



ESOTERICA

Volume IX (2007)

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ESOTERICA

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ISSN: 1523-1224

Volume IX (2007)

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Introduction

Welcome to the ninth volume of *Esoterica*, which again offers a rich selection of articles and reviews.

This issue features a major article, “Angel in the House,” by Allison Coudert, holder of the Paul and Marie Castelfranco Professorship at the University of California, Davis. In this provocative, beautifully illustrated investigation, she discusses the development of esotericism in the nineteenth century in light of prevailing male attitudes toward women. Coudert analyzes how, for the first time in history, a sizable group of female religious leaders and social activists began to speak out in public. Many of these women were involved in Spiritualism, Theosophy, Mormonism, Swedenborgianism, Shakerism, and the host of other esoteric spiritual and religious movements and organizations that sprung up in the nineteenth century. By taking the prevailing rhetoric of “The Angel in the House” seriously and quite literally, these women claimed that their innate moral superiority made it incumbent upon them to influence men and reform society. Coudert cogently argues that in England and the United States, the position of upper and middle class women improved significantly in the nineteenth century, and that esoteric currents of thought played an important role in this improvement.

In “Of Ether and Colloidal Gold: The Making of a Philosophers’ Stone,” Hereward Tilton of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, offers an important new interpretation of alchemy, drawing both on primary sources and on the full range of recent scholarship. He offers a strong corrective to those who would seek to discard “spiritual alchemy” or other forms of alchemical praxis that do not so easily conform to a narrative of scientific progress. Tilton offers a partial ‘translation’ of the alchemy of one of the greatest adepts, Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605), into the terms of contemporary chemistry. The purpose of this venture is twofold. Firstly, it offers insight into the laboratory techniques employed in early modern alchemy, and the type of materials and procedures utilised to create a Philosophers’ Stone. Secondly and more importantly, however, by bringing the alchemical process into

greater proximity with a world and a science with which we are familiar, it reveals what gets lost in translation, and thereby renders in starker relief the defining features of the alchemical endeavour vis-à-vis modern chemistry.

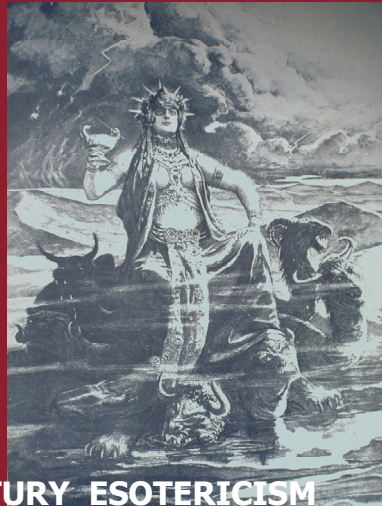
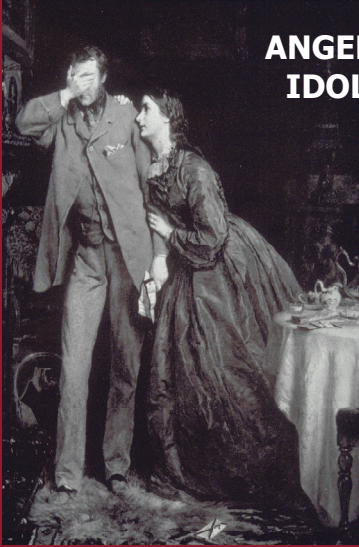
In “‘The Teutonicks writings’: Translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh,” Ariel Hessayon of Goldsmiths, University of London, shows how Boehme’s texts were copied, transmitted, issued and translated, demonstrating the key role Samuel Hartlib’s circle played in facilitating the project. Furthermore, he uncovers the translators’ networks, revealing their ties through kinship and friendship, as well as shared professional and commercial interests. Indeed, these extensive connections, which included sympathetic publishers, largely explains why Boehme’s works were acquired so readily in printed English translations and later selectively rendered into Welsh.

And in “‘The Flood’ of 1524—The First Mass-media Event in European History,” Gustav-Adolph Schoener of the University of Hannover, Germany, discusses the cultural significances of a conjunction of the slow planets Jupiter and Saturn in November 1484 in the sign of Scorpio. Italian and German astrologers took that as an indication of the Reformation and an aid in interpreting it. All seven planets joined together in February of that year to a kind of super conjunction – and that did not augur well! This prediction has gone down in history as the “The Flood-Prediction”. And it inflamed passions all over Europe.

In this issue are reviews of new books, including Hugh Urban’s *Magia Sexualis*, Marsha Keith Schuchard’s *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, Robert Lima’s *Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama*, and Sophia Heller’s *The Absence of Myth*, as well as an extensive series of book announcements. These articles and reviews, and the continued growth of the Association for the Study of Esotericism and the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, with their alternating conferences, demonstrate the vigor of this field of scholarship.

—Arthur Versluis

**ANGEL IN THE HOUSE OR
IDOL OF PERVERSITY?**



WOMEN IN 19TH CENTURY ESOTERICISM
Allison P. Coudert

***Angel in the House or Idol of Perversity?
Women in Nineteenth-Century Esotericism***

Allison P. Coudert

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In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas argues that between 1820 and 1875 an alliance developed between upper class women and clergymen that produced a morally bankrupt, sentimental culture, which further reduced women's already restricted roles. Religion moved from the head to the heart, and the very characteristics that were emphasized as the *sine qua non* of a religious temperament legitimized women's exclusion from the public sphere on the grounds of their intellectual inferiority. As Douglas says, "Feminine sentimentality, ignorance

of the world, lack of scholarship, precisely those qualities which made women more Christian. . . were, paradoxically, held against them.”¹ As a Congregational minister wrote in the *Ladies Magazine*: “Religion is far more necessary to you than self-sufficient men. In you it would not only be *criminal*, but *impolitic* to neglect it.”²

Douglas claims that Sarah Hale (1788-1879), the editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, exerted far more influence than Elizabeth Cady Stanton or any supporter of women’s rights when she encouraged women to exert their “influence” in ways that totally undermined the possibility of any real influence in the public realm. At the very time the American economy was becoming the most aggressively capitalist, cut-throat system in the world, Hale exalted “sweetness,” “sensibility,” and “suffering” as model female qualities. Women, along with religion, were consequently marginalized. A sugar-coating of female do-goodism effectively removed women from the public arena, while at the same time masking the increasingly rampant racism, imperialism, class conflict, and sexism that emerged in post Civil War America.

Douglas’s book was published in 1977. Since that time, a considerable body of work has appeared that rejects her views, arguing instead that far from further marginalizing and suppressing women, the feminization of religion allowed a crucial generation of women to find their voice both figuratively and literally. For the first time in history, a sizable group of female religious leaders and social activists began to speak out in public. Many of these women were involved in Spiritualism, Theosophy, Mormonism, Swedenborgianism, Shakerism, and the host of other esoteric spiritual and religious movements and organizations that sprung up in the nineteenth century. By taking the prevailing rhetoric of “The Angel in the House” seriously and quite literally, these women claimed that their innate moral superiority made it incumbent upon them to influence men and reform society.³ If we accept Douglas’s thesis that the rhetoric of “angelhood” further disenfranchised women, it is impossible to understand the virulent backlash against women that appears in nineteenth century art, literature, and science.

The truth is that in England and the United States, the areas I deal with in this article, the position of upper and middle class women improved significantly in the nineteenth century, and esoteric currents of thought played an important role in this improvement. The Married Women's Property Acts passed in England in 1870 and 1882 marked a significant step in the direction of women's financial independence and the recognition of a wife as separate from her husband. Birth control was spreading and with it the ability of women to have far greater control over their bodies and lives than ever before.⁴ The birth rate in the United States declined from 7.04 at the beginning of the century to 3.56 at the end.⁵ For the first time women gained access to higher education and were admitted to medical school.⁶ William Acton's contention that women neither experienced nor desired sexual pleasure in marriage⁷ was repudiated by the female physician Elizabeth Blackwell in her book, *The Human Sexual Element in Sex* (1884), while another female physician, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, rejected Henry Maudsley's claim that for purely medical reasons females could not undertake the rigors of higher education if they expected to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.

In 1884, the British Parliament abolished the penalty of imprisonment for denying conjugal rights to spouses, a response in large part to women's insistence that they should have control over their own sexuality in the interest of their health and the health of their offspring. By the 1890s, many thousands of women had already entered the public sphere through jobs in local government, business, and commerce. By 1914, almost three quarters of all elementary school teachers in England and Wales were women, and there were some 166,000 female clerical workers.⁸ It was improvements like these that were responsible for the backlash against women and the increasingly strong reactions against female sexuality that I will come back to in the second part of this paper. But before we get to the backlash, we must investigate the ways in which esotericism fostered women's rights and freedom.

It may seem a paradox, but the privatization of religion described by Douglas did, in fact, provide women with access to the public sphere. In situations where religious authority is derived

from individual experience or direct spiritual contact, and not through established, male-dominated religious institutions, women were and are able to exercise religious leadership.⁹ This explains the prominent role of women in early Christianity, the powerful force exerted by female mystics in the Christian tradition, and the role of women as leaders in the religious sects that sprang up in England during the Civil War period.¹⁰ Like these earlier women, nineteenth-century female religious leaders and esotericists exerted considerable influence that brought with it the power to alter the course of their own lives as well as the lives of their male and female followers. Female Spiritualists, for example, could say the most amazing things precisely because they did not claim to speak for themselves but only to channel the views of their spirit contacts.

What these spirits thought and said, however, is truly astonishing. For example, speaking in a trance on the text, “It is a shame for woman to speak in Church,” the American Spiritualist Lizzie Doten exclaimed: “It is indeed a shame for woman to speak in the Church; and woman ought to be ashamed. . . of the Church. Let woman come out from the Church; and when she comes out the minister and all the congregation will go out with her.”¹¹ Such a remark flew in the face of the religious injunctions leveled against females who dared to speak in public. In 1837, for example, the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts wrote a pastoral letter deploring the public appearance of the Grimké sisters. They decried, and I quote, the “dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury” and predicted that public speaking would lead to women’s “degeneracy and ruin.” Antislavery and Temperance conventions refused to allow women to speak. In 1847 Lucy Stone was elected valedictorian by her college class, but while she was allowed to write the commencement speech, she was not allowed to deliver it. It had to be read by a male professor.¹² In the face of such condemnation, females who dared to speak in public clearly felt the need to defend their honor and themselves. The leading English Spiritualist Emma Hardinge categorically denied any inclination to rebel against her allotted role as an “Angel in the

House”; in fact, she claims that she tried valiantly to stop speaking, but to no avail:

That I, a woman, and moreover, “*a lady by birth,*” and *English*, above all, that I would go out, like “strong minded women,” and hector the world on public platforms! Oh, shocking! I vowed rebellion—to give up spirits, spiritualism, and America; to return to England and live “a feminine existence” once again. With these magnanimous resolves upon me *one week, the next* saw me on a public platform fairly before the world as a trance speaker.¹³

Mary Dana Shindler, who wrote *A Southerner Among Spirits*, only did so at their behest. While visiting a New York medium she asked, “Do you wish me to write the work I am thinking of?” “Yes,” the spirit replied, “go on; it will sell well.” And it did.¹⁴

With spirits like this to guide them, women did all sorts of things they would not have done otherwise. They spoke in public, they wrote books, and they went on lecture tours. Achsa Sprague provides a fascinating example of the way in which contact with spirits could transform a woman’s life and empower her to do unprecedented things. In 1856 the twenty-five-year-old Sprague had been an invalid for five years, crippled by a joint disease. She lay in a darkened room in Plymouth Notch, Vermont “[b]owed down,” as she says, “by disease, shut up from the world. . . like a prisoner chained down in his dungeon.” Her painful existence was miraculously transformed through contact with spirits who urged her to rise up from her bed and go on a mission. As she wrote: “Having been raised from a bed of sickness. . . by spirit agency, I felt it my duty to do that which had been pointed out to me by my Spirit Guides, . . . to take the position which I now occupy, that of a Public Speaking Medium.”¹⁵

Sprague’s journals show how difficult it was for women to defy social conventions and escape the ideology that confined them to the private sphere. Spirits had constantly to quell her powerful inner doubts: “What doubting still?” a spirit asked. It continued encouragingly: “There shall be snarls, there shall be foes. But when thou doubttest most we shall be near.”¹⁶ What is

particularly interesting is that during her short career—Sprague died at the early age of 34—she received five marriage proposals, and these were contained in letters, so there is no telling how many more she may have received in person. Some men were clearly enthralled by female speakers, perhaps because, as Ann Braude suggests, their existence freed men from the social conventions governing male and female interactions in the same way they freed women. Braude quotes Nathaniel Parker Willis’s description of his reactions to a lecture by the medium Cora Hatch, noted for her lovely blond ringlets and charming decolté dresses. He describes the conflict in his mind between the way he thought women were meant to behave and his obvious approval of the way Cora Hatch did behave:

. . . my instinctive feeling, I must own, made no objection to the propriety of the performance. The tone and manner were of absolute sincerity of devoutness which compelled respect; and before she closed, I was prepared to believe her an exception—either that a male speaker was speaking through her lips, or that the relative position of the sexes is not the same as in the days of Paul. How was it with the Corinthians? Women are certainly better than we in these latter days, and as standing far nearer God, may properly speak for us, even in holy places—or so it seemed to me while listening to Mrs. Hatch.¹⁷

Spiritualists were not the only ones to criticize and contravene the prevailing limits on women’s freedom, although they were the most radical. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony recognized the importance role Spiritualists played in the women’s movement. As they said in their *History of Women’s Suffrage*, “The only religious sect in the world. . . that has recognized the equality of women is the Spiritualists.”¹⁸ But while not as consistently militant in their support of women’s rights, there were other forms of esoteric thought that criticized prevailing attitudes toward gender and gender relationships. This is not to argue that esotericism is by nature progressive since this is clearly not the case. Esotericists were represented along the entire political spectrum, and there were plenty of misogynists among them. For

example, members of the Theosophical Society who stressed the concepts of “Universal Brotherhood” and “One Life” advocated by Annie Besant might take these ideas to support equality, but they might also take them to emphasize the need for order and subordination in both the state and home.¹⁹ Some historians even claim that a natural affinity exists between esoteric and fascist or totalitarian ideologies.²⁰ But for the purposes of this paper, it is important to point out that esotericism provided a crucial space for the articulation of unorthodox politics of all sorts, and this includes unorthodox gender politics. Women and women’s issues dominated the Theosophical Society in the last years of the nineteenth century. Dixon claims that prominent feminists were “hundreds of times more likely to join the TS [Theosophical Society] than were members of the general population.”²¹ Some of these feminists had decidedly radical agendas. For example, Susan E. Gay assembled Mme. Blavatsky’s teaching about reincarnation into a “Theosophical-Feminist Manifesto,” in which she claimed that souls journeyed through both male and female bodies, gaining the noblest qualities of both sexes over time. “Spiritual equilibrium,” exemplified by Jesus, was the ideal for both sexes. Thus, manly men and womanly women were the least developed of souls. Gay insisted that men must free themselves from the delusion that

physical manhood is a sort of freehold possession to be held here and hereafter, which marks off certain souls from certain others known as women, and confers on them all sorts of superior rights and privileges, including the possession and submission of “wives.”²²

Gay believed that if men realized they could find themselves reincarnated in female bodies, they might think twice about the legitimacy of female subordination.

One of the most intriguing, if somewhat repellent, feminist esotericists of the nineteenth century was Frances Swiney (1847-1919). Born in India to a military family, she married a major general at the age of twenty-four and had six children. On her return to England, she became President of the Cheltenham Branch of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies

and a member of the militant Women's Social and Political Union. Although critical of what she perceived as the male bias of Theosophy, she pillaged freely from theosophical texts, ideas, and vocabulary to create her own evolutionary form of theosophy, which appeared in 1899 under the title, *The Awakening of Woman, or Woman's Part in Evolution*.²³ According to Swiney, all souls are essentially feminine, but they had to progress through an initial masculine state, which she describes as "the kindergarten of humanity." She drew on the racist theories presented by Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thompson in their popular biology textbook, *Evolution of Sex* (1889), which argued that sexual difference exists at the cellular level.

Swiney used this theory in a way its authors certainly never intended, to denounce men and support female superiority. She claimed that men embody the katabolic or destructive tendencies in human nature, while women embody the anabolic or creative principle. In her view, women's reproductive organs were as close as one could possibly come to the infinite creative power of the divine. The job of true feminists was to root out "lower, masculine" behavior. To prove her case, Swiney drew on biology, sociology, Kabbalah, the Vedanta, Gnostic Christianity (especially Mead's *Pistis Sophia*), and Egyptology. In Gnosticism and Egyptian mysticism she found traces of "sublime feminism." Christ, in her view, was a female figure, who sacrificed herself for the love of humanity by taking on a lower, male form. At her second coming Christ will appear as the woman she truly is. Swiney was a eugenicist and joined the women's branch of the Malthusian League. She claimed that the "Law of the Mother" made it imperative for women to abstain from intercourse while pregnant and nursing. By ignoring this law, male-dominated societies have contributed to an alarming rise in epilepsy, insanity, idiocy, and congenital diseases. With the re-imposition of the "Law of the Mother" and an improvement in women's economic position, motherhood will be redeemed. This would result in the gradual elimination of male babies, which are only born as a result of female weakness. In her book, which went through three revised and enlarged editions between 1899 and 1919, Swiney combines

an attack on male domination with a fierce critique of materialist and capitalist culture.

Esotericists were in the forefront of attacks on orthodox forms of Christianity as unnecessarily oppressive, especially to women. In the second volume of *Isis Unveiled* (2: iv), Mme. Blavatsky claimed that Christianity was “the chief opponent of free thought,” and she traced the way in which Christianity was derived from phallic worship and pagan ritual. Alex Fullerton, a leading member of the American Theosophical Society and a former Episcopal minister, contributed an article to *Lucifer*, the provocatively titled journal of the Theosophical Society, on “The Phallicism in the Fifth Commandment.” Esotericists from many different groups paved the way for less doctrinal and more egalitarian and ecumenical religions and spiritualities that were the precursors of contemporary New Age beliefs. From an authoritarian, punitive parent, God was transformed into a loving Father and, in some cases, Mother. Sin, hell, and the last judgment were eliminated. For Spiritualists, the love of dead children replaced the love of Jesus, and heaven became a wonderful place, where excellent child care was available, education continued, and spiritual progress was assured after death. Along with these startling religious innovations came positive changes in the roles of women as well as in attitudes toward them, as we have seen. But as I said at the beginning of this talk, for every step forward taken by women, there was a step backwards on the part of those men and women who were deeply suspicious of changes in gender roles and hostile to what they saw as the unnatural and unprecedented usurpation of power by women.

During periods of profound or rapid social change, women become something akin to moral barometers. They are often singled out as responsible for the breakdown of social order and a conservative backlash against them ensues. We can see this today in the resurgence of fundamentalism throughout the world and the increasing restrictions placed on women’s freedom where fundamentalism prevails. The nineteenth century was a time of rapid and unprecedented social change. As Ferdinand Braudel has suggested, life for most people remained pretty much the

same from the earliest ages until 1800, but with the advent of industrialization and urbanization life was radically transformed. Artists, writers, and scientists reacted to the profound and unsettling changes accompanying the industrial revolution, and their reactions can in many instances be measured in terms of their negative attitudes towards women.

