Medieval Mystics Study Guide

Medieval Mystics

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Introduction

Mysticism flourished in many parts of Europe, including Germany, Italy, the Low Countries, and England, from the middle of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth. The greatest figures in Germany were Meister Eckhart, a Dominican friar of formidable intellectual gifts, and his pupils, also Dominicans, Johannes Tauler and Henry Suso. In the Low Countries, John Ruusbroec developed a Trinitarian mysticism that owed much to Eckhart, despite his apparent disagreement with the earlier teacher. In Italy, the Franciscan scholar Bonaventure, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Catherine of Genoa upheld the mystical flame, and there was also a mystical outpouring in England, associated with the names Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Many of the continental mystics were members of the Friends of God, a movement that worked for the spiritual revival of people at a time when the worldliness of the Church, the ravages of the Black Death, and the cracks in the traditional social order created a desire in many to develop a deeper spirituality. Although some of the mystics were hermits, like Rolle, others combined their mysticism with practical concerns such as preaching, administrative duties, and caring for the poor and the sick.

The most enduring figures in medieval mysticism produced works of high spiritual and sometimes literary quality. Although they were all loyal to the Church (including Eckhart, in spite of the fact that he was posthumously condemned for heresy), they expressed their mysticism in a wide variety of themes and tones. Eckhart's lofty statements from the standpoint of eternity are very different from Catherine of Genoa's intense dialogue between soul and body, for example. Similarly, the visions of Christ's passion granted to Julian of Norwich differ greatly from the down-to-earth advice given by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Taken as a whole, the writings of the medieval mystics provide a remarkable record of the vitality and variety of the spirituality of the period.

Themes

Awakening

Many medieval mystics describe a dramatic personal experience in which they are first awakened to the full reality of the divine life. Once the experience has occurred, the mystic is never the same again. He or she has been allowed to experience, as a matter of direct cognition rather than intellectual speculation, the ultimate reality of life, its spiritual essence. After this experience, the mystic can never go back to the old way of understanding, and they may also find that the direction and purpose of their life is dramatically altered.

Sometimes the experience of awakening comes spontaneously and unsought; at other times it represents a deepening of a religious life already chosen. An example of the first category is Catherine of Genoa, who had no interest in the religious life until the age of twenty-six. At that time, as it is recorded in her biography, written by one of her followers:

> Her heart was pierced by so sudden and immense a love of God, accompanied by so deep a sight of her miseries and sins and of His Goodness, that she was near falling to the ground; and in a transport of pure and all-purifying love she was drawn away from the miseries of the world.

As a result of this experience and others that followed in the ensuing days, Catherine embarked on her life of contemplation and service.

In the case of Henry Suso, he had already entered the Dominican Order when he had his dramatic awakening. The experience happened when, as he puts it, he was still a beginner. One early afternoon after the midday meal, he was alone in the chapel. He was feeling sad and oppressed by suffering, when suddenly "his soul was caught up," and he experienced something that he later, writing of himself in the third person, struggles to describe:

> It was without form or definite manner of being, yet it contained within itself the joyous, delightful wealth of all forms and manners. . . . He did nothing but stare into the bright effulgence, which made him forget himself and all else. Was it day or night? He did not know. It was a bursting forth of the delight of eternal life, present to his awareness, motionless calm.

The experience lasted for perhaps an hour. When Suso came to himself again, he felt as if he were coming back from a different world, and as he reflected on the experience

it seemed as if he were floating in air. He knew intuitively that he could never forget what he had just known.

Descriptions of awakenings can be found also in Julian's *Revelations*, which is the record of one long experience of seeing into the divine essence and the divine plan. Rolle's *The Fire of Love* is another example, in which Rolle experienced, like Suso, a profound illumination while sitting one day in a chapel.

Purification and Penance

Having had a taste of the divine essence, the medieval Christian mystics undertook spiritual exercises involving purification and penance. The purposes of these practices were to make the mystics worthy vessels for further revelation of the divine, and to enable them to be of greater service to God. Some of the penance was through prayer, study of scripture, or solitude, in which the mystic turned away from the things of the world. The mystic also cultivated the traditional virtues of the religious life such as humility, obedience, and poverty. Sometimes penance involved bodily deprivation or self-inflicted physical pain. Some mystics took this to extreme lengths. Catherine of Siena regularly flagellated herself with an iron chain and fasted to the point where she was unable to eat. (She died of starvation.) Suso described in his autobiography how he would wear an undergarment to which were fastened a hundred and fifty pointed nails. He would tighten the garment until the nails pressed into his flesh. He also fastened to his back a wooden cross into which he had hammered thirty nails, and he wore this cross for eight years to praise the crucified Christ. This was by no means the most severe punishment that Suso inflicted on himself, and eventually, so Suso believed, God told him to cease such practices.

The mystics' desire to endure bodily deprivation or practice self-torture was explained by two reasons. First, it showed identification with the sufferings of Christ. Second, it rested on the dualism in Christian theology between body and soul, flesh and spirit. The body, as the site of sin and self-will, must be purged and made subservient to the higher faculties of soul.

However, not all mystics embraced this form of bodily penance, and even Suso later advised his students to take a more moderate course. Eckhart, in his "Talks of Instruction," wrote that "true penitence" required none of those things. The most effective penitence was simply a turning around of the will so that all the energies of the self were directed toward God.

Visions

Many of the medieval mystics were subject to visions. The entire revelations of Julian of Norwich, for example, were based on a series of visions of divine love. Catherine of Genoa also experienced visions frequently, as recorded in the *Spiritual Dialogue*. She saw angels and laughed with them; she saw Christ crucified, with his body covered from head to foot with blood; she had visions of love, of joy, and of sin. Ill and dying, she had

a vision of a ladder of flame (representing divine love) that drew her upwards, to her great joy. That vision lasted for four hours.

Suso also had visions through which he acquired a sense of what heaven, hell, and purgatory were like. He also claimed that the souls of deceased people appeared to him and told him about their situation in the afterlife. These included Suso's father and even Meister Eckhart.

Other mystics, such as Eckhart, Tauler, Ruusbroec, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, hardly mention visions. In fact, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is openly suspicious of them. The author states that the spiritual seeker will never have an unclouded vision of God in this life. He is also wary of the power of imagination to conjure images that have nothing to do with the divine, and he even pokes fun at the foolishness of some young disciples who gaze upward and form mental pictures of what heaven is like.

The Dark Night of the Soul

After a period of living in awareness of the presence of God, it is common for medieval mystics to experience a time of spiritual aridity and personal adversity. It is as if they have been abandoned by God. The phrase "dark night of the soul" was coined by St. John of the Cross, a later mystic, but the same idea had been expressed many times before. Tauler, for example, refers to it as "spiritual poverty" and states that it is the second of three stages in the mystical life. And Suso tells a vivid story in chapter twenty-two in his autobiography of how he was overwhelmed with sickness and with attacks on his teachings by religious authorities. He complained bitterly to God about his situation.

Ruusbroec wrote of the dark night of the soul in Book Two, parts two and three of *The Spiritual Espousals*. In such a situation, the disciple feels abandoned, poor, wretched, and forsaken. He asks, Where has all the joy gone? He may lose friends, family, and earthly goods. Ruusbroec writes as if this feeling of abandonment is to be expected at some point. It is simply the path that spiritual progress follows. If the person has the right attitude, the dark night can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. All that is necessary is for the person to abandon himself to the will of God. This sentiment is echoed by Tauler: The state of "spiritual poverty" is the prelude to an even deeper and richer awakening.

Contemplation

Contemplation is a broad term that encompasses the various stages of the process by which the mystic grows closer to union with God. Contemplation involves an ingathering of the mystic's faculties, so that the mind and the senses are turned away from the external world. In the process often called recollection or quiet, the mystic experiences a state of silence within; the surface activity of the mind is stilled. In order to achieve this, *The Cloud of Unknowing* advises the repetition of a simple, one-syllable word in prayer, such as Love, or God, which will lead the mind to quietness. In the state of quietness,

the *Cloud* states, there is a paradox. The individual mind is "nothing" and "nowhere," and yet that empty state of consciousness is also "all" and "everywhere," because it partakes of the boundless divine nature.

Eckhart and his disciple Tauler spoke frequently of this "emptying" process, whereby the individual mind passes beyond itself to the "ground of the soul." Tauler, for example, said in Sermon 1, "If you go out of yourself, you may be certain that God will enter and fill you wholly: the greater the void, the greater the divine influx."

The goal of contemplation, attainable only through the grace of God, is the state of mystical union between the soul and God, sometimes called spiritual marriage, or deification. As Tauler puts it, "[God] raises [man] from a human to a divine mode of being, from sorrow into a divine peace, in which man becomes so divinized that everything which he is and does, God is and does in him."

