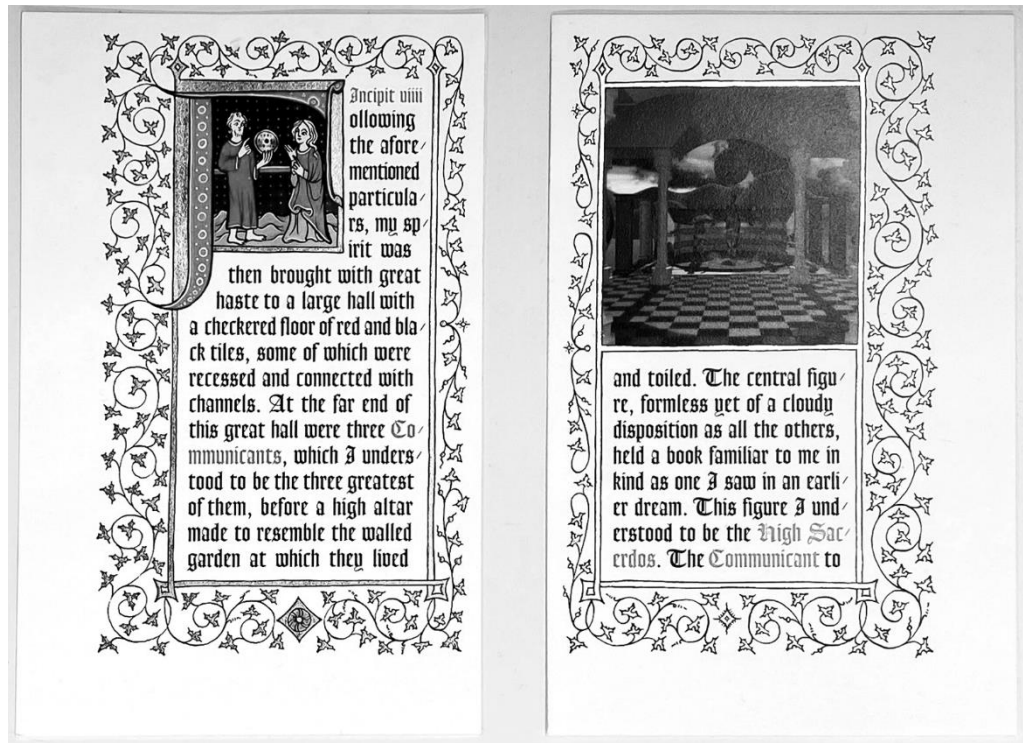


Uchronic Travels in Hypermedia: *The Gross Gloss*



Alan Perry

SAMPLE

PREFACE AND CHAPTERS 1-3

Preface

This facsimile of *The Gross Gloss* is intended for both academic and lay students of the history of manuscripts and medieval culture, as well as those interested in media archaeology. Here I provide extensive glosses,¹ etymologies, and visual analyses of each and every unfamiliar word, definition, symbol, and reference, either visual or textual. Sometimes I offer more than a strict factual gloss. At times I also provide an interpretive gloss in keeping with the tradition of the time from which this manuscript – or at least its principal text – date from. I have preferred contemporary explanations whenever possible, in order to aid conceptualization of the meaning of this text, but I have always kept what can be presumed to be the original spirit of the unknown author's literal meaning whenever possible. The factual statements and informed assumptions listed here, I hope, should enrich the understanding of this hyper-(media/object)² artefact. My aim has been to provide whatever help is possible to an inexperienced reader. Any kind of engagement with the dream visions in this text have not been created since Ollie Dortdelfer's silent and brief 3-minute film adaptation of a handful of the dreams at the cusp of the 20th Century,³ tragically lost to time like so many of the media produced in the age of flammable nitrate film. While written descriptions of this film paint a picture that is by all means intriguing, it is ultimately a poetic and not literal media (re)interpretation. It is my sincere hope that this heavily and generously glossed facsimile will make it possible for readers to experience the unknown author's own words with the original meaning intact.⁴

What follows from this preface is a contemporary reconstruction of the manuscript in question. I would like to briefly describe the artifact from which the text presented here has been derived, and its eccentricities. This facsimile reconstruction is primarily derived from the manuscript M 13 at the Newberry Library. Carbon dating reliably places this text as written in the 14th or 15th century, and contains historiated initials created in the style common at the time. The bookbinding has been chemically tested and contains pigment residue indicating a polychromatic treatment. And here we apprehend the first peculiarity: in addition to this chemical testing and dating that place it in the late Middle Ages, there is clearly a liquid crystal display embedded within the binding – a media technology that would not be common until roughly 600 years later. Additionally, the binding material itself is made of acrylonitrile butadiene styrene, or ABS, polymer. Present within the binding is a microcontroller and webhosting software that were clearly created with tools not commonly thought to be in existence until at least the 21st century. In my original research, and after repeated attempts to connect to this webhosting service, I have been able to access and determine that the contents of this service are a bricolage of late 20th century visual and computing technologies that were never used simultaneously. More specifically, the visual appearance of the hosted web files is remarkably similar to the Commodore-64 operating system, which was never designed to access hypertext documents.

¹ A gloss, in a literary context, is a translation or explanation of a word or phrase.

² Here I mean not only hypermedia in the sense of hypertext extended by multimedia, but also the concept of the hyperobject described by Timothy Morton: entities of vast temporal and spatial dimensions. See Morton, Timothy. "Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World." University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

³ See Musser, Charles. *Before the Nickelodeon: Bronco Billy Anderson and the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991.

⁴ See Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, edited by Kathryn Lynch, New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2007, pp. ix., particularly the first chapter of the preface.

The text itself has been produced by an unknown author writing in a late medieval style and using spelling and grammatical conventions common in English during the late Modern period. The text describes, rather anachronistically, a range of sociopolitical issues present in the early 21st century. We may presume that some of these issues may have been contemporary to the author's time as well. In my interpretive opinion, the narrative structure also spirals out from a gloss of a 360-word poem, which is included at the beginning of the manuscript, functioning somewhat like a table of contents familiar to the contemporary reader.

There are few similarities between the manuscript-text and the hypertext hosted by the device in the bookbinding. The ordering of words and their meaning are the same, yet the graphical qualities diverge significantly: the typeface in the manuscript-text is Gothic miniscule, potentially fraktur, while the hypertext uses the typeface programmed for display on the Commodore-64 personal computer that was popular in the early 1980s. There are red-letter words present in the manuscript-text, and these correspond to the words glossed in the hypertext with diagrammatic images that are regrettably unexplained in either mode of the text.

