AFFECTION AND IMAGINATION IN
'THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING' AND HILTON'S
'SCALE OF PERFECTION'

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How can a literary critic best approach texts which are living classics of religious literature? This question is being asked with increasing frequency by modern readers of The Cloud of Unknowing and Walter Hilton's Scale of Perfection. My own preference is for an historical-critical approach which, while recognising that these works are for all time, is concerned to relate them to the time in which they were written. It has recently been pointed out that certain studies of the English Mystics are marred by 'the scholar's lack of adequate theological training to interpret the mystics' teaching correctly,' a defect which is particularly marked in the case of discussions of the influence of pseudo-Dionysius. As Colledge rightly says, before we can speak with certainty about the Dionysian elements in the Cloud and the Scale, 'we need a clearer view of the Western medieval traditions which interpreted, glossed, and it may be distorted and exaggerated what the writer of the Mystical Theology had in truth said.' When this clearer view is attained, we shall be in a better position to understand more fully not only the theological content of our religious classics but also those facets of scholastic literary theory which crucially influenced their authors' attitudes to language and the way in which they wrote.

The Cloud author and Hilton have a great deal to say about stylistic and linguistic issues, both with regard to the inspired writings of holy Scripture and to their own writings. Since adequate presentation of the necessary background would require a book rather than an article, I have chosen to concentrate on two concepts in the Cloud and the Scale which have major literary ramifications, namely, the concepts of imagination and affection.

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4 To this end I am preparing a monograph on the literary theory found in scholastic commentaries on the works of pseudo-Dionysius, particularly De caelesti hierarchia.
According to scholastic literary theory, a writer could convey spiritual and invisible truths by means of likenesses, similitudes, and images (imagines, phantasmata) derived from visible things. The faculty of the soul which produced such imagery was imaginatio; the virtus imaginativa was the mental power behind figurative speech and writing. Moreover, the 'affective' functions of certain types of writing, particularly styles which were rich in imagery and symbolism, were held to be of the first importance, especially in the case of the poetic books of the Bible. For example, the Song of Songs was regarded as kinetic: it sought to move rather than prove. Medieval commentaries on the works of pseudo-Dionysius contain sophisticated treatments of such ideas, a few of which are touched on below. It will be argued that Hilton highly valued the imaginative and affective qualities of images both literary and plastic. The Cloud, author, by contrast, consistently denigrated the imaginative power, and was interested only in the highest reaches of the affective power, when it leaves behind all material figures to enter the cloud of unknowing where the hidden God is to be found. Yet he is a master of imaginative and affective writing, in the strict medieval senses of those terms; his achievement, viewed from the standpoint of medieval literary theory, is that he could exploit so effectively those very modes of expression which he professed to distrust.

I

'THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING'

The transcendence of reason advocated in The Cloud of Unknowing is, paradoxically enough, itself a product of an age of reason and reasoning, reflecting as it does the fruits of several generations of scholastic study of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In the twelfth century, Hugh of St. Victor had commented on De caelestis hierarchia, while Richard of St. Victor imitated and amplified pseudo-Dionysius in his major devotional writings; in the thirteenth century the Dionysian corpus was taught at the University of Paris, and the doctrine

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of ‘the Areopagite’ was interpreted by several of the foremost thinkers of the day, including Thomas Gallus, Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure. This is the context within which The Cloud of Unknowing and the Middle English treatises connected with it must be placed.

When the Cloud author asserted the superiority of the will over the intellect and reason, he tacitly was taking sides in a long-running scholastic debate which centered on the nature of theology. In the Summa theologiae which was completed by the disciples of Alexander of Hales after his death in 1245, a distinction is made between human science and divine science. Human science appeals to the intellect (intellectus), to the rational part of the mind. On the other hand, divine science or theology appeals to the affectus, i.e. to the ‘affections,’ ‘inclination,’ or ‘disposition’ of the mind, affectus mentis being coterminous with voluntas (‘will’). Some later schoolmen, notably Richard Fishacre, Robert Kilwardby, and Giles of Rome, argued that theology is essentially affective, while others, including Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent, sought to emphasize (in different ways and to different extents) the rational and intellectual nature of the science of theology. Pseudo-Dionysius was cited often in this controversy; conversely, the terms of reference of the debate coloured medieval approaches to the Dionysian corpus. For example, in his commentary on De mystica theologia (1255) Albert the Great asserted the superiority of the intellect, by means of which the soul is united with God. Writing earlier, Thomas Gallus had assigned this supreme role to the affection or disposition (affectus), the loving power of the will. It was the interpretation of Gallus which found favour with the Cloud author.

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8 I have used Phyllis Hodgson’s editions of the Cloud group of writings: The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling (EETS OS 218, revised reprint; London 1973); Deonise Hit Distristete and Other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer (EETS 138, revised reprint; London 1958). All references are to Hodgson’s page and line numbers.


12 See p. 354.
In the prologue to Deonis Hid Diuinete, a translation of De mystica theologia which the Cloud author seems to have made shortly after writing The Cloud of Unknowing, occurs this crucial passage:

Of þe whiche book [De mystica theologia], for þat it is mad minde in þe 70 chapter of a book wretin before (þe whiche is clepid þe Cloude of Unknowinge) how þat Denis sentence wol cleeri afferne al þat is wretyn in þat same book: þerfore, in translaicoun of it, I haue not onliche folowed þe nakid lettre of þe text, but for to declare þe hardness of it, I haue moche folowed þe sentence of þe Abbot of Seinte Victore, a noble & a worpi expositour of þis same book. (2.5–12)

‘De Abbot of Seinte Victore’ is Gallus, who was Abbot of St. Andrew’s at Verceil from its foundation in 1219 until his death in 1246, a Canon Regular of the Congregation of St. Victor. The Cloud author is expressing his concern not only with the ‘nakid lettre’ of his authoritative text (i.e. its grammatical construction and continuity) but also with its deeper meaning or sententia, and it is this which Gallus has explained so ably. Deonis Hid Diuinete is introduced as a confirmation of the doctrine of the Cloud, and to that end the translator has ‘moche folowed’ the Abbot of St. Victor. This may be taken to mean that Gallus’ exposition of pseudo-Dionysius is of primary importance for our understanding of the Cloud. It can be argued that Deonis Hid Diuinete and the Cloud have a special doctrinal relationship: both reflect the influence of

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14 Here the Cloud author is using Latin technical terms. Hugh of St. Victor (writing ca. 1127) advocated the following ‘order of exposition’ in Bible study: one begins with ‘the letter,’ working out the grammatical construction and continuity of a passage, then one proceeds to expand its sense or most obvious meaning, and finally the sententia or deeper meaning is sought. See Didascalicon 3.8, ed. C. H. Buttimer (Catholic University of America, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin 10; Washington 1939) 58; cf. the application of these same principles to a secular text by William of Conches, in Guillaume de Conches: Glossae super Platonem, ed. E. Jouncau (Textes philosophiques du moyen âge 13; Paris 1965) 51; also the general statement by Giovanni de’ Balbi, Catholicon, s.v. commentum and glosa (Venice 1493) fol. 101r, 153r.
Gallus. Deonise Hid Diuinite owes much of its characteristic flavour to the way in which Gallus had ‘medievalized’ De mystica theologia;55 the Cloud owes much of its characteristic flavour to Gallus’ version of Victorine spirituality.

This suggestion will be substantiated, in the first instance, by an examination of the position which Thomas Gallus occupies among interpreters of Pseudo-Dionysius. I have attempted to bring out some of the most distinctive features of his interpretation, by contrasting them on the one hand with twelfth-century Victorine ideas and on the other hand with other thirteenth-century expositions of De mystica theologia. Many of these features, it is then argued, are found in the Cloud also, and so one may postulate the influence of Gallus on the English treatise.16

Over a period of twenty years, Thomas Gallus (otherwise known as ‘Vercellensis’) busied himself with the exposition of De mystica theologia, De divinis nominibus, the two Hierarchies, and at least some of Dionysius’ letters. That part of his work which concerns us most, the exposition of De mystica theologia, took three forms: a brief commentary or gloss, hereafter referred to as the Glossa (written 1232), an explanatory paraphrase entitled the Extractio (1238), and a full commentary entitled the Explanatio (1241).17 Herein one can see Gallus building on Victorine ideas on contemplation — in particular, the thought of Richard of St. Victor (died 1173), who is explicitly acknowledged as a major source in the Explanatio — yet gradually moving towards a considerable modification of Richard’s position in emphasizing the highest and

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16 This procedure is necessary because of David Knowles’ statement that ‘it is not evident that the abbot of Vercelli inspired what are the peculiar characteristics of the Cloud and its companions’. The English Mystical Tradition (London 1961) 75. In fact, all but one of the ‘peculiar characteristics’ listed by Knowles are paralleled in Gallus. The exception is ‘the abundant and shrewd practical advice of the Cloud.’ This, I would suggest, may be attributed to the Cloud author’s wish to adapt the doctrine of Gallus to suit his very different audience: Gallus was writing for schoolmen, whereas the Cloud is addressed to a practising contemplative. Moreover, there are obvious differences of genre: Gallus provided scholastic explication de texte, while the Cloud author produced a manual for advanced mystics. For discussion see my article ‘The Sources of The Cloud of Unknowing: A Reconsideration,’ in The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers read at Dartington Hall, July 1982, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter 1982) 63–75.

most important part of the affection (principalis affectio, apex affectus) as the cognitive power by which the human soul is ‘oned’ with God.\(^{18}\)

In his *Benjamin major*, Richard of St. Victor had described six kinds of contemplation.\(^{19}\) In the first kind, the imagination plays a major role by bringing to one’s attention the form or image of visible things; the mind is astonished at how many, how great, how diverse, and how beautiful and delightful are these corporeal things. This automatically leads to veneration of the power, wisdom, and munificence of the Creator who is their source. The second stage in our mental ascent occurs when we seek the rational principle underlying the great variety of nature: the human reason examines the rationale, order, and disposition of things. This type of contemplation is ‘in imagination but according to reason’ because it proceeds by means of reasoning concerning those things which are engaged in the imagination. The third kind of contemplation is that which is ‘formed in reason according to imagination,’ when by means of the similitude of visible things we are raised up to speculation concerning invisible things. This speculation is ‘in reason’ since it goes beyond imagination by directing the mind’s attention towards invisible things, which can be apprehended only by the reason, but it is said to be ‘formed according to imagination’ since the soul is assisted by similitudes drawn from an image of visible things.

However, Richard continues, in the fourth kind of contemplation the reason dispenses with the imagination as it focuses on those things which the imagination does not know but which the mind gathers from ratiocination or understands by means of reason. Paradoxically, the fifth kind of contemplation is above reason yet not beyond reason. Here, by means of divine revelation, we know things which we are unable to comprehend fully by any human reason, such as those things concerning the divine nature which we believe and prove by the authority of holy Scripture. This is supposed to be above reason yet not beyond reason since the human reason is not able to oppose the results of this kind of contemplation and readily accepts them. By contrast, the sixth and highest kind of contemplation is concerned with those things which are above


reason and seem to be beyond or even against reason. Here the human soul exults and dances when from the illumination of divine light it knows and considers those things against which all human reason cries out.

These kinds of contemplation were seen by Richard in terms of a transition: the human mind is raised up gradually from the one to the other in an orderly sequence.²⁹ The imagination is regarded as indispensable until the fourth phase, and only in the sixth and final phase is the human reason transcended: the normal processes of human thought are therefore afforded considerable dignity.²¹ As the imagination is left behind, the human intelligence is dilated more and more fully; the farther it moves away from lower things the more it grasps of higher things. Finally, the mind goes beyond the bounds of human capacity and, ‘being transformed into a certain kind of supermundane affection, goes completely above itself.’²² The ‘human intelligence (intelligencia) increases from the greatness of its dilation so that it is no longer itself — not that it is not intelligence, but that it is no longer human.’

