

## The Prologue to Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*: Key to the Alchemical San of the Romance

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**Abstract** - Although it has been documented that alchemical treatises were translated into Latin, beginning at least in the middle of the 12th century, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes have not been connected with alchemical lore. This study suggests that Chrétien's first Arthurian romance, *Erec et Enide*, is an alchemical tour de force, and the "tel chose", mentioned twice in the prologue, is the key to an alchemical understanding of *Erec et Enide*.

Critical consensus holds that Chrétien's first Arthurian romance, *Erec et Enide*, tends toward cultural and psychological realism. The present article proposes that the *matière* of the romance of *Erec et Enide*—a fusion of literary motifs, realistic cultural and psychological observations, and ethical concerns—is superimposed on spiritual alchemy, or on the heterodox redemptive vision based on the polarity of spirit and matter. From their inception, Chrétien's Arthurian romances attested to the religious fervor and passionate quest for salvation symptomatic of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Li vilains dit en son respit  
Que tel chose a l'en en despit,  
Qui mout vaut mieuz que l'en ne cuide. Por ce  
fait bien qui son estuide  
A torne a sens, quel que il l'ait; Car qui son es-  
tude entrelait, Tost i puet tel chose taisir  
Qui mout venroit puis a plesir. Por ce dit Cres-  
tiens de Troies Que raisons est que totes voies  
Doit chascuns penser et entendre  
A bien dire et a bien aprendre, Et trait [d']un  
conte d'aventure Une mout bele conjuncture  
Par qu'em puet prover et savoir  
Que cil ne fait mie savoir  
Qui sa science n'abandone  
Tant con Dex la grace l'en done. D'Erec, le fil  
Lac, est li contes,  
Que devant rois et devant contes, Depecier et  
corrompre suelent  
Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent. Des or comence-  
rai l'estoire  
Que toz jors mais iert en memoire  
Tant con durra crestientez.  
De ce s'est Crestiens ventez. (vss 1-26)<sup>1</sup>

[The peasant in his proverb says that one might find oneself holding in contempt something that is worth much more than one believes; therefore a man does well to make good use of his learning according to whatever understanding he has, for he who neglects his learning may easily keep silent something that would later give much

pleasure. And so Chrétien de Troyes says that it is reasonable for everyone to think and strive in every way to speak well and to teach well, and from a tale of adventure he draws a beautifully ordered composition that clearly proves that a man does not act intelligently if he does not give free rein to his knowledge for as long as God gives him the grace to do so.

This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac, which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts. Now I shall begin the story that will be in memory for evermore, as long as Christendom lasts—of this does Chrétien boast.]<sup>2</sup>

Chrétien de Troyes wrote his first Arthurian romance, *Erec et Enide*, around 1170. It begins with a prologue evidently intended to claim the poet's superior narrative skill, which had transformed a popular tale of adventure, spoiled and distorted by professional storytellers, into a beautiful "conjuncture". It is the purpose of this paper to uncover a layer of esoteric, i.e., alchemical, meaning of the prologue in its entirety. The hidden meaning would have been understood only by the "sons of the doctrine", by those initiated into the explosive and heretic art or science of alchemy that had infiltrated southern France and beyond, from Moorish Spain, since at least the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The assertion that Chrétien opened his cycle of Arthurian romances with an alchemical tour de force seems, at first glance, quite implausible. To be sure, when French, English and Italian scholars congregated in Spanish towns, especially in Toledo, to absorb the accumulated knowledge of the Arabic world, their translations, literally by the hundreds, also included alchemical treatises.<sup>3</sup> Even if Chrétien had access to any of these treatises, they would have appeared to his creative genius as gibberish, for they described complex and obscure pseudo-chemical processes or advised the

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adepts to work with plant and animal substances for the production of the philosophical gold. Confronted with this scenario, modern scholars, understandably, have not seriously attempted to link alchemy with Chrétien's oeuvre.

The most influential of all alchemical western treatises, the *Turba Philosophorum*, has, however, never seriously been considered in connection with alchemy during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. According to Martin Plessner, one of the leading experts on Islamic science, the *Turba* was written around 900 A.D. and is "a most remarkable attempt to put Greek alchemy into the Arabic language, and to adapt it to Islamic science."<sup>4</sup> A Latin translation was printed in Basle in 1572, while known handwritten manuscripts do not go back further than the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. My hypothesis that Chrétien might have been familiar with the *Turba Philosophorum* is based on the extensive research of Julius Ruska, who in 1931 published the still unsurpassed investigative analysis of the *Turba*, using manuscript Qu 584 (B), one of the literary treasures of the Royal Library in Berlin.<sup>5,6</sup> Comparing the text with variants in other Greek, Arabic, or Latin manuscripts, and referring also to the great number of imitations, Ruska concluded that the *Turba* was known at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was already quite popular at that time. It became one of the most influential of all Western alchemical texts.

In the following, I intend to relate Chrétien's first Arthurian romance, *Erec et Enide* to the *Turba Philosophorum* and explore the possibility of an alchemical undercurrent, of an alchemical san concealed under a Christian veneer, thereby calling uni-linear mainstream interpretations into question.

My investigation is possible only through the scholarly labor of Julius Ruska. In his erudite German translation of the *Turba*, he convincingly proves, that the *Turba* is an attempt of alchemical allegorists to anthropomorphize the entire opus by comparing the processes in the retort to a body-soul, male-female drama as well as to death and resurrection. "The object of alchemy", the great Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem writes, "is not the transformation of metals but that of mankind itself ... mankind in the mystical stage of rebirth or redemption."<sup>7</sup>

Even a cursory reading of the *Turba* text would make its popularity understandable. The *Turba*, Martin Plessner observes, "occupies a peculiar position, not only because of the diversity of the extant texts ..., but also because of its special literary character."<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the serious

pseudo-technical alchemical treatises known to have been translated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the *Turba* describes an assembly of several of the ancient Greek philosophers who, under the guidance of Pythagoras, animatedly debate alchemical processes. The author, who according to Ruska had no practical alchemical experience, compensates for the contradictions and obscurities, for the endless repetitions and the use of fictitious cover names in his description of the alchemical opus, with a potent mixture of allusions to great tangible rewards, to great mysteries to be revealed, and to the danger presented by the envious or malicious. Over and over again, the brothers of the doctrine are entreated to hide the secret. "Ideo coniuro vos per Deum et vestrum Magistrum, ut hoc maximum non ostendatis arcanum; et cavete malignos!" [And herefore I plead with you by God and your master that you do not reveal this great secret, and beware the malicious!] (Sermo XXI)

