A Contemplative Community?  
The Cloud Texts and Scale 2 in Dialogue  
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A devotional milieu shared by Walter Hilton and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* was the probable basis of intertextual exchanges which took place in the early 1390s in major works by each writer. The article considers how this dialogue contributes to the climactic rendition of Hilton’s spiritual attainment in *Scale 2*. Early chapters are uninfluenced by the *Cloud* texts and dominated by an authoritarian polemic, but from Chapter 21, *Scale 2* weaves a sequential commentary on *The Cloud* into the unfolding of its teaching. In a convergence which challenges strict scholarly definitions of Hilton as cataphatic and the *Cloud*-author as apophatic, *Scale 2* deals expansively with the author’s paradoxical metaphor of darkness. Chapters 30-7 deploy a benevolent pastoral rhetoric to explicate or amend instructions given in related chapters of *The Cloud*. *Scale 2* proceeds to insist like *The Cloud* on the deceptiveness of language, as it seeks to merge the multiplicity of words and concepts into the unity of fulfilled contemplation. The article concludes by suggesting that the reinterpretations in *Scale 2* may have functioned ideologically to neutralise the potentially disruptive genius of *The Cloud* within official Church discourses.

The Case for a Shared Milieu  
Since the early twentieth century, commentators have perceived affinities of language and content linking *The Cloud of Unknowing* and its companion works with *The Scale of Perfection* and the varied corpus of shorter treatises in Latin and English attributed to Walter Hilton. The theory most often proposed to account for the affinities, a theory resilient enough to survive rebuttals by scholars as distinguished as Evelyn Underhill, Helen Gardner and Phyllis Hodgson, was that Hilton had also written the *Cloud* texts.1 An alternative

explanation first proposed by Gardner in 1933 is, however, now generally accepted.  
This is the view that the perceived textual interconnections result from a milieu shared by the authors. John Clark recently refined James Walsh’s suggestion, that the Cloud-author was a Carthusian of Beauvaile in Nottinghamshire, in contact with Hilton in residence during the last 10 years of his life at the nearby Augustinian priory of Thurgarton.  


Although a specific provenance for the *Cloud* group cannot be proved, there is ample textual support for a setting consistent with Carthusian traditions of pastoral writing, spiritual aspirations, and way of life. Following his renunciation, possibly as early as 1381, of an academic career in canon law, Hilton cultivated connections with the Carthusian order. In the most widely disseminated of his Latin letters, *Epistola de Utilitate et Prerogativis Religionis*, written while he was living as a solitary, he affirms a special admiration for Carthusians: ‘mons Domini et mons pinguis in vertice aliorum moncium, videlicet aliarum religionum eminencius’. Dialectal affiliations of some of the early manuscripts, which locate the *Cloud* texts with Hilton’s English works in the north-east Midlands, further support Walsh’s suggestion. The verbal linkages between the two groups, which do not always extend as far as theology and spiritual instruction, can be explained by their participation in an oral culture.

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4 In addition to the evidence rehearsed by Walsh, Clark and others, it may be noted here that *Discretion of Stirrings* refers to ‘goostly techers (I mene soche as haue ben of longe tyme experthe in singuler leuyng)’, Phyllis Hodgson, ed., *Deonise Hid Diuinite* E.E.T.S. OS. 231 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 67, lines 23-4, thus capturing the Carthusian linkage between communal and solitary living. The same work mentions ‘a goostly brofler of pine and of myne, at was now late in goure contrey’ (p. 68, lines 11-12). In a passage not dependent on its major source in St Bernard, *Discretion of Spirits* discusses an aspect of life in a ‘deuoute congregacioun’ (Hodgson, ed., *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, p. 86, lines 10-14).


of devotional preaching shared by Beauvale Charterhouse and Thurgarton Priory.\(^7\)

Interchanges between the *Cloud*-author and Hilton peaked in the years between the writing of *Scale 1*, dated c.1390, and *Scale 2*, composed shortly before Hilton’s death on 24 March 1396. The major *Cloud* texts seem all to have been written within this relatively short time-span.\(^8\) Intertextual dialogue


8 See Clark, ‘Sources and Theology in *The Cloud of Unknowing*’, *Downside Review* 98 (1980), pp. 108-9, and *The Cloud: An Introduction*, vol. 1, pp. 86-92. Clark dates the writing of *The Cloud* ‘to the very early 1390s, and *Privy Counselling* to the middle years of the same decade’ (*The Cloud: An Introduction*, p. 92). Manuscript, historical and internal evidence allows no more precise dating of the *Cloud*-author’s corpus, considered separately, than the second half of the fourteenth century. However, researches conducted chiefly by Joy Russell-Smith, ‘Walter Hilton and a Tract in Defence of the Veneration of Images’, *Dominican Studies*, 7 (1954), pp. 181-8, 199-204, 210-14, established several of Hilton’s important dates and locations. From these, from his further historical finds, and from comparisons which assume that similar issues, forms and source material
committed with responses in *The Cloud* to *Scale 1*, but can be inferred in shorter texts by each author as well. Deductions based on the premise of Hilton’s and the *Cloud*-author’s shared environment flow through recent commentary. Focus on the interchanges draws attention to the synchronic circumstanceuality of the texts in their time and place, in contrast with their debt to diachronic lines of descending tradition, much of which has already been traced.

