Lyndy Abraham, Katherine Eggert, and Theodore Ziolkowski have helpfully demonstrated the impact alchemy had on early modern writing in terms of how canonical male writers, from Chaucer to Marvell, have assimilated its knowledge and language, less attention

⁹ On the name 'Metaphysicals', see Colin Burrow's introduction to *Metaphysical Poets* (London: Penguin, 2006), xix–xliii. For early alchemical studies of the metaphysical poets, see Edgar Hill Duncan, "Donne's Alchemical Figures," *English Literary History* 1500-1900 9.4 (1942): 257–85; Alan Rudrum, "The Influence of Alchemy in the Poems of Henry Vaughan," *Philological Quarterly* 49.4 (1970): 469–80; Stanton J. Linden, "Alchemy and Eschatology in Seventeenth-Century Poetry," *Ambix* 31:3 (1984): 102–24.

¹⁰ John Donne, 'A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day being the Shortest Day' (ll. 12-13) in *The Complete Poems of John Donne* ed. Robin Robbins, rev. edn (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 227.

¹¹ Henry Vaughan, 'White Sunday' (ll. 59-60) from *Silex Scintillans* (1655) in *The Works of Henry Vaughan, Vol. 2: Texts 1654–1678, Letters, and Medical Marginalia*, eds. Donald R. Dickson, Alan Rudrum, and Robert Wilcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 570.

¹² 'Balsom' denotes an alchemical balm that 'preserves bodies from disease, decay and putrefaction'. See Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16. Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa' (ll. 108-109) from *Carmen Deo Nostro: Sacred Poems in The Poems of Richard Crashaw: English Latin and Greek*, 2nd edn. ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 320.

has been paid to women writers of the period.¹³ Much of what follows builds productively on the work done in the field of male poets. In particular, Stanton J. Linden's work elucidates not only a longstanding satiric tradition that frames alchemy as a charlatan's con and shorthand for obfuscation (as in Jonson's *The Alchemist*), but also shows how, for writers such as Donne and Herbert, alchemy was one way to meet 'intellectual, spiritual, and imagistic demands of the new metaphysical poetry that they were creating.'¹⁴ More recently, scholars such as Jayne Archer and Sajed Chowdhury have begun to uncover the depth of female engagement with alchemical writing, generating new and productive readings of poems by Hester Pulter and Katherine Philips.¹⁵

Although critics and individual projects have identified alchemical imagery in the work of female poets—as, for example in *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018)—much more can be gained, as this thesis will show, from a study of women writers that highlights their own myriad interpretations of alchemical ideas and their own creation of an alchemical poetic that is as seriously minded and wittily playful as that found in their male contemporaries.¹⁶ Indeed, as the following chapters discuss, often this alchemical thinking is taken more seriously by the work of women poets than that of their male contemporaries. I have therefore incorporated the work of male poets, including Donne, Vaughan, and William Cavendish, not to reaffirm their centrality to alchemical thought but to elucidate moments where the alchemical imagery in female poets overlaps or collides with their male counterparts. But given that the female poetic response to the 'golden age' of alchemy taking place over the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries

¹³ Lyndy Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990), Margaret Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and The Creative Imagination: The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Alchemist in Literature: From Dante to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 155.

¹⁵ Jayne Archer, "A 'Perfect Circle'? Alchemy in the Poetry of Hester Pulter," *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1–14; Sajed Chowdhury, "Hermeticism in the Poetry of Katherine Philips," *Women's Writing* 23:4 (2016): 465–82.

¹⁶ Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, gen. eds., *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018), <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>.

remains largely underanalysed, the primary focus of my argument is to show *how*, as well as *why*, these women writers fashioned their alchemical poetics in the particular ways that they did.

In newly articulating the means and affordances of alchemical thought in women poets I build on the work of Margaret Healy, who termed alchemy ‘a seminal “fable”’ in the Renaissance, which ‘inspired and helped to authorise [early modern] social and intellectual transformations, including its seventeenth-century political and scientific “revolutions”’.¹⁷ Healy evokes the question of Jonson’s alchemist, Subtle: ‘Are not the choicest fables of the poets, / That were the fountains, and first springs of wisdom, / Wrapped in perplexed allegories?’ (2.3.202– 7). This thesis builds on Healy’s critical insight and takes seriously Subtle’s question which Jonson sends up. By offering new ways of reading what may at first seem like ‘perplexed allegories’, I explore how women poets drew upon alchemy to engage with social and intellectual change in the seventeenth century. As the first detailed study of how alchemical knowledge found imaginative reflection in the poetry of early modern women writers, this thesis traces how these female poets shaped alchemical ideas for their own creative and intellectual purposes, and how their engagement with literary and alchemical coteries actively disseminated these ideas to particular readers in manuscripts (which were then, as we will see, often shared and transcribed by other male readers). I show that these women were creating a poetics of alchemy that moved beyond conventional deployment of alchemical imagery or the ‘parroting’ of male metaphysical poets. Instead, these women writers were creatively engaged with alchemical ideas and practices which were shaped in and through their own poetry. Through detailed explorations of Aemilia Lanyer, Hester Pulter, Katherine Philips, and Margaret Cavendish, this thesis recuperates the intellectual, social, political, and religious contexts animating and animated by the female alchemical poetics these women created—albeit in vastly different ways, and in very different settings. Recognising issues of class

¹⁷ Margaret Healy, “Protean Bodies: Literature, Alchemy, Science and English Revolutions,” *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing 1500–1650*, ed. Margaret Healy and Thomas Healy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 161–76 (161–2).

and education, as well as variance in political and religious engagement, this thesis argues that these female writers share a common aim: to promote—or, in the case of Cavendish, to recuperate—alchemical thinking as the means to ultimately effect scientific advancement *through* the poetry in which it finds its most powerful articulation.

EARLY MODERN ALCHEMY IN PRACTICE, MEDICINE, AND THE FEMALE DOMAIN

Before considering how women writers used alchemy in their poetry, it is necessary first to ask three questions: How was alchemy understood in the early modern period? How was it used practically? And, who employed it, and why? Modern assumptions about alchemy might place it in diametric opposition with chemistry, but William Newman and Lawrence M. Principe have convincingly shown that early modern practitioners drew no such clear and consistent distinction in their linguistic treatment of ‘alchemy’ and ‘chemistry.’¹⁸ In line with their insights, this thesis emphasises the heterogenous and capacious nature of early modern scientific enquiry. As alchemy itself intersects with various disciplines of knowledge, it necessitates an approach that draws upon the fields of science, history of philosophy, and cultural history as articulated in the manuscript sources and early printed material. In deploying this ‘non-literary’ material alongside my close reading of poetry, I aim to capture the specificity and significance of women writers’ poetic engagement with alchemy, theology, and politics and show how alchemy was understood contextually by each poet.

The writers discussed in this thesis—Lanyer, Philips, Pulter, and Cavendish—all occupy a period marked by a heightened interest in alchemy: ‘between the years 1650 and 1675 or 1680

¹⁸ William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, “Alchemy and Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake,” *Early Science and Medicine* 3.1 (1998): 32-65. For early scholars who tried to recuperate alchemy but were often dismissed, see the discussion of Frances Yates reception below.

more alchemical books appeared in English than in all the time before or after those dates.¹⁹ The seventeenth century reverberated with the ‘explosive force’ of Paracelsus, the sixteenth-century Swiss-German physician, Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (c.1493–1541), who promoted a wildly popular form of medical alchemy.²⁰ Far from being a marginal oddity, alchemy—as numerous critics, including Healy have shown—was practised in a wide variety of spaces, from the university to the kitchen, and was well-represented in practical handbooks (i.e. recipe books, natural philosophical treatises, etc) as well as literary material. Indeed, scholars in recent decades have emphasised the practical and scientific nature of alchemy, treating it as symptomatic of the heterogeneity that characterised early modern science.²¹ As Sarah Hutton notes:

Alchemy was not just about the transmutation of metals or search for the elixir; rather, it was integrally associated with medicine, pharmacology, mineralogy, and metallurgy. The scope of early modern alchemy extended from spiritual practices to the production of everyday materials such as dyes and medicines.²²

Along with its methodological emphasis on hypothesis and experiment, its practical applications paved the way for later advancements in seventeenth-century scientific methods, such as those promoted across a range of scientific fields by the Royal Society. Indeed, William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe have argued that many of the principles and practices characteristic of modern chemistry derive from the emphasis of alchemy on quantification, material production, and analysis or synthesis.²³ Due to the widening scope encompassed by alchemy during the

¹⁹ John Ferguson, “Some English Alchemical Books,” *Journal of the Alchemical Society* 2 (1913): 2–16 (here, 5).

²⁰ Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Paracelsian Movement,” *Renaissance Essays* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1985), 149–199 (here, 149).

²¹ Science is used here in the contextual sense, guided by Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton’s useful clarification that during the seventeenth century, science ‘was not yet fixed in its modern sense but retained its Latin meaning of ‘knowledge’ in general, even as the term came to denote the more specialised field of knowledge and method of enquiry that it has today.’ See Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton, “Introduction,” in *Women, Science and Medicine, 1500–1700* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 1–2.

²² Sarah Hutton, “Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women,” *Early Modern Women* 15, no. 2 (2021): 93–102 (93–4).

²³ See William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Linden has also argued that ‘it is useful to think of alchemy as pluralistic rather than singular, as “alchemies” rather than “alchemy.”’²⁴ Alchemy might refer to the transmutation of base metals into gold (chrysopoeia), the curing of diseases through medical alchemy (iatrochemistry), or spiritual alchemy, which was concerned with the purification and salvation of the soul, ranging between what we would now consider to be magic, medicine, and theology. The quest to produce the fabled Elixir or Philosopher’s Stone was bound up with each of these pursuits, as it was thought to be capable of not only transmuting metals but also healing disease and delivering eternal life. Historians of science now distinguish between the strand of exoteric or practical alchemy and a second strand of esoteric, spiritual, or philosophical alchemy.²⁵ The contrast between these two strands is clearly in evidence in contemporary alchemical texts. The first chapter of Roger Bacon’s *The Mirror of Alchimy* (1597) defines exoteric alchemy as a ‘Corporeal Science’:

Alchimy therefore is a science teaching how to make and compound a certaine medicine, which is called *Elixir*, the which when it is cast upon mettals or imperfect bodies, doth fully perfect them in the verie projection.²⁶

Here alchemy appears in its most commonly understood form—namely, chrysopoeia, a branch of science concerned with physical metallic transmutation from inferior matter to superior, precious, or perfect. Bound within the same volume, however, we find Hortulanus’ *Commentary on the Emerald Table of Hermes Trismegistus*, which provides an example of esoteric alchemy, where the alchemical opus is attributed to, and licenced by, God as ‘the sole commaundement of God, and miracle.’²⁷ Hortulanus consistently uses divine analogy to explain the preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone, for the ‘*worke imitateth the Creation of the worlde*’ and ‘as the world was created, so is our stone composed.’²⁸ Sublimation, or the transformation of a solid to gaseous state, became analogous to

²⁴ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 11.

²⁵ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 6-11.

²⁶ Roger Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy, composed by the thrice-famous and learned fryer, Roger Bachon* (London, 1597), A3r. Quoted in Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 7.

²⁷ Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy*, C4r.

²⁸ Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy*, D3r.

the transformation of the (human) soul which has been taken up to heaven. Just as a stone has been ‘made most clean without all filth’, the soul is said to be cleansed of sin: ‘the whole stone be caried upward, sublimating & and subtiliating. And this is it which the Philosopher saith: *It ascendeth from the earth into the heaven.*’²⁹ The alchemical affinities evidenced by these two texts draw attention to how the tributaries between exoteric and esoteric were less divergent than they might at first appear. As Linden cautions, ‘their differences were often muted even within the same author, treatise, or era: alchemy could at once display both exoteric and esoteric tendencies as the process for perfecting base metals was applied to the sinfully corrupt soul and psyche of man.’³⁰ The provisional nature of these boundaries in alchemical thinking remains crucial to this thesis, as both alchemical authors and our poets draw variously upon exoteric and esoteric pursuits. In the case of Cavendish, the provisional nature of alchemy fundamentally informs the way her syncretic poetry synthesises seemingly contradictory philosophies.

The writings of Paracelsus—arguably the father of early modern alchemical thought—showcase this intermixture of exoteric and esoteric in its combination of alchemy, medicine, and theology. Bearing these disciplinary nuances in mind, I gloss Paracelsianism in different ways and in accordance with how Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish read their alchemical texts. But overall we can say, following Allen G. Debus, that Paracelsus promoted and inspired an alchemy that was ‘the key not only to medicine, but to the wider problems of the universe and theology as well.’³¹ His ‘chemical philosophy’ was inspired by various currents of thought: even as it was a reaction against ancient authorities, it relied heavily on ancient Hermetic and neo-Platonic philosophy thereby fusing ancient and new philosophies in a deeply syncretic system.³² Above all, it was undergirded by a belief that observing the role of alchemy in nature would unlock not only

²⁹ Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy*, D2v.

³⁰ See Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistis to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

³¹ Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1966), 14.

³² For discussion of Paracelsus’ sources, see Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basle: S. Karger, 1958) and Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic, and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

new medical knowledge but the secrets of the universe, including theological concepts such as grace.³³ Paracelsus's writings thus promoted a form of iatrochemistry—a form of 'medical alchemy'—which was nevertheless rooted in theological language and ideas (or 'spiritualised alchemy').

Complicating the symbiotic relationship between these two categories is that Paracelsus aimed to replace the prevalent 'theory' of medicine derived from the ancients, especially Galen, with a 'religion' of medicine.³⁴ Replacing Aristotle's theory of four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) with a chemical basis of matter that relied upon three substances—what Paracelsus called the *tria prima* consisting of salt, mercury, and sulphur—this matter theory was grounded in Paracelsus's own understanding of the Holy Trinity.³⁵ Moreover, in Paracelsus' system of natural philosophy, it was thought that nature contained signs or signatures of the divine. These heavenly virtues, which God supposedly inscribed on earthly bodies to denote their purpose or application, could be accessed and interpreted by the adept alchemical practitioner through observation as well as alchemical skill.³⁶ Linked by bonds of sympathy between higher and lower states of existence, macrocosm and microcosm, Paracelsus's three principles (salt, mercury, and sulphur) as well as their cosmic signatures were thought to exercise their influence throughout a unified cosmos.³⁷ For Paracelsus and his followers, this means that to advance one's understanding of nature was part and parcel of undertaking one's own religious duty to understand the work of God and glorify the Creator.

³³ Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London: Oldbourne, 1965), 14.

³⁴ Charles Webster, "Paracelsus: Medicine as Popular Protest," in *Medicine and the Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London: Routledge, 1993), 68.

³⁵ Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna or The Whole Philosophia Sagax of the Great and Little World* (1537-8), I.xii.20-1. Translated from German in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus: Essential Readings* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1999), 112-3. Translated from German in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus: Essential Readings* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1999), 109-111. For a critical summary see Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 132-139.

³⁶ Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna*, I.xii.75-101. Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus*, 120-134.

³⁷ Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna* I.xii.59-60. Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus*, 118-9.

Influenced as he was by the medieval conception of the Book of Nature, Paracelsus thought that the natural world was like a book which could be read, through its various ‘signatures’ (a word which today carries both semiotic and bibliographic resonance), for knowledge and understanding.³⁸ Reading the world like a book was central to the twin concepts of the Light of Nature and the Light of Grace: God’s two teleological influences for the direction of mankind.³⁹ Knowledge of the divine could not be gained through reading books alone: instead, access was provided through careful observation of nature. The Light of Nature therefore promoted experiential knowledge over (institutional) book-learning. But lest we think that knowledge afforded through the Light of Nature might be ascertained empirically, Paracelsus made it clear that it was only through the Light of Grace that it was properly realised.⁴⁰ In other words, faith was a necessary precondition for access to knowledge, the divine, and the healing arts.

These central tenets of Paracelsianism were disseminated in Latin and English from the 1580s well into the Civil War period. In 1583, John Hester published the first Latin translation of Paracelsus, *A hundred and fourtene experiments and cures of the famous phisition Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Paracelsus*.⁴¹ This text promoted the same Paracelsian medicine that Hester had widely publicised from his apothecary shop in Paul’s Wharf, where he advertised and sold the prescriptions of Paracelsus.⁴² The spiritual and theoretical aspects of Paracelsianism were made available in English soon after when, in 1585, one R. Bostocke published *The Difference betwene the*

³⁸ Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna*, I.xii.3-7. Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus*, 109-111.

³⁹ Webster, *Paracelsus*, 153-156.

⁴⁰ Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna*, I.xii.8-9, Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus*, 111. See also Webster, “Paracelsus,” 73; Carlos Gilly, “‘Theophrastia Sancta’—Paracelsianism as a Religion in Conflict with the Established Church,” in *Paracelsus: The Man and His Reputation, His Ideas and Their Transformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 166.

⁴¹ Paracelsus, *A hundred and fourtene experiments and cures of the famous phisition Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Paracelsus, translated out of the Germane tongue into the Latine, Whereunto is added certaine excellent and profitable workes by B.G., a Portu Aquitano. Also certaine secretes of Isack Hollandus concerning the vegetall and animall worke. Also the spagerick antidotarie for gunshot of Iosephus Quirsitanus. Collected by I[ohn].H[ester]* [London, 1583]. Publication date conjectured on The *English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC) based on Bodleian Tanner 880. The 2nd ed. appeared in 1596. See Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, 69.

⁴² See Paul Kocher, “Paracelsian Medicine in England: The First Thirty Years (ca. 1570-1600),” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 2.4 (1947): 451-480 (461).

Auncient Phisicke... and the Latter Phisicke, which presented a long and impassioned exposition and defence of Paracelsian theory in relation to medicine.⁴³ By the mid-seventeenth century, the potential alchemical practitioner was ‘faced with a bewildering variety of texts’, as Tara Nummedal has argued:

Manuscripts circulated widely, and modern print editions of ancient alchemical writings joined editions of medieval Latin and translated Arabic authors in the booksellers’ shops. At the same time, new genres and texts flooded the market as practical *Kunstbüchlein* (or skills books) and the works of Paracelsus and his followers appeared in the bookstalls.⁴⁴

Far from a peripheral concern, then, alchemical knowledge was both widely produced and readily available to those who desired to become practitioners, and as scholarship has shown women were both producing and consuming this alchemical knowledge.

Scholars such as Sarah Hutton, Penny Bayer, and Meredith K. Ray have undertaken ground-breaking work in uncovering women’s participation in scientific intellectual and literary culture. Research over the past two decades has incited a paradigm shift in our own critical understanding of what constitutes science, placing women at the centre rather than on its fringes.⁴⁵ Essential to this new critical paradigm is ‘[f]irst an inclusive and historical view of what constituted science and, second, an appreciation of the fact that women pursued their interests in what we now call science in a diversity of ways.’⁴⁶ Concurrently, research on female participation in alchemy has flourished and it, too, has ‘evolved [...] from a peripheral enquiry to a recognized area of scholarship.’⁴⁷ In contrast to the androcentric studies of the greater part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is only since the late 1970s, that the potential of this critical inclusivity for

⁴³ Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, 57-65

⁴⁴ Tara Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 19.

⁴⁵ Hunter and Hutton, eds., *Women, Science and Medicine, 1500–1700*; Penny Bayer, “From Kitchen Hearth to Learned Paracelsianism: Women and Alchemy in the Renaissance” in *Mystical Metal of Gold: Essays on Alchemy and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Stanton J. Linden (New York: AMS Press, 2007), 365–86; Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ Sarah Hutton, “Science and Natural Philosophy,” in *The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Amanda Capern (London: Routledge, 2019), 386–483. For an earlier survey of developments, see Bayer, “From Kitchen Hearth to Learned Paracelsianism,” 365–86.

⁴⁷ Bayer, “From Kitchen Hearth to Learned Paracelsianism,” 365.

women and alchemy begun to be realised in scholarship. In 1978, Cherry Gilchrist noted the possibility that women involved in alchemy ‘were overlooked both by historians and contemporary alchemists’, suggesting that ‘further research would bring to light accounts of more women who were interested in alchemy.’⁴⁸ Twenty years later, pioneering studies by Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton analysed how biographical studies of women might lead to a reassessment of our understanding of science and who participated in it.⁴⁹ The essays included in their published volume *Women, Science, and Medicine, 1500-1700* repeatedly detail examples of female participation in science and medicine as well as suggesting that alchemy and early Paracelsian chemistry were accepted instruments of this practice.⁵⁰ In this way, their work reminds us to be wary of anachronistic readings of alchemy and chemistry in the early modern period. Mindful of how the term ‘science’ has been expanded by Pamela H. Smith and Meredith K. Ray to encompass numerous strands of knowledge, I use the terms ‘science’ and ‘natural philosophy’ throughout this thesis to indicate a broad range of intellectual pursuits, including medicine and alchemy, that sought to investigate and understand nature in the early modern period.⁵¹ Throughout, I favour the term ‘alchemy’ over ‘chymistry’ to refer to the discipline that encompassed both practical and spiritual pursuits.⁵² The term is capacious enough to include alchemical modes of thought imported to England from the Continent, which either amplified or softened certain aspects of their confessional contexts.

In line with this last point, the recent 2021 forum ‘Women and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe’, compellingly summarised how current criticism recognises the ‘vitality of pan-European

⁴⁸ Cherry Gilchrist, *Alchemy, the Great Work* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1978), 88.

⁴⁹ Hunter and Hutton, eds. *Women, Science and Medicine, 1500-1700*.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Tebeaux, “Women and Technical Writing, 1475-1700: Technology, Literacy and the Development of a Genre,” in Hunter and Hutton, *Women, Science and Medicine*, 37; Lynette Hunter, “Sisters of the Royal Society: The Circle of Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh” in Hunter and Hutton, *Women, Science and Medicine*, 182; Lynette Hunter, “Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570-1620,” 89.

⁵¹ Pamela H. Smith, “Science on the Move: Recent Trends in the History of Early Modern Science,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 62.2 (2009): 345–75. On the problem of terminology, see 345n1 and Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 4-5.

⁵² ‘Chymistry’ is used by William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe to signal the undifferentiated domains of alchemy and chemistry. See Newman and Principe, “Alchemy and Chemistry,” 41-2.

alchemical cultures in which women were active producers and consumers of alchemical knowledge.⁵³ Scholars including Sarah Hutton, Penny Bayer, and Tara Nummedal demonstrated how ‘across Europe women engaged with alchemy in a variety of ways through their activities as practitioners, patrons, and authors, as well as translators, collectors, and domestic healers.’⁵⁴ Hutton drew renewed attention to the scope of how women practised alchemy: both professionally, as in the case of the French Paracelsians Marie de Meurdrac, Jeanne du Port, and Madame de Martinville, and in a non-professional capacity, as in the case of influential literary figures including Marie de Gournay and Katherine Ranelagh.⁵⁵ Like my work on Margaret Cavendish, Hutton calls attention to the understudied figure of the woman philosopher, arguing that the writings of women such as Anne Conway and Margaret Cavendish are a source for women’s knowledge of alchemy and medicine.⁵⁶ As the international dimension of my work on alchemical communities—in particular, Margaret Clifford and Aemilia Lanyer’s engagement with Paracelsian Calvinism—bears out, the practice of alchemy is in evidence across the entire social scale in British as well as European contexts—from the laboratories of elite women such as Marie de’ Medici and Queen Christina of Sweden—to the kitchens and recipe books of women like Isabella Cortese.⁵⁷

Taking up Hutton’s argument that ‘we have not considered a broad enough range of sources, particularly theoretical writing by women in other domains’, I emphasise the international intellectual contexts of Lanyer, Phillips, Pulter, and Cavendish by looking beyond technical

⁵³ Sajed Chowdhury, “Introducing Women’s Alchemical Cultures,” *Early Modern Women* 15.2 (2021): 89–92 (92).

⁵⁴ Sarah Hutton, “Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women,” *Early Modern Women* 15. 2 (2021): 93–102 (94).

⁵⁵ See Penny Bayer, “Madame de la Martinville, Quercitan’s Daughter and the Philosopher’s Stone: Manuscript Representations of Women Alchemists,” in *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Kathleen P. Long (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 165–90. E. F. Secret, “Marie de Gournay, Alchimiste,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 35 (1973): 526–23; Michelle DiMeo, “Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh (1615–91): Science and Medicine in a Seventeenth-Century Englishwoman’s Writing” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2009). Summarised in Hutton, “Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women,” 93–102.

⁵⁶ Hutton, “Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women,” 96–102.

⁵⁷ See Hutton, “Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women,” 101–2.

alchemical texts to new *literary* sources to fully explore practical, as well as theoretical, alchemical knowledge in women's writing.⁵⁸ My work largely agrees with Penny Bayer's argument that since 'medicine and theology were accepted concerns of early modern noble and gentlewomen, and also arenas within which Paracelsian alchemy developed', we should not be surprised 'to find that some educated women engaged actively in Paracelsian alchemy in both its spiritual-philosophical and medicinal aspects, although the extent of this engagement is only beginning to be fully explored.'⁵⁹ To foreground this engagement, I trace how Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish understood and contributed to the spread of Paracelsian alchemy in literature. My focus here has two aims. On the one hand, this project responds to studies that have shown how seventeenth-century writers produced scientific knowledge in their literary texts, such as Frédérique Aït-Touati's tracing of a 'shared imagination' between the natural philosophical and the poetic to draw attention to the 'poetics of the cosmological discourse of the period'.⁶⁰ On the other hand, my thesis argues that female poets drew on the shared ideas of latent creativity between alchemy and poetry then current (as we saw earlier in the discussion of Sidney) to promote and, even, produce *new* scientific knowledge. One of the key parts of my argument therefore has to do with how these women writers developed new and important scientific perspectives that were themselves drawn from, and also further enlivened by, the affordances of alchemy transposed into literary form.

ALCHEMY AND THE EARLY MODERN PSYCHE

Building on the foundational work of historians ranging from Frances Yates and Hugh Trevor-Roper on the influence of alchemy on early modern thought, this thesis develops and nuances the argument that alchemy, 'with its limbecks and furnaces, its quest for a universal cure-all medicine,

⁵⁸ Hutton, "Alchemy and Cultures of Knowledge among Early Modern Women," 96.

⁵⁹ Penny Bayer, "Women Alchemists and the Paracelsian Context in France and England, 1560-1616," *Early Modern Women* 15.2 (2021): 103–12.

⁶⁰ Frédérique Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

its investment of nature with signatures of God, and its lexicon of wondrous transmutation of base substances into gold, exercised a considerable hold on the early modern psyche.⁶¹ As early as 1964, Yates argued in her influential studies of the ‘Hermetic tradition’ and alchemy that ‘[t]he Hermetic science par excellence’ located alchemy as part of a unified esoteric search for truth in the early modern period. She framed her argument in remarkably similar language to that of Henry Peacham (quoted above):

The cyclic view of time as a perpetual movement from pristine golden ages of purity and truth through successive brazen and iron ages still held sway and the search for truth was thus of necessity a search for the early, the ancient, the original gold from which the baser metals of the present and the immediate past were corrupt degenerations.⁶²

Later critics, such as Brian Vickers, have rebutted and revised Yates’ thesis of an occult ‘dynamic intellectual movement which typifies “the Renaissance mind” and has incalculable influence on such men as Francis Bacon, Comenius, Descartes, Kepler, Newton, and the whole of the Royal Society’.⁶³ But this should not diminish the fact that Yates’ arguments were the first to uncover and draw attention to the wide scope of alchemical learning in the early modern period. Despite its shortcomings, her pioneering work crucially highlighted how alchemy was, for its various practitioners (notably Giordano Bruno, Paracelsus, John Dee), not only a practical pursuit but also an art, the aims of which richly intersected with the quest for theological and philosophical truth. Yates’ attention to the influence of alchemy on the works of Spenser and Shakespeare modelled how alchemical analysis could be a productive tool for literary criticism; her work shed

⁶¹ Healy, “Protean Bodies,” 161.

⁶² Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 168, 1. See also, Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) and Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (New York: Routledge, 1979).

⁶³ Brian Vickers, “Frances Yates and the Writing of History,” *The Journal of Modern History* 51.2 (1979): 287–316 (288–289). For a summary of Vickers’ rebuttal see Brian Vickers, “Introduction,” in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1–56. Other revisions of the Yates thesis include Brian P. Copenhaver, “Natural Magic, Hermeticism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science,” in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 261–302 and Stephen Clucas, “Wondrous Force and Operation: Magic, Science and Religion in the Renaissance,” in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 35–57.

important light on the use of alchemical imagery in wider Renaissance literature just as Panofsky had argued for Renaissance art.⁶⁴ Yet the reception of Yates' work illustrates how the recuperation of early modern alchemy has often been dismissed as overly esoteric, easily aligned with the occult, and not to be taken seriously as an intellectual endeavour in the field of early modern science including the wider kinds of literature it informed.

Trevor-Roper's work on the seventeenth-century "Paracelsian Movement", which responds to Yates, elucidates his appreciation of Yates as well as the grip that alchemical thought had on the early modern mind:

Paracelsus himself, and his disciples after him, not only declared frontal war on the established medical philosophy: they also used every means to shock their adversaries—aggressive dogmatism, wild claims, bombastic, arcane and insulting language. Into the stylised and conventional language of the medical world, they introduced challenging concepts and bizarre neoterisms: archeus, magma, iliastrum, cagastrium, hylech, duelech; for in order to destroy the old orthodoxy it was not enough to refute its central ideas: they needed to destroy its habits of thought, its very terminology. This in turn entailed a new vocabulary, new dictionaries.⁶⁵

The vital, disruptive, generative nature of alchemy, as described by both Yates and Trevor-Roper, lie at the heart of this thesis and its argument about how alchemical poetics operate. Trevor-Roper's work, which identifies the capacity of alchemy for reworking accepted wisdom or habits of thought, illuminates the dominant impulse inherent within alchemical thinking to reforge, or make new, what seems out of date, tired, or, even contradictory. This capacity, which I discuss in terms of 'affordance' below, foregrounds the 'alchemical poetics' central to this thesis. Such an understanding of alchemical thought makes it particularly fertile as a source of poetic imagery, and its radical underpinnings informs the poetic of Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish, including the varying religious and political inflections of their writings. Attending to how Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish were serious alchemical thinkers and practitioners, this thesis continues the recuperation of alchemy begun by Yates and Hugh Trevor-Roper by revealing how alchemical

⁶⁴ See Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, on Spenser (111-27) and Shakespeare (186-192),

⁶⁵ Trevor-Roper, "The Paracelsian Movement," 155-156.

thought—a field now understood to be deserving of rigorous scholarly enquiry—also invites us to rethink how those aspects of early modern literature hitherto dismissed or overlooked as ‘topical’ tropes of alchemy are actually essential to how the poetry works. In this respect, I coin the term ‘alchemical poetics’ to find renewed attention for the alchemical thinking occurring in and through the poetry of these women writers, and how it can reanimate our own modes of literary criticism.

That said, it should be acknowledged that the radical underpinnings of alchemy have often been analysed in terms of gender. Tara Nummedal has surveyed how the ‘discursive potential’ of alchemy has been co-opted by a range of critics, including Evelyn Fox Keller and Kathleen P. Long, who have applied alchemical readings in the fields of feminist or queer criticism.⁶⁶ But what this thesis takes up and elaborates is Nummedal’s insightful point that it was not necessarily the discursive openness of alchemy to gender that attracted women alchemists, but rather its material power to refashion the body, and more broadly to intersect ‘with concerns that engaged early modern women: the spiritual and physical body, the household, faith, and practice.’⁶⁷ I analyse how this material power to refashion animates the poetic of Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish, and how the imaginative power to rethink alchemical knowledge in their verse exemplifies a way of engaging with and refashioning seventeenth-century theology, politics, and literary culture.

“WRAPT IN PERPLEXED *ALLEGORIES*?”: DEFINING ALCHEMICAL POETICS⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Tara Nummedal, “Alchemical Bodies: Discursive and Material Visions,” *Early Modern Women* 15.2 (2021): 121–32 (123–129). See Evelyn Fox Keller, “Spirit and Reason at the Birth of Modern Science,” in *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 43–65; Kathleen P. Long ed. *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶⁷ Nummedal, “Alchemical Bodies: Discursive and Material Visions,” 131.

⁶⁸ Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, (II.iii.207) in *Ben Jonson, Vol. 5: Volpone; Epicoene; The Alchemist; Catiline* eds. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 328.

In its study of alchemical poetics, this thesis builds on the work of Gary Kuchar, whose critical readings of alchemy and Robert Southwell have shed light on how attention to alchemical poetics allows us to open up ‘many formal, thematic, and intertextual features that have remained entirely unexplained or only partially understood’ in poetry.⁶⁹ A comprehensive understanding of alchemy and how it was understood by early modern writers furnishes critical readers today with necessary tools for navigating the rich complexities and problematic ambiguities within the poetry itself. If Kuchar is right to argue that ‘[as] an essentially allegorical mode of representation, alchemical allusion encourages readers to identify occult [or hidden] meanings’,⁷⁰ then this thesis attempts to show how, with a properly nuanced historical perspective, we might read with some accuracy the alchemical thought animating their poetry; and how this, in turn, provides a model by which we might reassess the formal complexity of their writing, including their wide-ranging theological, political, and literary engagements. Most importantly, it emphasises how these writers understood, through alchemical practices and ideas, the self-reflexive transformative power of poetry itself.

One female writer who exemplifies this practice, but who is absent from this thesis on account of the vast critical attention she has already received in the work of David Norbrook and Cassandra Gorman, is Lucy Hutchinson. In her 1679 biblical epic, *Order and Disorder*, Hutchinson imagined the salvation of the soul as an alchemical transformation:

[...] Where Mercy still doth fainting souls revive,
 And in its kind embraces keep alive
 A gentler fire than what it lately felt
 Under the sense of wrath. The soul doth melt
 Like precious ore, which when men would refine
 Doth in its liquefaction brightly shine;
 In cleansing penitential meltings so
 Foul sinners once again illustrious grow,
 When Christ’s all-heating, softening spirit hath
 Their furnace been, and his pure blood their bath (4. 348–54).⁷¹

⁶⁹ Gary Kuchar, “Alchemy, Repentance, and Recusant Allegory in Robert Southwell’s Saint Peters Complaint,” *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism*, ed. Lowell Gallagher (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 159-184 (159).

⁷⁰ Kuchar, “Alchemy, Repentance, and Recusant Allegory,” 160.

⁷¹ *Lucy Hutchinson: Order and Disorder*, ed. David Norbrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64.

In this metaphor, Hutchinson demonstrates a familiarity with the poetic language of alchemy and a broader engagement with an early modern tradition of Christianised alchemy that analogised chemical process to spiritual transformation.⁷² Her imagery stems from Malachi 3:2-3, cited in the margins of this passage, where the messenger of the Lord is likened to ‘a refiners fire’: ‘he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of siluer: and he shall purifie the sonnes of Leui, and purge them as gold & siluer, that they may offer vnto the Lord an offering in righteousness.’⁷³ But Hutchinson situates this biblical comparison in the realm of the laboratory, framing the soul as a precious metal ore, Christ’s spirit the furnace that heats it, and his blood as the *balneum* or ‘warming bath of sand, water or ashes’ representing the alchemical vessel.⁷⁴ Through this intermixture, the soul becomes ‘illustrious’, as Hutchinson collapses the reformed soul returned to its original state of grace with the re-formed alchemical ore stripped of its impurities and dissolved into ‘the original substance of creation, the *prima materia*’, through the alchemical process of liquefaction.⁷⁵ Hutchinson’s metaphor speaks both to the rich variety of alchemy (both exoteric and esoteric) in the early modern period, and more broadly illuminates the affordances of this early modern science as a source of poetic imagery.⁷⁶

The layers of meaning in alchemical language, where the material and figurative often collide, make it a useful source for similitudes. Hutchinson’s use of the word ‘refine’, for example,

For an excellent extended analysis of this passage, see Cassandra Gorman, *The Atom in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 201-205.

⁷² On Christianised alchemy, see Stanton J. Linden’s chapter “‘That great & generall refining day’: Alchemy, Allegory, and Eschatology in the Seventeenth Century” in *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 193-223. Cassandra Gorman also notes the inherent pun on ‘reformed’ that Hutchinson engages with in this passage. See Gorman, *The Atom in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, 204.

⁷³ Hutchinson read and used both the Geneva Bible and the King James Bible for writing *Order and Disorder*. Here, I have preferred the King James version’s ‘refiners fire’ over the Geneva version’s ‘a purging fire’ for the specificity of its alchemical language. See Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, “Lucy Hutchinson, the Bible and Order and Disorder” in *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 170-201 (here, 171).

⁷⁴ See ‘bath (balneum)’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 17-18.

⁷⁵ See ‘liquefaction’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 118.

⁷⁶ The term ‘affordance’ was coined by James J. Gibson. On Gibson, affordances, and poetry, see Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), esp. ch. 3, “The Balloon of the Mind,” 32-45, and ch. 4, “Literary Affordances,” 46-62 (46-51).

simultaneously captures the alchemical sense ‘To purify, clarify, or distil (a substance [...])’ alongside its more figurative meaning of ‘to make purer or of a finer quality.’⁷⁷ Throughout this thesis, I trace how other female poets of the early modern period similarly exploit the textures of meaning in words or their polysemous nature (i.e. ‘dross’, ‘purify’, ‘sublime’) in ways that speak to the generative aspect of alchemical language. I underscore how microcosm connects with macrocosm, linking the earthly and divine or material and spiritual, and how the collision between the two is fructifying for a densely layered poetic language that relies on spiritual analogies and correspondence as a means for comprehending the world. Drawing on Neoplatonic and Hermetic inheritances, including those that interlink the microcosm to the macrocosm, these poets create their own distinct spiritualised literary language, or poetic, unique to each writer.⁷⁸ This accords with Stanton J. Linden’s observation that

[a]long with other concerns, alchemical authors of this period were especially interested in setting forth the sacred implications of the art by devising or reaffirming intricate systems of correspondence that existed (or were thought to exist) between chemical processes and interactions occurring within their alembics and spiritual transformations taking place within their own hearts and souls. In each case the desired end was purification and perfection: the attainment of the philosopher’s stone or the moral and spiritual regeneration of a believer whose soul, through God’s grace, has been fitted for salvation.⁷⁹

As seen above, this is most clearly borne out in Hutchinson’s metaphor of Christ’s blood as the alchemical bath or vessel (*balneum*). In these lines, the transformative process of purification in the alembic corresponds to the regenerative action of grace, expressed synecdochally through Christ’s blood. The effect is to create an alchemical metaphor that privileges Christ’s blood as the physical sign of grace, albeit from a deeply Protestant perspective. As she renders the transformative action of blood tangible through the alchemical metaphor, she places the emphasis on the *meaning* of the blood in a way that remains consistent with her Protestant epic. The religious politics informing alchemical thought are not unique to Hutchinson, however. As I argue in Chapter One, Aemilia

⁷⁷ “refine, v.” 1b, *OED*.

⁷⁸ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 20.

⁷⁹ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 200-201.

Lanyer interprets grace, blood, and transformative alchemy in a profoundly similar way. Other critics have framed this idea of comprehension in terms of the ‘theological and devotional object lessons’ provided by alchemy;⁸⁰ and Sir Thomas Browne, for example, treats alchemy as an intellectual arsenal for religious belief when he asserts that his study of alchemy ‘taught me a great deale of Divinity.’⁸¹ Like Lanyer and Browne, Pulter evinces a similar desire to interrogate theology through the lens of alchemy, deploying alchemical correspondence as a form of accommodation to render divine principles intelligible to human comprehension. Each of the poets in this thesis reveals the way that, in a Protestant context, alchemical analogies afford new ways to think symbolically or metaphorically about how the earthly and divine intersect while maintaining the rejection of any doctrine of bodily presence.⁸² In this way, alchemical analogies function in a similar way to how Alec Ryrie has argued early modern Protestants ‘allegorized’ the elements—the table, bread and wine—in the Lord’s Supper: ‘Since there was no danger of believing that Christ’s body really was present, it was possible to use the elements to meditate with dazzling intensity on his true body’s past sufferings and present glory.’ Alchemy, with its emphasis on process and correspondence, offers a way of comprehending the divine that is at once tangible and metaphorical.

More broadly, what Linden has termed the ‘intricate systems of correspondence’ inherent in alchemy generate multi-layered interpretative possibilities for language and imagery. The biblical citations that accompany Hutchinson’s passage provide an apt example of multi-layered alchemical scriptural reading. Alongside Malachi 3:2-3, Hutchinson cites Revelation 1:5, a verse that details how Christ ‘washed vs from our sinnes in his blood’. As Hutchinson reimagines this washing

⁸⁰ 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*, edited by William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (London: The MIT Press, 2001), 385–431 (398).

⁸¹ Thomas Browne, *Religio medici* in *Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffroy Keynes, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 1:50. Quoted in Principe and Newman. “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” 398.

⁸² Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345.

taking place in the alchemical *balneo*, her metaphor transmutes Christ not only to the vessel in which transformation takes place but also the agent of that transformation. Uncovering the next interpretive layer of the metaphor reveals Christ's 'all-heating, softening spirit', as one of three fundamental ingredients (or *tria prima*) in Paracelsian alchemy and the process of alchemical transformation: body, soul, spirit or salt, sulphur, mercury. Christ's mercurial blood acts as the 'solvent and coagulator' that joins form (sulphur/blood) and matter (soul/salt) in the alchemical experiment.

Alchemy sought 'To make the fixed volatile.'⁸³ We have already seen how the impulse to unmake and remake is inherent within Paracelsian alchemy, which destroyed 'the habits of thought' and terminology of the old Galenic system.⁸⁴ Yet at the same time, synthesis is inherent to alchemy. It fundamentally rests on bringing into harmony disparate and conflicting elements as expressed in John Everard's 1649 English translation of the *Hermetica*, which encourages the 'friendship, and commixture of contraries and unlike.'⁸⁵ The Philosopher's Stone, one of the key aims of alchemy, represents 'unity within multiplicity' or 'a synthesis of all sublunary opposites, which have been brought together by God into a unified whole'.⁸⁶ Alongside a facility for generating interpretations, it affords way to express reinterpretation. The way that Hutchinson reinterprets a seemingly Catholic image—namely Christ's blood acting as a channel for God's grace—from a Protestant perspective provides one brief example of this. Katherine Philips draws on and reforges this Hermetic union of opposites from a distinctly Paracelsian perspective. But, more than any other writer in this thesis, Cavendish's syncretic matter theory demonstrates how alchemy can be used to express and enable the synthesis of disparate intellectual threads.

⁸³ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5.

⁸⁴ Trevor-Roper, "The Paracelsian Movement," 155-156.

⁸⁵ John Everard trans. *The Divine Pyramander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus: in XVII. books* (London, 1650), 123-24.

⁸⁶ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 23.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that Hutchinson's use of alchemy in this passage is not an isolated incident, but rather typifies the imaginative affordances of alchemy and specifically its role in women's writing. What I call 'alchemical poetics' thus encapsulates three interlinked points explored over the course of the thesis. Firstly, I will argue that the science and philosophy of alchemy has multi-layered imaginative affordances for poetry, which in turn were exploited by early modern women poets, both linguistically and intellectually. These women exploit the discursive function of alchemy and its potential for yielding rich imagistic language for poetry; in turn, their poetry was integral to disseminating alchemical knowledge.⁸⁷ Secondly, beyond the deployment of alchemical imagery, the poets in this thesis used alchemy as a tool to think with and to comprehend the early modern world. The fundamental importance of correspondence to alchemy means that, in the context of poetry, alchemy lends itself to accommodation, analogy, and metaphor: all rhetorical techniques with which to articulate and comprehend the innate sympathies or antipathies between concepts such as the self and the wider cosmos. Thirdly, and most importantly, I argue that the poets in this thesis understood alchemy and poetry metonymically. In the quotation which began this chapter, Sidney's description of how poets 'deliver a golden [world]' demonstrates existing sympathies between alchemy and poetry.⁸⁸ Tracing the deeply-rooted interconnections between alchemical practice and its poetic representation, I argue that the disciplines of literary writing and alchemy are mutually informing. Just as alchemical knowledge influences the formal and structural components of poetry, so too, I suggest, do the rhetorical frameworks of poetry shape and produce alchemical knowledge.⁸⁹ Alchemy and poetry work in mutually compatible ways to construct ideas of making and

⁸⁷ Nummedal, "Alchemical Bodies": Discursive and Material Visions," 123-129.

⁸⁸ Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, sigs. Cr-v.

⁸⁹ My approach here builds on studies of rhetoric and intellectual culture, for example Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sophie Read, *The Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

refashioning in the early modern imagination, and the articulation of their symbiosis is—for these women writers—itsself a self-reflexive, yet poetically innovative, practice.

Locating my discussion of alchemical poetics in the literature of the seventeenth century, this thesis begins with a new reconstruction of the alchemical library of Lanyer's patron, Lady Margaret Clifford (1560-1616) at Skipton Castle, based on manuscript evidence of alchemical works held at Appleby and Skipton Castle, alongside other documents remaining at the Kendal archives. This reconstructed library introduces the reader to standard medieval authorities, such as Arnald of Villanova (*ca.* 1240–1311) and George Ripley (*ca.* 1415-1490), alongside contemporary Paracelsian sources: most notably Oswald Croll (*ca.* 1560-1609)) and Thomas Tymme's translation of the French physician Joseph Du Chesne [Quercitanus]'s *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* (1605). The collection reflects the three-fold aim of alchemical pursuit during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: to turn metals into gold, cure the diseases of the human body, and, most importantly, to bring about spiritual regeneration and salvation. These key points of emphasis shape the contours for the wider alchemical discussion in the thesis, and how, as I contend, female alchemical poetry is far more syncretic than critics have hitherto appreciated. As Chapter One foregrounds, this alchemical poetry engages with a wide range of early modern alchemical sources and is fused with theology in complex ways that inflect gender concerns or the presentation of female authorship as well as coterie friendships.

Following the broader examination of alchemical sources in the Clifford library, the thesis then turns to alchemical poetics in the work of Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish. Chapter One uncovers how the abundant allusions to curative grace in Lanyer's *Salve Deus* acquire new significance when read in the context of Clifford's participation in the devotional and alchemical culture of international Paracelsian Calvinism. Lanyer constructs a spiritual equality between herself and Clifford that is attributable, ultimately, only to God. While her careful negotiation of patronage has long been a source of critical interest, Lanyer's poetic Paracelsian Calvinism and the 'rectefied oyle of Gratiouesnes' of her poem becomes a crucial way of rethinking just how radical

grace is in *Salve Deus*—not just in terms of female patronage but also in relation to how these women deployed their informed understanding of alchemical theology.

Chapter Two advances this argument by exploring Pulter's alchemical metonymic thinking: to trace how Pulter understands the correspondences between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, or the earthly and the divine, through alchemical metonymies, is to reveal how she connects (earthly) transformations to divine ones for spiritual redemption. The chapter reveals criticism's preoccupation with Pulter's alchemical sources to be mistaken in its focus on Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652). Drawing on the wider field of alchemical thought and the history of science and medicine, I argue that a hitherto unidentified source for her alchemical knowledge is John Woodall's *The Surgion's Mate* (1617) (mentioned in *The Pulter Project* but never fully explored in relation to alchemy). I discuss how the Puritan Paracelsianism present in Lanyer finds new expression in Pulter's Civil War poetry, which articulates a Paracelsian perspective on dust and resurrection (palingenesis) to express spiritual and political desire for reunification. Pulter's poetry thus disrupts the paradigm that Paracelsian alchemy was a Millenarian pursuit during the English Civil War, pressing alchemy instead into the service of royalism. I build on recent work in the history of science that has considered how royalists drew on alchemical literature to support the 'new science', though I argue that Pulter participates in an earlier tradition.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Katherine Philips's scientific engagement in both her manuscript poems and posthumous printed *Poems* (1667), arguing that readings which have reduced her alchemical conceits to mere 'borrowings' from John Donne have flattened the intellectual tenor of her poetry. This chapter argues that her intervention in Hermetic and Paracelsian alchemy is integral to understanding Philips's scientifically-inflected language of sympathy. Reconsidering her poems in the new context of her seventeenth-century scientific readers, in particular the unstudied medical academic and tutor of Balliol College, Nicholas Crouch (c.1618–c.1690), I argue that Philips replaces the Hermetic emphasis on 'commixture of contraries and unlike' with Paracelsian 'sympathy', the mixture of 'like with like' to collapse the hierarchy of

substance as promulgated in Renaissance Aristotelian as well as Stoic thought of Ciceronian humanism. This reinterpretation of the language of friendship has repercussions for the ways in which Philips expresses political affiliations and moderation; her alchemically coded verse becomes an ostensibly neutral ground on which different political and religious parties might meet.

Chapter Four makes a transition to an author who treats alchemy with scepticism, Margaret Cavendish. Yet, this chapter argues that Cavendish developed a matter theory as a royalist exile on the Continent by synthesizing both older forms of alchemical knowledge based on Paracelsian texts alongside more recent natural philosophical debates, such as those surrounding atomism. It examines how Cavendish combined potentially contradictory philosophical matter theories by creatively combining the work of the atomist Pierre Gassendi as well as his English translator Walter Charleton with Charleton's translation of Jan Baptist van Helmont and William Davidson's translations of Severinus. Analysing Cavendish's natural philosophy in *Poems, and Fancies*, as well as its evolution between the first edition of 1653 editions and the second much revised edition of 1664, reveals new insights into Cavendish's complex authorial strategy in which she simultaneously deploys and rejects alchemy to produce her strikingly syncretic matter theory and poetics.

Over the course of this thesis, my focus both on archival reconstruction and on what is produced by female alchemical poetics naturally shifts according to the alchemical sources that are available and how the women themselves deployed contemporary materials. I attend to the rich and complex, but often overlooked, contributions of women to both alchemical poetry and alchemical knowledge more broadly; and I have chosen to explore these contributions through four case studies of female poets rather than attempt an exhaustive account of alchemical material in early modern women's writing. As this introduction shows, the religious alchemy of Lucy Hutchinson might have featured alongside Aemilia Lanyer, or the spiritual visions of the Protestant mystic, Jane Lead (1624-1704). However, the purpose of this thesis is to interrogate what alchemical material generates in a poetic context, and to map how this shifts over the seventeenth century from the Paracelsian Calvinism of Aemilia Lanyer to Margaret Cavendish's syncretic

matter theory. In this way, this project reveals new perspectives on female engagement with the very *substance* of early modern alchemical thought, theology, politics, and literary culture.

Chapter One: Skipton's Secrets and The Margaret Manuscript: The Alchemical Grace of Aemilia Lanyer's Salve Deus Rex Judæorum (1611)

In 1917, George C. Williamson was conducting research at the castles of Skipton and Appleby for the work which was to become his monumental biography of Lady Anne Clifford (1590-1676), the celebrated diarist and literary patron.¹ At the request of Lord Hothfield, the then owner of the castles and estates, Williamson and D. O. Shilton, of the Public Record Office, London, undertook the rearrangement and compilation of the contents of these muniments rooms.² It was here that Williamson stumbled across 'a precious little volume in manuscript with recipes for medicines, electuaries, cordials and tinctures with annotations and corrections' in a hand he identified as that of Lady Cumberland, Margaret Clifford née Russell (1560-1616).³ This manuscript was catalogued alongside a great number of valuable, hitherto unknown, documents pertaining to the Clifford family. It subsequently appeared jumbled together with this evidence, in perhaps a similar state to which it was found: one amongst the many and various 'treasures' of the muniments rooms, identified yet undifferentiated.⁴ This volume, however, is key to unlocking the rich network of alchemical associations Margaret Clifford enjoyed throughout her lifetime. It provides physical evidence of the transmission and circulation of alchemical knowledge between the Continent and the circles of the North Yorkshire elite in which Clifford moved and which the wider Clifford

¹ This can be dated with reference to Daniel Scott's 1917 paper on these discoveries, "Recent Discoveries in the Muniments Rooms of Appleby Castle and Skipton Castle," *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, 18 (1918): 189-210. See Mihoko Suzuki, Introduction to *Ashgate Critical Essays on Women Writers in England, 1550-1700: Volume 5: Anne Clifford and Lucy Hutchinson* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), xiv. Pages xiii-xix provide a useful summary of the criticism surrounding Anne Clifford.

² George Charles Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke & Montgomery. 1590-1676. Her Life, Letters and Work* (East Ardsley: S. R. Publishers, 1967), 367.

³ Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford*, 367.

⁴ Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford*, 367. The book appears as part of a list which includes a map of the estate, a carefully written list of the various members of parliament for the Borough of Appleby, and two pedigrees 'one of which is of unusual importance'. As this list also includes other alchemical material, we shall return to it below. The book is also briefly sketched as part of 'a series of books, all of very great interest through their associations with members of the Clifford family' in Scott, "Recent Discoveries," 200.

library reflects. The volume encapsulates a specific strand of alchemical-spiritual learning in which Paracelsian alchemy and Reformed Protestantism are merged. Close analysis of this archival evidence reveals the rich signification of hitherto under-analysed alchemical language in texts dedicated to Lady Clifford. Aemilia Lanyer's poem *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611) is one such text. The godliness, stoicism, and medical healing dramatized in the poem, when placed alongside the other volumes in the Clifford library, emblazon a rich new meaning of alchemical-spiritual learning with profound implications for our understanding of Lanyer's suing for grace.

Salve Deus Rex Judæorum (1611)

In 1611, Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645) published a small volume of religious and epideictic verse, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* ('Hail God, King of the Jews'). We know little of Lanyer's life prior to this, save glimpses obtained through records of her family, the Bassanos, at the Tudor court, and the casebooks of the astrologer, Simon Forman, whom she visited at least four times in 1597, seeking advice on personal and social issues.⁵ Certainly, before 1610 she had spent time in the household of Margaret Russell Clifford, Countess of Cumberland; Lanyer's volume was entered into the Stationers' Register on 2 October 1610 and pays tribute to the powerful impact Margaret and her daughter Anne had upon her writing.⁶ The extensive dedicatory material which prefaces the central poem makes up nearly one-third of the text and is addressed exclusively to women: Queen Anne, Princess Elizabeth, 'all vertuous Ladies in generall', Arabella Stuart, and the Countesses of Kent, Pembroke, Bedford, Cumberland, Suffolk, and Dorset. However, although numerous patronesses are addressed, it is Margaret Clifford who is privileged and repeatedly

⁵ See Lorna Hutson ed., "Lanier [Lanyer; née Bassano], Emilia [Aemilia, Amelia]," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and David Lasocki and Roger Prior eds., *The Bassanos: Venetian musicians and instrument makers in England, 1531–1665* (London: Routledge, 1995). Bod. MS Ashmole 226, fols. 95v, 110v, 201r, 226v. The most extensive biographical account of Lanyer's life, drawing upon these casebooks among other sources, can be found in Susanne Woods ed., *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶ Woods, "Textual Introduction," xlvii.

elevated in the text. The prefatory dedication to Margaret Clifford is visually marked apart as the sole dedication to a specific noblewoman written as a prose epistle, nestled amongst the verse dedications which surround it. Of the nine copies of the book that survive, two, one presented to Prince Henry and the other to Thomas Jones, Archbishop of Dublin, make strategic omissions among the dedicatory poems.⁷ Both of these, however, retain the prose address to the Countess of Cumberland and the poem to her daughter, Anne of Dorset.

Clifford was intimately involved in the poem's conception, acting as the principal patron who 'will'd [Lanyer] to indite / 'The sacred Storie' of *Salve Deus* (ll.5-6), a commission made over a happy summer of companionship at her estate, Cookham.⁸ The estate itself acts as a source of divine inspiration for this task:

Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*) where I first obtain'd
Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd;
And where the Muses gave their full consent,
I should have powre the virtuous to content (ll. 1-4)

This valediction to a place, with its elegiac tone and the suffusion of pastoral imagery that portrays 'The Description of Cooke-ham' as the 'sweet place' or *locus amoenus*, consciously evokes such classical sources as Virgil's Eclogues: 'oft as a boy I recall that with song I would lay the long summer days to rest' (Ec. IX.51-2); 'These strains, Muses divine, it will be enough for your bard to have sung, as he sits and waves a basket of slender willow' (Ec. X.70-1).⁹ Yet the Muses might refer more specifically to the Cliffords, as Lanyer's witty antanaclasis uses 'grace' to mean variously favour, nobility or classical goddess, and virtue (l. 2). Lanyer addresses Clifford directly 'you (great Lady) Mistress of that place, / From whose desires did spring this work of grace' (ll. 11-12), emphasising her role as Muse and fount or 'spring' of inspiration.

⁷ Woods, "Textual Introduction," xlviii.

⁸ All quotations from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* are taken from *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, edited by Susanne Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁹ Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*. trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 89, 95.

Yet, in the rural setting of ‘The Description of Cooke-ham’, classical inspiration is transmuted and Christianised. While Clifford is alternately figured as a Grace and a Muse, she walks through this sylvan setting with ‘Christ and his Apostles’ (l. 82), meditating upon God’s ‘holy Writ’ (l. 83). Her piety is depicted as the result of this meditation upon and re-enactment of God’s Word. ‘With *Moses*’ she ascends Mount Sinai to ‘performe [God’s] Will’; her soul delights in singing ‘holy Hymnes to Heavens Eternall King’ with ‘lovely *David*’; she feeds ‘pined bretheren, when they stood in need’ with ‘blessed *Joseph*’ (ll. 82-92). Clifford’s commission of *Salve Deus* and the ‘sacred Storie’ of the Passion encourages Lanyer to meditate upon and transmit the ‘holy Writ’ in the form of the poem.

The description of *Salve Deus* as a ‘work of grace’ signifies more than classicised poetic flattery. Rather, it is suggestive of a spiritual rebirth undergone by Lanyer. Grace is here used in the sense of the Reformed Protestantism as one of the five chief Calvinist doctrines: ‘total depravity, unmerited election, limited atonement (for the elect only), irresistible grace (admitting no element of human cooperation or free response), final perseverance of the saints.’¹⁰ Grace is a crucial part of the stages in the spiritual life of any Protestant Christian, as marked in Pauline terms—election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification.¹¹ Alec Ryrie summarises:

If you are predestined to be saved, then you *will*—at some point in your life—repent and respond to Christ’s irresistible grace. As a result, you will be regenerated. You will experience grace within yourself—to some degree;—and manifest it in your outward life—to some degree.¹²

Salve Deus Rex Judæorum acts as a literary expression of, and testament to, Clifford’s God-given virtues of purity, strength and spiritual enrichment: in other words, her grace. Throughout the poem, grace is a capacious and multivalent term, simultaneously evoking social and theological contexts, as we see in Lanyer’s assertion that she obtained ‘Grace from that Grace where perfit

¹⁰ Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 20; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6

¹¹ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 16.

¹² Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 27

Grace remain'd' (l. 2). In a layering familiar to patronage poetry, Lanyer combines 'the agentive meaning of grace—the favour or privilege a person can confer on or over to others—with its unagentive meaning—the infusion of divine grace into the regenerate Christian'.¹³ In Lanyer's description of Clifford, the Countess not only manifests grace in both these senses, but also acts as an agent of regeneration herself, ushering Lanyer into a state of irresistible grace: 'I first obtain'd / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd (l. 1-2).'¹⁴ The suggestion that grace may be attained through a means other than the Holy Spirit is one to which we shall return below.

Lanyer's 'work of grace' would be consigned to oblivion for more than three hundred years before it resurfaced to modern critical attention. When Lanyer did enter onto the critical stage, she was masked as the 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets. In 1978, A. L. Rowse dubiously identified Lanyer as Shakespeare's mistress and produced a modern edition of *Salve Deus* titled "The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady."¹⁵ As Suzanne Trill notes, the conclusions about Lanyer's character and writing drawn in this volume 'disturbingly recall the early modern association of female expression with sexual transgression.'¹⁶ Consequently, early feminist critics of Lanyer were concerned with recovering her work in its own right and challenging Rowse's identification of Lanyer's text as a 'piece of rampant feminism', produced in angry retaliation against Shakespeare's Sonnets.¹⁷ Barbara K. Lewalski's important work on *Salve Deus* emphasises the work's 'quite remarkable feminist conceptual frame' and the idealised Protestant 'community of good women.'¹⁸

¹³ Julie Crawford, *Mediatrice: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 123.

¹⁴ Clifford's role as spiritual mediator is further explored in Micheline White, "A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex*," *Criticism* 45.3 (2003): 323–41; Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Imagining Female Community: Aemilia Lanyer's Poems," in *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 238.

¹⁵ A. L. Rowse, ed. *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, by Emilia Lanier* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978)

¹⁶ Suzanne Trill, "Feminism versus Religion: Towards a Re-Reading of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 25.4 (2001): 67–80 (67).

¹⁷ For a useful summary of this criticism see the above essay by Trill.

¹⁸ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Of God and Good Women: The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer," in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 203–24 (224); Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 241.

She cautions that to view the poem's religious subject matter as 'a thin veneer for a subversive feminist statement . . . would be wrongheaded.' Instead, she suggests that *Salve Deus* 'is set forth as a comprehensive 'Book of Good Women', fusing religious devotion and feminism so as to assert the essential harmony of those two impulses.' Although Lewalski discusses Lanyer's revision of the Passion, her primary focus remains on female relations both within the text and outside it. While feminism and religion are fused, religious concerns remain subordinate to feminist issues. This reading would shape the contours of critical debate for much of the subsequent scholarship.¹⁹

In 1993, Susanne Woods edited the text anew for Oxford University Press, providing more reliable biographical and textual introductions. Since then, Lanyer has progressively been included as a figure in critical studies of the seventeenth-century lyric, drawn into comparison with other poets such as Jonson, Marvell, and Donne. Critics have further uncovered the repercussions that reading her work has for our understanding of female community, women's engagement with religious discourse, and the complex politics of patronage in the early seventeenth century.²⁰ A pioneering article by Margaret Healy in 2013 provided new understanding of Lanyer's engagement with seventeenth-century alchemical medicine.²¹ Over time, Lanyer's poetry has increasingly been read for the subtle, witty, and provocative nature of her verse.²²

In this chapter, biographical context will be used to help navigate the rich possibilities for interpretation that this densely layered poem offers; it follows one strand in particular, that of

¹⁹ See Micheline White, "A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex*," *Criticism* 45.3 (2003): 323–41.

²⁰ See Lorna Hutson, "Why the Lady's Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun," in *Women, Texts and Histories, 1575-1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 13–38; see the varied selection of essays in Marshall Grossman ed. *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Jessica L. Malay, "Positioning Patronage: Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and the Countess of Cumberland in Time and Place," *The Seventeenth Century* 28.3 (2013): 251–274.

²¹ Margaret Healy, "Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 36.2 (2013): 75–103.

²² See for example, Helen Wilcox, "Aemilia Lanyer and the 'First Fruits' of Women's Wit," in *1611: Authority, Gender and the Word in Early Modern England* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 44–67; Erin Murphy, "Touches Across Time: Queer Feminism, Early Modern Studies, and Aemilia Lanyer's 'Rich Chains,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing in English, 1540-1700*, eds. Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, Danielle Clarke, and Sarah C. E. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 717–733.

Lanyer's alchemical imagery, to its conclusion. Close attention to the texts in the Clifford library uncovers how the theological concerns of the poem, including the operation of grace, are underpinned by Paracelsian Reformed Protestantism. In this way, the chapter sheds new light upon how attention to the multivalent understanding of grace fundamentally rethinks the relationship between grace and patronage in Lanyer's *Salve Deus* as well as female alchemical coterie culture. Lanyer's alchemically inflected language performs crucial epistemological work in her poetic strategy which links herself to her patron through their shared interpretation of spiritual alchemy.

THE MARGARET MANUSCRIPT: READING THE CLIFFORD LIBRARY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINENTAL ALCHEMY

The lifetimes of Margaret Clifford (1560-1616) and Aemilia Lanyer (1569–1645) witnessed the cultural zenith of alchemy as the interest in Paracelsianism reached its height in central Europe and in Western Europe. Alchemical centres, such as the courts of Rudolf II at Prague, Frederik II at Denmark, and Elizabeth I of England, flourished. From the early sixteenth century, authoritative alchemical texts canonising single authors and collecting together various alchemical treatises had poured from the Continental presses, increasing steadily as the century progressed.²³ Although the English printing presses had lagged behind those on the Continent, alchemical learning thrived in England during this period too, buoyed up on the tide of production from Continental printing presses.²⁴

²³ Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 40.

²⁴ On printing and alchemy, see Rudolf Hirsch, "The Invention of Printing and the Diffusion of Alchemical and Chemical Knowledge," *Chymia* 3 (1950): 115–42. For more recent discussions of continental publication, see Tara Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17-39; Stephen Clucas, "John Dee, Alchemy, and Print Culture," *Ambix* 64.2 (2017): 107–114. Clucas calls attention, for example, to important contributions of the printer Pietro Perna (1519–1582), based in Basel and key promoter of Paracelsian works, the German Lazarus Zetzner (1551–1616),

In the Introduction, I outlined the differences between exoteric and esoteric alchemy, including how ‘their differences were often muted even within the same author, treatise, or era.’²⁵ How exoteric chrysopoetic alchemy—that is, alchemy relating to the transmutation of metals—relates to the esoteric spiritual alchemy is vividly summed up in Thomas Tymme’s translation of *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* (1605). Tymme, an influential Calvinist alchemist, helpfully summarises how the exoteric and esoteric richly intertwine within the broader ‘noble Science’ of alchemy:

For *Halchymie* tradeth not alone with transmutation of metals (as ignorant vulgars thinke: which error hath made them distaste that noble Science) but shee hath also a chirurgicall hand in the anatomizing of every mesentericall veine of whole nature: Gods created handmaid, to conceive and bring forth his Creatures.²⁶

The concern here is theological and philosophical, with the focus resting upon epistemology rather than transmutation: Tymme presents alchemy as the cerebral art of analysis rather than the manual art of production. Indeed, Tymme suggests that to reduce alchemy to the simple chrysopoeia is an error of ‘ignorant vulgars’, known elsewhere as ‘puffers’, a term that is meant to conjure up the image of alchemists preoccupied with the furnace, at the expense of the spiritual or philosophical side of alchemy.²⁷ The language used here is anatomical, specifically referring to the mesentery, the skin or membrane that encases the guts.²⁸ Alchemy is figured as a skilled handmaid who performs surgical anatomies on the mesenteric vein of Nature herself, peering into the inner workings of nature to produce knowledge. Tymme’s depiction of Nature as a body with mesentery represents a physical rendering of the relationship between nature and God. The secret innards of Nature are

printer of the *Theatrum Chemicum*, and Antwerp printer Willem Silvius (d. ca. 1580), printer of John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

²⁵ See Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

²⁶ From Tymme’s dedication to Sir Charles Blunt, Earle of Devonshire, in Joseph Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...Translated by Thomas Tymme, Minister* (London, 1605).

²⁷ In Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, Mammon calls Face, tending to the furnace, ‘Lungs’ and ‘Puffe’: *Lungs*, I will manumit thee, from the fornice; / I will restore thee thy complexion, *Puffe*, / Lost in the embers’ (II.ii.18-19). Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, in *Ben Jonson: Volume 5*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

²⁸ “mesentery, n.” 1, *OED*.

intricately connected with God's wider creation, its structural backbone, much as the folds of membrane were often figured as suspending the viscera from the human backbone.²⁹ Through the 'noble science' of alchemy and its understanding of the relationship between nature and God, the alchemical adept may hope to enact on a microcosmic level, what is already enacted in the macrocosm. In this way, the alchemist becomes the 'maker', or poet, mimicking God's work and creating life itself.

Tymme's *Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* is a work of major importance that promoted spiritual alchemy; when Tymme wrote that '*Halchymie* should have concurrence and antiquitie with Theologie', his premise rests on a conception of creation as an alchemical process involving extraction, separation, sublimation, and conjunction.³⁰ If alchemy was, for Tymme, the operative process of the world's creation, it was also necessary for its dissolution at the Last Judgement:

in the fulnesse & last period of time (which approacheth fast on) the 4. Elements (whereof al creatures consist) . . . shall by Gods *Halchymie* be metamorphosed and changed. For the combustibile having in them a corrupt stinking feces, or drossie matter, which maketh them subject to corruption, shall in that great & generall refining day, be purged through fire: And then God will make new Heavens and a new Earth, and bring all things to a christalline cleernes, & wil also make the 4. Elements perfect, simple, & fixed in themselves, that all things may be reduced to a *quintessence of Eternitie*.³¹

The separation of soul from body becomes an alchemical sublimation, as purified spirit is separated from the dross material—or extraneous matter thrown off in the process of melting—of the corrupt body.³² Tymme is a significant figure not only as the earliest seventeenth-century source of this alchemical figuration of the Last Judgement, but also for his connection to Margaret

²⁹ St. George Jackson Mivart, *Lessons in elementary anatomy* (London, 1873), ix. 403

³⁰ Joseph Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical*, trans. Thomas Tymme (London, 1605), sig. A3r.