It was the suprahuman and suprarational nature of this highest type of contemplation which most interested Thomas Gallus. He firmly placed the will above the intellect, and affection or love above reasoning of however elevated a kind. According to the version of the six kinds of contemplation found in the Explanatio mysticae theologiae, the fifth kind is concerned with divine and eternal revelations in so far as they are apprehensible by the intellect and consonant with human reason, but the sixth kind is simply unknown to human philosophy.²³ Whereas Richard of St. Victor had pointed to many links between these two highest grades of contemplation, according to ‘be Abbot of Seinte Victore’ the distinction between them is absolute. In Gallus’ interpretation of De mystica theologiae a wedge is driven between philosophical wisdom and Christian wisdom, between the intellectus and the affectus. As a consequence the lower human faculties are denigrated, especially the imagination.²⁴

In the prologue to his Explanatio, Vercellensis explains that most of our knowledge, including our knowledge of God, is based on cognition of visible things and intellectual apprehension.²⁵ This is as true of the works of the Church Fathers as it is of the writings of the heathen philosophers — indeed, it ap-

²⁹ See especially Benjamin major 1.7: PL 196,72c–73c; trans. Zinn 164–65.
²¹ Benjamin major 1.8: PL 196,73c–74a; trans. Zinn 165–66.
²² Benjamin major 5.9: PL 196,117d; trans. Zinn 323.
²⁴ See for example GIoza, PL 122,272n, 274c, 279a, 282a.
²⁵ MS Royal 8.6.IV fol. 42r–43r.
plies to most of the works of Dionysius. However, Gallus continues, in *De mystica theologia* and in a few letters Dionysius propounded a more profound way of knowing God, a superintellectual and supersubstantial method which was unknown to the gentle philosopher, because he did not seek it or believe that it existed or discover the faculty according to which it is established in the human soul.26 The pagan philosopher thought that the intellect was the highest cognitive power, but there is another power which exceeds the intellect no less than the intellect exceeds the reason or the reason exceeds the imagination, namely the principal affection, by which unique means the soul may be united with God.27 By *principalis affectio* (or *apex affectus*) is meant the purest and most sublime activity of the affection, rising to its utmost limits with the aid of divine grace, leaving far behind all corporeal involvement and earthly emotion. It is coterminous with the *synderesis scintilla*, the spark of conscience or discernment which leaps up to God like a spark shooting from a fire.28 Gallus substituted *principalis affectio* for Richard's *intelligentia* (i.e., the superior function of the intellect) as the medium of unitive experience; he did not identify the former with the latter, as von Ivánka thought.29 We should realise, however, that for Gallus the principal affection was a cognitive power; more precisely, it was the supreme cognitive power possessed by man, whereby the

26 Cf. Glossa, PL 122.269a: 'Intentio est commendare verum sapientiam Christianorum, et sapientiam philosophorum reprobare.'

27 'Patauit enim vicin cognitionum esse intellectum, cum sit alia quae non minus excedit intellectum quam intellectus racionem vel raco ymaginacionem, sicut et principallis affectio, et ipsa est scintilla synderesis qua sola unibilis est spiritus divino' (MS Royal 8.6.IV fol. 49r).


29 Von Ivánka, 'Intelligentia oder Principalis Affectio' 150; also his article 'Apex mentis,' *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 72 (1950) 129–76, esp. 167–69, 171. In fact, in his interpretation of *De mystica theologia* Gallus does not distinguish clearly between *intellectus* and *intelligentia*, in respect of which his thinking resembles that of Richard of St. Victor: see Javellet in *RTA* 20 (1962) 212–18; 30 (1963) 88–93 and 117–21. Völker, op. cit. 225–6 n. 11, 231 n. 3, points out that in the *Extracito* Gallus does not make a contrast between the *intellectus* and the *intelligentia*, and that in the *Explanatio* they are used as synonyms; moreover, at one point in the *Explanatio* the *motus intelligentiae* is placed in opposition to the *motus affectionum*. 
soul obtained knowledge-in-love. The precise ideological nature of the disagreement between Richard of St. Victor and Gallus on the ultimate stage of contemplation remains a controversial issue in modern scholarship, but at least it is clear that in Gallus' rigidly hierarchical scheme of the human faculties, Richard's concern with cumulative process and gradual transition from one faculty to another has been excised.

As Gallus put it at the beginning of his Glossa, the utility (utilitas) of De mystica theologia is to lead to the pathless summit of the person, so that one may be united with God or 'deified' by superintellectual knowledge and affection. This process requires both divine grace and human co-operation. Gallus' emphasis on personal preparation and purification constitutes an intrusion of Augustinian ethics into negative theology. Much is made of the Arealpagite's exhortation of his beloved 'other self' Timothy to leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual operations, all sensible and intelligible things, and as far as is humanly possible to be raised up unknowingly to union with God, who is above every substance and all knowledge. According to Gallus, in order that Timothy may understand his teacher he should relinquish everything that stands between him and God (including all souls and angelic substances, indeed everything which can be contemplated) and ascend by means of the principal affection to union with God, who ineffably stands above every substance, and incomprehensibly is stationed above all knowledge whether human or angelic. No love of lower things should be retained, but 'purged from the last phantasms of the soul, by neglecting spiritual as well as divine activities you will be raised up to the superbright light of the most hidden deity.' It is clear then, that a major facet of the method of personal purification recommended by Gallus is the rejection of all the normal processes of human thought, which depend on visible and substantial things. Of course, this entails total abstinence from the phantasms or images which the imagination produces.

The necessity of leaving ordinary thinking behind is reiterated in Gallus' exposition of the central allegorical event featured in De mystica theologia, Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 19.8–15, 18–21; 24.1–18). Dionysius,

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31 PL 122.269a.

32 PL 122.271b–272a; cf. Esplanatio, in MS Royal 8.6.IV fol. 44r–44v.
as translated by John the Saracene around 1167, had recounted how even the
divine Moses was ordered to be first purified and then to be separated from
those who were not so. After total cleansing, he heard many-voiced trumpets
and saw many lights shining with streaming rays. Then he was separated from
the multitude and, with chosen priests, reached ‘the summit of divine ascents,’
although by this he was not with God: ‘he contemplated not Him, for He is
invisible, but the place where He is.’ In interpreting this passage, Gallus
presents Moses as the type of the mystic who must, in order to contemplate
God, not only cleanse himself but also separate himself from all unclean or
contrary things. After total purgation of the senses from sensible things, and
the intellect from phantasms, he hears or mentally perceives the inspirations of
many intelligences and contemplates many spectacles of the brightest lights
emanating from above. But these too must be transcended: separated from
the multitude, i.e. from varied material opinion and affections, he ascends to
God. However, he sees not His substance but the place where He dwells, or
the purest sapphire stone or burning fire (cf. Exodus 24.10; 19.18), or the ut-
most peak of the mountain.

Faced with the insuperable problem of describing the indescribable, Gallus
has reverted to images and phantasms, products of that very faculty, the human
imagination, which he has denigrated so consistently. Throughout his Glossa
and Explanatio, Vercellensis imitates his author in stretching language to its
absolute limits by heaping superlative on superlative, paradox on paradox, in the
inevitably vain attempt to express something of the inexpressible. This is the
language of the via negativa, which in its concern with what God is not rather
than with what He is would reject all analogical depictions of heavenly things,
every semantic link between words which describe the mundane and those
which describe the divine. Of course, in the final analysis words themselves are
inadequate, but for the mystic writer the problem of style remains. One way
out of his dilemma is to use language symbolically rather than literally, to
distance terms from their normal referents in the everyday world. Hence, Gallus

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33 For convenience see the text of John the Saracene printed with Gallus' Glossa in PL
122.274r. I consulted also The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite, trans. John Parker (London
1899) I 130-37, and The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies of Dionysius the
Areopagite, translated from the Greek by the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom (Flintry, Surrey,
n.d.) 9-16.
34 Cf. Explanatio, in MS Royal 8.8.IV fol. 45r-45v.
35 For discussion of this dilemma see especially Gillian R. Evans, 'The Borrowed Meaning:
Grammar, Logic and the Problem of Theological Language in Twelfth-Century Schools,'
The Downside Review 96 (1978) 165-203; M. F. Wakelin, 'Richard Rolle and the Language of
Mystical Experience in the Fourteenth Century,' The Downside Review 97 (1979) 192-203.
For related issues see Evert Cousins, 'Myth and Symbol in Bonaventure,' American Catho-
stated that in symbolic theology names which designate sensible things are transferred to designate in an 'anagogical' or 'upraising' fashion things which are invisible and divine. Gallus' imaginative depiction of the place where God dwells is a good example of language being used anagogically, as is his treatment of the Dionysian image which was to inspire an English mystic of the fourteenth century, the *caligo ignorantiae* or 'darkness of unknowing.'

Pseudo-Dionysius had prayed to the supercelestial Trinity to direct us to the supremely unknown and supremely shining summit of the mystic sayings, where the simple, absolute, and changeless mysteries of theology are hidden within the secretly supershining darkness of the silence which is spoken, making the superease to supershine in the deepest darkness, and (in a way that is always impalpable and invisible) filling with most beautiful splendid souls which are without eyes. According to Gallus, this means that God raises us up to Him, that we may reach through contemplation the deity who is the crown of the sacred Scriptures, in whom the wise sayings of Scripture are most profoundly enclosed and hidden, and are as it were compressed together in a most simple Ark. In this summit the simple, absolute, and changeless *sententiae* are enveloped in excessive light, being 'hidden' in so far as they are veiled by the superbrilliant rays emanating from God. Gallus seems to relish the paradox that this divine light is darkness and vice-versa — a sophistry made possible by the language of the *via negativa*, which is not bound by the distinctions and applications of everyday speech. The light in question is the secretly supershining darkness of spoken silence: this is incomprehensibility, Gallus explains, said to be 'darkness' on account of the excess of light, to be 'spoken' because of the eternal Word which speaks from eternity, to be 'secretly supershining' because of the most secret effusion of light, and to be 'of silence' because the generation of such a Word is not perceived by the intellectual hearing and therefore cannot be recounted by word of mouth. In sum, the superease light of the most hidden deity is described as darkness because in the affective union of the soul with God what is not seen is 'supersseen' and what is not comprehended is 'superunderstood.'

Such was the experience of Moses, who entered the dark cloud at the top of Mount Sinai. Pseudo-Dionysius, as translated by the Saracene, explained that this archetypal mystic was freed from those who are seen and seeing, and entered into the darkness of unknowing (*caligo ignorantiae*), a truly mystical darkness in which he shut up all ordinary thoughts: he was in 'the altogether impalpable and invisible, being wholly of Him who is beyond all,' by inac-

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36 PL 122.278c.
37 See the Sarracenus text printed with Gallus' *Glossa*, PL 122.270a–b.
38 PL 122.270c.
39 PL 122.271a; cf. the fuller account in the *Explanatio*, MS Royal 8.6.IV fols. 43r–44r.
tivity of all knowledge united in his better part' with God, 'by knowing nothing knowing above mind.' Gallus expounds this as follows:

Postea Moyes separatur ab his, qui secum locum Deividerant, id est, ab omnibus intellectibilibus opinionibus, et subtrahitur ab omni intelligentia et visu mentali, et intrat ad caliginem ignorantiae, quia unitur incomprehensi-

bilitati divinae, qui apex intelligentiae non penetratur, quae caligo vere est mystica, id est, clausura, quia vere est omnis cognitionis clausura, et in se claudit secretissima, celat omnes comprehensivas cognitiones, sicut in prima

omnia causa, et per hanc caliginem omnis animus unitur Deo, id est, super omnia fit in statu excellentissimo, quem nec ratio palpat per investigationem,

nec intellectus contemplatur per visionem...  

Such a state of union cannot be achieved by means other than the most fervent state of mental prayer, and by the power of the supermental affection. The eye of intellectual cognition cannot reach so high, whence such knowledge is said to be had 'by ignorance.' Therefore, the more proper method of praising God is by negation or removal: everything that is not God must be removed from our understanding of Him.

Now we may consider precisely how Gallus' exposition of De mystica theologia compares with the interpretations of those other great thirteenth-century commentators on the Areopagite, Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. There was general agreement that in the higher reaches of contemplation the human imagination was of no avail, but attitudes to the affectus differed considerably.

In his commentary on De mystica theologia Albert the Great states that the teaching of this book is open only to those who have prepared themselves for divine doctrine by purging both the affectus and the intellectus from error and concupiscence, and he interprets the sounds which Moses heard during his ascent of Mount Sinai as the passions of the soul raised up in God. But we are left in no doubt concerning Albert's belief in the essential superiority of the intellect, by means of which the soul is united with God. Albert assigns to the

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40 Text in PL 122.275a.
41 'After Moses is separated from those who with him saw the place of God, i.e. separated from all intellectual opinions, he is withdrawn from all intelligence and mental vision, and enters into the darkness of unknowing, because he is united with the divine incomprehensibility, which the point of the intelligence does not penetrate. This darkness truly is mystical, i.e. enclosed, because it truly is an enclosure of all cognition, and in itself encloses the most secret. It hides all comprehensive knowledge as it were in the first cause of all, and by this darkness every soul is united with God, i.e. is above everything in the most excellent state, which neither the reason reaches by investigation nor the intellect contemplates by vision...'

42 PL 122.276a.
43 S. Albert Magni opera omnia, ed. A. Borghet (Paris 1890–90) XIV 824, 829.
44 Ibid. 832, 834, 837; cf. Völker, Kontemplation und Ekstase 241–45.
intellect the supreme role which Thomas Gallus had assigned to the principal affection.

Comparison of Vercellensis with Thomas Aquinas is more difficult because among the writings of Dionysius, Aquinas commented only on *De divinis nominibus* (1265–67). As a student at Cologne Aquinas had attended Albert’s lectures on Dionysius, and so it is hardly surprising to discover that his discussion of the divine names echoes his former master’s concern with the intellect. However, in the second part of his *Summa theologiae* (1269–72) St. Thomas attempted to synthesize the *intellectus* and the *affectus* in a comprehensive theory of contemplation. For example, he argues that St. Paul’s rapture (2 Corinthians 12.2–4) was not just an intellectual experience but involved the saint’s *affectus* as well.