**The Cloud Texts and Scale 2: Complexities of Hilton’s Response**

The purpose of the present essay is to extend the developing interest in the intertextuality of fourteenth-century English contemplative writings by considering how dialogue with *The Cloud* contributes to the final rendition of Hilton’s spiritual attainment in *Scale 2*. Clark and others have traced the doctrinal correlations and divergences between the two works. My intention is rather to material surfacing in different works indicate contemporaneity, Clark deduces approximate dates for Hilton’s writings. By tracing their interchanges with Hilton’s works, Clark arrives at approximate dates for the major *Cloud* texts. Because *The Cloud* probably refers to, and on one occasion critiques, *Scale 1*, Clark argues for the priority of the latter. *The Cloud* plain and *Privy Counselling* use paradoxical language: ‘liȝty derknes’, ‘nouȝt’, which Hilton explicated in his own terms in a revisionist spirit in *Scale 2*. See Hodgson, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises* (1982), p. ix, and below. *Scale 2* also appears to take criticism of *Scale 1* in *The Cloud* into account. Clark suggests that the specific teachings of ‘another man’ referred to three times in *The Cloud* and formerly attributed to Guigo II’s *Scala Claustrium* may be drawn from *Scale 1*, Clark, *The Cloud: An Introduction*, vol. 1, pp. 86-8.

Such an interchange, previously unnoticed, may be present when, in *Eight Chapters on Perfection*, written after 1393, Hilton warns the reader against those who say they have the spirit of freedom, and so much grace and love, that they may live as they wish: ‘Thei thenken hem so free and so siker, that thei shall not synne. Thei maken hem-self abouen the lawe of Hooli Churche, and they seyn thus as Seynt Poule [seid]: “Where the spirit of God is, there is fredom”.’ (Fumio Kuriyagawa, ed., ‘The Inner Temple Manuscript of Walter Hilton’s *Eight Chapters on Perfection*’, *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo), English Number 47 (1971), pp. 21-2, Ch. 3, lines 220-7). While Hilton’s reference is to the contemporary heresy of Liberty of Spirit, aspects of the attitude criticised, especially the commitment to leading by grace, the approval of spiritual freedom, and the precise scriptural quotation, also occur in *Discretion of Stirrings* (Hodgson, ed., *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, p. 70, line 13; p. 71, line 2).

demonstrate the complexity and balance, as well as the range, of Hilton’s literary and spiritual interchanges with The Cloud, and to raise the issue of their ideological significance. The exercise has the advantage of allowing similarities and differences in the two authors’ approaches to be distinguished and confirmed by quotation and analysis.

The following sequential consideration of Hilton’s interpretations and revisions of The Cloud in Scale 2 reveals that these diverge from the typically dichotomised responses over centuries to the Pseudo-Dionysian heritage. Sometimes Hilton explains difficult aspects of doctrine in The Cloud for a readership no longer limited, as he had expected it to be in Scale 1, to contemplatives. He accomplishes his exposition through verbal simplifications, expansions, and translations into conventional devotional language, with an admixture of emotion. Elsewhere, he adapts for his interpretative purposes, inspired by mature contemplative experience, the paradoxes of luminous darkness and Nothing/All, which the Cloud-author had uniquely developed from versions found in tradition and the shared milieu.

Scale 2, Chapters 1-20
Interchanges with The Cloud do not commence immediately. The opening chapters of Scale 2 are brief, organising discussion in tight academic divisions and lists, and frequently resorting to the long, legalistic sentences typical of Hilton’s Latin letters and tracts. Subjects dealt with in earlier works, such as the reformation by faith of the image of sin, are revisited in Chapters 1-12. A divisive, authoritarian polemic predominates. For example, Chapter 3 splits those who are not reformed by the Passion into those (Jews and infidels) who do not believe in it, and those (false Christians) who do not love it. Chapter 4 distinguishes between full and partial reforming of the image. Chapter 5 subdivides partial reforming into reforming in faith and reforming in feeling. Hilton’s adherence to the Church as an institution mediating the divine will is evident in his view of the sacraments in Chapters 6-8 as ratifying God’s forgiveness, or as the instruments of grace. Chapters 13-19 discuss the state of worldly lovers and hindrances to undertaking and attaining reformation of the image of sin. Hilton seems to have chosen, in the first 20 chapters of Scale 2, to foreground his orthodox views and his status as spiritual advisor, before commencing a discourse on contemplation, which would inevitably at times, like The Cloud, transcend doctrinal and institutional concerns.

Scale 2, Chapter 21 and Following
Of all Hilton’s multifarious writings, Scale 2 from Chapter 21 has secured him continuing recognition over centuries as a writer on contemplation. Dialogue with The Cloud commences at this point, as Hilton weaves a sequential commentary on the earlier book into the unfolding of his teaching. As the chapters lengthen, Scale 2 duplicates a tendency which can also be traced in The Cloud, of subsuming categories such as sin and virtue, faith and feeling, into the unity of love and desire for God. Vocabulary and syntax are simplified, and there is a more frequent and innovative use of figures and analogies. Clark notes an expanding Christological emphasis. Rational boundaries are subjected

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13 This well-used patristic topic is the subject of Hilton’s earliest surviving Latin letter, De Imagine Peccati, ed. Clark and Taylor, vol. 1, pp. 73-102. In Scale 1 it is the central theme, expressed in more positive terms than in the letter, of Chs. 52-91.

to a range of qualifications and an impulse which, if it does not dismantle, renders them permeable or conditional.