³¹ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical*, sig. A3r. Stanton J. Linden notes that Tymme's alchemical description of the Last Judgement is the earliest of many seventeenth-century versions, "Mystical Alchemy, Eschatology, and Seventeenth-Century Religious Poetry," *Pacific Coast Philology* 19 (1984), 79-88 (84).

³² "dross, n." 1a, *OED*. Abraham, *Dictionary*, 55.

Clifford.³³ Clifford notably chose Tymme to translate Dudley Fenner's *Sacra Theologia* (Geneva, 1585) from Latin as *Sacred Divinitie or the Truth which is according to Pietie*, which he presented to her in manuscript in 1590, inscribed 'Your lovinge friend T.T.'.³⁴ Noting the relationship between Tymme's devotional literature and his alchemical studies, Penny Bayer raises the 'possibility that Tymme and Lady Margaret enjoyed a relationship with shared religious parameters that may have included the Paracelsian tradition'.³⁵ Enlarging upon this claim, I argue that such 'parameters' encapsulated a specific form of Calvinist Paracelsianism that Clifford shared not only with Tymme, but also Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby de Eresby (1555–1601) (whose alchemical interests I discuss below), and which the intellectual affiliations of the books held in the Clifford library further support.

Before exploring how Clifford's religious politics led to her practicing with Lanyer a Calvinist-inflected Paracelsianism, it is important to emphasise the sources of that alchemical knowledge. This section highlights the Calvinist-Paracelsianism of alchemical material in the Clifford library: the spiritual alchemy that Lanyer's verse itself promotes. The Clifford library contains 'one of the keystones of English alchemy': English alchemist and Augustinian (d. c. 1490), George Ripley's Middle English poem, the *Compound of Alchymy*, originally written in 1471 and dedicated to Edward IV. The book, translated by the alchemist and engineer Ralph Rabbards was among the first alchemical books printed in English in 1591.³⁶ This text draws on the same contrast between dross and purified spirit, including the process of alchemical sublimation, as in Tymme.

³³ The relationship between the alchemical and devotional in Tymme's writings is discussed further in Bruce Janacek, "Thomas Tymme and Natural Philosophy: Prophecy, Alchemical Theology, and the Book of Nature," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 4.30 (1999), 987-1007.

³⁴ George Charles Williamson, *George, Third Earl of Cumberland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 292-293. This manuscript is now held at the Folger (V.a.264).

³⁵ Penny Bayer, "Women's Alchemical Literature 1560–1616 in Italy, France, the Swiss Cantons and England, and Its Diffusion to 1660," (Unpublished thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), 212. This relationship between the alchemical and devotional in Tymme's writings is further discussed in Bruce Janacek, "Thomas Tymme and Natural Philosophy: Prophecy, Alchemical Theology, and the Book of Nature," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 4.30 (1999): 987-1007.

³⁶ Jennifer M. Rampling, *The Experimental Fire: Inventing English Alchemy, 1300–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 17.

The perfection of matter is consistently likened to the soul's journey through the fires of Purgatory, and on to Paradise:

For lyke as Sowles after paynys transytory
Be brought into paradyce where ever ys yoyfull lyfe;
So shall our Stone after hys darknes in Purgatory
Be purged and joynyd in Elements wythoute stryfe.³⁷

The text mingles the spatial and temporal as the alchemical *opus* is represented as a twelve-gated castle, each corresponding to a chapter of the text and to an alchemical process from 'calcination' to 'projection'. Here, however, tenor and vehicle collapse into one another: the text operates as both a practical guide to chrysopoeia and a metaphysical guide to the purification of the soul and journey to enlightenment, believed necessary to attain the Philosopher's Stone.³⁸ In these texts the metaphors which sprung from this fusion of alchemy and eschatology operate through the 'intricate correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm' drawing together the physical and spiritual, mortal and divine.³⁹

These metaphors informed not only alchemical and religious texts, but also more literary works, notably by John Donne, Henry Vaughan, and George Herbert. This proliferation derived, as Stanton J. Linden has argued, and as Ripley's *Compound* demonstrates, from 'a common basis in analogy': namely 'Christ as gold, tincture, mineral, or philosopher's stone; salvation as transmutation; the sinful self as base metal, clay, or vicious tincture; death as *putrefactio*; moral purification as *calcinatio*'.⁴⁰ Along with Donne, Vaughan, and Herbert, this chapter argues that Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* should be read in this tradition of 'spiritualised alchemy' (identified by Linden).⁴¹

As a member of the royal court and of a noble household with a particularly alchemical inheritance, Clifford was perfectly placed to benefit from, and perhaps even contribute to, the

³⁷ Linden ed. *George Ripley's The Compound of Alchymy (1591)*, 3.

³⁸ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 5.

³⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 5.

⁴⁰ Linden, "Mystical Alchemy," 86.

⁴¹ See Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*.

transmission of alchemical knowledge from the Continent and its circulation in England. Clifford would have had ready access to alchemical material from the moment she learned to read. Two years before she was born in 1560, physician and translator, William Ward (1534–1609) had published the *The Secrets (I Secreti)* of Alessio Piemontese (1558), the prototype ‘book of secrets’ that gave special emphasis to practical experience.⁴² This English translation was dedicated to her father Francis Russell (1527–1585) and subsequently held in his library at Woburn.⁴³ At seventeen, she married her father’s ward George Clifford, prospective Earl of Cumberland, and moved to Skipton Castle, Yorkshire, entering a household where alchemical manuscripts and books would have been readily available to her. In the Clifford family, there is a record of alchemical interest and study extending back to Henry, tenth Lord Clifford (c. 1455–1523), who carried out studies of alchemy at Barden Tower, North Yorkshire.⁴⁴ His grandson Henry, twelfth Lord Clifford, second Earl of Cumberland (c. 1517–1570) and father-in-law to Margaret Clifford was similarly ‘much adicted to the study and practice of alchemy, and chimestrie, and a greate distiller of waters and maker of chimicall extractions for medicines and very studious in all manner of learning’.⁴⁵ As an aid to this learning, the Earl is said to have had ‘an excellent library both of written hand books and printed books, to which hee was exceedingly adicted especially towards his latter end when he had given over liveing att the Courte and att London’.⁴⁶ We will see below how both courtly circles

⁴² That this text held currency among Calvinists is further suggested by the interest it held for Thomas Larkham, a non-conformist minister from Cornwall, whose notebooks contain a ‘lengthy “digest” of an English edition of I Secreti [...] British Library, Loan MS 9.’ Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, “Introduction: Secrets and Knowledge” in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500–1800*, ed. Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

⁴³ Alessio Piemontese, “Dedication” to, *The Secretes of the reverende maister Alexis of Piemount*, trans. William Warde (London, 1558), sig. ✕ iir. This text is named amongst those that Byrne and Thomson identify as having been ‘collected at some subsequent date or dates [after 1584], for the sake of their interest to the Earl’s descendants.’ M. St Clare Byrne and Gladys Scott Thomson, ““My Lord’s Books”. The Library of Francis, Second Earl of Bedford, in 1584,” *RES* 7.28 (1931): 390. For the development of this book of secrets genre, see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ Cumbria Record Office, WDHOTH/1/2.

⁴⁵ Jessica L. Malay ed. *Anne Clifford’s Great Books of Record* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 623.

⁴⁶ Malay ed. *Anne Clifford’s Great Books of Record*, 623.

and international courtly alchemical centres were crucial arenas for Margaret Clifford's alchemical knowledge.

When Williamson searched the muniments room of Skipton Castle prior to publishing his biographies of the family in 1920 and 1922, he found 'A Catalogue of the Books in the Closet in the Passage Room next the Pantry in Skipton Castle 28th August 1739.'⁴⁷ This catalogue details a series of alchemical manuscripts and printed books, some of which can be identified with texts preserved in the Hothfield of Appleby Castle archive held at the Cumbria Record Office, Kendal (see Appendix 1). Of particular note in this catalogue is 'An old Book of Chemistry and Alchimy, no title, unbound', evidencing a possible link to the 'precious little volume in manuscript', *The Margaret Manuscript*, found at Appleby.⁴⁸ By closely attending to the evidence from Appleby and Skipton Castle, and to those documents remaining at Kendal, we can reconstruct the wider alchemical corpus available to Clifford. Some items were possibly inherited from the 'excellent library' she gained access to when she married George Clifford, some bought to consolidate this library over the years, and some commissioned to allow more ready access to the alchemical texts within. It is certainly true that caution is necessary, as certain texts may have passed out of ownership before her arrival at Skipton or have been added to the collection following her death in 1616. Nonetheless, this archival evidence invites us to look through the keyhole of the Clifford library to the volumes which sat alongside *The Margaret Manuscript*.

At least two texts from the Skipton Catalogue, 'A Treatise entituled Woemens Work and Childrens Playe' and 'A Book entituled the Ladder of the Philosophers', suggest that the writer was in possession of an early collection of alchemical writings, such as *Artis auriferae* (Basel, 1572), and was translating tracts from Latin to English.⁴⁹ I concur with Penny Bayer in suggesting that,

⁴⁷ Williamson, *George, Third Earl of Cumberland*, Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford*. In a paper read in 1917, Daniel Scott states that Dr Williamson had been working on the Hothman papers for a considerable time Scott, "Recent Discoveries," 189-210 (189).

⁴⁸ "A catalogue of the books in the closet in the passage room next to the pantry in Skipton Castle, 28 Aug 1739." YAS, DD121/111, fol. 1.

⁴⁹ YAS, DD121/111, fol. 1.

as the member of the Clifford household with active interests in alchemy at this time, Clifford was most likely commissioning authors to translate works to compensate for the fact that she had no knowledge of languages other than English.⁵⁰ This volume is notable for collecting together the work of medieval alchemical authorities such as Arnald of Villanova (ca. 1238–1311), Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–1292?) and Guido de Montanor (fl. 15th century).⁵¹ The catalogue records further medieval sources in ‘The practise of the great Work etc. by the Monk of Berye’, attributed variously to Raymond Lull and Philip Rouillascus, and a further extract from the work of Arnald of Villanova in ‘his Book called the New Light’. It is possible that this last text refers to the more extensive translations of Arnald of Villanova held at Kendal, which encapsulate *Novum Lumen*, *Flos Florum*, *Epistola ad regem Neapolitanum*.⁵² Both Roger Bacon and Arnald of Villanova are alchemical writers who were involved in the late medieval debates centred on Scholasticism—the synthesis between Aristotelian philosophy and Neoplatonic Christian theology—in which the legitimacy of alchemy as a science was called into question.⁵³ Bacon’s *Opus tertium* (written around 1266) was a significant work in this debate, proposing that alchemy should form the primary means of reforming Scholastic science.⁵⁴ His contributions to scholasticism earned him the title Doctor Mirabilis, “Teacher of Wonders” after his death. Meanwhile, the writings of Arnald of Villanova were concerned with forging ‘a special connection between alchemy and Christian theology’, particularly placing this in the context of alchemical medicine. Arnald taught that medicine was a gift from

⁵⁰ Penny Bayer, “Women’s Alchemical Literature 1560–1616,” 216.

⁵¹ Although many alchemical writings are attributed to Arnald, it is unlikely that he wrote all of them. The works in the Clifford Library include those now acknowledged to be part of Pseudo-Arnald of Villanova corpus, a set of alchemical works which, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, were attributed to the physician, Arnald of Villanova (ca. 1238–1311). See Antoine Calvet ed. “Arnald of Villanova (Pseudo),” *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 19. (2008), 108–111. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 67. On the uncertainty surrounding Guido de Montanor, see Jennifer M. Rampling, “Establishing the Canon: George Ripley and his Alchemical Sources,” *Ambix*, 55:3 (2008): 189–208 (193–200).

⁵² WDHOTH/1/3.

⁵³ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 67. See William Newman, “Technology and Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages,” *Isis* 80.3 (1989), 423–445; see also Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, and Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), especially Chapter 4, “Vernacular Science, Vernacular Poetry: Dangerous Reading,” 102–129.

⁵⁴ See Newman, “Technology and Alchemical Debate,” 430–33 (423).

God and that divine illumination as well as human reason was needed for the true physician.⁵⁵

Indeed, in the translation of the *Novum Lumen*, knowledge of alchemy is a gift given directly from God:

Although (Reverend Father and Lord) I am altogether ignorant of the liberall sciences, nor doe nott applie my selfe to daily studdy: yet god, whoe inspireth whom itt pleaseth him, hath revealed unto me (though altogether unworthy) this most pretious seacrett.⁵⁶

Villanova draws a contrast here between the earthly knowledge provided by the liberal scholastic curriculum taught at universities that may be learned through study, and the altogether more precious alchemical knowledge gained through divine inspiration—a gift from God.

A similar spiritual strand of alchemy emerges also in the work of John Isaac Holland, whose *Opera Mineralia* (Middelberg, 1600) is indicated in the previously unattributed *Index Rerum*, and possibly refers to the ‘very old Abstract of some Book of Alchimy’ in the Skipton catalogue at Kendal.⁵⁷ Historians disagree when exactly Isaac Holland and his son John Isaac Holland were living; however, it is generally accepted that John Isaac Holland was active in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century.⁵⁸ The *Opera Mineralia*, the mineral work which Holland wrote alongside works on vegetables and animals, is a practical guide to mineralogy, alchemy and the philosopher’s stone. His works are liberally sprinkled with allusions to the Holy Trinity and, as in Arnald of Villanova,

⁵⁵ Michael Mcvaugh, “Arnald of Villanova,” *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 1 (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2008), 289-291 (90).

⁵⁶ WDHOTH/1/3, sig. 1r.

⁵⁷ WDHOTH/1/2. The catalogue description indicates that the six leaves, which survive in a damaged state, ‘appear to be a sort of Index Rerum, with reference to some other book or MS. on a similar subject, references being given to 153 chapters, notes concerning their contents, and a key to their arrangement.’ The final page has been annotated with ‘Isaac Holland booke’, which, combined with the distinctive number of chapters, have made it possible to identify this manuscript as an index to John Isaac Holland, *Opera Mineralia, sive de lapido philosophico* (Middelburg, 1600).

⁵⁸ Annelies van Gijzen, “Isaac Hollandus Revisited,” in *Chymia: Science and Nature in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Miguel López Pérez, Didier Kahn and Mar Rey Bueno (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 310-330. The historian Karl Christoph Schmieder concludes ‘that they [the Hollanduses] should be placed in the middle between Arnaldus and Paracelsus, that is, about the year 1425.’ Quoted and translated in Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 290. On these figures, see Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, especially Chapter 22: “Isaac Hollandus and His Son John Isaac,” 289-292. Jole Shackelford writes that ‘Isaac Holland was, probably, a post-Paracelsian alchemical author, who was believed to have lived in the fifteenth century because of the similarities between his writings and those of Paracelsus’. Jole Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus (1540/2-1602)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004), 74.

any alchemical success is attributed to God.⁵⁹ The index contains references to the specific processes involved in the alchemical work, including separating, conjoining, purging, and rubifying.⁶⁰ In the production of the Philosopher's Stone, the adept is instructed to follow nature, showing the same suggestion that the processes of nature are revealed in the art of alchemy seen also in the 'Tymme'.⁶¹ Holland's work was extremely popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, so much so that that he and his father become examples of lucrative good luck in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (first performed in 1610):

FACE	Will he win at cards too?
SUBTLE	The spirits of dead HOLLAND, living ISAAC
	You'd sweare, were in him: such a vigorous luck
	As cannot be resisted (I.ii.108-11). ⁶²

Moreover, in the dedication of *Opera Mineralia* (1600), it was presented as a truth universally accepted that none other than Paracelsus himself depended upon the work of John Isaac Holland. The unknown L. D. who wrote the dedication added that Paracelsus certainly would not grudge 'Hollandus' his due praise.⁶³

The same syncretism of alchemical knowledge and Christian theology promoted by both Arnald of Villanova and John Isaac Holland was foundational to the work of Paracelsus, in which alchemy, medicine, and theology are fused (as outlined in the introduction). A work defending this practical and spiritual Paracelsianism in both the Skipton catalogue and still extant in the Cumbria archive is the *Nova Disquisitio de Helia Artista Theophrasteo* (Marpurgi 1606).⁶⁴ The book was written by Raphael Eglin (1559-1622), a staunch Calvinist also known as 'Iconius', who 'combined New Testament studies with readings in prophetic mysticism, alchemy and Paracelsian natural

⁵⁹ John Isaac Holland, *Opera Mineralia, sive de lapide philosophico, omnia, duobus libris comprehensa*. (Middelberg, 1600), 26.

⁶⁰ WDHOTH/1/2, fol. 2r-5r.

⁶¹ Holland, *Opera Mineralia*, 76-77. This forms part of a much wider debate concerning art and nature and the place of early modern science within these spheres. See Abraham, *Dictionary*, 11-12.

⁶² Ben Jonson, *Vol. 5: Volpone; Epicoene; The Alchemist; Catiline* eds. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 306.

⁶³ Holland, *Opera Mineralia*, sigs. A5 r-v. See van Gijsen, "Isaac Hollandus Revisited," 311.

⁶⁴ WDHOTH/1/4.

philosophy'.⁶⁵ The text presents a manifesto of Paracelsian alchemy based in scripture, just as its author was noted for spreading Calvinist (or reformed) theology in an otherwise predominantly Lutheran Germany (in what was then the domain of Mortiz [Maurice], Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel).⁶⁶ Specifically aimed against Jesuit objections to transmutation, and with extended references to the writings of Paracelsus himself and other Paracelsian writers, such as Isaac Holland, Eglin refutes the objections posed by two Jesuits in particular: a professor of philosophy at the University of Ingolstadt, Balthasar Hagel (1551-1616), and philosopher and theologian, Benedict Pereria (1535-1610). Pereira's book, *De magia, de observatione somniorum et de divinatione astrologica Libri Tres. Adversus fallaces, et superstitiosas artes* (Ingolstadt, 1591), which has been cited as 'a model instance of the attitude taken by a Counter-Reformation author to the occult sciences', argued for the impossibility of alchemy and promoted the belief that superstitions, including alchemy, jeopardised Christian faith.⁶⁷ The Calvinist Eglin, who had studied in Geneva with reformed theologian Theodore Beza, used the *Nova Disquisitio* to defend alchemy as based in scripture.⁶⁸ The Clifford library, then, replete with a variety of esoteric and exoteric texts in both tracts and poetry, manuscript and printed books, displays a wide range of alchemical learning, but with a notably spiritual, medical, and Paracelsian bias that is firmly interlinked with Reformed Continental-cum-English Protestantism.

This rich stratum of sixteenth-century alchemy is encapsulated in microcosm in the books that, more than any other, has become synonymous with the alchemical library of the Cliffords: *The Margaret Manuscript*, a quarto volume of 138 folios, bound in leather in 1920 and embossed in gold lettering with the title, 'Receipts of Lady Margaret Wife of George, 3rd Earl of Cumberland

⁶⁵ Bruce T. Moran, "Alchemy, Prophecy, and the Rosicrucians: Raphael Eglinus and Mystical Currents of the Early Seventeenth Century," *Alchemy and Chemistry in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, eds. Piyo Rattansi and Antonio Clericuzio (Springer, 2012), 103; Martin Mulsow, "Ambiguities of the *Prisca Sapientia* in Late Renaissance Humanism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65.1 (2004): 1-13.

⁶⁶ Moran, "Alchemy, Prophecy, and the Rosicrucians," 103.

⁶⁷ Paul Richard Blum, *Studies on Early Modern Aristotelianism*, History of Science and Medicine Library 30; Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 164.

⁶⁸ Moran, "Alchemy, Prophecy, and the Rosicrucians," 107.

for Elixirs, Tinctures, Electuaries, Cordials, Waters, etc., MS circa (1550) with Her Annotations.⁶⁹ Here material is drawn together from medieval and Paracelsian traditions, exoteric and esoteric alchemy, and presented entirely in English. This is the book discovered by George Williamson in 1917, which was then deposited in the Cumbrian Archive in 1986, with a description (most likely written by Williamson himself) stating that the annotations in Lady Margaret's own hand were made in 1598.⁷⁰ Penny Bayer's important 2005 article, which marks the first detailed analysis of the document, has demonstrated, however, that neither of the two hands (hands A and B) in the receipt book match that of Margaret Clifford.⁷¹

Building upon evidence for the manuscript's links to Clifford and John Dee (1527-1608/1609), Bayer advances the compelling hypothesis that 'the alchemist-vicar Christopher Taylour compiled the receipt book for Lady Margaret by liaising on her behalf with members of the Dee-Kelley circle'.⁷² But Sienna Louise Latham's recent work has demonstrated that Bayer's suggestion that this Taylor was Christopher Tailer, vicar of Bradford, is impossible. This is because while the Christopher Taylour of *The Margaret Manuscript*, compiled receipts for 'my two beloued Sonnes', the Christopher Tailer of Bradford left a substantial library to a single son and two daughters.⁷³ Nevertheless, the evidence certainly indicates that a chymist Christopher Taylour did compile the manuscript, as indicated by the presence of his name, the initials 'CT' (which appear throughout the MS), and the presence of hands similar to hands A and B in other alchemical manuscripts associated with Christopher Taylour.⁷⁴ Regardless of the specific identity of Taylour (or Tailer), Jan Bäcklund has suggested that manuscripts associated with Christopher Taylour, now

⁶⁹ Cumbria Record Office, WDHOTH/1/5.; This manuscript is given the title, *The Margaret Manuscript*, by Penny Bayer in "Lady Margaret Clifford's Alchemical Receipt Book and the John Dee Circle," *Ambix* 52.3 (2005): 271-284.

⁷⁰ Letter from Richard Hall, Archivist, Cumbria County Council, 20 October 1998. Cited in Penny Bayer, "Lady Margaret Clifford's Alchemical Receipt Book and the John Dee Circle," *Ambix* 52.3 (2013): 271

⁷¹ Bayer, "Lady Margaret Clifford's Alchemical Receipt Book," 271-84.

⁷² Bayer "Lady Margaret Clifford's Alchemical Receipt Book," 271-274, 284.

⁷³ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 36v and 116v. See Sienna Louise Latham, "*Lady Alcumy*": *Elizabethan Gentlemen and the Practice of Chymistry*. Unpublished thesis (Victoria University of Wellington, 2010), 127.

⁷⁴ WDHOTH/1/5., fol. 77r; for Taylour's hand see Ashmole MSS 1392, 1406, 1447, 1450, 1482 and 1492.

in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, appears to have a direct connection to Edward Kelley (1555-1597/8), or, at least, to an English alchemical circle around him and John Dee.⁷⁵ The manuscripts that Bäcklund classes in the ‘Christopher Taylour’ group contain two manuscript volumes bearing the signature ‘Kelley’, with numerous references to persons in contact with Dee and Kelley. Indeed, these manuscripts are strong evidence of the transmission of continental alchemical material between Prague and England at the time.⁷⁶ The same is true of *The Margaret Manuscript*.

With ascriptions that range across England as well as the Continent, *The Margaret Manuscript* makes specific references to the alchemical circles surrounding Edward Kelley and John Dee in Prague: ‘To make the excellent waters out of Saturne to Dysolve Perle for Medicyne: And to open the Bodies of Mettales [...] 47em of Sr Edward Kelles brother’; ‘for the falling sickness [...] Taught by Sir Edward Kelle’; ‘A worcke of the Smerell stone [...] pro Sr Ed Kelle.’⁷⁷ The reference to ‘Mr Digges his Booke of his owne gatherings’ most likely refers to Thomas Digges (1546–1595) the mathematician and a close friend of Dee, whose name appears also in the ‘Christopher Taylour’ group of manuscripts at Copenhagen connected to the Dee-Kelley circle.⁷⁸ A treatise ‘taught unto Sr Ed: Dyar by a frenche gentleman, that Mr Webb brought over sea into Englande’ is, in all probability, a reference to the Thomas Webb, an alchemical friend and colleague of John Dee too.⁷⁹ In 1591, Webb was sent by Elizabeth I to Prague in an attempt to resolve a diplomatic catastrophe and rescue Sir Edward Dyer from house arrest, after the hot-tempered Kelley had

⁷⁵ Jan Bäcklund, “In the Footsteps of Edward Kelley: some MSS References at the Royal Library Copenhagen Concerning an Alchemical Circle around John Dee and Edward Kelley,” *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 193, ed. Stephen Clucas (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 295–330 (298).

⁷⁶ Bäcklund, “In the Footsteps of Edward Kelley,” 298–300, 309.

⁷⁷ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 19r–20; fol. 25r–26r; fol. 63v.

⁷⁸ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 44r. See Robert Goulding, “Wings (or Stairs) to the Heavens: The Parallactic Treatises Of John Dee And Thomas Digges,” and Stephen Johnston, “Like Father, Like Son?: John Dee, Thomas Digges and the Identity of the Mathematician,” in *John Dee*, ed. Stephen Clucas, 41–63, 64–84; Bäcklund, “In the Footsteps of Edward Kelley,” 300.

⁷⁹ WDHOTH/1/5., fol. 5v. Thomas Webb introduced Dee to alchemical patrons, assisted with his alchemy, and kept a room in Dee’s house. See Glynn Parry, *The Arch Conjuror of England: John Dee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 240.

killed an imperial official in a duel.⁸⁰ In 1591, John Dee's diary records that Dyer sent him money via Thomas Webb.⁸¹ It is entirely possible that alchemical receipts accompanied this money.

More than one reference to a Lord Willoughby, another member of the Dee-Kelley circle, also crops up in *The Margaret Manuscript*: 'My L: Willoughby' has named a receipt of silver for pains in the head 'the Vitrioll of Luna', said to be 'Had of Sir Edwarde Kelles brother'.⁸² Similarly, the *Manuscript* describes a recipe for 'A Mercuriall water to dissolve gold and to make as Elixer therof', which was said to have been 'given by Sir Edward Kellye unto the Lorde Willoby att his departure from him att his house neer Prage'.⁸³ In all likelihood, these references are to Peregrine, Lord Willoughby (1555–1601), who, prior to his appointment to Governor of Berwick-on-Tweed in 1598 which brought him into contact with Margaret Clifford, was an English ambassador *in the service of Queen* Elizabeth I, and so involved in multiple diplomatic missions also linked to Continental alchemical circles.⁸⁴ In 1582, for instance, he was sent on an embassy to Helsingør, Denmark, to invest Frederik II with the Order of the Garter on behalf of the queen. On this embassy, he was accompanied by Thomas Moffet, the English Paracelsian physician, who, some seventeen years later, would combine poetry and natural philosophy in the first Virgilian georgic poem published in English, *The Silkenwormes and their Flies* (1599), notably dedicated to the same Countess of Pembroke who appears as the dedicatee in Lanyer's *Salve Deus*.⁸⁵

At the Danish court, it is likely that Willoughby met the prominent alchemist Petrus Severinus, personal physician to the king, who would later be attacked by Libavius for his support

⁸⁰ Parry, *The Arch Conjuror of England* 216.

⁸¹ July 28th, 1591, J. O. Halliwell, ed. *The Private Diary of Dr John Dee, and the Catalogue of his Library of Manuscripts, from the Original Manuscripts in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and Trinity College Library, Cambridge*, Camden Society Publications 19 (London: The Camden Society, 1842), 38.

⁸² WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 20r.

⁸³ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 21v.

⁸⁴ D. J. B. Trim, ed. "Bertie, Peregrine, thirteenth Baron Willoughby of Willoughby, Beck, and Eresby," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸⁵ Victor Houlston, "Moffet [Moufet, Muffet], Thomas [T. M.] (1553–1604)," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of Paracelsian theory and the Calvinist belief it supported.⁸⁶ From Prague, Willoughby sent back to the English court a piece of pure silver which had apparently been produced from a brass warming-pan.⁸⁷ It is also clear that Willoughby came into contact with Edward Kelley in Prague, as he was sent by Queen Elizabeth to investigate claims that Kelley was carrying out successful transmutations abroad. *The Margaret Manuscript* records a recipe for ‘A Mercuriall Water to dysolve Sol and to make an Elixer thereof given by Sr Ed: Kellye unto the Lorde Willobye att his departure from him att his house neer Prage.’⁸⁸ In a letter to Mr. Aldrich in Norwich (1649), Arthur Dee, the son of John Dee, also speaks of how Lord Willoughby was a witness of transmutations in Bohemia.⁸⁹ On 3 December, 1593, Dee himself records a visit from Willoughby at his house in Mortlake, where, significantly, another attendant was Margaret Clifford, who had arrived with Willoughby’s sister, the Countess of Kent.⁹⁰ Given Clifford’s alchemical interests and the company in residence, it is hard not to think that alchemy was discussed at this gathering.

Had Clifford desired news, or even receipts, from the Continent, Dee, as well as Willoughby, would have been in a prime position to provide such valuable information (in the vernacular). In the months and years before this visit, Dee repeatedly recorded receiving letters from Kelley and his brother (e.g. letter, dated March 28th, 1594); the exchange of a glass with Kelley, which happened less than a month after Kelley had returned from Prague (December 4th,

⁸⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Court Physician and Paracelsianism,” in *Medicine at the Courts of Europe, 1500-1837*, ed. Vivian Nutton (London: Routledge, 1990), 79-94 (91); Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*, 297.

⁸⁷ This account is taken from Ashmole’s *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652), 481-82. Willoughby’s identity is confirmed in Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops who Have Had Their Education in the University of Oxford. To which are Added the Fasti, Or Annals of the Said University, Volume 1* (London: Rivington, 1813), 280. Quoted in Michael Wilding, “A Biography of Edward Kelly, the English Alchemist and Associate of Dr. John Dee,” in Stanton J. Linden, ed., *Mystical Metal of Gold: Essays on Alchemy and Renaissance Culture* (AMS Press, New York, 2007), 35-89 (55-6).

⁸⁸ *The Margaret Manuscript*, fol. 21v. This is quoted in Bayer, “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book,” 277.

⁸⁹ Wilding, “A Biography of Edward Kelly,” n. 77. (85)

Northamptonshire Record Office, Isham Papers, IC 272, “Arthur Dee to Mr Aldrich,” Norwich, 15 December 1649, Autograph. Cited in Bayer, “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book,” 275.

⁹⁰ ‘The Lord Willowghby his bowntifull promys to me. The Cowntess of Kent, his systers, and the Cowntess of Cumberland visited me in the afternone. The Lord Willowghby dyned with me.’ Entry dated 3. December 1593. MS Ashmole 487.

1588); a visit from the alchemist, Thomas Webb (July 31st, 1591), whose ‘chest, and case of boxes’ would later be seized from Dee’s house (January 9th, 1594).⁹¹ On the basis of these rich connections between Kelley, Dee, Willoughby, and Clifford, Penny Bayer has advanced the compelling suggestion that a ‘bountiful promise’ fulfilled by Willoughby to Dee on 3 December 1593, took the form of gifted receipts that would later be compiled into *The Margaret Manuscript*.⁹² Clifford’s proximity to Willoughby and Dee provides a compelling solution for how a manuscript seemingly so closely tied to the Dee-Kelley circle in Prague found its way into the Clifford library, and was later catalogued by Williamson in 1917. As Bayer notes, this visit provided Clifford with the opportunity to access receipts from the Dee circle dating from 1593–1594.⁹³ Moreover, Dee’s move to Manchester in 1598 would have brought him closer to the Clifford estates and Clifford had the opportunity to contact him through intermediaries: Robert Leigh, a local man and friend to Clifford, and his brother, Charles Leigh, who worked at Christ’s College, Manchester, alongside Dee.⁹⁴

The Margaret Manuscript is testament to the dissemination of Continental alchemical knowledge in England. It also speaks to how Clifford, despite residing at Clifton, was herself part of a courtly, London-based coterie of alchemical practitioners. In addition, one can broaden the circle to encompass alchemical centres in the Southwest, including Dee’s house at Mortlake (near London) and the Sidneys’ at Wilton (near Salisbury). Figures such as Lord Willoughby, Sir Edward Dyer, and Thomas Webb all shuttled between the Continent and the capital, thereby suggesting the London links, while the northern connections are suggested by a ‘practis to make Luna used by a gentlewoman of yorke’: i.e. Clifford.⁹⁵ A circle of alchemists and natural philosophers was also associated with Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland, ‘The Wizard Earl’, whose library at

⁹¹ Halliwell, ed. *The Private Diary of Dr John Dee*, 29, 38-9, 47. In 1594, Webb was exiled to the Netherlands for alchemically counterfeiting £2,000 worth of Elizabeth shillings. TNA E 178/2939, quoted in Glynn Parry, *The Arch Conjuror of England: John Dee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 240.

⁹² Bayer, “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book,” 284.

⁹³ Bayer, “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book,” 284.

⁹⁴ Bayer, “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book,” 284.

⁹⁵ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 52r.

Syon House in London was one of the largest in England at the time and contained numerous Paracelsian texts.⁹⁶ Alnwick Castle was his place of residence in the north and he also had estates in Yorkshire and Cumberland, which would have brought him into proximity with the Cliffords.⁹⁷ The *Margaret Manuscript* suggests that dissemination of alchemical texts was taking place to and from the Clifford library. If, as Bayer has argued, the manuscript evidences a commission from Clifford, and effort to gain access to alchemical texts in the vernacular, this commission encapsulates a desire for alchemical knowledge of a particular kind.⁹⁸

Much as in the wider library, within *The Margaret Manuscript*, references to standard medieval authorities are supplemented by references to more contemporary sources, with particularly strong Paracelsian influences. Directions to the books attributed to 13th-century authors, such as Raymond Lull ('Clavicula Raymundi Lillii'), Gerber ('Studdye well my ecphrasticall comentarie upon Geber of his Bookes of Alchymie'), and Arnald of Villanova ('Arnolde de villanova his Epistles')⁹⁹ sit alongside references to Paracelsian texts, such as those by Philippi a Rovillasco ('Remember what Phillip Rovillasco writes of copper') and A Portu Aquitanus ('yo muste allsoe peruse the Regina seu Canones aliquat philosophici de lapide philosophico: sett foorth in printe by B.G.L. a Portu').¹⁰⁰ Particularly plentiful are the recommendations to the Paracelsian Isaac Holland (already mentioned): these include mention of 'Workes of John Isaacus Hollandus', an injunction to read them ('What I would have you reade Joannis Isaaci, his written workes'), and advice based on them ('You shall finde also the making of good tinckture fixing strong waters in the works of John Isaakus Hollandus').¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Stephen Clucas, "Corpuscular Matter Theory in the Northumberland Circle," in *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories*, ed. Christoph Lüthy, John E. Murdoch, and William R. Newman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 181-207; G. R. Batho, "The Library of the 'Wizard' Earl: Henry Percy Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)," *The Library* 4.1 (1960), 246-261.

⁹⁷ Mark Nicholls, "Percy, Henry, ninth earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)," ODBN (Oxford University Press, 2008)

⁹⁸ Bayer, "Women's Alchemical Literature 1560-1616," 216.

⁹⁹ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 43r, 44r. Three books from Gerber are cited at fols. 134r, 44r.

¹⁰⁰ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 43v, 6r.

¹⁰¹ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 44r, 40r, fol. 56v.

The richest number of references, however, are to the works of Paracelsus himself. He is framed as the most helpful guide to alchemy in the manuscript beyond the compiler himself; and the reader is instructed to follow the ‘good advise of Paracelsus in his bookes of natural things [and] his Booke De Vexatione’. When making the Philosopher’s Stone, one is told that ‘Paracelsus will herein helpe you well if you observe him well.’¹⁰² This last exhortation is particularly evident in a list of alchemical recommended reading (fols. 43v-44r) in which more books by Paracelsus are cited than any other author: ‘Paracelsis his Manuale’, ‘And his Booke of the Compositione of Mettales’, ‘Paracelsus his booke De tinctura physicorum’, ‘Paracelsus his booke De Gradationes’, ‘Paracelsus his booke De Cementis’, and ‘Paracelsus his Archidoxces’.¹⁰³

The spiritual-alchemical emphasis of the manuscript is most plainly in evidence in the section entitled, ‘A Treatise on Cachelah’. This treatise is said to have been ‘trauncelated out of a Frenche coppye’ and inserted amongst the practical instructions of the manuscript. As Lauren Kassell notes, it was most likely connected to the anonymous Paracelsian treatise (now attributed to Alexander von Suchten) that was copied by Simon Forman, the same astrologer whom Aemilia Lanyer visited in 1598.¹⁰⁴ Both treatises are concerned with the use of the element ‘antimony’ in alchemical transmutation, though the word ‘cako’ is substituted for this element in Forman’s copy of the treatise. In ‘A Treatise on Cachelah’ itself, we find the writer declaring:

I will not mention but of the $\odot$ [antimony] of the sphere. For as much as you are desireouse to understand only what the woorke Chachelah signifieth wch in the germayne tongue is called Spitzglasse, I will willingly heare geve you myne opynion thereofe you must understande me in this my writinge but literallye for I use not unto you any Metaphors similitudes or allegories, but only doe write unto you of Chachelah after the maner of auncient pens to thence that in the operations which comonlye Menne adde to the letter you be nott hindred: but that you may attaine unto that wch I write, whereby you may iudge whether in the common Cachelah there be that Archanum chymicum and medececyne, whyereof the Magi and Paracelsus doe speake or nott.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 37r, 41r.

¹⁰³ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 44r.

¹⁰⁴ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 77r-95v; Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 176, 179.

¹⁰⁵ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 77r.

While the author does indeed draw upon metaphor and allegory throughout the treatise, this distinctly Paracelsian manifesto calls upon the reader to pay particular attention to the process of producing and using antimony. Through this, they may judge whether this common element of antimony does indeed contain the ‘Archanum chymicum’, or the divine signatures in nature that Paracelsus. The authors suggests that this act of interpretation aligns the reader with biblical magi, drawing on Jewish kabbalah (whom he crucially recast as members of the spiritual elect).¹⁰⁶ The treatise, then, is both practical and spiritual in nature: on the one hand, to practise alchemy is to come to a better understanding of the divine order; on the other, to follow it is to walk in the footsteps of the spiritual elect. Of equal importance is that, as in Paracelsus, the alchemical work performed is ultimately ascribed to the power of God: ‘the Misteries of Nature doe in sue out of one fountaine and are one [...] but miraculously severed accordinge to the will of God, this will is the Specifick of all his creatures, which is not comprehensible to sence, no more then God is.’¹⁰⁷ The treatise closes with a prayer to God: ‘God Allmightie illuminate by his holy Spirite all lovers of trueth and deliver them from the deepe darkenes and the unprofitable bablinge of such as bee skylfull onlye by opinion.’¹⁰⁸ The true alchemist, the text implies, is a pious one, understanding that any success or skill is holy in origin, dependent on God’s will.

This dual emphasis in the treatise on the power of alchemy as one with the power of God (the latter an emphasis in Reformed theology) is congenial to Urszula Szulakowska’s persuasive argument that Paracelsianism and Reformed Protestantism were entwined in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, though her argument is made with reference to the visual world of alchemical symbols in the printed literature of this period.¹⁰⁹ As in Paracelsus’ theory of lights, whereby access to the divine in nature is dependent upon an adept first receiving the Light

¹⁰⁶ Webster, *Paracelsus*, 65-67. For Paracelsus’s approach to medicine as a product of Reformation tensions, see Webster, “Paracelsus: Medicine as Popular Protest,” 64-74.

¹⁰⁷ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 80r.

¹⁰⁸ WDHOTH/1/5, fol. 94v.

¹⁰⁹ Urszula Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation*. (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

of Grace infused by God, so the grace of Reformed Protestantism is seen in both the *Margaret Manuscript* and, also, in Lanyer's poetry as a gift given by God *only* to the elect.¹¹⁰ This interfusion of grace—which links the alchemical adept and the Calvinist elect—is of crucial importance as we examine contemporary descriptions of Lanyer's patron, Margaret Clifford, by her male contemporaries as well as Lanyer herself.

‘THAT RECTEFIED OYLE OF GRATIOUSNES’: READING MARGARET CLIFFORD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WILLOUGHBY LETTERS

The letters from Peregrine, Lord Willoughby (1555–1601) to Margaret Clifford (WDHOTH/3/44/59-62) provide essential context for applying an alchemical lens to her life and reading, as well as to her influence over her ardent admirer, Lanyer.¹¹¹ Following a successful military career, and having distinguished himself in the Netherlands, Lord Willoughby was appointed Governor of Berwick-on-Tweed in 1598; it is from here that he wrote to Margaret Clifford. They had certainly met at Dee's house at Mortlake in 1593, and their letters reflect this, framed as they are by various forms and terms that speak at once to a pronounced intimacy as well as a carefully judged diplomacy. All four letters display signs of letter-locking, with three out of the four exhibiting the remnants of flossing, the practice of using colourful silk embroidery floss to secure letters.¹¹² They therefore provide an example of a wider practice marked for its intimacy, as Heather Wolfe discusses in her survey of silk-flossed letters:

The subject matter of these letters, always written in a familiar and affectionate tone, is wide-ranging, including letters of gratitude, request, intimacy, loyalty, desperation, and diplomacy. The unusual format strengthens the rhetorical impact of the letter,

¹¹⁰ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 189

¹¹¹ Trim ed. “Bertie, Peregrine, thirteenth Baron Willoughby of Willoughby, Beck, and Eresby.”

¹¹² Heather Wolfe, “‘Neatly sealed, with silk, and Spanish wax or otherwise’: the practice of Letter-locking with Silk Floss in Early Modern England,” *In the Prayse of Writing* ed. S. P Cerasano and Steven W. May (London: British Library, 2012), 169-189 (169).

encapsulating the voice of the sender in an intimate gift, more private and meaningful than a letter folded and sealed in a more typical manner.¹¹³

Although Clifford's replies to Willoughby do not survive, we know from Wolfe that in all likelihood these letters would also have been flossed in the same style, not least as Clifford is identified amongst those known to follow the practice.¹¹⁴ Willoughby's correspondence, then, is suggestive of a familiarity with the customs of the family and, also, courtly etiquette. The idiosyncratic mode of communication declares shared membership of an elite circle of letter writers, and its floss embodies the personal ties upon which a coterie relies.

More than this, however, Willoughby's flossed correspondence carries with it the undertones of a more exclusive connection: one based on shared knowledge of the esoteric—namely, the alchemical.¹¹⁵ It is tempting to interpret the colours of the floss as indicative of some alchemical symbolism. Where the floss survives it is in light blue and pale pinkish-plum.¹¹⁶ The colours of blue and purple are both associated with the alchemical process, representing different stages in the production of the tincture, or the philosopher's stone. However, to read the floss as in some way gesturing towards this process is perhaps to over-invest meaning in the choice of colours; in addition to symbolic meanings, the colour of the silk was, as Wolfe adds, 'often related to availability, convenience, and current fashion.'¹¹⁷ Regardless of whether these colours have alchemical significance or not, they nevertheless stand as a physical reminder of how the letters—like a book of secrets or collection of alchemical recipes—were accorded great value as they passed between Willoughby and Clifford.

Certainly, Willoughby's letters dwell on the subject of alchemy. In a letter dated 23 March, written between 1598 and 1601 (WDHOTH/3/44/59), Willoughby makes extended reference to

¹¹³ Wolfe, "Neatly sealed, with silk," 170.

¹¹⁴ Wolfe, "Neatly sealed, with silk," 181.

¹¹⁵ See 'azure' and 'purple tincture' in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 15, 159.

¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, the floss does not survive on WDHOTH/3/44/59. WDHOTH/3/44/60-61 are flossed in a light blue, WDHOTH/3/44/62 in a pale pinkish-plum.

¹¹⁷ Wolfe identifies shades of pink as particularly common, perhaps due to its association with Elizabeth I. Wolfe, "Neatly sealed, with silk," 174.

Clifford's alchemical practice, praising her as a 'noble phylosophying Lady', who has 'learned the art of Separation, to draw the spirit from the body to add it to it agayne, things dead to live, living things apparent dead, yet having in concealed beinge a multiplied life.'¹¹⁸ Even more strikingly, Willoughby hails Clifford as the contemporary exemplar of the practice, placing her in the privileged position in a historical line of notable alchemists:

So did Hermis, So did Salomon, So did Ripley, and So did Kelley. And now comes my La: of Cumberland knowinge how of dissolved putrefied bodies no good can be looked for without sublimatinge.¹¹⁹

Clifford's lineage as an alchemical adept begins with Hermes Trismegistus, author of the Hermetic Corpus, through to Solomon or Salomon Trismosin, teacher of Paracelsus. Both of these were legendary authors, and texts (in Latin) attributed to them were widely circulating in England at this time. The lineage progresses to George Ripley and to Clifford's contemporary, Edward Kelley, the English alchemist who, with John Dee, had hoped to heal the rift of Christendom through alchemy and angelic knowledge.¹²⁰ Each of these alchemists were part of a tradition in which alchemy is both physical and spiritual; in Willoughby's letter, Clifford ascends, as one of the 'elect', to this inheritance as an alchemical adept for the current times.

Throughout his letter, Willoughby implies that Clifford is more than simply a chrysopoetic alchemist, since she is also involved in *spiritual* alchemy. Willoughby draws a dichotomy between the earthly and the spiritual in his assertion that the 'works' Clifford is involved in 'are not natures effeck but wisdoms works...as in Eccleseasticus 8'. The reference here is to Ecclesiastes 8, which seeks to answer the question, 'Who is as the wise man? And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?' (Eccl.8:1).¹²¹ The answer provided is, 'When I applied mine heart to knowe wisdom, and to behold the busines that is done on earth, that neither day nor night the eyes of man take sleepe,

¹¹⁸ WDHOTH/3/44/6, fol. 59r.

¹¹⁹ WDHOTH/3/44/6, fol. 59r.

¹²⁰ Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, 269-9; Anthony Gross, "Ripley, George (d. c. 1490)," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Louise Schleiner, "Kelley, Sir Edward (1555–1597/8)," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹²¹ All quotations from the Bible in this chapter are taken from the Geneva Version. *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1560 edition* (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

'Then I behelde the whole worke of God' (Eccl. 8:16-17). But what, we might ask, is the wisdom contained here, and what is the knowledge that Clifford is interpreting? More to the point, what does Willoughby see specifically as the work of God?

Throughout his letter, Willoughby figures himself as older and frailer than Clifford, thereby extolling the transformative effect that her contact has had upon him. The letter dwells on the ravages of his older age: in terms of his body, Willoughby is figured as 'crooked', an 'old mans selfe'. Sapped of life's vitality, he confesses that his lines are 'frozen isecles [icicles]', which allows Willoughby to pre-emptively forestall any criticism 'for the barraines [barrenness] of their substance [~~might~~] have made you condemne the best cullour they had of whitenes.' The profound loyalty he feels towards Clifford—he says he is 'bound to her'—transmutes what might once have been read as a passionate, even embellished, overture, to a dependence that reverts again to the frailties of his age, which have happily fettered him to her rejuvenating presence. Clifford's great skill in alchemy, Willoughby suggests, extends also to her effect upon others; indeed, her God-like ability to make 'things dead to live' is not simply a description of metallurgical transmutation but a transformative power, communicated here through the form of her letters, that carries with it the signature of a resurrection of sorts:

She brings a dead body into the Alembic head of fine conceit, then disgests, then revives it, and lastly proiects that rectefied oyle of Gratiounes upon an old bowed plate of Saturne, and by her artifice makes the old mans selfe beleave he is not metall mutch inferiour to his grandchild Sol.¹²²

Ostensibly, this follows on from Willoughby's praise of Clifford's alchemical ability, containing a straightforward transmutation of lead (indicated by 'Saturn') to gold (indicated by 'Sol'). The language draws upon the alchemical tradition that each of the seven planets in the solar system was associated with and 'ruled' a certain metal. Heavily symbolic and allegorical, alchemical language often personified elements in this way.¹²³ Here, however, the 'old bowed plate' is at once

¹²² WDHOTH/3/44/6, fol. 59r

¹²³ See Abraham, *Dictionary*, xvii.

the metallurgically base lead and Willoughby himself, who elsewhere compares himself to ‘an old Hermite’.

While he was actually only in his mid-forties at the time of writing the letter, Willoughby suffered increasingly ill health in the last years of his life and died before reaching the age of fifty.¹²⁴ His letters are littered with allusions to his ‘sick recovered braine’, his ‘sufferings’, and his ‘selfe yet weake’. Beneath the description of transmuted metal lies an altogether more tender image—that of the old grandfather, bowed with age, regenerated through contact with Clifford—that implies a spiritual benefit as well as a physical one. As Clifford skilfully transmutes and purifies a metal in her alchemical alembic, so she makes the physically weak Willoughby feel young again through the ingenious language or conceit of her gracious letters, here envisaged as ‘the oyle of Gratiuousnes’. Much as the Paracelsian Light of Grace ushers the adept into a knowledge of the inner virtues of elements in nature, so the letters bring Willoughby into an awareness of his own inner virtue, not inferior to precious gold. Yet, crucially, here Clifford’s transmutation is achieved through the ‘oyle of Gratiuousnes’, which after repeated rectification, or purification, has been projected—that is to say, it has reached its most perfect state at the final stage in the alchemical opus.¹²⁵ Clifford’s influence, in other words, enacts the transformative power of Grace, ascribed only to God in Willoughby’s Paracelsian alchemy and the distinctly Reformed theology to which it is here tied.

The same letter contains suggestive hints as to how she has attained this unprecedented position. He draws upon another parallel, positioning Clifford as Octavia, in order to re-emphasise her spiritual-alchemical learning:

but I may not forget these last. Your elect history and your passionat ~~Cleopatra~~ <Octavia>. To the last I say as Daniel to Nebucadnezzar be this dreame far from that K. and happen it on his ennemies. If you have any suche ones I Wishe them worse than Antonies. For whan all is said that that may be Antony was a good felow Cleopatra, a sunn shine day,

¹²⁴ Lord Willoughby writes to Clifford from Berwick where he was Governor from 1598 to his death in 1601. The comparison of Clifford to Octavia may date the letter more specifically to a date after 1599, as this is when the famous comparison of Clifford to that ‘great afflicted Lady’ (l. 10) was made in Samuel Daniel’s *A Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius*. Samuel Daniel, *The complete works in verse and prose of Samuel Daniel*, ed. Grosart (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, 1885), I:114. Trim, ed. “Bertie, Peregrine, thirteenth Baron Willoughby of Willoughby, Beck, and Eresby,”

¹²⁵ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 164-5, 157-8

And ~~Cleop~~ <Octavia> a ritch clasped booke wherein the secrets of all good wifery is contayned.¹²⁶

Contemporaneously to these letters, the Margaret-Octavia analogy was publicly suggested by Samuel Daniel's 1599 dedication of *A Letter sent from Octavia to her husband Marcus Antonius into Egypt* to Margaret Clifford. This notably came on the heels of George Clifford's adultery and their consequent estrangement in the late 1590s.¹²⁷ In this poem, Clifford and Octavia both embody the 'great afflicted Lady' (l. 10) and the 'Most vertuous Ladie' (l. 14), exemplars of constancy and nobility in suffering.¹²⁸

Willoughby draws the same parallel as Daniel yet his comparison, appearing on the verso of the page where he has praised her alchemical skill, is invested with rich new signification. Willoughby reminds Clifford of 'your elect history and your passionat Octavia', thereby reinscribing their shared Calvinist faith, and offering another exemplar of stoic constancy in the face of marital difficulty. Stoicism had a long connection with both Christianity and spiritual alchemy, with all three aligning in their pursuit of spiritual regeneration based upon a pure and cleansed heart.¹²⁹ It therefore comes as no surprise to find similar imagery echoed by Anne Clifford in the *Great Books of Record*, where she writes, 'For as Gould is tryed in the fire so was her vertue tryed in the unkindnesses, sorrowes and mifortunes of this life.'¹³⁰

But when Willoughby speaks of Clifford as 'Octavia' with 'a ritch clasped boke [book] wherein the secrets of all good wifery is contayned', we cannot help but wonder what these secrets are. The reference to the 'ritch clasped boke' of secrets conjures up the same book of secrets dedicated to Clifford's father: the 1558 English translation of the *Secrets* of Alessio Piemontese. This prototype, and most popular 'secrets books', although not specifically targeted at women,

¹²⁶ WDHOTH/3/44/59

¹²⁷ Malay, "Positioning Patronage," 254-5.

¹²⁸ Daniel, *The complete works in verse and prose of Samuel Daniel*, I:114.

¹²⁹ The close relationship of Stoic ideas, the redemptive theme, gnosticism and alchemy is highlighted by H.J. Sheppard in "The Redemptive Theme and Hellenistic alchemy," *Ambix*, 7 (1959): 42-46, and "Gnosticism and Alchemy," *Ambix*, 6 (1957): 86-101.

¹³⁰ Jessica L. Malay ed. *Anne Clifford's Great Books of Record* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 729

includes home remedies, distillation, perfumery, dyeing, colouring, metalwork, and recipes with a strong emphasis upon practical application and lived experience. Given that Piemontese writes, ‘there is nothing in this Book but is true and experimented’, it seems more than likely that Willoughby’s imagery is figuring Clifford as a kind of proof for the majestic secrets contained in, and produced by, such a marvellous combination of domestic skill and alchemy (as in the case of Clifford-as-Octavia).¹³¹

However, in this particular type of ‘wifery’, Willoughby suggests Clifford is privy to learning that he would not wish his own wife to pursue: ‘Good Madame let not my wife open it [the ritch clasped bok of secrets] therefore; least she become a proselite, forsake her bible and mistake my name’.¹³² There appears to be an uncomfortable tension between the suggestion that a woman might gain much from alchemical learning (as Clifford has) and the danger of too much knowledge (perhaps indicated by the cancellation of ‘Cleopatra’).¹³³ This letter nevertheless acts as praise to Clifford; after all, it is only an exceptional woman, who evinces a perfect combination of learnedness, constancy, and secrecy, and has the ability to stay faithful to her bible and so honour her husband despite her humiliation, who is deserving—even, *elected*—to practise this sort of domestic spiritual alchemy.

In like manner, Willoughby’s allusion to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar is particularly loaded. It refers to the Book of Daniel, in which Daniel interprets a dream of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon. This leads to the king’s elevation of Daniel over the false Babylonian magicians (who failed to interpret his dream) and, hence, his rejection of the false Babylonian gods, and his affirmation that Daniel’s God is ‘God of gods, and the Lord of Kings’ (Daniel 2:47). Daniel tells

¹³¹ ‘Don Alexis to the reader’ in Piemontese, *The Secretes of the reverende maister Alexis of Piemount*, trans. William Warde (London, 1558), sigs. *iir-v.

¹³² Piemontese, *The Secretes of the reverende maister Alexis of Piemount*, sigs. *iir-v.

¹³³ This tension is particularly odd given that alchemical knowledge often emulated ‘women’s work’. The *Secrets* of Alessio Piemontese suggest that knowledge can be sought from a range of sources, including from women: ‘I haue learned many goodlye secretes, not alonely of men of great knowledge and profound learning, and noble men, but also of poore wome[n] artificers, peysantes, and all sortes of men.’ ‘Don Alexis to the reader’ in Piemontese, *The Secretes of the reverende maister Alexis of Piemount*, sig. *ii.

the king, ‘My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies’ (Daniel 4:19), lamenting that the suffering foretold by prophecy is favourable to his enemies, and wishing it upon them rather than the king. Yet, in this biblical passage, Nebuchadnezzar’s suffering nonetheless leads to redemption—here, in the form of his awareness of the supremacy of the Hebrew God:

at the ende of these 61eme I Nebuchad-nezzar lift up mine eyes unto heauen, and mine understanding was restored vnto me, and I gaue thanks unto the most High, and I praysed and honoured him that liueth for euer, whose power is an euerlasting power, and his kingdome is from generation to generation (Daniel 4:31).

All of this reinforces how Willoughby’s ultimate choice to liken Clifford to Octavia, that virtuous model of suffering womanhood, signals his desire to show she was predestined to greatness. However, this comes with great suffering (which helps to explain the cancellation of his original choice for her likeness: Cleopatra). While a complimentary comparison that evokes greatness and dignity in suffering, Cleopatra’s name also carried with it the suggestion of witchcraft that Willoughby was perhaps keen to avoid associating with Clifford’s alchemical practice.¹³⁴

Willoughby here plays to great purpose with contrasting visions of femininity. Cleopatra is certainly a suggestive original choice: replete with great beauty, evoking magic, potions, and even, tangentially, alchemy (though her association with witchcraft might also threaten to denigrate that alignment).¹³⁵ But, in the end, Willoughby speaks of even her seemingly unsurpassable beauty as a ‘sunn shine day’—lovely but commonplace. Where ‘sunn shine day’ evokes ephemerality (recalling the Greek ‘ἐφήμερος’ or ‘lasting only a day’, the clasped book evokes endurance. Like a treasure chest, it hoards and preserves. Octavia and Clifford are elevated through their passionate suffering, and on account of their virtue, as models of ‘good wifery’, lauded with Christian praise. The virtuous Clifford has not only come to a richer understanding of God through her suffering

¹³⁴ See, for example, Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*, which associates Cleopatra’s allure with witchcraft. Anthony notably names Cleopatra as a witch in Act IV: ‘The witch shall die’ (4.13.47). *The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606), ed. Michael Neill in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹³⁵ Cleopatra or Kleopatra (200 AD) the alchemist as opposed to the Cleopatra VII, the source of Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*, was the famed inventor of the alembic. See Abraham, *Dictionary*, 5, 244.

but is also transformed to ‘a ritch clasped boke [book] wherein the secrets of all good wifery is contayned.’ Through a combination of her godliness and alchemy—what we might see as her ‘wisdoms works’—Clifford becomes an interpreter for these secrets, understanding them and translating them onto the page: she has ascended to the status of the wise man in Ecclesiastes 8, who ‘knoweth the interpretation of a thing’. This is the reason, Willoughby suggests, that Clifford is able to produce that most sacred and transformative ‘oyle of graciousness.’ It also brings her into closer contact with the figure of Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar recognises as having the gift of godly inspired interpretation:

This is the dreame, that I King Nebuchad-nezzar haue seene: therefore thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof: for all the wisemen of my kingdome are not able to shewe mee the interpretation: but thou art able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee (Daniel 4:15).

Through his godliness, Daniel is able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream; and through his suffering, Nebuchadnezzar comes to an understanding of God and so is admitted into a knowledge of the ‘truth’ (Daniel 4:34). But Willoughby is also arguably making another point here too. The same biblical passage was interpreted by the Jesuit Benedictus Pereirius, whose disputation of Paracelsianism formed the basis of Eglin’s *Nova Disquisitio* (1606) in the Clifford library, in an entirely different manner: he argued that the story of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar showed him how ascertaining the truth of dreams as part of his mission ‘to combat the plague of superstition’, including the pernicious influence of alchemy.¹³⁶ Willoughby suggests that Clifford’s interpretation of alchemy—like Daniel’s interpretation of the dream—evinces a state of grace that not only purifies herself, but also echoes the transformative nature of God’s grace operating through her. This strikes a double blow, not just against Pererius’ attack on alchemy, but the Catholic Church’s position as the only intermediary capable of dispensing God’s grace through its forms of worship. For Willoughby, the individual ‘oyle of graciousness’ possessed by Clifford surpasses the

¹³⁶ Paul Richard Blum, *Studies on Early Modern Aristotelianism*, History of Science and Medicine Library 30, Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 176.

ceremonial oils of the Roman Catholic Church. This grace is *irresistible*, as in Calvinist theology; Willoughby has no choice but to respond to its transformative effect.

Indeed, the transformative grace that Clifford here demonstrates is not simply Protestant in genesis; it also speaks to an even more radical version of alchemical spiritual religion that owes much to the work of the German Calvinist physician, Oswald Croll (ca.1560-1609). Latterly at the court of Rudolph II in Prague, Croll was instrumental in merging key concepts of Calvin's theology and Paracelsian alchemy into what Jitse M. van der Meer has described as 'Calvinist Paracelsianism'.¹³⁷

the Protestant idea of salvation by grace is translated into the Calvinist notion of grace acting *in* nature. God's sovereignty meant that the healing power of things is seen as depending on God's absolute power and not as an inherent activity of things themselves as in Paracelsianism. Croll translated the Paracelsian notion of occult spiritual powers hidden in natural things into the divine Word animating a passive nature. Further, the effect of grace included human nature. The proper interpretation of the symbolic meaning of things in nature is a gift of grace.¹³⁸

In Margaret Healy's valuable alchemical reading of *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, she concludes that Lanyer adopts 'an alchemical, Paracelsian paradigm through which to explore women's relation to nature, to the divine, and to the healing arts—both medicine and poetry' resulting in an alchemical feminist poetics.¹³⁹ Healy identifies Paracelsian alchemical medicine specifically as the source for Lanyer's feminist poetics due to the privileged position it affords to female nature, advancing a 'dynamic case for female creative potential' which figures Clifford as 'a gifted distiller of healing poetry through nature's special grace and God's celestial powers'.¹⁴⁰ What Healy's article does not broach, however, is that the central mediating role of grace in Lanyer presents a marked departure from how grace operates in Paracelsus. In Paracelsus, engagement with nature became 'an act of piety', through which he might earn access to the Light of Nature, and thus the Light of

¹³⁷Owen Hannaway, *The Chemists and the Word: The Didactic Origins of Chemistry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 47.

¹³⁸ Jitse M. van der Meer, "European Calvinists and the Study of Nature: Some Historical Patterns and Problems," in *Calvinism and the Making of the European Mind*, eds. Gijsbert van den Brink and Harro Höpfl (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 103-130 (114).

¹³⁹ Healy, "Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity," 77.

¹⁴⁰ Healy, "Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity," 95.

Grace.¹⁴¹ In Lanyer's specifically Calvinist Paracelsian *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, not only does the Countess manifest grace within herself, but also acts as an agent of God's regeneration, ushering Lanyer into a state of irresistible grace herself: 'I first obtain'd / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd (l. 1-2).¹⁴² The polysemous grace of Willoughby's letter now emerges in this one line through Lanyer's witty polyptoton in which grace signifies: the *social* relationship between patron and poet; the irresistible grace between God and his elect; but also the spiritually regenerative grace that is channelled *specifically* through the female mediator, Clifford, to Lanyer, and which Lanyer's poem thus reflects back at Clifford. Healy's reading of grace in Lanyer's poem requires reappraisal in the light of the Paracelsian Calvinism that Clifford espoused in both her personal connections and in her reading, both of which influenced Lanyer's poem, specifically *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*.

‘TO YOU I DEDICATE THIS WORKE OF GRACE’: READING AEMILIA LANYER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CLIFFORD LIBRARY

Both Croll and Lanyer give grace a central mediating role. As in Calvinism, where the elect were required to passively ‘respond to Christ's irresistible grace’, so, in Croll, the Light of Grace acts as a vital mediation between the adept and God.¹⁴³ In Croll, fallen man is entirely dependent upon God, attaining access to knowledge ‘by the help of Secrets and by Wisdome [...] revealed but to few, and by speciall knowledge which God gave them in this particular.’¹⁴⁴ This ‘speciall knowledge’

¹⁴¹ James Joseph Bono, *Word Of God and The Languages Of Man: Interpreting Nature In Early Modern Science And Medicine, Volume I: Ficino To Descartes* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 129-166 (156).

¹⁴² Clifford's role as spiritual mediator is further explored in White, “A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?” 323–41. Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 238.

¹⁴³ See Bono, *Word Of God*, 129-166 (156).

¹⁴⁴ Oswald Croll, *Philosophy reformed & improved in four profound tractates. The I. discovering the great and deep mysteries of nature: by that learned chymist & physitian Osu: Crollius. The other III. discovering the wonderfull mysteries of the creation by Paracelsus: being his philosophy to the Athenians. / Both made English by H. Pinnell, for the increase of learning and true knowledge* (London, 1657), 217-8.

crucially inflects Lanyer's own framing of grace throughout the *Salve Deus*, as can be seen when we consider how Lanyer interlinks the language of grace, medicine, and alchemy.

Before arriving at *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, the reader is met with 'To all vertuous Ladies in generall', a poem which exhorts women to offer up their thanks to Christ by referring in biblical imagery evoking 'the arte of the apothecarie' (Exodus 30:34-5):

Annoynt your haire with *Aarons* pretious oyle,
 And bring your palmes of vict'ry in your hands,
 To ouercome all thoughts that would defile
 The earthly circuit of your soules faire lands;
 Let no dimme shadowes your cleare eyes beguile:
 Sweet odours, mirrhe, gum, aloes, frankincense,
 Present that King who di'd for your offence (ll. 36-42)

Lanyer here fuses two biblical episodes in which oils and balms are used in relation to Aaron and Christ.¹⁴⁵ In Exodus, God instructed Moses 'thou shalt take the anoynting oyle, and shalt powre upon [Aaron's] head, and anoynt him' (Exodus 29:7) and 'sprinkle [the oyle] upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sonnes, and upon the garments of his sonnes with him' in order that all 'shall be halowed' and 'the Priestes office shalbe theirs for a perpetuall lawe' (Exodus 29:21, 29:7-9). Further, he is instructed to take 'spices, pure myrrhe and cleare gumme and galbanum, these odours with pure frankincense' and 'make of them perfume composed after the arte of the apothecarie, mingled together, pure and holy' (Exodus 30:34-5). In the New Testament, prior to Jesus's death, Mary 'anoynted Iesus feete, and wiped his feete with her heare, and the house was filled with the sauour of the oyntment' (John 12:3). As Lanyer's poem combines these sacred symbolic substances in her own apothecary mingling, she imagines women—both biblical as well as her contemporary readers—reenacting this sacred gesture in the honour of Christ. While maintaining the rejection of any doctrine of bodily presence or 'real' enactment, her alchemical poetics affords new ways to think about earthly encounters with the divine through heavily symbolic language.

¹⁴⁵ White, "A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?" 329.

As in Croll, God's 'speciall knowledge' takes the form of 'Physick' which 'taketh its rise from Theology or the Light of Grace, and endeth in the Light of Nature'.¹⁴⁶ Grace, given by God, ushers one into an understanding of nature and the healing arts. Throughout Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, Clifford is herself figured as a physical and spiritual healer in this very tradition. Her medicinal healing takes the form of an oblation to God as she goes about her 'almes-deeds' (l. 1335). This corroborates contemporary evidence that underscores Margaret Clifford's religious charity through medicine of a specifically alchemical kind. In 1652, Anne Clifford recorded in the Great Book of Records of the Cliffords that her mother

was a lover of the study and practice of alchimy, by which she found out excellent medicines, that did much good to many. She delighted in distilling of waters, and other chymical extractions, for she had some knowledge in most kind of minerals, herbs, flowers, and plants.¹⁴⁷

It is significant here that Anne highlights a knowledge of nature which, in Paracelsian alchemy, would mark Clifford out as an adept at spiritual and medicinal alchemy. Moreover, Clifford promoted the combination of spirituality and medicine in the chapel-hospital that she founded around 1593. Reportedly, Clifford was so saddened by the sight of the many poor women in the town of Beamsley near Skipton that she was motivated to found a hospital or alms-house for a mother and twelve sisters (all of whom were poor widows).¹⁴⁸ Margaret requested in her will that this work be continued by Anne, leading to the full completion of the hospital circa 1631.¹⁴⁹

It is perhaps this hospital to which Lanyer alludes when she writes that Clifford performs corporal healing when Christ comes to Clifford in the form of those who are 'naked, poore, and bare, / Full of diseases, impotent, and lame, / Blind, deafe, and dumbe' (ll. 1352-4). In these 'workes of mercy', Lanyer invokes Luke 9:1-2 where Christ commanded his disciples 'to heale

¹⁴⁶ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 90

¹⁴⁷ Anne Clifford, 'A Summary of Records and also a memorial of that religious and blessed lady, Margaret Russell, Countess of Cumberland', in *Lives of Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, and Montgomery (1590-1676) and of Her Parents Summarized by Herself*, ed. J. P. Gilson (London: Roxburghe Club, 1916), 19-20.

