

LEIPZIG EXPLORATIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE  
VOLUME 4



## THE GOLDEN EGG

*The Golden Egg*  
Alchemy in Art and Literature

Alexandra Lembert / Elmar Schenkel, Editors

LEIPZIG EXPLORATIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE 4

GALDA + WILCH VERLAG  
GLIENICKE / BERLIN • CAMBRIDGE / MASSACHUSETTS 2002

## **Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP-Einheitsaufnahme**

The golden egg : alchemy in art and literature / Alexandra Lemberg ;  
Elmar Schenkel (Hrsg.). - Glienicke/Berlin ; Cambridge/Mass. :  
Galda und Wilch, 2002  
(Leipzig explorations in literature and culture ; 4)  
ISBN 3-931397-40-8

## **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The Golden egg : alchemy in art and literature / Alexandra Lemberg,  
Elmar Schenkel, editors.

p. cm. -- (Leipzig explorations in literature and culture ; v. 4)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-931255-10-5

1. Alchemy in literature. 2. Literature, Modern--History and  
criticism. 3. Alchemy in art. I. Lemberg, Alexandra. II. Schenkel,  
Elmar. III. Series.

PN56.A44 G65 2002

809'.9337--dc21

2002001277

ISSN 1435-9693

© 2002 Galda + Wilch Verlag

Neither this book nor any part may be reproduced or transmitted in  
any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including  
photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or by any information  
storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from  
the publisher. Direct all inquiries to G+W, Franz-Schubert-Str. 61,  
16548 Glienicke (Berlin), Germany

Printed and bound in India by BIBLIA IMPEX PVT LTD. New Delhi

# Contents

Preface: The Golden Egg .....	3
Helmut Gebelein	
Alchemy and Chemistry in the Work of Goethe	
Lecture with experiments .....	9
Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly	
Saxony, Alchemy and Dr Faustus .....	31
Betsy van Schlun	
William Godwin's <i>St Leon</i> and the Fatal Legacy of Alchemy ...	43
Anne Hegerfeldt / Dirk Vanderbeke	
The Terrestrial Humours of an All-Shemical Son: Alchemy	
and the Linguistic Transformations of <i>Finnegans Wake</i> .....	61
Liliana Sikorska	
Alchemy as Writing – Alchemy and Writing:	
A Study of Lindsay Clarke's <i>The Chymical Wedding</i> .....	81
Alexandra Lembergt	
The eternal return of the same? A comparison between Peter	
Ackroyd's <i>The House of Doctor Dee</i> and Gustav Meyrink's	
<i>Der Golem</i> and <i>Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster</i> .....	101
Norbert Schaffeld	
"a wondrous feat of alchemy":	
A Post-Jungian Reading of Ann-Marie MacDonald's Play	
<i>Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)</i> .....	115
Robert Stockhammer	
Rosicrucian Radioactivity: Alchemy around 1900 .....	133

## 2 THE GOLDEN EGG: ALCHEMY IN ART AND LITERATURE

Elmar Schenkel	
H. G. Wells: Alchemy and Information .....	149
M. E. Warlick	
An Itinerant Alchemist: Max Ernst in Europe and America .....	165
M. E. Warlick	
Moon Sisters: Women and Alchemical Imagery .....	183
Finn Riedel	
Stuntmen of Eternity – Chinese Alchemists and Literature ...	199
Notes on the Contributors .....	222
Index .....	227

M. E. Warlick

## Moon Sisters: Women and Alchemical Imagery

Alchemical manuscripts and early printed texts contain abundant images of women. Growing from the foundations of Hellenistic science, alchemical philosophy adopted the ancient premise of the unity of matter and its polarization into two opposing forces. As alchemy's enigmatic language developed in the early texts, authors often described these opposing principles as masculine and feminine. The early alchemical manuscripts offered few illustrations – scattered images of vessels and abbreviated symbols for the planets and laboratory substances. With the inauguration of alchemical imagery at the end of the Middle Ages, the masculine and feminine polarities began to appear as male and female characters, drawn from a variety of religious and secular sources. From the early fifteenth through the mid-seventeenth centuries, alchemical imagery underwent a remarkable development that produced a profuse body of visual imagery that still functions as the canon of alchemical images today.

