

## ***Runcofa* and the Inner Temple in the Alfredian *Metres of Boethius***

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This article will argue that the author of the Old English *Metres of Boethius* enhanced the mystical themes of the B text (the prose text) in the light of ideas articulated in John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, permeated by the Greek thought of Gregory of Nyssa, pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. In particular, it presents a mystical reading of the unique poetic compound *runcofa*, “the mystery chamber,” which appears in Metre 22 paired with *incofa*, “an inner chamber,” proposing that these terms bear the mark of what Eriugena terms *adyta*, “the inner sanctuary,” the dwelling place of “obscurissimas tenebras excellentissimae lucis,” “the uttermost darkness of the most excellent Light” (Eriugena, *Periphyseon* V, 983B). Interpreting Metre 22 as a theophany, the article focuses on Mod's descent into the innermost heart—*runcofa*—the place of mystical union.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Metre 22; *Mod*; *runcofa*; the innermost heart; the mystery chamber; contemplation; *theosis*

### **1. Introduction**

The precursors of English Mysticism (especially that of the Anglo-Saxon period) have been largely neglected due to the enduring belief that English Mysticism belongs to the Late Middle Ages (Ritzke-Rutherford 1980, 216). However, this article will read Metre 22 of the prosimetrical Old English *Boethius* as a piece of early English mystical theology, in the light of ideas expressed in the fifth book of John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (c. 860). A search for God, a reluctance to be contented with anything less than Him, “an immediacy with God Himself in love,” lies at the heart of mysticism (Louth 2007, 78). The ideas of the Greek mystics—Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–94), pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662)—had been introduced into the West through the Latin translation of Eriugena that illumines the course of mediaeval theology and mediaeval mysticism, establishing Eriugena as “the first great European mystic” (Moran 1989, xii). It is through Eriugena that the Latin Middle Ages inherited Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *epektasis*—the soul's continual longing for God (Louth 2007, 86); pseudo-Dionysian apophatic (negative) theology, “the superiority of negation over affirmation when speaking of God,” and the Neoplatonic scheme of procession (*exitus*) and return (*reditus*) (Jeauneau 1983, 144); and Maximus the Confessor's

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theology of deification (*theosis*) (147–48). Eriugena’s masterpiece—the *Periphyseon*—is “an attempt to create a synthesis with the theological tradition of the Greek Fathers” that “gave life to a result unique in the whole of the theological literature of the Latin Middle Ages” (Mainoldi 2020, 60–61).

In the fifth book of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena makes a distinction between a general Return of the Creation into the Cause of all things and a special Return of the elect, *theosis*:

*Reditus* omnium, quae in suas causas reuersura sunt, quando mundus iste sensibilis soluetur et mundus ille intellegibilis, qui super nos est, in Christo implebitur, dupliciter intelligitur. Est enim generalis et est specialis, *generalis* quidem in omnibus qui ad principium conditionis suae redituri sunt, *specialis* uero in his qui non solum ad primordia naturae reuocabuntur, sed etiam ultra omnem naturalem dignitatem in causam omnium (quae deus est) reditus sui finem constituent. (Jeauneau 2003, 1001B)

The *Return* of all things which shall be brought back into their causes when this sensible world shall pass away and the intelligible world which is above us shall be fulfilled in Christ, is to be understood in two senses. There is a general Return and a special Return. The *general* Return is the lot of all things which shall be brought back to the Principle of their creation: the *special* Return, of those which shall not only be restored to the Primordial Causes of their nature, but shall achieve the consummation of their Return, beyond every rank in the hierarchy of nature, in the Cause of all things, which is God. (Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 689; italics added)

For Eriugena, the uttermost darkness of God, His invisibility (hiddenness) is mediated by a theophany. The superlative *theophaniarum theophaniae*, “theophany of theophanies,” alludes to the exaltation above the created nature, seeing God “in nubibus theoriae,” “in the Cloud of contemplation”:

