

ALBERTUS MAGNUS AND THE QUEEN  
OF THE ELVES: A 15<sup>th</sup>-CENTURY ENGLISH VERSE  
DIALOGUE ON ALCHEMY<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* This article presents an edition of a Middle English verse tract on alchemy based on Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R. 14. 44 (15<sup>th</sup> century). The tract, entitled “*Semita Recta Albertus peribet testimonium*”, is structured as a dialogue between Albertus Magnus, the famous medieval scholar (c. 1200–1280), and Elchyzell, the Queen of the Elves. In the dialogue, Elchyzell instructs Albertus on how to produce an alchemical elixir that will produce silver or gold. Besides presenting the edition, this article also places the dialogue in the tradition of alchemical and scientific writing in Middle English. I argue that, as in the case of many other alchemical texts of the period, the author of this tract uses Albertus and the setting of the poem to bestow dignity and credibility on the text. Furthermore, it is shown that the tract exploits several presentation strategies common in other alchemical and scientific texts, such as the verse medium, the dialogue format, the recipe structure and coded language. However, I also demonstrate that this text appears to be unique in the way it utilizes and combines these presentation strategies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article presents an edition of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century English verse tract on alchemy entitled “*Semita Recta Albertus peribet testimonium*”, ‘The Right Path Albertus bears witness’ (henceforth: *Semita Recta*). The *Semita Recta* is cast as a dialogue between Albertus Magnus, the famous 13<sup>th</sup>-century scholar, and Elchyzell, the Queen of the Elves. In the dialogue, Elchyzell teaches Albertus how to produce an elixir that will turn mercury into silver and gold, or, alternatively, that will turn silver into gold. The *Semita Recta* is preserved in two manuscripts: the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Trinity

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Erik Smutterberg and Molly Zahn for reading and commenting upon an earlier version of this article. Naturally, any remaining errors are entirely my own.

College, Cambridge, MS R. 14. 44 (Part IV, ff. 15v–17r), and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century London, British Library MS Sloane 3580B (ff. 183v–184v).

In addition to providing an edition of the poem based on Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44, this article places the *Semita Recta* in the tradition of alchemical writing. I will demonstrate that, in many ways, this tract epitomizes alchemical texts in general, and Middle English alchemical texts in particular: it is an excellent example of the complex tradition of pseudepigraphy in medieval alchemy, and it illustrates how different genre conventions of alchemical writing could be exploited in English vernacular verse texts.

## 2. ALCHEMY AND ALCHEMICAL TEXTS IN 15<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY ENGLAND

In England, the practice of alchemy was prohibited by law as early as 1404–1405.<sup>2</sup> Despite this law, however, alchemy seems to have flourished. The reigns of both Henry VI (1422–1461) and Edward IV (1461–1483) witnessed a widespread interest in the pursuit of the philosophers' stone or elixir, which was believed to transmute base metals into silver and gold, or heal bodily diseases and prolong life.<sup>3</sup> This interest is illustrated by the fact that, from at least 1444 onwards, several prominent scholars and physicians successfully petitioned the crown for a license to practice alchemy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the number of extant alchemical manuscripts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century indicates that numerous alchemical texts must have

<sup>2</sup> D. Geoghegan, "A Licence of Henry VI to Practise Alchemy", *Ambix* 6 (1957): 10–17.

<sup>3</sup> L. E. Voigts, "The Master of the King's Stillatories", *The Lancastrian Court: Proceedings of the 2001 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. J. Stratford (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003) 233–252; J. Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2002) 102–103; C. M. Hathaway, 'The Alchemist' by Ben Jonson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903) 17.

<sup>4</sup> M. Pereira, "Mater Medicinarum: English Physicians and the Alchemical Elixir in the Fifteenth Century", *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. R. French, J. Arrizabalaga, A. Cunningham and L. Garcia-Ballester (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) 26–52, at 26–27.

been in circulation in this period.<sup>5</sup> This in turn suggests that alchemical experimentation was being carried out even more widely than is indicated by the number of license petitions.

Apart from being a golden age for alchemy, the 15<sup>th</sup> century is also significant for another reason. It is in this period that alchemical texts begin to be written in English, instead of exclusively in Latin.<sup>6</sup> This trend is of course not peculiar to texts on alchemy; rather, texts in a number of scientific disciplines begin to be vernacularized in this period.<sup>7</sup> A great deal of research has recently been carried out on the characteristics of this vernacularization of scientific texts, with a focus on medical texts. Studies of medical manuscripts and the language of early English texts on medicine have pointed out a number of important linguistic developments and patterns in the transmission and dissemination of texts.<sup>8</sup> These findings are of great value not only for our knowledge of the vernacularization of scientific texts but also in a wider context. They can inform our understanding of the factors that influenced the more general movement that was taking place in late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>-century England towards using English instead of Latin or French in all kinds of writing.

<sup>5</sup> See e. g. D. W. Singer, *Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Alchemical Manuscripts in Great Britain and Ireland, Dating from before the XVI Century*, Vols. 1–3 (Brussels: Maurice Lamertin, 1928, 1931, 1932).

<sup>6</sup> For surveys of these English texts, see D. W. Singer, 1928, 1931 and 1932; G. Keiser, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500. Volume X: Works of Science and Information* (New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998); L. E. Voigts and P. D. Kurtz, *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference*. CD-ROM, (Ann Arbor, MI: The U of Michigan P, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The concept of *science* in the Middle Ages was more inclusive than it is today and comprised areas, such as chiromancy, geomancy and alchemy, which would be considered occult practices or at best pseudo-sciences in a modern scientific framework. See L. E. Voigts, “Scientific and Medical Books”, *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 345–402, at 345–348.

<sup>8</sup> See I. Taavitsainen and P. Pahta, ed., *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); see also K. Bitterling, “Sprachkontakt und Übersetzungsliteratur in spätmittelenglischer Zeit”, *Anglia* 120 (2002): 200–227.