Persuasive as the above-mentioned allusions may have been to any novice initiated into the alchemical doctrine, the creative impulse of a literary-minded novice would more easily have been sparked by the rampant and seductive allegorization that permeates the *Turba* from S. XI on. In dramatic detail, the opus is described as a love-hate relationship of man and woman whose ultimate goal is the desired sexual embrace, the sine qua non for the production of the philosopher's child, of the philosopher's gold, of the elixir of life. "Et scitote, quod arcanum operis auri fit ex masculo et femina." [And know that the secret of the production of gold comes from the male and the female.] (S. XVI)

On the basis of Ruska's exhaustive analysis of the *Turba*, it is possible to interpret the prologue to *Erec et Enide* as an alchemical preamble, which will ultimately lead to a reassessment of the romance in its entirety. The most important word in the prologue, scholars unanimously agree, is the word "conjuncture" (vs. 16), and they also agree that it has to be understood in literary terms, referring more or less to the narrative structure of the romance.<sup>9</sup> Authoritative research has linked the term, most notably, to the *Ars Poetica* by Horace and to Alain of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*. Although scholars differ regarding the precise way in which Chrétien used the terms *iunctura* (Horace) or *coniunctura* (Allain of Lille), it has never been suggested that the key word of the prologue, "conjuncture", quite realistically could also be understood in accordance with its usage in Old French, namely sexual intercourse. As ludicrous as such suggestion

might sound, by connecting the “conjuncture” of the prologue with the way “coniunctio” is used in alchemy, and specifically in the *Turba*, the drama of the Erec-Enide relationship would be seen as transcending any psychological analysis and becomes a drama of deeply human, metaphysical perspective.

In the *Turba*, “coniunctio” and its grammatical derivatives occur fourteen times. They always refer to the union of male and female, sometimes with explicit sexual details, often connected with alchemical doctrine or also mentioned as matter of fact. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the alchemist’s grafting of a dualistic, cosmic world view upon practices relating to the forging of metals or of the sexualization of the opposites, and the accretion of symbolic representations. Already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this pseudo-religious view was threatened of becoming the preoccupation of secret societies. Led by Avicenna, an empirical school had emerged which denied the anthropomorphic view of sexually different metallic parents and the possibility of transmutation in general. The *Turba*, however, belongs to a group of treatises whose authors passionately believed in the ancient alchemical credo that the arcanum comes from the union of the male and the female.

To return to the prologue: the conjecture that the word “conjuncture” in the prologue has an occult, i.e., alchemical, meaning would remain irrelevant were it not for the rustic’s proverb, which so prominently opens Chrétien’s first Arthurian romance and that not only refers to a crucial alchemical doctrine but is linked, as I will show, to “conjuncture”:

Li vilains dit en son respit  
Que tel chose a l’en en despit,  
Qui mout vaut mieuz que l’en ne cuide. (vss 1-3)

[The peasant in his proverb says that one might find oneself holding in contempt something that is worth much more than one believes.] (Transl. C. W. Carroll)

Scholars, significantly, have paid next to no heed to the proverb in the opening stanza, apparently considering its enigmatic quality as inconsequential. D.W. Robertson, Jr.’s attempt to connect the proverb with the word “conjuncture” remains tangled in illogic.<sup>10</sup> “The thing of little value,” he maintains, “in this instance, is the narrative of *Erec* as it is usually told by professional conteurs.” Robertson’s argument is unconvincing, for it leaves too many logical gaps and assumes Chrétien, a writer skilled in the art of exciting

the imagination of his audience, to have used a heavy-handed *fabula docet* in the very introduction to his first Arthurian poem. If, as Robertson maintains, the “vile thing” indeed refers to the “conte d’aventure”, why is it that kings and counts listen to it, as Chrétien states in the prologue? Furthermore, a rustic can hardly be suspected of having a proverb referring to a narrative. Besides, Chrétien does not talk about “the thing of little value,” but of that thing, “tel chose”, which is not recognized as being valuable. Who should have recognized it? Did Chrétien refer to his own superior craftsmanship? He uses “tel chose” a second time in vs. 7, and now in connection with “plesir”. Robertson does not refer to the second “tel chose”, and indeed, one would probably not connect a narrative structure with “plesir”.

An attempt to solve the paradoxical riddle of the rustic’s proverb and specifically, as D.W. Robertson, Jr. suggests, to look for a connection between the rustic’s proverb and the “conjuncture” of vs. 16, we turn to the *Turba Philosophorum*. Regardless of time and locale, from ancient empires to the Middle Ages, from the orient to the occident, the alchemical opus has to begin with a quest for the prima materia. Only if the arcanum, the miracle substance, is found can the adept, in the magnum opus, through continuous purifying manipulations, produce the panacea for all worldly ills. Understandably, the philosophers, in their discussions of the arcanum, take great pains not to reveal the identity of the prima materia. In the hands of the evildoers—“cavete malignos”—misfortune for the entire world would ensue. But with absolute assuredness, they disclose and glorify the purifying agent. Passionately, Socrates relates his discovery of the purifying agent. “Et iuro vobis per Deum, quod multo tempore in libris investigavi, ut ad unius huius [rei] scientiam pervenirem, ac Deum oravi, ut quid est, me doceret. Exaudita autem oratione mundam aquam mihi demonstravit.” [I swear to you by God that I have researched the books for a long time in order to gain the science of the unique thing, and that I asked God to teach me what it is. When he answered my pleading he showed me the water.]<sup>11</sup> (S. XV)

One could cite many other philosophers—Parmenides, Pythagoras, Empedocles—who glorify the water, the water of life, aqua vitae, the eternal water, aqua permanens. It is obvious from such statements that the *Turba* stands in the allegorical tradition of alchemy, which for centuries, in always new forms, evolved together with the technical or theoretical form of alchemy. In the *Kitab al-Habib*, an Arabic allegorical treatise much

older than the *Turba* and almost certainly known to its author, the water already plays the role that is ascribed to it in the *Turba*: it is the purifying agent. “You have to know the power of the eternal water,” al-Habib admonishes his son, to whom he leaves his knowledge as a legacy.<sup>12</sup>

Chrétien begins his romance with a mysterious custom, the spring-time hunt of the white stag—I will refer to its alchemical significance at the end of this paper—but then quickly shifts the attention to Erec, a knight of the Round Table. Chrétien’s aristocratic audience would have been nonplussed to hear that Erec does not obey the royal command to participate in the hunt. On a steed, magnificently attired, he rides out alone:

Sor un destrier estoit montez: Afublez d’un mantel hermin, Vient galopant par le chemin; S’ot cote d’un dyapre noble  
Qui fu faiz en Constantinople. Chauces ot de paille chaucies, Mout bien faites et bien taillies, Et fu es estriers esfichiez  
Uns esperons a or chauciez; (vss 94-102)

[The knight was mounted on his steed; with ermine was his cloak bedecked. He galloped down the road unchecked. His coat of flowered silk was noble and fashioned in Constantinople. He had on silken hosiery well made and tailored fashionably. In stirrups set and firm of hold, his feet were clad in spurs of gold.]