Shadowing of The Cloud in Scale 2 is first indicated by Hilton’s meditations in Chapter 21 on imperfect and perfect humility. Clark notes that ‘Hilton’s teaching here is exactly matched by The Cloud, Chs.13-14’. The Cloud explains with characteristic vigour that the cause of perfect humility is ‘thé overaboundant loue & thé worthis of God in him-self; in beholding of which alle kynde quakin, alle clerkes ben foles, & alle seintes & aungelles ben blynde’ (p. 40, lines 15-17). By contrast, in Scale 2 there is a seamlessly positive orientation to: ‘pis meknes þat þe soule felip þurw grace in sig & beholdynge þe endeles beyng and wundreful godnes of Iesu’ (H, fol. 85v; Clark and Dorward, p. 228; TEAMS, 1153-4). This is an early instance of the tendency of Hilton’s interpretations to smooth over the Cloud-author’s challenging individualism and experiential specificity by means of a benevolent and encouraging style. Commentators have traditionally praised the humanity and compassion of Hilton’s English writings, and this is an assessment to which I actively subscribe. However, the capacity inherent in an accomplished pastoral tone, even one founded in charity, to assert precedence and control perhaps deserves more acknowledgment in Hilton studies than it has so far received.

15 Clark and Dorward, p. 310, n. 107.
16 Quotations from The Cloud of Unknowning and companion texts are taken from Hodgson’s E.E.T.S editions, details of which are given above.
17 The major remaining requirement in Hilton studies, acknowledged by commentators over a period of nearly seventy-five years (Clark and Dorward, p. 53), is for a full critical edition of The Scale. Michael Sargent is currently completing the late Professor Bliss’s work on Book 1, and S.S. Hussey is preparing Book 2, for a critical edition to be published by E. E. T. S. Quotations in the present paper are edited from Hussey’s base text for Scale 2: British Library, MS Harley 6579, here referred to as ‘H’. Equivalent page references are given to Dorward’s text in the translation from H co-edited with Clark in 1991. This is currently more accessible than Underhill’s modernised version (London: J. M. Watkins, 1923), which retains its textual value, based as it is on an examination of 10 manuscripts and a full collation of three. References are also supplied to Thomas H. Bestul, ed., The Scale of Perfection (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University for TEAMS, 2000). Bestul chose London, Lambeth Palace, MS 472 as copy text for his edition, with variants for Scale 2 recorded from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 100. The online version of Bestul’s text of Scale 2 is indicated by the acronym TEAMS, followed by line numbers.
The Luminous Darkness: Scale 2, Chapters 24-27

The analogy of the luminous darkness, already present in Hilton’s corpus in the Latin letters, *Epistola de Leccione, Intencione, Meditacione et Aliis* and *Epistola ad Quemdam Seculo Renunciare Volentem*, as well as in the English Psalm commentaries, *Qui Habitat* and *Bonum Est* (if the latter is by Hilton),¹⁸ unfolds in Scale 2, Chapters 24-27, with a lucidity and simplicity which attest the writer’s contemplative attainment. Interconnections with *The Cloud* in these chapters suggest that Hilton may have intended them as an interpretation and application of the author’s paradoxical metaphors and contemplative praxis, in a context of positive theology.

Clark asserts that ‘Hilton’s use of “darkness” has no apophatic overtones at all’.¹⁹ In Scale 2 ‘darkness’ stands for realisation of sinfulness, a significance also accepted in *The Cloud*,²⁰ and for a forsaking of worldly and carnal love, leading to illumination of the reason. However, if this illumination is ‘knowing’ by definition, then implications of ‘unknowing’ must cling to ‘darkness’.²¹ A more substantial point is that Hilton approves it as ‘a gode nyt and a liy mirknes’ (Ch. 24: H, fol. 90v; Clark and Dorward, p. 235; TEAMS, 1393). In conjunction with ‘a riche nyt’ (H, fol. 91r; Clark and Dorward, p. 237; TEAMS, 1437-8), such paradoxical terms suggest a Cloud-like transcendence of discursively produced reality appropriate to their purpose, which is to encourage the apprentice to persist in the apparent darkness of renunciation. As in the Cloud-texts, this entails a mental silence, free from ‘noise and dynne of fleschly affeccions and vnclene fletes’ (H, fol. 90v; Clark and Dorward, p. 235; TEAMS, 1396-7). Although Gardner’s statement, that Hilton ‘is using the terms

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²⁰ The cloud of unknowing, also metaphorically ‘darkness’, sometimes appears as a palimpsest for the detailed recording of individual sins, or as the ‘lump’ of sin itself (p. 122, line 19; p. 123, line 2; and p. 123, lines 15-17).