While most studies aim to explain how alchemy's symbolic forms illuminate its philosophical concepts and laboratory operations, few have considered the significance of gender as a determining factor in the evolution of alchemical imagery and its subtle changes over time. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that alchemical studies are enjoying a contemporary revival among a diverse group of historians of science, art historians, literary critics, practicing alchemists, herbalists, psychologists and new age philosophers, many areas of inquiry remain virtually uncharted. No scholar devoted to the study of alchemy would claim a cohesive doctrine to the development of its philosophy or its imagery. Still, it may be useful to offer an overview of some of the general categories of female images within alchemical texts. This paper will provide an introduction to alchemical images of women and will comment briefly on how alchemy's visual heritage mirrored the sexual polarization of its philosophy and the shifting social condition of women's roles in Europe from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

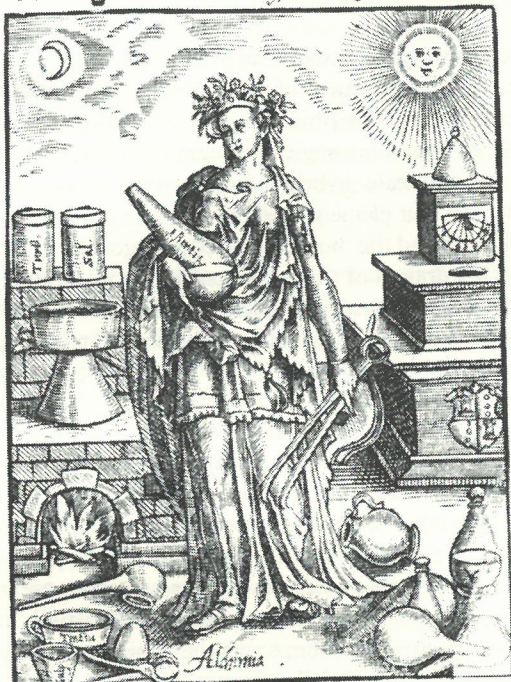
A female personification of alchemy, *Alchimia*, appeared in Leonhardt Thurneisser zum Thurn's *Quinta Essentia*, published in Leipzig in 1574 [Fig. 1] after the first Münster edition of 1569. It is a curious fact that women often appeared as allegorical figures to represent occupations or intellectual pursuits which were difficult, if not impossible, for women to pursue in real life. Flanked on either side by the moon and the sun, she stands between two furnaces, holding an alchemical vessel and a pair of tongs in her hands. She represents the two major avenues that this paper will take. First, the proliferation of vessels and furnaces around her is a reminder of the frequent visual associations between women and laboratory equipment used to illustrate alchemy's symbolic mysteries. Secondly, because she holds a vessel and tongs, she suggests the practical work of the alchemist in the laboratory. Images of women alchemists can also be found, often disguised as genre scenes of domestic activities and in prints and paintings of the 'foolish alchemist' theme, to be explored presently.

Within alchemical manuscripts and early printed texts, female figures represent a variety of feminine concepts: the female planets (Moon and Venus); the feminine principle of matter; the corporeal nature of the physical body; and laboratory processes that connote feminine associations, namely, cool, watery and volatile operations. One of the first illuminated manuscripts is *Das Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* from the early fifteenth century [Lennep, 73-8]. Produced in a Catholic context, its illustrations suggest parallels between religious concepts and alchemical processes. In several illuminations, Eve and her twin blond serpent represent the feminine aspects of primal matter in its unrefined state, while the Virgin Mary symbolizes its perfection. Adam and Christ represent their masculine counterparts.

Both male and female properties must be destroyed and subsequently purified before perfection can be attained. In one image, the female serpent attacks Adam with her spear to represent his destruction while other images fuse the Virgin Mary and the crucified Christ as symbols of triumphal alchemical rebirth after death [ibid., 73, Fig. 46; 75, Fig. 51]. Christian virtues are also linked to the seven ancient planets, each virtue representing one of the seven ancient planets or metals and signified by a crown of different color. This manuscript also contains a version of the alchemical androgyne, a single figure