By paying attention to the apparel of his protagonists, Bezzola maintains, Chrétien certainly aims to please his courtly audience. Its more important function, Bezzola observes, lies in its symbolic meaning.<sup>13</sup> Erec’s apparel fails on both counts. Even an aristocratic audience would not identify with a knight riding out into the woods dressed in clothing of the most costly and rare material. A symbolic significance is precluded by the realistic enumeration of clothing details. One can only draw the conclusion that Erec is different, singled out not only by his apparel, but also by an almost otherworldly beauty. “Et fu tant beax qu’en nule terre/N’esteust plus bel de lui querre.” (vss 87-89) [He was so fair, in no land’s lie could one find fairer to the eye.]

As a writer, Chrétien excels in descriptive portraits of stylistic originality, but none of the other nine male portraits in his romances show the singularity and radiance of the portrait of Erec, as he first appears on the scene. The glorification of Erec parallels the glorification of the water in the *Turba*, while Erec’s tunic of splendid flowered

silk could be seen as a brilliant poetic reference to water and life.

In allegorical alchemy, water, the eternal water, the pure water, the water of life, is the most frequently used cover name for pneuma or the spirit without which the magnum opus, the redemptive manipulations, would be meaningless. Seen in this light, the hermit preamble in the sparrowhawk episode becomes important. Before Erec sets out for the contest, he and his host, the vavasor, ask the hermit to celebrate the Mass of the Holy Spirit. On the surface, this incident sounds innocent enough and could be regarded as a Christological overtone, unimportant or even quite superfluous for the development of the plot. In an alchemical context, however, the seemingly meaningless detail becomes a pivotal point that not only decides the plot structure of the entire romance, but actually dictates Erec’s finding of Enide; for the spirit, according to alchemical doctrine, will have to find the body so that the drama of the “coniunctio” can begin. Erec riding out is therefore engaged in a quest. The goal of the quest, the body, comes to him unaware. Even before Erec had said a word, the vavasor offers him lodging and immediately presents his wife and his daughter. Inconsistent with the embroidered quilt and the rug which the vavasor’s wife spreads on the beds, his daughter appears in an old, tattered garment with the elbows worn through, or more precisely where they are pierced through. “Mais desoz estoit beax li cors.” (vs. 410) [but fair the body it contained.]

We are in alchemical territory. Aside from the curious and immediate referral to Enide’s body, the body, which Erec as the spirit has to find, and aside from the unusual dress, strangely reminiscent of the Aludel, a purification apparatus with openings at the side, it is the contrast between an outer deplorable appearance and an inner worth that connects Chrétien’s characterization of the unnamed female to alchemy. Since ancient times, alchemists have used the inner-outer contrast when referring to the secret substance, the prima materia needed for the magnum opus. It does, of course, make perfect sense. Aside from the so-called true bodies, the metals, Greek alchemists used honey, gum, milk, urine, vegetables—the complete list, according to W. F. Sherwood, would extend to some 500 substances, which although inconspicuous or worthless on the outside, were believed to hide a magic secret.

From the inner-outer contrast in Enide’s appearance, it is only a small step to the proverb of

the “villains,” since it contains a strikingly parallel inner-outer contrast:

Li vilains dit a son respit  
Que tel chose a l'en en despit,  
Qui mout vaut mieuz que l'en ne cuide. (vss 1-3)

The relevant phrase “tel chose”, variously translated as “a thing”, “the thing”, or “something”, has never been subjected to scholarly analysis—except for the unsuccessful attempt of D.W. Robertson, Jr. Yet it is the key phrase which has to be linked with “conjuncture” in vers 16.

In the *Turba*, the phrase “illa res”, the Latin for “tel chose”, occurs with predominant frequency. It is familiar to all participants of the assembly. Pythagoras, the master himself, attempts to define the “illa res” with the identical inner-outer contrast that we find in Chrétien’s description of Enide and the proverb of the “vilains”. “Illa res” is “vilis et pretiosa” [despised and valuable]. His speech culminates in referring to the most famous and most ancient equation for the prima materia: “Quae lapis est et non lapis” [It is a stone and not a stone.] (S. XIII)<sup>14</sup>

Aside from stating that the “illa res” is a stone and not a stone, the philosophers never identify the prima materia directly, but in endless variations, they describe the processes of the magnum opus and the manipulations that would lead to success, namely the purification. While the exoteric or practical alchemist attempted to purify a base metal or any other inorganic or organic substance, the *Turba* philosophers, who, as Ruska observes, had no practical alchemical experience and were also not interested in the experimental aspects of alchemy, covered up their ignorance or uncertainty with religious speculation and anthropomorphic allegories. Adamantly, and over and over again, they assert that the male spirit purifies the female body, since it has, like the base metal, a shadow or blackness.

To understand the religious ardor of the philosophers, we have to know the cover names. For the spirit, the *Turba*, in accordance with the ancient credo, it is water. Only occasionally its realistic equivalent, namely quicksilver, is mentioned. The cover name for the body is copper. The equation of the base metal with copper goes back to the dawn of civilization, the Bronze Age. Copper is still the prima materia of choice for the Greek alchemists and, since the *Turba* is derived from Greek alchemy, it became the cover name of choice for “illa res”:

Illa res = our copper = the body  
aqua permanens = the eternal water = the spirit

Hoc est argentum vivum. ... quod est aqua munda, quae aeris umbram delet.

[This is the quicksilver. ... this is the pure water, which destroys the shadow of the copper.] (S. LII)

Hoc autem est nostrum aes, quod aqua ablui permanente philosophi iusserunt.

[This is our copper which the philosophers instructed us to wash with the eternal water.] (S. XXXVII)

Si igitur aes et aquam regatis permanentem , ut vobis iussi, fiet inde maximum arcanum hoc modo.

[Take the copper and the eternal water and the greatest miracle will result.] (S. XXII)

Regimen enim (eius) maius est, quam quod ratione percipiatur (nisi) divina inspiratione .