¹⁴⁸ Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford*, 10, 97-98.

diseases [...] and to cure the sicke'. Clifford enacts the ministry to the poor, and pastoral care that were a crucial part of the doctrine of Reformed Protestantism.¹⁵⁰ Her actions recall the sacred gestures of the Biblical women who honour Christ in 'To all vertuous Ladies in generall', by performing this medicinal Christian charity.

Lanyer details the exact nature of the virtue that Clifford exhibits. In Lanyer's 'Invective against outward beauty unaccompanied with virtue', virtue is defined as that which emulates the actions of 'Holy Matilda' (l. 233): to 'drinke that poison with a cheerfull heart, / That could all Heavenly grace to her impart' (ll. 247-8). This refers to literal poison, drunk by the virtuous Matilda when lustfully pursued by King John, as recounted in Michael Drayton's *Matilda* (1594); but it also signifies Clifford's capacity to face hardship with the Christian virtue of patience, seen here as a female fortitude where suffering is greater than military might.¹⁵¹ Lanyer declares that Clifford possesses this same virtue which, like Matilda, indicates Heavenly grace in her:

This Grace great Lady, doth possesse thy Soule,
And makes thee pleasing in thy Makers sight;
This Grace doth all imperfect Thoughts controule,
Directing thee to serue thy God aright (249-52)

Lanyer alludes here to Clifford's patience and forbearance in the face of her husband's well-known affair which earned her the comparison to Octavia that 'great afflicted Lady' in Samuel Daniel (*A Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius*, l. 10) and Lord Willoughby's letters.¹⁵² Clifford's forbearance and passive suffering are contrasted with the active verbs associated with God who, in recognition for this Christian virtue, 'possesse[s]' and 'controule[s]' her.

As in Croll, Clifford here is a passive receptacle of God's irresistible Grace, which directs her to his service—the same service that she then enacts through her charitable medical care for

¹⁵⁰ See Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially Chapter 7, "Pastoral Care of the Sick and Suffering in the Evangelical Church Ordinances," 163-184.

¹⁵¹ Woods, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, 61.; Michael Drayton, *Matilda The faire and chaste daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater. The true glorie of the noble house of Sussex* (London, 1594), sig. G2.

¹⁵² Samuel Daniel, *The complete works*, I:114.

the poor. A contemporary description of Clifford by her daughter Anne in the Great Book of Record in 1652 chimes with Lanyer's picture of Clifford:

And certainly this noble Countess had in her the infusion from above of many excellent knowledges and virtues both Divine and humane; which did bridle and keep under that great spirit of hers, and caused her to have the sweet peace of a heavenly and quiet mind.¹⁵³

As in both Croll and Lanyer, there is a firm acknowledgement that the knowledge granted to the elect is attributable only to God. Infused from 'above' Clifford's knowledge is figured here in an even more explicitly Calvinist way than in Lanyer while conveying the same sense: God's irresistible grace is as a 'bridle' to the passive Clifford, controlling her while also guiding her to heavenly service.¹⁵⁴ The nature of Clifford's knowledge is couched in the same terms as Tymme's translation of *The practise of chymicall, and hermeticall physicke*. Tymme argues that his book of spiritualised alchemy solves the 'Paradox' that '*Halchymie* should haue concurrence and antiquitie with *Theologie*, the one seeming 68eme *Humane*, and the other *Diuine*.'¹⁵⁵ This fusion of medicine with religion is practised in Margaret Clifford's practical herbal healing linked with religious devotion, now imagined by Lanyer as a re-enactment of the sacred gestures of the women attending Christ, but also including the healing actions of Christ himself.

The theological physician is specifically aligned with the Calvinist adept in Croll's insistence that the 'true Theologicall Phylosophy' should be 'grounded on Christ the corner stone' and 'Chrisitan-like' in its practice:

¹⁵³ Anne Clifford, 'A Summary of Records and also a memorial of that religious and blessed lady, Margaret Russell, Countess of Cumberland', in *Lives of Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, and Montgomery (1590-1676) and of Her Parents Summarized by Herself*, ed. J. P. Gilson (London: Roxburghe Club, 1916), 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ See Calvin, *Institutes*, *supra* n. 25, at II.iii.3: 'Others [the unregenerate] he merely restrains by throwing a bridle over them only that they may not break loose [...] Hence some are restrained by shame [...] others by the fear of the law [...] Still others, because they consider an honest manner of life profitable [...] Others rise above the common lot, in order by their excellence to keep the rest obedient to them. Thus God by his providence bridles perversity of nature, that it may not break forth into action; but he does not purge it within.' Quoted in C. Scott Pryor, "God's Bridle: John Calvin's Application of Natural Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 22.1 (2006/2007): 225-254.

¹⁵⁵ Tymme's dedication to "To The Right Honorable, Sir Charles Blun" in Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*. Perhaps Anne Clifford was inspired by this very translation, written by the same Tymme who had translated Fenner's *Sacred Divinitie* for her mother.

Nor are we onely to know all Nature externally and internally, but we are also to make it our onely businesse, that according to the Fundamentall knowledge of the same by the supernall help of the *Light of Grace* we may together with Christ and all the Elect possesse that Eternall Life untowhich God hath created us, this is true Theologicall Phylosophy.¹⁵⁶

For Croll, as in wider Protestant alchemy, the trope of Christ as healer was bound up with the *Lapis*-Christ parallel, or identification of Christ with the Philosopher's Stone: 'the *lapis* is seen as the agent of healing, the deliverer from sin and baseness, the rewarder of merit, the author of grace and salvation, and the creator of new heavens and a new earth [in the Second Coming].'¹⁵⁷ In *Salve Deus*, Christ is referred to as a pure, unspotted 'Jasper stone' and 'corner stone' (ll. 1635, 1661) on which the 'worlds foundation first was laid' (l. 1643). This evokes the biblical representation of Christ as the corner stone of the church, but also of Croll's alchemical philosophy: 'True Phylosophy must be grounded on Christ the corner stone.'¹⁵⁸ Clifford, who was venerated by Lanyer as the 'Phoenix' (Cook-ham, l. 44), itself a common alchemical symbol for the Philosopher's Stone, thus emulates Christ both in description and in effect.¹⁵⁹ Christ, 'That true Physition that so many heales' (l. 1655) is the pattern of Clifford's pastoral care. Lanyer establishes the grace of Clifford's elect state, emphasising that she both experiences grace within herself and, also, manifests it in her outward life, as one of the Elect would.¹⁶⁰ In like manner, Croll's account of such 'Theologicall Phylosophy' is itself founded upon Christ:

Our study therefore and profession of Phylosophy should be Christian-like not after the manner of the Heathen in hollow empty language and temporaneous Arts, preferring the mortall and perishing before that which is Eternall; Nor are we onely to know all Nature externally and internally, but we are also to make it our onely businesse, that according to the Fundamentall knowledge of the same by the supernall help of the *Light of Grace* we may together with Christ and all the Elect possesse that Eternall Life unto which God hath created us, this is true Theologicall Phylosophy,¹⁶¹

This same combination of practical medicine and theological meditation manifested through charitable works forms the basis of Lanyer's praise of Clifford too. Through their practice, she too

¹⁵⁶ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 131-2, 52.

¹⁵⁷ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 103.

¹⁵⁸ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 52.

¹⁵⁹ *A Chymicall Dictionary* (1650), cited in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 152.

¹⁶⁰ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 27.

¹⁶¹ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 131-2.

is marked out as one of the elect, shining with the light of Christ and reflecting his work in her own. Describing the triad which informs Clifford's 'workes of mercy' (l. 1361)—namely, 'Thy faith, thy prayers, and his speciall grace' (l. 1367)—Lanyer writes:

These are those Keyes Saint *Peter* did possesse,
Which with a Spirituall powre are giu'n to thee,
To heale the soules of those that doe transgresse,
By thy faire virtues; which, if once they see,
Vnto the like they doe their minds adresse,
Such as thou art, such they desire to be:
If they be blind, thou giu'st to them their sight;
If deafe or lame, they heare, and goe upright (ll. 1369-76).

Here, Clifford's physical healing takes on the form of a spiritual work, as Clifford helps to 'recover' sinners (l. 1387). Lanyer relocates the healing works often associated with the keys of St. Peter, which had the power to 'binde' and 'loose' sins (Matthew 16:18-9), into the hands of Clifford.¹⁶² Lanyer draws upon the imagery of Calvinist pastoral theology in which the language of healing was conflated with the language of evangelical soteriology as a means of spiritual consolation.¹⁶³ On account of her 'faire virtues', she acts as an exemplum to sinner: addressing their minds to Clifford, they desire to follow her example. This recalls Willoughby's description of Clifford as a 'ritch clasped boke', or repository of secrets, who also is herself further proof of the gracious salvific power effected by spiritualised alchemical wisdom (which she imparts to those deserving of it).¹⁶⁴ Lanyer's poetic descriptions of blindness, deafness, and lameness hover between metaphors meant to express the disabilities afflicting the soul on account of sin, and actual disabilities that Clifford healed through her charitable works. These actions are notably prefigured in Lanyer's 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorset', earlier in *Salve Deus*, where Lanyer exhorts Clifford's daughter, Anne, to action—chiefly, to honour the memory of her mother and so continue her legacy:

And as your Ancestors [...]
Bind up the broken, stop the wounds that bleeds,

¹⁶² For a discussion of the 'priestly powers' of Clifford, see Micheline White, "A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *Criticism* 45, no. 3 (2003): 323–41.

¹⁶³ Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 170.

¹⁶⁴ WDHOTH/3/44/59.

Succour the poore, comfort the comfortlesse,
 Cherish faire plantes, suppress unwholsom weeds
 (To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorset, ll. 73-78)

In performing these charitable works, as the completion of the chapel-hospital at Beamsley suggests was the case, Anne both honours the memory of her mother and continues the legacy as a spiritual and physical healer.

In Lanyer, Clifford's status as an exemplum is not simply hinted at (as it was in Willoughby's letter to Clifford); now, in the poetry, the transformative effect of Clifford's virtue is celebrated for enacting both physical and spiritual healing:

Yea, if possesse with any euill spirits,
 Such powre thy faire examples haue obtain'd
 To cast them out, applying Christs pure merits,
 By which they are bound, and of all hurt restrain'd:
 If strangely taken, wanting sence or wits,
 Thy faith appli'd vnto their soules so pain'd,
 Healeth all griefes, and makes them grow so strong,
 As no defects can hang vpon them long (ll. 1369-1384).

Throughout the poem, Lanyer collapses spiritual and physical health. Clifford's 'faire example' is suggestive of her elect status, all of which acts as a proof of 'Christs pure merits', or the grace of God, now invested in human form. As Clifford cures physical defects in others, carrying out exorcisms (meant to cure illnesses caused by apparent demons or demonic influence), so does she carry out a divine healing of the soul. To describe Clifford as 'applying Christs pure merits' is to emphasise how she provides both a literal and metaphorical balm for the soul; Lanyer thus suggests that Clifford's grace imitates Christ's grace in pastoral theology.¹⁶⁵ As Clifford takes on the pastoral role of the '*dispensatores*', or 'disposers of the mysteries of God' (1 Corinthians 4:1) taken on by Christ's angels in the poem,¹⁶⁶ Lanyer suggests that she is very much *like* them:

[...] all their harpes and golden vials bring
 Full of sweet odours, euen thy holy prayers
 Vnto that spotlesse Lambe, that all repaires (ll. 1678-80).

¹⁶⁵ Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 18.

¹⁶⁶ '*Dispensatores*' shares its etymological root '*pensare*', 'to weigh out', with the word 'dispench', 'to make up (medicine) according to a prescribed formula'. See "dispench, v." 1, 3, *OED*.

Here, the homonyms viol, a musical instrument, and vial, a medical apparatus, are united to suggest that just as Christ's ministering angels bring the potent medicine that aids his healing practices and leads to a restorative effect, so, too, do Clifford's salvic application of 'Christs pure merits' through her own charitable works.¹⁶⁷ This depiction of grace imitates that same Light of Grace espoused by Croll as, through her medicinal healing ability, Clifford is both singled out to receive God's grace while simultaneously reflecting the transformative medicinal healing of Christ in and through her actions.

As discussed, this grace is bestowed on Clifford due to her Christian virtues of fortitude and patience; and it is on account of this, as Lanyer intimates, that she is also aligned with Christ. While George Clifford's will deprived Margaret of her widow's, or dowager lands, Lanyer's poem has the Countess take Christ as the 'Husband of [her] Soule' (l. 253). Drawing on the familiar biblical analogy between human marriage and the relation between the individual believer (or the Church) and Christ, Lanyer contrasts the death of Clifford's earthly husband with the death of Christ, rendering her 'Dowager of all' (l. 257).¹⁶⁸ This indicates primarily the redemption that Christ enacted through his passion, or sufferings:

Christs bloody sweat, the Vinegar, and Gall,
The Speare, Sponge, Nailes, his buffeting with Fists,
His bitter Passion, Agony, and Death,
Did gaine vs Heauen when He did loose his breath (ll. 261-64).

Yet, Clifford is manifestly not aligned with 'us', but rather, is joined in union with Christ as 'Co-heire of that eternall blisse' (l. 258). Certainly, Christ's death ushers her into salvation, but her own actions are the cause of her union with him: Clifford stoically denies the earthly 'Worlds delights' (l. 255) in favour of this heavenly 'eternall blisse' (l. 258), replacing her earthly husband with a heavenly one.

¹⁶⁷ "viol, n." 1a, *OED*. 'A musical instrument (in common use from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century) having five, six, or seven strings and played by means of a bow.' "vial, n." *OED*. 'A vessel of a small or moderate size used for holding liquids.'

¹⁶⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of the marriage imagery in the poem, see Achsah Guibbory, "The Gospel According to Aemilia: Women and the Sacred," in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. Marshall Grossman (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 191-211.

Ronald K. Rittgers has shown how, in the sixteenth century, a reformation of suffering ‘rejected the coupling of suffering and salvation in traditional penitential theology and piety’, so that ‘[s]uffering was no longer salvific’.¹⁶⁹ Yet, this simply was not true in Protestant alchemical practice, as Urszula Szulakowska has compellingly demonstrated:

Late sixteenth-century alchemy retained at its core the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, despite its rejection by Protestant reformers. The rite of Communion was regarded as a sacrifice, the same as Christ’s original sacrifice, but one transposed out of historical time into the sacred space of eternity. The Paracelsian alchemist regarded himself as performing the same rituals in his laboratory work, thereby purifying matter in a simulation of the torments of Christ and of the souls in Purgatory in preparation for the day of Judgement.¹⁷⁰

But Croll’s Calvinist interpretation of alchemy differs from that of Paracelsus insofar as the bodies of the followers of his spiritual alchemy do not themselves become objects of martyrdom, but, rather, the matter affected by Christ.¹⁷¹ As in Calvinism, the ascension to ‘Eternall Life’, already predetermined for the elect, but revealed through good Christian practice, was not meant to be easy. Croll likens the adept to a ‘miserable Exile and pilgrim (tossed up and down through various hazards, hardships, streights, and miserable sufferings)’, who experiences greater delight when ‘restord againe to his rightful Country’—that is to say, everlasting union with God.¹⁷² Human suffering is therefore aligned with persistence and perseverance, allowing the sufferer to exercise virtues such as patience, obedience, and faith: the very same virtues that Lanyer ascribes to Margaret Clifford.¹⁷³ The language of being ‘restored’ to their ‘rightful’ place reemphasises just how specifically the Reformed Protestant Croll’s ‘Theological Philosophy’ is rooted in the language of predestination and ideas of sanctification through suffering and salvation through grace.¹⁷⁴

In this sense, the *Lapis*-Christ parallel emphasised how the stone itself was seen to enact a purgative process that made it Christ-like, or capable of securing eternal life. The stone itself can

¹⁶⁹ Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 7

¹⁷⁰ Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 162.

¹⁷¹ Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body*, 162.

¹⁷² Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 193-4

¹⁷³ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 240.

¹⁷⁴ See Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, especially Chapter 4: Suffering and Salvation in Early Luther, 84-110, and Chapter 5: Suffering and the Theology of the Cross, 112-124.

only be found by the already elect *spiritual* alchemist. Just as in Protestant communion, the communicant might ‘use the elements to meditate with dazzling intensity on [Christ’s] true body’s past sufferings and present glory’, the alchemical opus itself became a means by which one can meditate upon, and try to effect, the transmutational alchemy of the *Lapis-Christ*. To do so, however, one must have already been chosen for this task, as both Willoughby and Lanyer suggest).¹⁷⁵

In *Salve Deus*, Christ alone is figured as a Paracelsian medicinal purgative, bringing spiritual health, as Lanyer acknowledges: ‘Thou entertaindst the Crosse, even to the death: / And nam’dst thy selfe, the sonne of Man to be, / To purge our pride by thy Humilitie’ (ll.478-80). The original purgative is imbibed by Christ himself:

For *Peter* grieu’d at what might then befall,
Yet knew not what to doe, nor what to thinke,
Thought something must be done; now, if at all,
To free his Master, that he might not drinke
This poys’ned draught, farre bitterer than gall
(ll. 585-592)

Lanyer here draws upon the imagery of the Gospels, interlinking the imagery of a bitter draught with Christ’s sacrifice: ‘O my Father, if this cuppe can not passe away from mee, but that I must drinke it, thy will be done.’ (Matthew 26:42). Christ takes the cup and drinks the bitter draught of suffering so that humankind need not suffer. This purgative medicine operates in tandem with the imagery of the ‘bitter draught’ common in alchemical medicinal literature. Hence, Linden observes:

Common among the charges levied against Paracelsian physicians was the bitterness of their metallic and mineral medicines, and central to Paracelsus’s theory of healing was the view that cures resulted from administering potions of the same “poisons” that caused the illness in the first place.¹⁷⁶

Lanyer emulates this Paracelsian model of curing ‘like with like’ (viz. our mortal death is healed by Christ’s).¹⁷⁷ Sacrificing himself, his blood becomes our medicinal purgative: ‘His sacred blood must

¹⁷⁵ See Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 103.

¹⁷⁶ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 245.

¹⁷⁷ ‘[L]ike seeks its like [...] It would be a wild disorder if we were to seek our cure in contraries.’ Paracelsus, *Opus Pararium* (1530-1), I.ix.65-6. Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus*, 78-9.

grace that loathsome field, / 'To purge more filth, than that foule place could yield' (ll. 1143-4). Christ's sacrificed—yet 'sacred'—blood ushers fallen humankind into a state of grace as we are 'purg'd by his Divinity' ('The Authors Dreame to the Ladie *Marie*, the Countesse Dowager of *Pembroke*', l. 224). The language of purgation and purification again returns us to the philosopher's stone, which transmutes base metals (a metaphor for the sinful soul) into gold (or one of the saved). This alchemical conceit animates other poetry of the period, such as Donne's 'Resurrection, imperfect':

For these three days become a mineral.
He was all gold when He lay down, but rose
All tincture, and doth not alone dispose
Leaden and iron wills to good, but is
Of power to make e'en sinful flesh like his.
(*'Resurrection, imperfect'*, ll. 12-17)

Christ, who 'was all gold when He lay down', thus enacts the alchemical process of 'Mortification', which is necessary for producing, through a combination of 'Mortification, Purification, and difficult Exaltation', the 'most perfect' gold.¹⁷⁸ Through his sacrifice, he returns for 'three days' (when he was dead and buried) to a 'mineral' state, after which time he is then reformed anew and, also, made superior to even his previous state: his resurrection transmutes him even from 'gold', that already most perfect of metals, to something *more*: namely, the Paracelsian tincture that 'changeth all the imperfect Mettals into clear and pure gold', and which, as Donne declares, has the 'power to make 'e'en sinful flesh like his'.¹⁷⁹ No wonder, then, that, as Urszula Szulakowska wrote, 'many alchemists from the sixteenth century regarded the quintessence [or stone] as being equivalent to the Eucharistic blood of Christ, offering health, if not eternal life itself.'¹⁸⁰ At the heart of the work of the alchemist Robert Fludd (1574 – 1637), Szulakowska describes his 'recipe for a red elixir' that was meant to be 'a universal medicine': 'It was the quintessence of both Nature and of the human soul, being permeated by the Holy Spirit of the resurrected Christ.'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Paracelsus, *Of the chymical transmutation* (London, 1655), sig. Fr.

¹⁷⁹ Paracelsus, *Aurora* (London, 1659), sig. G7r.

¹⁸⁰ Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 17.

¹⁸¹ Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 123.

In like manner, Lanyer dramatizes the effect of this Paracelsian universal panacea: Christ's blood, imbued with his grace, redeems the body and soul of the patient by granting him not only an extended life on earth, but, more crucially, eternal salvation.¹⁸² The bitter pill of death that Christ must imbibe is *converted* into the sweetness of salvation.¹⁸³ Henry Vaughan's 'Affliction' voices something similar, as Christ's suffering is there figured as 'the great Elixir that turns gall/To wine, and sweetness' (II. 2-5).¹⁸⁴ But, in Lanyer, we are presented with an altogether more innocent and motherly image: infants or spiritual invalids, take from Christ the 'Sweet milke, wherewith we weaklings are restored' (ll. 1737-8). The bitter medicine, made up of the Paracelsian *tria prima* (salt, mercury, and sulphur), is representative of the Holy Trinity, and so capable of enacting the transmutation originally carried out by Christ's sacrifice: 'His sweetnesse sweet'ned all the sowre of death' (l. 1745). At the level of the line, Lanyer's polyptoton of 'sweetnesse' enacts this transmutation, while the antithesis of 'sweet' to 'sowre' marks out the transformative shift in Lanyer's description of the first Christian martyr, Stephen:

[Christ's] sweetnesse sweet'ned that short sowre of Life,
Making all bitterness delight his taste,
Yeelding sweet quietnesse in bitter strife (ll. 1769-71)

This transformative sourness to sweetness recalls Calvin's commentary on Matthew 10:40, in which the 'prophet's reward' denotes

the *reward* which corresponds to the rank of the person to whom kindness has been exercised; for Christ means that this will be a remarkable proof of the high estimation in which he holds his *prophets*, and indeed all his disciples. The greatness of the reward will make it evident, that not one kind office which was ever rendered to them has been forgotten.¹⁸⁵

Crucially, in this text, Calvin emphasises the interlinking of sacrifice and sweetness from a Protestant perspective:

Perceiving that this was exceedingly adapted to support their weakness, he intended to assure them that, if any one would receive them in a friendly manner, and do them kind

¹⁸² This universal panacea is described in Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 11.

¹⁸³ For the biblical interlinking of sweetness and salvation see Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 44-6.

¹⁸⁴ L. C. Martin, ed. *The Works of Henry Vaughan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

¹⁸⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956), 476-77.

offices, he would be as highly pleased as if their benevolence had been exercised towards his own person; and not only so, but that in such a sacrifice God the Father would *smell a sweet savour* [Gen.viii:21].¹⁸⁶

Not only is Stephen assured of this sweet salvation after his death, but his holy martyrdom incites Christ to transmute his sufferings in life into sweetness.¹⁸⁷ Lanyer's association of salvation with sweetness is not introduced at the point of death, as might be expected from the pattern she has established but extends into Stephen's life of hardship. This enacts a kind of Calvinist 'assurance': Stephen is granted access to the God-given conviction that he is predestined to the sweetness of salvation and eternal life.¹⁸⁸ His 'yeelding sweet quietnesse in bitter strife' at once implies his stoicism in the face of suffering and his passive acceptance of Christ's grace. The language of sweetness proliferates throughout Lanyer's verse as she catalogues those Martyrs who, like Stephen, demonstrate unyielding Christian stoicism in the face of death: "To taste his sweetnesse, whom they so adored" (ll. 1741-2). The bitterness of death becomes sweetness in Christ, all of which allows the recipient of grace to give themselves up willingly to death:

The Princes of th'Apostles were so filled
With the delicious sweetnes of his grace,
That willingly they yeelded to be killed (ll. 1801-3)

In like manner, Lanyer refigures how Saint Laurence 'Yeeld[ed] his naked body to the fire, / To taste this sweetnesse, such was his desire' (ll. 1789-1792), though she adds that he also had the power to cool the searing flames 'with holy teares' (l. 1790). Since sweetness stands metonymically for the delightful rewards guaranteed by the blood of Christ's sacrifice, those who experience and hunger after such sweetness figuratively consume the knowledge of their own *assured* salvation. For Calvin, even 'heavy calamities' carried out in commitment to Christ are carried out are "Par un zele saint et plaisant a Dieu;"—"by a zeal; that is holy and pleasing to God".¹⁸⁹ The knowledge

¹⁸⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1.476.

¹⁸⁷ For a survey of medieval sweetness as medicinal, see Mary Carruthers, "Sweetness," *Speculum* 81.4 (2006): 999-1013.

¹⁸⁸ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 44

¹⁸⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1.454.

of *assured* salvation is as a ‘remarkable consideration that sweetens all their bitterness.’¹⁹⁰ Thus in Lanyer, for the Martyrs, ‘sweetnes made their hearts and soules so burne / With holy zeale and loue most pure and chaste’ (ll. 1796-1777), so the martyrs and saints end up ‘Rejoycing that for him they di’d disgrac’d’ (l. 1795).

Lanyer stresses that the Christian stoicism of Margaret Clifford enacts a similar process:

Tis He that doth behold thy inward cares,
And will regard the sorrowes of thy Soule [...]
He through afflictions, still thy Minde prepares,
And all thy glorious Trialls will enroule:
That when darke daies of terror shall appeare,
Thou as the Sunne shalt shine; or much more cleare (ll. 54-56).

The imagery of a ‘glorious trial’ captures the nature of Calvinist suffering. It is not a bodily mortification (as in Catholic theology), but rather an opportunity to persist in the face of hardship and offer up her ‘sorrowes’ and ‘afflictions’ for the redemption of others, as Christ did. Crucially, Lanyer presents a mental transformation, rather than the physical transmutation: her passive acceptance of suffering will cause Christ to ‘prepare’ her like an alchemical experiment, where the agency is notably placed with Christ, rather than with Clifford. This accords with the Calvinist vision of how salvation can be effected only through Christ’s irresistible grace, which is given to the elect. Here, Lanyer imagines how, following the darkness of Clifford’s earthly trials, she is eventually transformed into something glittering bright, ‘as ‘the Sunne’, before becoming ‘much more cleare’. Lanyer’s layering of meaning in the resounding homonym ‘sun’ / ‘son’ intimates Clifford’s close unity with Christ in salvation: she outshines the physical sun (itself emblematic in Willoughby of Cleopatra’s passing beauty) to become *more like* the light of the eternal, spiritual Son. Christ’s purgative medicine, which for the martyrs changed bitterness to sweetness, again enacts a process of purification, most often called the ‘albedo’ stage in alchemical experiments: impurity is removed from the metal in the alembic and purified into a white or clear substance,

¹⁹⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, I.456.

just as is transformed into a light ‘much more clear’ than physical sunlight.¹⁹¹ Lanyer’s description of a spiritual alchemical transformation emphasises a process of purification for Clifford that re-affirms her position as Christ-like, or one of the elect.

The meditational perfection of her soul that Clifford evinces throughout Lanyer’s text is figured in the terms of distinctly esoteric alchemy. Her meditation upon and ‘love of God’ (l. 1565) is framed in way that emphasises how she rejects impurity and exists in a state of purity (or election):

You loving God, live in your selfe confind
From unpure Loue, your purest thoughts retires,
Your perfit sight could neuer be so blind,
To entertaine the old or yong desires
Of idle lovers; which the world presents,
Whose base abuses worthy minds prevents (ll. 1547-1552).

Where the martyrs’ knowledge of their own salvation was framed as a medicinal sweetness, for Clifford, Lanyer turns to the terminology of alchemical refinement. Her superlatively pure thoughts and ‘perfit sight’ emphasise how far removed her own spiritual sightedness is from those ‘base abuses’ that ‘the world presents’. Clifford is aligned instead with an alchemical process unconcerned with material gain but rather intent on the spiritual perfection of the soul and emulation of Christ-like transformation. From chrysopoeia, the transmutation of metals, we move to a spiritual transmutation. Clifford, ‘Respecting worldly wealth to be but drosse’ (l. 1408)—the unrefinable material during the alchemical process—stands in contrast to those who seek external, ‘worldly wealth’ rather than the internal, spiritual ‘riches’ (l. 1385) by which she is already defined.¹⁹² However, we might read the final verb ‘prevents’ as active, indicating that Clifford’s worthy, or elect, mind acts as an example to others, preventing them from sinning, or ‘base abuses.’

¹⁹¹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 1, 4-5.

¹⁹² “dross, n.” 1a. *OED*. ‘The scum, recrement, or extraneous matter thrown off from metals in the process of melting’. Susanne Woods, note to line 1407 in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, 111.

Here, Lanyer's presentation of Clifford renders her akin to a Calvinist minister, teaching God's work; grace is mediated through her to the laity.¹⁹³ Rather than teaching through prayer, however, Clifford is teaching through her example of pastoral care:

But in thy modest vaile do'st sweetly cover
The staines of other sinnes, to make themselves,
That by this meanes thou mai'st in time recover
Those weake lost sheepe that did so long transgresse,
Presenting them unto thy deerest Lover (ll. 1394-1398).

Lanyer here literalises pastoral absolution, the process by which God's grace might be communicated to the transgressing, or sinning, laity through the pastor or minister who is here figured literally as the shepherd (*pastor*) returning sheep back to Christ after they have transgressed, or wandered, from him.¹⁹⁴ Lanyer also crucially alludes to the veil of flesh, a phrase which in Calvin alludes to 'mediatorial aspect of the person of Christ', or the containment of God's grace in Christ in his incarnate form.¹⁹⁵ Acting upon her human flesh, God's grace has the effect of an internal purification process that renders Clifford capable of 'couer[ing] / The staines of other sinnes' (ll. 1390-1). This echoes Lanyer's earlier defence of women in 'Eves Apologie' (ll.761-873) in which she rejects the notion that Eve is to blame for the stain of original sin, 'whose fault was onely too much love' (l.801). In her description of Clifford, not only is Clifford's sex divested of any corrupt inheritance, but she purifies the sins of others through an alchemical purification that enables her to enact a process that would not be possible outside the world of the poem: namely, to act as a female pastor.

Through her practice of spiritual alchemy, Clifford thus achieves a union with Christ that invites contrast with the 'true religious Alchymie' celebrated by Donne in praise of Elizabeth Drury in his 'The First Anniversary':

¹⁹³ Woods, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, 224.

¹⁹⁴ Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, 193-4.

¹⁹⁵ 'Christ will be subjected to the Father because, when the veil has been removed, we will see God plainly, reigning in his majesty, and the humanity of Christ will no longer be in between us to hold us back from a nearer vision of God.' Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles Of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 1 Corinthians 15:27. Quoted and translated in Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 41-43.

She, in whom virtue was so much refined,
 That for allay unto so pure a mind
 She took the weaker sex; she that could drive
 The poisonous tincture, and the stain of Eve,
 Out of her thoughts and deeds, and purify
 All by a true religious alchemy (ll. 177-182)¹⁹⁶

In Donne, an exceptional woman, such as Drury, may overcome the weakness of her sex through a form of internal curative alchemy. For Donne, the virtue of Elizabeth Drury acts after the manner of a metal alloy, combining with her 'weaker sex', and allaying, or mitigating, the 'stain of Eve' (ll. 178-80). Drury is remarkable because she is able to exhibit what was otherwise a traditionally masculine mode of 'healing', thereby neutralising the 'poisonous tincture' (l. 180) of original sin in herself; she recreates herself through 'true religious alchemy' in such a way so as to make her a practitioner of, but also the emblem for, the Philosophers' Stone—just like Christ. The result is that Drury can purify not only herself, but 'all' (l. 182). In the Catholic-turned-Anglican divine, it is the purified virtuous woman that enacts this transformation; whereas, in Lanyer's gendered and Calvinist interpretation, the 'stain of Eve' is rejected: any transformation belongs entirely to Christ and the operative grace he bestows upon his female intermediary, Clifford.

Lanyer also markedly diverges from gendered restrictions imposed by the Calvinist Paracelsianism from which her spiritual alchemy is drawn. In Croll, corruption is thoroughly aligned with women:

Man at first was created healthy, (sickness entered by the Woman, not by the Man) [...] after the transgression and fall from unity to alterity, by the curse of God new Tinctures came in (even infinite evils) by whose mixture with the miserable state of our life, together with that troublesome companion the world the beauty of the whole Creature was transplanted: Impurity was joyned to the pure roots, which was the predestination of diseases.¹⁹⁷

The 'stain of Eve', the impurity that corrupts and causes diseases, is covered by the action of Christ's grace in Clifford. Croll explains how woman's sin is passed through the generations through pregnancy as 'great bellied women doe print an Influence and impression upon the child,

¹⁹⁶ John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, 832.

¹⁹⁷ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 95-6.

as Engravers mark their work with an iron stamp.¹⁹⁸ In Lanyer, however, Clifford's influence causes not a propagation of sin but a removal of it. Rather than the transmission of death through woman—Donne's 'stain of Eve'—Clifford purifies the corruption of sin:

So you (deere Ladie) still remaine as Queene,
Subduing all affections that are base,
Unalterable by the change of times,
Not following, but lamenting others crimes (ll. 1556-1559).

Lanyer describes that the spiritual alchemy of Clifford's inner purification through the grace of Christ creates in her a state of inviolability, constancy, and spiritual integrity, similar to the statement of fidelity to nation and God that Elizabeth I invoked with her motto '*semper eadem*' (always the same). Drawing on the capacious affordances of alchemical language, Lanyer layers the transmutation of a corrupt base metal to perfection with Clifford's perfect spiritual state of salvation, again evoking the *Lapis*-Christ parallel discussed above. Clifford's state of unassailable perfection solidifies her status as an elect disciple of Christ in the manner described in Calvin's commentary on Luke 6:40:

The participle *κατηρτισμένος*, signifies *perfect*, but signifies also *fit and suitable*. Now, as Christ is speaking, not about perfection, but about resemblance, and must therefore mean, that nothing is more *suitable* for a *disciple* than to be formed after the example of his *master*, the latter meaning appeared to me to be more appropriate.¹⁹⁹

Lanyer's alchemical language reinforces how Clifford imitates the model of Christ by framing this imitation materially—the *Lapis*-Clifford parallel formed after that of the *Lapis*-Christ.

In this state of spiritual perfection, Clifford is marked apart from humankind, 'Not following, but lamenting others crimes' (l. 1560). In her lamenting and healing capacity she is aligned with both the daughters of Jerusalem and with the Maries (the Magdalene and the Virgin) (l. 1287). Meditation upon Christ's lamentation and healing are brought into alignment in Lanyer's Protestant reinterpretation of the Passion that places the emphasis on the female apprehension of

¹⁹⁸ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 175. Lanyer's removal of the 'stain of Eve' can be read elsewhere in the poem, for example in Eve's rousing 'Apology in Defence of Women' (ll. 752-880).

¹⁹⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 459.

Christ's suffering.²⁰⁰ This active female lamentation of the daughters of Jerusalem stands in contrast to the passive male onlookers, 'The Serjeants watching, while the women cri'd' (l. 969):

Thrice happy women that obtaind such grace
From him whose worth the world could not containe;
Immediately to turne about his face,
As not remembring his great grieve and paine,
To comfort you, whose teares powr'd forth apace
On Flora's bankes, like shewers of April raine (ll. 969-974)

The daughters of Jerusalem meditate on Christ's 'great grieve and paine' (l. 972) and enact his own suffering, mirroring Christ's own 'griev[ing]' and 'sigh[ing]' (l. 1006), as they 'By teares, by sighes, by cries intreat' (l. 996). For Lanyer, the active meditation upon the Passion, and demonstration of sorrow, becomes associated with healing as their tears offer a salvic 'comfort' (l. 973) to Christ. This recalls the same purification process that is associated with Clifford, enacting a form of baptismal purification where physical and spiritual impurity is removed. This is literalised as Lanyer describes how the tears of the Virgin Mary 'did wash away his pretious blood' (1017). The fluvial intermingling of blood and tears evokes the imagery of alchemical ablution where blood and matter, mixed together, were dissolved in water and underwent a purification process. 'No solution ought to be made without blood', instructed *The Rosarium of Philosophers*, where blood is synonymous with the 'solve et coagulation' (solvent and coagulator) which formed the basis of the process to create the Philosopher's stone, or elixir which gave eternal life and health.²⁰¹ The mixing of blood and tears enacts this purification, cleansing Christ's body, even as it takes on signification of a more medicinal kind as it acts as a spiritual 'comfort' (l. 973).

Indeed, these salvific tears are followed by salves of a more literal kind as the Maries attend Christ with medicinal 'pretious balmes' (l.1287), demonstrating a legacy drawn from Calvin's *Harmony of the Evangelists* (1584), in which meditation, grief, and medicine are drawn into alignment:

²⁰⁰ See Kimberley Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. "'A Womans writing of diuine things': Aemilia Lanyer's passion for a professional poetic vocation," 149-178. For the overlap between Catholic and Protestant versions of the Passion, see Joseph R. Teller, "Why Crashaw was not Catholic: The Passion and Popular Protestant Devotion," *English Literary Renaissance* 43.2 (2013): 239-267.

²⁰¹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 28.

if we are desirous to profit aright by meditating on the death of Christ, we ought to begin with cherishing abhorrence of our sins, in proportion to the severity of the punishment which he endured. This will cause us not only to feel displeasure and shame of ourselves, but to be penetrated with deep grief, and therefore to seek the medicine with becoming ardour, and at the time to experience confusion and trembling.²⁰²

For all that their ‘balmes’ presage the figurative oyles of salvation which ‘heale his grievous wounds’, it is their active contemplation of Christ’s suffering and their faith that enacts spiritual healing:

These pretious balmes doe heale his grieuous wounds,
And water of Compunction washeth cleane
The soares of sinnes, which in our Soules abounds (ll. 1298-99).

As the tears of the women wash the wounds of Christ, so does this ‘water of Compunction’ heal the wounds of sin in our own souls, reflecting the Calvinist notion of contrition and inner self-denial. Their active meditation upon Christ and his suffering enacts a physical healing, upon the body of Christ, that leads them into a state of grace, representing their spiritual healing. As they gaze unflinchingly upon the body of ‘this son’, so do they also behold the heavenly light of grace, ‘this Sunne’:

Your tearefull eyes beheld his eyes more bright;
Your Faith and Loue vnto such grace did clime,
To haue reflection from this Heau’nly light:
Your Eagles eies did gaze against this Sunne,
Your hearts did thinke, he dead, the world were done (ll.988-92).

Lanyer figures the eyes of the women, clear sighted, though they are glazed with tears of compassion, reflecting Christ’s grace back to him. As this occurs, the women of the poem are brought into alignment with one another. The ‘Eagles eies’ of the daughters of Jerusalem recall the same use of imagery to describe the eyes of Margaret Clifford, ‘Whose Eagles eyes behold the glorious Sunne / Of th’all-creating Providence, reflecting / His blessed beames on all by him’ (ll. 25-7). All of these women are linked by their ability to meditate upon Christ with clear sighted

²⁰² Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 290.

‘Eagles eyes’ (ll. 25, 991), which reflect the heavenly light of grace. In this reflection, they replicate the Calvinist imagery of Christ as a mirror:

Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge. But we contemplate by faith the life which God represents to us in this mirror; and by faith we lay hold on this pledge and earnest.²⁰³

As these women peer into the mirror that is Christ, they see the *irresistible power* and beauty of the light of salvation reflecting back upon them, which itself ‘unto Christ redounds’. Yet this knowledge assures them in their belief of their own elect and virtuous state insofar as Christ is their ‘pledge’ who assures them salvation.

Especially worth noting is that this mirror imagery is alchemically inflected. In fact, it is a central image in the Paracelsian microcosm-macrocosm relationship. The idea that the microcosm of the human body is simply a miniature version of the macrocosm of the universe is not unique to Paracelsianism; indeed, this central tenet highlights the syncretic nature of alchemical theology, which draws also on Neoplatonic thought. In the more explicitly Calvinist context of Croll, mirrors express the correspondence between man and the *divine*, as depicted on the frontispiece of his *Basilica Chymica* (1609) (Figure 1).

The two triangles (one upright and one inverted or *reflected*) symbolize the correspondence between the cosmic (above) and the terrestrial sphere (below). As summarised by John Hartman in his 1670 translation of the text, the terrestrial sphere is the ‘shadow of GOD, and figure of Internal *Paradise*’, the ‘mirror in which the external artificer exhibits himself to be contemplated by his creatures.’²⁰⁴ The shadows or occult properties in terrestrial elements are all shadows of God, which the elect alone can ‘read’. The ability to interpret, which is a gift of grace, is what proves the internal paradise (or elect status) that also presages paradise after death (salvation). This correspondence between earthly and divine contemplation is symbolised by the angelic orders

²⁰³ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1961), 127.

²⁰⁴ Oswald Croll, *Basilica chymica, & Praxis chymiatricæ, or, Royal and practical chymistry* (London, 1670), sig. B2r.

surrounding the upper triangle: the ‘perfect and absolute image of God’, ‘most certain *Mirrors* [...] which manifest the divinity in them by continual Contemplation.’²⁰⁵ Croll’s angels are a visible symbol of God’s grace, a powerfully accommodated form which links contemplation to the divine.

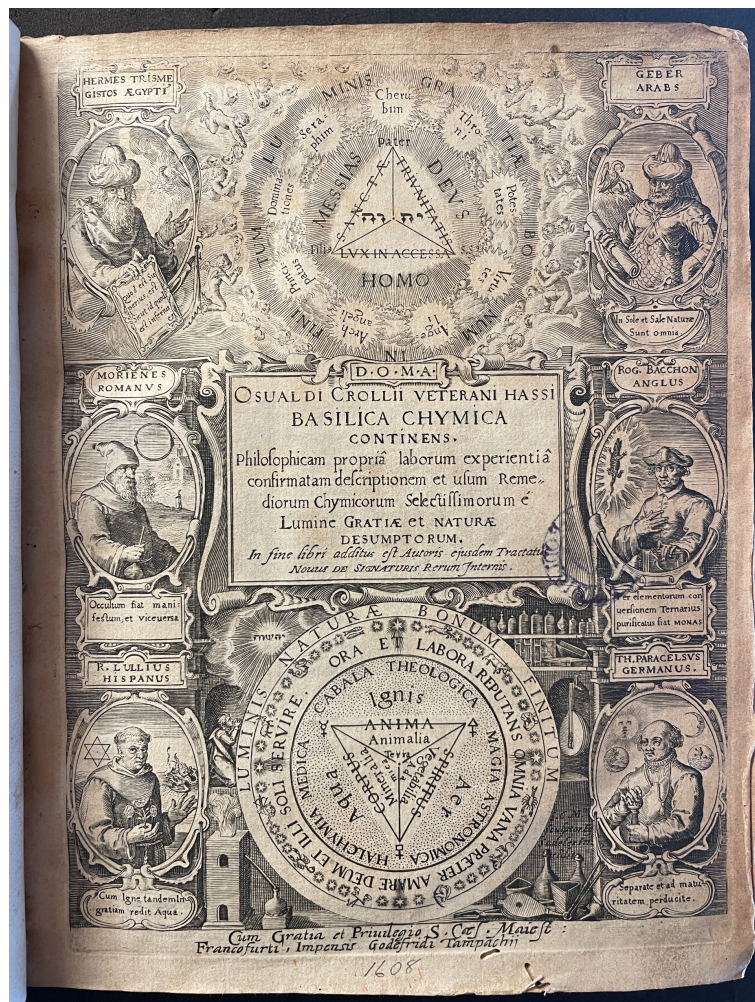


Figure 1: Frontispiece to Oswald Croll, *Basilica Chymica* (Frankfurt, 1609). Bodleian Library, Oxford, RR. w. 190.

The same is true for the various eagle-eyed women contemplating Christ in Lanyer’s poem: namely, the daughters of Jerusalem, the Maries, and Clifford herself. Here, the mirror image symbolizes the reflective circularity of grace. As the women interpret their elect status, they *manifest* their election precisely because the ability to interpret is itself a gift of grace. In her alchemical underpinning of the poem, Lanyer aligns their compassionate contemplation with angelic graciousness that is now crucially gendered as *female*.

²⁰⁵ Croll, *Basilica chymica*, sig. B3r.

Lorna Hutson has read this female ‘reflective knowledge’ of Christ as integral to Lanyer’s task to ‘unfold’ the interpretative virtue of Margaret Clifford’s mind through a dramatizing of the female recognition of Christ in the historical moment of his Passion’, in the manner of a dialectical ‘trial’ or ‘proof’.²⁰⁶ Hutson’s reading is focused on Lanyer in the context of Protestant humanism as she herself unfolds how in Lanyer’s ‘proof’ central humanist metaphors are revised to celebrate women as a ‘reader and agent’ within a patronage system where ‘intellectual participation was assimilated to a masculine monopoly of interpretative increase.’²⁰⁷

However, Lanyer’s effort to create an interpretative position for women, to which Hutson alerts us, has significant repercussions when applied in the rich new context of Calvinist Paracelsianism. We are reminded that for Croll, the proper interpretation of the symbolic meaning of things in nature is a gift of grace. ‘Physick’ constitutes a ‘speciall knowledge’ which ‘taketh its rise from Theology or the Light of Grace, and endeth in the Light of Nature’.²⁰⁸ Their interpretation of the text of sacred history, represented in their tears, acts as a proof of their grace, and their tears are consequently imbued with the ability to heal as adepts of Croll’s true ‘Physick’. Women are not only invested with a cognizance of virtue that relocates this virtue from a discourse that privileges masculinity, as Hutson argues, but also indicates a comprehension of that ‘certaine specifixe vertue’ concealed in ‘the very Seeds’ of Nature ‘which the Creator, that great Workmaster of all things, in the beginning of all the Creation planted in every growing thing by vertue of that omnipotent *Word*’.²⁰⁹ In Lanyer’s poem, the women’s compassionate response to suffering is an act of interpretation which proves their grace, but that grace originates with Christ, as Lanyer repeatedly highlights. The women’s compassionate tears grant them an angelic status as they comprehend the physical and spiritual efficacy of grace that can, as Lord Willoughby saw, be rejuvenating physically too. Lanyer emphasises the interpretative position of women who rely on

²⁰⁶ Hutson, “Why the Lady’s Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun,” 13-37 (20, 29).

²⁰⁷ Hutson, “Why the Lady’s Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun,” 14, 20-1.

²⁰⁸ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 90.

²⁰⁹ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 77.

their privileged status as interpreters of alchemical reformed theology. Their interpretative virtue is, however, proved by how they *themselves reflect* Christ's healing ability, but that this power is only theirs *through* Christ. In other words, as our understanding of virtue divorces the association between the masculine Latin *vir* ('man') and the feminine *virtus* ('strength and power'), a new 'interpretative virtue' can be traced throughout the poem—one which rests on the assimilation of alchemical spiritual knowledge.

This is the 'reflective knowledge' shared by the daughters of Jerusalem and by Margaret Clifford, whose compassionate behaviour as a healer of bodies and souls throughout the poem reflects their own.²¹⁰ Moreover, she acts as a mediator between God's grace and the spirituality of alchemy and its practical application in her pastoral care. This bears further comparison with the imagery of 'A Treatise on Cachelah' in *The Margaret Manuscript*.²¹¹ Here, the transformative alchemical opus is figured as a beloved lady surrounded by handmaidens:

Now this alchmiye is as a Ladie beloved of many, whoe is chaste, and hath many Maides her howst which have alwaies their eyes on ther mistres and offer themselves in her name to the end to kepe her pure and undefiled from the haunte of so manye importunate woers [...] the handemaides of Alchimye who to kepe their mystres that shee be not viollated doe prostitute and geve over themselves wholie to the pleasures of those that be in love with her as Riche menne, Covitouse men, fooles, and others, wch violate their faithe and common honestie. [...] God Almightye illuminate by his holy Spirit all Lovers of trueth and deliver them from the deepe darkenes and the unprofitable bablinge of suche as be skylful; onlye opynion.²¹²

The Lady of this metaphor represents spiritual alchemy itself but could just as easily be read as a metaphor for Clifford herself. Illuminated by God's grace, she represents the 'pure and undefiled' practice of alchemy, concerned with the healing of body and soul, rather than those handmaidens who represent alchemy as material practice, pursued by 'Riche menne, Covitouse men, fooles.' In this, she enacts the role of 'Gods created handmaid' in Tymme's translation of *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* (1605).²¹³ As Croll's 'created' adept, Clifford, who has been granted

²¹⁰ Hutson, "Why the Lady's Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun," 32.

²¹¹ WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 77r-95v.

²¹² WDHOTH/1/5, fols. 1r-6v.; fols. 77r-95v (93v-94r).

²¹³ From Tymme's dedication to Sir Charles Blunt, Earle of Devonshire, of Joseph Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...Translated by Thomas Timme, Minister* (London, 1605).

knowledge through God's grace, walks the metaphorical path to enlightenment 'not onely to come all the desired Secrets of Nature, but that which is the chieftest thing of all it leadeth even to the very workmaster of the universe.'²¹⁴ Much as Tymme's 'noble art' is achieved by mimicking the handmaid with her practical surgical skill, so in Croll, true Physicke is 'perfected and brought to light by practice.' As Clifford practises this spiritual alchemy on earth, she emulates the work of God, the workmaster who enacts this practice on a macrocosmic scale as the divine alchemist. Her example teaches the path to illumination.



Figure 2: Illustration accompanying 'A Treatise on Cachelah'. Cumbria Record Office, Kendal, MS WD/HOTH/1/5.

Crucially, at the end of the 'A Treatise on Cachelah' there is the image of a mirror (see Figure 2).

The writer of the treatise describes it thus:

note an Egge of glasse wch muste have a litle cannall or spowtte of the glasse it self wch goeth backe inwarde descendinge towards the bottome wthin wch may be putt a tonnell

²¹⁴ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 193.

of glasse to the end that by the said tonnell, the sonne beames gatherd by a Bornynge glasse may enter within the said Egge, and precipitate the [Mercury] animated wch is at the bottome.²¹⁵

The light hits the mirror, it is gathered and concentrated in the glass and through a tunnel it enacts a transformation, producing a proof of the experiment in the form of the precipitation beneath. Here we see in alchemical form the image of the ‘Eagle eyes’: Christ’s shining grace hits Clifford’s eyes, and then is mediated by her as, with the light pooling inside her, this grace is refracted outwards in her pastoral behaviour, and she comes to act as proof of God’s original blessing. In Lanyer, the agency rests with Clifford as Lanyer writes:

Whose Eagles eyes behold the glorious Sunne
Of th’all-creating Providence, reflecting
His blessed beames on all by him, begunne;
Increasing, strengthning, guiding and directing
All worldly creatures their due course to runne,
Vnto His powrefull pleasure all subjecting:
And thou (deere Ladie) by his speciall grace,
In these his creatures dost behold his face (ll.25-32)

In this verse, the action of ‘Increasing, strengthning, guiding and directing’ is carried out by Clifford, the subject of the verse, who carries out this same combination of pastoral duties in the poem—healing or ‘strengthening’ and spiritually ‘guiding’ Lanyer as well as her readers. Clifford’s ‘Eagles eyes’ denote not only clear-sightedness in the appreciation of Christ, but also recall the eagle that symbolised the sublimation of fixed matter by the volatile, or the initiate who has learned to spiritualise the earthly instinctive urge in man.²¹⁶ A variation of this would be emblematised in Emblem XLVI Michael Maier’s alchemical emblem book *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617), at the place where two eagles (here signifying the two principles of alchemy, masculine Sulphur and feminine Mercury) ‘come together’ in the hands of the alchemical initiate (see Figure 3).²¹⁷

²¹⁵ WDHOTH/1/5, sigs 94v-95r.

²¹⁶ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 64-5.

²¹⁷ Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens, hoc est, Emblemata nova de secretis naturæ chymica* (Oppenheim: Johann Theodor de Bry, 1618), 193.



Figure 3: Emblem XLVI, 'Of the Secrets of Nature.' In Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens, hoc est, Emblemata nova de secretis naturæ chymica* (Oppenheim: Johann Theodor de Bry, 1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

Moreover, as Lanyer describes Clifford enacting this alchemical spiritual practice, this grace is transmitted through Margaret Clifford and into the book itself, illuminated by Clifford's example. Lanyer writes to Anne Clifford, 'In this Mirrour let your faire eyes looke, / To view your virtues in this blessed Booke' (11. 7-8), and to Queen Anne, 'Let your faire Virtues in my Glasse be seene' (TQEM, l. 90). In her prefatory address 'To the Ladie Margaret Countess Dowager of Cumberland', she declares, 'I deliver the inestimable treasure of all elected soules, to be perused at convenient times; as also the mirrour of your most worthy minde' (ll. 29-30). By acting as a mirror and reflecting what Clifford teaches, Lanyer creates a chain of association between the two women as God's grace in Clifford by God, is transferred to Lanyer, giving 'grace to the meanest & most unworthy hand that will undertake of write thereof' (To the Ladie Margaret Countess Dowager of Cumberland, ll. 14-15). Lisa Schnell has written that 'dedicatory literature is the dedicated site of

social transaction.’²¹⁸ In *Salve Deus*, this transaction is now encoded in the early modern sense of ‘transference’, or ‘metaphor’ (which literally means a ‘carrying across’) so that religious and social grace are fused. Clifford’s patronage is divine and efficacious and so, in turn, is the text produced by her patronage; reproducing this divine grace, Lanyer’s words immortalise Clifford on the page. Lanyer asserts in the volume’s closing poem, ‘The Description of Cooke-ham’, ‘I first obtain’d / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain’d’ (ll.1-2), and we can now trace how the transformative and healing grace passes *from* Christ *to* Clifford and, thence, to Lanyer and to her poetry. The text itself becomes a site of communicable grace.

Given this spiritual alchemical poetic in Lanyer’s poetry, we are in a better position to appreciate that when Lanyer writes that she obtained ‘grace’ from Clifford (‘The Description of Cooke-ham’ ll. 1-2), she speaks, on the one hand, of how Clifford herself encapsulates the ‘grace’ (l. 14) of the volume of poetry that she (Lanyer) ‘deliver[s]’ to Clifford in fulfilling her commission. Lanyer effects the same intermingling of ‘the agentive meaning of grace—the favour or privilege a person can confer on or over to others—with its unagentive meaning—the infusion of divine grace into the regenerate Christian’.²¹⁹ The latter is what Julie Crawford rightly observes as operating in Donne’s verse letters to his patron Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford.²²⁰ This formulation of grace, commonly used in patronage poetry, is both ‘flattering to its recipient, and self-promoting of its author.’²²¹ I traced its operation in the Willoughby letters, whose flossed appearance marks them as objects of diplomacy, and in his figuration of Clifford’s ‘oyle of graciousness’, which transmuted lead to gold just as the ingenious language or conceit of her gracious letters makes the physically weak Willoughby feel young again.²²² So, when Willoughby

²¹⁸ Lisa Schnell, “‘So great a difference is there in degree’: Aemilia Lanyer and the Aims of Feminist Criticism,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 57.1 (1996), 26; “Transaction, n.” 4, *OED*. “The action of passing or making over a thing from one person, thing, or state to another; transference.”

²¹⁹ Crawford, *Mediatrice*, 123.

²²⁰ Crawford, *Mediatrice*, 123.

²²¹ Crawford, *Mediatrice*, 123.

²²² ‘She brings a dead body into the Alembic head of fine conceit, then disgests, then revives it, and lastly proiects that rectefied oyle of Gratiouesnes upon an old bowed plate of Saturne, and by her artifice makes

writes, 'Praise geving lady, All praises duely retorn to you as water to the mother Sea', the metaphor is meant to show how Clifford's own language has enacted a rejuvenating spiritual transformation in Willoughby that enables him to praise her. As such, all praises are attributable only to her, just as all water returns to the 'Mother Sea'.²²³

This textual communication of grace reaches its *irresistible* conclusion in Lanyer's prefatory address to Clifford, which frames Lanyer as Clifford's and, ultimately, God's initiate. Couched in the language of balms, gold, and spiritual health, Lanyer draws on the language of practical and spiritual alchemy that makes up the warp and woof of *Salve Deus*. Her alchemical negotiation of patronage operates in an even more complex way than a simple inscription of mediating grace. Lanyer claims to 'deliver', or return back to her the grace that Clifford initially transmitted to the poet:

as Saint Peter gave health to the body, so I deliver you the health of the soule, which is this most pretious pearle of all perfection, this rich diamond of devotion, this perfect gold growing in the veines of that excellent earth of the most blessed Paradise, wherein our second Adam had his restlesse habitation. The sweet incense, balsums, odours, and gummes that flowes from the beautifull tree of Life, sprung from the roote of Jessie, which is so super-excellent, that it giveth grace to the meanest & most unworthy hand that will undertake of write thereof [...]

(To the Ladie Margaret Countess Dowager of Cumberland, ll. 9-15)

Couched in the language of balms, gold, and spiritual health, Lanyer draws on the language of practical and spiritual alchemy that threads throughout *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* to establish herself as an initiate of the alchemical spiritual philosophy; God's grace, so in evidence in Christ during his Passion, is meditated upon and interpreted through the 'Eagles eies' (l. 991) of the *daughters* of Jerusalem. The 'Eagles eyes' (l. 25) belonging to Margaret Clifford emphasises how *female* spiritual sightedness involves an initiation into medicinal and spiritual alchemical knowledge. This sight extends to Lanyer whose volume of poetry claims to be written in response to Clifford's spiritual

the old mans selfe beleave he is not metall mutch inferiour to his grandchild Sol'. See WDHOTH/3/44/6, fol. 59r.

²²³ WDHOTH/3/44/6, fol. 59r.

as well as social ‘grace’ (l. 14). Hence, as Lanyer declares to the reader as much as to Clifford, ‘I deliver you the health of the soule’ (l. 9).

Her volume, she claims, delivers back to Clifford ‘the health of the soul’. God’s grace is mimetically reproduced, through Christ during his Passion, and interpreted through the ‘Eagles eyes’ of the daughters of Jerusalem. These are equated with the ‘Eagles eyes’ of Margaret Clifford, and, ultimately, to Lanyer’s, here figured in terms of the poem’s spiritual sightedness that the text offers in turn to the reader. Through their shared interpretation of this distinctly spiritual alchemy, Lanyer effectively links herself to, but also seeks to emulate, Clifford. The idea that Lanyer, too, can interpret signatures of the divine as one of the elect imaginatively closes the social gap between poet and patron; spiritually they have an equal share in God’s grace. Lanyer not only uses alchemical language to build up the ‘network of associations’ between patron and supplicant on which seventeenth-century patronage relied, but also creates the ‘rich chains’ that tie Lanyer to Clifford in the volume’s closing poem. The writing of *Salve Deus* thus becomes the consummate act of poesis, a microcosmic but no less radical reflection of God’s creation, in which grace is legible for the elect to interpret. In a breath-taking poetic sleight of hand, Lanyer constructs a spiritual equality between herself and Clifford that is attributable, ultimately, only to God.

For Hutson, the interpretative virtue of the daughters of Jerusalem is proved by a ‘literalization of the humanist metaphor of textual power as a mutually authenticating reflection’; however, in the context of Calvinist Paracelsianism, we turn from the humanist metaphor of the text as a mirror for princes to the alchemical metaphor of the text as a book of secrets to be unclasped and read by those worthies who are chosen (by Clifford and by God) to appreciate them.²²⁴ As in the Willoughby letters, where Willoughby heralded Clifford as that ‘ritch clasped boke [book] wherein the secrets of all good wifery is contayned’, Lanyer has Clifford become an interpreter of alchemical spiritual alchemy. She is capable of understanding the recipe book, books

²²⁴ Hutson, “Why the Lady’s Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun,” 29.

of secrets, and alchemical manuscripts in the Skipton Library, and translating them for her fellow practitioners—not in any literal way (as she had to employ others to put them into the vernacular, as discussed earlier), but in wholly spiritual sense.²²⁵ In Willoughby, it is her interpretative spiritual alchemical wisdom and housewifery that enables her to reproduce that most sacred and transformative ‘oyle of graciousness’; meanwhile, in Lanyer, this bespeaks the nature of that ‘perfit grace’ that Lanyer obtains from Clifford, which is transmitted from God, through Clifford, to Lanyer as a source of poetic inspiration (in ‘The Description of Cooke-ham’, ll. 1-2).²²⁶ Through their shared interpretation of spiritual alchemy, Lanyer effectively creates the ‘network of associations’ between patron and supplicant on which seventeenth-century patronage relied, linking herself inextricably to Margaret Clifford, through an alchemical poetics that has real substance to it, and, just as crucially, a marked confessional inflection.²²⁷

Clifford was to become Lanyer’s most significant patron, adding Lanyer to poets she supported, including Samuel Daniel and Edmund Spenser. It was Clifford that presented the copy of Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* to Henry, Prince of Wales, now held at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This copy (Figure 4), bound in vellum with Henry’s ostrich feather emblem in the centre of the front and back bindings, stands as a testament to Clifford’s circulation of Lanyer at the royal court.²²⁸ The emblem on the front evokes not only Lanyer’s entry to the circles of the elite, but also perhaps more esoteric circles, recalling those ‘Eagles eyes’, and above all, that grace-giving ‘Phoenix’ of Cookham (‘Cook-ham’, l. 44).

²²⁵ WDHOTH/3/44/59.

²²⁶ WDHOTH/3/44/59.

²²⁷ Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 54.

²²⁸ Barbara K. Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 321. The copy is Dyce S 4to 5675, National Art Library, London.



Figure 4: The encircled ostrich feather emblem of Henry, Prince of Wales. Presentation copy of Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (London, 1611). National Art Library, London, Dyce S 4to 5675.

By my argument, Lanyer's *Salve Deus* discloses a new meaning beneath the greeting, 'Hail God', as careful attention to the texts remaining in the Clifford library at Appleby and Skipton reveal. The intellectual interests and commitments of Margaret Clifford sheds new light on a rich network of associations that arise between Lanyer's use of 'Salve' (as a medicinal balm) and 'Deus' (meant to refer to 'the Celestiall Physitian of our Soules').²²⁹ It is no accident, I suggest, that The Great Picture, now displayed in Skipton Castle, depicts the Countess with four prominently displayed books to her right-hand side, each with its title meticulously detailed and legible to the onlooker: a Holy Bible, the works of Seneca, and a handwritten book of alchemy (see Figures 4 and 5).²³⁰ My account of the texts remaining in the Clifford library and manuscripts associated with her circle suggests that the intellectual purchase of these books are part of how Margaret Clifford was seen both as a historical figure and as a literary construction in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex*

²²⁹ Croll, *Philosophy reformed*, 178

²³⁰ Crawford, *Mediatrice*, 82.

Judæorum. The Great Picture visually represents the sort of biblical meditation inflected by Christian stoicism and alchemical-spiritual knowledge, but with an emphasis on her status as a woman of great learning. This is chiefly because the rich interplay between the books on display suggest that Margaret Clifford was a learned participant in the compounded medicinal, devotional, and alchemical culture—specifically Paracelsian Calvinism—that the remains of her library encapsulate. What the Picture and the library holdings reveal is how a hitherto under-analysed set of alchemical texts informs and animates works dedicated to Clifford herself as well as those written to her (such as Willoughby’s letters). As a poem that brims with allusions to the curative balms of grace, Lanyer’s poem *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611) aims to deliver to Clifford the ‘health of the soule’ that first originates *in* and *through* her. Lanyer’s poem, when read through the lens of the Paracelsian Calvinism that was current in the Clifford Circle, suggests a much more complex and richer account of her own response to Clifford and how her ‘rectefied oyle of Gratiouesnes’ (as Willoughby called it) opens a new window of interpretation for understanding that nature of those ‘rich chaines’ (l. 210) tying Lanyer to Clifford in ‘this work of Grace’ (‘Cooke-ham’, 12).



Figure 5: Jan van Belcamp, *Attr.* (c.1610-1653), *The Great Picture*, 1646, oil on canvas, reproduced by courtesy of Abbot Hall, Lakeland Arts Trust.



Figure 6: Detail from *The Great Picture* centre panel, "A Written hand Booke of Alkimie Extractions, of Distillations, And Excellent Medicines." Jan van Belcamp, Attr. (c.1610-1653), *The Great Picture*, 1646, oil on canvas, reproduced by courtesy of Abbot Hall, Lakeland Arts Trust.

Chapter Two: Hester Pulter's Palingenesis: The Matter of Alchemy in the Poems and Emblemes

Hester Pulter's emblem poem 'View But This Tulip' presents the reader with a striking analogy between two resurrections: the alchemical resurrection of a plant from ashes (palingenesis) and the resurrection of the body in Christian theology.¹ This poem includes a concentrated cluster of words and concepts that insistently repeat across her poetic corpus, most notably in 'The Circle' cycle of poems: dust, atoms, principles, calcination, dissolution and involution. Throughout her work, Pulter is particularly concerned with both material and process, especially those of early modern alchemy; and as 'The Circle' poems attest, Pulter's alchemical vocabulary is notably technical and precise. Her concern with the materials and processes of alchemy evinces a serious engagement with the *substance* of early modern alchemical thought. Pulter's interest in alchemy has often been reduced to a kind of poetic gilding that provides metaphors of transformation for her poetry whereby alchemical transformation is similar yet unconnected to theological transformation. However, to read Pulter's poetry 'alchemically' necessitates a close attention not only to alchemical vocabulary, but to the more fundamental processes and form of her work.

This chapter explores Pulter's alchemical metonymic thinking: the ways in which Pulter understands the correspondences between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, or the earthly and the divine, through alchemical metonymy and specifically how earthly changes and transformations are similar and intimately connected to divine transformations. In this way, this chapter demonstrates how seriously Pulter takes the allegorical nature of alchemy and how it is reflected in the form of her emblematic poetry. We have already seen how closely alchemy and emblems were linked in the early modern imagination in Chapter One, which highlighted how Michael Maier's alchemical emblem book *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618) sheds interpretative light on

¹ Unless otherwise noted, throughout this chapter references are to Hester Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, ed. Alice Eardley (Toronto: Iter Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 2014), 241-43. Line numbers are indicated after each quotation.

images such as the eagle in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611). As Alison Adams and Stanton J. Linden write,

if the formal emblematic divisions of *inscriptio*, *pictura* and *subscriptio* are not always present—as they are present in, say, the alchemical emblems of Michael Maier—nonetheless alchemical authors and illustrators often (and variously) draw upon both of the sister arts to vivify, enrich, clarify, allegorize, mystify or even obfuscate their discourse.²

It is particularly the work of allegory in producing clarification that this chapter explores in relation to Pulter's alchemical poetics. As discussed in the Introduction, allegory is one of the key affordances of alchemical language. Indeed, this is what seemed so particularly alluring to Martin Luther, who draws on the process of sublimation in the posthumously printed *Table Talk* to describe the Last Judgement:

The science of alchemy I like well, and, indeed, 'tis the philosophy of the ancients. I like it not only for the profits it brings in melting metals, in decocting preparing, extracting, and distilling herbs, roots; I like it also for the sake of the allegory and secret signification, which is exceedingly fine, touching the resurrection of the dead at the last day. For, as in a furnace the fire extracts and separates from a substance the other portions, and carries upward the spirit, the life, the sap, the strength, while the unclean matter, the dregs, remain at the bottom, like a dead and worthless carcass; even so God, at the day of judgment, will separate all things through fire, the righteous from the ungodly. The Christians and righteous shall ascend upward into heaven, and there live everlastingly, but the wicked and the ungodly, as the dross and filth, shall remain in hell, and there be damned.³

Here, we see praise of chrysopoeia, or the transformation of metals, for its material benefit or 'profits', which is directly mapped onto the benefit provided by spiritual purification. Sublimation here expresses the sorting of souls on Judgement Day as pure or righteous spirit ascends to heaven, separated from the dross, the wicked and ungodly.⁴ Luther's allusion captures how the processes involved in alchemy resonated as a way of engaging with spirituality and religious belief in the

² Alison Adams and Stanton J. Linden ed., *Emblems and Alchemy* (Glasgow: Glasgow Emblem Studies, 1998), v. These terms refer to the tripartite structure of the emblem: the short title or motto, the illustration, and the explanatory text in prose or verse. On the continental emblem tradition more broadly, see Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), and Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: contributions to the theory of the emblem* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

³ Martin Luther, "Of the Resurrection," Book DCCLX, *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 826. For a discussion of this passage and its relation to 'Alchemy, Allegory, and Eschatology', see Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 193-223 (193). Cited in previous chp.