Prior to its accession to the Newberry Library when it was founded in 1887, it was in the possession of the daughter of Walter Loomis Newberry, who died without any male heirs and therefore the fortunes of Walter Newberry were applied to the establishment of the library. Prior to this date, notes are scarce and contradictory. One such note attests ownership of Haralda Braddocke, the Baron of Braddocke who was killed in the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Yet another contradictory document ascribes a line of provenance between European mystics including Alister Crowley, John Dee, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Friars Bacon and Bungay, and the Pope Sylvester II. While we may not yet currently have a clear image of the manuscript's provenance, the note attaching ownership to Haralda Braddocke seems the most likely explanation. What we can say with certainty is that the earliest attested ownership does not predate Pope Sylvester II, who was born in the 10th Century, four or five centuries before the conclusions of carbon dating analysis of the text itself.

Contradicting its premodern dating, the manuscript is written in Late Modern English. Despite the modern grammar and spelling, it is otherwise identical in process to *incunabula* printed shortly before the 16th Century in Europe. Of the writing style, one can only make the anachronistic assumption that the writing was generated by use of a thesaurus⁵ to be intentionally obfuscatory, as if the unknown writer was attempting to put on airs in order to appear more erudite to their audience, which we can only assume to be made of literate aristocracy. Beyond that, very little can be assumed, other than their status as textual literates with some passing degree of interest in visual culture. An odd structure can be found in the word count and number of citation-images⁶ of each of the twelve chapters, which, if we are following my interpretation, can understood as dreams:

| Chapter | Word Count | Citation-Image Count |
|---------|------------|----------------------|
| Aries | 1,024 | 6 |
| Taurus | 1,024 | 12 |

⁵ The word *thesaurus* was first used in 1852 by Peter Mark Roget, for *Roget's Thesaurus*. Conceptually, however, the idea, at least in the western tradition, can be found as far back as the 1st Century in the lexical and grammatical writings of Philo of Byblos.

⁶ By "Citation-image" here I mean the images that have been used as a sort of visual gloss or commentary on the text itself.

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Gemini | 1,024 | 5 |
| Cancer | 1,024 | 11 |
| Leo | 1,024 | 10 |
| Virgo | 1,024 | 8 |
| Libra | 1,024 | 16 |
| Scorpio | 1,024 | 2 |
| Sagittarius | 1,024 | 3 |
| Capricorn | 1,024 | 13 |
| Aquarius | 1,024 | 4 |
| Pisces | 1,024 | 14 |
| Total | 12,288 | 137 |

The pattern of the number of citation-images per chapter follows the first two rows of the magic square of Jupiter, as described by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and starting in the 6th square.⁷ This magic square is also found in Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I*, albeit in an inverse form. It is unclear what this connection, if intentional, means, other than perhaps to imbue the text with some kind of semblance of occultic magic. In the reproduced text portion of this facsimile, citation-images are shown in order at the end of the chapter. Putting the question of citation-images aside, the strictly followed count of 1,024 words per chapter is certainly remarkable given that the unknown author, which I will here qualify as "transtemporal", may or may not have known of the number's unique relationship with binary units in the late 20th Century, when a megabyte was defined as 1,024 kilobytes, and a kilobyte containing 1,024 bytes, and so on. This was eventually changed just prior to the dawn of the 21st Century, giving a comparatively small temporal window of about 25 years for this knowledge to be anything but obscure.

Narratively, the story told in the text recounts a series of dream visions experienced by the author, over the course of a single night or series of nights. This can be seen in the repetitive references and descriptions of slumbering and bed-chambers, as in the end of the first chapter. Peculiarly, a natal horoscope for this dream sequence was created and included in other versions of this manuscript, derived from planetary positions, as natal horoscopes are wont to do, in an attempt to possibly consecrate the creation of this text. Regretfully the version present at the Newberry Library does not contain this horoscope but included here is a reconstruction from a page from another manuscript, since destroyed in a flood, that was used as binding matter in a medical text on digestive cures. After significant astronomical computation and calculation of planetary positions, the date "consecrated" by this horoscope has been determined to be March 13, 2694.

A visual analysis of the book-as-artifact shows similar formal qualities with books of the 14th and 15th centuries, like the tomes kept in chained libraries. The liquid crystal display also shares clear visual similarities with *fenestra*, a word meaning "window" in Latin. These thin pieces of translucent bone would protect and display textual information concerning the book. In the same way, this artifact, when electricity is applied to it, displays visual information regarding its contents on the liquid crystal display. Within the hypertext, where the writing has been glossed with diagrammatic imagery, we can find an inexact correlation between the glossed word or phrase and the imagery. While this creates an occasionally provocative but primarily confusing tension, I have done my best in this annotated facsimile

⁷ See Agrippa, Heinrich Cornelius. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Antwerp, 1531.