Style

Paradox

The mystical experience is inherently paradoxical. A paradox is a statement that appears to be contradictory but which may also be true. Tauler, for example, writes of the Trinity as an "imageless image." Perhaps the most common paradox in mysticism describes the coexistence of rest and motion, or stillness and activity. The paradox describes the nature of the divine reality, which is at rest within itself but also actively contemplates itself and ceaselessly flows out from itself into the world. The person who is in union with the divine partakes of this paradoxical divine nature. Eckhart, Ruusbroec, and Tauler give the clearest descriptions of the paradox, even as they state that words cannot really capture it. As Ruusbroec puts it:

Every lover [of God] is one with God in rest and is
like God in the works of love, for God in his sublime
nature, of which we bear a likeness, subsists
blissfully in eternal rest in accordance with the essential
Unity of his being and also subsists actively
in eternal activity in accordance with the Trinity.
Each of these is the perfection of the other, for rest
abides in the Unity and activity abides in the Trinity,
and the two remain thus for all eternity.

Similarly, Tauler writes of the ground of the soul that God Himself inhabits:

For it is an unfathomable abyss, poised in itself, unplumbed,
ebbing and flowing like the sea. As one is immersed in it,
it seems still and void; yet in an instant it wells up as if
it would engulf all things.

There are other paradoxes in mystical theology, many of them echoing the statement of Christ in the New Testament that "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39, Revised Standard Edition). The mystics interpreted this saying in terms of the need to transcend in contemplation all activity of the senses and of the individual mind. By "emptying" themselves in this way, they would allow the fullness of the divine to take possession of them. By making themselves poor (to the external world of the senses), they would become rich (in God); by renouncing everything, they would gain everything. As Eckhart puts it, again paradoxically, "those who are equal to nothing, they alone are equal to God." A similar paradox underlies the entire *Cloud of Unknowing*: since God is beyond thought, he cannot be grasped by the mind, therefore the way to "knowing" is by "unknowing."

Related to the device of paradox is the oxymoron, in which two contradictory terms are yoked together. Eckhart refers to the "splendent darkness" of the Godhead (splendent

means shining). Bonaventure uses the same phrase; he and Eckhart are both quoting Dionysius the Areopagite, the sixth century writer of *The Mystical Theology* who exerted a powerful influence on medieval mysticism.

Oxymora are also used or implied in reference to the life of the person who has fully submitted to God's will. In such cases, joy and sorrow become of equal value because they are both expressions of God's will. It is this that enables Eckhart to say of the enlightened man, "all pain is a joy to him"; and Suso to declare that his "severe sufferings . . . were like the sweet dew of springtime." It is only a short linguistic hop from these expressions to an oxymoronic "joyful pain" and "sweet sufferings."

Figurative Language

It is commonplace in mystical writing that the experience of union with God is ineffable. Because it cannot be described in words, mystics frequently resort to figurative language, particularly simile and metaphor. Ruusbroec, for example, uses an elaborate simile that compares the coming of God into the life of the believer to the passage of the sun across the heavens from the period in late spring to early autumn, as it passes through the zodiacal signs of Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, and Libra. Ruusbroec also makes use of a number of extended similes intended for instructional purposes. The seeker, when Christ's light shines on him, should be like the bee that works for the good of its colony; at certain other times, he should follow the example of the ant.

Many of the similes and metaphors used by the mystics have their origins in the Bible□Christ as the shepherd or bridegroom, for example. Catherine of Siena, who in general is quite conventional in this regard, appears to have invented her own extended metaphor of Christ as a bridge. She writes in *The Dialogue* that this bridge stretches from heaven to earth and has three stairs, which correspond to three spiritual stages and to three parts of Christ's body. The first stair is the feet, which symbolize the qualities of the individual mind; the second, the heart, which is love; the third, the mouth, which symbolizes peace.

God as light or God as fire are also biblical images used frequently by the mystics, but their usage presents questions of interpretation. In some cases, the phrase "God is light" or similar is used in a figurative sense, but in other cases a literal light seems to be implied. The mystic describes what he sees and experiences. It is not always possible to tell the difference between these two usages, but when Eckhart writes of the "uncreated light" that exists in the ground of the soul, and Ruusbroec of the "incomprehensible light" that shines in the "simple being of [a person's] spirit," they are likely referring to a direct cognition and not speaking metaphorically.

The same problem occurs with the metaphor of God as a fire. When Rolle used the phrase the "fire of love," he intended a literal as well as a metaphorical meaning. He insisted that he felt a real, physical warmth, or heat, around his heart, and this formed the basis for his entire metaphysics of fire or heat as one of the modes by which the divine could be experienced. Other English mystics were not so ready to accept this

literal meaning of divine fire. For Walter Hilton, a fourteenth-century English mystic who wrote *The Scale of Perfection*, the phrase "God is fire" is a metaphor, meaning simply that God is "love and charity."

Allegory

An allegory is a narrative that has two levels of meaning. One is literal, in which the characters act out their story; the other allegorical, in which the characters and actions symbolize something else□a set of concepts or ideas, for example. In general, the medieval mystics did not write much extended allegory, although they would frequently expound on the parables of Jesus. (A parable is a kind of short allegory.) However, Julian of Norwich does include in chapter fifty-one of her *Revelations of Divine Love* a long allegory about a lord and his servant. She supplies to the story her own double-level allegorical interpretation, in which the lord is God in his totality and also God the Father, and the servant is both Everyman and God's son.

Historical Context

The Black Death

The fourteenth century in Europe was an extremely turbulent age for all levels of society. To begin with, there were more than the usual number of natural disasters. Famine, flood, and earthquakes caused misery and death for thousands, and the outbreak of the plague (Black Death) in 1348 was the most devastating public health crisis humanity has known. It began in Sicily in October 1347, and reached France in January 1348; it continued to ravage Paris until 1349. It reached England in August 1348, where it continued until early 1350. There were recurrences in 1360 and 1369. No one knows for certain what the death toll was, but it could have been one-quarter or even onethird of the entire population of Europe, which would have been about twenty million deaths. Paris lost half its population; London, one-third; Siena and Venice, two-thirds. (Catherine of Siena grew up during the period of the Black Death, and when there was another outbreak in 1374, she cared for some of the victims, as did Tauler when the plague hit Strasbourg.)

The devastation caused by the Black Death was so severe that many people thought the end of the world was coming. It also had social and economic consequences, leading to inflation and a shortage of labor. The resulting social disruption produced peasant rebellions in France in 1358 and England in 1381, where peasants for a time captured London. These rebellions were suppressed with great brutality. In France, over thirty thousand died.

The Black Death also produced changes in the way people behaved. Many people considered the disease to be God's punishment for sin, and some took to practicing extreme forms of penance. One example of this was the Order of the Flagellants, who marched through towns beating themselves with whips. Other people sought a scapegoat and blamed the Jews for the Black Death, claiming that the Jews had poisoned the wells. There were many massacres in which hundreds of Jews were killed.

The Church

The fourteenth century was a period of turmoil in the Catholic Church. Faced with political instability in Italy, the pope moved to Avignon, France, in 1309. This diminished the Church's authority, since Rome had been the traditional place where the pope reigned, and a pope in France was considered to be the tool of the French king.

During the Avignon period (which is known as the Babylonian captivity and lasted until 1377), the papacy also lost much respect because of its luxury and extravagance and the way it centralized the administration of the Church. High papal income taxes were imposed on the clergy, who passed them on to local parish priests and laity. There was also widespread corruption, with religious offices open to the highest bidder and

preferments of all kinds available in exchange for money. Many clergy neglected their religious duties, being more concerned with wealth and property. Catherine of Siena, as well as another mystic, Birgitta (1303-1373), were two of many voices bemoaning the decadence of the Church. Catherine had direct audiences with the pope in Avignon, urging him to return to Rome and initiate church reform.

This period of the papacy also includes the Great Schism, which began in 1378 and lasted thirty years. During the schism there were two rival popes, one elected in Avignon (by the French cardinals) and the other in Rome. Each man claimed to be the leader of the Church.

Heresies

With resentment growing against the Church, the time was ripe for heretical ideas to flourish. In late-fourteenth-century England, John Wyclif, an Oxford theologian and preacher, attacked the abuses of the Church and denied the authority of the pope. He claimed that priests were not necessary for salvation, denied the validity of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and encouraged the translation of the Bible into English. For Wyclif, following scripture was more important than accepting the received doctrines of the Church. Wyclif accumulated many followers in England, who were known as Lollards.