⁴ "dross, n." 1a. *OED*.

period. The resonance stems from the ‘allegory and secret signification’ that Luther identifies, specifically, the ease with which the physical process might be mapped onto the metaphysical. How alchemy engaged religion through allegory and secret signification becomes crucial when we consider Pulter’s poetry. Following on from our discussion of Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* in Chapter One, this chapter will argue that Pulter should also be read in this poetic tradition of ‘spiritualised alchemy’ (identified by Stanton J. Linden).⁵ I expand upon what I have been calling ‘alchemical poetics’ to show how Pulter draws upon the correspondences inherent within alchemy to toggle between emblematic poetry and divine order, as well as between the divine scheme and the life of the individual.

This chapter offers a fuller understanding of alchemy as underpinning not only the technical knowledge and spiritual and political narratives in the poems, but also the formal characteristics of the verse across Pulter’s corpus. In the readings that follow, I analyse the interrelation of cosmology and poetics, and the ways alchemy bridges the gap between the two.⁶ While it has been argued by Rachel Dunn that ‘Pulter embraces a devotional poetics at odds with traditional emblematic didacticism and readerly exhortation’, I will demonstrate how alchemy provides Pulter with tools for marrying up devotion and didacticism.⁷ Recovering two new sources for this alchemical imagery, I demonstrate how her poetry draws upon a spiritual alchemy deeply rooted in Paracelsian and Protestant thought. Ultimately, I propose that Pulter’s alchemical thinking accommodates the divinely ordained hierarchies and cycles of her cosmology, providing both herself and her reader with the tools for comprehending the ineffable power of divine processes, in particular the Resurrection, and for responding to the political crises of the 1640s and 1650s.

⁵ See Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*.

⁶ “cosmology, n.” *OED* “The science or theory of the universe as an ordered whole, and of the general laws which govern it. Also, a particular account or system of the universe and its laws.”

⁷ Rachel Dunn, “Breaking a Tradition: Hester Pulter and the English Emblem Book,” *The Seventeenth Century* 30:1 (2015): 55-73 (66).

Pulter's poetry emerges as a fascinating counterpoint to what Nigel Smith has termed Civil War 'fragmentation and despair'.⁸ Mapping the cultural fragmentation of the Civil War onto the formal characteristics of poetry, Smith argues that the Civil War yielded a poetic preference for the epigram over the sonnet.⁹ For Pulter, fragmentation percolates her poetry both thematically—in its rumination on atomisation—and formally—in the disintegration of meter and line length throughout 'The Circle' poems. Pulter's poetic innovation is to unify these two concepts and to deploy fragmentation as a surprising way of counteracting despair.

PULTER'S CRITICAL CONTEXTS

In 1605, Pulter née Ley, was born just outside Dublin, the eighth of eleven children of Sir James Ley (1550-1629), first Earl of Marlborough (lord treasurer and later lord chief justice), and his first wife, Mary Pettie.¹⁰ In 1608, the family returned to England by royal command, eventually settling at Heywood in Wiltshire.¹¹ Alice Eardley notes that Pulter's father was 'a prominent lawyer and antiquarian, active in the service of his monarchy, and his wife is frequently praised for her piety and devotion to her family.'¹² Her older sister, Margaret, was the addressee of a sonnet by Milton, which praises her for possessing the virtues of her father 'that good Earl, once President /Of Englands Counsel, and her Treasury (ll. 1-2).¹³ Depicting her father as an 'upright statesman', Milton attributes Ley's death (four days after the dissolution of parliament on March 10 1629) to 'the sad breaking of that Parliament' that 'Broke him' (ll. 5-6); Ley was an active participant in the

⁸ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 256.

⁹ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 256.

¹⁰ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 13. For the evidence relating to Pulter's date of birth, see Alice Eardley, "Hester Pulter's Date of Birth," *Notes and Queries* 57.4 (2010): 498-501; Mark Robson, "Pulter [née Ley], Lady Hester (1605?-1678)," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Wilfrid Prest, "Ley, James, first earl of Marlborough (1550-1629)," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 13.

¹² Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 13.

¹³ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 18; 'Sonnet X. To the Lady Margaret Ley,' in *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 2007), 289-90.

first session.¹⁴ Pulter was a fervent royalist, writing verse that panegyricised Charles and Henrietta Maria, and key Civil War military figures, including Sir George Lisle and Sir Charles Lucas.¹⁵ Her royalist views were shared by some of her relatives including her nephew James, later the third earl of Marlborough who fought and died for the king during the Civil War, and whose estates were sequestered in 1646.¹⁶ Her husband's first cousin, Sir Arthur Capel, also fought for the king, and was executed by Parliament in 1649, an event memorialised in Pulter's poem mourning the death of Charles ('On the Same [2]', ll. 14-21).¹⁷

Yet, Pulter's politics were not shared by her closest relatives, and during the 1640s, 'the majority [...] were, at points, in active opposition to the king'. Her sister Margaret married James Hobson, a lieutenant colonel in the Westminster regiment of the parliamentary army.¹⁸ Another of Pulter's sisters, Dionysia, married the MP John Harington (1588/9–1654), eldest son of Sir John Harington (bap. 1560, d. 1612), translator of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591). Between 1647-1650, Harington was a moderate 'among those who favoured negotiation and compromise with the king'; in December 1648 he withdrew from parliament in protest against the ejection of moderates in Pride's Purge.¹⁹ Harington's moderate stance perhaps brings him closer to Pulter in ideology. It is Harington's diary that provides much of our evidence for Pulter's life. He records, for example, that 'she [Hester Pulter] had perswaded her [Margaret Hobson] to convey al back to her husbands

¹⁴ Prest, "Ley, James, first earl of Marlborough (1550–1629)."

¹⁵ For poems on Charles I, see 'On That Unparalleled Prince Charles the First, His Horrid Muder,' 'Upon the Imprisonment of His Sacred Majesty,' and 'On the Horrid Murder of that Incomparable Prince, King Charles the First'. For Henrietta Maria, see 'The Complaint of Thames, 1647' and 'The Invitation to the Country'. On Sir George Lisle and Sir Charles Lucas, see 'On Those Two Unparalleled Friends, Sir George Lisle and Sir Charles Lucas, Who Were Shot to Death at Colchester.' For discussion of Pulter's royalist poetics, see Sarah C. E. Ross, "'This Kingdoms Loss': Hester Pulter's Elegies and Emblems," in *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135-73.

¹⁶ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 19-20. G. G. Harris, "Ley, James, third earl of Marlborough (1618/19–1665)" ODNB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 20. Ronald Hutton, "Capel, Arthur, first Baron Capel of Hadham (1604–1649)," ODNB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 18.

¹⁹ J. H. Bettey, "Harington, John (1588/9–1654)," ODNB (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

estate and kindred'.²⁰ Much recent criticism has emphasised the complexity of mid-century allegiance and identity and uncovered extensive cross-partisan cooperation during the Civil War.²¹ By attending to the way Pulter's alchemical poetry traces a compelling trajectory from fragmentation to unity and harmony, I argue that Pulter uses a similarly alchemical poetics to Lanyer, but for very different purposes, namely to articulate a response to the fragmentation of the family and the nation during the civil wars.

Pulter's manuscript, written during the 1640s and 1650s, contains two series of poems, both passionately and variously engaged with contemporary politics, religion, science, and literature. 'Poems Breathed forth By The Noble Hadassas' is comprised of largely occasional and devotional lyrics, while 'The sighes of a sad soule Emblematically breath'd forth by the noble Hadassah' is a striking set of verbal emblems.²² Throughout the manuscript, Pulter addresses the capture and execution of the king ('When the Best of Kings was Imprisoned by the Worst of Rebels at Holmby', 'On that Unparalleled Prince Charles the First, His Horrid Murder'), theological controversies, such as *ex nihilo* creation ('The Circle [1]'), and Copernican and Galilean astronomy ('Written 1648, when I Lay Inn, with my Son John'). Although Pulter describes herself as writing her poems 'shut up in a country grange' ('Why Must I Thus Forever Be Confined' (Poem 57 l. 18)), the boundaries of her rural estate, Broadfield in Hertfordshire, were broader than this poem suggests; indeed, the position of her home, about thirty miles, or a day's ride, from the City allowed for not infrequent visits to London as well as for City visitors to retreat to her estate for the intellectual exchange of manuscripts and ideas.²³

²⁰ John Harington, *The Diary of John Harington, M. P., 1646–53: With Notes for his Charges*, ed. Margaret F. Stieg (Old Woking, UK: Somerset Record Society, 1977), 75. Quoted in Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 18.

²¹ See, for instance, Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars: Marvell and the Cause of Wit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²² *Poems breathed forth by the noble Hadassas, and The Unfortunate Florinda, by Lady Hesther Pulter*. MS Lt q 32, Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection.

²³ See Karen Britland, "Conspiring with 'Friends': Hester Pulter's Poetry and the Stanley Family at Cumberlow Green," *The Review of English Studies* 69, no. 292 (November 1, 2018): 832–54; Alice Eardley, "Shut up in a Countrey Grange": The Provenance of Lady Hester Pulter's Poetry and Prose and Women's Literary History Quarterly 80, no. 2 (2017): 345–59.

Pulter's poems were left unread for over three hundred years, and were only brought to light in 1996, when the Brotherton Library, Leeds, undertook a digital cataloguing project of its manuscripts. Since then, her work has assumed a central position in the study of early modern women's writing, culminating most recently in the open-access digital collaboration showcasing variant editions of her poetry: *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018). More fundamentally, as Leah Knight and Wendy Wall have noted, Pulter's work has enabled a 'more inclusive rethinking of our narratives about seventeenth-century history, intellectual life, and literary production'.²⁴ As indicated above, Pulter's interest in alchemical imagery has been the subject of critical interest; most notably, Jayne Archer's important article on Pulter's alchemy has helpfully brought critical attention to how Pulter's cycle of 'Circle' poems employ specific alchemical concepts as a way to explore alchemical-religious transformation.²⁵ As the most extensive treatment of Pulter's alchemy, Archer's reading now forms a crucial part of a wider critical discourse focused on Pulter's poetic engagement with seventeenth-century science.

The online *Pulter Project* (2018) has recently marked a salutary return to Pulter's alchemical poetry, including a more detailed consideration of Pulter's poetic and philosophical use of alchemy. The project features several alchemical 'Explorations' of Pulter's poems curated by Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, in which explanation of alchemical conceits, contemporary alchemical literature, and extended quotation from Archer's original article are made available to the reader.²⁶ Scott-Baumann's recent work sheds light on Pulter's engagement with alchemical imagery and poetic form in poems such as "The Circle [2]" and "The Hope". Scott-Baumann argues that alchemy does not simply provide metaphors for transformative processes in these poems, but that the poetic is

²⁴ See Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, gen. eds., *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018), <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>; Leah Knight, and Wendy Wall. "Poet in the Making: How Hester Pulter Read the Digital Age," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020): 1–15 (here, 2). For scholarship on the *Pulter Project*, see the rest of this special issue of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*.

²⁵ Jayne Archer, "A 'Perfect Circle'? Alchemy in the Poetry of Hester Pulter," *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1–14.

²⁶ See Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, gen. eds., *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018), <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>. For an alchemical reading, see Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, ed. "The Circle [2]" by Hester Pulter. (Poem 21, Amplified Edition). In *The Pulter Project* (2018).

itself a sort of alchemical alembic in which Pulter transforms the alchemical tropes into a complex critique that ‘show[s] up the shared vanity of both alchemy and the sonnet: the reproductive, immortalizing, monumentalizing aspirations of both arts.’²⁷ Similarly, Liza Blake has explored alchemy as a crucial aspect of what she terms Pulter’s ‘Poetics of Involution’: the intersection of Pulter’s physics, ‘in which matter is recycled, repurposed, intermixed and interpenetrated to create new worlds’ is, for her, at one with Pulter’s poetic process, where ‘repetitions, revisions, and involutions’ make the poems ‘like windows to one another.’²⁸

Despite Archer’s earlier argument that ‘the sheer density of allusion in “The Circle” demands that it be read alchemically’, this approach has not been applied to Pulter’s wider corpus, which is dense with alchemical allusion. In fact, where critical literature provides alchemical readings, it focuses almost exclusively on “The Circle” poems.²⁹ To address this critical gap, this chapter considers the role of alchemy across Pulter’s wider corpus, contending that alchemical thought crucially underpins her understanding of matter, her philosophy of nature, and notion of the cosmos more generally. In line with Liza Blake’s productive suggestion that ‘[Pulter’s] vision of the makeup of the universe and the rules that govern it [...] is a motley one’, based upon ‘sometimes conflicting philosophies and scientific theories’, this chapter practises a syncretic approach to Pulter’s source material that is based on, and further reflects, her own eclectic readings in early modern alchemical sources.³⁰

The question of Pulter’s scientific sources has remained uncertain throughout her critical history. Alice Eardley, one of Pulter’s first editors, has discussed the difficulty of pinpointing exact sources for many of Pulter’s scientific and philosophical ideas, while Liza Blake has suggested that ‘no one source (a given alchemical treatise, the tradition of Aristotelianism) is fully sufficient to

²⁷ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, “Hester Pulter’s Well-Wrought Urns: Early Modern Women, Sonnets, and New Criticism.” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020): 120–43.

²⁸ Liza Blake, “Hester Pulter’s Particle Physics and the Poetics of Involution,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020): 71–98.

²⁹ Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 2.

³⁰ Blake, “Hester Pulter’s Particle Physics,” 87, 76.

understand the vision of the universe that even one single poem conjures and plays with, as each poem involves, echoes, and complicates others.³¹ However, this is in large part due to the critical neglect of Pulter's engagement with alchemy since Archer's 2005 article. Archer was the first to suggest Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) as a tentative source for Pulter's alchemical imagery in 'The Circle', in particular to contextualise the use of 'vermilion' in early modern alchemical literature.³² Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* contains the major works belonging to a tradition of English alchemical poetry, and was designed to supplement the European *Theatrum chemicum* (1602 and subsequent editions) in order to draw attention to distinctly English achievements in the field.³³ Ashmole compiled and made available a wide variety of alchemical works, ranging from the late medieval to the seventeenth century, and centring around the *Ordinall of Alchimy* by Thomas Norton (1477) and the *Compound of Alchemy* by Sir George Ripley (1471). Archer's suggestion bolstered alchemical readings in the first and most complete critical edition of Pulter's works, where Eardley agreed that Pulter 'may have encountered alchemical texts as they circulated in manuscript or in the form of popular publications such as Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), an anthology of alchemical poetry.'³⁴

While Archer's intervention was crucial to alchemical readings of Pulter, it had the effect of focusing criticism on this anthology; even the most recent work continues to list Ashmole's edition as a contemporary collection of texts.³⁵ But there are important limitations to this emphasis on Ashmole as a source text. The fact remains that Pulter's manuscript material includes a body of poetry and prose that has been dated to the 1640s and 1650s. Several poems are explicitly dated, including 'Of a Young Lady at Oxford, 1646' (Poem 43); 'Made When I Was Sick, 1647' (Poem

³¹ Alice Eardley, "Hester Pulter's 'Indivisibles' and the Challenges of Annotating Early Modern Women's Poetry." *SEL* 52 (2012): 117–41; Blake, "Hester Pulter's Particle Physics," 87–88.

³² Archer writes 'A possible source for Pulter's use of this term is George Ripley's *The Compound of Alchymy*, in Ashmole, in which the selection of 'Vermilion' as prima materia results in 'nought' (p. 189).' Archer, "A 'Perfect Circle,'" 13

³³ Michael Hunter, 'Ashmole, Elias (1617–1692), astrologer and antiquary', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

³⁴ Eardley, ed. *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 12.

³⁵ Blake, "Hester Pulter's Particle Physics," 88

31); ‘This Was Written in 1648, When I Lay in, With my Son John’ (Poem 45). It is possible that Pulter may have had access to texts within Ashmole’s collection, either from this volume itself or circulating separately. Indeed, George Ripley’s *Compound of Alchymy* (1651) was among the first alchemical books printed in England and one of the best-known works of English alchemy. Since Pulter’s manuscript was not compiled until around 1660, the more explicitly alchemical poems (including ‘View But This Tulip’) might have been composed following the publication of Ashmole’s *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652).³⁶ But to anchor Pulter to Ashmole and Ripley exclusively is to limit artificially the scope of her literary and intellectual achievements as displayed by the poetry itself. Rather, if we view Pulter’s alchemical thinking as marking a more sophisticated engagement with the underlying philosophy, we are in a better position to recover how her philosophic poetic draws on and adapts earlier source texts than Ashmole’s in surprising and innovative ways.

THE MATTER OF ALCHEMY IN WOODALL AND PULTER

Pulter’s ‘The Pismire (Poem 35)’ is not often associated with her alchemical imagery; instead, it is placed in a long tradition beginning with Aesop and Proverbs of texts praising the organisation and hard work of the pismire or ant.³⁷ However, it is in the figure of the ant that Pulter’s interest in both Baconian science and in alchemy collide, allowing us to place her in a scientific tradition rooted in a larger ideological transformation. In this poem, the speaker suffers from physical and mental exhaustion as she contemplates the transience of life:

Then down I threw myself upon the grass;
 Some solitary hours I thought to pass.
 Leaning my head against a sycamore,
 My heavy eyes upon the ground did pore.
 Musing and looking on my Mother, Earth,
 To which I must, from whence I drew my breath;
 Then did I think how I to dust must turn,

³⁶ Eardley, ed. *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, 1.

³⁷ Frances E. Dolan, ed. ‘The Pismere’ by Hester Pulter (Poem 35, Amplified Edition) in *The Pulter Project* (2018).

And lie forgotten, in my silent urn (ll. 5-12).

In this melancholy state, the troubled speaker searches for distraction; her downward gaze lights upon an anthill, causing her to shift to an emblematic way of seeing the world as she extrapolates macrocosmic reflections from this image:

A hill of pismires, who their labor plied,
Some lugged up and down their flatious issue,
And some with glitt'ring wings that shone like tissue (ll. 20-22)

The emblem is freighted with Baconian significance; for Bacon, 'The men of experiment are like the ant, they only collect and use' (*Novum Organum*, i, xciv).³⁸ Here, Pulter approaches the image from a distinctly female viewpoint, transforming her into a 'woman of experiment' as she figuratively collects and uses the emblematic hill of pismires to produce a commentary on the conflicting futility and generativity of endless earthly labours shared by all of God's creatures. Pulter's conceit centres around the soil heap upon which the pismires work—a literalisation of the earth and temporal labour. On the ground, the pismires 'moil and labour in this dunghill earth' (l. 30); flying above the earth, they 'play, / Seeming to keep perpetual holiday' (ll. 25-6). Pulter's image emblematises the contrast between material body and immaterial soul; concurrently, the separation between earthly mortal state and heavenly salvation. As Dolan's excellent analysis of the dunghill in Pulter's poetry has demonstrated, the image reflects the 'entrapment and enfranchisement' of 'human life as it is captured in God's punishment to Adam and Eve—"for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (KJV [Genesis] 3.19)', a point to which we shall return below.³⁹ More specifically, it gives us the shape of a *woman's* life as it is envisaged in God's punishment of Eve—"in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). The ants' 'flatious issue' (l. 21) conveys the sense of the Latin stem '*inflatus*, blown into, filled by blowing, puffed up', evoking both the swollen stomach of pregnancy and the life-giving breath of God in the Creation.⁴⁰ This transforms

³⁸ Francis Bacon, *Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces*, ed. R. F. Jones (New York: Odyssey, 1937), 313.

³⁹ Frances E. Dolan, "Hester Pulter's Dunghill Poetics." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2020): 16–42. (here, 29).

⁴⁰ "inflate, adj." *OED*.

the ‘labor’ of the previous line into a sorrowful pun, as Pulter layers the meaning of labour as both physical exertion and childbirth.⁴¹ ‘The ants’ repetitive drudgery becomes a cycle of sorrowful procreation as they drag the heavy burden of their offspring up and down the earthy hill, unable to raise them higher than the earth upon which they themselves struggle. It is a bleak emblem of the mother’s body as the origin of both birth and death for their child. Yet, in her usage of this emblem, Pulter’s ant is more comparable to Bacon’s bee, which ‘gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own’ (*Novum Organum*, i, xcvi). Notable also is the fact that Pulter transforms the opening tone of melancholic contemplation into spiritual consolation: ‘O then as I in heaven have placed my love, / So I’m ambitious of those joys above (ll. 41-42).’⁴²

While this reading of Pulter’s ‘flatious issue’ focuses on the spiritual reward offered by the poem, the term ‘flatious’ (l. 21) repays attention; it suggests a link to John Woodall’s *The Surgeons Mate* (London, 1639), where the only other documented source of this word occurs. The ‘Elemental’ editors of ‘The Pismire’, Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, note that ‘This word, not in the *OED*, is used in John Woodall’s *The surgeons mate or Military & domestique surgery* (1639), p.57, in reference to “belching, quartans, cold, and all flatious diseases”’.⁴³ But the influence of Woodall is, I suggest, not limited to a single term in Pulter; rather this text represents a hitherto unidentified source for her alchemical knowledge. This underappreciation of the importance of Woodall to Pulter’s poetic has been a significant oversight in readings of both Pulter’s alchemical imagery and her natural philosophy, though it is perhaps explicable by the fact that Woodall’s *Surgeon’s Mate* (1639) was a textbook of naval medicine and surgery, the first official medical guide for the cure of seamen during their long sea voyages to the East and West Indies, and so a seemingly unlikely

⁴¹ “labour, n.” *OED*.

⁴² Francis Bacon, *Essays, Advancement of Learning, New Atlantis, and Other Pieces*, ed. R. F. Jones (New York: Odyssey, 1937), 313.

⁴³ Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, ed. ‘The Pismire’ by Hester Pulter (Poem 35, Elemental Edition) in *The Pulter Project* (2018).

source for Pulter's own natural philosophy.⁴⁴ Woodall's book quickly became the standard work of naval medicine in the first half of the seventeenth century; the first edition was followed by the enlarged edition of 1639 and 1655. The expanded text added to the naval information material on 'the exact cures of wounds made by gunshott' and 'a treatise for the cure of the plague', accounting for great success of the text: plagues ravaged London in 1603 and 1625 between the dates of the second and third editions and countless bullets were spent in the English Civil War (1642-1651).⁴⁵ The book's use was therefore not limited to naval officers and seamen. *The Surgeons Mate* appears in the booklists that survive from two ladies' closets, Lady Alice Hatton (née Fanshawe) (d. 1638.) and Lady Margaret Heath (née Miller) (d. 1647), where it is accompanied by a broad range of medical and household books, all written in English.⁴⁶

This book is remarkable for its promotion of Paracelsian medical practice in England. This was first noted by Allen G. Debus,⁴⁷ and, indeed, Woodall's text is part of a rich tradition of Paracelsian alchemical practice descending from the early Paracelsianism of Petrus Severinus.⁴⁸ This Danish physician, educated at the University of Paris, emphasised the medical rather than the theological works of Paracelsus. The central concept that dominates Severinus' work is the idea that causation in the material world is organized around archetypal forms that intersect with material existence at seedlike points called *semina* proceeding from God; these *semina* or seeds are located within the four Aristotelian elements, and are likened to wombs or dwellings, fortified with the vital balsam or principle of activity of the seeds themselves.⁴⁹ Many post-1570 medical alchemists were at least to some degree influenced by Severinus' interpretation of Paracelsus and

⁴⁴ Irmgard Müller ed. *The Surgions Mate: The First Compendium on Naval Medicine, Surgery and Drug Therapy London 1617* (Birkhäuser, Cham, 2016), 1.

⁴⁵ John Woodall, *The surgeons mate*, 2nd ed. (London, 1639).

⁴⁶ '273.48 Woodalls Surgerie in Fol.' Joseph L. Black and R.J. Fehrenbach eds. *Private Libraries in Renaissance England: A Collection and Catalogue of Tudor and Early Stuart Book-Lists* (Accessible at <https://plre.folger.edu/booksDetail.php?id=14266>); '296.8 Woodhalls Chirurgery. fol.' Mark Empey ed. *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* (Accessible at <https://plre.folger.edu/booksDetail.php?id=15548>).

⁴⁷ Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London: Oldbourne Press, 1965), 99.

⁴⁸ Georgiana D. Hedesan, *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge: The 'Christian Philosophy' of Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579-1644)* (London: Routledge, 2016), 5.

⁴⁹ Hedesan, *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge*, 144., 464.

the theory of *semina* also profoundly influenced the work of seventeenth-century natural philosophers, such as Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655).⁵⁰ Indeed, we will see in Chapter Four how the theory of *semina* that infused Gassendi's matter theory influenced Margaret Cavendish's representation of the atom in her *Poems, and Fancies* (1653). Most notably, for our current discussion, Severinus' work informed the Middle Paracelsian, French alchemist physician Joseph Du Chesne (Quercetanus) (c. 1544-1609), whose work the English Paracelsian Tymme had translated into English as *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* (1605).⁵¹ This work combines the teachings of various alchemical traditions, citing authorities such as Hermes Trismegistus, Raymond Lull, and Arnald of Villanova (all discussed in my first chapter), to make a case for the inherent wisdom or truth of medical and theological Paracelsian teaching. As we saw in the last chapter, Tymme's translation is a work of major importance, promoting the spiritual alchemy of Paracelsus that was so crucial to Margaret Clifford and Aemilia Lanyer. Of interest here is that Tymme translated Du Chesne's work from a notably theological position. Du Chesne conceived of the elements as containing seed-like indivisible 'simples', underpinned by the earlier Severinian *semina*, which depended on God for their innate qualities.⁵² As discussed in the Introduction, Tymme believed the work of alchemy microcosmically replicated the macrocosmic work of God. Through a divine alchemy, God would 'make new Heavens and a new Earth, and bring all things to a christalline cleernes, & wil also make the 4. Elements perfect, simple, & fixed in themselves, that all things may be reduced to a *quintessence of Eternitie*'.⁵³ The alchemist's work imitated God's original separation of substances that occurred at the Creation, and aimed at creating a 'simple, & fixed' substance as in the case of 'an hearbe into ashes: ashes into Salt[,] Salt

⁵⁰ Joel Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus (1540/2-1602)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004), 209-49.

⁵¹ Hedesan, *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge*, 6-7.

⁵² Joseph Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...Translated by Thomas Timme, Minister* (London, 1605), sigs. C3v.

⁵³ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, sig. A3r.

into water, and Mercury so moueable, into a fixed body.’⁵⁴ This was achieved through a process with seven degrees or stages, which I quote in full below:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 Calcination, | Which is the bringing of any thing to ashes. |
| 2 Digestion, | Is a dissolving of that which is thick into thinne, to be purified. |
| 3 Fermentation, | Is a mixing of kindly matter for multiplication or the kindly seasoning, or leauining of a thing. |
| 4 Distillation, | Is an extraction of a liquor from a body, by heate. |
| 5 Circulation, | Is to rectifie anything to a higher perfection. |
| 6 Sublimation, | Is the lifting vp of moyst matter, to make it more pure and dry. |
| 7 Fixation, | Is to make that which is flying, to abide with his body. ⁵⁵ |

As we will see throughout the chapter, these seven degrees of the alchemical cycle, and particularly the processes of ‘calcination’ and ‘circulation’ crucially underpin Pulter’s understanding of alchemy, and her application of these processes to her poetry.

Woodall promotes both Severinus’ medically focused alchemy as well as Tymme’s more theological inflection. This is made explicit in the frontispiece of the second edition of *The Surgeon’s Mate* (1639) that replicates a key part of the frontispiece of Croll’s Calvinist Paracelsian text, *Basilica Chymica* (1609) (see both images in Figure 7). In Croll’s frontispiece, two encircled triangles (one upright and one inverted or reflected) symbolize the correspondence between the cosmic (above) and the terrestrial sphere (below). Woodall’s frontispiece replicates only the upper of these triangles, which symbolises the correspondence between earthly and divine contemplation. Man (*homo*) accesses God (*pater*) through his contemplation—or interpretation—of grace in nature, now symbolised by the central Hebrew Tetragrammaton. This reflection of God’s grace is echoed by the nine orders of angels that surround the triangle. As discussed in relation to Aemilia Lanyer’s angelic depiction of Margaret Clifford in *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611), angels in Croll are a

⁵⁴ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, sig. Aa4r.

⁵⁵ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, sig. Aa4r.

powerfully accommodated form that link contemplation to the divine: they are the ‘perfect and absolute image of God’ and ‘most certain *mirrors* [...] which manifest the divinity in them by continual contemplation.’⁵⁶



Figure 7: Frontispiece to Oswald Croll, *Basilica Chymica* (1609 and frontispiece of the second edition of John Woodall, *The Surgeon's Mate* (London, 1639). Bodleian Library, Oxford. RR. w. 190 and P 1.26 Med.

In Woodall's frontispiece, however, the correspondence between earthly and divine is disrupted: a portrait of the author himself replaces the mirror image of the macrocosm. Visually, the emphasis is not on nature but the individual—an idea articulated clearly in Woodall's 'Preface':

[...] we may so far venture to conceive, that the same gift of God, namely the gift of healing, might by his holy Spirit be, and was transcendent successively on those whom he had preordained, and chosen unto the medicinall function, to the end that they might be the better enabled to search out and apply wholesome medicines in due season, according as they were inspired or taught; for all excellent knowledge commeth from above: and this opinion is also assented unto by holy Scriptures in sundry places.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Oswald Croll, *A Treatise of Oswaldus Crollius of Signatures of Internal Things; or, a True and Lively Anatomy of the Greater and Lesser World in Bazilica chymica*, trans. John Hartman (London, 1670), sig. B3r

⁵⁷ Preface to Woodall, *The surgeons mate*, A6r-v.

Rather than nature reproducing the efficacy of God's grace, it is a chosen *individual* surgeon or physician, elected or preordained by God for this position, who replicates this saving efficacy through his godly-inspired empirical scientific technique (such as was ascribed to Clifford by Lord Willoughby in Chapter One). Woodall's text contains a significant mixture of scientific technique (surgical operations, the application of medicines aboard ship, the treatment of gunshot wounds) alongside alchemical teachings, as evidenced in various practical prescriptions, such as the Paracelsian narcotic, 'Laudanum opiat Paracelsi', which he took directly from Oswald Croll's *Basilica Chymica*.⁵⁸ Most importantly, however, *The Surgeons Mate* contains theoretical alchemical and poetic material that all hint that it was a key source text for Pulter's engagement with alchemical processes and her representation of the elements, atoms, and dust.

READING PULTER ALCHEMICALLY

As we have seen, Jayne Archer's article on Pulter's alchemy represents the most extensive treatment of alchemical concepts in Pulter's work. The basis of the article is 'The Circle [2]', perhaps the most explicitly alchemical of all Pulter's poems, in which the 'sheer density of allusion [...] demands that it be read alchemically.'⁵⁹ Although Archer provides a subtle comprehensive reading of the alchemical images and word clusters in the poem, paying specific attention to how Pulter reworks these in her poetry, this cycle of poems has yet to be read *alchemically*: that is, it has yet to be read as part of the wider cycle of dissolution and regeneration that propels Pulter's verse. Extending the work of Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, this chapter emphasises how 'a materialist redefinition of form—to include urns, stairs, and circles alongside sonnets and couplets'—can also account for why the cyclical movement in Pulter's poetry is both a figurative and formal motif rooted in alchemical thought.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Woodall, *The surgeons mate*, 189-194 (189).

⁵⁹ Archer, "Perfect Circle," 2.

⁶⁰ Scott-Baumann, 'Hester Pulter's Well-Wrought Urns,' 140.

Circles proliferate across the four poems, each titled ‘The Circle’. At their most basic, the ‘Circle’ of the title demands that each these poems be read as a part of a poetic cycle. The circle and its centre are enduring symbols of unity, and specifically unity with God, finding particular resonance in the Neoplatonic philosophy that would inform syncretic alchemical learning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶¹ From an alchemical reading, the ‘Circle’ refers to the ‘opus circulatorium’, the cycle of separation and union of elements that in Tymmme moves through the seven stage process from calcination to fixation.⁶² ‘Circulation’, the fifth degree in Tymmme’s description of the alchemical process, denotes the stage that ‘rectifie[s]’—purifies by repeated distillation—anything to a higher perfection.⁶³ Often, this process, and the wider cycle of the alchemical process by which matter moves from calcination to fixation, is visually represented as a wheel, the *ouroboros* (the self-birthing snake that devours its own tail), and the sun’s circular course around the earth (in the Ptolemaic view of the universe).⁶⁴ This geometric form also represents the perfection of the *process* of alchemy, with the circle acting as a visual symbol of the ‘opus circulatorium’, or the ‘circular work’ by which the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—undergo a cycle of separation and union—dissolution and coagulation (*‘solve et coagula’*)—to create a perfect form.⁶⁵ The alchemical opus, then, is a cycle of successive acts of conversion—creation, death, recreation, renewing in perpetuity—that leads to a refinement of these disparate elements until they achieve a perfect unity, here reproduced in man’s ‘Adamic’ or undivided state of wholeness.⁶⁶ In alchemical texts, the circle is associated with the instruments of alchemy—the sealed alchemical alembic within which the processes take place—as well as the products of alchemy—the symbols for the sun, gold, and the Philosopher’s Stone are based upon the circle.

⁶¹ For further discussion of the circle’s links to alchemical theology, see Margaret Healy, “‘Making the quadrangle round’: Alchemy’s Protean Forms in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and ‘A Lover’s Complaint,’” *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 405-25 (409-12).

⁶² Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...*, sig. Aa4r.

⁶³ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...*, sig. Aa4r. See ‘rectification’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 164-5.

⁶⁴ See ‘opus circulatorium’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 137-9. Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 3.

⁶⁵ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 137. See also ‘solve et coagula’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 186-7.

⁶⁶ Healy, “‘Making the quadrangle round,” 412.

Ultimately, it also encompasses its Neoplatonic, and earlier, significations, which associate the earthly alchemical opus with the work of the divine alchemist, God, whom Archer has called ‘the ultimate alchemist-as-geometrician, in whom each of the elements, all contraries and all lines, are finally united.’⁶⁷

The all-encompassing symbology of the circle underpins Pulter’s cycle of poems, thereby presenting the reader with a dizzying array of cyclic images. ‘Circle [1]’ acts as the key to the cycle, directing and influencing our response to the circles within the text, and to the Circles that follow, as Pulter places herself in a position of authoritative enlightenment: ‘Trust me’ (l. 5). We are first presented with the ‘sad circle’ (l. 9), an endless cycle of grief imagined as a water cycle: ‘Sighs like the air doth clouds condense / Which tears from our sad eyes dispense’ (ll. 3-4). Pulter’s cycle draws upon the Petrarchan alignment of emotions and hyperbolic meteorological images to render grief in material form. The same convention is used to express the grief following the lovers’ death in Donne’s ‘The Dissolution’: ‘My fire of passion, sighs of air, / Water of tears, and earthly sad despair’ (ll. 9-10).⁶⁸ For Pulter, sighs give way to tears, which fall and give way to yet more sighs, just as the air condenses into rain clouds and rain evaporates again. This passionate water cycle has ‘no end’ (l. 1): it is simultaneously unending and unproductive, as the tears ‘descend in vain’ and ‘to sighs they rarify again’ (ll. 7-8). Rarefaction is both the process of becoming less thin, especially in relation to air, but also suggests the alchemical process in which rarefaction means refinement or purification. Here, no ultimate refinement or purity is reached, as the cycle simply continues *ad infinitum*. Where we might hope for the curative effect of tears that the eyes ‘dispense’—that is ‘make up (medicine) according to a prescribed formula’—the sighs and tears are ultimately inefficacious and produce ‘no ease’ (l. 5).⁶⁹ Yet, even as she recognises the futility of

⁶⁷ Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 3.

⁶⁸ John Donne, ‘The Dissolution’, in *The Complete English Poems*, 165.

⁶⁹ “dispense, v.” 3, *OED*.

this grief, she is unable to escape the cycle: as she acknowledges the vanity of tears, the line itself is interjected by a sigh ‘ah me’ (l. 7).

The metaphor of the ‘sad circle’ shifts at line 9 to synecdoche, with the circle as both the earth and mortal life: ‘In this sad circle I run round, / Till giddily I tumble down’ (ll. 9-10). Pulter follows the metaphor though to its logical conclusion, hypothesising her fate after she ‘tumble[s] down’, or sins and then dies. Firstly, she might ‘suspire to air’ (l. 11), sighing out her soul in an exhalation of despair that untethers soul from her body. This fate is aligned with the ‘sad fruits of despair’ that Pulter already ‘know[s]’ (l. 12), where the fruits resemble the droplets of condensing air already depicted in the markedly fruitless cycle. Inverting the association between fruit and productivity, these productions are drained of their regenerative power by the fact that they are caught up in this cycle of sameness that leads only to suspiration-as-annihilation. The ‘sad fruits of despair’ (l. 12) to which Pulter attests also call to mind contemporary royalist depictions of the period of civil strife during the 1640s and 1650s, often referred to at the time as a ‘winter’, and imagined terms of a blighted landscape or spoiled garden.⁷⁰ Indeed, the term ‘sad fruits’ was used by Charles himself to describe ‘The hazards and miseries of civil War [...]’, all ‘sad fruits for a King to reap after a long, just, peaceable, plenteous and religious reign.’⁷¹ The echo of this in Pulter’s ‘sad fruits of despair’ (l. 12) carries with it an implicit inditement to guard against the greatest of sins, despair, as well as the unproductive nature of grief; in this respect, it recalls the meteorological

⁷⁰ Dale B.J. Randall, *Winter fruit: English drama, 1642-1660* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), xi. Peter Davidson (ed.), *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse 1625-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), lxx.

⁷¹ Richard Watson, *Effata regalia. Aphorismes divine, moral, politick. Scattered in the books, speeches, letters, &c. of Charles the First, King of Great Brittain, &c.* (London, 1661), 24. The imagery of ‘sad fruits’ also appears in the account of Simeon Ashe, a contemporary observer of the siege of York in 1644: ‘The Lord affect us with the sad fruits of wasting warres and speedily and mercifully end our combustions which are carried on with high sinnes and heavy desolations. Truly my heart sometimes is ready to breake with what I see here.’ Quoted also in Simon Schama, *A History of Britain: The British Wars 1603-1776* (London: Bodley Head, 2009), 120.

water cycle with which the poem began, even as it looks forward to the poem's ultimate shift from despairing sighs to the comforts of spiritual consolation.⁷²

Nevertheless, Pulter here imagines herself consigned to a purgatorial fate, her spiritual progression refracted through tropes of Civil War tumult and grief. The alternative fate Pulter poses is the destruction of her body, extending the Petrarchan conceit of tears to horrifying effect: 'should I into tears dissolve / What horror would my soul involve' (l. 13). To 'involve' means here to 'envelop [...] in trouble', but also to 'overwhelm and swallow up', with all its overtones of death and destruction (as in Exod. 15:12; Numb. 26:10; Lamentations 2:5, 16). Paul's caution in II Cor. 2:7 against being 'swallowed up with overmuch sorrow' is lost as Pulter succumbs to tears without the remembrance of Christian consolation. Pulter speculates about the vulnerability of the soul to immaterial horror by imagining the dissolved body as a (self-)enveloping chaos, consistent with the scriptural characterisation of the watery void: 'the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2).

Pulter's poem is centred not on mortal devotion but immortal longings for unity with the divine. As soon as it is introduced, this cycle of sighs and tears is dismissed; Pulter instead instructs her soul, and her reader, 'on heaven alone depend' (l. 2). The unproductive cycles are ruptured, and a new cycle is forged as she turns back to God, as Pulter verbally signals: 'Then, gracious God, in Thee I'll *trust*' (l. 15; my emphasis). This new cycle rests upon Pulter's continuity with, and trust in, God. Even as Pulter imagines herself crumbling into dust, replicating the calcining process by which matter is transmuted to ash, she recalls that this dissolution is temporary, and that her soul will unite with God after death:

Although Thou crumble me to dust.
No grief shall so emergent be
To separate my soul from Thee (ll. 16-18)

⁷² On Pulter's sighs and tears as royalist consolation see Sarah C. E. Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. chapter 4, "'This kingdoms loss': Hester Pulter's Elegies and Emblems", 135-174.

The body crumbling into dust recalls the dissolution into water; however, in this new cycle, the possibility of chaos is precluded by faith. Trust is central to this faith; indeed, as in Calvin, faith is a function of the will, based on trust (*fiducia*). Calvin writes in his Institutes (II.ii.2): ‘your idea of his nature is not clear unless you acknowledge him to be the origin and fountain of all goodness. Hence would arise both confidence [trust or *fiducia*] in him, and a desire of cleaving to him, did not the depravity of the human mind lead it away from the proper course of investigation.’⁷³

Pulter’s trust stems from her faith in God’s power and her belief in *creatio ex nihilo*: ‘Of nothing Thou didst me create’ (l. 19). Even an annulation (l. 20), a complete destruction of her soul and body, Pulter argues, would be to God’s glory, proving his divine power over matter, creation and destruction.⁷⁴ Pulter’s initial expression of grief and fear is finally countered in her expression of trust in God; her inward-turning sigh ‘*ah* me’ (l. 7, emphasis my own) is converted to the culminating proclamation of joy at God’s glory in breathless lines that spill over the iambic tetrameter of the poem:

And should’st Thou now annihilate,
Abrupt, or consummate my story
Oh let it be unto Thy glory (ll. 20-22).

Pulter cedes control of her story, both her life and her poem, offering it up to God’s glory. Her ‘let it be’ (ll 22) acts as both an entreaty and a submission to the divine fiat. ‘Consummate’ has echoes of Christ’s final words on the Cross: ‘he said, It is finished’ (John 19:30) or ‘consummatum est’ in the Vulgate. Pulter’s story or life is ended, but these echoes of Christ’s last words invoke the Resurrection that will follow—‘Thy glory’—which is also the beginning of her eternal story and immortal life. In contrast to the circle that has ‘no end’ (l. 1), God’s intervention in the poem introduces hopeful ‘consummation’ or completion, offering salvation as a counterpoint to the

⁷³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846), 53.

⁷⁴ For a summary of the controversies of this debate, see Dennis Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 2, ‘Multiverse, Chaos, Cosmos’, 27-50 (esp. 27-32).

despair with which the poem started. This is aurally echoed in the resoundingly harmonious rhyme that connects ‘story’ and ‘glory’ (ll. 21-22), prefiguring the union of Pulter’s soul with the divine.

Pulter’s poem might be read as an optimistic riposte to Donne’s ‘Dissolution’, a poem infused with both sexual competition and the grief of losing a mortal lover: ‘She’s dead; and all which die / To their first elements resolve’ (ll. 12). For Donne the subsequent involution of the lovers’ bodies is deathly, as his resolved elements ‘nourish not, but smother’ (l. 8). Pulter offers instead a vision of spiritual ecstasy that reaches its culmination in the erotically charged consummation of her union with God; hence, the speaker’s joyfully expiring exhalation: ‘oh’ (l. 22). The final line, aligning Pulter’s (life) story with the (narrative) story of her poem, brings her devotional self-abasement and her confident self-construction as a poet of consolation, into a state of blissful harmony, as both are offered up to God’s glory.

‘The Circle [1]’ acts as a key to the poems that follow, pushing the reader through the cycle, even as each successive poem dwells in further detail upon the processes detailed in first. ‘The Circle [2]’ is, however, Pulter’s most explicitly alchemical poem, offering a critique of those alchemists that focus on wealth and eternal life over the spiritual pursuits (commonly found in the work of practitioners like Tymm): the poem implicitly castigates those writers who present alchemy as a cerebral art of analysis rather than a practical-cum-spiritual manual of devotion. Though a common trope in alchemical-spiritual texts, used to denigrate those alchemists preoccupied with the furnace at the expense of the spiritual side of alchemy, it would seem that Pulter’s use of the term ‘Chimick Art’ at the opening of the poem is not simply, as Jayne Archer, has argued, deployed pejoratively. The term might more accurately be read in the sense it acquires in Woodall’s *The Surgeons Mate* (1639), where he uses it to extol the benefits of specifically spiritual and medicinal alchemy, itself derived from Paracelsus:

Bazillius Valentinus seconded him, who having his lights from [Paracelsus] exceedingly beautified the Chymick Art, by composing medicines of unspeakable worth to future ages, far exceeding their worthy predecessors as is manifest; for what comparison can there be betwixt medicines made of vegetables, decocted, contunded or mixed how artificial soever, if compared with Elixers, Quintessences, Tinctors, and like extracts of price, which are not

only dureable for many yeers without change, easie and pleasant to be received into mans body in his greatest weaknesse, but also they excel all Galenistical compositions for the eradicating inveterate maladies, as experience more then sufficiently manifesteth.⁷⁵

‘The Circle [2]’ takes the form of a sonnet; yet, similarly to ‘The Circle [1]’, the Petrarchan conceits are inverted. Rather than the expected comparison of humans to objects we might expect, rather the objects—alchemical elements—are personified in the chemical wedding between mercury and sulphur (l. 3). These elements were often figured as opposing gendered forces: male and female, sulphur and mercury, Sol and Luna.⁷⁶ For, as Lyndy Abraham details,

Alchemy is based on the Hermetic view that man had become divided within himself, separated into two sexes, at the fall in the garden of Eden and could only regain his Adamic state when the opposing forces within him were reconciled.⁷⁷

Consequently, the chemical wedding of male and female, or *conjunctio*, is a central motif found throughout alchemical works—from the ascription of masculine and feminine pronouns to elements in texts to the very alchemical illustrations that anthropomorphise chemical elements. The *conjunctio* in Pulter combines or ‘wed[s]’ two gendered elements to create a gendered ideal substance—what Abraham has described as a ‘complete, undivided unity known as the rebis or hermaphrodite, [...] the perfect integration of male and female energies.’⁷⁸ In alchemical terms, this represents the mixture of ‘sulphur, the hot, dry, active male aspect of the *prima materia* [and] the cold, moist, receptive female aspect, *argent vive* or mercury’, and speaks to their transmutation from base substances into the ideal Philosopher’s Stone (which we encountered in Chapter One).⁷⁹ Pulter draws upon this gendered hermetic imagery to imagine alchemists bringing the female mercury and male sulphur together to produce an hermaphroditic ‘posterity’ (l. 5), everlasting in its life as well as in terms of its offspring.

But ‘The Circle [2]’, much like the preceding poem, also critiques the false hope—or more accurately, faith—placed in any cycles removed from God’s influence and power; the cycle of

⁷⁵ Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 3-4. Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 236.

⁷⁶ Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 3-4, 123.

⁷⁷ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 36-7.; Roberts, *Mirror of Alchemy*, 84.

⁷⁸ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 98.

⁷⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 98, 124.

alchemical progression set up here is held in a negative contrast to the harmonious consummation and salvation that is presented beforehand. Mercury and sulphur are ‘consumed with love’ (l. 4), artificially engineered by philtres (l. 3) or love potions. Rather than glorying in God, as in ‘The Circle [1]’, this poem witnesses the elements ‘Glorying to shine in silver and gold’ (l. 7): that is, material, not spiritual, concerns are incorrectly placed at the forefront, and rather than yielding to the will of God, the elements ‘resign’ (l. 6) or give up their beings for ‘their posterity’ (l. 5), here, metals. This misplaced faith in gold *alone* results in an obliteration of the self, a horrifying absorption into self-love that reflects the soul’s involvement in the chaos of ‘The Circle [1]’ (l. 14): ‘fretting vermeil posion doth enfold’ (l. 8). Framed in the language of Petrarchan conceit, Pulter offers a critique of outward beauty: ‘to fret’ means ‘to adorn richly with gold, silver, or jewels’ as well as ‘to wear away by gnawing’, so it has doubly pejorative connotations here.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, vermillion, or the red pigment used as a cosmetic, which often appears in poetic blazons to describe the idealized red of female cheeks and lips, is degraded as false, deceptive appearance meant to seduce.⁸¹ In Pulter’s poem, the image of being enfolded by ‘fretting vermeil poison’ (l. 8) thus suggests the seductive, yet ultimately destructive, outcome of placing material over spiritual concerns. Where the union of mercury and sulphur promises gold, it instead now produces a poisonous chemical; where it promises life, it produces death. Insofar as the poem sets up certain alchemical expectations—the colour red symbolises the *rubedo*, or ‘the reddening of the white matter of the [Philosopher’s] Stone at the final state in the opus alchymicum’, which is when the chemical marriage yields the resurrection of the body into eternal life—it also radically turns against them.⁸² This movement is mirrored in the meter of the lines—‘That they, consumed with love, may live / In their posterity and in them shine’ (ll. 4-5)—which moves from the poem’s pentameter into tetrameter, metrically replicating the hollow promise of eternity as the lines are suddenly

⁸⁰ “fretting, v.” 2 and 1. *OED*.

⁸¹ This layering is also noted in Archer, “Perfect Circle,” 7-8, and Scott-Baumann, “Hester Pulter’s Well-Wrought Urns,” 123.

⁸² Abraham, *Dictionary*, 174-5.

curtailed. The love of exoteric as opposed to esoteric alchemy does not bring one closer to God, but cuts one off from Him.

In many ways, Pulter's poem echoes, and so can be drawn into dialogue with, Donne's 'A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day'. Donne's poem also presents the antithesis of an alchemical transmutation, in large part because the world in his 'Nocturnal' is presented as alchemically losing its vital force. The world's 'sap' is likened to 'general balm' (l. 6), harking back to the 'vital balsam' of Paracelsus and Severinus, but as it drains away into the earth (l. 6), the positive image of the balm becomes negative, effectively drowning the earth and rendering it 'hydroptic', or excessively full of fluid; all hopes of a positive transmutation are lost. Organic life is left 'Dead and interr'd' (l. 8).⁸³ This fact is reinforced by the monosyllabic diction and dirge-like spondaic meter of poem—'The sun is spent, and now his flasks' (l. 3); 'The world's whole sap is sunk' (l. 5)—all of which thud hollowly, straining against the progression of the poem. Turning against the Paracelsian idea that a quintessence implies something pure and medicinal, much like Aristotle's mysterious 'fifth element' or aether, Donne speaks of a 'quintessence even from nothingness', made darkly through Love's 'new alchemy' (ll. 13-15).⁸⁴ Donne's alchemy does not regenerate its speaker but brings death: the 'new alchemy' is 're-begot / Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not' (ll. 17-18), until the speaker's state is reduced to 'the grave / Of all that's nothing' (ll. 21-22). His reduction to nothingness is bitterly contrasted with the usual life-affirming spirit given to other earthly beings that benefit from God's goodness or grace: 'All others, from all things, draw all that's good, / Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have' (ll. 19-20). While Donne is subject to 'love's limbeck' (l. 21), or a distillation of love, his love is actually poisoned by grief, much like the 'spider Love' in 'Twickenham Garden', 'transubstantiates all, / And can convert manna to gall' (ll. 6-7). We see in these poems an unsettling of Donne's 'vertue'; rather than engendering a

⁸³ Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*, 464.

⁸⁴ 'The Quintessence [...] is a certain matter Corporally extracted out of all the things, which Nature hath produced; and also out of every thing that hath a life in its self, and is separated from all impurities and Mortality', Paracelsus, *Archidoxis* (London: J.H. Oxon, 1660), sig. D2v.

regenerative transformation, alchemical transformation is subverted, producing corruption and death where it should produce healing and life.

Although Pulter's couplet sonnet is dominated by verbs of transformation (fretting, refining, calcining), all things in the poem ultimately return to dust because they forget their original—and promised—spiritual refinement at the hands of God: 'Forgetting quite that they were once refined. / By time and fate to dust are all calcined' (ll. 10-11). The process of calcination, which transforms 'bodies into Calx' or 'burne[s] them to powder', here produces only lifeless dust, all 'lying obliviated in their urn' (l. 11).⁸⁵ Yet, unlike "The Circle [1]", this is a poem from which God is *made* entirely absent by the egotistical alchemists who seek to replace God as the divine alchemist.⁸⁶ Playing upon the punishment of Adam and Eve—"for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19)—Pulter's poem shows how the alchemists who echo the actions of their fallen ancestors are doomed to create only dust; hence, 'they to their great ancestors return' (l. 12). In fact, neither the love nor the life they artificially engineer can echo the blissful consummation, or union, with God evident in "The Circle [1]". The consequent inversion is powerfully expressed in the final couplet of "The Circle [2]"; while the word 'So' (l. 13) seems to introduce the volta of the sonnet, this poem actually achieves no such transition. Instead, it turns back upon itself, reinstating the fruitless cycle: 'So man, the universe's chiefest glory, / His primitive's dust (alas) doth end his story' (l. 13-14), where the emphatic possessive in 'primitive's' underlines how far man has fallen away from God, and is still falling (into *dust*). With its resounding finality, Pulter's final couplet inverts the rhyme of 'story' / 'glory' from the previous Circle poem: rather than achieving salvation, this circle finds its resolution in the place whence it began (dust-as-death).

⁸⁵ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 268, 252.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann also reads this sonnet as a rebuke to egotism: "'The Circle [2]' is, then, a non-sonnet about non-posterity. Pulter engages with both sonnet form and alchemical knowledge through denial. In some ways it is a correction of, a retort to, the egotism of the sonnet tradition.' In "Hester Pulter's Well- Wrought Urns," 124-5.

On the one hand, Jayne Archer's reading of the conclusion to 'The Circle [2]' as inevitable is a useful one:

This is the sting in the tail of the ouroboros, and of the revolution it represents. The ouroboros is not a perfect circle; it traces a line from a point back to a point, and that point, inescapably, involves death, oblivion: we will be consumed by the snake's mouth.⁸⁷

The alchemist who operates without God's assistance is 'doomed to fail'.⁸⁸ On the other hand, when read within the wider cycle of poems, this transformation to dust might be better understood as part of a larger process of falling from which one can be raised. Certainly, the meter of Pulter's final couplet, in which she adds an additional foot to the iambic pentameter, gives the sense of something unfinished, thereby pushing the reader forwards—to continue the cycle by reading 'The Circle [3]'.

'The Circle [3]'—replete with its numerological significance—notably transmutes the desolation of 'The Circle [2]' back to the spiritual consolation we encountered in 'Circle [I]'. Indeed, the poem acts as a metrical continuation of the poem preceding it, maintaining the iambic pentameter. For this reason, the first three lines caution against viewing the cycle in 'The Circle [2]' as complete:

To be unwilling or afraid to die
In the whole world's society,
Is a sign of huge impatency (ll. 1-3)

The tetrameter of the second line causes the reader to rush on to the third line, wittily underpinning the breathless impatience that Pulter counsels against in the poem. Rather than resisting the forward progression of the cycle, suggested by the insertion of a triplet that aurally clings to the preceding rhymes in a poem of couplets, Pulter argues that the reader must turn their attention to the cycles of the universe for consolation: 'That many things revolve thou mayest explore' (l. 4). The breakdown of matter in death, 'when thou dost dissolve (l. 5), is a necessary part of the process of renewal. The ambiguous subject of 'it is no more' refers not to the body and its destruction, as

⁸⁷ Archer, "Perfect Circle," 9.

⁸⁸ Archer, "Perfect Circle" 9.

we saw in ‘The Circle [2]’; rather, the line conveys the sense that dissolution itself is ‘no more’. Dissolution becomes one of the ‘many things [that] revolve’ (l. 4) as the Copernican model of the universe becomes a source of consolation: ‘For so this earthly transitory mound / In an eternal motion still runs round’ (l. 6-7). Here, we see a shift from the godless vision of ‘The Circle [2]’ back to the divinely ordained cycles of ‘The Circle [1]’. Pulter imagines the Christian virtues of patience and resignation through the lens of the materialist belief in the constant regeneration of matter. In so doing, she offers a consolatory reading of death as a necessary part of the divine cycle.⁸⁹

The turn to hope is realised in the consoling retelling of Genesis 1:1-5 achieved in ‘The Circle [4]’. In this poem, Pulter reintroduces God to the cycle, framing the creation in specific alchemical terms, describing how the ‘eternal Spirit of life and love’ (l. 1), God, ‘From nature’s mass extracted Light (ll. 3). In Woodall, ‘Extraction is a segregation of an essence from a corporeous concretion’: the same separation of the immaterial Light from the corporeal mass.⁹⁰ In contrast to the futile imitations of divine work in ‘The Circle [2]’, this divine alchemy yields a series of interlinked generations that imbue the eternal Spirit with a hermaphroditic perfection that anticipates the creation scene in Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667):

Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad’st it pregnant (I.19-22).

on the watery calm
His brooding wings the spirit of God outspread,
And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid mass (VII.234-237).⁹¹

In Milton’s reimagining of Genesis, the divine spirit’s masculine penetration renders the abyss, a womb-like receptacle, pregnant; at the same time, its feminine brooding incubates its own

⁸⁹ For Pulter’s interest in dirt and waste as resource, see Dolan, “Hester Pulter’s Dunghill Poetics,” 16–42.

⁹⁰ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 271.

⁹¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Routledge, 2013).

pregnancy. In Pulter's poetry, the proliferating clauses of the poem similarly blur the distinctions between male and female, subject and object:

The eternal Spirit of life and love,
 Descending from His throne above;
 From nature's mass extracted Light,
 Biding her triumph over night.
 Who, in her prime of youth and day,
 Lovely Astrea did display;
 Who, conquering all the shades infernal,
 Her virgin womb showed life eternal
 To lapsèd man, then flew above
 To be involved again in life and love (ll. 1-10)

From one perspective, the subject of the verse remains God, moving through a series of gendered transformations as he circles down to earth in shifting biblical and classical forms—Spirit, Light, Astrea—before returning to his throne at the close of the poem. Yet, the terms 'display' and 'show' might be read as describing the physical display of the maternal body. Pulter thus makes the idea of generation more explicit as God effectively births Light who, in turn, gives birth to Astrea, whose womb produces eternal life. The figure of Astrea thus unites biblical and classical narratives, standing both for the Virgin Mary and the classical goddess of Justice. Her 'virgin womb [that] showed life eternal / To lapsèd man' (ll. 8-9) aligns Mary's grace with the gift she receives and imparts to the world and identifies Christ's Redemption with Astrea's hoped-for return to bring back the Golden Age to humankind (Virgil, *Ecl. IV*, iv.6: *iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna*).⁹² Pulter joins a tradition of authors who use Astrea to figure the Restoration as a return of justice, most famously John Dryden's *Astraea Redux*, where Charles II's triumphant return to England at the end of Interregnum is compared to Astraea's descent to the earth.⁹³

The final four lines echo the transition of the cycle as a whole shifting, or perhaps more accurately, dissolving—from pentameter (l. 7) to catalectic pentameter (l. 8), to tetrameter (l.9)—before resolving in pentameter (l. 10). The prosody enacts in microcosm the progress of the entire

⁹² 'Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns,' Virgil. *Eclogues*, trans H. Rushton Fairclough, new ed. rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 48 (Latin), 49 (English).

⁹³ John Dryden, *Astraea redux: A poem on the happy restoration & return of His sacred Majesty Charles the Second* (London, 1660).

cycle of circle poems. This circling motion reflects how the stanzaic length of the Circle poems, seems to play with disintegration and the proportions of form: the poems degrade from twenty lines ("The Circle [1]"), to fourteen ("The Circle [2]"), here dividing in half to seven lines ("The Circle [3]"), before rising again to ten lines ("The Circle [4]"), a perfect division of the length of the first poem.⁹⁴ 'Astraea' completes the motion of the circle by returning to be 'Involved' (l. 10) above in God. 'Involved' (l. 10) is now used in its positive sense, meaning to 'consummate[d]' (l. 21), as at the close of 'The Circle [1]', or as the fulfilment of the 'enfold[ing]' described in 'The Circle [2]'. Pulter expresses a sense of reunion as her poem's opening and closing lines end with the same words, 'life and love', thereby resolving the rhyme while encircling the poem with the central spiritual conceits. These circles within circles within circles proliferate through image, meter, and rhyme in Pulter's poetry, evoking an endlessly spinning cycle presided over by the poet, but ultimately, attributed—as in Pulter's poetic 'story' (l. 21) in "The Circle [1]"—to God: 'Oh let it be unto Thy Glory' (l. 22).

To read Pulter in terms of a distinctly spiritual alchemy is to be acutely aware of the processes of dissolution and resolution that circumscribe her verse, and of how careful she is to privilege spiritual over practical alchemy (in ways that differ from Clifford and Lanyer, as discussed in Chapter One). For Woodall, 'Alchemy is an Art dissolving natural congealed substances, and again congealing substances dissolved, for the more grateful, wholesome, and safe preparing of medicines for mans body.'⁹⁵ This cyclical logic underpins not only the wider theological and political narrative of Pulter's poetry, but also, as we have seen, the formal structure of her verse.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann has shed light on how Pulter engages with the sonnet form in "The Circle [2]" but it is possible that "The Circle" poems are playing with sonnet form more broadly across the cycle (see Scott-Baumann, "Hester Pulter's Well-Wrought Urns"). At twenty lines, "The Circle [1]" introduces an extra sestet, while "The Circle [3]", a poem that dwells on death and has the shortest line length, cuts the preceding sonnet ("The Circle [2]") in two. The ten lines of "The Circle [4]" perhaps recalls the interlinking of the numbers four and ten in Platonic and Pythagorean thought (in which they were interpreted as divine) to evoke a shift to perfect harmony: '4 represents the unfolded cosmos In its physical aspect—what humans perceive with their senses; and 10 refers to the whole as a functioning organism.' See Sigling Bruhn, *The Musical Order of the World: Kepler, Hesse, Hindemith* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2005), 65.

⁹⁵ Woodall, *The surgeons mate*, 235

But if Pulter's subtle poetic negotiation of different *types* of alchemy undergirds the movement of her poetry, the substance of alchemical thought also provides the intellectual thread that bridges her careful detailing of how the micro— and macrocosm converge, as subtly displayed in 'View But This Tulip.'

THE PROCESS OF PALINGENESIS IN TYMME AND PULTER

Pulter's poem opens with an imperative to the reader to 'View but this tulip, rose, or july flower', verbally replicating the visual layout of an emblem book, in which the reader was usually met with an emblem followed by a couplet or moral verse below.⁹⁶ Pulter's poem lacks an accompanying emblem but the poem does not linger over the 'tulip, rose, or july flower', which the reader is advised to view as an emblem: 'And by a finite, see an infinite power' (l. 2). Pulter invests the emblem poem with new dynamism as she moves swiftly on from the static image of a flower, towards an emblematic *process*. The poem shifts to a detailed description of palingenesis, an alchemical process whereby a plant or flower is first killed and then brought back to life or resurrected. Pulter develops this process into a meditation on God's capacity to endow the human body and soul with eternal life through the Resurrection.

Accounts of palingenesis were widely circulated in seventeenth century England.⁹⁷ While Eardley draws our attention to examples in the 1640s to 1660s, I propose that the most pertinent account to Pulter's poem is the earliest—here, in Tymme's translation of Du Chesne (1605)—which I quote in full:

⁹⁶ For a particularly popular example see Francis Quarles, *Emblems. Divine and Moral* (London, 1635).

⁹⁷ Alice Eardley draws our attention to accounts in Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642), Gaffarel Jacques, *Unheard-of Curiosities concerning the Talismanical Sculpture of the Persians, the Horoscope of the Patriarkes, and the Reading of the Stars* (London, 1650) Kenelm Digby, *A Discourse concerning the Vegetation of Plants* (London, 1661). See Eardley, "Hester Pulter's 'Indivisibles,'" 134.

This man was so excellently, and phylosophically skilfull in the preparing of the ashes out of al the parts of any maner of plant, with all the Tinctures and Impressions of all the parts of the plant, and would in such wise conserue all their Spirites, and the Authours of all their faculties, that hée had about thirtie such plants prepared out of their ashes of diuers sorts, conteyned in their seuerall glasses, sealed vp with Hermes seale, with the tyle of each particular plant, and the propertie thereof, written vpon the same. So, as that if a man desired to see a Rose or Mary-gold, or any other flower, as a red or white Poppey, or such like: then would hée take the glasse wherein the ashes of such a flower was inclosed, whether it were of a Rose, a Marie-golde, a Poppey, a Gilly-flower, or such like, according as the writing of the glasse did demonstrate. And putting the flame of a Candell to the bottome of the glasse, by which it was made hote, you might see that most thinne and impalpable ashes, or salt, send foorth from the bottome of the glasse, the manifest forme of a Rose, vegetating and growing by little and little, and putting on so fully the forme of stalkes, leaues and flowers, in such perfect and naturall wise in apparant shew, that a man would haue beléeued verily, the same to be naturally corporeat, whereas in truth it was the spirituall Idea, indued with a spirituall essence: which serued for no other purpose, but to be matched with his fitting earth, that so it might take vnto it a more soly body. This shadowed Figure, so soone as the vessell was taken from the fire, turned to his ashes againe, and vanishing away, became a Chaos and confused matter.⁹⁸

This passage contains several suggestive details that closely echo Pulter's own description. The rose and gilly-flower that Tymme lists are replicated in Pulter's first line 'View but this tulip, rose, or July flower' (l.1): 'July-flower' was another name for the carnation or gillyflower. The poem poetically reproduces Tymme's directions for the experiment through a series of imperatives:

Shut up the ashes under Hermes's seal;
Then, with a candle or a gentle fire,
You may reanimate at your desire (ll. 8-10)

The details of the ashes, the hermetic seal, and the candle precisely correspond to Tymme's account, which draws upon the seven stage process of the *opus circulatorium* outlined in the first section of this chapter: calcination; digestion; fermentation; distillation; circulation; sublimation; and fixation.⁹⁹ But Tymme's brief description of 'the preparing of the ashes' is expanded in Pulter's poem, demonstrating a detailed technical knowledge of the process: 'With beating, macerating,

⁹⁸ Du Chesne, *Practice of Chymicall Physicke*, sigs. F3r-v. Cassandra Gorman has also noted that Pulter may have had this specific passage in mind when writing 'View but this tulip.' Gorman, however, argues that it is Kenelm Digby's account of palingenesis in *A discourse concerning the vegetation of plants spoken by Sir Kenelme Digby at Gresham College on the 23 of January, 1660* that Pulter was using as a main source. Cassandra Gorman, "The Imperfect Circle: Hester Pulter's Alchemical Forms" in *The Poetics of Scientia in Early Modern England: Devices of Fancy* eds. Subha Mukherji and Elizabeth L. Swann (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming), ms 1-24.

⁹⁹ The term 'Hermes seal' is 'the hermetic seal which closes the alchemical vessel and keeps it airtight by either fusion or welding', referring to its origins in the alchemical practice of Hermes Trismegistus. See Abraham, *Dictionary*, 99. Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...*, sig. Aa4r.

fermentation, / Calcining chemically, with segregation' (ll. 5-6). The plant is first macerated, steeped in liquid, then that liquid is fermented: 'subjected to a process of vaporization and distillation' through heat.¹⁰⁰ Through this process, liquid and solid are separated or 'segregated'; the liquid evaporates while the solid undergoes 'calcination'—'the conversion of a metal or mineral to powder or dust by the heat of the fire.'¹⁰¹ In both 'Tymme and Pulter, 'chaos' evokes the dark abyss of formless matter before God divided this matter in the world's creation (Genesis 1:1-18); for both, this division is invested with alchemical meaning. As detailed in Tymme's *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, the practice of alchemy has 'concurrence and antiquitie with Theologie', replicating on earth the work of God as the divine alchemist in the world's creation:

the *Spirit of God moved upon the water*: which was an indigested Chaos or masse created before by God, with confused Earth in mixture: yet, by his Halchymicall Extraction, Seperation, Sublimation, and Coniunction, so ordered and conioyned againe, as they are manifestly seene a part and sundered.¹⁰²

Pulter sets up a similar analogy, asserting that the 'human art' of alchemy brings the flowers out of chaos where they 'were retired' (l. 3), or latent and waiting to be drawn out. Relatedly, the ashes that are 'a Chaos and confused matter' in Tymme contain the very salt that will eventually transition 'into water, and Mercury so moueable, into a fixed body.'¹⁰³ Pulter invests this process with theological significance, using 'raised', meaning 'to cause the growth of a plant' or 'to bring into life' and 'reinspired' meaning reanimated, as if through the life-giving breath in Genesis 2:7: 'God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'.¹⁰⁴ The 'human art' reproduces the implicit 'divine art' of God's creation.

¹⁰⁰ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 31.

¹⁰² Tymme trans. *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, Sig. A1.