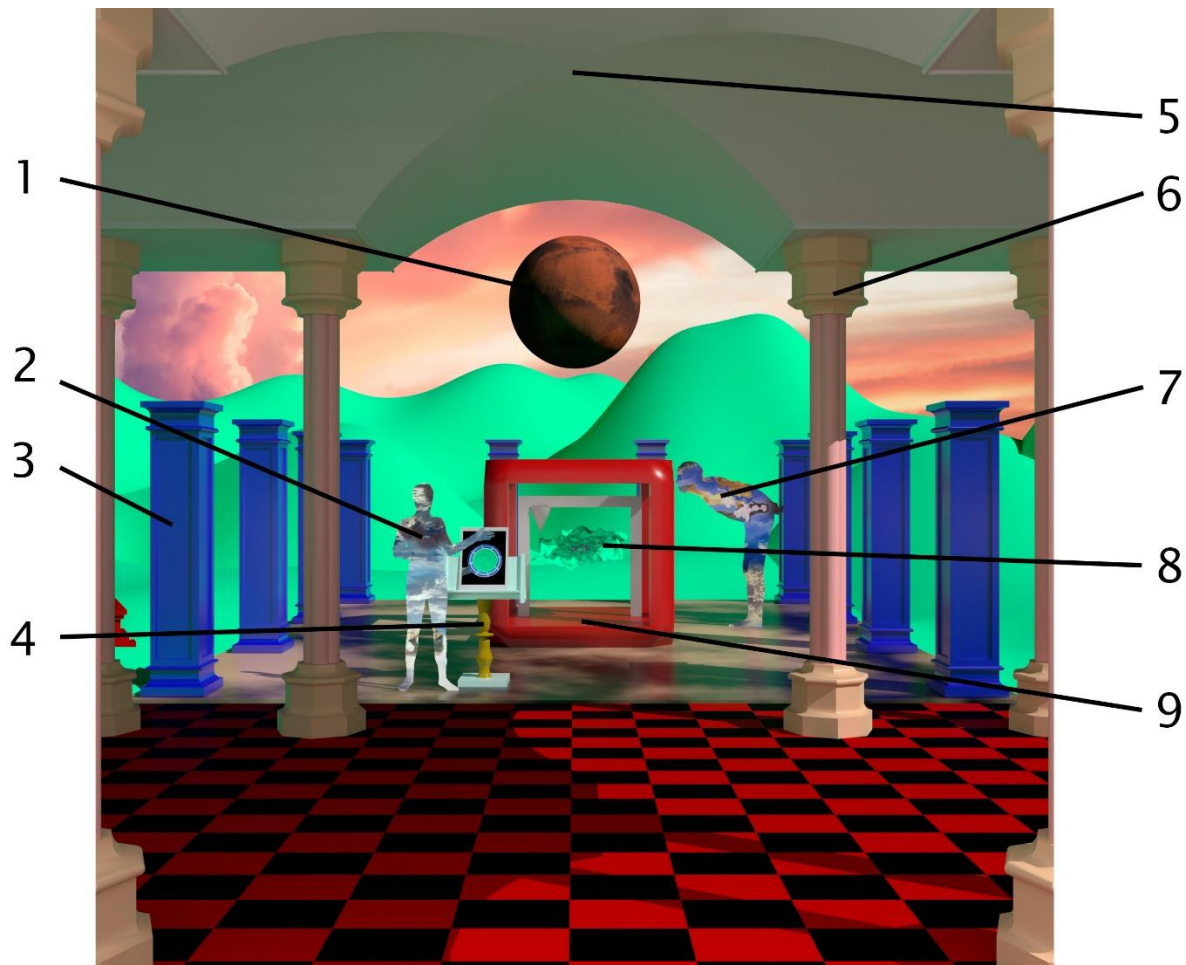
of the text to make informed interpretations of the connection between text and image. I have been assisted with interpretations by collaborating with an artificial intelligence system trained on every surviving illuminated manuscript published globally in the date range of 1100-1600 CE. Also contained in the files hosted on the book is a remarkably high-resolution video file with twelve distinct scenes that linger for a short while. Throughout the duration of my comments, I will reference these as tableau, given their visual similarities with *tableaux vivant*. A visual analysis of each of the twelve tableaux follows this preface. It is unclear how this video file would be played, accessed, or otherwise seen beyond the liquid crystal *fenestra* on the front matter of the binding. A close examination of the mechanism hosting the hypertext has shown that it is conceivable to interface the mechanism with a display via a High-Definition Multimedia Interface Type D cable, colloquially referred to as a micro-HDMI cable. This may or may not display the video file on the interfaced display.

I must give thanks to the many individuals who assisted me in the writing and organization of this glossed facsimile. If there were some way to begin a list with a superposition of items, this would begin simultaneously with my eternally supportive wife Alyssa Perry, the scholar who I know only through reading but taught me what kind of beauty exists in glosses Kathryn Lynch,⁸ my collaborator who assisted with visual interpretations Ksenia Cherniavska, my professors who continue to inform my engagement with image and text James Elkins and Marlena Novak, and the two professor-poets who introduced me to the technology and science of the early Modern period Jennifer Nelson and Eduardo Kac. I am also indebted to the kind and resourceful individuals at Newberry Library, particularly Suzanne Karr Schmidt, whose expertise on volvelles and other movable parts in books helped in many ways, and Christopher Fletcher, who provided feedback and guidance on the fine-grain details of the early Modern state of affairs when it comes to the transition between manuscripts and printed books. Certainly not least is also the warm encouragement and support of Casey Carsel and Unyimeabasi Udoh, excellent artists, skillful picnickers, and early believers in this project of mine.

⁸ See Chaucer, *ibid.*, pp. xvi.