Spiritualists were a special target of the male medical profession since they were vocal in their criticism of medical theories about women's alleged physical weakness. Spiritualists rejected the idea that women were ill and incapacitated during a significant portion of the year simply because they menstruated. They scoffed at the notion that pain was an essential part of childbirth as a result of original sin, and they considered the long bed rest prescribed by doctors after childbirth unnecessarily debilitating. They also favored birth control, which was as contentious an issue in the nineteenth century as abortion is in the United States today. Spiritualists offered a variety of unorthodox diagnostic techniques and remedies that brought them into direct conflict with the medical establishment. As the medical profession became increasingly regulated and male-dominated, a number of American spiritualists joined in the establishment of The Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia, founded in 1850 to provide a voice for women and place for the education of women doctors. (Let me add as an aside here that Harvard Medical School was not opened to women until 1950.) In response to these threats and infringements on their territory, doctors and clergymen joined forces in claiming that women's ill health was a direct result of their disobedience and failure to follow the dictates of male authority figures. R. Frederick Marvin, a professor of psychological medicine and medical jurisprudence, was in the forefront of the medical attack on Spiritualists. He targeted trance speakers as victims of "utromania," which he described in detail in his book *The Philosophy of Spiritualism and the Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania*, published in 1874. Women who spoke in public suffered from a "tilted" or "inverted" uterus, and this was the direct cause of the insanity that led them to abandon their homes and embrace all sorts of dreadful doctrines. As he says:

Utromania frequently results in mediomania. . . . The angle at which the womb is suspended in the pelvis frequently settles the whole question of sanity or insanity. Tilt the organ a little forward—introvert it, and immediately the patient forsakes her home, embraces some strong ultraism—Mormonism, Mesmerism, Fourierisim, Socialism, oftener Spiritualism. She becomes possessed by the idea that she has some startling mission in the world. She forsakes her home, her children, her duty, to mount the rostrum and proclaim the peculiar virtues of free-love, elective affinity, or the reincarnation of souls.²⁴

The neurologist William Alex Hammond, a professor at New York City University and Bellevue Hospital and author of *The Physics and Physiology of Spiritualism*, dismissed Spiritualism as a fraudulent enterprise resulting from hysteria. A second enlarged edition published in 1876 was more straightforward in linking mental illness to Spiritualism. It was titled, *Spiritualism and Allied Causes of Nervous Derangement*.²⁵ The prevailing view of medical men was that women must not be independent and exercise their own will. Female patients must be entirely subjugated to the will of the doctor. In this way they were to be treated exactly like children, whose self will must be broken. This was the basis of the “rest cure” for newly delivered mothers devised by Dr. Weir Mitchell, the effects of which are so vividly described in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s harrowing novel *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which chronicles her descent into madness while under the care of Weir Mitchell.

From these examples, it is clear that what passed for the “scientific” wisdom of the period provided the seemingly impregnable foundation for the categorical denial of women’s capabilities in any role other than that of wife and mother. Woman’s great and enduring function was that of reproduction. As one can see from this grossly sentimental picture by Thomas Cooper Gotch, motherhood became an obsession:



Figure 1: Thomas Cooper Gotch, “The Child Enthroned” (1894)
[Royal Academy Pictures (1906)]

A woman’s entire physical constitution and mental abilities were geared to this and this alone. The law of conservation of energy was cited to explain why women could not transcend their biological nature or attempt to scale the spiritual and intellectual heights attained by men. Women simply could not expend the necessary energy to develop their minds. They were inextricably tied down by their nature as men were not. Only men could aspire to culture. The assumption that because they were child bearers women were closer to nature than men was common and reiterated. In nineteenth-century art across the spectrum of styles and schools women are constantly shown in conjunction with nature, merging, melding, or barely emerging from it as in the following illustrations.



Figure 2: Moreau, “Mystic Flower” (1875)



Figure 3: Arthur Hacker, “The Drone” (1899) [Royal Academy Pictures (London, 1899)]

In this picture the “drone” is as much the woman herself as the bee that has caught her attention. As a contemporary critic remarked:

All the beauty of the foxglove in its many colours is thrown into relief by a depth of dark leafage, and into this congregation of colours comes many a honey-loving and honey-gathering bee, the worker and the non-worker, the industrious and the idle. A large drone, earning nothing for all its loud humming, has caught the notice of the stately lady, herself an idler, who wanders amid this paradise of blooms, and seems at the moment to be in contemplation of her own life, as being possible no less indolent and useless than that of the drone.²⁶



Figure 4: Armand Séquin, frontispiece to *Le Pelerin du Silence* (1896)



Figure 5: Maximillain Lenz, “A Daydream” (1899) [*Die Kunst* 25 (1911-12), 275]

In this last painting, one sees—and cannot help but contrast—a pensive, somberly dressed male walking amongst frolicking, mad, scantily dressed maenads.

The didactic message in pictures like these is that women’s realm is nature. Should they reject this realm and trespass into the masculine realm of culture, they would lose their femininity, their reproductive capacity, and become masculinized, eunuch-like creatures. Paul Moebius, an ardent misogynist often quoted by Freud (and excoriated by Virginia Wolf in *A Room of One’s Own*), made this clear:

If we wish to have women who fulfill their responsibilities as mothers, we cannot expect them to have a masculine brain. If it were possible for the feminine abilities to develop in parallel fashion to those of a male, the organs of motherhood would shrivel and we would have hateful and useless hybrid creatures on our hands.²⁷

Even if a woman were not to marry, either by choice or circumstance, this law of nature could not be abrogated. Spinster, married, or widowed, young or old, women were dominated by their reproductive organs. If they diverted energy from these, it would reap a terrible physical toll on themselves as well as on those around them. What women could withstand the cautionary tale of the Radcliffe graduate who, upon dissection, was found to have ovaries the size of dried-up, shriveled peas? Women must abandon the intellect for the health of their bodies, indeed for their sanity since hysteria was believed to be a peculiarly female disease arising from the womb (*husteros* in Greek). It affected women who shirked, rebelled, or were somehow not fortunate enough to fulfill their biologically ordained reproductive destiny.²⁸ Listen to the experts and imagine what an effect the constant reiteration of views such as these had on female psyches: “The laws of divine and natural order reveal the female sex to be incapable of cultivating knowledge, and this is especially true in the fields of natural sciences and medicine.” So pontificated Dr. Theodor von Bischoff in 1845.²⁹

In *The Descent of Man* Charles Darwin came right out and said that male superiority was an irrefutable consequence of evolution. Once again women’s deficiencies were explained on the basis of allegedly objective scientific evidence. As Darwin says, because of both natural and sexual selection, “man had ultimately become superior to women,” a fact that, given the continuing pressure of evolution, would “tend to keep up or even increase [the male’s] mental powers, and as a consequence, the present inequality between the sexes.”³⁰ That men and women evolved at different rates or even that women had actually ceased to evolve while males continued ever onward and upward was a common notion at this time. There was even the suggestion by the great sexologist Havelock Ellis that women were actually still quite close to those apes from whom men had managed to distance themselves:

It seems to be an indication of an abnormal interest in monkeys that

some women are observed by the attendants in the monkey-house of zoological gardens to be frequent visitors. Near the Amazon the traveler Castelnau saw an enormous coati monkey belonging to an Indian woman and tried to purchase it; though he was offered a large sum, the woman only laughed. “Your efforts are useless,” remarked an Indian in the same cabin, “He is her husband.”³¹

The German craniologist Karl Vogt was not so hesitant. In his opinion, women simply were closer to apes than man:

We may be sure, that whenever we perceive an approach to the animal type, the female is nearer to it than the male, hence we should discover a greater simious resemblance if we were to take the female as our standard.³²

The connection between women and apes fascinated a number of painters and sculptors:



Figure 6: John Charles Dollmann, “The Unknown” (1912)
[*Royal Academy Pictures* (London, 1912)]



Figure 7: Otto Friedrich, “Vanity” (1904) [*Die Kunst* 11 (1904-5), 441



Figure 8: Emmanuel Frémiet, “Gorilla” (c. 1887) [Georges Ollendorf, *Le Salon de 1887* (Paris, 1887)]

It is hard to believe, but his predecessor of King Kong won the medal of Honor at the Salon of 1887.

Given these expert opinions, the notion of a truly “educated woman” or of a genuine “female” writer, thinker, or artist was an oxymoron since education and the intellect were defined as masculine and beyond female capabilities. Just compare the term “Old Master” with what might be considered a comparable term for a woman, “Old Mistress.” I doubt that the image of a female artist jumped to your minds!³³ Artistic and intellectual creativity was appropriated by men.

As a late nineteenth century writer said, “As long as a woman refrains from unsexing herself, let her dabble in anything. The woman of genius does not exist; when she does she is a man.”³⁴ This was precisely the diagnosis given to explain the work of George Eliot. Her old friend Herbert Spencer was puzzled by her brilliance and could only conclude it was pathological. As he says,

I can tell you of no woman save George Eliot in whom there has been this union of high philosophical capacity with extensive acquisition. . . . While I say this, however, I cannot let pass the occasion for remarking that, in her case as in other cases, mental powers so highly developed in women are in some measure abnormal and involve a physiological cost which feminine organization will not bear without injury more or less profound.³⁵

In other words, for Spencer, Eliot lived her life on the verge of hysteria because her brilliance and talent were totally beyond the norm for women and overtaxed her physique. Henry James had no such problem understanding Eliot. He could not be fooled. Although Eliot might assume a masculine pseudonym, she remained for him a supremely and “a delightfully feminine writer.” Why? because she was unable to attain that state of transcendent objectivity that marked the best male thinking. As James condescendingly says: “[Her books were filled with] microscopic observation, not a myriad of whose keen notations are worth a single one of those great synthetic guesses with which a real master attacks the truth.”³⁶ Let me add here that James’ novel *The Bostonians* took on the issue of female trance speakers and concluded that what they really needed was a strong, resolute man and marriage.

There was virtually nothing a woman could do to enter the brotherhood of artists, writers, and intellectuals. If she painted, wrote, or thought differently, her work was by definition inferior because it reflected supposedly feminine characteristics and consequently did not fit the parameters of excellence set up by males. If, on the other hand, she had even modest success, playing

by the same rules as men, like Eliot, it was because she was “unsexed” and “masculine.” The grudging praise given to Berthe Morisot by George Moore in his book *Sex in Art* (1890) shows how women were trapped in a Catch 22 situation. Here we can see that lying beneath the lip service so freely given to the “Cult of Womanhood” and the ideal of “The Angel in the House,” there lay a terrible disdain for all things feminine. Surveying the work of the few recognized female artists, Moore concluded that Morisot was the only one to “create a style” and consequently the only woman fit to be remembered. As he says of her work,

her pictures are the only pictures painted by a woman that could not be destroyed without creating a blank, a hiatus in the history of art. True, that hiatus would be slight—insignificant if you will—but the insignificance is sometimes dear to us; and though nightingales, thrushes and skylarks were to sing in King’s Bench Walk, I should miss the individual chirp of the pretty sparrow. Mme. Morisot’s note is perhaps as insignificant as a sparrow’s, but it is an unique and individual note. She has created a style, and has done so by investing her art with all her femininity; her art is no dull parody of ours; it is all womanhood—sweet and gracious, tender and wistful womanhood.”³⁷

The best woman artist is, alas, but a “sparrow,” a tiny, insignificant “bird.” This is a word that we need to keep in mind when we think of the way women in the nineteenth century were so often described purely in terms of their reproductive functions. As Dr. M. L. Holbrook, a noted medical authority on childbirth said, “[It is] as if the Almighty, in creating the female sex, had taken the uterus and built up a woman around it.”³⁸ This radically reductionist definition of women appears in the illustration of a female skeleton from John Barclay’s *Anatomy of the Bones of the Human Body* (1829):

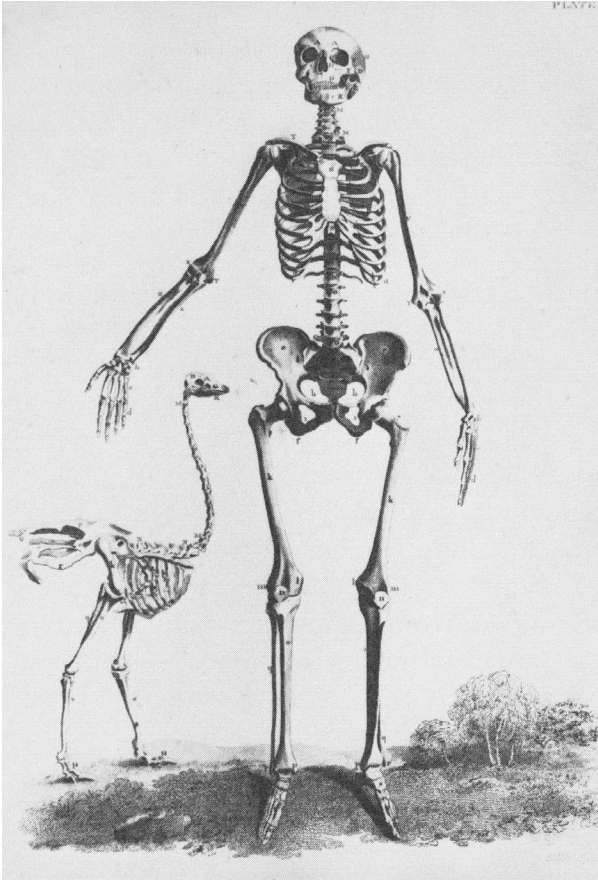


Figure 9: Female skeleton

Barclay distorted his drawing to emphasize what he wanted to see, namely the relatively large size of the female pelvis, her narrow shoulders, and small head. This emphasis on the pelvic areas is underlined by his association of the female skeleton with an ostrich—a small headed “bird” if there ever was one. Now look at Barclay’s illustration of a male skeleton.

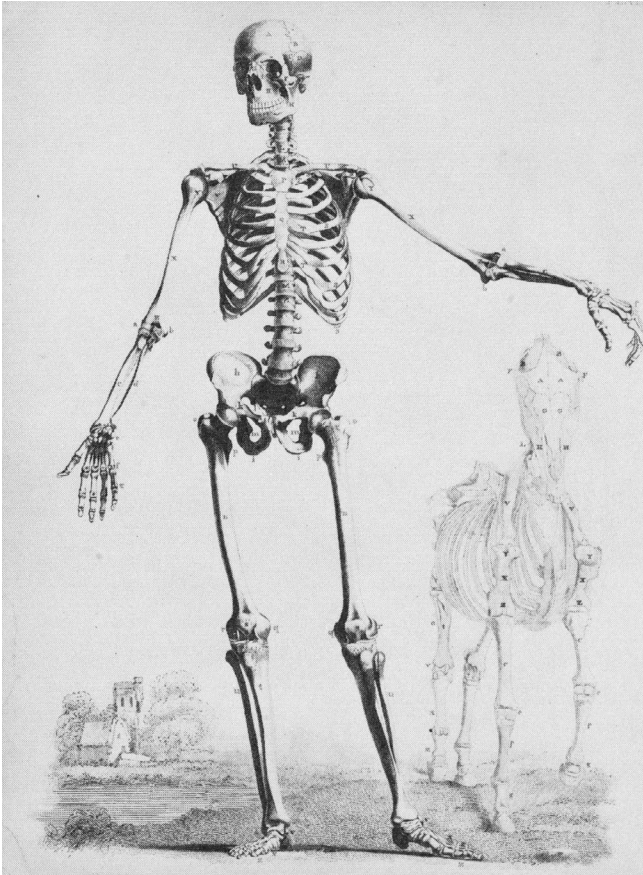


Figure 10: male skeleton

Note the much bigger head, smaller pelvis, and the proud and powerful horse that stands beside him. And also note the house in the background. Not only were males kings of their respective castles but they were the source of the culture that produced their castles.

As we have seen, women were compared to sparrows and the small-brained ostrich, but the most common comparison was to silly geese, even turkeys, and we all know what it means to be called a “turkey.” In an article published in 1889 describing an animal show at the Palace of Industry in Paris an illustration appeared of a fashionably dressed young lady standing before a two-tiered cage containing turkey and geese. The caption reads,

“Qui se ressemblent s’assemblent” (birds of a feather flock together).³⁹ “A white goose” (*une oie blanche*) was a synonym for an innocent young girl, while “an unaccompanied goose” signified a prostitute. Not a whole lot distinguishes the two, and that indeed gives us a hint as to the real feelings many men had about women. And here we come to the dark underbelly of the ideology of “The Angel in the House.” Although lip service was given to women as paragons of virtue, they were more often despised for their moral weakness and sexual rapacity.

The image of the pure, asexual angel in the house, who closed her eyes, lay back, and thought of God and country when called upon to fulfill her reproductive duty, appears in stark contrast to the images of deranged, dangerous, and predatory women who populate the landscape of nineteenth-century art and inhabited the subterranean regions of many a male subconscious. It is as if women were divided into two distinct categories: the good, nurturing, gentle, passive, sexless, selfless wife and mother and the evil, violent, hysterical, egomaniacal woman who literally drain men of their vital seminal juices through their excessive sexual demands. (One must remember here that a common euphemism for sexual intercourse during the nineteenth century was “to spend.” Women, as we shall see, were the ultimate consumers — not just of goods, but of men.) But I would go farther and suggest that the dichotomy between the good wife and rapacious, evil temptress was superficial, that for a great number of men the idealization of women was a cover, a ploy, a prophylactic so to speak, to hide their real belief that women were the implacable enemy inhibiting male transcendence. For it was precisely because of their natures and because they followed their natures that women dragged men down. In his book on evolution, Joseph LeConte argued that man’s role in life is to transcend nature:

[man] is possessed of two natures — a lower in common with animals, and a higher, peculiar to himself. The whole mission and life-work of man is the progressive and finally the complete dominance, both in the individual and in the race, of the higher over the lower. The whole meaning of sin is the humiliating bondage of the higher over the lower.

As the *material* evolution of Nature found its goal, its completion, and its significance in man, so must man enter immediately upon a higher *spiritual* evolution to find its goal and completion and its significance in the ideal man—the divine man.⁴⁰

Perhaps Le Conte's language is a bit more theatrical and overblown, but are his views really very different from what Freud says about women in *Civilization and its Discontents*? In this work Freud argues that women are the natural enemies of civilization along lines that are not that different from all the other male experts we have listened to. Women cannot transcend their own subjective and familial interests. They can never reach the women soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence heights of objectivity and idealism attained by the males:

. . . —those very women who, in the beginning, laid the foundations of civilization by the claims of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimation's of which women are little capable. Since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even ever estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.⁴¹

In this diagnosis, woman's physical nature is the reason for her deficiencies. So much for the marvels of motherhood. It is precisely motherhood that makes women the threatening creatures they are. For if woman is the womb writ large, she is troublesome indeed. Frenzied, demented women are a common subject in the art of the period, as we can see from the following illustrations.



Figure 11: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, “Women of Amphissa” [Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts]

Here we see a group of maenads, exhausted after a night of drinking, carousing, dismembering animals and perhaps men. In the next illustration, jealous Morgan-Le-Fay weaves a poisonous coat for her brother, good King Arthur. The message is clear: as weavers, women ensnare, entrap, and kill men.