[For this opus is too wonderful, that it could be grasped through reason, it has to be through divine revelation.] (S. XXXIX)

To summarize: in the *Turba*, the “illa res”—the prima materia, the female impure body—has to be purified by the male spirit. If we now substitute “tel chose” for “illa res”, and imbue it with the characteristics of “illa res”, it almost becomes imperative to relate Enide to “tel chose”. She shares with the “illa res” or the “tel chose” the contrast between an outer worthless appearance and an inner value. She shares the identification as female and as body. And she shares the need to become purified if we read Chrétien’s second mention of tel chose in context with alchemical doctrine:

Car qui son estude entrelait, Tost i puet tel chose taisir  
Qui mout venroit puis a plesir. (vss 6-8)

Modern translators seem to be nonplussed by these lines. They either translate the “tel chose” of v. 7 with “something” (Carleton W. Carroll) or “a thing that proves a joy to learn” (Ruth Harwood Cline).<sup>15</sup> If we apply alchemical doctrine to these lines, they become clear and meaningful. “Tel chose”—the prima materia, the female body—if purified by someone who makes good use of his alchemical learning, will later give pleasure, or, in allegorical terms, will give sexual pleasure. “Ideoque magistri dixerunt, inter ea esse libidinem

tanquam maris et feminae.” [And therefore, the Master said, between them is a lust as between man and woman.] (S. XXVI)

The difficulty with an alchemical reading of the lines in question is obvious: Enide, it seems, does not need to be purified. On their wedding night, Erec and Enide are joined in a blissful “conjuncture”. In fact, the union is so pleasurable that Erec neglects his knightly duty and surrenders completely to sexual pleasure. “Sovant estoit midi[s] passez/Aincois que de lez li levast.” (vss 2442-2443) [It was often well past noon before he rose and left her side.]

The *Turba* philosophers would not have been surprised. For the “coniunctio” of the body and the spirit is not a simple one-step procedure, but it is a drama involving capture and reconciliation. The female body, in the 1<sup>st</sup> “coniunctio”, entraps the spirit (on the practical level, copper solidifies the quicksilver), “quod aes argentum concipiens vivum coagulat ipsum” (S. XLII), and only after a war has been fought, “irritate bellum inter aes and argentum vivum” (S. XLII), only after the purification of the body has been achieved, the body and the spirit, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> “coniunctio” can become one.

The alchemical body-spirit drama, in which the first “coniunctio” is followed by war and culminates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> “coniunctio”, is mirrored by the journey that Erec undertakes, solely accompanied by Enide and for which he ceremoniously prepares. He climbs up to a gallery, and has a rug spread out which shows the image of a leopard. His arms are placed on one side of the rug, while he is seating himself on the other side. ‘Erec s’assist de l’autre part / Dessus l’ymage d’un luepart / Qui ou tapiz estoit portraite.’ [Erec sits down on the other part, directly on the image of the leopard, portrayed on the rug.] Gilbert of Hoyland, a Cistercian abbot who died in 1172, probably at the French Cistercian monastery of Larrivour, 50 miles east of Troyes, equates the leopard with heresy.<sup>16</sup> The rug would indicate a devout frame of mind. It is likely that prayer rugs were known in France through the contact with Moorish Spain. An otherwise strange detail would become a religious preamble for the journey that Erec, as the spirit, initiates so that the purification of the body can unfold. The philosophers purify through washing. “Igitur ablutione ipsum private nigredine.” [Therefore free it through washing from its blackness.] (S. XXXVII) Chrétien translates the superiority of the spirit into Erec’s demanding absolute obedience from Enide. She is commanded to ride in front, and therefore would

be the first to face any oncoming danger, but is forbidden to address Erec with a single word:

“Alez, fait il, grant aleüre,  
Et garder ne soiez tant ose, Se vos veez aucune chose,  
Que vos me diez ce ne qoi. Garder ne parlez ja a moi,  
Se je ne vos aresne avant. Grant aleüre alez devant  
Et chevauchiez tot a seür.” (vss 2764-2771)

[“Ride at high speed and do not venture to have the insolence and nerve to tell me what you may observe. I order you not to address a single word to me, unless I’ve spoken first, and to proceed along the roadway at high speed. In perfect safety you will ride.”]

Valiantly scholars have tried to find meaning in Erec’s humiliating, if not to say cruel, treatment of Enide, only to conclude that “any attempt to find out what was in the poet’s mind must be more or less conjectural, and only a certain degree of probability can be attained.”<sup>17</sup> In the light of spiritual alchemy, however, the cruelty on the narrative level is revealed, on the occult level, as the male spirit’s mandate to remove the blackness from the female body so that in the second coniunctio they rejoice and become one, “ut unum forent.” (S. XXVIII) Many verses in Chrétien’s narration of Erec’s maltreatment of Enide during the journey are taken up by detailed description of the emotional see-saw. Enide’s emotions swing from shame and regret, from accepting the misery and punishment, to real concern for Erec, while Erec vacillates between anger, or even hate, and the dawning awareness that Enide perhaps does love him. An attempt to make Erec and Enide’s emotional turmoil psychologically applicable has led to endless debates and controversies. For the disciples of spiritual alchemy, however, psychology is irrelevant. They are concerned about the fusion of the spirit and the body. “Hoc enim regimine spiritus incorporatur et corpus in spiritum vertitur.” [Though this regiment the spirit becomes coporeal and the body is changed into spirit.] (S. XVIII) Towards the end of the journey, when in alchemical terms the purification of the body has been achieved, Erec and Enide unite again in a second blissful “conjuncture”:

Tant ont eü mal et ennui, Il por li, et ele por lui,  
Or ont faite lor penitance (vss 5243–5245)

[Their suffering had been so grim, his pain for

her and hers for him,  
and now their penance was all done]

The next to last adventure, the Count Oringles of Limors episode, supports the contention that spiritual alchemy provides the motif for Erec's maltreatment of Enide: the body has to be cleansed of its shadow. By emphasizing the brilliantly developed storyline, replete with bizarre details and yet eminently realistic and anchored in believable psychodynamics, scholarly research dismisses the episode as yet another puzzling adventure and disregards the sinister, ominous undercurrent. Death, apparent death, longing for death, and actual death permeates the entire episode up to the surprise ending of ethereal beauty.

Death holds sway over both Erec and Enide. Barely having survived the ferocious battle with the two giants in the preceding episode, Erec arrives at the castle of the Count Oringles like a lifeless man, bathed in blood and collapsing on his horse. The count conveys the lifeless body of Erec to the hall where it is put on a litter, a corpse to all appearances. Overcome with grief, Enide passionately longs to join him in death:

“Morz, car m’oci tot a delivre!” (vs. 4614)

[“Death, come and kill me, come with speed!”]

“Dex ! que ferai ? por qoi vif tant?  
Morz que demore et que atant,  
Que ne me prent sanz nul respit? Mout m’a la  
Morz en grant despit,  
Quant ele ocire ne me daigne.” (vss 4649-  
4653)

[“Oh God! Whatever shall I do? Why am I living  
out my days?