²¹ Riehle argues that Scale 2 associates the night less regularly with sin than with unknowing, in contrast with Scale 1 (‘The Problem of Walter Hilton’s Possible Authorship’, pp. 33-4).
night, nought and darkness not for the cloud of unknowing, but for the cloud of forgetting’;\(^{22}\) is doctrinally correct, the poetic and practical contemplative connections between Scale 2, Chapter 24, and the Cloud texts are undeniable.\(^{23}\) They may in fact have been recognised by a scribe of Dublin, Trinity College, MS 122, writing in the second quarter of the fifteenth century in a Lincolnshire dialect, who placed a copy of Scale 2, Chapter 24, after copies of The Cloud and Privy Counselling made earlier in the manuscript by a different Lincolnshire scribe.\(^{24}\) The distinction between the two clouds maintained in The Cloud and pinpointed by Gardner is lost in Privy Counselling, which, as we have seen, Hilton probably also knew.

In Chapter 25, Scale 2 explains that the night ‘stonde\(\overline{p}\) only in desire and longynge to pe luf of Iesu with a blynde \(\overline{p}\)ingynge on him’ (H, fol. 92r; Clark and Dorward, p. 238; TEAMS, 1472-3). This summary of a teaching already explicated in the preceding chapter, repeats, except in its personalising reference to Jesus, the love offered in unknowing which is the essence of contemplation in The Cloud.\(^{25}\) Like the Cloud-author too, Hilton advises the reader to adopt an easeful attitude (‘suffre esily’) to the memories of fleshly and worldly sins


\(^{23}\) Watson alludes to connections between the two texts other than those exemplified here, and observes ‘in many respects...a fundamental rethinking in Scale 2 of Hilton’s earlier contemplative theology’. He argues, however, that in Scale 2 the metaphor of good night/ rich nought is used with the understanding that ‘it is possible to see beyond it’, while The Cloud insists on ‘God’s full ineffability’ (‘“Et que est huius ydoli materia?”’, p. 108); see below.

\(^{24}\) See Clark, The Cloud: An Introduction, vol. 1, p. 102. The presence of an extract from Scale 2 in Trinity College MS 122 is significant, because fifteenth-century manuscripts of core Cloud texts – The Cloud, Denis’s Hidden Divinity, An Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings, An Epistle of Prayer and Privy Counselling – usually contain no texts from other sources. In the early sixteenth century, the occurrence of Of Angels’ Song with Cloud texts in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 576, and with Cloud texts and selections from St Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe in Henry Pepwell’s printed anthology of 1521 suggests that early readers saw connections between the two oeuvres. Clark’s note on this sentence insists that ‘blinde’, ‘does not mean the apophaticism of the Cloud...but blind rather means single-minded’ (Clark and Dorward, p. 312, n. 139). This seems to be a strained interpretation. The occasionally Cloud-like conception of night-darkness as a moratorium on thought in Scale 2 is further exemplified by the following: ‘\(\overline{p}\)is nght is not elles bot a forberyngye and a withdrawyng of pe bour of pe soule fro erply \(\overline{p}\)inges, by grete desire & \(\overline{p}\)eryngye for to luf & seen & felen Iesu & gostly \(\overline{p}\)inges’ (Ch. 24: H, fol. 90r; Clark and Dorward, p. 235; TEAMS, 1383-5).
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which ‘presen so oppon him’: ‘be not to heuy ne strife not to mikel, as ṣaw ṣu woldest ṣurw maistrye put hem out of ṣi .POUG’ (H, fol. 90v; Clark and Dorward, p. 236; TEAMS, 1412-14; cf. Cloud, Ch. 46). Both authors use the traditional metaphor of a beam of light for divine self-revelation:

Cloud: ‘a beme of goostly li, persyng ṣis cloude of vnknowing’ (Ch. 27, p. 62, lines 14-15)
An Epistle of Prayer: ‘a soule...illumined in ṣe resoun by ṣe clere beme of euerlastyng li, ṣe whiche is God, for to se and for to fele ṣe louelines of God in himself...’ (p. 54, lines 5-8)
Scale 2: ‘smale sodeyn li tynges ṣat glideren out ṣburgh smale caues fro ṣat citee’ [Ierusalem] (Ch. 25: H, fol. 92v; Clark and Dorward, p. 238; TEAMS, 1492-3); ‘bemes of gostly li’ (Ch. 27: H, fol. 98r; Clark and Dorward, p. 247; TEAMS, 1770).

The examples of the Cloud-author’s terminology just quoted prove that he does not subscribe to Pseudo-Dionysian thought to the extreme of arguing that no intellectual understanding of God can be attained in earthly life. On the contrary, he states that when the ‘inner man’ finally attains to the recognition that the apparent Nothingness of the cloud is the All, ‘he is wel lernid to kon skyle of alle ingletones, bodely or goostly, wi-outen any specyal beholdyng to any o ingleton by it-self’ (Cloud, p.122, lines 11-17). While the Cloud-author mostly adheres to the paradox of an unknowing which is yet a knowing, he sometimes recognises a non-paradoxical illumination. Knowledge of ‘sum of [Godes] priuete’ is a blessing bestowed on those who persevere in the cloud, even though it cannot be retranslated into language (Cloud, p. 62, lines 16-21).