On the European continent, a movement known as the Spiritual Franciscans sprang up, who protested against the wealth that the Franciscan order had accumulated. They said that since Christ lived without possessions, that was the only true Christian life. In 1315, the Church denounced the Spiritual Franciscan movement as a pernicious heresy. In Marseille in 1318, some Spiritual Franciscans were tried by the Inquisition and burned at the stake.

One of the most persistent heresies was that of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, which began in the thirteenth century and spread across vast areas of Europe. The most important surviving text of the movement is *A Mirror for Simple Souls*, written around the beginning of the fourteenth century by Marguerite Porete, who was burned as a heretic in 1310.

Adherents of the Free Spirit believed in a mystical doctrine far more extreme than that of orthodox mysticism. They claimed that they had been so transformed by their spiritual experiences that they had become permanently identical with God. Now made perfect, they were incapable of sin. This meant that in their view they were not bound by moral laws; they could simply do as they wished and take whatever they wanted (sexual liberties included) without being troubled by their consciences. Such beliefs involved a rejection of the need for the sacraments of the Church, and the Free Spirits saw no need to observe events in the Church calendar such as fast days and feasts, or to participate in confession or prayer.

The Brethren of the Free Spirit movement was condemned by the pope, and in the fourteenth century and beyond, the Church made extensive efforts to defeat the heresy. Some Free Spirits were burned at the stake. Many of the medieval mystics, including Ruusbroec, Tauler, and the author of the *Theologia Germanica* also tried to combat the movement. Ruusbroec in particular wrote treatises against it. He had firsthand knowledge of the Brethren of the Free Spirit because the movement flourished in the Low Countries during his lifetime, where in Brussels a woman named Bloemardinne had a large and devoted following.

Movement Variations

Christian mysticism is often divided into the two categories of *via negativa* (also known as apophatic theology) and *via affirmativa* (also known as kataphatic theology). The first emphasizes that God is not to be found in any image, name, or attribute, because these would be a limitation on him. The God of the *via negativa* is utterly beyond all concepts and all language, existing in an infinite darkness and eternal silence. In order to know him, the seeker must cast off everything that pertains to the individual self and lose himself in this infinity beyond being. The *via affirmativa*, on the other hand, affirms that words and images can convey something of the divine essence. God can be spoken of and known through contemplation of his attributes, such as goodness, love, wisdom, and power; through emulation of his son Christ; and through the revelations of scriptures.

Many mystics combine aspects of both approaches, and the categories should not be too rigidly applied. For example, in *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure describes the first six stages on the path in terms of the *via affirmativa*. Only in the last stage does he switch to the language of the *via negativa*.

Of the medieval mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, the *Theologia Germanica*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Ruusbroec embrace to a greater or lesser degree the *via negativa*. But there are differences between them. The most towering figure in this respect is Eckhart. In almost all of his German sermons he repeats his central idea of the "simple ground," the "quiet desert" which is beyond form or image, beyond even the Trinity, and that there is an uncreated "spark of the soul" that belongs to this divine ground. Tauler echoes this with his concept of the "ground of the soul." The difference between Eckhart and his two pupils is that Tauler and Suso do not have Eckhart's intellectual power or his gift for exploring abstract subtleties, but they make up for that in their ability to translate Eckhartian concepts into practical spiritual advice.

The differences between Ruusbroec and Eckhart are more marked. Although Ruusbroec's mysticism contains all the Eckhartian (and Dionysian) elements of negation and stillness in the ineffable "essential bareness" of the divine being, he is often also referred to as a "Trinitarian" mystic. According to Louis Dupré, in the preface to *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, Ruusbroec's God is always dynamic, never at rest: "Ruusbroec overcame the ultimate negation by refusing to posit a unity beyond the Trinity, as Eckhart had done." Moreover, some scholars claim that when Ruusbroec wrote treatises late in his life attacking the notion that the individual could in the fullest sense become God, he may have had Eckhart or one of Eckhart's disciples in mind. It seems likely that at the very least, Ruusbroec had concerns about this aspect of Eckhart's teachings, since during Ruusbroec's lifetime his disciple John van Leeuwen wrote a treatise that directly attacked Eckhart.

Of the other major mystics of the period, Julian of Norwich, Rolle, Catherine of Siena, and Catherine of Genoa belong more to the *via affirmativa*. Julian's entire *Revelations of Divine Love* consists of her meditations on her visions of Christ. The idea of her

anonymous fellow English mystic (that God can be found only in a cloud of unknowing) would have been alien to her way of thinking. Her work is full of images and metaphors designed to lead the reader to a fuller understanding of the love of God. Mystics of this type often tend to be Christ-centered and to emphasize in particular (as Julian does) the passion of Christ. This is not something to be found in the pages of Eckhart. Nor could one imagine a mystic of Eckhart's type receiving the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ, as did Catherine of Siena as a result of her intense meditations upon Christ's sufferings.

Rolle too is Christ-centered and places great value on the name of Jesus. His central concern is to reveal God as love. Although Rolle was himself a recluse, this type of Christ-centered mysticism often emphasizes the importance of the active life. It does not rest ultimately in quiet contemplation. Catherine of Siena's mysticism, for example, has been called "missionary"; as Ray Petry puts it, "For her the love of Christ and neighbor is inseparable from the love of God." The same might be said of Catherine of Genoa. Both these saints distinguished themselves for their active work in ministering to the poor and the sick.

Representative Authors

Giovanni Bonaventure (1217-1274)

Giovanni Bonaventure was born in Bagnorea, Italy, around the year 1217. He entered the Franciscan order and was later sent to Paris to complete his education. In Paris he became friends with Thomas Aquinas, one of the great philosophers in the Christian tradition. Bonaventure taught in Paris from 1248 to 1257, when he was elected minister general of the Franciscan Order. He held this position for sixteen years, during which time he wrote his major works, including *Life of Francis*, a biography of St. Francis of Assisi, and *The Soul's Journey into God*. Bonaventure was made a cardinal in 1273; he died the following year, on July 15, while attending the Second Council of Lyons. He was canonized in 1482 and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Sixtus V in 1587.

Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

Catherine of Genoa was born in 1447 to an aristocratic family. She had a melancholy temperament, which was made more pronounced by an unhappy marriage. A powerful spiritual experience in 1473 transformed her life, and after a period of penance and prayer she began to work among the city's sick and poor. In 1477, she founded the first hospital in Genoa and was its director from 1490 to 1496. It was during this period, in the summer of 1493, that an outbreak of the plague killed nearly four out of five of those who remained in the city. Catherine herself contracted the disease but recovered. Catherine attracted many followers, and between 1499 and 1507, she discussed her spiritual experiences with them, including the times in which she had experienced union with God. Catherine died on September 15, 1510, and was canonized by Pope Clement XII in 1733.

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Catherine of Siena was born in Siena on March 25, 1347, the twenty-fourth child in a lower-class family. Even as a child she exhibited a longing for God, and she refused to marry. When she was about sixteen, she joined the Mantellate, a Dominican body that worked with the poor and the sick. In spite of her lack of formal education, Catherine also became known as a teacher. During her lifetime she attracted a large following, and she also founded a convent. Catherine was active in politics, acting as ambassador between the Papacy and the city-state of Florence. Throughout her life she had unusual spiritual experiences, including visions and ecstasies. In 1368, she experienced a "mystical marriage" to Christ, after which she felt totally given to Christ. She also received the stigmata (the marks of the wounds of Christ). All her life, Catherine practiced severe penance, and often she would eat very little. In 1380, she was unable to eat at all, which led to her death at the age of thirty-three on April 29th of that year. In 1970, Pope Paul VI proclaimed her a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church.

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-c. 1327)

Meister Johann Eckhart, who is widely considered to be the greatest of all the German medieval mystics, was born in the village of Hochheim, near Gotha, Germany in 1260. His father was the steward of a knight's castle in the Thuringian forest. When Eckhart was about fifteen, he entered the Dominican monastery at Erfurt and remained there for at least nine years. He then studied in Cologne before becoming prior of Erfurt and vicar of Thuringia. In about 1300, he was sent to Paris to teach, where he presented the Dominican theological positions against their rivals, the Franciscans. In 1302, the prestigious Studium Generale in Paris conferred a Master's degree on him, and since then he has been known as Meister Eckhart. In 1303, he became Provincial of the Dominican order in Saxony, and four years later, Vicar of Bohemia. In 1313, Eckhart, now widely known and respected, lived in Strasbourg, where he preached and was prior of a convent. At some later time, not earlier than 1322, he was invited to take up a professorship at the Studium Generale in Cologne, an extremely high honor. But the Archbishop of Cologne harbored a dislike of all mysticism, and he formally charged Eckhart with heresy. Eckhart denied the charges and made a vigorous defense. He is believed to have died in 1327. In 1329, Pope John XXII condemned many aspects of Eckhart's teaching as heretical.