Von der Alchimy.  
Das Ander Capitel.  
**Alchimia die kunst redet.**

xxxiij



**A**lchymia. **G**ert/ mercke/ verstehe/ verneme mich rec  
 All die ihe seid in diesem geschlecht/  
 All die ihe meine kinder sind/  
 Vnd sonst mir geschwegert/ vnd gefründ/  
 Vnd all die hie in dieser welt  
 Stellt nach reichthumb/ kunst vnd geld/  
 Babst/ Keyser/ König/ Potentaten/  
 Cardinal/ Bischoff vnd Prelaten/  
 Churfürsten/ Fürsten/ Ritter/ Craffen/  
 Epe/ Pöbst/ Thumherren/ Mönch vnd Pfaffen/  
 Edelcut/ Bürger/ vnd von geschlechtem/

D

Xoctorn

Fig. 1. *Alchimia*. Woodcut [Thurneisser, 37]. Courtesy of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections Department.

composed of a King and Queen, each halved and joined vertically down the middle, standing above a dragon with four grotesque heads to illustrate the spiritual need to conquer vice [ibid., 76, Fig. 52], a Christian parallel to laboratory processes leading to the spiritual perfection of metals.

The *Aurora consurgens*, another early fifteenth century manuscript, contains a remarkable assortment of planetary personifications, secular images and fantastic creatures [ibid., 54-70]. A volatile nude androgyne rises from a pile of dead blue eagles to begin the series [ibid., 56, Fig. 17]. Elsewhere, composite hybrid animals stand beside large-scale vessels to signify the four elements and the various colors and operations of the work. The sun and the moon, pictured as a golden knight and his silver lady, slay the dragon of primal matter in one illustration while in another they attack each other, each planet armed with the shield of its opposite. Another woman serves as an allegory of wisdom, nursing two elderly alchemical philosophers [ibid., 70, Fig. 44; 61, Fig. 25; 63, Fig. 28].

Secular scenes containing female figures are also numerous in this manuscript. Some of them are quite violent as small figures perform amputations on each other to represent putrefaction and other destructive operations in the laboratory. In a sequence inspired by the *Song of Songs*, the male and female archetypes appear as contemporary lovers who court each other, make love and produce a child. Briefly discussed by Carl Gustav Jung, this manuscript was the subject of a major study by Marie-Louise von Franz. Briefly discussed by Carl Gustav Jung in his *Mysterium coniunctionis*, this manuscript was the subject of Marie-Louise von Franz's longer study entitled *Aurora consurgens*. Together they launched the Jungian psychoanalytic approach to interpreting alchemical texts and images that pervades much of the contemporary study of alchemy today.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the first printed texts began to adapt earlier manuscript illuminations into simplified woodcut images. The *Rosarium philosophorum*, published in Frankfurt in 1550, was one of the most influential of these texts and later publications often repeated its images, occasionally with artistic misunderstanding or editorial censorship no doubt provoked by the explicit sexual nature of many of its illustrations [Lenep, 155-9]. Religious images continued, including the

*Crowning of Mary* and *Christ's Resurrection* placed strategically at the end of this series, as they were in *Das Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit*, to represent the perfection of the masculine and feminine principles. More prominent, however, are the King and Queen, accompanied by their corresponding symbols of the sun and the moon, who make love and join together as an androgyne lying on a sarcophagus. Throughout the series, they switch positions, with the King and the Queen alternating on top to indicate the masculine or feminine nature of each successive laboratory operation. Small male and female figures ascend from and return to the couple in the clouds above to represent gases and spirit essences that leave and return during evaporation and condensation [cf. Max Ernst article in this volume, Fig. 2].

The result of the couple's amorous encounters is a child known as the Philosopher's Stone. Once produced in the laboratory, this mysterious substance enables the alchemist to achieve further transformations with relative ease. The Philosopher's Stone often appears as a child, either within or emerging from a vessel and thus connected in some texts to the creation of a homunculus. Alchemical texts make frequent references to the conception and the growth of this child as paralleling the natural processes of pregnancy and birth as they had been understood since classical times. So it is not surprising that images of women, human sexuality and procreation illustrate these same points and that visual equations are drawn between the female body and the alchemical vessel, or alembic. For example, in the *Aurora consurgens* discussed above, one image depicts a menstruating woman surrounded by zodiacal symbols as a reminder of the corporeal nature of the female body and the connection of alchemical process to the monthly planetary influences. In another image, a winged woman with the silver head of the moon opens her white dress to reveal a red womb with a mercurial symbol within [Lenep, 62, Figs. 26; 67, Fig. 40].