Figure 12: Frederick Sandys, Morgan-Le-Fay

Women like these were essentially “hysterics” because they repudiated their natural role as wives and mothers. Since Social Darwinists regarded insanity as the regression to a lower state of development, it made perfect sense that insanity was gendered feminine.⁴² But even if their wombs were kept occupied through constant pregnancies, women could still get out of hand. Far from being sexless angelic creatures, the mere fact that women possessed a womb made them prey to all kinds of hideous and diabolical sexual impulses, even during pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. As Dr. Issac Ray put it,

With women, it is but a step from extreme nervous susceptibility to downright hysteria, and from that to overt insanity. In the sexual evolution, in pregnancy, in the parturient period, in lactation, strange thoughts, extraordinary feelings, unseasonable appetites, criminal impulses, may haunt a mind at other times innocent and pure.⁴³

One of the arguments given against giving women anesthesia during childbirth, in addition to the idea that God had ordained women to suffer as a punishment for sin, was the widely held conviction that alleviating or even mitigating a woman's pain would lessen her inhibitions and result in all kinds of sexually obscene behavior. "Every medical man has observed," begins one doctor, who claims to have observed such indelicate scenes,

the extraordinary amount of obscenity in thought and language which breaks forth from the most modest and well-nurtured woman under the influence of puerperal mania; and although it may be courteous and politic to join in the wonder of those around, that such impurities could ever enter such a mind, and while he repudiates Pope's slander, that "every woman is at heart a rake," he will nevertheless acknowledge that religion and moral principles alone give strength to the female mind; and that, when these are weakened or removed by disease, the subterranean fires become active, and the crater gives forth smoke and flame.⁴⁴

Ideas such as these, ideas which assumed and emphasized woman's closeness to nature and her resulting uncontrollable sexuality, made woman man's natural enemy, and an extremely dangerous enemy if we judge from the following images. Let me point out once again that these images come from all kinds of artists belonging to diverse artistic schools.⁴⁵ In Fernard Knopff's "The Art of the Caress" we see woman's predatory and bestial nature expressed in terms of the Sphinx:



Figure 13: Fernard Khnopff, “The Art of the Caress” (1896)



Figure 15: Arthur Hacker, “The Temptation of Sir Percival” (1894) [*Royal Academy Pictures* (London, 1894)]

While there is no sphinx in this last picture, there is a decidedly predatory women who moves uncannily like a cat. The next images are even more deadly because they depict women as decapitators of men. Judith, Salome, and Delilah appear with too much regularity to be coincidental. For Gustav Klimt Judith and Salome

were interchangeable although they decapitated men for very different reasons:

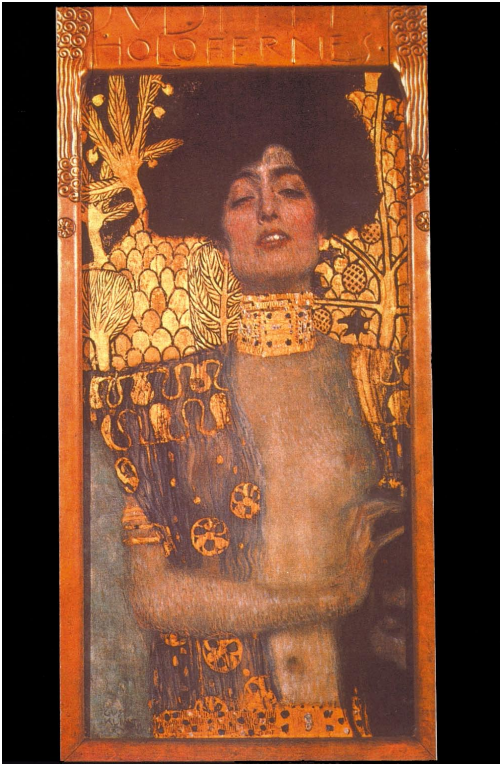


Figure 16: Gustav Klimt, “Salome” (or “Judith I”) (1901)[*Die Kunst für Alle* 10 (1894-5), 339]

The next illustration, Edouard Toudouze’s “Salome Triumphant,” we come upon a pre-pubescent seductress, which could lead to a discussion of Lewis Carroll, John Ruskin, and the other artists and intellectuals of the period who had a penchant for young girls; but I will avoid the temptation to digress.

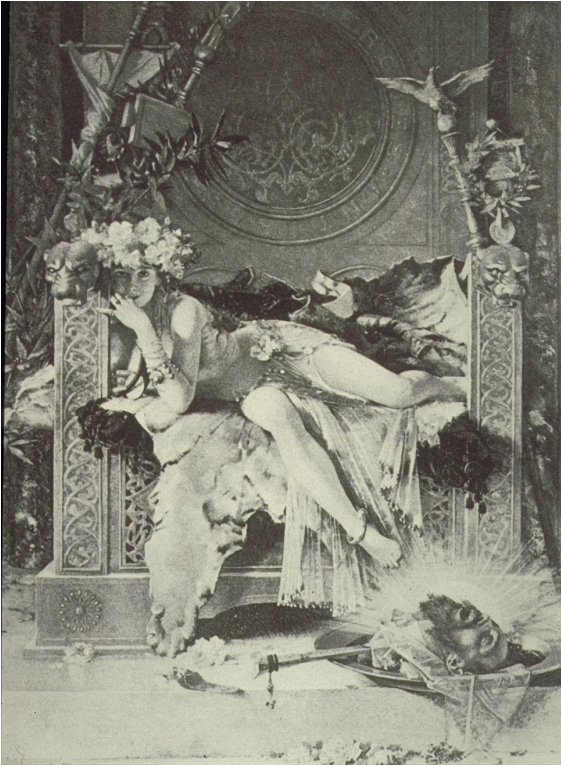


Figure 17: Edouard Toudouze, “Salome Triumphant” (1886)

In the next picture we see Delilah. Note how fashionably modern she is!



Figure 18: Alexander Oppler, “Samson & Delilah” (1908)

I include Delilah with the decapitators because she did after all weaken Samson by cutting off his hair, and as Freud pointed out, images of decapitation encapsulate male fears of castration. The next painting is even more horrifying.



Figure 19: Franz von Stuck, “Sensuality” (1897) [*Die Kunst* 9 (1903-4), 37]

Here we see a graphic depiction of Freud’s “phallic” mother. Every one of these images offer a clear message: Women are dangerous. They distract man from his higher “purpose”; they literally drag him down to their own materialistic, spiritually dead level. Edward Burne-Jones’ painting “The Depths of the Sea” makes precisely this point:

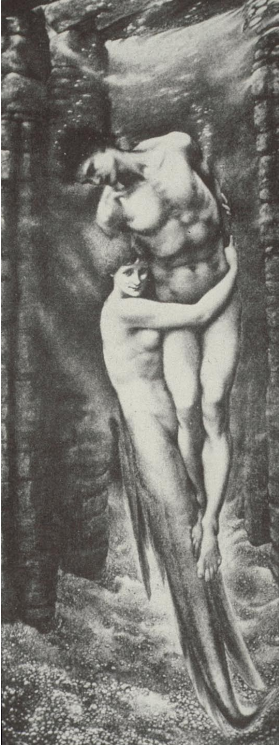


Figure 20: Edward Coley Burne-Jones, “The Depths of the Sea” (1885) [Cosmo Monkhouse, *British Contemporary Artists* (New York, 1899), 71]

Burne-Jones hated marriage, opposed female suffrage, and told his studio assistant that “women ought to be locked up. In some place where we could have access to them but that they couldn’t get out from.”⁴⁶

As the next deadly humorous picture by Charles Dana Gibson suggests:



Figure 21: Charles Dana Gibson, “In the Swim” (1909)[Charles Dana Gibson, *Americans*, 1900]

women had become the ultimate consumers, consumers of men and all the things that men stood for. No man could hope to keep “in the swim of things” when women were around. Such was the fierce and misogynist reaction occasioned by the manifest changes in the position and rights of women. “No century,” claims Peter Gay, “depicted woman as vampires, as castrator, as killer, so consistently, so programmatically, and so nakedly as the nineteenth.”⁴⁷ As I said at the beginning of this essay, the intense backlash against women that I have described and Gay sums up so succinctly is a mark of the actual advances made by women as they gained entrance into the public world of men.

There were many factors involved in the progress towards women rights, but among these certain currents of esoteric thought must be given their due. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in the introduction to the *Woman’s Bible*:

The bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the bible position of woman briefly summed up.

By providing alternatives to the biblical text and Christianity, the progressive and feminists esotericists I have described breached two of the most resistant barriers to women's liberation. But the reaction to these breaches was ferocious. Scientists, artists, and intellectuals of all stripes jumped in to fill the gap by dredging up misogynist pronouncements from the past and combining them with new and even more vitriolic forms of misogyny in the present. One can only add, *tous ça change, tous ça reste la même!*

¹Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 141. Douglas's analysis of nineteenth century religion as increasingly marginalized and privatized reflected the theory of secularization that prevailed at the time she wrote, although it was beginning to be questioned. Cf. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), ch. 2.

²*Ladies Magazine* 5 (1832): 308-15. Cited in Douglas, 44.

³Female preachers and religious leaders emerged in unprecedented numbers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Ann Lee, a Quaker who became the leader of the Shakers, was a self-proclaimed female redeemer. Mary Evans called herself the "bride of Christ." Elspeth ("Luckie") Buchan saw herself as "the spirit of God and sister of Christ. Sarah Flaxmer and Joanna Southcott were women with large numbers of male and female followers. Shakers, Swedenborgians and Saint-Simonians subscribed to an androgynous Deity. Both Shakers and Mormons believed in Mother and Father Gods. Among Swedenborgians and Spiritualists the idea emerged that masculinity and femininity principles existed in both sexes, although this did not necessarily entail equality. See J.F.C Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1989); James K. Hopkins, *A Woman to*

Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution (Austin: University of Texas, 1982).

⁴ J.A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning* (Liverpool: University Press, 1964); Linda Gordon, "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginning of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Octagon Books, 1976); Peter Fryer, *The Birth Controllers* (New York: Stein & Day, 1966).

⁵ Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1 (Winter-Spring, 1973): 40-57. Ann Braude discusses the frank and open analysis of marriage among spiritualists. They campaigned against the factors that made "The Body and Soul Destroying Marriage Institution," broaching such sensitive issues as the relations between husbands and wives, parents and children, and the nature and amount of sexual intercourse both inside and outside of marriage. They argued that women needed jobs and money so they could marry for love and not merely for support. They advocated the right of married women to decide for themselves whether or not to bear a child. See Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (2nd Ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 118ff.

⁶ In England Newnham College, Cambridge, opened its doors in 1871, while Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall opened in Oxford in 1879. In the United States Georgia Female College (now Wesleyan College) opened in 1836. Before the Civil War Antioch, Oberlin, and Hillsdale, all private colleges, admitted women, while two public universities admitted women, The University of Iowa and the University of Deseret (now Utah). Vassar College and Smith were founded as "experiments" to determine if women could withstand the rigors of a male education without losing their ability to reproduce. The Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia, founded in 1850, was the first women's medical school.

⁷ "As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions. No nervous or feeble young man need, therefore, be deterred from marriage by any exaggerated notion of the duties required of him." See William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life Considered in their Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations* (Philadelphia, 1871).

⁸ Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 3. See Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978).

⁹ Rosemary R. Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), introduction.

¹⁰ Female mystics were powerful enough to be seen as a problem by Catholic male authorities. See Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female*

Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2004); Claire Guilhem, "L'Inquisition et la dévaluation du discours féminin," in *L'Inquisition espagnole, xv-xix siècles*, ed. B. Bennasser (Paris: Hachette, 1979). Keith Thomas, "Women in the Civil War Sects," in *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660*, ed. Trevor Aston, (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 317-340.

¹¹ Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 93.

¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ Joy Dixon, *The Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 150.

²⁰ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1976).

²¹ Dixon, *The Divine Feminine*, 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 158. Gray's *Theosophical-feminist Manifesto* was published in *Lucifer*, the journal of the Theosophical Society, in October, 1890.

²³ Swiney's book received mixed reviews when it was published, and it continues to receive mixed reviews up to the present. On the one hand, it has been seen as a fierce denunciation of women's oppression and, on the other, as an unabashed example of late Victorian racial feminism. See Dixon, *The Divine Feminine*, 167.

²⁴ Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁶ *Great Pictures in Private Galleries*. 2 vols. (London: Cassell & Co., 1905), 26. Cited in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 175-6.

²⁷ Moebius's essay "On the Physiological Debility of Woman" (1898) was often reprinted. Cited in Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 172.

²⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); eadem, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990); Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Barbara Ehrenreich & Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978); John S. Haller & Robin M. Haller, *They Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); eadem, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (New

York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

²⁹ Theodor L. W. von Bischoff, *Das Studium und die Ausübung der Medicinē durch Frauen* (Munich, 1845), 45.

³⁰ Cited in Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 172.

³¹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1936), vol. 2, pt. 2, 84-5.

³² Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 167. The idea that women were less evolved was commonplace. Herbert Spencer simply said that there had been “a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men” (*The Study of Sociology*, 1873, 340). Joseph A. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-subject Painting* (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 8. In *Mother Right* (1861, 78), Johann J. Bachofen distinguishes between the lower “maternal-tellurian” and the higher “paternal-uranian stages of life: “Mother right [is] the law of material-corporeal, not of higher spiritual life, and shows the matriarchal world as a whole to be a product of the maternal-tellurian, not of the paternal-uranian attitude towards human existence.” He continues more concisely, “The realm of the idea belongs to the man, the realm of material life to the woman” (cited in *ibid.*, 30).

³³ Giselda Pollock, *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988); Rozsica Parker and Giselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

³⁴ Pollack, *Vision and Difference*, 21.

³⁵ Kristin Brady, “Physiology, Phrenology, and Patriarchy: The Construction of George Eliot,” in *Women and Reason*, ed. E.D. Harvey & K. Okruhlik (Ann Arbor: The University Press, 1992), 204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁷ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 83.

³⁸ Dr. M. L. Holbrook, *Parturition without Pain* (1892), quoted in Mary Poovey, ““Scenes of an Indelicate Character”: The Medical “Treatment” of Victorian Women,” in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

³⁹ Cited in Wayne Andersen, *Gauguin's Paradise Lost* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 55.

⁴⁰ Joseph LeConte, *Evolution: Its Nature, Its Evidence, and Its Relation to Religious Thought* (2nd rev. ed. New York: D. Appleton, 1897), 330.

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929/30). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), Vol. XXI, 50-51.

⁴² Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 3.

⁴³ *Insanity produced by Seduction* (1868). Cited in Poovey, “Scenes of an Indelicate Character.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ A number of scholars have discussed the conservative and even reactionary nature of artists in regard to women's rights. See, for example, Cited in Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny*, 3: "It is the contention of this study that Victorian paintings of classical subjects are part of a cultural discourse concerning women which restricted and delayed the progress of social reform." See also Lynne Pearce, ed., *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

⁴⁶ Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny*, 239. Before beginning on one picture, Burne-Jones said to his assistant Thomas Rooke: "A woman at her best, self-denying and devoted, is pathetic and lovely beyond words; but once she gets the upper hand and flaunts, she's the devil. . . as soon as you've taken pity on her she's no longer to be pitied. You're the one to be pitied then." Cited in *ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁷ Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. Vol. 1: *Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 207.

Of Ether and Colloidal Gold The Making of a Philosophers' Stone

Hereward Tilton



Of Ether and Colloidal Gold: The Making of a Philosophers' Stone

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The following paper was written with the generous assistance of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation; I would also like to thank Dr. Walter Caseri of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich, for the advice he has contributed during my research. My special thanks go to Dr. Carlos Gilly and Dr. Cis van Heertum of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, for their help with this revised form of my original paper.

The identity of the alchemical agent of transmutation, the Philosophers' Stone, counts amongst the greatest enigmas of Western cultural and scientific history; numerous tales tell of those who forfeited their wealth, health and even their lives in a Promethean quest to wrest fire from heaven and manifest the divine power of creation and transformation in the vessels of the laboratory. At every turn this quest was frustrated by the dream-like ciphers of alchemical discourse, which led the seeker after the Art into a labyrinth of fruitless deductions and failed experiments, as witnessed by the words of an author writing under the name of the medieval scientist Arnaldus de Villanova:

It is a Stone and no Stone, and is found by every body in plane fields, on Mountaines, and in the water, and is called Albida; heerein all physitians agree, for they say that Albida is called Rebio. They name it in hid and secret words, because they perfectly understand the materia; some say it is blood, others say it is a man's hair, others say it is eggs, which has made many fooles and unwise men, that understand no more then the letter, and the meere sound of words, seeke this art in blood, in eggs, in hair, in the Gaull,

in Allum, in salt, but they have found nothing, for they did not rightly understand the sayings of naturalists, who spake their words in hid language. Should they have spoken out plainly, they would have done very ill for divers reason, for all men would have used this art and the whole world would have been spoiled, and all agriculture perisht.¹

Whilst alchemical symbolism derives its opacity in part from the exigencies of occult secrecy, the altruism which pseudo-Arnaldus and other ‘adepts’ profess can itself be read as a cipher for more worldly motivations - for example, the maintenance of a privileged discourse concerning coveted chemical and metallurgical techniques. That the coded language of alchemy is at once ambiguous and seductive is without doubt also attributable to a phenomenon known to the contemporary psychologist as *pareidolia*, for the evocative transformations of colour and form within the vessel served as a mirror of the alchemist’s desire and fantasy - hence Theobald de Hoghelande describes “the wonderful variety of figures that appear in the course of the work... just as we sometimes imagine in the clouds or in the fire strange shapes of animals, reptiles or trees.”² A third factor conspiring to thwart the interpretive efforts of any novice is the ideology of Hermeticism itself, in which the upper and lower worlds reflect one another, and bonds of similitude and sympathy pervade a curiously interconnected cosmos. It is for this reason, for example, that the symbols of the sun and the moon speak not only of gold and silver, but also of sulphur and mercury - that is to say, Philosophical Sulphur and the Mercury of the Wise, which by virtue of their qualitative affinity with the ‘fixed’ and ‘volatile’ elements of the same name (and here the properties of cinnabar, or mercuric sulfide, lent their suggestive role) were thought to form the fundamental constituents of every metal. Likewise, the alchemical vessel is akin to a human being or the cosmos; the Passion of Christ corresponds to the black phase of the work, and the Resurrection to its perfection; and so forth.

During the course of the seventeenth century this opaque and many-layered language, in which “the same words are applied

to different things and different words to the same things,”³ began to give way to a more translucent chemical terminology, which tended to restrict the possible significations of words rather than to multiply them in the manner of Hermetic discourse. With the sea-change in scientific attitude and nomenclature came the devaluation of the currency of alchemical language and the exposure of processes which had previously been closely-held ‘trade secrets’. Within the works of writers such as Andreas Cassius (1605-1673), Johann Joachim Becher (1635-c.1682) and Johann Kunckel von Löwenstern (1638-1703), the knowledge amassed by the alchemists through the centuries is finally presented in a manner which is legible to the uninitiated.

In the following paragraphs I will be referring to the work of these writers (for whom the possibility of metallic transmutation was still very real) as well as to the work of eighteenth century German chemists (for whom the alchemical enterprise had become synonymous with fraud or self-deceit) in order to create a partial ‘translation’ of the alchemy of one of the greatest adepts, Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605), into the terms of contemporary chemistry. The purpose of this venture is twofold. Firstly, it may afford us a little insight into the laboratory techniques employed in early modern alchemy, and the type of materials and procedures utilised to create a Philosophers’ Stone. Secondly and more importantly, however, by bringing the alchemical process into greater proximity with a world and a science with which we are familiar, my purpose will be simultaneously to determine what gets lost in translation, and thereby to render in starker relief the defining features of the alchemical endeavour vis-à-vis modern chemistry.

Heinrich Khunrath and his reception

Before commencing this undertaking, a few comments are in order concerning our subject Khunrath; for even if his laboratory work involved procedures which were widespread amongst the alchemists of his day, the elaborate manner in which they were expressed was in some respects atypical. The Neoplatonism and inspirationism characteristic of his thought attracted accusations

of *Schwärmerei* or ‘enthusiasm’ from his detractors, although in Khunrath’s case these were less the hallmarks of Anabaptism than of Paracelsian theosophy, which shortly after Khunrath’s death was to become a prominent ideological component of nascent Rosicrucianism.⁴ Khunrath’s work managed to polarise opinion dramatically both during and after his time, and a brief consideration of its reception should serve to familiarise the reader with the idiosyncracies stemming from the author’s decidedly mystical mindset.

Thus admirers of Khunrath’s thought were to be found chiefly amongst Protestants inclined towards pietistic and theosophical modes of thought; for example, the famed Lutheran theologian Johann Arndt (1555-1621) exchanged correspondence with Khunrath concerning the divine light in humankind, and later confessed to Khunrath’s publisher that the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595) had taught him to recognise ‘God and true wisdom’ in the Book of Nature.⁵ Such sentiments are witness to the close alliance of Paracelsianism with religious reform in early modern Germany, and reflect a striving to establish an indigenous German and Protestant science, founded not upon the ‘papist’ Scholastic tradition but upon the unshakeable bedrock of Scripture, upon a pagan wisdom (Plato, Pythagoras, Hermes Trismegistus) conceived as more amenable to Christian teaching, and upon an experience of the divine unmediated by the functionaries of the Church. Thus the ‘Silesian fanatic’ Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651-1689), whose short life of visions and chiliasm ended on the pyre, applauded Khunrath’s censure of those “damned souls and teachers of folly” who seek wisdom in Aristotle rather than in the Bible, in Nature and in the ‘mirror’ of their own mind (that is to say, in the divine signatures reflecting an archetypal cosmic order).⁶ Khunrath’s ideas also found admirers in Pietists such as Friedrich Breckling (1629-1711)⁷ and Gottfried Arnold (1660-1714), the latter of whom placed Khunrath in that lineage of ‘true’ Christians - stretching from the ancient Gnostics to the Pietists of his own day - who have always faced persecution at the hands of the Roman church.⁸

Whilst Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*

was censured by the Parisian theological faculty in the early years of the Thirty Years War,⁹ and his *Quaestiones tres perutiles* (1607) was placed on the Index in 1667,¹⁰ criticism was not limited to the defenders of Catholicism. The presumed author of the Rosicrucian manifestos, Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), warned that the paradoxical language of Khunrath and his ilk does not bring happiness to a man.¹¹ Likewise, the Lutheran theologian and philologist Johann Konrad Dieterich (1612-1667) recommended Khunrath's "old wives' tales and nonsensical superstitions" to the fire in his *Antiquitates Biblicae* (1671).¹² Dieterich's scorn was motivated more by scientific than theological objections, as was that of Jacques Gaffarel (1601-1684), librarian to Cardinal Richelieu, who in his *Curiositez inouyes* (1629) accused Khunrath of "waging war on Nature" with his obscurities.¹³

But Khunrath continued to be thought of as one of the great German adepts - i.e. possessors of the Philosophers' Stone - amongst Paracelsians,¹⁴ and his ideas have undergone sporadic revivals within alchemical, Rosicrucian and theosophical circles. The flurry of reprints of Khunrath's works which emerged in the late eighteenth century from the Rosicrucian publisher Adam Friedrich Böhme testifies to the popularity of his ideas amongst the *Gold- und Rosenkreutz*, a Freemasonic grouping which sought to wind back the gains of the *Aufklärung* with its medievalist nostalgia and alchemical cult.¹⁵ In *fin-de-siècle* France the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* was translated and disseminated widely in the circles of prominent Hermeticists such as Eliphas Lévi and Gérard Encausse ('Papus'), and the work continues to fascinate esotericists with its intricate emblems and pansophist amalgam of alchemical, Kabbalistic and pietistic elements.¹⁶



Figure 1: An eighteenth century rendition of the author's portrait from Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1609 edition). ULB Darmstadt, Ms. 3263 (with permission of the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt).