Julian of Norwich (1342-c. 1416)

There is little information about the life of Julian of Norwich, who was one of the most important figures in medieval English mysticism. She reveals something of herself in her *Revelations of Divine Love*. She reports that she was given her revelations in 1373, when she was thirty and a half, which would mean she was born in 1342. Since she is named as a beneficiary in a will dated 1416, it appears that she was still living at that time as a recluse in Norwich, supported by the church of St. Julian and St. Edwards in Conisford. This church belonged to the Benedictine community. Julian's writings show her to be well read in many of the classic texts of Christian spirituality, and it is possible that she acquired her education by entering a religious order, although whether she was in fact a nun cannot be known.

Richard Rolle (c. 1300-1349)

Richard Rolle, who was born around 1300 in the Yorkshire region of England, has been called the father of English mysticism. Rolle was a prolific author in both English and Latin and was widely read and admired in his day. He was born at Thornton Dale, near Pickering, in Yorkshire. He studied at Oxford but appears to have abandoned his studies, since he did not receive a degree. Rolle then withdrew from the world and devoted himself to a contemplative life. He had a number of unusual psychic and spiritual experiences, feeling heat in his chest and hearing heavenly music. Some of his acquaintances thought him mad. He described these experiences in *Incendium Amoris* (c. 1340, trans. *The Fire of Love*). Rolle's works are characterized by a love of Christ and especially the power of the divine name Jesus. He emphasized love and a religion

of the heart. Rolle died in 1349 at Hampole, near Doncaster. Legend has it that he died after tending to victims of the Black Death.

John Ruusbroec (1293-1381)

John Ruusbroec was born in 1293, in the village of Ruusbroec, near Brussels. He became a priest in 1317, when he was twenty-four. For the next twenty-six years he served as chaplain to the church of St. Gudule in Brussels. During this time he wrote treaties opposing the heretical teachings of a woman named Bloemardinne. In 1343, he retired to Groenendael in the forest a few miles from the city with two companions to lead a more solitary life. The small group acquired a few more members and became, with the blessings of the local bishop, an official religious community canons regular of St. Augustine. Ruusbroec spent the remaining years of his life at Groenendael, where he wrote the most influential of his mystical works. He died December 2, 1381.

Henry Suso (1295-1366)

Henry Suso, who with Eckhart and Tauler was one of the three great figures in German medieval mysticism, was born on March 21, 1295, to a noble family. When he was thirteen his parents sent him to the Dominican friary in the town of Constance. After being a member of the Dominican order for five years, he underwent a conversion experience that became the basis for his later life. In 1322 or 1323, he was sent to pursue advanced studies in the Dominican house at Cologne, an honor given to only a few. There he expanded his knowledge of theology and scripture, and his teacher for some of this period was probably Meister Eckhart. Suso remained in Cologne until 1326 or 1327, when he returned to the friary at Constance as a director of studies for the students in the order. Around 1330, Suso was summoned to Maastricht to defend himself against charges of heresy, and he was dismissed from his position at the friary. But he must have emerged unscathed from the accusations, since later he was appointed prior or superior of the house at Constance. He also preached in the countryside and supervised the spiritual studies of Dominican nuns. In about 1348, Suso was transferred to the Dominican house in Ulm, where he lived for the rest of his life. During this time, he edited his works for publication, collecting them under the title *Exemplar*. Suso died in Ulm on January 25, 1366.

Johannes Tauler (c. 1300-1361)

Johannes Tauler was born around 1300 to a well-to-do family in Strasbourg. He began training in the Dominican Order in 1314, and became a preacher and director. In 1339, he moved to Basle because that city sided with Pope John XXII in his dispute with Louis of Bavaria, whereas Strasbourg was loyal to Louis. Tauler remained in Basle for four or five years, where his influence in the spiritual movement known as the Friends of God increased. Tauler was a disciple of Eckhart and a friend of Suso. Tauler became widely known in the vicinity for his preaching, and his teaching has come down to us in the

form of sermons. He died in 1361, in the monastery of Saint Nicholas in Undis, during an outbreak of the plague.

Representative Works

The Cloud of Unknowing

The Cloud of Unknowing is an anonymous devotional book written in England, probably in the East Midlands, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. It is one of the classics of the English mystical tradition. The author appears to have been a male priest, but nothing more is known of him. In seventy-five short chapters, the author offers guidance to the spiritual seeker in his quest to know God. He points out that God is calling the disciple to a higher spiritual life. This is an act of grace on the part of God, and the seeker must respond with a desire for God. He must empty his mind of all thoughts and images in order to penetrate the "cloud of unknowing" that stands between him and God. Thoughts must be pushed away in a "cloud of forgetting." Then the love of God may pierce the cloud. Although the process may be difficult, the seeker eventually loses all awareness of himself, and his soul becomes united with God.

The Exemplar

The Exemplar is the title given by Suso to the collection of his own works that he prepared for publication. It includes an autobiography, *The Life of a Servant*, which for the modern reader is the most accessible of Suso's works. Suso describes the severe bodily penance he imposed on himself as well as the visions and mystical experiences that came to him on his spiritual journey. *The Exemplar* contains three other works. *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* was written to rekindle the love of God in those who wish for it, through the examples of Christ's sufferings and the sorrows of the Virgin. *Little Book of Truth* is about how to live a detached life and touches on many of the most important themes in German mysticism: spiritual freedom, the nature of true discernment, and of union with God. *Little Book of Letters* consists of letters of instruction for practical life and worship sent by Suso to women under his spiritual direction.

The Fire of Love

The Fire of Love is a translation of a Latin work, *Incendium Amoris*, written by English mystic Richard Rolle in about 1340. Rolle's devotional text was inspired by the mystical experience he describes in the prologue and chapter fifteen. Sitting in a chapel one day, he felt his own heart burning with heat and heard heavenly music. The experience became the basis of Rolle's poetic exposition of a life lived in what he called the fire of everlasting love. He explains that divine illumination has three aspects: *fervor* (heat), *dulce* (sweetness), and *canor* (song). The heat in the heart he associates with the burning of divine love. Sweetness refers to the peace and joy that results when the heart burns in love and the presence of the divine beloved is felt. By song, Rolle seems to mean the harmony experienced in the individual mind when all its powers are

wedded to God; every thought becomes like a melodious song. These three modes of functioning (heat, sweetness, and song) represent the highest perfection of the Christian religion, although Rolle continually warns that they are not easily attained.

Meister Eckhart's Sermons

Eckhart's sermons, especially those that he preached and wrote in Middle High German rather than in Latin, provide a representative view of his most important thoughts. Of the German sermons that survive, scholars consider about one hundred authentic, and about fifty more probably so. Eckhart's sermons focus on a few central themes, such as detachment or self-abandonment, the birth of Christ in the soul, the divine spark of the soul, the abyss of divine being, and the Godhead beyond even the Trinity. Eckhart's philosophy was based on mystical experience of the highest order, and his sermons and treatises were extremely controversial. In part this was because he had a gift for expressing himself in a striking way, using puns, word play, and paradox in the hope that his listeners would be startled into new understanding. In some respects also, the sermons express views that are on the margins of orthodoxy; Eckhart's teaching about the birth of Christ in the soul, for example, was condemned as being suspect of heresy.

Revelations of Divine Love

Revelations of Divine Love was written in the latter part of the fourteenth century by Julian of Norwich. It is organized around sixteen revelations, or "showings," as Julian called them, which she received from God. All but the last came during one five-hour period from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. on May 8, 1373, when she was extremely ill and believed herself to be dying. The illness and the revelations came as an answer to an earlier threefold prayer, in which she had asked to more fully understand the passion of Christ, to suffer physically, and to be given three "wounds": contrition, compassion, and longing for God. The first twelve revelations are based on the crucifixion and suffering of Christ, which was a demonstration of God's love that redeemed mankind. The thirteenth revelation deals with the problem of sin, which will, Julian says, be turned into a blessing by Christ. The fourteenth revelation discusses the nature and purpose of prayer, and the fifteenth, the bliss of heaven. The final revelation (which was given to her that same night) acts as conclusion and confirmation of the others.