The imagery of luminous darkness in Scale 2 differs from that in The Cloud in its leisurely presentation, as Hilton applies it meditatively to the explication of a subtle practice. Thus, in a passage conceptually similar to Henry Vaughan’s poem ‘Night’, he associates the night with rest from bodily business and temptations (Ch. 24: H, fol. 90r, Clark and Dorward, p. 235; TEAMS, 1386-92), which he refers to as a false day. He explains transition from the day to the night paradoxically figuring knowledge of God, in a homely analogy of someone passing from sunshine into a darkened house (Ch. 27: H, fol. 98r; Clark and Dorward, p. 246; TEAMS, 1747-55). True to the via positiva, Hilton draws

on Isaiah to poeticise the dawn of spiritual understanding, when the night has passed: ‘And þan schal oure Lord Iesu fulfil þi soule with schynynge’s’. (Isa. 58.11; H, fol. 98r; Clark and Dorward, p. 247; TEAMS, 1767-8). Scale 2 dwells lovingly on contemplative attainment in terms of light imagery, in a notable expansion of the stylistics of the Cloud-author, who rarely forgets the deceptiveness of metaphors.

In their urgency to discount the erroneous attribution of the Cloud texts to Hilton, Gardner and the approved line of scholarship which followed her constructed an unnecessarily strict dichotomy between Hilton as cataphatic, and the Cloud-author as apophatic. Clark and Minnis have demonstrated that, as a later participant in the continuing debate over the priority of knowledge or love in contemplation, the author’s discipleship of Pseudo-Dionysius was moderated by arguments in favour of love.27 Hilton’s writing too sometimes embraced this priority.28 It is rarely acknowledged, however, that the Cloud-author’s commitment to unknowing itself is incomplete. This was argued by Riehle,29 whose article has


28 In Chapter 27 Hilton defines a true experience of the luminous darkness as a restful ‘freadam of spirit’, ‘for it is a feyling of hemself first and a risynge above hemself þurwȝ brennande desire to þe siȝt of Iesu, or elles if I sal say more soply, þis gracious feyling is a gostly siȝt of Iesu’ (H, fol. 95r-v; Clark and Dorward, pp. 242-3; TEAMS, 1630-2). Cf. Riehle, who notes this similarity of emphasis in The Cloud and The Scale (‘The Problem of Walter Hilton’s Possible Authorship’, 36-7). In Scale 2 the concept of understanding – elevated feeling or insight – heals the hierarchised dichotomy of ‘trouȝ (faith) and (bodily) ‘feeling’ which concludes Of Angels’ Song. In fact, by devoting two-thirds of his definitive work to the subject, ‘reforming in feeling’, Hilton implicitly overturns the superiority of ‘trouȝ’, in a procedure which he clarifies in Chapter 41. Living in ‘trouȝe’ is explained as a recommendation of indifference towards bodily feelings only. Hilton advises readers to desire spiritual feelings of Jesus’ love, the ‘opening of the spiritual eye’ (H, fol. 128v; Clark and Dorward, p. 287; TEAMS, 3094-101). Scale 2 nevertheless retains the binary of ‘bodily’ and ‘spiritual’ feeling, and, unlike The Cloud, does not set feeling free from understanding (see Clark and Dorward, p. 304, n. 15).

been discounted because it supports Hilton’s authorship of the *Cloud* texts. Mainstream scholarship has similarly submerged the persistent apophatic elements in the language and contemplative counsel of *Scale 2*, in which earlier commentators rightly perceived parallels with *The Cloud* and its companion texts.30

**Scale 2, Chapters 30-35**

Signs of an intention on Hilton’s part to reshape aspects of the *Cloud*-author’s doctrine in more conventional and therefore accessible terms surface again in Chapters 30-35 of *Scale 2*. These draw on Chapters 52-62 of *The Cloud*, to reaffirm the distinction between bodily and spiritual understanding and practice. Hilton utilises the author’s recognition of the deceptiveness of the imagination, as well as the specialised definitions in *The Cloud* of the prepositions, ‘within’ and ‘above’.31 He follows *The Cloud* in exemplifying the former by a turning of the attention inwards to the body, although he substitutes ‘po23’ for ‘bodily wittes’, and eliminates the acerbity which characterises the *Cloud*-author’s treatment of this topic.32 Like *The Cloud*, *Scale 2* exemplifies ‘above’ by visions of Jesus in heaven (*Cloud*, Ch. 57, p. 105, lines 9-11; *Scale 2*, Ch. 33: H, fol.109r; Clark and Dorward, p. 261; TEAMS, 2232-57). Hilton draws on the psychology adapted by *The Cloud* from Richard of Saint Victor’s *The Twelve Patriarchs* (Ch. 31: H, fols.106v-107r; Clark and Dorward, pp. 258-9; TEAMS, 2122-53), to assert that only Jesu-God’s divine nature is ‘above’ ‘pe kynde of a soule’ (Ch. 33: H, fols. 108v-109r; Clark and Dorward, p. 261; TEAMS, 2233-34; cf. *Cloud*, Ch. 62, p. 115, line 3). Phrase patterns and descriptions used to expose deception echo satiric evocations in *The Cloud*, but with greater tolerance and human sympathy. They also adopt a smoother pastoral rhetoric, for example:

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32 For example, ‘& forp[i] ſat pei knowe not whiche is inward worchyng, perfore pei worche wronge. For pei turne peire boduly wittes inwarde to peire body & ens pei cours of kynde; & streynen hem, as pei wolde see inwarde wi peire bodily inwarde, & heren inwarde wi peire eren, & so forpe of alle peire wittes, smellen, taasten, & felyn inwarde’ (*Cloud*, Ch. 52, p. 96, lines 16-21); ‘pan if ſu coueite for to knowen & seen ſi soule what it is, ſu schalt not turne ſi po23 into ſi body for to seken it & felen it, as it were hid within ſi hert as ſi hert is hid & holden within ſi body’ (*Scale 2*, Ch. 30: H, fol. 102r; Clark and Dorward, p. 252; TEAMS, 1940-3).
Cloud: þees men willen sumtyme wiþ þe corioust of here ymaginacion peerce þe planetes, & make an hole in þe firmament to loke in þerate.
(Ch. 57, p. 105, lines 9-11)

Scale 2: Not as summe wenen, þat þe opnynge of heuen is as if a soule miȝt seen by ymaginacioun þurȝ þe skies abouen þe firmament. (Ch. 32: H, fol. 108v; Clark and Dorward, p. 261; TEAMS, 2222-4)

Cloud: to streyne þin ymaginacion in þe tyme of þi preier bodely upwards, as þou woldest clymb abouen þe mone. (Ch. 59, p. 111, lines 7-8)

Scale 2: þe hiȝere he stiep aboue þe sunne for to see Iesu God so bi swilk ymaginacioun, þe lowere he falliþ bineþ þe sunne. (Ch. 32: H, fol. 108v; Clark and Dorward, p. 261; TEAMS, 2226-8)

Hilton further mitigates the rigour of The Cloud by an escape clause which characteristically licenses imaginative sight ‘to symple soules, þat kunne no better seke him þat is vnseable’ (Ch. 32: H, fol. 108v; Clark and Dorward, p. 261; TEAMS, 2228-9).33

Chapter 32 of Scale 2 explicates the limited knowing of God which is possible on earth as specifically a sight and a knowing of Jesus, from which love flows. This is ‘reforming in faith and feeling’, ineffable but still ‘dark’ in comparison with full knowing in heaven (H, fol. 107r-v; Clark and Dorward, p. 259; TEAMS, 2176-9). Continuing in apparent dialogue with the negative theology of The Cloud, in Chapter 34 Hilton asserts a preference for the contrary side of the debate over priorities already referred to, by repeating the axiom that knowledge must precede love. He distinguishes ‘love unformed’, the Holy Spirit, from ‘love formed’, the created human capacity to love, and asserts that humans love God through his gift of himself as love unformed. Scale 2 diverges from The Cloud in a correction which replaces energetic effort in the ‘werk’ of contemplation promoted in The Cloud, with the unconstrained bestowal of divine love as insight:

A later summary in Scale 2 of the author’s satirical descriptions of misdirected bodily ‘straining’ and ‘violence’ in contemplation contains a corrective which clarifies Hilton’s more moderate attitude to such ‘feruours’: ‘And in þis maner wyrkyenge þei ðelen grete ferouer and mikel grace. And soþ it is as me þinkþ, þis wyrkyenge is good and medful, if it be wel tempred with meknes and with discrecioun’ (Ch. 35: H, fol. 113r-v; Clark and Dorward, p. 267; TEAMS, 2432-4).
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Now may þu see þat lufe formed is not cause whi a soule comiþ to þe gostly siþ of Iesu, as summe men wolde þenken þat þei wolde luf God so brennandely as it were bi þeire owne miþ, þat þei were worþi for to haue þe gostly knowynge of him. Nay, it is not so. Bot luf vnformed, þat is God himself, is cause of al þis knowynge. (Ch. 34: H, fol. 111r; Clark and Dorward, p. 264; TEAMS, 2328-32)

Divisions Overcome: Scale 2, Chapter 37

In a renewed discussion of the two levels of humility in Chapter 37, Scale 2 achieves what Clark regards as Hilton’s closest explicit approach to the teaching of The Cloud (H, fol. 117r; Clark and Dorward, p. 272; see p. 321, note 276; TEAMS, 2573-98). For both authors, the transcendental vision which generates perfect humility resolves the inner dichotomies created by the perception of separate being. In Chapter 13, The Cloud states:

bot ofte it may befalle þat a soule in þis deedly body, for abundaunce of grace in multipliing of his desire, as ofte & as longe as God voucheþ saaf to worche it, schal haue sodenly & parfitely lost & forgetyn alle wetyng & felyng of his beyng, not lokyng after wheþer he haue ben holy or wrechid (p. 41, lines 2-5).