Although our knowledge of the Englishing of medical texts has been greatly enhanced by recent research, very little is known about the dynamics of the vernacularization of alchemical texts. The simple reason for this is that very few editions and studies of early alchemical texts exist, even though bibliographic works have made available basic information on a large number of vernacular alchemical texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> Prose texts remain virtually unexplored,<sup>10</sup> whereas the situation for verse texts is slightly better. Many of the surviving verse texts in Middle English were included in Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (TCB), published in 1652, which has been reprinted several times in the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Two poems also exist in modern editions, which contain extensive studies of the poems' sociohistorical context: George Ripley's *Compound of Alchymy* from 1471 and Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* from 1477.<sup>12</sup> Most poems, however, do not exist in modern editions that consider the manuscript tradition of the poems, and the structure, content and conventions of alchemical poems remain unstudied. This edition of the *Semita Recta* and the study of its characteristics address this lack of modern studies. I will also make comparisons with other alchemical poems of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and thus illustrate more general patterns and conventions among Middle English alchemical verse tracts.

<sup>9</sup> P. Grund, "In Search of Gold: Towards a Text Edition of an Alchemical Treatise", *Middle English from Tongue to Text*, ed. P. J. Lucas and A. M. Lucas (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002) 265–279, at 265–266; P. Grund "ffor to make Azure as Albert biddes': Medieval English Alchemical Writings in the Pseudo-Albertan Tradition", *Ambix* (Forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> See, however, Grund 2002; Grund, "Misticall Wordes and Names Infinite": An Edition of Humfrey Lock's Treatise on Alchemy, with an Introduction, Explanatory Notes and Glossary (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation: Uppsala University, 2004); Grund, "ffor to make Azure as Albert biddes' . . .", *Ambix* (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> E. Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652; reprinted Kila, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2001) [TCB].

<sup>12</sup> J. Reidy, ed., *Thomas Norton's 'Ordinal of Alchemy'* EETS OS 272 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975); S. J. Linden, ed. *George Ripley's 'Compound of Alchymy' (1591)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). See also A. Timmermann, *An Edition of the Medieval Alchemical Poem 'Verses upon the Elixir'* (Unpublished M. Phil. thesis, University of Glasgow, 2003).

## 3. CONTENT

The *Semita Recta* is a poem of 64 rhymed lines. On the basis of the content, the poem can be divided into several sections. The validity of the alchemical procedure described in the poem is established in the first three lines, where the poem's narrating "I" pronounces it to be one of the best procedures available to create the elixir. Lines 4–8 go on to outline the potency of the elixir, stating that, if it is applied to mercury, it will produce silver or gold (depending on the amount of mercury used), or, if it is applied to silver, it will produce gold. The exposition of the procedure begins in line 9 and continues to the end of the poem (line 64). The setting of this description is a meeting between the medieval scholar Albertus Magnus (c. 1200–1280) and Elchyzell, the Queen of the Elves, in a "weldernesse" outside Damascus (see 4.1). After setting the scene in lines 9–18, the poem outlines the theoretical foundation of the production of the elixir in lines 19–36. This description is given by Elchyzell and is interrupted twice by Albertus with requests for clarification. The poem draws upon the notion common in alchemy that an elixir may be produced by mixing mercury and sulfur. In this context, *mercury* and *sulfur* should not be understood as the substances known as *mercury* and *sulfur* today; rather, they should be regarded as the two primary constituents or elements of all metals and of the elixir. Simply put, alchemists believed that, since all metals contained mercury and sulfur in different proportions, one metal could be turned into another if the proportions were changed. The means of accomplishing this transmutation was the elixir, which was thought to change the balance of the two constituents by supplying additional mercury or sulfur.<sup>13</sup> After this theoretical discussion, the remaining part of the poem (lines 37–64) is structured as a recipe where Elchyzell provides instructions on how to produce the elixir. Again, Albertus intervenes at a few points with requests for clarification. This section contains anagrams and coded language, which are common features of alchemical literature (see 4.3).

<sup>13</sup> F. S. Taylor, *The Alchemists: Founders of Modern Chemistry* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949) 80–81; G. Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books* (London: The British Library, 1994) 50–51, 62.

4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE *Semita Recta*4.1 *Characters and Setting*

The characters and setting of the *Semita Recta* provide important clues for our understanding of the poem's authority claim and its place in the tradition of alchemical writing. Although the characters and setting might appear to be fictional from a modern perspective, it is not certain that medieval readers would have perceived them as such. In fact, there are reasons to believe that they were chosen to bestow credibility and dignity on the poem and therefore that readers of the poem would have interpreted them as non-fictional.

As mentioned earlier, one of the two characters in the poem is Albertus Magnus. Interestingly, Albertus's name always appears as simply "Albertus" or "Albert" in the *Semita Recta*. Although no epithet is given which would help to clearly identify the figure as Albertus Magnus, it is unlikely that anyone but Albertus Magnus is intended. This is suggested by a number of facts known about Albertus Magnus and his association with alchemy. Albertus Magnus was a well-known name in alchemical circles in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. This fame might partly stem from his statements in some authentic writings, in particular *De Mineralibus*, that alchemical theory is sound. At the same time, he also states that he has never seen alchemical procedures carried out in practice. He is moreover overtly critical of some aspects of alchemy, including the alchemists' over-reliance on earlier authorities instead of first-hand observation. Besides Albertus's predominantly critical attitude towards alchemy, there is also a lack of contemporary evidence suggesting that Albertus Magnus was a practicing alchemist or wrote alchemical texts.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, more than 30 texts on alchemy were in circulation under Albertus's name during the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> These texts,

<sup>14</sup> P. Kibre, "Albertus Magnus on Alchemy", *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays 1980*, ed. J. A. Weisheipl (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980) 187–202, at 190–194.

<sup>15</sup> P. Kibre, "Alchemical Writings Ascribed to Albertus Magnus", *Speculum* 17 (1942): 499–518; P. Kibre, "Further Manuscripts Containing Alchemical Tracts Attributed to Albertus Magnus", *Speculum* 34 (1959): 238–247.

however, appear all to have been spurious attributions, probably fueled by Albertus's favorable comments about alchemical theory. Conspicuously, these texts do not begin to appear until after his death and only become common in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. What is particularly significant for this discussion as regards this corpus of writings is that one of the earliest and certainly the most widely disseminated pseudo-Albertan text is a prose treatise that mostly appears under the title *Semita Recta* in manuscripts. Surviving in more than 40 copies in Latin, the prose text must have been considered a standard work or even a handbook of basic alchemical practice.<sup>16</sup> Together with Albertus's alleged association with alchemy, the appearance of the title *Semita Recta* in the poem in question thus seems to be a clear indication that the Albertus mentioned in the poem is intended to be Albertus Magnus and that readers would have recognized that.