Theophaniarum quaedam tantae altitudinis sint, ut supra omnem creaturam proxima deo contemplation intelligantur exaltari, ac uelut *theophaniarum theophaniae* creduntur esse. Deus enim omnio nulli creaturae uisibilis per se ipsum est, sed in *nubibus theoriae* uidetur et uidebitur, sicut ait Apostolus: “Rapiemur in nubibus obuiam Christo, et sic semper cum ipso erimus.” (*Periphyseon* V; Jeauneau 2003, 905C)

Some of the theophanies are so exalted that they are understood to be exalted above every creature in a contemplation very close to God: these are regarded as *theophanies of theophanies*. For God in Himself is visible to no creature whatsoever, but in the *cloud of contemplation* is seen and shall be seen, as the Apostle says: “We shall be rapt into the clouds before Christ, so we shall be ever with Him.” (Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 577; italics added)

Eriugena’s mystical ideas may have come to Alfred’s court via scholars such as Saint Grimbold, a Benedictine monk at the Abbey of Saint Bertin in France, and John the Old Saxon, the first abbot of Athelney—representatives of continental scholarship amongst the king’s circle of scholars (Treschow 1993, 286). As Michael Treschow (1993, 281) comments, the Alfredian translator contradicts “his purported authority” for the third book of the *Soliloquies*—Augustine’s *De Videndo Deo*—concurring instead with Eriugena’s *Periphyseon* on the spiritual vision of God in the afterlife. More recently, Eleni Ponirakis has discussed an excerpt from the *Periphyseon* as a source for an

interpolation of the Neoplatonic concept of return (*reditus*) in the *Old English Boethius*, “challenging the idea that English mysticism began in the Middle English period” (Ponirakis 2021, 279). Following Treschow (1993) and Ponirakis (2021), in this article I address the theme of special Return—*theosis*—and its transmission into Alfredian literature through the *Periphyseon*. In particular, I will argue that the unique poetic compound *runcofa*, “the mystery chamber,” marks the epitome of the mysticism of the Alfredian *Metres of Boethius* (see Orchard 2022, 242).

Recent scholarship has addressed the reading of *runcofa* as “the location of hidden *rihtwisness*, ‘reason,’” enhancing the sense of mind as “a hidden and mysterious chamber within the self” (Faulkner 2019, 57–58); “sacred memory,” the embodiment of seminal knowledge and “the Anglo-Saxon version of Platonic memory” (Lenz 2011, 156); and a traditional Anglo-Saxon idiom for the representation of the mind-as-enclosure that “appears to have been added for aesthetic reasons” (Mize 2008, 62) in the process of rendering a vernacular prose text into verse. In what follows, I will present a mystical reading of *runcofa*, “the chamber of secret counsel, the mind, breast” (Bosworth-Toller 2014, s.v. *rún-cofa*) in the light of Eriugean thought.

## 2. A synopsis of the source texts

Boethius’s *De consolazione philosophiae* (c. 524) Book III (Metre 11) evokes the Platonic theory of recollection (*Phaedro* 72–76)—man’s inherent desire to return to the One (the Truth), Whose presence within the spirit (*animus*) is akin to “the hidden treasure”:

Quisquis profunda mente vestigat verum  
 cupitque nullis ille deviis falli  
 in se revolvat intimi lucem visus  
 longosque in orbem cogat inflectens motus  
 animumque doceat quidquid extra molitur  
 suis retrusum possidere thesauris. (Metra 11, ll. 1–6; Weinberger 1934, 72–73)

The man who searches deeply for the truth, and wishes to avoid being deceived by false leads, must turn the light of his inner vision upon himself. He must guide his soaring thoughts back again and teach his spirit that it possesses hidden among its own treasures whatever it seeks outside himself. (Green 2002, 61–62)

Nam cur rogati sponte recta censetis,  
 Ni mersus alto viveret fomes corde?  
 Quod si Platonis musa personat verum  
 Quod quisque discit immemor recordatur. (Metra 11, ll. 13–16; Weinberger 1934, 72–73)

For how can you answer questions truly unless the spark of truth glows deep in your heart? If Plato’s Muse speaks truly, whatever is learned is a recollection of something forgotten. (Green 2002, 61–62)

