

Paracelsian Medicine and Theory of Generation in 'Exterior homo', a Manuscript Probably Authored by Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579–1644)

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Abstract: This article discusses a Latin manuscript that can be found in the Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579–1644) archives in Mechelen (Malines), Belgium. The manuscript bears no author and no title, and begins with the words 'Exterior homo', hence being referred by this provisional title in the analysis. Ecclesiastical prosecutors investigating Van Helmont for heresy in 1634 considered that it was written by him, but this was vehemently denied by the Flemish physician. The present article takes a first detailed look at the content of the treatise and ideas contained therein. It hence identifies the manuscript as belonging to a seventeenth-century physician influenced by the ideas of Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493–1541) and his interpreter Petrus Severinus (1542–1602), and containing a complex medical philosophy drawn on alchemical thought. Thus, the anonymous author presents a comprehensive view on the nature and structure of man, as well as an idiosyncratic theory of human generation. Following the analysis of the treatise, the article further compares it with the known works of J.B. Van Helmont, and finds that it is very similar to his ideas. Hence, the article concludes that it is 'likely' that the manuscript is indeed written by Van Helmont, although lack of direct evidence prevents certain attribution.

Keywords: Early modern medicine, Alchemy, Theory of generation, Theory of reproduction, Paracelsianism, Van Helmont

On 3 March 1634, the Flemish physician and alchemical philosopher Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579–1644) was arrested by the order of the Mechelen (Fr Malines) ecclesiastical court under suspicion of heresy.¹ His troubles had been ignited long before

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¹ This episode is the subject of a lively narrative by Craig Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 179–241. Another important source is Robert Halleux, 'Le procès d'inquisition du chimiste Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont (1578–1644): les enjeux et les arguments', *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 148, 2 (2004), 1059–86, 1074–8.

this date, in 1621, when a small printing house in Paris published Van Helmont's treatise *De magnetica vulnerum curatione* (*On the Magnetic Cure of Wounds*).² This work maintained that a Paracelsian cure called the weapon-salve was natural rather than diabolical, thus arousing the ire of the Jesuit Jean Roberti (1569–1651), who spent most of the following years attempting to get Van Helmont condemned for heresy. After a long delay, in 1634, the ecclesiastical court in Mechelen decided to proceed with Van Helmont's arrest, and confiscated all papers it found at the Brussels residence of the Flemish physician. Although the court eventually released Van Helmont in 1637 without charging him, it never returned the papers, and hence these can still be found in the Archives of the Archbishopric of Mechelen today.

Amongst the confiscated papers there is a short Latin treatise bearing neither title nor author, and beginning with the words 'Exterior homo' ('External Man').³ When the court inquired about its contents, Van Helmont affirmed that the treatise was not his, having been sent to him by Father Marin Mersenne (1588–1648) of the Minorite order in Paris as part of a *consilium* (medical consultation) regarding a certain prince.⁴ The prosecutors were not convinced; they showed Van Helmont the annotations he himself had made in the manuscript and accused him of having, in fact, written it. This was vigorously denied by the Flemish physician; when the prosecutors recited to him a suspicious passage and asked him to comment on it, he simply stated that it was a strange statement that he could not understand.⁵

The court clearly did not feel it had sufficient evidence to pursue the matter further, as the subject was never broached again in the trial records. The prosecutors were probably unaware of the treatise's circumstances, which led historian Robert Halleux to claim that the *consilium* containing 'Exterior homo' was surely authored by Van Helmont.⁶ Unfortunately, as we will see, the circumstantial evidence does not establish authorship beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In the present article I will focus on the content of the treatise, which has never before been analysed. Whether or not authored by Van Helmont, 'Exterior homo' is a valuable document that can be closely connected with his ideas and related to the development of his thought. Furthermore, the brief work offers a remarkable insight into Paracelsian medical philosophy and theory of human generation as it was expounded by an early seventeenth-century follower. Hence, the purpose of this article to investigate the main tenets set forth in the treatise and their possible sources, before assessing them against Van Helmont's genuine works.

² In front of the ecclesiastical court, Van Helmont maintained that the treatise had been published against his will and that it was meant to be circulated only amongst a group of friends and acquaintances. See Corneille Broeckx, 'Interrogatoires du docteur J.B. van Helmont sur le magnétisme animal, publiés pour la première fois', *Annales de l'Académie d'archéologie de Belgique*, 13 (1856), 306–50: 314. For more information on the weapon-salve controversy and Van Helmont's involvement, see Mark A. Waddell, 'The Perversion of Nature: Johannes Baptista Van Helmont, the Society of Jesus, and the Magnetic Cure of Wounds', *Canadian Journal of History*, 38 (2003), 179–97; and Carlos Ziller Camenietzki, 'Jesuits and Alchemy in the Early Seventeenth Century: Father Johannes Roberti and the Weapon Salve Controversy', *Ambix*, 48, 2 (2001), 83–101, 87–96.

³ I am henceforth referring to this untitled treatise as 'Exterior homo'.

⁴ Broeckx, *op. cit.* (note 2), 347–8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 347–8.

⁶ Halleux, *op. cit.* (note 1), 1078.

The Context of 'Exterior homo'

Jan Baptist Van Helmont is one of the most famous chemical authors of the seventeenth century, a liminal figure variously seen as the last of the medical–alchemical school of Paracelsus, a transitional author at the threshold of the Scientific Revolution or as one of the first modern chemists. He was a polymath physician who dedicated himself to alchemical experiments while developing a new philosophy that made a particular impact on the following generation of chemists, including Robert Boyle, Ernst Stahl, Hermann Boerhaave and even Antoine Lavoisier. Today, many history of science books credit Van Helmont for the discovery of the concept of gas, for performing some of the first quantitative experiments in chemistry and for his contribution to the demise of Galenic medicine. Van Helmont saw himself as much more than a scientific figure: he felt called to develop a new 'Christian philosophy' that would be dedicated to the betterment of humanity through medicine.⁷

Van Helmont's life and works are marked by the profound disruption caused by the lengthy persecution by the Inquisition and the Mechelen ecclesiastical court. The first proceedings against him were opened in 1625; the last were ended in 1642, two years before his death. Although he was never convicted, he experienced frequent harassment and misfortune. He may have suffered even worse had he not been a member of a famous noble family, with good connections in the upper echelons of Flemish society. Even this would not have saved him, suggested French Galenic physician Guy Patin (1601–72) after his death, if he had not been in the good graces of the Queen Mother of France.⁸

Patin's commentary voiced rumours that linked Van Helmont to the French Court. There was apparently some truth to them, as during the trial Van Helmont admitted to have been in contact with a confidant of Queen Mother Maria de Medici (1573–1642).⁹ More importantly for the present analysis is the 1630–31 correspondence carried out between Van Helmont and Marin Mersenne in regards to King Louis XIII (1601–43) himself. Thus, the two philosophers discussed the marriage of the monarch to Anne of Austria (1601–66), which was childless at the time of the exchange. In the letter of 29 March 1631, Van Helmont told Mersenne, who was in contact with the king, that he wished to visit France for the purpose of communicating the secret of successful procreation directly to Louis XIII.¹⁰ He claimed that his remedies had helped numerous infertile women get pregnant even after seventeen years of sterile marriage, and promised he could do the same for the French monarch.¹¹ Van Helmont further asked to be informed about the king's condition without the knowledge of the royal physicians. In the course of this letter, Van Helmont affirmed that the 'Hermetic school' of alchemy was superior to all others in curing infertility, because it operated on the 'magnetic attractor in the womb', which was the only cause of pregnancy.¹²

⁷ This is the subject of my PhD thesis, Delia Georgiana Hedesan, 'Christian Philosophy: Medical Alchemy and Christian Thought in the Work of Jan Baptista Van Helmont (1579–1644)' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Exeter, 2012).

⁸ Guy Patin, *Lettres* (Paris: J.H. Reveille-Parise, 1846), 16 December 1649.

⁹ Broeckx, *op. cit.* (note 2), 45.

¹⁰ 'Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont, à Bruxelles, à Mersenne, à Paris, 29 mars 1631', in Cornelis de Waard (ed.), *Correspondance du Marin Mersenne*, 17 vols (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1936), III, 162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹² *Ibid.*: 'D'ailleurs magnetica uteri attractrix, unica impregnationis causa, a nemine certius tractabitur (absit invidia) quam ab authore Magnetismi'.

This only surviving letter on the subject clearly situates ‘Exterior homo’ in the context of King Louis’ sterile marriage, and makes it possible that Van Helmont could have authored a *consilium* to be sent to the monarch. As we will see, the statement that the magnet in the uterus is responsible for procreation agrees very well with the ideas of the treatise. However, the circumstances do not completely exclude the possibility that Mersenne would have sent Van Helmont a treatise congenial with the physician’s views, especially since Van Helmont himself maintained that his ideas were common in the ‘Hermetic school’, by which he probably meant the medical alchemists inspired or influenced by Paracelsus.¹³

There is much in the ‘Exterior homo’ that is in line with the theory of human generation advocated by Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493–1541) himself.¹⁴ Paracelsus’s theory emphasised divine agency in the making of the human embryo and expounded a Christian view of conception.¹⁵ Accordingly, he frequently used the Bible to understand human reproduction. He also argued that true generation was done spiritually or mentally, downplaying the role of the coitus in procreation.¹⁶ In addition, the Swiss physician sought to highlight the role of women in generation, going beyond the traditional Galenic two-seed theory.¹⁷ Paracelsus emphasised the importance of the womb in several treatises. He portrayed the womb as an active entity, comparing it with a ‘magnet’ that actively attracts the seed within.¹⁸

Analysis of the Treatise

‘Exterior homo’ is part of volume two of the three-volume MS ‘Causa J.B. Helmontii medici’, which can be found in the Archives of the Archbishopric of Mechelen. The treatise is four folios in length, written in a neat scribal hand, which is clearly not that of Van Helmont. It may, however, be the writing of an amanuensis, as Van Helmont would have been wealthy enough to afford one. Due to the calligraphic handwriting, the treatise is largely readable; the only inconvenience is the quality of the paper, which in time has absorbed the ink and makes certain words hard to decipher.