This same comparison between the female body and alchemical processes can be seen in a series of manuscripts known as the Ripley Scrolls. At the top of these scrolls, a male alchemist places his hands on the belly of a large glass vessel [ibid., 91-5, Figs. 98-9]. Although this vessel has no facial features or breasts, its rounded and enlarged lower belly can be compared to that of a pregnant woman. Inside, seven or eight roundels around a central circle illustrate a sequence of alchemical operations in which a nude man and woman, representing Sulphur and

Mercury, are washed and heated, overseen by laboratory assistants. These symbolic representations of laboratory operations and their parallels to human sexuality and pregnancy reflect how alchemical philosophy adopted the sexual polarization of male and female bodies found in contemporary medicine, underscoring the significance of gender as a factor in determining the development of alchemical imagery and philosophy.

Furnaces also assume these same anthropomorphic functions. A comparison between a woman's body and a furnace can be seen in an early eighteenth century engraving from Urban Hjärne's *Actorum chymicorum holmiensium* published in Stockholm, 1712 [ibid., 242, Fig. 292]. Adapted from the Hellenistic sculpture of Artemis of Ephesus, this alchemical goddess represents the abundance of nature and the organic processes that cause metals to incubate and grow to perfection in the earth. So too, the alchemist must learn how to duplicate these natural processes in the laboratory and through the careful control of the furnace's heat, in effect, simulate a pregnancy. A number of male furnaces can also be found and their phallic shapes suggest the warming action of the furnace that supports inseminating operations within the vessel.

Considering this close association between women and alchemical vessels, it is interesting to note that two of alchemy's founding mothers, Maria the Prophet and Cleopatra, are both credited with the invention of vessels. Maria appears in Michael Maier's *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum*, published in Frankfurt in 1617, a treatise devoted to the contributions of twelve major alchemical philosophers of the past, each representing a different nation. Maria represents the Hebrews, having often been incorrectly associated with Miriam, the sister of Moses. In an engraving by Matthaeus Merian, Maria points to a small hill where two smoky emanations flow in a circular motion from the earth to the heavens around a small white flower [ibid., 178, Fig. 89]. This detail captures a central concept in her teachings that the masculine and feminine substances of the work, Sulphur and Mercury, are formed in the earth under planetary influences. The white flower, identified as lunary, was an herbal remedy and a symbol of the white, lunar and feminine perfection of the work, a reminder that women were often associated with plants and with the organic and vegetable aspects of the alchemical work.

No treatise by Maria remains. Her precepts come down from Zosimos of Panopolis (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. CE), who speculated that she lived just a few generations before he did (cf. Patai, 60-91). Her teachings reveal that she was a practicing alchemist, credited with the invention of three important vessels, including the *Bain Marie*, or water bath, still used in kitchens today. Her *kerotakis* was a more complicated two-part apparatus with a small sieve placed between the lower container and the upper condensing cover. When heated, vapors passed across the sieve to affect whatever metals might be placed on it, inspiring the circulating vapors seen in the engraving of her discussed above. Her *triblikos* was a refluxing still with three collecting arms. Zosimos enumerated the ingredients in Maria's recipes, recounted her directions for making these vessels and explained how she used them in her experiments.

Maria also appears as part of a series of one hundred sixty medallions of famous alchemists published by J. D. Mylius in his *Opus medico-chemicum* in Frankfurt, 1618-1630, all engraved by Matthaeus Merian. Within each circle is an emblematic synthesis of alchemical precepts. Maria's circle includes again the small detail of the lunar plant and the two circulating vapors. Also included in this series are four other ancient women alchemists whom Michael Maier claimed had all achieved the preparation of the Philosopher's Stone, including Cleopatra, Medera, Thaphuntia, and Euthica [Klossowski de Rola, 140, Figs. 124-8]. Of these, Cleopatra is the best known, as she is possibly the same Cleopatra as the last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt. Known for her treatise on the preparation of perfumes, Cleopatra is also credited with having invented a still. Thus, it is significant that in alchemy's earliest beginnings, women are credited with the invention of the vessels and with many of the practical operations of the work. Despite their technical achievements, these female philosophers are not depicted working in the laboratory, but rather their teachings are distilled into basic emblematic representations of their alchemical teachings.