¹⁰³ Du Chesne, *Practice of Chymicall Physicke*, sigs. F3r-v, sig. Aa4r. Cassandra Gorman has also noted that Pulter may have had this specific passage in mind when writing 'View but this tulip.' Gorman, however, argues that it is Kenelm Digby's account of palingenesis in *A discourse concerning the vegetation of plants spoken by Sir Kenelme Digby at Gresham College on the 23 of January, 1660* that Pulter was using as a main source. Cassandra Gorman, "The Imperfect Circle: Hester Pulter's Alchemical Forms" in *The Poetics of Scientia in Early Modern England: Devices of Fancy* eds. Subha Mukherji and Elizabeth L. Swann (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming), ms 1-24.

¹⁰⁴ "raise, v." OED.

Pulter's addition of the tulip to Tymme's list of flowers sharpens the focus of the poem upon the aestheticism of this 'human art'.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the variety of garden flowers listed in Tymme, the tulip, rose, and gillyflower to which Pulter draws our attention speak eloquently to artful human intervention in nature. The tulip was famously the subject of botanical hybridization and efforts to produce even more decorative and tempting specimens, resulting in the 'tulip fever' in Holland in the 1630s where scandalous sums were paid for variegated bulbs.¹⁰⁶ During the sixteenth century, roses were particularly subject to ornamental cultivation: the period marks the development of the Dutch cabbage rose—"The Great Holland Rose"—and its introduction to England.¹⁰⁷ The gillyflower, whose streaking depended on grafting, plays a central role in the ethics of artful interventions in nature in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*.¹⁰⁸ Pulter's floral imagery also evokes man's power over generation in the natural world which mimics God's own creation. Pulter's assertion that 'a wretched mortal hath the power / To recreate a Virbius of a flower' (ll. 15-16) refers to Asclepius' resurrection of Hippolytus, torn to pieces by horses, who was then renamed Virbius (from *vir bis*, 'a man twice [born]').¹⁰⁹ The resurrected flower and the resurrected body are drawn into radically close alignment. The creation is echoed in the meter of the verse itself: the lines 'With beating, macerating, fermentation, / Calcining chemically, with segregation' (ll. 5-6), each contain an extra syllable that spills over the iambic foot in tumbling generativity. This might

¹⁰⁵ It is also possible that Pulter draws here upon another account of palingenesis noted by Alice Eardley and Cassandra Gorman. Tymme's account is the source for Kenelm Digby, who writes: '*Querquetanus* the famous Physician of King *Henry* the fourth telleth us a wonderfull sto|ry of a *Polonian* Doctor that shewed him a dozen glasses Hermetically Sealed, in each of which was a different Plant; for example, a Rose in one, a Tulip in another, a Clove-Gilly-flower in a third; adso of the rest.' Kenelm Digby, *A discourse concerning the vegetation of plants : Spoken by Sir Kenelme Digby at Gresham College, on the 23. of January, 1660. At a meeting of the Society for promoting philosophical knowledge by experiments, 1660* (London, 1661), 72-3. See Eardley, "Hester Pulter's 'Indivisibles,'" 134. Gorman, "The Imperfect Circle: Hester Pulter's Alchemical Forms," ms 9-11.

¹⁰⁶ For the tulip craze, see Anne Goldgar, *Tulipmania: money, honor, and knowledge in the Dutch golden age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

¹⁰⁷ John Gerard, *The herball or Generall historie of plantes* (London 1597), 1081.

¹⁰⁸ 'PERDITA [...] the fairest flowers o'th' season | Are our carnations and streaked gillyvors, | Which some call nature's bastards; of that kind | Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not | To get slips of them.' (IV.iv.81-5). William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Frances E. Dolan ed. "View But This Tulip" by Hester Pulter (Emblem 40, Elemental Edition) and Leah Knight and Wendy Wall eds. "View But This Tulip" by Hester Pulter (Emblem 40, Elemental Edition). In *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018). Accessible at <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>.

be seen as an ‘overstepping’ of sorts; certainly, Frances E. Dolan has read the poem as a critique of the ‘pretensions of alchemy to control life and death.’¹¹⁰ On the other, Pulter presents the reader with perfection—‘by a finite, see an infinite power’ (l. 2)—rather than pretence. Instead of a critique, the poem celebrates the aesthetic potential of the ‘human art’ of spiritualised alchemy to reveal God’s divine art in the emblem of a perfect flower. The sequence of imperatives that structure the first part of the poem (detailing the process of palingenesis)—‘Then [...] shut up the ashes’ (ll. 6-7), ‘Then [...] reanimate’ (ll. 8-7)—gives way to the conditional structure of the poem as a whole and Pulter’s use of alchemical analogy to prove the resurrection of the flesh: ‘If man can raise a flower, God can thee’ (l. 45).

In many ways the poetic image of the flower is the imagined emblem that provides the answer to Pulter’s rhetorical question:

Then seeing a wretched mortal hath the power
To recreate a Virbius of a flower,
Why should we fear, though sadly we retire
Into our cause? (ll. 15-18)

As has been noted by Alice Eardley, Pulter’s analogy here is similar to Thomas Browne’s account of palingenesis:

[...] which can from the Ashes of a Plant revive the plant, and from its cinders recall it into its stalk and leaves again. What the Art of man can do in these inferiour pieces, what blasphemy is it to affirm the finger of God cannot do in these more perfect and sensible structures! This is that mystical Philosophy, from whence no true Scholar becomes an Atheist, but from the visible effects of nature.¹¹¹

Here, too, the ‘visible effects’ of palingenesis by way of proof to ‘affirm the finger of God’ or divine art. Browne’s description expands on the idea of Tymme’s ashes with their latent salt, water, and Mercury, noting,

A plant or vegetable consumed to ashes, to a contemplative and schoole Philosopher seemes utterly destroyed, and the forme to have taken his leave for ever: But to a subtile Artist the formes are not perished, but withdrawne into their combustible part, where they lie secure from the action of that devouring element.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Dolan ed. “View But This Tulip”, ‘Headnote’. *The Pulter Project* (2018).

¹¹¹ Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642), sigs. Hr-v. See Eardley, “Hester Pulter’s ‘Indivisibles,’” 134.

¹¹² Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London: 1642), sigs. Hr-v.

While the ashes look like dead matter, the ‘forme’—the essential Mercury in Tymme—is waiting to be reanimated by the alchemist. Thomas Browne is certainly a possible source for Pulter since *Religio Medici* was printed in 1642 and would have been available in the period she is thought to have composed her poetry (1640s to 1650s).

However, one further source is pertinent to this discussion of Pulter’s alchemical poetry, which sheds new light on her poetic reimagining of spiritual alchemy, and that is, as has been previously noted, Woodall’s *The Surgeons Mate* (1639). Pulter’s dust and urn take on new significance, and more specifically spiritual alchemical meaning, when read in the context of Woodall’s text. *The Surgeons Mate* evokes the theory, first proposed by Du Chesne, that the three Paracelsian principles correspond to three (rather than four) elements. In Woodall, this correspondence is described so:

A word or two touching the foure Elements. The foure Elements are Fire, Aire, Water, and Earth. But the division which the Chymists of these times plead for touching the Elements, Josephus Quercitanus expresseth in these words following: saith he, The whole world is divided into two Globes, to wit, into the superiour Heaven, which is Aetheriall and Aery, and into the inferiour Globe which containeth the Water, and the Earth. The superiour Globe which is Aetheriall, hath in it fire, lightning, and brightnesse, and this fiery Heaven is one formall and essentiall Element; the water and earth are the other two Elements so he concludes, there is but three, and with him all the Chymists of latter times subscribe, affirming that number most perfect which agreeth with the everlasting Trinitie.¹¹³

Woodall’s descriptions of the Paracelsian principles are strikingly accompanied by versifications of these descriptions.¹¹⁴ Each of these verses personifies the principles, as was commonplace in alchemical texts. The personifications have elemental significance. Sulphur has a fiery temperament: ‘his infernall / Hath millions slaine in towne and field, / by Mars his furious ire.’¹¹⁵ Mercury is notable for his active, aerial nature: ‘From earth to skie with oft returnes,/ [...] wing’d, I flye in hast’.¹¹⁶ Salt is full of similar vitality to Mercury, but on earth: ‘his force, his place,

¹¹³ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 232.

¹¹⁴ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 206-220, 221-224, 225-232.

¹¹⁵ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 222.

¹¹⁶ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 225.

his time, / his power in life and death/ [...] admire we may on earth'.¹¹⁷ The same combination of air, earth, and fire is legible, too, in Pulter's description of the Resurrection: 'Our God will reinspire' (air), 'Our dormant dust' (earth), 'and keep alive the same / With an all-quickenning everlasting flame' (fire) (ll. 18-20). Both poetic examples evoke the correspondence of the three Paracelsian principles to the three elements. But in Pulter, there is a crucial difference. Her depiction is at odds with Woodall's portrayal of Mercury, who marrying together salt and earth, brimmed with generative vitality. Rather, we see the inverse of this, which Woodall also describes:

What living creature can want salt?
 What plant or tree may grow?
 What metal perfect doth endure
 If salt it do forgo?¹¹⁸

In Pulter, as the vital life force contained in the body is removed in death, it echoes the removal of the principle of salt from the earth: earth is transformed to dust. The 'forgotten dust' (l. 33) is the same as the 'dormant dust' (l. 19) that Pulter hopes God, the divine alchemist, will reinspire with life-giving breath and 'all-quick'ning', everlasting flame' (l. 18-20), marrying together the three principles and elements in unity. The urn is more than simply 'a temporary container' for either dust or the soul, as Scott-Baumann has argued; rather, it reflects the alchemical alembic, shut up with 'Hermes's seal' (l. 8) and reveals Pulter's investment in the processes of alchemy, the tools which form a vital part of the process of dissolution and coagulation in palingenesis.¹¹⁹

As in Woodall, the marrying together of the three principles and three elements, which he versifies in 'Certaine Chemicall Verses', produces a perfect unity:

But will you know why Chymists call
 their principles but three?
 With heavenly number it agrees,
 from all Eternitie.

¹¹⁷ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 218

¹¹⁸ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 218

¹¹⁹ Scott-Baumann, "Hester Pulter's Well-Wrought Urns," 136. Scott-Baumann makes a compelling comparison between the urn and the alembic in relation to 'The Circle [2]' to argue that the urn in this poem shows up the 'vanity' of alchemy (135). Archer notes the same figuration of the urn in 'The Circle': 'A death-like state becomes death as oblivion, the calx lying in the bottom of the alchemical vessel compared to the ashes of the cremated body lying forgotten in a funeral urn.' Archer, "Perfect Circle," 8.

A Trinitie in Deitie,
 most sacred and most sure:
 All should confesse in unity
 is, was, and shall endure.

From which, as from a perfect guide,
 each man his work should frame,
 And in his conversation true,
 alwaies respect the same.

In honour of which Deitie,
 true Chymists daily find
 A tripart substance for to be
 of all things following kind.¹²⁰

These verses are a powerful analogue to Pulter's poem. The three Paracelsian principles combine to yield a unified 'Trinity' that will 'endure', much as in Pulter's poem the combination of divine breath, flame and dust (ll. 18-20) yields an 'everlasting morrow' (l. 30). The metrical length of Pulter's lines directly parallels her earlier description of the processes of alchemy (ll. 5-6), where the feet overstepped their bounds in a generative mimicry of God's creation. Here, we see the realisation of that Resurrection, as the length of the lines gesture to the ineffable scope of that 'everlasting morrow' (l. 30), or spiritual salvation through the Resurrection 'cause[d]' by God (l. 18).

ASHES TO ASHES, DUST TO DUST

At line 31 of 'View But This Tulip', there is a turn as, rather than extrapolating out the microcosmic palingenesis to the macrocosmic Resurrection, Pulter performs the inverse as she accommodates the macrocosmic Resurrection to the microcosm of a seed:

As wheat in new plowed furrows rotting lies,
 Incapable of quickening 'til it dies,
 So into dust this flesh of mine must turn,
 And lie a while forgotten in my urn (ll. 31-34).

Here, Pulter refers to the need for seeds to be buried and to undergo a figurative 'death' before they can generate new life. The flesh 'turn[ing]', or converting, to dust, echoes the 'turn[ing]' of

¹²⁰ Woodall, *The Surgeons Mate*, 262.

soil to ‘reverse the position of the turf, or of the soil, in ploughing or digging, so as to bring the under parts to the surface.’¹²¹ The urn, as Scott-Baumann has noted, is both a literal representation of Pulter’s funeral urn in which her ashes rest, and a euphemism for her dead body which lies waiting to be reunited with her soul in the ‘glorious spring’ of Resurrection (l. 28).¹²² However, a third interpretation of Pulter’s ‘turn’, as the alchemical process itself, captures the inexorable process of dissolution and eventual resolution that underpins her poetry.

Pulter’s ‘dust’ is the matter from which God ‘cause[d]’ human life: ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return (Genesis 3:19). Yet Pulter also frames dust in a particularly alchemical way as it recalls how ‘simples’ or the essential elements are created by God. Tymme’s translation of Du Chesne provides a compelling source for these lines because it yokes together the idea of these essential elements, which he calls ‘simples’ with both the idea of indivisibility and with Heaven: ‘the Indiuidualls, or simples which cannot be diuided, doe borrow from Heauen, & from no other, all those forces, faculties, and properties, which they haue no shewe foorth.’¹²³ In Pulter’s alchemical vision of the universe, ‘Dust is but four degrees removed from glory / By nature’s paths’ (ll. 24-25). This recalls the four steps of palingenesis—beating, macerating, fermentation and calcining—which reanimate the ashes of the plant. More specifically, it recalls the four degrees of the ‘opus circulatorium’ outlined in Tymme, in which ash moves through calcination, digestion, fermentation and distillation, to arrive at circulation—the rectification of the material that is here imagined as ‘glory’ (l. 24).

Pulter reinforces this link between ‘cause[s]’ (l. 18) and ‘quickening’ seeds (l. 32) and God in her description of atoms: ‘Then though I into atoms scattered be, / In indivisibles I’ll trust in thee’ (ll. 21-22). Alice Eardley has drawn attention to the many possible sources for Pulter’s atoms

¹²¹ “turn, n.” *OED*.

¹²² For Pulter’s urn imagery, see Scott-Baumann, “Hester Pulter’s Well-Wrought Urns,” 120-143 (136).

¹²³ Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, sig. C3v.

in this poem, including works by Walter Charleton and Kenelm Digby, both of which were published in English and therefore may have been available to Pulter.¹²⁴ In Pulter's vision of the universe, it is not the shapes and motions of particles that cause all things in the universe; rather, Pulter draws upon atoms in a much more figurative sense. Here, she imagines being broken down into the smallest units of nature possible in seventeenth-century thinking. Yet her fragmentation into these particles is not a cause for despair but for trust in God—"Then though I into atoms scattered be, / In indivisibles I'll trust in thee" (ll. 21-22). Pulter presses alchemical imagery into the service of Christian soteriology, thereby claiming that the material world reflects a divinely imposed 'order' predicated upon the altogether more alchemical dissolution and coagulation of biblical dust. Her fragmentation into dust or atoms is only the first step in the alchemical cycle which promises a spiritual rebirth, figured as a re-coagulation of material and spiritual matter in the 'glory' (l. 24) of salvation.

A later addition to 'View But this Tulip' in Pulter's manuscript produces a suggestive variation on this reading:

But with my soul my flesh shall reunite,
And ne'er involved be with death and night,
But live in endless pleasure, love, and light (ll. 39-41).

Line 40 was inserted into the couplet in the manuscript in the same hand but in smaller, darker ink (see Figure 8), rendering it a triplet (fol. 118v).¹²⁵ This added line emphasises God's position as the divine alchemist in the poem, transforming the flesh from passive dust 'involved' (l. 40) in death—as in the urn or alchemical alembic—to regenerated perfection—as in the unified Paracelsian principles. In contrast to the earthly alchemy of palingenesis, where the regenerated plant returned to its 'first principles' (l. 13) when removed from the heat, this divine alchemy invests the flesh with an active force that 'live[s]' in perpetuity (l. 41). Frances E. Dolan suggests that,

¹²⁴ Eardley, "Hester Pulter's Indivisibles," 126.

¹²⁵ 'Poems Breathed forth By The Nobel Hadassas' (Lady Hester Pulter). Brotherton Collection MS Lt q 32, fol.118r.

the added line interrupts the desired consummation towards which the poem builds—the reunion of soul and body—to remind the reader one more time of the death and night from which this reunion will release both soul and body into endless pleasure.¹²⁶

However, I suggest that the added line *enacts* the consummation towards which the poem builds, marking the realisation of the metrical generativity Pulter employs when describing alchemical processes, both earthly (ll. 5-6), and divine (ll. 29-30). Here we see the completion of the alchemical cycle of dissolution and coagulation that underpins the poem. The couplet unit upon which the poem is built is transformed into a harmonious trinity that spills over its unit, visually and aurally echoing the ‘endless pleasure’ of Resurrection.

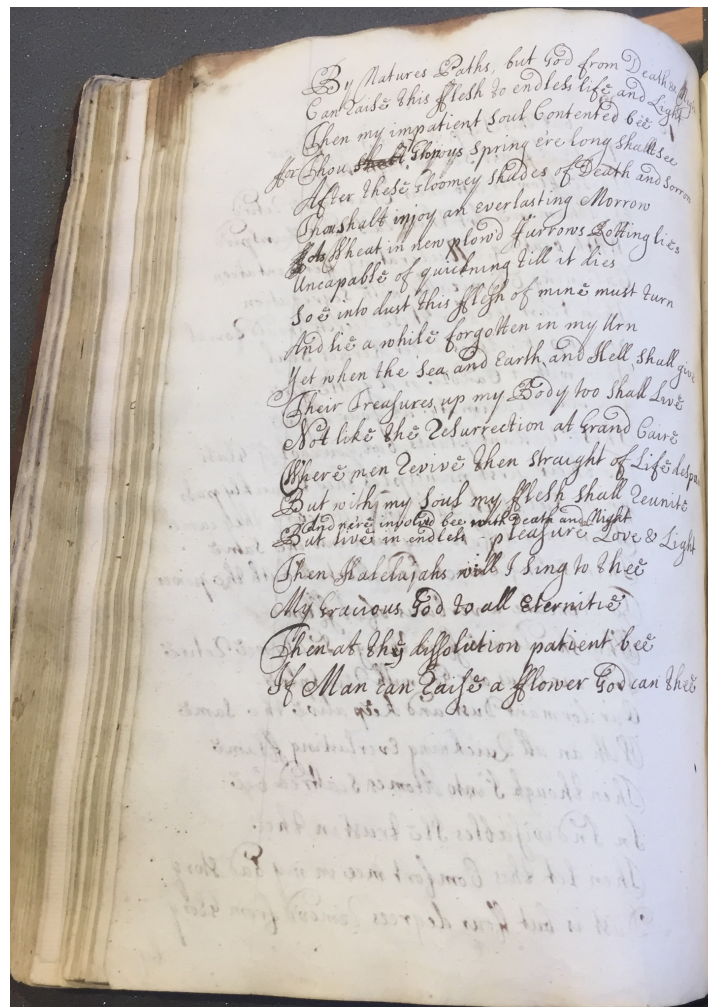


Figure 8: 'Poems Breathed forth By The Nobel Hadassas' (Lady Hester Pulter). Brotherton Collection, Leeds, MS Lt q 32.

¹²⁶ Frances E. Dolan, ed. 'View But This Tulip' by Hester Pulter (Emblem 40, Amplified Edition). In *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (2018). Accessible at <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu>

This joyous movement from dissolution to coagulation through God's grace is expressed in Pulter's poem, 'The Brahman' (Emblem 44) through the image of the phoenix:

Nor shall my scattered dust forgotten rest,
 But like the embryo in the Phœnix nest,
 That Word that nothing did create in vain
 Shall reinspire my dormant dust again;
 And from obscurity my atoms raise
 To sing in joy His everlasting praise,
 And reunite my body to my spirit,
 That we may those eternal joys inherit,
 Which I may claim by my dear Savior's merit (ll. 30-38).

Here, Pulter draws together the images that I have explored throughout this chapter—scattered dust, the reinspiring action of God, the reunion of material and spiritual matter—and emblematises them in the alchemical phoenix, which regenerates through its own ashes in death. Likening the ashes of the phoenix to 'the embryo' (l. 31) which Cassandra Gorman notes 'could signify not only unborn potential but imperfect formation', Pulter once again draws us back to the imagery of Du Chesne's 'simples' that 'doe *borrow* [emphasis my own] from Heauen, & from no other, all those forces, faculties, and properties, which they haue no shewe foorth.'¹²⁷ Indeed, Du Chesne's simples promoted a theory of divine formative power in matter that would become heavily influential in Renaissance embryology.¹²⁸ The resonance suggests that the regenerative force of the phoenix is God-given, returning us to the necessity of God in the alchemical process of palingenesis as expressed in 'View But This Tulip'.

'View But This Tulip' was neither the first nor the last account of palingenesis. In 1846, Thomas De Quincey published a review article, 'System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes.' The principal subject was the recent astronomical work of the Earl of Rosse as detailed in J.P. Nichol's *Thoughts on Some Important Points relating to the System of the World* (1846). The principal metaphor that De Quincey used to describe this system was palingenesis:

¹²⁷ Gorman, *The Atom*, 145. Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, sig. C3v.

¹²⁸ See Hiro Hirai, "The Invisible Hand of God in Seeds: Jacob Schegk's Theory of Plastic Faculty," *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (2007): 377-404.

Not otherwise by secular periods, known to us geologically as facts, though obscure as durations, Tellus herself, the planet, as a whole, is for ever working by golden balances of change and compensation of ruin and restoration. She recasts her glorious habitations in decomposing them; she lies down for death, which perhaps a thousand times she has suffered; she rises for a new birth, which perhaps for the thousandth time has glorified her disc. Hers is the wedding-garment, hers is the shroud, that eternally is being woven in the loom of *palingenesis*. And God imposes upon her the awful necessity of working for ever at her own grave, yet of listening for ever to his far-off trumpet of resurrection.¹²⁹

This secular palingenesis is the inverse of Pulter's theological process and its underpinning alchemical thinking. In De Quincey's secular imagining, the ashy dust of palingenesis waits indeterminably for resurrection as the article recalls the anxieties of Donne's 'Anatomy of the World': 'new philosophy calls all in doubt' (l. 205).¹³⁰ For Pulter, however, the hierarchies and cycles of her cosmology are divinely ordained, and it is invested with an altogether more hopeful stance. Pulter's palingenesis parallels that of De Quincey insofar as earthly alchemy can never attain a divine level of perfection. Yet, for Pulter, dust becomes generative in the alchemical alembic, while for De Quincey, decomposition is grave-like. For De Quincey, ruin and restoration comprises a never-ending cycle of births and deaths, while Pulter's Resurrection yields never ending life. Pulter's alchemy is both teleological and theological. A century earlier than De Quincey's account, Pulter was engaging with not only alchemical conceit, but with the fundamental substance of spiritual alchemical practice, as promoted by Joseph De Chesne, Thomas Tymme, and John Woodall.

These texts provide an illuminating lens through which to view Pulter's poetic engagement with political writing. Scholars such as James Loxley have provided important complications to the association of retreat with political inaction. Loxley argues that during the Civil War period, 'the business of poetry, envisaged as a polemical instrument, is literally pressed into service' as a kind of commission 'involved not in transcending but in maintaining conflict.'¹³¹ Pulter's use of Woodall's military-cum-medical text, *The Surgeons Mate* imagines poetry pressed into a different

¹²⁹ Thomas De Quincey, "System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* Vol. 13.153, (Sep 1846): 566-579 (568).

¹³⁰ John Donne, 'An Anatomy of the World', in *The Complete English Poems*, 835.

¹³¹ James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

kind of service than Loxley discusses, emphasising healing instead of conflict. Yet, the reunifying impulse at the heart of her alchemical poetics demands that it be read as a strikingly original response to the royalist crises of the mid-seventeenth century. Her deployment of alchemical disintegration and unity crucially underpins her poetic strategy by which she transforms fragmentation and despair to spiritual consolation. Whereas Loxley and others have seen all mid-seventeenth-century poetry as weaponised instruments in a war of words, Pulter's vision of unity from dispersal offers a more hopeful and unifying possibility for both poetry and contemporary England.

To return to the tulip with which we began, Pulter's imperative to the reader to 'View but this tulip' not only verbally replicates the emblem of a flower, but also reproduces the humanist trope of a moral poem as a flower.¹³² Wendy Wall has suggested that Pulter presents her poetry's ability to reanimate as a parallel to resurrection.¹³³ However, viewing Pulter's poetic ability as a reflection of divine creativity misrepresents the work that an emblem does in accommodating the infinite to the finite. As Pulter puts it at the opening of the poem: 'And by a finite, see an infinite power' (l. 2). Rather, Pulter's 'View But This Tulip' can be read as a consummate act of poesis, a microcosmic exemplum of macrocosmic creation, in which the beauty of God's wider work is metonymically perceived. Her alchemical poetics creates an affective alchemical poetry that converts fragmentation—whether political or theological—to the balm of spiritual consolation.

¹³² For an earlier example, see Isabella Whitney's collection of poems, *A Sweet Nosegay, or pleasant posy conteyning a hundred and ten phylosophicall flowers &c.* (London, 1573)

¹³³ Leah Knight and Wendy Wall, "Ecologies of Text and World: Hester Pulter and the Art of Making," The Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies plenary, June 2019. Quoted in Frances E. Dolan, "Hester Pulter's Renaissance," *English Literary Renaissance* 50.1: The State of Renaissance Studies II (2019): 32–39.

Chapter Three: 'Friendship's a science': Cryptic Language and Alchemical Sympathy in Katherine Philips

Cloistered within the archives of Balliol College, Oxford, is an unassuming seventeenth-century notebook, bound in brown calf with modest gilding, which once belonged to a Fellow of the College, Nicholas Crouch (c.1618 – c.1690).¹ It is written in the same precise hand that can be traced throughout the collection of papers and books bequeathed by Crouch to Balliol. The collection, encompassing prescriptions books and a breadth of medical, mathematical, and scientific texts, reflects Crouch's vocation as a medical academic and practitioner during the fifty-six years he spent at Balliol where he enrolled in 1634 and remained until his death in 1690. The notebook, Balliol MS 336, was succinctly catalogued by R. A. B. Mynors in 1963 as 'a note-book containing a few arithmetical data and a short alphabetical catalogue of medical books, later used (the other way up) to copy verses.'² It is these verses, or more precisely, the five poems which lie almost exactly at the heart of the verse collection, which render Crouch's notebook of such interest to this chapter. The presence of five pre-publication poems by the seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips within this scientific notebook strikes the reader as anomalous, even jarring.³ Until recent decades, the work of Katherine Philips was read as anodyne pastoral poetry, mild and unstimulating 'warblings' lacking 'merit'.⁴ Feminist criticism of the twentieth century revalued Philips's poetry as significant in the contexts of seventeenth-century language of politics and of friendship.⁵ However, the Crouch notebook encapsulates such an unanticipated mode of reading

¹ Balliol MS 336.

² R. A. B. Mynors, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 342. Mynors details that Balliol MS 336 is a seventeenth-century notebook of 35 folios, 7.5 X 5.5 inches, bound in original brown calf with a small gilt center-piece.

³ The poems are as follows: 'Syndænia' (fol. 7r), an untitled poem beginning 'Not to obleige Syndænia by my Voice' (fols. 7v-8v), 'Madam, I doe not these few Lines indite' (fols. 9r-v), 'To Alicia, Count. of Carbery Coming into Wales' (fol. 10r) and 'In Nobilem Palaemonem' (fols. 10v-11r).

⁴ George Saintsbury, *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905), viii; Philip Webster Souers, *The Matchless Orinda* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 276.

⁵ On Philips in relation to politics, see Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). On Philips in relation to friendship, see Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity:*

Philips that it prompts us to consider whether even current criticism has implicitly maintained the assumptions of earlier scholarship by failing to question Philips's genre and language beyond the pastoral mode.

Balliol MS 336 provides a detailed portrait of Crouch's academic and poetic interests. In the rich interplay between text and context, this compilation reveals a hitherto under-analysed strand of scientific thinking underpinning Philips's poetry. It challenges established critical narratives surrounding Philips's poetry and allows us to access the intellectual world of her seventeenth-century readers, inviting us to reconsider how they read her work and helping us to re-read it in turn. Through the eyes of our medical, mathematical, and alchemically literate reader, Philips's scientifically-inflected language of sympathy becomes legible, with profound implications for the ways in which we understand the interlinked discourses of politics and friendship in her poems. This sympathy is vital to Philips's poetic negotiation of both personal and political allegiance.

Widely recognized during her lifetime as both a poet and a translator, Philips occupied a position as one of the foremost women writers of the seventeenth century. Her biographer in the early twentieth century, Philip Webster Souers, writes that among her friends and contemporaries, she was known as 'the pattern of female excellence.'⁶ She was 'The Matchless Orinda' at the centre of a literary coterie, dubbed the 'Society of Friendship', which 'unite[d] all those of her acquaintance, which she found worthy or desired to make so [...] into one societie'.⁷ It was a Society both exclusive and varied; members (identified by pseudonyms) included elite men—Charles Cotterell (Poliarchus) and Sir Edward Dering (Silvander)—and women—Mary Aubrey (Rosania) and Anne Owen (Lucasia). In genre, Philips's work spans the 'political, occasional,

Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Penelope Anderson, *Friendship's Shadows: Women's Friendship and the Politics of Betrayal in England, 1640-1705* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

⁶ Souers, *The Matchless Orinda*, 3.

⁷ Unpublished letter by Sir Edward Dering. Quoted in Patrick Thomas, *Katherine Philips ('Orinda')* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), 13.

elegiac, religious, philosophical, pastoral, complimentary, and friendship poems (including passionate poetry to women), among others; she translated poems from the French and Italian, and two French heroic tragedies.⁸ In dissemination, this work spanned England, Wales, and Ireland.

Born in 1631/2 to John Fowler (d. 1642), a prosperous cloth merchant, and Katherine Oxenbridge, she was raised as a Puritan in a family with strong Parliamentary connections; following the death of her father at age ten, Philips's mother married parliamentary Major-General, Philip Skippon, and her aunt was married to parliamentary lawyer, Oliver St John. At school in Hackney, however, Philips befriended girls not only of a higher social standing but also notably royalist connections: Mary Aubrey (cousin to Sir John Aubrey and daughter of a leading Welsh royalist) and Mary Harvey (niece of the royalist sympathiser and physician, Dr William Harvey).⁹ In 1648 Philips married influential Parliamentarian, Colonel James Philips and moved with him to Wales. It was here that she met and befriended the daughter and heiress of John Lewis of Presaddfed, Anne Owen, to whom she later addressed several poems. While Philips spent the majority of her adult life in the period up to the Restoration in the Welsh town of Cardigan, she accompanied her husband to London when Parliament was in session.¹⁰ Her childhood friendships gained her an entrée to the London-based royalist literary and musical circle around Henry Lawes, former master of the king's music, in the 1650s. Harvey was a music student of Lawes and it was probably through her and her husband, prominent royalist, Sir Edward Dering, that Philips made this important connection.¹¹ Her verse, circulating in manuscript during the 1650s, addresses a

⁸ Patricia M. Sant and James N. Brown, "Two Unpublished Poems by Katherine Philips," *English Literary Renaissance* 24.11 (January 1994): 213.

⁹ Kate Lilley, "Dear Object: Katherine Philips's Love Elegies and Their Readers," in *Women Writing, 1550-1750*, ed. Jo Wallwork and Paul Salzman (Bundoora, Victoria: Meridian, 2001), 163-78 (163).

¹⁰ A widely held assumption in early Philips criticism that her husband was fifty-four (to her sixteen) when they married has now been corrected. New research by Elizabeth Hageman has conclusively shown that he was twenty-four. See Warren Chernaik, "Philips [née Fowler] Katherine (1632-1664)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹ *CWKP* i. 2,3. See also Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), esp. Ch. 1.

number of royalist figures associated with Lawes: John Jeffreys, Francis Finch, John Berkenhead, Sir Edward Dering, and Henry Vaughan.¹² Vaughan, who lived nearby to Philips in Breconshire, was the first to publicly acknowledge her verse in his *Olor Iscanus* (1651) in his poem “To the most Excellently accomplish’d, Mrs K. Philips.”¹³ Philips first appeared in print in 1651, amongst those royalists she addressed in manuscript, as the sole female contributor to the posthumous and politically significant collection of William Cartwright’s plays and poetry, a collection that has been recognized by scholars as a ‘Royalist touchstone’.¹⁴ The verse of these poets, including Philips, later appeared in Lawes’s *Second Book of Ayres, and Dialogues* (1655).

It was Philips’s translations for the stage, however, that ushered in her most notable commercial success. In particular, her translation of Corneille’s *La mort de Pompée*, performed at the Theatre Royal in Dublin in 1663 and published in both Dublin and London the same year. This text was ‘the biggest literary success of her life’, selling out of its initial printing in a few short weeks.¹⁵ In contrast, the only other publication of Philips’s poems in her lifetime was an unauthorized edition in 1664 which shortly preceded her untimely death from smallpox. Following her death, however, her fame continued to flourish, marked by a 1667 folio edition of her work, which was to act as her ‘Monument’ against ‘Oblivion’.¹⁶ This edition is arrestingly and decorously adorned with a frontispiece by William Faithorne, the foremost portrait engraver of the period. Echoing the monumental ambitions of the folio, Philips appears as a statuesque classical bust, raised on a plinth and set within a niche, placing her within ‘a classical pantheon of fame, in which all the most distinguished personages of history take their immortal place.’¹⁷ This work was swiftly

¹² On this dating see Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 59. On Philips’s manuscript circulation see Elizabeth Hageman and Andrea Sununu, ‘New Manuscript Texts of Katherine Philips, the “Matchless Orinda,”’ *EMS* 4 (1993), 174–219.

¹³ Henry Vaughan, *Olor Iscanus* (London, 1651), 28

¹⁴ Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177.

¹⁵ Peter Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and Their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 137.

¹⁶ Sir Charles Cotterel, ‘Preface’ to *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs Katherine Philips The Matchless Orinda* (London, 1667), sig. ar.

¹⁷ Beal, *In Praise of Scribes*, 176.

reprinted three times, ensuring the continued circulation and influence of her writing in the seventeenth century. Her popularity continued to a certain extent during the eighteenth century; however, it gradually waned and, by the nineteenth century, she had fallen into the very oblivion that the folio had sought to prevent. A meaningful critical return to Philips's poetry would not be inaugurated until Lillian Faderman's influential work *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981). Faderman's readings of Philips's work, placing it at the nexus between Platonic early modern friendship and modern lesbianism would shape the contours of critical debate for much of the subsequent scholarship.¹⁸ Following Faderman, key scholarly work in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly that of Harriette Andreadis, Elaine Hobby, and Elizabeth Wahl, uncovered the lesbian or Sapphic content of Philips' poems, providing crucial reevaluation of early modern homoeroticism in women's writing.¹⁹ Partly in reaction to this, Carol Barash's work sought to 'place some distance, once again, between Katherine Philips, the historical figure, and 'Orinda', the character she develops to address various topics and various people in her complicated—and often quite explicitly political—poems.'²⁰ Her reading emphasises Philips' innovative melding of the rhetoric of women's friendship with the tropes of courtly love poetry and royalist verse. Under the lenses of friendship and sexuality, then, a relatively small number of poems in Philips's oeuvre have been the subject

¹⁸ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), 71. On the wider field of lesbian criticism, see Liz Stanley, 'Epistemological Issues in Researching Lesbian History: The Case of Romantic Friendship,' *Working Out: New Directions for Women's Studies*, eds. Hilary Hinds, Ann Phoenix, and Jackie Stacey (New York: Routledge, 1992), 161-72; Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Harriette Andreadis, "The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips, 1632-1664," *Signs* 15 (1989): 34-60; Elaine Hobby, "Katherine Philips: Seventeenth Century Lesbian Poet," *What Lesbians Do in Books*, eds. Elaine Hobby and Chris White (London: The Women's Press, 1991), 183-204. For later important discussions of Philips in relation to the histories of friendship and sexuality, see Lorna Hutson, "The Body of the Friend and the Woman Writer: Katherine Philips's Absence from Alan Bray's *The Friend* (2003)," *Women's Writing* 14.2 (2003): 196-214; Harriette Andreadis, "Re-Configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.3 (2006): 523-42; Elizabeth Wahl, "Female Intimacy and the Question of 'Lesbian' Identity: Rereading the Female Friendship Poems of Katherine Philips," in *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 130-7; Kate Lilley, "Fruits of Sodom: The Critical Erotics of Early Modern Women's Writing," *Parergon* 29.2 (2012): 175-92.

²⁰ Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

of great deal of scrutiny. In offering new readings of sympathy in a specifically alchemical context, this chapter aims to generate a fresh approach to Philips's friendship poems that emphasises how interconnected they are with her wider engagements with seventeenth-century politics, theology, and science.

PHILIPS'S MODERN READERS: FRIENDSHIP, POLITICS, AND ALCHEMY

A considerable body of critical work on Katherine Philips's verse examines its approach to friendship between women and criticism has increasingly connected this with her politics; the complexity of interconnections between friendship and royalism has been more fully realised as criticism has produced increasingly sophisticated definitions of these concepts in relation to early modern writing. The work of Carol Barash has been instrumental in recognizing that the depiction of (women's) friendship and the registering of royalist political allegiances are invariably connected in Philips's verse.²¹ In paper and ink, Philips's work creates what Barash calls a 'community' of royalists, overcoming any literal geographical distance between the scattered members of her society.²² The sense of community in this coterie, simultaneously exclusive and various, is reinforced in Philips's use of coterie names drawn from the royalist-identified genres of romance and tragedy.²³ However, Barash's work has been criticised for eliding other interpretative possibilities, reading Philips's poems as 'more political than erotic, more public than private' as part of Kate Lilley's wariness of 'straightening' readings of Philips.²⁴ This chapter seeks to build upon the work of Hero Chalmers in endorsing this wariness while balancing it with 'a recognition of the political investment of Philips [...] in the ideals of friendship, including friendship between

²¹ Barash, *English Women's Poetry*.

²² Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, 62.

²³ On royalist genres, see Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 233–49 and 287–94.

²⁴ Lilley, "Dear Object," 166, 173.

women.²⁵ Chalmers's emphasis on the 'royalist coding' of friendship in Philips's verse expands the key studies by Annabel Patterson, James Loxley, and Lois Potter on royalist political coding to include women; at the same time, Chalmers raises useful questions about the accuracy of claiming a royalist 'tradition' in the verse of late seventeenth-century women.²⁶ Where this chapter extends and departs from Chalmers is to complicate both how Philips formulates this political coding and indeed the very notion of a distinctly 'royalist coding'.

While Chalmers argues that the 'exclusively royalist membership of [Philips's] "society" signals its affiliations with politically coded understandings of the word friendship amongst contemporary royalists', the reality is more complex.²⁷ Anne Owen, as Carol Barash observes, came from a family of shifting political allegiance.²⁸ Owen's stepfather and later father-in-law, Sir Hugh Owen sided with Parliament on the outbreak of the Civil War. He then transferred his sympathies to the royalist cause, but eventually went on to hold important public appointments under the Commonwealth throughout the 1650s.²⁹ Moreover, membership within the Society itself, rather than exclusively royalist, was politically diverse, evidenced by the presence of her husband: Philips supported the Cromwellian government, though he had a reputation as a moderate among contemporaries.³⁰ His coterie name, Antenor, is probably an allusion to the Trojan who tried to make peace between Greece and Troy.³¹ Philips thus had strong royalist and parliamentary connections, and Mark Llewellyn has argued that it was for this reason that she and her poetry had

²⁵ Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 58.

²⁶ Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 6; Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, 2. For work on royalist coding see, Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: the Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writings: Royalist Literature, 1640–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁷ Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 60.

²⁸ Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, 76.

²⁹ Francis Jones, "Owen of Oriulton," *Pembrokeshire Historian* 5 (1974): 11-32 (19-20).

³⁰ Chernaik, "Philips [née Fowler] Katherine (1632-1664)."

³¹ Chernaik, "Philips [née Fowler] Katherine (1632-1664)."

to ‘strike a balance between the often conflicting political and religious imperatives of two very different visions of worldly existence’.³²

More recent criticism by Penelope Anderson has qualified the ways in which Philips’s use of friendship intersects with her politics and the problem of ‘reconcil[ing] conflicting obligations—to spouse, family, ruler, country, God—amidst the changing political circumstances of the English Civil War, Commonwealth, Protectorate, and Restoration.’³³ Where Anderson argues that ‘Philips utilizes friendship’s betrayals to produce textually generative same-sex alliances’, however, this chapter argues that Philips’s sympathy is crucial in this reconciliation.³⁴

More broadly, this approach builds upon the work of more recent criticism on royalist or ‘Cavalier’ writing, which has further complicated Barash’s concept of a royalist ‘tradition’.³⁵ Summarising this approach, Nicholas McDowell argues that

by identifying English “Cavalier poetry” very precisely with the imitation and translation of continental lyric forms, we could escape the restrictions imposed by the current use of “Cavalier” as a static marker of political allegiance—one that excludes poets as significant as Marvell and as interesting as John Hall because they wrote for Commonwealth and Protectorate—and instead identify the “Cavalier” in terms of a distinguishing literary feature of writers who were known to each other and were conscious of their common involvement in a literary enterprise.³⁶

McDowell’s emphasis on literary affiliation over political allegiance is particularly useful for suggesting how we might more productively situate Philips’s verse as part of a ‘Cavalier’ tradition. Philips’s revision of Continental and classical tropes in friendship poetry enables this reconciliation of conflicting or shifting political allegiance through alchemically-coded verse.

Returning again to the work of Barash, we find the following analysis of Philips’s sources that is itself indebted to the work of Leah Marcus:

[...] in the earlier years [Philips’s] allegiance to the late Stuarts seems to have been as much aesthetic as political. Leah Marcus’s description of the sources of royalist imagery is

³² Mark Llewellyn, “Katherine Philips: Friendship, Poetry and Neo-Platonic Thought in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002): 441–68 (445).

³³ Anderson, *Friendship’s Shadows*, 3.

³⁴ Anderson, *Friendship’s Shadows*, 3.

³⁵ Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 6.

³⁶ Nicholas McDowell, “Towards Redefinition of Cavalier Poetics,” *Seventeenth Century* 32.4 (2017): 413–31 (425).

especially true for Philips: royalist sympathizers coped with the loss of public ritual and festivity by recasting old ceremonies in more private forms and surrounding them with cryptic language and hermetic symbolism.³⁷

What Barash does not address is that the ‘hermetic symbolism’ referred to in Marcus is used with technical precision to mean the ‘symbolism of the “Ancient Theology” of Hermes Trismegistus.’³⁸ The Hermetic chemical wedding of two gendered elements gave rise to the analogy between alchemy and unity which in turn was exploited in the work of Interregnum poets. This chapter takes up and develops further the threads of Barash’s connection between Philips’s politics and hermeticism, chiefly to explore *how* Katherine Philips exploits alchemical symbolism to create a vision of unity in friendship that collapses oppositions hitherto emphasised in the critical literature.

Despite the breadth of the debate surrounding Philips’s poetry, her inventive use of alchemical discourse has gone unrecognised. Analysing how Philips uses the language of Hermetic and Paracelsian alchemy to transform the masculine discourse of ethical friendship allows us to revise the assumptions of previous criticism. All too often, Philips’s alchemical language has been reduced to another of her ‘borrowings’ from Donne and her intervention in this discourse has thus been overlooked.³⁹ Sajed Chowdhury’s article, ‘Hermeticism in the Poetry of Katherine Philips’ (2016), marks a long-overdue consideration of Philips’s alchemical imagery.⁴⁰ Yet, Chowdhury’s analysis is limited to Hermetic alchemy. By attending closely to these interrelated Paracelsian and Hermetic languages, I contend that Philips engages with and transforms the medical alchemical language of her day through a gendered reinterpretation of this language. This reinterpretation of the language of friendship in turn has repercussions for the ways in which political affiliations and moderation are expressed in Philips’s poetry.

³⁷ Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 213-214. Quoted in Barash, *English Women’s Poetry, 1649-1714*, 66.

³⁸ Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, 223.

³⁹ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 70; Andreadis, “The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips,” 34-60; Paula Loscocco, “Inventing the English Sappho: Katherine Philips’s Donnean Poetry,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102 (2003): 59-87.

⁴⁰ Sajed Chowdhury, “Hermeticism in the Poetry of Katherine Philips,” *Women’s Writing* 23.4 (2016): 465-482.

Philips replaces the Hermetic emphasis on ‘commixture of contraries and unlike’ with Paracelsian ‘sympathy’, the mixture of ‘like with like’. In Philips criticism, the term ‘sympathy’ has been anachronistically read as an aspect of friendship discourse, collapsed into the friend as ‘*alter idem*’ (‘another the same’) or reshaped to convey ‘erotic similitude’.⁴¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* traces this conflation noting that sympathy as ‘Agreement, accord, harmony [...] agreement in qualities’ has merged with ‘Conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other’.⁴² Emphasising the importance of recognizing these two distinct definitions with reference to Paracelsian imagery, specifically, I define sympathy in the technical early modern sense of offering a model of curing ‘like with like’ (*similia similibus*)—the same model that informed George Puttenham’s comparison between poetry and alchemy discussed in the Introduction.⁴³ In Philips’s verse, repeated references to sympathy between friends is crucial in formulating a gender-based reinterpretation of curative alchemy whereby alchemical perfection, commixture and harmony might be achieved within female, as opposed to male, friendship. In this way, I seek to illuminate a new coding in Philips’s verse: one that is alchemically-based and politically moderate.

THE CROUCH NOTEBOOK: PHILIPS’S SEVENTEENTH CENTURY READERS

At the time Mynors catalogued Crouch’s notebook, which was well before the revival of critical interest in Katherine Philips spurred by Lillian Faderman, only the latter two poems were attributed to Philips. Later, they were included in Patrick Thomas’s 1990 edition of Philip’s *Poems*

⁴¹ Cicero, *De amicitia*, trans. William Armistead Falconer, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (London: Heinemann, 1923), XXI.80, 188; Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 40; Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 330.

⁴² “sympathy, n.” ‘Obsolete or merged in 3a’. *OED*.

⁴³ George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), G4r. Quoted in Healy, “Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity,” 82.

and identified as variants of manuscript copies existing elsewhere.⁴⁴ The remaining three poems were identified by Patricia M. Sant and James N. Brown in 1994 as manuscript variants of one of Philips's best-known poems, 'Lucasia' and two previously unattributed and unpublished manuscript poems.⁴⁵ Sant and Brown focus on how the position of the poems in the notebook, along with the dating of other known poems by Philips lends credibility to the attribution of the two new poems to Philips, and they focus less on the matter of the wider notebook.⁴⁶ However, in concentrating upon the self-contained unit of poems as a means of establishing consistency, some of the strangeness of this positioning is lost.

When read in the context of the wider collection of verses in Crouch's notebook, the particular gathering of Philips's poems strikes the attention of the reader: it appears incongruous, bounded by verses in Latin with a particular connection to Oxford. On one side there is the *Mensa Lubrica*, a light-hearted poem on the game of shovel-board written in 1651 by Thomas Master, Master of New College; on the other, 'Rustica Academiae Oxoniensis nuper Reformatae Descriptio', a satire of the Oxford parliamentary visitation of 1647, daringly published by John Allibond of Magdalen College in 1648.⁴⁷ The beginning of this section of the notebook is delineated as the reader turns the page from the final lines of the *Mensa Lubrica*. On the verso of this page is written an initial list of coterie names and their counterparts taken from Philips's Society of Friendship (Figure 9): 'Lucasia: Mrs. An: Owen. of Orielson; Orinda: Mrs. Kath: Phillips;

⁴⁴ 'To Alicia, Count. of Carbery Coming into Wales' exists in an incomplete version written in Philips's hand in the National Library of Wales (NLW 775B), titled 'To the Right Hon^{bl}. Alice, Countess of Carberry, on her enriching Wales with her presence.' Also, in the hand of Sir Edward Dering ('Silvander') in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin (HRC 151 Philips MS. 14,937) and in an unknown hand in the National Library of Wales (NLW 776B). 'In Nobilem Palaemonem', in Philips's hand, is titled 'On Mr Francis Finch (the excellent Palemon)' in NLW 775B. Crouch's MS. lacks the final line but contains an extra couplet not found elsewhere. It also exists in HRC 151 Philips MS. 14,937, and NLW 776B.

⁴⁵ In Balliol MS 336, 'Syndaenia' is used wherever 'Lucasia' appears in the other manuscripts (NLW 775B, HRC 151 Philips MS. 14,937, and NLW 776B); Patricia M. Sant and James N. Brown, "Two Unpublished Poems by Katherine Philips," *English Literary Renaissance* 24.11 (January 1994): 211–28.

⁴⁶ Sant and Brown, "Two Unpublished Poems by Katherine Philips," 213.

⁴⁷ Balliol MS 336, fols. 4v-5v, 12r-14r. This poem later appeared in a small 1658 miscellany of Oxonian pieces gathered together by Thomas Barlow, Bodley's Librarian since 1652 and from 1658 the Provost of Queen's College, Oxford. See William Poole, "Thomas Master and the *Mensa Lubrica*: a Seventeenth-Century Gaming Poem," *New College Notes* 3 (2013): 182–230.

Palemon: Mr. F.F.: int: temple; Rosania: Mrs. Mary Aubrey. n. Montague; Antenor: Mr. Phill: orindae, conjux; Cratander: Mr. J.B.; Silvander: Sr. Edw: Deering.; Ardelia' (fol. 6v).⁴⁸ The final three lines of the last Philips poem, 'In Nobilem Palaemonem', are written sideways to avoid spilling onto the next page. Her verses are thus contained within the space of five verso-recto spreads within the wider academic and scientific material of the notebook.

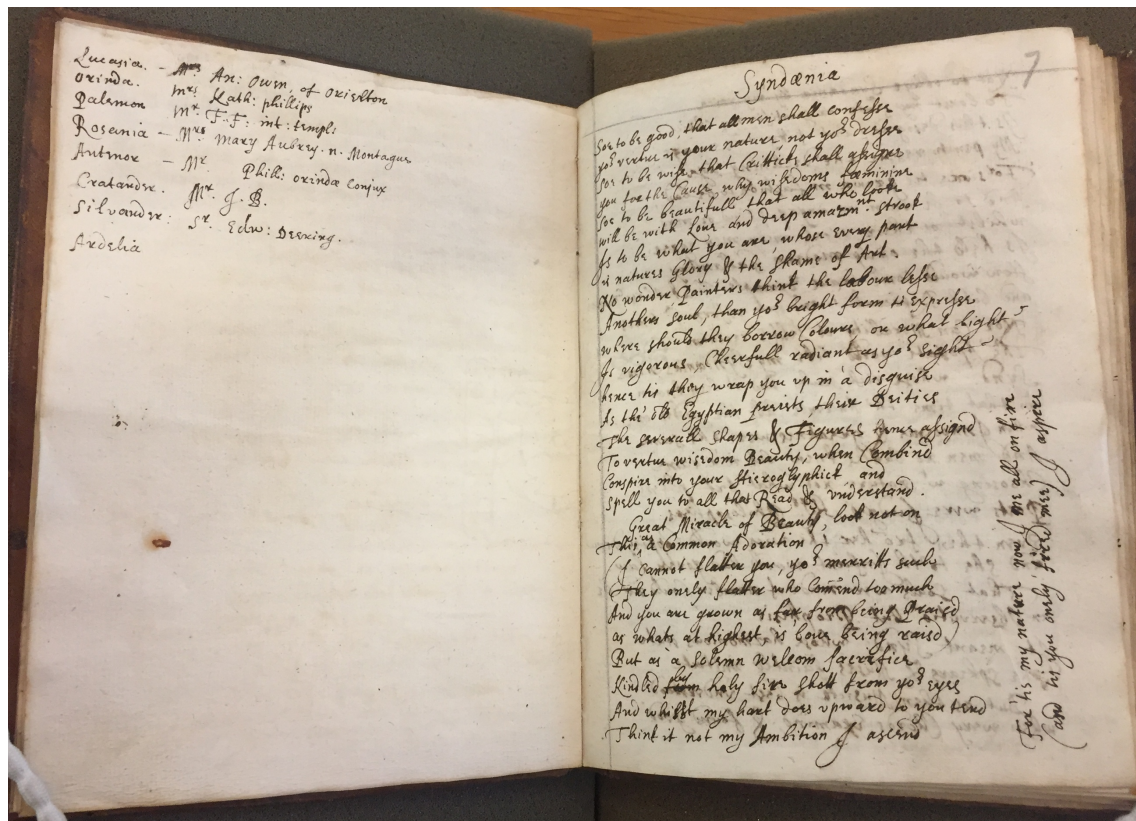


Figure 9: Society of Friendship coterie names, listed in Nicholas Crouch's notebook. Balliol College, Oxford, Balliol MS 336.

This collection of five poems are the only verses in the book to have been written by a woman. They are hemmed in by verses produced from the Oxford colleges, androcentric bastions of learning. The superior power of the mind over the temptations of the female flesh is repeatedly celebrated. One poem, printed in the *Meditations* of Joseph Henshaw (1631), educated at Hertford College, begins:

'Tis the mind that makes the fault
Else such things would not be naught.
He that can (and is noe lyer)
Sport and talke, without à fire,

⁴⁸ Balliol MS 336, fol. 6v.

Can be courteous, can be kind
 And not kindle in his mind,
 And can touch à womans skin
 as his owne; not stir within:
 Doth salute without Delight
 And more would not yf he might,
 nor scarce that (ll. 1-11).⁴⁹

It cautions, ‘untill thy mind be such / ‘Think à look, à smile too much’ (ll. 39-40). The theme is taken up by the dialogue between Hedon and Euritheia which directly follows this poem.⁵⁰ The dialogue follows the well-worn dialectic of sexual advocacy by one voice, in this case Hedon, and virtuous chaste denial by another, Euritheia.⁵¹ While Hedon champions the productivity and pleasure of physical passion, ‘Come then, lett’s vse our Clouds, nor loose o~~ur~~ Age of Flou’rs / Coldnesse may see us Old, but never A’ncestours’ (ll. 11-12), Euritheia counters his arguments with a defence of chastity: ‘Peace Flesh, you are not shap’t in vaine / you’re Able, that you may Abstaine’ (ll.28-29). The piece concludes with a celebration of platonic love:

The lasting pleasure’s mingling of two Minds,
 To Rude delights which heards affect and you
 Clo’tes are throwne off, but to true Bodyes too (ll. 35-37).

It is particularly perplexing, then, to find poetry written by Philips amongst admonitory verses in which women are figured as something of a distraction, or even a temptation. These poems, lauding the superiority of the intellectual mind over the pursuits of base flesh, appear consistent with the other matter of the notebook: namely, poems written by students of various colleges, catalogues of books which were circulating in the University, and cribs of mathematical measurements and values. The five Philips poems seemingly sectioned off from the rest strike a discordant note in the harmony of the whole.

Thus far criticism has presumed that Philips’s poems are utterly divorced from the academic and scientific emphasis of the rest of the notebook; however, I suggest that these poems

⁴⁹ Balliol MS 336, fol. 2r.

⁵⁰ Balliol MS 336, fols. 3r-v.

⁵¹ The name Euritheia recalls the character in Sir William Davenant’s *The Platonic Lovers* (1636) who appears as the very pattern of courtly, intellectual love.

do, in fact, speak to that interest, and so contribute to the wider continuity of the whole. The threads of Crouch's interest can be traced throughout the notebook, connecting the catalogue of his medical books, details of his university learning, with his record of Oxford verses, with the poems of Philips circulating in a royalist university context.

Sant and Brown have positioned Crouch as part of a royalist network at Oxford in the mid-1650s to suggest how the poems came into his possession. At this time, Crouch may have obtained Philips's poems through a member of her Society of Friendship and contributor to the 1651 edition of Cartwright, Francis Finch, also a member of Balliol college.⁵² However, they acknowledge that 'other members of Orinda's circle were known in Oxford circles of the time, including Berkenhead [sic], Taylor, Jeffreys, Lawes, and Dering, and Crouch could have received Orinda's poems from anyone who had access to them.'⁵³

Further evidence from Nicholas Crouch's collections sheds light on this wider royalist network. During the 1650s, Francis Finch addressed a prose text on friendship to Philips in response to a request from her.⁵⁴ While the dedication is addressed solely to Anne Owen, the main text, dated 30 October 1653, indicates that the work was initially conceived as a response to the joint promptings of 'Lucasia-Orinda', a composite identity for both Owen and Philips.⁵⁵ Balliol 915 contains a rare copy of the manuscript of this text, bound with a volume of printed pamphlets, in Crouch's hand. Patrick Thomas has suggested that Philips and Finch first encountered one another through Henry Lawes's circle although it possible that they also saw each other in Wales.⁵⁶ Crouch's copy of *Friendship* would seem to support this latter theory as the manuscript contains additional information which allows us to place where and when it was written: 'Brecknock, Sunday Evening, Oct. 30. 1635'.⁵⁷ This manuscript thus places Finch in direct proximity to Henry

⁵² Sant and Brown, "Two Unpublished Poems by Katherine Philips," 215.

⁵³ Sant and Brown, "Two Unpublished Poems by Katherine Philips," 215.

⁵⁴ Francis Finch, *Friendship* ([London], 1654).

⁵⁵ Finch, *Friendship*, sigs. A2r-A3r, 1, 34.

⁵⁶ *CWKP* ii. 160, 161.

⁵⁷ Crouch's copy of Finch's *Friendship* survives in the collections at Balliol College, Oxford. Shelfmark 915 h 1 (24).

Vaughan, resident of Breconshire, who would later publish the poem ‘To his Retired Friend, an Invitation to Brecknock’ in *Olor Iscanus* (1651). It is possible that Vaughan, who had attended Jesus College, Oxford after 1641, is one other possible candidate linking Philips, Finch, and Crouch.⁵⁸

Of crucial importance is not only how but *why* the poems were in Crouch’s possession: ‘if he did not know the poet herself, then he knew someone who knew he would be interested.’⁵⁹ Crouch’s political leanings, suggested by the circles in which he moved, are reinforced by documentary evidence from his diaries that, containing little else than notations of the weather and occasional engagements, record his royalist sympathies. On January 30, 1648/49 Crouch records the execution of Charles I with ‘Rex Barbare capite Truncatus’; on May 1, public prayers for Charles II at University Church of St Mary the Virgin; on May 10, 1660, the proclamation of Charles II in Oxford; on May 22 Crouch drank to the health of the king and wished him a good journey (Charles travelled from Breda to The Hague on 14 May).⁶⁰ During the Siege of Oxford (1642-1646), Crouch would leave the city in the months between the second siege (22 May 1645 – 5 June 1645) and the third (1 May 1646 – 25 June 1646), which ended with a Parliamentary victory in 1646. John Jones writes that Crouch ‘slipped away from Oxford at the end of 1645, reappearing without any fuss in June 1649. He was at heart a royalist. But the cause was lost, so he opted for a quiet and apolitical life.’⁶¹ What Sant and Brown do not theorise in their discussion of Crouch’s notebook is the way in which Philips might have been of interest to Crouch precisely on account of the moderate nature of his royalism and, beyond this, how Crouch’s interest might go beyond this to explain the ways in which the presence of Philips’s poems within a university notebook can inflect our readings of the scientific within her verse.

⁵⁸ Brigid Allen, “The Vaughans at Jesus College, Oxford, 1638–48,” *Scintilla, The Journal of the Usk Valley Vaughan Association* 4 (2000): 68–78, cited by Alan Rudrum, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁵⁹ Allen, “The Vaughans at Jesus College, Oxford, 1638–48.”

⁶⁰ ‘The barbarians cut off the King’s head,’ Balliol MS 355, fol. 27r.

⁶¹ John Jones, *Balliol College: A History 1263-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107.

Crouch left Oxford for Loughton, Essex, passing through Kidlington and Buckingham on December 24 1645. On June 22 1649, he records setting up house-keeping again at Balliol College. Balliol MS 355, fols. 23v, 27r.

The second poem of the Philips section, ‘Not to oblige Syndænia by my voice’ (hereafter referred to by its usual title ‘Lucasia’ for clarity), is a perfect example of the passionate poems addressed to women for which she has become known, marking Lucasia, the coterie name for Ann Owen, ‘apart from the other less affect-laden female addressees.’⁶² However, in the context of the Crouch notebook, the poem’s scientific, medicinal, and alchemical terminology suggest that the poet figures the meeting of friends as a sort of (al)chemical process. The friends themselves are ‘liquid things’ (l. 44) and ‘distilled simples’ (l. 47), where the latter denotes ‘[a] medicine or medicament composed or concocted of only one constituent’, such as an herb.⁶³ They come together in ‘the Lembique’ (l. 48), the early apparatus used for distilling, and ‘loose [i.e. lose] Variety’ (l. 48), inherently changing from two separate liquid elements to a single distilled and refined mixture. Through this process, a commixture is produced—‘one rich usefull masse’ (l. 50)—where ‘mass’ refers to ‘a quantity of a substance from which medicinal pills are made’.⁶⁴ Philips’s use of these terms demonstrates a technical knowledge and familiarity with medicinal practice. This language necessitates placing her in a new critical context which allows for the exploration of the ways in which her friendship poetry is formulated through a specifically scientific lens never before attributed to her.

In the circles that Philips’s verse circulated, these scientific undertones would certainly have been legible, particularly to Crouch as a student and practitioner of medicine at the university. His notebook catalogues numerous influential medical texts, such as the famous anatomy work *Anatomicae Institutiones Corporis Humani* (1611) by Caspar and Thomas Bartholin, and William Harvey’s *Exercitatio anatomica de circulatione sanguinis* (1649).⁶⁵ Similarly, it catalogues texts concerning alchemy and chemical medicine, including the works of Daniel Sennert (1572-1637) and the same 1609 edition of *Basilica Chymica* by Oswald Croll (c. 1563-1609) that provided the frontispiece

⁶² Lilley, “Dear Object,” 17.

⁶³ “simple, n.” 6. *OED*.

⁶⁴ “mass, n.” 2, *OED*.

⁶⁵ Balliol MS 336, fols. 32r, 29r.

discussed in relation to Lanyer in Chapter One.⁶⁶ A 1649 list of books recording which texts Crouch took from Oxford during the Civil War details those by Sennert and Croll. Among those he left with John Good at Balliol was Jean François Fernel's influential work on physiology.⁶⁷ From this, it is clear that alchemy and chemical medicine remained of particular interest to Crouch.

The poetry by Philips recorded in the notebook is consistent therefore with Crouch's continuing engagements. The poems notably share a lexicon that draws upon the imagery of an ordered, vitalist universe; the interplay between high and low; the process of transformation (often associated with light or flames); and the alchemical as well as the medicinal. In 'Lucasia', Philips draws upon the Pythagorean idea of 'the music of the spheres'—a conceit grounded in the metaphysical principle that mathematical relationships express qualities or 'tones' of energy which manifest themselves in numbers, shapes and sounds, all connected within a pattern of proportion.⁶⁸ In 1619 Johannes Kepler published *Harmonices Mundi* which posited that musical intervals and harmonies describe the motions of the six known planets of the time. In this poem, divine order underpins Philips's conception of the universe as Syndænia is figured as the truest example of divine harmony:

That souls were made of number could not be
an Observation but Prophetie.
It meant Syndænia whose harmonious state
The spheares and Muses faintly imitate (ll. 20-23).

Here, the correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm, higher and lower, is reversed as Syndænia is the source and origin which the wider cosmos imitates.

Similarly, in 'Madam I doe not these few lines indite', the object of praise is the origin of light and its vitalist ability to invest matter with a live-giving principle. The central role of the sun in the universe was established in Copernicus's *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres* in 1543, in

⁶⁶ Balliol MS 336, fols. 24r, 32v.

⁶⁷ Balliol MS 458, fol. 8v.

⁶⁸ Balliol MS 336, fol. 7v; see Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres: Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe* (London: Abacus, 1995).

which he proposed his paradigm shift to a heliocentric cosmology. Harvey's *Disputations* detail how the sun is the 'common father and begetter of all things' which spontaneously brings forth 'from worms, larvae, from larvae, chrysalides, from chrysalides, butterflies, flies, bees, and so forth'.⁶⁹ This dynamic and interdependent model of the universe is characteristic of vitalism, according to which 'vital forces' are causally operative in nature, and the presence of these 'vital forces' marks out the difference between organic and inorganic matter.⁷⁰ In 'Madam I doe not these few lines indite', light is used to depict this transformative effect:

the reverence you spread
Created from the beames and rays you shed
From the Majestique beauties you put on
Is such as will teach a Religion
To senses things, who worship and admire
when you with your bright form doe them inspire (ll. 11-16).

The radiant object of praise demonstrates a vitalist godly ability, creating a gendered depiction of Genesis 2:7: 'And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.'⁷¹ For Philips, it is the woman who 'inspires'—or, 'breathes [life] into'—'senseless' matter, rendering it sentient and capable of intelligent action: to worship and admire.⁷²

A similar yet subtler formulation of this idea can be read in Philips's poem, 'To Alicia Countess Of Carbery Coming Into Wales.' The Countess of Carbery enacts the divine order of Genesis 1, making order from chaos, light from darkness:

soe when our Country which was doomd to be
close mourner to its own obscurity
And in neglected Chaos so long lay
was rescu'd by your beams into a day (ll. 5-8).

⁶⁹ William Harvey, *Disputations Touching the Generation of Animals*, trans. and intro. Gweneth Whitteridge (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1981), 235, 238. Quoted in Elizabeth Spiller, *Science, Reading, and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63.

⁷⁰ Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, 1, 222.

⁷¹ All quotations from the Bible in this chapter are taken from the King James Version (1611).

⁷² "inspire, adj." 1a, 2b. *OED*.

This is invested with a healing quality as she brings ‘refreshment’ to the ‘sad groves’ of Wales through her ‘splendour’ (ll. 23-24). Described as ‘vertuous’ (l. 28) her presence at once captures the meanings of moral virtue and excellence but also efficacy.⁷³ Her radiance has curative effect, as it ‘recruit[s]’, or returns to strength and health the world, anthropomorphised into a sickly patient:

The vertuous grandure which they once did boast
of you like pilgrims, they may here obtain
worth to recruit the dying world again (ll. 28-30).

Recruit is here used with a medicinal tinge, in the same way that Cowley writes of food ‘recruit[ing]’ ‘decay’d Sp’irits’ and returning them to health.⁷⁴ So, too, do these lines suggest the image of Christ as healer as The Countess of Carbery, figured as second Christ, heals ‘the dying world *again*’ [emphasis my own]. This medically curative aspect of light is made explicit in two more of Philips’s poems through the use of the word ‘dispence’—or ‘to make up (medicine) according to a prescribed formula.’⁷⁵ In ‘Lucasia’, she writes, ‘Soe she, now life, and then doth light dispence / But is one shining orbe of Excellence’ (ll. 30-31). Similarly, in ‘In Nobilem Palaemonem’, Philips writes, ‘He to her [the world’s] dying groans did life afford / And to her own vast eminence restord’ (ll. 51-52). The rays of sunlight are figured in medicinal terms: ‘Hee’s one rich Lustre, which doth rays dispence’ (l. 17). The religious, scientific, and medicinal are tightly interwoven, recalling pastoral theology where the care of souls was treated as a practical science and those in a pastoral role were the ‘*dispensatores*’, ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’ (1 Corinthians 4:1), in a similar way to how Lanyer frames Margaret Clifford in *Salve Deus*.⁷⁶ Where for Lanyer, Clifford’s eyes reflected the radiant light of ‘the sunne’ (l. 56), with the homonymic son evoking the transformative light of grace, in ‘Syndænia’, light is transmuted to fire.⁷⁷ Philips invests the subsequent transformation

⁷³ “virtuous, adj. and n.” 1, 2. *OED*.

⁷⁴ Abraham Cowley, *Davideis in Poems* (London, 1656), IV.143.

⁷⁵ “dispence, v.” 3, *OED*.

⁷⁶ ‘*Dispensatores*’ shares its etymological root ‘*pensare*’, ‘to weigh out’, with the word ‘dispence’, ‘to make up (medicine) according to a prescribed formula’. See “dispence, v.” 1, 3. *OED*.