The text itself does not offer easy reading, as it appeals to a large number of doctrines and ideas. In particular, ‘Exterior homo’ displays an impressive knowledge of the Bible, which it often interprets in an allegorical sense. Generally, many sentences in the treatise seem feats of virtuosity, distilling a vast number of sources in shorthand-like expressions. On occasions, the text becomes obscure and elusive, particularly when it refers to religious matters. It seems this opacity is purposeful, as the author is capable of being extremely clear in other passages. Although the overall sense of the text is intelligible, one is left with the impression that a lot is left unsaid.

As the prosecutors had pointed out, the text is annotated and corrected solely in Van Helmont’s hand. The majority of Van Helmont’s annotations refer to Latin grammar or

¹³ I have discussed in detail Van Helmont’s ideas of the ‘Hermetic school’ and the Adepts in *op. cit.* (note 7), 107–14.

¹⁴ On this topic, see Amy Eisen Cislo, *Paracelsus’s Theory of Embodiment: Conception and Gestation in Early Modern Europe* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40–1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26–7, 36–9.

¹⁸ Theophrastus Paracelsus, ‘Buch von der Gebärdung der Empfindlichen Dingen Durch der Vernunft’, in Karl Sudhoff (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke: Abteilung, medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften*, 14 vols (Munich and Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1922–33), I, 243–74: 262. On the importance of the womb in Paracelsus, see also Cislo, *op. cit.* (note 14), 27–30, 34, 36, 47, 61.

choice of words. For instance, on different occasions, he corrected 'somnolentiarum' with 'somnolenta', inserted 'quippe' or 'quidam', cut 'exantlata', and replaced 'purum' with 'pretiosum'. These interventions do convey the impression that Van Helmont is correcting a transcription of his own writing. Nevertheless, he rejected this suggestion, maintaining that Mersenne had explicitly allowed him to alter the contents of someone else's treatise. The only substantive marginalia is Van Helmont's comment 'hence women being preferred to men in the Scriptures', which refers to an obscure passage in the text, according to which the serpent in Eden found it easier to corrupt the male (Adam) than the female (Eve).¹⁹ This passage was underlined by the prosecutor for suspiciously meddling in matters of faith and for being the only passage that was commented on directly by Van Helmont. Nevertheless, the prosecutor was unsuccessful in either attracting a confession of authorship from the Flemish physician or in obtaining an explanation for the passage.

Based on its contents, 'Exterior homo' can be divided into two parts: in the first, the anonymous author espouses a philosophical view of man, his nature and constitution, while in the second he focuses on the subject of human generation. In the period, issues of reproduction were often seen in a larger religious and philosophical context that involved considerations about the human condition and the nature of the human soul.²⁰ In 'Exterior homo', both parts remain highly theoretical, with very little advice given. In this sense, it was probably meant to support a more practical *consilium* that has not been preserved.

The Treatise's View of Man

The 'Exterior homo' treatise begins with a few preliminary statements which intend to position the discourse within the medical–philosophical tradition. The Hippocratics, the treatise states, divide 'the exterior man' into three parts: the containing (the body), the contained (the humours) and *impetus faciens*, which is the same as the *spiritus*.²¹ Here the author is obviously borrowing from Claudius Galen (129–ca. 200/216) without acknowledging the source. Instead, the concept is described as 'Hippocratic', since Galen himself maintained that he drew it from Hippocrates's *Epidemics*.²²

The treatise goes further in its classification, affirming that the physicians (*Medici*) divide the *spiritus* into *insitus* (resident or implanted) and *influens* (inflowing). Again, no authority is cited, but the source of this idea is the French physician Jean Fernel (1497–1558), for whom the *spiritus influens* was associated with the traditional Galenic spirits, while the *spiritus insitus* was a divine force associated with vital heat.²³

¹⁹ 'Exterior homo', in MS 'Causa J.B. Helmontii medici', 3 vols, *Archives of the Archbishopric of Mechelen*, II, fol. 257r–260v: fol. 257v: 'hic femina estanti am viri prefert in scripturam'.

²⁰ Karen Crowther, "'Be Fruitful and Multiply'": Genesis and Generation in Reformation Germany', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 55 (2002), 905–34.

²¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: 'Exterior homo apud Hippocrateni dividitur integraliter in Continens, Contentum et impetum faciens. Id est spiritum'.

²² Claudius Galen, *De differentiis febrium libri duo* (Lyon: Guillaume Rouille, 1550), I, ch. 2; see also Roger K. French, *Ancient Natural History: Histories of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 153 and Walter Pagel, *New Light on William Harvey* (Basel: Karger, 1976), 64.

²³ Walter Pagel, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont: Reformer of Science and Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 99; Antonio Clericuzio, 'Spiritus Vitalis: Studia sulle teorie fisiologiche da Fernel a Boyle', *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*, 2 (1988), 33–84: 37; Jean Fernel, *On the Hidden Nature of Things*, John M. Forrester and John Henry (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 2005), I, 216. Pagel argued that the specific terms *insitus–influens* were not widely adopted before Van Helmont except by Dominico Bertacchi and Johann Heinrich Alsted: Walter Pagel, *Smiling Spleen: Paracelsianism in Storm and Stress* (Basel: Karger, 1984), 132. While the exact terminology may have originated during this late period, it is worth noting that Petrus Severinus had used the expression *essentia insita* to reflect a similar notion; see *Idea medicinae philosophicae* (Basel:

Further on, 'Exterior homo' criticises the so-called *schole theoremata* or the theorem-based school of medicine for neglecting the role of *potestates* ('powers') in the functioning of the human body. The term *schole theoremata* offers a clue as to the provenience of the treatise, since it was employed by the Danish physician Petrus Severinus (1542–1602)²⁴ to refer disparagingly to the Galenic school.²⁵ Severinus was an influential medical philosopher, who was reputed for his interpretation of the works of the Swiss physician Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493–1541) in his masterpiece *Idea medicinae philosophicae* (1571). His approach of placing Paracelsus within the tradition of learned medicine made Paracelsianism much more acceptable to the European intelligentsia.²⁶

The suspicion that the author of 'Exterior homo' was inspired by Severinus is strengthened in the next paragraph, where the anonymous author describes the *potestates* of the soul. The concept of the 'powers of the soul,' developed by St Augustine (354–430),²⁷ explained how an incorporeal soul exercised authority over the material body. Here these powers are associated with 'Roots, Gifts, Reasons, Characters, Ideas, or Sculptures, hidden Words'.²⁸ The roots, gifts and reasons prominently appear in Severinus's *Idea medicinae* as occult vital agents.²⁹ Severinus had also briefly discussed *potestates* as representing spiritual forces that act in bodies or in the *semina*.³⁰ His observation that *potestates* are 'shadows' is mirrored in 'Exterior homo', where they are described as 'shadows of the body'.³¹

The opening statements of 'Exterior homo' hence offer a major insight into the treatise. First, they establish the work's adherence to the Ficinian–Fernelian current of

Henricpetri, 1571), 92; moreover, Daniel Sennert pointed out in his critique of Severinus that the *spiritus insitus* was the same as the vital balsam, mummial spirit and vital sulphur of the Paracelsians; *De chymicorum cum Aristotelicis et Galenicis consensu ac dissensu liber* (Wittenberg: Zacharias Schurer, 1619), 237.

²⁴ For the Paracelsian school of medicine and alchemical philosophy, Allen Debus's *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 2nd edn (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002) is still the best introduction. On Petrus Severinus, see Jole Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus, 1540–1602* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004), Ole Grell, 'The acceptable face of Paracelsianism: the legacy of *Idea medicinae* and the introduction of Paracelsianism in early modern Denmark' in Ole Grell (ed.), *Paracelsus: The Man and his Reputation, His Ideas and their Transformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 245–69, as well as Hiro Hirai, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de matière à la Renaissance* (Brussels: Brepols, 2005), 217–67.

²⁵ Severinus, *op. cit.* (note 23), I, 2, 44. As Owsei Temkin has shown, Galen himself believed that investigation was only warranted where geometrical proofs could be found; Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973). For Severinus's criticism of Galen see *op. cit.* (note 23), I, 2; Shackelford, *idem.*, 63; Grell, *idem.*, 251–3.

²⁶ Grell, *op. cit.* (note 24), 245–9.

²⁷ On the powers of the soul in St Augustine, see Philip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: the Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), particularly 132–4.

²⁸ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: 'Potestates dico, Radices, Dona, Rationes, Characteres, sive Sculpturas, Verbi absconditi, ac celati in condo creaturarum'.

²⁹ Severinus, *op. cit.* (note 23), 20, 22, 79. The 'Gifts' and 'Reasons' are drawn by Severinus from Paracelsus; Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 23), 251–3. 'Characters' may have been drawn on Paracelsus's treatise 'Astronomia Magna': Theophrastus Paracelsus, 'Astronomia magna sive Tota philosophia sagax, Maioris et Minoris Mundi', in *Operum medico-chymicorum sive paradoxorum*, 12 vols (Frankfurt: Collegio Musarum Palthenianarum, 1605), X, I, 170. The 'hidden Words' are more likely an influence of another Paracelsian, the German physician Oswald Croll; see Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 23), 316–20. On Croll, the best available work is still Owen Hannaway's *The Chemists and the Word* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975).