Both of these texts appeared during the greatest proliferation of printed alchemical imagery in the early seventeenth century in Germany sponsored largely by the publishing family of De Bry in Oppenheim and by Lucas Jennis in Frankfurt. Often based on earlier manuscript images, these new engravings adopted the more classical figural proportions and elaborate spatial environments of Renaissance art. Owing to a more Protestant audience, images of the Virgin Mary and

Eve disappear almost entirely from these new alchemical engravings. The King, Queen and Androgyne found in the earlier manuscripts continue to appear in these new images and they are joined by an abundance of classical gods and goddesses who represent the planets, the metals and the laboratory operations they oversee.

One of the most splendid of these books is Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens*, first published in 1617. Following the popular tradition of emblem books, it contains fifty engravings, again designed and executed by Matthaeus Merian. Each engraving is accompanied by a motto, an epigram, a few pages of discourse and a musical fugue. In two of the engravings, women perform domestic tasks symbolic of alchemical operations, namely cooking and washing [Warlick, 25-47]. In one, a pregnant woman watches boiling pots in a kitchen to represent the operations of heating and cooking. Her pregnancy again mirrors the incubation that takes place in the vessel to form the Philosopher's Stone. In the other, a woman adds water to a boiling laundry tub to represent the hot watery operations that purify substances in the vessel. Precedents for these domestic scenes can be found in earlier manuscript illuminations and in the many textual references to cooking and washing throughout alchemical philosophy.

In fact, it is often stated in alchemical texts, that the practical laboratory operations are 'women's work' or 'child's play.' The laundress in *Atalanta fugiens* can be traced back through intermediary printed texts to a full-page illumination in the late sixteenth-century manuscript, the *Splendor Solis*, where a group of laundresses bleaches sheets in the out-of-doors [Warlick, 42]. These domestic alchemists with their tasks of cooking and washing present an unusual blend of allegory and genre imagery. While they represent the working alchemists, they are pictured as laundresses and cooks, assigned by their gender to more domestic roles. As alchemical imagery had adopted the traditional polarization of male and female sexuality, so too did masculine and feminine stereotypes dominate images of laboratory operations. This is particularly evident in Antonio Neri's *Alchimia* manuscript at the University of Glasgow Library. In illustrations of four different laboratories devoted to alchemical work with plants, animals, stones and metals, women participate equally in the plant and animal realms of gardens and kitchens, but are increasingly excluded in the images from

laboratory work on the 'harder' and more masculine substances of stones and metals [ibid., 30-2].

To find women actually in the laboratory we must turn to the popular tradition of the 'foolish alchemist.' These prints and paintings provided a comic parody of an alchemical laboratory as a place of physical chaos, human folly and financial ruin. A well-known version by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, engraved by Hieronymus Cock, was instrumental in launching this theme [Gebelein, 288, Fig. 76]. The foolish alchemist, seated on the left by his furnace, dissipates his energies in a vain pursuit to turn lead into gold. Eventually, this path will lead him and his entire family to the poorhouse – a fate prefigured through the window at the upper right-hand corner. In most descriptions of this print, the alchemist's wife is mentioned only in passing, although she occupies a strategic place in the center of the laboratory. Bracketed by fools on either side, she neglects her household duties and her children, who climb unsupervised into a closet above her head looking for food.