For all those distinguishing traits of Khunrath's alchemy which made it variously the object of scorn and praise through the centuries, we will soon see that the core features of his praxis are largely congruent with other alchemies of early modern Germany, and reflect standard pre-occupations detailed in the alchemical corpus as a whole. In his *Vom Hylealischen, das ist, Pri-materialischen Catholischen oder Allgemeinen Natürlichen Chaos, der Naturgemäss-en Alchymiae und Alchymisten* (1597; hereafter simply *Vom Chaos*), Khunrath tells us that he learnt the secrets of the Art by experience and the grace of God; however, he also read prolifically, and received instruction from a certain learned master of the Kabbalah, who was the first to demonstrate to him the procedures we are about to discuss.¹⁷

The great and the lesser stones

In order to identify the key components of the alchemical process as they are set forth in *Vom Chaos*, one must first consider a very basic distinction Khunrath makes - that between the *Lapis philosophorum specialis et parvus*, or lesser and specific Philosophers' Stone, and the *Lapis philosophorum catholicus et magnus*, or great and universal Philosophers' Stone. The lesser Stone, as Khunrath repeatedly emphasises, is manufactured from metallic silver or gold; it is able to transmute metals and heal diseases by imparting the special silver or golden virtues ('silverness' or 'goldenness') which God has given these metals by means of Nature.¹⁸ The greater Stone, on the other hand, is not derived from metals or minerals, and is able to generate vast amounts of silver or gold through projection of only a minute portion of the substance.¹⁹

This distinction between universal and particular agents of transmutation is standard in the early modern literature. However, Khunrath goes on to write that both these Stones are created via the same spagyric procedure - a resolution of the *Ausgangsmaterial* (source material or subject) into a *prima materia*, and its 'artificial conjugation' in more perfect proportion.²⁰ Spagyric, or the branch of alchemical technique dealing with the dissolution and re-assembly of matter, is associated with a plethora of alchemical symbols. Thus Michael Maier (1568-1622), a younger contemporary of Khunrath, once stated to his patron that "a straw house cannot become the marble stone castle of a great prince" unless one first "tears down the straw house to its foundations and thereafter builds the marble castle from the ground up."²¹ One of the oldest symbols for spagyric is dismemberment by the sword, which is already to be found in the famed visions of Zosimos (3rd-4th centuries AD):

I am Ion, the priest of the sanctuary, and I have survived intolerable force. For one came headlong in the morning, dismembering me with a sword, and tearing me

asunder according to the rigour of harmony. And flaying my head with the sword which he held fast, he mingled my bones with my flesh and burned them in the fire of the treatment, until I learnt by the transformation of the body to become a spirit.²²



Figure 2: The dissolution of the subject represented by dismemberment, from *Splendor Solis oder Sonnenglanz* (Berliner Staatsbibliothek Codex Germ. fol. 42, late 16th century, from the 1972 facsimile edition of Inge Veifhues).

Spagyric symbolism readily lends itself to a psychological or religious interpretation, as the Gnostic and cultic-initiatory overtones of Zosimos' text demonstrate. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the laboratory worker the dismembering sword

signifies the action upon the source material of a ‘universal’ solvent, a substance which is described by Khunrath variously as the universal *prima materia*, the Green Lion, the Mercury of the Philosophers, and Azoth (from the Arabic *az-zāūq*, quicksilver). According to Khunrath, both the lesser and the great Stones are produced by employing this universal solvent, which has the power to reduce all things to their own *prima materia* by breaking the bonds uniting their three fundamental constituents - Mercury, Salt and Sulphur (the Paracelsian *tria prima*).²³ This dissolution is effected by the release of the spirit (Mercury) binding the body (Salt) with the soul (Sulphur), a process portrayed figuratively by Khunrath with the words of St. Paul: *cupio dissolvi, et esse cum Christo* (Phil. 1.23; literally, “I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ”).²⁴

Hence we are presented in *Vom Chaos* with four basic elements of the alchemical work - the source material or ‘subject’, the solvent, the *prima materia* of the source material, and the Stone itself. With regard to the great Philosophers’ Stone, the subject is in fact the same as the solvent - for the Mercury of the Philosophers itself is transformed into a consummate universal Stone through a mysterious spagyric process of death and rebirth, and only then is this Stone (as said, in minute quantities) given to molten gold or silver in the fire, which it massively multiplies through a few day’s ‘fermentation’ and a ‘projection’ that takes place in the blink of an eye.²⁵ In accordance with alchemical tradition, Khunrath names this the ‘dry method’; however, the bulk of *Vom Chaos* deals with the production of the lesser Stone via a ‘wet method’. By way of contrast to the ‘dry method’, this ‘wet’ procedure involves dissolving fine particles of gold or silver in the Mercury of the Philosophers, whereby they are reduced to their *prima materia* (‘killed’) and brought back to life in a higher state.²⁶ In the case of the golden lesser Stone, a red fluid is thereby produced which is able to flow across and transmute a silver plate; in the case of the silver lesser Stone, a white fluid.²⁷ Khunrath names these lesser Stones *tincturae*.²⁸

If the possibility of a genuine magical transmutation is precluded (and this, for some, may be an unwarranted step)

then we appear to be dealing with a method for gilding metals here. From this perspective, the action of Khunrath's lesser Stone conforms to the second class of methods used in alleged transmutations set forth by Vladimír Karpenko - the surface treatment of common metals (although here silver is being gilded) with precious ones.²⁹ Another class of 'transmutations' mentioned by Karpenko are those in which the precious metal is contained in the whole volume of the final product (including methods leading to the debasement of precious metals via alloying or cementation, as well as those methods yielding pure metal through either deceitful manipulation or the isolation of precious metals from an alloy).³⁰ *Vom Chaos* is appended with a *Treuhertzige Warnungs-Vermahnung* ('Sincere Warning,' a tract which was later falsely attributed to Michael Maier) in which just such methods are detailed.³¹ There Khunrath not only rails in a prejudiced manner against those 'gold-beetles and Jews' who conceal gold in double-bottomed crucibles, or in stirring rods and other apparatus, or even in the lead to be 'transmuted', but also warns of those frauds who claim to create a homunculus from the *prima materia* (with the help of sleight of hand and a little skeleton made of ivory).³² The miraculous action of Khunrath's great Stone (which he apparently did not possess himself) seems to suggest Karpenko's fifth category of transmutation: fantastic processes, or purely mythic procedures often stemming from corrupted interpretations of older texts.³³ But if Khunrath was well aware of the various tests for exposing fraud and determining the purity of precious metals - his extensive knowledge of the matter can be gleaned from the *Treuhertzige Warnungs-Vermahnung* - then how could he have regarded a gilding process as genuine transmutation? Indeed, why does the entire corpus of his alchemical work rest upon the conviction that his Stones could produce a net increase in gold? Consideration of the processes lying behind the production of Khunrath's lesser Philosophers' Stone reveals the probable cause of this conundrum - namely, Khunrath's belief in the possibility of the complete dissolution and destruction of gold, coupled with the fact that only minute amounts of gold are necessary to gild a very large surface area.



Figure 3: Rosenberg castle near Krumau, Bohemia - the family estate of Wilhelm von Rosenberg (1535-1592), who employed Khunrath as his physician in 1591.

Aurum potable and the veiled source material of the Art

As we try to unravel the identity of the four elements of Khunrath's alchemical process - source material, solvent, *prima materia* and Stone - we might begin by considering a question once posed to me by a practising alchemist. Given the many warnings in the alchemical canon concerning the various shady *Decknamen* or codenames which the alchemists have employed to conceal their Art from the unworthy, can we really take Khunrath's words at face value and accept common gold as the source material of his

lesser Philosophers' Stone? In a number of places Khunrath speaks of the much-debated *aurum potabile* or 'potable gold' - a medicine supposedly produced from the virtuous kernel lying under the hard 'husk' of the king of metals - as a synonym of the lesser golden Stone.³⁴ However, this in itself does not necessarily point to common gold as the lesser Stone's source material; Michael Maier, for example, distinguished his own potable gold from that of his associate, Francis Anthony, by stating that it was not manufactured from common gold but from Philosophical Gold - which, he cryptically remarks in his *De Medicina Regia* (1609), is only conceivable in the imagination.³⁵ Reproofs of those who confuse common with Philosophical Gold are not uncommon in the alchemical canon. Perhaps the most elegant and amusing example is to be found in de Limojon's *Le Triomphe Hermetique* (1689), where we find a dialogue derived from the influential Arabic *Book of Alums and Salts*.³⁶ There a personification of the Philosophers' Stone chides his irritated rival, Gold, in the following way:

Why are you not angry with God, and enquire why he has not created in you what is found in me?... you are not the gold of which the *Philosophers* write, but the same is concealed within me... there is not one in a hundred that works with me, but all of them seek to complete the Art with you, gold, and your brother mercury [quicksilver]. Whereby they have erred, however, and proceeded falsely, it being apparent that all of them bring nothing to effect, but employ their gold in vain, destroy themselves by it, and are reduced to poverty. And this is mostly due to you, *sol*, [i.e. gold, corresponding to the sun] who know particularly well that no true gold or silver can be made without me, for I alone have that power.³⁷

Utilising a related dialogue from the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, Khunrath also warns his readers not to confuse vulgar gold with the Philosophical variety.³⁸ Nevertheless, his burden in *Vom Chaos* is only to show that *aurum potabile* or the lesser Stone cannot be made from common gold *alone*, but must

be made from common gold with the help of Philosophical Gold, which is the Sulphur residing together with Mercury (Philosophical Silver) in the universal *prima materia* (i.e. Chaos, Azoth, the universal solvent, which is ‘melted and extracted’ from the ‘*minera Magnesia*’).³⁹ His language in this regard is unmistakable:

The specific and lesser Philosophers’ Stone, which can only be lunar or solar (that is, specifically silver or golden, only a silverstone or goldstone, and which is named Tincture) also has its own particular and natural special subject, which is METALLIC silver or gold [Khunrath’s emphasis, not mine]. For no metallic silver or gold can be alchemically created in accordance with Nature without metallic silver or gold, because silverness lies only in silver (be it barely metallically embryonated, or already perfect, pure or molten); and goldenness (of the same said form) lies only in gold. Just like the usual order and customary course of Nature, like gives rise to its like; therefore one reaps that which one sows.⁴⁰

The conception of embryonic and mature forms of gold and silver stems from the Aristotelian notion that metals gestate in the womb of the earth through the warmth of the sun and the interplay of dry Sulphur and moist Mercury. The vitalism expressed here is typical of the Hermetic worldview, which often lacks the contemporary distinction between organic and inorganic matter - and in this case, the ‘gestation’ of metals is readily suggested by the crystalline form of silver ores such as argentite and the sulfides associated with some gold deposits.

As for the axioms ‘you reap what you sow’ and ‘like produces like’, these are already to be found associated with alchemical process in the work of Arabic authors, and stem from an old debate in the literature concerning the possibility of transforming one type of metal into another.⁴¹ Whilst authors such as the thirteenth century Abu’l-Qāsim al-Irāqī believed that all metals belonged to one species and were distinguished only by ‘accidental’ qualities (in the Aristotelian sense),⁴² others such

as Avicenna held that metals were different species of one genus rather than varieties of a single species, and that transmutation was therefore impossible.⁴³ This latter position does not exclude the possibility of a ‘multiplication’ of precious metals, which is precisely the action of Khunrath’s great Stone. The lesser Stones (or ‘minor elixirs’, as Khunrath sometimes calls them) can transmute base metals into gold or silver, but they do not have a universal application - they cannot multiply metals from which they were not themselves manufactured, nor are they a panacea, but only impart the particular medical virtues inherent in silver and gold.⁴⁴ In any case, Khunrath’s employment of the ‘like produces like’ trope differs slightly from its use in the said medieval controversy, as he only wishes to state that transmutation involves the imparting of silverness and goldenness - properties which are to be found in metallic silver and gold alone.

Hunting the green lion

If gold was the subject of Khunrath’s golden lesser Stone, what was the solvent he used to spagyrically isolate its virtues and make them available for medicinal and transmutatory purposes? Gold’s resistance to fire and corrosion has inspired its association with eternal life and divinity since the time of the Egyptians; nevertheless, Khunrath evidently believed he possessed the means to break down and utterly destroy the metal:

The lion is the *devorans Aurum*, the devourer of gold, which not only devours gold, but also digests it, and destroys its metallic nature, so that it is no longer a metal, nor will it ever be one again... our Mercury is the Lion, now green, soon red, the silver- and gold-devouring Philosophical Lion: he who knows how to destroy metallic gold, so that thereafter no metal more remains, has come upon a great secret.⁴⁵

The debate concerning the possibility of irreversibly dissolving gold by breaking it down into its component principles occupied

a prominent position in that critical period for the emergence of modern chemistry with which we are dealing, and as we shall see, its echoes continued to reverberate until the early twentieth century. At the centre of the controversy in the early modern period stood Robert Boyle, who in *The Sceptical Chymist* (1661) makes mention of Mercury of Gold, explaining that “Gold is, of all Metalls, that whose Mercury Chymists have most endeavoured to extract, and which they do the most brag they have extracted.”⁴⁶ As an opponent of the Paracelsian *tria prima*, Boyle devotes much space to denying the ability to break down any metal to a constituent Mercury (the principle of fluidity, penetrativity and lustre), Sulphur (the principle of combustion and colour) or Salt (the principle of solidity and form), be it with strong acids or fire, and ascribes any apparent success in manufacturing Mercury of Gold to trickery.⁴⁷ It should be noted that, whilst he was no doubt eager to press his revision of Boyle’s legacy, there is little evidence for Principe’s assertion that the said comments in *The Sceptical Chymist* are directed solely towards the Paracelsian *tria prima*, and not towards the traditional Sulphur-Mercury dyad;⁴⁸ for immediately after *rhetorically* acquiescing to the possibility that Sulphur and a ‘running Mercury’ may be extracted from gold but not a Salt,⁴⁹ Boyle rejects the very same proposition via the words of the ‘impartial judge’ Eleutherius.⁵⁰

Khunrath was himself intent on producing a ‘Mercury of Gold’ by dissolving the ‘coagulation bonds’ which bind ‘all corporeal things’ together. He employs a myriad of terms for the necessary solvent and its components: some, such as the Green Lion, Universal Mercury and Azoth, are traditional alchemical codenames, but others - such as ‘spark of the World Soul’, ethereal spirit or ‘triune, catholic Chaos’ reflect the author’s idiosyncratic Christian Platonic mindset. The significance of this varied nomenclature will become more clear in due course; for now it suffices to remark that this substance was an object of veneration for Khunrath, possessing for him a sacred character absent from modern scientific models of matter:

For I have perceived the Universal Green Natural

Lion of the Kabbalists, which universally penetrates the whole world; for I have smelt and tasted the Blessed Natural Verdancy of the Magicians working in harmony with Nature, which naturally begets all natural things and impels them in their growth and flourishing. [You might ask,] My good man! Just what are you thinking? [But if] someone has seen the Green Universal Lion of Nature which conquers all natural things, and [if they have] drawn and lured him by artifice from the Caves of his Saturnine Universal Mountain and Earth, and smelt and tried him, just as [they have] smelt and tried his Rose-coloured Blood, isn't it fair that such a person, as a seasoned hand, should be allowed to speak on this theme to those who haven't yet learnt the basics?⁵¹

From these words it is clear that the universal solvent not only destroys but also imparts life. Khunrath refers to this dual action in other places in *Vom Chaos*; he asks, for example, how silver or gold are to be 'seeded' in order that they are born again and fruitfully increased?⁵² First they must be reduced to their *prima materia*, he declares, without which process all the alchemist's work is in vain, and this cannot come about without the Mercury of the Wise, which is the 'proto-material water and spirit' or the 'universal Mercury of the primordial world' from which gold first arose.⁵³ Yet this primeval substance is also the medium for a life-giving 'scintilla of Nature' responsible for the gold's 'resurrection' in a spiritual or essential state.⁵⁴ In accordance with Maier's warning that "the same words are applied to different things" in alchemical discourse, here it is worth noting that we are dealing with two Mercuries or *primae materia*: the first is the *prima materia* of gold itself, the second a universal *prima materia* which generates the specific *prima materia* of gold.⁵⁵ Hence Khunrath's reminder in *Vom Chaos* that all metals derive from the universal *prima materia* or Mercury, and that we must therefore place the 'kernel' of the body of gold into its 'primeval essence'.⁵⁶

The prominence of numinous, antinomic imagery - the Green Lion penetrates and destroys all things, yet simultaneously

gives them life and drives their growth - as well as the devotional language used by Khunrath betray an important religious aspect of his stance towards the Universal Mercury. Viewed from this perspective, the alchemist's experience of the laboratory work resembles an Eliadean re-immersion in the cosmogony, with the proviso that the alchemist's aim was to achieve not just a symbolic but a very physical rejuvenation through the manufacture and ingestion of the Philosophers' Stone. What is at stake here is not merely a re-enactment of mythic origins, but the manifestation of primordial matter in the physical world.



Figure 4: The alchemical Green Lion, from Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.

Be this as it may, given that Khunrath speaks of extracting the universal solvent from a mineral with the codename 'Magnesia',⁵⁷ it seems reasonable to conclude that the luring of the Green Lion from his cave in the 'Saturnine Mountain and Earth' points towards two very physical processes - the first is the extraction of a particular mineral from a mine, the second

the extraction of a particular substance from that mineral in the laboratory. The rose-coloured blood derived from the Green Lion would thus correspond to the flowing red Stone, i.e. the lesser Philosophers' Stone.

Khunrath uses the alchemical Green Lion alongside 'the green Duenech' (from an allegory concerning the rejuvenation of the melancholy duke Duenech) as another synonym for the animating alchemical solvent.⁵⁸ The symbol probably derives from observations of the action of dilute acids upon copper, for according to Wiedemann the Green Lion was a codename for copper amongst the Arabic alchemists.⁵⁹ An interesting procedure in this regard is mentioned by Andreas Cassius, a follower of the atomism of Daniel Sennert and an opponent of Boyle in the seventeenth century debate concerning the possibility of 'destroying' gold, who leant his name to the dye known as Purple of Cassius (a subject to which we will soon return). In his *De Auro* (1665) he speaks of dissolving two ounces of verdigris (copper acetate, $\text{Cu}(\text{C}_2\text{H}_3\text{O}_2)_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$, prepared by corroding copper with vinegar) in distilled vinegar, and giving the solution to two drachmas of gold dissolved in *aqua regia*. When this concoction is allowed to sit in a vessel with springwater for a number of days, "there will appear filaments like silk threads dispersed throughout the liquor, and the gold will gradually precipitate and fall to the bottom of the vessel in the most tiny atoms of beautiful golden splendor."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, 'tiny atoms' clearly do not equate with an irreversible dissolution of gold, and the Green Lion certainly does not have the connotation of verdigris in the work of Khunrath, who in his *Vom Chaos* lists the substance amongst a number of candidates for the Universal Mercury which have led would-be adepts astray.