³⁰ Severinus, *op. cit.* (note 23), 15, 84, 91, 251, 283. On Severinus's *semina* theory, see Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 24), 237–44.

³¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: '(...) corporis umbra (...)'.

medical–philosophical thought that emphasised the importance of the incorporeal *spiritus* over that of the three traditional, material Galenic spirits (the vital, animal and natural).³² Second, the arguments identify the treatise as originating from the pen of a writer influenced by Petrus Severinus.

'Exterior homo' further discourses on the nature of the soul, which it describes as a luminous substance and the image (*simulacrum*) of God.³³ The soul is derived from the Father of Lights or divine light (*lux*).³⁴ The soul as *imago Dei* was an accepted orthodox tenet since the early Fathers of the Church.³⁵ 'Exterior homo's' view of the soul as immortal and divine in origin mirrors the Paracelsian attempt to ground its understanding in Christian sources.³⁶

The treatise speculates that the soul has a tripartite structure, made up of *anima stans* ('Standing Soul'), *anima sedens* ('Sitting Soul') and *anima cadens* (the 'Falling Soul'). The idea of a tripartite soul within the human body (rational, irrational and passionate) harks back to Plato, supported in this perspective by both Aristotle and Galen.³⁷ Yet the actual soul triad *stans-sedens-cadens* seems to occur only in this treatise, and may have originated in a phrase found in the chief work of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535), *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (*On the Occult Philosophy*).³⁸

The treatise explains that each of these souls has its own role and its specific place in the body. It then dwells at length on the description of the *anima stans* and *sedens*. Thus, the *anima stans* contemplates that which is above itself, and fittingly has its location in the brain: it is the reflective side of the soul, which manifests itself in night-time prayer.³⁹ By comparison, the *anima sedens* is located in the heart: it is active and intimately linked with the *potestates*.⁴⁰ The location of 'souls' in specific organs of the human body was Galenic in origin.⁴¹

³² D.P. Walker, 'The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 21 (1958), 119–33, 124–6.

³³ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: 'Anima itaque est substantia luminosa, procedens et dependens à Patre luminum creata ad eius simulacrum'. The expression 'Father of Lights' originates from James 1:17. I have used the King James Bible edition for English quotations and the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* for Latin ones.

³⁴ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r–257v: 'Profecto uti anima, quedam sui Archetypi exemplaris, derivata lux est'.

³⁵ For the tradition of Man as *imago Dei* in the Western Middle Ages, see Bernard McGinn, 'The Human Person as Image of God: II, Western Christianity', in Jean Leclercq *et al.* (eds.), *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1985), 312–30.

³⁶ In this, Paracelsian followers were following the tradition of Paracelsus himself; on the Swiss physician's understanding of the soul, see also Dane T. Daniel, 'Invisible Wombs: Rethinking Paracelsus's Concept of Body and Matter', *Ambix*, 53 (2006), 129–42: 140–1.

³⁷ In the *Republic*, Plato referred to the rational, irrational and passionate soul (*to logistikon*, *thymos* and *to epithemetikon*). For Galen, see Temkin, *op. cit.* (note 25), 44. Aristotle inclined toward an account of one soul in three parts, but in practice called each a 'soul', eg. the rational, sensitive and vegetative souls; see Denis Des Chene, *Life's Form: Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 153–5.

³⁸ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (Lyon: Beringos Fratres, 1550), XLIII, 309: 'Quae igitur meti unita est anima, haec dicitur anima stans & non cadens'.

³⁹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: 'Siquidem Anima Stans, duntaxat contemplatur que supra se sunt, et essentie vitalem luminis sui conceptum radium, reflectit in abyssale initium. Idque, non alibi, quam in cerebri, id est, Lune arce (. . .) Ideo enim anima stans, plerumque orationibus nocturnis (vigilate, orate et sobry estate), lumen superne haurit affatim'.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 'Ast Anima sedens, que in sole, sive corde, tabernaculum possuit, Potestatum corporalium qui deinceps sunt, dispensatrix'.

⁴¹ J. Finamore, 'The Tripartite Soul in Plato's Republic and Phaedrus', in J. Finamore and R. Berchman, *History of Platonism: Plato Redivivus* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2005), 35–52; Temkin, *op. cit.* (note 25), 121.

The activity of each soul is further explained by a reference from the Bible: ‘Day unto day uttereth speech, night unto night showeth knowledge’.⁴² The author of ‘Exterior homo’ interprets ‘speech’ to mean the active (solar) side of human life, with knowledge (*scientia*) belonging to the contemplative (lunar) side.⁴³ Hence, the two represent the active–contemplative poles of the human soul:

the Standing Soul, through nightly prayer (watch, pray and be sober), draws down an abundance of light from above. Meanwhile, the Sitting Soul, shining at the concentricity of the solar light (. . .) administers correctly all the aspects of mundane life.⁴⁴

The solar–lunar association is carried further, as ‘Exterior homo’ claims that the *anima sedens* and *stans* are the two ‘luminaries’ of the body, the Sun and the Moon.⁴⁵ The microcosm–macrocosm analogy is here made explicit and drawn in line with the popular medical–astrological tradition that had long assigned the heart to the Sun and the brain to the Moon.⁴⁶

Having discoursed on the two higher souls, the author now proceeds to the third soul, the *anima cadens* (‘Falling Soul’), which is ‘always prone to slide downwards’.⁴⁷ Apparently this soul also has its original seat in the heart, but travels downwards into the inferior powers. This soul is responsible for the sexual drive and reproduction, and is assigned to Venus and Mercury. The author takes a dim view of the *anima cadens*, which is described in religious terms as living ‘under the rule of sin’.⁴⁸

Moving onward, the author points out that the soul is incapable of communicating directly with the body, as it is incorporeal and has no spatial dimension (it lacks extremities, the author says, *extremitatibus carens*). Hence, the soul needs an agency to intercede on its behalf: this is the *spiritus, impetus faciens*. By positing a tripartite structure of man (soul, spirit and body), the treatise is in basic agreement with Galenic doctrine; nevertheless, it differs from it on its description of the spirit. Galenists commonly referred to the spirit as being finely corporeal and tripartite (natural, vital and animal).⁴⁹ By comparison, the treatise’s notion of interceding powers appears to refer to something more transcendental than the Galenic spirits. The author calls them ‘Ideas’, or more specifically ‘Agents of Ideas’ (*agendorum ideas sive Potestates*) or ‘Active Ideas.’ This terminology underlines the appropriation of overtly Platonic concepts in the treatise.⁵⁰

⁴² Psalms, 19:2.

⁴³ In Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, speech is connected with the lungs which are ‘annexed to the heart’, Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Henry Cripps, 1638), 19.

⁴⁴ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: ‘Ideo enim anima stans, plerumque orationibus nocturnis (vigilate, orate et sobry estate) lumen superne haurit affatim. Ubi interim anima sedens, solaris lucis concentricitate fulgens (. . .) rectius tamen cuncta ad motum mundane facis administrat’.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: ‘Sunt nimirum in Microcosmo haec duo luminaria magna, quorum prius, ceu dies, diei eructat verbum, alterum vero, ceu nox, noci indicat scientiam’.

⁴⁶ Walter Pagel, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Contributions to the Knowledge and Philosophy of the Brain’, in F.N.L. Poynter (ed.) *The History of the Brain and its Functions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 108; this also appears in Agrippa, *op. cit.* (note 38), II, ch. 5, and in Paracelsus: Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus* (Basel: Karger, 1982), 120; Pagel, *Smiling Spleen, op. cit.* (note 23), 108.

⁴⁷ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: ‘semper prona ac deorsum’.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: ‘Semper nanque sui ordinis peccatum anime casum comitatur’.

⁴⁹ For the standard Galenic doctrine see also Burton, *op. cit.* (note 43), 16.

⁵⁰ The introduction of ‘ideas’ into medicine is due to Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. by Sears Jayne (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1985), 51, and adopted by Fernel; see Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 24), 35, 99.

Ideas are further associated with images, which are the instruments whereby the soul acts on the corporeal matter.⁵¹ Such images have the power of creating true entities (*vera entia*) within the body.⁵² The treatise hence supports the Renaissance theory of imagination whereby images are deemed to have a true material impact, at least in so far as the human body is concerned.⁵³ To uphold this theory, the author brings the example of the 'phantasms' that are conceived by pregnant women and have the power to alter the foetus, a common conception in the period.⁵⁴

The anonymous author further describes the powers as normally acting mildly, but occasionally expansively and impetuously, a fact which determined Hippocrates to associate them with the *impetus faciens*.⁵⁵ To explain their action, the treatise appeals again to a passage in the Old Testament (Kings 19:10–12), where the Prophet Elijah, having hidden in a cave and expecting God to pass by, experiences a strong wind, earthquake and fire, but is not deluded by these and eventually, after the commotion had passed, recognises God in a gentle whisper.⁵⁶ The author of the treatise suggests that God is found more readily in the suave aura. Through this example, the text makes the rather explicit attempt to describe the internal powers as heavenly forces. Indeed, the author further maintains that the powers are of celestial origin.⁵⁷

The *potestates* are, in turn, impressed by the soul into the corporeal 'radical humour' and 'radical balsam' of the body.⁵⁸ The distinction between 'humour' and 'balsam' was articulated by Severinus.⁵⁹ The balsam renders the humour vital and lively and instructs it with the knowledge (*scientia*) of its purpose.⁶⁰

True to his agenda of emphasising the spiritual agency, the author does not discuss the body in any great detail, describing it as an instrument at the hands of the powers and ultimately of the soul. Nevertheless, he addresses the subject of blood, which is given special importance. Blood, the author maintains, is a special substance extracted from the *limus* of the Macrocosm.⁶¹ Here the treatise clearly draws on Paracelsus's idiosyncratic interpretation of Genesis 2:7, where God creates man out of the dust of the ground (*limus terrae*).⁶² Paracelsus understood this verse to mean that the *limus* was a

⁵¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: 'Etenim cadens anima (...) nil prorsus agit citra imagines et ideas'.