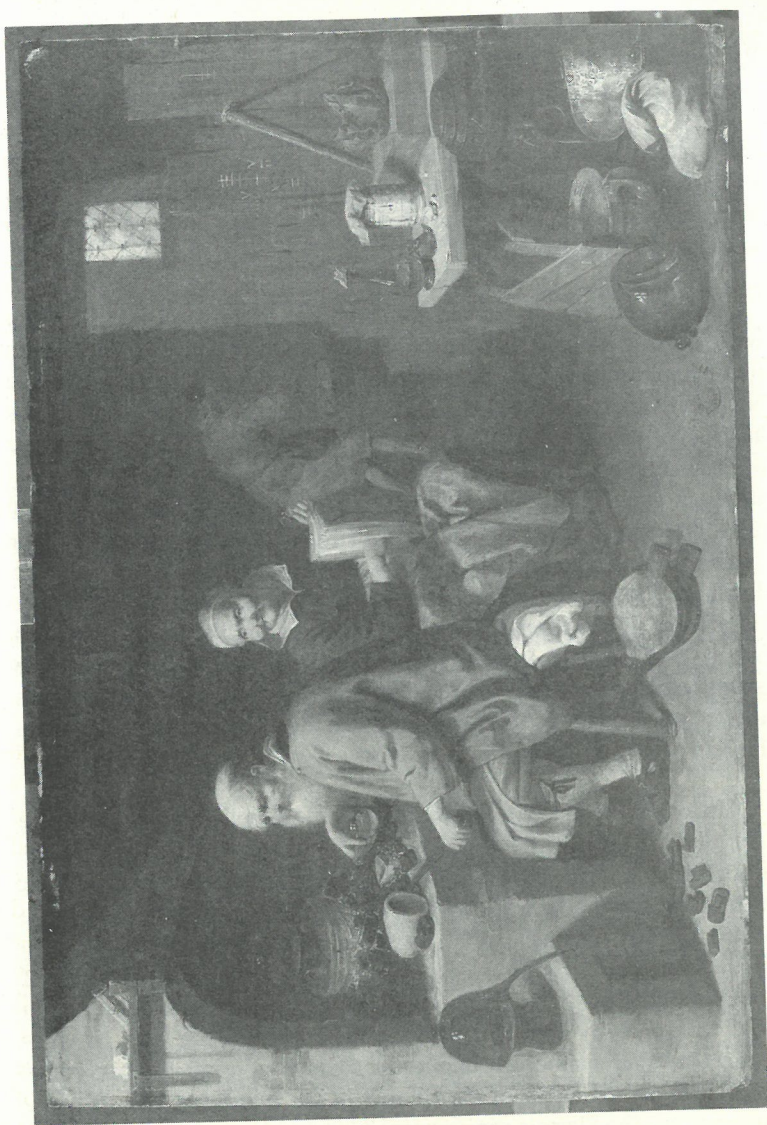
Bruegel's laboratory inspired many prints and paintings of foolish alchemists into the late seventeenth century. Scholars have debated the degree to which such scenes contain authentic details of contemporary laboratories or whether they are simply the products of overly fanciful artistic imaginations [ibid., 280-303]. If we hold such scenes to be representations of at least a glimmer of truth, we can use them as a foundation for discussing the role of women as practicing alchemists. In Bruegel's print, the wife's central participation in the activities of this household bears some examination, as it parallels the structure of other types of domestic craft workshops in southern Germany in the sixteenth century, issues that have been examined in recent years by the historians Lyndal Roper and Mary Wiesner, among others.

Beginning in the late Middle Ages, women held a significant role in the craft household in both the manufacture of products and in the maintenance of home. As the sixteenth century progressed, a variety of economic and social factors, including the development of guilds and new urban-centered systems of commerce, increasingly excluded women from productive labor. At the same time, Protestant teachings encouraged an increasing polarization of the role of women within the home, emphasizing their domestic roles. These forces gradually conspired to displace women from most professions, particularly in those of metal-

working and goldsmithing, guilds that had close associations to the alchemical work.

In the many scenes of foolish alchemists that followed into the seventeenth century, artists often marginalized the alchemists' wives to the side or to the background where they tend to their domestic responsibilities, such as serving dinner, subduing children or crying over their husbands' foolish endeavors [ibid., 289, Fig. 77]. A painting in Leipzig by David III Ryckaert entitled *The Alchemist with his Wife in the Laboratory*, 1648 [Fig. 2] provides an interesting exception to this rule. Ryckaert (1612-1661), following the fashionable convention of his time closely imitate works of well-known artists, often painting scenes of everyday peasant life in the style of Adriaen Brouwer and David II Teniers. By mid-century, he had adopted Teniers' moralizing intent and many of his paintings can be interpreted with hidden moral messages. Ryckaert painted several alchemists and in four related works, including the one in Leipzig, the alchemist's wife occupies a prominent place in the center of the painting and holds a large book [Haute, 107-10, Cat. A53, A78-A81]. Scholars who interpret these paintings as having a moralizing purpose identify the book as a Bible. In this view, the alchemist's wife is pointing out to her husband the error of his ways.