*De consolazione philosophiae* was translated into Old English first in prose (the B text, c. 890–930, preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 180) and then in prosimetrum (the C text, preserved in the mid-tenth-century manuscript London, British Library MS Cotton Otho A. VI). In the Old English prose version, Chapter 35, the return of Mod (standing in for the Latin source’s *Boethius*) to God is addressed through the

recollection of the blessedness of the first man.<sup>2</sup> Mod's inherent kinship with the divine (*rihtwisnesse*, "the right understanding") is kept in his *gemynde*, "memory":

Ch. 35, 24–28: Forþam hit is swiðe ryht spell þæt Plato se uðwita sæde. He cwæð swa hwa swa ungemýndig sie rihtwisnesse, gecerre hine his ghwilc ungemýndig rihtwisnesse hine to his gemynde. Þonne fint he þær þa ryhtwisnesse gehyde mid þæs lichoman hefignesse and mid his modes gedrefednesse and bisgunga. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:330–31)

For it is a very just speech that Plato the philosopher said. He said, whoever is forgetful of right understanding, let him turn back to his memory. Then he will find there the right understanding hidden by the body's heaviness and by his mind's disturbance and preoccupations. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:61)

In the corresponding section of *De consolacione philosophiae*, Prose 11 (40–41), Lady Philosophy praises her pupil for the right understanding of *veritas*, "the truth": "Nimium, inquit, o alumne, laetor; ipsam enim mediae veritatis notam mente fixisti. Sed in hoc patuit tibi, quod ignorare te paulo ante dicebas" ("I am greatly pleased with you, my pupil, for you have found the key to truth. And you also see clearly what a while ago you said you did not understand"). The acquisition of *veritas* in the Latin *Consolatio* resonates with the imagery of the door in the Old English *Boethius*:

Ch. 35, 77–87: Ða cwæð ic. Nu ic ðe andette þæt ic hæbbe funden duru þær þær ic ær geseah ane lytle cinan, swa ðæt ic uneaðe mihte gesion swiðe lytelne sciman leohtes of þissum þiostrum. And þeah þu me tæhtest ær þa duru, ac ic hire ne meahte mare aredian buton þæt ic hire grapode ymbutan þæt þe ic þæt lytle leoht geseah twinclian . . . þu habbe þa duru anbroden þe ic ær sohte. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:332)

Now I confess that I have found the door where I saw before a little chink, so that I could scarcely see a very little ray of light from this darkness. And yet you showed me the door before, but I could not find my way to it except that I felt around it so that I saw the little light twinkle . . . [you] have opened the door I sought before. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:62)

The relevant passage in the Old English *Soliloquies* reads: "þu us clypast to urum wege and us geledest to þære dura and us ða untynst, and us sillest þonne hlaf ecęs lyfes and þone drinc of lyfes wylle" (Lockett 2022, 194), which is translated as follows: "You summon us onto our path and lead us to the door and open it to us, and you give us the bread of eternal life and the drink from the spring of life" (Lockett 2022, 195).

In the Old English *Soliloquies*, allegorical imagery—"þonne hlaf ecęs lyfes and þone drinc of lyfes wylle" ("the bread of eternal life and the drink from the spring of life")—alludes to a general Return to Paradise, the restoration of human nature formed in the Image of God. The door into "the garden of Paradise" is Christ. Parallel imagery is found in the Song of Songs 4:12, wherein the Virgin Mary is described as a *hortus conclusus* ("the garden enclosed") and *fons signatus* ("a fountain sealed"), and in the Old English

<sup>2</sup> The B text, Chapter 35 (1–28) adheres to the C text, Metre 22; Chapter 35 (29–95) corresponds to Prose 22.

poem *Christ I* (also known as the *Advent Lyrics*), wherein she is the *duru ormæte* (“immense door”) (l. 309b) through Whom Christ made his noble entrance.