Even if the "Albertus" of the poem is Albertus Magnus, which the evidence clearly suggests, there is still a problematic issue, namely what Albertus's exact role is in the poem. The appearance of the title *Semita Recta* in connection with Albertus seems to have led compilers of modern bibliographies to assume that this poem is a verse version of the longer prose text and hence that it should be considered pseudepigraphic.<sup>17</sup> However, such an assumption is fraught with problems. The full title, as it is found in the two extant manuscripts, needs to be considered here: "Semita Recta Albertus peribet testimonium", 'The Right Path Albertus bears witness'. The title does not unequivocally attribute the poem to Albertus; instead, it simply indicates that Albertus attests to the validity of the process, i. e. he bears witness that it constitutes the right path. The structure of the poem lends support to

---

See also P. Grund, "'ffor to make Azure as Albert biddes' ...", *Ambix* (forthcoming). The ascription of alchemical writings to notable scholars and clergymen was one of the most characteristic features of medieval alchemy; see e. g. M Pereira's discussion of alchemical writings attributed to the medieval mystic Raymond Lull; M. Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, XVIII (London: Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, The Warburg Institute, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Grund, "'ffor to make Azure as Albert biddes' ...", *Ambix* (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> Singer 1928, 156; Keiser 1998, 3791; R. M. Schuler, *English Magical and Scientific Poems to 1700: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York & London: Garland, 1979) no. 3.

this theory, since the poem seems to consist of several layers. The first eight lines establish the validity of the procedure according to the 'I' or the author of the poem; the actual retelling of the meeting between Albertus and the Queen of the Elves does not begin until line 9. It is significant that the first eight lines contain 'I' forms, whereas the introduction of the dialogue (l. 9 ff.) mentions Albertus in the third person (e.g. "Albertus knew here ful wel I wene | for ofty<sup>n</sup> befor<sup>n</sup> he had here sene"). It thus seems that the 'I' of the poem is simply retelling Albertus's experience and is not Albertus himself.

If the verse *Semita Recta* is not pseudepigraphic, as the evidence seems to indicate, the alleged relationship between the verse and the prose *Semita Recta* is called into question. Another piece of evidence suggesting that there is no textual relationship between the two is the fact that there is no procedure in the prose *Semita Recta* that is exactly parallel to the one that is expounded upon by the Queen of the Elves. As mentioned before, the verse *Semita Recta* describes an elixir produced by the mixing of sulfur and mercury. Although such ideas are also found in the prose text, there is all the same no obvious connection between the specifics of the procedures described in the two texts. It is also true that instructions that call for the use of sulfur and mercury are commonplace in alchemical writings.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, naming the verse dialogue *Semita Recta* may of course be an allusion to the popular, widely circulated prose text, but there is no indication that the intention was to emulate in verse the prose *Semita Recta*. The aim may instead be to exploit the fame of Albertus as an alchemist, and the renown of the prose *Semita Recta*, to gain authority and credibility.

Casting the Queen of the Elves as Albertus's instructor in the poem does not necessarily detract from the poem's claim of authority. In fact, it may have been part of a conscious strategy, taking advantage of Albertus's reputation as a man possessing

<sup>18</sup> I have only consulted a limited number of printed and manuscript versions of the Latin *Semita Recta* (see P. Grund, "'ffor to make Azure as Albert biddes' ...", forthcoming). There seems to be some uniformity among the manuscripts, but there are also copies of the text that present widely aberrant versions. Naturally, there may exist, or have existed, a version which contained the procedure outlined in the verse dialogue.

superhuman powers. Numerous stories of Albertus performing magical feats and supernatural acts were circulating in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries; several of these stories involve Albertus conversing with spirits or demons.<sup>19</sup> It is quite possible that Albertus's dialogue with the Queen of the Elves would have been understood and interpreted as yet another example of his connection with the supernatural, thus adding to Albertus's already mythical status.<sup>20</sup>

The choice of Damascus as the setting for the meeting between Albertus and Elchyzell may at first seem peculiar. There is of course no historical evidence that Albertus ever visited Damascus. However, rather than having a direct connection with Albertus, Damascus may have been chosen in order to exploit its mythical status and its associations with alchemy. Damascus was certainly known in late medieval England, not the least in connection with the famous damask cloth.<sup>21</sup> It must also have been known in a more religious or mythical context. The monk in Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*, for example, declares that Adam was created by God "in the feeld of Damysse", "in the field of Damascus", and hence brought into Paradise.<sup>22</sup> This legend is also found in other medieval texts, including the probable sources of Chaucer's tale: Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium* and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that it was a fairly widespread notion. More importantly, however, there is a specific connection between Damascus and alchemy. One of the most extensively cited alchemical authorities in the Middle Ages is the

<sup>19</sup> W. P. Eckert, "Albert-Legenden", *Albert der Grosse: Seine Zeit, sein Werk, seine Wirkung*, ed. A. Zimmermann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981) 1–23.

<sup>20</sup> It is possible that, like so many names of substances in the poem, Elchyzell is an anagram or code. "Elchyzell" (or a similar name) does not seem to appear elsewhere as the name of the Queen of the Elves. See L. Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (New York: Rider and Company, 1948) 24–25.

<sup>21</sup> See *MED* s. v. *damask* and *OED* s. v. *damask*; *MED* = *Middle English Dictionary* (available at <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/mec/>), as accessed in 2004.

<sup>22</sup> L. D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 241 [l. 2007], 930.

<sup>23</sup> P. Aiken, "Vincent of Beauvais and Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*", *Speculum* 17 (1942) 56–68, at 56–57.

legendary monk Morienus or Maryanus (see also 4.2). According to both historical and alchemical sources, Morienus, who lived as a hermit outside Damascus, instructed the Ummayyad Prince Khālid ibn Yazīd (635–704? AD) of Damascus in the art of alchemy.<sup>24</sup> Although there seems to be little clear historical evidence for this, the legend must have been well known among alchemists of the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup> L. Stavenhagen has demonstrated that an alchemical text which relates the story of how Morienus and Khālid met and which describes their subsequent alchemical discussions circulated in a large number of copies from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> It is thus possible that, by using Damascus as the setting, the author of the *Semita Recta* wanted to conjure up associations with alchemy and other mythical legends to give even more weight to his alchemical text. Although there is no obvious, historical connection between Albertus and Damascus, the fact that they both enjoyed legend status and the fact that they were both associated with alchemy might have been enough to make their appearance in the same context credible.