The Soul's Journey into God

The Soul's Journey into God is a seven-chapter treatise by Bonaventure. The first six describe the steps toward the soul's union with God. In the first two steps, the soul looks outside of itself to God's creation and the world of the senses. In steps three and four, the mind turns within and contemplates God through the use of its faculties of memory, understanding, and will, and is purified through the traditional virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In the last two stages, the mind rises above itself to consider first the essential attributes of God, and then the Trinity through its name, the Good. The last chapter

describes the final goal, a mystical ecstasy in which the soul is entirely absorbed by God. In this chapter, Bonaventure is deeply indebted to a treatise by the sixth-century mystic Dionysius the Areopagite, who described the ultimate reality as a divine darkness, beyond all names, that can only be known by stripping away all concepts and all forms.

The Spiritual Dialogue

The Spiritual Dialogue was composed by friends of Catherine of Genoa to represent Catherine's teachings and her inner life. It had been written by about 1522, twelve years after Catherine's death. *The Spiritual Dialogue* is a spiritual autobiography cast in the form of a miracle play, in which different aspects of being conduct a dialogue as they go on their journey through earthly life. The main actors are Soul and Body. Body is joined by Self-Love and Human Frailty; Soul is supported by Spirit. The great enemy of the Soul is Self-Love, which is contrasted with the pure love that flows from God, which alone can lift the Soul from the murky waters of the material world in which it has become enmeshed. When she has been granted a vision of the pure love of God, Catherine is sent more tests. She is sent to minister to the sick, where all traces of Self-Love and Human Frailty are burned out of her. The last part of the *Dialogue* drops the allegorical figures and describes Catherine's final illness and death.

The Spiritual Espousals

The Spiritual Espousals is usually regarded as Ruusbroec's masterpiece, and it was widely known and read in his lifetime. Each of the three sections of *The Spiritual Espousals* (published c. 1335) is organized around the parable of the virgins in Matthew's gospel, in particular the passage, "See, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him." The virgin is the individual soul, which must go out and meet the bridegroom (Christ), and Ruusbroec explains in each section the process by which this may take place. The first section, the active life, is intended for beginners; the second section describes the interior life, which is cultivated through virtue and the grace of God; the third section explains the nature of the "superessential" contemplative life, which few are able to obtain. This highest state of being, in which the individual is made one with God, cannot be gained by any learning or spiritual exercises but only by the abandonment of all forms and attributes of material life.

Theologia Germanica

The *Theologia Germanica* is an anonymous devotional text written in southern Germany around 1350 by a man from Frankfurt. The author was a member of the Friends of God movement in which Suso and Tauler were prominent. Strongly influenced by Eckhart and Tauler, the *Theologia Germanica* focuses on the difference between self-will and God's will. Self-will is the prime obstacle to the spiritual life and must be overcome. Self-will belongs to the natural man, but the spiritual man possesses no will other than the

will of God. Everything about the natural man must be transcended, including the activity of the senses, in order to know God. Like many mystics, the author of the *Theologia Germanica* emphasizes the eternal Christ within, rather than the historical Christ. The *Theologia Germanica* was greatly admired by Martin Luther, who first discovered it and published it in 1516.

Critical Overview

The medieval Christian mystics have exerted a powerful influence on Christian spirituality, both Catholic and Protestant, that continues to the present day. Perhaps the most interesting example is that of Eckhart. Seventeen propositions in Eckhart's teaching were condemned as heretical by Pope John XXII in 1329, but this did not destroy his influence. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, his writings continued to be copied and read in the Dominican and Carthusian Orders. He was known to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and his pupils Suso and Tauler continued to interpret his teachings in practical ways for the Christian life.

However, Eckhart's condemnation ensured that for several centuries his influence was far less than it might otherwise have been. In the early nineteenth century, interest in his writings was revived and scholarly German editions of his work were published. The twentieth century saw a remarkable flowering of interest in Eckhart. Part of this coincided with a growth of interest in Eastern mysticism, and Eckhart's philosophy has often been compared to Zen Buddhism. The influential Catholic monk Thomas Merton acknowledged his debt to Eckhart, as did psychologist Carl Jung. There is also a consensus amongst scholars today that Eckhart was unjustly convicted of heresy. It is believed that those who examined him were influenced by politics and also had a more shallow understanding of the roots of Christian spirituality than he did.

Eckhart's disciple Tauler has had a consistently favorable reputation. There appear to be only a couple of exceptions to this, when his works were banned in 1518 by the Jesuits and in 1590 by the Belgian Capuchins for advocating quietism, the idea that the spiritual life consisted of passively resting in a state of mental quietness (a complete misreading of Tauler). But these attacks did not prevent Tauler from having a continuous influence during the Reformation, continuing into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The other fourteenth-century mystic who today occupies a place of honor only slightly less than Eckhart's is Ruusbroec. Like Eckhart's, Ruusbroec's writings concerning the union of the soul with God were daring, and he was aware that he might be in danger of being thought heretical. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the last book of his, *The Spiritual Espousals*, was attacked by the theologian John Gerson, and this temporarily harmed Ruusbroec's reputation. But during the early years of the Reformation (beginning in the early sixteenth century) and Counter-Reformation (mid-sixteenth century), Latin translations of Ruusbroec's works were made, and these were intended to encourage people to remain in the Catholic fold. They had the effect of making Ruusbroec well known throughout the continent.

In modern times, Ruusbroec was championed by Evelyn Underhill in her authoritative book, *Mysticism* (1911). She regarded Ruusbroec as "one of the greatest mystics the world has yet known. In Ruysbroeck's [sic] works the metaphysical and personal aspects of mystical truth are fused and attain their highest expression."

William Ralph Inge, author of another influential study, *Christian Mysticism* (1899), grouped Ruusbroec with Suso, Tauler, and the *Theologia Germanica* as "the crowning achievement of Christian Mysticism before the Reformation."

In English mystical literature, *The Cloud of Unknowing* has always been held in high esteem. It was well known in medieval times since there were many manuscripts in circulation, and this was also true for Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* and many of the works of Rolle. *The Cloud of Unknowing* has held its reputation to the present day. Clifton Wolters, its most recent translator, describes it as perhaps the greatest devotional classic of the English church: "No one who reads it can fail to catch something of its splendour and charm."

In medieval times, Julian of Norwich was not so well known as the other English mystics. Until the mid-seventeenth century, her *Revelations of Divine Love* had only limited circulation. Today her reputation is secure, and she has been called the most approachable of the medieval English mystics. Medieval historian Jean Leclercq, in the preface to the Colledge and Walsh translation, comments that "her writings are now considered to have universal and permanent value. As a woman, she represents the feminine teacher and feminine insight that are less rare in the Western Christian tradition than many of our contemporaries might think."

Julian has even had an influence on English literature. The lines, "All shall be well and / All manner of things shall be well," which bring T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* to an optimistic close, are taken from Julian's twenty-seventh chapter: "It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on mystical literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses different ways in which mystical experience has been defined and classified.

When the modern reader approaches medieval mysticism for the first time, he or she may be more than a little bewildered by the language and patterns of thought of the period, and particularly by the mystical experiences themselves. These by definition are not everyday experiences and do not come under the category of things that can be explained solely by the rational intellect. Many questions arise: What is mystical experience? Is it an objective or a subjective phenomenon? How is it to be evaluated?

The problem is compounded by the fact that one cannot duplicate a mystical experience by reading someone else's account of it. At best one might receive a certain aesthetic pleasure from the act of reading and reflecting on the mystic's writings, but that is more like the pleasure that might accrue from reading, say, a novel or a poem; it is not the experience itself, which cannot be transmitted in this way.

And yet mystical experience, if what the mystics say about it is true, is surely a vitally important dimension of human knowledge. There is a wellknown story about the great medieval scholastic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. Toward the end of his life he was granted mystical experience, and he declared that all his learned tomes were but straw compared to what he had just been permitted to experience directly. Similarly, a later mystic, the unlettered Protestant Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), said that he had learned more in his fifteen minutes of mystical illumination in 1600 than he would have learned had he studied many years at a university.

Many writers have attempted to define and classify the different kinds of mystical experience. In a pioneering effort, philosopher William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, identified four characteristics of mystical experience. The first is ineffability: the experience cannot be expressed in words. One consequence of this is that it must be directly experienced, since it cannot be passed on to another person by use of language. The second characteristic is noetic quality, by which James means that it is a state of consciousness that communicates real knowledge of some kind□"insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect." In other words, it is not illusory. The third characteristic is transiency. The mystical experience cannot be sustained for more than a brief period, perhaps up to one hour or two at the most. The final characteristic is passivity, in which the mystic feels as if his own will is suspended, and he is held by a superior power.