⁷⁷ *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

with undertones of a scientific experiment as the friend is figured as a furnace, subjecting the speaker to heat in order to effect change:

[...] you are grown as far from being Praisd
as whats at highest, is 'boue being raisd)
But as à solemn welcom Sacrifice
Kindled (from) by holy
fire shott from your eyes
And whilst my hart does upward to you tend
Think it not my Ambition I ascend
For 'tis my nature now I'me all on fire
(and tis you onely fired mee) I aspire (ll. 23-31).⁷⁸

The change is shown to be a reworking in the nature of the speaker, an aspirational Neoplatonic upwards tending of the heart and nature. The word 'aspire' wittily encapsulates the exhalation of that life-giving breath portrayed in 'Madam I doe not these few lines indite', where the desire to further attainment is conveyed in the rising up or improvement of nature itself.⁷⁹ The process here enacted echoes an alchemical sublimation, by which a purification by heat takes place and 'that which is spirituall is separated from that which is corporeal', revealing the innate, pure nature of the element.⁸⁰ This is further suggested by the first lines of the poem in which Philips asserts *Syndænia* to be so good that 'your vertue is your nature, not your dresse' (l. 2); it is essential rather than ornamental. Philips reinforces that it is not a desire for glory that fires her but her Christ-like 'sacrifice' that allows her to ascend wreathed in 'holy fire'. This improving, purifying fire is also detailed in 'In Nobiliem Palaemonem', where a distinction is specifically drawn between friendship and love in terms of these flames: "Twas he that made freinds more than lovers burn, / And then made Love to sacred freindship turn' (ll. 49-50). While lovers may burn, friendship alone produces this ascension to the divine through the process of sublimation.

This alchemical process is most effectively captured in the aforementioned poem 'Lucasia':

For vertues soe Congeniall to her mind
That liquid things, or friends are lesse Combind

⁷⁸ The last two lines of this poem are written sideways on the page.

⁷⁹ "aspire, v." 1, 2, 3, *OED*.

⁸⁰ Bodleian Library MS Marshall 15, fol. 30r.

soe that in her The sage his wish had seen
 and Vertues self had personated been.
 Now as distilled simples doe agree
 and in th' Alembick, loose variety
 soe virtue, tho' in scattred peices 'twas
 Is by her mind made one Rich usefull masse (ll. 42-49).

Both the 'outer work' of alchemy, concerning the perfection of external, physical substances and 'inner work', concerning the perfection of the internal nature interlink in the imagery of Philips's verse.⁸¹ The poem details curative force emanating from the mind of a woman, aligned with virtue and usefulness, expressed in terms which were in frequent use in the alchemical and medical receipt books of sixteenth and seventeenth women, such as those documented by Anthony Fletcher in 1995 (see note 67). Crouch's subtle editing of this poem reveals his interest as a scientific reader. His substitution of 'th'Alembick' for Philips's 'the Lembique', which appears in Philips's autograph manuscript, clarifies the sense of the metaphor.⁸² Sant and Brown note that Dering's copy book also makes this change although they argue that 'this would not in itself seem to suggest that one copied the other's manuscript or that they copied from the same manuscript source.'⁸³ Rather, it could be that both were applying their scientific knowledge, familiar as they would have been with the alembic, which appeared in both academic and domestic contexts.

Two additional Oxford miscellanies compiling Philips's printed works are of particular interest to this study and bear comparison with Crouch's notebook.⁸⁴ Both record poems which, turning our new critical lens upon them, are scientifically inflected. Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 65 is a later seventeenth-century miscellany of various poems that includes twenty-one by Philips but seems to favour those with a particularly theological or metaphysical bent. Compiled by a member of St John's College, Oxford, the pages which contain Philips's poem are headed 'K

⁸¹ Margaret Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and The Creative Imagination: The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15; on the distinction between exoteric and esoteric alchemy see Peter Forshaw, "Subliming Spirits: Physical-Chemistry and Theo-Alchemy in the Works of Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605)," in *Mystical Metal of Gold: Essays on Alchemy and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Stanton J. Linden (New York: AMS, 2007), 255–75.

⁸² See NLW MS 775B, fol. 75.

⁸³ NLW MS 775B, fol. 218.

⁸⁴ See *CWKP*, 49.

P. O.’ (i.e. Katherine Philips. Orinda) and include verses such as ‘Death’, ‘Controversy in Religion’, ‘The Soul’ and ‘L’Accord Du Bien’.⁸⁵ ‘L’Accord Du Bien’ expresses the same unity in friendship that can be read in ‘Syndænia’:

But Goodness keeps that Unity,
And loves its own Society
So well that seldom we have known
One reall worth to dwell alone.
And hence it is we Friendship call
Not by one Vertue’s name, but all (ll. 21-26).⁸⁶

However, the emphasis in this poem falls on the wider cosmic harmony that friendship enacts in microcosm:

Order by which all things are made,
And this great worlds foundation laid,
Is nothing else but Harmony,
Where different Parts are brought t’agree (ll. 1-4).

The same refining light that is enacted by the object of admiration in ‘To Alicia Countess Of Carbery Coming Into Wales’ and ‘Lucasia’ is here attributed to God:

And Grace destroys not but refines,
Unveiles our reason, then it shines;
Restores what was deprest by Sin,
The fainting Beam of God within (ll. 41-44).

God alone is able to create that ‘one Harmonious constant bliss’ as Philips writes ‘But only in Eternity / We can these beauteous Unions see’ (ll. 105-6). Alchemy and religion are once again fused as spiritual alchemy, where grace becomes the refining flame with the ability to heal, originating from God, rather than any earthly object of praise. The lens has been widened to place the focus less on the friends and more on the nature of God and the universe, the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm conventionally figured in contrast to ‘Lucasia’.

Another Oxford manuscript, Rawlinson poet. 90, entitled ‘A Collection of Verses, Fancies and Poems, Morall and Devine’, offers a slightly different compilation with a more earthly focus

⁸⁵ Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women’s Writing*, 193.

⁸⁶ Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson poet. 65, fols. 12v-13v.

than Rawlinson poet. 65, ruminating upon the nature of pleasure and Philips's pastoral poems, quoting 'Against Pleasure' and 'In praise of A Countrey Life'. The majority of its selections from Philips are taken from the printed friendship poems: 'Friendship', 'A Friend', and 'Content'.⁸⁷ These poems share the focus of 'Lucasia', exploring how the intermingling of friends souls, brought together in mutual engrossing harmony, or 'sympathy', the 'agreeing' of souls, enacts a transmutation: 'Whose thoughts and persons chang'd and mixt are one, / Enjoy Content, or else the World hath none' ('Content, to my dearest Lucasia', ll. 71-2), 'Who by a thousand mixtures are allied, / And chang'd and lost, so that it is not known / Within which breast doth now reside their own' ('A Friend' ll. 28-30).⁸⁸ Within these poems, we again see the creation of a harmonious ideal through friendship as the sympathy of the souls, the 'chiefest thing in friends' ('A Friend' l. 25), which has the ability to make the two souls 'agree' (l. 27) or meld. Much as this commixture produced the medicinal 'masse' in 'Lucasia', the emphasis on sympathy recalls the healing ointment or powder found in works by Paracelsus, Kenelm Digby, and Robert Boyle which were said to cure by sympathy.⁸⁹ As in 'Lucasia', emphasis on mutual goodness is figured by Philips in the language of alchemical refinement: friendship is 'love refin'd and purg'd from all its drosse' ('A Friend', l. 8). The friends undergo transformation by fire through the 'Noble flame' of friendship ('A Friend', l. 7) by which all their impurities are removed. Its 'pure fire' stands in contrast to the 'earthly fires' of Love 'which will decay / If the material fuel be away' ('Friendship', ll. 37-40), as they are fed by earthly pleasures, which are transient, echoing the thinking we find in 'In Nobilem Palaemon'.⁹⁰ It is unclear how this process of purification bound up with sympathy would have been read by the compiler, but it was evidently familiar to Crouch whose lending lists detail books

⁸⁷ See *CWKP*, 49.

⁸⁸ Bodleian Library Rawlinson poet. 90, fols. 81r, 8r.

⁸⁹ See Paracelsus, *Archidoxes of Magic* (London, 1656), 117; Kenelm Digby, *A Late Discourse made in a Solemne Assembly of Nobles and Learned Men at Montpellier in France... Touching the Cure of Wounds by the Powder of Sympathy* (London, 1658); Robert Boyle, *Two Essays Concerning the Unsuccessfulness of Experiments in Certain Physiological Essays* (London, 1661), 91-92; see Seth Lobis, *The Virtue of Sympathy: Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 36-68.

⁹⁰ Bod. Rawlinson poet. 90, fol. 9v.

by Digby and Boyle.⁹¹ These two miscellanies, MS Rawlinson poet. 65 and Rawlinson poet. 90, highlight the importance of the Crouch notebook as a compilation which explicitly places scientifically inflected poems against scientific material and, in so doing, provides us with one identifiable example of her scientific readership.

‘STRUNG UPON A VITAL LINE’: PHILIPS AND VAUGHAN’S POETIC EXCHANGES

We may trace Philips’s scientific readership in print by turning to the poems which passed between her and Henry Vaughan, poet and translator of Henry Nollus.⁹² Shortly after the first part of Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans*, *Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* appeared in 1650, Philips wrote ‘To Mr. Henry Vaughan, Silurist, on his Poems’, expressing her appreciation.⁹³ In this poem, Vaughan’s interest in alchemy is used as a means of elegantly framing her praise:

[Thou] Descend’st from thence like Moses from the Mount,
And with a candid and unquestion’daw,
Restor’st the golden age when verse was law.
Instructing us, thou so secur’st thy fame,
That nothing can disturb it but my name;
Nay I have hopes that standing so near thine
‘Twill loose its drosse, and by degrees refine (ll. 25-31).

Philips wittily figures Vaughan’s verse as having alchemical effect. It has the ability of refinement, able to produce both a ‘golden age’ and to purify Philips’s poetry and name from all ‘its drosse’, the ‘extraneous matter thrown off from metals in the process of melting’.⁹⁴ This sense was lost in the unauthorized edition of Philips’s poems produced in 1663/4, where the word appeared as ‘dress’, retaining the dualistic vision of body and soul yet losing the alchemical figuration of

⁹¹ Balliol MS 825 e 16, fol. 113, 114.

⁹² On the tradition of attention to Vaughan’s alchemical and hermetic imagery, see Philip West, *Henry Vaughan’s Silex scintillans: Scripture Uses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5-6.

⁹³ Thomas, *Katherine Philips* (‘Orinda’), 26. *CWKP*, 96-97.

⁹⁴ “dross, n.” 1a, *OED*. On Vaughan’s own use of the language of refinement and its scriptural sources, see West, *Henry Vaughan’s Silex scintillans*, ch. 6, esp. 203-6.

friendship as a purifying fire.⁹⁵ This is an example of the ‘falseness of the Copies’, Philips decried in the Preface to the 1667 edition:

Some infernal Spirits or other have catch’d those rags of Paper, and what the careless blotted writing kept them from understanding, they have supplied by conjecture or else I know not which way it is possible for them to be collected, or so abominably transcrib’d as I hear they are.⁹⁶

For, in her autograph manuscript of her own poetry and subsequent editions, the full alchemical valence of the verse is clear in her use of ‘drosse’⁹⁷ or ‘dross’.⁹⁸

Vaughan responded to Philips’s praise by including a poem ‘To the most Excellently accomplish’d Mrs K. Philips’ in his *Olor Iscanus* (1651). In this poem, she is figured in scientific terms, her illuminating and inspiring presence compared to a lodestone, a naturally magnetised stone used as the first magnetic compass:

It was your light shew’d me the way.
So *Lodestones* guide the duller *Steele*,
And high perfections are the *Wheele*
Which moves the lesse, for gifts divine
Are strung upon a *Vital line*
Which touched by you, Excites in all
Affections *Epidemicall* (ll. 30-36).

The physicality of this inspiring force is picked up in Vaughan’s particularly notable choice of the word ‘Epidemicall’. Philips’s poetry is praised as prevalent or popular but also able to move the reader in a way similar to a disease, physically acting upon the bodies of all people.⁹⁹ Vaughan repurposes a word which is so often used negatively, for example, by Robert Burton, who writes of the ‘Epidemicall diseases which afflict whole kingdomes’ in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Katherine Philips, *Poems by the incomparable Mrs. K.P* (London, 1664), sig. E4r.

⁹⁶ Katherine Philips, *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs Katherine Philips The Matchless Orinda* (London, 1667), sigs. A2r-v.

⁹⁷ Katherine Philips, ‘To Mr. Henry Vaughan, Silurist, on his Poems,’ MS 775B. Digitized on Perdita Manuscripts.

⁹⁸ Philips, *Poems* (1667), sig. H2v.

⁹⁹ “epidemicall, adj.” 2, 1a, *OED*.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 382. Diseases which are described as ‘epidemicall’ by Burton include the plague and plica (73).

Instead, he stresses the power of Philips's verse to affect universally and profoundly his own work, which itself interlinks the poetic with the scientific as well as the religious or mystical.¹⁰¹

This idea of universal affect is picked up in the reference to the 'vital line' (l. 34). This idea, going back at least to Plotinus, expresses the idea of the Soul as 'is present everywhere where it is present and is everywhere in the All without being divided' referring to the Neoplatonic creation of unity from multiplicity that also inflects alchemical philosophy.¹⁰² Thomas Vaughan was to draw upon this idea in his 1650 *Anthroposophia Theomagica* to express the interconnection between micro and macrocosm—the soul's place in and connection with the wider universe—: 'She [the Soul] can (per unionem cum virtute universali [by a union with universal force]) infuse, and communicate her thoughts to the Absent.'¹⁰³ It is an image that strongly recalls Philips's 'Lucasia', where we follow the infusion of two sympathetic minds, bringing the scattered pieces of virtue into 'one rich usefull masse'. In Vaughan's poem, Philips communicates divine gifts to her reader through her connection with this 'vital line', this link between the individual and the universal that connects them all in unified harmony. In writing that Philips has touched this line, Vaughan frames her work as engaging with the same divine proto-chemistry upon which Thomas Vaughan's *Anthroposophia Theomagica* is grounded. Philips's praise of Henry Vaughan evoked his ability to transform those close to him into a product of alchemy (in Philips's case, gold). In Vaughan, we see the culmination of that transformation as Vaughan celebrates a meeting of sympathetic minds infusing and communicating across the alchemical vital line upon which the Vaughan brothers and Philips are all intellectually strung.

¹⁰¹ Quite literally in some cases. Vaughan attached to the second volume of *Silex Scintillans* (1655) a translation of Henry Nollus's *Hermetical Physick*.

¹⁰² Plotinus, *Enneads* (VI.4) in *Ennead, Volume VI: 1-5*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 311.

¹⁰³ Thomas Vaughan [Eugenius Philalethes], *Anthroposophia theomagica* (London, 1650), 47.

Beyond their exchange of poems, it is possible that it was through Vaughan that Philips gained access to her alchemical, and specifically, hermetic knowledge, as is argued by Sajed Chowdhury.¹⁰⁴ Vaughan produced a translation of Henry Nollus's *Hermetical Physicke* in 1655. The *Hermetica*, the body of writings of Hermes Trismegistus (thought to have been active around the time of Moses, though later disproved by Casaubon) emerged from obscurity following Cosimo de Medici's procurement of a fourteenth century Hermetic manuscript around 1460.¹⁰⁵ Cosimo ordered that the manuscript be immediately translated by Marsilio Ficino so that he might read it before his death; the works of Plato waited while Ficino produced the Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in fourteen tracts, published as *Pimander* in 1471. By the mid-sixteenth century, this work, disseminated from the Florentine academy throughout Europe, had gone through two dozen editions and had been translated into French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Greek and English.¹⁰⁶

This Hermetic alchemy provided the basis for Paracelsian alchemy, and the inextricability of these two strands of alchemy—the Hermetic and the Paracelsian—is encapsulated in Vaughan's 1655 translation of *Hermetical Physicke*. Chowdhury omits to note that had Vaughan's translation exposed Philips to the *Hermetica*, it would also have exposed her to Paracelsian alchemy. This text certainly had its basis in Hermetic philosophy, as Nollus observes in the Preface to Vaughan's translation of the *Hermetical Physicke*: 'It is termed *Hermetical Physicke*, because it is grounded upon Principles of true *Philosophy*, as the *Physicke* of *Hermes* was.'¹⁰⁷ But this should not discount its inheritances from Paracelsian medicine and alchemy; as Vaughan writes, 'I honour the truth where ever I find it, whether in an old, or a new Booke, in Galen, or in Paracelsus'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the book's

¹⁰⁴ Chowdhury, "Hermeticism in the Poetry of Katherine Philips," 469.

¹⁰⁵ Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1982), 13.

¹⁰⁶ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xlvii-xlix.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Nollus, *Hermetical Physicke*, trans. Henry Vaughan (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1655), sig. B2r.

¹⁰⁸ Nollus, *Hermetical Physicke*, sigs. A4v-A5r.

emphasis on medicinal, curative alchemy renders it ‘avowedly Paracelsian in orientation’, since, as Nollius went on to elaborate,¹⁰⁹

it doth most exquisitely search and find out the natures of health and sickness, it provides most elaborate and effectuall Medicines, teacheth the just Dose of them, and surpasseth by many degrees the vulgar Philosophy, and that faculty which is grounded upon the principles of the common, supposititious knowledge, that is to say, it doth much exceed and out do the Galenical Physick.¹¹⁰

Given the historical syncretism of Hermetic and Paracelsian alchemy, a more comprehensive treatment of Philips’s alchemical imagery is needed, which is what the following section discusses in relation to Philips own status as a woman writer involved in distinctly female friendship networks.

‘A KNOT SO HARD, SO FAST, AND DURABLE’: HERMETIC AND PARACELSIAN UNITY

In 1603, John Florio’s English translation of Michel de Montaigne’s essay ‘Of Friendship’ articulated the gendered doctrine of friendship from which women were excluded, the Ciceronian ideal friendship, or *amicitia*:

Seeing (to speake truely) that the ordinary sufficiencie of women, cannot answer this conference and communication, the nurse of this sacred bond: nor seeme their mindes strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, and durable [...] this sexe could never yet by any example attaine unto [friendship], and it is by ancient schooles rejected thence.¹¹¹

The gendering of this doctrine originates from the implicitly androcentric nature of Cicero’s *De amicitia*, which might be summarized in the maxim ‘*amicitiam nisi inter bonos esse non posse*’ (friendship cannot exist except among good [men]).¹¹² That this adage finds a coda, ‘none can be a friend that is not good’ (l. 36), in Philips’s poem ‘A Friend’ would suggest that Philips had read Cicero’s text

¹⁰⁹ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 243.

¹¹⁰ Nollius, *Hermetical physick*, sig. B2r.

¹¹¹ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. John Florio (London: Edward Blount, 1603), sigs. I4r-v.

¹¹² Cicero, *De amicitia*, XVIII. While the word ‘men’ does not appear in the Latin, the masculine plural of bonus, ‘*bonos*’, implies that the ‘good’ are men.

(perhaps in the English, first translated in 1481), and that her poem constitutes a direct response, wittily and ambiguously gendering the original maxim. Just as ‘*bonos*’, though implicitly masculine, might be taken to be neutral so Philips herself uses a neutral pronoun, ‘none’, stripped of any implicit gendering, destabilising readings focused on men. Philips’s rewriting of masculine ethical friendship has been well documented by critics of her poetry, but two key critical oversights have been made in this scholarship that need rectifying.¹¹³ First, criticism has tended to suggest that Philips’s Neoplatonic figuration of sexless souls is the sole uncomplicated means of this rewriting, citing the example of ‘A Friend’:

If souls no sexes have, for men t’exclude
 Woman from Friendship’s vast capacity,
 Is a design injurious or rude,
 Only maintain’d by partial tyranny (ll. 19-21).

However, what critics have omitted from this discussion is that, as John Rogers has noted, the ‘traditional subordination of matter to spirit had always been figured and justified as the reasonable subordination of a female to a male principle of being.’¹¹⁴ So, while the sexless Neoplatonic soul may enable women access to ethical friendship, it nevertheless implicitly maintains the same hierarchy latent in *amicitia*. Second, critical comment has not discussed the fact that Philips’s alchemical imagery is steeped in the same negotiation of gendered language evidenced in her reformulation of the ‘*bonos*’. The two are tightly interlinked: negotiation of Hermetic and Paracelsian gendered language *enables* a reformulation of the gendered language of masculine friendship. More than this, it collapses the implicit hierarchy of Neoplatonism previously thought to have achieved this reformulation in Philips’s poetry of friendship.

‘Friendship’, in the sense of ‘the capacity to unite harmoniously’,¹¹⁵ is a foundational tenet of Hermetic ideology, as found in John Everard’s 1650 English translation of the Hermetic *Divine Pymander*:

¹¹³ Chernaik, “Philips [née Fowler] Katherine (1632-1664)”; Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*; Anderson, *Friendship’s Shadows*.

¹¹⁴ Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 14.

¹¹⁵ “friendship, n.” 5, *OED*.

[...] friendship, and commixture of contraries and unlike, became Light shining from the Act or Operation of God, the Father of all Good, the Prince of all Order, and the Ruler of the Seven Worlds [...] For there is one Soul, one Life, and one matter.¹¹⁶

These ‘contraries and unlike’ brought into friendship were figured as gendered forces: male and female, sulphur and mercury, red and white, Sol and Luna.¹¹⁷ For, as Lyndy Abraham details,

Alchemy is based on the Hermetic view that man had become divided within himself, separated into two sexes, at the fall in the garden of Eden and could only regain his Adamic state when the opposing forces within him were reconciled.¹¹⁸

Consequently, the chemical wedding of male and female or *conjunctio* is a central motif found throughout alchemical works, from the ascription of masculine and feminine pronouns to elements in texts to the alchemical illustrations that anthropomorphise chemical elements. The *conjunctio* sees two gendered elements combine or ‘wed’ to create a gendered ideal substance, a ‘complete, undivided unity known as the rebis or hermaphrodite, [...] the perfect integration of male and female energies.’¹¹⁹ In alchemical terms, this represents the mixture of ‘sulphur, the hot, dry, active male aspect of the *prima materia* [and] the cold, moist, receptive female aspect, *argent vive* or mercury’ and their transmutation from base substances into the ideal Philosopher’s Stone¹²⁰

Alchemy, then, lends itself to a conflating lexicon, a figurative gendered blurring of boundaries which is helpfully encapsulated in Michael Maier’s 1618 popular alchemical emblem book *Atalanta Fugiens*.¹²¹ Emblem XXX (Figure 10) depicts Sol (male) and Luna (female) standing apart, prior to the *conjunctio*; Emblem XXXIV (Figure 11) depicts the *conjunctio* itself, a physical coupling (*concipitur*) within a bath (*balneis*), representative of the alchemist’s alembic; Emblem

¹¹⁶ Everard, *Divine Pymander*, 123-24, 127.

¹¹⁷ Everard, *Divine Pymander*, 123.

¹¹⁸ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 36-7; Roberts, *Mirror of Alchemy*, 84.

¹¹⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 98.

¹²⁰ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 98, 124.

¹²¹ The text was republished in 1687 and 1708. For an excellent digital edition of *Atalanta Fugiens*, which allows the reader to hear the fugues that appear alongside the alchemical emblems, see *Furnace and Fugue: A Digital Edition of Michael Maier’s “Atalanta Fugiens” (1618) with Scholarly Commentary* (2020), edited by Tara Nummedal and Donna Bilak. Accessible at <https://furnaceandfugue.org/>. As this edition notes, the publication date for the text is variously given as 1617 and 1618, though these are virtually identical states rather than separate editions. Due to the availability of extant copies, this chapter will prefer the 1618 edition.

XXXVIII (Figure 12) portrays the birth (*nascitur*) of the rebis or hermaphrodite from this coupling, its figure prominently standing between the entwined male and female couple in the foreground below. Commixture and blurring of boundaries is present not just in depictions of the *conjunctio* but in the ‘odd bodies’ noted by Kathleen P. Long, anthropomorphised elements portrayed as ‘ambiguous or mixed in nature’.¹²² Wind, typically a masculine element, is gendered male, but the figure of a child is visible in his pregnant stomach (Figure 13); water, typically feminine is ‘hydropic’ man, swollen and also seemingly pregnant (Figure 14).¹²³ The very structure of *Atalanta Fugiens* fosters this emphasis on balance and intermixture. Each emblem is preceded by a three-voiced fugue which corresponds to the three key elements of alchemy mercury, sulfur, and salt. The three voices are interdependent, mutually sustaining, in harmony, conveying aurally the ‘commixture of contraries’.¹²⁴



Figure 10: Emblem 30. ‘Sol indiget Luna, ut gallus gallina’ (Sol needs the Luna as the cock needs the hen). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

¹²² Kathleen P. Long, “Odd Bodies: Reviewing Corporeal Difference in Early Modern Alchemy,” *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Kathleen P. Long (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 75.

¹²³ Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens, hoc est, Emblematum nova de secretis naturæ chymica* (Oppenheim: Johann Theodor de Bry, 1618), sigs. B3r, H3r.

¹²⁴ Everard, *Divine Pymander*, 127.



Figure 11: Emblem 34. 'In balneis concipitur, & in aëre nascitur, rubeus verò factus graditur super aquas' (He is conceived in baths, born in the air, and being made red he walks upon the waters). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.



Figure 12: Emblem 38. 'Rebis, ut Hermaphroditus, nascitur ex duobus montibus, Mercurii & Veneris' (The Rebis, like a Hermaphrodite, is born from two mountains, of Mercury and of Venus). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

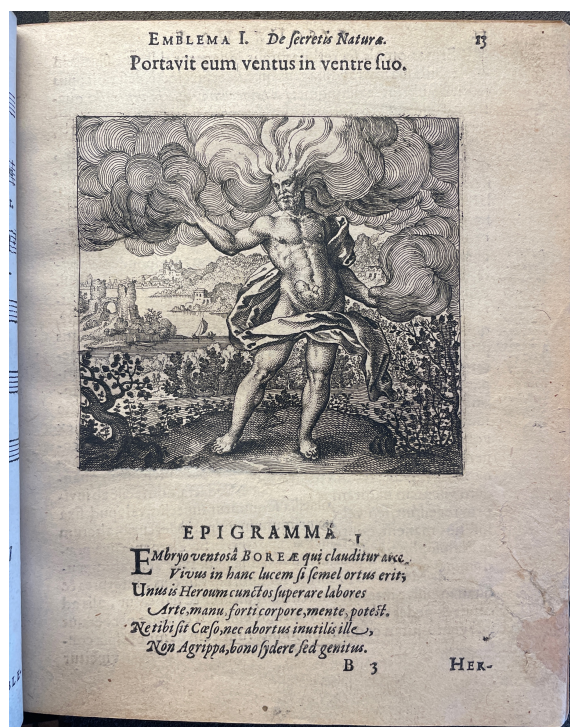


Figure 13: Emblem 1. *Portavit eum ventus in ventre suo* (The Wind carried him in his belly). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

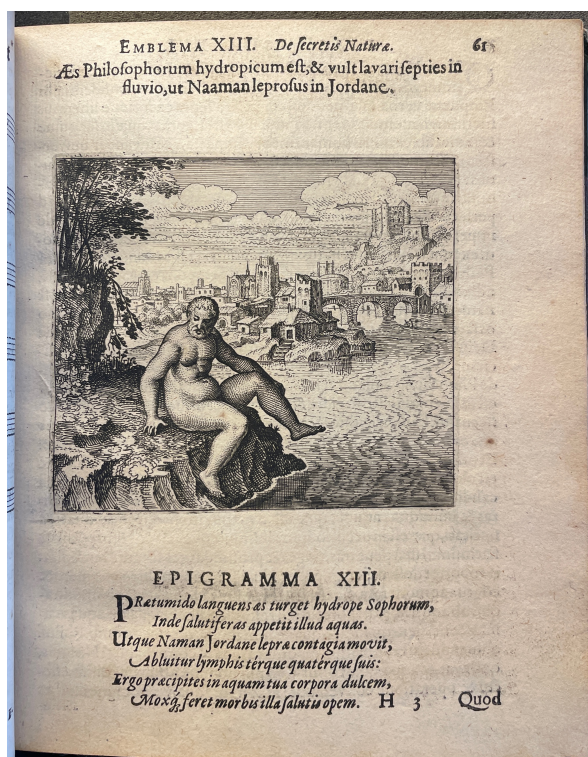


Figure 14: Emblem 13. '*Æs Philosophorum hydropicum est, & vult lavari septies in fluvio, ut Naaman leprosus in Jordane*' (Ore of the Philosophers is dropsical, and needs to be washed seven times in the river, as Naaman the leper was in Jordan). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

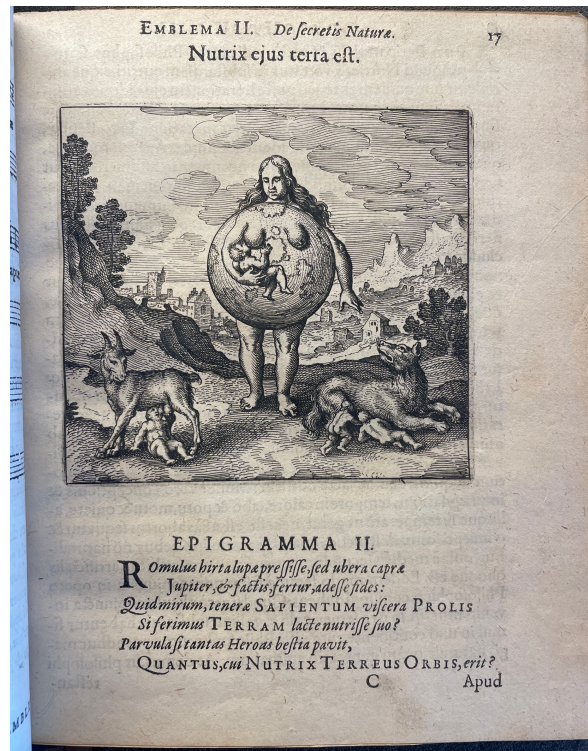


Figure 15: Emblem 2. 'Nutrix ejus terra est' (The Earth is his Nurse). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

The hermaphroditic emphasis of alchemy and its representations has invoked, perhaps inevitably, a mixed response. While feminist critics such as June Singer and Kathleen P. Long acknowledge the disruption of the sexual hierarchy of male over female in the figure of the hermaphrodite, others such as Sally G. Allen and Joanna Hubbs have noted that the symbol might be construed as misogynistic.¹²⁵ Allen and Hubbs suggest that hermaphroditic alchemical symbolism 'involves mastery over the feminine', encoding 'an obsession with reversing, or perhaps even arresting, the feminine hegemony over the process of biological creation'.¹²⁶ They contrast the male appropriation of maternity in Emblem I (Figure 13) entitled 'Portavit eum ventus in vetre sui' (The wind carried him in his womb) with the reduction of the female's function to that of nurse in the directly following Emblem II (Figure 15), 'Nutrix ejus terra est' (The earth is his nurse).

¹²⁵ June Singer, *Androgyny: The Opposites Within* (York Beach: Nicolas Hays, 2000), 100; Kathleen P. Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 56; Nancy Tuana, "The Unhappy Marriage of Alchemy and Feminism," *Prairie Home Philosophy*, ed. Mark Chekola (Moorhead: Moorhead State University Press, 1987), 110-122; Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 87.

¹²⁶ Sally G. Allen and Joanna Hubbs, "Outrunning Atalanta: Feminine Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation," *Signs* 6.2 (1980): 211, 213.

Certainly, the symbol is open to criticism that the female is in some way subsumed by this mixture: it is arguably ‘healed’ by the male element, improved in some way by its exposure. While binaries are elided, it nevertheless might be viewed as enshrining the same subordination of female to male that Neoplatonism implicitly encodes.¹²⁷

However, the alchemical hermaphrodite seems to resist this reading, overturning, for example the ‘normalizing view [of contemporary medical texts which] focus[ed] primarily on an idealized masculine body, with the feminine version presented as an afterthought.’¹²⁸ Rather than the female being subsumed, the alchemical hermaphrodite is manifestly a mixture of male and female, always represented with two heads (one with short hair and one with long hair) and, where visible, two distinct sets of genitalia: distinct forms and individual identities are retained, even in commixture. Female and male are distinct and equally active elements in a model of gender that, as Kathleen P. Long notes,

recognizes both difference and resemblance between the sexes. The male-female binary is not effaced, but complicated by the notion that perfection can only be achieved by uniting these two aspects.¹²⁹

Indeed, in Emblem XXX (Figure 7), this co-dependency is stressed in the Latin title: ‘Sol indiget Luna’ (Sol needs Luna). Rather than the male healing the female she is a vital component, adding to the perfection, rather than detracting from it. The role of the woman is vital, seen more generally in the alignment of the alchemical opus with ‘women’s work’ in Emblem XXII (Figure 16) and also in Emblem III (Figure 17) where the alchemist is directed to observe and learn from women’s daily, domestic routines: ‘Go to the woman who washes the sheets and do as she does.’¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, 14.

¹²⁸ Long, “Odd Bodies,” 63.

¹²⁹ Kathleen P. Long, “Introduction: Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture,” *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture*, 4.

¹³⁰ Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, sigs. C3r, Nr.



Figure 16: Emblem 22. 'Plumbo habito candido fac opus mulierum, hoc est, COQUE' (Having acquired white lead, do the work of women, that is, COOK). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.



Figure 17: Emblem 3. 'Vade ad mulierem lavantem pannos, tu fac ſimiliter' (Go to the woman who waſhes ſheets and do as ſhe does). Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

This stands in radical contrast to the Ovidian figuration of the hermaphrodite in the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in the *Metamorphoses*. In this telling, the female Salmacis is subsumed into the male Hermaphroditus, who retains his essentially masculine identity though now qualified and weakened by the feminine addition:

[...] in the water sheene
 To which he entred in a man, his limmes were weakened so
 That out fro thence but halfe a man he was compelde to go.¹³¹

It is the alchemical hermaphrodite, rather than the Ovidian, that we glimpse in Philips's poetics, I suggest. Crucially, though, her imagery reformulates the chemical marriage to portray a female commixture which might be as Adamic and self-sufficient as the Hermetic Mercurius. Rather than a dominant soul subsuming a weaker soul, Philips emphasises the *mutual* absorption—a creation of a cohesive union which cannot be divided into its basic elements. Put simply, the two are 'engrossed' or collected together and entirely absorbed into one another: 'We both diffuse, and both ingross' ('Friendship's Mysterys, to my dearest Lucasia', l. 13), 'We have each other so engrost, / That each is in the union lost.' ('To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting', ll. 17-18)¹³² There is no need for one soul to in some way 'heal' the other as each is a vital component. In contrast to the Hermetic hermaphrodite, in which 'male-female binary is not effaced, but complicated', Philips puts forward a radical new view suggesting that the female souls contain all that is needed for perfection.¹³³

Rather than simply Hermetic, this female-inclusive formulation may be viewed as Paracelsian, a strand of alchemy that arguably encodes sexual equality, which Lanyer deployed to such striking effect in her gendered reinterpretations of Paracelsianism to celebrate her patron, Clifford in Chapter One.¹³⁴ While it is certainly true that for Paracelsus, the male was still a

¹³¹ Ovid, *The Fovrth Booke of Ouids Metamorphosis in The Fifteene Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso; entituled, Metamorphosis*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1612), sig. C8v.

¹³² "engross, v." 4, 5, *OED*.

¹³³ Long, "Introduction: Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture," 4.

¹³⁴ See Penny Bayer, "From Kitchen Hearth to Learned Paracelsianism: Women and Alchemy in the Renaissance," *Mystical Metal of Gold*, 365–86; Arlene Miller Guinsberg, "The Counterthrust to Sixteenth

significant component within the alchemical mixture, Paracelsus's studies of female anatomy played a significant role in granting women a privileged position within his philosophy as he 'exalted and celebrated women's biological role in procreation':

Woman was special [...] because she was that member of the human species which bore children; as such she was the end point of God's creative process and the matrix of man. As four elements of the macrocosm came from the matrix of the three principles, salt, sulphur, and mercury, man's physical body came from the limbus, that is, the matrix of the four elements; so woman, taken from her matrix, Adam, became the matrix of the human species.¹³⁵

This acts as a significant counter to the Aristotelian procreative model in which agency was stripped from women in procreation as Aristotle's haematogenous theory of reproduction stipulated the woman's role was to contribute the 'matter' and menstrual blood was then 'acted upon' by the semen to effect generation.¹³⁶

Philips marks a progression from this idea that female is the end point of God's creation, a more perfect being than man.¹³⁷ For in her poetry, two females are perfectly able to create an equivalent of the perfect hermaphroditic, self-sufficient state: a woman's creative power is sufficient. Bringing the souls together in mutual engrossing harmony enacts a transmutation achieving an 'incomparable mixture', a shift from two into 'one' ('L'amicie: To Mrs. M. Awbrey', l. 4). Stress falls upon the transformation of the two friends: 'Whose thoughts and persons chang'd and mixt are one, / Enjoy Content, or else the World hath none' ('Content, to my dearest Lucasia', ll. 71-2), 'Who by a thousand mixtures are allied, / And chang'd and lost, so that it is not known / Within which breast doth now reside their own' ('A Friend' ll. 28-30). The union becomes more than the sum of its parts. Philips describes an increase in the souls: they are 'grown' by the

Century Misogyny: The Work of Agrippa and Paracelsus," *Historical Reflections* 8 (1981): 3-28; Healy, 'Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity,' 75-103.

¹³⁵ Guinsberg, "The Counterthrust to Sixteenth Century Misogyny," 8, 10.

¹³⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Tredennick, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), I.29, I.20.

¹³⁷ Evert Jan van Leeuwen, *Alchemical Construction of Genders in Anglo-American Fiction, 1799-1852* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 26.

acquaintance ('To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting', l. 13)), and 'grown' by the incomparable mixture of female fellowship ('L'amitie: To Mrs. M. Awbrey', l. 3).

This yields an interesting comparison with Donne's figuration of alchemy and *amicitia*. Certainly, Donne marks a crucial departure from tradition in his elevation of women to a degree that they are able to engage in the traditionally masculine practice of *amicitia*. In 'Elegie on the Lady Marckham', her soul is able to partake in *amicitia* and is demonstrably 'meet / To have reform'd this forward heresy, / That women can no parts of friendship be (ll. 56-58). Lady Bedford, too, in 'To the Lady Bedford', partakes in a friendship which reflects the tropes of *amicitia*, the merging of 'one of two' and the friend as 'another the same':¹³⁸

You that are she and you, that's double shee,
In her dead face, halfe of your selfe shall see;
Shee was the other part, for so they doe
Which build them friendships, become one of two (1-4)

However, despite this language of mutuality, the focus rests primarily on the virtues of Lady Bedford. The death of her friend is not able to harm her because her transformative alchemy is internal and solipsistic, rather than externally transformative:

And as no fire, nor rust can spend or waste
One dramme of gold, but what was first shall last,
Though it bee forc'd in water, earth, salt, aire,
Expans'd in infinite, none will impaire;
So, to your selfe you may additions take,
But nothing can you lesse, or changed make (ll. 35-40).

The vision presented by Donne is of an extraordinary self-sustaining entity which, crucially, and rather paradoxically, does not undergo change even when the addition of a friend renders the pair 'one' rather than 'two'.

For Philips, the surrendering of hearts, or entering into friendship, enacts the transformation, mirroring the sacrificial language of the *conjunctio* which 'always involves some kind

¹³⁸ Cicero, *De amicitia*, XXI; Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 40.

of sacrifice or death [...] The death at the wedding symbolises the extinction of the differentiated state before union'.¹³⁹ Through this loss, Philips writes, undifferentiated perfection is achieved:

Our hearts are doubled by the loss,
Here Mixture is Addition grown;
We both diffuse, and both ingross:
And we whose Minds are so much one,
Never, yet ever, are alone ('Friendship's Mysterys, to my dearest Lucasia', ll. 11-15).

Couched in the Hermetic language of the harmony of contraries, the two souls have achieved the ideal harmonious state which evokes the perfection and self-sufficiency of the alchemical hermaphrodite.

Yet, Philips's formulation must be contrasted with the alchemical portrayal of the domination of the female in Hermetic alchemy, centred around the *nigredo* state, the sacrifice or death, prior to the *conjunction*, or chemical marriage. At this point 'the "female" influence is dominant [...] because the feminine, dissolving capacity is what is required to break down the old form into its basic matter'.¹⁴⁰ This stage, as well as being figured in terms of the 'ascendency of the female', is also characterized by a 'journey to a cursed or barren land', as can be read in the alchemical 'Visio Arislei':¹⁴¹

Arisleus and his companion-chemists journey to 'the end of the world', to a kingdom where 'nothing multiplies'. Only like mates with like. Learning that there are no philosophers in this barren land, the alchemists offer to teach the king the secrets of generation. 'If there were a philosopher among you, your sons could multiply, your trees would not die, your seed would grow'. They decree that the king's son and daughter, Thabritius and Beya must couple.¹⁴²

Where 'like mates with like', rather than male with female, there can be no creation of the hermaphroditic ideal state; the land remains barren and nothing can be generated.

¹³⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary*, 36-7; Roberts, *Mirror of Alchemy*, 84.

¹⁴⁰ Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy*, 79.

¹⁴¹ Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy*, 78-80.

¹⁴² This myth, commonly known as the 'Visio Arislei' ('Vision of Arisleus'), is taken from the *Aenigmata ex visione Arislei et allegoriis sapientum* collected in *Artis auriferae quam chemiam vocant, volumen primum* (Basel, 1593), vol. 1, 146-54. Quoted and translated in Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 138.; Abraham cites the *Artis Auriferae* as a basic work of alchemy. See Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy*, 23, 85.

Philips thus radically reformulates the traditional basis of Hermetic alchemy: the creation of the harmonious and self-sufficient ideal is achieved not through the ‘friendship, and commixture of contraries and unlike’, but through the friendship and commixture of *like with like*: the ultimate act and union of sympathy. This manifests as an emphasis upon the sympathy of the souls, the ‘chiefest thing in friends’ (A Friend’ l. 25), which has the ability to make the two souls ‘agree’ (l. 27) or meld:

But neither Chance nor Compliment
Did element our Love;
’Twas sacred Sympathy (ll. 7-9, “To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting”)

It is this sympathy, or similarity, between the friends that has the ability to alchemically ‘element’, to ‘compound’ the two into one.¹⁴³ Couched in the same witty language of gallantry that has been well recognised in Marvell and Donne, Philips elevates the love of the friends by stressing its rarefied nature.¹⁴⁴

This reforging of the hermaphroditic Mercurius (male-female) allows Philips to negotiate a contiguous parallel between the self-sufficient mixture of two masculine souls needed for *amicitia* and the self-sufficient mixture of two female souls, countering Montaigne’s Ciceronian belief that ‘the ordinary sufficiency of women, cannot answer this conference and communication [of *amicitia*]’.¹⁴⁵ In this way, she reformulates the ‘natural’ hierarchy which placed male above female, achieving the same equality that critics have perceived in the Neoplatonic ‘sexless souls’. Philips certainly draws upon Neoplatonism in her poetry, suggesting that the body is subordinate to the soul: the body is the ‘cloggy dross’ from which ‘once gone’ the soul ‘Puts on perfection’ (‘In memory of the most Justly honour’d Mrs Owen of Oriulton’, ll. 15-16). This hierarchy is expressed alchemically in Donne’s ‘true religious alchemy’ (*The First Anniversary*, l. 182) (previously discussed in Chapter One in relation to Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611)): the virtue of

¹⁴³ “element, v.” 1, *OED*.

¹⁴⁴ Abraham, *Marvell and Alchemy* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990); Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 155.

¹⁴⁵ Montaigne, *Essays*, sigs. I4r-I4v.

Elizabeth Drury is able to act as an ‘allay’ to the ‘weaker sex’, mitigating the ‘stain of Eve’ (ll. 178-80). Elizabeth Drury is remarkable because she is able to exhibit this traditionally masculine ‘healing’ of the feminine, neutralising the ‘poisonous tincture’ (l. 180), creating an equilibrium which mimics the perfection of the Philosophers’ Stone. She purifies not only herself but ‘all’ (l. 182). This strains against Donne’s description of the body as ‘gold’ (l. 241) and the body as an ‘electrum’ (l. 242), or an ‘alloy of gold and silver’, ‘hold[ing] / Many degrees of that’ gold of the soul (l. 243).¹⁴⁶ While this would seem to suggest some continuation between body and soul, the implication of the ‘stain of Eve’ remains, and the subordination of female to male is retained.

Philips’s alchemical language similarly sees her adopting and reworking Neoplatonic thought in much the same way that she negotiated *amicitia*. Just as the soul, while sexless, was regarded as ‘masculine’ due to its superior state, so, too, does Philips’s reconfiguration of gender hierarchy result in an identification of the soul with femininity. In the aforementioned poem, the soul, free from the body ‘Puts on perfection, and resumes *her* own’, ll. 15-16). So too, in ‘The Soule’:

She’s [the soul] then a substance subtile, strong and pure,
So immaterial and refin’d
As speaks *her* from the body’s fate secure,
And wholly of a diffrent kind (ll. 49-52).

Philips here does indeed present us with a soul ‘wholly of a diffrent kind’, secure from the body’s traditional fate of being aligned with ‘inferior’ femininity.

Rogers has argued that a similar effect was achieved by monistic vitalism, as its ‘general reconfiguration of the relation of spirit to matter compelled, at least rhetorically, a parallel reconfiguration of the relation of male to female.’¹⁴⁷ While it is certainly true that Philips is not drawing upon the specific rhetoric of monism, an implicit prefiguring of this egalitarian theory may be read in the suggested equality of the feminine and the masculine in Philips’s verse. Philips’s

¹⁴⁶ “electrum, n.” *OED*.

¹⁴⁷ Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 14.

negotiation of the gendered language of the Hermetic hermaphroditic model (a mixture of male and female) has the effect of enabling a female-female friendship access to *amicitia* (a previously exclusively male bond): their sex does not bar them access. In this way, Philips's reforging of the androgynous Mercurius allows her to counter Montaigne's Ciceronian belief that the 'ordinary sufficiency of women cannot answer this conference and communication': she rewrites both the conference of *amicitia* and the communication of Neoplatonic souls.¹⁴⁸

Rather than reiterating the Neoplatonic gender hierarchy that we see in Donne, Philips's use of alchemy collapses the traditional hierarchy of matter. Her innovative philosophic poetic thus arises from her subtle reformulation of the gendered lexicon of the (al)chemical wedding. The female element is shown to be not simply necessary but capable of being entirely self-sufficient: a male presence is not required. As in Paracelsian alchemy, her poetry celebrates the generative power of the female. By conflating the difference between male and female souls, *amicitia* and this self-sufficiency may be achieved by either men or women. Moreover, rendering the hermetic ideal a meeting of sympathies rather than contraries, Philips's *amicitia* is firmly rooted in a shared ideology or virtue which is removed from gender, creating a female-inclusive interpretation of *amicitia*.

‘BY HER MIND MADE ONE RICH USEFUL MASS’:

SYMPATHY IN FEMALE FRIENDSHIP

Having unravelled that ‘knot so hard, so fast, so durable’ and reweaving it to encircle women as well as men, Philips appropriates the tropes of classical *amicitia* within her female friendships, framing them within an alchemical context.¹⁴⁹ Specifically, the concepts of similarity or sympathy, virtue, and mutual benefit or purification may be explicated with reference to Paracelsian alchemy.

¹⁴⁸ Montaigne, *Essays*, sigs. I4r- I4v.

¹⁴⁹ Montaigne, *Essays*, sigs. I4r-v.

In criticism, there has been the tendency to view sympathy as simply an aspect of friendship discourse, using it to support arguments of the friend as *'alter idem'* ('another the same') or reshaping it to convey 'erotic similitude'.¹⁵⁰ However, the sympathy of Philips's friends is crucial to demonstrating Philips gender-based interpretation of curative alchemy whereby alchemical perfection, commixture and harmony might be achieved within female, as opposed to male, friendship. Philips's alchemical imagery figures female friendship as 'a utopian "counterpolity" composed of two private persons', prefiguring the blissful purification and union with God following death.¹⁵¹ While Carol Barash has effectively disproved the reductive character sketch of Philips as a writer of 'innocent little verses about her private life in Wales', Philips's alchemical formulations continue to be viewed as simply innocent gilding to her verse.¹⁵² Treating seriously the alchemical imagery in Philips's poetry reveals that her work purposefully responds to and reworks the hierarchy couched in the Donnean 'true religious alchemy' predicated upon healing 'the staine of Eve'.

Having established how Philips's use of sympathy acted as a reformulation of the chemical marriage and the bringing together of gendered contraries, it is necessary to establish that this emphasis on sympathy also functioned to recreate the tropes of friendship within the exclusionary ideology of the tradition of male ethical friendship, *amicitia*. The Ciceronian dictum, '*amicitiam nisi inter bonos esse non posse*' placed an emphasis on a similarity within friendship predicated upon virtue, which in Philips may equally be achieved in female friendship.¹⁵³ It is here that the context of Philips's Society of Friendship is so crucial: the society operated in the same way as the alchemist's alembic in which 'distilled simples do agree' and 'lose variety' ('Lucasia', ll. 47-48.). Those of sympathetic or agreeing ideology, perceived as similarly virtuous or 'good' came together in unity, as may be read in a subtle reference to the society in 'L'accord du bien':

But goodness keeps that unity,

¹⁵⁰ Cicero, *De amicitia*, XXI; Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 40; Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 330.

¹⁵¹ Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 12.

¹⁵² Barash, *English Women's Poetry*, 56.

¹⁵³ Cicero, *De amicitia*, XVIII.

And loves its own society
 So well, that seldom we have known
 One real worth to dwell alone (ll. 21-24).

Within this context, the Ciceronian stipulation of *amicitia*, ‘none can be a friend that is not good’, may be realised. By reformulating the chemical wedding so that it is predicated not upon contrast but upon similarity, not upon gender but upon ideology, Philips’s *amicitia* exists within a space where the only obstacle to attaining a melding of the souls would be a difference in ideology or goodness, not a lack of male presence.

The emphasis on mutual goodness is figured by Philips in the language of alchemical refinement: friendship is ‘love refin’d and purg’d from all its drosse’ (‘A Friend’, l. 8). Refinement takes on a dual meaning in Philips: it is both alchemical and social. We read in ‘Friendship’

Let the dull brutish World that know not Love,
 Continue heretics, and disapprove
 That noble flame; but the refined know,
 ’Tis all the Heaven we have here below.
 Nature subsists by Love, and they do tie
 Things to their causes but by sympathy (ll. 1-6).

‘The refined’ (l. 3) are primarily those in the ‘know’ about love (l. 3), standing in opposition to the rest of the ‘dull brutish World’ (l. 1). Here, the meaning of ‘refined’ is extended, simultaneously indicating both ‘freed from impurities’ and ‘cultivated’, layering a socially embedded meaning over the alchemical.¹⁵⁴ The word, then, gestures to a socially cultivated, ideologically united coterie, Philips’s Society of Friendship, the goal of which was ‘to unite all those of her acquaintance, which she found worthy, or desired to make so’.¹⁵⁵ In contrast to the flattening of gender hierarchy, social hierarchy is inscribed by Philips identification of friendship as a ‘noble flame’ (‘Friendship’, l. 3) which ‘creeping mortalls know not how to name’ (‘Friendship’, l. 28), declaring that ‘he that can / Friendship revere must be a noble man’ (‘To My Lucasia’, l. 15-16). The Society of Friendship, then, is self-perpetuating in its refinement, as those whom friendship ‘will refine’ (l. 15) must

¹⁵⁴ “refined, adj.” 2 and 3, *OED*.

¹⁵⁵ Sir Edward Dering, unpublished letter quoted in Thomas, *Katherine Philips* (‘*Orinda*’), 13-14.

already be refined in order to be initiated to the Society; they must demonstrate the crucial sympathy of the ideal friend. In this way, Philips is creating a parallel of the same exclusionary ideology promoted by male *amicitia*. The friends inhabit an idealised, ‘refined’ space, above the rest of society, in the same way that the male friends were hierarchically positioned above women.

Paracelsian meaning may be read in Philips’s assertion in ‘A Dialogue of Friendship’ that ‘The *purity* of Friendship’s flame, / Proves that from *sympathy* it came’ (ll. 23-24). This formative sympathy between the friends echoes the Ciceronian emphasis on the friend as *alter idem* (‘another the same’)¹⁵⁶ but this sameness may be further explicated within a Paracelsian framework, a central curative tenet of which was ‘like cures like’ in contrast to the Galenic practice of curing by contraries.¹⁵⁷ Paracelsian medicine was ‘founded upon the Centre of unity, concord and agreement’: its aim was to bring man ‘to unity in himself’, in contrast to the ‘dualitie, dicord and contrarietie’ employed in Galenic medicine.¹⁵⁸ As we saw in the Introduction, George Puttenham employed this same contrast in order to celebrate in *The arte of English poesie* (1589) ‘the noble Poets [who] sought by their arte to remoue or appease, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the Galenistes vse to cure (*contraria contrariis*) but as the Paracelsians, who cure (*simila similibus*) making one dolour to expell another.’¹⁵⁹

In Philips, the two sympathetic souls come together and healing *simila similibus*, become infallible:

The hearts thus intermixed speak
A Love that no bold shock can break
For Joyn’d and growing, both in one
Neither can be disturb’d alone (‘Friendship in Emblem, or the Seale, to my dearest
Lucasia’, ll. 1-4).

¹⁵⁶ Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 40; Cicero, *De amicitia*, XXI.

¹⁵⁷ Healy, “Paracelsian Medicine and Female Creativity,” 82.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Bostocke, *The difference betwene the auncient phisicke, first taught by the godly forefathers, consisting in vnitie peace and concord: and the latter phisicke proceeding from idolaters, ethnicks, and heathen* (London: Robert Walley 1585), sig. B1r. Quoted in Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and The Creative Imagination*, 34.

¹⁵⁹ Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie*, sig. G4r.

The hearts' invulnerability to shock, coupled with the 'growing' expansion they undergo is clearly linked in the word 'thus' to their mixture; as two elements brought together, a reaction has taken place, producing a curative transmutation. In this way, the friendship comes to enact the mutually beneficial classical *amicitia* which itself became figured in terms of health. In Walter Dorke's book *A Tipe or Figure of Friendship. Wherein is liuelie, and compendiouslie expressed, the right nature and propertie of a perfect and true friend* (1589), which enumerates twenty points of 'the lawe of Amitie', the 'sweete communication' of a friend is described as a 'soveraigne consolation' and 'most cordiall medicine'.¹⁶⁰ In 'Lucasia', this curative force emanates from the woman's mind:

Now as distilled simples do agree,
And in th' alembic lose variety:
So virtue, though in pieces scatter'd 'twas,
Is by her mind made one rich useful mass (ll. 47-50).

A medical lexicon underpins this poem. The 'distilled', or refined, 'simples' denote 'A medicine or medicament composed or concocted of only one constituent' that is perfected to 'agree' with one another; hence, in the 'alembic [they] lose variety', or what makes them different from each other. Meanwhile, the 'mass' ending line 50 denotes 'a quantity of a substance from which medicinal pills are made'.¹⁶¹ The basic conceit is that Lucasia's mind performs an alchemical experiment, crucially forming a medicinally curative virtue that is also 'useful' for quite literally solidifying the ties of friendship. Here, Philips appropriates the Ciceronian emphasis on a binding and preservative virtue: 'Virtus [...] et conciliat amicitias et conservat' (Virtue [...] both creates the bond of friendship and preserves it).¹⁶² This investment of curative power into the female presents a marked contrast to the concept encoded in Hermetic alchemy which has caused such conflict amongst feminist critics: that the female needed to be healed by the male.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Walter Dorke, *A Tipe or Figure of Friendship. Wherein is liuelie, and compendiouslie expressed, the right nature and propertie of a perfect and true friend* (London: Thomas Orwin and Henry Kirkham, 1589), A3r. Quoted in Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 5, 7.

¹⁶¹ "simple, n." OED; "Mass, n." 2, OED.

¹⁶² Cicero, *De Amicitia*, XXVII.

¹⁶³ For further discussion of the misogyny encoded in Hermetic alchemy see Tuana, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Alchemy and Feminism,' 110-122; Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 87.

Moreover, it demonstrates how far Philips has progressed from the alchemical model expressed by Donne, whose poetry is often seen as the original for her own. This is simply not the case since Donne has no such capacious understanding of female friendship. In 'Love's Alchemy', Donne advises his reader to 'hope not for mind in women; at their best / Sweetness and wit they are, but mummy, possess'd' (ll. 23-4). An exceptional woman, such as Elizabeth Drury in 'The First Anniversary' may 'purify' her 'weaker sex' through a curative alchemy (ll. 177-182). For Philips, however, there is no need to eradicate the female from the equation, and no need to 'purify' the 'stain of Eve'. Rather, it is by the female 'mind', which Donne so dismissed, that virtue is rendered 'one rich useful mass', or that which enacts the purification. A new meaning, then, may be read in Philips's assertion in 'A Dialogue of Friendship' that 'The *purity* of Friendship's flame, / Proves that from *sympathy* it came' (ll. 23-24): the sympathy of female friendship takes on the same active, transformative quality of fire, the 'Instrument' of Paracelsian reactions, as 'that abstracted flame' (l. 27), that 'pure fire' ('Friendship', l. 37).¹⁶⁴

Philips's figuration of friendship as a refining 'noble flame' ('Friendship', l. 3) presents a fascinating contrast to the use of alchemical flames within devotional and theological texts to represent divine purification. Donne's sermons or Robert Boyle's *Some Motives and Incentives to the Love of God* (1659), also known as *Seraphick love*, use flames as a symbol of devotion and an instrument of God's purification. Boyle's book puts forward a theory of 'seraphick love', denoting 'the seraphic fire or devotion attained after passing through the various stages of earthly love'.¹⁶⁵ This love is compared to that of 'the zealous and perfectest Lovers of God [...] the glorious Angels' and is only able to be achieved through the rejection of 'the torments that are wont to attend sensual love'.¹⁶⁶ For Boyle, woman is 'an Obstacle to [...] devotednesse to Seraphick Love [...] Her beauty, and her Friendship too concurring, could not have made her other, than, as

¹⁶⁴ Paracelsus, *Of the chymical transmutation, genealogy and generation of metals & minerals*, trans. by Robert Turner (London: Printed for Richard Moon, 1657), sig. B2v.

¹⁶⁵ Llewellyn, 'Katherine Philips: Friendship, Poetry and Neo-Platonic Thought': 450.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Boyle, *Some motives and incentives to the love of God: pathetically discours'd of, in a letter to a friend* (London, 1659), sigs. B7v, D6v.

Disadvantagious as Injurious, a Rivall unto God.¹⁶⁷ Male *amicitia* and the ‘Other selves’, too, provide a distraction for Boyle: ‘we commonly dote on them to a Degree, that, as it were, Reduces God to deprive us early of them, and Snatch our Idols, and his Rivalls, from us’.¹⁶⁸

Philips, however, qualifies the contrast between earthly love and heavenly love by introducing contrast between earthly love and friendship: friendship is ‘love refin’d and purg’d from all its drosse’ (‘A Friend’, l. 8). Its ‘pure fire’ stands in contrast to the ‘earthly fires’ of Love, ‘which will decay / If the material fuel be away’ (‘Friendship’, ll. 37-40); that is, earthly love is fed by transient, sensual pleasures. For Philips, friendship acts as a prefiguration of the heavenly flame—it is ‘all the Heaven we have here below’ (ll. 39-40)—and it originates from the divine: ‘Friendship from good=angels springs’ (‘Friendship in Emblem’ l. 39). Friendship’s fire ‘burns the clearer ’cause it burns the higher’ (‘Friendship’, ll. 37-38), reaching upwards, towards the divine, much as Boyle’s ‘flaming’ seraphim whose ‘employment [...] sufficiently poynts at the divine Object, to which the flames, that warm them, aspire and tend’, with both Philips and Boyle playing with the idea of the flame as a pyramid.¹⁶⁹

In ‘Friendship in Emblem’, we see a similar movement in the flaming hearts:

They flame, ’tis true, and severall ways,
But still those flames doe so much raise,
That while to either they incline
They are yet noble and divine (ll. 13-16).¹⁷⁰

The hearts’ inclination towards the flames enacts the same process as the seraphim’s flames, naturally tending towards God. The hearts, enwreathed in divine flame, thus achieve what might be termed a preliminary stage of ‘seraphick love’ as they strive to return to the ‘good=angels’, whence love springs. Significantly, this is not an enactment of the love that Boyle describes as ‘Fervent love’, which is ‘little else then Devotion mis-address’:

Offering up of hearts, Adoring, Sacrifices, Martyrdoms: does not all this imply that though it be Said to her, ’tis meant to a Divinity: which is so much the True and genuine Object

¹⁶⁷ Boyle, *Some motives and incentives*, sig. Cr.

¹⁶⁸ Boyle, *Some motives and incentives*, sigs. L4r., L5r-v.

¹⁶⁹ Boyle, *Some motives and incentives*, sig. B5v.

¹⁷⁰ C.f. Crashaw’s ‘The Flaming Heart’ in *Carmen Deo Nostro*, 324-327.

of mens love, that we cannot exalt that Passion for any other, without investing it with the Notion and Attribute of God?¹⁷¹

Rather, as Philips states in ‘To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting’, the love of the friends “’Twas sacred Sympathy was lent / Us from the quire above’ (ll. 9-10), evoking not only angelic choirs but the quires of a book perhaps exchanged between friends.

An interesting contrast may be drawn here between Philips’s female-female friendships and her female-male friendships. In ‘To my dearest Antenor on his parting’, her husband James Philips, or ‘Antenor’, is identified as her ‘guide, life, object, friend, and destiny’ (l. 36):

Each of our souls did its own temper fit,
And in the other’s mould so fashion’d it,
That now our inclinations both are grown,
Like to our interests and persons, one;
And souls whom such an union fortifies,
Passion can ne’er destroy, nor Fate surprise.
Now as in watches, though we do not know
When the hand moves, we find it still doth go:
So I, by secret sympathy inclin’d,
Will absent meet, and understand thy mind;
And thou at thy return shalt find thy heart
Still safe, with all the love thou didst impart (ll. 13-24).

Certainly, this verse encapsulates all the similarity, sympathy and infallibility discussed in this chapter, demonstrating what Penelope Anderson has identified as ‘friendship’s resilience, its ability to incorporate multiple obligations.’¹⁷² However, there is a key difference in the portrayal of the ultimate obligation to God. Indeed, it we might compare this intermingling of souls with the alchemical reunification discussed in relation to Pulter in Chapter Two, which highlights the central role of God in the alchemical process. As Philips writes, ‘For though that treasure I have ne’er deserv’d, / It shall with strong religion be preserv’d’ (ll. 25-26). This is a slightly different usage than we find in ‘Friendship’s Mysterys, to my dearest Lucasia’:

Come, my Lucasia, since we see
That Miracles Mens faith do move,
By wonders and by prodigy
To the dull angry world let’s prove

¹⁷¹Boyle, *Some motives and incentives*, sigs. Ev-r.

¹⁷² Anderson, *Friendship’s Shadows*, 235.

There's a Religion in our Love (ll. 1-5).
 [...]
 Our Hearts are mutual Victims laid,
 While they (such power in Friendship lies)
 Are Altars, Priests, and Offrings made:
 And each Heart which thus kindly dies,
 Grows deathless by the Sacrifice (ll. 30-34).

'Friendship's Mysterys' encapsulates the same approach to religion as 'To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting': religion is 'in' the love (l. 5), it is that 'lent' 'sacred Sympathy' (l. 1). The friends may imitate 'wonders' and 'prodigy': 'such power in Friendship lies' to render the hearts 'Altars, Priests, and Offrings' (ll. 31-32); however, their friendship is not a 'strong religion' (l. 26) as that found in 'To my dearest Antenor', the 'Devotion mis-address' we see in Boyle.¹⁷³ This provides a fascinating contrast to later friendship discourses, such as Lucy Hutchinson's figuration of marriage in the terms of *amicitia* and Jeremy Taylor's celebration of marriage as 'the Queen of friendships'.¹⁷⁴ It is only female friendship, Philips implies, that is capable of creating a space in which devotion may be addressed first to the friend and through the friend to God; the act of friendship is an act of worship.

A new meaning may therefore be read in Philips's assertion that 'Friendship's a science'. At the time Philips was writing, science had come to signify a 'branch of study that deals with a connected body of demonstrated truths'.¹⁷⁵ Directing the reader's gaze to focus in upon the harmonious intermixture of the friends, the souls act as a proof in microcosm of the harmony of the wider universe expressed in '*L'accord du bien*', a demonstrated truth of cosmic harmony investing all things. The friend comes to enact the very action of God, through the curative alchemy of like curing like. In 'To My excellent Lucasia, on our friendship', Lucasia does not simply cure Orinda by inciting a purifying alchemy in her soul, but supplies her very soul itself:

But never had Orinda found

¹⁷³ Anderson, *Friendship's Shadows*, 235.

¹⁷⁴ Jeremy Taylor, *A discourse of the nature, offices, and measures of friendship: with rules of conducting it* (London: Printed for Richard Royston, 1657), sig. D12v.

¹⁷⁵ "science, n." 4b, *OED*. This reading of the word science features also in Chowdhury's article, where he argues that it 'indicates that friendship involves both inner, esoteric contemplation and exoteric, physical demonstration.' Chowdhury, "Hermeticism," 477.

A soul till she found thine;
 Which now inspires, cures and supplies,
 And guides my darkened breast:
 For thou art all that I can prize,
 My Joy, my Life, my Rest (ll. 11-16).

The use of the verb ‘inspire’ imagines Lucasia investing Orinda with the vital breath of life. In this way, the curative alchemy of Lucasia comes to invest matter with a vitalist principle that also leads, inevitably, to the tranquillity of the spirit not so much with God, as with God *through* Orinda: ‘My Joy, my Life, my Rest’. Philips unites Paracelsian vitalism, which drew upon the idea of a ‘Spirit of Life, that is dispersed throughout the whole body’, originally invested by God (since ‘God our Father gave life unto us’),¹⁷⁶ with that of the Hermetica, in which ‘the Act or Operation of God’ brings together ‘contraries and unlike’ in ‘one Soul, one Life, and one matter.’¹⁷⁷ In this way, Philips draws on the power of alchemical traditions to synthesize potentially conflicting elements to create unity out of division; animated wholes out of separable atomistic individuals, much like we saw in Chapter Two. Lucasia comes to reflect that Godly attribute of life-giving breath, inspired by Genesis 2:7, but more significantly the power of the gift of friendship to inspire *poetry*.

The souls act as a medium to the enlightened state of cosmic comprehension as Philips conflates the macrocosm and the microcosm:

Let dull philosophers enquire no more
 In Nature’s womb, or causes strive t’explore,
 By what strange harmony and course of things
 Each body to the whole a tribute brings;
 What secret unions secret neighbourings make,
 And of each other how they do partake.
 These are but low experiments: but he
 That Nature’s harmony entire would see,
 Must search agreeing souls, sit down and view
 How sweet the mixture is, how full, how true;
 By what soft touches spirits greet and kiss,
 And in each other can complete their bliss (‘To my Lucasia’, ll. 1-12).

¹⁷⁶ Paracelsus, *Archidoxes*, I3v, I1v.

¹⁷⁷ Everard, *Divine Pymander*, 123-24, 127.

The truest encapsulation of cosmic harmony may be read in Lucasia herself, ‘whose harmonious state / The Spheres and Muses only imitate’ (‘Lucasia’, ll. 23-24). The alchemical reactions of ‘dull philosophers’ (l. 1) are simply ‘low experiments’ (l. 7), concerned with earthly gains. Philips’s alchemically figured souls, enshrining divine sympathy, encapsulate true Godly harmony. The ‘agreeing souls’ (l. 9) act as the demonstrated proof of the divine. In this way, the two are able to ‘prove / There’s a Religion in our Love’ (‘Friendship’s Mysterys, to my dearest Lucasia’, (ll. 4-5), as their intermingled state prefigures Eternity’s ‘one harmonious constant bliss’ (‘*L’accord du bien*’, l. 108).