Oh, why won’t Death, which just delays take  
me at once and have me slain. Death’s treated  
me with vast disdain not to have killed me by  
this time.”]

Ainsi morrai, mal gre en ait  
La Morz qui ne me vuet aidier (vss 4656 – 4657)

[Thus I shall die, though I incur  
the wrath of Death which would prefer  
not to accord me its assistance]

Enide’s death wish, however, is not merely an expression of her sorrow for having lost her husband, she considers death a just punishment for having killed him.

“He! dist ele, dolente Enide,  
De mon seignor sui homicide.” (vss 4617- 4618)

[“Ah !” she said, “woeful Enide,  
I am the murderess of my Lord.”] (Transl. Car-  
roll).

Precisely how did she kill him?

“Par ma parole l’ai ocis” (vs. 4619)

[With my word I killed him]  
(Transl. my own).

And a few lines on:

La mortel parole entochie (vs. 4641)

[The fatal poisonous word] (Transl. my own).

Since it was Enide’s fateful soliloquy that occasioned the current sorrowful state of affairs, one might consider the expression “la mortel parole entochie” [the fatal poisonous word] as a stylistic hyperbole. However, in the *Turba*’s allegorical jungle, it is one allegory that stands out. It goes back, according to Martin Plessner, to the Hindu myth of the poison maid and was known, Plessner believes, to the *Turba* author. “Illius enim mulieris venter armis plenus est et veneno.” [The body of the woman is full of weapons and poison.] (S. LIX)<sup>18</sup>

In 1949, Roger Sherman Loomis suggested a connection between the Count Oringles of Limors episode and Breton legends about death and a castle presided over by death personified.<sup>19</sup> Scholarly research has not followed this interpretive argument. Understandably so, for even if one could follow Loomis into his Celtic labyrinth, the question would remain why Chrétien incorporated a Celtic myth about death into his first Arthurian Romance. Chrétien, clearly, did not create in a haphazard way. The answer is quite simple. An alchemical inspiration would require a death phase, or the nigredo.

In one of the oldest Greek alchemical manuscripts, the nigredo phase is connected with factual observations of occurrences in the technical apparatus. The prime matter, usually copper or a copper alloy is subjected to a process that blackens it as a result of oxidation. Overlaying the description of the practical manipulation, religious sentiment, from early on, gave the work a spiritual significance. “And tell us how the blessed waters visit the corpses lying in Hades fettered and afflicted in darkness and how the medicine of Life reaches them,”<sup>20</sup> the legendary Persian magus Ostanes asks Cleopatra, one of the very few ancient adepts. Centuries later, Bonellus (Apollonios) in

S. XXXII of the *Turba*, describes the nearly identical drama of death and resurrection.

Appolonius addresses the Master. “Omina a te, Pitagora, moriunter et vivunt nutu Dei,” [All things die and live, so you teach us, according to the will of God.] With religious fervor he then portrays dramatically the death and resurrection of “illa res”, intermingling allegorical and practical description. “(Et) moruto similis tunc videtur.” [Illa res will appear like dead.] Then “illa res igne indiget.” [Illa res will then need the fire.] Fire like eternal water, is a cover name for quicksilver or the spirit. “Hic peractis reddet ei Deus et animam suam et spiritum.” [After this has occurred, God will infuse “illa res” again with soul and spirit.] Then “illa res” will appear stronger and younger. “Quemadmodum homo post resurrectionem fortior fit et iunior.” [Just as man will appear stronger and younger after resurrection.]

True to alchemical doctrines, but also true to Christian beliefs, the death-dominated Count Oringles episode ends in the resurrection of Erec and Enide. Coming out of his death-like swoon, Erec kills Count Oringles and escapes with Enide, both sitting on one horse, in joyful, close embrace. He assures her, in 12 verses, of his undying love, calling her “ma douce suer” (vss 4914-4925) [my sweet sister] For the apologists of a realistic interpretation along the lines of marriage and psychology, Chrétien’s use of the word “suer” for Enide is an embarrassment. The philosophers of the *Turba*, however, would understand. The basic physical theory of alchemy was that of the four qualities of the bodies or elements, namely the hot and the cold, the moist and the dry. Since all bodies or elements were composed of these qualities in different proportions, that is, since they are related, they could be transmuted by changing the proportions. The theory of the four bodies and their interconvertibility is usually ascribed to Aristotle, but It is probably one of the basic physical concepts that go back to earlier times and different cultures.

For the *Turba* philosophers, the ancient maxim is a given. “Sapientes dixerunt, quod ‘natura natura laetatur’ propter propinquitatem, quam sciunt existere inter haec duo corpora, (scilicet aes) et aquam permanentem.” [Wise men have said that “nature enjoys nature”, because of the kinship that exists between these two bodies, namely the copper and the eternal water.] (S. XXVIII) Without this kinship, the philosopher continues, they could not cling to each other when they are joined and become one. Erec and Enide, when they escape on one horse in tight embrace, have become like one

and Enide is truly Erec’s “douce suer.” Chrétien expresses their fulfillment, their state of absolute bliss or, shall we say, their resurrection, in a beautiful poetic image—it is the moonlight that accentuates their happiness, as it illuminates their way:

Et ce lor fait grant soatume  
Que la lune cler lor alume. (vss 4931-4932)

If my contention that Chrétien, in writing *Erec et Enide*, was inspired by alchemical doctrines is correct, the appearance of the moon at a decisive turning point of the story line cannot be taken as an innocent poetic embellishment. The ancient and most sacred alchemical treatise, the *Tabula Smaragdina*, testifies to the belief that there is correspondence or interaction between terrestrial and celestial affairs:

True it is, without falsehood, certain and most true. That which Is above is like to that which is below,  
And that which Is below is like to that which is above, To accomplish the miracles of one thing ...  
The father thereof is the Sun, the mother is the Moon.<sup>21</sup>

Understandably, the *Turba* philosophers, obsessed as they were with the purification process, refer to the sun and moon allegory only fleetingly and obscurely. Chrétien, however, brilliantly weaves it into the activity of his protagonists. Since the Latin translation of the *Tabula* goes back to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, it presumably belonged to the easily accessible alchemical lore. In order to test the hypothesis that Erec and Enide, on the allegorical level, play out the role of the sun and the moon, we shall take a close look at their sleeping arrangements during the venturesome journey which Erec precipitously undertakes, forcing Enide to accompany him. Enide, true to her role, should be awake during the night, while Erec should sleep until the sun rises. In the first night, riding through an uninhabited area, they have to bed down on the ground and decide who is to stay awake and who should sleep:

A l’anuier lor ostel prindrent Soz un aubor en  
une lande. Erec a la dame commande  
Qu’ele dorme, et il veillera (vss 3084–3087)

[When evening fell they bedded down beneath a tree upon a moor.  
He bade the lady to secure  
some sleep while he kept vigilant]

But Enide disagrees: he was the one who needed to sleep, since he was more fatigued. She covers him, from head to foot, with her mantle, and while he sleeps, she stays awake:

Cil dormi, et cele veilla;  
Onques la nuit ne someilla (vss 3095–3096)

[He slept, and she remained awake. No rest that evening did she take]

Throughout the night, she continues lamenting, until the moment when the daylight appears, and Erec begins to stir:

Erec s'esveille par matin,  
Si se remetent au chemin (vss 3117–3118)

[Then Erec rose at break of day, and he continued on his way]

Enide spends the second night sleepless again, this time because of Count Galoain's threats.

Onques la nuit ne prist somoil (vs. 3441)

[That night no slumber did she take]

Toute la nuit veillier l'estuet (vs. 3451)

[throughout the night she stayed awake]

Erec, however, is unconcerned:

Erec dormi mout longuement. Tote la nuit,  
seurement,  
Tant que li jorz mout aprocha (vss 3455–3447)

[But Erec slept, his sleep profound.  
the whole night through, long, safe, and sound,  
until the dawn was very near]

Finally, in the third night, spent at King Arthur's impromptu court in the woods, Enide sleeps throughout the night until the day breaks. The sleeping arrangements, however, are unusual. Sharing the bed of the queen, Enide is concealed under a coverlet of precious fur, "Desoz un covertor d'ermine" (vs. 4272). Allegorically speaking, the moon is hidden under a cloud.

The events of the fourth night, which they spend until midnight in the castle of Count Oringles of Limors and then on the road, are so momentous and convoluted that it is easy to overlook that Enide is awake and active throughout the night, while Erec is prostrate most of the time. He is either in a deathlike faint or in a state of complete exhaustion, lying on the ground, barely able to sit up. Gratefully he accepts the ministrations of

Enide and Guivret, so that at long last he can lapse into sleep. Et dormi trestote la nuit (vs. 5161) [In peace he slept the night away].

In the night preceding the Joy of the Court adventure, the pattern from night one and two is repeated. With the misgivings and fear of King Evrain on their mind, Erec and Enide spend the evening talking about what lay ahead. Enide, tormented by fear and apprehension, stays awake throughout the night, but Erec sleeps. When he awakens at daybreak, he sees the rising sun:

Au main quant il fu ajorne; Erec, qui fu en son  
esveil,  
Vit l'aube clere et le soleil (vss 5664–5666)

[Next day, when early morning broke, and Erec's  
wakening was done,  
he saw the brilliant dawn and sun]

By scrutinizing the sleeping arrangements of Erec and Enide, it becomes plausible to connect the romance with the *Tabula Smaragdina*, the holy bible of the alchemists. In the *Tabula Smaragdina*, however, the sun and the moon produce a child—its father is the sun, its mother is the moon—while, obviously, there is no mention of an offspring of Erec and Enide. Chrétien's amusing and mystifying play on Enide's horses could open up an interpretation consistent with the hypothesis of an alchemical inspiration. Having lost her palfrey in the Count Oringles episode, Enide arrives at Pointurie, the castle where Guivret's sisters live, riding on a mule, an animal incapable of sexual reproduction. After an interval of two weeks, dedicated to the cure of Erec, when he is bathed, bandaged, salved, given no less than 4 meals a day, but no garlic or pepper, Erec no longer feels pain or misery. The detailed description of Erec's cure is followed immediately by a detailed description of Erec and Enide's night of love-making. Chrétien leaves no doubt that it is a sexual "conjuncture". Having described their hugging, kissing, and embracing, their granting each other's every wish, tongue-in-cheek he concludes "Dou soreplus me doi taisir" (vs. 5248) [I must be quiet about the rest.]

Their love-making had results. Having arrived on an animal that cannot produce an offspring, Enide leaves the following day on a palfrey with a strange head. One cheek is white as snow, the other black as a crow. Between the opposite sides runs a green line "plus vert que n'est fuelle de vigne" (vs. 5320) [of a greener shade than a leaf of vine.]

Scholars, understandably, have been puzzled by the strange horse, and especially by the green

line that commingles the contrasting black and white cheek. It is either regarded as irrelevant or bizarre, or it is, as Maddox interprets, “suggesting chromatically the couple’s passage from tribulation to happiness.”<sup>22</sup> In alchemy, the color green is not one of the colors used for the various phases of the magnum opus. As the color of new life, of spring-time growth, it is associated with the end result, with the generation of the philosopher’s child, of the elixir, or, to use the cover name, of the stone “Lapis veridis” the *Turba* states. In a slightly later manuscript, the *Tractatus Micreri suo discipulo Mirnefindo*, which belongs to the group that borrowed from the *Turba*, the color green is glorified more explicitly:

O, what Is like the green color of vegetation:  
This is our stone!<sup>23</sup>

Seen in this light, the Dido and Aeneas story, which is carved into the ivory saddlebow of Enide’s horse, contrasts with the Erec and Enide story in a significant way. The love of Dido and Aeneas ends in the death of Dido, while the love of Erec and Enide brings forth new life, symbolically expressed with the green color joining the opposites. The war-like spirit of Aeneas leads to the realistic conquest of countries, while Erec’s journey combines the defeat of evil on the realistic level with the spirit’s role as the redeemer of matter or the body on the occult level. In the Eneas story, written in Old French, Lavine and Eneas are crowned as King and Queen of a realistic country, of Latium, while Erec and Enide are crowned as King and Queen of the Universe. In the coronation scene, the universal aspirations are emblematically revealed in the scepter which King Arthur places in Erec’s hand. It is engraved with images of life forms of every kind:

Por verite dire vos os  
Q’en tot le mont ne a meniere De poisson ne de  
beste fiere Ne d’ome ne d’oiseil volage,  
Que chascuns lonc sa propre ymage  
N’i fust ovrez et entailliez. (vss 6868-6873)

[Now I shall make the truth be heard:  
that every kind of flying bird or fish, wild animal,  
or man existing in the wide world’s span,  
each in the image of its own,  
was worked and carved upon the stone.]