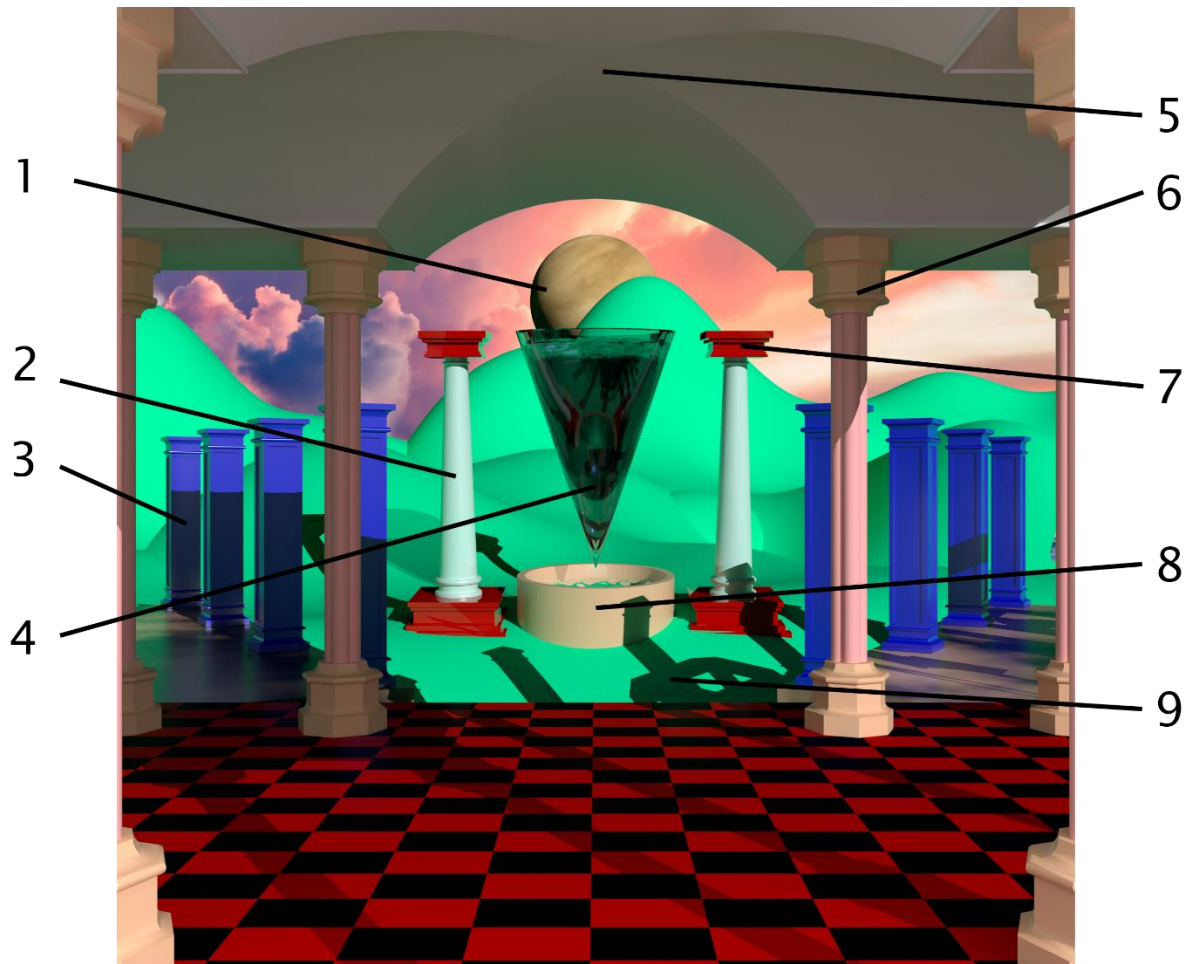
Diagrams of *Tableau-Vivants*

Aries Tableau

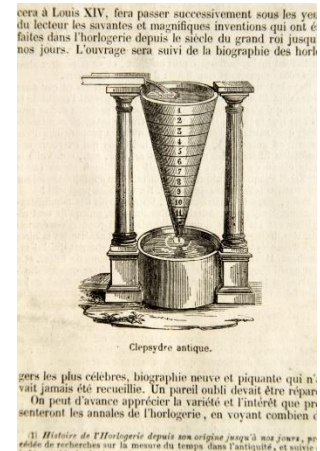


1. Mars (astronomical body depicted, astrological ruler of Aries)
2. "Telluric being with aspect of the cloud," see *Atalanta Fugiens* by Michael Maier, 1617, specifically emblem 21
3. Column, see *Susanna and the Elders in the Garden, and the Trial of Susanna before the Elders*, by Master of Apollo and Daphne, 1495-1505, repeated in every other tableau
4. Lectern with tablet displaying architectural model, see *Chants royaux* manuscript, BNF Français 1537, fol. 27v.
5. Groin vault, common structure in medieval architecture, repeated in every tableau
6. Quadrilobed column with simple octagonal capital, uncommon structure in gothic architecture, repeated in every tableau
7. "Telluric being with aspect of the cloud," see *The Conjuror*, Hieronymus Bosch, 1502
8. Self-referential model of landscape present in video file and tableaux
9. Potential, if not overly simplistic, model of Makerbot Replicator FDM 3D printer