#### 4.2 *Medium, Structure and Presentation Strategy*

The fact that the *Semita Recta* is written in verse firmly anchors the text in a well-established tradition, not the least in an English alchemical context. The writing of scientific texts in verse was not an uncommon phenomenon in the Middle Ages, and the tradition of scientific or didactic poetry goes back at least as far as Classical Antiquity.<sup>27</sup> In Middle English, there are poems dealing with a

<sup>24</sup> M. Ullmann, “Hālid ibn Yazīd und die Alchemie: Eine Legende”, *Der Islam* 55 (1978): 181–218, esp. 191–192; E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (New York: Dover, 1957, reprinted 1990) 63–66. Some versions of the legend seem to put Morienus outside Jerusalem rather than Damascus; Holmyard 1990, 64.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten. I. Chālid ibn Jazīd ibn Muāwija*, Vol. 1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1924); Ullmann 1978.

<sup>26</sup> L. Stavenhagen, “The Original Text of the Latin *Morienus*”, *Ambix* 17 (1970): 1–12.

<sup>27</sup> R. M. Schuler, “Three Renaissance Scientific Poems”, *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 1–3; R. M. Schuler, *Alchemical Poetry 1575–1700. From Previously Unpublished Manuscripts* (New York: Garland, 1995) xxv–

number of different scientific topics, including alchemy, medicine and astrology. Alchemical texts are particularly common in verse: as many as 53 Middle English poems have been recorded.<sup>28</sup> R. M. Schuler goes so far as to state that, in Middle English, alchemical tracts in verse are more common than verse texts in all other scientific topics combined.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, whereas most alchemical prose texts in English of the 15<sup>th</sup> century seem to be translations or adaptations of Latin writings, the great majority of the verse texts appear to be original compositions in the vernacular. For example, the two most famous alchemical texts of the period, Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477) and George Ripley's *Compound of Alchymy* (1471), are both extensive verse treatises, originally written in the vernacular.<sup>30</sup> The *Semita Recta* also belongs to this tradition: it does not appear to have a Latin *Vorlage*.<sup>31</sup>

Like the verse format of the *Semita Recta*, the overall structure and presentation strategy of the poem also anchor it firmly in the tradition of alchemical writing. Both the dialogue structure and the sequence of instructions formulated as a recipe are found in other alchemical texts of the period, in prose as well as verse.<sup>32</sup>

---

xviii; Y. Haskell, "Introduction", *Poets and Teachers: Latin Didactic Poetry and the Didactic Authority of the Latin Poet from the Renaissance to the Present* (Bari: Levante editori, 1999) 5–14; T. Hays, *Das lateinische Lehrgedicht im Mittelalter: Analyse einer Gattung* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 45.

<sup>28</sup> R. H. Robbins, "Alchemical Texts in Middle English Verse: Corrigenda and Addenda", *Ambix* 13 (1966): 62–73. See also Voigts and Kurtz 2001, who have found some 16<sup>th</sup>-century poems that may be of Middle English origin.

<sup>29</sup> Schuler 1995, xxvii. Why alchemical texts in particular were written in verse is a vexing question. Several reasons have been suggested. For example, it has been claimed that verse was a more dignified medium than prose and hence was better suited for the alchemists' exalted topic, or that the verse medium facilitated the use of the anagrams, codes and similar modes of language that are so common in alchemical texts; Schuler 1978, 3; Linden 2001, xliii–xliv. None of these suggestions are completely satisfactory, but to explore this question further would require a larger study, considering more texts, which is outside the scope of this article.

<sup>30</sup> Reidy 1975; Linden 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Singer 1928, 156.

<sup>32</sup> For prose dialogues on alchemy, see, e.g., Grund 2004, 35–38. *TCB* includes several dialogues in verse (365–367, 380–388, 427–428), for

However, the amalgamation of the two strategies evidenced in the *Semita Recta* seems to be rare.

The dialogue format is a common didactic feature of scholastic texts, and it is found in instructive texts of various kinds throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>33</sup> I. Taavitsainen, who has investigated the use of the dialogue format in medical texts, stresses that, in vernacular English texts of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, dialogues are exclusively structured as a series of questions and answers without specified participants. Dialogues on medical matters where the questioner and respondent are identified, on the other hand, do not appear until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> The situation is quite different for Middle English alchemical writings. Dialogues occur both in prose and verse with explicitly named participants, mostly in the formulaic form of a father and his son or a master and his disciple. Dialogues between participants of a less formulaic nature, i. e. where the participants have given names, as in the *Semita Recta*, are infrequent in Middle English alchemical texts. The only other example of this set-up that I have found is a dialogue in verse between Merlin and Morien, with which the *Semita Recta* shares other features (see 4.3).<sup>35</sup> Both Morien (an

---

example, “A Dialogue betwixt the Father and the Sonne Concerning the two Principles of the Blessed Stone” and “The Mistery of Alchemysts”, which are both dialogues between a father and his son.