Among all the scholastic commentaries on pseudo-Dionysius, those of Thomas Gallus and Robert Grosseteste stand out because of their similarities of interpretation and approach. This may be, to some extent at least, due to mutual influence. A letter to Gallus by Grosseteste’s friend Adam Marsh has been taken as evidence of an exchange of commentaries: Marsh sent Gallus a copy of Grosseteste’s *Expositiones super angelicam ierarchiam* and requested on Grosseteste’s behalf a copy of the Abbot’s *Extractio* on *De mystica theologia*. Therefore, one might expect to find similarities of thought and expression in the *Extractio* and Grosseteste’s commentary on *De mystica theologia* (1242–43). Unfortunately there are no indubitable verbal parallels to settle the matter (after all, Grosseteste worked from the original Greek whereas Gallus relied on the Saracene’s inadequate translation), but certain similarities of thought are obvious, notably in their explanations of the *caligo ignorantiae*. In effect, Grosseteste sides with Gallus against Albert in affording the *affectus* an elevated status in the mystical union, although he does not share the anti-intellectualism which, by no means obvious in the *Extractio*, was to reveal itself so fully in the later *Explanatio*. Grosseteste limits himself to the statement that in the *caligo*

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46 The basic study of this work is by J. Durantel, *S. Thomas et le pseudo-Denys* (Paris 1919). A basis for examination of the extent to which Aquinas developed Albert’s interpretation of *De divinis nominibus* is provided by F. Ruello, *Les ‘Noms Divins’ et leur ‘Raisons’ selon S. Albert le Grand, commentateur du ‘De divinis nominibus'* (Bibliothèque Thomiste 25; Paris 1963); see further Ruello’s article ‘La Divinorum nominorum reseratio selon Robert Grosseteste et Albert le Grand,’ *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 34 (1959) 99–197.
49 This is the opinion of D. A. Callus, ‘The Date of Grosseteste’s Translations and Commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius and the Nicomachean Ethics,’ *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 14 (1947) 186–210.
ignorantiae every natural function of the human intellect ceases.60 We must abandon all the normal actions of the senses and the intellect, he argues, so that we may not be trapped by any earthly passion, by a disorderly affection for some creature, and thereby held back from our ascent towards God. It would seem, however, that for Grosseteste an ordered affectus is necessary for this ascent. Timothy is invited to rise up towards a union with God — who cannot be known by rational investigation — with desire and with a love which is super fervid, with an ecstasy or detachment from all created things.

The similarities of thought between Gallus and Grosseteste are manifested even more clearly in the sermon Ecclesia Sancta celebrat which Grosseteste produced at about the same time as his commentary on De mystica theologia.61 Here he identifies the intelligentia with love (amor), paralleling Gallus' doctrine that the highest knowledge possible in this life is acquired in and through affection. The author of the most comprehensive study of Grosseteste's theology to appear in recent years can see no difference between the two schoolmen here, 'rather an identity of thought.... For the immense influence which this development had upon the history of western mysticism Gallus cannot be given the sole credit.62 This is a valuable corrective to von Ivánka's unduly large claim for the importance of Gallus' theory of principalis affectio. But it must be emphasized that Grosseteste's Dionysian scholarship was far too erudite for many readers, while the more facile and succinct expositions of Thomas Gallus enjoyed a wide audience. It was Vercellensis who influenced those masterpieces of affective piety, Hugh of Balma's De theologia mystica or Viae Sion iugent and St. Bonaventure's Itinerarium mentis in Deum.63 He seems to have influenced The Cloud of Unknowing also, either directly, or indirectly through intermediate writings which reiterated his teaching.64 Two


facts, the indubitable influence of Gallus on Deonis Hid Diuinile and the
congruence of the thought in this work and in the Cloud, strengthen the case
for direct influence, especially in view of the prominent and distinctive position
which Gallus occupies among medieval interpreters of pseudo-Dionysius.

The Cloud author’s emphasis on love or affection places him firmly beside
Thomas Gallus. Their terminology is slightly different in some particulars:
the Cloud author speaks of ‘loue’ where Gallus spoke of principalis affectio;
in the English treatise ‘affection’ and ‘wille’ designate the mental
faculty which Gallus usually designated as affectio or affectus. These English
terms reflect small and natural developments of Gallus’ theory of affection;
one may point to the same process in Vias Sion lugent, where Hugh of Balma
substituted words like affectio amoris, ardur amoris, and amor ardentrissimus
for Gallus’ principalis affectio. But there are no essential differences of
doctrine: the Cloud author shares Gallus’ belief in the primacy of love in the
soul’s ascent to God.

Vercellensis believed that the soul is united with God by the principal affection.
Similarly, the Cloud author states that the spiritual disciples of God may be
‘onid vnto God in parceite charite’ in so far as this is possible in this life

to be reducible to one or another of the following categories: ideas and images of fairly wide
currency, with roots in the Fathers and the Victorines; notions expressed with sufficient
clarity and amplitude by Gallus himself; logical extensions of Gallus’ thought which (one may
imagine) the Cloud author was perfectly capable of, given his interests and tastes. Leo’s
main argument turns on the belief that Hugh went beyond Gallus by formally dissociating
knowledge-in-love from other types of knowledge, on which see von Ivánka, ‘Apes mentis’
170; cf. the more elaborate and cautious statements by J. Krymen, ‘La Pratique et la théorie
de l’amour sans connaissance dans la Vias Syon lugent de Hughes de Balma,’ Revue d’asétique
tique et de mystique 40 (1964) 161–83, and F. Rusillo, ‘Statut et rôle de l’intellectus et de
l’affectus dans la Théologie mystique de Hughes de Balma,’ in Karlsruheristik und-Mystik I,
Analecta Cartusiana 55 (1981) 1–46. But Gallus’ contrasts between the Intellectus and the
affectus are quite sufficient to account for all the major contrasts between ‘understanding’
and ‘love’ found in the Cloud. It may be argued that the Cloud author shares Gallus’ opinions
concerning the function of intellect in the lower stages of contemplation (see especially The
Book of Priay Counselling 158.17–25) and the function of superintellect in the highest possible
stage (see especially the Cloud 62.14–19; cf. Piute of Prete 54.6–11). Moreover, it should be
noted that the most distinctive feature of Vias Sion lugent, its division of the contemplative
way into the purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages, is unparalleled in the Cloud, al-
though it does seem to have influenced two fifteenth-century tracts on the contemplative
life which contain extracts from the Cloud (on these see P. S. Jolliffe, ‘Two Middle English
must not be multiplied beyond necessity, especially when we know, on the Cloud author’s own
admission (in Deonis Hid Diuinile), that he knew Gallus’ interpretation of De mystica
theologia.

55 See the text printed among the work of Bonaventure, S. Bonaventurae opera omnia
(Venice 1751–55) 348, 353, 354, etc.; cf. the citations in Völker, Konempaltung und Ektase
232–35. P. Dubourg’s critical edition of Vias Sion lugent has yet to be published.
(85.7–8). For the *Cloud* author as for Gallus, love is the highest cognitive power, far superior to the powers of reason and intellect. God is incomprehensible to every created intellect (i.e. to the understanding of men and indeed of angels) but not to love (18.17–21). This echoes Gallus’ doctrine of ascent ‘per principalem affectionem ad Dei unionem, qui est . . . super omnem cognitionem tam humanam quam angelicam incomprehensibiliter collocatum.’

According to the *Cloud* author, there are two main mental powers, two types of ‘principal worching myȝt,’ the knowing faculty and the loving faculty. God is incomprehensible to the ‘knowable myȝt’ but comprehensible to the ‘louynge myȝt’:

> Bot siȝ alle resonable creatures, aungel & man, halp in hem, lehi-one by hem-self, a principal worching myȝt, þe whiche is clepid a knowable myȝt, & a noþer principal worching myȝt, þe whiche is clepid a louynge myȝt: of þe whiche two myȝtes, to þe first, þe whiche is a knowynge myȝt, God, þat is þe maker of hem, is euermore incomprehensibyl; & to þe secondd, þe whiche is þe louynge myȝt, in iche one diuersely he is al comprehensibyl at þe fulle. . . . (18.22–19.6)\(^56\)

This contrast between the *intellectus* and the *affectus* is reiterated constantly throughout *The Cloud of Unknowing*. For the *Cloud* author it is as rigid a distinction as it was for Thomas Gallus, and here both writers agree against Richard of St. Victor, who (as has been noted above) postulated a progressive movement through the mental hierarchy, an ordered transition from one type of contemplation to another. The *Cloud* author is not prepared to accommodate human reason and intellect in the higher reaches of mystical experience: God ‘may wel be loued, but not þouȝt. By loue may he be getyn & holden; bot bi þouȝt neiphe’ (26.3–5). In a manner strongly reminiscent of the way in which Gallus expounded Dionysius’ advice to Timothy, the *Cloud* author counsels his spiritual friend to reject all the normal processes of human thought, which depend on visible and substantial things. He who would be ‘oned’ with God must suppress all knowledge and feeling about anything less than God (see especially 81.21–83.5).

This emphasis on personal purification and preparation for grace squares with that ethical bias which has been singled out as a distinctive feature of


\(^57\) Cf. Gallus’ *Extractio* on *De divinis nominibus*, cit. Théry, *Vie spirituelle*, suppl. to vol. 32, p. 38: ‘It must be understood that our mind has a power for knowing, which we may call the speculative intellect *theoricius intellectus*, by which the mind looks into intelligible things. The mind, moreover, has a power of union, which we call the highest point of the affection [summus affectionis apex], which the love of God properly brings to perfection.’ See also the extract from Gallus’ commentary on the Song of Songs cit. von Ivanka, *Intellecutus oder Principalis Affectio* 190.
Gallus' medievalization of *De mystica theologia*. We have shown above how Gallus interpreted Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai in terms of the process whereby the contemplative separates himself from varied material opinions and earthly affections in order to ascend to God. One concomitant of this doctrine, in both the *Glossa* and the *Explanatio*, is discrimination between the gentle philosopher who believed that the intellect was supreme and the Christian mystic who recognises the superiority of the principal affection. This may lie behind the *Cloud* author's repeated attacks on learned men who suffer from intellectual pride: these latter-day philosophers refuse to recognise the superiority of love.

The point of the intelligence does not penetrate the divine incomprehensibility, Gallus argues, the eye of intellectual cognition cannot reach so high, whence mystical knowledge is said to be by ignorance. By the power of the principal affection the soul is united with God in that most excellent state which neither the reason reaches by investigation nor the intellect contemplates by vision; by the full affection of the mind we long to be in the superlucent darkness of the *caligo ignorantiae*, i.e. in a state which is 'superintellectual' since the intellect does not see or know it in any way. The parallels with the *Cloud* author's depiction of the cloud of unknowing are striking. When the soul begins to ascend to God it finds

> a derknes, & as it were a cloude of vnknowynge, þou wost neuer what, sauyng þat þou felst in þi wille a nakid entent vnto God. þis derknes x þis cloude is, how-so-euer þou dost, bitwix þee & þi God, & lette þee þat þou maist not see him cleerly by lyght of understanding in þi resoun, ne fele him in sweynes of loue in þin affeccon. (16.20–17.5)

But the eye of intellectual understanding is of limited avail. In this life knowledge cannot reach up to God but love can (33.11), and so it is necessary to 'fele in þin affeccon goostly' a 'blynde steryng of loue vnto God for him-self' (34.8–11). One must beat away at the cloud of unknowing 'wip a scharpe darte of longing loue' (38.12–13), recognising that we can encounter Him only in the darkness of this wonderful cloud: 'þer was neuer þit pure creature in þis liif, ne neuer þit schal be, so hige rausischid in contemplacion & loue of þe Godheed, þat þer ne is euermore a hige & a wonderful cloude of vnknowynge bitwix him & his God' (47.17–20). While the 'cleer siȝt' of God is not possible to us in this life, by grace God can give men the 'felyng' of Him (34.17–19). Hence, one should cease from intellectual activity and lift up one's love to that cloud, hoping that God will send out a beam of spiritual light to pierce it, thereby revealing some of His secrets. 'Þan schalt þou fele þine affeccon enflamid wip þe fiire of his loue, fer more þen 1 kan telle þee . . .' (62.14–18).