The coronation scene is preceded by an episode—the Joie de la Cort—which appears to be a patchwork of traditional motifs, most of them taken from Celtic mythology. Nevertheless, most critical analyses maintain that it is an integral part

of the narrative plot. Quoting Anatole France, that behind every great work of art there is always a simple idea, William A. Nitze suggests that Chrétien, wanting to uphold the ideal of marriage, “adds the contrast of the Joie de la Cort episode where Enide’s own cousin is the imperious and exacting drue of the enthralled and bewitched Mabonagrain.”<sup>24</sup> I hesitate to see the enslavement of the male by the female as a contrast to marriage, but if we replace male and female, according to the spiritual alchemy of the *Turba*, with body and spirit, the contrast becomes relevant on several levels. The spirit’s entrapment, we know from S. XLII has to be followed by the purification of the body. Enide had willingly submitted to Erec’s harsh treatment. Enide’s cousin had used a ruse to keep the spirit entrapped. Erec had been angry when he became aware of his bondage in matrimony. Mabonagrain remained bewitched and in a long soliloquy tries to excuse his betrayal of the spirit and the deaths which had followed in its wake. “Mais miens n’en est mie li torz, Qui raison I vuet esgarder.” (vss 6102-6103) [However, if you view it right, their death should not be thought my fault.] The Joie de la Cort episode was indeed inspired by a simple, i.e., alchemical, idea embedded though it is in fantastic, legendary ornamentation.

The redemptive vision of the Joie de la Cort episode is continued in the final episode of the romance, the coronation of Erec and Enide. It is symbolically expressed through the spirited display of literary erudition, the opulence of the coronation festivities, the cosmic relevance of the scepter that King Arthur places in Erec’s right hand, and the dazzling radiance of the two identical crowns that Erec and Enide wear, sitting side by side on two thrones, made of gold and ivory: the King and the Queen of the Universe.

Were it not for Erec’s transformation, as Maddox puts it “into the measure of the universe,”<sup>25</sup> one could perhaps see the coronation scene as an accolade of the “sacred nature of kingship in courtly society.” Allegorical alchemy, however, would more convincingly explain the cosmic ambiance that permeates the coronation ceremony. Since the elixir, the end result of the magnum opus, was believed to be a universal panacea, which would eliminate poverty, cure all diseases, and confer immortality, it was, already in antiquity, infused with cosmic power. In the testament to his son, Ga’far al-Sadiq says of the true elixir: “It is the king of the entire world and Its head.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Turba* philosophers never explicitly refer to the elixir as the king, but they clothe it in the purple royal garment. When the elixir in the vessel changes to a purple color, the disciples are promised, “Et videatis iksir vestitum regni vestimento.” [then you will see the elixir clothed in the royal garment.] (S.XXXIX) Preoccupied as they are with the purification drama, when the eternal water removes the shadow of the copper or when the spirit penetrates the body, the *Turba* philosophers give royal rank to the dramatis personae. “Veneramini regem et suam uxorum.” [Venerate the king and his wife.] (S. XXIX) The transcendent ambiance of the coronation scene parallels the arcane atmosphere enveloping the dramatis personae in the *Turba*’s endeavor to spiritualize or redeem the world.

The purpose of writing this paper is twofold: firstly, to question the persistent tendency of interpreting *Erec et Enide* in the light of 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of psychology or socio-historical realism, and secondly to single out allegorical alchemy from the mystical and heretical wave that swept over France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, coming from the south in the form of Islamic Sufi mysticism, Catar heresy, and alchemical dogmatism, and via the west as burgeoning Jewish kabbalistic mysticism from the esoteric circles of the German Hassidim. “The entire land was in commotion,” Gershom Scholem writes in “The Origin of the Kabbalah”.<sup>27</sup>

It would indeed be strange if a writer of Chrétien’s genius had not been aware of the cultural and spiritual restlessness of his time. By connecting the “tel chose” and “conjuncture” in the prologue of the romance of *Erec et Enide*, with the “illa res” and “coniunctio” of the *Turba Philosophorum*, Chrétien’s first Arthurian romance became transparent for religious analysis: the spirit removes the imperfection of the body, so that an awareness of their kinship can unfold in the quest for salvation.

I would like to conclude with an addendum, by briefly considering the ambiguous role that King Arthur is playing in the romance of *Erec et Enide*. If connected with alchemical lore, certain aspects of the premier vers and the coronation scene will appear in a new light.

In a preliminary report on three Cambridge manuscripts of the *Turba Philosophorum*, Martin Plessner writes: “Of particular interest is the fact that King Arthur, by attending an assembly of alchemists, plays a similar part to that of Emperor Heraclios. It is left for a medievalist to prove to what extent King Arthur’s role as an alchemist

can be based on the legendary tradition of King Arthur.”<sup>28</sup>

There are many facets to the legendary tradition of King Arthur, but if we intend to look for alchemical motifs, only one is important: King Arthur is wealthy beyond belief. His generosity at the coronation festival exceeded even that of Alexander the Great and Caesar, the emperor of Rome. How did Arthur accumulate such wealth? In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1137), which Chrétien may have known, and in the *Roman de Brut* by Wace (ca. 1155), which Chrétien definitely knew, Arthur is an invincible warrior and gains wealth the realistic way—through conquest. Chrétien’s Arthur is completely passive. His court serves as a rallying point of knightly adventures, but the king himself never participates. Chrétien’s Arthur acquired his wealth through magic, i.e., by practicing exoteric alchemy.

By the time alchemy reached the west in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, the determination to liberate alchemy or esoteric alchemy from its religious ballast is clearly manifest in the treatises of Al-Razi, Avicenna and Jabir ibn Hayyan. One of these treatises, the *Liber de Septuaginta* by Jabir ibn Hayyan, was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187), the most prolific among the Toledan scholars. Jabir ibn Hayyan, an innovator in several respects, introduced animals to the list of substances to be used as prima materia.<sup>29</sup> “Il faut prendre cette pierre et la tirer du meilleur animal,” Berthelot translates from Gerard’s Latin text. Jabir then asks at what time the alchemist has to begin his labor. “Dans quel temps faut-il la fabriquer?” He is very specific: in the spring, “a l’époque ou le soleil entre dans le Belier, jusqu’au tempts de son entrée dans le Taureau,” that is approximately between March 21 and April 20. White is the color of the apparent prima materia: “Le mercure dans ses proprietes apparentes est blanc.”<sup>30</sup> To paraphrase: in order to produce the stone, i.e., the miracle substance capable of turning base metal into gold, one has to pull it out of the better animal. The manipulation has to be done in the springtime, approximately between March 21 and April 20. White is the visible color of the Arcanum.