⁵² 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: '(...) Que demum ibidem imagines (tanquam phantasmata quarumcunque pregnantium) in vera entia, et Potestatum prosapiam adolescentur'.

⁵³ The idea of the active power of imagination as transforming matter was supported by Pietro Pomponazzi, Marsilio Ficino and others. For a summary of the debate, see Guido Giglioli, *Immaginazione e malattia: Saggio su Jan Baptista Van Helmont* (Milan: Francoangeli, 2000), 58–67.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.* (note 52). The power of imagination within the human body was a rather commonplace belief in the period; see Giglioli, *op. cit.* (note 53), 62–3.

⁵⁵ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 257r: '(...) Helias namque a furore Jesabel aufugiens, antro reclusus, ventum fortem, item commotionem, dein et ignem, sensit quibus Dominus non inervat (...) sed aure suavi'. This is drawn from 1 Kings 19:10–12.

⁵⁷ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: '(...) Etenim ut erant de stirpe celica (...)'. The treatise does not seem too concerned in differentiating divine from heavenly action.

⁵⁸ The concept of radical humour (humidity or moisture) was popular with physicians since the Middle Ages; see T.S. Hall, 'Life, Death and the Radical Moisture', *Clio Medica*, 6 (1971), 3–23; Michael McVaugh, 'The "humidum radicale" in Thirteenth-Century Medicine', *Traditio*, 30 (1974), 259–83.

⁵⁹ On radical balsam and humour in the work of the Danish physician, see Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 24), 223–32.

⁶⁰ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257r: '(...) praefatum balsamum: in quo facultates sane non segnes, non inertes, non fatuas, ignobiles et otiosas: sed rerum agendarum scientys instructas'.

⁶¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r: 'Sanguines autem sunt, materiale extractum limi Macrocosmi, continentis utriusque sphere itemque animantium essentias omnes'.

⁶² Genesis 2:7, in *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*: 'formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae'.

quintessence of all things; consequently, man's body contained all things within.⁶³ This view was adopted by many Paracelsians.⁶⁴ 'Exterior homo' concurred with this standard Paracelsian view, affirming that 'the Microcosm participates in all things in the universe (...) by containing them.'⁶⁵

By linking blood with the primordial *limus terrae*, the treatise emphasises its significance. Galenic medicine had already placed great importance on blood as the carrier of the vital spirit infused from the air into the body.⁶⁶ Yet some early modern physicians went further than Galen by speculating that blood itself was a locus of spirit and power. Heightened views of blood could be found in several Paracelsian authors, including Severinus and the Flemish physician Gerhard Dorn (1530–84), before reaching its fullest expression in the work of William Harvey (1578–1657).⁶⁷

Yet in a treatise like 'Exterior homo', with its strong dualist tendencies between body and soul, blood is not seen as a positive force. The author laments that the blood of man contains within it the 'will of the flesh' and the 'will of man', hence reflecting the Original Sin.⁶⁸ Every sexual relation impresses 'necessity' through the blood; by this the author appears to take the Augustinian position that the Original Sin is passed physically from generation to generation through the seed.⁶⁹

The criticism of sexual procreation is accompanied by a positive view of virginity. This too is in line with Paracelsian thought: Paracelsus had extolled chastity and virginity as an imitation of Christ and a path to regeneration,⁷⁰ and several of his followers shared his views.⁷¹ Along the same lines, the treatise expresses the view that Christian Baptism regenerates the body by restoring its lost virginity.⁷² By contrast, the sexual, here called 'Adamic', generation is despised as being a remnant of the Fall of Man.⁷³ Generation, it

⁶³ Paracelsus, *op. cit.* (note 29), I, 108–12. More generally on Paracelsus's macrocosm and microcosm, Pagel, *Paracelsus, op. cit.* (note 46), 65.

⁶⁴ See for instance Joannes Bickerus, *Hermes Redivivus*, in Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1958), VII, 135–7. Another supporter of this idea was Oswald Croll, 'The admonitory preface of Oswald Crollie, Physician: to the Most Illustrious Prince Christian Anhaltin, in *Philosophy Reformed & Improved in Four Profound Tractates*, trans. H. Pinnell (London: Lodowick Lloyd, 1657), 1–226: 55, 57: 'As an Oration is made up of letters and syllables, so the Microcosm or Limus Terrae, Man is compacted of all bodies and created things'.

⁶⁵ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r–258v: 'Quorum universorum, Microcosmus particeps (...) revera contineret'.

⁶⁶ The physician Michael Servetus (ca. 1511–53) discovered the lesser circulation of blood through his focus on the assimilation of the vital spirit through respiration; Allen Debus, *The French Paracelsians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

⁶⁷ For the Paracelsian focus on blood, see Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas* (Basel: Karger, 1967), 245–7 and Pagel, *Smiling Spleen, op. cit.* (note 23), 20–1. Harvey's spiritualisation of blood was also perceptively discussed in Walker, *op. cit.* (note 32), 131.

⁶⁸ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r: 'Acqui sanguines item carnis et viri voluntates'; John 1:13.

⁶⁹ John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 317–20, 326.

⁷⁰ Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), 91.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Benedictus Figulus who signed himself as 'Eremita' (hermit) as Paracelsus himself was often portrayed to be; Benedictus Figulus, 'Prolocutrix sermo dedicatorius', in *Pandora magnalium naturalium aurea et benedicta, De benedicto lapidis philosoph, mysterio* (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1608). Van Helmont's son, Francis Mercury, who also shied marriage, also described himself as 'eremita peregrinans' ('a wandering hermite'), see introduction to *Ortus medicinae*, 'To the Friendly Reader', 1.

⁷² 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: 'In qua nimirum, palmites de vite, corporis ex virgine hausti, regeneramur, si per Baptismi lavarum, rite nostri insitio facta sit'.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 'Acqui sanguines (...) generationem Adamicam saltem proferunt, celo proscriptam'; 'Sed iterum Adamicam generationem respiciamus'.

insists, always happens under the law of sin; in support of this idea, the treatise adduces a Biblical citation from Psalms 51:5: 'behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.'

The overview of the first part of the treatise has pointed out the strong religious themes of the work. Its Christian view has a significant Platonic undertone that clearly departs from medieval Scholastic tradition. The author talks about the august origins of the soul (*anima*), which it had forgotten when 'chained' to the body, and about the 'prison of the body' (*corporis ergastulo*) in which it has been confined. The theme of the body as the 'prison of the soul' had a long tradition in Christian Platonic thought where it was deemed to accurately portray the state of the soul after the Fall of man.⁷⁴

This tendency toward body–soul dualism is further enhanced by the dichotomy between 'inner' and 'outer' man (*homo exterior* and *interior*), a concept that had a venerable career in Christian thought, particularly that of mystical persuasion.⁷⁵ The inner man usually reflected the divine in man, while the outer man was the soul (sometimes seen together with the body) that lived in contact with the exterior world. In the early modern period, the dichotomy of inner and outer man was adopted by Paracelsus and many of his followers.⁷⁶ In 'Exterior homo', the outer man is described as being the inner spirit (*impetus faciens*, or *spiritus*) together with the body.

The Theory of Human Generation

After espousing a general theory of man, the author of 'Exterior homo' proceeds to express his views on human generation. He notes that fecundity is a divine quality, a prerogative of the Word itself,⁷⁷ referring to the command in Genesis 1:22 to 'be fruitful and multiply'. The emphasis on the sacred nature of procreation was common in the early modern world.⁷⁸ At the same time, the author was ambivalent toward sexual relations, condemning human reproduction through coitus.

The key to understanding the treatise's views rests in its radical argument on behalf of the superiority of women over men. Thus, the treatise can be inscribed within the

⁷⁴ The expression 'prison of the body' (*corporis ergastulo*) ultimately originates in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Cratylus*; it was assimilated by Christian literature through association with Psalms 152:7 'Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name'; see St Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121–50* (New York, NY: Augustinian Heritage Institute, 2004), 341. More generally, see Pierre Courcelle, 'Tradition platonicienne et traditions chrétiennes du corps-prison (Phédon 62b; Cratyle 400c)', *Revue d'Etudes Latines*, 43 (1965), 406–43. The expression was used rather extensively during the early modern period across denominational boundaries; see for instance John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* (Geneva: Eustathius Vignon and Ioannis le Preux, 1585), 151; Luis de Molina, *Liberi arbitri concordia* (Antwerp: Joachim Trognaesius, 1595), 10; or in the correspondence of René Descartes: Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 89.

⁷⁵ The concept of interior and exterior man was prominent in the thought of St Paul and taken up by St Augustine, from whom it spread into the Middle Ages; see Geert Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: the Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Anthropology in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 366–75; St Augustine, *On John's Epistle* 99:4, *The City of God* 13.24.2, *Confessions* 10.6.9; Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing, 2005), 123, 251–2.