On Gallus' belief that the *apex intellectus* is inferior to the *apex affectus* see Walsh, *Sapientia Christianorum* 82, cf. Lees, *The Dionysian School* 204.
Traces of Thomas Gallus’ theory of affection may be found even in passages where the Cloud author is following closely Richard of St. Victor. As Hodgson has pointed out, chapters 63–66 of the Cloud are indebted to the classification of mental faculties which Richard had provided in chapters 3–6 of his Benjamin minor. But there is one major difference: the Cloud author has upgraded the will. Richard held that in the normal course of events reason is superior to affection, and when defining the soul’s faculties he treated affection along with sensuality, and reason along with imagination: sensuality serves affection just as imagination serves reason. In Richard’s allegorical scheme of contemplative ascent, the children of Rachel (= reason) are born after those of Leah (= affection), and it is Rachel’s lastborn son Benjamin who personifies contemplation in ecstasy. But Rachel dies at Benjamin’s birth, signifying that when the mind of man is carried beyond itself all the limits of human reasoning are surpassed. Attempting to describe how Benjamin is ravished in ecstasy, Richard reverts to the language of love; he returns, as it were, to Leah. This is the central paradox of Richard’s mystical theology: a progressive system of affirmative knowledge, governed by reason and intellect, culminates in a dark night of unknowing in which reasoning and intellection are transcended. The Cloud author will have none of this double standard. In chapter 64 he treats reason and will together, in chapter 65 he defines imagination, and in chapter 66 he defines sensuality. Thus, Richard’s link between will and sensuality is broken. As the faculty by which we choose good after it has been approved by the reason, and the power by which we are united with God, will is placed unequivocally above reason: ‘Wille is a mygt þorou þe whiche we chese good, after þat it be determinid wip reson; & þorow þe whiche we lorn God, we desire God, & resten as wip ful licyng & consent eendili in God’ (116.17–19). This extension of the thought of Richard of St Victor bears the stamp of Thomas Gallus.

Chapters 71–73 of the Cloud are based on Richard’s Benjamin major 4.22 to 5.1. From this portion of Richard’s text the Cloud author drew his account of Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai — and perhaps also the central image of his work, the cloud of unknowing, for here Richard described the darkness of unknowing as the nubes ignorantiae. But there is one interesting change which may be attributed to the influence of Gallus’ replacement of intelligentia with principalis affectio. The Cloud author allegorizes the Ark of the Covenant as

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60 The Cloud, ed. Hodgson, lxxv.
61 Benjamin minor 3–6, PL 196.3A–6A.
62 Benjamin minor 73, PL 196.52d.
63 See especially Benjamin minor 75–78, 80, PL 196.52d–56A.
65 The Cloud, ed. Hodgson, lxxii; cf. lxxi–lxxi.
love: just as the Ark contained all the jewels and relics of the temple, ‘riēt so
in his lityl loue put ben contenid alle be vertewes of mans soule’ (126.21–24).
There is nothing to parallel this in Benjamin major 4.22 to 5.1, but in 1.2
Richard had allegorized the Ark as intelligence:

Scimus autem quia pretiosa quaeque aurum, argentum et lapides pretiosi
soleant in arca reponi. Si igitur sapientiae et scientiae thesauros cogitamus,
quod sit illud ejusmodi thesauros reconditorum citius inveniimus. Quae
erit arca in id negotii idonea nisti humana intelligantia?65

For intelligentia the Cloud author has substituted ‘loue,’ in agreement with
the thought of Gallus. In sum, it would seem that the English writer read the
Benjamin minor and Benjamin major in the light of the opinions and emphases
of Vercellensis.

A similar conclusion may be reached through comparison of the themes of
imagination formulated by Richard of St. Victor, Gallus, and the Cloud author.
As has been demonstrated above, Richard placed considerable emphasis on the
importance of imagination in the first three of his six stages of contemplation,
whereas Gallus emphasized instead that the imagination, together with the
other lower faculties of the soul, must be left behind as the soul ascends to en-
counter the unknown God in darkness. It is Gallus’ emphasis which is present in
the Cloud. While the soul dwells in ‘his deedly body,’ the sharpness of our
understanding in beholding spiritual things, especially God, is unfortunately
‘medeldi wip sum maner of fantasie,’ which can lead us astray. Therefore, this
kind of thinking, which always interferes when one is trying to engage in the
‘blynd werk’ of contemplation, must ruthlessly be suppressed: ‘hot þou bere
him doun, he wil bere þee doun’ (33.11–20).66 The Cloud author is convinced
that the ‘bodely and fleshely consevtes of hem þat han corious & ymaginatyue
wittys ben cause of moche error’ (94.22–24). By contrast, the ‘denoute sterying
of loue’ in a pure spirit is ‘fer fro any fantasie, or any fals opynion þat may
befal to man in þis lif’ (91.14–18).

Richard of St. Victor had praised the imagination as the willing handmaiden
of reason: ‘always and in all things, imagination is ready, and reason can
employ her service everywhere.’67 Indeed, without imagination the soul would
not know corporeal things, and were she deprived of such knowledge she could

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65 ‘We know that every precious thing — gold and silver, and precious stones — is
usually placed in an ark. Therefore, if we consider the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,
we shall quickly discover what the storehouse of such treasures is. What ark will be suitable
for this activity, except the human intelligence?’ (PL 196.65c; trans. Zinn 153, to which I
have made one alteration).

66 Cf. Book of Privy Counselling 152.3–18, 157.27 to 158.16.

67 Benjamin minor 5, PL 196.5a; trans. Zinn 58.
not ascend to contemplation of heavenly things. Richard felt obliged, however, to enter the caveat that when the imagination is not controlled by the reason she will suggest phantasms and images to us which hinder greatly our spiritual progress. This warning is repeated with great relish in chapter 65 of the Cloud, where we are assured that, if the imagination is not restrained by the light of grace in the reason,

it wil never sese, sleping or wakyng, for to portray dyuerse vnordeynd ymages of bodely creatures; or elles sum fantasye, þe whiche is nouȝt elles bot a bodely conseyte of a goostly þing, or elles a goostly conseyte of a bodely þing. & þis is evermore feynid & fals, & aneste vnto errore. (118.3-5)

This disobedience of the imagination is clearly manifested by the prayers of those who have recently turned aside from the world into a life of devotion. For until such times as their imagination is controlled (which will happen after constant meditation on spiritual things),

þei move in no wise put away þe wonderful & þe divers ¿ȝȝes, fantasies & ymages, þe whiche ben mynystred & preentid in þeire mynde by þe lyȝte & þe corouste of þymanacyon. & alle þis inobedience is þe pyne of þe original synne. (118.3-6).

The positive aspect of Richard’s theory of imagination, which makes considerable provision for ‘ordeynd ymages,’ has altogether been ignored.

And this brings us to the major literary paradox of the Cloud. Despite the anonymous author’s constant dismissals of the imagination, he employs figurative language throughout his treatise. Rich symbolism and imagery is used to evoke something which, we are assured, beyond all literary symbolism and imagery. An explanation of this apparent clash of modus docendi and doctrina, of form and content, is to be found within Dionysian theology itself, as understood by late-medieval scholars. Such readers would have found nothing anti-Dionysian in the Cloud author’s literary practice: it is, as I now hope to show, perfectly justified and rendered more comprehensible by the literary theory which emerged during the ‘medievalization’ of the Dionysian corpus.

We have already noted that according to Thomas Gallus’ theory of symbolic language, names which ordinarily designate sensible things are transferred

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68 PL 196.4n. Later schoolmen emphasized such positive and commendable functions of the imagination in discussing the imaginative or phantastic or cogitative power (these different terms and divisions having been used by different authorities). See Nicholas H. Steneck, *The Problem of the Internal Senses in the Fourteenth Century* (Ph.D. thesis; University of Wisconsin 1970) 15-16, 52-54, 63-64, 68-73, etc.

69 *Benjamin minor* 6, PL 196.50-56.

to designate divine things in an analogical or ‘uprasing’ manner. Dionysius’ statement that Moses saw not God but the place where He dwells provided Gallus with a rationale for his exposition of this very statement with figurative language drawn from Scripture. When Gallus’ friend Robert Grosseteste came to expound the same passage of De mystica theologia he launched into a discussion of the literary method of analogic passages of Scripture. Anagogy has something of the earthly in it, he says, because it goes in search of God in His creatures, seeing in them God’s traces (vestigia) according to their degree of perfection. Grosseteste adds that ultimately the soul should go beyond anagogy to the vision of God which is without symbols and images. One implication of this explanation would seem to be that many Biblical writers had to resort to symbols and images in order to express themselves in human terms, and when expounding such passages theologians are justified in using the same manner of speaking. Hence the imagination is reinstated, its figures and symbols being recognised as useful, and perhaps indispensable, for human communication.

These ideas are made quite explicit in medieval interpretations of the first two chapters of De caelesti hierarchia. Pseudo-Dionysius had argued that the holy Scriptures depict the heavenly orders of angels by means of corporeal figures in order that we might be borne by them to those divine things which are without symbol and without type. As Gallus put it in his Extractio on De caelesti hierarchia,

Quapropter sancta ordinatio Dei, quae est principium perfectionis, dignata facere nostram sanctissinan hierarchiam supermundane imitataeangelici-carum hierarchiarum, ipsas angelicas hierarchias, in se immateriales, in sacris scripturis designavit variis materialibus figuris et formis compositis, ut nos (juxta singulorum capacitatem) per sanctas significations formarum sensibilium reducantur ad contemplationem simplicium, et non formabilium, et semper similiter se habentium, supernarum virtutum.

71 Glossa in PL 122.274b.
72 Grossatea al De mystica theologia, ed. Gamba, 34–36.
73 Cf. Mystical Theology and Celestial Hierarchies, trans. the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom, 21–28. The ideas found therein were very influential. See for example the prologues to the De proprietatibus rerum of Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Étienne de Bourbon’s Tractatus de diversa materiis predicabilibus, cit. Minnis, ‘Langland’s Imaginari’ 88–90. Typical of the scholastic uses made of the opening chapters of De caelesti hierarchia is Thomas Aquinas’ commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius, 6.2, ‘Should we entirely abandon the imagination in Divine Science?’ Sacred Scripture, Aquinas claims, does not present divine things to us under sensible things so that our intellect may stop with them, but in order that it may rise from them to the immaterial world. From Dionysius and other authorities he derives the doctrine that, while we must employ imagery in all our knowledge of the divine (the imagination being necessary to us in this present life), with regard to such matters we must never terminate there. See St. Thomas Aquinas: The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences, 3rd rev. ed. by Armand Maurer (Toronto 1998) 66–72.
Neque enim possiblē est nostrae menti sursum excitari ad illam immaterialēm imitationēm et contemplationēm caelestium hierarchiarum, nisi ipsa mens nostra (secundum conditionem praesentis caecitatis) utatur manuductione signorum materialis: reputando, quodam intimā aestimatione, sensibilēs pulchritudines esse imaginēs invisibilēs pulchritudinis, et sensibilēs gratos odores esse expressiones distributionis odoris insensibilēs, et materiālēs lumina esse imaginēs intelligibilēs luminis, et cognitivam intelligentiam sacrarum scripturarum esse imaginēm comprehensivae contemplationis quae mentes satiat. . . . et similiter reputando de quibuslibet allīs, quae caelestībus quidem substantīlis supernundane conveniunt, nobis autem sub aignis sensibilībus in Scriptūrās traduntur.74

Commenting on his own translation of this passage of Dionysius, Grossesetea remarks that ultimately we may contemplate the divine and intellectual beings without material forms and figures, and without phantasms, 'yet we shall not be able to attain to this contemplation unless we first use both the uplifting forms and material figures.'75 The same basic attitude to anagogic language is found in a section of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin minor* which seems to have been heavily influenced by the doctrine of *De caelesti hierarchia*, wherein the Scriptures are praised for the way in which they condescend to human infirmity by making use of an imaginative way of thinking:

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74 'So God's holy ordination, which is the beginning of perfection, condescending to make our most holy hierarchy in a supernatural way an imitator of the angelic hierarchies, designated in the holy Scriptures the actual angelic hierarchies, which are in themselves immaterial, by various material figures and composed forms, that we (according to our individual capacity) should, by the holy significations of forms which are comprehensible to the senses, be upraised to the contemplation of celestial virtues which are simple and without form, and always remain the same.

For it is not possible for our mind to be raised up to that immaterial imitation and to the contemplation of the heavenly hierarchies unless our mind itself (as far as its present condition allows) uses the guidance given by material signs; considering, as the result of inner judgment, that kind of beauty discernible to our senses are images of that beauty which cannot be seen, and that pleasing smells, discernible to our senses, are expressions of diffusion that cannot be so discerned, and that actual visible lights are images of light which is open only to the understanding, and that the cognitive understanding of the holy Scriptures is the image of that all-embracing contemplation which fully satisfies minds . . . . . and one must draw a similar conclusion about any number of other things, which describe appropriately heavenly substances in a way that is beyond worldly understanding, but are taught to us in the Scriptures under the guise of figures that can be grasped by the senses' (*Dionysiaca: Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys l'Aréopagite*, ed. P. Chevalier [Paris 1897] II 1043–44, sections 734–37).