Chapters 43 and 44 of The Cloud are related to this in that they describe the experience in agonised sorrow – ‘he wepiþ & weilip, striuiþ, cursiþ & banneþ’ (p. 84, line 18) – of ‘a nakid weting & a felyng of þin owne beyng’ (p. 83, line 3), ‘a foule stinkyng lumpe of him-self’ (p. 84, line 14). The subsequent forgetting of this feeling in fulfilled longing for God consummates the ‘werk’, when the soul ‘mowe parfitely be onid vnto God in parfite charite’ (p. 85, lines 7-8). Hilton’s parallel presumptive resolution of the sense of separate subjectivity, subsumed in the feeling of God’s presence, evokes a transcendence joyfully freed from awareness of personal worthiness or guilt:34

34 In Scale 1 Hilton applies St Bernard’s distinction between humility as true self-knowledge and humility derived from an intuition of the divine. The contrast with Scale 2 is marked. See Clark, The Cloud: An Introduction, vol. 2, Notes on The Cloud of Unknowing, Analecta Cartusiana 119:5 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1996), pp. 106-9, where relevant passages in St Bernard, Gilbert of Holland, Scale 1, Scale 2 and The Cloud are quoted in full, and further in vol. 1, Introduction, pp. 88-90.
For whan þe Holy Gost liȝteneþ þe resoun in-to þe sifȝt of sopȝfastnes, how Ihesu is al and þat he dop al, þe soule hap so grete luf, so grete ioy in þat gostly sifȝt, for it is so sopȝfast, þat it forȝtæþ þit-self and fully leneþ to Ihesu with al þe lufe þat it hap for to beholden him. It takiþ no kepe of vnworþines of it-self, ne of synnes before done, bot settiþ at noȝt it-self, with al þe synnes and alle þe gode dedis þat euer it did, as if þer ware noþinge bot Ihesu. (H, fols. 116v-117r; Clark and Dorward, p. 272; TEAMS, 2588-94)

In a textual mimesis of the contemplative path pursued throughout Hilton’s corpus, this passage consummates his earlier doctrinal emphasis on gaining humility through the arduous overcoming of pride. The discussion omits the Cloud-author’s vivid experiential details, including the anguished inner struggle stemming from a realised self-knowledge. Instead, the passage quoted summarises the kernel instruction of The Cloud in simple language, and finds an equally generalised authority for it in the Bible: ‘Et substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te’ (Psalm 38.6; H, fol. 117r; Clark and Dorward, p. 272; TEAMS, 2595-8). There has been a loss in empiricist conviction and a gain in devotional serenity, as Scale 2 again functions as a bridge between the Cloud-author’s insights and a more conventional Christianity. The passage quoted has the further interest of unravelling the skillful evolution of the paradox of Nothing/All in Chapter 68 of The Cloud already discussed (p. 122, lines 6-17).

Language Unmasked: Scale 2 from Chapter 39
Finally, Scale 2 contains Hilton’s only sustained acknowledgment of the multiplicity of language as inadequate for conveying divine transcendence. In this he was again probably influenced by The Cloud, which, more forcefully than any other surviving medieval text, develops themes of ineffability and of the duplicity of ‘bodili’ language as a medium for spiritual instruction.\(^\text{35}\) In Scale 2, an unmasking of metaphors and paradoxes as interchangeable, fallacious representations of the divine occurs when they are grouped, as if for reader

\(^{35}\) The spiritual-bodily dichotomy in contemplative understanding is expanded in Ch. 40, where Scale 2 again utilises psychological terminology characteristic of The Cloud (Ch. 62, p. 114, lines 17-18), to promote ‘heiȝe herte’, or perception of the divine above the ‘praldom’ of worldly love, in which the soul is ‘beneþ alle creatures’ (H, fols. 124v-125r; Clark and Dorward, p. 282; TEAMS, 2922-37).
selection, in Chapter 40, following the disclaimer, ‘I drede mikel to speke ouȝt of it, for me þinkþ I kan not’ (H, fol. 123r-v; Clark and Dorward, p. 280; TEAMS, 2860-1). Holy men write diversely ‘in schewynge of wordes, nerþeles þei arne alle in on sentence of sopfastnes’. Possession by grace of this single truth is (paradoxically) possession of the whole (H, fol. 123v; Clark and Dorward, p. 281; TEAMS, 2870-5).

Diverse statements in the latter part of Scale 2 advocate a simplification of words and speaking. The drive of the text, leading to its ultimate self-cancellation, is towards a submergence of linguistic multiplicity in the unity of fulfilled contemplative experience. This movement again is initiated in Chapters 21-24, in the sequence of words which the pilgrim bound for Jerusalem repeats as a defence against the ‘veyn iangelynge’ of his spiritual foes: ‘I am noȝt, I hafe noȝt, I coueite noȝt, bot only þe luf of Iesu’. Woven into the pilgrimage exemplum, and merging it with the luminous darkness through the unity asserted between Jesus and desire-for-Jesus (Ch. 24: H, fol. 89r; Clark and Dorward, p. 234; TEAMS, 1334-45), the formula operates as an implied sanctification of the text.36 The recommended simplicity of focus recalls the Cloud-author’s advice to respond to distracting thoughts with a single sentence: ‘sey þou þat it is God þat þou woldest haue. “Him I coueite, him I seche, & noȝt bot him”’ (Ch. 7, p. 26, line 16). The personifying of thoughts, and even the terminology: ‘drawe douni þi þouȝt and þi desire fro þe luf of Iesu’ (Ch. 23: H, fol. 89v; Clark and Dorward, p. 233; TEAMS, 1309-10) recall dramatic scenarios in The Cloud.37

In dealing in Chapter 39 with the power of love of Jesus, ‘frely & restfully’ contemplated in the heart, over sins and the ‘veyn likyng’ of the five senses, Hilton pays most attention to hearing and speaking. He prefers a singular inner focus to ‘þe spekyngþe and þe techynge of þe grettest clerke of erþ, with alle þe resouns þat he coude seyen to him þurȝ mannes witte’ (H, fol. 122v; Clark and Dorward, p. 280; TEAMS, 2837-8). Strengthened negative judgments of book-learning in Scale 2 may further reflect Hilton’s acquaintance with The Cloud (Ch. 43: H, fols.135v-136r; Clark and Dorward, p. 296; TEAMS, 3398-3402).