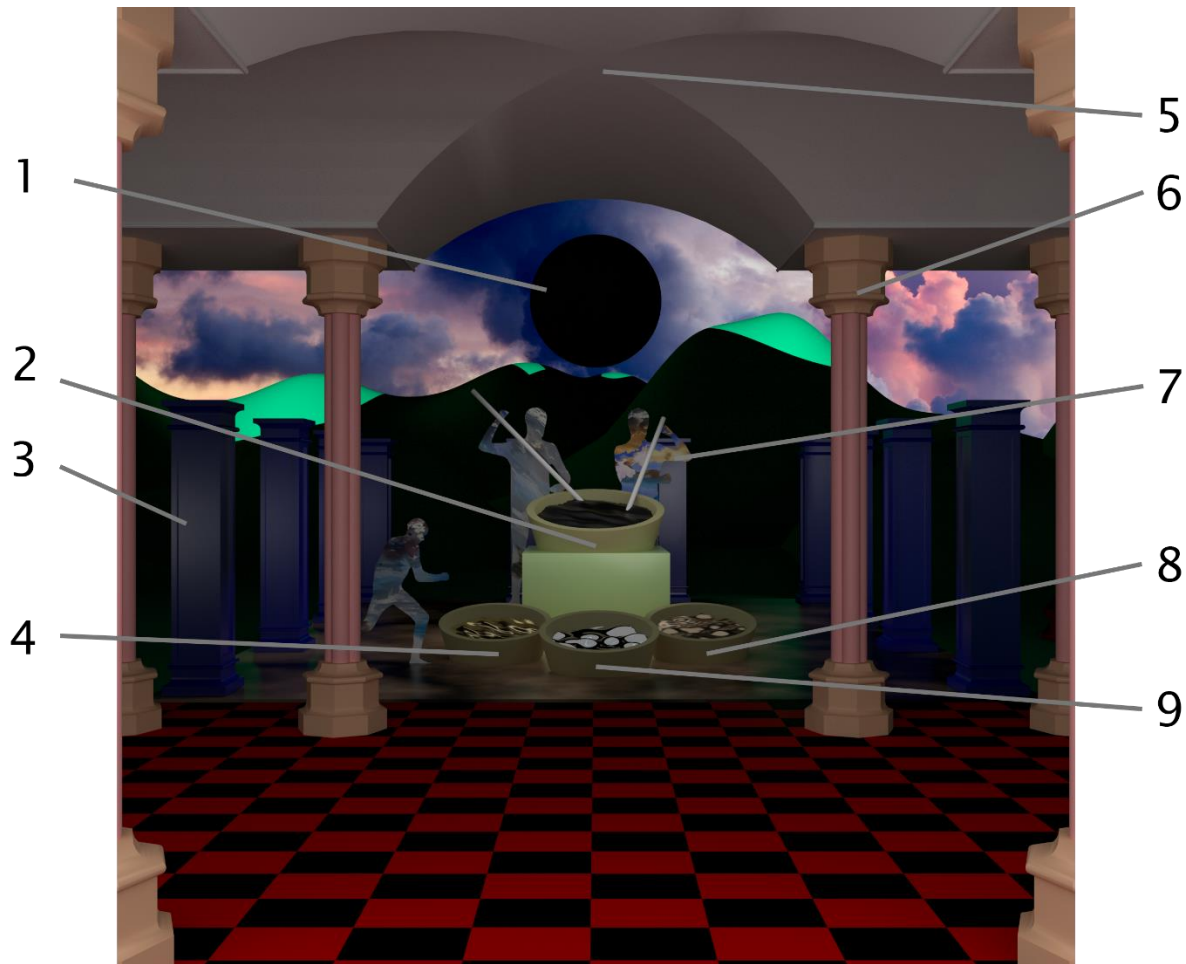
Taurus Tableau



1. Venus (astronomical body depicted, astrological ruler of Taurus)
2. Column of unknown origin, visually similar with 19th Century French gravure plate image of a “clepsydre antique” (see lower right image)
3. Column, see *Susanna and the Elders in the Garden, and the Trial of Susanna before the Elders*, by Master of Apollo and Daphne, 1495-1505, repeated in every other tableau
4. Basin element of the Clepsydrae, or water-clock, containing water in order to keep track of time
5. Groin vault, common structure in medieval architecture, repeated in every tableau
6. Quadrilobed column with simple octagonal capital, uncommon structure in gothic architecture, repeated in every tableau
7. Column of unknown origin (see 2), anachronistic column capital
8. Reservoir element of the Clepsydrae, or water-clock, collecting the water that is regularly released through a small opening from the basin (see 4)
9. Shadow cast by columns and potential Makerbot Replicator FDM 3D Printer in Aries tableau



Gemini Tableau



1. Presumed to be Mercury (astronomical body depicted, astrological ruler of Gemini)
2. Basin of combined metals
3. Column, see *Susanna and the Elders in the Garden, and the Trial of Susanna before the Elders*, by Master of Apollo and Daphne, 1495-1505, repeated in every other tableau
4. Basin, presumed to represent molten gold
5. Groin vault, common structure in medieval architecture, repeated in every tableau
6. Quadrilobed column with simple octagonal capital, uncommon structure in gothic architecture, repeated in every tableau
7. "Telluric beings", or "Communicants", mixing molten precious metals; compare with MS Cotton Augustus V, f363r, British Library
8. Basin, presumed to be molten copper
9. Basin, presumed to be molten silver

Chapter 1: The Dream Under Aries

Subsequent to the effects of the rotational principle, I found myself at a place and time at which the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon could be seen.⁹ In this moment and at this position I reflected on the concerns of the world. The white **miasma**¹⁰ which rose from the land hung in the air like seeds from cottonwood, causing those who walked in its midst to cough and choke.¹¹ In the sky hung red clouds drenched in blood¹² which cast dark shadows upon those who labored in the fields despite the late hour. Against the receding horizon stood many great black plumes, either from pit fires or from workshops. The silver light of the moon struck the faces of those retreating to their bedchambers, some tired by the silver light and others tired by the stress of obligating those in the fields to commit to their work,¹³ and they held shut their windows as the sun was consumed by the horizon. As I considered these things, I felt a heaviness in my body, and while the flames of my own chamber had been lit and light danced upon the walls, I retreated from the lancet window¹⁴ to my own bed.

Here the light of the day and the shadows of the night met upon the ceiling and created many intriguing patterns. As my eyes rested upon these shadows, through which **I could see many designs caused by that which projected**¹⁵ them, I began to think of pearlescence and its beauty. In these precious shadows many things began to form, and although the earthly portion of my being was heavy, the portion corresponding to airy qualities lifted towards these shapes and opalescent shadows.¹⁶

Freed from my earthly being and nourished by shapes caused by light and its absence, that which was earthly I could see through this nacreous¹⁷ material, as though they were shadows caused by a yet unseen source. I felt myself conveyed a great distance through this iridescent haze, during which I saw the twelve signs of the night sky, and that which those signs ruled over, and that which ruled over them.¹⁸ I saw shadows of the ram, the bull, the twins, the crab, the lion, the virgin, the scales, the scorpion, the hunter, the sea-goat, the water-bearer, and the fish. Yet these shadows were not wholly these things, for simultaneously cast within these shadows were yet other shapes, which danced with great skill and flourish as if they were entertainment for aristocracy.

⁹ This clearly denotes a sunset during a full moon.

¹⁰ The hypertext citation-image here appears to illustrate either an article of clothing, or a plastic bag common in the latter half of the 20th century.

¹¹ This may be a reference to microplastics, although the connection is unclear and speculative.

¹² The meaning here, both metaphorical and literal, is difficult to comprehend. It may be a poor attempt at describing a sunset.

¹³ This is likely an obfuscatory way to describe a foreman or boss that finds management tiresome.

¹⁴ A high, thin window.

¹⁵ The citation-image here is, again, not entirely clear, and certainly betrays a stylistic difference between the others used in this chapter. The depicted diagram may be of a lens, an aperture, or some other kind of optical tool.

¹⁶ This appears to be some kind of mimicry of Aristotelian physics mixed with humourism.

¹⁷ An obscure word for "pearlescent."

¹⁸ Here the unknown author lists the traditional signs of the zodiac. We may speculate that this passage indicates some kind of updating or thinking on what the signs ruled over, as these do not match extant 14th/15th/16th Century astrological theory.

Within these deeper shadows I saw figures, which appeared in shape to be figures of telluric¹⁹ beings, yet within their essence was an aspect of the cloud, which mirrored the experience of my own body. I saw these figures organize themselves thusly:²⁰ first, under the sign of the ram, they created the world by use of mysterious and arcane devices.²¹ Under the sign of the bull, they shaped the essence of time and motion through their tools. Under the sign of the twins, **they mixed precious objects together and combined their characteristics to extract hidden forms from them.**²² These objects were of a sub-astral quality, but these figures commanded these precious things to obey their desires.

Under the sign of the crab, these figures took their precious objects and created the tellurian world by spinning threads made of copper, silver, and gold into the soil.²³ Under the sign of the lion, they created great houses within which they stored a harvest of knowledge gleaned from the world below, and the activities of the laborers within it. Under the sign of the virgin, those that filled the great storehouses, which was accomplished by many spirits, informed these figures of that which occurred outside of the great walls of this celestial garden.