Res enim invisibles, per rerum visibilibus formas describunt, et earum memoriam per quarundam concepsibilibus specierum pulchritudinem mentibus nostris imprimit. Hinc est quod nunc terram lacte et meli manantem promittunt; nunc flores, nunc odores nominant, nunc per cantus hominum, nunc per concentus avium coelestium gaudiorum harmoniam designant. Legite Apocalypsim Joannis et invenietis coelestis Hierusalem ornatum per aurum, et argentum, per margaritas vel alias quaslibet gemmas pretiosas multipliciter descriptum. Et scimus quidem quia horum omnium nihil ibi est, ubi tamen nihil omnino deesse potest. ... Haece enim statim cum voluerimus imaginari possimus. Nunquam imaginatio rationi utile esse poterit quam cum ei in tali obsequio deservit.76

All this may seem very far away from the *via negativa* of *De mystica theologia*, but one major symbol is used in this work, and it is used to illustrate the process of the *via negativa* itself. Dionysius, as translated by the Saracene, had explained that not to see and not to know is in itself to praise God in an appropriate manner, by the removal or abstraction of all existing things.77 This may be likened to the process whereby those who make an emblem or symbol (*insigne*) remove the encumbrances which obstruct the clear view of the concealed object, revealing its hidden beauty by this process of removal alone. According to Thomas Gallus, this means that we are able to know and see God superintellectually, namely by the removal of intellectual cognition, since God Himself can in no way be reached by intellectual vision.78 We can pray to God through the removal of all existing things, a process exemplified by artificers who make the similitude of something from some inanimate material.79 By sculpting and cutting they remove the outer parts of the grosser materials which conceal and cover the clear image (which naturally and potentially is inside) so that it cannot be seen. Solely by removing such obstacles and without adding anything else, the beauty of the image itself, which previously lay hidden in obscurity, is manifest in its proper form.

The translation of this Dionysian passage in *Deonise Hid Divinite* displays the influence of Gallus, but the *Cloud* author has added technical details about

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76 *For they describe unseen things by the forms of visible things and impress them upon our memories by the beauty of desirable forms. Thus they promise a land flowing with milk and honey; sometimes they name flowers or odours and describe the harmony of celestial joys either by human song or by the harmony of bird-song. Read John’s Apocalypse and you will find that the heavenly Jerusalem is often described as being adorned with gold and silver, pearls, and other precious gems. Yet we know that none of these things are in that place from which no good thing is absent. ... And we can immediately imagine these things when we like. The imagination can never be more useful to the reason than when she ministers to it in this way* (Benjamin minor 15, PL 196.10b-11a; trans. Clare Kirchberger, *Richard of St. Victor: Selected Writings on Contemplation* [London 1957] 92-93).

77 *Glosae* in PL 122.276a.

78 *Ibid*.

79 *PL* 122.276c.
carving a block of wood which make the exemplum more concrete and lively. Particularly interesting is the statement that the artist holds in his mind 'by clear craft of imagination' the image of his artifact:

First þou wost wel by natureel wit þat er he may com to for to see þat ymage hi cleer bodely sigt of his outward iche, or for to schewe it to be seen vnto iche, þe whiche he hap in hymself by cleer craft of yimaginacioun, þe stok gyt beyng hole on euery side, he most algates by craft & by instrumentes vaide awey alle þe outward partes of þat wode, being aboute & lettyng þe sigt of þat same ymage (6.3-9).

However, the English writer is not altogether satisfied with this illustration. First he hints that the profound point may not have been conveyed very well by so crude an example drawn from something which is utterly different in nature — 'Rigt so we must have us in his hige deuyne werk, as it is possible to be comyn to in ynderstondyng by soche a boistous ensample of so contrary a kynde.' (6.9-11) — and then he supplies his own exemplum, of a man who attempts to make an 'ymage' of his essential and spiritual nature. This is impossible while his nature is joined to his mortal body: it can only be seen as a thing which is covered and wrapped and overlaid with 'vnnumerable sensibl bodys & vnderstandable subsantaunces' and 'wip many a meruelous fantastik ymage,' all this being conglomerated into a cumbersome 'clog' about him, just as the image in the previous example was hidden in the thick, great, solid block (6.12-24). Here the Cloud author has managed to paint an imaginative picture which denigrates the imagination.

Imaginative denigration of imagination, and symbolic rejection of symbolism, figure largely in The Cloud of Unknowing. Numerous passages in this work indicate its author's debt to the theory of imaginative and symbolic writing which has been outlined above. In particular, there are constant attacks on literalism, the understanding of what is said spiritually in material terms: 'beware þat þou conceuye not bodely þat þat is mente goostly, þot al it be spokyn in bodely wordes' (114.3-10). Speech is a 'bodely werk' wrought by the tongue, which is an instrument of the body. No matter how spiritual something is in itself, it must always be spoken of in 'bodely wordes.' Shall it therefore be understood corporeally? Indeed not, but spiritually. Presumptuous young disciples often fail to realise this, the Cloud author complains, and misunderstand 'bodely wordes' like 'up or doun, in or oute, behinde or biforn, on o side or on oþer.' For example, they think that heaven is 'up' in the air somewhere, and 'þiw þe coriuste of here yimaginacion' penetrate to the planets, making a hole in the firmament to look at an anthropomorphic God:

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80 Cf. Deorise Hid Deitinite, ed. Hodgson, 126n.; also her appendix 97-98.
Dee's men wil make a God as hem lyst, & clopen hym ful richely in clopes, & set hym in a trone, fer more curiosuly þan euer was he depeynted in þis erðe. Dee's men wil maken angelles in bodely lices, & set hem aboute ich one with divers minstralsie, fer more corsul þan euer was any seen or herde in þis lif (105.11–16).

Clearly, this passage was influenced by the last book of De caelestii hierarchia, in which Dionysius undertook to explain the holy figures under which heavenly beings are described in Scripture. This entailed extensive allegorizing of, among other things, the human appearance and the clothes of the angels; medieval scholars supplied interpretations of their music. Dionysius, as translated by the Saracene, justified his exposition on the grounds that it would prevent us from remaining on the level of 'figurative phantasies.' In Gallus' Extractio on De caelestii hierarchia the passage is rendered as follows:

Haec igitur quae de sensibilibus invisibilium descriptionis scriptius, non plenarie invisibilita manifestant, sed nobis conferunt et illuminant ne in imaginariis descriptionibus animos deflugiamus, nihil ultra vel superius quaerentes; sed discamus per praedicta et in alius figuris sensibilibus investigare invisibilem veritatem.

The Cloud author tactily agrees with both aspects of this balanced statement. We should not remain at the level of imaginative descriptions but rise above them, yet by imaginative descriptions we are taught to investigate higher things. The fact that all images and symbols must ultimately be left behind by the upraised soul does not render them worthless; imaginative language may be used analogically, to 'raise up' the soul.

The most striking analogic image in the Cloud is of course the cloud of unknowing itself, and the English author is careful to indicate its non-literal and symbolic nature. He is not talking of a cloud of the sort one sees in the sky; neither is the darkness the kind one experiences at home when the light is out:

& wene not, for I clope it a darknes or a cloude, þat it be any cloude congeld of þe humours þat seel in þe ayre, ne ȝit any darknes soche as is in þin house on nigtes, when þi candel is oute. For soche a darknes & soche a cloude maist þou ymagyn wip coroluste of witte, for to bere before þin igen in þe lytest day of somer; & also ægenswarde in þe derkit nigð of wynter þou mayst

81 Dionysiaca, ed. Chevalier, II 1038.
82 Similarly, these things which we have written about the descriptions of invisible things rendered in terms understood by the senses, do not reveal the invisible things fully, but convey a notion of them to us and elucidate them, lest we hold down our minds in descriptions based on images, seeking nothing beyond or above that. But let us learn by means of the abovementioned to investigate the unseen truth in other figures which can be understood by the senses' (Dionysiaca, ed. Chevalier, II 1066).
83 Cf. the careful identification of other symbols in chapters 71 and 73 of the Cloud, ed. Hodgson, 126.10 to 127.13; 128.12 to 129.10.
ynagin a clere schynyng ligt. Lat be soche falsheed; I mene not þus. For when I sey derknes, I mene a lackyng of knowyng: as alle þat þing þou knowest not, or elles þat þou hast forgetyng, it is derk to þee, for þou seost it not wil þi goostly ȝe. & for þis skile it is not clepid a cloude of þe eire, but a cloude of vknwoynge, þat is bitwix þee & þi God. (23.13–24).

Gallus had defined the divine darkness as incomprehensibility, and stated that intellectual vision is useless when faced with it, hence human minds are said to be 'without eyes' (inoculatus) in this darkness. In his similar gloss, Grosseteste explained that Dionysius did not mean that the intellect should be 'without eyes,' which is not possible since 'the essence of the intellect is a spiritual eye.' (We may compare the Cloud author's remark that 'goostly, þe ȝe of þi soule is þi reson' [72.5].) According to Grosseteste, Dionysius' point was that the intellectual faculty has to be put aside altogether when we enter into the darkness of unknowing, since its 'eye' has nothing to see. Thinking such as this lies behind the Cloud author's statement that things which are not known and 'derk' cannot be seen 'wil þi goostly ȝe': the knowing power of the soul cannot perceive the unknown.

One remark in the Middle English passage quoted above is particularly interesting, namely that he is not speaking of the kind of darkness or cloud that

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84 Explanatio, in MS Royal 8.6.IV fol. 44r: 'non habentes oculos idest in principali affectionem, quo oculus intellectualis non attingit'; Glossa in PL 122.270c: 'in isto statu verbi nec ratio investigando palpabit, nec intellectio contemplando considerabit, radix autem aliarum simplicibus et effectu alier super fundit caelo et mentes, quae sibi tuas sunt oculos, vel quae non sunt materialibus sensibus.' Cf. Deontes Hid Disinhte 2.24–6: '... þoo soules þat hèn not hauing ȝe of mynde. And for alle þees jinges ben abouen mynde, þerfore wil affecyey abouen mynde as I may, I desire to purchase hem vnto me. ...' The reference to affection is not found in the Saracene's Latin, as Hodgson points out in her edition, 121 n.

one can imagine with visual accuracy in the brightest day of summer, just as
in the darkest night of winter one can imagine a clear shining light. It would
seem that in the Cloud author's mind the notion of darkness in light was
associated with the notion of light in darkness. This becomes more obvious in
chapter 68 of the Cloud, where we are told that the dark nothing which the soul
is being urged to experience may more accurately be described as an 'habun-
dance of goostly ligt' rather than actual darkness or the absence of physical
light (122.8–13).\footnote{This imagery derives, I suspect, at least in part from glosses
on Dionysius' reference to the supershining darkness of unknowing, rendered
in Deinita Hid Diuinita as 'he souereyn-unknown and he souereyn-shinyng
heigt of the derke inspirid spekynges, where alle he pvyue pinges of deunytee ben
kouerid and hid ynder he souereyn-schinyng darknes of wissest silence' (2.18–
21). The paradox that the divine darkness is light and the divine light is
darkness brought forth descriptions of rare beauty from the medieval com-
mentators. Galsus, for instance, was moved to say that 'the divine light is seen
through the divine darkness, and the light itself is discovered through the
setting of the luminaries, and there that which is clear is made dark, that which
is great is diminished, that which is human is made divine, which is unknown
is made even more unknown.'\footnote{The divine light,' he explains, 'is the
love of the divine knowledge; the divine night is the impossibility of compre-
hending that same knowledge,' while the setting of the luminaries may be
understood as the overreaching of all the senses and mental powers as the
soul enters a state of profound ignorance which is 'at its highest in the realm
of superior wisdom.' For Grosseteste, the darkness of divine inaccessibility is
in fact 'light surpassing all light'; it is superlucid in itself, with more than
blinding bright light.\footnote{Indeed, it is far too bright for the eyes of weak mortals,}

\footnote{Cf. the similar imagery in A Pstle of Preter 54.5–12.}
\footnote{Glosso in PL 122.279b.}
\footnote{Grossete\footnote{De mystica theologia,} ed. Gamba, 24–25; cf. 29–41. Cf. Grosseteste's
beautiful explanation of the image of a bright cloud sometimes applied to the angels in
Scripture: 'For a cloud has light within it hidden from us, which it receives from above, from
both the sun and the other heavenly bodies. It has also the matter of light hidden from us,
from which the gleams of light shine forth. It pours out plentifully these manifestations
of light, received for the most part from the heavenly bodies as a whole, on the things below it,
though these do not receive the light so fully, rather in proportion to their capacity to receive.
Moreover, the cloud is the mother of rain, and, by sending showers on the bosom of the earth,
it makes it conceive, bring forth, bud, and give life, growth, and maturity to its products;
so that the cloud itself has the same properties, since the cause possesses more fully and more
substantially the qualities it gives to the effects. Thus these properties of the clouds sym-
bolize the angels' properties; their being filled, indeed to overflowing, with the light that is
hidden from us, namely God; they receive the first manifestations of this light without display,
that is humbly, and bring it down plentifully to those below, giving them the maximum
amount they can take. The clouds also signify that the angels conceive intelligible showers,
of wisdom, that is, poured out by spiritual instruction, within the ability of the receivers;
to whom it appears as darkness. Albert the Great has a similar comment. The very brightness of the sun causes in the feeble human eye a certain darkness, although there is no actual darkness in the sun. Likewise, in God there are no obscurities, but because of His excessive splendour our eye is darkened, since in the face of such splendour it is powerless; divine mysteries are hidden to us by this darkness. All these glosses testify to the imaginative and affective power of the image which functions as the central symbol in *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

This completes our attempt to indicate some of the sources of the content and form of the *Cloud*, of both its mystical theology and the anagogic style of writing in which this doctrine is couched. Thomas Gallus described the utility of *De mystica theologia* as being to lead the soul to union with God by super-intellectual knowledge and affection, a description which is very appropriate to the *Cloud* also. The manner of speaking or *modus loquendi* employed in the English work is an imaginative and symbolic style, and the experiential and concrete quality of the imagery and symbolism contributes greatly to the affective appeal of the work. In sum, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a fine product of the very 'crafte of ymaginacioun' which its author was so concerned to transcend.