- <sup>33</sup> I. Taavitsainen, “Transferring Classical Discourse Conventions into the Vernacular”, *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, ed. I. Taavitsainen and P. Pahta (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 37–72, at 44–45; F. L. Utley, “Dialogues, Debates, and Catechisms”, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*. Vol. 3 (New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1972) 736–745; T. L. Burton, ed. *Sidrak and Bokkus: A Parallel-Text Edition from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Lansdowne 793 EETS OS 311–312* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998–1999) xxvi–xxviii.
- <sup>34</sup> I. Taavitsainen, “Dialogues in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Medical Writing”, *Historical Dialogue Analysis*, ed. A. H. Jucker, G. Fritz and F. Lebsanft (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999) 243–268, at 244–245, 247, 251–252. In a later article, however, Taavitsainen (2004, 63–65) does discuss a (semi-)medical dialogue from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, *Sidrak and Bokkus*. The characters of this dialogue are Sidrak, a Christian philosopher, and Bokkus, a heathen king. See also Burton 1998.
- <sup>35</sup> A fragmentary version said to be between “Marlin” and “Martin” is found in *TCB*, 427–428. A more complete version of the poem has been

English version of the name Morienus), a mythical alchemist of the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century AD (see 4.1), and Merlin, the legendary wizard most often connected with King Arthur, appear in alchemical texts as adepts of the art or originators of alchemical writings.<sup>36</sup> However, the Merlin-Morien dialogue unfolds as an ordinary father and son dialogue, where, peculiarly, Merlin is the son of Morien. It is thus uncertain whether later alchemists actually equated the participants in this dialogue with the mythical alchemists.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, unlike the *Semita Recta*, this dialogue does not provide a detailed setting, but simply starts “As the Child Merlin sat on hys father’s knee”.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the *Semita Recta* is to my knowledge unique among Middle English alchemical poems in exploiting the dialogue format as it does. The pains taken over providing a setting for the *Semita Recta* should probably be connected with its authority claim: furnishing the poem with a detailed context would have enhanced its credibility.

The actual teaching of the Queen of the Elves is cast as a recipe, which follows most of the conventions of recipe writing.<sup>39</sup> The structure of this part of the poem relies heavily on imperative verb forms conveying instructions such as *take* (ll. 39, 44, 61), *temper* ‘mix’ (l. 44), *put* (l. 46), *distil* (l. 51), and *dissolve* (l. 62). Exact measurements of the substances to be used are also given: “14 peny weyte” (l. 40) and “half an vnce & 3,” (l. 63). The temporal sequence of the procedure is stressed with the help of the adverb *then* (*thanne*, *than*: ll. 43, 44, 49, 51, 61), and the syntax is relatively uncomplicated, with few subordinate clauses. That the *Semita Recta* was indeed seen as a recipe or a text performing a

---

edited by F. S. Taylor, “The Argument of Morien and Merlin: An English Alchemical Poem”, *Chymia* 1 (1948): 23–35.

<sup>36</sup> Stavenhagen 1970, 1–12; Taylor 1948, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Elias Ashmole (1617–1692), who annotated the manuscript containing the dialogue, seems to have taken the participants as historical figures and writes “Merlin was before Morien 100 yeares”, apparently skeptical about the relationship between the two that the dialogue alleges (Taylor 1948, 23).

<sup>38</sup> Taylor 1948, 26.

<sup>39</sup> P. Grund, “The Golden Formulas: Genre Conventions of Alchemical Recipes in the Middle English Period”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 104 (2003): 455–475.

similar function is suggested by its manuscript environment in Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century copy of *Semita Recta*. In this manuscript, the poem is followed by several alchemical recipes in prose.

The *Semita Recta* is not the only verse text extant in Middle English that exploits the conventions of recipe writing: *TCB* (see p. 643 above) contains several Middle English poems with recipe-like structures.<sup>40</sup> However, the way that these conventions are used makes the *Semita Recta* special, if not unique. I have argued elsewhere that alchemical poems which exhibit features of this kind fall into two broad categories.<sup>41</sup> The first category comprises alchemical poems that contain recipe-like features but do not employ them throughout the poems. Rather, the sequences formulated as recipes are found together with passages of a more expository or descriptive character. These poems in particular tend to use analogies, symbols and metaphors. In displaying these characteristics, this category of poems is related to alchemical tracts and treatises in prose, in which there is often a mixture of practical and theoretical passages.<sup>42</sup>

The second category comprises alchemical poems that are consistently formulated as recipes, that is, they provide instructions throughout on how to produce the elixir or some other substance, or they give advice on how to carry out a certain alchemical procedure. An example of this kind of poem is found in British Library, MS Harley 2407 (late 15<sup>th</sup> century), ff. 29v–31v. This untitled poem, which begins “Now I schal here begynne | to teche the now a conclusion”, describes the production of an elixir and how more of this elixir should be made. It provides specific measurements for the substances to be employed and gives practical advice on procedures and equipment. Poems of this category are more similar to prose recipes than to alchemical tracts and treatises.

<sup>40</sup> *TCB*, 269–274, 275–277, 344–347, 358–361, 362–363, 377, 393–396.

<sup>41</sup> P. Grund, “‘Take atyscam sche seyth fayre & bryzte’: Alchemical Recipes in Verse in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries”, paper presented at the conference *Recipes in Early Modern Europe: The Production of Medicine, Food and Knowledge*, Oxford University, February 13–14, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Grund 2004, 146–149.

Interestingly, the *Semita Recta* seems to straddle the two categories. It resembles poems in the first category in that it is not structured as a recipe throughout; rather the sequence with recipe features is embedded in a more descriptive or narrative context. It also contains coded language, as will be shown in 4.3. However, the *Semita Recta* is similar to the second category of poems in that it provides exact measurements and consistently employs recipe-like features in the instructive passage.

### 4.3 Alchemical Language

The identity of some of the substances and procedures described in the *Semita Recta* is obscured by its use of coded language. The use of codes is common in all types of alchemical writing and is related to a number of other linguistic strategies found in alchemical texts. These strategies were presumably exploited to hide the art from the uninitiated.<sup>43</sup> There is a clear parallel case to the *Semita Recta* in the verse dialogue between Merlin and Morien (see 4.2): both texts use anagrams as well as codes of a more complex character.

The *Semita Recta* uses a number of different coding schemes. In a few items, it seems to employ a strategy where the coded word needs to be read from back to front and the third and fifth letters need to be supplied, as in *Atyscam* for ‘Marcasyta’ (l. 39),<sup>44</sup> *Retelas* (ll. 50, 58) for ‘sallpeter’, and *Erupus* (l. 59) for ‘sulphure’. A similar strategy may be behind *Sugasigi* (l. 46) for ‘ignis magnus’, but this word needs to be read from back to front and three letters need to be supplied: ⟨n⟩ as the third letter, ⟨m⟩ as the sixth letter and another ⟨n⟩ as the ninth letter. In other cases, a completely different strategy seems to be used. The word *odufn* (or *odnfu*, l. 42) seems to be an anagram for ‘found’, i. e. ‘mix’, ‘fuse’, and *Animul* (l. 61) an anagram for ‘alumin’, i. e. ‘alum’. Possibly, *Iamoriltu* (ll. 49, 57) is an anagram for ‘uitriolam’, though it is difficult to account for why a Latin accusative form

<sup>43</sup> M. P. Crosland, *Historical Studies in the Language of Chemistry* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 40–42; P. Grund 2004, 132–149.