The book might just as well be an alchemical text, for they are often found scattered around painted laboratories, indicating the wife's attempt to help her husband follow the book's instructions, a rather unusual scenario. Ryckaert gave the wife reading glasses and he placed her fingers inside the book to mark her place, indicating her literacy and raising her above the vast majority of weeping, distraught and marginalized wives usually found in foolish alchemist paintings. Her physical prominence in the painting is typical of other genre scenes by Ryckaert, who often painted farmhouses, taverns and domestic craft workshops, including scenes of cobblers, smiths, and butcher shops, where women or wives play a central role. Perhaps the conservative nature of Flemish painting contributed to this prominent presence of women in his paintings, as Flemish artists continued to paint themes after they had been abandoned in Holland [ibid., 20-42]. Whether the interpretation of the wife's role here is one of moral correction of her husband or her active participation in the alchemical work, Ryckaert's painting stands as an unusual and intriguing contribution to the theme



**Fig. 2.** David III Ryckaert. *The Alchemist with his Wife in the Laboratory*. 1648. Oil on wood. Courtesy of the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig.

of the foolish alchemist's wife. In another painting in Mannheim, Ryckaert depicts an elderly alchemist and his wife, clearly past child-bearing age, both dismayed at the creation of a homunculus in a vessel [ibid., 41, 334, Cat. A83]. A number of large books are scattered on the table in front of them, while a skull and burning candle signify *vanitas* connotations. Further inspection of the details painted onto the many open manuscripts and printed books in these paintings may help to clarify Ryckaert's intent.

Beyond the moralizing and comic images of the foolish alchemist's wife, historic women alchemists are few and far between. In the late fourteenth century, Pérenelle Flamel, wife of the Parisian alchemist Nicolas Flamel, was the first significant woman alchemist to follow the handful of classical female alchemical philosophers. The authenticity of this couple's alchemical legend has been debated [cf. Gagnon], although they were real people who lived in Paris around the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. In 1761, Etienne François Villain wrote a book on the Flamels, claiming that he had found many authentic documents in the local Paris archives to validate parts of the legend. He offered information about Pérenelle's life and the lawsuit between Nicolas and his sister Isabel over her estate when she died. The trouble is that contemporary scholars today cannot find these alleged documents and the only extant copies of Flamel's famous manuscript of Abraham the Jew date from the eighteenth century.

Historical evidence of the couple exists. Flamel's tombstone can be seen at the Cluny Museum and one of the oldest remaining structures in Paris, at 15 rue de Montmorency, was supposedly one of their residences. On the facade of this building, there is a stone relief of a seated woman reading a book beside a wattle fence. Pérenelle also appears as a donor figure kneeling at the lower right in an engraving of Nicolas's famous 'Hieroglyphic Figures' which were first published in 1612 in French by Pierre Arnaud [Lennep, 256-62, Fig. 12]. Its enigmatic Christian symbolism duplicates sculptures originally carved on an arch in the cemetery of the Church of the Innocents, one of many churches that the Flamels commissioned but which was later destroyed.

Eirenaeus Orandus translated Flamel's text into English in 1624. Nicolas relates their story giving substantial credit to his wife's participation in the laboratory work. In this account, he speaks very affectio-

nately of his wife whom he "loved as myself" [Flamel, 15] and, in terms of the alchemical work, she "understood it as well as I" [ibid., 30]. According to the legend, Nicolas found a mysterious book filled with symbols that he could not understand. He took a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and received help from a converted Jewish scholar there to decipher the manuscript. Returning to Paris, he and Pérenelle were able to successfully transmute both silver and gold in 1382.

A second English translation by William Salmon of Flamel's text was published in 1692 with additional engravings that depict Nicolas and Pérenelle surrounded by Christian saints. In one of the engravings, Nicolas claims in a banderole that "Man must come to the judgment of God" and she replies, "That day will be terrible indeed" [Flamel 1692, 539]. The text is filled with such religious inserts into the alchemical discussion. While debates continue about the authenticity of the Flamel legend, this couple's fame has not diminished, especially in French alchemical circles where they are revered as the consummate model of egalitarian activity in the laboratory.

Sometimes it is assumed that Nicolas and Pérenelle are the couple in the *Mutus Liber*, a series of full-page engravings first published in La Rochelle in 1677 by the pseudonymous Altus [Lennep, 231-4]. As the title suggests, there are no words to this silent book, except for a few on the title page and some short phrases and numbers on several of the plates. Within this series of engravings, a man and a woman work in the laboratory and in the fields to complete the lunar and solar phases of the cycle. In one three-tiered engraving, they combine lunar and solar essences into a single flask on the top row [Lennep, 233, Fig 256]. In the middle row, the man seals the glass vessel and they place it in the athanor furnace. Below, the deities Diana and Apollo join hands to represent the sexual fusion of the moon and sun that takes place within the vessel. As the feminine and masculine substances are combined in the vessel, represented by the moon and the sun and their mythic personifications Diana and Apollo, so too female and male alchemists must work together to bring the work to completion. Diana and Apollo are sister and brother, thus making Diana one of several legendary mystical sisters, a *soror mystica* [Jung, 153, fn 317]. Their brother-sister relationship vies with that of husband and wife, found with the King and Queen and Nicolas and Pérenelle Flamel. Together they form

an enduring but shifting alchemical concept of cooperation between the sexes that deserves further exploration.