⁷⁶ See Pagel, *Smiling Spleen*, *op. cit.* (note 23), 98–102 for a review of such ideas in Paracelsus, Oswald Croll, Valentin Weigel, Jacob Franck and Van Helmont.

⁷⁷ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 257v: '(...) destinatae in prolificam multitudinem, imperium vitalis Verbis, magna prerogativa fecunditatis (...)'.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Kathleen Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 140–84, Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31; Ulinka Rublack, 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present*, 150 (1996), 84–110.

Renaissance trope of the dignity of women, which had been inaugurated by Agrippa, but also upheld by Paracelsus.⁷⁹ The ‘Exterior homo’ author takes a similarly radical view. For him, females are superior to males, who are described as incontinent and lecherous.⁸⁰ In rather obscure words, he also seems to suggest that the serpent of Eden found Adam an easier target for sin than Eve, as the male was made weaker in virtue.⁸¹

‘Exterior homo’ carries the praise of women even further, making reference to God’s statement in Genesis 3:15 according to which the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.⁸² This verse in Genesis 3.15 was commonly thought in the early modern age to be a prophecy referring to Christ, and the treatise employs this as an argument that Christ originated only from the female seed, and not the male one.⁸³

The author further distinguishes the female seed, which is described as ‘foamy’ (or venereal) from the male’s ‘sanguine’ (or mercurial) seed. In espousing a two-seed doctrine of generation, the writer chooses the views of Galen over those of Aristotle, who insisted that only males had seed.⁸⁴ Yet the text goes further than both authorities and the limits of traditional natural philosophy in general. Thus, it attempts to formulate a Christian view of human generation by speculating on a ‘divine’ mode of reproduction that occurred before the Original Sin. In rather veiled words, the author explains that the Church itself blessed woman, not man, to be fruitful, and implies that pre-lapsarian generation must have occurred without a male seed. Yet this method of procreation remained possible even after the Original Sin in the case of very holy women. The writer points out that the Bible bore witness to the fact that blessed women, such as Sarah, Rachel and Elisabeth, procreated through God Himself, not through sexual intercourse.⁸⁵ The tone is oblique but allusive. The author talks about this generation being a ‘mystery’ hidden in the Church and imparted only to initiates (*Ecclesia mysteriorum Symmista*).

Although the sense of the text is somewhat unclear, the views seem to draw on those expressed by Paracelsus. They mirror Paracelsus’s concern of heightening the role of God in human generation, his praise of women, his emphasis on their role in reproduction, and his attempt of differentiating ordinary women from holy ones (albeit concentrating on Virgin Mary).⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Arlene Miller-Guinsburg, ‘The Counterthrust to Sixteenth Century Misogyny: The Work of Agrippa and Paracelsus’, *Historical Reflections*, 8, 1 (1981), 3–28. On Paracelsus’s views of women, see also Cislo, *op. cit.* (note 14). In the sixteenth century, moderately positive views of women were expounded in several religious tracts; see Crowther, *ibid.*, 104–8; Fissell, *ibid.*, 31–5. However, Fissell notes that women and their bodies were viewed more negatively in the seventeenth century, at least in an English context; Fissell, *ibid.*, 53–89.

⁸⁰ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r: ‘Sic nanque uteri Sare, Rachel, Elisabeth etc divinitus aperti, quod non idem legitur viris prestitum: quin potius Ecclesia mysteriorum Symmista unica, eatenus in matrimonio, prolificam fecunditatem, mulieris benedictione, inaugurat: non autem sponsi;’ fol. 258v: ‘Acqui sanguines item carnis et viri voluntates, generationem Adamicam saltem proferunt, celo proscriptam. Quod de mulieris sanguinibus non ita legitur’.

⁸¹ This is the part that worried the prosecution so much, fol. 258r: ‘Sane virilis anima, omni evo, facilis in casum fuit: ideoque antiquus serpens, vix in parte mascula defectum iri detegens feminam priorem, utque validius resistentem, nec irritio adoritur’.

⁸² Genesis 3:15: ‘And I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 20), fol. 258v: ‘Patet itaque mulierem suo in semine benedictam, adeo ut eius, et non viri proles, caput serpentis conterat’.

⁸³ *Ibid.*: ‘Quippe sola et omnis propago Deo nata, in sanguine muliebri id est virgineo, beanda’.

⁸⁴ Jacques Roger, *The Life-Sciences in Eighteenth-Century French Thought*, Keith R. Benson (ed.) and Robert Ellrich 9 (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 44–9.

⁸⁵ *Op. cit.* (note 80). The author refers to the opening of Sarah’s womb by God, Genesis 17:15–17:19; similarly Rachel’s, Genesis 30:22; on Elizabeth, see Luke 1:41.

⁸⁶ On this subject, see Cislo, *op. cit.* (note 14), particularly 21–76.

The veiled account of holy generation in 'Exterior homo' serves as an introduction to the author's theory of ordinary human reproduction. This too is unusual through its radical implications. First, the writer argues that the male seed does not actually contribute to the seminal mass at all; instead, it only 'excites' and promotes the self-generation of women.⁸⁷ Interestingly, this idea reflects the speculations of early seventeenth-century Aristotelian physicians. According to Fabrizio d'Aquapendente, William Harvey and others, the sperm of the male did not penetrate into the uterus.⁸⁸ The Aristotelian physicians used this theory to show that the role of the male in generation was spiritual, hence superior to the material conception of the female.⁸⁹ 'Exterior homo' employed this theory in an exactly opposite way: in order to demote and demean the importance of the male in generation.

To substantiate this view, the treatise adduces several empirical observations that point to the minor role of males in generation. Hence, the author argues that men's weak generational power is proven by the fact that birth defects are caused by the female, and that all beings that come out of an egg (fish, birds, insects, etc) are pre-formed by the mother.⁹⁰ More importantly, cross-breeding shows that the offspring is most like to the mother: the author points out that when a female coney is crossed with a male dormouse the outcome is always a coney, with only the tail to betray the male's side.⁹¹

Having thus established the comparative role of the male and female in reproduction, the treatise proceeds to explain the actual process of generation. The theory emphasises spiritual agency: nothing can be conceived without the intervention of the soul, in this case the reproductive soul, *anima cadens*. It vitalises the seed by a ray of light, which seals the powers, the Active Ideas, into it.⁹² The author makes it clear that without the light of the falling soul the seed would be an empty husk.⁹³ In this, the author sets forth his theory of image-ideas that act as 'seals' on the generative mass, seals which contain the blueprint of the future development of the foetus.⁹⁴

Moving further, the author concentrates on the role of the uterus in conception. This emphasis on the importance of the womb is clearly a Paracelsian legacy.⁹⁵ According to his views, the womb contains a spirit Architect, also called Vulcan or *Archeus*.⁹⁶ The concept draws extensively on Paracelsian and Severinian ideas: Paracelsus had maintained that the spirit *Archeus* or Vulcan was responsible for making seeds fertile.⁹⁷ Severinus did not use the term *Archeus*, but had agreed with Paracelsus that the seed was inhabited by a

⁸⁷ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: 'nulla [masculus] contribuat pro materia seminis: sed quedam duntaxat inspiretur, ex parte paterna, concitatrix vis'. The part in brackets was added by Van Helmont himself.

⁸⁸ For Harvey's views, see Pagel, *op. cit.* (note 67), 43–5.

⁸⁹ Roger, *op. cit.* (note 84), 49–50.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43–4.

⁹¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r.

⁹² This concept is Ficinian in essence; according to Ficino, *op. cit.* (note 50), 51, there is a hierarchy of divine hypostases emanating from God who sends His animating ray to the world below.

⁹³ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258r: 'Est nimirum cadens libidine anima, duntaxat que spumoso geniture corpori, agendorum ideas sive Potestates imprimit: sine cuius lumine (iterum dicam) semen omne siliqua inanis est'.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 257v: 'Adeoque constat, sui luminis nutum sigillatur, nec alias, imprimi, quam per conceptas imagines, effluentes in dicatam generatione massam'.

⁹⁵ See above on Paracelsus' high view of the womb. This can be contrasted with the inherited medieval view, which described the womb as a 'sewer' of impurities; see Crowther, *op. cit.* (note 78), 165–6, Rublack, *op. cit.* (note 78), 94.

⁹⁶ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v.

⁹⁷ For more on Paracelsus's concepts of Vulcan and *Archeus*, see Pagel, *Paracelsus, op. cit.* (note 46), 105–11; for Van Helmont, see Pagel, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont, op. cit.* (note 23), 96–102.

spiritus architectonicus; his term is mirrored in the treatise by the notion of the ‘magnetic Architect’.⁹⁸ The ‘Exterior homo’ further describes the *Archeus–Vulcan* as a ‘vital’ or ‘seminal’ power, in line with Renaissance view of the formative power.⁹⁹ The *Archeus* does not lie on the material, but on the spiritual plane,¹⁰⁰ resembling the description of Vulcan in Paracelsus’ treatises as an alchemical agency revealed by the action of the stars.¹⁰¹

In a manner reminiscent of Severinian speculation, the author describes the *Archeus* as containing within itself the knowledge of the future body as a type of spiritual nucleus.¹⁰² The spirit in the womb guides the organs to their ‘entelechy’, an Aristotelian term that referred to the predestined purpose of each thing.¹⁰³ In this sense it is an architect of the body, which designs the structure and then creates it in a similar manner to that of an artist making a sculpture.¹⁰⁴

The treatise insists on the ‘magnetic’ nature of the process of generation. The *Archeus* is a ‘magnet’ which sleeps in the womb. It needs to be excited by ‘friction’ and, once awakened, attracts the male seed within itself and proceeds to create a new being. The theory of the womb’s magnet originates from Paracelsus.¹⁰⁵ The male seed, as such, is only responsible for the excitement, or awakening, of the somnolent *Archeus* in the womb.