In order to arrive at a reasonable hypothesis concerning the identity of Khunrath's universal solvent, it behoves us to follow an alchemical *via negativa* and investigate the list of 'red herrings' given in *Vom Chaos*. Far from being a futile diversion, this process of elimination allows an exploration of diverse procedures involving the manipulation of gold for the production of tinctures

and elixirs in the early modern period, and allows the identification of some important procedural commonalities amidst this diversity.

Quicksilver: the devil disguised as an angel of light

Given de Limojon's avowal that ninety-nine percent of alchemists attempted to complete the Art with common gold and quicksilver (which alloys readily with gold), could Khunrath have been utilising one or another form of common mercury as his mystery solvent? After all, even if 'Philosophical Mercury' is clearly a codename, it might at least point to a derivative or 'essence' of quicksilver. As Khunrath himself implies, the predicate 'Philosophical' was often taken in his day to indicate the 'inner essence' of a substance.⁶¹

In the *Supplementum Secundum* to his *Physica Subteranea* (1675), Johann Joachim Becher sets forward a procedure which employs common mercury to produce a gilding agent, the action of which is somewhat similar to that described by Khunrath in his *Vom Chaos*. In order to transmute silver, gold must be dissolved in *aqua regia* and quicksilver added; the liquid is reduced to crystalline form, then dissolved in spirit of vinegar, filtered, purified and thickened to the consistency of molten wax. When this tincture is poured on incandescent silver, be it even the thickness of a *Thaler* (a German dollar coin), such silver will be transformed into gold.⁶²

Despite having infamously sold the Dutch a method for winning gold from sand,⁶³ Becher was in fact quite an innovator in matters of manufacturing and commerce, and also played a minor role in the development of modern chemistry through his influence on Georg Ernst Stahl and the phlogiston theory of combustion.⁶⁴ The *Supplementum Secundum* was dedicated by Becher to his patron Emperor Leopold I in 1675 - the same year in which he was appointed *Hofkammerrath* at the imperial court in Vienna, and in which he produced a silver medallion

imprinted with the words “*Anno 1675 mense Julio Ego J. J. Becher Doctor Hanc unicam argenti finissimi ex plumbo arte alchymica transmutavi*” (“In July of the year 1675, I, Dr. J. J. Becher, transmuted this piece of finest silver from lead through the art of alchemy”).⁶⁵ In the *Supplementum Secundum* we find a recipe for creating silver alongside the aforementioned method for creating gold, although here it is mercury rather than silver which is subject to transmutation. The silver is dissolved in *aqua fortis* (*Scheidewasser* or dilute nitric acid, prepared by dry-distillation of saltpeter with hydrated vitriols or alum) and reduced to crystalline form, then repeatedly dissolved and reduced in spirit of wine or vinegar; eventually a ‘salt of silver’ remains in the liquid which has the power to transform quicksilver.⁶⁶ As in the case of the golden tincture, Becher assures his readers that the customary tests will prove an increase in the initial amount of the precious metal took place during transmutation.⁶⁷

Whilst the fact that Becher died in penury contradicts this latter claim, both of these recipes demonstrate a central problem of alchemy through the centuries - how does one make a ‘fixed’ (i.e. fire-resistant) substance such as silver or gold subtle or ‘volatile’ (i.e. readily vaporizable), so that it retains its silver or golden properties whilst being able to ‘penetrate’ and transmute lesser metals? The creation of a ‘fixed subtle body’ is the subject of many an alchemical emblem portraying the *coniunctio oppositorum* (conjunction of opposites); traditionally, the fixed and volatile aspects of a metal were respectively its Sulphur and Mercury. For Becher (drawing upon a theory to be found as early as the 4th century pseudo-Synesius) common mercury is the source of all metals, which differ in form by virtue of the degree of the mercury’s ‘coction’ or heating in the earth.⁶⁸ Porosity and penetration are the key concepts of Becher’s theory of transmutation, as metals cannot be tinged like molten glass in the furnace because mercury is ‘compact’ and ‘heavy’ rather than porous. Nevertheless, despite being impenetrable itself, mercury has the power to penetrate other objects; and as penetration is the “principle of every transmutation”, in order to penetrate the

compact ‘skin’ of a metal, gold or silver themselves must be made subtle or ‘mercurified’ and given to the lesser metal.⁶⁹ Such penetration is to be distinguished from alloying, which according to Becher is a mere ‘juxtaposition’ of metals, and achieves no net increase in either silver or gold.

CONIUNCTIO SIVE
Cottus.



Figure 5: The *coniunctio oppositorum*, from the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (1550). With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Although Becher’s procedure, like Khunrath’s, involves the transformation of metallic gold into a flowing, waxy substance to be poured over incandescent silver, there is little doubt that Khunrath did not use common mercury to extract the essence of his metallic gold. Indeed, he mounts quite a polemic on the subject in his *Vom Chaos*.⁷⁰ Quoting from the *Rosarium Philosophorum* and a letter of Arnaldus de Villanova to the king of Naples, Khunrath states that all true Philosophers “unanimously condemn and damn quicksilver” as the key to the Art.⁷¹ He notes, however, that a good many *Arg-chymisten* (wicked-chymists) utilise common mercury, which like the devil disguised as an angel of light brings nothing

but injury.⁷²

Spiritualizing gold with mercurius sublimatus

Khunrath also clearly voices his contempt for those who identify Philosophical Mercury with the ‘innermost essence’ of common mercury, and claim (in accordance with the description of Sendivogius) that such an essence flows as clear as tears in the hands, and yet does not make them wet.⁷³ According to Khunrath, this would-be Mercury of the Wise is manufactured by the *Argchymisten* from *mercurius sublimatus*, known today as mercuric chloride (HgCl_2), a strong poison produced by sublimating (i.e. repeatedly vapourising and condensing) mercury nitrate or mercury sulfate mixed with sodium chloride.⁷⁴

It is possible that Khunrath’s words regarding this false candidate for the title of ‘Universal Mercury’ were aimed at certain contemporaries in his native Saxony. Sebald Schwaertzer and David Beuther laboured together in the years 1580-1591 to produce a Philosophers’ Stone for the Electors August (1526-1586) and Christian I (1560-1591) of Saxony; in the course of their many experiments, they employed mercuric chloride to radically ‘dissolve’ gold and thereby create an alchemical tincture.⁷⁵ Schwaertzer’s description of the procedure is written with the clarity of a later age, and begins with a formula for producing *aqua regia* from saltpeter, a vitriol and sal ammoniac, in which four marks of fine gold should be dissolved. This ‘water of gold’ should be evaporated until it runs like oil or ‘thick blood’, and poured into a vessel together with two pounds of an *oleo mercurii* distilled from *mercurius sublimatus*, sal ammoniac, saltpeter and alum. The mixture is to be sealed in the vessel and placed on a gentle heat for forty days (the putrefaction), then distilled with a retort until a milky white distillate appears (the white phase). This distillate is the body of the gold made spiritual, devoid of impurities. Dulcification (removal of acidity) proceeds through solution of the distillate in springwater (the ‘washing’ phase), whereupon a white precipitate forms at the bottom of the vessel. The precipitate is useful for healing wounds, Schwaertzer advises us, but has no

further use in this particular work. Rather, it is the now yellowish springwater which should be further distilled, and this repeatedly with the addition of more water, and then sublimated until “you find a colour which will make you beside yourself with joy, for nothing is more beautiful. This I have seen with my own eyes,” Schwaertzer continues, “and made with my own hands.” The said colour is red, and thus completes the traditional colour phases of the alchemical process: black, white, yellow and red.⁷⁶

Apart from producing a golden tincture for his royal patron which multiplied its own worth by a factor of 1024, it was Schwaertzer’s burden to show with his experiment that gold may be dissolved into its constituent components, Salt, Sulphur and Mercury, in such a way that no gold could be reconstituted should one of the components be missing. Hence the white precipitate (Sulphur or *Terra Solis*) could no longer yield gold without being joined once again with the metal’s Mercury and Salt.⁷⁷

Similarly, *mercurius sublimatus* is also mentioned as a suitable agent for the production of a colouring tincture and *aurum potabile* by Cassius. In *De Auro* he describes a number of ways of producing *aurum potabile* - a synonym for Mercury of Gold in his eyes - which involve removing from gold its Salt and Sulphur in order that it is able to penetrate and transmute metals and humans. In accordance with alchemical tradition, Cassius details two methods for achieving this goal: a wet and a dry. The dry method - by fire alone - was used by Moses to produce the ‘potable gold’ he made of the golden calf and gave to the Israelites to drink.⁷⁸ This alchemical interpretation of Exodus 32.20 was also made by Artephius and Basil Valentine; Cassius tells us that although Moses’ deed was not a miracle, the technique he used has been lost. However, the ‘wet’ method is still known to the alchemists, who add *mercurius sublimatus* to gold dissolved in *aqua regia* in order to break the metal down into its constituent principles.⁷⁹ Whilst the procedure Cassius describes may have resulted in the production of a gold that was more or less potable, it was also surely toxic - and judging from his strictures upon *mercurius sublimatus*, it was clearly not what Khunrath had in mind.

Aqua regia: maceration versus radical dissolution

Even if Khunrath would consider them to be the work of *Arg-chymisten*, this handful of recipes from the 16th and 17th centuries already demonstrate an important affinity with each other - namely, the use of *aqua regia* to bring gold into such a state that it can be further manipulated with ease. In contemporary chemical nomenclature, that state is known as tetrachloroauric acid (or commonly, gold chloride), which in its crystalline form is highly hygroscopic and readily soluble in water or alcohol.⁸⁰ Following its first manufacture, *aqua regia* itself seems to have been hailed by some medieval alchemists as the Universal Mercury, although the fact that gold is easily retrievable after being dissolved with this agent must have worked against the popularity of the idea. Thus in his *Vom Chaos* Khunrath makes a distinction between metals that have been “radically and internally dissolved” and those that have merely been “macerated and strewn about in very subtle parts” by the use of powerful acids, and are therefore easily retrievable by reduction.⁸¹

Aqua regia (*Königswasser*), so named for its ability to dissolve the king of metals, was commonly prepared by dissolving one part sal ammoniac (ammonium chloride, NH_4Cl) in four of *aqua fortis* and distilling the solution.⁸² Some earlier texts recommend taking roughly the same proportion of common salt for dissolution in the *aqua fortis*;⁸³ in both cases the resulting yellow mixture of hydrochloric and nitric acids (nitromuriatic acid) gives off highly corrosive nitrosyl chloride fumes, and the alchemists must have learnt to handle the substance with caution after its discovery in late thirteenth century Italy.⁸⁴ In order to dissolve gold, filed gold dust or finely cut gold leaf would be placed with the *aqua regia* in a vessel of good Venetian glass, which was closed up with waxed cloth to hinder the fumes and heated in a larger container half-filled with sand (the *Sandbad* or *balneum arenae*⁸⁵) to increase reactivity.⁸⁶ Another commonly described method for dissolving gold, which amounts to the same chemical process, involves the heating of gold leaf together with *aqua fortis* and common salt.



Figure 6: The distillation of *aqua regia*, from Lazarus Ercker's *Aula Subterranea* (1580). With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Whilst Khunrath makes a clear distinction between the Universal Mercury and acidic agents such as *aqua regia*, his words do not constitute a disavowal of the use of *aqua regia* to break down gold into fine particles - after all, he speaks of “sowing metallic grains in the universal field or watery Azotic *Materia Prima*”, and in order to transform solid gold into a ‘Stone’ which flows at room temperature, *aqua regia* is an indispensable first step.⁸⁷ A good description of its employment in this regard is given in a manuscript attributed to Heinrich Khunrath, *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*. Probably stemming from some time in the period 1566-1604,⁸⁸ this Paracelsian text concerns itself with the dissolution of the natural bonds uniting metallic gold by immersing and ‘destroying’ the metal in the primeval substance “from whence it

came”;⁸⁹ in this way a spirit or Mercury of Gold is produced which has the colour of a carbuncle or ruby,⁹⁰ and which can be employed either as a medicinal *aurum potabile* or as a ‘transmuting’ (gilding) agent to be poured over a red-hot silver plate.⁹¹ Apart from these clear thematic and procedural affinities, this document also shares with Khunrath’s genuine work the employment of acrostics,⁹² a condemnation of calumniators and godless times,⁹³ praise of the ancient *magi* as guardians of the Art,⁹⁴ parallels between the subject’s dissolution and the Genesis creation myth,⁹⁵ and the devotional employment of Biblical passages conceived as descriptions of the Light of Nature;⁹⁶ nevertheless, it lacks some of the key terminology typical of Khunrath’s works, and has been judged as spurious by the foremost bibliograph of esoterica in our time, Carlos Gilly.⁹⁷ What is more, those parallels in language and content which *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* does have in common with Khunrath’s genuine work are also to be found in other alchemical texts of the time. To this extent the manuscript is simply one more item of testimony for the widespread use of similar alchemical techniques in the period we are concerned with.



Figure 7: The purification of gold with antimony, from Count Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618).
With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

The recipe given in *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* begins by telling the reader to take “fine gold purified to the highest degree by quartation or antimony,” and to dissolve the same in a strong *aqua regia* until it is crystalline.⁹⁸ Quartation belonged to the standard methods for refining gold in the sixteenth century; one part of gold was alloyed with at least three of silver, and heated in a vessel together with *aqua fortis* or dilute nitric acid, whereupon the silver and impurities dissolved and were poured away.⁹⁹ Likewise, antimony (‘the grey wolf’) was widely used for the same purpose; the two metals were alloyed (the gold being thereby ‘devoured’), and the antimony was driven off by oxidation in a cupel (the rebirth of the ‘king’ from the fire, as shown in figure 7).¹⁰⁰

In the course of listing the many false candidates taken to be the universal solvent in his *Vom Chaos*, Khunrath launches a particularly long diatribe against the ‘antimonialists’ of his time, whose most important representative was ‘Basil Valentine’ (a.k.a. Johann Thölde, whose printed works began to appear some five years after the publication of *Vom Chaos*):

...the philosophers have called the black phase of their universal work lead, antimony and the raven's head only as a comparison because of the black colour, and certainly not because it should be made from metallic lead, mineral antimony or a raven's head... O Lord! What an antimonial plague prevails these days, and not just amongst the ordinary *Arg-Chymisten*, but also amongst many who have studied a little and believe they have eaten up the whole Art with a spoon. Many have lost their faith in quicksilver, and now antimony is supposedly the best thing around. O you wretched antimonialists - your ideas have no basis whatsoever in the Light of Nature! ... If antimony or some derivative of it were the Lion of the Philosophers, then it

would devour metallic gold as well as the other metals... so that it is no longer a metal, nor will it ever be one again.¹⁰¹

The author of *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* does not claim antimony, *aqua regia* or any other identifiable substance as his universal solvent; having described the production of crystals by cooling the tetrachloroauric acid, he only advises that it be set in solution and treated with an unnamed ‘medium’ in order to convert it into the Mercury or *prima materia* of gold (this being the *Vorarbeit* or preliminary work). Nor does he give any clues as to the identity of this mystery ‘medium’; indeed, his wording suggests he is loath to set this secret down on paper.¹⁰² Nevertheless, there exists an anonymous Paracelsian tract from 1604, also by the name of *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, which is manifestly based upon the treatise ascribed to Khunrath, and which interprets this ‘medium’ as *quinta essentia tartarisata cum tartaro albocalci* - possibly an *oleum tartari* similar to that once employed by Schwaertzer, the use of which Khunrath also condemns.¹⁰³

From these considerations it is clear that not only the elusive chemistry of alchemical process, but also the uncertain provenance of many alchemical works, present the researcher with a labyrinthine and at times frustrating journey. There are, however, some very suggestive clues regarding the identity of Khunrath’s Universal Mercury to be found in a work which is surely his own, and which deals directly with the production of the universal solvent: the *Consilium Philosophicum Practicum*, which Khunrath sent to Prince August of Anhalt-Plötzkau (1575-1653)¹⁰⁴ along with some other writings shortly before his death in 1605.¹⁰⁵

Vitriol and Khunrath’s Consilium

Khunrath begins his counsel for Prince August with a description of the *Vorarbeit* of the work, which is the production of the Philosophical Key. This key is described as Magnesia (and elsewhere in Khunrath’s works, as we have seen, as “the mineral Magnesia”); Khunrath warns God’s punishment will be meted out upon those who reveal its identity, and while he states that he

reveals more in his manuscript than he has ever before brought to paper, he is only willing to divulge the full procedure to the prince by direct oral transmission.¹⁰⁶ This was a standard measure amongst alchemists for guarding the secrets of the Art, just as providing tantalising partial disclosures in manuscript form was a standard method for ‘hooking’ potential patrons.

The codename Magnesia has a long history. Amongst authors of late antiquity such as Zosimos and Maria Prophetissa a distinction between Cyprian Magnesia (probably the naturally occurring manganese dioxide, MnO_2) and “Our Magnesia” is already to be found.¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer described it as “a water that is maad... of elementes foure”; in his *Ordinal of Alchemy* Thomas Norton describes “an other stone... ye must haue... a stone glittering with perspicuite. Being of A wonderful diaphanite her name is magnesia”; in his *Compend of Alchemy* George Ripley states, “Our stone is called the less worlde one & three, Magnesia also of sulphure and mercurie proporcionat by nature moste perfitlye”; and in his commentary on the Arabic *Hermetis Trismegisti Tractatus Aureus* William Salmon describes it as “the Mother and the Generatrix of our Whole Work.”¹⁰⁸ In a similar vein, Khunrath writes in his *Symbolum Physico-Chymicum*:

Now he that desireth to be a true Philosopher, and would obteyne the Chymicall naturall and universal great stone of the wise, he must also hold the universall Chaos of the Naturall Chymicall Magnesia, the Azoth, that is, the Catholike universall Mercury, which is the true naturall... Subject, and only *materia* of the Philosophicall and universall great stone.¹⁰⁹

Whilst the codename ‘Magnesia’ often possesses the same basic connotation in the alchemical corpus - that of a primeval substance containing the four elements or two principles in equal proportion - there is no reason to believe that its interpretation in the laboratory was also constant for different authors and periods. In his *Consilium* Khunrath calls the solvent’s source, the solvent and the subject upon which it works ‘Magnesia’, which must be

“freed from its coagulation-bonds”.¹¹⁰ This is congruent with his descriptions of the production of the Great Stone in *Vom Chaos*, in which the mysterious subject, as we have noted, is the same as the solvent to which it is applied. Likewise, in his *Consilium* Khunrath again states that exactly the same solvent is required to turn metallic gold into a ‘pure spirit’ - i.e. it is the Universal Mercury requisite for production of the Lesser Stones.¹¹¹



Figure 8: Stalactites of iron (II) sulfate heptahydrate (melanterite or green vitriol).

Remarkably, Khunrath’s manuscript proceeds with what appears to be a description of the production of sulfuric acid by the dry-distillation of iron (II) sulfate heptahydrate (green vitriol, a product of the efflorescence of iron pyrite and iron sulfide which was abundant in the mines of Goslar).¹¹² Khunrath begins by instructing us to take a strong hammer and a small anvil for beating gold leaf, and to break up the ‘Magnesia’ into little pieces about as large as beans or hazelnuts.¹¹³ We are advised not to grind the substance in a mortar from Messingen, as this contains

copper which would presumably interfere with the chemistry of the process.¹¹⁴ Once it has been broken up, one pound of this Magnesia should be placed into a retort (made in Waldenburg or Görlitz), which is placed on the furnace after it has been coated with clay mixed with cow’s hair (a fire-lute to protect the vessel from high temperatures). A glass recipient is fixed over the retort’s aperture, and the joint is sealed with a type of papier mâché.¹¹⁵



Figure 9: The furnace and recipient, from the *Consilium Philosophicum Practicum*, f. 16 verso (Khunrath’s autograph).