Obviously, many questions need to be asked and problems solved before an alchemical interpretation of the premier vers can be seriously considered. It might, however, result in scholarly inquiries. 1) In his essay “The White Stag in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*”, R. Harris states that

the premier vers does not “appear to have any bearing upon the rest of the romance.”<sup>31</sup> From an alchemical viewpoint, the immense riches that King Arthur distributes during the coronation festival would be a logical outcome of his alchemical activities in the premier vers. 2) The white stag appears in the folklore of the time, in the lays of Marie de France, and in Celtic mythology. The invasion of the supernatural, however, is not connected with a custom which was bequeathed by an ancestor to his descendants. In allegorical and exoteric alchemy, the inheritance motif is standard, going back hundreds of years. “My son, I bequeath to you a kingdom, which will never vanish,” the Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (700-765) writes in his testament.<sup>32</sup> Lest they forget the “posteri”, the *Turba* philosophers routinely remind each other to be considerate of them. 3) The ambiguity of King Arthur’s role in the coronation ceremony will be seen as a cover-up for King Arthur’s self-diminishment. Only briefly King Arthur occupies one of the two thrones, although they were given, in homage, to him and his queen. As soon as Enide appears, he eagerly jumps up, runs to meet her, and places her on the throne next to Erec, “car mout li vost grant honor faire”. (vs 6825) [for he wanted to do her great honor.] One could interpret, as Donald Maddox has done, that “the elder Arthurian order” is harmoniously united “with the nascent, mediatory order modelled on the exemplary experience of Erec and Enide”, i.e., an experience of fulfilled marital love “in a period that strongly tended to dissociate love and marriage.”<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Chrétien’s outstanding artistic genius, it was clearly understood in this vein by the subsequent writers of courtly romance.

Were it not for the ambiance of sacredness that permeates the entire coronation ceremony, obscured, to be sure, by the full-scale charmingly creative courtly hyperbole, one could indeed, as Maddox suggests, admire Chrétien’s “audacity” with regard to the love-in-marriage topos. It was, after all, his patroness, Marie de Champagne, who wrote in a letter, dated May 1, 1174: “We declare and firmly establish that love cannot unfold its powers between married people.”<sup>34</sup> It is only through an alchemical analysis, that King Arthur’s subservience can be seen in its religious significance. King Arthur’s concern had been the production of wealth, while Erec and Enide had achieved the purification of matter or its spiritualization.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Citations are from de Troyes (1992).
- <sup>2</sup>Translation from Carroll (1991). All other translations, unless otherwise noted, are from Cline (2000).
- <sup>3</sup>See Holmyard (1957).
- <sup>4</sup>See Plessner (1954:337).
- <sup>5</sup>Ruska (1937).
- (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin I). All English citations from the *Turba* are my translations from Ruska's translation into German from the Latin ms. Qu 584 (B).
- <sup>6</sup>The only English translation of the *Turba Philosophorum* is the one by Arthur Edward Waite (2010) who wrote extensively on occult and esoteric topics. It is not clear which manuscript he used. He seems to have known only two, a shorter one and a longer one which he used for his translation. Since Waite apparently did not understand that the *Turba* fuses poorly understood technical alchemy with allegorical alchemy and uses a profusion of cover names, his translation is basically unintelligible.
- <sup>7</sup>See Scholem (2006:11).
- <sup>8</sup>See Plessner (1954:331).
- <sup>9</sup>See Robertson (1951:669–682). See also Kelly (1970:179–200).
- <sup>10</sup>See Robertson (1951:685).
- <sup>11</sup>According to F. Sherwood Taylor (1930:131, 138), an authority on Greek alchemy, the divine water played an important role in early Greek alchemy. "The recipes which employ the 'divine water' seem to indicate that it had the power of dissolving or disintegrating the substances used in the art, and that it had also the property of colouring coloring metals." However, "In many passages the practical element is replaced by mystical and religious matters." From the time of its inception, the two kinds of alchemy, the exoteric or practical alchemy and esoteric or spiritual alchemy were often inextricably mixed.
- <sup>12</sup>In one of the two primary sources of the *Turba Philosophorum*, the *Kitab al-Habib*, the cover name *aqua permanens* is used innumerable times and is equated with the redeeming agent (Ruska 1937:43).
- <sup>13</sup>See Bezzola (1968:97).
- <sup>14</sup>The stone, the most ancient and important of alchemical images may refer, paradoxically, to the initial substance, the *prima materia* to be used in the *magnum opus*, and also to the end product, the elixir. The saying "it is a stone and not a stone" already occurs in a treatise by the Ssabian prophet and teacher Agathodaimon. E.H. Stapleton (1953) quotes Agathodaimon in the appendix to his article "The Antiquity of Alchemy". "This 'Stone' by which the Work is performed is a Stone and not a Stone." "This 'Noble stone' which God has bestowed on us" is not one of the ordinary stones, seeing that it melts and comes out as the Essential Nature (*kiyan*) of the stones—a Clear Water and Pure Spirit.
- <sup>15</sup>Carroll (1991): "... may easily keep silent something that could later give much pleasure." Ruth Harwood Cline: "... for he who sets his wits aside might know, while keeping taciturn, a thing that proves a joy to learn."
- <sup>16</sup>*Patrologia Latina* (176: 989; 184:152).
- <sup>17</sup>See Nitze (1919:28): "It is certainly true, as Professor Sheldon wisely remarks, that "any attempt to find out what was in the poet's mind must be more or less conjectural, and only a certain degree of probability can be obtained."
- <sup>18</sup>See Plessner (1954:333).
- <sup>19</sup>See Loomis (1949:162–168).
- <sup>20</sup>See Linden (2003).
- <sup>21</sup>The scholarly apparatus for Ruska's (1926) pioneering investigation *Tabula Smaragdina* is tremendous. Plessner (1927:713) maintained that in all probability a Latin text was already extant in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>22</sup>See Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (2005:112).
- <sup>23</sup>Ruska (1937:322).
- <sup>24</sup>See Nitze (1954:695).
- <sup>25</sup>See Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (2005:116).
- <sup>26</sup>Ruska (1937:254).
- <sup>27</sup>See Scholem (1987:16).
- <sup>28</sup>See Plessner (1959: 159–163).
- <sup>29</sup>See Holmyard (1957:79).
- <sup>30</sup>"*Liber de Septuaginta, Translatus a Magistro Renaldo Cremonensi, de Lapide Animalis.*" in Berthelot (1967: 328–335).
- <sup>31</sup>See Harris (1956:56).
- <sup>32</sup>See Ruska (1924:71).
- <sup>33</sup>See Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, (2005:115–116).
- <sup>34</sup>See Bumke (2000:377). The original Latin reads: "Decimus enim et stabilito tenure firmamus, amorem non posse suas inter duos iugales extendere vires." Pp. 652–653.