Consequently, the treatise affirms, in order to get a woman pregnant, a physician must exclusively concentrate on the *Archeus–spiritus*, rather than the contained body or the containing humours as Galenists do.¹⁰⁶ The *Archeus*, being a magnet, has to be ‘amplified’ or ‘sharpened’ in order to generate a new foetus. This is done by ‘refreshing’ (*refocillatur*) or ‘reintegrating’ (*reintegratur*) the *Archeus* by means of alchemical medicine.

The treatise flatly rejects traditional Galenic remedies, such as the cure by heat and cold, cautery, perspirations or evacuations.¹⁰⁷ These in fact debilitate the *Archeus* further and have nefarious consequences. Instead, the author recommends the use of medicine obtained by the separation of the subtle from the gross. This principle too is supported with a quote from the Bible, Jeremiah 15:19.¹⁰⁸

In these passages, the treatise clearly draws on the quintessential tradition in alchemy, which dated back to the High Middle Ages and had been promoted by

⁹⁸ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: ‘uteri magneticum Architectum’.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 258v: ‘(. . .) ac hactenus potestatibus vitalibus, seu seminalibus donasse (. . .)’ On the notion of formative or plastic power, see Hiro Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy: Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life, and the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), particularly chapters 3 and 6.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: ‘(. . .) non illo quidem materiali, sed plane spirituali (. . .)’.

¹⁰¹ Weeks, *op. cit.* (note 70), ft e, 310.

¹⁰² ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: ‘magneticum Architectum (. . .) cuius manu, motus attractivus retentio, adbitarum virtutum et scientiarum enucleatio, contingunt’.

¹⁰³ On the meaning of *entelecheia* in Aristotle, see Daniel Graham, ‘The Etymology of *Entelecheia*’, *The American Journal of Philology*, 110 (1989), 73–80 and George A. Blair, ‘Aristotle on *Entelecheia*: A Reply to Daniel Graham’, *The American Journal of Philology*, 114, 1 (1993), 91–7.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 258v: ‘At ille prefatum magnetem (. . .) recondite ad sui destinatum entelechiam, ac solus velut futuri effectus, ac superbe sculpture presagus, occurrit ceu anhelans nove structure architecturam’.

¹⁰⁵ Paracelsus, *op. cit.* (note 14), 262.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Exterior homo’, *op. cit.* (note 19), fol. 260r: ‘Hactenus itaque docuimus pro scopo impregnationis, in sanis alioqui mulieribus, nullatenus spectandum corporis Continens, ut neque Contentum, sive humores, vanumque esse, circa (. . .) omnem Medicorum conatum: quinimo neque impetum facientem spiritum, considerari debere’.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 260r.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 260r: ‘Juxta illud Domini apud Jheremiam (cap 15): Si separaveris pretiosum a vili, tanquam os meum eris’. In the Latin Vulgate, this reads ‘si separaveris pretiosum a vili quasi os meum eris’; the King James Bible renders this as ‘if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth’.

Paracelsus.¹⁰⁹ The spagyric process, described as a secret union or conjunction (*syzygia*), results in a purer, more powerful medicine than ordinary concoctions. In Paracelsian style, the resulting medicine is called *Arcana*.¹¹⁰ The Arcanum is obtained by reducing the prime matter into a small but highly potent dose by distillation and sublimation. The Arcanum is essentially 'spiritualised' by this process, losing its 'earthly' and 'immature character'¹¹¹ and acquiring a 'firmamental temperament'.¹¹² By this the author means that the medicine transcends the Galenic temperaments (hot, cold, humid or dry), which are not suitable for procreation, and attains a higher, celestial power.

The microcosm–macrocosm analogy is re-affirmed, since the power of the *Archeus* is connected with that of its corresponding star (*astrum*). This means that the astrological 'favour' (*astrologico...favore*) must be sought.¹¹³ The author does not explain what he means by this, and one is left to speculate whether he means that the *Archeus* of the womb, for instance, must be treated by an alchemical medicine associated with planet Venus (copper) or whether the 'favour' must be drawn down from Venus into a talisman.

Once the elevation of the medicine is achieved, the powers of the *Arcanum* work with the corporal powers in perfect harmony, or 'symphony', as the treatise puts it.¹¹⁴ It is an important tenet of Paracelsian medicine that the cure must conform to the body: the principle of 'like cures like'. In the treatise, the author affirms that the *Arcana* are 'akin' or 'friendly' to the powers of the *Archeus* and 'converse' with them.¹¹⁵ The medicine becomes easily assimilated into the body and is hence able to excite the internal magnet of the womb.

The treatise concludes rather abruptly with the statement that the wise alone can dominate the malignant stars, a phrase common in the Middle Ages and attributed to Ptolemy.¹¹⁶ The author again draws a microcosmic–macrocosmic analogy, as it is clear that the 'malignant stars' that he is referring to are present in the microcosm (human body) as disease. It is another strong affirmation that is meant to sway the reader into employing alchemical remedies rather than harmful Galenic concoctions. The 'wise men' are clearly the Paracelsian physicians, who are in possession of the knowledge that can ward off illnesses.

As mentioned in the introduction, the treatise was meant to be part of a practical medical consultation for King Louis XIII of France on the matter of his sterile marriage to Anne of Austria. The actual medical prescription has not been retained and perhaps was never written. If Van Helmont had indeed been its author, he would have sent the treatise to the King as a formal introduction, or advertisement of his vast knowledge and learning on the subject of human generation. In this sense, the treatise could also be read as a

¹⁰⁹ On the topic of the alchemical quintessence, see F. Sherwood Taylor, 'The Idea of the Quintessence', in E. Ashworth Underwood (ed.), *Science, Medicine and History*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), I, 247–65.

¹¹⁰ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 20), fol. 260r; Pagel, *op. cit.* (note 37), 70.

¹¹¹ 'Exterior homo', *op. cit.* (note 20), fol. 260r: 'Arcana scilicet in hoc expetimus, non quevis, sed illa duntaxat, que dotem refocillandi magnetis uterine imprimis nacta, partium Archeis sint amica, terrenis sordibus, et immaturitatibus liberat'.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, fol. 258v: '(...) firmamentali temperamento (...)'

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 260r.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 260v: 'Potestatum igitur cum Potestatibus harmonica symphonia spectanda erit'.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 260v: '(...) cum internis astris nostris sive Potestatibus confabulentur, id est, magnetem excitent'.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 'solus Sapiens dominabitur astris malignis'. On this popular saying in the period, see also Jean Patrick Boudet, 'Astrology', in Thomas F. Glick et al (eds.), *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 62.

quest for patronage.¹¹⁷ However, ‘Exterior homo’ does not read like a typical alchemical petition. As a nobleman, Van Helmont may have thought a subtler approach would be more appropriate to his status; indeed, in his later *Opuscula medicina inaudita* (1642), he prided in his refusal to pander to the wishes and requests of sovereigns.¹¹⁸ Instead, Van Helmont would have hoped to impress the French monarch with his medical, philosophical and religious insight, in the hope of securing a private audience. The Flemish physician had made it clear in the letter to Mersenne that he could only share his reproductive secret in the king’s presence. We can speculate that this secret would have involved alchemical medicine, perhaps enriched by the influence of propitious stars.

If the work was indeed by Van Helmont, we may wonder why the treatise was still in his possession when he was arrested in 1634, particularly since the discussion with Mersenne dated back to 1631. We can speculate that, in fact, he could have sent another copy and retained this annotated one for his records: surely Van Helmont would not have sent a treatise full of grammar corrections to the French sovereign. On the other hand, if he did send it to France, no records of a response from either Mersenne or the king have survived. Moreover, Van Helmont’s plans of emigrating to France and hence escaping the Spanish Inquisition’s influence never materialised.

At the same time, we cannot of course exclude Van Helmont’s own declaration, according to which this was someone else’s *consilium* that had been shared with him by Mersenne. Van Helmont maintained that he was permitted to retain the copy. This plausible explanation was accepted by the ecclesiastical court and cannot easily be dismissed due to our suspicions regarding Van Helmont’s authorship.

The Relationship between ‘Exterior homo’ and Van Helmont

This article has so far shown that the ‘Exterior homo’ treatise is a work written in the first half of the seventeenth century by a Paracelsian physician familiar with Renaissance medicine and the works of Petrus Severinus. In this section, I will seek to situate the treatise in relation to the known writings of Van Helmont, considering the likelihood that he might have been the author of the treatise.

Van Helmont’s masterpiece, *Ortus medicinae* (1648) was published posthumously in Amsterdam by his son Franciscus Mercurius (1614/18–98).¹¹⁹ Given its comprehensiveness and influence, most scholars have based their analysis of Helmontian thought on this large compendium. However, Van Helmont’s thought had developed over time, and my doctoral dissertation has argued that his writings should be separated between the ‘early’, ‘mature’ and ‘late’ stages.¹²⁰ The early stage comprises the 1607 youthful treatise *Eisagoge de arte medicam à Paracelso restitutam*. The mature one contains his writings between 1608 and 1634, including *De magnetica vulnerum curatione*

¹¹⁷ On the subject of alchemical patronage, see Bruce Moran, *The Alchemical World of the German Court: Occult Philosophy and Chemical Medicine in the Circle of Moritz of Hessen (1572–1632)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), Tara Nummedal, *Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 96–118.