A later philosopher, W. T. Stace, in *Mysticism and Philosophy*, sheds further light on James's first two characteristics. Stace classifies mystical experience into two types: introvertive and extrovertive mysticism. Introvertive mysticism corresponds to the end result of the *via negativa*; it is an experience of the oneness beyond all thought and activity of the individual mind. When the mind has turned inward, away from the senses,

and transcended all the ephemeral manifestations of life, it arrives at the one eternal, unchanging, silent reality, without form or limit. This state of being is beyond language because language deals only with the differentiated world of subject and object. In the introvertive experience, consciousness remains, but it is not consciousness of anything□there is no object of perception. It is, in a sense, the equivalent of the eye being able to see itself, an image that is used by Eckhart to convey his meaning (as translated by Blakney): "The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same□one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving."

Perhaps the best way to understand the introvertive mystical experience is by means of an analogy drawn from the modern world. Everyday perception is like seeing a succession of changing images projected on a blank screen, as with a movie. Normally, no one sees the blank screen on which all those images are projected. What the mystic does is free his mind of the images so that he experiences the blank screen, which is awareness itself, in all its simplicity□as it always is, was, and will be (although no such words of past and future can apply to it). Eckhart called this experience "isness," in the sense that it is beyond "myness." It is neither an objective nor a subjective experience; it is simply beyond such categories, and it is this that makes is so difficult for the rational mind to comprehend and for the mystic to describe. When the mystic does describe it, he is in effect capturing only his memory of it, since in the timeless moment in which it took place, "he" was not present, the individual self being wholly immersed in a state of undifferentiated unity, rest, and stillness.

If one had to identify a core mystical experience, common to all times and cultures, it would have to be, as Stace argues, the introvertive experience. The description of the experience of consciousness devoid of an object is consistently found in the spiritual writings of the East as well as the West. The *Mandukya Upanishad*, one of the oldest texts in the Hindu tradition, for example, says of reality:

It is not outer awareness,
It is not inner awareness,
Nor is it a suspension of awareness.
It is not knowing,
It is not unknowing,
Nor is it knowingness itself.
It can neither be seen nor understood,
It cannot be given boundaries.
It is ineffable and beyond thought.
It is indefinable.
It is known only through becoming it.

It would be hard to find a clearer description of the *via negativa* than this, and there is nothing in this quotation that Eckhart would have objected to. At this level of experience, differences between East and West tend to arise only when the mystic interprets his experience in the light of the doctrines of his own religious tradition. For the Hindu, the

Mundakya Upanishad describes the essential Self that is identical by its very nature with Brahman, the universal consciousness.

The Christian mystic, on the other hand, is wary of how he describes this "unknowing" union of the soul with God. This is because in orthodox Christian doctrine, such "deification" is attained only through the grace of God, not by virtue of the intrinsic nature of the individual self, and the creature always retains its distinct identity even as it experiences its union with the divine. There is a certain tension between the theological position that mystics such as Eckhart and Ruusbroec felt the need to uphold and the introvertive experience itself, in which all distinctions of creature and creator, individual and universal, dissolve in the silent abyss of the divine ground.

Stace's second category, "extrovertive" mystical experience, occurs when the mystic perceives the underlying unity of all things in the multiplicity of the world of nature. This is often accompanied by a perception of glorification, in which everything is seen in the light of the divine. Evelyn Underhill, in her classic study *Mysticism*, described this as "the illuminated vision of the world." It is found in mystics such as Boehme and in mystically inclined poets such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Traherne. It is less common in the medieval mystics, who for the most part looked inward rather than outward.

But Eckhart, perhaps the most profound of all the medieval mystics, wrote numerous passages that allude in a subtle way to this extrovertive experience of seeing God in all things. Often his gnomic, paradoxical utterances must be unpacked before they yield his meaning. In his sermon on the passage in the Book of Acts, "Paul rose from the ground and with open eyes saw nothing" (as translated by Walshe), Eckhart gives a characteristic meaning to the word "nothing," as referring to God, for God is "no-thing," existing in the abyss beyond all "somethings." So in Eckhart's exegesis of the passage, when Paul got up he saw "nothing but God"; "in all things he saw nothing but God," and when he saw God, "he saw all things as nothing." Eckhart's play on words makes his meaning clear: when a person is filled with God, like the apostle Paul, everywhere he looks, even at the meanest thing in creation, he sees God, for God is the nothing that underlies and is present within all the multiplicity of created "things."

For a less intellectual, more practical (and devotional) example of the extrovertive experience, one might turn to St. Francis of Assisi (1182- 1226), whose sense of union with all things was so refined that he preached to the birds, soothed captured turtledoves, and befriended pheasants, among other things. Underhill describes the reality that St. Francis lived not as an idea but as a direct experience: "every living creature was veritably and actually a 'theophany or appearance of God' . . . [he was] acutely conscious that he shared with these brothers and sisters of his the great and lovely life of the All." This kinship with all creatures, which is the practical fruit of mystical experience, is clear also in St. Francis's well-known "The Canticle of Brother Sun," in which he addresses the sun as "Sir Brother Sun" and the moon as "Sister Moon," as well as addressing "Brother Water" and "Brother Fire."

Given all these examples of introvertive and extrovertive mysticism, the question remains of the extent to which the mystical experience might be objectively evaluated.

Does the mystic have genuine insight into the nature of reality? Does his experience add to our knowledge of human consciousness, or is it unverifiable in any meaningful sense? As William James pointed out, for the mystic, the experience by its very nature conveys a sense of truth. When the introvertive mystic sinks into a state of eternal peace and stillness, without boundaries of any kind, he finds it so immensely satisfying, so compelling, that he believes it to be self-evidently an experience of the ultimate truth, since it stands in such stark contrast to the transient, restless nature of everything that exists in the realm of time and space.

But in the scientific age in which we live, subjective claims of truth count for little. The introvertive mystical experience, in which consciousness remains awake but with no object of experience, falls outside the realm of what contemporary neuroscience, cognitive science, or rationalist philosophy can explain. This leaves the mystic in the position of a person trying to explain the taste of strawberries to someone who has never tasted one (and who also may doubt that such a thing as a strawberry really exists). No amount of description is going to help. The mystic says: taste for yourself, and only then will you know.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on the Medieval Mystics, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following introduction to his English Mystics of the Middle Ages, *Windeatt touches on why medieval mystics wrote and how they referenced each other in their works.*

For sith in the first biginnyng of holy chirche in the
tyme of persecucion, dyverse soules and many weren
so merveylously touchid in sodeynte of grace that sodenly,
withoutyn menes of other werkes comyng before,
thei kasten here instrumentes, men of craftes,
of here hondes, children here tables in the scole, and
ronnen withoutyn ransakyng of reson to the martirdom
with seintes: whi schul men not trowe now, in
the tyme of pees, that God may, kan and wile and
doth□ye! touche diverse soules as sodenly with the
grace of contemplacion?

(*The Book of Privy Counselling*)

The later Middle Ages in England were indeed to prove such an age of contemplative saints, and 'the medieval English mystics' are often now grouped together. Viewed with one kind of hindsight, something new stirs with the writings of Richard Rolle (d. 1349), broadens and gathers the later fourteenth century□with Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*□and also includes a corpus of translations into English of other mystical writings that point to contemporary interest in contemplation. Like most retrospects on 'movements' or 'schools' of writers, such a view simplifies both the continuities with earlier traditions and between the writers themselves. Hindsight differently focussed might emphasize the substantial earlier literature on contemplation available in England, or the tradition of meditations in the vernacular.Independent and original in their time the English mystics of the Middle Ages nonetheless remain. On the most demanding of subjects they write in their own tongue at a new level of intensity and complexity in English prose, while the surviving translations of continental mystics show no significant influence on the most creative English mystical writers. Their subject must be demanding, for it is nothing less than the way to God through love, and their aim is to give their reader direction, and signposting a schematic, progressive ascent. Mere knowledge or learning for its own sake is of no avail, and they dismiss it. The way to perfection described by the English mystics stands open□although the demandingness of contemplation will preclude all but the committed□and witnesses to the appeal of the inner life to a growing section of contemporary men and women readers, whether in solitary, monastic or secular life.