In the Old English *Boethius*, Christ opens the door into *þes þiostre* (“this darkness”)—the Uttermost Darkness of God. Darkness is the name for what Eriugena calls the *perfectissima ignorantia* (“the perfect ignorance”) of Mod that exemplifies the true knowledge of God. The relevant passage from the fifth book of Eriugena’s *Periphyseon* reads:

Diuinum lumen tenebrarum uocabulo, quoniam incomprehensibile est, uocatur. Similiter et gnostica uirtus contemplantium illud, quoniam ab eo repercutitur, tenebrarum nomine frequenter appellatur. Superpositae ipsius tenebrae uelantur ab omni lumine et abscondunt omnem scientiam. Ipse autem super animum et essentiam supercollocatus uniuersaliter non cognoscitur neque uidetur, et est superessentialiter, et super animum cognoscitur. Et ipsa secundum quod melius est perfectissima ignorantia scientia est eius super omnia cognita. (*Periphyseon* V; Jeauneau 2003, 920C–920D)

The Divine Light is given the name of darkness, for it is incomprehensible. Similarly, the gnostic power of those who contemplate it, because it is beaten back by it, is also frequently called darkness. For the Darkness which transcends all light is impenetrable to all light and conceals all knowledge. For He Himself resides above Mind and above Being, and is therefore utterly unknowable and invisible, being superessential and known above Mind. And it is this perfect ignorance, understood in the higher sense of the term, which constitutes the true knowledge of Him, a knowledge beyond all things. (Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 594)

For Mod, *þes þiostre*, “this darkness,” is mediated by a very little ray of light. Wisdom—who takes the place of Boethius’ *Philosophia*—enlightens the dark by opening the door “swylce þu habbe þa duru anbroden þe ic ær sohte” (“as if you have opened the door I sought before”). The door into darkness is Christ, His Manifestation that makes visible the Invisibility of God.

Elsewhere, the mystic-poet of Metre 22 is assiduous in binding literary tropes to the doctrine of mysticism: for this Alfredian author, contemplation of God is possible only through Christ. The phrase “eft gewendan into sinum modes gemunde” (“turn himself back quickly to the inward thoughts of his mind”) is allusive of the return “to the Paradise of human nature” (*Periphyseon* V, 983A; Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 667–68), deification (*theosis*) of Mod:

Æghwile ungemyndig  
rihtwisnesse hine hræde sceolde  
eft gewendan into sinum  
modes gemunde; he mæg siððan  
on his *runcofan* rihtwisnesse  
findan on ferhte fæste gehyde  
mid gedræfnesse dogora gehwilce  
modes sines mæst and swiðost  
and mid hefnesse his lichoman  
and mid þæm bisgum þe on breostum styreð  
mon on mode mæla gewhylce. (Metre 22, ll. 55–65; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:484)

Anyone unmindful of wisdom should turn himself back quickly to the inward thoughts of his mind. Then he can find wisdom in his *inner heart*, his spirit, deeply hidden very greatly and often by the daily confusion of his mind and by the heaviness of his body, and by the anxieties which are stirred up in his heart, his mind, all the time. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:161)

In *runcofa*, as “in the midst of Paradise” (*Periphyseon* V, 982B; Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 666), the Beloved bestows upon Mod a perception of His presence by Faith—“he mæg siððan [on his runcofan] rightwisnesse findan” (“then he can find Wisdom in his inner heart”).

### 3. *Mod’s descent into the innermost heart*

Deification (*theosis*) is inherently inseparable from what the Alfredian author of the *Metres of Boethius* terms *gewiss andgit* (“perfect understanding”), bestowed upon angels and wise men. Perfect understanding is marked by its steady contemplative nature, “the ability of the creature to go beyond itself” (Carabine 2000, 105). The corresponding passage in Metre 20 reads:

“Þonne hio [saul] ymb hire scyppend mid gescead smeað,  
hio bið up ahæfen ofer hi selfe.” (Metre 20, ll. 218–219; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:469)

When it [the soul] thinks with proper understanding about its creator, it is raised up above itself. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:152)

The idea that perfect understanding implies the stillness of mind, its fixedness on the object of desire, also features in the Old English *Soliloquies*: “Ac seo lufa ne byð næfre gewanod, ac byð swiðe miclum geeced þonne þæt andgyt byð gefasnoð on Gode, ne þare lufe nefre ne byð nan ende” (Lockett 2022, 228), which is translated as follows: “Love, however, will never be diminished, but rather it will be very greatly increased when the understanding is fixed on God, nor will there be any end to that love” (Lockett 2022, 229).