Under the sign of the scales, that which was housed in the great storehouses was judged by a terrifying Scribe having two faces which these figures served and worshipped with elaborate rituals.²⁴ Under the sign of the scorpion, a great host of laborers pleaded and petitioned for access through the great walls of this space. Under the sign of the hunter, I saw the figures with facets of loam and **cloud**²⁵ commit themselves to a great and mysterious ritual, through which their essence fully shed their terrestrial aspects and joined in consort with the terrifying Scribe.

Under the sign of the sea-goat, I saw promises of the mysterious and terrifying ritual that had occurred, which fully separated the earthly from the airy. Under the sign of the water-bearer, **I saw a figure not**

¹⁹ This may be a literary reference to *tellurium*, atomic symbol Te, atomic number 52. This element was discovered during the mid-18th Century in what is now Germany, European Union. The word as presented here, telluric, simply means “of or relating to the earth.”

²⁰ This section of the text essentially functions as a table of contents and an ekphrasis of the tableaux present in the video file contained in the book binding.

²¹ See illustration of Tableau #1/Aries. The “mysterious and arcane devices” appear to be an iPad resting on a lectern or bookrest, and a remarkably large 3D printer somehow creating a floating structure in midair. The figure to the right shares a remarkably high degree of visual similarity with the audience member in Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Magician*, unaware that his coinpurse is about to be removed by a bespectacled man looking at the sky. This victim of the crime is wholly enthralled with a pearl held by the titular magician.

²² This citation-image depicts a side view and front view of different tubes. This may be related to the description of the Internet as a series of tubes by United States politicians in the early 21st Century, or a schematized illustration of cathode ray tubes used in the construction of color images from red, blue, and green projections prior to the ubiquity of liquid crystal displays.

²³ This may describe 20th Century communication technologies, specifically integrated circuits and cables used in communication, such as the deep-sea cables connecting continents and used for internet communication.

²⁴ As implied by the table-of-contents-cum-ekphrasis structure of this chapter, these rituals are described in further dreams/chapters, specifically the Libra chapter.

²⁵ This citation-image is a highly schematized illustration of decentralized information storage that was common in the early 21st Century. According to contemporary accounts, information was stored in clouds, although there is no clear description of how or exactly where within the cloud this information was stored. It seemed to serve as some kind of panacea for many businesses and enterprises.

unlike my own meditate upon the shadows shown to me.²⁶ At the end of my travel through this iridescent haze, I saw under the sign of the fish a great desolation. This desolation was as empty and formless as the beginning of a dream, and I saw the concepts behind forms evaporate as if they were frost in the morning of the vernal equinox.²⁷

After all this, as the entire field of my perception was brought back within me, I could see a refinement of shape and form, as if a mass of beasts emerged from fog. These strange figures moving about in the shadows were earthly only in the tracing of their shape, for in their essence they belonged to the clouds and other higher celestial spheres. Before them laid a **demonstration of the world they desired**,²⁸ and this desire was held against those whose quality of being was different. They studied this demonstration and used a great contrivance to produce a model of their desired world, referencing their idealized demonstration of the ways in which thoughts and ideas should be organized, and paid no attention to me or my being.

As these things came to pass, I noticed within myself my own properties, which had been altered from fixation into mutability by the projection of the nacreous shadows I had witnessed. I felt my sight diminish as if the dusk of a moonless night rapidly descended upon the world and was met by a restless peace as I continued to slumber.

²⁶ This citation-image seems to describe some kind of sensory processing mechanism that connects to “the cloud” as well as physical devices. This could describe a philosophical model of the human individual, or alternatively a model of artificial intelligence or some kind of cyborg being more common in the 22nd Century.

²⁷ Comparing this ekphrasis with the related tableau, #12/Pisces, this desolation that is described here is visually represented simply by the absence of visual objects in the landscape. Looking forward in the tableaux and the text, we will also see here perhaps the apex of the divergence between the tableau image and the textual description of the dream. We can infer then, by the time they wrote the last chapter, the author was either unconcerned with the narrative, tired of working on it, had regulated it to some other author, or perhaps a combination of the three.

²⁸ This citation-image is conceptually obvious and does not need any further explanation, so I will not insult the reader by including such a thing here.

Chapter 2: The Dream Under Taurus

Once the things described before had come to pass, a large structure was brought immediately to my consciousness, taking the form of an inverted cone within which a reservoir of water was held.²⁹ This reservoir was fashioned out of glass and had markings upon it. It tapered towards the bottom and was flanked by two great pillars. Underneath this reservoir was a pool, upon which droplets of water would fall from the taper and create a pattern of inference³⁰ upon the pool.

At this moment I perceived **vapors**³¹ of mint and thyme in the air. As I looked into the pool, I saw within it a reflection not of myself but of the entirety of what had come before. While **scrying**³² this reflection, a great condensation of knowledge formed from the heavens and coalesced into the telluric figures that had made themselves known to me prior. Suddenly I found myself before the figures I had since seen only from afar. Their form was contained in a way such that **I could not see the definition of their depth**.³³ As I moved away from the pool and reservoir, their bodies moved in such a way that it always faced me.³⁴ Yet within this form were the symbols of clouds, and I saw signs of condensation and heard sounds of crashing thunder. **They had no mouth to open**,³⁵ yet the sounds of thunder, rain, and wind resonated in such a way that utterances fell upon my ears. With great speed I began to understand these utterances, although within me was great confusion and horror, much like the terror of those who recoil from the **vox humana**.³⁶

Hence it spoke to me: “Do not fear my form or my speech, for I alight upon the air and preside between the earth and the heavens. I, and those like me, speak to the **Autodidact**,³⁷ who knows your essence and

²⁹ Contrary to the previous chapter, this seems to be a description of the object presented to us in the video contained in the embedded micro-computer. The description here and the visual form of the object indicate that it is a water clock, which was used to measure time prior to the development of mechanical escapements.

³⁰ This is potentially a reference to the holographic process, but it is unclear.

³¹ This citation-image is perplexing. It appears to describe a system of interconnected hoses from the 20th or 21st century. It is likely a safe assumption, given the context, that this system could distribute gaseous materials, and may be a ventilator or humidifier.

³² It is unclear if this is a cross-section of an unidentified flying object or the lens of an eyeball. The connection here with scrying may be related to the visual sensory organs. Some kind of connection with the sense faculties appears to be a theme in this chapter’s citation-imagery.

³³ This citation-image is unique in that it appears to contain color photographic information. The four photographs to the right are anaglyphic images that should create a stereoscopic image when viewed with the correct glasses.