The effects of Philips’s egalitarian rhetoric speak to the wider trend of Philips’s poetry itself and its transformation between the 1650s and 1660s, traced by Carol Barash and, more recently, Hero Chalmers. Chalmers notes:

The number and tenor of Philips’s poems on friendship alters markedly with the restoration of Charles II to the English throne. Poems on the topic of friendship constitute nearly half of those she composed during the 1650s but only around a quarter of those written from the Restoration until her death in 1664.¹⁷⁸

Following her remove to Dublin, she ‘recast her Society of Friendship in relation to the new royalist aristocracy in Ireland’, having both the ‘opportunity and the necessity to concentrate more on writing openly royalist panegyric, seeking patronage from influential public figures’.¹⁷⁹ In her poems addressed to the elite, the alchemical figurations so prolific in her friendship poems to Rosania (Mary Aubrey) and Lucasia (Anne Owen) are noticeably absent. Rather than a desire to create equality, there is a repeated inscription of hierarchy: ‘Equality in friendship is requir’d, / Which here were criminal to be desir’d’ (‘To Celimena’, 7–8).

Marie-Louise Coolahan has argued that Philips’s post-Restoration friendship poems evince an ‘attempt and repeated failure to cancel inequality’.¹⁸⁰ However, I would argue that the lack of alchemical imagery in these poems evinces a tactical abstention from the egalitarian rhetoric of her

¹⁷⁸ Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650-1689* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 82.

¹⁷⁹ Barash, *English Women’s Poetry*, 78; Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, 83.; *CWKP*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ Marie-Louise Coolahan, *Women, Writing, and Language in Early Modern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 204 n. 79.

earlier alchemical friendship poems, a decided closing-up of the ‘gold mine ripe for exploitation.’¹⁸¹ To do otherwise while courting patronage would be an impertinence—that is, a grave, or ‘criminal’ offence. Barash’s figuration of friendship as ‘a code that creates equality’ returns us to the ‘Dialogue between Lucasia and Orinda’ with which we began, where friendship is seen as a *science* that, as a form of spiritual alchemy, is conducive to, and, even, creates equality. Through this ‘science’, in the manner of a proof, Philips ‘teaches’ a new approach to female friendship, ‘Redeem[ing] the age and sex’ (‘To Mrs. Mary Awbrey at parting, ll. 56-59). Investing female matter with a vitalist equality with that traditionally ascribed to the male, the female friends encapsulate, in microcosm, the vitalist harmony of the macrocosm, refined and purified into an Eternity that consists in a sympathetic communion of like with like—that is, among the godly *with* God. This act of female friendship offers her readers, in turn, a proof of a *via media*—that is, a way of reconciling the personal, political and religious oppositions reflected in Philips’s interregnum verse with her desires for unity, peace, and harmony.

¹⁸¹ Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre*, 97.

Chapter Four: Margaret Cavendish's Syncretism in the Poems, and Fancies: From Alchemy to Atomism

In her 1664 *Philosophical Letters*, Margaret Cavendish wrote 'I would not study Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury, but the Natural motions of every Creature, and observe the variety of Natures actions.'¹ Her statement strikes one as a conclusive repudiation of alchemy, thereby setting her at odds with the women authors previously discussed in this thesis—Lanyer, Pulten, and Philips—who understood alchemy as a practical and verifiable science. This chapter marks a transition to an author who treats alchemy with scepticism yet, as we will see, writes poetry in which the figurative and conceptual language of alchemy is everywhere apparent. Published four years after the founding of the Royal Society, *Philosophical Letters* reflects the new systematisation of scientific enquiry through institutional structures, such as the Royal Society, that existed and, indeed, flourished outside the Universities. Of particular interest for the purpose of this thesis is that they provide an exacting record of contemporary philosophic and scientific texts that Cavendish (1623–1673) was reading during the 1660s, as well as evidence of her detailed critiques of contemporary male natural philosophers, who had very different positions on modes of scientific enquiry and its implications: these include now familiar figures, such as Jan Baptist van Helmont (1580-1644), well-known revolutionary thinkers of the mid-seventeenth century, such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and René Descartes (1596–1650), and the Cambridge Neoplatonist Henry More (1614-1687) (against whom many of the Cambridge Neoplatonists eventually wrote despite initially adopting and changing some of his ideas). In the wake of Cavendish's publication, More wrote to his pupil, the philosopher Anne Conway (1631-1679), with a cutting observation: 'the Marchionesse of Newcastle has in a large book confuted Mr Hobbs, Des Cartes, and myself, and

¹ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical letters, or, Modest reflections upon some opinions in natural philosophy maintained by several famous and learned authors of this age, expressed by way of letters* (London, 1664), III. xiii (here, 286). Hereafter, *PL*.

(which will make your Ladship at least smile at the conceit of it) Van Helmont also to boot'.² Letter XIII (quoted above) is, on the one hand, Cavendish's critique of Van Helmont, and most clearly demonstrates her rejection of alchemical thought outright; on the other hand, the 'conceit' of her performative rejection of Van Helmont asks us to reconsider how Cavendish's literary works actually draw upon a range of alchemical concepts and methodologies from the Paracelsian tradition that she repudiates. It is, I suggest, characteristic of Cavendish's wit that her most innovative poetic modes of thinking ultimately derive from the very alchemical art and authors that she claims to reject.

A royalist exile who moved between Paris and Antwerp during the Civil War, Cavendish's alchemy and natural philosophy was informed by the continental coteries in which she participated; indeed, her syncretic method of amalgamating diverse elements of material influences is evident throughout her poetic works. In this regard, Cavendish's political experience as a royalist exile is immediately tied to her evolving natural philosophy: shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, Cavendish left her native Colchester in the autumn of 1642 for the court (then at Oxford), and by 1643, she was maid of honour to Queen Henrietta Maria, accompanying the queen into exile in Paris a year later.³ It was in Paris that she first met William, Marquis of Newcastle (1592–1676), the royalist commander of Charles I's northern armies, who was serving out exile after he had suffered defeat at the Battle of Marston Moor in July 1644.⁴ After her marriage to William Cavendish in 1645, Cavendish spent the next fifteen formative years of her life in exile too—first, in Paris (1644–7/8); then, at Antwerp (c.1648) following a brief stay in Rotterdam; and, finally returning home to England at the Restoration in 1660.⁵

² *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642–1684*, edited by M.H. Nicolson and S. Hutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 234.

³ James Fitzmaurice, "Cavendish [née Lucas], Margaret," *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴ For an examination of the discrete phases of Cavendish's education, and their influence upon her educational theories, see Mariah Spencer, "A Duchess 'given to Contemplation': The Education of Margaret Cavendish," *History of Education Quarterly* 61 (2021): 213–239.

⁵ Spencer, "A Duchess 'given to Contemplation'," 215.

During her exile, Cavendish studied under the tutelage of both William and his brother, the natural philosopher and scientist, Sir Charles Cavendish (1594-1654). She acknowledged ‘the delightful conversation of [Charles’s] company’ in the Epistle Dedicatory to *Poems, and Fancies*, while she credited William with her corpus as a whole, writing in a preface to *The Worlds Olio*, ‘if there be any Wit, or any thing worthy of Commendations, they are the Crumms I gathered from your Discourse.’⁶ Underlying this rhetorical posture of humility is the fact that Cavendish’s ‘Crumms in fact refer to a wide-ranging and intellectually rigorous education, carried out in conversation with some of the foremost philosophic and scientific thinkers of the period to which she added in turn.

It is therefore significant that between 1645 and 1648, the Cavendishes’ Parisian salon played host to, and supported, numerous natural philosophers; the Cavalier poet Edmund Waller later recalled dining at the Cavendishes’ table with Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), Hobbes, and Descartes.⁷ While she was herself present at these dinners, Cavendish frames herself at the periphery, claiming later not to have participated in discussion and claiming that ‘three or four visits do not make an intimacy, nor familiarity, nor can much be learnd therefrom.’⁸ However, even if Cavendish was positioned at the margins of these exchanges, as she eagerly wants to make us think she was, her engagement with natural philosophy ran much deeper than the mere gathering of ‘Crumms’ that feed from the rich discourse her husband (and his brother) had with other male scientific thinkers. Rather, Cavendish evokes a crucially collaborative approach between herself and her natural philosophic thinkers and the transition from her accomplished early education in the preface to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655). Studying with William Cavendish, she wrote, ‘I dance a measure with the muses, feast with the Sciences, or sit and discourse with the arts.’⁹ In this description, Cavendish brings herself into intimate proximity with intellectual pursuits—the muses of poetry become her dancing partners, sciences her food, arts

⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* (London, 1655), sig. A2r.

⁷ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 1.366.

⁸ Cavendish, preface to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), sig. A4r.

⁹ Cavendish, preface to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. A4r.

her conversational companions. Wittily collapsing the boundaries between intellectual and social pursuits, the description testifies to the virtuosic intellectual milieu in which Cavendish was engaged alongside her husband. They were part of a wide-ranging group of thinkers, based outside of the Universities, who developed and refined their scientific ideas through conversation and debate amongst the courtly circles of continental elite.

A crucial figure in the Parisian circle was Scottish chemist and physician, William Davidson (sometimes spelled Davison) (c.1593-1669). Davidson taught chemistry at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris during the early to mid-seventeenth century, after having moved there from Aberdeen in 1618. His early textbook, *Philosophia Pyrotechnica seu Curriculum Chymiatricus* ('Pyrotechnic Philosophy, or a course in Spagyric Chemistry'), which was in part used in his teaching, promoted chemical laboratory methods alongside Paracelsian theory, which Davidson also promoted in his pedagogy.¹⁰ In 1645, Davidson presented a Paracelsian treatise to William Cavendish, written at his request, and appended an index, written in English, for his textbook.¹¹ In this treatise, Davidson provides an account of the medicinal properties of minerals, based on his experience of studying and teaching chemical remedies, in answer to William's questions on the subject:

If I had had more time, I could have amplified your Lordships demands, in such a way, that I might have giuen your Lordship full satisfaction. I shall not for all that leaue off for the present to give a breefe answer to euery article sett downe in your Lordships memoire, and shall say but what reason and experience conuinceth to bee true.¹²

Davidson's apology here indicates something of the depth and complexity of William Cavendish's inquiries and Davidson's meticulous regard for the experimentally and rationally verifiable. The relationship between Davidson and the Cavendishes is further evidenced throughout the collection of recipes held at the British Library. William Cavendish corroborates a recipe for 'The Universall medsin, or the pouder of Golde, Itts preparation, or howe Itt is hadde,—Given mee by a Friar In

¹⁰ Joel Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus (1540/2-1602)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004), 403-454 (406).

¹¹ 'A Table Of all the operations that are in my printed booke, to the imitation of whose any other may easily be done' appears on Harley MS 6491 fols. 21v-23r.

¹² Harley MS 6491, fol. 1r.

France’, written in his own hand by invoking Davidson’s high regard for it: ‘Docter Davison a moste exselente kimiste sayde absolutlye this was the waye to the Philosophers stone—howsoever I am shure itt is the beste medecin in the worlde.’¹³ This medical approach to alchemy informed a series of commentaries Davidson produced in 1660 on Petrus Severinus’ *Idea medicinae*, a text we considered in Chapter Two in relation to Hester Pulter; this text is part of a rich tradition of Paracelsian practice that Davidson evidently shared with the Cavendishes and which we was particularly influential for Cavendish’s atomism in the *Poems, and Fancies* (to which I will shortly turn).¹⁴

Matters of health might lead to consultation with natural philosophers: it was Cavendish’s indisposition in London in 1651-3 that led her first to consult the natural philosopher, atomist, and doctor, Walter Charleton (1619-1707).¹⁵ Immediately prior to treating Cavendish, Charleton had embarked on disseminating van Helmont’s works, which led to three publications in 1650: a Helmontian explanation for the universal stone-forming spirit, *Spiritus Gorgonicus*, and two translations of van Helmont—one, the *Ternary of Paradoxes*; the other, *Deliramenta Catarrihi*. Deborah Boyle has argued that by the 1660s, Helmontianism had become ‘a formidable rival to the traditional English practice of medicine, which was based on Galen’s theories’.¹⁶ Cavendish, in other words, was being treated by the medical practitioner responsible for disseminating Van Helmont’s innovative Paracelsian chemical and medical ideas. However, as Justin Begley has argued, the circles in which Cavendish moved gave her reason to believe that a more syncretic approach might be taken to the combining of Galenic and alchemical medicine, hitherto seen as incompatible.¹⁷ While Van Helmont himself insisted on the irreconcilability of these medical orientations, figures such as Mayerne, Digby, and Charleton were attempting to unite Galenic and

¹³ Harley MS 6491, fols. 29r, 29v.

¹⁴ Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*: 403-454 (406).

¹⁵ Charleton to Cavendish, 1 January 1655 in *A Collection of Letters And Poems*, here, 146.

¹⁶ Deborah Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 218.

¹⁷ See Begley, ‘Margaret Cavendish, The Last Natural Philosopher’, 136-138.

Paracelsian practice and to highlight the productive overlapping of ideas put on display by both alchemical practitioners and institutional physicians.

By 1654, Charleton had turned his critical attention from Van Helmont to the works of the atomist Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), publishing his English translation of Gassendi's *Animadversiones* (1649) as *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletonia*. It seems that Margaret Cavendish was abreast of the shift: a 1654 letter from Charleton to Cavendish demonstrates that her engagement with Charleton was intellectual as well as medicinal and from sometime in 1651 (or thereafter), Charleton writes that he had enjoyed the 'Honour and Pleasure of sometimes attending you, and hearing your more than ingenious Discourses'.¹⁸ Since Cavendish returned to England in November 1651, supposedly writing *Poems, and Fancies* during her first 'nine Months in England'—which would imply that the full draft existed in mid-1652, it appears that Cavendish was in conversation with Charleton during the time of its composition.¹⁹ Aside from the timeline, the content of Cavendish's works show that both Charleton's translations of Van Helmont and Pierre Gassendi (in 1650 and 1654, respectively), along with Davidson's Severinian commentaries (1660), proved to be crucial influences on Cavendish's syncretic substance theory and, also, her syncretic method, as appears in her *Poems, and Fancies*.

Cavendish's 'fusion of seemingly contradictory concepts is a methodology which', as Lisa Waters has argued, 'may have been influenced by the Neoplatonic [...] concept of "perennial philosophy" (*philosophia perennis*)'.²⁰ Originating with the Italian Augustinian, Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), and further developed in the humanist works of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico, this Neoplatonic approach emphasised finding a harmony from discord, or unity from multiplicity, with the aim of suggesting that diverse pagan philosophies throughout history contained traces of

¹⁸ Charleton to Cavendish, 1 January 1655 in *A Collection of Letters And Poems*, 145.

¹⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), sig. A7r. All quotations are taken from this edition, unless otherwise stated. Hereafter, PF.

²⁰ Lisa Walters, "[N]ot subject to our sense": Margaret Cavendish's Fusion of Renaissance Science, Magic and Fairy Lore," *Women's Writing* 17:3 (2010): 413-431 (here, 419).

(Christian) truth.²¹ This belief animates Ficino's translation of the *Hermetica*, a text that, as discussed in Chapter Three, established a deep rooted connection between alchemical tradition(s) and philosophical syncretism in the early modern period.²² Cavendish's syncretic methodology was influenced by, as well as written against, alchemical thinkers, including early modern natural atomists, such as Gassendi, Davidson, and Charleton. Attending to Cavendish's imaginative investment in alchemy—as a process that produces harmony from discord and, also, unity from multiplicity—reveals how she conceived of her poetic process in terms of early modern philosophical syncretistic thought. For all her protestations to the contrary, this framework more accurately reflects her immersion in older and newer modes of natural philosophic enquiry and the uses to which she put them in the poetry of *Poems, and Fancies*.

In this chapter, we move away from the more domestic practice of science and alchemy explored in the discussions of Lanyer, Pulter, and Philips, towards an institutional context of scientific enquiry informed by the continental coteries Cavendish participated in as a royalist exile. This participation famously culminated in her appearance at the Royal Society in 1667 as the first woman permitted to visit, which incited the well-documented scorn of Pepys and her own sustained satirical critique of the Society in *The Blazing World*. Indeed, for all that she visited the Royal Society, Cavendish positions herself on the outside of these institutional structures. It is a positioning that accounts both for her satiric distain in *The Blazing World* and it also, perhaps, reflects why she attempts to occlude the sources that animate her work—Gassendi was a key figure in the 'new philosophy' her prose lambasts. This new, institutional context for scientific thinking throws into relief the Janus-like quality of Cavendish's thinking, syncretising older forms of alchemical knowledge with newer natural philosophic concepts that evolved from the time of the Civil War into the Restoration. It is a quality that resonates with Charleton's own

²¹ Walters, "[N]ot subject to our sense," 419; Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27.4: 505–32.

²² Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," 510.

acknowledgement in his work on atoms: 'Requisite it is therefore that this Chapter have, *Ianus* like, two faces: *one* to look backward on those *Impediments* to its general admission, the *Inconsistences* charged upon, and sundry *Difficulties* supposed inseparable from it; the *other* to look forward at the plenary *Remonstrance* of its *Verity*.'²³ The alchemical ideas circulating in Cavendish's continental context reveal how her matter theory synthesizes both older forms of alchemical knowledge based on Paracelsian texts alongside more recent natural philosophical debates, such as those surrounding atomism. The result is that her time spent on the Continent places her in immediate engagement with Gassendi as well as his English translator Charleton, all of which suggests that while she was having conversations with key advocates of van Helmont's alchemical treatises (i.e. Davidson and Charleton), she was also thinking creatively about how to combine potentially contradictory philosophical matter theories in the spirit of the *philosophia perennis*. Analysing Cavendish's natural philosophy in *Poems, and Fancies*, as well as its evolution between the first edition of 1653 editions and the second much revised edition of 1664, therefore reveals new and exciting insights into her complex authorial strategy in which the deployment and, also, rejection of alchemy overlap and rub against one another in productive ways. To recuperate this aspect of how her philosophic matter theories inform her poetry is to restore the fundamental role that alchemy plays in Cavendish's thinking in and through her poetry.²⁴

ALCHEMICAL FRAMING: PARATEXTS IN THE *POEMS*, *AND FANCIES*

1. 'THE QUINTESSENCE OF WIT'

²³ Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (London, 1654), 99.

²⁴ *Poems, and Fancies* appears in three key editions: the first edition, *Poems, and Fancies: Written By the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Marchioness Newcastle* (London, 1653); a second much-revised edition, *Poems, and Phancies, Written By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious And Excellent Princess The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle, The Second Impression, much Altered and Corrected* (London, 1664), and a third and final edition of 1668, which reprinted the 1664 edition with a small number of additional changes.

Given that Cavendish wrote ‘I would not study Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury’, it may seem odd that her *Poems, and Phancies* (1664) opens with a poem ‘To the Lady Newcastle, on Her Book of Poems’ written by her husband, William Cavendish,²⁵ that praises her in distinctly alchemical terms:

Your head the limbeck, where the Muses sit,
Distilling there the quintessence of wit,
Spirits of fancy, essences so sweet,
In your just numbers walk on velvet feet (ll. 16-22).²⁶

The metaphor renders literal the idea of wit animating poetry by combining materialist and vitalist perspectives on matter—more than a figurative ‘liveliness’, Cavendish’s fancies are ‘endowed with life’ itself.²⁷ Cavendish’s ‘just numbers walk[ing] on velvet feet’ are not only lines of verse (‘numbers’) constructed from well-paced and smoothly flowing metrical feet, but also are imaginative creations given the capacity to ‘move’ of their own accord.

The metaphor draws upon the central tenet of Cavendish’s philosophy, namely that everything in the universe or ‘Nature is material, or corporeal, and so are all her Creatures’.²⁸ This philosophy includes humans but also concepts that others might think of as immaterial, such as the mind and thoughts, thereby placing Cavendish in direct opposition not only to earlier Platonic-Aristotelian ideas on the subject, but also Descartes’ newer form of dualism that distinguished mind from matter.²⁹ William Cavendish’s description pre-echoes Cavendish’s account of Fancy in *The Blazing World*, where Fancy is ‘a voluntary creation or production of the Mind, [...] [one of the] effects, or rather actions of the rational part of Matter.’³⁰ Much like thoughts, fancy or imagination has a material basis. Cavendish’s imagination is presented as the ‘quintessence of wit’,

²⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical letters, or, Modest reflections upon some opinions in natural philosophy maintained by several famous and learned authors of this age, expressed by way of letters* (London, 1664), III. xiii (here, 286). Hereafter, *PL*.

²⁶ *PF*, frontispiece.

²⁷ “animate, adj. and n.,” 4 and a1, *OED*.

²⁸ *PL*, 320-1.

²⁹ See John Cottingham, “Cartesian Dualism: Theology, Metaphysics, and Science,” *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 236-57.

³⁰ Cavendish, ‘To the Reader’ in *Observations upon experimental philosophy to which is added The description of a new blazing world* (London, 1668), sig. B*v. Quoted in Deanna Smid, *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 15

evoking the ‘fifth essence’ produced by successfully ‘reconciling the four warring, quarrelling elements into one harmonious and perfect unity.’³¹ Her imaginings or fancies are not static pictures, but rather animate figures formed from a synthesized blend of ‘spirits of fancy, essences so sweet’ within the alembic of her head. Implicit in the description of blending and distillation (the process whereby impurities were removed) is a concurrent pun on the idea of wit as ‘refined’, gesturing simultaneously to its social meaning of ‘cultivated’ and alchemical meaning as ‘freed from impurities’.³²

The metaphor presents a witty and unexpected riff on the customary imagery of humanist learning, the busy Senecan bees famously described by Montaigne in his essay ‘Of the Education of Children’:

The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with pieces borrowed from others; he will transform and blend them to make a work that is all his own, to wit, his judgement. His education, work, and study aim only at forming this.³³

In William Cavendish’s poem, the alchemist (his wife) who distils, rather than the bee digesting flowers, becomes the agent of transformation. In other words, while the apian metaphor presents what G. W. Pigman has called the ‘two opposed conceptions of imitation: the poet as collector (following) and the poet as maker (imitation or emulation)’, in the distillation metaphor, the emphasis rests upon transformation and, by extension, the poet as a maker rather than a collector.³⁴ The proverbial bee visiting the flower evokes the physical process of consulting a tangible text, excising appealing selections and condensing or arranging these as commonplaces in *florilegia* or collections of literary ‘flowers’. However, William Cavendish’s poem bears out the assertion of Walter Charleton, that Cavendish produced poetry ‘free from the Contagion of Books, and Book-

³¹ See ‘fifth element’ or ‘quintessence’ in Abraham, *Dictionary*, 75-6.

³² “refined, adj.,” 2 and 3, *OED*.

³³ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), I.26 (111). On the bee, see G. W. Pigman, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1980): 1–32.

³⁴ Pigman, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,” 4

men', with its broader evocation of institutional learning.³⁵ The creations in William Cavendish's alchemical metaphor represent transformations of her own thoughts free from the outside influence of extra-authorial texts. In a series of dazzling images that see Muses (most often thought of as inspiring from above) placed within a head now transformed to an alchemical alchemic, essences being distilled but also dancing in velvet shoes, William Cavendish evokes the proliferating and strikingly heterogenous nature of Margaret Cavendish thought. Most crucially, the alchemical metaphor constructs a distinctly flattering view of Cavendish's poetic method, framing her as a poetic maker in the terms of her own natural philosophy.

2. 'HER OWNE FLAMES DOE HER INSPIRE'



Figure 18: Abraham van Diepenbeeck. Frontispiece to Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* (London, 1671). Second edition. British Library, London, 8407 b 11.

³⁵ Walter Charleton to Margaret Cavendish, 1 January 1655 in *A Collection of Letters And Poems: Written by several Persons of Honour and Learning, Upon divers Important subjects, to the Late Duke and Dutchess of Newcastle* (London, 1678), 142-9 (here, 146).

If William Cavendish's poem is a fascinating paratextual framing device concerned with alchemical, philosophical, and literary themes, it is not the only one: Margaret Cavendish herself constructed elaborate frontispieces to her work to structure and guide her reader's interpretation of her work.³⁶ To read these highly emblematic etchings—themselves made from portraits by Abraham van Diepenbeck (1596-1675)—alongside the poetry is to understand better how Cavendish constantly seeks to present herself in different ways. The subject of the work is, as in William Cavendish's poem, the author herself—and, more specifically, the author as an alchemical practitioner-as-poet.³⁷ In one frontispiece in particular (Figure 18), Cavendish appears as a 'solitary genius', staring out from the page to meet the gaze of the viewer, ensconced in her closet, with paper, a quill, and ink well at her hand.³⁸ She wears a black dress, evoking scholar's robes, and the carriage clock on the table, as well as acting as a *memento mori*, suggest time well spent in studious retreat. This is further suggested by the enclosed nature of the space hung round with sumptuous curtains. The viewer is separated from the subject by a balustrade, which has been variously interpreted as the barrier between monarch or aristocrat on his dais from the rest of the room and the altar rails of churches and it suggests that the author's solitude is spiritual.³⁹ The barrier more broadly signals the retreat from the outside world necessary for literary production. Yet, glaringly absent from the closet is any book. This absence vividly recalls Cavendish's own lack of formal study and her desire

³⁶ As James Fitzmaurice has noted, there is 'little pattern to the way in which frontispieces appear in her books: that is, virtually any book may be found with any of the three frontispieces or with none at all [...] they might have been purchased separately in shops selling prints.' James Fitzmaurice, "Fancy and the Family: Self-Characterizations of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53.3 (Summer 1990): 198-209 (here, 202).

³⁷ James Fitzmaurice, "Front Matter and the Physical Make-up of Natures Pictures," *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 354.

³⁸ Fitzmaurice, "Front Matter," 354. This frontispiece precedes the *Poems, and Fancies* in two copies: one survives at the Wayne State University in Michigan in a modern binding (call no.: 118: 29) another survives at the Senate House Library bound with an additional frontispiece portraying Cavendish as a statue (the 'Here on this Figure' engraving) (classmark: [S.L.] I [Newcastle - 1653] fol.). 'Here on this Figure' is more common in copies of *Poems, and Fancies*, however, more commonly it does not survive with an engraving at all. In a survey of 41 copies carried out by Liza Blake, thirty-three have no engraving, one has a modern reproduction of the 'Studious' engraving, two have the original 'Studious' engraving, and six have the 'Figure' engraving (these numbers take into account the double frontispiece in the Senate House copy). I am grateful to Liza Blake for providing this information.

³⁹ Fitzmaurice, "Front Matter," 202.

to make light of her intellectual debts; more specifically, it evokes the centrality of her mind and its innovative thought in the role of her own presentation of herself and her views on natural philosophy. When, in *The World's Olio* (1655), she writes, 'Most spend Their time in talk rather Then in thought... for we go by custome, force and strength, without a constant notice or observation',⁴⁰ she emphasises how her own natural genius and originality are sufficient to produce new knowledge—a point that is crucially reiterated in the brief poem that appears at the base of the balustrade in the engraving (Figure 18):

Studious She is and all Alone
Most visitants, when She has none,
Her Library on which She look's
It is her Head, her Thoughts her Books (ll. 1-4).

The poem expresses Cavendish's process of thinking as a kind of inward-looking gaze, literalising her 'head' (so called by her husband's prefatory poem) now as a library, her thoughts and fancies as the books that populate it. The figuration of immaterial forms as material is further developed by the swirling putti that render these generative thoughts as anthropomorphised representations. The putti crown her with a laurel wreath and olive branches, suggesting through visual synecdoche (the laurel stands for Apollo; the olive branch for Minerva) that Cavendish stands at the nexus between knowledge and poetry.

It is no accident, then, that Richard Flecknoe's poem, 'On the Dutchess of Newcastles Closet' evokes this complicated negotiation of material and immaterial form in the engraving and the image presented by its accompanying poem. What is of especial significance in Flecknoe's poem is that although he, too, admits that Cavendish's wisdom does not come from physical books, he nonetheless imagines it as received from a higher spiritual source:

Scarcely a *Glass*, or *Mirror* in't you find,
Excepting *Books*, the *Mirrors* of the mind.
Nor is't a *Library*, but only as she,
Makes each place where she comes a Library,
Carrying a living *Library* in her brain
More worth then *Bodleys* or the *Vatican*.

⁴⁰ Cavendish, Epistle to *The World's Olio* (London, 1655), sig. E3r.

Here she's in *Rapture*, here in *Extasy*,
 With studying high and deep Philosophy.
 Here those clear *Lights* descend into her *Mind*,
 Which by Reflection in her *Books* you find;
 And those high *Notions* and *Ideas* too,
 Which none before, but she, did ever know.⁴¹

This poem captures the double-vision required from the viewer to see the putti both as representations of Cavendish's thoughts and symbols of learning. Flecknoe asserts first that Cavendish's books are reflections of her mind, but then that this library exists only within her 'brain', recalling William Cavendish's description of her head as the self-contained alembic.

Where *The World's Olio's* frontispiece puts pressure on the gap between external object and internal composition, here Flecknoe blurs the separation between the two. The external object—book—and internal composition—brain—are collapsed into one another, before they rematerialize in the texts that Cavendish writes, which represent her thoughts both figuratively and literally, to the reader. Similarly, to Figure 18 with its depiction of a domestic sphere of knowledge production, Flecknoe sets up the closet as a rival to the great institutional libraries of Oxford and the Vatican)—from which Cavendish, as a woman, was barred—relocating knowledge production to a distinctly feminine sphere over which the author could preside, requiring nothing but her thoughts and the tools to express them.

Flecknoe frames Cavendish's inspiration in distinctly Neoplatonic terms. Through her imagination, she is able to grasp and comprehend transcendent reality: the true Forms of things, here described as 'clear *Lights*'. These 'descend into her *Mind*'—moving from the transcendent realm into the world of the senses—illuminating her mind and, by extension, giving rise to higher substance that are the thoughts of her own (natural) philosophy. Cavendish's mind thus acts as the Platonic mirror, reflecting the 'clear Lights' outwards into her books, and therefore her readers.⁴² These secondary reflections, representations of the lights that 'none before, but she, did

⁴¹ Richard Flecknoe, *A Farrago of Several Pieces Being a Supplement to His Poems, Characters, Heroick Pourtraits, Letters, and Other Discourses Formerly Published by Him* (London, 1666), 13-14.

⁴² Plato, *Republic, Volume II: Books 6-10*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), *Republic* 10, 596c-e. For a detailed study of Plato's use

ever know', in turn invite the reader to try to access the higher truths, or 'clear lights', that Cavendish experiences in her rapturous, ecstatic state.

But Cavendish's own model of poetic inspiration as expressed by the frontispiece and prefatory material is more radical than even Flecknoe's overblown flattery in his poem. She frames her inspiration as phoenix-like in its self-sustaining generativity, in a notable departure from the use of the phoenix image we saw in Pulter's poetry in Chapter Two:

Scorning dead Ashes without fire
For her owne Flames doe her Inspire.⁴³

Excised from this description are the literary flowers of the apian metaphor or even the illuminating lights of Flecknoe's poem. Cavendish embodies the alchemical phoenix, arising from flames of her own making as she asserts herself as her own muse, without any debt to another text, thinker, or higher Form. Her thoughts are here conceived of as flames, recalling the association between thought and fire in 'Nature's Oven':

The thoughts are wood, which motion sets on fire
[...] But thinking much, the *Braine* too hot will grow,
And burnes it up'.⁴⁴

As in William Cavendish's poem, Cavendish disrupts the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter by likening the thoughts to a material form and investing them with motion, normally attached to the material. Cavendish's frontispiece, dwelling on the material form of the books she scorns, and the origins of paper as wood, emphasises the inferiority of text to thought as a source for poetry: the overwrought thoughts within texts have caused them to burn up entirely leaving only 'dead Ashes'. In contrast, in Cavendish's frontispiece, her fiery thoughts are attributed with the capacity for inspiration as Cavendish collapses the sense of poetic infusion and in the life-giving breath attributed to God in Genesis 2:7: 'And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,

of the mirror metaphor, see Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 118–47.

⁴³ PF, frontispiece.

⁴⁴ PF, 128. See also 'Of Loose Atomes': 'In every brain there do loose atoms lie, / Those which are sharp, from them do fancies fly.' PF, 10.

and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'. What is key in Flecknoe's description is its emphasis on Cavendish's senses and her heightened perception—on her ability to act as a conduit of divine knowledge. While it might be objected that Flecknoe's imagery is different from Cavendish's poem in key ways, it is worth remembering that the divine light of inspiration was a central tenet of Hermetic philosophy, which received renewed importance by the Neoplatonists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In line with that, Cavendish's image of herself as the phoenix—itself associated with Christ—is revealing of how Cavendish conceives of poetic imitation. While Anne M. Threll has read the figure of the phoenix in relation to Cavendish's views on authorship in *The Blazing World* 'according to her [Cavendish's] materialist understanding of intellectual endeavour', arguing that 'she is physically embodied in her texts and again in our minds each time we read them',⁴⁵ this has not hitherto been connected to how Cavendish presents herself, both poetically and pictorially, in her book, and how her male admirers—namely, her husband and Richard Flecknoe—capture something of her own conceits or an understanding of them in their own responses to her poetry. Cavendish's own deployment of the phoenix is arguably capacious in its symbolism: it represents how Cavendish uses her source material (the ashes of the old philosophies) to create a new self that is both author and subject of her work in both a poetic and philosophical sense. Her thinking mind resurrects itself and, by implication, her, but it does by rejecting, or 'scorning', the 'dead ashes' of other texts—which Flecknoe exaggeratedly saw as including all the books of 'Bodleys [library] or the Vatican.' Cavendish herself is the best at wittily disrupting the hierarchy between an 'original' and its 'image' by becoming all that she learns—itself a resurrection of the Aristotelian psychology that her contemporaries in the Royal Society rejected and had come to 'scorn'—but which she now renews

⁴⁵ Anne M. Threll, "Lady Phoenix: Margaret Cavendish and the Poetics of Palingenesis," *Early Modern Women* 11.1 (2016): 128–36 (here, 129).

through the language of divinely inspired (self-)creation; she becomes what she practises: alchemical perfection.⁴⁶

3. '[L]IKE PURE GOLD, WHICH IN THE EARTH IS FOUND

A change in Margaret Cavendish's conception of alchemy is traceable in her omission of her husband's poem on the Muses' limbeck from most copies of the 1653 edition of *Poems, and Fancies*. The poem survives in only a few of these editions, though it does appear regularly in the second and third editions of 1664 and 1668, where the title is given as 'To the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle, on Her Book of Poems'.⁴⁷ Margaret Cavendish's removal of this material from the 1653 edition, and its subsequent inclusion in later editions, allows us to trace a change in her views on alchemy that is then thrown into relief by the alchemical material still present in the 1653 edition. Cavendish's poem 'To the Reader' draws upon metallurgical imagery in a way that modulates her husband's alchemical rendering of the apian metaphor (as discussed above). Comparing the two poems, we see a noticeable contrast in the way art—specifically, poetic art—is framed:

'To the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle, on Her Book
of Poems'
William Cavendish

Your head the limbeck, where the Muses sit,
Distilling there the quintessence of wit,
Spirits of fancy, essences so sweet,
In your just numbers walk on velvet feet.⁴⁸

'To the Reader'
Margaret Cavendish

But at all other things let *Fancy* flye,
And like a *Towering Eagle*, mount the *Skie*.
Or lik the *Sun* swiftly the *World* to round,
Or like pure *Gold*, which in the *Earth* is found.
But if a drossie *Wit*, let't buried be,
Under the *Ruines* of all *Memory*.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For further discussion of the way *imitatio* enables change and imitating authors as 'makers, unmakers, and remakers of earlier authors', see Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford: OUP, 2019), esp. 1-34 (here, 34).

⁴⁷ It survives, for example in a 1653 edition, Bodleian Library, shelfmark P 1.22 Jur.Seld. See Liza Blake ed. "Textual and Editorial Introduction," *Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition*, website published May 2019. <http://library2.utm.utoronto.ca/poemsandfancies/>.

⁴⁸ PF, frontispiece.

⁴⁹ PF, sig. A7v.

William Cavendish's distillation metaphor portrays the poet's head in a manner akin to Seneca's digestive bee: this is the model of the poet-as-maker, imitating by transforming source material.⁵⁰ In Cavendish's poem, however, the poet-as-maker is removed entirely from the model of production, as the poet places herself in the role of ideal model, and all others as imitators. Unlike in William's model, in which Fancy can be produced by alchemical instruments, for Cavendish, Fancy cannot be artificially manufactured, but should rather be akin to naturally occurring material: 'pure gold, which in the earth is found'. Early modern natural philosophers and chemists, including van Helmont, argued that metals grew from seeds (*semina*) within the crust of the earth; over time imperfect metals such as copper might ripen into gold, the final ideal.⁵¹ The idea underpins, for example, the argument of Jonson's *Subtle* that an egg is a chicken *in potentia*: 'The same we say of lead, and other metals, / Which would be gold, if they had time [...] Nature doth, first, beget th' imperfect; then / Proceedes shee to the perfect' (2.3.135-6, 158-9).⁵² In line with this, Cavendish argues that a drossy wit should be 'buried' and forgotten, perhaps with the potential to grow into gold; notably, it should not be extracted and purified, or crafted and transformed. Unlike the synthesising process inherent in William Cavendish's metaphor with its multiple spirits and essences, Cavendish's Fancy exists already in a state of perfection that outshines inferior dross (waste metal) in purity. While 'dross' carries with it the implication of both compositeness and volatility and so represents the impurities that must be separated from metal or matter, pure gold remains the standard for a perfect, stable metal, and is therefore accorded high value.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of how the bee topos might signify imitation as replication or transformation, see Pigman, "Versions of Imitation," 1-32, and Burrow, *Imitating Authors*, 83-88.

⁵¹ This view persisted over the seventeenth century. Robert Boyle's *This view persisted over the seventeenth century*. Robert Boyle's first draft of *The Sceptical Chymist*, for example follows van Helmont's theory of *semina rerum* or seeds as the beginnings of minerals. See Antonio Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles: A Study of Atomism and Chemistry in the Seventeenth Century* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 127.

⁵² Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, quoted in Abraham, *An Alchemical Dictionary*, 87.

This is Cavendish's most radical statement of her poetic innovation. Framed in the terms of the alchemical hierarchy of metals, Cavendish defines her poetic craft as one of as true innovation insofar as her metallurgical metaphor recasts the digestive bee metaphor and its synthesis of sources. Resolving the tension between imitation as collecting and imitation as innovation, Cavendish presents her Fancy as an ideal that cannot be crafted but, rather, develops directly from Nature or her own capacity to merit divine inspiration. Whereas Aemilia Lanyer, Katherine Philips, and Hester Pulter draw upon the imaginative possibilities of alchemy as a craft, Cavendish distances herself from alchemy by appealing to the 'variety of Natures actions' and herself as the artist perfecting her *ars* by synthesising, revivifying, and so transforming her sources (as in her recast creation account in 'Nature Calls a Counsel', where Nature, not God, 'first the world's foundations laid').⁵³ If Cavendish's own view of herself as a 'petty poetess' may adopt a posture of humility (which, as we saw earlier, is just that: a posture), she took seriously the idea that she was 'a legitimate poetical child of Nature' insofar as her mind could *become* and so impart unto others the reality of Nature itself. In the next section, I explore how Cavendish's poems draw upon the continental writers that she read and conversed with, despite her own assertions of independence from these sources. What is remarkable is the way Cavendish synthesises older alchemical authorities, such as Severinus and van Helmont, with the newer atomistic material of Charleton and Gassendi to create a startlingly original ontology *through* her poetry.

ATOMS, SEMINA, ARCHEUS

These continental connections helpfully contextualise the influence of alchemical thinking and atomistic philosophy in relation to Cavendish's matter theory and invite us to explore how she came to be sympathetic to Gassendi's particular synthesis of vitalism and mechanism.⁵⁴

⁵³ *PL*, III. xiii (here, 286).

⁵⁴ On Gassendi's matter theory, see Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 63–70; Saul Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science: Atomism for Empiricists* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Antonia LoLordo, "The Activity of Matter in Gassendi's Physics," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy Volume 2*, ed. Daniel Garber &

Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies* suggests that she amalgamated a range of Parisian and English sources, as well as a range of alchemical and natural philosophic sources, to construct her alchemically-inflected atoms. Drawing on Stephen Clucas's study of the atomist thought in the Cavendish Circle and his important warning that we should not overemphasise Gassendi's influence on Cavendish, I argue that Cavendish's poetic interpretation of the atom is animated by two key interrelated concepts: Severinus' *semina* and van Helmont's *archeus*. These may seem immediately contradictory to historians of science and philosophy, but there is more to be said about this than meets the eye, as Clucas has himself highlighted in his reading of the matter theory of William Warner, an English atomist and member of the Cavendish Circle: 'are we to override [Warner's] own terminological categories in the name of an anachronistic conceptual "purity"? Or should we instead try to understand his conception of "the atom", enmeshed as it is within an overlapping series of contemporary 'particulate' theories of natural phenomena?'⁵⁵ Employing the same method—namely, of attending to Cavendish's own terminology and its flexibility in terms of adapting and rethinking aspects of particulate matter theories—I suggest that Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies* may productively be read as displaying a variety of influences—drawn from Gassendi, Severinus, and van Helmont—all of which speaks to her more syncretic view of atoms and their crucial role in the *Poems, and Fancies*.

Critics have variously described Cavendish's metaphysics as "anthropo-morphic naturalism," "(materialist) panpsychism," "pan-vitalism," "vitalist(ic) materialism," "organicist materialism," and "animism" in attempts to pin down a matter theory that shifts between mechanistic and vitalist.⁵⁶ 'A World Made by Atomes', the first of Cavendish's atom poems in *Poems, and Fancies*, introduces many of the attributes of her syncretic atoms, which are then explored in greater depth in the fifty poems that follow:

Steven Nadler (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 75-103 and *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006).

⁵⁵ Clucas, "The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle," 252.

⁵⁶ For a summary of these positions, see Jonathan L. Shaheen, "The Life of the Thrice Sensitive, Rational and Wise Animate Matter: Cavendish's Animism," *HOPPOS* 11.2 (2021): 621–41 (621).

Small Atomes of themselves a World may make,
 As being subtle, and of every shape:
 And as they dance about, fit places finde,
 Such Formes as best agree, make every kinde.
 For when we build a house of brick or stone,
 We lay them even, every one by one:
 And when we find a gap that's big or small,
 We seek out stones to fit that place withal.
 For when as they too big or little be,
 They fall away and cannot stay, we see.
 So atoms as they dance find places fit;
 They there remain, lie close, and fast will stick.
 Those which not fit, the rest that rove about
 Do never leave, until they thrust them out.
 Thus by their several motions, and their forms,
 As several workmen serve each other's turns.
 And so by chance may a new world create,
 Or else, predestinate, may work by Fate.⁵⁷

The poem's mercurial atoms reflect the interconnections between vitalist and mechanist ontologies from the late sixteenth to seventeenth century, a time that, as Marina Paola Banchetti-Robino describes,

witnessed a significant transition from the vitalistic ontology that had dominated medieval and Renaissance natural philosophy to the early modern mechanistic paradigm endorsed by Cartesian and Epicurean natural philosophers, who rejected the presence of vital forces in nature and regarded matter as inert rather than as inherently active [...] The transition from vitalism to mechanicism was not abrupt, however, and close examination reveals that 16th- and 17th-century chemical philosophies involved very complex and nuanced ontologies that often straddled the line between vitalism and mechanicism.⁵⁸

Cavendish's atoms, too, straddle mechanism and vitalism. She believes the universe comprises divisible, independent parts and at first glance, her atoms are framed by the same metaphorical commonplaces as Lucretius—her atoms dance through space replicating the atomic movement of dust motes dancing in the sunbeams.⁵⁹ The visual analogy of atomic movement as building

⁵⁷ PF, 5-6.

⁵⁸ Marina Paola Banchetti-Robino, *The Chemical Philosophy of Robert Boyle: Mechanicism, Chymical Atoms, and Emergence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 9.

⁵⁹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.112-24. For the connections between Cavendish and Lucretius, see Jessie Hock, "Fanciful Poetics and Skeptical Epistemology in Margaret Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies*," *Studies in Philology* 115.4 (2018): 766–802. Cassandra Gorman has also noted Cavendish's unconventional take on Lucretian atoms in *The Atom in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 117-173 (here, 164).

collapses the atoms with bricks or stones in a way that seems to gesture to some outside mechanistic force operating upon them. Yet, these parts are animated, and imbued with rational and sensitive power, bringing her matter closer to that of vitalists, especially, Pierre Gassendi.⁶⁰ As the poem continues, it becomes clear that it is the atoms themselves, rather than an outside force, that ‘find places fit’: they are simultaneously the stones used to build and, also, the workmen. Their aimless and unsystematic roving abruptly counters the mechanistic implications of the well-ordered dance. More broadly, Cavendish’s atoms evoke the rich nuance and possibilities of atoms in the seventeenth century. The poem is also notably written in the subjunctive, and so represents what Cassandra Gorman has called ‘imaginative reasoning’.⁶¹ In this way, Cavendish avoids aligning herself firmly with one conception of atomism, mechanism or vitalism, choosing instead to explore the various premises and consequences of an atomistic universe.

Liza Blake has noted that the ambiguities of this poem are exacerbated by a stop-press correction in the first edition that corrects ‘change’ to ‘chance’ in the final line.⁶² Cavendish’s atom poems repeatedly encourage the reader to grapple with the generative potential of atoms and matter in Cavendish’s materialist world; whether they operate by their own desires, by chance, by predestination, or a combination of all of these is left for the reader to decide, placing Cavendish’s atoms at that ambiguous mechanist-vitalist intersection outlined by Banchetti-Robino. What is certain, however, is that the movement of these atoms is not entirely random, nor entirely due to the ‘chance’ that Cavendish evokes in the final line. Evoking the doctrine of predestination with her ‘predestinate’ atoms, Cavendish renders Epicurean atomism compatible with the Christian theism in a way that brings her into close intellectual contact with Gassendi. Indeed, Banchetti-Robino and others have shown that Gassendi, ‘while arguably the strongest proponent of

⁶⁰ On Cavendish’s vitalism, see Jay Stevenson, “The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 36 (1996): 527-43; John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, 1998), 177-211; Jonathan L. Shaheen, “The Life of the Thrice Sensitive, Rational and Wise Animate Matter: Cavendish’s Animism,” *HOPOS* 11.2 (2021): 621-41.

⁶¹ Gorman, *The Atom in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, 151.

⁶² Cavendish, “A World Made by Atoms” (note 12), *Margaret Cavendish’s Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition*, ed. Liza Blake, Website published May 2019. <http://library2.utm.utoronto.ca/poemsandfancies/>.

mechanistic Epicurean atomism in early 17th-century France [...was...] far from simply being a “rationalistic mechanist,” [since] Gassendi was also influenced by Paracelsians such as Petrus Severinus and Jan Baptista van Helmont.’⁶³ Hence, these influences can be traced to Cavendish’s syncretic atoms too.

This idea thus promotes the idea that Cavendish’s poetry is the medium through which this important synthesis between atoms and elements takes place. While Robert Kargon has argued that such a relationship in Cavendish’s poetry is idiosyncratic, I suggest that her poetry displays traces of both Gassendi and Severinus, and that this is done to deliberative effect.⁶⁴ For Cavendish, the world is made up of four different forms or shapes of atom: square, flat atoms; round atoms; long, straight atoms; and sharp atoms. Although Cavendish stipulates that they are alike in ‘*Quantity, Quality and Weight*’ (‘The weight of Atomes’), her atoms differ in form (their shape) and figure (the attributes of these forms).⁶⁵ It is these differences that produce the four elements, as she argues in ‘The foure principall Figur’d Atomes make the foure Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and Sharp’:

THE Square flat Atomes, as dull Earth appeare,
The Atomes Round do make the Water cleere.
The Long streight Atomes like to Arrowes fly,
Mount next the points, and make the Aiery Skie;
The Sharpest Atomes do into Fire turne,
Which by their peircing quality they burne.⁶⁶

Describing her atoms in this way, Cavendish engages with the Scholastic discourse of occult and manifest qualities, which is to say the hidden causes of natural phenomena and observable causes

⁶³ Hiro Hirai, “Anatomie du chymiste sceptique: Robert Boyle et le secret des ses premières sources sur la croissance des métaux,” *La philosophie naturelle de Robert Boyle*, ed. Myriam Denehey and Charles Ramon (Paris: Vrin, 2009) 93–116 (here, 93). Translated in Marina Paola Banchetti-Robino, *The Chemical Philosophy of Robert Boyle: Mechanicism, Chymical Atoms, and Emergence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 47. See also, Hiro Hirai, “Mysteries of Living Corpuscles: Atomism and the Origin of Life in Sennert, Gassendi and Kircher,” *Early modern medicine and natural philosophy*, eds. Peter Distelzweig, Benjamin Goldberg, Evan Ragland (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), 255–269.

⁶⁴ Robert Kargon, *Atomism in England from Harriot to Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 73–4.

⁶⁵ PF, 8.

⁶⁶ PF, 6.

of phenomena.⁶⁷ The figures and qualities of her atoms supply the causes, as in the case of the round atoms that make up water:

But water is round drops, though ne'er so small,
Which shows its figure to be spherical.
That figure makes it spongy, spongy wet,
And being hollow, softness doth beget.
And being soft, that makes it run about.⁶⁸

With a compelling logic, Cavendish progresses from a description of the general figure as 'round' to the texture of its shape as 'spongy' to a qualifying description of the element as 'wet'; this yields a concise explanation in atomic terms for what makes the element of water watery. Cavendish has folded into the description of the atom the otherwise defining quality of the *element* (wetness for water), but this is secondary to the figure being spherical. The logic runs that all atoms of water have to be spherical and are therefore spongy. The internal repetition of 'spongy'—'spongy' moves to be 'spongy wet'—thus forcing the reader to link wetness to sponginess as the defining texture of water and, hence, its atomic particulate. There are echoes of Gassendi's matter theory, as laid out by Walter Charleton—namely, 'that Elements are not therefore the First Principles, but rather those from whose respective Contexture they borrowed the nature of Elements'—alongside the atom theory of no less an authority than the Roman poet Lucretius:

[...] the Patrons of Atoms do not (as the malice of some, and incogitancy of others hath praetended, to cast disparagement upon their Theory) deny the Existence of those four Elements admitted by most Philosophers: but allow them to be *Elementa Secundaria*, Elements Elementated, *i. e.* consisting of Atoms, as their First and Highest Principles. Thus much we may certifie from that of *Lucretius* (2. *lib.*) treating of Atoms:

Unde mare, & Terrae possent augescere, & unde
Adpareret spatium Coeli domus, alta {que} tecta,
Tolleret a terris procul, & consurgeret Aer, &c.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of occult and manifest qualities, and how these were absorbed into matter theory, see John Henry, "Occult Qualities and the Experimental Philosophy: Active Principles in Pre-Newtonian Matter Theory," *History of Science* 24 (1986): 335-81.

⁶⁸ PF, 6.

[that from these sea and land might increase, and the habitation of the sky might amplify its expanse and uplift its dwellings high over the earth, and the air might rise up] *DRN*, II.1109-1111].⁶⁹

For Gassendi, like Cavendish, the attributes of the elements are secondary, caused by the atoms that give them form and quality. This link between elements and atoms, however, has earlier origins than Gassendi, as shown in Charleton's reading of Lucretius, and it is also a key component of Severinus' *semina*.

Of central importance to Severinus's matter theory (which Cavendish adopts) is the idea that causation in the material world is organised around archetypal forms that intersect with material existence at seed-like points called *semina*; and that these seeds are located within the four Aristotelian elements that are likened to wombs or dwellings, which are, in turn, fortified with the vital balsam or principle of activity that animates the seeds.⁷⁰ William Davidson's Latin commentaries on Severinus provide a close reading of these Severinian *semina*; they also inflect the language used in the Paracelsian treatise Davidson presented to William Cavendish.⁷¹ Quicksilver, for example, is the 'seede of metals, for it is found in every one of them [...] it hath neither body nor spirit, but may bee called a spirituuous body or a corporal spirit: It hath within it all nature matallicke and most rare qualities in the metallicke nature.'⁷² Gassendi's *semina rerum*—compound corpuscles or seeds—draw upon this common Paracelsian notion of seminal principles—the immaterial sources from which the physical world emanates—thereby merging alchemy with atomism.⁷³ Antonio Clericuzio helpfully clarifies that idea: 'Like molecules, seeds are endowed with activity—which ultimately originates from their component atoms. *Semina rerum* are not ordinary

⁶⁹ Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletonia* (London, 1654) 102, 100; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin F. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 180-1.

⁷⁰ Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charletonia*, 144., 464.

⁷¹ William Davidson, *Commentariorum in sublimis philosophi & incomparabilis viri Petri Severini Dani Ideam medicina philosophica, propediem proditurore prodromus* (Hague, 1660), 207-8. Translated and summarised in Shakelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*, 420

⁷² Harley MS 6491, fol. 12.

⁷³ Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 18, 74.

molecules. If all molecules have some inherent degree of activity, *semina* are endowed with formative power and “programme,” being responsible for the generation of minerals, plants and animals’.⁷⁴ In much the same way as these generative *semina*, Cavendish’s atoms generate ‘the Substance [...] of all; / With *their foure Figures* make a *worldly Ball*’:

The Atomes sharpe hard *Mineralls* do make,
The Atomes round soft *Vegetables* take.
In Animals none *singly* lye alone,
 But the *foure Atomes* meet, and joyne as *one*.⁷⁵

However, what is striking about Cavendish’s matter theory is that, although it bears similarities with that of Gassendi, she preserves earlier forms of vitalistic corpuscularianism, promoted by Severinus and Van Helmont. Attributing these invisible seminal principles to God at the point of creation, the Christian atomist Gassendi created a preordained atomistic system that avoided mechanistic materialism and emphasised God’s absolute authority over nature. The result is that, for Gassendi, ‘matter is active, but has no internal principle of organisation—which ultimately depends on God’.⁷⁶ In Gassendi’s system, God imbued atoms with what Charleton terms ‘inhaerent Motive Faculty’ at the beginning of time and their subsequent motion is the result of atomic *vis motrix* (this divinely instilled intrinsic motive power) and *gravitas* (or weight).⁷⁷ The view that atoms are dependent upon God for motion is expressed in his *Syntagma Philosophicum* (published posthumously in 1658):

Deinde igitur non sunt Naturae opera comparanda cum iis, quorum tota materia est iners, ac veluti mortua; sed cum iis, in quibus nisi omnes materiae partes, at aliqua saltem expers omnis motus, actionisque non est. Si comparatio igitur iuvat, confer opus naturae non cum domo, sed cum exercitu; materiam non cum lapidibus, sed cum militibus; agens non cum fabro, sed cum Imperatore.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 68. For a full discussion of Gassendi’s ‘semina rerum’ see 63–70.

⁷⁵ PF, 31.

⁷⁶ Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 71.

⁷⁷ LoLordo, “The Activity of Matter in Gassendi’s Physics,” 79–80.

⁷⁸ “Then, therefore, the works of Nature are not to be compared with those whose matter is inert and as if it were dead; but with those in which, not all the parts of matter, but at least to some extent all motion and action are absent. If, therefore a comparison helps, compare the work of Nature not with a house, but with rather with an army; matter not with stones, but with soldiers; acting not with the builder, but with the

Clericuzio summarises how ‘Gassendi clarifies this view by means of an analogy. Nature, he states, is to be compared to an army, not to a building, and God’s relationship to the physical world is to be conceived as that of an emperor, not as that of a workman.’⁷⁹ The striking similarities to Cavendish’s ‘A World Made of Atoms’ (discussed above) demonstrate the divergences between the two matter theories. For Cavendish, Nature is the ‘house of brick or stone’ while the atoms act as the builders that ‘seek out stones to fit that place withal’.⁸⁰ The atoms provide both the building material and the workforce, crucially building Nature ‘by *their* several motions, and *their* forms’ (emphasis my own).⁸¹ Nature takes the place afforded to God by Gassendi, marshalling the creation of the universe, while each individual atom is an ‘independent, self-directing unit’.⁸² While Cavendish raises the Gassendian possibility that atoms are ‘predestinate’ in ‘A World Made of Atoms’, her framing of her atoms and Nature at times veers closer to the van Helmont’s understanding of matter and, in particular, the principle of *archeus*, itself an important concept to Gassendi and, also, Charleton.

Indeed, in his translation, *Ternary of Paradoxes*, Charleton relays how van Helmont arrived at the idea of *archeus*, or divinely-guided spirit, by reasoning that there must exist

some precedent or elder principle, which must be wholly and purely immaterial, yet real, and operative, to which may be justly attributed the power of figuration or delineation, by a sigillary impression upon the Archeus, or Regent Spirit of the Seed. The Soul of the Genitor, therefore, when it descends to visit and relieve the inferior faculties, and makes a progress to survey the Seed, in a paroxysm of carnality, doth upon the mass of seed, engrave and adumbrate the impress and figure of it self.⁸³

The *archeus* is therefore the efficient agent, responsible for generation and containing ‘all the information needed to convey specificity in nature.’⁸⁴ In Charleton’s *Ternary of Paradoxes*, this *archeus*

Emperor’ (translation my own). Gassendi, *Syntagma Philosophicum, Opera Omnia*, i, 336a. Original Latin quoted in Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 65.

⁷⁹ Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 65.

⁸⁰ PF, 5-6.

⁸¹ PF, 6.

⁸² Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe*, 41

⁸³ Walter Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes* (London, 1650), 129.

⁸⁴ Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*, 241.

was figured as the ‘Vitall Spirit in the throne of flesh and blood, that is the outward man, [which] sits Viceroy to the Soule, and acts by her commission: and is the same plastick spirit, which in the seed comprehends, contrives, and models the whole figure of man.’⁸⁵ In contrast to the Aristotelian efficient cause, analogised as the artist shaping the matter from the outside, matter is here imbued with a sentience and intelligence all its own, which, according to Charleton, ‘doth order and govern the vast engine of the Universe.’⁸⁶

Cavendish’s atoms similarly display a striking combination of vitality, sentience, and intelligence. In ‘What *Atomes* make *Fire* to burne, and what *Flame*’, Cavendish expresses this through analogies that frame her atoms as living creatures:

What makes a *Sparke* of *Fire* to burne more quick,
Than a great *Flame*? because ’tis small to stick.
For *Fire* of it selfe, it is so dry,
Falls into parts, as crowds of *Atomes* lye.
The *sharpest Atomes* keep the Body hot,
To give out *Heat* some *Atomes* forth are shot.
Sometimes for anger, the *Sparkes* do flye about;
Or want of roome, the weakest are thrust out.
They are so sharpe, that whatsoere they meet,
If not orepowr’d, by other *Atomes*, eate:
As *Ants*, which small, will eate up a dead Horse:
So *Atomes sharpe*, on *Bodies* of lesse force.⁸⁷

Stephen Clucas has argued that ‘Cavendish’s explanations of the activity of fire in the *Poems, and Fancies* all involve physical, mechanical actions, albeit sometimes presented in terms of homespun vitalist analogies’; however, rather than simple analogies, these vitalist descriptions represent serious engagements with the van Helmontian *archeus*.⁸⁸ These atoms are no mechanical units, but vital units, driven by wants and desires, including, for Cavendish, hunger. What seems at first like a simple analogy between atoms meeting and ants eating the body of a horse causes the reader to stumble in surprise at the comparison. Cavendish’s repetition of the verb ‘eate’ creates an emphatic

⁸⁵ Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, 58.

⁸⁶ Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, 44.

⁸⁷ PF, 13.

⁸⁸ Clucas, “The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle,” 260.

link between the actions of atoms and ants and asks the reader to concentrate on not the likeness between a mechanical process (collision) and vital action (eating), as Clucas implies, but on the likeness between two creature-like entities and their *manner* of eating (small overcoming large).⁸⁹ By forcing the reader to recognise the similarity between these two actions, Cavendish reinforces the vital capacities of her atoms.

Imbuing her atoms with more than sentience, Cavendish appeals to a language of sympathy and antipathy to express how the vitalist atoms come together to create new forms and phenomena:

Tis severall Figur'd Atomes that make Change,
When severall Bodies meet, as they do range.
For if they sympathise, and do agree,
They joyne together, as one Body bee.
But if they joyne like to a Rabble-rout,
Without all order running in and out;
Then disproportionable things they make,
Because they did not their right places take.⁹⁰

In the same way that the figures and qualities of Cavendish's atoms render occult qualities manifest, Cavendish accounts for attraction between atoms by means of sympathy, here framed as 'fellow feeling between and among individuals'.⁹¹ In her vision of atomic sympathy, each atom 'agree[s]' with one another in a harmonious consensus and 'right' order that echoes the earlier description of the atoms 'find[ing] places fit'.⁹² Unified matter is thereby based upon a sympathy that goes beyond mere atomic attraction to signify an anthropomorphic 'Conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament'.⁹³ This language of sympathy has its roots in late sixteenth and early seventeenth alchemical writing, such as Charleton's translation of van Helmont, in which the *archeus*, also termed the 'universal spirit', is 'the grand and sole causant of all *sympathy*) transmitted

⁸⁹ Walter Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes* (London, 1650), 129.

⁹⁰ PF, 9.

⁹¹ On sympathy, see Lobis, *The Virtue of Sympathy*, esp. 69-109 (here, 71).

⁹² PF, 5-6.

⁹³ "Sympathy, n.," 3a, *OED*.

to a remote and determinate object' was used to justify a unified theory of the natural world.⁹⁴ Her language harkens back to the Neoplatonist cosmology that undergirds the matter theory of both Severinus and van Helmont; and, as Jole Shackelford has written, this accounts for the idea that 'the universe is a living thing with an underlying, spiritual basis, which wells up or emanates material existence.'⁹⁵ Cavendish collapses the boundaries between the spiritual and material by portraying this sympathy as an innate quality—or modification on a Gassendi-Charleton 'contexture'—of her material atoms.

By her *Philosophical Letters* (1664), Cavendish describes sympathies and antipathies in the natural world as 'nothing else but ordinary Passions and Appetites amongst several Creatures, which Passions are made by the rational animate Matter, and the Appetites by the sensitive.'⁹⁶ Yet, the atoms of her 1653 *Poems, and Fancies* demonstrate that her early conception of matter ascribed both rationality and sensitivity to atoms. In much the same way that Gassendi's atoms reinterpreted *semina*, Cavendish's atoms give corpuscular interpretation to the agentive force of *archeus*: she invests her vital atoms not only with motion, but also renders them individual agents with their own sentience and intelligence. While they share similarities with Gassendi's atoms, they resemble most closely the Helmontian seeds invested with their own agency and generative power, thereby recalling her own account of generative Fancy as 'pure gold', growing and developing from Nature.⁹⁷ Cavendish's analogy between atoms and workmen in 'A World Made of Atoms' encourages us to think of atoms as synecdochic satellites of the overarching vital figure of Nature, which is personified variously as a general, a housewife, the creator of the world.

This vitalist conception of matter is even more explicit in the companion work to *Poems, and Fancies*, the *Philosophicall Fancies* of 1653. While atoms dominate the first section of the *Poems, and Fancies*, in the slightly later *Philosophicall Fancies*, also published in 1653, Cavendish relied

⁹⁴ Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, 44.

⁹⁵ Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine*, 155.

⁹⁶ PL, 297.

⁹⁷ PF, sig. A7v.

increasingly on van Hemont's work (again mediated by Walter Charleton's translation) and gave pride of place to the role of the *archeus* in her matter theory. Indeed, it is likely that Cavendish's discussions during the 1650s are responsible for the radical changes evident between the 1653 and 1664 editions of the *Poems, and Fancies*—editions that reflect the development of Cavendish's own natural philosophic worldview in which she puts increasing pressure on Cartesian ideas of form and spirit by investing her matter with this vital principle of activity. In *Philosophicall Fancies*, atoms are mentioned only once—as part of a conditional statement in which atoms are aligned not with the vital forces we have seen in the *Poems, and Fancies*, but rather with 'dull Matter': 'Matter that is thinnest or thickest, softest or hardest, yet it is but one Matter; for if it were divided by degrees, until it came to an *Atome*, that *Atome* would still be the same *Matter*, as well as the greatest bulk'.⁹⁸ Rather, Cavendish's focus in *Philosophicall Fancies* lies upon 'the Spirits that are in the Seed'—those forces that animate or 'move in dull matter'.⁹⁹ This renders explicit the principle of activity that in the *Poems, and Fancies* was suggested by the innate motion and sympathy of the atoms; in *Philosophicall Fancies*, Cavendish's vitalist matter, and in particular the spirit within it, brings her matter theory much closer to that of van Helmont's *archeus*.

Much as van Helmont's *archeus* is the efficient cause throughout nature, whether human, animal, or mineral, Cavendish's spirits similarly invest all matter with a vital power. The interactions between Cavendish's spirits, and their various motions, account for all physical and mental processes in all matter. They are responsible for formal causes insofar as they shape and order matter:

Sensitive Spirits work not all one way,
But as the Matter is, they cut, carve, lay.
Joyning together Matter, solid Light,
And build, & form some Figures streight upright
(‘Of the Working of severall Motions of Nature.’)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophicall Fancies* (London, 1653), 2-3. Hereafter *Phil.F.*

⁹⁹ *Phil.F.*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Phil.F.*, 27-8.

But as well as this, they are the cause of motion, responsible for the natural cycles of ‘The Earth, Sun, Moon, the rest of Planets’ (‘Of the Motion of the Planets’) and the sea: ‘The Sea’s more quick, then fresher Waters are, / The reason is, more Vitall Spirits are there’ (‘The Motion of the Sea’).¹⁰¹

It is no coincidence that Cavendish changes numerous titles in Part III to emphasise the active role of Nature, while limiting analogies. For instance, the poem ‘Comparing the Head to a Barrel of Wine’ becomes in the 1664 edition ‘Nature’s Cellar’, while ‘Comparing of Wits to Wines’ becomes ‘Nature’s Wines.’ The effect of her changes is to create a role for a vitalist Nature that reflects the ‘precedent or elder principle, which must be wholly and purely immaterial, yet real, and operative’ carried out by van Helmont’s *archeus*, animating the matter that makes up her poetic universe. As Jonathan L. Shaheen notes ‘Nature does not [...] merely follow orders, but governs wisely, which involves governing intelligently.’¹⁰² Yet, while Shaheen reads Cavendish’s elevated Nature in light of the rational ‘plastic natures’ of the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, earlier alchemical conceptions of matter, the *semina* and *archeus*, provide important new contexts for understanding her vitalist atoms and how they animate her poetry. In the re-examining the matter theory of the *Poems, and Fancies* and *Philosophicall Fancies* of 1653, we can recuperate Cavendish’s engagement with Gassendi, Davidson, and Charleton, as well as her transformative synthesis of those sources—all of which ties into her own powerful and often self-aggrandising presentation of her own *natural* poetic as well as philosophical talents.¹⁰³

THE GREW NOTEBOOK: RECEPTION AS TESTAMENT

A late seventeenth century reader of Cavendish elucidates the interconnections between the matter theory of *Poems, and Fancies* and *Philosophicall Fancies* of 1653, and Cavendish’s later works, and also testifies to its appeal with contemporary readers. The English physician and microscopist,

¹⁰¹ *Phil.F.*, 70.

¹⁰² Shaheen, “The Life of the Thrice Sensitive, Rational and Wise Animate Matter,” 638.

¹⁰³ Shaheen, “The Life of the Thrice Sensitive, Rational and Wise Animate Matter,” 635.

Nehemiah Grew (1671–1712), was a fellow of the Royal Society and secretary from 1677, editing the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1678–1679. Grew recorded an eight folio-page compendium to the 1655 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* in his commonplace book, which survives as Sloane MS 1950 in the British Library. Grew's compendium, entitled 'The Marchionesse of Newcastle her philosophy', places Cavendish amongst other key philosophical authorities.¹⁰⁴ The notes on Cavendish directly follow Grew's manuscript 'Short account of Thales, Solon, Socrates, and other ancient philosophers, and their different systems of philosophy' derived from Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy*.¹⁰⁵ The only text from *Physical Opinions* that Grew transcribed in its entirety is the poem 'Great God, from thee all infinites doe flow' (fols. 38r-v), which closed Cavendish's earlier volume, *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653) (Figure 19).