II

Hilton’s ‘Scale of Perfection’

In *The Book of Privy Counselling* the *Cloud* author makes a major concession of a kind not found in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Having emphasized that one cannot attain the height of perfection by intellectual means and by 'quinte ymaginacions & meditacions,' he admits that 'faire meditacions' are the best way for the beginner to commence his awareness of himself and of God: indeed, no sinner can have such awareness without first having seen and felt God through imagination and meditation concerning his own deeds and God’s:

Neuerpeles git ben pes faire meditacions pe trewest wey pat a synner may haue in his begynnynge to be goostly felyng of hymself & of God. & me wolde penk pat it were impossible to mans vnderstanding — pat al God may do what he wil — pat a synner schuld com to be restful in pe goostly felyng of

In order to bring forth, by reflection upon the instruction received, actions worthy of the teaching; to flower, through effort to extend their resolve into practice; to give life, by bringing them into act; to give growth by directing and repeating the actions; to give maturity by bringing them to a high point, and sustaining this; and those who pour out these showers possess these qualities in greater degree and more essentially' (*Grosseteste on the Celestial Hierarchy* obs. 10–15, ed. and trans. McEvoy, 199–201).

him-self & of God, but 3if he first sawe & felt by ymagination & meditacion 
be bodely doynges of hym-self & of God, & therto sorowed for pat pat were 
to sorowen, & maad jole for pat pat were to jolien. & who-so comeb not 
in bi pis wye, he comeb not trewly. . . . (158.17–25)

Such views are afforded far greater prominence in The Scale of Perfection of 
Walter Hilton. Like Richard of St. Victor, Hilton teaches an orderly progress-
ion from one spiritual step to another (as the title The Scale of Perfection 
immates), only at the very top of the contemplative ladder rejecting affirm-
tive thinking in the face of an indescribable mystical marriage between man 
and his maker wherein the soul becomes united to God in an ecstasy of love, 
and is confirmed to the likeness of the Trinity (1.8). In this ultimate stage, 
which comprises contemplation of Christ in His divinity, the imagination is 
transcended. However, according to Hilton it plays a major role in the pen-
ultimate stage, wherein the soul knows God 'purgh fail & ymagiacion of 
Jesu in His manhede' (2.30). Indeed, a man cannot have spiritual delight in 
contemplation of Christ's divinity unless he first engages in imaginative and 
affective meditation on His humanity (1.35). What for the Cloud author was 
a mere aside is for Hilton the basis of a commendable spiritual condition, a 
state of grace which is the highest that many good Christians attain.

The doctrine of the Cloud is essentially private and privileged; it can hardly 
be expressed and it is appropriate only to a select group of contemplatives. By contrast, while Book 1 of the Scale is addressed to a 'Dear Sister in Christ' 
(apparently an enclosed nun), in its entirety the work guides the reader through 
the entire process of meditation and contemplation, ranging from an explana-
tion of the kinds of meditative achievement possible in the active life to a 
description of the supreme achievement of the perfect contemplative who

90 For Book 1 of the Scale I have used Barbara E. Wykes, An Edition of Book 1 of The 
Scale of Perfection by Walter Hilton (Ph.D. thesis; University of Michigan 1957); for Book 
2, S. S. Hussey, An Edition from the Manuscripts of Book II of Walter Hilton's Scale of 
Perfection (unpub. Ph.D. thesis; University of London 1962). Since neither of these editions 
is widely available I have included in my text the book and chapter numbers, which will 
enable the reader to locate the passages in one of the many modernized versions, among which 
I have consulted those by Gerard Sitwell (London 1953) and Leo Sherley-Price (Harmonds-
worth 1957). Dr. Wykes' page numberings, and Dr. Hussey's page and line numberings, will 
be provided in footnotes.

91 Wykes 95.

92 Herein a man's soul is taken from 'alle erply and flasely afecciones, cro vayns bough-
tes and ymagnynges of alle bodili creatures, and as hit were mikel y-rauisched out of pe 
bodili wittes . . .' (Wykes 95).

93 Hussey 126.1.

94 'for a man schal nought comen to gostili delit in contemplacion of Cristes godhede buthe he 
come in ymagiacion bi hiternes and be compassion and be stedfast thinkenge of His man-
bode' (Wykes 145–46).
enjoys union with God. Hilton was exceptional among writers of his time in giving close attention to the problems of the contemplative life lived in an active state, and ... different features of the second treatise in the Scale illustrate concern with the spiritual progress of all Christians, no matter what their state of life' (‘Walter Hilton,’ in Pre-Reformation English Spirituality, ed. James Walsh [London and New York 1965] 182–97 at 195).

For elements which Hilton has in common with the so-called ‘religious handbook tradition’ see Joseph E. Milosh, The Scale of Perfection and the English Mystical Tradition (Madison 1986) 140–68. Yet these elements should not be emphasized disproportionately, in view of the highly sophisticated and sublime instruction found in the closing chapters of the Scale.


98 Wykes 107.

99 Wykes 89–93.

images perform similar functions in the spiritual progress of imperfect Christians, according to Hilton’s theory of affection and imagination.

In the first book of the Scale three degrees of contemplation are described. The first consists of the knowledge attained by ‘colde, naked raisen’ (1.4). This is acquired through the teaching of other men and our own study of the Scriptures; it is not accompanied by any interior consolation brought about by a gift of the holy Spirit. Unfortunately, men who possess such knowledge are prone to the sin of intellectual pride; one is reminded of the similar warning in the Cloud, although of course the overall context is very different. The second degree of contemplation consists principally in the act of love and involves no special illumination of the intellect (1.5). It is commonly achieved by active men, including simple and unlearned people who devote themselves wholly to God: the holy Ghost may give such men the grace to feel fervent love and great devotion at the thought of Christ’s passion or some other event in His earthly life. However, only contemplatives experience this degree to the fullest possible extent. The third and highest degree of contemplation consists of both knowledge and love, in knowing God and the perfect love of Him; by divine grace the ‘cognicion’ is ‘illumined for to see bi vndirstandyng, soffastnesse, whilk is God, and gostli pinges,’ while the will is inflamed ‘with a soft, sweet, burning love’ (1.8). This assertion that both the intellect and the affectus are involved in the ultimate contemplative experience places Hilton along with Richard of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas rather than with those thinkers, including Thomas Gallus, Hugh of Balma, and the Cloud author, who identified the affectus as the faculty by which the soul is united with God.

In the second book of The Scale of Perfection Hilton elaborates on his synthesis of affection and intellect. Love and light are both found in a pure soul (2.46). For truly humble souls, the true Sun, i.e. the Lord Jesus, will illumine here resoun in knowynge of sopfastnes & kyndelen here affeccioun in brenynge of luft, & than schal þei hop brennen & schynen. Þei schul þurw vertus of þis heavenly sunne bren in perfitt luft, & shynen in knowynge of God & gostli pinges . . . (2.26)

However, it would seem that the intellect plays the dominant role. The view of Gallus and the Cloud author that the principal affection is a cognitive power, and the highest one possessed by the human soul, is not shared by Hilton, who believes rather that the supreme cognitive faculty is the intellect, which is,

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101 Wykes 91.
102 ‘he seconde parte of contemplacion lith principali in affection withouten light of vnderstandynge of gostly pinges’ (Wykes 91).
103 Wykes 93–94.
104 Wykes 95.
105 Hussey 101.19–102.2.
considered in relation to the other human faculties, superior to the will or affectus.\textsuperscript{107} In the mental ascent through the degrees of perfection the intellect leads the way, since affection follows intellect: 'lufe com[pl] oute of knowynge & not knowynge oute of luf' (2.34).\textsuperscript{108} The soul cannot love what it does not know; the more it knows, the more it loves: 'perfor it is seid pat in knowynge & in sigt principally of God with lufe is pe blis of a soule, & pe more He is known pe better is He lufed.'\textsuperscript{109} Similarly, the Cloud author had placed the will's choice of good after its determination by reason, but for him the significance of this relationship was quite different. The Cloud affirms the supremacy of will over intellect whereas the Scale (2.34) emphasizes the primacy of intellecction. Hilton does go on to say that the soul cannot attain knowledge of God, or the love which arises from it, without love, but here he is indicating the ultimate supremacy of uncreated love ('lufe vnformed'), which is God Himself, the third person of the Trinity. 'Lufe formed,' the created love produced by the human soul, is not the cause of a soul coming to 'pe gostly sigt of Jesu,' as some men believe, but rather 'lufe vnformed & vmade.' As uncreated love, God brings the human soul to knowledge of Him and thus to the created love of Him which is kindled in the affectus as a result of this intellecction. Only in this sense can it be said that the man who possesses the highest degree of love in this life is most pleasing to God (2.35).\textsuperscript{110}

To make the same point in terms of Hilton's version of traditional metaphors, light precedes burning and sight comes before affection. Divine grace having closed the corporeal eyes, the soul sleeps to the worthlessness of the world, and the spiritual eyes being opened, it wakes to the sight of God's majesty hidden under His humanity (2.40).\textsuperscript{111} Intellectual vision increases as God gradually opens 'pe innere eye of pe soule' (2.32).\textsuperscript{112} The intellect of a tried and tested soul is strengthened and illumined by the gift of the holy Ghost, and it sees God with great reverence and ardent love, with spiritual sweetness and heavenly joy, more clearly and more fully than can be described. Of course, unimpeded vision of the Sun is not possible in this life: the contemplative is like a man who sees the light of the sun but not clearly, because his eyelids, i.e., his bodily nature, prevent him. However, the purer and more refined the soul becomes, and the more independent it is of the body, the clearer is its view of the divinity in Jesus.\textsuperscript{113} The contrast with the thought of Gallus and

\textsuperscript{108} Hussey 146.16.
\textsuperscript{109} Hussey 146.17–147.1.
\textsuperscript{110} Hussey 153.20–154.2.
\textsuperscript{111} Hussey 185.6–17.
\textsuperscript{112} Hussey 136.18.
\textsuperscript{113} Hussey 139.5–19.
the Cloud author is most striking. As we have seen, they emphasized the notion of mental blindness in face of the divine incomprehensibility: in the superlusive darkness of the caligo ignorantiae the eye of intellectual understanding ceases its operation as the principal affection comes into its own.

Hilton's belief in the importance of intellect in the ultimate stage of contemplation is of a piece with his insistence on the major role played by imagination, acting as the handmaid of intellect, in the penultimate stage. Basically, there are two ways of knowing God:

On is had principally in imaginacion, & litel in vnderstandyng. Dis knowynge is in chosen soules bigynyng with profite and grace, but known God & Hef Him al manie not gostly, with manly affection & with bodily likenes. ... Anoper knowynge is principally feled in vnderstandyng, whan it is conforted & illumined by the Holy Gost, & litel in imaginacion. For the vnderstandyng is lad, & the imaginacion is as mayden seruende to the vnderstandyng when neede is. (2.31)\[14]

Clearly, this is a simplification of Richard of St. Victor's scheme of six types of contemplation, as paraphrased above.