It is towards the cultivation and extension of that inward life that the English mystics seek to express their own understanding of the art of mystical loving. Rolle or Hilton achieved a much wider readership than the *Cloud*-author or Julian, and their approaches are as distinctive as their styles. A text that advises 'First gnawe on the nakid blinde felyng of thin owne being' (*The Book of Privy Counselling*) is working with

different aims and assumptions from one that declares 'In this felynge myne undyrstandynge was lyftyd uppe into heven, and thare I sawe thre hevens. . .' (*Revelations of Divine Love*) Yet there are signs of interchangebetween mystics, of reading and commenting on the experiences and writings of others. Most vivid of interactions between the English mystics is Margery Kempe's memory of her visit to consult Julian of Norwich, and she reports the anchoress as having a contemporary reputation as an expert in discerning truth and deception in revelations, locutions, 'sweetness and devotion.' Margery has evidently been affected by Rolle's work, and it is his unforgettable example and pervasive influence on subsequent perceptions of contemplative experience in medieval England that prompt some of the intertextuality between the English mystics. Coming in his wake, such later English advisers on contemplation as Hilton or the *Cloud*-author are often writing, albeit implicitly, 'against' Rolle, at least in the sense that for them some of Rolle's work prompted reservations and qualifications (although probably not such late work as *The Form of Living*). One surviving 'Defence' of Rolle by Thomas Bassett, against the now-lost criticisms of a Carthusian detractor, insists that God does reveal his secrets to the humble and simple of heart, and seeks to counter the charges that Rolle made men judges of themselves and that more have been led astray than have profited by his writings.

Neither the *Cloud*-author nor Hilton refers directly to Rolle, or denies the experiences to which he lays claim. Yet both are recurrently concerned to offset any spiritually undesirable influence of their predecessor. As Rolle memorably described it□especially in *Incendium Amoris*□his own experience might seem too easily accessible: its sensory qualities could encourage the impressionable to mistake merely physical sensations for mystical experience. The *Cloud*-author apparently has Rolle's followers in mind when advising caption about 'cou*n*fortes, sounes, & gladnes, & swetnes,' or when characterizing would-be contemplatives who feel a physical sensation of heat in their breasts '& zit, parauenture, þei wene it be þe fiir of loue,' concluding sharply: 'For I telle þee trewly bat be deuil haþ his contemplatyues, as God haþ his.' Hilton gives a similarly strong warning on the fire of love misconceived bodily rather than spiritually (*The Scale of Perfection*); he also warns against 'felyng in þe bodily wittes,' whether 'in sownyng of þe ere, or saueryng in þe mouth, or smellyng at þe nese, or elles any felable hete as it wer fyr, glouand and warmand þe brest,' because such is not true contemplation and a comparable warning occurs in his *Epistle on the Mixed Life*. In *The Scale* Hilton also seeks to allay the recipient's disquiet, caused by what sounds like a reading of Rolle on devotion to the Holy Name, and *Of Angel's Song* sets Rolle's teachings on the hearing of heavenly melody in a proper context for Hilton's correspondent.

Near the close of *Angels' Song* Hilton's warning against the 'naked mynde' might be read as a comment on the *Cloud*-author's teachings, and the works of these two contemporary Midlands writers on contemplation do point to some interchange and mutual criticism, some learning from each other. At three points *The Cloud* acknowledges and refers its reader to 'another man's work,' in each case possibly referring to Book I of *The Scale*. In recommending 'Redyng, þinkyng & Preiing,' *The Cloud* declares: 'Of þeese þre þou schalt fynde wretyn in anoþ*er* book of anoþ*er* mans werk moche betyr þen I can telle þee,' perhaps referring to Hilton's account in *The Scale*. On the vexed question of whether 'counfortes and sounes and swetnes' be good

or evil, *The Cloud* comments: 'þou mayst fynde it wretyn in anoþe*r* place of anoþe*r* mans werk a þonsandfolde betir þan I kan sey or write,' which could well refer to Hilton's discussion in *Scale*. When the *Cloud*-author expresses reservation about 'wher anoþe*r* wolde bid þee gader þi miztes & þi wittes holiche wiþ-inne þi-self, & worschip God þere'□although he pays tribute to this other teacher: 'þof al he sey ful wel & ful trewly, ze! and no ma*n* trewlier & he be wel co*n*seiuid'□he may be criticizing such contexts as Hilton's advice to 'drawe in þi thoztes' or 'Geder þen þi hert togeder.' Indeed, it may be that while the *Cloud*-author responds to Book I of *The Scale*, Hilton in Book II sometimes writes with the *Cloud*author in mind. His warning against the misunderstanding of spiritual language in material and spatial terms may reflect Hilton's absorption of *The Cloud*'s insistent teachings on this point. Yet Hilton's very different application of the idea of the 'lighty mirknes' shows his distinctive independence, while the Christocentric emphases of Book II of *The Scale* may express implicitly Hilton's critique of the *via negativa* in *The Cloud* and his concern to redress the balance. In his *Privy Counselling* the *Cloud*-author may himself be seeking to respond to such a criticism, to offset his earlier work's emphasis on leaving behind meditation on the manhood and Passion of Christ, although in *The Cloud* he could not have been more succinct. In the preface to *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, his early fifteenth-century translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, Nicholas Love, prior of the Mount Grace Charterhouse, notes that to 'symple soules . . . contemplacion of þe monhede of cryste is more likyng, more spedefull & more sykere þan is hyze contemplacion of þe godhed,' and the English mystics make such a distinction in pursuing their own way to 'hyze contemplacion.'

When early in *Privy Counselling* the author dismisses the criticisms that 'I here sum men sey'□ that 'my writyng to thee and to other is so harde and so heigh. . .'□he brings together the English mystics' alertness to their works' reception and a mode of intimate address, apparently directed in the first instance to a personally known recipient, which is characteristic of many of their writings. In *Mixed Life* Hilton is moved in part to write to his addressee 'for tendre affeccioun of love whiche thou haste to me.' *The Cloud* was initially written (as is made clear) for the direction of a particular twenty-four year old disciple, although the manner of address in the prologue ('whatsoever thou be that this book schalt have in possession') shows an awareness that what was written for one known individual will come to be seen and used by a wider unknown readership. The opening of *Privy Counselling* confronts this matter directly: the author prefers to write what he thinks 'moste speedful' to his particular 'goostly frende' rather than to write generally for a general audience, trusting that among others who may read his work those similarly disposed may find something rewarding to them. Even in the epistles that Rolle writes as if to known women recipients ('Til the I write specialy'; 'Loo, Margarete') there is provision for 'thou, or another that redes this,' as in the mention of alternatives ('or if thou be na mayden'). In the longer, presumably later version of her *Revelations* Julian addresses herself more emphatically and confidently in the first person plural to her 'even- Cristen'; in Book II of *The Scale* Hilton apparently envisages a wider audience than the anchoress to whom Book I is ostensibly written, although even here Hilton comments: 'Thou schalt be saufe as anker incluse, and noght only thou bot all Cristen soules.' The mystics' counselling directed to particular cases becomes more widely available without losing the immediacy of its address. *Mixed Life*

sets out Hilton's interpretation of such a 'mixed' life for the benefit of a known individual in specific circumstances, yet the appeal of his theme is such that the epistle is copied unchanged in itself but with an emended opening address to a more general audience.

In one manuscript of *The Scale of Perfection* is written the message: 'My hert is ful heuy to send zow ois boke for I supposid þat ze suld hafe comen home þat we myght hafe comend togedir þer of' (Trinity College, Dublin). The English mystics' writings are often composed as if to inscribe such an intimate interchange, in the manner of a personal letter that stands in for a confidential conversation, and so represents parts of a larger implied dialogue between author and recipient. 'A thousand mile woldest thou renne to comoun mouthly with one that thou wist that verrely felt it,' and as an opening device to chapters, sections or whole works the mystics recurrently write as if responding to a request for guidance and direction. *Of Angels' Song* begins in this way, as does the 'Pilgrimage to Jerusalem' chapter of *The Scale*, while another chapter opens as if Hilton is reacting to his recipient's request to moderate the difficulty and adjust the level of his writing. That both the interpolation in this same chapter on the Holy Name and the later interpolation on charity begin with the similar 'But now, seist thou . . .' and 'But now seist þou . . .?' may indicate that such passages □evidently authentic, although absent from some manuscripts□represent Hilton's later responses to questions posed by some readers of his work. Such anticipations of a reader's possible questions, doubts and uncertainties are a characteristic feature of the implied dialogue that structures many of the mystics' writings. Hilton makes adroit use of the device, and it occurs in Rolle's epistles. Boldest use of such imagined questions from a reader is made by the author of *The Cloud*, not least when a question is forestalled only for the speaker to admit that it is unanswerable: 'But now thou askest me and seiest: "How schal I think on himself, and what is hee?" And to this I cannot answere thee bot thus: "I wote never!"' It is the *Cloud*-author whose mode of address to his contemplative pupil may recall that of a seasoned coach, coaxing a pace from an athlete under training: 'Lette not therfore, bot travayle therin tyl thou fele lyst.' It is also the *Cloud*-author who in *Privy Counselling* shrewdly confronts the issue of authorial control implicit in such one-sided 'dialogues': 'Lo! here maist thou see that I coveite sovereinte of thee. And trewly so I do, and I wol have it!'