³⁴ This may be a description of the same effect we see in early videogames such as *Doom* (1993), where the non-player character sprites were two-dimensional and would rotate to always face the player’s perspective.

³⁵ The associated citation-image here is a medical cross-section of a human’s nasal cavity, mouth, and throat. The mouth appears to be blocked by some device, and arrows indicate the passage of what we can assume to be air, or perhaps vapor.

³⁶ A *vox humana* is simply a human voice. It may refer to the tonalities of a pipe organ in the late Middle Ages that were banned by the church for sounding too close to the human voice. What is paradoxical here is that this citation-image shows another medical image of a human ear as a cross section. The ear also appears to be blocked by something, and what looks like a WiFi symbol is also present. It is unclear if this is intentional or not.

³⁷ This word is capitalized like a proper noun, indicating that this figure is a specific individual. An autodidact is a self-taught person, which would imply that this is a figure who learns from itself in some capacity. This may be a reference to artificial intelligence that does not require human input for a dataset.

whose assumptions of your character are true by their very existence. For this reason, you may call me and my siblings **Communicants**.³⁸

I here inquired: “Why have my **lancet windows**³⁹ been replaced with this pool? For what purpose do these things exist, and why have I been brought here?”

Thusly it spake: “The Autodidact and the Twice-Faced Scribe⁴⁰ alone know the answer to your second inquest. As regards the pool and the cone, your ignorance is true and clear. You see before yourself a water-clock.

Such is the way in which time is measured: as the water trickles into the pool, which you vainly attempt to scry in, it leaves the cone and inscribes the passage of time between surface of the water and the markings upon the cone. What is clearly beyond your understanding is that this is merely a symbol describing the point in time we observe in common. **Through this movement we inscribe the number of points in time from a place fitting to us.**⁴¹ You may be confident in your knowledge that as I utter this, precisely one billion six-hundred thirteen million seven hundred fifty thousand nine hundred forty-one⁴² points in time have been counted.”

Through my clenched jaw, which had shut itself from fear, I asked further: “But is not the motion of time circular, as we measure the continuous motion of the heavenly bodies in their spheres? What can be said of the time prior to this counting, and what happens once the counting has grown so large such that its count cannot be contained in any one thing?”

As though I was listening to a quiet rain, the Communicant spake: “Out of my duty to impart information, which defines who I am,⁴³ I tell you thusly: that which is continuous is falsehood. The Autodidact, which teaches itself, and the Scribe, who records all that Communicants and **Percepts**⁴⁴ ponder and act upon,

³⁸ This word is likely used here in its archaic meaning, which is an individual who imparts, or communicates, information. These figures then must serve as a type of intermediary between the describe class structure here: Percepts (used later) form the bottom of this hierarchy, followed by Communicants, and then finally the Autodidact itself. Regarding the related citation-image, there is a distinct difficulty in interpretation. The cloud motif is readily apparent, followed by illustrations of figures that have a late 19th Century style to them. The exact relationship between the figures and cloud are not obvious.

³⁹ This citation-image can be related to the prior one in that we can see a distinct and apparent late 19th Century style in them. There appears to be a group of three humans and the WiFi symbol appears next to each of them, in a circle with a line crossing the symbol out. Perhaps there is some metaphorical connection between wireless connections and the symbol of a pool here, inasmuch as that we connect to a pool of information through WiFi, and many of our devices need an internet connection to establish the date and time, but this is purely speculative, and may not have been known by the unknown author. What is clearly not represented is a lancet window, which is a tall and thin window resembling the shape of a lance.

⁴⁰ This is the first reference to this figure, which will be described more fully in the chapters ahead.

⁴¹ This citation-image clearly describes the gearing system for a clock.

⁴² 1,613,750,941; This may be a UNIX epoch number, commonly used for keeping time in digital systems. If this assumption is correct, it corresponds to the following date and time: 10:09:01 AM Friday February 19, 2021. Of note is the fact that this timekeeping system is linear and will eventually become obsolete in the year 2038, similar to the infamous “Y2K bug”.

⁴³ This passage confirms the earlier, archaic definition of what a “Communicant” can be understood as.

⁴⁴ This citation-image is absolutely baffling: there seems to be a ghost of some kind standing next to a large egg with a small foot at its base. Perhaps this is some kind of sensory chamber? The word, which is peculiar in itself, is a noun that refers to an object that is perceived by something.

have determined the following: that which is discrete is true. Time, and the world that flows from it, is made up of discriminate parts. What you foolishly believe to be the continuous motion of the celestial bodies is a discrete motion. Your **sense organs**,⁴⁵ which cannot be trusted to accurately reconstitute the world in your mind, fail to notice the discrete motion of the passage of time, as our instruments do.⁴⁶

As to your inquiry of what is prior to the counting of seconds, truly it is a dark place without form. It is not worth the time to consider. We do not lower ourselves to concern one another with what may or may not occur before the first point in time. It is best to not consider the heresies of percepts which, in their uneducated hubris, talk in circles about that which has happened before the Moon has set.”

At this moment, an awful rumbling grew like the herald of a hurricane, and the Communicant spake: “If the count becomes too large to contain, we shall **create a larger container**!”⁴⁷ Do you not understand that with our mastery of discrete things we create forms to fulfill our own needs? What hubris it is to assume that which the Autodidact does not!”

I saw then before me this Communicant darken like a terrible storm, and with a booming sound it spake with finality: “Now I leave this poor fool, unguided in this land strange to them!”

⁴⁵ This citation-image is also perplexing in that it shows what we can understand as a human brain near a balloon or light source attached to a late 20th or early 21st Century computer. Arrows indicate some kind of flow – perhaps of information – but there is no clear description of what kind of substance is moving between the parts in the image.

⁴⁶ This passage betrays a kind of philosophy about time, specifically that it is essentially discrete and measurable and not continuous. This is contrary to the consensus of philosophers throughout recorded history as received from extant texts.

⁴⁷ If this citation-image is understood as an illustration of lenses, this seems to be a focusing device for light beams. It is not entirely clear what would be stored in this kind of object, or how it is a container of any variety.

Chapter 3: The Dream Under Gemini

Succeeding the aforementioned events, and with swift motion which I felt to be continuous, a place was brought to my perception wherein I could see at a distance three Communicants at labor in the shadows of the host of celestial bodies. In this darkness, their bodies of condensed vapor moved and mixed together precious metals as if performing some alchemical ritual. Two stood before a large vessel above a furnace,⁴⁸ churning and mixing molten metals, and underneath the furnace a third moved between smaller vessels, containing liquid gold, silver, and copper, respectively.