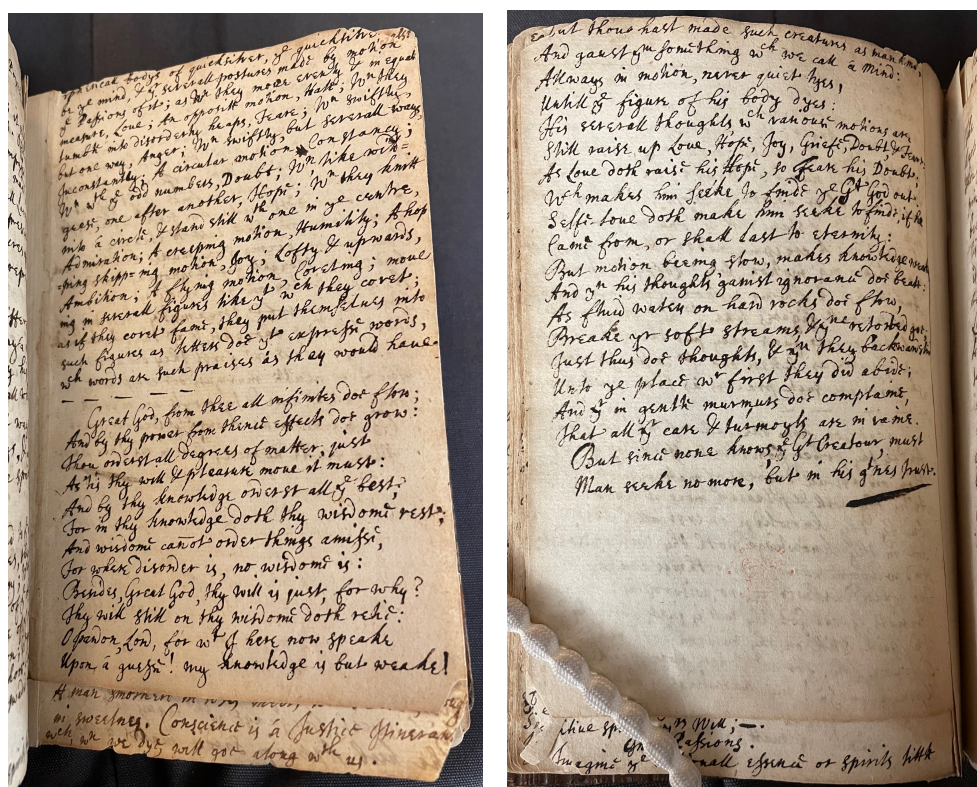


Figure 19: Nehemiah Grew's transcription of Margaret Cavendish's 'Great God, from thee all infinites doe flow'. British Library, London, MS Sloane 1950.

¹⁰⁴ Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fols. 35r–38v.

¹⁰⁵ BL MS Sloane 1950, fols. 13r–34v. Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science: Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 83–4 and 326; For a full account of Grew's engagement with Cavendish, see Justin Begley, "The Minde Is Matter Moved": Nehemiah Grew on Margaret Cavendish," *Intellectual History Review* 27.4 (2017): 493–514 (here, 493).

Cavendish's appearance in this notebook went unremarked until Justin Begley's recent exposition of how Cavendish influenced Grew's substance theory in the years leading up to the publication of his 1682 *The Anatomy of Plants*, and Grew's later critique of her version of material vitalism in his 1701 *Cosmologia Sacra*.¹⁰⁶ Begley argues that,

Distancing herself from the atomism of her earlier *Poems, and Fancies* of 1653—in which she accounted for natural phenomena largely by appealing to the size, shape, and weight of atoms—Cavendish clearly forwards a theory of material vitalism in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*.¹⁰⁷

Begley's argument places the atomism of the *Poems, and Fancies* in contrast with the material vitalism of the 1665 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, suggesting a similar separation between the early atomism and Cavendish's 'mature matter theory' that critics such as Karen Detlefsen have also read in Cavendish's works.¹⁰⁸ However, critics such as Stephen Clucas and Jay Stevenson have shown that, despite Cavendish's rejection of mechanical atomism in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she continued to promote atomism based on 'a synthesis of materialism and vitalism'.¹⁰⁹ Grew's notebook provides compelling evidence that to an early reader of Cavendish's matter theory, the atomism of the *Poems, and Fancies*, and the vitalism of her later works, such as *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653) and *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1665), share a similar engagement with the work of Van Helmont, rendering them less at odds than they might appear to later readers.

The poem begins as an invocation of God, who is identified as the cause of all natural effects and the source from which the infinite matter and motions of a material universe, unbounded in time and space originate:¹¹⁰

Great God, from thee all infinites doe flow;
And by thy power from thence effects doe grow:
Thou orderst all degrees of matter, just

¹⁰⁶ Begley, "The Minde Is Matter Moved," 493–514.

¹⁰⁷ Begley, "The Minde Is Matter Moved," 496.

¹⁰⁸ Karen Detlefsen, "Atomism, Monism and Causation in the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy, Volume III* (2006): 199–240.

¹⁰⁹ See in particular Cavendish's 'A Condemning Treatise of Atomes' in *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), fol. A3v. Clucas, "The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle," 261.

¹¹⁰ For a recent exploration of Cavendish and infinity, see Sara Mendelson, "Margaret Cavendish and the Nature of Infinity," *Margaret Cavendish: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, eds. Lisa Walters and Brandie R. Siegfried (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

As 'tis thy will & pleasure moue it must:
 And by thy knowledge orderst all the best;
 For in thy knowledge doth thy wisdom rest;
 And wisdom cannot order things amisse,
 For where disorder is, no wisdom is:
 Besides, Great God, thy will is just, for why?
 Thy will still on thy wisdom doth relie:
 O pardon, Lord, for what, I here now speake
 Upon á guesse! my knowledge is but weake!
 But thou hast made such creatures as mankinde,
 And gaust them something which we call á Mind:
 Allways in motion, never quiet lyes,
 Untill the figure of his body dyes:
 His several thoughts, which varieuse motions are
 Still raise up Loue, Hope, Joy, Griefe, Doubt, & Feare;
 As Loue doth raise his Hope, so Feare his Doubt;
 Which makes him seeke to find the Great God out:
 Selfe loue doth make him seeke to finde, if he
 Came from, or shall last to eternity:
 But motion beeing slow, makes knowledge weak,
 And then his thoughts 'gainst ignorance doe beat:
 As fluid water on hard rocks doe flow,
 Breake their soft streams, & thence retorted goe;
 Just thus doe thoughts, & then they backward slide
 Unto the place where first they did abide;
 And there in gentle murmurs doe complaine,
 That all their care & turmoysls are in vaine.
 But since none knows the Great Creatour, must
 Man seeke no more, but in his greatnes Trust.¹¹¹

As with Cavendish's other poems, the universe is an ordered one. However, what is notable about this poem is its prayer-like form as Cavendish explicitly names God, so often absent from her poems, reclaiming the place of ultimate authority that Nature inhabits in the *Poems, and Fancies*. Where Nature ordered 'Life, and Form, and Matter fit' in *Poems, and Fancies*, by *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653), it is God's infinite power that both animates and orders matter. Cavendish argues it is God's will & pleasure' that causes 'all degrees of matter' to move, while his His infinite knowledge and wisdom allows Him to 'orderst all the best', rendering the universe 'just' in a vision of structured perfection.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fols. 38r-v.

¹¹² Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fol. 38r.

Begley identifies this investment of divine motion and order as a form of Neoplatonic emanationism—from the Latin ‘*emanare*’ meaning ‘to flow from’—that regarded the universe as ‘deriving its existence from the essence of God.’¹¹³ In doing so, Begley compellingly argues that this poem is evidence of yet another link to Charleton’s translation of Van Helmont:

Cavendish may have arrived at her ideas on emanationism through conversations with Charleton or even by reading *Ternary of Paradoxes*, in which he refers to a ‘spiritual emanation’ that executes ‘the mandates of the will, concerning the magnetism of all Creatures,’ and affirms the ‘superiority of man over all other sublunary bodies.’¹¹⁴

Certainly, Cavendish’s argument that ‘by [God’s] power from thence effects doe grow’ directly replicates Van Helmont’s conception of the *archeus*, imbued by God into matter thereby giving it the capacity to move.¹¹⁵ This interpretation of the poem aligns Cavendish’s matter theory much more straightforwardly with that of Gassendi and, indeed, with Grew himself.¹¹⁶ The ‘starting point’ for Grew’s discussion of his vital substance theory in the *Cosmologia Sacra* (1701) is the premise that ‘God, who as he is the Cause of all other Beings, is the most Substantial Being: is Himself a Substance Vital and Incorporeal’.¹¹⁷ To Begley, this poses something of a contradiction with Cavendish’s wider material as it ‘implies the more Platonic notion that immaterial principles connect the soul of man to God and the divine, [while] the rest of Cavendish’s work aligns humans with the natural world and other species.’¹¹⁸ However, as with Van Helmont’s *archeus*, the effects of these immaterial principles in Cavendish’s poem connect all matter, bringing humans and the natural world into close alignment. Where God is perfectly ordered, imprinting this order onto the wider universe, man’s mind is ‘Allways in motion, never quiet lyes’, with the ‘various motions’ of

¹¹³ “Emanation, n.,” 1a, *OED*.

¹¹⁴ Charleton, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, 87; Begley “‘The Minde Is Matter Moved’, 501-2.

¹¹⁵ Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fol. 38r.

¹¹⁶ It is interesting to note that, while Grew does not make notes on Gassendi, Stanley’s section on Epicurus is a direct translations of two of Gassendi’s works: *De vita et moribus Epicuri* (1647) and *Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma* (1649). See Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 335.

¹¹⁷ Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra*, 31 quoted in Begley “‘The Minde Is Matter Moved’, 501-2.

¹¹⁸ Begley, “‘The Minde Is Matter Moved’, 504.

thoughts echoing ‘the Natural motions of every Creature, and [...] the variety of Natures actions’ that underpins Cavendish’s natural philosophy.¹¹⁹

By the end of the poem, Cavendish concludes that the finite limits of man’s knowledge, in contrast with God’s infinite wisdom, prohibit us from fully comprehending divine knowledge: ‘But since none knows the great Creator, must / Man seek no more, but in his greatnes trust.’ Cavendish’s natural philosophy, rather than knowledge of God, offers explorations of the effects, or ‘motions’ of God in nature; or more accurately, Cavendish’s natural philosophy offers accommodated understanding of the divine through nature. For Cavendish, God is not to be explicated as such, though Nature is or can be. Cavendish analogises the motion of thoughts to ‘fluid waters’ to elucidate the particular paradox that human thought may be unable to comprehend him—‘they backwards slide’. These thoughts, springing from God like water, nevertheless come up against the insurmountable obstacle of man’s ignorance, here analogised to water beating against hard rock. Grew alters the original Cavendish poem, introducing the passive ‘retorted’¹²⁰ to the analogy between thoughts and water:

Philosophical and Physical Opinions (1655)

BL MS Sloane 1950

But motion, being slow, makes knowledge weak,
And then his thoughts ’gainst ignorance doth beat,
As fluid waters ’gainst hard rocks do flow,
Break their soft streams, & so they backward go:
Just so do thoughts, & then they backward slide,
Unto the place where first they did abide¹²¹

But motion beeing slow, makes knowledge weak,
And then his thoughts ’gainst ignorance doe beat:
As fluid water on hard rocks doe flow,
Breake their soft streams, & thence retorted goe;
Just thus doe thoughts, & then they backward slide
Unto the place where first they did abide¹²²

It is difficult to say whether this is simply eye-slip on the part of Grew, performing what the content of the verse details, a slide backwards on the page away from the repeated word. However, replacing part of this analogy elides the materialist underpinnings of the poem. In the original

¹¹⁹ Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fol. 38v.; *PL*, 286. This point is raised in n. 14 “Untitled [Great God, from Thee all infinites do flow] (from Phil. Fancies and Phil. Phys. Op.)” in *Margaret Cavendish’s Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition*, edited by Liza Blake, website published May 2019.

¹²⁰ “retort, v. 1” 4a, *OED*.

¹²¹ *PPO*, 173.

¹²² Grew, BL MS Sloane 1950, fol. 38v.;

verse, Cavendish's analogy emphasises the innate motion of both water and thoughts and their active capacity to flow and slide backwards to God. Grew's elision removes this emphasis, placing it instead on God and his overarching role in creating and moving matter. This has the effect of bringing Cavendish's matter theory into line with that put forward by Grew in his 1701 *Cosmologia Sacra: or a Discourse of the Universe as it is the Creature and Kingdom of God*. In this text, Grew argues against the innate motion of matter: 'neither can we so reasonably ascribe unto Atomes, any Innate Motion, as some do; as a certain Principle of Life.'¹²³ According to Grew, 'God, who as he is the Cause of all other Beings, is the most Substantial Being: is Himself a Substance Vital and Incorporeal'.¹²⁴ He is 'the first Cause and Pattern, of all regular Motion and Operation.'¹²⁵ These arguments are borne out in Grew's alterations to Cavendish, which brings the substance theory of her poem closer to that of Van Helmont or Gassendi. In removing the possibility of innate motion in matter, Grew's record of the poem then removes some of the syncretism of Cavendish's matter theory; the original as written in the 1653 *Philosophicall Fancies* demonstrates that Cavendish reconciled a materialist view of the universe with vitalist matter in verse. Focusing on Cavendish's engagement with Charleton and Van Helmont in her 1653 works, this section has suggested that her poetry reveals its deeply syncretic nature as texts engaged deeply with contemporary theories of motions and the properties of matter, even though they draw on and preserve earlier vitalist philosophical theories of matter, which are indebted to alchemical ideas about the role of *semina* and the *archeus* in Nature and natural philosophy. The next section will examine how Cavendish erases her alchemical, and specifically, Paracelsian sources in the *Poems, and Fancies*, even as these sources inform the privileged position Nature occupies in her poetic universe and perhaps her most comprehensive expression of vitalist matter.

¹²³ Nehemiah Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra: or a Discourse of the Universe as it is the Creature and Kingdom of God* (London, 1701), 35

¹²⁴ Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra*, 31.

¹²⁵ Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra*, 86. On Grew's matter theory, see Brian Garrett, "Vitalism and Teleology in the Natural Philosophy of Nehemiah Grew (1641– 1712)," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 36, no. 1 (2003): 63–81.

NATURE

In *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish states that the observation of Nature, encompassing the ‘Natural motions of every Creature’ and ‘the variety of [its] actions’, is the fundamental purpose of her natural philosophy.¹²⁶ This is born out most strikingly in the series of poems that form the bulk of Part III of the text, where the personified and feminised figure of Nature presides over Cavendish’s ingenious materialist and vitalist world. This is prefigured in the very first poem of the volume, ‘Nature Calls a Counsel, which was Motion, Figure, Matter, and Life, to Advise about Making the World’.¹²⁷ Nature presides over the universe and marshals its foundational principles:

First Matter she materials in did bring,
And Motion cut, and carved out every thing.
And Figure, she did draw the forms and plots,
And Life divided all out into lots.
And Nature, she surveyed, directed all,
And with four elements built the world’s ball.¹²⁸

Unlike the 1653 *Philosophical Fancies*, God is notably absent in this materialist universe and the ordering of all things falls instead to Nature. As such, Cavendish presents her as a monumental figure, encompassing and connecting, all things in the universe, as described in ‘Natures Dresse’:

THE *Sun* crownes *Natures Head*, *Beames* splendent are,
And in her *Haire*, as *Jewels*, hang each *Star*.
Her *Garments* made of pure *Bright watchet skie*,
The *Zodiack* round her *Wast* those *Garments* tye.
The *Polar Circles* are *Bracelets* for each *Wrist*,
The *Planets* round about her *Neck* do twist.
The *Gold*, and *Silver Mines*, *Shoes* for her *Feet*,
And for her *Garters*, are soft *Flowers* sweet..¹²⁹

Nature appears on a macrocosmic scale, with the elements and natural resources of the world figured as her adornments. The effect is to literalise metaphor and so reinforce the material basis

¹²⁶ *PL*, 285-6.

¹²⁷ *PF*, 1.

¹²⁸ *PF*, 3.

¹²⁹ *PF*, 127.

of this universe that Nature rules over. Forms we expect to read as figurative, such as the Petrarchan conceit of the beloved emitting rays of sunlight or starlight, are rendered materially as light becomes jewellery for Nature.¹³⁰

VAN HELMONT

To understand Cavendish's natural philosophic approach and the role that alchemy plays in her *poetic* interrogation of perception, representation, and the role of Nature, we must linger over Cavendish's letter on van Helmont, the Flemish physician, philosopher, and chymist, with which we began this chapter. In this letter, which forms part of a wider critique of van Helmont's work, Cavendish provides an extended commentary on the first English translation of van Helmont's complete works, *Ortus Medicinae*, first published in Latin in 1648 and translated by John Chandler in 1662.¹³¹ Here, Cavendish evaluates and ultimately rejects van Helmont's text in favour of her own natural philosophy:

Truly, *Madam*, I wish with all my heart, the poor Royalists had had some quantity of that [alchemical] powder [described by van Helmont]; and I assure you, that if it were so, I my self would turn a Chymist to gain so much as to repair my Noble Husbands losses, that his noble family might flourish the better. But leaving Gold, since it is but a vain wish, I do verily believe, that some of the Chymical medicines do, in some desperate cases, many times produce more powerful and sudden effects then the medicines of Galenists, and therefore I do not absolutely condemn the art of Fire, as if I were an enemy to it; but I am of an opinion, that my Opinions in *Philosophy*, if well understood, will rather give a light to that art, then obscure its worth; for if Chymists did but study well the corporeal motions or actions of Natures substantial body; they would, by their observations, understand Nature better, then they do by the observation of the actions of their Art; and out of this consideration and respect, I should almost have an ambition, to become an Artist in Chymistry, were I not too lazie and tender for that imployment; but should I quit the one, and venture the other, I am so vain as to perswade my self, I might perform things worthy my labour upon the ground of my own Philosophy, which is substantial Life, Sense, and Reason; for I would not study Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury, but the Natural motions of every Creature, and observe the variety of Natures actions.¹³²

¹³⁰ For further discussion of how Cavendish demonstrates an innovative approach to the Petrarchan blazon in her Nature poems, see Scott-Baumann, "Bake'd in the Oven of Applause", 86-106, *Forms of Engagement*, 31-59.

¹³¹ The title identifies Chandler as 'sometime of M[agdalen]..H[all]. Oxon, but besides this, little else is known.

¹³² *PL*, 285-6.

In this letter, the *tria prima* of Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury is replaced by Life, Sense, and Reason, moving from a materialist to a vitalist concept of nature. As with Cavendish's poem 'To the Reader', Cavendish's philosophy is concerned not with the artificial reproduction of Nature but with the actions of a sentient Nature. While Cavendish's framing of Nature has been read as a reaction against the gendered metaphors for scientific experimentation found in Francis Bacon, and taken up by the Royal Society—most notably explored by Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*—I argue that these metaphors frame Nature as a hunted female force, meant to be caught and mastered through the art of science.¹³³ Robert Hooke's 1665 *Micrographia*, for example, urged scientists to trace 'The footsteps of Nature [...] not only in her ordinary course, but when she seems to be put to her shifts, to make many doublings and turnings, and to use some kind of art in endeavouring to avoid our discovery.'¹³⁴ The Van Helmont letter shows that Cavendish was not opposed to the Baconian principles of observation, and so encouraged the chymists she addresses to adopt them. It is rather those 'actions of their Art' that are called into question, as Cavendish engages more broadly with questions of methodology and how best to study Nature.

Cavendish's suspicion of art as a false informer is well documented, most notably in relation to the study of optics carried out by the Royal Society.¹³⁵ Responding to Hooke's *Micrographia* in her 1666 *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, she argued: 'For unless they [microscopes] could discover their interior, corporeal, figurative motions, and the obscure actions of Nature, or the causes which make such or such Creatures, I see no great benefit or advantage they yield to man'¹³⁶. For Cavendish, microscopy was capable only of showing the external parts of an object; the internal composition remained inaccessible via these instruments, due in part to

¹³³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, rev. edn (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990). Scott-Baumann also discusses this in *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48-50.

¹³⁴ Robert Hooke, *Micrographia* (London, 1665), sig. a2r.

¹³⁵ See for instance, Anita Gilman Sherman, "The Skeptical Fancies of Margaret Cavendish" in *Skepticism in Early Modern English Literature: The Problems and Pleasures of Doubt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 137-175.

¹³⁶ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, sig. c2v.

the fallibility of our own perception. Cavendish therefore sets up ‘rational Perception’ as an alternative for discovering Nature:

our sensitive Perception can go no further then the exterior shape, figure and actions of an object; yet the rational being a more subtil, active and piercing Perception, by reason it is more free then the sensitive, does not rest in the knowledg of the exterior figure of an object, but by its exterior actions, as by several effects, penetrates into its interior nature, and doth probably guess and conclude what its interior figurative motions may be.¹³⁷

This brings us back to her ‘own Philosophy’ in the Van Helmont letter: Life, Sense, and, crucially, Reason. Spurning Cartesian scepticism about perception, Cavendish advocates for a model of studying Nature that draws conclusions from ‘the corporeal motions or actions of Natures substantial body’, yet without the empiricist ‘observation of the actions of [...] Art’ that was associated with the mastery of Nature. In like manner, she returns to the idea that ‘rational perception’, like spiritual sight or divine inspiration, can see into the ‘interior nature’ and so circumvent the problem introduced by empiricism’s introduction of precepts (because in empiricism, a means of representation must copy what it is a representation of).

Although Bethany Williamson has argued that Cavendish ‘appears more interested in the potential end product of the alchemical process than in abstract philosophical ideas’,¹³⁸ the subjunctive mood of the Van Helmont letter (quoted above) demonstrates that alchemy proves useful for an abstract understanding of how Nature operates in line with Cavendish’s (anti-empiricist) philosophy of ‘rational Perception’.¹³⁹ Indeed, Cavendish’s way of framing Nature in this poem recalls how Paracelsian texts privileged Nature, as seen here in Emblem 42 of the German Paracelsian Michael Maier (1568-1622) (Figure 20), taken from his alchemical treatise *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Emblem 42 portrays an elderly alchemist (symbolising philosophy or Art) following in the footsteps of a young lady (symbolising Nature). The emblem is didactic, reminding alchemists that their arts replicate nature without the implication of mastery that we find in the

¹³⁷ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 219.

¹³⁸ Bethany Williamson, “Margaret Cavendish, the Royal Society, and the Alchemy of the Arabian Sands,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17.1 (2017): 120-146.

¹³⁹ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 219.

empiricist approach to Nature. In her work, however, Cavendish goes a step further and rejects the idea that Nature can be replicated at all: 'Art is not onely intricate and obscure, but a false informer, and rather blinds then informs any particular Creature of the Truth of Nature.'¹⁴⁰ As shown by her own treatment of atoms in the 1650s, Cavendish went so far as to ascribe the qualities of vitality, sensitivity, and rationality to matter itself, thereby replacing the fundamental *tria prima* of alchemy with her own fundamental principles: Life, Sense, and Reason. In the *Poems, and Fancies*, the alchemical drive to elevate and follow Nature, as opposed to forcing Nature into submission, offers one way to counteract the prevailing tendencies of the new philosophy.

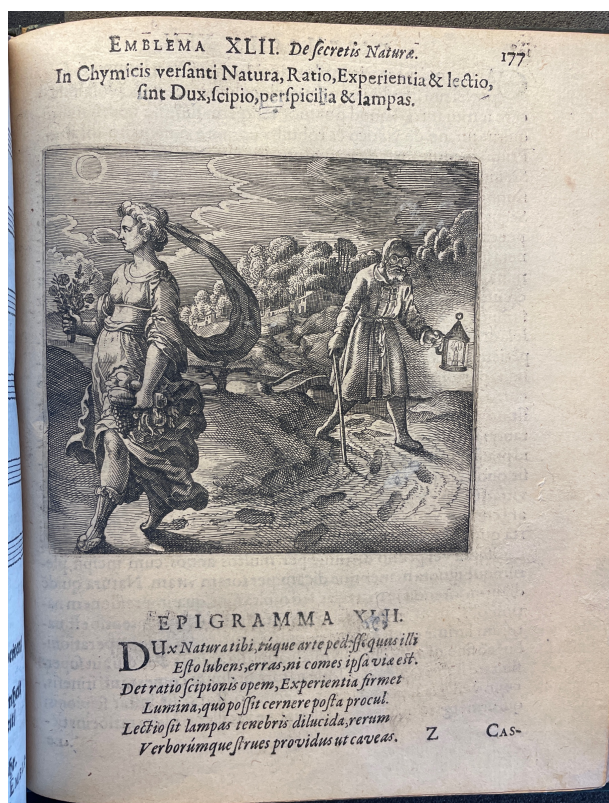


Figure 20: Emblem 42: 'In Chymicis versanti Natura, Ratio, Experientia & lectio, sint Dux, scipio, perspicilla & lampas' ('For him versed in Chemistry, let Nature, Reason, Experience, and Reading be his Guide, staff, spectacles and lamp'). Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Vet. D2 e.18.

In her detailed exploration of Cavendish's Nature, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann has argued that

Cavendish's Nature is a female, generative figure who chews up literary conventions and spits them out as Cavendish's parodies of the blazon, of pastoral, of the idealized female form. She often turns wittily from the conventionally poetic to the literal. Cavendish is

¹⁴⁰ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 72.

original, and yet her originality can only be understood fully as a dialogue with her peers Hobbes, Davenant, and the Cavalier poets. Her theories of originality and of naturalness emerge from a culture of new thought, of assertive breaks with the past, and signal her active participation in her intellectual milieu.¹⁴¹

Building on Scott-Baumann's work, this section argues that Cavendish's anatomising turn from the poetic to the literal is central to the *Poems, and Fancies*; however, it also significantly diverges from Scott-Baumann's argument insofar as it traces Cavendish's original approach to Nature to her investment in syncretising older alchemical methodologies with seventeenth-century natural philosophic thought, rather than making 'assertive breaks with the past'.

NATURE ANATOMISED

Cavendish's Fancy sets up an alternative model for investigating Nature that stands in opposition to Baconian empiricism and which also draws on earlier models for framing and investigating Nature through alchemical thought. Thomas Tymme's translation of *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* (1605), discussed in Chapter One, provides a useful analogue for Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies*: 'For *Halchymie* [...] hath also a chirurgicall hand in the anatomizing of every mesenteriall veine of whole nature: Gods created handmaid, to conceive and bring forth his Creatures.'¹⁴² For Tymme, Alchemy is figured as a skilled handmaid who performs surgical anatomies on the mesenteric vein of Nature herself, peering into the inner workings of nature to produce knowledge. Nature is embodied in precise anatomical detail, with the 'mesenteriall veine' referring to the mesentery, the skin or membrane that encases the guts.¹⁴³ Tymme's depiction of Nature as a body with mesentery represents a physical rendering of the relationship between nature and God; the secret innards of Nature are intricately connected with God's wider creation, its structural backbone, much as the folds of membrane were often figured as suspending the viscera

¹⁴¹ Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, 59.

¹⁴² From Tymme's dedication to Sir Charles Blunt, Earle of Devonshire, of Joseph Du Chesne, *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke...Translated by Thomas Timme, Minister* (London, 1605).

¹⁴³ "mesentery, n.," 1, OED.

from the human backbone.¹⁴⁴ In this way, the secret innards of Nature are laid bare in precisely the same way that Cavendish pursues ‘the interior corporeal figurative motions of things, the obscure actions of nature, or the causes which make such and such creatures.’¹⁴⁵ This is born out literally in Cavendish’s ‘*A Bisk for Natures Table*’, in which one of the ingredients of the bisk (or bisque) is ‘A Hand that’s fat, smooth, and very white,/ The inside moist, and red, like Rubies bright.’¹⁴⁶ Cavendish first describes the hand as a beautiful object, employing Petrarchan conventions of smoothness and whiteness. But the reader is then unexpectedly taken inside the hand, faced with the visceral wetness and redness of blood itself, rendered materially as glistening gems. The image is an unsettling one, layering a new and unexpected set of values over the Petrarchan conventions; as Scott-Baumann has argued, ‘the precious jewel-like commodity is not chastely appealing beauty, but the blood necessary to life’.¹⁴⁷ Cavendish’s rapid shift from beauty to blood emphasises the innate beauty in bodily matter and, more broadly, the intricacy and value of the body as a vital system. A similar shift occurs with the description of the ‘*Fingers* long, and *Joynts* not big withal’ and ‘A sound firm Heart, a Liver good’.¹⁴⁸ Cavendish stretches the limits of conceit as she wittily but jarringly layers figurative qualities with literal physical descriptions of the vital organs. The heart is both steadfast and texturally solid;¹⁴⁹ the liver—the supposed seat of love and passion—is both good in the abstract and ‘healthy, strong; able to function properly’.¹⁵⁰ As with her description of the adorned body of Nature in ‘*Natures Dresse*,’ Cavendish complicates the traditional blazon by putting the matter of metaphor under the lens; however, unlike the limited lens of a microscope, Cavendish offers us a vision inside the body itself, dwelling on its internal composition and its vital motions. The images that are produced by Cavendish’s remarkable anatomising Fancy offers up alternatives to the experiments carried out by the empirical

¹⁴⁴ St. George Jackson Mivart, *Lessons in elementary anatomy* (London, 1873), ix. 403.

¹⁴⁵ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, sig. c2v.

¹⁴⁶ PF, 130.

¹⁴⁷ Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, 48.

¹⁴⁸ PF, 130, 129.

¹⁴⁹ “firm, adj. and adv.,” 6a, 1a, OED.

¹⁵⁰ “good, adj., n., adv., and int.,” 6c, OED.

experiments of the Royal Society, and its predecessors at the Universities. In this way, Part III of the *Poems, and Fancies*, operates not at odds with the atomistic material of Part I but in tandem. Throughout this volume Cavendish's poetic constructions render manifest the occult causes of natural phenomena; the ultimate manifestation is Cavendish's Nature.

NATURE AS HOUSEWIFE

In the third section of *Poems, and Fancies*, Cavendish likens Nature's actions specifically to the work of a housewife, and the section collapses the boundaries between the universal and the domestic. Cavendish emphasises the elevated status of the personified Nature, the picture of feminine virtue and orderly domesticity, whose home stands metonymically for the well-ordered universe described in 'Nature Calls a Counsel'. In 'Nature's Grange', various kinds of 'Houswifery'—cooking, feeding, spinning, dressing—take place by 'design' upon her grange, or estate, to yield life itself:

Thus *Nature* busily doth her selfe imploy
On every *Creature* small, till they do dye.
When any dies, that work is done,
And then a new work is begun.¹⁵¹

Nature is ultimately responsible for each human life, with her 'work' eliding the busy employment of an estate owner with the act of creation. In 'The severall Keyes of Nature, which unlock her severall Cabinets', keys hang from Nature's side, recalling a chatelaine, the decorative belt hook hung from the waist, often mounted with keys to an estate alongside other useful household objects. By extension, Nature is framed as the owner of a castle or large country house, a description later confirmed in Cavendish's description of her '*palace*', mounted with '*Turrets of Fame* [...] on every side'.¹⁵² Nature's keys open various boxes; as a marginal note to the 1653 text confirms, 'The five senses are Nature's boxes, cabinets: the brain her chief cabinet'.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *PF*, 135-6.

¹⁵² *PF*, 133.

¹⁵³ *PF*, 126.

A Bunch of Keyes which hung by *Natures* Side,
Nature to unlock these her *Boxes* try'd.
 The *first* was *Wit*, that *Key* unlockt the *Ear*,
 Opened the *Brain*, to see what things were there.
 The *next* was *Beauties* *Key*, unlockt the *Eyes*,
 Opened the *Heart*, to see what therein lyes.
 The *third* was *Appetite*, that *Key* was quick,
 Opens the *Stomack*, meat to put in it.
 The *Key* of *Scent* opens the *Braine*, though hard,
 For of a *Stink* the *Nose* is much afeard.
 The *Key* of *Paine* unlocked *Touch*, but slow,
Nature is loath *Diseases* for to shew.¹⁵⁴

This list conveys a similar shift away from Petrarchan convention as in ‘*A Bisk for Natures Table*’. The senses of hearing and sight are represented by the boxes of wit and beauty, respectively. But the analogy does not continue in the direction we might expect. Rather than representing the sense of taste with discernment or appreciation for ‘what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful’ especially in arts or literature, Cavendish once again takes us inside the body itself, relating taste to its more corporeal meaning—the act of perceiving flavour—as she turns to the stomach and the meat that can be found within.¹⁵⁵ In this way, Nature asserts her control not simply over the feminine virtues of wit and beauty, but the spaces of the household itself and the materials one finds there: the kitchen and the food within.

In the *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1668) her principal polemic against the New Science, Cavendish returns to housewifery,

And though Nature takes so much delight in variety, that she is pleased with them, yet they are not to be compared to her wise and fundamental actions: for Nature, being a wise and provident Lady, governs her parts very wisely, methodically and orderly; also she is very industrious, and hates to be idle, which makes her imploy her time as a good Huswife doth, in Brewing, Baking, Churning, Spinning, Sowing, &c. as also in Preserving for those that love Sweet-meats, and in Distilling for those that take delight in Cordials; for she has numerous employments, and being infinitely self-moving, never wants work, but her artificial works are her works of delight, pleasure and pastime: Wherefore those that imploy their time in Artificial Experiments, consider onely Natures sporting or playing actions; but those that view her wise Government, in ordering all her parts, and consider her changes, alterations and tempers in particulars, and their causes, spend their time more usefully and profitably [...]¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ PF, 126.

¹⁵⁵ “taste, n.” 1, 8a, OED.

¹⁵⁶ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1668), 101-2.

Emphasising that housewifery provides an epistemological model for comprehending the works of Nature, Cavendish argues that the ‘Artificial Experiments’ of empirical science can provide insight only into ‘[Nature’s] works of delight, pleasure and pastime’; these artificial fripperies are ‘not to be compared to [Nature’s] wise and fundamental actions’.¹⁵⁷ She ironically subverts the trope of woman’s work as less intellectually serious than that of a man to argue that women’s work is in fact more valuable in the production of knowledge than natural philosophical experimentation. The housewife’s work, expressed in Cavendish’s poems as a kind of domestic government that is organised ‘wisely, methodically and orderly’, presents an alternative study of Nature that eclipses the ‘artificial’ empirical methods employed in exclusively male institutional contexts. This is borne out in Cavendish’s collection of poems as the reader is asked to envision the practising of domestic skill as analogous to replicating an experiment, with a greater understanding of Nature as an end result in both cases. Indeed, Wendy Wall has argued that the domestic sphere and recipes themselves act as ‘sites of theoretical exploration’ in which a woman can explore the Nature from the confines of the kitchen.¹⁵⁸ The ‘infinitely self-moving’ Nature thus plays upon a metaphorical sense of Nature as busy, various, and motivated, but also draws on the specific idea of a vitalist materialist universe—of ‘self-moving’ matter—which can best be understood when it is deconstructed and recombined in domestic household /kitchen experiments.

While Scott-Baumann and Joe Moshenska have considered Cavendish’s poems in relation to cookery, the form of these poems—variously engaged as they are with cookery, medicine, and exploring Nature through experimentation—be placed productively in the context of the medicinal or alchemical receipt.¹⁵⁹ Cavendish’s striking combination of the language of cookery,

¹⁵⁷ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 101.

¹⁵⁸ Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 2.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, “‘Bake’d in the Oven of Applause’: The blazon and the body in Margaret Cavendish’s *Fancies*,” *Women’s Writing* 15:1 (2008): 86-106; Joe Moshenska, “The Art of Early Modern

anatomy, and medical practice finds an analogue in the medical book at the University of Nottingham in which both Cavendishes documented and supplemented the advice and recipes that they received between 1648 and 1654.¹⁶⁰ In this collection, ‘A Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts Collected at Paris from those who hath had great Experience of them’, the pair of document recipes provided to them by their friend, Kenelm Digby, and containing letters written to the Cavendishes by Thomas Cademan, Theodore Mayerne, and William Davidson.¹⁶¹ This volume chiefly consists of a number of seventeenth-century manuscript recipes for making medicines and remedies for a wide range of illnesses and afflictions, from coughs and fevers to advice on overcoming sterility in both men and women. Alongside these household medical recipes, the book also contains a number of instructions for curing afflictions in animals, such as horses, suggestive of William’s interests, alongside recipes for culinary dishes. The scribe, Thomas Farr, documents recipes addressed to both Margaret and William, including ‘My Lady Marquesse of Newcastelle Receipt to Cure a Fluxe or Dissentorye’ and ‘Receipts given to my Lord Maquesse of Newcastle’, suggesting the collective nature of composition.¹⁶² Indeed, Mayerne seems to gesture to this collaboration in a letter written to William that reads, ‘you set mee too greate a taske in desiring my counsell for your infirmity in English of which language I dare not brag, and I doe not love to doe any thing that I cannot doe de bonne grace.’¹⁶³ Much like Margaret Clifford’s receipt book (discussed in Chapter One), which compiles texts originally in Latin, Mayerne’s letter suggests that the Cavendishes were deliberately commissioning receipts in English to allow Cavendish access to medical knowledge circulating in French. ‘Sr Theador Mayernes Description of Remedy’s for the Lord Henry Cavendishe against the Spleene’ is quickly followed by a recipe for a ‘Broath’, which calls for dandelion roots, chicory, capers, demonstrating a similarly capacious

Cookery,” *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, ed. J. Michelle Coghlan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 29–43.

¹⁶⁰ NUL, MS Pw V 90.

¹⁶¹ NUL, MS Pw V 90.

¹⁶² NUL, MS Pw V 90, fols. 63r–64v.

¹⁶³ NUL, MS Pw V 90, fols. 63r–64v, 109v.

catalogue of information as in Cavendish's poems and the intellectual flexibility required from her readers.¹⁶⁴ Cavendish's 'Nature's Cook', a poem which frames the housewife Nature as the ultimate authority (even over Death), presents the collision between cookery and medicine in the early modern kitchen:

Some Death doth Roast with Feavers burning hot,
And some he Boyls with Dropsies in a Pot;
Some are Consum'd for Jelly by degrees,
And some with Ulcers, Gravy out to Squeeze;
Some, as with Herbs, he stuffs with Gouts and Pains.
Others for tender meat he hangs in chains;
Some in the sea he pickles up to keep;
Others he, as soused brawn, in wine doth steep;
Some flesh and bones he with the pox chops small,
And doth a french fricassee make withall;
Some on gridir'ns of calentures are broiled,
And some are trodden on, and so quite spoiled.
But some are baked, when smothered they do die;
Some meat he doth by hectic fevers fry;
In sweat sometimes he stews with savory smell:
A hodge-podge of diseases tasteth well.

Fever and dropsy produce heat and liquid that Death uses to culinary advantage, serving Nature dishes 'cooked' through the symptoms of various forms of illnesses and ailments. As Samantha Snively has argued, the poem 'draws its conceit from the extensive knowledge of disease and the shrewd observational skills that early modern housewives needed to spot and diagnose illness.'¹⁶⁵ As we know from Cavendish's own compilation of medicinal recipes, these were terms and diagnoses with which she was familiar. However, the conceit reverses the usual diagnostic process as the diseases produce food, rather than food being used to produce a cure. In the case of 'Fevor' for example, a 'Cooling Julep or Diet drinke' consisting of barley water, and violet and lemon syrups is prescribed by 'Doctor Davison' in the Cavendish medical book.¹⁶⁶ In Cavendish's poem, life itself is turned into a material commodity as Cavendish wittily collapses the senses of preservation through both medicinal and culinary methods that protect from sickness and, also, prevent

¹⁶⁴ NUL, MS Pw V 90, fols. 8v, 11r.

¹⁶⁵ Samantha Snively, "'The Quintessence of Wit': Domestic Labor, Science, and Margaret Cavendish's Kitchen Fancies," *Newberry Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 9 (2015): 21-8 (24).

¹⁶⁶ NUL, MS Pw V 90, fol. 53.

decomposition through processes that include hanging meat, pickling in salt, steeping in wine (all detailed in the poem).¹⁶⁷

While Nature is personified as a housewife, Life and Death are both allocated the role of cook. Cavendish envisions the composition of the human body by using the process of preparing a recipe to anatomise the various components of the body. In the terms of *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, she frames the body as an intermixture of abstract components made material and lengthily listed physical parts to reveal ‘the interior corporeal figurative motions of things, the obscure actions of nature, or the causes which make such and such creatures.’¹⁶⁸ The poem, ‘Heads, and Braines’, for example details both the abstract and physical components of the human brain: it is constituted of reason, judgement, wit, and fancy, alongside nerves.¹⁶⁹ ‘A Posset for Natures Breakfast’ is just one of many poems in this section that narrates the technical instructions to make a variety of mixtures, ranging from olios, ‘bisks’, and hodge-podges, that seek to shed light on how abstract concepts are made, which in Cavendish’s materialist universe is through transformative mixtures of tangible material.¹⁷⁰

Life scummes the *Cream* of *Beauty* with *Times Spoon*,
And drawes the *Claret Wine* of *Blushes* soon.
There boiles it in a *Skillet* cleane of *Youth*,
Then thicks it well with crumbl’d *Bread* of *Truth*.
And sets it on the *Fire* of *Life*, which growes
The clearer, if the *Bellows* of *Health* blowes.
Then takes the *Eggs* of *Faire*, and *Bashfull Eyes*,
Aud puts them in a *Countenance* that’s *wise*,
And cuts a *Lemmon* in of *sharpest Wit*,
By *Discretions Knife*, as he thinkes fit.
A handfull of *Chast Thoughts* double refin’d,
Six *Spoonfuls* of a *Noble*, and *Gentle Mind*.
A *Graine* of *Mirth*, to give’t a little *Tast*,
Then takes it off, for feare the *Substance* wast.
And puts it in a *Bason* of *Rich Wealth*,
And in this *Meat* doth *Nature* please her selfe.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ “preserve, v.,” 1, 5. *OED*. Snively also argues that Cavendish’s ‘attention to preservation suggests a parallel between the preservation of food and the preservation of human life, achieved through observation and understanding of disease.’ Snively, “The Quintessence of Wit,” 24.

¹⁶⁸ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, sig. c2v.

¹⁶⁹ PF, 131.

¹⁷⁰ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, sig. c2v.

¹⁷¹ PF, 128

This poem is littered through with technical verbs that recall the imperatives that Wall writes, ‘syntactically ordered readers to “actualize” knowledge by undertaking action’: Life ‘Scums’, ‘Boyls’, ‘thicks’, ‘Cuts’ and adds ‘A Handfull of Chast Thoughts, double Refin’d, /Six Spoonfulls of a Noble and Gentle Mind, A Grain of Mirth to give’t a little Taste’, before sending this concoction ‘up to *Nature*,’ the ultimate, all-consuming authority.¹⁷² Cavendish literalises the various Aristotelian causes of human life in order to produce a more nuanced or scientific understanding of life itself. She explores material causes by distilling the innate properties of bodily actions and features into tangible ingredients: the blood beneath the skin producing blushes becomes claret wine; the eyeball becomes an egg; the (metaphorical) sharpness of wit becomes itself a lemon. Life, the literalised efficient cause, stirs together various ingredients to produce the formal cause, the functional structure of the human organism, here figured as the ingredients to create a young woman, beauty, youth, and wealth. By theorising the elements that create these mixtures, Cavendish’s *Fancy* promotes a model of *a priori* natural philosophy that opposes empiricist observation.

Following the publication of her *Poems, and Fancies*, the fellows of St John’s College, Cambridge, wrote to Cavendish:

So difficult to men is nature and truth. Alas how do they vex and pursue her fleeing from them; others suppose her to be swallowed in Whirlepoole, (as another *Scylla* or *Charibdis*) such a one indeed as they do commonly find to be of report or opinion: others grope for her in a vain Vacuity with the like success: yea, some there are which seek her among Ghosts and Goblins, as if she were some Witch, or Sorceress; some offer violence to her, and put her to the rack, and make her rather Lie then Confess. To your Grace she doth freely open and unbowel her self, fearing to be branded with incivility if she should deny.¹⁷³

This image of Nature ‘unbowel[ing] her self’ imbues the figure with more agency and willing than Hooke’s later descriptions of Nature ‘endeavouring to avoid our discovery’, as it conveys a sense of Nature ‘open[ing]up’ to Cavendish.¹⁷⁴ Yet, the description also carries with it the more

¹⁷² Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 227.

¹⁷³ *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 5. Quoted in Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, 50.

¹⁷⁴ Hooke, *Micrographia*, sig. a2r.; “unbowel, v.,” 2a, *OED*.

immediate and violent meaning of ‘disembowel[ing]’: ‘to eviscerate, exenterate.’¹⁷⁵ Neither of these descriptions convey how Cavendish opposes her Fancy to empiricism to generating a new understanding of Nature. Rather, it is Tymme’s description of how alchemy ‘anatomiz[es]’ Nature—‘To dissect a human body, or an animal, for the purpose of displaying the position, structure, and relations of the various parts’—that comes closest to expressing how Cavendish deploys metaphor as a mode of enquiry and promotes Fancy as a viable natural philosophic tool for revealing and comprehending Nature’s actions.¹⁷⁶

ALCHEMY AS CONCEIT

In the same passage that Cavendish heralds housewifery as preferable to empirical science in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, she returns to the idea of alchemy:

[...] truly to what purpose should a man beat his brains, and weary his body with labours about that wherein he shall lose more time, then gain knowledg? But if any one would take delight in such things, my opinion is, that our female sex would be the fittest for it, for they most commonly take pleasure in making of Sweet-meats, Possets, several sorts of Pyes, Puddings, and the like; not so much for their own eating, as to imploy their idle time; and it may be, they would prove good Experimental Philosophers, and inform the world how to make artificial Snow by their Creams or Possets beaten into froth, and Ice by their clear, candied or crusted quiddinies or conserves of fruits; and Frost by their candied herbs and flowers; and Hail by their small comfits made of water and sugar with whites of Eggs; and many other the like figures which resemble Beasts, Birds, Vegetables, Minerals, &c. But the men should study the causes of those Experiments, and by this society the Commonwealth would find a great benefit; for the Woman was given to Man not onely to delight, but to help and assist him; and I am confident, Women would labour as much with Fire and Furnace as Men, for they’l make good Cordials and Spirits; but whether they would find out the Philosophers-stone, I doubt; for our sex is more apt to waste, then to make Gold; however, I would have them try, especially those that have means to spend; for who knows but Women might be more happy in finding it out, then Men, and then would Men have reason to imploy their time in more profitable studies, then in useless Experiments.¹⁷⁷

Evoking the tools of alchemy, ‘Fire and Furnace’, Cavendish once again makes explicit her doubts about whether alchemical experimentation has the capacity to truly produce its aims, the

¹⁷⁵ “unbowel, v.,” 1a, *OED*.

¹⁷⁶ “anatomize, v.,” 1a, *OED*.

¹⁷⁷ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 101-2.

‘Philosophers-stone’. The passage reinscribes the hierarchy between Nature’s ‘wise and fundamental actions’ and ‘her artificial works [...] of delight, pleasure and pastime’ previously discussed. For Cavendish, alchemy falls into the same category as empirical science: it is an ‘Artificial Experiment’ that seeks to replicate Nature’s actions without the more capacious understanding of Nature that housewifery provides.¹⁷⁸ However, like housewifery, alchemy provides an epistemological model for experimentation that is uniquely suited to female skill. Writing that she ‘would have [women] *try*’ alchemy, Cavendish implies that it is one of those ‘sites of theoretical exploration’ that, as Wall has said of recipes, is useful for trying and testing knowledge of Nature.¹⁷⁹ If alchemy is a process that seeks to replicate Nature, and yet does so only artificially in Cavendish’s eyes, it nonetheless carries out the same intellectual work as the fantastical culinary creations explored by Wall—a pastry deer stabbed with an arrow that bleeds blood made from wine—in which ‘the semblance of a natural form [...] gives way to a fully and unfamiliar artificial reality’.¹⁸⁰ Wall links these culinary ‘conceits’ as they were termed specifically with the poetic conceit:

Positioned at the meeting point of the mental and material, the conceit posed a key conceptual problem for poets and philosophers contemplating the relationship of cerebral labor to material craft. Domestic creations in the form of recipes might be seen as crafty tricks (another meaning of “conceits”), but they also engaged the critical philosophical problem of yoking the abstract to the concrete, precisely the issue that poets identified as a central conundrum of intellectual wit.¹⁸¹

From its earliest reception, Cavendish’s work has been read as a fanciful construction like the culinary conceits that Wall describes. In his copy of the *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, the poet Edmund Waller (1606-1687) wrote, ‘New Castles in the air this Lady builds, / While nonsense

¹⁷⁸ Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 101-2.

¹⁷⁹ Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 80.

¹⁸¹ Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 80.

with Philosophy she guilds' (Figure 21).¹⁸² Cavendish herself did not refute this reading of her poetic and philosophical method, but rather later defended it in her *Sociable Letters*:

In your last letter, you were pleased to tell me you were invited to a meeting where many ladies and gentlemen were, and amongst their several discourses the Lady M.L spoke of me, saying I lived a dull, unprofitable, unhappy life, employing my time only in building castles in air [...] [A]s for the mind's architecture as castles in the air or airy castles, which are poetical conceptions and solitary contemplations which produce poems, songs, plays, masks, [...] and the like, they will be more lasting than castles of wood, brick, or stone. And their architecture if well designed and built will be more famous and their fame spread farther than those of stone.¹⁸³

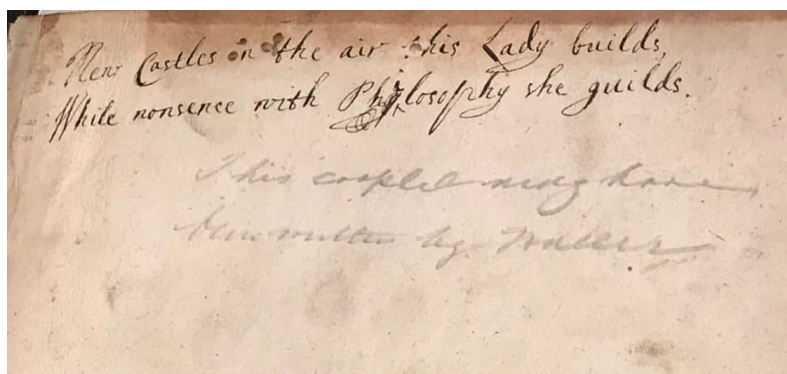


Figure 21: Edmund Waller's copy of Margaret Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663). Huntington Library, San Marino, 120156.

Cavendish's riposte reconceptualises the language of her critics to argue that her wit has the capacity to render abstract poetic and philosophical thought both more enduring and more concrete than earthly material, wood, brick, or stone (all subject to earthly decay). The undergirding conceit is that 'poetical conceptions and solitary contemplations'—such as those we saw in Cavendish's own self-presentation in her earlier engravings and poetry—last longer because, they, like the mind, remain *in motion*, even after the material body decays.

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen that alchemy provides one conceptual solution for bridging the gap between the abstract and the concrete. The Nature poems of Part III of the *Poems, and Fancies* operate as transformative conceits that create new perspectives of the familiar, disrupting the binaries by which we compartmentalise and understand the world—the

¹⁸² This couplet is inscribed on the flyleaf of Edmund Waller's copy of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663), now in the Huntington Library (shelf mark 120156). I am grateful to Christopher Archibald for this image.

¹⁸³ Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 226-7.

animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, human and animal, mind and matter, fiction and existence. Cavendish's poetic strategy is indebted to the concept of intermixture as she explores matter and Nature throughout the *Poems, and Fancies* from a perspective that draws variously on materialist, vitalist, and alchemical theories. In keeping with her notion that matter is neither created nor destroyed but simply combined and recombined to produce new forms, her literary composition melds older and newer forms of knowledge to produce a strikingly original syncretic philosophy. The 1653 and 1664 editions of *Poems, and Fancies* demonstrate Cavendish extracting from and compounding, and expounding upon the ideas of various alchemical thinkers before she critiques many of the same figures in her subsequent publications, most notably van Helmont. As Charleton put it in a later letter to Cavendish:

Your Collections by the improvement they receive from your fertile Brain, become your own Production: and those obscure Hints delivered to you in the Discourses of others, by passing through your lightsome Imagination, are turned into bright and full Discoveries.¹⁸⁴

Through her 'Collections' and readerly extractions from Davidson, Severinus, Charleton, and van Helmont, Cavendish developed a notion of animated matter that was nonetheless also in lively engagement with seventeenth-century debates about materialism, atomism, and Paracelsian theories of Nature. In contrast to Lanyer, Pulter, and Philips, Cavendish situates alchemy at the meeting point of the mental and material (to adopt Wall's words), the intersection of the fanciful and practical. It is a process to view with healthy scepticism that may not produce tangible products like the ever-elusive Philosopher's Stone but that conceptually creates unity from multiplicity and synthesis in thought. This method prompts us to return to the phoenix emblem that Cavendish deployed in her frontispieces: we might now read it as expressing Cavendish's approach to both literary and philosophical engagements in equal measure: the phoenix serves as an emblem for how Cavendish's vitalist materialist understanding of the world around her is also one with her own authorial strategy, in which her literary texts deploy as well as destroy the very source material

¹⁸⁴ Cavendish, *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 92.

on which they productively draw, thereby generating new and unexpected material from the ashes of the old.

Conclusion:

Golden or Barren? The Afterlife of Alchemical Poetics

This thesis has traced how Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish fused alchemy with poetry to create a distinctive alchemical poetics. Drawing on the shared language of transformation, production, and perfection, their poetry harnesses the material power of alchemy to refashion and make new; it emerges from the library, the kitchen, and the laboratory; it renders abstract concepts of faith, friendship, and philosophy tangible. Returning to the text that began this thesis, Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (1595), we can now see the alchemical poet from an entirely new perspective. This study has shown, in contrast to Sidney and the masculine emphasis of 'his own invention', that a rich variety of women were actively engaged in defining and redefining alchemical poetics in their work. The chapters of this thesis outlined how this alchemical poetics was ever-developing, reformed in each woman's writing to new theological, political, and scientific ends.

In Chapters One and Two, the theological and political rose to the fore. Chapter One showed how Lanyer's poetic Paracelsian Calvinism and the 'rectefied oyle of Gratiouesnes' in *Salve Deus* offer a radical rethinking of the meanings of grace—not just in terms of female patronage but also in relation to how these women deployed their informed understanding of alchemical theology. As we saw in Chapter Two, the Calvinist Paracelsianism present in Lanyer found new expression in Pulter's Civil War poetry, which articulates a Paracelsian perspective on dust and resurrection (palingenesis) to express spiritual and political desire for reunification. This reading of Pulter's poetry thus disrupts the critical paradigm that Paracelsian alchemy was a Millenarian pursuit during the English Civil War, showing instead how alchemy could be put to the service of royalism. In Chapters 3 and 4, the focus shifted, tracing the developing concerns of early modern science, and attending to the scientific and political uses of alchemy. Philips reworked alchemical imagery, replacing the Hermetic emphasis on 'commixture of contraries and unlike' with Paracelsian 'sympathy', the mixture of 'like with like' and thus collapsing the hierarchy of substance

as promulgated in both Renaissance Aristotelian and Ciceronian humanism. Through her reinterpretation of the languages of alchemy and friendship, Philips' alchemically coded verse created an ostensibly neutral ground on which different political and religious parties might meet. Chapter Four traced a more radical development in alchemical poetics, looking at how Cavendish synthesizes both older forms of alchemical knowledge based on Paracelsian texts and more recent natural philosophical debates, such as those surrounding atomism. Her alchemical poetics revealed how the rejection and deployment of alchemy might coexist in strikingly syncretic matter theory and poetics. Looking back from Cavendish's alchemically-inflected atoms to Sidney's golden world of poets, we can see just how protean alchemy is and the diverse imaginative uses to which it was put by these women writers across their different poetic outputs.

In 1657, the image of the alchemical poet returned in the Preface to Joshua Poole's *The English Parnassus*. Unlike Sidney, the anonymous author, J. D., frames the figure of the alchemist in particularly disdainful terms:

As to *English Poesie*, we shall lay it down as granted, that it may be fortunate in any kind, and upon any subject, if it meet with a true son of *Parnassus*, and a genius that knowes how to manage it. And yet we find by experience that the most considerable, and for ought can be found, the most fortunate therein were a sort of *Chimists*, men of much leisure, and sedentary lives, who writ altogether in *Stanzas*. In so much that for some centuries of years, the greatest part of English Poetry, was spent on those barren and indeed abstruse subjects of *Chymistry*, and the *Philosophers stone*. But the English Language ariving daily to greater perfection and purity, Poesie must needs accordingly extend to all subjects and occasions, incident to humane life.¹

This writer dismisses the practice of alchemy as 'barren' and 'abstruse' and yet, at the same time, employs the terminology of alchemical purification to describe how language is 'ariving daily to greater perfection and purity'; this contradiction captures the paradox at the heart of this thesis. The tensions between the art of alchemy and the art of poetry are what drives alchemical poetics. For Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish, alchemy is not simply a source of imagery, nor a 'barren' subject, as J.D. thought, but a generative and serious intellectual endeavour. As this thesis

¹ J.D., preface to Joshua Poole's *The English Parnassus* (London, 1657).

has shown, alchemy offers more than rhetorical ‘gilding’ for aesthetic ends, its multiple and complex affordances enliven literary form. Alchemical poetics enables the formal complexity of these women’s verse and transforms their use of rhetorical figures, such as Pulter’s metonymy; it challenges the boundaries between the literal and the figurative, yielding Lanyer’s alchemical reinterpretation of grace and Philips’s transformative mixtures of friends; and it underpins the syncretic methodology of Cavendish’s verse. Penned just four years after Cavendish’s *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), J.D.’s dismissal of alchemy as a serious subject reflects how, as science became more codified through institutions like the Royal Society in a post-Newtonian era, alchemy began to seem obscure and outdated. J. D. implicitly criticises alchemy as ‘rarefied’ and esoteric. Where rarefaction was one of the affordances of alchemy for Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish—who conceptualise poetry as a mysterious alchemy of the mind that nonetheless has real, practical implications for themselves and for their readers—for J. D. it is simply ‘abstruse’.

This critique of alchemy highlights how alchemical poetics and its signification are shaped by specific contemporary cultural contexts. Applying what Clifford Geertz termed ‘thick description’, the previous chapters attended to a variety of contemporary sources—alchemical manuscripts and printed texts, letters and notebooks, religious thought, and political circumstances—to reveal the capacious meanings of seventeenth-century alchemy.² These four poets make detailed and sophisticated use of a range of sources, demonstrating a recuperation of contemporary alchemical, and particularly Paracelsian, thinking in their verse. As we have seen, alchemy was not a single homogenous set of doctrines, nor was there one way to interpret major alchemical phenomena such as the Philosopher’s stone, gold, or purification; the wide variety of

² This term was coined by the Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his *Concept of the Mind* (New York: Hutchinson and Company, 1949). However, it rose to prominence in the work of social anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. The term denotes an analytical approach to culture that ‘is essentially a semiotic one’. Geertz writes, ‘Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.’ Clifford Geertz, “Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture” in *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30 (5).

Paracelsian authors—Paracelsus himself, Severinus, Du Chesne, Van Helmont—offered different interpretations of their art and its significance, as we have seen. I have traced how these poets’ use of alchemy is inflected by their social intellectual milieu. This thesis explored how patrons—such as Clifford—as well as male contemporaries—such as Peregrine Willoughby, Nicholas Crouch, and Nehemiah Grew—recognised these poets as alchemical thinkers and practitioners. Alchemy is regenerative in each author; it has the capacity to destroy habits of thoughts or terminology, forging anew what seems out of date, tired, or, even contradictory, and creating new avenues for poetic and imaginative experiment.³

Much as the work of Lanyer, Pulter, Philips, and Cavendish drew upon, and was enlivened by, alchemy, this thesis has sought to recuperate alchemy as a crucial source for their poetics. It has illuminated the fundamental role played by alchemical thinking in seventeenth-century women’s writing. Paralleling their poetic methods, this thesis has also sought to find new possibilities from surprising sources, distilling what alchemical material can generate in a poetic context, and uncovering the origins of this alchemical thinking. In doing so, I hope to have recovered the substantial contributions these four women made to the twinned creative arts of alchemy and poetry.

³ Trevor-Roper, “The Paracelsian Movement,” 155-156.

Appendix

Table 1: The alchemical manuscripts contained in ‘A catalogue of the books in the closet in the passage room next to the pantry in Skipton Castle, 28 Aug 1739’. YAS, DD121/111, fol. 1.

<i>Skipton Catalogue</i>	<i>Source/ Analogue</i>	<i>Extant in Archive?</i>
Arnoldus de Nova Villa his Book called the New Light	‘Magistri Arnaldi de Villa Nova, Liber dictus, Nouum Lumen’ in <i>Artis auriferae, quam chemiam vocant</i> , vol. 2 (Basel, 1572) ¹	WDHOTH/1/3 ²
A Treatise entituled Woemens Work and Childrens Playe	‘Tractatus opus mulierum et ludus puerorum dictus’ in <i>Artis auriferae, quam chemiam vocant</i> , vol. 2 (Basel, 1572) Opus mulierum, Tractatus, siue ludus puerorum’ in <i>De Alchemia</i> (2nd ed. Frankfurt, 1550).	—
A Book entituled the Ladder of the Philosophers	[Guido de Montanor,] ‘Liber Scala Philosophorum dictus’ in <i>Artis auriferae, quam chemiam vocant</i> , vol. 2 (Basel, 1572) (107-170) [?] ³	—
The practise of the great Work etc. by the Monk of Berye	Alchemical tract. [Raymond Lull/ Philip Rouillascus]. <i>The practise of the great work of the monk of berye</i> . (16th c.) [?] ⁴	—

¹ I propose that this text has been extracted from an alchemical compilation, as several manuscript texts in YAS, DD121/111 seem to have been. Three of the manuscript texts appear in *Artis auriferae*, suggesting that they may have been transcribed from the same copy. Other possible sources include the works of the author published at Lyon in 1504 and 1532, and at Basel in 1585.

² This copy also includes Arnald of Villanova, *Flos Florum* and *Epistola ad regem Neapolitanum*. All three texts are in translation.

³ This may also refer to ‘Liber, dictus Scala Philosophorum’ in *De Alchemia* (2nd ed. Frankfurt, 1550), which was attributed to Guido de Montanor in *Scala philosophorum* in Jean-Jacques Manget, *Bibliotheca chemica curiosa, seu rerum ad alchemiam pertinentium thesaurus instructissimus*, vol. II (Geneva: 1702), 134. This attribution had been made earlier in manuscript by none other than George Ripley. On Ripley and the attribution, see Jennifer M. Rampling in “Establishing the Canon: George Ripley and his Alchemical Sources,” *Ambix*, 55:3, 189-208 (196).

⁴ The ‘monk of berye’ is identified as John Lydgate in Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 102. Multiple copies of this treatise survive in manuscript and are variously attributed. Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 102 has been attributed to Raymond Lull. However, BL Sloane 299, where the tract also appears, has been identified as an English translation of Philip Rouillascus’ alchemical treatise *Practica magni operis* from the 16th century. On these attributions, see the Old Royal Collection 3502, Royal Library, Copenhagen; and Irma Taavitsainen ed. *The Index of Middle English Prose, Handlist X: Manuscripts in Scandinavian Collections* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 14.

An old Book of Chemistry and Alchimy, no title, unbound	<i>Unidentified</i>	WDHOTH/1/5 ⁵
Another Book of Alchimy entituled a Dialogue between Nature and a Disciple of Philosophie, a stiched folio.	Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1487. ⁶	
Part of a very old imperfect Manuscript of Alchimy	Isaac Israeli, <i>Omnia opera Ysaac in hoc volumine contenta: cum quibusdam alijs opusculis</i> (Lyons, 1515)	WDHOTH/1/1 [?] ⁷
A very old poem in folio stitch'd, of Alchymy	—	—
A very old Abstract of some Book of Alchimy	John Isaac Holland, <i>Opera Mineralia, sive de lapido philosophico</i> , Middelburg, 1600 ⁸	WDHOTH/1/2
Part of a very ancient Book writ on parchment	Isaac Israeli, <i>Omnia opera Ysaac in hoc volumine contenta: cum quibusdam alijs opusculis</i> (Lyons, 1515)	WDHOTH/1/1 [?]

⁵ I follow Penny Bayer in my suggestion that the possible source for this manuscript is The Margaret Manuscript. See Penny Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature 1560–1616 in Italy, France, the Swiss Cantons and England, and Its Diffusion to 1660,' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), 217.

⁶ See 'A dialogue between Nature and a Disciple of Philosophie', Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1487, f100-106v.

⁷ Perhaps the manuscripts described in T. D. Whitaker in *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven in the County of York*, vol. 2 (3rd ed., Manchester: E. J. Morten and Yorkshire: The Craven Herald, 1973), 324. See Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery (1590-1676)* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 260. Spence suggests these manuscripts have been compiled into WDHOTH/1/1. This manuscript is described in the Cumbrian Archive Service Catalogue as 'Manuscript containing "Commentary on 'Liber Dictarum Universalis'" by Ishak ibn Sulaiman Al Israili (known as Isaac) and "Liber Dictarum Particularum," with other fragments relating to medical works'. The manuscript is compiled from 'different hands, late 13th century to early 14th century; thought to have belonged to Henry Tenth Lord Clifford "the Shepherd Lord" (c1455-1523).' The age and fragmentary nature of these texts in the Skipton Castle catalogue would seem to confirm this hypothesis.

⁸ I have identified this as an Index Rerum to John Isaac Holland, *Opera Mineralia, sive de lapido philosophico* (Middelburg, 1600) having cross-referenced the number and content of chapters cited in the Index.

Table 2: The alchemical printed books contained in 'A catalogue of the books in the closet in the passage room next to the pantry in Skipton Castle, 28 Aug 1739'. YAS, DD121/111, fols. 2-4.

<i>Skipton Catalogue</i>	<i>Extant in Archive?</i>
<i>The Compound of Alchymy etc. first written by George Ripley and dedicated to King Edward 4th set forth by Ralph Rabbards Gent. A Poem.</i> London 1591.	One copy is in YAS, DD121/109
Another of the same	See above
<i>The Mirror of Alchymy by Fryer Roger Bachon.</i> London 1597.	No extant copy in CRO or YAS
<i>Nova Disquisitio de Helia Artista Theophrasteo, in qua de Metallorium transformatione adversus Hagelii & Pererii Jesuitarum Opiniones etc. disseritur, Auctore Heliophilo a percis philochemico.</i> Marpurgi 1606.	WDHOTH/1/4

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MS Ashmole 487. Diaries of John Dee.

MS Rawlinson poet. 65. Seventeenth-century miscellany of poems compiled by a member of St John's College, Oxford.

MS Rawlinson poet. 90. 'A Collection of Verses, Fancies and Poems, Morall and Devine.'

British Library, London

Harley MS 6491. Treatise presented by William Davidson to William Cavendish.

Brotherton Library, Leeds

MS Lt q 32. *Poems breathed forth by the nobel Hadassas, and The Unfortunate Florinda, by Lady Hesther Pulter.*

Cumbria Record Office, Kendal

WDHOTH/1/2. Early sixteenth century Index Rerum to John Isaac Holland, *Opera Mineralia, sive de lapido philosophico*, Middelburg, 1600.

WDHOTH/1/3. Manuscript translation of three works by (or attributed to) Arnaldus de Villa Nova (c.1235-1313).

WDHOTH/1/4. *Nova Disquisitio de Helia Artista Theophrasteo* by Heliophilus a Percis Philochemicus [pseudonym of Raphael Eglinus], printed at Marpurgi, 1606.

WDHOTH/1/5. Receipts of Lady Margaret Clifford, wife of George 3rd Earl of Cumberland for Elixirs, Tinctures, Elecutuaries, Cordials, Waters, etc. MS circa (1550) with her annotations.

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MS 775B. Tutin manuscript of poems by Katherine Philips.

MS 776B. Rosania manuscript of poems by Katherine Philips.

Nottingham University Library, Nottingham

MS Pw V 90. Medical book belonging to Margaret and William Cavendish.

The Yorkshire Archaeological & Historical Society Archive, University of Leeds, Leeds

YAS, DD121/109. *The Compound of Alchymy etc. first written by George Ripley and dedicated to King Edward 4th set forth by Ralph Rabbards Gent. A Poem*. London 1591.

YAS, DD121/111. 'A Catalogue of the Books in the Closset in the Passage Room next the Pantry in Skipton Castle.'

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