Why does a mystic *write*? To praise God? To make a record of experience, as a witness? To instruct others, as a guide? It is the impetus to offer direction, to share knowledge, that constitutes one unifying feature in theme and form among the English medieval mystics. To read them is to be in the presence of an experienced guide to a process that implies a progression or an ascent ('I wyll that thou be ay clymbandetyll Jhesu-warde'). No wonder that in *De Utilitate*, his Latin letter to Adam Horsley, Hilton exclaims: 'If not even the least of the arts can be learned without some teacher and instructor, how much more difficult it is to acquire the Art of Arts, the perfect service of God in the spiritual life, without a guide?' and he criticizes those so overconfident as 'to set out on the way of the spiritual life without a director or capable guide, whether it be a man or a book . . .' A book in place of a man: the medieval mystics aim to be that guide to the Art of Arts, although the limits of books are acknowledged ('For a soule þat is clene sterid bi grace to vse of þis werkynge may see more in an hour of swilk gostly mater þan myzt be writen in a grete book,' *Scale*). The mystics offer guidebooks, maps

and manuals, and readers are urged to read them over not once but repeatedly. They represent instructions for use, for an art of loving to be put into practice beyond the process of reading and not to be confused with it. Indeed, *The Cloud* specifically warns against possibly mistaking the pleasures of the text for contemplative vocation: 'Alle þoo þat redyn or heren þe mater of þis book be red or spokin, & in þis redyng or hering þink it good & likyng þing, ben neu*er* þe raþer clepid of God to worche in þis werk, only for þis likyng steryng þat þei fele in þe tyme of þis redyng.' Any frisson of interest quickened by the literary effectiveness of the writing as art is not to be confounded with the soul's movement towards contemplation. Attainment lies over the horizon: it can rarely be more than adumbrated within the text and□always excepting Rolle□the English mystics are not generally concerned to strain after descriptive effects. Dame Julian, whose career begins in vision, leaves a text in which description is framed and transmuted by contemplation, while both Hilton and the author of *The Cloud* cast themselves as still travelling towards a goal, and so having limited personal experience from which to describe what they nonetheless assist their readers towards.

'If thou aske what contemplacioun is, it is hard for to telle or utterly diffine,' as one English version of Rolle admits, although such definition is the concern of almost every piece in this book. All description falls short□'For al that is spokyn of it is not it, bot of it,' as *Privy Counselling* notes□but the higher contemplation is defined in *The Scale* as illumination:

for to se by vnderstondyng sothfastnes whilk is God
and also gostly thynges with a soft swete bre*n*nand
loue in hym, so p*er*fitely þat by rauyschyng of
þis loue þe soule is oned for þe tyme and conformed
to þe ymage of þe Trinite. þe biginnyng of þis
contemplacio*u*n may be feled in þis lyfe, bot
þe fulhed of it is keped in þe blis of heuen.

Nor is contemplative accomplishment to be won by study or booklearning, and may be hindered. In short, 'oure soule, bi vertewe of this reformyng grace, is mad sufficient at the fulle to comprehende al him by love, the whiche is incomprehensible to alle create knowable might' (*Cloud*). One other thing is clear: fulfilment may only be yearningly awaited and prepared for, never claimed: 'The swetnesse of contemplacioun . . . cometh not thoruh merite ne diserte of man, but oonly of the free yifte of God' (*Mendynge*).

Source: Barry Windeatt, "Introduction," in *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, edited by Barry Windeatt, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 1-14.

Topics for Further Study

What relevance do the fourteenth-century mystics have for today's world? Are they remote, inaccessible, and incomprehensible, or do they offer something of value? If so, what, and for whom? For everyone or just a select few? Does one have to be a Christian to appreciate them? Could one be a mystic without even believing in God? How would a modern psychologist explain the phenomenon of mystical experience?

Research the poetry and prose of the seventeenth- century poet Thomas Traherne. Might Traherne be called a mystic? What elements in his poetry are mystical? What does he have in common with the medieval mystics that you have read and how does he differ from them? (You may apply the same questions to another poet or prose writer with whom you are familiar.)

What were the underlying assumptions that the medieval mystics made about existence? What did they believe about human nature, sin, and God, for example? In other words, what was their world view□the set of beliefs and assumptions that shaped their response to life? How does their world view differ from the world view underlying a literary movement such as Romanticism, or Absurdism, or any other literary movement with which you are familiar?

Compare and Contrast

Fourteenth Century: The fourteenth century is an age of faith. Although there is dissatisfaction with the worldliness of the Church, few people in Christendom doubt the essential truths of the Christian religion. They believe that Christ offers salvation to all who believe, and that heaven, hell, or purgatory await the soul after death.

Today: Although many thousands of evangelical Protestant Christians still believe in the literal truth of the Bible, and Catholics still accept the authority of the pope and of Catholic doctrine, the modern Western world is predominantly secular. Christianity is no longer the common language of Western civilization. People identify more with political ideas such as freedom, democracy, and equality of opportunity than with theological concepts. In the United States, because of the separation of church and state, religion is more of a private than a public matter.

Fourteenth Century: Before the development of the technology of printing, important manuscripts are copied and circulated by hand. For example, hundreds of copies are made of Rolle's *The Fire of Love*.

Today: Anyone wishing to read Rolle's *The Fire of Love* simply has to access the Internet by computer. The electronic publication of texts revolutionizes the dissemination of knowledge as completely as the first printing press did.

Fourteenth Century: The Black Death rages unchecked and kills perhaps twenty million people from Iceland to India. The disease is borne by rats and fleas, but this is not known at the time so no prevention is possible.

Today: The plague of AIDS reaches public attention in the 1980s, and, although currently diminishing in the United States and Europe, it is spreading rapidly in other parts of the world. In 2000, there are three million deaths worldwide from AIDS. Most of the deaths occur in developing countries, which cannot afford the expensive new drug treatments that are prolonging the lives of AIDS sufferers in the West. The total number of deaths from AIDS is estimated to be 21.8 million.

What Do I Read Next?

Thomas Merton (1915-1969) was one of the most influential religious writers of the twentieth century. His *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) is his spiritual autobiography, describing his early doubts, his conversion to Catholicism, and his decision to become a Trappist monk.

The Tao of Physics (1975), by Fritjof Capra, explores some of the striking parallels between modern theories of physics and the mystical traditions of the East.

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) was a shoemaker in Germany who had spontaneous experiences of divine illumination and became one of the greatest mystics in the Christian tradition. His *The Way to Christ*, originally written in 1622 and published by Paulist Press in 1978, presents the essence of his thought.

The Interior Castle was written by Teresa of Avila in 1577 and published in the Classics of Western Spirituality series in 1988. The Spanish saint describes the mystical life in terms of seven interior mansions that make up the classic stages of purgation, illumination, and union on the mystical path.

A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century (1978), by Barbara Tuchman, is a bestselling history of the century in which almost all of the great medieval mystics lived. Tuchman sees those turbulent times as a mirror of the social and cultural upheavals of the twentieth century.

Thomas Traherne: Selected Poems and Prose (1992) is a selection from one of the most mystical poets in English literature, who lived from 1637 to 1674. Traherne's poetry has been described as a nature mysticism that sees the glories of God in the external world.

Further Study

Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*, translated by C. E. Rolt, SPCK, 1979.

Dionysius the Areopagite was the sixth-century mystic who exerted such a powerful influence on many of the medieval mystics. These two short treatises are lucid expositions of his thought.

Johnston, William, *The Mysticism of "The Cloud of Unknowing": A Modern Interpretation*, Abbey Press, 1975.

This analysis of the theology of *The Cloud of Unknowing* makes some very interesting comparisons to Zen Buddhism.

Jones, Rufus M., *Studies in Mystical Religion*, Macmillan, 1909.

This is an engaging, if somewhat opinionated, survey of mysticism from ancient times to the seventeenth century, including several chapters on that of the medieval period.

Kempe, Margery, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, translated by B. A. Windeatt, Penguin, 1985.

Margery Kempe (c. 1373-c. 1440) was an illiterate woman from King's Lynn, England, who dictated the story of her stormy life and her spiritual journey toward God. The manuscript was lost for centuries before being rediscovered in 1934; it is the earliest surviving autobiography of an English person.

Wiethaus, Ulrike, *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, Syracuse University Press, 1993.

This is a collection of nine scholarly essays that examine medieval women mystics from a variety of standpoints. The focus is on how religious women steered themselves through the patriarchal structure of late medieval society.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

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