After gentle heating a ‘sweat’ will appear in the recipient; upon raising the furnace temperature drops begin to fall, and after three or four hours of steadily increased heating a white ‘spiritus’ can be seen accumulating.¹¹⁶ Some nine to twelve hours later, as the heat is gradually increased, the retort will begin to glow and a

white ‘salt’ in the form of ‘cypress leaves’ can be seen amidst the fluid in the recipient.¹¹⁷ When the recipient is filled with a ‘thick mist’, it is to be left to cool overnight and removed. The ‘liquor’ or ‘water’ therein has a pale green to white colour; removing the subtle flecks of ‘salt’, this ‘water’ should be poured into a clean glass vessel, which must be well sealed with a removable stopper so more of the fluid can be gathered there during the subsequent process of ‘rectification’.¹¹⁸

The rectification, or refinement by reiterated distillation, is achieved with the simultaneous use of two furnaces and the help of a grindstone to pulverise the ‘Magnesia’ remaining at the bottom of the retort at the end of the first day’s work.¹¹⁹ During the last day of rectification the hottest possible flame should be applied to the retorts, until the Magnesia is fully calcinated with a slightly red colour and no fluid remains to be driven off.¹²⁰ The ‘Spiritus’ is again collected in the stopped glass vessel, then filtered and warmed gently in the *balneum arenae* in order to separate off its ‘oily phlegm’.¹²¹ This oil is the First Philosophical Key of Magnesia, is yellow in colour and highly acidic.¹²²

In the terms of contemporary chemistry, the dry-distillation of iron (II) sulfate heptahydrate produces iron (II) oxide (the ‘calcinated’ and slightly reddish substance described at the bottom of Khunrath’s retort), water and sulfur trioxide (which together produce the ‘thick mist’ of dilute sulfuric acid seen in the recipient). The separation of the ‘phlegm’ by gentle heating yields a more concentrated acid, and whilst pure sulfuric acid is colourless, the yellow colour described merely suggests the presence of impurities. The procedure is so clearly described that it leaves little room for a disavowal of the centrality of iron sulfate in such alchemical work.¹²³



Figure 10: Iron (II) oxide.

A perplexing question arises here, however. Although by his own admission this First Philosophical Key of Magnesia is a strong acid, Khunrath began his tract with a familiar polemic against those who identify various acids with the Universal Mercury - mentioned amongst these “supposed Philosophical Keys or pick-locks” are *aqua fortis*, *aqua regia*, *spiritus urine* (nitric acid prepared from ammonium salt extracted from urine), *oleum salis* (hydrochloric acid), vinegar (acetic acid) and *spiritus vitrioli* itself.¹²⁴ In his *Vom Chaos* Khunrath speaks of the Green Lion as ‘our Vitriol’, at the same time telling his readers that “the ordinary copperas has nothing to do with it” (the reference here may be to green vitriol, but also to blue vitriol, copper (II) sulfate, or possibly the white vitriol of Goslar, zinc sulfate).¹²⁵ Rather, this “universal green lion of Nature” is *Visitabis Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem Universa Medicinae* (“[if] you visit the interior of the purified earth, you will find the secret universal stone of the Medicine”).¹²⁶ Whilst this acronym does seem to suggest a process of rectification, ‘vitriol’ is clearly yet another misleading codename, for the end-product of the procedure described in the *Consilium* is named by Khunrath ‘*spiritus vitrioli* of the Wise’.¹²⁷



Figure 11: An emblem from the *Aurora Consurgens* with the caption *Visita Interiora Terrae*.

To some extent the distinction between the acid described in Khunrath's *Consilium* and the false candidates he enumerates appears to lie in the strength of the product; for Khunrath admits that some errant laboratory workers have possessed the true Magnesia and driven small amounts of a very weak acid from it by dry-distillation, but they have failed to create a very powerful product via his own process of rectification.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, sulfuric acid does not dissolve gold, regardless of its purity.

However, according to Khunrath this is only the first step of the procedure to produce the Philosophical Key for breaking the 'coagulation bonds' of the metals.¹²⁹ A Paracelsian medicine derived from the acidic substance which is useful in tartaric diseases (involving painful deposits, such as gallstones and gout) is mentioned in the *Consilium*, but this procedure is added as an aside, and does not appear to be the Philosophical Key itself.¹³⁰ The requisite steps for completing this Key are omitted, though

Khunrath mentions that they involve the distillation of the acid he has produced, and he declares himself ready to divulge them to Prince August if he so requires.¹³¹

Here follows, then, a summary of our findings thus far:

1. A number of processes are described in the early modern literature which produce flowing ‘Stones’ for use as tinctures and/or *aurum potabile*. They involve the use of various ‘solvents’; the end-product is sometimes described as being red; and often a similar gilding procedure to the one mentioned by Khunrath (involving a heated silver plate) is specified; all of them, however, are derived from the manipulation of metallic gold in the form of tetrachloroauric acid.

2. By contrast to the various candidates for the title of ‘Universal Mercury’ put forward in these recipes - such as mercury, mercuric oxide and verdigris - Khunrath utilised an agent produced by the distillation of sulfuric acid which reacts with ‘fine particles of gold’¹³² in such a way as to give the impression that the gold has been permanently and irrevocably broken down.

3. Hence the following question arises: which product manufactured via the distillation of sulfuric acid can give the impression of ‘destroying’ gold - as opposed to merely ‘macerating’ it - whilst producing both a gilding agent and a non-acidic medicine which is more or less fit for internal consumption?

Two lines of inquiry can help to determine the identity of this substance; firstly, its physical properties as borne witness to by Khunrath’s descriptions of its flammability, volatility, smell and taste; and secondly, a further investigation of the controversy concerning the possibility of ‘destroying’ gold once and for all, which - as we have mentioned - reached well into the twentieth century. We shall begin with this latter investigation.

Ruby glass and the radical dissolution of gold

A key figure in the said controversy was the early eighteenth century chemist Johann Kunckel von Löwenstern, a late proponent of transmutation who cited Schwaertzer's attempt to radically 'dissolve' gold with the help of mercuric chloride as proof that one may "divide the parts of gold so that in all eternity it will never be gold again."¹³³ With his prodigious knowledge of both alchemy and glassmaking - arts which had stood in close proximity since the Middle Ages - Kunckel attempted to disprove the corpuscularianism of Descartes with recourse to the example of ruby glass, a luxury item deriving its colour from the aforementioned Purple of Cassius. It was Cassius who first uncovered what had been a closely-kept alchemical secret¹³⁴ - the reduction of an aqueous tetrachloroauric acid solution with tin dichloride to produce a powerful pigment.¹³⁵ When he attempted to introduce the pigment into glass, however, the resulting product was merely clear rather than red. Around the year 1679 Kunckel first discovered that the glass must be cooled and gently reheated to obtain the long sought-after colour; according to his description in the *Collegium Physico-Chymicum* (1716), the pigment consisted of "such subtle atoms of gold, that one part can tinge 1280 parts of really beautiful ruby glass."¹³⁶ He went on to argue that the clearness of the glass prior to reheating was proof that the *atomi solares* had been 'vitrified' and thus thoroughly destroyed, and that consequently no gold could be retrieved from ruby glass.¹³⁷ This he took as a repudiation of mechanistic corpuscularianism; for the principle of Salt in both the gold and the glass had clearly melted together, the gold had thus irretrievably lost its Aristotelian 'form', and had been converted into a weightless, non-corpuscular spiritual essence able to penetrate and colour glass.¹³⁸

Unfortunately for Kunckel, an embittered one-time laboratory technician by the name of Christoph Grummet countered his claim with the assertion that ruby glass gives up fine gold dust when subjected to strong heat; in accordance with Grummet's prophecy that he would "precipitate with Icarus," Kunckel subsequently fell from favour at the Saxon court.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, it became widely evident that ruby glass does not appear to yield gold upon melting - a fact observed,

for example, by pillagers during the French Revolution - and Kunckel's observations remained a point of contention until the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁰ Given that this phenomenon baffled researchers for so long, and that it was so liable to create the impression of gold's radical dissolution, let us now turn to a particular subset of procedures involving the manipulation of tetrachloroauric acid - the production of gold colloids, a class of products to which ruby glass itself belongs.

Aurum potabile and gold nanoparticles

It was Richard Zsigmondy (1865-1929) who first solved the problem which had vexed Kunckel and his successors. Inspired by his early employment at a glassworks and with the ultramicroscope he had invented at hand, Zsigmondy was able to determine that ruby glass contains dispersed submicroscopic clusters of gold atoms in such small quantities that their retrieval is indeed problematic.¹⁴¹ What is more, both Zsigmondy and his fellow Nobel laureate, The Svedberg (1884-1971), were moved by their research on colloids (dispersed nanoparticles) to suggest that the *aurum potabile* of Paracelsus and Basil Valentine was a preparation of gold nanoparticles in a fluid dispersion medium (i.e. a gold sol).¹⁴² Taking a leaf from Cassius' book, Svedberg suggested that the Paracelsian and Valentinian *aurum potabile* was derived from the addition of tin dichloride to tetrachloroauric acid in solution,¹⁴³ although there exist a number of other reactants that give rise to colourful gold sols using the same process, with resulting spheroidal clusters of gold atoms usually ranging from 2 to 150 nanometers in size.¹⁴⁴



Figure 12: A gold sol manufactured with trisodium citrate. With permission of Professor Basab Chaudhuri, University of Calcutta.

Today gold sols are used chiefly for ‘labelling’ or dyeing proteins in order to view cellular and tissue components by electron microscopy; the finest nanoparticles ($< 5\text{nm}$) are produced by reduction of a 1% aqueous solution of tetrachloroauric acid with phosphorus in diethyl ether.¹⁴⁵ The use of phosphorus as a reductive reagent gives rise to a crimson-coloured sol, a procedure which was first described by the pioneering Elizabeth Fulhame in her *Essay on Combustion* (1794), in which she documented her attempts to make “cloths of gold, silver, and other metals, by chymical processes.”¹⁴⁶ Fulhame was particularly fascinated by the action of the sun upon cloth impregnated with a tetrachloroauric acid solution:

One exposes a piece of silk which has been dipped in a solution of nitromuriatic gold in distilled water to the rays of the sun, and dampens it with water; the yellow tint

which the metallic solution gives to the silk changes to a pale green, and then becomes purple.¹⁴⁷

Fulhame correctly inferred that this process was driven by the ‘decomposition’ of the water, as the reductive reagent here is hydrogen released by evaporation.¹⁴⁸ The minute size of the gold particles produced by such reduction had already been remarked upon by Juncker in his *Conspectus Chymiae*, who followed Cassius by introducing tin dichloride to a “single drop of dissolved gold in quite some *Loten* of water” - that the entire solution was permeated by redness was the “clearest proof of how immensely small the particles must be.”¹⁴⁹

Svedberg and Zsigmondy were not the first writers to identify colloidal gold with *aurum potabile*, even if they were amongst the first to fully understand its chemistry in modern terms. In his *Dictionnaire De Chymie* (1766) Peter Macquer describes those alchemists who dissolve gold with *Königswasser*, add ethereal oils, separate the latter from the acid and mix them with alcohol; in so doing these ‘charlatans’ claim not only to have ‘fundamentally’ dissolved the gold, but also to have produced a medicine with remarkable healing properties:

In any case, all these gold tinctures are nothing other than natural gold, most finely dispersed and floating about in an oily fluid. Strictly speaking, therefore, they are not tinctures... and they deserve the title ‘potable gold’ only insofar as we do not associate this name with any other concept than gold which floats in a fluid, and which has been made into such fine particles that it is possible to drink in the form of a fluid.¹⁵⁰

Following Macquer, in the early twentieth century Vanino experimented with the production of gold sols using various ethereal oils such as the rosemary oil mentioned in the *Dictionnaire De Chymie*, and came to the conclusion that *aurum potabile* “must without doubt be counted amongst the predecessors of colloidal gold.”¹⁵¹

Given the history of its production, it is clear that one of the most remarkable impressions liable to be imparted during the manufacture of colloidal gold is that the metal has been entirely ‘dissolved’; this stands in contrast to those aforementioned varieties of tincture and *aurum potabile* produced with verdigris or mercuric chloride, in which “atoms of golden splendour,” albeit minute, are still visible. It must also be said that the brilliant red colour associated with the Philosophers’ Stone throughout the centuries (Khunrath and other authors often describe it as the ‘ruby-stone’¹⁵²) is highly suggestive not only of the presence of gold, but specifically the presence of colloidal gold, a fact which inspired Ganzenmüller’s investigations into the alchemical production of ruby glass. Even the colour phases involved in the manufacture of some gold sols are reminiscent of alchemical process - for example, in 1821 Krüger experimented with the introduction of albumen into an aqueous tetrachloroauric acid solution, and described the ensuing formation of white and red colour phases over a period of six days.¹⁵³ The suspicion that Khunrath also busied himself with the production of gold colloids becomes ever stronger as we return to consider the identity of his Universal Mercury with recourse to his descriptions of its physical properties.

Spiritus vini and the ether

From certain comments in Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum*, we may gather that the Universal Mercury is a highly flammable substance. In various places in his work it is also described as *alcohol vini* or *spiritus vini*, which naturally raises the possibility that we are dealing with the distillation of ethanol, given the enthusiasm shown amongst the medieval alchemists for the *quinta essentia* which was regularly manufactured in their reflux stills.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, alcohol or ethanol is a suitable reductive reagent for producing an *aurum potabile* containing colloidal gold - by way of contrast with those varieties of *trinkbares Gold*, still to be found on the market in Germany, which only possess finely cut gold leaf suspended in spirits. We also find in the work of both Kunckel

and Becher recipes for ‘mercurifying’ gold by adding alcohol to tetrachloroauric acid in solution (and Kunckel reminds his readers that should the vessel break during this sublimation an untimely death may ensue).¹⁵⁵

It should come as no surprise, however, that *spiritus vini* was employed as a codename by Khunrath, and that with his typically pious style he spots those inebriated ‘adepts’ who work diligently with their alcohol both day and night.¹⁵⁶ The Universal Mercury does not derive from grains, or apples, or pears - indeed, by Khunrath’s estimation it belongs neither to the realm of minerals, nor to that of animals, and nor to that of vegetables.¹⁵⁷ This might suggest that the substance of which he spoke was a mere fantasy; nevertheless, his words here merely conform to the alchemical trope of a power preceding and animating all organic and inorganic forms, for which reason the Philosophers’ Stone itself is also described in the corpus as being *simultaneously* animal, vegetable and mineral.

If we continue with our assumption that the substances with which Khunrath worked are known to contemporary science, then the property of flammability narrows our search field considerably. Moreover, when we consider the fact that Khunrath admits in one place he has smelt and tasted the Universal Mercury himself, and that in another he claims it is “the sweetest smelling substance,”¹⁵⁸ and in yet another that it is extremely light and ‘hot’ to the taste, and that it is volatile to the point that it readily evaporates at room temperature,¹⁵⁹ then we are driven to conjecture that he was working with diethyl ether (C₄H₁₀O), known commonly simply as ‘ether’.

Michael Faraday (1791-1857) was the first to document (with the terms of modern chemistry) the production of a ruby-red gold colloid using diethyl ether and tetrachloroauric acid.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the early seventeenth century author writing under the name of Basil Valentine speaks of taking the Sulphur from gold and making the metal ‘spiritual’ by means of a substance which is “subtle, penetrating, with a lovely taste and beautiful scent.”¹⁶¹ This substance is distilled from oil of vitriol (sulfuric acid) and *spiritus vini* (ethanol) - a fairly clear indication that the production

of diethyl ether was known to him. What is more, the goal of his process was to create an *aurum potabile* - a fact which led Claus Priesner to remark suggestively that “a colloidal gold-in-ether solution can be prepared by extracting gold containing *aqua regia* with ether.”¹⁶² Likewise, in the eighteenth century Macquer spoke of diethyl ether as “one of the best mediums for making a so-called potable gold.”¹⁶³

Hence diethyl ether can be used to produce a colloidal *aurum potabile* which is more or less fit for internal consumption - but can it be used as a ‘tincture’ for gilding a silver plate? The answer to this question is fairly simple, as the standard contemporary German definition of *Goldtinktur* is “a solution of gold chloride [tetrachloroauric acid] in [diethyl] ether for the purpose of gilding.”¹⁶⁴ What is more, the fact that gold sols can actually be precipitated to produce fine gold powders of a matching colour may partially explain the prevalence in the literature of alchemical tinctures in powdered form - for example, the bright golden powder from England that inspired Count Michael Maier’s interest in alchemy, or the alchemical remedy that famously healed the adolescent Goethe.¹⁶⁵

The first firm evidence for the production of diethyl ether comes in the work of Paracelsus, who in his *Von den Natürlichen Dingen* (c. 1525) speaks of a ‘sweet’ substance known to the alchemists and distilled from vitriol and *spiritus vini*, which has the power to anaesthetise patients without any harmful side-effects.¹⁶⁶ It has been suggested that the Alkahest or universal solvent of Paracelsus was also diethyl ether, prepared by distillation of ethanol with caustic potash (potassium hydroxide).¹⁶⁷ Be this as it may, diethyl ether is commonly considered to have entered the realms of modern chemistry in the 1730 transactions of the Royal Society, where Sigismond Augustus Frobenius¹⁶⁸ described the remarkable properties of his *Æthereal Liquor* or *spiritus vini aethereus*, “the lightest of all fluids.” As a solvent for vegetable, animal and mineral products alike, Frobenius described ether as “certainly the most noble, efficacious and useful Instrument in all Chymistry and Pharmacy.”¹⁶⁹ Even if it is “kindled in a thousand Times the Quantity of cold Water, it burns inextinguishably,”¹⁷⁰ and

is thus “the very *Ens*, or Being most pure of Flame.”¹⁷¹ Noteworthy are the words of Frobenius concerning its use in the dulcification and purification of gold in the form of tetrachloroauric acid:

And indeed a wonderful Harmony is observable betwixt Gold and this Aether... If a Piece of Gold be dissolved in the best Aq. Regia, and upon the Solution Cold, be poured half an Ounce, or what Quantity you please of the Æthereal Liquor, shake the Glass carefully, and all the Gold will pass into the Æthereal Liquor, and the Aqua Regia, robbed of all its Gold, will presently deposite the Copper at the bottom of the Vessel as a white Powder, which turning of a green Colour, contains the Portion of Copper wherewith the Gold was adulterated. The Æther will swim like Oil on the Surface of the corrosive Waters. The Experiment deserves the utmost Attention; for here the heaviest of all Bodies, Gold, is attracted by this very light Æther... owing to a certain Harmony and Similitude of both of them.¹⁷²

Given the Hermetic flavour of Frobenius’ words concerning harmony and similitude, one may ask in what sense his account is ‘modern’. One answer to this question lies in the fact that it displays the eschewal of secrecy and invitation to experimental verification characteristic not only of the transactions of the Royal Society but also of chemistry as we know it today. True, Frobenius chose to withhold the secret of his ether’s manufacture, and the editor of the *Philosophical Transactions* advises the reader to contact the author directly if a sample is desired. However, following the death of Frobenius the secretary of the Royal Society, Cromwell Mortimer, published those unreleased portions of the papers submitted by the author, in which are mentioned the efforts of Boyle and Newton to synthesise the same substance.¹⁷³ Of particular note is the fact that Frobenius speaks in these unpublished fragments of a class of four “simple æthereal spirits” corresponding to the earth, the sea, the air and the heavens; whilst the first three are manufactured from salts, the fourth appears to

be *spiritus vini aethereus* itself.¹⁷⁴ Noteworthy too is Mortimer's comment that Frobenius had gained all his knowledge concerning the substance from an unnamed noble in Vienna.¹⁷⁵ If alchemists as prominent and influential as Paracelsus, Heinrich Khunrath and Basil Valentine were indeed working with diethyl ether, then these two facts cast some etymological light upon Frobenius' choice of the nomenclature *spiritus vini aethereus* (as opposed to Cordus' 'sweet vitriol' or Paracelsus' *spiritus vitrioli*). Rather than being an attempt "to hide a substance, perhaps already known to some people, behind a new name," as Priesner suggests,¹⁷⁶ the possibility exists that Frobenius actually followed those of his alchemical predecessors who identified diethyl ether with that pure, shining heavenly element known to the Greeks as *âither* or ether (from the root of *aithô*, to kindle), and characterised by Aristotle as the fifth element, the *quinta essentia* pervading the superlunary spheres and comprising the heavenly bodies.¹⁷⁷ For Khunrath names this more ancient ether *spiritus aethereus* or "the most sweet-smelling ethereal fertility," and asserts not only that it may be isolated in the laboratory, but also that it is synonymous with the Universal Mercury with which the Philosophers' Stone is to be made (i.e. synonymous with diethyl ether, if our conjecture is correct).