¹¹⁸ Jan Baptist Van Helmont, *Ortus medicinae id est, Initia physicae inaudita: Progressus medicinae novus in morborum ultionem ad vitam longam* (Amsterdam: Ludovic Elzevir, 1652); *Opuscula medica inaudita*, ‘Tumulus Pestis’, chap. 1, 834. Van Helmont mentions that he was solicited for employment by Emperor Rudolf II and Prince-Archbishop Ernest of Bavaria (1554–1612), but he preferred to dedicate himself to helping the poor.

¹¹⁹ On Franciscus Mercurius thought and career see Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in The Seventeenth Century: The Life And Thought Of Francis Mercury Van Helmont (1614–98)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹²⁰ Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 89–99.

(1621), *Supplementum de Spadanis fontibus* (1624), surviving letters, as well as a range of manuscripts still found in the Mechelen archives. Finally, the late stage (1634–44) includes the *Opuscula medica inaudita* as well as the posthumous *Ortus*.

This proposed division is important in the context of the present analysis, as 'Exterior homo' can clearly be positioned at the boundary between the mature and late stage. This means that resemblance between mature Helmontian treatises (written before 1634) and 'Exterior homo' strengthen the suspicion that the work was written by Van Helmont himself. Of course, we cannot discount the possibility that the writer of 'Exterior homo' was influenced by Van Helmont's printed works themselves. Resemblance between post-1634 work and 'Exterior homo' is more likely due to influence from 'Exterior homo' on Van Helmont's later work, but could also be understood as exposition or correction of earlier ideas. Beyond the authorship issue, the comparison between 'Exterior homo' and Van Helmont's mature and later works serves to highlight the little-studied changes in Helmontian thought over time.

For the purpose of this assessment, it is equally important to note that the youthful and mature works of Van Helmont show him as an outspoken supporter of Paracelsus and his ideas. Yet, as scholars have rightly pointed out, Van Helmont initially absorbed Paracelsian doctrine through the primary medium of Petrus Severinus.¹²¹ The Severinian influence, strongest in the 1607 manuscript *Eisagoge*, is also felt in the mature treatise *De Spadanis fontibus*.¹²²

Mature Van Helmont adopted the Severinian interpretation of Hippocrates' *to enormon* (*impetus faciens*) as being the same as the *spiritus* of the Ficinian–Fernelian tradition. In the mature *De Spadanis fontibus*, Van Helmont associated the 'architectonical chaos' of Severinus (similar to the *spiritus mechanicus* or *architectonicus*) with *to enormon*.¹²³ Finally, in the *Ortus medicinae*, Van Helmont refers to the Paracelsian spirit *Archeus* as an equivalent for the Hippocratic term.¹²⁴ Thus, we can find in Van Helmont's mature and later thought the same rich association of *spiritus* with *to enormon*, the *Archeus* and the spirit-architect that was present in 'Exterior homo'.

The treatise's theoretical distinction between the *spiritus insitus* and *influens* can be found in Van Helmont's mature work. In *De magnetica* we can find a sentence similar to that of 'Exterior homo': 'physicians divide this spirit into the implanted or mummial, as well as the inflowing spirit, which departs with life'.¹²⁵ Here Van Helmont interprets the *spiritus insitus* to mean a spirit that dwells within the body for a short time after death, while the other flies away immediately.¹²⁶

The idea of the *spiritus insitus* and *spiritus influens* also appears in the late *Ortus medicinae*. However, at this point Van Helmont changes his terminology: he equates the *spiritus insitus* not with the mummy, but with the local *Archeus* or *spiritus insitus*

¹²¹ Antonio Clericuzio, 'From van Helmont to Boyle: A Study of the Transmission of Helmontian Chemical and Medical Theories in Seventeenth-Century England', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 26 (1993), 303–34: 307; Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 24), 443.

¹²² Hirai, *op. cit.* (note 24), 445–50.

¹²³ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 546. This is the second improved edition of Van Helmont's work.

¹²⁴ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 157.

¹²⁵ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 610: 'Hunc spiritum propterea medici, in insitum sive mumialem, & influentem, cum vita scilicet priore, abeuntem, dividunt'.

¹²⁶ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 609.

vitalis.¹²⁷ Van Helmont now calls both the *spiritus insitus* and *influens* ‘*Archei*’.¹²⁸ Yet the importance of the *spiritus insitus* remains; the resident spirits govern every organ of the body. The implanted spirit of the seed, the *Archeus* of generation, ‘constructs’ the foetus and endows it with all of the organs necessary for survival.¹²⁹

As in ‘*Exterior homo*’, the *spiritus insitus* of the late *Ortus medicinae* is connected with medical astrology. Van Helmont argues that ‘the planetary spirits shine brightest in the bowels’.¹³⁰ This statement is complemented in the Dutch abbreviated version of the *Ortus*, *Dageraad* (1661), and the German translation, *Aufgang der Artzney Kunst* (1683), with a paragraph where the different ‘planetary spirits’ are associated with the organs. The scheme is the same as in ‘*Exterior homo*’: the Sun is associated with the heart and the Moon with the head.¹³¹ Why this statement is missing in *Ortus* is a mystery; Walter Pagel tried to explain it by suggesting that it ‘may have been thought suitable for a more popular version in the vernacular’.¹³² In any case, the brief statement in the *Ortus* implies that Van Helmont believed in medical astrology. At the same time, the idea of the Sun in the heart and Moon in the head squares uneasily with Van Helmont’s *Ortus* concept of the sensitive soul and the mind being lodged in the stomach.¹³³

In the mature *De magnetica*, Van Helmont also develops a theory of the powers (*potestates*) that is similar to that in ‘*Exterior homo*’. This theory is intimately connected with the proposed dichotomy between the ‘exterior’ and ‘interior’ man. The exterior man is essentially ‘an animal making use of the reason and will of the blood’.¹³⁴ The powers of the blood belong to the exterior man, while the powers of the mind belong to the interior man.¹³⁵ Van Helmont uses the expression *exterior* and *interior homo* not only in his mature but also in his late works.¹³⁶

De magnetica also insists on the power of the blood. This power, Van Helmont maintains, lies dormant until it is somehow aroused. Once excited, it can transport the spirit of the exterior man into a distant object by means of the force of imagination, or natural magic.¹³⁷ This emphasis on blood and natural magic disappears in the *Ortus medicinae*, most likely due to the censorship of his earlier work by the Inquisition.

The mature Van Helmont adheres to the traditional Paracelsian interpretation of the macrocosm–microcosm analogy. In a 1631 letter to Mersenne, Van Helmont explains that blood is ‘our microcosmic sea’,¹³⁸ a statement that resembles the similar affirmation in ‘*Exterior homo*.’ Furthermore, in *De magnetica* he often refers to the microcosm

¹²⁷ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 236: ‘*Archeus localis, sive insitus*’; *idem*, 339: ‘*spiritus insitus vitalis*’.

¹²⁸ For a pertinent discussion of the *Archeus insitus* and *influens* in the mature work of Van Helmont, *Ortus Medicinae*, see also Giglioli, *op. cit.* (note 53), 52–3.

¹²⁹ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 581: ‘*Sed unicus insitus, sibi per partium rudimenta continuus, totam generationis repartitionem absolvebat*’.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33: ‘*In visceribus, nimirum planetarii spiritus elucent maxime*’.

¹³¹ Jan Baptist Van Helmont, *Aufgang der Artzney Kunst* (Sulzbach: Johann Andreae Endters, 1683), 41.

¹³² Pagel, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont, op. cit.* (note 23), 99.

¹³³ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 276.

¹³⁴ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 608: ‘*Dico itaque, hominem externum esse animal, ratione & voluntate sanguinis utens*’.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ I have talked at length on this topic in my dissertation, Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 254–8.

¹³⁷ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 608: ‘*Igitur in sanguine est quaedam potestas ecstatica, quae si quando ardentis desiderio excita fuerit, etiam ad absens aliquod objectum, exterioris hominis spiritum, deducendo sit: ea autem potestas, in exterior homine latet, velut in potentia; nec ducitur ad actum, nisi excitetur, accensa imaginatio ferventi desiderio, vel arte aliqua pari*’.

¹³⁸ ‘*Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont, à Bruxelles, à Mersenne, à Paris, 30 Janvier 1631*’, *op. cit.* (note 10), 63.

as man, containing all essences of things within.¹³⁹ By comparison, in his late stage Van Helmont 'denounces' the microcosm–macrocosm analogy by emphasising man's fundamental similarity to God rather than the world. Nevertheless, his argument is nuanced and complex.¹⁴⁰

The 'Exterior homo' concept of a 'will of the flesh' is already present in *De magnetica*. The will of the flesh and blood is separate from the will of God or the will of man.¹⁴¹ This 'will of flesh and blood', which unconsciously belongs to all animated beings, dwells in the exterior man as the product of Original Sin.¹⁴² The concept of the 'will of the flesh' reappears in the *Ortus medicinae* as well.¹⁴³

Mature Van Helmont seemed to share the 'Exterior homo's' views of the superiority of women and of the inferiority of sexual generation. His opinions on this matter are not expressed in the published treatises, but can be inferred from his archives. As already pointed out, Van Helmont agreed with the idea of the superiority of women over men in the annotation he made on 'Exterior homo'.