36 Ch. 21: H, fols. 84v, 85r; Clark and Dorward, pp. 227, 228; TEAMS, 1118-20, 1140; Ch. 22: H, fols. 87r, 87v, 88r; Clark and Dorward, pp. 231-2; TEAMS, 1234-5, 1261-2, 1278-9; and Ch. 23: H, fol. 88v; Clark and Dorward, p. 233; TEAMS, 1316-17.
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Hilton identifies the inspired inner state of silence and virtue, of restful labour ‘in pe fre gostly wyrkyng of lufe’, with Jesus’ voice. Another metaphor, which equates the prayer of actives with two (dualistic) words and contemplatives’ prayer of the heart with one word, further extends the notion of reducing language (Ch. 42: H, fol. 131v; Clark and Dorward, p. 291; TEAMS, 3206-12). Finally, Scale 2 turns the newly acquired insight into language against itself: the feeling of Jesus’ presence in the soul is better known by experience than by any writing (Ch. 41: H, fol. 129r; Clark and Dorward, p. 288; TEAMS, 3113-14), ‘for a soule þat is clene, sterid bi grace to vse of þis werkyng, may see more in an houre of swilk gostly mater þan my  t be writen in a grete book’ (Ch. 46: H, fol. 140r; Clark and Dorward, p. 302; TEAMS, 3593-4).

Summary

Hilton was the first in a long line of writers who strove to mediate The Cloud of Unknowing to students of mysticism and aspiring contemplatives. The discontinuous intertextual dialogue with The Cloud, traced above through 25 chapters in Scale 2, reveals convergences in both theology and contemplative praxis, which the compulsion experienced by earlier commentators to disprove Hilton’s authorship sometimes elided. Hilton interprets for his readers the doctrine of imperfect and perfect humility, and the abandonment in The Cloud of dichotomised self-judgment, when awareness of separation is lost in apprehension of God’s being. He follows the Cloud-author in the advice to persist in the darkness of forgetting, awaiting ‘the beam of spiritual light’, a metaphor which both writers use to express grace-bestowed knowledge. Signs of linguistic constriction in the latter part of Scale 2 further orient that work towards The Cloud and the via negativa.

As well as seeking to interpret, Scale 2 exercises a right of disagreement. Despite the concessions listed above, Hilton maintains the theology of the via positiva against the influence of The Cloud, and continues to contextualise contemplation within Augustinian moral theology. He also mitigates features

38 ‘For whi, his vois is so swete and so miȝty þat it puttith silence in a soule to iangelynge of alle oþer spekers’ (Ch. 40: H, fols. 123v-124r; Clark and Dorward, p. 281; TEAMS, 289-93). Jesus’ secret sayings are further identified, following St Gregory, with the ‘hidden word’ of Job 4.12 (Ch. 46: H, fols. 139v-140r; Clark and Dorward, p. 302; TEAMS, 3573-6).
disturbing to contemporary instructional rhetoric, such as the Cloud-author’s empirical representation of anguished self-knowledge, his impatience with self-deception, and his portrayal of contemplation as vigorous, sustained effort.

**An Issue of Ideology**

Hilton’s responses and applications in Scale 2 certainly furthered the dissemination of the author’s ideas, and may have encouraged the reading and widened the circulation of the Cloud texts themselves. The complex treatment given to The Cloud in Scale 2 nevertheless raises the question of whether, whatever his conscious intention may have been, Hilton’s interpretation had the further effect of naturalising the distinctive, and potentially disruptive, genius of The Cloud within ecclesiastical discourse. Hilton was experienced as an apologist for the Church, having learned his craft while writing such works as Epistola de Utilitate, De Adoracione Ymaginum, Epistola de Leccione, and Eight Chapters on Perfection. His tone, reflecting an underlying attitude of constructive benevolence, was admirably suited to rendering the Cloud-author’s energetic idiolect unexceptionable. The application in Scale 2 of paradoxes of the luminous darkness and of Nothing/All can perhaps be regarded as adapting the powerful practices of the via negativa to positive theology. This was standard and assumed in Church-sponsored English pastoral writings extant from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, except, indeed, for The Cloud and Privy Counselling. That Hilton built his most sustained commentary on the Cloud-author’s instruction on a foundation of his most authoritarian institutional writing in Chapters 1-20 of Scale 2, might be seen as further subordinating The Cloud to official discourses. Alternatively, these chapters might be interpreted as having provided Hilton himself with a plank from which to leap, together with The Cloud, to a spontaneous affirmation of contemplation as central to joyful Christian service.

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40 Of course, Denis’s Hidden Divinity is not a pastoral work. The author probably translated De Mystica Theologica defensively, as being the chief theological authority for his apophatic contemplation.