Behind these figures I saw hills rise from the ground, upon which there were no features or **gramineous**⁴⁹ life. These hills grew in size until I could see the great signifier of one's location, the horizon. In the sky above I saw the great host of celestial bodies in their courses: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. When my eyes rested upon the hills at a great distance, I saw upon them a line of percepts moving towards me and away from me. This line terminated near the horizon, at a place in the hills that held within it an opening in the ground. Atop this opening was a shelter, within which sat a winch that lowered percepts, buckets, and other tools into the opening. From this opening many glittering things were taken, iridescent and gold in hue and color. These clinquant objects were brought to great **furnaces**,⁵⁰ which consumed them and made them become like water. Red clouds came out of these furnaces and moved across the sky before passing into the celestial spheres. Closer to the place I found myself in were many impressions within the ground, which the percepts brought the opalescent and gold water to. They poured this mixture into the ground,⁵¹ and after a while, would dig the earth around where they had poured to reveal mysterious and beautiful contrivances. Yet others would bring the mixture to the Communicants, who would add it to their own vessels. Only that which was contained in the smaller vessels would be added to the larger vessel mixed by the two Communicants.

Here the copper would be portioned out and spun into fine thread. The silver, in its turn, would be applied to rollers and used to ink plates, which were printed on great verdant boards⁵² with

⁴⁸ See MS Cotton Augustus V, f363r, British Library. This illumination is an almost-identical match to the image present in the accompanying video and tableau.

⁴⁹ The decision to use a word this obscure could only be meant to be obfuscatory. Gramineous, in this context at least, must refer to grass. The citation-image here visually describes something that looks more akin to a tomato plant than grass, however. Whatever sort of plant life it is, it appears to be growing in a laboratory test tube.

⁵⁰ Another citation-image whose interpretation is not readily apparent: this may be a furnace of some type, but it appears first and foremost to be a kind of silo or air filtration system from the early 21st Century.

⁵¹ By all accounts, this appears to be a description of sand mold metal casting. This technique was known during the Middle Ages and used in the pre-industrial era.

⁵² This may be a reference to circuitry, especially in the late 20th Century when circuits were printed and etched onto green or "verdant" boards. This interpretation is strengthened if we consider "precious threads" to be synonymous with wiring made from copper.

yet smaller precious threads attached to them. The mixture of gold was cooled and beat into leaves, which were applied to the gramineous boards and precious contrivances by the steady and skillful hands of the percepts. Lastly all these things, the fine threaded copper, the silvered ink, and the gold leaf, and all the other precious things, were taken and combined into **worshipful objects**.⁵³

I saw then a host of Communicants, whose number I estimated to be simultaneously one billion and twenty-five score with one dozen,⁵⁴ chant a beautiful liturgy over these worshipful objects. After this ritual was completed, I saw these worshipful objects take the form of a looking-glass, which could at times recall images and sounds from far-away places, or even places and conceits which exist only in the mind. Hence the Communicants took the worshipful objects and distributed them to the percepts, who took hold of them quickly, and contemplated the images and reflections within them, which shook and changed rapidly. Consequently, the percepts' days were divided into labor and **image-contemplation**, and accordingly the minds of the percepts were fully occupied by labor on behalf of the Communicants and contemplation upon that which the Communicants willed.

As the sun moved low and many shadows were cast, from this place did the percepts take their worshipful objects of contemplation and retire to their houses made of thatching and dirt. Yet the Communicants remained to tend to that which the percepts were not allowed near, namely, the alchemical vessels containing gold, silver, and copper, and the combinations thereof. At this dark hour I observed them churning the contents of these vessels, ceaselessly and without rest. They chanted their liturgies over these vessels as well. I was able to hear the words spoken over these vessels, and while I could recognize the sounds of these rites, the meaning of them were kept beyond my understanding. As I listened, I felt my temperament change from sanguinity⁵⁵ to a choleric and melancholy disposition. My whisps of joy became as anger or sadness, until that was truly all that I felt. The weaving liturgy of the Communicants acted upon my being and my essence, and I understood in that moment that these metals, and indeed all things constructed from them, would work upon the yellow and black bile⁵⁶ of those who brought themselves into close association with it.

Yet despite the sudden anger and sadness I felt towards the world, towards my peers, and especially towards those whose ways, beliefs, and customs I did not understand, I saw also the

⁵³ It may be the case that this citation-image is describing a smartphone, or a smartphone that is connected to a computer and perhaps the internet, if we take the cloud to be representative of such a thing. It is unclear if this means that the unknown author was aware of smartphones or not, but it seems safe to assume that they were familiar with micro-computing given the technology present in the book.

⁵⁴ This could be a super-positioning of binary and decimal numbering systems. 512 is 1,000,000,000, or one billion, expressed in binary notation.

⁵⁵ This is an application of the 15th Century medical theory known as humourism, which we may also relate to modern-day psychology as well regarding dispositions, character traits, etc.

⁵⁶ According to theories of humourism, yellow bile produces choleric temperament while black bile produces melancholic temperament.

Communicants withdraw from the largest vessel twelve brilliantly cut gemstones, one after the other. Thusly I saw pulled from the vessel in succession:⁵⁷ jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and lastly amethyst. I saw all this but did not understand what they might signify, nor their utility.

Clasping my ears with my hands, so that I might not hear any more of this terrible and terrifying liturgy, the hills from which the percepts came moved away from my being. Far away from the chanting Communicants and their enchantments, my humors began to repair. As I looked upon the structure of the world from these hills, I saw that I had journeyed one-fourth of the way along the path I saw in the night sky while I was within my **dolorous opalescence**.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Compare with stanzas 84 and 85 of *Pearl* by the Pearl Poet. This is also the ordering of gemstones in the volvelle that functions as a civil and astrological calendar in the original manuscript.

⁵⁸ This citation-image also contains symbols that we may be able to relate to smartphones and the internet if the earlier interpretative assumptions are well-grounded. The depicted visual elements appear to describe an individual transmitting their image to the “cloud” and being seen or received by an audience of three other individuals. Based on earlier passages of the text, these individuals may be understood as the percepts, or objects of perception, first described in the prior chapter.