Echoing ideas from Richard's Benjamin minor and the first two chapters of Dionysius's De caelesti hierarchia, Hilton admits that it is very difficult for an untutored soul that is weighed down by the body truly to know itself, or an angel, or God (2.30).\[15] It imagines a 'bodily shappe,' intending in that way to acquire knowledge of itself, and so of God and other spiritual things. But this is impossible, because 'alle gostly thinges are seen & knowne by vnderstandyng of the soule, not by imaginacion.' No matter how much fervour of devotion and fire of love the soul may feel, as long as its conception of God is largely or wholly dependent on imagination rather than intellect, it has not yet attained perfect love or contemplation.\[16]

However, although much less elevated than the intellectual contemplation of Christ's divinity, imaginative meditation on the humanity of Christ is definitely good and inspired by grace. This is made absolutely clear in Hilton's classification of the three stages of love in 2.30,\[17] a scheme which to some extent parallels the three degrees of contemplation described in the first book of

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\[14\] Hussey 136.4–15.
\[15\] Hussey 124.6–13. Perhaps it should be emphasized that, although Hilton took over certain technical terms and certain formulations of traditional ideas from Richard of St. Victor, Richard cannot be regarded as being a determining influence on him. The point is rather that Hilton is employing some of Richard's terms and formulations within a framework determined especially by Augustine and Bernard. For example, Hilton's references to imagination are very much bound up with Bernard's doctrine of the carnal and spiritual types of love. I am indebted to J. P. H. Clark for valuable discussion of these facts.
\[16\] Hussey 125.9–14.
\[17\] Hussey 125.15–126.6.
the Scale (1.3–9). All three stages of love are good, Hilton explains, but they become progressively better. The first is in faith alone without any knowledge of God given in the imagination or in the intellect by grace; in the second the soul knows God not only by faith but also in the humanity of Jesus through the imagination; while in the third the soul's contemplation extends to the divinity that is united to the humanity, in so far as this is possible in this life. Naturally, few people are able to attain such intellectual contemplation, and therefore God, because of His love of all humanity, made provision for lesser mortals:

Nerpeles vnto swilc soules þat can not þinken of þe Godhed gostly, þat þei schuld not eren in here deuoциoun, bot þat þei schuld be conforted & strengthed þurgh sum maner inward beholdeynge of Jesu, for to forsake synne & þe luf of þe werld; þerfore oure Lorde Jesu tempreþ His vnseeable light of His Godhed, & cloþip it vndir bodiliy liknes of His manhed, & schewip it to þe inner eye of a soule & fedeþ it with þe luf of His precious fleische gostly . . . oure Lord Jesu in His Godhed is a spirit, þat may not be seen of vs lîfande in fleische as He is in His blissid lîght. Þerfore we schal liken vnder þe shadwe of His manhedec as longe as we are here. (2.30)119

At the beginning of De caestiti hierarchia Dionysius had described Jesus as the Light who lights every man coming into the world, through whom we have access to the source of light, God the Father.120 The supremely divine ray cannot illuminate us mortals except through sacred veils and shadows, which are disposed for our benefit by divine forethought. For Hilton, the human nature of Christ was the major shadow by which the divine light is mediated to men, and imaginative meditation on ‘þe shadwe of His manhedec’ was a major step towards eventual vision of the divinity behind the humanity.

According to Hilton, beginners and those who are not far advanced in their spiritual course can love Jesus only ‘as it were al manly and fleashly after þe condicions & þe liknes of man. And vpon þat rewarde þe schapen al here wirkyng, in here þouxges & in here affecciouns’ (2.30).121 They reverence Him as man, and adore Him and love Him principally through their imaginations. The parallel with Richard of St. Victor is so striking as to suggest direct influence:

Sed quis nesciat quam sit difficile, imo quam pene impossibile mentem carnelam, et adhuc in studiis spiritualibus rudem, ad invisibillum intelligentiam assurgere, et in illis contemplationis oculum figere? Nulla quippe novit adhuc, nisi corporalia; nil alius adhuc cogitans occurrat, nisi quae cogitare consuuet sola visibilia. Quaeiret invisibilia videre, et nil occurrit nisi formae rerum visibilibus; desiderat intueri incorporate, et nil somniat nisi imaginum

118 Wykes 88–89.
119 Hussey 128.5–129.5.
120 De caestiti hierarchia 1; see the various Latin versions printed in Dionysiac, ed. Chevallier, II 727–39.
121 Hussey 128.9–12.
rerum corporallum. Quid igitur faciat, quid agat? Nonne melius est quall-
cunque modo illa cogitare, quam oblivionem vel negligentiam tradere? . . .
Faciat tamen quod potest, intuetur ea quomodo posse. Cogitat per imagina-
tionem, quia neecessum videre valet per intelligentiam puritatem,122

Hilton provides three examples of such imaginative thinking.123 If the un-
proficient have sinned, they think that God is angry with them as a man would
be whom they had wronged, and so they fall down as it were at the feet of our
Lord and ask for mercy. When they wish to adore God, they imagine our
Lord in a bodily form aglow with wondrous light. Similarly, when they wish
to love God, they think of Him, worship Him, and reverence Him as a man,
calling the passion of Christ or some other event in his earthly life. These
imaginations move them greatly to the love of God.

But the imagination must remain the subservient handmaiden of the intel-
lect. Hilton warns against the illusions and hallucinations which it can pro-
duce when it is not controlled properly, or indeed when it is influenced by
the devil. Those who give themselves wholly to meditation without adequate
preparation fall into fantasies and strange imaginations (1.28).124 Since the
soul can be occupied in imagining worldly vanities, the windows of the imagina-
tion need to be closed to sensual and external things (1.81).125 Only then can
the faculty form a fitting image of Him which will be useful in meditation.
In a short treatise attributed to Hilton, Of Angels' Song, this valuable activity
of the imagination is mentioned but its problematic nature is emphasized. The
true song of angels, Hilton explains therein, is not to be mistaken for the false.
The man who seeks heavenly things in a violent manner may overwork his
wits by imagination, and, because of the feebleness of his brain, think that he
hears wonderful sounds and songs. But this is nothing other than ‘a vanite
and a fantasy of be heued, or els it es be wirkyng of be enemy but fynes
swylk soun in his herung’ (13.119–29).126 It is only when the reason is cleared

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122 But who does not know how difficult it is — or rather how well-nigh impossible it is
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123 Hussey 126.12–127.8.
124 Wykes 132–33.
125 Wykes 229–30.
126 Of Angels' Song, ed. Teishyuki Takamiya in Two Minor Works of Walter Hilton (Tokyo
1980) 9–15. References are to Prof. Takamiya's page and line numberings.
fra al werdy and fleshly behaldyngys and fra al bodyly ymagnaciouns, figurs and fantasis of creatures’ that it can, with the aid of divine grace, experience the genuine article, together with an abundance of ‘many other comforthes, saours, sweetenes, and wonderful felyngs’ (10.17–18, 11.45–46).

According to Of Angels’ Song a naked imagination or a naked intellect of Jesus or of any other spiritual thing is but a blindness unless it is concomitant with ‘swetnes of luf in pe affeccioun’ and ‘light of knawynge in resoun’ (15.184–85) — an echo of the claim made in the Scale that in genuine contemplation both the affectus and the intellectus are involved. As Hilton makes clear in the Scale, affection is involved in all three degrees of contemplation, and the higher the degree the more purified is the affectus.127 In the synthesis of affect and intellect characteristic of the second or penultimate degree, the imagination is dominant; it stimulates the soul to human affection (‘manly affeccioun’), so-called in contradistinction with the refined and therefore spiritual type of affection present in the third and highest degree (2.30).128 Hilton affirms that beginners and those who are not spiritually gifted by nature should foster human and natural love through the imagination, until greater grace be given them. Since such people can think of Jesus only as a man living under earthly conditions, and all their affections are shaped by this limitation, they worship and love Him principally in His human aspect. But, of course, the soul should desire to have a spiritual love and understanding of Christ’s divine nature as well as His human nature. The divine goodness can transform one’s natural aspiration to God into spiritual affection (‘gostly affeccioun’ 2.35).129 In the manner of Richard of St. Victor, Hilton conceives of a transition rather than an enormous leap from ‘manly affecciouns’ and ‘gracious ymagnacioun’ to the ‘gostly affeccioun’ and illumined intellect with which the soul, as far as it may in this life, contemplates the Godhead united to manhood in Christ.

What, then, is the function of material images like paintings and sculptures in the earlier stages of the soul’s ascent of the ladder of perfection; how useful are they to those lesser mortals with whose spiritual welfare Hilton is so concerned? As we have seen, in the first book of De caelesti hierarchia Dionysius had described the way in which certain material things may guide the intellect to spiritual things. Visible beauties are reflections of the invisible comeliness, sweet sensual odours are emblems of spiritual dissemination, and so on. According to Grosseteste, by visible beauties Dionysius meant such beauties as existed in the temple of Solomon, and such as still exist in present-day

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127 See the Scale 2.30 and 35 in toto; Hussey 122.14 to 132.22, 153.15 to 158.5.
128 Hussey 131.5–6.
129 Hussey 153.17–18; 157.19.
Christian churches. Our intellect, he continues, regards religious *objets d'art* as images or imaginations of an invisible and intelligible beauty and comeliness, which exists in the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the tabernacle and temple were the figure and type, as is Holy Church. This belief in the emblematic and symbolic nature of artifacts is one of the main assumptions behind the defence of material images offered in the Latin treatise *De tolerandis imaginibus* which Hilton wrote against Wycliffite iconoclasts between 1385 and 1395. Although three Church Fathers, Saints Gregory, Damascene, and Augustine, are the authorities mentioned therein, on occasion the influence of Dionysian thought-patterns is evident.

Six erroneous views are discussed in detail in *De tolerandis imaginibus*, the last four of which are of special interest to us. Hilton's opponents had complained that certain simple and unlearned people fail to realise that religious *objets d'art* are merely the signs of absent things. Images originally were instituted to excite devotion and to lead the faithful by an exterior sign to interior and spiritual adoration. But nowadays simple laymen and idiots, acting out of ignorance, render great reverence to images, both in exterior behaviour and in interior affection (*affectus*), as if these things were the actual objects of worship. In this they sin gravely; their ignorance does not excuse them any more than it excused those idolatrous Jews condemned in the Old Testament. From this another point follows, namely, that images were instituted not as an end in themselves but as a means to an end. By this memorialistic means, simple folk were supposed to be led and advanced towards spiritual adoration. But many people concentrate all their deliberation and affection on the images themselves, thereby ignoring the end (i.e., God and His saints) and remaining superficially and illicitly with the means. St. Paul says that 'corporeal agency is of little value' (1 Timothy 4:8), which may be understood to mean that the corporeal and exterior worship of images is far inferior to the interior and perfect adoration of God. This brings us to the final argument offered in support of the rejection of images, and here the influence of Dionysian

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thought is apparent. It is particularly reprehensible to represent the most blessed Trinity in corporeal form: because God is the sum of inreate spirit, invisible, incorporeal, and without limit, as are the Son and the Holy Spirit, these three being but one God, imaginary forms (imaginarios formas) must not be ascribed to them.

Hilton's reply to these arguments is precise and pragmatic. In the early Church, he explains, the few faithful people who believed in Christ were almost all perfect, and were prepared to be martyred for the faith. They did not need to be led to devotion by exterior signs or images since their hearts had been recently inflamed by the memory of our Lord's passion. Signs became necessary with the spread of the faith, when among the multitude of believers few were perfect and many were imperfect, carnal, and idiotic. Moving from history to psychology, Hilton states that human nature is weak and always inclined to the evil and vanity of this visible life. The remedy is an appropriate one: through what St. Paul called 'corporeal agency,' in this case by means of signs, the stubborn are moved, the unlearned are taught, and the imbeciles are led by the hand, to internal and spiritual knowledge and love of God. Images of the crucified Christ and His saints are not in themselves adored as divine with the intellect and affection of the mind: what happens is that by the sight of images the mind is recalled to the memory of the passion of our Lord and the passions of the saints. In this manner, slow and carnal minds are aroused to compunction and devotion.

A distinction is then made between the needs of the perfect and those of the imperfect. Although St. Paul said that 'the hidden wisdom of God is spoken among the perfect in mystery' (1 Corinthians 2.6–7), nevertheless he condescended to the weak and carnal by preaching to them plainly and aptly: 'I could not address you as spiritual men but as men of the flesh' (1 Corinthians 2.2). The perfect or proficient do not need to be nourished on the milk of corporeal signs, or to learn through the sight of images, because they are fed with the solid food of truth and spiritual adoration (cf. 1 Corinthians 3.2). The milk is rather for those who are like children in understanding, namely, simple layfolk, on account of whom signs were instituted. Such, Hilton affirms, was the intention of the Church and the cause whereby images and other corporeal signs were established in churches. As St. Gregory says, 'what Scripture conveys to clerks a picture is wont to exhibit to layfolk.'128 Just as literate people, by inspecting sacred Scripture, are instructed and moved to compunction and devotion, so layfolk by inspection of images may be recalled to the memory of

Christ’s incarnation and passion, in which the salvation of mankind consists, and thus be excited the more frequently to the ardent desire of compunction.\footnote{On these notions see S. Ringborn, ‘Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions — Notes on the Place of Art in Late-Medieval Private Piety,’ Gazette des Beaux-Arts ser. 6, 78 (1969) 159–70.}

Because of the idolatry of the gentiles who had been seduced by the illusions of demons, God prohibited the children of Israel from making images of Him. But nowadays, Hilton assures us, images in Christian churches record the historical fact that God took on human form in Christ. It is useful and proper for an absent friend, in this case Christ, to be remembered by a mnemonic sign. This principle applies not only to the image of our crucified Lord but also to the images of God’s saints, which similarly are venerated as signs and not realities. Images which represent the Trinity also are signs of certain historical events recorded in Scripture: God the Father did appear in the form of a man, God the Son actually assumed human nature, and God the holy Spirit adopted the form of a dove.