<sup>44</sup> I. e. *marcasite* ‘a metallic sulphide’ (*MED* s. v. *marcasite*).

would be employed.<sup>45</sup> In yet other cases, the identity of the substance is difficult to determine and it cannot be ruled out that the code has been corrupted in the transmission of the text. The possibility of confusion and misinterpretation caused by textual transmission is seen in a comparison between the two extant copies of the *Semita Recta*, which differ in a number of words (see the critical apparatus, 5.3 below): e. g. *Almuga* vs. *almigill* (l. 41), *Ergraf* vs. *argrall* (l. 43), and *Artasape* vs. *asartasape* (l. 45). There are a few codes that I have not been able to decipher with any degree of confidence: *Almuga* (l. 41), *Ergraf* (l. 43), *Enycoro-teal* (l. 43), *murcann* (l. 44) and *Artasape* ('a paste?', l. 45).<sup>46</sup>

## 5. MANUSCRIPTS AND EDITION

### 5.1 *The Manuscripts*

As mentioned above, the *Semita Recta* appears in two manuscripts: Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R. 14. 44 (Part IV, ff. 15v–17r) and London, British Library MS Sloane 3580B (ff. 183v–184v).<sup>47</sup> R. 14. 44 is a 15<sup>th</sup>-century codex containing a variety of scientific material. The codex comprises several different booklets

<sup>45</sup> The normal Latin form for *vitriol* is *vitriolum* (OED s. v. *vitriol*). However, D. Goltz shows that there was considerable variation in spelling of substances like *vitriol* in medieval Latin; D. Goltz, *Studien zur Geschichte der Mineralnamen in Pharmazie, Chemie und Medizin von den Anfängen bis Paracelsus* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972) 209–213. It is of course quite possible that <a> is a scribal misreading of <u>.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, a similar strategy of anagramming is found in the alchemical prose tract preceding the *Semita Recta* in Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44, ff. 15r–15v (“Now ffadyr I wele 3ow schewe þe priuete & þe praktys . . .”). Both of the texts are written in the same hand and the similarities between the two may suggest that they were copied from the same source or that both texts were produced by the scribe of R. 14. 44. I have not been able to find any other copies of the prose tract in Voigts and Kurtz 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44 is listed in *IMEV/S* (nr. 2614) and Robbins 1966, 64. Both Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44 and British Library Sloane 3580B are listed by Keiser 1998, 3791. They are also found in Voigts and Kurtz 2001, but they are not cross-referenced.

copied in different hands. Part IV, in which the *Semita Recta* appears, is largely written in the hand of one and the same scribe, probably from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The dialect of this scribe has been located to Norfolk by LALME (LP 669).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, an account in a different hand, which appears in f. 18r, contains references to places around Cambridge, including Saham, Fordham, Ely, Hadenham and Necton.

British Library MS Sloane 3580B and its partner volume MS Sloane 3580A together make up a collection of alchemical writings copied by one Thomas Potter in 1579–1580. I have not been able to find any information on Potter in standard biographies.

The two copies of the *Semita Recta* differ substantially in some verses. Line 16 of the poem is omitted in Sloane 3580B, and the latter manuscript also changes the word order in line 51, thus disrupting the rhyme. There are also a number of other lines where the reading of MS R. 14. 44 seems more contextually suitable (see e. g. lines 33 and 46). In line 30, on the other hand, the syntax of Sloane 3580B is better “☿ [i. e. mercury] & Sulphur are divers in kinde” than that of MS R. 14. 44 “in *mercurye* and Sulphur *arn dyuers kende*”. Furthermore, in Line 41, R. 14. 44 reads “sche seyde”, whereas Sloane 3580B has “2 z” (i. e. ‘two ounces’), both of which are plausible in the context. There is also minor variation throughout the poem in word order, inflection and form words such as *than*, *there*, *so* etc. Since there are only two extant copies of the *Semita Recta*, the exact relationship between them is difficult to determine, but R. 14. 44 is the more complete copy, since it contains line 16. Sloane 3580B could be a copy of R. 14. 44, but it is perhaps more likely that it derives from a different copy which may or may not have been based on R. 14. 44. The reading in line 30, which is more syntactically suitable in Sloane 3580B than in MS R. 14. 44, may indicate that Sloane 3580B was based on a different copy or that the scribe emended the text. I have edited R. 14. 44 and have supplied all variants from Sloane 3580B in a critical apparatus that follows the edited text (see 5.3

<sup>48</sup> LALME = *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, ed. A. McIntosh, M. Samuels and M. Benskin (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1986) 3: 327. The *Semita Recta* contains the very distinctive Norfolk feature “xal” for *shall*.

below. The line and folio numbers have been supplied. I have also added explanatory notes after the critical apparatus.<sup>49</sup>

5.2 *Edition of Trinity College, Cambridge,*  
MS R. 14. 44 (Part IV, 15v–17r)

Semita Recta Albertus peribet testimonium  
 Off all þe weys þat I knowe be est or be weste [15v]  
 Euere holde I þis path for on of þe beste  
 ffor þis is þe ryȝt path good & sure  
 A lixer made of 2 thynges be kende of nature  
 It makyth good lune of *mercurye* yf o part be put þerto 5  
 A part vpon an 100 of *mercurye* ys sol ryȝt good also  
 And of lune þe same yf þou welt wele do  
 on part on 300 yf yt be cast þerto  
 In þe cyte of Damaske was Albert dwellyng  
 And as he wente be weldernesse in a somerys morwenyng 10  
 There he mette wyth Elchyzel fayre & fre  
 þe queen of elphys lond vndyr an ev tre  
 Albertus knew here ful wel I wene  
 for oftyn befor he had here sene  
 And quan he saw þat lady bryȝte 15  
 he heylyd here be name as sche hyȝte  
 Tho þat lady vp gan ryse  
 and spak to hym on þis wyse  
 I am kome sche seyde in þis morwenyng  
 to helpe þe in þin studyng 20  
 Of a trewe lixer I can telle þe  
 wythynne a monyth made may yt be  
 Of 2 þinges & no mo trewlye  
 yf þou make þi proieccyon upon *mercurye*  
 And yt ys þe beste syluer þat man can fynde 25  
 for yt is made of þe same kende

<sup>49</sup> In presenting the text, I have followed the following transcription principles: The lineation of the manuscript has been retained but the indication of folio and line is editorial. I have retained the capitalization of the manuscript. Punctuation marks are very rare in the manuscript and mainly occur together with numerals or abbreviations. I have not reproduced these punctuation marks. Furthermore, I have not kept the underlining of some words (mostly anagrams) found in the manuscript. Abbreviations have been expanded and the expansion has been marked by the use of italics.

