

ABSTRACT

AN ALCHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN'S NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

My overall goal in this thesis is to explain how Hildegard perceives the universe through alchemical images and how understanding her visionary language may help an individual read his own universe. I do so by situating the reader within the cultural context of Hildegard's day and age and look at possible scholarly and folkloric influences that guided her beliefs about health and approaches to healing. I interpret much of Hildegard's natural philosophy in Margret Berger's translation of *Causes and Cures*, and relate how thoughts can be linked to physical manifestations such as disease. This analysis looks closely at the energetic relationship between spirit and matter and the relationship between thought and manifestation in Hildegard's natural philosophy. Hildegard maintains that humans are given free will in order to partake in the universal act of creation and destruction. She expresses this concept through alchemical language which describes how the elements transform from one state of being into another and how they express themselves spiritually and physically. I use depth psychology to explain Hildegard's perception that the elements function within man's psyche to bring about change both internally and externally. The microcosm that is a man's internal universe mirrors his exterior one and he is made responsible for all the manifestations that make up his inner and outer environment which Hildegard defines as health.

Stefani Desiree Hooper
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