But what of the charge that the worship of images by certain contemporary Christians seems to be at variance with the original reason for their institution? Hilton’s solution is to distinguish between the ‘explicit intention’ of the learned and the ‘implicit intention’ of simple laymen. The former group are fully aware that images are nothing other than wood or stone: when they kneel before the images that serve as reminders they forget the physical objects as such and send forth their prayers to God and His saints. The latter, by contrast, have in mind the images themselves and not God. Their intellectus and affectus are occupied with what is external and sensory, yet their habitual intention is directed towards God in whose name they adore the images. This ‘sensual and carnal affection,’ therefore, is not reprehensible. Hilton is adamant that simple believers should not worry about worshipping images, although they may not always use them properly (i.e. as mnemonic signs which excite to interior adoration), because they mean well, believing that they are acting in accordance with the custom and practice of the Church. If they knew better they would want to do better.

It is clear, then, that according to Hilton material images, like the literary imagery or imaginarias formas found in certain figurative passages of Scripture, at once teach and move, by appealing to both the intellect and the affection. A more elaborate version of this doctrine, with special emphasis placed on the role of the imagination, is found in the refutation of Lollard attitudes to images which forms part of Reginald Pecock’s Repressor (ca. 1449). Amplifying St. Gregory’s notion that images are the books of the unlearned, Pecock describes how a learned man may use both books and images.\footnote{The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy by Reginald Pecock, ed. Churchill Babington (Rolls Series 19; London 1860) 1212–13.}
to be 'remembrid' of the passion of St. Peter or St. Paul or the holy life of St. Nicholas, although he can read about these things he can learn about them much more quickly 'bi siet of the jyre in biholding an image.' The 'iye siȝt schewith and bringith into the ymaginacioun and into the mynde withynne in the heed of a man myche mater and long mater sooner, and with lasse labour and traveil and peine, than the heering of the eere dooth.' Moreover, anyone wishing to kindle his affections concerning Christ our absent friend will find images an invaluable stimulus to the imagination, which has the power to make present and vivid His passion:

Each man hath nede forto have gode affecciouns anentis Crist, as upon his best freend; and this freend gaueth not to us his presence visibill; wherfore it is profitable to ech man for to ymagine this freend be present to us bodili and in a maner visibill. And sithen herto serveth ful weel and ful myche the ymage of Crist crucified, whilis and if the biholder ymagineth Crist to be streȝt abode bodili thoruȝ the bodi of the same ymage, heed to heed, hond to hond, breste to breste, foot to foot, — theryfor the olde praktik of deuoute Cristen men was forto so ymagynen; thouȝ thel knewen and bleueneden weel ynoȝ, that it was not so in deede as thel deuoute ymagyneden.\textsuperscript{125}

Apparently, Pecock held a higher opinion than Hilton of images both material and mental. For Hilton, the more perfect the Christian the less he need rely on images of whatever kind.

This is made utterly clear by the distinction, made in the \textit{Scale}, between the nourishing milk appropriate to spiritual children and the solid food appropriate to spiritual adults (2.31).\textsuperscript{126} As in the \textit{De tolerandis imaginibus}, in the \textit{Scale} this gastronomic metaphor reinforces the difference between the imperfect who need imagery and the perfect who do not. The inferior manner of knowing God, which depends principally upon the imagination and little on the understanding, is a kind of milk by which 'chosen soules bigynnande & profitande in grace' are 'tendrely norisched as children, vntil pai ben able for to coman to be faders borde & taken of his hande hool brede.' The superior manner of knowledge depends principally upon understanding, imagination having little place. 'Dis knowynge is hol brede, mete for perfite soules, & it is reformynge in felynge.' This reformation of feeling is described variously in the two books of the \textit{Scale}, although the basic point is the same, as we shall see.

In the first book Hilton argues that in order to attain the highest state of perfection possible in this life you must exclude from your mind all corporeal images ('drawe inner bi þouȝt from alle ymageninge . . . of oni bodili þing'), and all thought of your former activites, directing your whole intention and purpose to the Lord Jesus, desiring nothing except His grace and presence

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.} I 269.
\textsuperscript{126} Hussey 156.8–17.
(1.52). What will you find? A dark and painful image (‘a mirk ymage and a peinful’) of your own soul, which possesses neither the light of the knowledge of God nor any love and devotion to Him. This image is entirely enveloped in the black cloak of sin; you carry this black shadow with you wherever you go. Withdraw, therefore, your thoughts from all material things, and you will find ‘riȝt nouȝt’ in which your soul may rest, a ‘nothing’ which is defined as darkness of mind and lack of love and light (1.53). Here Hilton is using the imagery of darkness with its standard Augustinian connotations of spiritual deprivation and alienation. In this context, the concepts of ignorance (‘vnconnynge’) and blindness (‘gostle blindness’) are being used not paradoxically but according to their usual pejorative senses. The reader is urged to struggle through this darkness which, with all its sorrow, pain, and blindness, hides Christ from him.

On the other hand, in the second book of the Scale Hilton speaks of a ‘liȝtsom darknes’ or ‘liȝty mirknes,’ a ‘godne niȝt’ and a ‘riȝte nouȝt’ (2.24, 25, 27). Is this terminology due to the influence of the Cloud, which he may have read after completing Book 1 of the Scale? It is quite possible that Hilton may have derived from the Cloud a smattering of the language of negative theology, but a smattering is all it is. The references to darkness found in Book 2 have no apophathic connotations; it is as if Hilton focused on Chapters 68 and 69 of the Cloud, to the exclusion of its earlier references to darkness as a lack of knowing. Hilton’s seeker after truth enters a glowing darkness which shuts out the false light and love of the world and ushers in the dawn of the true day; Jesus, who is both love and light, is found therein (2.24). This darkness is painful to those who are not yet enlightened and cleansed, but eventually it becomes restful, ‘whan þe soule is hid for a tyme fro þe pyneyful felynge of alle swilk vayne pouȝtis, & onely is restyd in desyre & lonynge to Iesu with a gostly bhoidyng of Him.’ In the first book of the Scale Hilton had described the darkness of sin; here in the second book he is employing imagery of night and darkness to describe, in terms strongly reminiscent of Chapters 68 and 69 of the Cloud, the process of adjustment from a state of sin to a state of grace. Yet in both Hilton’s books the central concept is the same, namely the Augustinian imperative of restoring in man, through the removal of sin, the divine likeness which is one’s true self. For Hilton the lightsome darkness is a means to an end: having passed through the cleansing, and to that extent welcome,

137 Wykes 181–83.
139 Hussey 88.9, 90.17, 83.8, 103.2, 109.16.
141 Hussey 88.9–11, 91.10–11.
142 Hussey 93.2–5.
darkness, the soul may proceed to higher things. The intellectus and affectus are raised to their highest possible states as ‘he innere ily of he soule’ is opened to see Christ as He is in His divinity, ‘in vindirstandynge bat is comforted & lighted bi he gifte of he Holy Gost, with a wondyrful reverence & a priue brendande lufe, & with gostly savour & heueneul delite, more clerly & more fully þen it may be wryten or sayde’ (2.32).²⁴³ By contrast, the Cloud author believed that ‘þe soureyyn-schinynge darknes’ was reached in the penultimate stage of the mystic quest. The higher part of contemplation, as we know it in this life, is wholly caught up in darkness: the soul must wait in this darkness as long as is necessary, striking at the thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of love, until God may, perhaps, send out a shaft of spiritual light to reveal some of His secrets (Cloud 32.5–8, 26.8–12, 62.14–17).

One obvious conclusion which may be drawn from this is that Hilton had a somewhat casual attitude towards the metaphorical expression which medieval writers often called upon to support and clarify their scholastic terminology and distinctions. Doubtless, Hilton would have countered this charge by appealing to the inexpressible nature of the spiritual realities in question; the apparent lack of consistency revealed by our inquiry exists only at the level of human communication. Language, like visual art, is an adequate sign-system in respect of this world, but hopelessly inadequate in respect of the world to come. Faced with an impossible task, the mystic writer is obliged to use each helpful word and metaphor in various significations and applications.

The inexpressible nature of spiritual realities is discussed in Book 2, Chapters 32–33 of the Scale, a section which probably was influenced by Chapters 51, 52, and 57 of the Cloud. The saints have written about heaven being opened to the eyes of a pure soul, Hilton says, but it must be recognised that such language is metaphorical and analogical. This opening of heaven does not imply, as some think, that the soul can see ‘by ymaginacloun þyr þe skyes abouen þe firmament, how oure Lorde Iesu sittip in His maieste in a bodily liyt as mikel as an hundred sunnes’ (2.32).²⁴⁴ Anyone who desires to seek God wisely must not picture His majesty in this manner. Instead, let him forget the sun and all the firmament, which after all are inferior to both God and man, ‘& þenke þan if he can gostly bop of himself & of God also’ (2.33).²⁴⁵ The Cloud author could be making these statements. But Hilton’s distinctive voice dominates the overall context, arguing the case of imperfect and uneducated Christians. Thinking of our Lord in an imaginative way is permissible for simple souls, ‘þat kunne no bettere seke Him þat is vnseable’ (2.32).²⁴⁶ The supreme

²⁴³ Hussey 137.3–4, 15–19.
²⁴⁴ Hussey 141.5–8.
²⁴⁵ Hussey 142.13–21.
²⁴⁶ Hussey 141.12–13.
precedent of holy Scripture is cited, wherein God is described as Light and Fire. Language of this kind is necessary in the first instance because of our corporeal nature, but with the aid of divine grace the soul can understand corporeal descriptions spiritually:

Dese wordes & al ober þat are spoken of oure Lorde in holy writynge bi bodily liknes, moste medis ben vnndrstonden gostly, elles ther is no sauour in hem. Nerpeles þe cause whi swilke maner wordes are seid of oure Lorde in Holy Writt is þis. For we are so fleschly þat we kun not spoken of God ne vnndrstonden of Him, but if we bi swilke wordes first ben entrid in. Nerpeles when þe inner ege is opned þurȝ grace for to hafe a litel aȝt of jesu, þan schal þe soule turne liȝtly inowȝe alle swilke wordes of bodily finges into gostly vnndrstondyngye. (2.33)\textsuperscript{147}

As Hilton puts it in a later chapter God, who is ‘al sopfastnes,’ is ‘hid & hiled’ in holy Scripture, ‘wounden in a soft sendel vnndir faire wurdes, þat He may not be knowne ne felt hot of a clene herte’ (2.43)\textsuperscript{148}

This is a development of the theory of anagogic language propounded in De caelesti hierarchia and Richard’s Benjamin minor. The Scriptures condescend to human infirmity by making use of an imaginative way of thinking and writing; unseen things are conveyed indirectly by imaginary forms and material signs, so that we may be upraised ‘to the contemplation of things which are simple and without form.’ By contrast, the Cloud author, relying as he does (for the most part) on the negative theology of De mystica theologia as interpreted by Thomas Gallus, is preoccupied with what for him is the unbridgeable gap between language, however sublime, and the spiritual realities which are beyond the scope of human semantics. Consequently, the Cloud is permeated with imaginative denigration of imagination and symbolic rejection of symbolism (as has been argued above). Against this we may set Hilton, with his concern for lesser mortals and his interest in the less elevated regions of the mind, in particular the imagination and the ‘manly affeccioun,’ who is able to defend imaginative and kinetic expression openly and ungrudgingly, without disparagement or embarrassment. The literary imagery employed in the books of the learned, and the material images which are the books of the unlearned, are of major importance in the soul’s spiritual progress. The extent to which he is prepared to condescend to human infirmity makes Hilton an attractive writer. It is to his credit that he recognised that some of us weak humans are weaker than others, and allocated to each and every believer in Christ his appropriate position on the ladder of perfection.

Comparison of the Cloud author and Walter Hilton is difficult because their intended audiences and aims in writing were not the same. The Cloud, as we

\textsuperscript{147} Hussey 144.21–145.9.
\textsuperscript{148} Hussey 207.10–12.
have seen, is concerned almost exclusively with the highest level of contemplation possible in this life, whereas the Scale describes the full range of meditative and contemplative experience, providing both milk for spiritual children and solid food for perfect souls. However, it is clear that, in their views on the respective roles of affection and intellection, our writers differ fundamentally. The Cloud author shared Gallus’ belief in the primacy of the affectus in the soul’s journey to God, whereas Hilton postulated a synthesis of intellection and affection at every step of the mystic way, including the ultimate stage in which God, who is both Light and Love, illuminates the intellectus and inflames the affectus to the very limits of their capacities. Hilton was interested in reason and intellect, in the normal operations of human thinking, including imaginative thinking, whereas for the Cloud author, who advocated the transcendence of ordinary thought-processes, imaginings and fantasies were dangerous hindrances to the soul’s affective ascent. These quite different theological positions are reflected in our authors’ different attitudes to language, their only means of communication. The Cloud author, as it were, constantly bites the hand that feeds his reader, but Hilton is prepared to exploit all the semantic levels of language and all the possible meanings of a useful word or phrase. In view of all these contrasts in intention, end, matter, and stylistic mode, it is difficult to see how some modern scholars can still be attracted by the theory that Hilton wrote The Cloud of Unknowing.146

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