Of <i>mercurye</i> and Sulphur I wene and zet of þe same kende þei bene	<i>quod albertus</i>	
That is onpossybyll as me thynkyth in mende for in <i>mercurye</i> and Sulphur arn dyuers kende	<i>quod elchizel</i>	30
Nay sulphur shulde be made of <i>mercurye</i> and þat is werkyng more naturalye ffor <i>mercurye</i> wele not be prouabyll metall		[16r]
to puttyñ hym to asay he faylyth his <i>vertuis</i> all But þat Sulphur þrow hym wele not pas		35
þat is made or had where þat Sulphur was <i>quod albertus</i> how is þat Sulphur made now ze me tell Thanne answerde þe queen Elchyzell		
<i>quod elchizel</i> Take Atyscam sche seyth fayre & bryzte þe mountenese of 14 peny weyte		40
And Almuga sche seyde good & pure and odufn hem wel & sure Thanne Ergraf away þe Enycoroteal þanne take murcann & temper hem all		
So yt be as Artasape wel dyzt & put hym to Sugasigi anon ryzt		45
Tyl he be so red as rose on rys In all þes werkes loke þou be wys Than seke þe herte of a beeste is clepyd Iamoriltu And anoþer Retelas ys grey of hew		50
Dystylle a water of hem ij thanne In a body of glas as þou wel kanne Caste away þat water for yt ys nowt but wyth þe 2 þes werkes shal be wrot		
<i>quod albertus</i> how proporcyon ze þe bestys tweyne	55	
Thanne answerde sche ageyn <i>quod elchizel</i> Of þe herte of Iamoryltu 1 li þefore and of Retelas half as meche or more		
<i>quod albertus</i> And how oftyñ xal þe Erupus be so dyzth <i>quod elchizel</i> Tyl yt ys waxe nere whyzth		60
Take þanne Animul good & pure and dyssolue hym in <i>zour water</i> sure		[17r]
half an vnce & 3 3 of erucaem þerto and Ioyne hem all togedre so		

### 5.3 Variants

Variants from BL Sloane 3580B (ff. 183v–184v). The line number is from the edition (Trinity College, R. 14. 44, Part IV, ff. 15v–17r).

Line	Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 14. 44	BL Sloane 3580B
Title	<i>testimonium</i>	Testamentum
2	holde I	I holde
5	of <i>mercurye</i> yf o part be put þerto	if ☿ a parte be put therto
7	of	vpon
8	on	vpon
8	þerto	thervnto
10	as he wente be weldernesse	he went in wildernes
11	There	than
12	ev	Elder
13	ful wel	well
14	oftyn befor	oftetimes affore
15	And	<i>absent</i>
16	he heyld here be name as sche hyzte	<i>absent</i>
18	on þis wyse	once or twice
20	þin	thy
21	can	shall
22	may yt	it maye
24	make	willt
28	zet	<i>absent</i>
29	thynkyth	think
30	in <i>mercurye</i> and Sulphur arn dyuers kende	☿ & Sulphur are divers in kinde
31	Nay	ne
32	and þat	<i>absent</i>
32	more	moste
33	be <i>prouabyll</i>	prove able
34	putty	put
34	faylyth	failes
37	me	may
41	Almuga	almigill
41	sche seyde	2 z
43	Ergraf	argrall
43	Enycoroteal	enicortiall
44	murcann	murcame
45	yt	y <sup>t</sup>
45	as Artasape	asartasape
46	to	<i>absent</i>
46	Sugasigi	sugasige
49	is	<i>absent</i>
49	Iamoriltu	Iamoriltum
51	water of hem ij thanne	a water then of them twoe
52	glas	a glas

52	as þou wel	as well as y <sup>u</sup>
53	þat	y <sup>e</sup> firste
54	þes	<i>absent</i>
56	sche	Elchezel
57	Iamoriltu	Iamoriltum
58	Retelas	y <sup>e</sup> retelas
58	as	so
58	or	<i>absent</i>
59	And	Than
59	xal	shall
60	waxe	waxen
61	Take þanne	Than take
61	Animul	ammale
63	& 3 3	<i>absent</i>
64	erucaem	eruceme

#### 5.4 Explanatory Notes

4 A *lixer*: The usual form of this word is *elixir* (*MED* s. v. *elixir*), but line 21 indicates that the form *a lixer* ‘an elixir’ is intended. I have not found this form attested elsewhere.

4 be kende of nature: ‘in accordance with the laws of nature’, ‘as nature does’.

5 *lune*: i. e. *silver*. Throughout the history of alchemy, the metals were associated with different celestial bodies, silver with the moon or *Luna*. *Lune* is an Anglicized form of Latin *Luna* (*MED* s. v. *luna*).

6 *sol*: i. e. *gold* (*MED* s. v. *sol* n[1]). See note to line 5.

9 *Damaske*: ‘Damascus’. See 4.1.

11 *Elchy3el*: in MS *E5* *Elchy3el*.

12 *ev tre*: ‘yew tree’. Trees are of special significance in elflore, and elves are commonly said to inhabit trees. Spence lists a number of different trees that are especially frequent in stories about elves, including the rowan-tree, the hawthorn and the alder. The yew tree, on the other hand, is not mentioned. It may be noted that BL Sloane 3580B uses *Elder* ‘alder’, which is included in Spence’s list.<sup>50</sup>

15 *bryzte*: in MS *fre* *bryzte*.