His pre-1634 support for the idea of the inferiority of sexual generation is conjectural. Amongst the documents confiscated by the court in 1634 were some extracts that Van Helmont attributed to Cornelius Agrippa. These contained potentially heretical statements that attributed the Original Sin to sexual relations. Van Helmont distanced himself from this document, but suspicion remains that he may have been sympathetic to the doctrine. This is highly important in light of the fact that his late work, the *Ortus medicinae*, makes this view explicit and comprehensive. Thus, in the *Ortus*, Van Helmont firmly believed that carnal copulation was the actual Original Sin, sharing such unorthodox beliefs with his fellow compatriots Michel de Bay and Cornelius Jansen.¹⁴⁴ Van Helmont maintained that the Apple contained within it an urge toward concupiscence, which made Adam defile Eve.¹⁴⁵

In the *Ortus*, Van Helmont linked this unorthodox theory with that of the superiority of women over men. Adam, not Eve, was responsible for the Original Sin. Instead, 'Eve was of firmer chastity and her body created more perfectly'.¹⁴⁶ In her case, the loss of virginity due to Adam's rape was equal to a fall from a high spiritual status, as she was reduced to a role of mothering in a similar way to animals. Hence, only virgins come close to the elevated position of undefiled Eve,¹⁴⁷ the Virgin Mary being the sole woman to recover the pre-fall role of divine generator.

The Original Sin hence replaced what Van Helmont described as the original, 'virginal' generation, with the Adamical generation through seed.¹⁴⁸ The Adamical generation

¹³⁹ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 614: 'omnes omnium rerum spiritus, ac velut essentias, in nobis latere, & microcosmicatrice phantasia duntaxat nasci & educi'.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 336; on the complexity of his views on this topic, see Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 238, 246–7, 252–3.

¹⁴¹ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 607: '(...) sic nempe carni & sanguine voluntas competit, quae non sit voluntas viri, nec voluntas Dei'.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 610: '(...) dormit itaque scientia & potestas magica & solo nutu atrix in homine, postquam scientia pomi manducata fuit'.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁴⁴ Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 156–9.

¹⁴⁵ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 525. It must be noted that sixteenth-century art portrayed the Fall as an erotic event; Crowther, *op. cit.* (note 76), 120.

¹⁴⁶ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 528: 'Unde didici, Evam tenacioris pudicitiae, imo & perfectiorem fuisse creatam in suo corpore'.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 535.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 516–18.

caused an alteration in the very nature of man. In the initial divine plan, man was composed only of body and mind, the mind governing the body directly.¹⁴⁹ However, after the Original Sin, the mind retreated in the recesses of the body, and the place of governor of the body was taken by a new entity, the sensitive soul (*anima sensitiva*). This inferior soul bears strong similarity to the treatise's *anima cadens*, and is similarly mortal.

Van Helmont's theory of generation is advocated in the *Ortus medicinae* in very similar terms to the treatise. Just as in 'Exterior homo', the womb possesses magnetism, which is described as the key aspect of generation.¹⁵⁰ Procreation is achieved when the male seed is attracted by the womb's magnet within the uterus. Van Helmont uses the same quote from the Bible, God opened the womb of Sarah, to show that the male seed has a relatively unimportant role in generation.¹⁵¹ He also affirms, in direct line with Paracelsus and 'Exterior homo', that procreation is a divine gift and that God intervenes directly in generation.¹⁵² Van Helmont also refers to the experiment whereby a dormouse was crossed with a coney to suggest the lesser importance of the male in conception, whose primary role is only to excite the mother's womb for generation.¹⁵³

The process of generation is also explained in terms similar to the 'Exterior homo' treatise: the seed draws down the light (*aura vitalis*) which contains the seal of Image-Ideas, or the pattern of the body. Van Helmont also argued that images influenced the creation of new beings or even of disease.¹⁵⁴

In respect to the theory of the soul, Van Helmont's ideas are generally comparable to those of 'Exterior homo'. The soul is also a light descended from the 'Father of Lights' and an *imago Dei*; however, Van Helmont generally emphasises that it is the mind (*mens*) as the interior part of the soul that most resembles God.¹⁵⁵ As in 'Exterior homo', Van Helmont also believes that the soul requires an agency to implement its will; this agency is usually referred to as the *spirit* or *Archeus*.¹⁵⁶

In addition, Van Helmont's commitment to alchemical medicine as opposed to Galenic treatment is too well known to analyse here.¹⁵⁷ He was thoroughly devoted to the Paracelsian view of 'like cures like', and maintained that Arcana cured by appeasing the Archeus, not by irritating it.¹⁵⁸

Given the strong similarity between Van Helmont's ideas and those of 'Exterior homo', it is worth asking whether there are any obvious discrepancies. The most obvious difference is the affirmation of a Platonic tripartite theory of the soul (*anima stans*–*anima sedens* and *anima cadens*). This elaborate theory cannot be found in Van Helmont's works,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 514: 'Erat autem homo immortalis, quatenus mens ejus immortalis, cuncta munia corporis immediate praestabat, dabatque vitam de se immortalem'.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 580: 'Inprimi vidi uterum plicis, inimitabili artificio contractum, seseque sub conceptum pandere, per proprium Blas magneticum'; 'Quisquis ergo prolium expectationem meditatatur, non venerem salacem, non seminis abundantiam, imo nec sanitatem expectet: sed omnino atque, primario praefatum uteri magnetismum'.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 580: '(...) Quod in Sacris dicitur: Deus aperuit uterum Sarai'.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 580: 'Siquidem non est ulla uteri diductio voluntaria, ut neque artificii subjecta. Quin potius quodammodo superans naturam, ostentat Deum humanae generationis Praesidem, continuatae in posterum juxta verbum benedictae propagationis, Crescite & multiplicamini'.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 523, *idem*, 539.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁵⁵ Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 249–59. The importance of the theme of the mind as *imago Dei* in Van Helmont's thought has also been noticed by Giglioli, *op. cit.* (note 53), 169–75.

¹⁵⁶ Van Helmont, *op. cit.* (note 118), 272, 335.

¹⁵⁷ See, for instance, Pagel's extended discussion of the principles of Helmontian medicine, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont, op. cit.* (note 23), 154–87 and 195–8; Debus, *op. cit.* (note 24), 371–6.

¹⁵⁸ Giglioli, *op. cit.* (note 53), 135–42; Debus, *op. cit.* (note 24), 371–6.

at least those that have been deciphered.¹⁵⁹ As already pointed out, there is a similarity between the treatise's *anima cadens* and the sensitive soul of Van Helmont's late works, but the 'Exterior homo's' perspective of the contemplative and active souls as separate entities is harder to reconcile with Van Helmont's works. We should not conclude by this that the subjects of contemplation and action are of no concern to Van Helmont. On the contrary, he articulates a complex process of acquiring knowledge through mystical contemplation, which then translates into practical knowledge.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

The careful analysis of the text of 'Exterior homo' has revealed strong similarities between Van Helmont's ideas and those of the treatise. These include the division of man into 'exterior' and 'interior', the separation of the *spiritus* into 'resident' (*insitus*) and 'inflowing' (*influens*), the impression of images into the generative mass by the light of the soul, the existence of a spirit called *Archeus*–Vulcan which renders the seed fertile, and the importance of magnetism in procreation. The similarity is even more striking when we consider the radical argument that women are superior to men, and that they were supposed to give birth supernaturally, without the aid of male seed. Even though the 'Exterior homo' is evasive on the subject of divine generation, its ideas seem to correspond well with those of Van Helmont.

Nevertheless, these resemblances cannot by themselves ascertain that Van Helmont is the author of the treatise, as they can be attributed to mutual influence. It is also not impossible that another Paracelsian shared his views, particularly since many of the ideas can be traced back to the thought of Paracelsus, Severinus or Croll. This is the more so as both Van Helmont and 'Exterior homo' maintained that these beliefs were not unique to themselves. 'Exterior homo' referred to the initiates (*Synmista*) of the inner church, while Van Helmont often talked about the ideas of the Hermetic school which he identified himself with. Therefore, we can conclude that it is 'highly likely' that Van Helmont wrote 'Exterior homo', without attributing authorship with absolute certainty.

Leaving the thorny issue of authorship aside, the treatise should be deemed valuable in and of itself through the fascinating perspective it conveys. 'Exterior homo' clearly draws on Paracelsian and Severinian ideas to construct a comprehensive medical philosophy, which includes a complex if underdeveloped theory of the nature and structure of man, of the Original Sin, the difference between men and women, and of the way the human body functions. In light of these, it proposes an unusual perspective of human generation, which emphasises the role of the women and of spiritual agency in procreation. It further advocates the use of non-Galenic, alchemical medicine in order to stimulate reproduction.

The reader of 'Exterior homo' cannot but be impressed by the breadth of philosophical and religious thought presented in only four folios of text. Biology, medicine, chemistry, physics, theology, philosophy converge into one coherent, if unusual vision of the human being. In this sense, the treatise is representative of the Paracelsian attempt to unify knowledge and then use it in pragmatic ways for the betterment of others. Thus, in 'Exterior homo', the grand philosophical speculation on the nature of man is ultimately 'brought down to earth' and converted into useful knowledge on the specific subject of

¹⁵⁹ There are several folios in the Van Helmont archives in Mechelen that are difficult to decipher and await the work of a professional graphologist.

¹⁶⁰ For more on this, see Hedesan, *op. cit.* (note 7), 249–308.

reproduction. Although the treatise does not include practical recipes, a full *consilium* would have involved the prescription of alchemical medicine. It was indeed the application of philosophical theory to medical practice that constituted an important part of the Paracelsian worldview.