Alchemy and Khunrath's cosmology



Figure 13: "Just as iron has its magnet, which its marvellous invisible love draws to itself, so too does our gold also have a magnet, which is the first matter of our great stone." From

The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine (1599).

Regardless of the truth of this conjecture, the discrepancy between contemporary and traditional connotations of the word ‘ether’ displays another important distinction between the worldviews of alchemy and modern chemistry - the cosmological significance of chemical substances has radically changed. In their rush to join the postmodern critique of all ‘grand narratives,’ Newman and Principe have recently counterposed a “correct chemical analysis” of alchemical texts carried out by “serious historians of alchemy” with a Jungian “analysis of unreason,” and have stated that there is “no indication that the vast majority of alchemists were working on anything other than material substances towards material goals.”¹⁷⁸ It is necessary to distance the ‘translation’ that has been attempted here from such assertions, as they display precisely the presentism and positivism Newman and Principe claim to disown, by which contemporary cosmologies and notions of matter are unconsciously elevated to the realm of the definitive. Nowhere is this error more clearly demonstrated than in Principe’s *The Aspiring Adept*, where Paracelsian cosmologies are condemned as “lofty and obscure,” “bizarre and rambling,” “extravagant and incoherent,” and even “pretentious” - which adjectives are counterposed with a positively-valued “recitation of recipes.”¹⁷⁹ It may well be that Khunrath, who is commonly counted amongst the most mystical and obscure practitioners of the Art, busied himself with procedures that appear relatively mundane to the contemporary chemist; nevertheless, this fact does not help us towards an understanding of the nature of matter itself in the alchemist’s worldview, any more than a description of a Gothic cathedral in terms of the chemical composition of stone and glass would help us to a deeper appreciation of the medieval psyche.

In order to come to a closer understanding of Khunrath’s alchemy, and in particular of that substance which he names alternately ‘ether’, the *prima materia* and the Universal Mercury of the Wise, let us turn again to his *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, which counts amongst the most powerful of early

theosophical works. An extended commentary on the biblical book of Proverbs and the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, the *Amphitheatrum* presents us with a synthesis of the Christian Neoplatonic and ancient Hebrew cosmologies which is coloured by Kabbalistic and alchemical notions.¹⁸⁰ His comments upon the substance pervading the divine, supercelestial realm specify a distinctive ‘theosophical’ mode of perception reliant upon celestial influence and divine guidance:

Of what kind, substance and nature the waters above the heavens are must be researched theosophically. I say, therefore, under the direction and guidance of the influence, light and movement of the divine sun, and in the name of God, that the waters above the heavens are of exactly the same kind and substance as that ethereal fluid which burnt without being extinguished, which in the time of our fathers was found in a most ancient grave in Padua, Italy, within which were two vessels held within a clay urn, one of which was gold and the other silver. This lamp burnt on for many years due to the power of this very fine liquor...¹⁸¹



Figure 14: A portrayal of the cosmos from Peter Apian's *Cosmographia* (1524). With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Khunrath's inspired and revelatory style is evident here, as is the solar mysticism which pervades the alchemical corpus.¹⁸² This report was drawn by Khunrath from the work of Peter Apian and Bartholomeus Amantius on the inscriptions of antique tombs;¹⁸³ the Roman grave in question belonged to a certain Olybius, and we are told that the everburning lights therein were extinguished when they were exposed to the air by the peasant who unearthed them.¹⁸⁴

The conception of such everburning lights is ancient, and is to be found elsewhere in the alchemical and esoteric literature; for example, the tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz was said by Johann

Valentin Andreae to be lit with ‘another sun’ at its ceiling,¹⁸⁵ whilst Bartholomäus Korndörffer’s *Everburning Lights of Trithemius* (late 16th century) describes the manufacture of a little lamp with an asbestos wick and a fuel composed of sulphur and *spiritus vini*, which Abbot Trithemius supposedly gave to Emperor Maximilian I as a present.¹⁸⁶ But the fuel used in the everburning lights of Padua came to hold a special place in alchemical lore. By 1529 Hermolaus Barbarus had already identified it as a “divine water of the chemists” known to Democritus and Hermes Trismegistus, who spoke of it as ‘Scythian water’ and a “spirit from the nature of the ether”; significantly, he adds that it is the substance with which *aurum potabile* and the Philosophers’ Stone are manufactured.¹⁸⁷ Conrad Gesner also cited the story of the Paduan discovery as proof of the antiquity of the art of distillation and sublimation, and supposed that Cardanus had once spoken of the same divine water.¹⁸⁸ But he confesses he does not know the secret of its manufacture. Khunrath would no doubt have ascribed this ignorance to the fact that Gesner was a ‘four-elementer’ (*quatuor elementistarum*), i.e. one who works only with the four mundane elements and who is unable to research the matter ‘theosophically’.

Khunrath, on the other hand, claims knowledge of this divine water, and would reveal its identity if only he were authorised to “break the heavenly seal and divulge the mysteries of God”; as it stands, he feels it is only right that the sons of the doctrine should be encouraged to ‘theosophically’ consider the various clues he supplies.¹⁸⁹ One of these clues stands in the 1595 edition of his *Amphitheatrum* in the form of a table correlating the substances named in the Genesis creation account (earth and water, heaven and the breath of God) with the principles and substances of the Hermeticists, ‘ancient philosophers’, physico-chemists and four-elementers.¹⁹⁰ What to Moses was ‘heaven’ (*shâmayim*), was to Hermes the *spiritus mundi*, ether and a corporeal spirit permeating all things; to the antique Greek philosophers a medium between matter and form; and to physico-chemists such as Khunrath, Mercury or a ‘spiritual ether’ which operates “in accordance with the scintilla of nature with which it is joined.”¹⁹¹

In order to understand these correspondences, it is

necessary to delineate a central feature of Khunrath’s cosmology - the concept of an all-pervading ‘heaven’ (Hebrew *shâmayim*), which is threefold in its structure, and which can be manifested to the human senses through the work of a talented alchemist.¹⁹² *Elohim* resides with his angels in the uppermost, third or empyrean heaven,¹⁹³ an eternal ‘fiery water’ composed from the upper waters, variously described as an ‘impenetrable light’, the quintessence, an ‘aethereal fertility’ and a divine water known to the alchemists. Beneath the empyrean heaven lies the firmament (*râqîya shâmayim*) or second heaven, composed of the same ‘fiery water’ which was congealed by God into a ‘solid arch’ more durable than diamond, in order that it supports the upper waters and is not annihilated by the heat of its own light and fire (i.e. that of the sun, moon and stars God has placed there).¹⁹⁴



Figure 15: The cosmos of Heinrich Khunrath, from an eighteenth century manuscript copy of the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1609). ULB Darmstadt, Ms. 3263 (with permission of the

Beneath the firmament lies a ‘great empty space’ filled with ‘watery humours’ and the vapours which daily rise from the lower regions - the site of a condensation and rarefaction akin to that which takes place in the alchemical vessel. The first or inferior heaven is also composed of the same ‘fiery water’ as those above it, but it interpenetrates and is mixed with the material sublunary world which God has created from the *prima materia* (‘Chaos’, ‘Abyss’, composed of the Philosophical Gold/Sulphur and Philosophical Silver/Mercury we have mentioned).¹⁹⁵ Here too there are stars, Khunrath tells us, which sympathetically follow the motion of the upper stars - a reference to the *scintilla* which were scattered throughout “the great mass of the *prima materia*” by the breath of God (*rûwach ălôhâm*).¹⁹⁶ All earthly things have been lent their forms or *signatura* by God through *rûwach ălôhâm*, a ‘spirit’ or ‘vapour’ which is “an emanation of primeval archetypes or patterns” conceived in the mind of God.¹⁹⁷ This *rûwach ălôhâm* is also described as ‘Nature itself’ and the *anima mundi*; as pure form it can only be united with its opposite (matter) through the medium of heaven, *shâmâyim*, which union is described in sexual terms as the pouring forth of semen and warmth by God into virginal matter.¹⁹⁸

Notwithstanding his employment of the nomenclature of the Genesis creation account, Khunrath’s basic cosmological conceptions are thus more or less identical with those of the greatest *magus* of the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). *Shâmâyim* is the Ficinian *spiritus mundi*, which is described in Ficino’s *De Vita* as precisely ‘heaven’ and the quintessence, and which acts as the all-pervasive medium allowing the generative power of the *anima mundi* (Khunrath’s *rûwach ălôhâm*) to act upon the lower, grosser world.¹⁹⁹ The Universal Mercury was thought of by Khunrath as a medium for nothing less than the seminal power of God, the “blessed green which makes all things fruitful” - hence its power not only to destroy, but to impart a higher form to the alchemical subject.²⁰⁰ This seminal power is to be found in

the lower world in the form of fiery sparks of the world soul, the ‘scintillas of nature’ which need the heavenly water (spirit) as their vehicle in order to be united with and give form to matter (body).²⁰¹



Figure 16: The stag (soul) and the unicorn (spirit) in the forest (body), from Lamsprinck, *De lapide philosophico* (1625): “But happy shall that man be called, who shall snare and capture them.” With permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Hence Khunrath’s laboratory procedures constituted a microcosm of the genesis of the world; just as Khunrath describes the universe as the “macrocosmic laboratory of God,” so the alchemist forms an image of the Creator standing above the vessel of his own creation.²⁰² The reduction of the gold to its *prima materia* constitutes the breaking of those natural bonds which unify the metal’s Sulphur, Salt and Mercury, which are likened by

Khunrath to the reproduction of that watery, chaotic state of matter preceding the creation of the world in Genesis 1.2.²⁰³ Likewise, the ethereal Universal Mercury of the Wise which brings life to the chaos is the medium for the animating breath of God, which moves over the face of the waters in the Genesis account. This grants to all things created their form or *entelechia*, the inner *telos* which drives their process of becoming.²⁰⁴

Such parallels between the biblical creation story and the alchemical work were commonplace amongst alchemists in the early modern period;²⁰⁵ they constituted a means of legitimising the alchemical work with recourse to Scripture, and complemented the medieval parallel drawn between the Philosophers' Stone as the perfection of the alchemical work and Christ as the crown of creation and saviour of the microcosm which is man. The Hellenistic *Tabula Smaragdina*, a central text in the transmission of alchemical lore to both Arabia and the West, provided the precedent for likening alchemical process with the Creation:

This is the mightie power of all power, for it shall overcome every subtil thing, and pearce through every solide thing. So was the worlde created.²⁰⁶

Ficinian and heterodox Lutheran influences aside, Khunrath's alchemy as we have described it here reflects the standard preoccupations of the alchemical canon, not only with regard to notions of virtue and penetrativity, but above all in relation to the unification of spiritual and material principles in an agent of transmutation. As the *Tabula Smaragdina* puts it,

The father of all the perfection of this world is here. His force and power is perfect, if it be turned into earth.²⁰⁷

And the *Tractatus Aureus* of Hermes Trismegistus:

And know that the Heaven is to be joynd in a mean with the Earth: But the Figure is to be in a middle Nature,

between the Heaven and the Earth, which thing is Our Water.²⁰⁸

As Jung (and Herbert Silberer before him) plausibly asserted, it is the *coniunctio oppositorum* which forms the central symbolic complex of the alchemical literature.²⁰⁹ Closely allied with this theme is the endeavour to draw down to earth a divine, heavenly or spiritual principle - as Maier puts it, “God gives power to the sun, the sun to the gold, this eventually to the human heart” - a fact which prompted Metzger (again, plausibly) to speak of vitalism as the defining characteristic of alchemy vis-à-vis modern chemistry.²¹⁰

Hence we must reject the ‘presentist’ assertion that alchemists were only “working on material substances towards material goals.”²¹¹ If corpuscularian texts with little or no recourse to vitalistic concepts are to be found in the medieval period, this fact only reveals alchemy to be a subset of chemistry as it has been practised since time immemorial - it is simply *another chemistry* with a paradigm largely alien to the contemporary scientific worldview.²¹² Nor should we imagine that any chemistry, modern, early modern or medieval, exists without a psychological and cultural subtext. Thus Jung once proposed that alchemy is “a chemical research into which there entered an admixture of unconscious psychic material by the way of projection.”²¹³ In the course of pillorying the valuable contributions of Jung, Newman and Principe counter this proposition with the following entirely untenable statement:

...if the images used in alchemical texts are in fact irruptions of the unconscious, then there would be no possibility of “working backwards” from them to decipher such images into actual, valid laboratory practice.²¹⁴

There are, of course, very obvious parallels which can be drawn between psychological and chemical process (first and foremost being the dissolution and recombination of *spagyria*), a fact reflected in Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandschaften*, for example. That

the processes in the alchemical vessel were guided by a recognised chemical logic in no way precludes the possibility that another purely subjective logic came into play through the assignment of *Decknamen* to those processes by imaginative association (i.e. via the phenomenon of *pareidolia*). Furthermore, the concept that a symbol possesses more than one connotation is central to alchemy in particular, as well as to the Hermetic worldview in general (as we have already noted). Indeed, it would appear that the rise of modern chemistry was marked by the gradual disintegration of Hermeticism as the dominant cosmological paradigm, and by a concomitant devaluation of the *mesocosm* of the imagination as a tool for knowledge of things divine in humanity and cosmos. A hard demarcation between the stuff of matter in the outer world and the constituent elements of the observing subject does not exist in alchemical natural philosophy, a fact which leads one to suspect that the main fault in the Jungian theory of alchemy lies in his postulation of an *unconscious* projection. Indeed, if contemporary scientific discourse is almost as heavily psychologically laden with the neuroses and fantasies of largely reclusive male scientists as alchemical symbolism, then the distinction between the two languages stems more from the fact that today's laboratory workers are *less* conscious of the mythic, imaginary dimensions of their enterprise.

Whilst the Hermetic worldview may well have been sequestered from the scientific mainstream in the course of the Enlightenment, it continued to live on in esoteric circles - not merely in the form of a 'spiritual alchemy' focused exclusively upon a mystical inner transformation, but also in the form of laboratory work. Unless we wish to erase from history the development of alchemical thought subsequent to the seventeenth century, we must reject the suggestion of Newman and Principe that early modern alchemy be referred to by the terms *chemia* or *chymia*, and that the term 'alchemy' should be applied to the medieval period alone.²¹⁵ Whilst these authors make brief mention of the fact that the thought of Heinrich Khunrath persisted amongst 'secret societies', they summarily dismiss the developmental continuity of the Western esoteric tradition on the grounds that,

in the hands of such societies, “alchemical works deliberately written to be obscure and secretive in their own age became meaningless in the next.”²¹⁶ I, for one, find nothing ‘meaningless’ in either the practical alchemy of the *Gold- und Rosenkreutz* or the purely spiritual alchemies of fringe Masonry (such as we find in the works of Hitchcock and the younger Waite). With regard to the former, there still exist communities of practical alchemists in the world today; with regard to the latter, ‘spiritual alchemy’ is merely a natural extension of Hermetic ideology emerging from the individualist sentiments and ‘reflective activity’²¹⁷ inspired by the Protestant Reformation.²¹⁸ Whilst the alchemical interests of Newton and Boyle show that modern chemistry did not emerge from alchemy in a day, a year, or even the lifetime of one great innovator, the historiography proposed by Newman and Principe still fails to address that manifest post-Reformation fission of the *physica* and the *mystica* of which Jung spoke.²¹⁹ If we choose to ignore this schism by removing esotericism from our picture of modernity, or by belittling the *mystica* as the “product of a disordered mind,” then we are only exposing that divided, fragmented consciousness characteristic of the modern and postmodern psyche.²²⁰

On the other hand, a conception propagated today by certain followers of practising twentieth century alchemists such as Fulcanelli (and implicit in much of the alchemical corpus) is that there exists a unique Magistry or Work possessed by all adepts in the long history of alchemy; from this perspective, the symbolism of alchemy points towards a single, correct method for creating the Philosophers’ Stone (or alternatively two correct methods, i.e. a ‘wet’ and a ‘dry’). It is evident, however, that not all alchemists worked with diethyl ether or tetrachloroauric acid (for example), since there is no firm evidence for the existence of the former prior to Paracelsus, and since the employment of *aqua regia* also emerges at a relatively late stage in the history of alchemy. Rather than striking the names of Basil Valentine and Heinrich Khunrath from that glorious list of adepts, it is more reasonable to accept that we are dealing with a range of interpretations of a more-or-less constant symbolism, as opposed to a single carefully-guarded

chemical process which is signified throughout the alchemical canon.

My reflections here on the shifting of chemical paradigms provide no grounds for adopting a Kuhnian post-positivist relativism, or an agnosticism concerning the beliefs of the alchemists; for despite the varied methods employed by the ‘adepts’ to transmute metals, deception seems to be a unifying factor in their claims of success. In his polemical *Adeptus Ineptus* the pastor Georg Wilhelm Wegner (1692-1765) once spoke of both self-deception and fraud in this regard, and characterised the alchemists as “thieves to themselves and their needy neighbours.”²²¹ We may well point in protest to the many contributions to the advance of science and technology made by the alchemists, or perhaps even to the usefulness and legitimacy of gilding and alloying techniques, and to variant definitions of the word ‘gold’; but the stubborn fact remains that at least two of the three treasures held at the heart of the alchemical labyrinth - unlimited wealth, revelation and eternal life - remained undiscovered by those errant explorers who stumbled their way through the darkened corridors of experiment. In the case of Khunrath’s career self-deceit is very much a factor, as he clearly believed silver could be transmuted into elemental gold, despite being aware of the various methods for ascertaining the purity of golden objects. His belief seems to have rested upon a kind of *ipso facto* reasoning typical of the alchemists: if the gold in the ‘transmuting’ agent has already been irreversibly destroyed, then the reappearance of gold during its application is evidence of transmutation - an error which is readily fostered by the enigmatic sub-microscopic properties of colloidal gold which so captivated Kunckel and his successors, and by the fact that a very large gilded surface area can be formed by very small quantities of nanoparticulate gold.

Whilst Wegner explained such credulous self-deception with recourse to the alchemists’ greed for worldly wealth, this clearly does not suffice to clarify the motivations of a pious iatrochemist such as Khunrath. One might also turn to the paradigm of memetics to understand the persistence of alchemical

ideology in the face of lost fortunes and lives cut short by heavy metal poisoning; but it seems to me that the theories of Jung are most useful here. For we may well be dealing with a form of *Ergriffenheit*, a state of being ‘seized’ or possessed by archetypal thought processes relating to certain primordial desires - a phenomenon which is most clearly illustrated in the figure of Goethe’s Faust. From this perspective alchemy appears primarily as a magical or even religious artefact, and the unswerving faith in the reality of its promises (a faith still to be observed today) derives above all from the seductive, numinous power of its Promethean mythology. This is a mythology which lives on - albeit largely unrecognised - in the endeavours of the inheritors of the alchemical mantle, in the form of a penetration into the farther reaches of Nature (now divested of its sacred character by deicide) to obtain a feminised arcanum.

Notes

¹ Pseudo-Arnaldus de Villanova, *A Chymicall treatise of the Ancient and highly illuminated Philosopher, Devine and Physitian, Arnoldus de Nova Villa who lived 400 years agoe, never seene in print before, but now by a Lover of the Spagyrick art made publick for the use of Learners, printed in the year 1611*, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1415, p. 131.

² Cited in Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychology and Alchemy,” *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 12, trans. R. F. C. Hull, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, pp. 238-239.

³ Michael Maier, *The Flying Atalanta, Or Philosophical Emblems of the Secrets of Nature*, British Library, MS Sloane 3645, 17th century, p. 63.

⁴ On this subject, see Carlos Gilly, ‘*Theophrastia Sancta*’: *Paracelsianism as a Religion in Conflict with the Established Churches*, http://www.ritmanlibrary.nl/c/p/res/art/art_01.html.

⁵ Johann Arndt, *Das Grosse Geheimniß der Menschwerdung des Ewigen Worts*, in a letter to Erasmus Wolfart bound together with Christian Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica*, Frankfurt am Main: Johann Nicolaus Andreae, 1717, pp. 8, 15.