16 *he heylyd here be name as sche hyzte*: ‘he greeted her by the name that she was given’.

24 *proieccyon*: Projection was an alchemical procedure where the elixir was supposed to be *thrown* (projected) on the substance to be transmuted (*MED* s. v. *proieccioun*).

<sup>50</sup> Spence 1948, 180–181, 321–322.

27 *mercurye* and *Sulphur*: For a discussion on the meaning of mercury and sulfur, see section 3.

28 *quod albertus*: Albertus's response follows in line 29.

29 *thynkyth*: in MS *thynk*<sup>t</sup>.

30 for in *mercurye* and *Sulphur* *arn dyuers kende*: The reading of BL Sloane 3580B “*☿* [i. e. mercury] & Sulphur are divers in kinde” seems more suitable in the context both as regards syntax and meaning. The point of the argument is that mercury and sulfur are different types of substances.

30 *quod elchizel*: Elchyzell's answer follows in line 31.

32 and *þat* is *werkyng more naturalye*: This line can be interpreted in two ways. In the first interpretation, *þat* is the subject and *is werkyng* is a progressive verb phrase. The meaning would then be ‘that [i. e. the making of sulfur out of mercury] is/works more in accordance with nature’. In the other interpretation, *werkyng* is a noun, referring back to the process of making sulfur out of mercury. [N]*naturalye* would in this case be an adjective. The second reading is perhaps less likely since *naturally* as an adjective is only recorded once in the *MED* (s. v. *naturali*) and with the meaning ‘suitable’, ‘naturally suited’. Another possibility is that the verbal noun *werkyng* has retained enough verbal force to allow modification with an adverb.<sup>51</sup>

33–36 for *mercurye* *welē . . . where þat Sulphur was*: The syntax of these lines is unclear. The first argument seems to be that mercury alone cannot be made into a good metal. *To puttyñ . . .* should probably be taken as a tautologous continuation of *prouabyll* ‘capable of being tested’ (see *MED* s. v. *provable*). The sense would then be ‘for mercury will not be a metal capable of being tried or put to the test’. “[H]e faylyth his *vertuis* all” would in this interpretation be taken with lines 35–36: ‘he loses all his virtues unless that sulfur does not pass through him which is made or had where that sulfur was [i. e. made and had]’. The relative clause would refer back to line 31, where it is stated that sulfur must be made of mercury. The sense would be that the sulfur created from mercury must stay (i. e. not pass through) with the mercury in order for a proper metal to be created. Alternatively, line 34 should be taken as parenthetical: (‘if he is put to the test, he loses all his virtues’). However, I have not been able to find other examples of an infinitive used with this kind of conditional force.

39 *Atyscam*: *marcasyta* (?) ‘marcasite’, ‘a metallic sulfide’ (*MED* s. v. *marcasite*).

40 *mountenisse*: There is a tilde above ⟨un⟩ in the MS; it is unclear what it signals. See *MED* s. v. *mountaunce* ‘amount’, ‘quantity’.

41 *Almuga*: It is unclear what substance is intended here. *Almvga* appears in the right-hand margin written by the same scribe, perhaps as a clarification of the minims.

42 *odufn*: or possibly *odnfu* = *found*(?) ‘mix’, ‘melt’, ‘fuse’ (*MED* s. v. *found*).

43 *Ergraf*: It is unclear what word is intended here. A verb of some sort indicating removal is expected since it is followed by *away*. A small ⟨e⟩ is written on top of the capital ⟨E⟩, probably as a clarification.

<sup>51</sup> See T. Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax. Part I: Parts of Speech* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960) 649–650.

- 43 **Enycoroteal**: It is unclear what word is intended.
- 44 **murcann**: It is unclear what substance is intended here.
- 45 **Artasape**: The word may stand for the phrase *a paste*, indicating that the substance should be treated until it reaches a dough-like condition.
- 45 **dyȝt**: 'prepared' (*MED* s. v. *dighten*). See also l. 59.
- 46 **Sugasigi**: *ignis magnus*(?) 'great fire'.
- 46 **anon**: in MS *a# non*.
- 47 **rose on rys**: 'rose upon the stem' (*MED* s. v. *ris* n. 1). This phrase was common in Middle English lyrical poetry.<sup>52</sup>
- 49 **beeste is clepyd Iamoriltu**: i. e. 'a beast that is called Iamoriltu'. Leaving out the relative pronoun in subject position is a fairly common phenomenon in Middle English texts.<sup>53</sup>
- 49 **Iamoriltu**: *uitriolam*(?) 'vitriol'.
- 50 **Retelas**: *sallpeter*(?) 'saltpeter'.
- 57 **1 li**: '1 pound'.
- 59 **Erupus**: *sulphure*(?) 'sulfur'.
- 60 **whyȝth**: 'white'.
- 61 **Animul**: *alumin*(?) 'alum'.
- 63 **3 ȝ**: '3 ounces'.
- 63 **erucaem**: *mercury*(?). The ⟨a⟩ may be a misreading of an earlier ⟨r⟩ (see the reading in BL Sloane 3580B). Since the point of the procedure is to mix mercury and sulfur and thus make the elixir, mercury seems suitable in the context.
- 64 **all togedre so**: After line 64, the phrase *ex<sup>m</sup> Doweld* appears. It is unclear what this phrase refers to. Perhaps, *Doweld* should be interpreted as a name and *ex<sup>m</sup>* as 'exemplum'.<sup>54</sup> The sense would then be 'copy by/from Doweld'. However, I have not found the name *Doweld* in standard biographies. It is of course possible that the name is an anagram like so many other lexical items in the *Semita Recta*. I have also searched for, for example, *Woddle*, but found no clues. Singer interprets the name as *Goweld*, but the initial letter is the same as in *Damaske* (l. 9) and *Dystylle* (l. 51) and must be a capital ⟨D⟩.<sup>55</sup>

NOTRE DAME, IN

PETER GRUND

<sup>52</sup> See e. g. *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. G. L. Brook, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1968) 31 (poem 3/11) and 34 (poem 5/32).

<sup>53</sup> Mustanoja 1960, 204–205.

<sup>54</sup> See A. Cappelli, *Lexicon Abbreviaturarum* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1926), 127.

<sup>55</sup> Singer 1928, 156.