Perfect understanding is akin to perfect obedience that governs the (perfect) choice of free will, essential for Union. In Boethian Metre 22, the image of the Beloved is thought to be carved in Mod’s *ingedonc* (“inner thought”), which acquires the connotation of “free will” (Otten 1964, 172). Mod reveals his power of contemplation by “gesamnige ealle to þæm anum his ingedonc” (“gathering his thoughts on that One thing,” ll. 11–12) and “findan eall on him innan” (“finding all everything [Him] within the innermost self,” ll. 13b–14a). In Metre 22, the Beloved is called by various names: *riht* (“the right,” l. 1a), *eall* (“all everything,” l. 12a), *gooda æghwylc* (“every good,” l. 16a) and *anum* (“One,” l. 12a), that is the One Who, in pseudo-Dionysian terms, “in Its all-embracing Unity contains beforehand all things” (Luibheid and Rorem 1987, 131–33). The poet of Metre 22 uses envelope patterns, italicised in the selected stanzas, to enhance the contemplative quality of reading:

Se þe æfter rihte mid gerece wille  
inweardlice æfterspyrian,  
swa deoplice þæt hit todrifan ne mæg  
monna ænig ne amerran huru

ænig eorðlic ðincg, he ærest sceal  
*secan on him selfum* þæt he sume hwile  
 ymbutan hine æror sohte.  
*Sece þæt siððan on his sefan innan*  
 and forlæte an, swa he oftost mæge,  
 [ælcne] ymbhogan ðy him unnet sie,  
 and gesamnige, swa he swiðost mæge,  
 ealle to þæm anum his ingeðonc;  
 gesecge his [mode] þæt hit mæg *findan*  
*eall on him innan* þæt hit oftost nu  
 ymbutan hit ealneg seceð,  
 gooda æghwylc. (Metre 22, ll. 1–16a; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:482–83)

He who wishes to inquire inwardly after the right with due order, so deeply that no man can drive it away nor indeed any earthly thing hinder it, he must first *seek in himself* what he earlier at one time sought outside himself. Let him *seek it then within his mind* and abandon as often as he can each anxiety which is useless for him, and let him gather his thoughts as best as he can wholly on that one thing. Let him say to his mind that it can *find all everything*, each good, *within him* which it now very often consistently seeks outside himself. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:161; italics added)

The poetic description of this process of contemplative reading progresses from exterior concerns to the inner self. The formulae of seeking deeply within the self—*æfterspyrian* (“inquire after,” l. 2b) and, especially, the repetition of *secan* (“seek,” ll. 6a, 7b, 15b), echoed by *findan* (“find,” l. 13b)—can be compared with the lament of the Bride in the Song of Songs 3:1:3 “In lectulo meo per noctes quaesivi quem diligit anima mea, quaesivi illum et non inveni” (“In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him and found him not”).<sup>4</sup>

The Beloved (Christ the Bridegroom) is beyond the sensuous world and escapes the thoughts of the Bride (“quaesivi illum et non inveni”). In Metre 22, seeking Christ *mid gerece* (“with due order,” l. 1b) summons the stages of *theosis*—Purification, Illumination and Union—established by the repetition of an adverb, *siððan* (“afterwards”), that features on three occasions. On the textual level, *siððan* is paired with *secan* (“seek”), *ongitan* (“perceive”) and *findan* (“find”) (*on him innan*, “within himself”), forming an envelope pattern: “Sece þæt siððan on his sefan innan” (“Let him seek it then within his mind,” l. 8a), “He ongit siððan . . . on his incofan” (“Then he will perceive . . . in his heart,” l. 16b), and “He mæg siððan / on his runcofan . . . findan” (“Then he can find . . . in his inner heart,” ll. 58b–60a).

Eriugena explains that Purification begins with “the transformation of mind into the knowledge of all things which come after God” (*Periphyseon* V, 1020D; Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 713), this accords with Metre 22’s description of Mod’s yearning to inquire “æfter rihte mid gerece inweardlice . . . deoplice” (“inwardly after the right with due order . . . deeply,” ll. 1–3). Gathering his *ingeponc* (“the inward thoughts of his mind”)—that is, his will—on the object of yearning, Mod descends into *incofa* (“the

<sup>3</sup> For connections between the Bride of the Song of Songs and the Old English *Soliloquies*, see Jones (2021).

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from scripture are taken from the Vulgate Bible; translations are from the Douay-Rheims.

inner chamber”), the place of contemplative silence. Eriugena describes this process of the transformation of knowledge “into wisdom, that is into the innermost contemplation of the Truth, in so far as that is possible to a creature” (*Periphyseon* V, 1020D; Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 713). Contemplation (*theoria*) refers to Illumination (the Light of Gnosis), enabling Mod *ongitan* (“to perceive”) his former vanity:

He ongit siððan  
 yfel and unnet eal þæt he hæfde  
 on his incofan ærot lange. (Metre 22, ll. 16b–18; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:482–83)

Afterwards he will perceive all that he had in his heart for a long time before to be evil and pointless. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:161)

The repetition of *ongit* in lines 16a and 21b echoed by *his ingeþonc* acquires the spiritual connotation of what Eriugena terms *intelligentia* and the Old English author *gewis andgit* (“the divine understanding”) as compelling evidence of the transfiguration of Mod into the Eriugean angelic mind, Mod’s “direct perception of ultimate truth and forms” (Godden 2008, 276):

And [he] eac ongit his ingeþonc  
 leohtre and berhtre, þonne se leoma sie  
 sunnan on sumera, þonne swegles gim  
 hador heofontungol, hlutrost scineð. (Metre 22, ll. 21–24; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:482–83)

And he [mind] also perceives his thoughts to be lighter and brighter than is the radiance of the sun in summer, when the jewel of the sky, clear heavenly star, shines most brightly. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:161)

It is no wonder that the brightness of *ingeþonc* succeeds the radiance of the physical luminary, the Sun, for it gains the resemblance of “þonne swegles gim / hador heofontungol” (“the jewel of the sky, clear heavenly star,” ll. 23b–24a) Who is Christ.<sup>5</sup> In other words, *ingeþonc* invites an analogy of a mirror that reflects the image of the Beloved. Elsewhere, the illness of *ingeþonc* eliminates a theophany—Mod’s contemplation of “þonne hlutrestan heofontorhtan stream” (“the purest heavenly bright stream,” l. 3):

[S]ie ðæt la on eorðan ælces ðinges  
 gesælig mon, gif he gesion mæge  
 þonne hlutrestan heofontorhtan stream,  
 æðelne æwelme ælces godes,  
 and of him selfum ðone sweartan mist,  
 modes þiostro, mæg aweorpan.  
 We sculon ðeah gita mid Godes *fylste*  
 ealdum and leasum ðinne ingeðonc  
 betan bispellum. (Metre 23, ll. 1–9a; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:489)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Revelation 22:16. “I, Jesus, have sent my angel, to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star.”



Oh, a man would be happy in every respect on earth, if he could see the purest heavenly bright stream, noble source of every good . . . Yet with God's help we shall remedy your mind with old and false stories. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:165)

As Karmen Lenz comments, the poetic variations on *ingebonc* as “the gem of the sky” and “the clear heavenly star” “at once recall the divine and the human to emphasize the union of the blessed mind with the divine” (Lenz 2011, 155–56). The image of Christ as the star, illuminating the intellect while making the heart (*cor*) his Tabernacle, resonates with Bede's commentary on II Peter I.9:

Quis est lucifer iste? Si dominum dicas, parum est. Lucifer ipse praeclarus intellectus noster est. Ipse enim oritur in cordibus nostris, ipse illustrabitur, ipse manifestabitur. (Hurst 1983, 267)

What is that morning star? If you say the Lord, that is too little. The morning star is our own excellent understanding. For if this arises in our hearts, it will be enlightened, it will be made clear. (Hurst 1985, 132)

For Eriugena, those who return to the pristine dignity of the Image, will be granted the vision of God as *proxima illi theophania* (“the highest possible theophany”). The relevant passage from the fifth book of the *Periphyseon* reads:

In futuro uero in pristinam diuinae imaginis dignitatem ad quam facti sunt reuersuri, ipsum deum facie ad faciem (quantum creaturae comprehensibili et intelligibili incomprehensibilem et inintelligibilem uniuersalitatibus causam) super omnia exaltati – facie ad faciem, hoc est proxima illi theophania – uisuri sunt. (*Periphyseon* V; Jeaneau 2003, 926C–926D)

In the life to come when [the purged and perfected souls] return into their former glory of the Divine Image to which they were created, raised above all things, they shall see their God “face to face,” in so far as it is given to the comprehensible and intelligible creature to behold the incomprehensible and unintelligible Cause of the Universe. By “face to face” is meant “in the highest possible theophany.” (Sheldon-Williams and O'Meara 1987, 601–2)

Likewise, the passage in the Old English *Soliloquies* is suggestive of the beatific vision as a theophany: “Seo gesyhð þe we God myd geseon scylon is angyt” (Lockett 2022, 226), which is translated as follows: “The vision with which we must see God is understanding” (Lockett 2022, 227).

In Boethian Metre 22, the vision of God for *mod monna gehwelces* (“any man's mind,” l. 34) in the present life, *nu* (“now,” l. 28b), is obscured by *gedwol-mist* (“the mist of error,” l. 33a), as opposed to *nubibus theoriae* (“the Cloud of contemplation”):

Forðæm þæs lichoman leahtras and hefignes  
and þa unþeawas eallunga ne magon  
of mode ation monna ænegum  
rihtwisnesse, ðeah nu rinca hwæm  
þæs lichoman leahtras and hefignes  
and unþeawas . . .  
mid gedwolviste dreorigne sefan

fortihð mod foran monna gehwelces,  
 þæt hit swa breohte ne mot blican and scinan  
 swa hit wolde gif hit geweald ahte. (Metre 22, ll. 25–36; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:483)

For the sins, heaviness, and vices of the body cannot wholly remove righteousness from any man's mind, though now the sins, heaviness, and vices of the body . . . obstructs the sorrowful mind, the spirit, of every man, with a mist of error that it cannot sparkle and shine as brightly as it would if it were able to. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:161)

In the view of Eriugena, Christ establishes in Himself as in a House those whom He deifies, each according to the height of contemplation (*Periphyseon* V, 911C; Sheldon-Williams and O'Meara 1987, 584). This idea also appears to have influenced the Old English *Soliloquies*, wherein some dwell in *bur* (“a private chamber”), “the bridal chamber” of a King, and some in *carcern* (“the prison”):

Ælc þara þe hys [wisdom] wilnað and þe hys geornful byt, he hym mæg cuman to and on hys hyrede wunian and be lybban, þeah hi hym sume nær sien, sume fyer. Swa swa ælces cynges hame beoð sume on bure, sume on healle, sume on odene, sume on carcerne, and lybbað þeah æalle be anes hlafordes are. (Lockett 2022, 252)

Each person who desires [wisdom] and is eager for it can approach it and dwell in its household and be sustained by it, even if some are nearer to it and some farther away. In the same way, in any king's dwelling, some will be in a private chamber, others in the hall, some on the threshing floor, others in the prison, and yet all are sustained by the favour of a single lord. (Lockett 2022, 253)

The bridal chamber, which is the Holy of Holies and what Eriugena calls “the innermost part of all” (*Periphyseon* V, 905A; Sheldon-Williams and O'Meara 1987, 577), is the place of “the innermost Theophanies,” encountered by the elect (*Periphyseon* V, 983A; Sheldon-Williams and O'Meara 1987, 668). In the apophatic ascent in search for the Incomprehensible Beloved in Metre 22, Mod descends into the bridal chamber in the innermost heart—*on his runcofan*—“where [his] inner self is locked up,” l. 59a). Finding the Beloved *on his runcofan* again resonates with the song of the Bride in the Song of Songs 3:4: “Inveni quem diligit anima mea tenui eum nec dimittam donec introducam illum in domum matris meae et in cubiculum genetricis meae” (“I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him: and I will not let him go, till I bring him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore me”).

The Beloved comes within *cubiculum*, “the chamber,” (that is, the heart), when it returns to the dignity of the first Cause personified as mother (see Jaeger 1960, 183). In Metre 22, the Old English poet offers some opaque insights into the mystery concealed by the veil of the letter. The Beloved (Christ, the Wisdom of God) is hidden in the Cloud of contemplation—*fæste gehyddde* (“deeply hidden,” l. 60b), *mæst and swiðost* (“very greatly,” l. 62b). Being what Eriugena terms “one with Christ and in Christ” (*Periphyseon* V, 981C; Sheldon-Williams and O'Meara 1987, 666), Mod enters the inner sanctuaries of Wisdom, the place of mystical union. In the thought of Eriugena, entering the Holy of Holies appertains to entering “the innermost Theophanies.” This is the final stage of the return into “the uttermost darkness of that most excellent Light,” the return of the elect:

In paradiso itaque humanae naturae unusquisque locum suum secundum proportionem conuersionis suae in hac uita possidebit, alii exterius ueluti in extremis porticibus, alii interius tanquam in propinquioribus atriis diuinae contemplationi, alii in amplissimis diuinorum mysteriorum templis, alii in intimis super omnem naturam in ipso et cum ipso qui superessentialis et supernaturalis est theophaniis. Beati sunt qui adyta intrant sapientiae (quae est Christus), qui occidunt in obscurissimas tenebras excellentissimae lucis, in qua simul in causis suis uident omnia. (*Periphyseon* V; Jeauneau 2003, 983A–983B)

In the Paradise of human nature, each man shall have his proper place according to his conduct in this life; some, as it were, in the outer porticoes, others further in, in rooms that are closer to the Beatific Vision, others again in the spacious temples of the Divine Mysteries, others finally in the innermost Theophanies above every nature shall be with Him and in Him, Who is above nature and above being. Blessed are they who enter into the Shrine of Wisdom, which is Christ; who have access to the uttermost darkness of that most excellent Light in which they behold all things at once in their Causes. (Sheldon-Williams and O’Meara 1987, 667–68)

In Metre 20, an allusion to the possibility of Mod’s return into the hiddenness of God in *runcofa* is juxtaposed to the return to *sio wlitige stow* (“the delightful place”) and *þa mæran gesceaft* (“that glorious creation”) that all men desire:

Þu eart selfa weg  
and latteow eac. lifgendra gehwæs  
and sio wlitige stow þe se weg to ligð,  
þe ealle to a fundiað  
men of moldan on þa mæran gesceaft. (Metre 20, ll. 277b–281; Godden and Irvine 2009, 1:470)

You are yourself the way and also the guide of every living thing and the delightful place to which the way leads, which all people always strive towards, men on earth [striving] for that glorious creation. (Godden and Irvine 2009, 2:152)

*Runcofa* is Mod’s return to his own human nature.

#### 4. Conclusion

As this article has demonstrated, *runcofa* (“the mystery chamber”) is the epitome of mysticism in the Alfredian *Metres of Boethius*. Metre 22 unveils the imagery of special return, Mod’s mystical ascent from the Light of Christ and Illumination in *incofa* to the concealment of God and Deification in *runcofa*. Christological imagery—Christ opening the door into the darkness of “the bridal chamber” and of “the inner sanctuary”—consolidates the mystical tenor of this section of the Old English *Boethius*. The incorporeality of Mod is no way undermined by its confinement in the innermost heart, the place of mystical Union. In like manner, the divine majesty of Christ is not lowered by the Incarnation and blending with human nature, for He has not ceased to be the *Verbum*.

The Greek voices of Gregory of Nyssa, pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor resonate in the Boethian Metre through the influence of Eriugena’s Latin *Periphyseon*. Mod’s longing for God—*epektasis*—becomes a premise of his special return

into God—*theosis*, granted to the blessed mind through Grace. The ideas of Greek mystics translated from the Carolingian court to the Alfredian court point the way for future research into Alfredian literature, the exegesis of the Alfredian *Metres of Boethius*, and the origins of English Mysticism.

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