Throughout the *Mutus Liber* series, the woman takes an active role. In one of the engravings, a man and woman gather dew for their experiments [Warlick, 45]. Behind them, a ram and bull in the middle ground represent the transition from Aries to Taurus, placing this scene in late April, when Nicolas Flamel claimed that he and Pérenelle made gold, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April. While it is tempting to connect the Flamels' legend to these images, so little is known about the history of this text, its author, or its unknown artist that this seems premature. The *Mutus Liber* remains a book with the most thorough inclusion of a man and woman working as equal partners and its images are often reproduced. It is important to remember, however, its unique place within the development of alchemical imagery and its rather unusual depictions of a woman actually working in the laboratory.

As a whole, alchemical imagery provides a fascinating mirror to reflect the evolving concepts about female sexuality and appropriate roles for women in society. If women in alchemical manuscripts, printed texts and popular paintings seem more at home in the bedroom, the kitchen, and the laundry, then it should be remembered that these images developed during a time when women's roles in society were also shifting towards more exclusively domestic roles. While the laboratory and the kitchen have become two separate spheres, they are linked by common origins in Hellenistic Egypt in the laboratory kitchen of Maria the Prophet. As herbal remedies and aromatic therapies are enjoying a comeback today, perhaps the kitchen and the laboratory are being reunited. To simply 'add a few women and stir' into the pot of alchemical history would not do justice to the handful of mythic female philosophers and practicing alchemists, even if their experiments and legends cannot be documented with any degree of certainty. Rather it is the pot, or alchemical vessel, that is so rich in meaning and gendered implications. The study of gender in alchemy is a task of many dimensions, of which only a few have been presented here. But within alchemical philosophy, there is an underlying promise of unity between the sexes, as represented by the androgyne, and of egalitarian cooperation, as seen in the *Mutus Liber*, that holds a promise for women to contribute equally to the alchemical quest.

## Bibliography

- Altus [pseud.]. 1677. *Mutus Liber*. La Rochelle, France: Pierre Savouret.
- Gagnon, Claude. 1994. *Nicolas Flamel sous investigation*. Québec: Editions Le Loup de Gouttière.
- Flamel, Nicolas. 1612. *Trois Traictez de la Philosophie Naturelle*. Comp. by Pierre Arnould. Paris: M. Guillemot & S. Thibouste.
- . 1624. *Nicholas Flammel, his exposition of the hieroglyphical figures*. Transl. by Eirenaeus Orandus. London: T. Snodham for T. Walkley.
- . 1692. *Medicina Practica or Practical Physick*. Transl. by William Salmon. London: W. Bonny for T. Howkins.
- Franz, Marie-Louise von. 1966. *Aurora consurgens*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gebelein, Helmut. 1996. *Alchemie: Die Magie des Stofflichen*. Munich: Diederichs.
- Haute, Bernadette van. 1999. *David III Ryckaert: A Seventeenth-Century Flemish Painter of Peasant Scenes*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1963. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Transl. by R.F.C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Klossowski de Rola, Stanislas. 1988. *The Golden Game: Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century*. New York: George Braziller.
- Lenep, Jacques van. 1984. *Alchimie*. Brussels: Crédit Communal.
- Maier, Michael. 1617. *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum*. Frankfurt: Lucas Jennis.
- Patai, Raphael. 1994. *The Jewish Alchemists*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.
- Roper, Lyndal. 1989. *The Holy Household*. Oxford: Clarendon P.
- Thurneisser zum Thurn, Leonhardt. 1574. *Quinta Essentia*. Leipzig: Hans Steinmann.
- Warlick, M.E. 1998. "The Domestic Alchemist: Women as Housewives in Alchemical Emblems." *Glasgow Emblem Studies* 3, 25-47.
- Wiesner, Merry E. 1986. *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP.