Fall 8-2020

Art as Alchemy: The Meaning of Bartholomeus Spranger's Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis and Scylla and Glaucus

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by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

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Saint Charles, Missouri

August 2020

Abstract

The subject of this study is two paintings by Bartholomeus Spranger titled *Glaucus and Scylla* **(Fig. 1)** and *Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis* **(Fig. 2)**. Building upon the work of scholars who have argued for a possible alchemical interpretation of at least one of the paintings in the context of its execution for Emperor Rudolf II, this study goes beyond merely suggesting an alchemical connection, and argues that the two paintings, forming a pendant pair, depict two attempts at the alchemist's *magnum opus*—one a failure, the other a success. This study further argues that the paintings are not merely inert visual representations of alchemical allegory, but are in fact themselves works of alchemy. Requiring exceptional skill, talent and erudition, the very act of creating the paintings was itself an alchemical experiment equal to those performed by alchemists in Rudolf's royal laboratory. To create the paintings, Spranger gathered the *prima materia*, clarified, dissolved, and reunited it, creating an object that was capable of effecting a spiritual change in the viewer, just as the philosopher's stone was capable of transforming that which it came in contact with. In transmuting raw materials into pigments, binders, and vehicles, and those into figures capable of effecting a change in the mind of the viewer, the artist and the alchemist become one. However, Spranger was not the only alchemist at work on the *magnum opus* with respect to the paintings. According to principles of Renaissance vision theory, the beholder of a work of art, if sufficiently ennobled, erudite, and properly motivated, becomes an alchemist whose *magnum opus* is carried out in his soul. Using the intellect, the viewer animates the picture, gives it its power of transmutation, and, through the act of contemplation, achieves an alchemical union with the divine. At the time of their creation, Spranger's paintings were thus not merely depictions of alchemy; they were actual works of alchemy, and their creator and beholder both alchemists.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor and committee chair, Dr. James Hutson, for encouraging my enthusiasm for research, for reassuring me that I was on the right track, and for reining me in whenever I thought I had uncovered a new layer of meaning, which, if included, would have necessitated a paper several times the size of the present study. I am grateful to Dr. Sarah Cantor and Dr. Steven Cody for taking the time to read my work and provide valuable feedback, as well as insightful suggestions regarding the direction my research on the topic could take in the future. I am indebted to my friend Michael Foster for combing through my humble *oeuvre*, and catching all my misspellings and grammatical errors. I am also indebted to my friend Jana for finding the time to hunt down three titles on Rudolfine alchemy in second-hand book shops in Prague, and to my mother, Marie, for making room for them in her suitcase on her way home from vacation last summer. It goes without saying that the debt I owe my mother goes far beyond her toting three books from Prague. Her enthusiastic support of all of my ambitions is beyond appreciated, and ultimately beyond repayment. Finally, although he is not directly involved in the current project, I would also like to acknowledge a professor from my undergraduate years, Dr. Vincenzo Traversa. It was in his courses as a freshman in college that I read my first sonnet by Petrarch and my first story by Boccaccio; it was in his courses that I discovered the poetry of Ovid, Virgil and Dante; and it was the readings in his courses that sent me to the library stacks looking for connections between works of literature, philosophy, and art. Although years have passed since I last saw Professor Traversa, when reading certain classical, medieval, or Renaissance authors, I occasionally still hear their words spoken in his Italian accent. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that by introducing me to the intellectual and artistic tradition of the European Renaissance, he helped lay the foundation for this study.

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Introduction

In 1604, when the Flemish artist and biographer Karel van Mander (1548-1606) published his *Schilderboeck* with the dual purpose of teaching "zealous youth the principles of the fine and liberal art of painting," and presenting the "lives of the famous and illustrious painters of ancient and modern times," he did not neglect to include a lengthy section on his friend, the celebrated artist Bartholomeus Spranger (1546-1611).[1] In a most effusive tone, Van Mander recounts Spranger's life from his birth in Antwerp to present day. Both "Fortune and *Pictura*," writes Van Mander, were on Spranger's side, the former with paints and brushes, and the latter with a smile, claiming him for her own, the Graces serving as her dowry.[2] Van Mander writes of Spranger's early days in Antwerp copying prints in charcoal, his having earned favor with the Pope who housed him in the Belvedere above the Laocoön, and of his eventually becoming court painter to Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) in Prague. The celebrated engraver and painter Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617) said he did not know an artist "equal to Spranger."[3] Van Mander writes that the Emperor so appreciated Spranger's art that "in the presence of the deputies at Prague . . . [he] admitted Spranger and his descendants to the nobility."[4] In Spranger, Van Mander continues, the Emperor had found his Apelles. For all his talent though, as Van Mander tells us, Spranger rose to become a celebrated artist under the auspices of the goddess Fortune as much as *Pictura*. It was his good fortune to find a patron who appreciated his art so much that he made him *Hofmahler*, engaging him in works so numerous that, according to Van

[1] Karel Van Mander, *Dutch and Flemish Painters*, trans. Constant Van de Wall (New York: Arno Press, 1969), xxxiii.
[2] Van Mander, 309.
[3] Van Mander, 327.
[4] Van Mander, 326.

Mander, it would "take much space" to mention all of them.[5] In short, in Emperor Rudolf II, Spranger the Apelles, found his Alexander.

Who was this emperor who loved Spranger's work so much that he insisted that Spranger paint in his royal apartments, which, Van Mander tells us, Spranger did "in the presence and to the great delight of his Majesty?"[6] Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor, son of Maximilian II (1527-1576) and nephew to Philip II (1527-1598), has long had a reputation as an eccentric. A lifelong bachelor, Rudolf kept a fiancé, his cousin Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566-1633), waiting for marriage for fifteen years. Never marrying, he fathered at least eight children by the daughter of his court antiquarian Jacopo Strada (1507-1588). Rudolf considered himself a *rex pacificus*. During his reign Prague was characterized by an exceptional religious tolerance: Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Jews coexisted relatively peacefully. The Prague Jewish community experienced unprecedented economic prosperity largely due to Rudolf's Charter of 1577, which expanded the economic possibilities of Jewish craftsman and merchants through a series of Royal privileges.[7] It was as a display of gratitude that the Jewish community of Prague very likely gifted Rudolf an amulet in the form of a *Choshen* **(Fig. 3)**, which included various apotropaic symbols from both Judaism and Christianity and was possibly meant to protect Rudolf with its magical properties while amplifying his might and wisdom.[8] Rudolf was an inveterate collector. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather Ferdinad I (1503-1564), he collected works of art, or *artificialia*, as well as *naturalia*. Rudolf's collection comprised works

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[5] Van Mander, 326.
[6] Van Mander, 325.
[7] Joaneath Spicer, "The Star of David and Jewish Culture in Prague around 1600, Reflected in Drawings of Roelandt Savery and Paulus van Vianen," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 203.
[8] Rostislav Švácha and Taťána Petrasová, eds., *Dějiny Umění v Českých Zemích 800-2000*, Vydání první (V Řevnicích : v Praze: Arbor vitae societas ; Ústav dějin umění Akademie věd České republiky, 2017), 440.

by established Masters like Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), Pieter Bruegel (1525-69), Raphael (1483-1520), Correggio (1489-1534), and Titian (1488-1576), as well as sculptures by living artists like Giambologna (1529-1608) and Adrien de Vries (1556-1626). Among the *naturalia* in Rudolf's collection were found no fewer than twenty-eight rhinoceros horns, eighteen Seychelles nuts, and twenty-two bezoar stones.[9] If he set his sights on a work of art he wanted for his collection, he would spare no expense, go to any lengths to possess it. His immense collection of art new and old filled the halls of his Royal *Kunstkammer*, where he would spend hours in solitary contemplation of his artistic treasures.

History has passed down a description of Rudolf whose love of collecting is matched by his devotion to occult interests. At Prague castle, Rudolf surrounded himself with esoteric thinkers, alchemists, Neoplatonists and Kabbalists. The Italian mystic Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was a visitor at the court of Rudolf and in 1588 received a sum of 300 Thalers from the emperor personally. The Jewish mystic and creator of the fabled homunculus, Golem, Rabbi Loew (1520-1609), was also a visitor, engaging with the emperor in a discussion on the mystical teachings of the Kabballah in February of 1592.[10] Among the alchemists patronized by Rudolf were the Englishman John Dee (1527-1609) and his assistant Edward Kelly (1555-1597), the Polish philosopher and physician Michael Sendivogius (1566-1636), and Michael Maier (1568-1622), the German physician, alchemist, epigrammist, and author of the monumental work of early multimedia titled *Atalanta fugiens* (1617)**.** Rudolf not only patronized alchemists, but had a laboratory built at Prague castle so he could practice the "noble art" himself. But, while relatively uncommon in the eighteenth century, Rudolf's interest in alchemy was not at all

[9] Ilona Fekete, "Family at the Fringes: The Medico-Alchemical Careers of Johann Ruland (1575-1638) and Johann David Ruland (1604-1648?)," *Early Science and Medicine* 17, no. 5 (2012): 560.
[10] Rabbi Judah Loew was to have created the living being from the mud of the banks of the river Vltava

unusual during the Renaissance. In fact, as R. J. W. Evans tells us, "alchemy was the greatest passion of the age in central Europe," belonging to a "whole late-Renaissance tradition whose frame of reference was a complete cosmology."[11] The early modern obsession with occult interests has to be understood as an attempt to gain knowledge and mastery over the universe. And in this pursuit, Rudolf was far from unique. Many royals and nobles in the late Renaissance interacted with alchemists, and many, like Rudolf, turned their own hands to alchemical practices.[12] Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603) is known to have consulted the astrologer and alchemist John Dee. Cosimo de Medici (1389-1464), in addition to commissioning Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) to translate the fourteen volumes of ancient hermetic doctrines called the *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin, is to have passed down two alchemical recipes of his own devising, one of which promised "a remedy to cure every species of fever," and the other "a means of artificially increasing the weight of gold coins."[13] In the words of Evans, however, while not being an exception in his interest in the occult, Rudolf does stand as an extreme.[14] Dignitaries and emissaries visiting Prague Castle report on a ruler who, they say, is "interested only in wizards, alchemists, Kabbalists and the like."[15] A Venetian observer reports that Rudolf "delights in hearing secrets about things both natural and artificial, and whoever is able to deal in such matters will always find the ear of the Emperor ready."[16] All reports of Rudolf's interest in the occult have a similar tone, portraying Rudolf as an ineffectual ruler, one whose priorities have been skewed by an unnatural interest in the dark arts, and a desire to pursue esoteric

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[11] R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 199.
[12] Pamela H. Smith, "Alchemy as a Language of Mediation at the Habsburg Court," *Isis* 85, no. 1 (1994): 2.
[13] Sheila Barker, "Cosimo de' Medici's Chemical Medicine | The Medici Archive Project," accessed May 6, 2020, https://www.medici.org/cosimo-de-medicis-chemical-medicine-2/.
[14] Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*, 243.
[15] Evans, 197.
[16] Evans, 196.

knowledge. It is at this intersection between the occult and the arts that the two paintings by Spranger that form the core of my study are situated.

The subject of this study are two mythological paintings by Bartholomeus Spranger titled *Glaucus and Scylla* **(Fig. 1)** and *Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis* **(Fig. 2)**. For all that has been written on Rudolf and the artists active at his court, the question of the meaning of these two paintings remains largely unanswered.[17] No documentation about their exact date of creation, or the occasion and cause of their commission exists. Based on comparative evidence and stylistic chronology, current scholarship places their creation to sometime in the early 1580s.[18] We know that Spranger painted the pair sometime after being made *Hofmahler* by Rudolf in 1581; and we have a drawing after one of the paintings with the inscription "Glaucus & Cilla [sic]" dated to 1586, which serves as a *terminus ante quem*, providing a window for their creation between 1581 and 1586.[19] While, based on stylistic elements, an argument can be made against the two paintings being executed at the same time, current theory agrees that the two paintings in question are a pendant pair due to their being identical in size, sharing similar content and compositional elements.[20] Some theorize that the paintings in question, by virtue of their being linked by subject, size and stylistic elements, may have hung together in the Emperor's private *studiolo* at Prague Castle.[21]

Paintings with classical mythology as their subject were far from unusual during the time of Rudolf. One need only think to Philip II's *poesie* cycle, which Rudolf would have seen as a

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[17] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 59.
[18] Sally Metzler, *Bartholomeus Spranger: Splendor and Eroticism in Imperial Prague, the Complete Works* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 97.
[19] Metzler, 96.
[20] Metzler, 97.
[21] Karl Schutz, "The Empire of the Senses: Bartholomaeus Spranger," *FMR: The Magazine of Franco Maria Ricci*, no. 76 (October 1995): 47.

young man living with his uncle in Spain. In six large-scale oil paintings that Titian painted for Philip, Greco-Roman mythology provides a classical context in which to tell stories of seduction, disguise and power. However, the myths depicted in the *Scylla* and the *Salmacis* paintings were relatively rare, and must have had specific meaning to Rudolf.[22] Absent any historical documents, one has to resort to contextualizing in order to ascertain meaning. By virtue of his role as monarch, more information is available about Rudolf than about the paintings in question or their painter. Therefore, the most fruitful analytic approach to the two paintings is to see them in the context of Rudolf's "extreme" interest in the occult, specifically alchemy, hermeticism and Neoplatonism. Based on an analysis of contemporary alchemical literature and iconography, this thesis will argue that the paintings represent two versions of the alchemist's *magnum opus*, one representing a failed attempt, the other a successful one. To support this, this study will outline that the goal of the Renaissance alchemist's *magnum opus* was to achieve a *rebis*—a hermaphroditic being, the perfect union of male and female—which represented the final step towards the creation of the philosopher's stone. Referencing the works of Paracelsus (1493-1541), Ficino and Bruno, this study will argue that in addition to their meaning as alchemical allegory, the two paintings also represent Neoplatonic allegory, as alchemy and Neoplatonism shared many key concepts during the late Renaissance, primarily that of erotic love as a means of reaching the divine. The argument will continue that in depicting the *magnum opus*, the paintings represent the desire to achieve the ultimate goal of both alchemy and Neoplatonism: to transcend the imperfection of the world and achieve oneness with the divine. Finally, this study will argue for the function of the two works as objects representing more than inert visual allegories. Using contemporary textual sources and principles of Renaissance vision theory, this study will argue

[22] Antonio Vannugli, "Jacopo Da Empoli's Study for 'Glaucus and Scylla,'" *Master Drawings* 33, no. 4 (1995): 408.

that the works in question were meant to be actively engaged through a process of contemplation and visualization, and that they possessed true transformative potential for an erudite "super-reader" such as Rudolf, who understood alchemical and hermetic practices and sought to realize all that they promised.[23]

Literature Review

To date, the most comprehensive work published on Rudolfine art is Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's 1988 book *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II.*[24] This seminal book on art of the Rudolfine era includes chapters on Rudolf, his penchant for collecting, his love of alchemy, and his role as patron of the arts. In the chapter titled "Rudolfine Mythological Paintings: *Poesie* in Prague," Kaufmann establishes that Rudolf was not the first monarch to use visual representations of mythological figures to personify abstract ideas. Kaufmann argues that Renaissance mythographic handbooks and commentaries on Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 CE) often regarded the ancient myths as containing "historical, or moral ideas."[25] Various Renaissance philosophical traditions such as Hermeticism and Neoplatonism also used mythological characters to explore and depict philosophical or mystical truths. Kaufmann explains the frequent use of erotic imagery in Rudolfine art, writing that in poetry, the tradition of using erotic imagery goes as far back as the commentaries on Dante's *Convivio* (1304-1307). These readings of ancient myths, Kaufmann argues, were most likely known in Prague at the time of Rudolf II. Kaufmann further argues that Spranger may also have been familiar with Van Mander's allegorical interpretation of Ovid, and Van Mander's commentaries could have informed some of

[23] In reception theory and reader-response theory, a reader is a decoder and interpreter of a given text. Super-reader and hyper-reader are terms used by the French literary critic Michel Riffaterre to describe a reader who possesses all the knowledge required to interpret a text correctly.
[24] Kaufmann, *The School of Prague*.
[25] Kaufmann, 59.

Spranger's mythological work. Kaufmann also argues that as the philosopher Giordano Bruno, who wrote about Neoplatonic interpretations of erotic themes, visited Prague in 1588 and dedicated a book on esoteric philosophy to Rudolf, some of Spranger's mythological couples can be read as images of Neoplatonist "cosmic harmony."[26] But Kaufmann is clear in stating that no specific evidence, either written or iconographic, exists to support this or any other theory explaining their meaning.[27] What we do know, Kaufmann tells us, is that eroticized mythological paintings are not unique to Rudolfine Prague. A rich tradition of using mythological figures as allegories existed throughout the continent during the Renaissance. Focused on couples, and sharing a common theme of love and desire, the paintings in Rudolf's collection are reminiscent of the *poesie* paintings of Titian, but as Kaufmann points out, there are distinct formal differences between the Italian Renaissance *poesie* paintings and the whimsical erotic paintings executed for Rudolf II.[28]

Specific to the two paintings in question, Kaufmann notes that in their "divergent flesh tones, gestures and poses, these paintings express a humor which is not present in the "epic" style of their Italian Renaissance counterparts."[29] Kaufmann further argues that in light of this clear formal difference between the Titian cycle and Spranger's paintings, the analogy between Titian's *poesie* paintings and classical epic poetry would, in the case of Bartholomeus Spranger, be more accurately made between Spranger's paintings and the condensed and witty epigram. Kaufmann points out that Spranger's "poetic use" of the visual analogies of rhetorical ornamental and thematic elaborations such as *antithesis*, *anaphora*, *chiasmus*, and *irony* support

[26] Kaufmann, 59.
[27] Kaufmann, 59.
[28] Kaufmann, 95.
[29] Kaufmann, 110.

this theory.[30] Kaufmann details the abundance of *contrapposto* found in the paintings of Spranger. *Contrapposto*, he argues, is the visual analogy to the rhetorical device of antithesis. Kaufmann observes *antithesis* in the painting of *Scylla and Glaucus*, as Scylla forms a *figura serpentinata*, what Kaufmann calls "an obvious sort of complicated *contrapposto*."[31] He points out the presence of *chiasmus*, *anaphora* and further examples of *antithesis* and *contrapposto* in both *Scylla and Glaucus* and *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*. But Kaufmann is careful to point out that while a connection between the formal elements of Rudolfine art and literature does exist, one should not immediately look to interpret Rudolfine art as necessarily representing philosophical allegories.[32]

In making his argument for potential meaning of Spranger's mythological paintings, Kaufmann mentions the importance of alchemy to Rudolf, but denies the direct role of alchemy and the hermetic arts in informing meaning in the two paintings in question. Kaufmann acknowledges that Rudolf is well-known as a devotee of the "hermetic arts," having entertained and lavished inordinate sums on some of the most famous among Renaissance alchemists like Dee, Kelly, Sendivogius, and Maier. Yet Kaufmann glosses over the connection between Rudolfine art and alchemy, saying that while specific paintings may invite "further allegorical reading," "there is no evidence, written or visual, that [these] Prague erotica were meant to be read in this manner."[33] In this context, Kaufmann mentions the work of the Czech art historian, Pavel Preiss, who alludes to the connection between alchemy and the visual arts at the court of Rudolf II in his 1974 book *Panoráma manýrismu: kapitoly o umění a kultuře 16. století*, but Kaufmann does this only to state that there is no real evidence to support Preiss' claim, and more

[30] Kaufmann, 94.
[31] Kaufmann, 94.
[32] Kaufmann, 94.
[33] Kaufmann, 95.

research would need to be done to establish any connection.[34] Kaufmann further refers to the desire to read Rudolfine art allegorically as engaging in "symbolic polysemy," stating that, while there is no doubt that a cultivated humanist milieu existed in Prague, and that the imperial painters had connections with it, there is no evidence that its members consistently read "overtly erotic or mythological subjects as concealing philosophical truths."[35] He does concede for the possibility of Rudolfine art possessing allegorical meaning when he states that any "original context for [the] many erotic Rudolfine mythologies which might have aided a coherent allegorical interpretation has been lost," adding that the interpretation of Rudolf's mythologies as outstandingly erotic "demands further consideration."[36]

Since Kaufmann's *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II*, scholars have been largely reiterating his argument that nothing exists in the historical literature to conclusively support a theory as to the meaning of Spranger's mythological paintings. Some scholars, like Karl Schutz, have avoided the alchemy question altogether, focusing instead on Rudolf's childhood spent living with his uncle Philip II in Spain as influencing Rudolf's love of art collecting and his interest in the "beautiful world" conjured up by mythological paintings. In his article titled "The Empire of the Senses: Bartholomaeus Spranger," published in 1995 in *FMR*, Schutz argues the two paintings in question, by virtue of their being linked by subject, size and stylistic elements, may have hung together in the Emperor's private *studiolo* at Prague Castle, where they may have served as a sort of distraction for Rudolf.[37] In Schultz's words the paintings may have symbolized for Rudolf a "beautiful world where conflicts are depicted veiled

[34] Pavel Preiss, *Panoráma manýrismu: Kapitoly o umění a kultuře 16. století* (Praha: Odeon, 1974).
[35] Kaufmann, *The School of Prague*, 59.
[36] Kaufmann, 58.
[37] Schutz, "The Empire of the Senses: Bartholomaeus Spranger."

in the dress of classical mythology and allegory."[38] Schutz continues, that their purpose was to "divert the Emperor from the cruel and warlike reality of his own time."[39] Schutz attributes Rudolf's love of picture collecting to a family tradition, writing that mythological pictures were "particularly prized" by earlier Hapsburg collectors, and their collecting may have served Rudolf as a model.[40] The fact is that both Charles V (1500-1558) and Philip II of Spain had commissioned painters to depict tales of amorous adventures of the gods from stories of Ovid. The most notable example of these kinds of works, of course, being the *poesie* painted for Philip II by Titian.[41] As Rudolf spent his formative years at Philip II's court in Madrid, the argument goes, he would certainly have learned the importance of princely patronage and trained his appreciation of art on the best artistic works of his time. Alas, Schutz, like Kaufmann before him makes no direct link between Rudolfine art and the practice of alchemy.

In a chapter from his 1997 book *Rudolf II and His World*, titled "Rudolf and the Fine Arts," R. J. W. Evans focuses on the relationship Rudolf had with art and artists, as both a collector and a patron.[42] Evans speculates on the role of the *Kunstkammer* as a means of allowing Rudolf to search for a key to the harmony of the universe. This is a reference to Rudolf's interest in the occult arts, an interest that Evans explores at length in a later chapter of the same book. He alludes to a strong connection between art and the occult by asserting that the goal of Rudolfine artists, like many Mannerist artists, was to "combine the dual role of portraying imperial virtue with its second, but no less serious goal" of achieving a sort of "metaphysical purpose."[43] This notion, while not conclusive, is widely supported by other scholars. Evans also posits that the

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[38] Schutz, 47.
[39] Schutz, 6.
[40] Schutz, 18.
[41] Schutz, 7.
[42] Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*.
[43] Evans, 162.

underlying idea of Rudolfine Mannerist art was to present an encyclopedia of the visible world which included a "deliberate parallelism between nature and art and the mental world."[44] Spranger's name comes up in Evans' book as a chief proponent of the courtly Northern Mannerist style favored at the court of Rudolf II. Evans refers to Spranger's paintings as "highly erotic mythological canvases" depicting primarily amorous adventures of "stylized, contorted couples who are usually—like Hercules and Omphale, or Vulcan and Maia—ill-suited in age and appearance."[45] This concept of ill-suited couples is mentioned in several other publications, including Sally Metzler's *Bartholomeus Spranger: Splendor and Eroticism in Imperial Prague*, and Eliška Fučíková's *Rudolf II and Prague*.[46] [47] Kaufmann also mentions this theme in several publications dedicated to the artist Arcimboldo.[48] Kaufmann refers to Arcimboldo's portrait of Rudolf as Vertumnus as possibly paralleling in a humorous way Rudolf's "amorous" reputation. Evans further mentions that all of the artists assembled at Rudolf's court formed "a close knit and esoteric circle of a cultural elite."[49]

The role of Rudolfine artists is explored by Thea Vignau-Wilberg in a chapter from the 1997 book *Rudolf II and Prague* titled "*Pictor Doctus*: Drawing and the Theory of Art around 1600."[50] In the chapter, Vignau-Wilberg explains the concept of *Hermathena* as being central to the artists at Rudolf's court, stressing the fact that Rudolf, as patron and connoisseur, was interested in the intellectual engagement of a picture, or as the author puts it, he "sought out the

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[44] Evans, 178.
[45] Evans, 165.
[46] Metzler, *Bartholomeus Spranger*.
[47] Eliška Fučíková, "Catalogue: Imperial Court: Section I: Painting, Sculpture, Drawings and Engravings: Paintings," in *Rudolf II and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 198.
[48] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Arcimboldo: Visual Jokes, Natural History, and Still-Life Painting* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 21.
[49] Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*, 165.
[50] Thea Vignau-Wilberg, "Pictor Doctus: Drawing and the Theory of Art around 1600," in *Rudolf II and Prague: The Court and the City* (Thames and Hudson, Ltd, 1997), 179–86.

essence and truth behind a picture rather than merely viewing its surface."[51] Vignau-Wilberg mentions Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) who claimed that painting had divine power in its capacity to represent people and objects which are absent, and therefore painters were thought to be like divine creators, and painting the mistress of all the arts. Alberti believed that besides possessing great technical skills, painters had to study the poets and orators, because the use of ornaments by poets and orators was closely related to their use in painting. Karl van Mander himself, echoing the words of Aristotle, that true art is the result of natural ability, skill, and practice, also claimed that essential to becoming a good artist were three things: "natural gift, skill, and practice."[52] Alberti also maintained great paintings should be constructed with the greatest possible degree of "variety and beauty."[53] According to Vignau-Wilberg, a Rudolfine *pictor doctus* would achieve this by being both inventive and capable of uncovering the deeper meaning in images.[54] Bartholomeus Spranger is mentioned by Vignau-Wilberg having painted an easel painting showing the abduction of Psyche by Mercury which is credited by the author as having made the theme of Mercury and Psyche popular at the court of Rudolf II. Vignau-Wilberg states that this was surprising and unusual because their story was of "little importance" in common mythology.[55] Cupid and Psyche form a small part of the story in Apuleius' (ca. 124-170 CE) *Golden Ass* (ca. 158-180 CE). Spranger painted numerous mythological paintings for Rudolf, and most of these feature lesser-known figures or episodes from their source stories. The implication is that Rudolf favored lesser-known stories in the classic myths. Once again, though, as with the allegorical meaning of Spranger's works, there is no consensus as to the reasons why

[51] Vignau-Wilberg, 180.
[52] Vignau-Wilberg, 181.
[53] Vignau-Wilberg, 182.
[54] Vignau-Wilberg, 182.
[55] Vignau-Wilberg, 182.

these figures may have been chosen. Vignau-Wilberg goes on to say that Mercury and Psyche should be read as possibly "equivalent in theoretical terms to Minerva and Mercury."[56] She concludes by stating that it was decidedly not voyeuristic pleasure in the sight of beautiful naked human forms that prompted Rudolf's interest in scenes from antiquity. In this she echoes the opinion of Kaufmann and Evans, who state that while there was most likely a component of titillation to Rudolf's choice of subject matter, the ultimate meaning behind the mythological paintings is complex, and while no evidence exists to support this, it is also likely they harbor some symbolism.

Identifying possible iconographic sources for the two paintings in question is the topic of Lubomír Konečný's article titled "Sources and Significance of Two Mythological Paintings by Bartholomeus Spranger," published in the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen*.[57] Konečný echoes what many before and since have said, that very little is known about the two paintings in question, as well as the entire series of pictures based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Spranger painted for Rudolf in the mid-1580s. In the article, Konečný shares what he calls the fruits of reading (*Lesefruchte*) long-forgotten literature pertaining to Spranger's paintings. He refers specifically to a 1958 publication by W. S. Heckscher, which posits that Spranger's hermaphrodite may have had as its iconographic source the Capitoline *Spinario* **(Fig. 4)**. Konečný finds this argument convincing, citing among his reasons the fact that upon closer inspection, Spranger's painting "reveals a thorny plant, maybe a bramble or wild blackberry" in the foreground.[58] Spranger's potential use of the Capitoline *Spinario* is exciting for Konečný because in the Middle Ages, this statue was referred to as *Marzo,* and used as representation of

[56] Vignau-Wilberg, 182.
[57] Lubomír Konečný, "Sources and Significance of Two Mythological Paintings by Bartholomeus Spranger," *Jahrbuch Der Kunsthistorischen Sammlung in Wien* 85/86 (90 1989): 47–56.
[58] Konečný, 50.

March in depictions of the cycles of the labors associated with the months. According to Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636 CE), March was the month of "universal renewal," but also "stirred voluptuous passions in men."[59] This, Konečný argues, aligns perfectly with what poets and mythographers from Ovid to Giraldi (1504-1573 CE) were saying about Salmacis. Another possible iconographic source for a figure in *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* according to Konečný is a sculpture by Giambologna **(Fig. 5 and Fig. 6)**. Konečný sees in this potential association yet another example of the *antithesis* which Kaufmann wrote about as being prevalent in the paintings.[60] A classically inspired hermaphrodite would this way be juxtaposed with a "modern" Salmacis. In further *Lesenfruchte*, Konečný finds classical models for the second painting as well. In his reading of a 1910 article by Ernst Diez, Konečný finds a potential classical source for Glaucus in a mural on the wall of Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli **(Fig. 7)**. While the mural was not discovered until 1786, it is not out of question that Spranger may have been inspired by a similar design from antiquity, as artists in antiquity often "worked according to similar pictorial formulae."[61] Spranger could also have worked according to a description of one of the numerous mythographical handbooks available during the sixteenth century. Nearly all of these used a description of Glaucus originally written by Philostratus (ca. 170-250) in his *Eikones* II, 15.[62]

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[59] Konečný, 53.
[60] Konečný, 53.
[61] Konečný, 54.
[62] Philostratus' description of Glaucus as it appears in his *Eikones*: The curls of his beard are wet, but white as gushing fountains to the sight; and heavy are the locks of his hair, which conduct on to his shoulders all the water they have taken up from the sea; his eyebrows are shaggy and they are joined together as though they were one. Ah, the arm! how strong it has become through exercise against the sea, continually battling against the waves and making them smooth for his swimming. Ah, the breast! what a shaggy covering of seaweed and tangle is spread over it like a coat of hair; while the belly beneath is undergoing a change and already begins to disappear. That Glaucus is a fish as to the rest of his body is made evident by the tail, which is lifted and bent back toward the waist; and the part of it that is shaped like a crescent is sea-purple in colour. Source: Philostratus, Flavius. *Imagines*. Edited by T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W. H. D. Rouse. Translated by Arthur Fairbanks. The Loeb Classical Library 256. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Philostratus' description matches Spranger's depiction. Kaufmann's antithesis is here again present, this time between the two paintings in question. *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* represent a "modern" composition, while *Glaucus and Scylla* are inspired by the art of antiquity.

Sally Metzler revisits the connection between Rudolfine art and alchemy in an article titled "Artists, Alchemists and Mannerists in Courtly Prague" published in a 2006 collection of essays edited by Jacob Wamberg titled *Art and Alchemy*, as well as her own book titled *Bartholomeus Spranger: Splendor and Eroticism in Imperial Prague* published in 2014.[63] [64] In her book, Metzler writes that many of Spranger's paintings done for Rudolf II were based on a "source rarely used" and refers to their themes apparently satisfying "Rudolf's penchant for the esoteric."[65] The book is copiously illustrated, and Metzler provides a brief formal analysis as well as a brief summary of the literary source for each painting to the extent that they are known. She describes the mythological series done by Spranger for Rudolf shortly after being installed in Prague as sharing a theme of "couples' struggles of love and desire."[66] In relation to one of the paintings in the catalogue, she writes that Spranger's mythological works "harbor recondite symbolism entwined with tales of transformation and alchemic metaphors."[67] When writing about the two paintings that form the focus of this study, Metzler paraphrases and even quotes directly from Kaufmann's *School of Prague*. She mentions Kaufmann's suggestion that Spranger's particular thematic and iconographic choices are analogous to epigrammatic poetry, and in a few places quotes directly from Kaufmann's book, *The School of Prague*.[68] Metzler's

[63] Sally Metzler, "Artists. Alchemists and Mannerists in Courtly Prague," in *Art & Alchemy*, ed. Jacob Wamberg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 129–48.
[64] Metzler, *Bartholomeus Spranger*.
[65] Metzler, 95.
[66] Metzler, 97.
[67] Metzler, 97.
[68] Metzler, 97.

writing reinforces the fact that the research done by Kaufmann in the 1980's has not been improved upon. Especially relevant to this study is Metzler's repeating Kaufmann's assertion that, while there may be some allegorical and philosophical meaning behind Spranger's mythological paintings, there is no real evidence to support any theory.[69]

In her contribution to Wamberg's book, Metzler goes beyond Kaufmann's unwillingness to ascribe alchemical meaning to Rudolfine art and takes a stand in favor of a direct connection between Rudolfine art and alchemy. Metzler echoes the words of Kaufmann when she begins by writing that "although hermeticism was a pervasive intellectual and philosophical force during the flowering of the Prague Mannerists, the nexus between alchemy and art at Rudolf's court has not been adequately examined."[70] She states that her paper "does not posit that [any of] the paintings represent alchemical treatises," or that any of Rudolf's artists were practicing alchemists, but, she ultimately goes much further than Kaufmann by acknowledging that Rudolfine art reflected "the influence of alchemical philosophy."[71] She argues that this influence found its way into Rudolfine art as both "direct alchemic symbolism," and as an artistic style or technique "reflecting alchemic philosophy."[72] Metzler acknowledges that the work of Rudolfine artists is "riddled with complicated allegories, symbols, and veiled nuances" like the kind one finds in alchemical literature.[73] She refers to Spranger's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* as being replete with alchemic references. She argues convincingly that the story from Ovid is a representation of the alchemical creation of the *rebis*.

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[69] Metzler, 97.
[70] Metzler, "Artists. Alchemists and Mannerists in Courtly Prague," 130.
[71] Metzler, 130.
[72] Metzler, 130.
[73] Metzler, 134.

While it constitutes a break in the chronological order of this literature review, the work of the Czech art historian Pavel Preiss merits mention at this point. Not getting the same degree of readership that the other writers on the topic have gotten, because of its having never been translated from Czech, Preiss's work nevertheless serves as a kind of precursor to the work of Metzler. Like Metzler, Preiss sees a strong connection between alchemy and the works of Rudolfine artists. In a chapter titled "Člověk kosmos a příroda" (*Man, Cosmos, and Nature)* from his 1974 book titled *Panoráma manýrismu: kapitoly o umění a kultuře 16. století* (*Panorama of Mannerism: Chapters on Art and Culture of the Sixteenth Century)*, Preiss makes a strong connection between Mannerism and alchemy, arguing that in the sixteenth century the whole of Mannerist culture "referred to the art of alchemy," which itself had an influence on the fine arts that was, according to Preiss, "strong and far-reaching."[74] When seen through the lens of the Mannerist era's obsession with the "mystical union of everything with everything," Preiss argues, one begins to see the possibility of interpreting the works of Rudolfine artists as alchemy "veiled in mythology."[75] Regarding the work of Spranger, Preiss writes: "It is impossible to avoid the feeling that the sophisticated sensuality of erotic passions . . . painted by Bartholomeus Spranger for the 'new Hermes Trismegistus,' the Emperor Rudolf . . . are something more than just visual aphrodisiac."[76] Preiss refers to Spranger's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*, making a connection between its subject and the alchemical symbolism of the androgyne. The remaining paintings in the cycle, Preiss adds, do not lend themselves to such easy "alchemical explanation." Their meaning, he writes, "*sensus multiplex*, possibly astrological, possibly moral, but maybe

[74] Preiss, *Panoráma manýrismu: Kapitoly o umění a kultuře 16. století*, 170. (All translations from Czech into English are mine)
[75] Preiss, 173.
[76] Preiss, 174.

also alchemical, very likely lies hidden deep beneath impenetrable layers."[77] He concludes by stating that the paintings of Spranger may not be the key to understanding the connection between Mannerism and alchemy, but they provide "obscure glimpses through the keyhole."[78]

In his article titled "Salmacis, Hermaphrodite, and the Inversion of Gender: Allegorical Interpretations and Pictorial Representations of an Ovidian Myth, circa 1300 -1770" published in 2018 in *The Figure of the Nymph in Early Modern Culture*, Karl Enenkel argues against an alchemical interpretation of Spranger's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis.* Enenkel posits that *Salmacis* represents the triumph of painting over sculpture in the ongoing *paragone* debate, and a work of "sophisticated sixteenth-century pornography."[79] To support the former assertion, he builds upon Konečný's article which suggests Giambologna's Venus sculptures as potential iconographic sources for the figure of Salmacis. Enenkel sees a declaration of the supremacy of painting in Spranger's use of Giambologna's sculptures, whose *figura serpentinata* was greatly admired, and which Spranger has bested with the impossible contortions of his own Salmacis. The painting's role as pornography, he argues, can be seen in its obvious suggestion of "sensual and sexual seduction, lust, and "forbidden practices, such as voyeurism and homosexuality."[80] Enenkel writes that to read the painting as alchemical allegory representing the *rebis* as Metzler does is attractive, but "highly speculative."[81] To support his argument, he states that there are no parts of the painting that "clearly" refer to alchemy. The alchemical symbol of the two-headed hermaphrodite does not appear anywhere in the painting, and at the time of its creation, the

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[77] Preiss, 174.
[78] Preiss, 174.
[79] Karl Enenkel, "Salmacis, Hermaphrodite, and the Inversion of Gender: Allegorical Interpretations and Pictorial Representations of an Ovidian Myth, ca. 1300–1770," in *The Figure of the Nymph in Early Modern Culture* (Brill, 2018), 109.
[80] Enenkel, 110.
[81] Enenkel, 110.

emblem of the hermaphrodite/*rebis* from Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* **(Fig. 8)** did not exist as Maier's book hadn't been published yet. He adds that Michael Maier had not actually met with Rudolf until 1608.[82] In mentioning the absence of a two-headed hermaphrodite symbol in the painting, Enenkel makes the mistake of looking for obvious and clear signs where unclear ones should be. It was the deliberate intent of alchemists to be obscure and refer to things obliquely using opaque symbolism. When Enenkel speaks of Spranger's painting predating Michael Maier's hermaphrodite emblem, he is not allowing for Spranger to have drawn inspiration from the numerous other references to the hermaphrodite in alchemy and Neoplatonism spanning back years. Enenkel does admit to a long tradition of some form of hermaphroditism in literature, philosophy and art, but for him this does not change the fact that Spranger's painting is not alchemical in meaning.

It is the views of Preiss and Metzler which serve as a foundation for this study. Both scholars see a clear connection between alchemy and the work of Rudolfine artists. Metzler goes further in drawing a connection between alchemy and the work of Spranger than Preiss; yet even Metzler does not go far enough in linking the art at the court of Rudolf II with the practice of alchemy. There are formal elements of the two paintings that she appears to have overlooked, or at least did not find significant enough to include in her writing. She does not mention the painting of *Scylla and Glaucus* being the exact size and serving as a possible pendant to that of *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* when discussing the potential alchemical theme of the latter. More importantly, neither her article nor her book delves deeply enough into the practices of Renaissance alchemy, which keeps her from attributing to the paintings a larger, that is, an active, role in alchemical practices. In fact, it is this active role of art in alchemy that she denies

[82] Enenkel, 110.

when she writes that the paintings do not represent alchemical treatises, and that the artists at the court of Rudolf were not practicing alchemists.[83] It is precisely this role that this study argues the paintings by Spranger played. Acknowledging the active power that art was thought to have by some early modern occultists and even mainstream philosophers would have allowed Metzler to delve deeper into the alchemical nature of Rudolfine era art. A deeper look into esoteric philosophy of the late Renaissance reveals not only that alchemical and hermetical concepts are present in some of the art of the period, but that these concepts enabled the works to manifest a profound change of consciousness in the viewer.

Methodology

As the most thorough analysis of Rudolfine era art to date, the work of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann relies on several methodological approaches to explore possible meaning in the works of Spranger. Kaufmann begins by employing structuralism, approaching the subject by looking at the role played by art and artists in the world of Rudolfine Prague. He follows by drawing on historical antecedents that share a common theme, both literary and iconographic, to situate the works of Rudolfine artists in a chronology of similar works dating back as far as the Middle Ages. Kaufmann then proceeds to apply formalist analysis to the paintings, searching for meaning by analyzing formal elements. Formal analysis leads him to an intertextual reading of the works as analogous to poetry, which then leads him back to structuralism where he finds a similarity between the works of Titian and Spranger. Structuralism is once again employed when Kaufmann looks to the cultural milieu surrounding Rudolfine Prague as a possible key to understanding the works. Karl Schutz initially chooses the same two methodologies as Kaufmann and in the exact order. His addition is to include elements of reception theory and

[83] Metzler, "Artists. Alchemists and Mannerists in Courtly Prague," 130.

psychological analysis when he conjectures as to the "purpose" of the paintings for Rudolf. R. J. W. Evans chooses the reception theory approach, as well as that of structuralism and psychology. Psychology, specifically Rudolf's interest in paintings of "ill-matched couples" makes an appearance in the comments of Metzler and Fučíková, but it is not explored in depth. Nor does Evans attempt to posit a psychological reason for Rudolf's tastes in art. Vignau-Wilberg returns to structuralism, contextualizing the role of Rudolfine artists as being on par with poets. She touches upon psychological analysis when she posits that Rudolf was interested in the intellectual engagement of pictures, seeking their essence and their truth rather than just viewing their surface. While her broaching the subject of Rudolf's psychology is exciting, she makes the statements regarding Rudolf's psychology as a matter of fact, without any further exploration. In his article for the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen*, Konečný employs structuralism and formalism when arguing for a potential relationship between the two paintings as a pendant pair and when he explores potential iconographic sources for both. Drawing on historical sources, he teases out a potential meaning by comparing formal elements of the two paintings to sources as varied as classical sculpture, fresco paintings, engravings, and art produced by Spranger's contemporaries. Metzler's monograph dedicated to the works of Spranger relies on structuralism and formalism to draw conclusions about potential meaning of specific works of art. While much of what she states echoes the theories posited by Kaufmann, it is when she employs intertextuality to draw parallels between visual elements in the paintings with concepts and theories espoused by Renaissance era thinkers that she strikes out on her own. In both her book and her contribution to Wamberg's anthology, Metzler uses intertextuality to establish a viable connection between alchemy and the works of Spranger. In so doing, she echoes the sentiments of Pavel Preiss, who employs the same structuralist intertextuality when he

argues for an alchemical meaning to Spranger's work. Enenkel, for his part, sees no need to employ psychological analysis in a search for meaning of Spranger's Hermaphroditus. Using only structuralist intertextuality, comparing contemporaneous alchemical iconography to visual elements present in the painting, he concludes that the connection between Spranger's painting and alchemy, while attractive, remains highly speculative, and for him largely improbable.

Only one of the authors chooses to approach Spranger's paintings using reception theory as the central methodology. Structuralist analysis combined with formal analysis are a solid foundation for determining meaning of a work of art at the time of its creation. In searching for meaning, one should begin by looking for formal elements, *i.e.* subject matter, figure placement, etc. These formal elements can then be contextualized in the works' historical milieu using the structuralist approach. The paintings' subject matter would have meant something different to viewers in Rudolf's time than to viewers in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. The general structuralist approach taken by scholars from Preiss to Kaufmann, however, does not address the most important agent in giving meaning to a work of art, the person for whom the paintings were executed—Rudolf. In terms of analysis, while structuralism and formalism are a solid foundation, the true meaning of the works cannot be deduced without employing reception theory.

This study takes several methodological approaches to determine meaning for the two paintings. Reception theory serves as the starting point, a sort of umbrella theory, under which the remaining methodologies fall. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, and touching on elements of psychological, feminist, and gender studies methodologies, the works' iconographic elements are explored, as are their literary sources (Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* as well as the work of Renaissance mythographers), contemporary philosophy, and alchemy. Rudolf serves as the

works' intended audience, or "super-reader," so when employing the various methodologies, the question of what the specific interpretation would mean to Rudolf is always posed. Due to the scarcity of contemporaneous textual evidence to support any definitive meaning for the two paintings, analysis of the works begins by using formalist methodology to analyze their iconographic content, and continues by extrapolating meaning based on historical evidence rooted in structural analysis. The lack of textual evidence to support meaning in the paintings aside, a close reading should be the starting point of all critical analysis. A close reading forces the viewer to consider all of the internal elements of a work, and evaluate them for their effectiveness in communicating meaning. Since the two paintings have relatively little written about them, an object-centered method of analyzing their formal elements will allow for the laying of a foundation upon which to build using the other methodologies. This study identifies iconographic elements and argues for their meaning in the context of Renaissance mythography and alchemy. Formally speaking, connections are made between visual elements in Spranger's paintings and select poetic devices, as a convincing case has been made for the paintings possessing elements analogous to those of specific literary genres.[84]

This study employs structuralist intertextuality, shifting focus between the paintings, their literary sources (the words and images of Renaissance alchemists) and the alchemical interests of Rudolf II. Drawing on the methods of Claude Levi-Strauss, who established that in order to be understood, a culture's myths need to be analyzed in the full context of the entire mythology, the aim of this study is to explore the works' relationship to other works of art and search for their connotative and denotative meaning.[85] The goal of this approach is to determine meaning using the relevant stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* and their interpretations at the hands of

[84] Kaufmann, *The School of Prague*, 166.
[85] Anne D'Alleva, *Methods and Theories of Art History*, 2. ed (London: Laurence King, 2012), 43.

philosophers, mythographers and alchemists from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. This study establishes that mythography played a role in the work of early modern alchemists, and classical mythology found its way into alchemical iconography because of its facility as a symbolic vehicle. Psychological criticism is touched upon to assesses and analyze the response of Rudolf II as the intended audience of the works. An argument is made from a psychological standpoint for the works' meaning as being entirely dependent on Rudolf's interest in alchemy and hermeticism. This study also borrows elements from feminist methodology to explore possible meaning in the context of women's roles in Ovid's stories, Renaissance society, and most importantly, in the symbolic language of early modern alchemy. Finally, this study incorporates elements of a gender studies approach to explore the function of the hermaphrodite in the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, as representing the union of opposites, a central doctrine of Neoplatonism, hermeticism, and alchemy.

Analysis

A. The Objects

The paintings in question are equal size. They are both vertically oriented and painted in oils on canvas. In *Glaucus and Scylla*, an older male sea-serpent hybrid is submerged up to his waist in a dark and agitated sea. He looks up towards a young woman standing on a rocky shore above him. The sky is dark with clouds. The female figure is partially clothed in billowing drapery, some of which flutters in the wind behind her and above her head. The sea serpent extends his right arm towards the viewer. His upper body is bare and displays pronounced, but clearly middle-aged musculature. He has a beard and long locks, both of which are matted and wet. His flesh is a warm red-ocher mix, which contrasts with the cool blue-green and blue-gray of the surrounding waters and the pale pink hues of the woman's skin. Behind the male figure, a

tapering fish tail rises in a serpentine motion upwards, terminating near the left side of his head in a bifurcated shape which resembles the wings of a downward swooping bird. All of these elements communicate motion. A skirt of fish fins girds the man's hips, separating the human upper half from the sea creature lower half. Beneath this skirt, where his serpent body begins, scales are visible, painted by a loose scumbling of muted shades of green and gray. His tail is painted in dark tones of burnt sienna and black. Where his tail emerges from behind his torso a streak of white paint traces the outline of his body, implying the highlight on a wet and slimy sea creature. The man is separated from the woman by a half-submerged boulder. This sea in which he is submerged is an ominous dark blue-green to black mixture with little streaks of lighter green to suggest the crests of small waves, and white daubs to suggest flecks of foam. The hand he extends towards the viewer draws attention to this dark and ominous looking sea. It appears as though the man is showing the woman his dark and deep domain.

The woman stands on dry land in an extreme *contrapposto* pose, her left leg on a flat rock closer to the viewer, her right leg bent slightly, the foot elevated on a greenish brown rock jutting from the sea between her and the man. She bends and twists her torso in a typically Mannerist fashion, challenging physics and anatomy. In a characteristically Mannerist way, perspective, and proportions are also skewed and not easily legible. With her left arm the female reaches downward, pulling up the green cloak that partially hangs and partially flutters by her side to cover herself. The other garment, most likely originally glazed red, now faded to pinks and revealing a yellow underpainting, drapes around her body from below her bent right knee, past the right side of her torso, over her right shoulder, where it is borne up towards the darkened sky in a crumpled fluttering mass reminiscent of the gravity-defying fabric that often flutters around the crucified Christ's loins in Renaissance paintings. In the tradition of the *Venus pudica*, **(Fig. 9)**

the red cloak covers and simultaneously draws attention to the woman's sex, while altogether failing to cover her breasts. She looks down towards the man in the water, presenting the viewer with her profile. Her hair is pulled back and braided into a bun. Still the wind manages to send a few strands of her hair flying in the opposite direction of the red cape behind her. It is as though the wind were undoing her neatly coiled locks in a premonition of her transformation. In the front, delicate golden strands have worked themselves loose and flutter in the wind. The woman's right arm is entirely obscured by her body. Only her right hand is visible, palm upwards, pinky and ring finger curled inward, thumb out, middle and index finger extended in a not easily discernible direction. This gesture is perhaps the most enigmatic element of the painting. One is at first glance convinced she points towards the man, but a closer look reveals that her fingers appear to be pointing towards an area just in front of him.

Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis also features two figures in a landscape. In the right side foreground stands a tall female figure facing away from the viewer in the direction of a seated male figure on the opposite side of the painting. The male figure is in a partially clothed state, a white, almost diaphanous swath of fabric draped around his body from his thigh, around his right arm, up and over his left shoulder. He sits upon a rock in a still pool of water, looking to his left, beyond the border of the canvas. His left leg is pulled up out of the water and towards his body, providing the viewer with what would without the strip of fabric be an unobstructed view of his genitals. His right arm is reaching down towards his left foot, which is raised above his right knee. His left arm, shoulder high, supports his weight on the boulder. He holds his raised foot in his right hand, and there is some suggestion with pale blue and white pigment of water falling from the foot towards the surface of the water. Above him, and between the two, grows a tree. Its crown is densely foliaged with dark green leaves, in places painted with a deep black.

The tree is positioned behind the woman in such a way that it appears to be almost growing out of her chest. The dark green foliage of the tree serves as a dark canopy and a foil to the pale bodies of both figures. The space around the two is verdant, assorted flora covering the floor. The pool in which the boy sits on the boulder is fed by the painterly suggestion of a waterfall cascading near the mouth of a cave directly behind his right shoulder. The mouth of the cave is painted in muted shades of red and blue, giving it the mottled appearance of a newborn child, creating a visual link, through the suggestion of childbirth, between the mouth of the cave and the female sex. Only loose brushstrokes of pure white serve to suggest the falling water. The boy's body, one leg submerged, the other dripping water, does not appear to disturb the surface of the pool at all. The woman is reaching with her right hand down to her left foot. Her left leg is bent, the foot resting on a rock, the fingers of the outstretched right hand unlacing her shoe. She appears to be undressing. With her left hand she is in the process of removing a gold hemmed pale blue garment, pulling it away from her partially clothed body. The fabric appears to be falling away from her effortlessly. On the ground directly behind her lies a red garment which appears to be a soft velvety texture. The red of this garment contains the area of brightest color in the entire composition, and serves as a color complement to the predominantly green setting, and as such, tends to attract the viewer's eye. While the woman stares intently at the young man from behind her garment, he appears to be completely unaware of her presence, absorbed in some thought, and expression that reads as possibly melancholic on his face. While her face is in a *profil perdu,* we can make out a barely perceptible hint of excitement in her parted lips.

B. Literary Context

Both paintings depict stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). Both stories feature lovers rejected by the objects of their affection. Both stories are etiological, and both stories have

tragic endings. As with all of Ovid's stories in the *Metamorphoses*, at the heart of both narratives is transformation. The story of Scylla and Glaucus begins with the recently transformed sea-god Glaucus' infatuation with the nymph Scylla. He swims near land and spots the nymph sauntering "naked . . . along the thirsty sands."[86] Glaucus is transfixed by the nymph's beauty and speaks to her, but she flees in terror, confused, as Ovid tells us, by his "twisting fish's tail" and the strange color of his hair. Glaucus assures her he is no monster but a sea-god, boasting that neither Proteus nor Triton are more powerful than he. He recounts the story of how he discovered magical herbs that first brought back to life the fish he had caught that day, and then, upon his chewing on them, drew him to the sea. The sea-gods welcomed him to join their company, Glaucus continues, took his "mortal essence," and transformed him physically into a creature half sea-serpent half man. Scylla retreats further while he tells his story, repulsed by his appearance. Lovesick and despondent, Glaucus turns to the witch Circe for help. He beseeches Circe:

> let now your magic lips, if spells
> Have ought of sovereignty, pronounce a spell,
> Or if your herbs have sure power, let herbs
> Of proven virtue do their work and win.
> I crave no cure, nor want my wounds made well;
> Pain need not pass; but make her share my hell![87]

Unbeknownst to Glaucus, Circe is in love with him, and instead of making Scylla fall in love, decides, with "her ill-famed herbs . . . of ghastly juice" to poison Scylla's pool.[88] She grinds her herbs while singing "demon's spells," sprinkles "noxious roots" in Scylla's pool, and mutters with her "witch's lips . . . thrice nine times a baffling maze of magic incantations."[89] Scylla

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[86] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 551.
[87] Ovid, 550.
[88] Ovid, 551.
[89] Ovid, 552.

wades waist-deep into the pool, and her lower half is transformed into "foul monstrous barking beasts."[90] Horrified, and thinking that perhaps she is dreaming, Scylla tries to push the beasts away, but soon realizes that she is not dreaming, that in fact where her legs once were, are now "gaping jaws . . . like Hell's vile hound."[91] Seeing Scylla transform into a monster, Glaucus weeps and flees from the embrace of Circe as Scylla had earlier fled from him.

The story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus begins with the teenaged Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, who, upon turning "thrice five years," leaves his "fostering home" and discovers a "limpid shining pool . . . clear to its very bottom" where "no marsh reed, no barren sedge [grows], its margins ringed with verdure always green."[92] Near this pool lives a nymph, a water sprite, who, unlike her sisters, does not enjoy the hunt, choosing instead to spend her time bathing in the pool, combing her hair, and gazing at her reflection in the water. While gathering flowers, she spots the boy, and in him instantly sees "her heart's desire."[93] She approaches the boy, imploring him to make her his bride. Upon hearing her words, Ovid tells us, "a rosy blush dyed the boy's cheeks" as "he knew not what love was."[94] But the boy's flushed complexion only kindles hotter the flames of love in the nymph's heart, and pleading and begging, she tries to throw her arms around his "ivory neck." Her advances are met with cries of "enough!" She flees and hides in the leafy undergrowth. Thinking she has gone, the boy strips off his garments and dives into the pool for a swim. Unable to resist her desire for him, the nymph jumps in, kissing and caressing his body. He fights to escape, but she clings to him, till, as Ovid tells us, she resembles a snake wrapped around an eagle who is carrying it off in its

[90] Ovid, 552.
[91] Ovid, 552.
[92] Ovid, 190.
[93] Ovid, 188.
[94] Ovid, 190.

talons. She then cries out to the gods: "Ye gods ordain / No day shall ever dawn to part us twain!"[95] The gods answer her prayer, merging their bodies into one. "As when a gardener sets a graft," Ovid writes, were the two joined into one. "They two were two no more, nor man, nor woman — / one body then that neither seemed and both." The boy, now "half woman," his limbs "weak and soft," cries out to his divine parents his wish to fix the pool so that when "its waters bathe a man," he emerges half woman, "weakened instantly." [96] His parents hear his pleas and grant him his wish, turning the pool that once was clear, Ovid writes, into one "impure."[97]

Both stories feature women as central characters, a common theme in Rudolf's mythological paintings. In the first story, that of Scylla and Glaucus, the male pursuer, finding his female prey unwilling to submit, turns to the witch Circe for help. The witch Circe, herself madly in love with Glaucus, realizes the frustration of her unrequited love for Glaucus by poisoning Scylla's pool and transforming the beautiful nymph into a monster. Scylla and Glaucus is thus a story of a female punished for resisting the advances of a man and standing in the way of another woman's designs on him. Read in this way Scylla is a part of a trend in the stories of Ovid of punishing women for choosing to remain chaste. This tradition includes women like Daphne, who in fleeing from Apollo begs to become a laurel tree rather than submit to Apollo's desire, and the gorgon Medusa, who, following a rape by Poseidon in a temple of Athena, is punished by Athena for violating the sanctity of her temple by being turned into a monster whose gaze turns those who gaze upon her into stone. Misogyny was common to the Greco-Roman civilization. According to Aristotle (384-322 BCE), women were "mutilated men," because they lacked the "member of generation, that they were more cowardly, exercised

[95] Ovid, 190.
[96] Ovid, 191.
[97] Ovid, 191.

insufficient control over their emotions, and were generally more cunning and deceptive than men."[98] According to the Roman poet Horace (65 -8 BCE), Circe was a prostitute, charming her clients, holding them captive by desire."[99] Arguing that books possess magical powers, the oldest extant work of literary criticism, an essay by an unknown twelfth-century Neoplatonist titled "An Interpretation of the Modest Charicleia from the Lips of Philip the Philosopher," states that a work of literature can be like "Circe's potion: it changes those who read it impurely into the very image of licentiousness; but it initiates those who interpreted philosophically to more sublime thoughts."[100] [101] In this context at least, Circe represents the potential for ruin. The third Vatican mythographer, generally accepted to be Alberic of London, employing a favorite method of medieval mythographers to explain hidden meaning behind myth, that of etymology, regards Scylla's story as that of moral corruption, a consequence of sloth and carelessness. His argument is based on his belief that Scylla means "confusion."[102] Scylla, he argues, was born of ignorance, and thus anyone who falls prey to lust becomes confused. Glaucus means "one eyed," because "anyone who devotes himself to lust is blind and foolish and rotten." Dogs and wolves were attached to her lower half, he further argues, because women who serve men's lust can never satisfy it, nor can they, once given to this kind of pleasure themselves, separate themselves from their corruptors. [103] In the Renaissance, Circe was regarded as a dangerous woman. In the *Ovide moralise* (ca. 1317-1328), Circe is an allegorical double for the whore of Babylon. She is the

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[98] Robert Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle's Biology: Reason or Rationalization.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 75.
[99] Greta Hawes, "Circean Enchantment and the Transformations of Allegory," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. Vanda Zajko (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2017), 163.
[100] Hawes, 155.
[101] Graeme Miles, "The Representation of Reading in "Philip the Philosopher's Essay on Heliodorus," *Byzantion* 79 (2009): 294.
[102] Ronald E. Pepin, ed., *The Vatican Mythographers*, 1st ed, Medieval Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 304.
[103] Pepin, 305.

"disgusting horror of evil origins, mother of abomination . . . [who] makes the poison, the drink which intoxicates the princes of this world."[104]

The story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus served as a fable about the danger inherent in empowered female sexuality. As William Keach has argued, "no other Ovidian episode crystallizes so mysteriously the . . . pattern of delicate, chaste male beauty under assault from aggressive femininity."[105] Early mythographers such as Petrus Bechorius (1290-1362), the author of *Ovidius moralizatus* (1340) and the anonymous author of the *Ovide moralise* both used the story of Salmacis as a "vehement denunciation of feminine seduction," and the latter even interpreted Salmacis as a prostitute who lures Hermaphroditus the monk away from the spiritual life.[106] Boccaccio (1313-1375) writes about the tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in his *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (1360-1374) as an allegory of "wanton, effeminate speech."[107] In his interpretation, Boccaccio includes a story from Vitruvius's (ca. 70-ca. 15 BCE) *De architectura* (30-15 BCE) about the spring of Salmacis in Caria, famous for its clear and pleasant waters, which when consumed, "softened" the crude Arcadians. Softening in this sense meant to be feminized, a decidedly negative quality in the eyes of Renaissance readers. On the astrological level, according to Vitruvius, Hermaphroditus' parents, Mercury and Venus represent masculine and feminine planets respectively, and consequently their offspring was bi-sexed. According to Vitruvius, analogous to the seven planetary bodies, there were seven chambers of the womb: three masculine, three feminine, and one a mixture of the two.[108] The infant that emerges from

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[104] Hawes, "Circean Enchantment and the Transformations of Allegory," 154.
[105] Ruth Gilbert, *Early Modern Hermaphrodites; Sex and Other Stories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 70.
[106] Gilbert, 71.
[107] Gilbert, 73.
[108] Eugene Michael O'Connor and Antonio Beccadelli, *Hermaphroditus* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2001), 17.

the "mixed" chamber will be of both sexes, "as if he had emerged from Salmacis's pool."[109] Antonio Beccadelli's (1394-1471) *Hermaphroditus* (1425) is a book of bawdy Latin epigrams celebrating numerous forms of eroticism.[110] Becadelli envisioned his book as an actual hermaphrodite, writing "my book has both a cunt and a pecker."[111] A sentiment common to many authors who were rewriting the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus was to emphasize the mutability of temporal existence and the need to despise earthly goods and riches and strive for the stability of heavenly things.[112] The implication is that the nymph, representing womankind, is the embodiment of the surrender to the world of *voluptas* and a source of perversion which takes men away from the path of virtue. Sixteenth-century authors presented the story as an allegory of innocence corrupted by the guile and lust of a woman. The Elizabethan poet Thomas Peend, the author of an epyllion based on the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus called *The Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* (1565), maintained that his fable was a moral work concerned with "that filthy loathsome lake of lust" and the "mad desires of women, theyr rage and folysh fits."[113] In his 1552 *Picta poesis,* Barthelemy Aneau (1510-1561), includes three separate emblems related to the myth of Salmacis, and includes below the second emblem **(Fig. 10)** the motto "*fons salmacidos libido effoeminans*" ("the fountain of Salmacis sex emasculates"). The poem accompanying the emblem warns against the urge to "quench the torrid heat" in the "swampy water," for to do so would result in one emerging androgynous, "of uncertain sex, not half the man he used to be." In the poem, the

[109] O'Connor and Beccadelli, 17.
[110] O'Connor and Beccadelli, *Hermaphroditus*.
[111] O'Connor and Beccadelli, 17.
[112] Sophie Chiari, ed., *Renaissance Tales of Desire: Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Theseus and Ariadne, Ceyx and Alcione and Orpheus and His Journey to Hell*, Rev. and augmented ed (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 31.
[113] Chiari, 14.

fountain of Salmacis is compared to "the cunt . . . [an] icebox of . . . raging lust." The poet concludes by reminding his readers that to submerge oneself in that "obscene bog," would mean the loss of one's "manhood" and "natural heat," making him "effeminate, his strength into foetid weakness," turning him into a "male eunuch." The last word of the poem in Latin is *semivirumque* which means both half-man and castrato.[114] The lesson is clear: Indulging one's lust with a woman emasculates a man. And while, as some argue, this may have been a warning against the dangers of illicit sexual relationships in light of the real danger of venereal diseases, the implication is still that it is women who are the source of "emasculation." There is no male counterpart to Salmacis who un-genders women, whether in the form of a venereal disease or moral corruption.

C. Visual Context

The story of Glaucus and Scylla is rarely found in the visual arts prior to Spranger's painting. In fact, Spranger's Scylla may be the first painting of the subject.[115] While Scylla does appear in the art of the ancient Greeks, the story depicted is not one of her transformation, but of her menacing sailors. Whether as a relief plaque to mark a grave with a possible apotropaic function **(Fig. 11)** or on jewelry or pottery, she is a monster, part dog, part sea-serpent, usually a foil to the heroic Odysseus. In the classical world, Scylla, as a decorative motif, finds her way onto household items, such as a Roman table-leg decoration **(Fig. 12)**. As a monster, she also appears alongside sirens in a fifteenth-century manuscript **(Fig. 13)**. Her involvement with Glaucus is not the central concern of artists until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Similarly, the hermaphrodite as an artistic subject reaches back to ancient Greece. In

[114] Chiari, 31.
[115] Vannugli, "Jacopo Da Empoli's Study for 'Glaucus and Scylla,'" 408.

the early 1440s, the sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) witnessed what he later described as an awe-inspiring event: the unearthing of a headless statue of a hermaphrodite.[116] The statute, writes Ghiberti in his *Commentarii* (ca. 1477), was roughly "the size of a thirteen-year-old girl and made with admirable genius." "It is not possible to express in words the perfection of the statute," Ghiberti continues, "which, covered in a subtle cloth, showed the male and the female nature."[117] Depictions of the hermaphrodite, a Roman copy of which Ghiberti witnessed being exhumed, were common in Hellenistic art. In addition to providing a degree of titillation, statues of the hermaphrodite also allowed the Hellenistic artist to engage the viewer using the element of witty interplay of expectations and surprises, features that characterize much of Rudolfine art. Hellenistic-era depictions of the hermaphrodite fall into three basic categories.[118] The first is the hermaphrodite *anasyromenos*, or the revealing hermaphrodite **(Fig. 14)**. The second category is that of the so-called struggle group**.** The third is the "Borghese type" **(Fig. 15)**. The revealing hermaphrodite is caught in the precise moment of revealing their unexpected gender, and in this act, the *anasyromenos* "creates a temporal progression in a static image."[119] The second group, the so-called struggle group, is, as its title implies, one of a hermaphrodite engaged in a struggle. The most famous of these are the Dresden type **(Fig. 16)** and the Berlin type **(Fig. 17)**. In the former, the artist creates a tangle of arms and legs in which the hermaphrodite's body twists in such a way that their face, breasts, penis, and buttocks all face different directions. This visual element of intertwined limbs appears in the work of Spranger, whose paintings of amorous couples often display crossed limbs to suggest sexual intercourse **(Fig. 18)**. In the

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[116] Pablo Maurette, "Plato's Hermaphrodite and a Vindication of the Sense of Touch in the Sixteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2015): 896, https://doi.org/10.1086/683854.
[117] Maurette, 896.
[118] Robert Groves, "From Statue to Story: Ovid's Metamorphosis of Hermaphroditus," *Classical World* 109, no. 3 (May 25, 2016): 331, https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2016.0032.
[119] Groves, 332.

Borghese/Sleeping Hermaphrodite **(Fig. 15)**, the idea of a single viewpoint from which to view and interpret the work of art is rejected in favor of an interactive viewing experience. The viewer has to circumnavigate the sculpture to complete it, with each angle revealing a different narrative. Traditionally the statue is approached from behind, and from this angle the buttocks, face, and general body shape suggest that the sleeping figure is a female. In some versions, the side of the right breast is even visible. The crumpled sheets on which the apparent female lays indicate that she is not prepared for the viewer. The viewer is surprising the sleeper, possibly in a dream. The crumpled sheets imply that the viewer might be approaching the hermaphrodite in a post-coital moment. Both of these possibilities heighten the element of intrusion and surprise. As the viewer circles the sleeper and discovers the male sex, the roles of the "surprised" and the "surpriser" are reversed.

The earliest painted version of the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus story is by the Flemish artist Jan Gossart (ca. 1478-1532). Gossart is credited by his biographer Lodovico Guicciardini (1521-1589) with being "the first to bring to [Northern Europe] from Italy the art of painting *historie* and *poesie* with nude figures."[120] Guicciardini's words—echoed by several Gossart biographers—along with the fact that there are no known visual representations of the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus before his painting, make Gossart very likely to have been the first to depict this theme.[121] The painting titled *The Metamorphosis of Hermaphrodite and Salmacis* **(Fig. 19)** was likely painted for his one-time patron, Philip of Burgundy (1464-1524), himself a Maecenas of art like Rudolf.[122] Gossart, like Spranger, benefited from a long-term relationship

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[120] James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575* (New York: Abrams, 1985), 419.
[121] Walter S. Gibson, "Jan Gossart de Mabuse: Madonna and Child in a Landscape," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 61, no. 9 (1974): 287.
[122] Gibson, 287.

with his patron. One of the benefits of this relationship was an extended stay in Rome, where Gossart, like Spranger, absorbed the art of the classical past.[123] Like Spranger, he built his reputation on painting mythological nudes for his patron. Unlike Spranger's painting, however, Gossart's version of the Salmacis story appears to be a part of the tradition of medieval and Renaissance mythographers who make Salmacis a source of a man's destruction. In Gossart's painting, Salmacis scowls and has one hand on Hermaphroditus' neck and the other around his wrist. Based on her tense musculature and her animated pose, she is clearly exerting a great deal of physical force to subdue the unwilling Hermaphroditus. Her body almost appears to be suspended by holding on to his neck. In her posture and facial expression there is no hint of the burning love that Ovid writes about. While the two appear in the background as a hermaphroditic unity peacefully holding hands, in the foreground, Gossart emphasizes the violence involved in their transformation. This violence, underscored by the pair's stark nudity and their intertwined legs, is unmistakably a sexual violence perpetrated by a woman on a man. Since there are no visual precedents of this scene in Renaissance art, it is entirely possible that Gossart turned to the *Weibermacht,* or "Power of Women" tradition for a source of inspiration. The *Weibermacht* theme represented the idea of role reversal, a kind of "battle of the sexes," found in the misogynistic literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Always on the lookout for a scapegoat, someone on whom to blame crop failures, diseased livestock, or illness, society found an easy target in women.[124] This type of misogyny saw its culmination with the publication of Heinrich Kramer's (1430-1505) witch-hunting manual *Malleus maleficarum* (1486). Kramer, while not limiting witchcraft to women, nonetheless saw the specter of the witch as being

[123] Harold Osborne, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970), 490.
[124] Julia Nurse, "She-Devils, Harlots and Harridans in Northern Renaissance Prints," *History Today* 48, no. 7 (July 1998): 42.

representative of the demonic side inherent in all women, and it was this link with the demonic that for Kramer represented the greatest threat to mankind.[125] While it is uncertain who first coined the term *Weibermacht,* it was popularized by the innovation of printmaking, which made visual culture accessible to a wider part of the population. Artists like Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533) and even Albrecht Dürer participated in the tradition. In 1514 and 1519 Van Leyden published what is possibly the first instance of the *Weibermacht* series to be produced commercially, the so-called "Large and Small" series of woodcuts depicting the harmful effects of a woman's power over a man in various Biblical and historical scenes. Albrecht Dürer was commissioned in 1520 to decorate the interior of the Nuremberg town hall with scenes on the theme of *Weibermacht*.[126] Popular among artists working in the *Weibermacht* tradition was the theme of the henpecked husband or the angry and physically abusive wife **(Fig. 20)**. Common also was the theme of Aristotle and Phyllis, which was found throughout the Renaissance in prints **(Fig. 21)** as well as domestic objects like the early fifteenth-century *Aquamanile in the form of Aristotle and Phyllis* **(Fig. 22)**. Biblical stories also provided material for the *Weibermacht* artists. Eve, as the first woman to seduce a man with dire consequences, was a common inspiration, as was Delilah. In classical mythology the *Weibermacht* tradition found a popular source in the story of Hercules and Omphale **(Fig. 23)**.

The story of Hercules and Omphale appears in several works of mythography from the Middle Ages to Rudolf's time. Boccaccio recounts the story several times in his *Geneologia*. While it falls into the tradition of great men dominated by women, the story of Hercules and Omphale includes elements which are purely comical. In the *Ovide moralise*, the author describes how Hercules and Omphale had gone to their separate beds still wearing each other's

[125] Nurse, 46.
[126] Nurse, 42.

clothes, when Faunus tries to get into bed with Omphale. Feeling the lion skin, Faunus moves into the bed of Hercules who is wearing Omphale's soft fabrics, which assures Faunus he is in the correct bed. Spranger depicted the story of Hercules and Omphale for Rudolf, filling his painting with typical Rudolfine eroticism, making Omphale a kind of dominatrix and Hercules a masochist enjoying the humiliation.[127] In his painting he suggests eroticism by placing Hercules' foot between Omphale's legs, introducing the feature of crossing and intertwining of limbs common to Spranger's erotic canvases. The Hercules myth was of particular interest to Rudolf. His collection included not only two separate paintings of the Hercules' story by Spranger, but four paintings by Tintoretto (1518-1594), including the comical *Hercules Kicking Faunus out of Omphale's Bed* **(Fig. 24)**. However, Spranger's depiction of the story has a decidedly witty and erotic feel, which is absent in the misogynistic *Weibermacht* paintings and prints. In his 1585 painting on copper titled *Hercules and Omphale* **(Fig. 25)**, Spranger emphasizes the episode's gender-reversal elements. In Spranger's painting, Hercules is muscular and bearded, but he wears a garment of pink silk and is engaged in spinning—an exclusively female activity. The distaff is placed between his legs, suggesting both a phallus and a symbol of women's labor. In his *Le imagini con la sposizione dei degli antichi* (1556), the Italian mythographer Vincenzo Cartari (1531-1590) mentions the distaff in the section on Minerva, referring to the art of spinning, sewing, and weaving as "suitable for women."[128] In the section on the goddess Juno, Cartari refers to Plutarch (46 - ca.119) who writes of the distaff as the object a woman carried when she first entered her husband's home.[129] In Spranger's painting, Omphale casually slings

[127] Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 134.
[128] Vincenzo Cartari, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythography*, trans. John Mulryan, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, v. 396 (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 289.
[129] Cartari, 153.

Hercules' club over her shoulder and faces the viewer with her back, hiding the most telling features of her gender from our view. While the story is ostensibly one of a woman dominating a man, to satisfy Rudolf's interests in alchemy, Spranger has changed the focus of the painting from female dominance to gender fluidity. It is this gender fluidity and its alchemical significance that serve as the subject of Spranger's *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*.

In Rudolf's time, gender roles were not simply the concern of poets, mythographers and artists. In August of 1588, only six years after Spranger painted the two paintings, Elizabeth I of England, addressing her troops on the eve of the Spanish Armada, referred to herself as possessing "the body but of a weake and feeble woman" and "the heart and stomach of a king."[130] The equating of hermaphroditism with lasciviousness found in the moralizing mythographies of the era also extended to royalty. Rumors abounded that Elizabeth may have had a physical defect that rendered her body impenetrable. The author Ben Jonson (1572-1637), when speaking to the Scottish poet William Drummond (1585-1649), claimed that, "[Elizabeth] had a membrana on her which made her uncapable of man, though for her delight she tried many."[131] Eighteen years after Elizabeth's speech, in 1606, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) created the character of Lady Macbeth who decries her husband's "milk of human kindness" and begs the spirits to "unsex" her, to "come to [her] woman's breast and take [her] milk for gall," so she could commit murder, an act unsuitable to women.[132] For their contemporaries, Elizabeth I, like the fictional Lady Macbeth, represented a woman in a position of power. The danger inherent in a powerful woman found its counterpart in the dangers inherent in a hermaphrodite. It would appear that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century male was incapable of accepting a

[130] Chiari, *Renaissance Tales of Desire*, 13.
[131] Gilbert, *Early Modern Hermaphrodites; Sex and Other Stories*, 64.
[132] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16.

powerful woman as in fact a woman, and found ways to "unsex" her. Either she became, as Elizabeth, a Virgin Queen, one physically incapable of accepting a man, or she rejected her womanhood like lady Macbeth. Rudolf's relationship to Elizabeth I is little discussed. It is worth noting that when she addressed her troops at Tilbury, Elizabeth was deploying ships to fight against the Habsburgs. Elizabeth and Rudolf exchanged letters, mostly formal in both tone and content; however, an understanding of the two paintings is more informed by the fact that, like Rudolf, Elizabeth remained unmarried, which was not at all common for a monarch for whom a successful marriage meant the expanding of empire. It is entirely possible that in Rudolf's mind the subject of androgyny and hermaphroditism would have extended to alchemy as well as current politics. After all, the universe of correspondences to which Rudolf heartily subscribed, required that one believe that all things were connected, and truths lay concealed beneath poetic symbolism. For a reader erudite enough to see beneath the surface, a fable written 1500 years earlier could have real world parallels. For Rudolf, the noble art of alchemy held the promise of revealing these connections, allowing him to uncover hidden meanings and connect things seemingly disconnected.

D. Renaissance Alchemy

a. Opinions of Alchemy

During the Renaissance, opinions of alchemists and the practice of alchemy varied. In the 1532 German edition of his *De remediis utrisque fortune,* the Italian humanist poet Francesco Petrarch (1304-74) established the image of the alchemist as "the pitiful victim of a hopeless obsession.[133] Petrarch writes that the work of an alchemist leads to "a disfigured and grimy

[133] Tara Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 48.

mouth, blinded eyes, and painful poverty, and worst of all, the name of a fraud and a dissolute rascal and a life spent in the darkness of the night and the secret lurking holes of thieves."[134] The poet Sebastian Brant (1457-1521) included alchemists among his panoply of fools in the *Narrenschiff* (1494). The alchemist, according to Brant, is he who "used to live in happiness" and now "pours and fills the monkey glass," burning it down to a powder, until he no longer knows even himself.[135] The humanist writer Erasmus (1366-1536) called alchemy "a disorder so intoxicating . . . that it beguiled even the learned and the prudent." [136] The Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel (1525-69) offers a depiction of alchemy, warning those who might be tempted to pursue it that it could destroy their families. In a print titled *The Alchemist* (ca. 1558) **(Fig. 26)**, a scholar is depicted crouching on the floor wearing a fool's cap and puffing the bellows at an overturned crucible. The scholar's wife shows the viewer her empty purse, while their children play inside an empty cupboard. Through the window, in a scene from the not-too-distant future, the viewer can see the entire family begging for charity. Below this pitiful scene is the following inscription: "See how this foolish man distills in his vials / the blood of his children, his treasures and his senses."[137] For Petrarch, Brant, Erasmus and Bruegel, the only real power of transmutation that alchemy possessed was to transform its practitioner into a dissolute fool. The idea of alchemists as misguided fools coexisted with that of alchemists as outright frauds. Alongside deceitful merchants and clergy, Brant denounces alchemists who conceal a precious metal in a hollow rod before a supposed transmutation in order to fool their intended victims, plugging the bottom of the rod with a bit of wax. As the rod is stirred, the wax melts and releases the hidden metal into

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[134] Nummedal, 51.
[135] Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, trans. Edwin H Zeydel (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1991), 329.
[136] Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire*, 52.
[137] Nummedal, 55.

the mix, which then appears to have generated gold or silver. The opening lines of Brant's entry on falsity and deception read: "In Alchemy it's plain to see / As 'tis in vinous chemistry, / What falsity on earth there be."[138] Similar readings show that by the middle of the sixteenth century, "alchemy had become a ready symbol of deceit, whether self-delusion or the deception of others."[139]

But alongside this image of alchemists as fools or charlatans existed one of the scholar/magus genuinely attempting to pursue the lofty goals of the "Royal art."[140] Petrarch himself allowed for the possibility that alchemy could be useful if done correctly. It was this kind of alchemist, the scholar/magus, that held such sway over the imaginations of those eager, like Rudolf, to believe in a world of veiled correspondences. As R. J. W. Evans writes, during the late Renaissance, "alchemy was the greatest passion of the age" belonging to a "whole . . . tradition whose frame of reference was a complete cosmology."[141] Many royals and nobles at the time interacted with alchemists, and many turned their own hands to alchemical practices.[142] The most powerful woman of the time, Elizabeth I, is known to have consulted the alchemist John Dee, and Cosimo de Medici is to have passed down two alchemical recipes of his own devising."[143]

b. Alchemy and Rudolf II

Alchemy had many roles for Rudolf. Among these was its role as *representatio*, a way to demonstrate his right to rule and to help in maintaining his reputation, or *fama*.[144] During the Renaissance it was believed that alchemical knowledge was a *donum dei*, a gift bestowed by

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[138] Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, 327.
[139] Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire*, 56.
[140] Nummedal, 53.
[141] Evans, *Rudolf II and His World*, 199.
[142] Smith, "Alchemy as a Language of Mediation at the Habsburg Court," 2.
[143] Barker, "Cosimo de' Medici's Chemical Medicine | The Medici Archive Project."
[144] Smith, "Alchemy as a Language of Mediation at the Habsburg Court," 22.

God.[145] It was seen as exclusive esoteric knowledge reserved for the few. Alchemy called for virtue in its practitioner. A would-be alchemist was required to be constant, pious, humble, and altruistic. Alchemy also required wealth to build laboratories and purchase the materials used in the experiments. Transmutation often involved "multiplication" rather than "creation" of the noble metals, so the starting point often involved a certain amount of silver or gold. [146] Alchemy also reinforced a ruler's right to precious metals found in his domain, which was linked to his right to mint money. At the court of Rudolf, alchemy may also have represented a means of reconciling the differences between the Catholic and the Protestant faiths. Rudolf may have believed that this reconciliation was achievable through a "metaphysical rendering of the multitude of contraries in the temporal world into a unified and meaningful whole."[147] Alchemy's goal of reuniting that which was once a unity and is now scattered into a whole is shared by Neoplatonism and Hermeticism.

The practice of alchemy as a symbol of divine right is linked to the tradition of collecting as a means of imperial self-representation. Rudolf is widely regarded as one of the most extensive collectors of art and natural objects (*artificialia* and *naturalia)* in the late Renaissance. The Neapolitan Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535-1615), author of the *Magia naturalis* (1558) reports that Rudolf told him, "When our arduous tasks of government permit, we enjoy the subtle knowledge of natural and artificial things." [148] Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* comprised works by Dürer, Bruegel, Raphael, Correggio, and Titian, as well as sculptures by Giambologna and Adrien de Vries. Among the *naturalia* in Rudolf's collection were found no fewer than twenty-

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[145] Vladimír Karpenko, "Alchemy as Donum Dei," *Hyle: International Journal for Philosophy of Chemistry* 4, no. 1 (May 1998): 18.
[146] Smith, "Alchemy as a Language of Mediation at the Habsburg Court," 20.
[147] Smith, 7.
[148] Peter H. Marshall, *The Magic Circle of Rudolf II: Alchemy and Astrology in Renaissance Prague* (New York: Walker & Co, 2006), 76.

eight rhinoceros horns, eighteen Seychelles nuts, and twenty-two bezoar stones.[149] While some of these items were considered to possess medicinal properties, such as the bezoar stone, which, when crushed into a powder and mixed with a drink, was thought to be helpful in fighting against melancholy, most of Rudolf's collection would have served a different role. Contrary to the long-held impression of Rudolf's collections as a "circus sideshow lacking any organizing principle or orderly display," it was catalogued rationally, and divided into logical categories.[150] A collection as vast and encyclopedic as Rudolf's would have communicated to anyone who heard about it that Rudolf was not simply first among rulers, but also first among collectors. But there may have been an added dimension of meaning for Rudolf in his *Kunstkammer*. In the context of his belief in the powers of alchemy, Rudolf's collection may have represented man organizing and controlling the universe.[151] The concept behind the collection may have been to represent a sort of *theatrum mundi*, by its comprising specimens from all over the world. In collecting samples of everything and anything from everywhere, Rudolf would have been constructing a small universe – a microcosm. The notion of microcosm and macrocosm reflecting each other is one of the key concepts of alchemy. Alchemy teaches that everything that is in the universe, is also contained in man. By representing a universe in microcosm at his court, Rudolf may have been trying to realize this alchemical concept.[152]

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[149] Fekete, "Family at the Fringes," 560.
[150] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "Remarks on the Collections of Rudolf II: The Kunstkammer as a Form of Representatio," *Art Journal* 38, no. 1 (1978): 23, https://doi.org/10.2307/776251.
[151] Kaufmann, 26.
[152] Peter Marshall, *The Philosopher's Stone: A Quest for the Secrets of Alchemy* (London: Pan Books, 2002), 146.

c. The Parallels of Material and Spiritual Alchemy

Rudolf, like all of his fellow Renaissance princes who shared an active interest in alchemy, would have been familiar with two forms of alchemy. The first, the one most imagine when they hear the word alchemy, had to do with material transmutations. This form of alchemy involved the transformation of metals from base to precious ones. One imagines an adept inside a dimly-lit laboratory, squinting through spectacles at bubbling alembics, mixing and distilling metals, hoping that in the end, lead would be transformed into gold. It is this form of alchemy which drew so much scorn from Petrarch and Brant. At the core of material alchemy was the notion that all matter within the universe was made up of two elements—mercury and sulfur. These two elements formed the foundation of all the other metals. Renaissance Alchemists believed there were seven metals, beginning with mercury and culminating in gold. All metals were born within the earth, as a child is born inside its mother, and gradually "ripened" until they reached their highest form. Given enough time even the base metal of mercury became the "immortal" element gold. As this process of "ripening" was slow, it was the task of the alchemist to accelerate it.[153] In order to achieve this acceleration, the alchemist had to generate a substance which would enable it. This substance was called the philosopher's stone (*lapis philosophorum*). In spite of its name, this stone did not necessarily have to be a stone. At various times this term was used to describe a powder, or a liquid. The power that the philosopher's stone possessed was one of transmutation. Through physical contact with this stone, powder, or liquid, the alchemist could transform any metal into gold.

[153] Vladimir Karpenko, "A Path to the Rudolfine World," in *Alchemy and Rudolf II: Exploring the Secrets of Nature in Central Europe in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, ed. Ivo Purš and Vladimír Karpenko (Prague: Artefactum: Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2016), 42.

Alchemy was far from a precise science adhering to a regulated set of procedures. In a world of correspondences which was limited only by the alchemist's imagination, something like the number of steps required to achieve the philosopher's stone varied greatly. Numerology had great appeal for alchemists who sought correspondences between the material world and the world of ideals. It is no surprise then that the numbers four, seven, and twelve show up in various publications as the supposed number of steps required to achieve the philosopher's stone. Most alchemists agreed, though, that the creation occurs in four steps grouped into two larger stages. These stages are called the lesser work and the greater work. Each of the four steps corresponds to a base metal as well as a color, and, according to some treatises, in the final stages of the process, all the colors should be observable. This phenomenon was referred to by alchemists as the "peacock's tail."[154] All alchemical work began with by gathering of the first matter, or the *prima materia*. Once again, mindful of cosmic correspondences, the alchemist is careful to observe the time of year, as astrological signs will affect the process. It was believed that the most favorable results were achieved if the alchemist began the lesser work under the sign of Aries or Taurus, as spring was a time of birth and renewal. The first step of the lesser work is called a *nigredo*, or blackening, possibly because the original *prima materia* has at times been thought to be the black soil around the river Nile. The second stage of the lesser work is called the *albedo*, or whitening. This involves cleansing the first matter. The *albedo* is followed by the first step of the greater work, the preparation for the alchemical marriage. The final step, representing the climax of the alchemists' labor, is called the *rubedo*, or the red work.[155] This final step yields the philosopher's stone. In alchemical writings this process is referred to as the *magnum opus,* or "the great work."

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[154] Karpenko, 44.
[155] Sean Martin, *Alchemy and Alchemists* (Harpenden, Herts [England]: Pocket Essentials, 2006).

d. *Magnum Opus*

The *magnum opus,* as both a goal and a process of material alchemy, is also shared by the second form of alchemy, spiritual alchemy. While material alchemy sought to transform base metals to precious ones, Renaissance spiritual alchemy centered around the alchemist's desire to perfect himself spiritually by transforming that which was base into something precious.[156] This was the alchemy that interested Rudolf the most. In a letter to Michael Maier in 1609, on the occasion of granting Maier the status of nobility and his own coat of arms, Rudolf praises Maier for having amassed a wealth of knowledge, having enlarged learning, but not a word was written about turning lead to gold**.** The steps involved in transforming base nature into a higher one were analogous to those of material alchemy. In a series of steps beginning with the collection of raw material representing the alchemists current and fallen state, proceeding through a series of spiritual equivalents of dissolution and coagulation as found in material alchemy, the alchemist hoped to achieve a state of transcendence. The four steps of material transmutation are interpreted by spiritual alchemists as representing: the assembling of the "raw, confused mass" of the alchemist's worldly nature; the undergoing of a spiritual death; cleansing of the spirit; and a mystical reunion of body and soul and the animating force of the universe.[157] These terms are intentionally vague, as "cleansing" could take on different meaning for different adepts.

e. Alchemy, Philosophy and Religion: A Universe of Correspondences

To affirm the importance of alchemy, Renaissance alchemists found parallels between alchemy and popular philosophy and religion. The deliberately ambiguous imagery of alchemical treatises made this an easy task. Alchemists had a fondness for textual ambiguity. Complicated

[156] Karpenko, "A Path to the Rudolfine World," 29.
[157] Karpenko, 40.

language, opaque symbols and allusions were intentional in the writings of alchemists, meant to keep the reader guessing as to the real meaning of the words on the page. Alchemy, after all, was an exclusive art, and only those who were pure of soul and possessed a certain level of learning and erudition would be allowed to understand its hieroglyphics. No philosophy found more common ground with alchemy in the Renaissance then Neoplatonism. Renaissance Neoplatonism is synonymous with one name, that of the Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino. Like the alchemists, Ficino interpreted the ancients as representing allegory. Like an alchemist decoding a particularly multivalent treatise, Ficino was considered to be lifting the veil and exposing the true meaning behind Plato's "fables." Exciting for the alchemist was that Ficino included their art in his Platonic universe, conceiving of the world as possessing a body, soul and spirit.

A confirmation of the divine nature of the work done by alchemists came from the Swiss physician and occultist Paracelsus (1493-1591). Paracelsus believed that nature was a living, dynamic whole, and that God was the supreme alchemist who created all things in a kind of raw state. Humans were to continue God's work and perfect this raw matter as an alchemist would perfect base metals by turning them into gold. Paracelsus saw the entire universe as a kind of crucible in which the original creation had been God's *magnum opus*. To the two base elements of alchemy, Mercury and sulfur, Paracelsus added a third one, salt. Paracelsus believed that a physician was an alchemist of the body whose goal it was to restore in the sick a perfect balance of the three elements he called the *tria prima*.[158] Paracelsus' understanding of alchemy served as a sort of bridge between the material branch and the spiritual branch of alchemy. Paracelsus was a physician and for him medicine was a material art, but in order for it to work it must address

[158] Marshall, *The Philosopher's Stone*, 197.

the spiritual aspects of a man's total well-being. He found ways of addressing the latter in the concept of corresponding bodily organs and planetary bodies. Paracelsus writes: "the purpose of alchemy is not, as it is said, to make gold and silver. . . . Nature and man, in health and sickness, need to be joined together, and to be brought into mutual agreement. All this shall be achieved by alchemy, without which these things cannot be done."[159]

The work of an alchemist as not merely continuing, but in fact representing the work of God came from the writings of the Italian mystic and hermeticist Giordano Bruno. Bruno believed that God was the animating totality from which everything emanated, and because God possessed no limits in his faculties of creation, the universe likewise had no limits. As a part of the cosmos, man is also a part of God, and as such is neither higher nor lower than God. Because of his divine nature, searching into the workings of a man's nature, was for Bruno, a search for divinity.[160] This resonated with alchemist who believed that man was a microcosm of the universe, which itself was a manifestation of the higher unity. Taking Paracelsus' idea that man was perfecting God's work one step further, Bruno posited that the only way to understand God and his creations is to become equal to God:

> Unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand God: for the like is not intelligible save the like. Make yourself grow to a greatness beyond measure. . . . Believe that nothing is impossible for you, think yourself immortal and capable of understanding all, all arts, all sciences, the nature of every living being. . . . If you embrace in your thought all things at once, times, places, substances, qualities, quantities, you may understand God.[161]

What Bruno's philosophy added to the work of alchemy is the dimension of an alchemist's recognizing that his work was in fact the work of God. Not simply, was an alchemist completing

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[159] Marshall, 199.
[160] Giuseppe Candela, "An Overview of the Cosmology, Religion and Philosophical Universe of Giordano Bruno," *Italica* 75, no. 3 (1998): 348, https://doi.org/10.2307/480055.
[161] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 32.

God's work, as Paracelsus stated, but in the laboratory as well as in the mystical spiritual realm, the alchemist was himself God.

In Rudolf's time, alchemy and Hermeticism were closely related to magic. While this was an uneasy association for the Church, not all forms of Renaissance magic were viewed in a negative light. In the Renaissance concept there were two forms of magic: natural magic (*magia naturalis*) and spiritual or demonic magic. The latter was very close to witchcraft, while the former was a part of natural philosophy. Unlike its counterpart, natural magic was not considered a perversion of religion but rather a perfection of it. In fact Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) called natural magic "its perfection (*consummatio*)."[162] The Renaissance philosopher was expected to study the works of nature and seek out all the treasures that became hidden after man's expulsion from the garden of Eden. According to hermetic cosmology, the celestial bodies serve as a link between God and mankind through the doctrine of sympathy and antipathy. They possessed divine efficacy, which the skilled natural philosopher might access. This way alchemical distillation could lead to the recovery of divine signatures.[163] In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) Pico writes: "magic does not create miracles . . . it calls up the living forces of nature. It studies the connection in the universe which the Greeks called sympathy. The magician marries heaven and earth and puts in contact the lower world with the upper world."[164] Acknowledging that magic can have a dark side, Pico writes: "There are two sorts of magick: [and] the one is infamous and unhappie, because it hath to do with foul spirits, and consists of inchantments and wicked curiosity."[165] In the introduction to his *De vita* Ficino writes:

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[162] Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, v. 125 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 28.
[163] Margaret Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination: The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42.
[164] Marshall, *The Magic Circle of Rudolf II*, 98.
[165] Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, 25.

> There are two kinds of natural magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to demons by a specific religious rite, and, relying on their help often contrived portends. This, however was thoroughly rejected when the prince of this world was cast out. This type [of magic] must be avoided as futile and dangerous to the health and the saving of the soul.[166]

Ficino agrees with Pico's assessment. According to Ficino the benevolent magician can be compared to a farmer:

> [J]ust as a farmer tempers his field . . . for the sake of human welfare, so that wise man . . . for the sake of human welfare tempers the lower parts of the world to the upper parts; and just as a farmer sets the hen [to brood upon] eggs, so the wise man fittingly subjects earthly things to heaven that they may be fostered. [167]

The study of alchemy and magic were of equal importance to Paracelsus, who wrote "magic has power to experience and fathom things which are inaccessible to human reason."[168] This distinction between natural and demonic magic, between acceptable magic and unacceptable witchcraft, was often overlooked in talks about Rudolf by his contemporaries. A proposition to the Archduke in Vienna dated 1606 reads:

> His Majesty is interested only in wizards, alchemists, Kabbalists and the like, sparing no expense to find all kinds of treasures, learn secrets and use scandalous ways of harming his enemies. . . . He also has a whole library of magic books. He strives all the time to eliminate God completely so that he may in future serve a different master.[169]

These words betray a lack of understanding of the principles of alchemy by many of Rudolf's contemporaries. They also emphasize the alchemists' belief that true understanding of their craft was not possible for everyone. Only those who were adequately learned and noble understood the difference between demonic magic and the noble art of alchemy.

The ancient Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah also shared a great deal of beliefs with the alchemists. In fact, the foundational work of Kabbalah, the Zohar, which includes

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[166] Zambelli, 23.
[167] Zambelli, 25.
[168] Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination*, 45.
[169] Marshall, *The Magic Circle of Rudolf II*, 129.

commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah, echoes the words of Hermes Trismegistus in the *Emerald Tablet* (ca. 500-799 CE) when it states that, "everything which is on the earth is also up above. . . . Everything is connected and united together."[170] Like the Neoplatonist Ficino, and the hermeticists Paracelsus and Bruno, the Kabbalah also places a great importance on love in the universe. The Zohar states that "if we are good, the flow of love increases; if we are evil, the severity of judgment grows." According to Kabbalists, one can seek immortality through "inner distillation," which is a part of a process by which humans strive, with the help of God, to restore universal harmony through love.[171]

Alchemists also easily found correspondences between their art and Christianity. As early as the fourteenth century, the Franciscan Johannes de Rupescissa (1310-1370) compared the third stage of the *magnum opus* to the crucifixion. While observing the "digestion of alchemical Mercury and the ascent of its vapors to the head of the alembic," he wrote that he visualized Christ's ascent on the cross.[172] He noted that as in Christ's ascension, so in the distilled vapors "what ascends . . . is pure and spiritual . . . and exulted in the cross of the head of the alembic just like Christ."[173] According to Ficino and Pico, the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus were the singular source of Judaic religion and Greek philosophy. In his *De doctrina Christiana* (1473/74), Ficino writes: "God prefers to be worshiped in any manner, however unfittingly…then not to be worshiped at all through pride."[174] In his *The Ordinal of Alchemy*

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[170] Marshall, 129.
[171] Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination*, 20.
[172] Tara Nummedal, "Alchemy and Religion in Christian Europe," *AMBIX* 60, no. 4 (November 2013): 314.
[173] Smith, "Alchemy as a Language of Mediation at the Habsburg Court," 314.
[174] Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination*, 37.

(1477), the English poet and alchemist Thomas Norton (died 1513) writes: Holi Alkimy: / A wonderfull Science, secrete Philosophie, / A singular grace & gifte of th'almightie.[175]

Mythology was seen in the Renaissance as a way for the ancients to "hide divine truth behind fables."[176] This concept is exemplified in the ten volume work *Mythologia* (1567) of the Italian mythographer and poet Natalis Comtes (1520-1582). Comtes, like the earlier euhemerist mythographers, argued that mythological characters represented idealized human beings, and that while the stories contained philosophical and natural truths, only those who were sufficiently erudite could grasp them. Hermeticists like Bruno, incorporating his personal theory of memory, argued that the ancients, rather than concealing truths, "declared and explained truths through the myths in order to make them more easily remembered."[177] The concept of secrets concealed from the general reader and revealed only to the initiated one appealed to alchemists, who often incorporated elements from Greco-Roman myths into their texts, finding in them easy parallels to their art, just as mythographers found parallels between classical myth and Christian moralizing. One of the most popular myths among the alchemists was that of the Golden Fleece. It was believed among some alchemists that the Golden Fleece was in fact a parchment upon which the secrets of the universe were written, and the quest to find it was in fact an alchemist's quest to perfect nature through the work of alchemy.[178] In 1585, the English alchemist R. Bostock (ca. 1530-1605) wrote:

> Divers Poets before the tyme of Plato, and also after his tyme did wrapp and hide this Arte in Ridles, darke speeches and fables. As by the fable of the golden Fleece brought from Colchos by Argonautae, the companions of Jason, [. . .] by their perrilous navigation, by the place where it was kept, which was the fielde ye called Martius, [. . .] by plowing of it with Oxen, that breathed & plowed out fire at their nosethrills, by the

[175] Healy, 24.
[176] Didier Kahn, "Alchemical Interpretations of Classical Myths," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. Vanda Zajko (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2017), 212.
[177] Frances A. Yates, *Art of Memory*, Selected Works / Frances Yates (London: Routledge, 1999), 291.
[178] Kahn, "Alchemical Interpretations of Classical Myths," 212.

> ground which should be sowne with the teeth of the Dragon that watched and kept the golden Fleece, by the bringing the Dragon a sleepe, and obtaining the golden Fleece, they signified the practice of this Arte, daungers and perrills in this worke, the purging and preparing of the matters and substaunce of the medicine, in the furnaces that breath out fire at the venteholes continually in equal quantitie: the Quicksilver and Mercury sublimed, which should be sowen in Mars his fielde like seede, which by often sublimation, doth so rise out of the matter contained in the Alembick, into the helme or head, and in it maketh divers formes, figures and fashions, as if men were fighting, and one killing another.[179]

For Rudolf, the legend of the Golden Fleece was significant in more ways than just the alchemical. Rudolf was a member of the order of the Golden Fleece, an exclusive order of knights established by Philip the Good (1396-1467) in 1430, and wears the necklace of the order in several of his royal portraits **(Fig. 27)**.

An accurate alchemical reading of classical mythology required of the reader of a text or viewer of an emblem to be literate and knowledgeable of antiquity. In 1617, Michael Maier proposed that one's ability to interpret myths alchemically lay at the heart of all the intellectual activity of alchemists.[180] For this purpose, Maier argued that alchemists needed to be knowledgeable in the arts of discourse and language, especially poetics, since the subject of poetry was the "artful and clever concealment of alchemical allegories."[181] The alchemist was especially to be versed in grammar, rhetoric and logic, which according to Maier formed the basis of all the other fields of knowledge. In addition to these, Maier called for an alchemist to be familiar with the fundamentals of geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and physics, as well as medicine. Being ignorant of any of these, the alchemist would not be able to accurately interpret the allegories hidden in the writings of the ancients. Ignorance of the true meaning of

[179] Kahn, 214.
[180] Kahn, 216.
[181] Kahn, 216.

mythological writings would, according to Maier, "bring [the alchemist] darkness instead of the truth hidden behind their veils."[182]

f. The Divine Hermaphrodite

The goal of the Renaissance alchemist, in both the material and spiritual sense, was the uniting of previously separated elements. This concept, shared by Fician Neoplatonism and hermeticism, finds its symbolic alchemical representation in the figure of the hermaphrodite. The idea of a hermaphrodite representing a form of perfection dates back to Plato's *Symposium* (385-370 BCE). According to a speech delivered by the speaker Aristophanes, there were once three species of human beings.[183] One consisted of two males, another two females, and the third was a union of the both. All of these human beings had four hands and legs, two sets of genitals, a single head and two faces. Their shape was round and formed a circle. Males descended from the sun, and the females from the earth. The third mixed sex was governed by the moon. The original beings were powerful and decided to attack the Olympian gods. In the ensuing battle, the primordial beings lost to the Olympians, who, fearing there would be no one left to worship them, decided not to kill their attackers but instead cut them in half. Aristophanes' speech thus posits, through the story, the origin of love and sexual desire. In Aristophanes' story, erotic love becomes "a signifier for the pursuit of lost primordial wholeness."[184] This notion of sexuality and love being a substitute for primordial unity appealed greatly to Renaissance Neoplatonist thinkers like Ficino. In his commentary on the Symposium, Ficino writes that it is "indispensable

[182] Kahn, 221.
[183] Plato, Seth Benardete, and Allan Bloom, *Plato's Symposium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19.
[184] Sergius Kodera, *Disreputable Bodies: Magic, Medicine and Gender in Renaissance Natural Philosophy*, Essays and Studies 23 (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 220.

to read the myth as an allegory in order to discover the divine mysteries that lie under the veil of the figments of the text."[185] Ficino applies this medieval strategy of interpretation in writing his commentary on Aristophanes speech, equating it with an allegory of the fate of the human soul. Ficino thus severs soul from body, making the argument that the story is in fact about "psychological" processes, of searching for a higher meaning. [186]

Renaissance alchemists saw a validation of their practices in the Platonic dual-sex hermaphrodite and Ficino's explanation that Plato's story represents the human soul. In alchemical treatises this concept of duality in unity was symbolized by the divine hermaphrodite (**Fig. 28**). The alchemical hermaphrodite is the child of Sol and Luna who are brother and sister. In keeping with the alchemical penchant for vagueness, in the treatises where this element is found these two are sometimes depicted as a king or queen, at other times prince or princess. Whatever their identity, their union is always incestuous. This brother and sister union is described in the *Rosarium philosophorum* (1550), a sixteenth-century two-volume collection of alchemical treatises. In keeping with the tradition of near-impenetrable metaphors, the *Rosarium* includes equally cryptic woodcuts to illustrate the steps of the *magnum opus*.[187] Through the character of the philosopher Arisleus, the author argues that a king who seeks answers about the "tree of immortals" must bring forth his son and daughter so they may marry as Adam married his sister Eve, and be quickly thereafter incarcerated inside a glass house.[188] The tree represents the *arbor philosophorum*, the tree of knowledge. The glass house is the alchemist's alembic. The woman represents mercury and the man represents sulfur, the two original base metals of

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[185] Kodera, 221.
[186] Kodera, 223.
[187] John Ferguson, *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Rome, Italy: Volume Edizioni s.r.l., 2013).
[188] Thomas Willard, "Beya and Gabricus: Erotic Imagery in German Alchemy," *Mediaevistik* 28 (2015): 280.

alchemy. Their father, the King, represents the *materia prima*, the raw first matter. Their union is the essential alchemical process of two things related by virtue of having the same mother, split after birth and merged back together through the work of the alchemist. The king is reminded that the union will be fruitless if the husband is not pure. Following this, the woman takes the man inside of her until "nothing at all can be seen of him."[189] She then splits him into sundry identical parts. Following this, both man and woman, brother and sister, die. The text accompanying the figure reads: Here king and queen lie dead / the soul is separated with sadness."[190] With the soul's departure, the body decomposes. The entire episode takes place in a small pool of water. Then begins the second work, the *albedo*. The first part of the second work is the cleansing, in this case the washing of the dead body and spirit, illustrated as rain coming down from the clouds into which the soul has disappeared. In the following woodcut, the soul flies down from heaven. The accompanying text reads: "Here the soul descendeth from on high and revives the putrefied body."[191] In the final work, the *rubedo*, the sun and the moon die, and the soul again ascends into the clouds, this time in the form of a woman. The soul descends once more, when the couple emerges dressed as the winged alchemical hermaphrodite (**Fig. 29**).

E. The Paintings as Allegory of Alchemy

In light of the importance of alchemy to Rudolf, and the title of at least one of the paintings being suggestive of a connection to alchemy, Spranger's paintings lend themselves to interpretation as allegory of the alchemical process relatively easily. As alchemical allegories, the paintings would have provided a visual link to alchemy for Rudolf, reminding him of its tenets and its ultimate goal. Central to the alchemical worldview is the theory that the world

[189] Ferguson, *Rosarium Philosophorum*, 27.
[190] Ferguson, 33.
[191] Ferguson, 50.

consists of four elements: air (*aer)*, water (*aqua)*, fire (*ignis)*, and earth (*terra*). These four elements were written about by the alchemist Geber (ca. 721-ca. 815) who borrowed the idea from the ancient Greeks. Both Aristotle and Plato discuss the four elements, and their theories are possibly founded on the work of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles (ca. 494-ca. 434 BCE), who himself was not the first to posit the notion that the world consists of four elements.[192] Likely motivated by a desire to reduce the complex world to a simpler one, the elemental scheme underlying the formation of the universe was popular in ancient Greece as far back as the early pre-Socratics.[193] Eight separate systems of elements existed between the time of Thales (ca. 623-ca. 548) and Empedocles.[194] Empedocles believed that the four elements took their shape based on the principles of love and strife: love causes mixing; strife, separation.[195] According to Empedocles, this principle of love and strife, as respectively combining and separating elements, applies to the lives of individuals as well. Empedocles also ascribed colors to the four elements: white, black, red, and a type of yellow called *ochron*. In the Renaissance, the notion of linking the elements to colors can be found in the writings of Alberti, for whom red corresponded to fire, blue to air, green to water, and an "ash color" (*cinereum*) to earth.[196] According to Galen, a person's health is tied to the correct balance of the four humors, which also correspond to colors: red blood to sanguine, white phlegm to phlegmatic, black bile to melancholy, and yellow bile to choleric.[197] The elements were also associated with specific qualities. The pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander (ca. 610-ca. 546 BCE) believed that change

[192] Philip Ball, *The Elements: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 104 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.
[193] Ball, 6.
[194] Ball, 2.
[195] Ball, 7.
[196] Ball, 10.
[197] Ball, 11.

between elements, such as that observed when wood burns and turns to ash, or water freezes and turns to ice, came about through the agency of opposing qualities: hot and cold, and dry and moist. This theory was adopted by Aristotle who believed that the four elements each possessed two qualities, either hot or cold and wet or dry.[198] The earth was considered cold and dry, the air hot and wet, fire hot and dry, and water cold and wet. Possibly the most influential proponent of the idea of the Aristotelian qualities during the Renaissance was the physician Galen, for whom an imbalance of these qualities resulted in an individual possessing one of the four temperaments.

Visual representations of the alchemical elements and their associated qualities abound in the paintings. Scylla's drapery is billowing in the breeze above and behind her, signifying her connection to the element of air. Glaucus is half submerged in the dark sea, his hair and beard appear soaked, and his lower half, that of a sea serpent, also serves as a visual link to the element of water. The setting of the Salmacis painting is a wooded grotto, which, while including water, is mostly earth and rocks, thereby representing the element of earth. While one of his feet is in the water, Hermaphroditus is in fact sitting on a rock, linking him to the element of earth. Salmacis' deep-red robe, clustered on the ground by her feet, serves as a visual link to the element of fire, as well as the pigment vermillion, which is the product of mercury and sulphur. Mercury and sulphur were considered by Geber to be two "philosophical elements," and in his system they are added to the four natural elements. According to Geber, sulphur and mercury also possess the opposing qualities of fire and water.[199] This way, all of the six elements of Geber's system are represented in both Spranger's paintings. In the Renaissance, each of the four elements often carried a gender association. Fire and air were often depicted as men; earth and

[198] Martin, *Alchemy and Alchemists*, 23.
[199] Ball, *The Elements*, 16.

water as women. These gender associations can be seen in contemporary works such as the *Four Elements Series* (1575-1618) by the Flemish engraver Adriaen Collaert (ca. 1560-1618) **(Fig. 30 and Fig. 31)** and the *Series of Circular Designs Depicting the Four Elements* (1590-1612) by the engraver Crispijn van de Passe (1589-1637) **(Fig. 32 and Fig. 33)**. Keeping with the Rudolfine penchant for playfulness and wit, in Spranger's paintings these associations have been reversed: Scylla is connected to air, Salmacis to fire, Glaucus to water, and Hermaphroditus to earth. Spranger also includes visual elements representing Galen's theory of humors in the two paintings. Within these associations of humors to figures also lies the characteristically Rudolfine wit, as the humors, like the four elements, were often associated with genders **(Fig. 34)**. The humors were thought to correspond to the four elements with all of their associations, and in Spranger's paintings, these have also been reversed: Scylla wears an archaic smile and appears to be happy, thereby representing the sanguine humor. Glaucus, with his gestures of sincerity and entreaty, is visually analogous to the humor of a phlegmatic. Salmacis exhibits traits of the choleric humor. An important aspect of the choleric humor for the purposes of the myth of Salmacis is the fact that in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, cholerics were regarded as violent. Part of the Salmacis myth as interpreted by medieval and Renaissance mythographers—the same part emphasized by Gossart in his earlier depiction of the scene—entails Salmacis' assuming the role of a male, and using violence to emasculate Hermaphroditus. Hermaphroditus wears an introspective and somewhat sad expression, his face turning away, suggesting his representing the humor of melancholia. Rudolf himself was regarded by his contemporaries as a melancholic and would have very likely identified with the figure of Hermaphroditus.[200] According to Galen's system of temperaments (*krasis*), men in their prime are a hot and dry sex,

[200] Josef Janáček, *Rudolf II. a jeho doba*, Edice Omega (Praha: Dobrovský, 2014), 250.

while women are cold and wet.[201] In the two paintings, those qualities are reversed. The men are both in bodies of water: Glaucus is half submerged in the sea, and Hermaphroditus is pouring water on one foot while his other foot is submerged in the pool. Both bodies of water are painted with cool blues and greens. The women are both on dry land and are either depicted using warm colors or surrounded by objects painted in warm colors.

The ultimate goal of the alchemist's *magnum opus* was the creation of the hermaphrodite, the union of man and woman, into a single bi-sexed being. The first step of the *magnum opus* was separating the *prima materia*. In both paintings Spranger has represented this phase of the alchemical process by juxtaposing contrasting visual elements—the artist's counterpart to the rhetorical device of *antithesis*—but he has also included a subtle form of visual contrast in the form of *contrapposto.* C*ontrapposto* has its origins the classical era as a system of composing the human body to create a counterbalance of tension and ease in a sculpted figure. In this system the parts of the body are arranged asymmetrically, so that they "oppose" each other and create a dynamic balance. With the work of Michelangelo (1475-1564) the classical *contrapposto* pose transformed into the exaggerated *figura serpentinata,* which Spranger incorporates into both paintings. Exemplified in Michelangelo's *Victory* (1532-1534) **(Fig. 35)**, and discussed at length by Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1592) in his *Trattato* of 1584, the *figura serpentinata* is a shape "pyramidal, serpentine, and multiplied by one, two or three."[202] Lomazzo argues that this precept contains the secret of painting, or as he states, "a figure has its highest grace and eloquence when it is seen in movement." Lomazzo likened the composition to a flame, being the most "mobile of all forms" and conical, in which a snake-like figure "S" twists upwards. The conical flame

[201] Susan P. Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
[202] John Shearman, *Mannerism*, Reprint edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 81.

containing a figure "S," Lomazzo argues, should not only apply to the entire figure, but also to its individual parts. All forms which have this form will be, according to Lomazzo, "very beautiful."[203] Within Spranger's paintings, every figure exhibits *contrapposto*. In *Scylla and Glaucus*, Scylla is posed in a *contrapposto* pose, which according to Enenkel bests the contrapposto of Giambologna. Glaucus's tail is in a swooping serpentine, which echoes Scylla's *contrapposto* pose. In *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, Salmacis is also in a pose of exaggerated contortion, and while Hermaphroditus is seated, his figure also exhibits exaggerated *contrapposto*. While Konečný has argued for the possibility that the figure of Hermaphroditus was inspired by the Capitoline *Spinario*, with his leaning backwards, one shoulder higher than the other, the seated Hermaphroditus appears to be more in Hellenistic tradition of the seated nymph **(Fig. 36)**.

When the two paintings are placed next to each other, the interplay of opposites, the iconographic and narrative counterpart to the divided and clarified elements to be united by the alchemist, also becomes apparent. In one painting an older man pursues a younger woman. In the other a young man is pursued by an older woman. In one, the setting is a dark and stormy seascape. In the other the setting is a verdant grotto with a pristine body of water. In one, the two bodies present front and back respectively; in the other, both present their front. In one painting drapery defies gravity and flutters in every direction; in the other, drapery falls into crumpled piles at the woman's feet. In one, the woman reveals her face, appearing to present it intentionally to the viewer; in the other, the woman faces away from the viewer, lifting a part of her robe, further hiding her face from view. In one, the woman's hair is neatly styled in a tight serpentine bun; in the other the wind sends the woman's hair flying in every direction. Opposites

[203] Shearman, 82.

abound within the individual paintings as well as between them. The elements of old and young, male and female, rock and sea, light and dark are all present within the *Scylla and Glaucus* painting. The two figures in the painting serve as contrast to each other in age, appearance, association with elements and humors, and Aristotelian qualities. The male is old and the woman is young. The male is half sea-serpent, while the woman is a human. He wears an expression of consternation; she a smile. The male is submerged up to his waist in a dark sea, which serves as a contrast to the rocky outcrop on which the female stands. She appears to be held aloft by the wind that ruffles her robes and hair. He appears to be weighed down, drenched and heavy beneath her. The same interplay of opposites takes place in the *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* painting. The painting features a woman and a boy, the elements of water and earth, and the qualities of hot and cold.

To create a visual representation of the union of opposites, Spranger has created paintings that when viewed together, while consisting of various opposing elements, form a whole with unmistakable unity. First, the paintings are identical size. Each painting has one large figure in the foreground, which has been painted to the right side of one painting and the left side of the other. This way, if placed near each other, the paintings display a sort of bilateral symmetry. In both paintings the male is in contact with a body of water, while the women are both on dry land. In both paintings, the women are painted larger than the men and stand above them. The bodies of both women are posed in a *figura serpentinata*. Both women have one leg bent and the other straight, their bodies contorted in the characteristic “S” shape. In both paintings, Spranger employs a degree of chiaroscuro, painting a dark background contrasted against the lighter values of bodies. Further linking the two paintings is the fact that one figure in each painting turns away from the viewer, and the other towards him, thus the figures are relating to each other

in a complex motif of movement, a sort of *figura serpentinata* ballet. Within the paintings there are also elements of visual unity. In the *Scylla and Glaucus* painting the swooping shape of Glaucus's tail mirrors the *figura serpentinata* of Scylla's body.

While the connection of at least one of Spranger's paintings to alchemy based on some of its iconographic elements has been made in the past, it is their alchemical interpretation as a pendant pair that serves as this study's point of departure from previous scholarship. It is the assertion of this study that, read as a pendant pair, in the context of the goals of the alchemist's work, Spranger's paintings depict two attempts at the *magnum opus*—one successful and one unsuccessful. In *Scylla and Glaucus,* the alchemist is unsuccessful in reaching the desired goal of creating the divine hermaphrodite; in *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, the outcome is a success. It is entirely possible that the former was meant as a sort of cautionary tale, while the latter represents the perfect execution of the *magnum opus*. The distinguishing element, the factor which makes one a success and the other a failure, is the means by which the representation of the alchemist in each painting attempts to unite the opposites of male and female. In the *Scylla and Glaucus* painting, the lovesick Glaucus turns to the witch Circe for help. Rudolf would have undoubtedly seen himself in the role of Glaucus, and his focus would have been Glaucus's failure to successfully complete the *magnum opus*. Circe has an established reputation as a corrupter of men. In the *Odyssey*, as commented on by Renaissance mythographers, she represents a man's ruin, the "disgusting horror of evil origins, mother of abomination . . . [who] makes the poison, the drink which intoxicate the princes of this world."[204] The primary reason for the failure of Glaucus' attempt at producing the alchemical *rebis* is that Glaucus, unlike his counterpart Salmacis in *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, did not beseech the gods, but turned to

[204] Hawes, "Circean Enchantment and the Transformations of Allegory," 154.

witchcraft. Witchcraft, as discussed earlier, was rejected by alchemists and hermeticists alike as a path most "infamous and unhappie, because it hath to do with foul spirits, and consists of inchantments and wicked curiosity."[205] The *magnum opus* could only be a success if the adept was working in accord with divine will. This is precisely what Salmacis does. She asks the gods to help her become one with Hermaphroditus. Her wish is granted. In her beseeching the gods, she underscores that the outcome of an alchemical work depends on the alchemist's submission to the will of God.

F. The Artist/Alchemist

Going still further than previous scholarship, this study posits that Spranger's paintings are not merely visual representations of alchemical processes; they are themselves works of alchemy. In their creation, Spranger the artist becomes Spranger the alchemist. The role of the artist as creator, as an agent of transformation of raw, unprocessed minerals and liquids into objects of art, is analogous to that of the alchemist who transmutes base metals into precious ones and a corrupt soul into one that is perfected. Like the alchemist, the artist begins with unrefined and undifferentiated elements which, through a series of mechanical processes, turn into discrete elements constituting vehicles and pigments. The foundation of pigments is mineral or vegetable matter which has to be distilled, baked or boiled, and then pulverized. The artist has to transform the "shapeless, formless masses of oils, waiting to be distilled and separated into grades, or the endless rocks in the earth, waiting to be exhumed, purified and ground into pigments."[206] To underscore this similarity between the artist's craft and alchemy, painters' manuals sometimes used the language of alchemy, writing of the use of distinctly alchemical

[205] Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, 40.
[206] James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 48.

ingredients in their recipes, such as mercury and *sal ammoniac*. The creation of certain colors calls specifically for the combining of mercury and sulfur, the two principal substances of alchemy. To create the color vermilion, according to some craftsman, mercury and melted sulfur is to be combined to make a black substance called *ethiops mineral*, or "the Moor." Upon being placed in an oven and heated, this substance condenses into a bright red vapor which is subsequently ground into vermilion.[207] The process of creating pigment and vehicle from minerals and oils is the first stage of the alchemical artistic process. The same way that the cleansed and separated *prima materia* has to be reunited, the discrete elements of pigments and vehicles now have to be reunited to create a work of art. The artist has to turn the purified matter into something that is alive and "full of thought and expressive meaning."[208] Drawing on the correspondences between Christianity and alchemy, the artist is in this way thought to be like God, taking the chaos of undifferentiated material and creating a singular perfection.[209] This singular perfection, being the result of the alchemist's uniting of what was previously separated but before that a unity, is analogous to the alchemical concept of uniting woman and man, brother and sister, into the perfectly balanced hermaphrodite. The incestuous nature of this marriage of materials is found in the self-referential nature of Spranger's work. In places where brushwork is not carefully blended, but applied in what would be later termed "rough-style brush work," wherever, in short, "paint refers to itself," Spranger allows Rudolf to see that the hermaphrodite philosopher's stone is a child of incest.[210] In the words of James Elkins, "whenever a brush marks stands out reminding the viewer of the paint, or where the canvas

[207] Elkins, 19.
[208] Elkins, 45.
[209] Elkins, 46.
[210] Elkins, 156.

shows through, recalling the unavoidable picture plane," this is the alchemical hermaphrodite.[211] Like God, who imposed order on the primordial chaos, the world "without form," the artist takes the formless mineral, heats and distills it, suspends it in oil, and through skill and learning assembles a new unity, a world improved.[212] But the artist/alchemist's *magnum opus* begins before a single dab of pigment suspended in oil is dragged across the surface of a stretched canvas carried on the tip of a hog hair brush. The artist's *magnum opus* begins in the artist's imagination. Same as God imagined the world into being, the alchemist imagines the world that he will create on the canvas. Thus, Spranger has not only depicted an alchemical hermaphrodite in his painting, but the very process by which this depiction occurred is alchemical in nature. It is possible that with this role of artist as alchemist in mind, Rudolf granted Majesty to his artists on April 27, 1595, freeing them from the obligations of the guilds, and elevating them from "mere practitioners of handicraft" to "self-aware and self-assured courtiers."[213] For Rudolf, aware of the alchemical nature of their work, his artists, chief among them Bartholomeus Spranger, were both scholars and alchemists.

G. The Viewer/Alchemist

Spranger was not alone in assuming the role of alchemist in regards to his paintings. Rudolf too, possessing the erudite eye and employing the faculty of imagination, was active in creating the philosopher's stone in Spranger's paintings. In the eyes of Renaissance alchemists, viewing a work of art constituted a reciprocal interaction. In this, the alchemist found a correspondence with Ficino's theories of vision and doctrines of love. The act of viewing a work

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[211] Elkins, 156.
[212] Elkins, 170.
[213] Lubomír Konečný, "Picturing the Artist in Rudolfine Prague," in *Prague in the Reign of Rudolph II: Mannerist Art and Architecture in the Imperial Capital, 1583-1612* (Praha: Karolinum Press, Charles University, 1997), 107–21.107.

of art was analogous to viewing a beautiful youth as described by Ficino in *De amore*. According to Ficino, the eyes serve as transparent windows of the soul through which love for a beautiful object travels into the body, piercing the soul, kindling the appetite for beauty, carrying the appetites from the body of the object being viewed to the beholder's soul, to the angels, and finally to God.[214] The ultimate in beauty, that which pleases the soul, must be incorporeal, ideal, a "conceptual representation not based in sense perception."[215] The image of beauty affects the eyes, and provokes contemplation of the ideal of beauty which the youth represents. This contemplation activates memory, which is crucial, because through memory, through accessing images of the eternal and cosmic truth using the mind's eye, the divine is reached. Just as the human body can become pregnant, writes Ficino, so the soul too can procreate.[216] Both the physical body and the soul share their being stimulated to childbearing through the incitement of love. Ficino posits that there are two types of people, ones better fitted to bear children of the soul due to either being naturally disposed or educated, and the other who are unfit. The fit "parents" follow what Ficino calls heavenly love, while those that are unfit follow vulgar love. The distinction between the two is subtle, and hinges entirely on intention. Rudolf, being fully aware of the importance of moral virtue in pursuing alchemy, would undoubtedly have been aware that viewing the paintings should carry no intention other than the contemplation of beauty, first corporeal, then ideal, with the goal of bringing his soul closer to the divine.

Ficino was not the first person to emphasize the importance of imagination and memory when discussing the power of images. According to St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), three kinds of seeing are involved in the exercise of prayer: the bodily, the spiritual, and the

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[214] Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination*, 65.
[215] John Shannon Hendrix, "Perception as a Function of Desire in the Renaissance," in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. Charles H. Carman and John Shannon Hendrix (New York: Routledge, 2016), 89.
[216] Hendrix, 89.

intellectual.[217] The pious contemplation of an image should lead from a physical act of seeing to a devotional form of "inner seeing." This inward-seeing culminates in the viewer's direct grasping of the divine through the intellect. During the Renaissance, there were three ways of perceiving the visible world, all sharing the concept of ocular rays. The theories differed in the direction these rays traveled. These three ways were: *intromission*, *extramission* and a combination of the two.[218] According to the *intromission* theory, founded on the authority of Aristotle and the thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher Averroes (1126-1198), seeing was a "painful reception of tiny images sent out by the objects of vision . . . an intrusion of things upon the eye and mind."[219] Plato and Galen, on the other hand, argued for the system of *extramission*, whereby the eye sends out rays towards the object being viewed. These rays struck the object being viewed and set up a reaction, and this reaction, in the form of a vibration or reflection, sent the ocular rays back to the viewer's eyes in the form of an *imago*.[220] The latter theory gave the viewer an active role. In his *Theologia platonica* (1482), Ficino postulates that these ocular rays are made of invisible spirits. As these ocular spirits stem directly from the viewer's mind, looking at someone may "infect" the person being viewed with the viewer's own passions.[221] Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) borrowed from Ficino, when he explained the act of seeing as an invisible "legation." In his *De occulta philosophia* (1531), Agrippa argues that all sensible things emit spirits according to their qualities, and they are likewise affected by spirits emanating

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[217] Andrew Morrall, "Defining the Beautiful in Early Renaissance Germany," in *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 83.
[218] Mary Quinlan McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, 2016, 80.
[219] McGrath, 80.
[220] McGrath, 80.
[221] Thijs Weststeijn, "Seeing and the Transfer of Spirits in Early Modern Art Theory," in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, ed. Charles H. Carman and John Shannon Hendrix (New York: Routledge, 2016), 149.

from things around them.[222] Agrippa describes various things, such as plants, potions, weapons, and sorcerers, which can affect a man without directly touching him, "binding" him with invisible "threads," which transfer their qualities. As examples of this form of binding he provides the "infection of wantonness" one develops after looking into a prostitute's mirror. According to Agrippa, a man's eyes are the weakest part of his body because they are the most spiritual. As the spirit leaves the body through the eyes, so spirits from outside find an easy entrance through his most "transparent" organ. Agrippa calls this process *fascinatio*. He calls the rays of vision the "vehicles of the spirit" describing *fascinatio* as a tool for the *magus*, which can be manipulated for good as well as bad. Agrippa states that powerful legations may be made by "charms, strong imaginations and images."[223] Agrippa was a proponent of sympathetic interaction between objects and humans, implying that "all successful works of art affect the viewer from a distance."[224] Agrippa was not the first to posit this theory, as many ancient authors attributed this power to statues. Greek authors wrote of magical statues that could harm humans. In the Renaissance, Cartari retells a story originally told by the Greek geographer Pausanias (110-180) of a statue that committed murder. [225] A man, whose name is unknown, is honored with a statue. Following the man's death, a man envious of his fame whips the statue so vigorously, that, as Cartari writes, "you'd think he was actually whipping the living man." As the man is whipping the statue, it falls on him and kills him. The dead man's children take the statue to court, make a convincing argument for its guilt, and the statue is ordered tossed into the sea. Shortly after, however, the entire country is stricken with a plague of infertility. Following a consultation with an oracle, it is decided to retrieve the statue from the sea with the help of

[222] Weststeijn, 151.
[223] Weststeijn, 152.
[224] Weststeijn, 151.
[225] Cartari, *Vincenzo Cartari's Images of the Gods of the Ancients*, 133.

fisherman, reinstate it and worship it as a beneficent deity. Works of art could also exert a positive power over their viewer. The Bible writes of the "brazen serpent" that, when held up by Moses had a "healing effect on the Israelites.[226] Saint Augustine cites the first century Greek physician and medical writer Soranus who tells a story about the tyrant Dionysius who,

> because he was deformed, did not wish to have children like himself. In sleeping with his wife he used to place a beautiful picture before her, so that by desiring its beauty and in some manner taking it in, she might effectively transmit it to the offspring she conceived.[227]

Stories of murderous statues, brazen serpents, and Augustine's retelling of Soranus' anecdote all underscore the power images were thought to possess throughout history.

The notion of *intromission* was associated with love and can be found in popular books of the time such as Ficino's *De amore* and Baldassare Castiglione's (1478-1529) *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528). Like the work of Agrippa, these books argue for the eyes being the entrance of spiritual rays into the body from the outside world. When these rays mingle with the lover's blood, writes Castiglione, they make him or her receptive to the beloved's image.[228] These rays enter through the eyes and mingle with the spirits that are "dwelling" within the beholder. The impression of the beloved is then made on the heart. In a section titled "The Origin of Love" from his emblem book *Iconologia* (1593, 1603), the Italian iconographer Cesare Ripa (1560-1622) discusses the ancient poet Musaeus who argued for vision as the foundation of love.[229] Ripa's idea, supported by Ficino, gave rise to the notion that a beloved's gaze possesses a powerful and "consummating fire." It is this fire that Michelangelo, ever the Neoplatonist, refers to when he writes in one of his sonnets that from his beloved's eyes "there issues and flies / a ray

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[226] Weststeijn, "Seeing and the Transfer of Spirits in Early Modern Art Theory," 152.
[227] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3.
[228] Weststeijn, "Seeing and the Transfer of Spirits in Early Modern Art Theory," 153.
[229] Weststeijn, 154.

that burns with a light so bright . . . it pierces [his] heart."[230] Regarded this way, the act of seeing was a source of power. In the Renaissance there was a popular idea that taking someone's sight was to rob them of their power. In the eighth book of his *Naturalis historiae* (77), Pliny writes that a lion can be caught by throwing an object over its head, because "all his power is concentrated in his eyes."[231] The *Anthologia graeca,* an anonymous collection of poems collected over the span of four centuries, tells of an Eros sculpted by Praxiteles (ca. 300) whose "eyes lance charms, not with his arrows, but only with his gaze."[232] According to Pausanias, a certain statue of Aphrodite had to be blindfolded to prevent her having too great a power over her viewers.[233] There was even an element of this theory of the power of the gaze applied to the *paragone* debate. Castiglione in his *Il libro del cortegiano* argues that painting's ability to represent the "gracious sight of black and blue eyes, with the splendor of those amorous rays" makes painting the clear winner in the *paragone* debate.[234]

In Ficino's *De amore*, Giovanni Calvalcanti (1444-1509) explains the speech of Phaedrus from Plato's *Symposium*. In his explanation, Calvalcanti, echoing the thoughts of the Hellenistic Neoplatonist Plotinus (204/5-270 CE), states that the world prior to the creation of forms was chaos, formless and dark, and only turned to order through the "creation of the substance of the mind, the archetypal idea, which is its essence."[235] This essence, which is itself formless, is charged with a desire to turn towards God, as God is its ultimate source. It is this part of the mind that brings the "sensible" world into existence, as without it, sensible objects, according to Calvalcanti, have no connection to each other, or with that which is perceiving them. Without the

[230] Weststeijn, 155.
[231] Weststeijn, 155.
[232] Weststeijn, 155.
[233] Weststeijn, 156.
[234] Weststeijn, 156.
[235] Weststeijn, 90.

"ordering process of reason" the sensible world would not exist.[236] Turning towards God, Calvalcanti states, the intellect is illuminated by God's rays, and in this way itself receives form. The first turning of this essence towards God, away from chaos, is the birth of love. Love attracts the mind towards the beautiful, and simultaneously allows the mind to become beautiful. As the world only becomes sensible when it has received its forms from the mind, that is when it has been perceived, it follows that without love, the world would remain formless matter. A work of art is considered beautiful when it kindles desire for beauty in its ideal. This desire for ideal beauty is the mind's desire for God. This desire can never be satiated as it is a desire for the infinite, thus the viewer always feels the desire to return to the work of art to view it again and again. The act of repeated viewing of a beautiful work of art represents the desire of the viewer's intellect for the beautiful in the divine which is also the universal good.

Imagination as a means of creation is an equally powerful tool of the alchemist. The material alchemist creates form from chaos, gold where lead once was, and while he does this materially in the crucible and the alembic, the process begins intangibly in his imagination. In order to actualize that which is only potential, the alchemist employs his imagination. In alchemical treatises, the alchemist is repeatedly asked to engage in contemplation. The importance of contemplation and imagination is revealed in the full title of Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens*:

> Atalanta Fleeing: that is, new chymical emblems of the secrets of nature- fitted partly to eyes and intellect, with figures engraved in copper and additional maxims epigrams and notes, and partly to the ears and the recreation of the soul with some fifty musical fugues in three parts, of which two are to correspond to one simple melody suitable for singing in couplets; the whole to be seen, read, meditated understood, judged, sung and heard with extraordinary pleasure.[237]

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[236] Weststeijn, 90.
[237] Karen-Claire Voss, "Imagination in Mysticism and Esotericism: Marsillio Ficino, Ignatius de Loyola and Alchemy," 17

Imagination and memory are closely linked for the esoteric thinkers of the Renaissance. The Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo (1480-1544) devised a memory theater which was to allow its user to visualize elements from the simplest to the most complex in a hierarchy which spanned from the earthly to the divine.[238] This theater consists of seven grades divided by seven gangways representing the seven planets. These seven planets correspond to the seven pillars of Solomon's house of wisdom. Solomon's seven pillars then correspond to the seven measures of the fabric of the world, "in which are contained the ideas of all things both in the celestial and in the inferior worlds."[239] Camillo's theater represents the order of eternal truth, allowing the spectator/visualizer to "remember" through a process of association all of the underlying order of the eternal cosmos including first causes and all the stages of creation.[240] Giordano Bruno also argues for the importance of imagination. According to Bruno in his *Torch of the Thirty Statues* (1591), the imagination is necessary to "grasp the universe through images."[241] While Bruno's system could be used to aid in memorizing, much like early memory systems devised by Greek rhetoricians, it can also be used to help structure the universe by its personifying of concepts that are too abstract, too difficult to conceptualize. Bruno argues that perceiving forms in the world referred to as *sensibilia* helps man direct spiritual intentions towards things that are only intelligible, *intelligibilia*. To this effect, his system advocates the imagining of a series of statues of Greco-Roman deities corresponding to universal concepts.[242] For Bruno, through this process of creation by imagination, the poet, the philosopher, and the artist are all one.

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[238] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 141.
[239] Yates, 137.
[240] Yates, 138.
[241] Yates, 289.
[242] Yates, 291.

The power of an image to affect the viewer and vice versa according to Renaissance vision theory is thus established. When Rudolf sat in his *Kunstkammer* and looked upon Spranger's paintings, he was not merely observing inert objects; he was participating in a reciprocal exchange of ocular spiritual rays and turning dark chaos into sensible forms through his turning towards and participating in God's love. Rudolf was engaging in meditation on the two paintings in order to actualize their potential as well as his. From his eyes, invisible rays traveled towards the paintings. At the same time, rays traveled from the object back towards his eyes, and moved towards his mind through his bloodstream. His mind, through the power of imagination, made sensible the forms before him and imprinted an image of their ideal forms on his soul. Rudolf's viewing of the visual symbols of alchemical transformation painted by Spranger was initiated by an earthly love towards corporeal forms. These forms entered his mind through his eyes, triggered memories of ideal beauty, and ended with Rudolf's intellect partaking in God's love of which it had originally been a part. This active back and forth involving ocular rays, the contemplation of imagined and remembered forms, and the desire of all things on earth to return to the source of love turned Rudolf into a *magu*s who both transformed the works of Spranger and was transformed by them, same as an alchemist experimenting with metals in the laboratory sought both to transform and be transformed. Through contemplation, Rudolf the spiritual alchemist transformed Spranger's paintings into a *magnum opus*, and the works thus transformed, in turn transformed Rudolf. Like the philosopher's stone, Spranger's art effected a transmutation of Rudolf's baser nature into one which had been ennobled by love, into one united with the divine.

Conclusion

In January of 1612, the last months of his life, Rudolf suffered from advanced stages of syphilis. He was dutifully attended to by a bevy of learned physicians prescribing all manner of treatments for his condition. To alleviate the pain from the swelling in his legs, Rudolf was regularly pricked and bled. To counter his constant thirst, he was made to drink water in which various minerals had been dissolved. To soothe the pain and fight the infection which had come about as a result of the open sores on his genitals, court physicians advocated the application of salves made from dried roots and crushed bezoars **(Fig. 37)**. Most of these treatments had their origins in the humoral theory prevalent in medicine since the time of Hippocrates (460-370 BCE). Some drew on the more recent theories posited by Paracelsus that "like should treat like." From a contemporary perspective, they all appear blatantly ineffective. But Rudolf was an emperor, and as such, had access to the best medical treatment available in his time. The assumption, then, must be that his physicians were recommending what they believed to be the best treatment available. It is most telling therefore, that in his last days Rudolf rejected the various treatments promoted by his physicians, treatments with an established Aristotelean and Galenic pedigree, requesting instead to be treated with "magical oils and other alchemical preparations, which were once given to him by the famous Scottish alchemist Alexander Seton."[243] But, in his turning to alchemy for relief, Rudolf was in no way unusual. In fact, without a doubt, his royal physicians read alchemical treatises and pondered on the shared aspects of their disciplines. The fact is that during the Renaissance, disciplines as we know them today, as discrete and separate, hardly existed. Michael Maier was himself a physician, as was Paracelsus. Yet both argued for the primacy of alchemy in the universe. The boundaries between

[243] Václav Bužek and Pavel Marek, *Smrt Rudolfa II*, Vyd. 1, Knižnice dějin a současnosti 55 (Praha: Nakl. Lidové Noviny, 2015), 14.

science and magic were blurry. When Rudolf was administered liquids by his physicians to help him sweat, he was very likely given these in goblets made of rhinoceros horns and Seychelles nuts **(Fig. 38)**. Rhinoceros horns and Seychelles nuts were both thought in Rudolf's time to serve as antidotes to poisons. In addition to providing relief from melancholy, the bezoar was thought to possess the same qualities. The bezoar in fact had a history on the European continent spanning back to the twelfth century when physicians promoted it as an antidote against "poisonous animals and plants . . . [if] the powder [is] in a dose of twelve grains taken." [244] But the bezoar's effectiveness was perhaps most persuasively attested to when Ficino wrote in his *De vita libri tres* (1489) that the bezoar was given its power against poison by none other than Jupiter.[245] According to Ficino, if taken internally or placed in contact with skin, the bezoar introduced a "celestial force into the spirits by which the spirits preserve themselves from plague and poison."[246] Rudolf was thus far from behaving strangely in requesting a secret alchemical potion. What Ficino's testimony of the effectiveness of a bezoar speaks to is the Renaissance desire to seek correspondences as validation. In claiming that it had been given its power by Jupiter, Ficino gave a calcified concretion found in the stomachs of cows the ultimate in Renaissance approvals. This approval did not come from the authority of Jupiter alone; rather, it came from the fact that suddenly a correspondence had been established between Jupiter, medicine, and, in Ficino's invoking a celestial force, Neoplatonism and Christianity. In this convergence of authorities past and present, quasi-scientific and mystical, the bezoar became the perfect alchemical object.

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[244] Marnie P Stark, "Mounted Bezoar Stones, Seychelles Nuts, and Rhinoceros Horns: Decorative Objects as Antidotes in Early Modern Europe," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 11, no. 1 (2003): 71.
[245] Stark, 72.
[246] Stark, 72.

Like the bezoar, Spranger's *Scylla and Glaucus* and *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* take on meaning in their embodying of correspondences. Far from representing the nude figure as mere titillation, the paintings cross philosophical, literary and practical boundaries. They allegorize the process of the evolution of the soul as seen in the works of Renaissance alchemists, Neoplatonists, Hermeticists, Kabbalists and mystical Christians. They make clear the difference between the use of natural and demonic magic in the pursuit of this goal and spell out their respective consequences. But they are not simply inert images narrating scenes within a larger allegory in an alchemical context. Combining his talent and learning, Spranger created a visual representation of alchemical allegory. But the very act of the paintings' creation was also a work of alchemy, same as those performed by alchemists in Rudolf's royal laboratory at Prague Castle. In transmuting raw materials into pigments, binders, and vehicles, and these into a representation of figures, figures that tell a story and are capable of effecting a real and profound change in the mind of the viewer, the artist and the alchemist become one. Spranger took the prime substance, clarified it, dissolved it, reassembled it, and used it to create an object that was capable of effecting a spiritual change in the viewer the same way the philosopher's stone transforms whatever it comes in contact with.

But Spranger was not the only alchemist engaged in the *magnum opus*. The beholder, if sufficiently ennobled, well-intentioned, and erudite like Rudolf, becomes an alchemist whose *magnum opus*, by virtue of his viewing and contemplating the pictures before him, is carried out in his soul. Cognizant of the power, and versed in the means of alchemy, Rudolf animated the picture, imbued it with the power of transmutation, and through his gaze and contemplation achieved an alchemical marriage that yielded the *rebis* in his soul. In the paintings, a correspondence is created between the source material as written down by alchemists from the

time of Hermes Trismegistus to Rudolf's day, the material version of this written source as executed by Spranger, the method of execution itself, and finally, the active means by which it is viewed and contemplated by an informed viewer like Rudolf. These elements converge within the work, instilling it with immense transmutative power. For Rudolf, Spranger's paintings were thus not merely visual representations of alchemy; they were at once the *magnum opus* and the philosopher's stone; they were alchemy.

Figures

Fig. 1. *Glaucus and Scylla,* Bartholomeus Spranger, ca. 1581-82, Oil on canvas, 110 x 81 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 2. *Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis,* Bartholomeus Spranger, ca. 1581-82, Oil on canvas, 110 x 81 cm, Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 3. *Amulet in the Form of a Choschen*, ca. 1600, Onyx, gold, enamel, emerald, amethyst, ruby, sapphire, corundum, onyx, agate, hessonite, almandine, turquoise, carnelian, H. 6.8 cm, W. 5.8 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

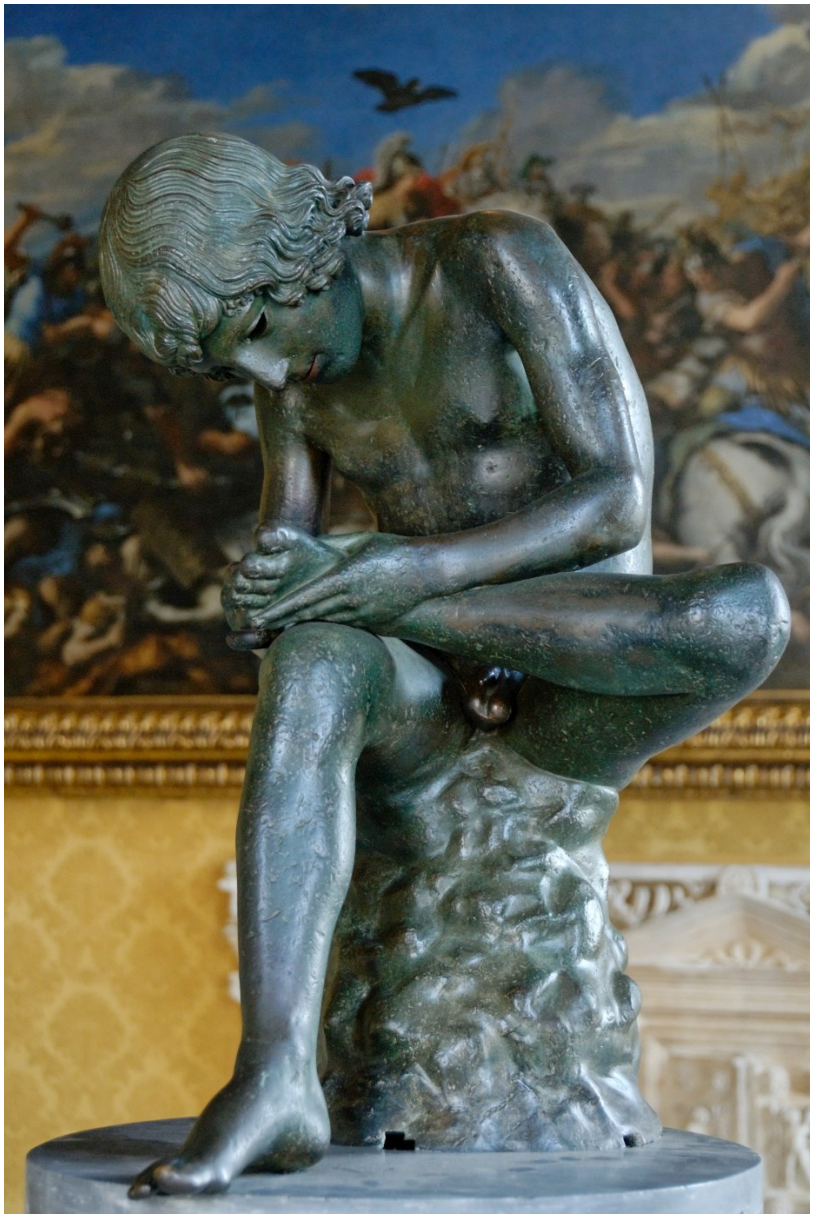


Fig. 4. *Spinario (Thorn Puller),* 1st century BCE, Bronze, H 73 cm, Capitoline Museum, Rome.

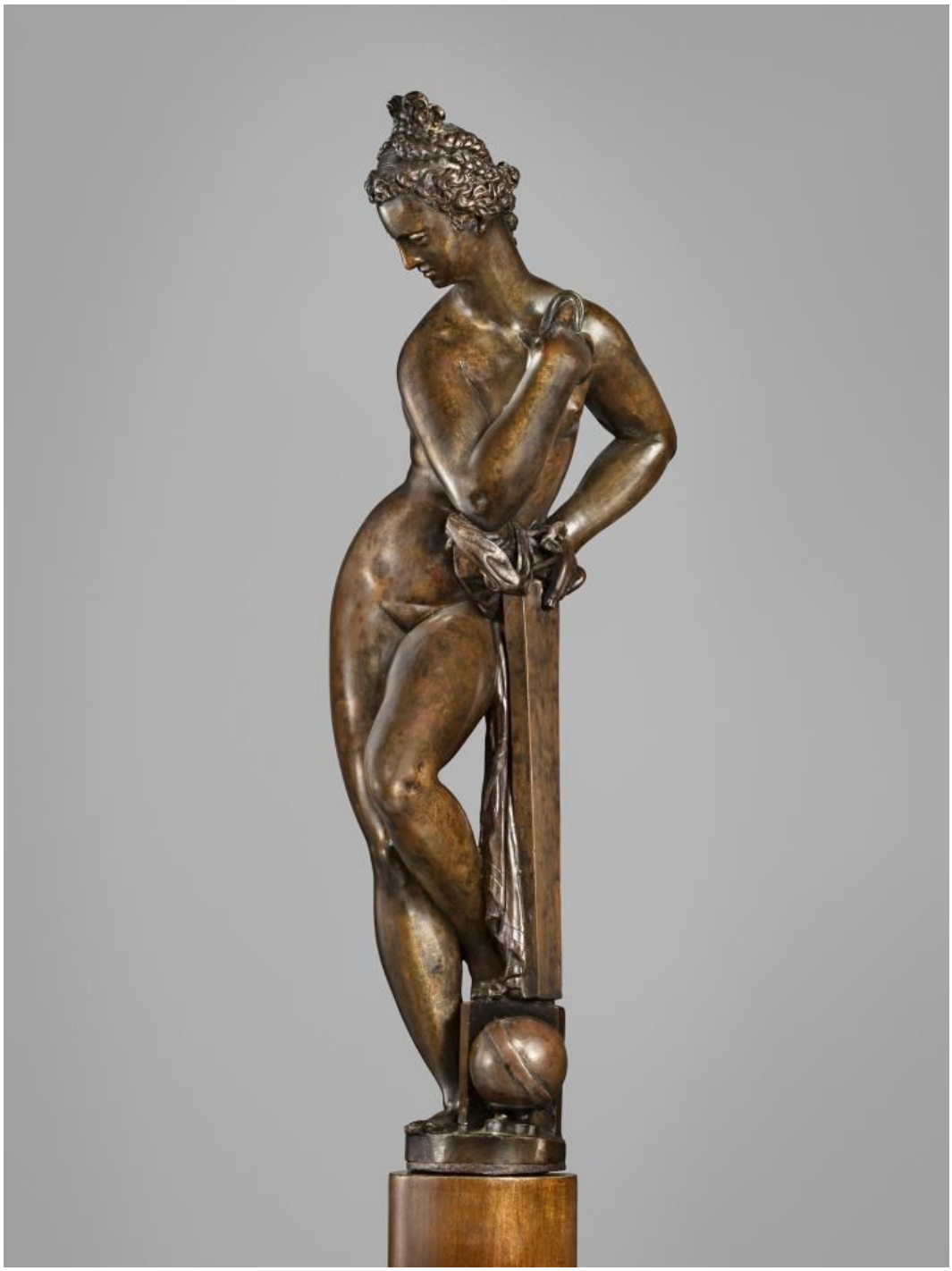
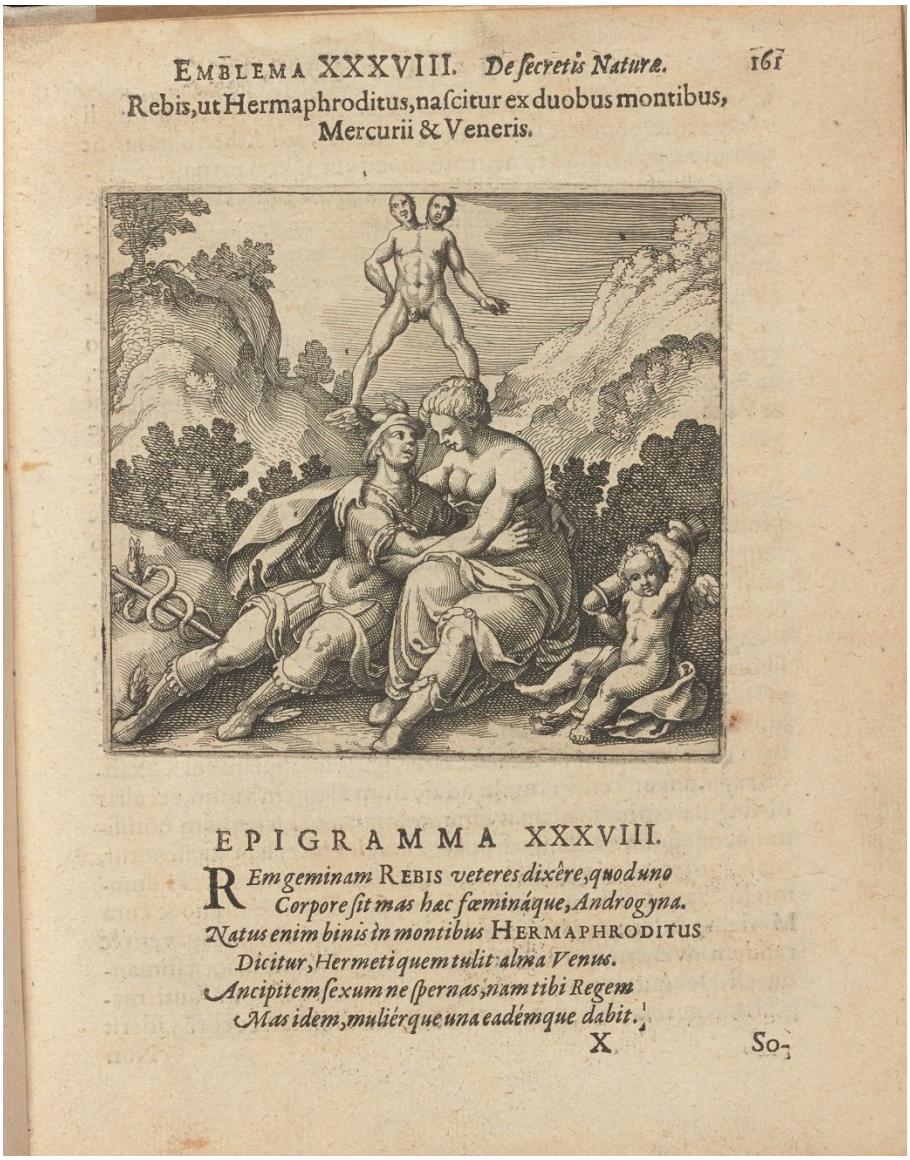


Fig. 5. *Astronomy*, Giambologna, Cast early 1570s, Bronze, H 38.8 cm, Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 6. *Venus after the Bath*, Giambologna, ca. 1585, Bronze, H 31.5 cm, Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 7. Untitled (*Glaucus and Scylla after the Tivoli Villa*), Francesco Bartolozzi, Stipple engraving, 357 x 265 mm, Georgetown University Art Collection, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, DC.



EMBLEMA XXXVIII. *De secretis Naturæ.* 161

Rebis, ut Hermaphroditus, nascitur ex duobus montibus, Mercurii & Veneris.

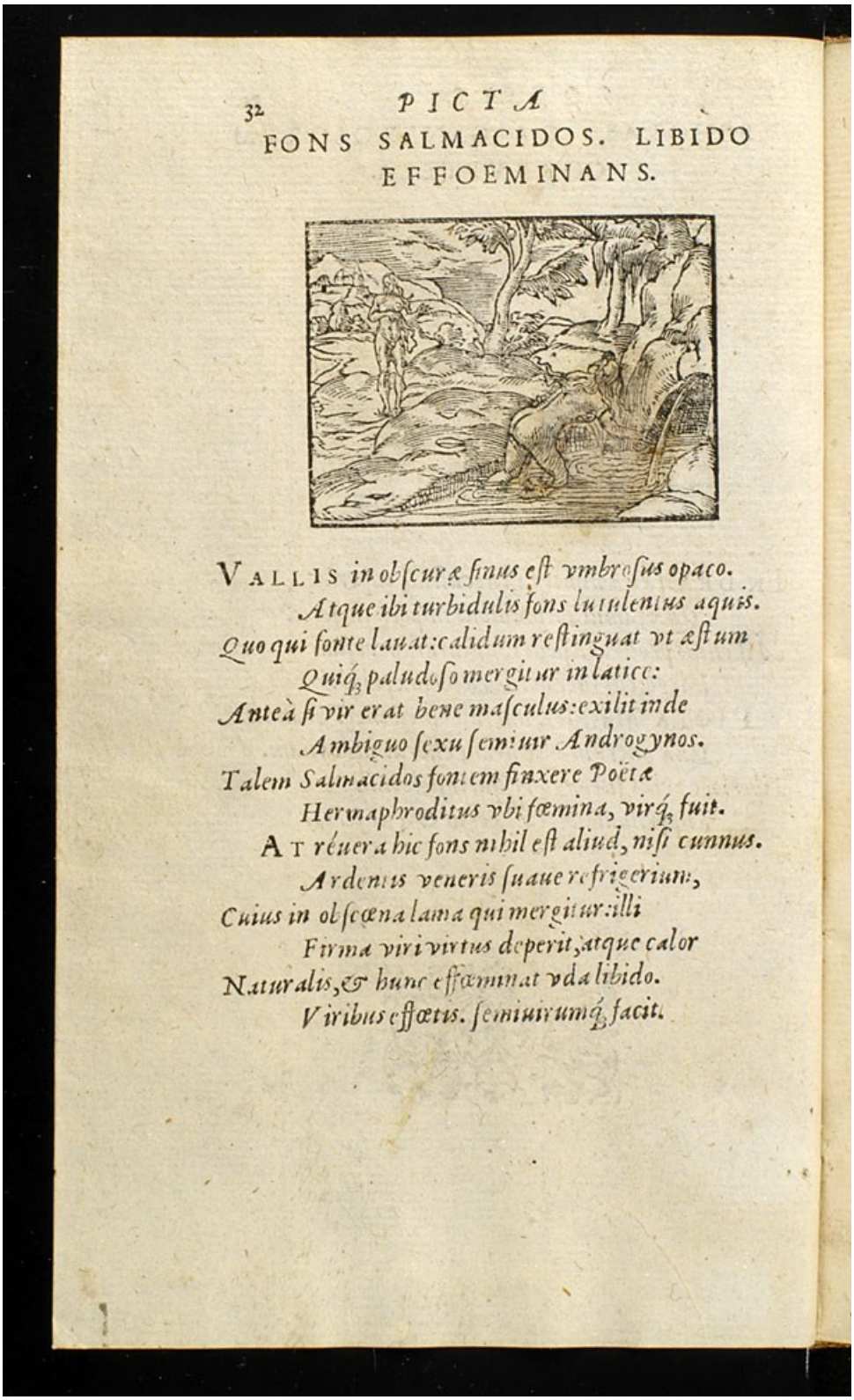
EPIGRAMMA XXXVIII.

REm geminam REBIS *veteres dixêre, quod uno*
Corpore sit mas hæc fœminâque, Androgyna.
Natus enim binis in montibus HERMAPHRODITUS
Dicitur, Hermeti quem tulit alma Venus.
Ancipitem sexum ne spernas, nam tibi Regem
Mas idem, mulierque una eademque dabit.

X So-

Fig. 8. *Emblem 38* from Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, Michael Maier (Author and Designer), Matthaus Merian the Elder (Engraver), Johann Theodore de Bry (Printer and Publisher), Copper Engraving, Page size 20 x15 cm, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

Fig. 9. *Aphrodite of Knidos (Ludovisi Aphrodite)*, Copy after Praxiteles, ca. 350-330 BCE, Marble, H 205 cm, Museo Vaticano, Vatican.



32 PICTA

FONS SALMACIDOS. LIBIDO EFFOEMINANS.

VALLIS in obſcuræ ſinus eſt vmbroſus opaco.
Atque ibi turbidulis fons lutulentus aquis.
Quo qui fonte lauat: calidum reſtinguat vt æſtum
Quiq; paludoſo mergitur in latice:
Anteà ſi vir erat bene maſculus: exilit inde
Ambiguo ſexu ſemiuir Androgynos.
Talem Salmacidos fontem finxere Poëtæ
Hermaphroditus vbi fœmina, virq; fuit.
AT réuera hic fons nihil eſt aliud, niſi cunnus.
Ardentis veneris ſuaue refrigerium:
Cuius in obſcœna lama qui mergitur illi
Firma viri virtus deperit, atque calor
Naturalis, & hunc effœminat vda libido.
Viribus effœtis. ſemiuirumq; facit.

Fig. 10. *Fons Salmacidos. Libidoe Efeminans*, Barthelemy Aneau, From *Picta poesis*, 1552, H 160 mm, University of Glasgow Library, Glasgow.

Fig. 11. *Scylla Relief*, ca. 450 BCE, Terracotta, H 12.5 cm, The British Museum, London.

Fig. 12. *Scylla*, part of Roman table support, 120–140, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

Fig. 13. *Scylla and Sirens*, Artist unknown, ca.1475, Tempera, gold leaf, and gold paint on parchment leaf: 43.8 × 30.5 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Fig. 14. *Hermaphroditus Anasyromenos*, Statuette from a Roman art market, 2nd Century BCE.

Fig. 15. *Borghese/Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, 2nd century CE, Marble, L 169 cm, Museo Nazionale, Rome.

Fig. 16. *Dresden Type Satyr-Hermaphrodite Group* from the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis, Before 79, Marble copy of Hellenistic original, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Dresden.

Fig. 17. *Berlin-Torlonia Type Group*, 2nd century CE, Marble copy of Hellenistic original, Antikensammlung, Berlin.

Fig. 18. *Venus and Mars Warned by Mercury*, Bartholomeus Spranger, ca. 1585, Oil on canvas, 108 x 80 cm, Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 19. *The Metamorphosis of Hermaprodite and Salmacis*, Jan Gossart, ca. 1516, Oil on panel, 32.8 x 21.5 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

Fig. 20. *The Angry Wife*, Israhel van Meckenem, ca. 1495/1503, Engraving, Sheet: 16.7 x 11.1 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Fig. 21. *Aristotle and Phyllis*, Matthaus Zaisinger known as Master M.Z., ca. 1500, Engraving, 182 x 131 mm, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

Fig. 22. *Aquamanile in the Form of Aristotle and Phyllis*, Late 14th or early 15th century, Bronze, quaternay copper alloy, H. 32.5 cm, W. 17.9 cm, L. 39.3 cm, Wt. 6062 g, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 23. *Hercules and Omphale*, Aegidius Sadeler II after Bartholomeus Spranger, ca. 1600, Engraving, Sheet: 43.3 x 31.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 24. *Hercules Kicking Faunus out of Omphale's Bed*, Jacopo Tintoretto, ca. 1585, Oil on canvas, 112 x 106 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

Fig. 25. *Hercules and Omphale*, Bartholomeus Spranger, ca. 1585, Oil on copper, 23.2 cm x 18.4 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 26. *The Alchemist*, Phillip Galle, after Pieter Breughel, ca. 1558, Engraving, 33.5 x 44.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 27. *Emperor Rudolf II*, Hans von Aachen, ca. 1606-08, Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 48.7 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 28. *Rosarium perfectionis, The Hermaphrodite*, from *Rosarium philosophorum*, 1550, Wood engraving.

Fig. 29. *The Hermaphrodite*, from *Rosarium philosophorum*, 1550, Wood engraving.

Fig. 30. *Terra*, Adriaen Collaert, from *The Four Elements*, 1575-1618, Engraving, 170 x 213 mm, The British Museum, London.

Fig. 31. *Ignis*, Adriaen Collaert, from *The Four Elements*, 1575-1618, Engraving, 172 x 213 mm, The British Museum, London.

Fig. 32. *"Aer" in a Decorative Border with Birds*, Crispijn de Passe the Elder, from the *Series of Circular Designs with the Four Elements*, 1590-1612, Engraving, 12.4 x 12.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 33. *"Aqua" in a Decorative Border with Birds*, Crispijn de Passe the Elder, from the *Series of Circular Designs with the Four Elements*, 1590-1612, Engraving, 12.4 x 12.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 34. *The Four Humors*, Leonhard Thurneysser, from *Quinta essentia*, 1574, Woodcut, 15.2 x 11.3 cm, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden.

Fig. 35. *Victory*, Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1532-1534, Marble, H 261 cm, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Fig. 36. *Seated Nymph*, Roman copy of Hellenistic original from Asia Minor, Second half of the 2nd century CE, Marble, Cinquantenaire Museum, Brussels.

Fig. 37. *Bezoar Bowl*, Jan Vermeyen (1559-1608), Bezoar, gold, enamel, H 14.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 38. *Seychelle Nut Vessel*, Portugal, Last Quarter of the 16th Century, Listed in the 1607 Inventory of Rudolf II's Kunstkammer, silver (gilded), Seychelle nut (Lodoicea maldivica), southern serow horn (Capricornis sumatrensis), 37.1 x 22.2 x 34 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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