Re-Configuring the Apophatic Tradition in Late Medieval England

Conference Abstracts: Alphabetical List

Amy Appleford (Boston University), 'Who are the Devil's Contemplatives in the *Cloud of Unknowing*?'

This paper takes as its focus Chapter 52 of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, exploring the author's use of the language of impairment in his critique of those contemplatives who mistake spiritual apprehension for physical affect. This work of the "feendes scole" manifests in a non-normate physicality, unnatural movements, and various forms of sensory pathologies. The disordered minds and souls of "heretics" and "hypocrites" are made visible to those who can discern them through uncontrolled bodily movements, especially of their heads and feet. But who are these ascetics of the "feendes scole," the contemplatives that writhe their bodies, wag their feet, and roll their eyes, permanently damaging their minds through their misplaced devotional fervor? The identities of the "heretics" and "hypocrites" alluded to in the text is a complex question, connected to the equally difficult question of the authorship and dating of the *Cloud* text. Current scholarly consensus points to Carthusian authorship, an identification suggested by Phillis Hodgson in her second edition of the text and argued for vigorously by John Clark. In this model, the addressee is therefore a junior monk being instructed by a senior colleague in one of the advanced contemplation praxes for which the ascetic order was known. The text is usually dated to the 1380's, with the result that it has been assumed by scholars, following Clark, that the wrong-headed ascetics the *Cloud* author characterizes in such extreme and pathologizing terms must be followers of John Wycliff.

As Wolfgang Riehle has noted, however, the ascription of Carthusian authorship is complicated by a number of features of the text, such as its recurring habit of imagining both male and female as future readers, using a formulation ("men and women") often associated with works written in part for women readers. Moreover, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton reminds us that there was a "range of concern about and interest in non-Wycliffite radical thought in England," while the always various shape of what would later be understood to be Lollard religiosity was notably inchoate in the 1380's.

Drawing on the work of Riehle, Kerby-Fulton and others, this paper reads Chapter 52 of the *Cloud* in the context of the new academic discourse of "discretion of spirits," which by the late fourteenth century had been deeply shaped by scholastic natural philosophy and medical theory, as Nancy Cacciola has shown. In its critique of bodily, affective, and ecstatic religiosity, I shall argue, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is one of the first texts in English to characterize semi-religious and lay ascetics as impaired or disabled, a pathologizing move that will later dominate the *discretio* writings of Jean Gerson and others across the fifteenth century.

John Arblaster (Ruusbroec Intsitute, University of Antwerp), 'Gained in Translation? Apophatic Additions to John of Ruusbroec's *Sparkling Stone* in the Middle English Tradition'

It is well-known that Willem Jordaens (d. 1372), a canon regular of Groenendaal, translated four of the mystical treatises of his prior John of Ruusbroec (1293-1381) into Latin. One of these

treatises was the short work *Vanden blinckenden steen* (The Sparkling Stone), which was known in Jordaens' Latin translation as *De calculo candido*. In its turn, this treatise was translated into Middle English under the title *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, a text that new some popularity in Late Medieval England and was predominantly circulated by Carthusians. It has been argued that this treatise stands "in a firmly pastoral tradition of practical instruction" (Watson, 1996, p. 30). The Middle English rendering of Ruusbroec's *Stone* is often painfully literal, but there are some remarkable omissions and additions to the text. One notable omission is a long passage in which Ruusbroec employs a river metaphor for mystical union that has been described as "one of the most successful and striking of Ruysbroeck's 'sea figures'" (Bazire and Colledge, 1957, p. 330). Instead, the translator interpolates a completely novel passage into the text in which the wine cellar of the Song of Songs is interpreted in an explicitly Dionysian vein, focused on the apophatic darkness of God. Building on the work of Marleen Cré and others, this paper will inquire into the possible reasons why Ruusbroec's original text was thought to be potentially problematic and the ways in which the Middle English translator makes Ruusbroec's text more apophatic through their translation techniques, and what this may reveal about the theological and devotional context of late medieval England.

Antje Chan (McGill University), 'Pseudo-Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the Liturgy in Late Middle English Writings'

In his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius the Areopagite points at the role of perceptible liturgical symbols in the anagogical movement of the soul to union with God. At the heart of Pseudo-Dionysian epistemology one finds that all things both affirm God's being and conceal him. By considering the liturgy as an "immaterial initiation" both revealing and concealing sacramental mysteries, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* articulates both a cataphatic and apophatic understanding of God (*Pseudo-Dionysius,* eds. Luibheid and Rorem, 199). By engaging with the thought of postmodern thinker Anthony Adler and his understanding of the apophatic as what can be attained through what is beyond expression but also what is *beneath* it, and his distinction between esoteric and exoteric modalities of the apophatic, this paper looks at the notion of the liturgy's ineffability and its appropriation in late Middle English devotional writings on the Mass (*Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Nahum Brown and J. Aaron Simmons, 340). By looking at the "unsayable dimension of being" in these writings, as what Adler would define as "beneath", whether in the use of symbolism or Latin as sacred language, new understandings of the ineffable as intrinsic to "ordinary communication and everyday life" emerges in the context of vernacular receptions of highly Latinate rites. While this paper does not aim to trace cultures of apophatic reception in vernacular transmission of liturgical literacy, by comparing Pseudo-Dionysius' *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and its Middle English treatises on the Mass in light of Anthony Adler's exoteric apophaticism, this paper aims to shed light on the medieval Mass as a socio-cultural practice embedding the apophatic tradition in the everyday parish life of fifteenth-century England.

Corinne Clark (University of Oxford), 'Oblative Oblivions: Finding Divinity Through Intoxication In The Middle English *Mirrour*'

'sche is ri3t drunke and more þan drunke of þat sche neuer dranke ne neuere schal drynke'
In the lines of the 15th-century Middle English translation of Marguerite Porete's *þe Mirrour of Simple Soules*, a series of negations set out to encapsulate the state of the intoxicated contemplative, drunk on a substance she can never truly consume, which provides a "knowynge" of the "diuine bountie" which is the grace of God. This undrinkable drink is enticing in its very absence, and transcends mortal experience in an almost transgressive excess. It is a state of drunkenness evoked entirely through its unknowability.

      In this paper, I will offer a reading of these divine inebriations alongside medieval physiologies of drunkenness, exploring the tension between loss of reason and elevation of the spiritual senses as depicted in the *Mirrour* and select analogues. Interested in the quotidian realities of mixed, alcoholic liquids which deal with the interplay between pleasure, sin, and the alteration of the senses, I will draw upon Robert E. Lerner's exploration of the image of mixed liquids and their equally mixed reception in late medieval thought to argue for apophatic allowances in the Middle English translation of Porete's work.

      These, I suggest, carefully negotiate a "plunging into the darkness which is above the intellect" which encourages an unknowing oblivion within the established – but by no means uncomplicated – tradition of contemplative vocabularies extracted from the Song of Songs which were popularised so enduringly in the twelfth century in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Anselm of Canterbury.

Boyd Taylor Coolman (Boston College), 'Re-Visiting the Influence of Thomas Gallus on the *Cloud* Author'

The influence of the Victorine theologian, Thomas Gallus (d. 1246), on the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* is well known. Indeed, the *Cloud* author refers explicitly to the "Abbot of Vercelli" in several of the writings attributed to that anonymous writer. Both the anonymous author and later medieval and modern readers of the *Cloud* have also tended to assume that the *Cloud* author is more or less faithfully receiving and reproducing Gallus' particular form of Dionysian mysticism, including Gallus' approach to the apophatic dimension of mystical thought and experience. Through a careful comparison of the writings of both authors, this paper seeks to revisit and substantially complicate that standard assumption. It will argue in particular that a nuanced reading of Gallus' whole literary corpus yields a conception of the relationship between knowing and unknowing, between knowledge and love or intellection and affection, that differs in important ways from that of the *Cloud* author.

Marleen Cré (Université Catholique de Louvain, Saint-Louis Bruxelles), 'Writing in Exile and the Way of Abnegation: Apophatic Dimensions in *Confessiones Amantis*: *The Spiritual Exercises of the most Virtuous and Religious Dame Gertrude More* and Related Texts'

Exiled from England, the Cambrai Benedictine community in which Gertrude More sought to shape her religious life drew its spiritual nourishment from a wide range of contemplative and

mystical texts. More's *Confessiones Amantis* are her spiritual exercises that take the form of letters to God, aiming to reach him in writing a profuse and repetitive discourse coloured by biblical, contemplative, and liturgical language. More wrote the *Confessiones* in a community in which many texts converged. She refers explicitly to Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation Christi*, and references Augustine as her favourite author. Baker points to More's understanding of a passage from Constantin de Barbanson's *Secrets sentiers de l'amour divin* (Douai 1629) as a turning point in her life as a religious.

More herself repeatedly points out the central role that Augustine Baker played in helping her to find a method of prayer and meditation that was congenial to her, 'putting her in the right way' out of her 'banishment' from God, helping her to develop 'relations' with God and to overcome 'impediments' – to speak in terms that More herself frequently repeats in the *Confessiones*. Baker's own writings include, among others, a commentary on the *Cloud of Unknowing* preceded by autobiographical reflections, and directions for contemplation.

In this keynote I will discuss how Baker's influence can be seen and understood, and the extent to which More picks up on the apophatic dimensions (the necessity of abnegation, the impossibility of knowing God in this life, the impediments that stand in the way of true knowledge of God, the ways in which God can or cannot be spoken of…) in the texts that Baker may have introduced to her. I will also extend the discussion to the autobiographical passages in Baker's own writings and the *Devotions of Margaret Gascoigne*.

Another theme that will be considered in this lecture is the role of speaking and writing to and of God in the contemplative's search for abnegation of the self and for union with God, and the way in which a profusion of words is used to fill the chasm between the contemplative and a God who is both intimately present yet out of reach – an experience that is as visceral for More as, I would contend, it was for her fellow religious, both medieval and contemporary.

Chen Cui (University of Lausanne), 'Apophatic Theology in Muriel Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965)'

With the rise of postmodernism in post-war Europe, negative theology received increasing discussion among twentieth-century Continental philosophers (such as Jacque Derrida, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Marion), but seemingly without drawing particular attention from analytical philosophers in the English-speaking world. Yet alternatively, mysticism insinuated itself into twentieth-century English literature, carrying authorial reflection on the fluidity of Western modernity, the ineffability of truth, the limitation of human language, and the trauma of warfare. T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1941), for instance, contains joint references to the *Cloud*-author, Julian of Norwich, as well as apophatic traces crystallised in the *œuvres* of seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, which is still inviting criticism in relation to the afterlife of medieval apophatism on British soil.

Another echo of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in post-war English literature consists in the Jewish- Scottish female writer Muriel Spark (1918-2006)'s multifaceted novel *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965). This novel relates the pilgrimage of Barbara Vaughan in Jerusalem, who is a half-Jewish, half- Catholic Englishwoman visiting the Holy Land and, while *on route*, undergoing a series of emotional, political, and existential crisis. When philosophising how human beings understand the way of the world, Spark writes that "in the course of time," it feels like "an

electric shock of fatal voltage ... like *a cloud of unknowing*, heavy with the molecules of accumulated impressions [...and] many-coloured fragments of what actually happened". The distinct use of cloudy images, as such, is accompanied by Spark's multiple quotes and paraphrases of the *Cloud*-author's original words throughout the episode of Jerusalem-centred roaming. This paper will offer a fine-grained case study on Murial Spark's resort to apophatic theology in tackling the following issues in the post-war context: faith and identity, temporality and eternity, and pilgrimage as a spiritual metaphor. It will also exemplify the long- lasting and wide-ranging impact of medieval apophatic theology upon twentieth-century English postmodern writing.

Olena Danylovych (University of Lausanne), 'The *Mirrour*'s Dark Pedagogy, Clarified by MN'

The Middle English *Mirrour of Simple Soules*, translated by the anonymous MN from Old French in the fourteenth century, aspires to bring its readers and listeners to a state wherein they might experience God. However, and in contrast to explicitly pedagogical texts such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, its teaching is much more opaque, elusive, and implicit. Indeed, a defining characteristic of a soul capable of mystical union is that 'noon hir may teche', complicating the pedagogical aspirations of the text.

Rather than guiding the reader towards spiritual ascent, the *Mirrour* seeks to bring them into a realisation of their inherent spiritual status, predicated upon their capacity for understanding. The *Mirrour* is rife with riddles, contradictions, and repetitions that obscure meaning, yet it instructs its intradiegetic characters (especially *Reason*) and extradiegetic readers to 'understand the gloss' of the text, or its deeper meaning. Given that there is no description of how this should be done, the implication is that the spiritually sophisticated reader understands intuitively.

In seeming contradiction with this elusive teaching of the *Mirrour*, MN provides fifteen explanatory glosses that help guide the reader into deeper understanding. Rather than focusing on inherent abilities, MN emphasises acquiring knowledge through the practice of glossing. In MN's hands, the Middle English *Mirrour* is transformed into a pedagogical tool for the exegetical education of the reader.

Diana Davis (University of Rochester), 'Polishing the *Mirrour*: Articulating the Distinction between Porete's Text and M.N.'s Glosses'

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of the glosses within M.N.'s Middle English translation of Marguerite Porete's *Mirrour of Simple Soules* and the points in the text itself which are being glossed. After surveying the body of scholarship which has heretofore discussed the coherence of M.N.'s glosses to Porete's text, the paper then turns to a close analysis of the first four glosses and Porete's text to re-evaluate the extent of this coherence. The analysis finds that while the glosses do incorporate what Marleen Cré (2017) has termed 'text-internal material,' there is a tendency within M.N.'s interjections to reinterpret theological points in Porete's text which not only veer toward the heterodox, but correspond, as Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarnieri (1968) originally demonstrated, to articles from Porete's trial for heresy. Furthermore, this paper argues that in addition to attempting to yoke Porete's theology to the

orthodox, M.N.'s interjections fundamentally alter the apophatic nature of her mysticism, particularly with respect to her insistence upon having attained a state of being in which her soul has undergone a permanent transformation of being noughted in God. Ultimately, by reinterpreting the permanent in Porete as the temporary and her negations as assertions, M.N. obscures the annihilative state which the *Mirrour* so eloquently and uniquely reflects.

Lieven De Maeyer (Radboud University, Nijmegen), 'A Simple (Non-)Seeing in God. Assessing the Influence of Benet of Canfield on the Mysticism of Madame Guyon'

In his classic study of the quietist controversy *Crépuscule des mystiques*, Louis Cognet repeatedly points out the decisive influence of the writings of Benet of Canfield on the French mystics of the seventeenth century. Cognet's observation confirms Brémond's earlier qualification of Canfield as 'the master of the masters' of spirituality during the *grand siècle*. More recently, Bernard McGinn has also drawn attention to the presence of a number of typically Canfeldian themes and terminology in the writings of the so-called '(pre-)quietists' in France, among whom Madame Guyon (1648-1717) was arguably the most prolific, controversial and influential.

The precise extent of Canfield's influence on Guyon remains to be determined, however. It is clear, nonetheless, that Guyon herself considered her mysticism to be in line with Canfield's. Canfield's influence even served as an argument for the orthodoxy of her work; in her autobiography she recounts how she used her agreement with Canfield in a discussion with Bossuet, and Canfield's *Rule of Perfection* is cited extensively in Guyon's *Justifications*, written to defend herself against Bossuet's accusations of heresy.

The objective of this paper is to assess the influence of Canfield on Guyon, and how she used – and perhaps manipulated – his thought to present her own writings as essentially 'Canfeldian.' To do so, I will first provide an overview of the presence of Canfield's writings in Guyon's work. Secondly, I will zoom in on the apophatic notion of '*le simple regard en Dieu*' and compare its use and function in the mysticism of both authors.

Mary Dzon (University of Tennessee), 'The Faces of Christ in Later Medieval English Spirituality'

In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine remarks offhand that "even the countenance of our Lord himself in the flesh is variegated and fashioned by the diversity of our countless thoughts." From the twelfth to fifteenth centuries in England, authors and artists drew attention to numerous faces of Christ. This multiplicity stems from different approaches to spirituality, as well as different emphases on the person of Christ, including his emotions. Aelred of Rievaulx, for example, called attention to how the beauty and charm of Christ's face, when he was twelve, mesmerized those around him. He also spoke of the contemplative as longing for the Bridegroom, who "look[s] out as it were through the lattice-work," and, similarly, of the veil that now separates us from the Holy of Holies, underscoring the inaccessibility of Christ's face. While modern scholars tend to emphasize the figure of St. Veronica who, according to a later version of her legend, met Christ on the way to Calvary, where she received a miraculous imprint of his face, there were many facets to medieval devotion to the face of Christ. My paper will focus on

texts concerned with contemplation read and/or produced in England, including Guigo II's *Scala claustralium* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, as well as works more closely linked with lay piety, such as the writings of St. Birgitta and Books of Hours. Tracing the development of English fascination with the holy face, I hope to demonstrate how capacious this devotional image was, appealing as it did to cloistered religious who were suspicious of art, as well as pilgrims who went to Rome in hopes of seeing at least one of the famous representations of Christ's holy face.

Joshua Easterling (Murray State University), 'Liberty and Nothing: Christ in Walter Hilton'

Few subjects so intensely preoccupied the English reformer Walter Hilton as the mystical ideal that genuine spiritual liberty was possible only by negating or annihilating (*noughynge*) the self. Such work required navigating the self's own apophatic character, its impenetrably paradoxical status as a 'lightsome darkness' (*merkenesse*). In *Scale 2* and the *De imagine peccati* that darkness extended from the dual status of the soul as fallen image on the one hand and divinely guided agent on the other. There the contemplative, either unreformed image (corrupt material not yet 'noughted') or instrument of God (a 'noughted' and reformed vessel), gradually acquires freedom through special form of sentience (*felynge*).

In so framing the process of "reformation in feeling" Hilton outlines for contemplatives a mode of sentience, and by extension spiritual liberty, that involves both the negation of agency and its enhancement. He accomplishes this, as this paper submits, through a Christologically structured re-envisioning of mystical sentience, which is intended to reform those mainstream ideas of spiritual liberty and annihilation. Here the paradoxes attendant upon the annihilated soul are resolved in the Incarnation as an act entailing at once the reduction and enhancement of (divine) agency. Here privation and abundance, the loss of agency and its amplification, are joined and become a *different experience of sentience*. In brief, Hilton's theory of reform effectively guides contemplatives beyond the self's darkness, as beyond the paradoxes of liberty and 'noughting,' though not conceptually but in a transformed and irreducibly inner experience that exceeds any description.

Juan Pablo Espinosa (University of Rochester), 'Correcting the Heretical in M.N.'s English Translation of Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer des simples âme'*

Subjected to attempted censorship, interrogation, and later condemnation, we are fortunate to have Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer des simples âme* in several manuscripts, in different languages. Witnessing a heterodoxic theological impulse predating the Lollards by c. 80 years, Marguerite Porete contemplates the mystical nature of the soul and its transcendent relationship to God, in a way that's reminiscent of a later English work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Porete's writing, as both Sister Marilyn Doiron and Romana Guarnieri have previously observed, is suspectable to a wrongful interpretation, especially by orthodox Christians in the late Middle Ages. Yet, it's interesting to see how the work informs a heterodoxic view of God and the soul. Translated into English, Italian, and Latin, *Le Mirouer* is a work devoid of territorial stasis, and the most compelling translation is the Middle English one, thanks to the mysterious M.N. Indeed M.N.'s glosses are nothing short of corrective, appropriating Porete's message of the

soul's state of mystical unknowing and (mis)clarifying it for an English audience. Interested in the linguistic and transnational availability of *Le Mirouer*, my aim in this paper is to evaluate the heterodoxic nature of Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer* using the Middle English translation, *Þe Mirrour of Simple Soules*, and how it informs a heretical prescription to Lollardy in England. I will also evaluate M.N.'s glosses in the Middle English translation and how they contribute to an orthodox reading of *Le Mirrour*.

Rob Faesen (KU Leuven/ Tilburg University), '"The Rich Wandering in Supra-Essential Love": Ruusbroec's Apophatic Theology in his Treatise *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden Blinkende Steen*)'

One of the two treatises by Ruusbroec translated into Middle English, namely *The Sparkling Stone* (*Vanden blinkende steen*, cf. *The Treatise of the Perfection of God's Children*) contains extensive elements of apophatic theology. These can be found in the first description of the 'hidden sons of God' and in the second part of the treatise, following the question of the anonymous hermit (cf. ed. Hilde Noë, p. 142, line 401). In this contribution, I will explore these elements, and especially try to discern the specific theology that underlies the apophatic dimension in Ruusbroec's thought.

Rebecca Field (University of Cambridge), 'Cross-Temporal Affinities: Apophatic Communities of Practice in the *Cloud*'s Reception History'

This paper will explore how the seventeenth-century Benedictine Augustine Baker used the *Cloud of Unknowing* as a tool for retrospective pedagogic community formation. When teaching the *Cloud* to the nuns in his care, Baker recognised apophatic contemplative teaching as an ideally social and relational process, even though the practice itself is necessarily solitary. He crafts his own commentary on the *Cloud* as a way to foster friendship and 'conversancy', as he puts it, between the nuns and the fourteenth-century *Cloud*-author. I will argue that Baker's pedagogic practice demonstrates that community formation need not be time-bound and can work backwards: his work demonstrates that searching for affinities and belonging in the work of past practitioners becomes an enduring source of comfort, inspiration, and indeed company, for contemplative teachers who work with the *Cloud* long after it was written. Moreover, in the fraught religious context of the seventeenth century, forging such communities of (apophatic) practice becomes an inherently political act of solidarity. My paper will look first at Baker's interest in and insistence upon the suitability of medieval apophatic contemplative literature for the nuns that he instructs; secondly, it will examine his commentary on the *Cloud,* to see how he frames the text for his students in a seventeenth-century context. Thirdly, it will explore what his apophatic teaching and learning community looked like in real life; finally, it will include some thoughts on the continuity of Baker's teaching methods, and how they kept the *Cloud*'s particular branch of contemplative praxis alive.

Timothy Glover (University of Cambridge), 'Richard Rolle's Apophatic Discourse'

This paper argues that Rolle's characteristically formless prose can be read as apophatic discourse, that it was influenced by Pseudo-Dionysian currents in twelfth-century spirituality, and that it expresses that the greatest grade of divine love is beyond order.

A well-known influence on Rolle's spirituality is the positivist tradition of 'the grades of love'. However, a key component of this twelfth-century tradition was the apophatic idea that the greatest grade of love is beyond order or reason. Bernard claimed that the greatest *modus* of love is *modus sine modo* ('a measure beyond measure') (a statement Rolle quotes directly). Similarly, Bonaventure closes his *Itinerarium* by quoting Pseudo-Dionysius to exhort advanced readers to abandon rational thinking and instead pursue God in darkness.

Rolle's preoccupation with the highest grade of love meant he drew on such ideas, which shaped the forms of his writing. While Rolle sometimes sets out neat grades, in other cases he resists definitions and order, freely reordering the structures outlined by others (e.g. Richard of St Victor's grades of love) or using synaesthetic language to blur the boundaries of his own schema (heat, sweetness, and song). He states that the highest love is beyond understanding, and self-consciously churns up any notion of order by piling up imagery in his spiralling, recursive prose.

Thus, Rolle contributed to the English apophatic tradition. Despite his reputation for cataphatic, affective spirituality, Rolle also drew on apophatic, Pseudo-Dionysian ideas of twelfth-century monastic theologians, which shaped his writing as apophatic discourse that restlessly reconfigures its subject.

Rachael Hodgson (University of Cambridge), 'The *Cloud* author as Literary and Contemplative Theorist: Metaphor as an Instrument of Apophaticism in *The Cloud of Unknowing*'

Critics have consistently framed the *Cloud* author's abundant use of metaphor as counter to the apophatic desire to evade language and imagination. This paper argues that this view overlooks a crucial mechanism of metaphor recognised by scholars such as Christine Brooke-Rose: the removal of irrelevant attributes. Furthermore, I contend that the *Cloud* author anticipates this theory and uses metaphor to exploit this mechanism, whereby the paring down of attributes functions as a metonymy for the paring away of all thoughts which obscure the contemplative's focus upon God.

I further propose that the *Cloud* author is at several points entirely explicit about this subtractive dimension of metaphor. This theorisation of metaphor reveals itself most significantly in *Deonise Hid Diuinity* in which the *Cloud* author conceives of a sculpture which is pared down to the smallest imaginable element. This sculpture is faceless and featureless, in a significant departure from the *Cloud* author's sources. I contrast this narrowing of attributes with the *Cloud* author's derision for different forms of 'extension' associated with verbosity, from gossiping to the scholarly process of 'expounding'. In contrast, metaphor is instrumental: we are not to imagine things entirely disappeared but instead enact a process of concentration which focusses the mind upon a singular, concentrated object of thought – a narrow sharpness which contains the potential to pierce through unknowing into a form of experience. Metaphor

therefore allows for a pared-down and focussed role for imagination and its images and words in apophatic discourse.

Ian Johnson (University of St Andrews), ''I wote neuer': Instances of a Repertoire of Time-Denial in *The Cloud of Unknowing*'

As a signifier variously denying temporality and affirming atemporality in the earthly and celestial realms, the word *neuer* is creatively deployed by the *Cloud* author to perform a versatile range of functions in the work of his text. An example of the semantic possibilities of its theological repertoire begins chapter 6, when the author gives an intriguing response to his pupil's question concerning how to think about God: 'But now þou askest me & seiest: "How schal þink on himself, and what is hee?" & to this I cannot answere þee bot þus: "I wote neuer."' His single answer, 'I wote neuer', in responding to two different questions, emits a theologically fertile range of possibilities, amongst which may be an instruction not to think on God and/or an instruction to think on God's (non-)modality as that of neverness. It may also be seen as a claim of his ignorance and/or a claim to his (unknowing) knowledge of divine neverness. Further possibilities for neverness suggest themselves in this passage and elsewhere in the work, as in chapter 61, when, somewhat differently, the border/juncture of human temporality and divine transcendence is negotiated by a twofold denial, qualified by *neuer*, of the variegated absence of the Manhood in the process of the Ascension.

This paper will, then, investigate ways in which *neuer*, in its action-modifying repertoire of time-denying negativity articulated from a timebound perspective, squeezes itself in and out of physical presence and extensibility, and negotiates the perils of (a)temporality as a formidable vehicle for the immaterial transcendency to which it refers.

Lucie Kaempfer (University of Lausanne), 'The Language of Forgetting in the Apophatic Tradition'

Unlike memory, whose art and craft have been the subject of numerous critical studies, forgetting appears to escape critical enquiry. The important presence of ars memoriae in the Middle Ages suggests the cultural significance of memory, understood as an active art and a sign of genius. Forgetfulness, in this context, is seen as a passive failure of memory, if not a disease or a sin. Indeed, while the virtue of Patience was associated with memory in the Middle Ages, forgetting was a symptom of the sin of acedia. And yet, in the medieval apophatic tradition, forgetting comes to be associated with a higher state of consciousness which can lead the contemplative towards mystical union. In this paper, I would like to question the use of a positive language of forgetting in apophatic mysticism and its relationship with other religious discourses on forgetting.

Epitomised in the figure of the 'cloud of forgetting', found in the anonymous English Cloud of Unknowing as well as in Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Major,* the apophatic language of forgetting expresses the relinquishing of the mind's cognitive capacities in order to accept and to access the unknowability of the divine. My paper will offer a close study of this language of forgetting and its affiliations with the apophatic notions of unknowing and annihilation. In

particular, it will highlight the significance of continental authors such as Meister Eckhardt and Marguerite Porete on the *Cloud*-author's discourse of forgetting.

Tamás Karáth (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest), 'What can one hear in the *Cloud*?'

Is the apophatic mysticism of *The Cloud of Unknowing* anacoustic? The paper will approach the aural dimensions of the *Cloud* and propose that the strict prohibition on cognition and vision as major obstacles to contemplation and mystical union do not apply equally to hearing and audiation in the experience of the apophatic contemplative.

     The Cloud of Unknowing does not present a wholly negative view of sounds. The work evinces an acoustic quality that arises from the interplay of various dimensions of aurality. The language of the *Cloud,* rich in alliterating doublets and internal rhymes, and its undulating prose rhythm emulate the "life of breath" that is often associated with the context of an oral recital or a performative reading ("here", "here to be red"), as opposed to a silent (private) reading. The *Cloud* also suggests that sound is a natural conduit for contemplation that bridges the humanity of the contemplative with the pre-unitive phase of the mystical experience through one-syllable vocal prayers.

     Following the exploration of the sound world of the *Cloud,* the second part of the paper will examine the perception of this aurality by those who utilized the *Cloud* in their own (mostly cataphatic) mystical pursuits. It will focus on three texts: the central chapters of Walter Hilton's *Scale II* (which engages with the *Cloud),* the corresponding chapters in the Latin translation of the *Scale* by Thomas Fishlake, and finally, Richard Methley's translation of the *Cloud* itself into Latin, as well as his repurposing of *Cloud*-reminiscences in his spiritual diaries.

Kasey Kimball (Boston College), 'The Spiritual Senses in the *Cloud* and Rudolph of Biberach's *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*'

Phyllis Hodgson has named *De septem itineribus aeternitatis* (a text written by German Franciscan Rudolph of Biberach around 1300) as one of the "encyclopedic compilations" through which the *Cloud* author may have had access to the preceeding theological tradition. At the same time, the *Cloud* author's caution against any reliance on the interior (spiritual) senses seems to be at odds with the spiritual senses tradition carried by and advanced in *De septem itineribus*. In this paper, I will consider Rudolph's positive treatment of the spiritual senses (especially spiritual taste and its Eucharistic transformation) in *De septem itineribus* VI and propose that it may yet be reconcilable with the *Cloud*'s claim that "those who set out to see, hear taste, smell, and feel the spiritual, either interiorly or exteriorly, are greatly deceived and violate the natural order of things."

Sarah Lancaster (University of Nottingham), 'A 'merkeness of unknowynge': Apophatic Selfhood in Yorkshire Confessional Literature'

In *The Northern Homily Cycle*'s exemplar for the 'Fourth Sunday After Epiphany', a usurious knight climbs naked into a chest filled with snakes, newts, toads and worms. He is eaten alive.

The prescription of this strange but effective penance is the result of the knight's felicitous self-knowledge: God 'gaf him graz himself to knau,/And his sin to the bischop schawe'. This paper proposes that the knight's gruesome fate should not be read as self-destruction, but as self-discovery. He identifies and sheds only what is sinful and extraneous, engaging in a process of negative self-actualisation which is characteristic of late medieval vernacular confessional writing.

This discussion traces some of the structures of thought underpinning apophatic mysticism as they found their way into the more pragmatic discourse of confessional literature. Here, self-knowledge is a prerequisite for effective shrift, as each corner of the soul must be completely ransacked to root out hidden sin. Yet for Walter Hilton, the sin which is thereby discovered and eliminated is nothing more than a 'merkeness of unknowynge', a 'nought' with 'fals misruled love' at its centre. In this sense, knowledge of sin is not self-knowledge *per se*, but a means whereby a better, truer self can be approached through the identification and elimination of what is *not*. By examining images of gardening, pruning and ripening in confessional works from late medieval Yorkshire, this paper exposes the more accessible face of the English apophatic tradition.

Mireille Le Berre (University of Lausanne), '"No word in oure langage worthi;" "Nether ende nere mesure nere nombyr:" Cataphasis and Apophasis in *Orysons and Meditacions*.'

Orysons and Meditacions is a devotional text translated from French into Middle English by Dame Eleanor Hull – the first English woman translator whose name is known to us – in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The aim of my doctoral thesis is to provide the first complete edition of this text, which is extant in two manuscripts: Cambridge University Library, MS KK 1.6 and University of Illinois, pre-1650 MS 0080, with significant variants and original parts.

The text consists of a series of meditations, topical in a first part and arranged around the days of the week in a second one, most of which are affectively embroidering on the humanity of Christ (three different Passion meditations), the life of the virgin (a meditation on the Annunciation and one on her Five Joys) or the saints. The final meditation breaks this trend as it proposes an ascent to a heavenly sphere that is mostly described in negative terms and culminates with loss of self and mystical union.

In this presentation, I want to look at how apophasis lays dormant in this mostly cataphatic text before dominating its closing part. Interestingly, the meditations where apophasis most visibly emerges are the ones that are original to each manuscript. Apophasis, in this case, appears to help the modern reader reach out beyond the texts in their extant tangible forms to get a glimpse of their (now) elusive origin.

Hannah Lucas (University of Cambridge), 'Close, But Not Deep: Attentive Reading at Syon Abbey'

Recent explorations in literary criticism and the so-called postcritical turn have highlighted the multiple attentional possibilities in approaching a text. Close, deep, surface reading; various hermeneutic modes which ask for various degrees or qualities of attention. But such injunctions

are not new: medieval devotional texts are highly invested in how their readers attend to the words within. In this paper, I consider reading instructions for enclosed religious at Syon Abbey, to highlight the similarities and divergences between their recommended attentional strategies and those found in apophatic mystical texts like the *Cloud of Unknowing*. For example, the Syon treatise *The Myroure of oure Ladye* outlines a few possible levels of reading comprehension, focused variously on syllables, words, and meanings; I describe these strategies in the terms of *surface* reading, in that they are concerned not with interpretation, but correct textual performance. This instructive 'myroure' is a surface that reflects an exemplary reader— unlike for the *Cloud*-author, for whom the Word is a mirror that reflects imperfection. The paper also identifies connections between the *Myroure*'s guidance and the syllabilistic strategies of the *Cloud*: I identify a shared interest in fragmented words in both texts, exploring how devotional attention is variously conceived as a gathering together of broken pieces. This paper aims to highlight Syon's unique blend of mystical inheritance and institutional orthodoxy, shedding new light on this downstream evolution of apophatic methods in its post-Arundel context, and thus also the history of attentive reading as born out of the English contemplative tradition.

Andrew Maxwell (Harvard University), 'To Speak Without Speaking: Apophasis and the Poetics of Voice in the Works of the *Cloud*-author'

Critical attention to the anonymous author of the corpus surrounding *The Cloud of Unknowing* has tended to focus on the historical person behind these texts. By analyzing the nuances of the *Cloud*-author's language and theology, scholars have worked to uncover new insights into this mysterious author's monastic affiliations, educational background, and connections to other late-fourteenth-century contemplative writers. But there is another side to the *Cloud*-author, associated with but irreducible to such historical concerns, requiring a different approach to questions of authorial identity. In this paper, I propose a more poetic, literary way of reading the *Cloud*-author, inquiring not into the nature of the writer behind these texts but into that of the speaker *within* these texts, the speaking "I" who addresses and instructs the reader in the complexities of mystical life. Exploring the distinctive textures of the *Cloud*-author's voice, from specific structural elements, such as the effects of limited diction and nested repetition on syntax and rhythm, to more dramatic moments of tone and affect—in particular, the author's sharp mockery of learned clerics and other "bad" readers—I argue that these texts present, not simply a cohesive contemplative method, but also the illusion of a living, breathing authorial figure. In the *Cloud*-author's presence as a first-person narrator, the reader encounters a literary fiction, a persona constructed for the purpose of guiding them through experiences of spiritual friendship and textual intimacy and thus, ultimately, enacting the apophatic desire that drives *The Cloud of Unknowing*'s contemplative ascent.

Alastair Minnis (Yale University), 'How to make all things well: Julian of Norwich's questions put within the big picture'

Julian of Norwich famously asks why, in his all-foreseeing wisdom, God had not prevented the origination of sin – 'for then thought me that alle shulde have be wele'. To which Jesus answers that, as things stand, everything is indeed 'wele', well-appointed and beneficial. Even 'Sinne is

behovely'; it has its part to play in God's grand design. Addressing such issues, Augustine said we should not 'doubt that God does well', even when he allows ill things to happen, because this is allowed 'only through a just judgment – and surely all that is just is good'. Similarly, Anselm claimed that God directs the perverse actions of the human will 'toward the order and beauty of the universe'. Sin and punishment are positioned within an all-encompassing structure which is revered for its symmetry and indeed beauty. Such 'big picture thinking' was a standard response to the presence of great evil in a good creation. Drawing on that very metaphor, Augustine declares that 'Just as a picture is enhanced by the proper placing within it of dark colours, so, to those able to discern it, the beauty of the universe is enhanced even by sinners, though, considered in themselves, theirs is a sorry deformity'. Here, then, is how to make all things well. Julian's questioning brings her into the presence of such confident certainties, even as she accepts that some of the answers are still in the process of being revealed.

Fred Morgan (University of Oxford), '"Hyʒe contemplacion of þe godhed": Tracing the Flight of Souls in the Illustrations of Love's *Mirror*'

Nicholas Love's popular devotional work, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, is a quintessentially cataphatic text. As Love explains, his mediated translation of the Latin *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, is concerned less with 'hyʒe contemplacion of þe godhed' than with 'þinges þat bene visible & þat man kyndly knoweþ'. To the extent that Love is concerned with that which transcends experience and eludes understanding, he warns against dangerous speculation: 'trowe soþfastly þat it is soþ as holy chirch techeþ & go no ferþer'. Conversely, the two illustrated pictorial cycles of Love's *Mirror* that were produced in the mid-fifteenth century evince a very different attitude toward Christological meditation. Building on previous surveys of these image cycles, this paper will examine the ways in which the artists who illustrated *The Mirror* in National Advocates Library, Scotland, Adv.MS.18.1.7 and Morgan Pierpoint Library MS M.648, freely elaborated on and supplemented the accompanying text. Perhaps more closely aligned with Love's Latin source than his English work, these image cycles suggest an engagement with – and a desire to facilitate – more ambitious kinds of meditative ascent.

Anne Mouron (University of Oxford), 'Mechthild's Revelation: Beyond words and into 'nought''

Mechthild of Hackeborn was a thirteenth-century Benedictine nun at the convent of Helfta in Germany. For many years she received divine revelations which were taken down in Latin by two of her fellow nuns at first without her knowledge. These with her approval were turned into the *Liber specialis gratiae.* The text quickly became a medieval 'bestseller' and was abbreviated into five books that circulated under the title of *Liber spiritualis gratiae* through scribal error. It is this shortened version which was translated in the 15th century into English as the *Boke of Gostely Grace*. Since there is no modern edition of the Latin text, this paper will exclusively examine the Middle English vernacular version.

Even in its abbreviated form, the *Boke of Gostely Grace* is still a long text. In a constant dialogue with Christ, the revelations include Mechthild's close devotions to the heart of Jesus as

well as visions regarding the community at Helfta and others to the 'comfort of mennys soulys'. They contain many lavish images of numerous objects, be they sumptuous jewelry, resplendent fabrics, houses made of precious metal and gemstones, trees, flowers, gardens, etc. These attractive objects, if worldly in origin, nonetheless cataphatically enable the reader to reach the divine which they reflect through their beauty.

Yet, in spite of this plethora of positive descriptions of beautiful and concrete objects, the text regularly also acknowledges in negative statements that the divine is ultimately beyond human language and comprehension. This article will analyse these moments of linguistic ruptures in the *Boke of Gostly* Grace. It will examine when and how the text turns into this apophatic mood and what it can tell us (or not) about Mechthild and her *Boke*.

Louise Nelstrop (PThU/MBIT/St John's College, Oxford), Imagination as an Apophatic Communal Technique of Soteriological Interpretation in Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love*

This paper will explore the way in which imagination in Julian's Revelations allows the reader to move beyond a mere rational understanding of soteriology. Indeed, it will be argued that Julian invites her readers into imaginative practice such that soteriology and Christology are not limited or fixed as known answers but come to be understood through experience as we engage with them, and yet this subjective method is a communal enterprise in the sense that no one interpretation becomes 'correct'. It is argued that this amounts to an apophatic technique, one which Julian illustrates through her use of everyday images.

Yea Jung Park (Saint Louis University), ''Semely withinne and withoutyn': Seemliness, Interiority, and Social Discernment in the *Cloud*-corpus'

The novice contemplative's body in the *Cloud*-corpus is subject to two conflicting epistemological mores. The first pushes the contemplative toward unknowing, not only in terms of apophatic practice but also through the mandate that one *not know* one's own body: rather than consciously mimicking holy postures in "ape maner" (the author's term in the *Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings*), one must let such postures occur "unwetyng himself that worcheth" (*Cloud* ch. 61). On the other hand, the contemplative's body is knowable to others under a semiotics of discernible human action, physically signalling holiness or the lack thereof not only to superiors but also to members of the surrounding community ("iche man or womman that lokyd apon hym"; *Cloud* ch. 54). The contemplative's awareness of this second aspect creates room for the *Cloud*-author's famously hated vice: the unseemly dissimulation enacted by "the devil's contemplatyves" (*Cloud* ch. 45). This paper will highlight the importance of the quasi-social criterion of "seemliness" throughout the *Cloud*-corpus. Seemliness denotes behavioral appropriateness in a given communal context, applying equally to Christ's incarnate body and to the bodies of successful (or failed) contemplatives. I argue that the author deploys this notion to balance and reconcile two incompatible modes of knowing throughout his oeuvre, particularly in his shorter treatises on the discernment of spirits. The inventive methodology of discernment that the *Cloud*-author develops vis-à-vis seemliness leads us to see a subtle but rich vein of social engagement in his work that has remained largely neglected in scholarship to date.

Ryan Perry (University of Kent), ''[W]ritynges of þese hiȝe goostli felynges':The Circulation of Contemplative Writings in Fifteenth-Century London'

This paper will survey the dissemination of English apophatic and spiritually ambitious literatures in the metropolitan area in and around the city of London. Focussing on the fifteenth century the paper will review a number of case studies that demonstrate how the works of Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle and texts associated with the *Cloud*-author were being produced for metropolitan audiences, and trace exactly who those audiences were. In part the paper will investigate the processes through which such texts were produced and their conduits into metropolitan circulation, whilst also considering the utilities such texts served for their readerships.

Klára Petríková (Charles University, Prague), 'A Journey of Translating *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* into Czech'

Firstly, the paper will briefly introduce the circumstances which led to both translations (the Cloud translation was issued by a community of Benedictine nuns to replace the existing Czech translation which was based on the Modern English translation by Clifton Wolters; Julian's texts were translated as part of the ongoing project by the Charles University Faculty of Arts to make seminal Middle English texts accessible to wider Czech audience)

Then it will explore which problems were encountered during the process of translation of each work. Such as:
- difficulties with terminology (e.g. *kyndeli wit*, *worching might*, *knowable might*, *reson/ mynde, beholding*) and utilizing the vocabulary found in medieval Czech mystical writings
- problems with puns and with keeping vital associations among words realized by morphological patterns and homonyms (esp. in Julian's text) and the associated problem of narrowing down meaning when translating (e.g. *fēlen*, *kinde*)
- necessity to avoid too literal translation, deciding on what could be an idiomatic expression and treating it as such
- difficulties with staying true to style – keeping the rhythm and alliteration in the *Cloud*; Julian clearly has the knowledge of rhetoric yet intentionally uses repetitive syntactical patterns – should these be kept intact or varied sometimes?
The paper will also discuss the Czech language from the perspective of its language typology, exploring its advantages/disadvantages in translating these texts.

Raphaela Rohrhofer (University of St Andrews), 'The Apophatic Julian: New Directions'

Symbolising the ultimate paradox of manifest transcendence, the abundance of divine love Julian of Norwich encounters in her visions radically and effortlessly transfigures her mind and raises her apprehension above finite discursive human consciousness towards wholeness and unity. Indeed, the anchoress's understanding of divinity and love is reciprocally defining and perichoretic, as coinhering as the divine persons.

This paper has two main focal points. First, it examines Julian's sophisticated linguistic plays, which dismantle perceptual barriers to create an imaginative universe in the kenotic

modality through which her God wishes to be understood. By transforming the motions of the mind, her readers are invited to relinquish particularities and the pursuit of absolute or certain knowledge of both divinity and themselves. Second, the paper situates Julian's textual finesse within the global Middle Ages, drawing comparisons to a range of contemplative authors who approach divine ineffability in parallel, albeit distinct, ways. These include Marguerite Porete, whose engagement with nothingness offers significant and previously unexplored avenues for comparison; Angela of Foligno, whose language of the abyss resonates with Julian's concept of the ground; and Ephrem the Syrian, who deconceptualises divine attributes in ways that might be described as Julianesque. The complex modes of meaning- making developed by these authors will be further enriched by references to a variety of illuminated manuscripts, paintings, and sculptures.

Joseph Romano (Columbia University), 'The "Lightsome Darkness" Re-Considered: Critique of the *Cloud* Author's Apophaticism in Hilton's Incarnational Theology of Contemplation'

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* teaches that in contemplation "thou fyndest bot a derknes, and as it were a cloude of unknowing... savyng that thou felist in thi wille a nakid entent unto God" (Ch. 3). However, for the *Cloud* author's contemporary, Walter Hilton, "resteful myrkenesse" is "not yit there it schulde be"; apophatic darkness is but preparatory to the soul's unitive illumination in the "trewe light of knowing that cometh oute of Jhesu" (*Scale* 2.25-6). Long ago, John Clark introduced the now sedimented view that Hilton's "myrkenesse" is unrelated to the *Cloud*'s "derknes," with "no apophatic overtones at all" (98).1 Re-opening this question, I argue the contrary: in Book Two of the *Scale of Perfection* Hilton polemically redeploys the *Cloud's* apophatic language to critique its apophatic theology, and to differentiate his own Incarnational theology of contemplation. Hilton's and the *Cloud* author's contemplative practices diverge, therefore, in conscious, and critical, dialogue. The *Cloud* author's "apophatic practice" wedges a dualistic gap between the between the contemplative's will and God's grace, which for Hilton, can only be bridged in Christ (McGinn 401).2 For, as Hilton writes in *Scale* 2, in contemplation "grace wexeth with the soule and the soule wexeth with grace," the grace which is "Jhesu and mai be called Jhesu" (*Scale* 2.40, 42).

Steven Rozenski (University of Rochester), 'Developing Negatives: Apophaticism and the Middle English *Golden Legend*'

Although hagiography is rarely invoked today in most studies of the apophatic tradition, its wide reception among a variety of clerical and lay audiences (in Latin and the vernacular) demonstrates the profound importance of the lives of saints in popular theology and devotion in the late Middle Ages. Indeed, precious few late-medieval texts can match the thirteenth-century Genoese Dominican Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* for the sheer number of its surviving manuscripts across Europe (over a thousand MSS, and multiple pre-Reformation printings in most vernaculars). Indeed, for centuries it was in these hagiographic pages that many pious readers would have encountered the tripartite Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite (as Athenian philosopher converted by Paul, cephalophoric founder of Paris, and dean of mystical theologians).

His legendary conversion and martyrdom, however, are not the sole Dionysian appearances in the *Legenda*: Jacobus' account of the Ascension cites the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Divine Names*, the discussion of Pentecost again cites the *Divine Names* (as well as treating apophatic topics more broadly in discussing the invisibility of certain aspects of the influence of the Holy Spirit), and the Assumption of the Virgin cites the *Divine Names* and a Dionysian epistle. In Caxton's printing of the text, the reading for the Resurrection also cites Denys' letter to Demophilus. This paper investigates the changing uses of the legend of Saint Denys and of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus in Middle English translations of the *Golden Legend*. How was he differently cited, translated, and invoked in the earlier fifteenth-century text (ed. Richard Hamer), when compared to the substantial Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde printed versions? The pan-European *Golden Legend* textual tradition is quite vast and complex, but by focusing on the Middle English manuscript and early print renderings of the Continental text, a more finely-detailed picture of the changing role of Dionysian apophaticism in late-medieval English hagiography will emerge.

Michael Sargent (City University of New York), 'The Literature of English Spirituality in the Century after the Great Plague: A Game of Two Halves?'

In an article published seventy years ago, Elizabeth Zeeman Salter observed that the eleventh- and twelfth-century development of English prose did not take place only in the West of England, as exemplified by the *Ancrene Wisse* and the texts of the *Katherine* Group, but also in the East, in Essex for example, as exemplified by the dialogue of *Vices and Virtues*. She described this text as a precursor of the writings of Walter Hilton, the *Cloud* author, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Nicholas Love and John Capgrave. In this later period, she says, 'the West is practically silent'. It is silent, of course, if you ignore the influence of John Wyclif.

Working on English devotional and mystical texts that have their roots, at least, in the East of England, I wonder whether the two halves of England, focused intellectually on Oxford and Cambridge and their environs respectively, producing texts of markedly different spirituality, texts with largely different paths of textual dissemination, were playing two different games. Works characteristic of Wycliffism tend to the pastoral and morally didactic, teaching the laity in particular to obey the ten commandments. The major works of the East of England include not only moral, but also contemplative didacticism, like Hilton's *Mixed Life* and *Scale of Perfection*, and also—as Salter pointed out—works of visionary and apophatic mysticism. This paper will explore the extent to which the two halves of English spirituality in the period after the Great Plague may have been speaking past each other.

Alexis Francesca Statz (St John's College, Cambridge), ''Aliqua in me lumina': Pseudo-Dionysian Contemplation in the Writings of Guillaume de Deguileville'

Over a decade ago, Graham Robert Edwards noted the presence of Pseudo-Dionysian ideas in the Latin poetry of the fourteenth-century Cistercian monk and pastoral allegorist Guillaume de Deguileville. Although Edwards has convincingly made the case that more research remains to be done on the Pseudo-Dionysian current throughout Deguileville's *corpus*, Deguileville is seldom included in discussions of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Middle Ages – nor is he even

considered a 'contemplative' writer. However, as Marco Nievergelt has recently shown, Deguileville's writings are filled with mystical imagery, including a deep commitment to Isidorean letter-symbolism. This paper will argue that the *Pèlerinage* allegories – as well as their transmission and translation via John Lydgate and another anonymous writer into Middle English – should be reread in light of the Deguileville's reverence for Pseudo-Dionysius. I will base this claim on an examination of Deguileville's 1362 Latin poem, 'Ego Sum Alpha et O', a work saturated with references to Pseudo-Dionysius and two other French martyrs, Rusticus and Eleutherius. The paper will pay particular attention to the presence of a Trinitarian diagram in this poem, an apophatic image that – like the *Pax* square in the *Pèlerinage* allegories – is both a Pseudo-Dionysian 'natural mystical sign' and a sacramental one. For Hugh of St. Victor, a central influence on Deguileville as well as a key figure in the propagation of Pseudo- Dionysius, these 'sacramental signs' demand to be treated mystically or allegorically. Overall, this paper will propose that Deguileville should be re-evaluated as a contemplative writer whose pastoral teaching is indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius.

Kirsten Stirling (University of Lausanne), 'Apophatic Donne: John Donne's Use of the Sculptor Image'

This paper explores the sixteenth-seventeenth century English poet John Donne's use of the image of the sculptor who subtracts as opposed to the painter who adds detail, an apophatic metaphor for the divine which is to be found in both his poetry ("Of the Crosse") and in his sermons. What sources may Donne have been drawing on for his knowledge of negative theology? Was he aware of *The Cloud of Unknowing*? Could he have had direct knowledge of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*? Or did he access this apophatic approach through the writings of the Church fathers, particularly Aquinas? The paper will go on to explore the ways in which Donne – who is not generally regarded as a mystical poet – appropriated this image from apophatic theology to his own purposes.

Annie Sutherland (University of Oxford), 'Neither Here nor There – the Apophatic Anchorhold'

In my paper, I plan to explore the anchorhold as a fundamentally apophatic space. My attention will be focused on the cell as depicted in John of Forde's twelfth-century *Life of Wulfric of Haselbury*, though I will also consider figurations of the anchorhold, and of further reclusive spaces, in other texts and traditions.

Reading the apophatic tradition as one which roots itself in paradox, and systematically prioritises negation, absence and denial, I will examine the ways in which Wulfric's cell is shaped by such categories. In particular, I plan to explore the ways in which the limitations imposed by the walls of the cell prove immaterial to those who reach towards the heights of reclusive devotion, and the ways in which strict enclosure becomes a paradoxical form of radical exposure of the self to the world.

I am aware that a great deal of excellent work has already been done on the anchoritic cell as a paradoxical site of liberation. With this in mind, I hope to be able to offer a fresh perspective in my paper by considering the apophatic cell through the lens of psychogeography, defined as an awareness of the relationship between one's physical location and one's

emotional condition. Read in this way, the cell's paradoxical dialectic of presence and absence, or materiality and immateriality, takes on a new significance. If there is time, I might also consider the cell in the context of the situationist movement more broadly.

Katherine Turley (University of Cambridge), 'Yet this passing over is mystical and most secret' (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 7:4): The Reception of Bonaventure's Apophatic Teaching in Late Medieval England'

The *Itinerarium mentis is Deum* (1259) has long been recognised as a jewel of mystical teaching. Blending scholasticism and mysticism, Bonaventure frames his work by the six wings of the seraph between which St Francis saw the figure of the crucified Christ, receiving, as he did so, the dazzling seals (*sigilia*), a model of 'perfect contemplation' (*Itin.* 7:3). In a seventh and final chapter, Bonaventure, with the help of Dionysius the Pseudo-Aeropagite, leads the reader to glimpse this final *excessus*, a 'passing over' into the '"utmost brilliant darkness of silence!"'. Yet fragments of quotations from the divine Word: from *Job*, *Isaiah*, the Psalms and *Revelations*, are also vehicles of the *excessus*. What is the relationship between the divine Word of Scripture and apophatic darkness?

Two late thirteenth-century English manuscripts containing very early witnesses of the *Itinerarium* suggest that the work reached England while Bonaventure was still alive. This paper examines Bonaventure's unique formulation of apophatic mysticism and considers its influence on writers circulating in late medieval England, particularly Walter Hilton. Bonaventure's formulation of apophatic mysticism at the conclusion of the *Itinerarium*, particularly in its images of heat, and the role of the will, intellect and affect invite illuminating and intriguing contrasts with other writers such as Richard Rolle and Marguerite Porète whose condemned work circulated in it its Middle English version as *The Mirror of Simple of Souls*.

Nicholas Watson (Harvard University), 'Margery Kempe's Prayer: "Qwyk and gredy to hy contemplacyon in God"'

Can *The Book of Margery Kempe* tell us anything about the apophatic? Or does its presentation of the "creatur's" life of meditation, revelation, pilgrimage, tribulation, teaching and weeping for her own sins and those of others belong self-evidently within the penitential, the pastoral, and the cataphatic, as modern readers of the book understandably tend to assume? This paper considers this question by focusing on a distinct and somewhat neglected section of the *Book*, the long prayer text appended to Book II in the only full copy of the work that survives to us, London, British Library MS Add 61823, written by the Norwich Benedictine Richard Salthouse, and likely kept in Norwich Cathedral Priory or perhaps one of its dependencies for some fifty years. Beginning at the top of the verso of the folio (f. 120) whose recto records the last nine lines of Book II and is otherwise blank, the prayer (which ends near the foot of f. 123r) takes up the equivalent of three full folios, is presented in much the same way as the text it follows and appears to maintain its careful spelling system. Although the medieval Benedictine and Carthusian owners of Add 61823 do not treat is as especially notable, it is nonetheless a distinct section. Stepping away from Book II's breathless account of Kempe's final pilgrimage and return "a geyn to london / & sithyn hom to lynne" to depict how"[th]ys creatur of whom is tretyd be

forn vsyd … to be gynnyn hir preyerys" over a period of "many ȝerys," it is written in a formal, somewhat Latinate register appropriate to its liturgical content but unique to this portion of the *Book*. Whether or not Salthouse was working with the same exemplar here as he had been earlier, the prayer fairly clearly began life as a distinct document, conceivably a small booklet produced for Kempe's own use in her daily devotions. It may for that reason be the earliest part of the *Book* to be written.

Contextualizing Kempe's singular status as a visionary within a series of wider frames, local, national, ecclesiastical, and ultimately cosmic, the prayer at no point discernibly evokes the pseudo-Dionysian tradition as represented by *The Cloud of Unknowing* and its colleagues. The only certain source I have found so far belongs in the encylopaedic, not the apophatic, tradition. Yet the prayer is concerned to emphasize the incomprehensible gap between earth and heaven, especially in one crucial and strikingly extended sentence. It also plays games with language, representing this gap with a version of the "as if" formulation the *Book* often uses in depicting counterfactuals (here, a sequence of conditionals introduced by "þow I had"), whose effect is to point up the absolute insufficiency of any attempt to grasp, let alone adequately praise, the reality of the divine. Early Victorine influence seems plausible here, perhaps via Edmund Rich's *Mirror of Holy Church*, and other, more recent sources are also possible. Although the prayer shows strong traces of Kempe's own reading, it was likely written collaboratively, and there is no reason not to suspect the presence of other intellectual and theological traditions, such as those a learned Carmelite like Alan of Lynn might bring to a task of this kind, given his interest in the visionary. It deserves to be read closely with the apophatic in mind.

In considering the apophatic mode in late-medieval England and Europe, especially in vernacular texts and contexts, we in any case do well to cast our net widely, not least because doing so challenges us to take a greater range of texts seriously as self-aware and self-constent works of theology. I shall try to rise to this challenge in the case of *The Book of Margery Kempe.*

Christiania Whitehead (University of Lausanne), 'Introducing *De Adhaerendo Deo*'

De adhaerendo Deo, attributed in the Middle Ages to Albertus Magnus, but probably by the fifteenth-century Bavarian Benedictine prior, Johannes von Kastl, is a mystical treatise in the Dionysian tradition. It is extant in two late medieval manuscripts of English provenance; in one, MS Bodley 856 (s. xv$^{1/2}$), it is copied alongside one of the two independent Latin translations of the *Cloud of Unknowing, Nubes ignorandi*; in the other, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. th. d.27 (s. xv$^{2/2}$), it appears in the course of a much larger and more varied contemplative Latin compendium which seems to have connections to the Carthusian order. In her initial edition of the *Cloud of Unknowing* in 1944, Phyllis Hodgson devoted a short section of her Introduction to detailing perceived likenesses between the *Cloud* and *De Adhaerendo Deo*. However, she makes much less of this connection in her revised edition of 1982, and the question has rarely been revisited since. This paper will seek to reopen this discussion, examining key points of similarity and difference between the two texts, exploring some of the translator's additions to *Nubes ignorandi*, and thinking through the implications of deliberately placing *Nubes ignorandi* in the company of *De adhaerendo Deo* in Bodley 856.

Lorenzo Zaggia (University of Padua), '"Lat Þe Proue Witnes": Choosing Discretion in the *Epistle of the Discretion of Stirrings*'

This paper examines the use of the concept of *discretio* in the *Epistle of the Discretion of Stirrings*, which might have been written by the same author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The *Epistle of the Discretion of Stirrings* is a short text written for the instruction of one specific disciple and is concerned with recognizing the correct conduct to observe in everyday life. In the text, the virtue of *discretio* is presented as one of the keys to approach this problem. However, it appears to receive two interpretations: it is presented as part of the allegorical "crown of life" as the ability to provide counsel to others, but there are also implicit references to *discretio* as the form of self-knowledge developed in Richard of St Victor's *Beniamin minor*. The potential clash between these two forms of *discretio* — one directed outward, the other self-referred — is averted as the choice of one's daily activities is superseded by the necessity to choose God over everything else. This leads to a change in the mode of knowledge required to approach these objects, from rational and abstract distinctions to affective experience, and a shift from the operations of *discretio* towards the practice of contemplation. However, this change of perspective produces a unitary understanding of *discretio*. Contemplation thus contributes to the interpretation of the texts that teach how to perform it; in this case, it is not simply the activity that develops from *discretio* but also that which can provide access to its full meaning.

Katherine Zieman (University of Poitiers), 'Unnatural Orientations: Attention and Curiosity in Apophatic Meditation'

The Cloud-author frequently denounces meditative practices that he considers ineffective or misguided as motivated by "curiosity." As other scholars have shown, the idea of *curiositas* has a long history in discussions of faith and contemplation. As I will discuss, the idea of *curiosity* can be understood as part of an evolving discourse of attention and distraction in medieval contemplative practice, where it comes to represent a fracturing of attention from the properly motivated will and its aimless and scattered orientation towards worldly things. The *Cloud*-author, however takes this one step further to align *curiositas* with a confusion of bodily and spiritual sense and a misdirecting of the bodily senses in terms the ultimately designates as unnatural or "aȝens þe cours of kynde." Drawing on concepts from Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, I will discuss *curiositas* in terms of queer orientations, broadly conceived.