⁶ Quirinus Kuhlmann, *Der Neubegeisterte Böhme*, ed. Jonathan Clark, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1995, pp. 111-112; cf. Heinrich Khunrath, *Vom Hylealischen, das ist, Pri-materialischen Catholischen oder Allgemeinen Natürlichen Chaos, der Naturgemässen Alchymiae und Alchymisten* (hereafter *Vom Chaos*), Magdeburg: Andreas Gene, 1597, p.)(8).

⁷ Johann Moller, *Cimbria Literata*, Vol. 2, Hanau: Orphanotrophus, 1644, p.

440.

⁸ See Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer- Historie*, Frankfurt am Main: Thomas Fritsch, 1715, pp. 11-13.

⁹ Joachim Telle, "Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* - ein frühes Zeugnis der physikotheologischen Literatur," in Elmar Mittler et. al. (eds.), *Bibliotheca Palatina: Katalog zu Ausstellung vom 8. Juli bis 2. November 1986*, Heiligegeistkirche Heidelberg, Vol. 1, Heidelberg: Braus, 1986, p. 346.

¹⁰ Moller, *Cimbria Literata*, Vol. 2, p. 441.

¹¹ Johann Valentin Andreae, *Mythologiae Christianae, sive Virtutum et vitiorum vitae humanae imaginum*, Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1619, p. 137.

¹² Johann Dietrich, *Antiquitates Biblicae*, Gießen: Jakob Gottfried Seyler, 1671, p. 132.

¹³ Jacques Gaffarel, *Curiositez inouyes, sur la sculpture talismanique des Persans, Horoscope des Patriarches, et Lecture des Estoilles*, Paris: Hervé du Mesnil, 1629, pp. 595-596.

¹⁴ See, for example, Johann Ludwig Hannemann, *Ovum Hermetico-Paracelsico-Trismegistum*, Frankfurt am Main: Friedrich Knoch, 1644, p. 130.

¹⁵ Böhme, regarded by Joost Ritman as "the most important publisher of his time," brought out the following works of Khunrath: *Alchymisch-philosophisches Bekenntnis vom universellen Chaos der naturgemässen Alchymie* (1786); *Magnesia Catholica Philosophorum* (1784); *Wahrhafter Bericht vom philosophischen Athanon und dessen Gebrauch und Nutzen* (1783) and *De Igne Magorum Philosophorumque secreto externo et visibili* (1783).

¹⁶ Telle, "Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum*," p. 346.

¹⁷ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 27, 55-56.

¹⁸ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 81-82.

²⁰ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 83.

²¹ Cited in Bruce T. 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, p. 104.

²² F. Sherwood Taylor, "The Visions of Zosimos," *Ambix*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1937, p. 89.

²³ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p.12: "Daher kommt/ daß die *universal* Natur Mercurii *Philosophorum* auch aufflöset die *coagulation* oder Härtings-Bande der Natur/ damit alle natürliche leibliche Dinge Natürlich gebunden und geschlossen seyn. Dahero ist Er der Haupt-Schlüssel in dieser Kunst/ zu allen Natürlichen Dingen/ dieselben Natur-gemäß künstlich zu *solviren*, und in Materiam Primam zu bringen; Ja/ das Fundament und unfählbarer Anfang zu den Philosophischen *Lunarischen* und *Solarischen* Special-Steinen und Tincturen, auch Alle wahrhaffte nützliche *transmutir-Particularia* zuverrichten/ wie hernacher an seinem Ort außführlicher soll dargethan werden."

²⁴ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 124: "Wann der Leib unseres Steins (*Subjectum* unseres Steins) zerstöret und getödtet wird/ so weichen Sein Geist und Seel von ihm hinweg: Dann was ist der Todt/ so wohl allhier als mit dem Menschen/

anders/ als Abscheidung der Seele vom Leib? Wann Seel und Leib getrennet werden/ also/ daß das Band/ nehmlich der Geist/ damit *Anima* und *Corpus* zusammen verbunden und verknüpfft seyn/ auffgelöset wird/ so kan die Seele aus dem Leibe weichen/ und von demselben abscheiden. Darhero sagt auch PAULUS Tarsensis: *Cupio dissolvi, et esse cum CHRISTO*, Ich begehre auffgelöset zu werden/ und bey CHRISTO zu seyn.” In Paracelsian tradition, the spirit (Mercury) binds the body (Salt) and soul (Sulphur); compare, however, the words of Paracelsus, *De Natura Rerum*, in Sudhoff (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 11, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1928, p. 318, where he follows Platonic tradition in speaking of the soul (Sulphur) as the bond uniting spirit (Mercury) and body (Salt). To confuse matters further, Khunrath equates the body with both Sulphur and Salt and the spirit with Mercury in his *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, Hamburg: n.p., 1595, p.17.

²⁵ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 81-82: “Erstlich, so *Materia Prima Catholica*, daß ist/ *Mercurium Philosophorum* (*Azoth Catholicus*, *per se*, vor und an sich selbst Naturgemäß-Alchymisch *plusquamperficiret*/ oder mehr denn vollkommen gemacht/ daß ist/ durch den ordentlichen und in gemein bräuchlichen Weg der Naturgemässen-künstlichen Wiedergeburt glorificiret/ und der *Universal* grosse Stein der Weisen ist; das alsdann von derselben/ vermittelst künstlicher Fermentation [margin: ‘Fermentatio und Projectio’] (so bey den Philosophis die Andere *Fermentirung* genannt wird) die *Metalla Silber* und *Gold* (als *per Fermentum Catholicum*) in *Metalla plusquamperfecta* vegetiret/ exaltiret und glorificiret werden;... Gleich wie auch/ nach Lehr Biblischer heiliger Schrifft/ die Leiber derer Menschen/ so/ wann der grosse Tag des Gerichts des Herren angehen wird/ noch nicht abgestorben seynd/ in einem Nu und Huy verwandelt sollen werden;” p. 84: “Die erstgesagten Philosophi haben ihren Catholischen und grossen Stein *per se*, Catholisch absolviret und verfertigt/ und als dann erst im Ende ihrer Arbeit (wann sie gewollt) mit etwas wenigen darvon/ in gar einer überaus sehr kleinen Portion (so viel ihnen nur selbst zum wenigsten wolgefallen und geliebte) ein gut Theil Metallisch Silber oder Gold künstlich fermentiret/ und aus Krafft/ Gewalt und Macht seines inneren Quintessentialischen Saltz-Feuers der Natur/ dieselben zur Plusquamperfection Natürlich vegetiret/ beweget und erhebt... [margin: ‘Diese Fermentation wird bald verrichtet/ in gar wenig Tagen: darauff folget dann Transmutatio per Projectionem, in einem Nu und Huy.’]”

²⁶ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 83-84: “[Margin: ‘Der nasse Weg’] Der andere Weg ist: So *Materia Catholica* *Prima* Naturgemäß-Alchymisch erst *plusquamperficiret*/ oder mehr denn vollkommen gemacht/ das ist/ durch den Weg der Naturgemäß-künstlichen Wiedergeburt glorificiret soll werden; daß nehmlich Metallisch Silber oder Gold in Pri-materialischen AZOTH (als *FONTINA Catholica*, davon der König/ *h.e.* Gold anfänglich gemacht ist) auffgelöset/ durch *MATERIAM PRIMAM*, das ist/ durch *unctuosam humiditatem*, oder *Mercurium Philosophorum*, in *Materiam primam*, in *Mercurium*, in *unctuosam humiditatem* (die sie vor ihrer *Coagulation* auch waren) widerum bracht werden/ und Naturgemäß-künstlich/ *in justa proportione*

conjungiret/ auch nach dem Process/ so dieser so wohl als der Universal-Stein/ in seiner andern praeparation, gehalten haben will/ zugleich mit einander sterben/ faulen/ geschwärtzt/ coagulirt/ firet/ geweisset oder gerother/ und inceriret/ das ist/ Waxflüssig gemacht werden.”

²⁷ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 145.

²⁸ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 67, 79-80 *et passim*.

²⁹ Vladimír Karpenko, “The Chemistry and Metallurgy of Transmutation,” *Ambix*, Vol. 39, Part 2, July 1992, pp. 55-56.

³⁰ Karpenko, “The Chemistry and Metallurgy of Transmutation,” pp. 49-55.

³¹ Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569-1622)*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003, pp. 248-249.

³² Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 270, 271, 280-281. Anti-Semitism was prevalent in early modern Germany, and was fostered amongst Protestants above all by Luther’s antagonistic writings concerning Jews and Judaism. Adherence to the Kabbalah also went quite happily hand-in-hand with anti-Semitism: Khunrath’s Christian Kabbalah is ultimately derived from Pico della Mirandola, whose *Conclusiones* (1486) Khunrath cites at the end of the introduction to *Vom Chaos* (p. 8)(*verso*). According to Moshe Idel, Pico advocated “censure if the Kabbalah does not correspond to Christianity, its exploitation as a missionary tool if it does agree with Christianity, or its dispossession if it is found to possess something valuable that is missing in Christianity.” Moshe Idel, “Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates’ Renaissance”, in *Ésotérisme, gnosés et imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, ed. Richard Caron, Joscelyn Godwin, Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron. Peeters: Leuven, 2001, p. 76.

³³ Karpenko, “The Chemistry and Metallurgy of Transmutation,” pp. 59-60; the fact that Khunrath devotes *Vom Chaos* to a description of the lesser Stones, and that he speaks of the great Stone in terms of the credible testimony of others, seems to bear out this assertion. See Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 82-83.

³⁴ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 142-143, 145.

³⁵ Michael Maier, *De Medicina Regia et vere heroica, Coelidonia*, Copenhagen, Royal Library, MS 12,-159, 4°. Prague: n.p., 1609, p. 93.

³⁶ See Julius Ruska, *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze: Ein Grundwerk der Spätlateinischen Alchemie*, Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1935, p. 91-92.

³⁷ Alexandre T. de Limojon de Saint-Didier, *Le triomphe hermetique, ou La pierre philosophale victorieuse. Traitté plus complet & plus intelligible, qu’il en ait eu jusques ici, touchant le magistère hermetique*, Amsterdam: chez Henry Wetstein, 1689: “...pourquoy ne te faches-tu pas plustost contre Dieu, et pourquoy ne lui demandes-tu pas, pour quelles raisons, il n’a pas créé en toy, ce qui se trouve en moy?... tu n’es pas cet Or, dont les écrits des Philosophes font mention; mais cet Or est caché dans mon sein... aussi s’en trouve-t-il à peine un entre cent, qui travaille avec moy. Ils s’appliquent tous à chercher (la verité) de l’art dans toy, et dans ton frere Mercure: c’est pourquoy ils errent tous, et c’est en cela que leurs travaux sont faux. Ils en font eux-mesmes un (bel) exemple:

car c'est inutilement qu'ils emploient leur Or, et qu'ils tâchent de le détruire: il ne leur reste de tout cela, que l'extrême pauvreté, à laquelle ils se trouvent enfin réduits. C'est toy Or, qui es la première cause (de ce malheur,) tu sçais fort bien que sans moy, il est impossible de faire aucun or, ni aucun argent, qui soient parfaits; et qu'il n'y a que moy seule, qui aye ce (merveilleux) avantage.”

³⁸ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 71-72.

³⁹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 141-142: “Es kan *Aurum vulgi sive Metallicum* nicht warhafftig und Naturgemäß-künstlich *Potabile* gemacht werden/ ohne *Aurum Philosophorum*. Ohne Dieses ist Jenes in *Medicina* nicht vollkommen würckende/ will geschweigen in *Alchymia*. *Aurum potabile Philosophorum Catholicon*, wird nicht von gemeinem Metallischen Golde *præpariret*, sondern nur alleine ex *Magnesia*. Der Rothe unverbrennliche *Sulphur Magnesiae* ist *Aurum Philosophorum*. *Animam Magnesiae* nennet Hermes *Aurum*... Aus unserer Catholischen Saturnischen Erde oder *Minera Magnesiae*, wird Unser Gold und Silber *Sulphur* und *Mercurius*/ geschmeltzt und gezogen... Diese beide *componiret* in wässeriger Gestalt/ seind *Azoth sive Mercurius Phil. Universalis*.”

⁴⁰ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 79-80: “*Lapis Philosophorum Specialis et parvus*, so nur entweder Lunarisch oder Solarisch/ das ist/ Silberisch oder Guldisch gewißgeartet/ ein Silber- oder Gold-Stein alleine ist/ und eigentlich *Tinctura Speciale*, verstehe/ METALLISCH Silber oder Gold: Sintemahl ohne Metallisch Silber oder Gold kein Metallisch Silber oder Gold/ Naturgemäß Alchymistisch kan zuwegebracht werden; dieweil *Argenteitas*, die Silberkeit/ alleine im Silber/ (es sey nun gleich nur kaum Metallisch embryoniret/ oder aber allbereit *perfect*, gediegen oder geschmeltzt) und *Aureitas*, die Guldigkeit (gesagter gleicher Gestalt) im Golde ist; Auch den gewissen Ordnungen und bräuchlichem Lauff der Natur nach/ gleiches seines Gleichen herfür gibt; Darum man auch erndtet solches/ wie man gesäet.”

⁴¹ Cf. the ‘Tractatus Aureus’ from the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 1624 (translated by Arthur Edward Waite from the expanded 1678 edition as the *Hermetic Museum Restored and Enlarged*, London: James Elliot, 1893, pp. 13-14): “‘But nothing,’ says our Richard, in his first chapter, ‘can be got out of a thing which is not in it. Therefore every species, every genus, every natural order, is naturally developed within its own limits, bearing fruit after its own kind, and not within some other essentially different order: everything in which seed is sown must correspond to its own seed... a thing can be developed and improved only by that which belongs to its own nature... If any one wished to change a man into a horse, an apple into a lettuce, a diamond or any other jewel into gold, he would make an enormous mistake.’”

⁴² Abu’l-Qāsim Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Irāqī, *Book of the Knowledge Acquired Concerning the Cultivation of Gold*, trans. E. J. Holmyard, Paul Gauthner: Paris, 1923, pp. 11-12.

⁴³ On the subject of this debate, see H. M. E. de Jong, *Michael Maier’s Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969, pp. 17, 155-157.

⁴⁴ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 59-61; p. 80: “Und hat derenthalben auch seinen gewissen *Usum specialem*, Silberisch oder Güldisch/ *Medicinalem*, beydes die unteren Metalla in Silber oder Gold zu verwandeln/ und auch (nach Vermögen derer Special-Silberischen oder Güldischen Kräfte und Tugenden/ so Gott/ durch die Natur/ in diese beyde Metalla gelegt) Kranckheiten der Menschlichen Leiber/ und anderer Thieren zu vertreiben.”

⁴⁵ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 75: “Leo ist *devorans Aurum*; der Goldfresser; so nicht alleine das Gold verschlinget/ sondern auch verdauet/ und aus seiner Metallität zerstöret/ daß es forthin kein Metall ist/ noch wird;” p. 196: “...unser Mercurium ist Leo *jam Viridis*, *jam Ruber*, *Lunam et Solem devorans*, der jetzt Grüne/ bald Rothe/ das Silber und Gold verschlingende Löw. Philosophus: Wer das Metallische Gold weiß zu zerstören/ daß forthin kein Metall mehr ist/ der kommt zu einem grossen Geheimnuß.”

⁴⁶ Robert Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*, London: Crooke, 1661, p. 180.

⁴⁷ Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*, p. 181.

⁴⁸ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Aspiring Adept - Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 43, 62.

⁴⁹ Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*, p. 174.

⁵⁰ Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*, p. 179.

⁵¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 56-57: “Daß ich hab in acht genommen die Grüne/ die gantze Welt Catholisch durchgehende Natürliche Lineam [*sic*; I have taken this to be a typographical error for *Leonem*] der Cabalisten/ Catholisch: Daß ich hab gerochen und geschmacket die Gesegnete der Naturgemässen Magorum Natürliche Grüne/ so alle Natürliche Dinge Natürlich zeuget/ in ihr wachsen und grünen treibet. Lieber! wie düncket dich nu? Wer gesehen hat/ den Grünen alle Natürliche Dinge überwindenden Catholischen Löwen der Natur/ aus den Höhlen seines Saturnischen Catholischen Berges und Erden künstlich herfür locken/ und herausser ziehen; Ihn gerochen und geprüft; So wohl auch von und aus demselben sein Rosenfarbes Blut! Kan und mag derselbe nicht billig/ als ein erfahrner/ vor andern/ so nichts gründliches darum wissen/ darvon reden?”

⁵² Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 193: “Jetzt wird nun gefragt/ worein man Silber oder Gold Naturgemäß-künstlich säen solle und müsse/ auff daß sie wieder und Neugeboren/ fruchtbarlich vermehret/ und (auff ihre Weise) hochnützlich verbessert und vervielfältiget werden.”

⁵³ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 40-41, 139.

⁵⁴ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 193-194.

⁵⁵ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 194: “...die *Metalla* aber können in ihre erste *Materiam* nicht widerum bracht werden/ als durch die Erste *Materiam*, das ist/ durch Mercurius/ nicht *vulgi*, sondern den Erstwelt-anfangs Allgemeinen/ welcher ist Mercurius der Weisen.” Compare Martin Ruland, *Lexikon Alchemiae sive Dictionarium Alchymisticum*, Frankfurt am Main: Zacharias Paltenius, pp. 96-97: “Azoth est argentum vivum, ex quouis corpore metallico tractum: & proprie Mercurius corporeus, Mercurius corporis metallici... Theophrastus nennet seiner fürnembste Artzney eine also: Vermeinen etliche/ es sey *Lapis philosophicus* gewesen. Der Azoth wird auß den Körpern gezogen durch

Mercurium/ und wird genennt *Spiritus animatus*, ein geseelter Geist/ *aqua nostra*, Essig &c... *Geber: Azoth* ist der Mercurius/ welcher von den Cörpern durch den *Mercurium Philosophorum* außgezogen wirdt. Ist also und werde *Azoth* ein *Elixir*, *id est*, ein auffgelöster Cörper in dem Mercurialischem Wasser. Heist auff Arabisch *Azoth* ein auffgelöst Silber, &c.”

⁵⁶ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 194: “Es sey dann/ daß das Korn *corporis Auri vel Argenti* werde geworffen in sein allererstes Wesen/ sonst arbeitestu umsonst.”

⁵⁷ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 141-142; see citation above, n. 39.

⁵⁸ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 56; also Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595 edition), p. 17; for the Duenech allegory, see the *Theatrum Chemicum*, Vol. 3, Ursel: Zetzner, 1602, pp. 756-757.

⁵⁹ Eilhard Wiedemann, *Aufsätze zur arabischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Vol. 1, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1970, p. 25; Morienus Romanus, *A Testament of Alchemy*, ed. and trans. Lee Stavenhagen, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1974, p. 43, n. 58.

⁶⁰ Andreas Cassius, *De extremo illo et perfectissimo naturae opificio ac principe terranorum sidere auro* (hereafter *De Auro*), Hamburg: Georg Wolff, 1685, p. 97: “Nimirum auri drachmae duae solvantur in aqua regis; solvantur itidem aeris viridis unciae duae in aceto destillato: Confundantur solutiones, et dein largissime affusa aqua fontana in vitro per aliquot dies quiescere permittantur: apparebunt filamenta adinstar fili serici per liquoris compagem dispersa, et aurum sensim in atomos minutissimos pulcherrimi splendoris aurei, pro scopo pictorio utiles, praecipitabitur et fundum petet.”

⁶¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 66-67.

⁶² Johann Joachim Becher, *Supplementum Secundum in Physicam Subterraneam*, Frankfurt am Main: Johann David Zunner, 1675, p.29-30: “Idem contingit in auro, quod si in aqua Regis solvas, addasque Mercurium abstrahendo liquorem ad salis consistentiam, eamque in spiritu aceti resolvendo, filtrando, purgando, et denuo inspissando ad consistentiam, quae cerae instar fluet, ac quodvis argentum etiam in talerorum crassitie in aurum transmutabit, modo candescat citra fusionem, idque cum augmento auri, quae experimenta ideo tantum adduco, ut aperte clareat, aurum vel argentum non alterare nec transmutare metalla, quamdiu in statu soliditatis sunt, verum cum primum subtiliantur, ut penetrare possint, illa statim juxta gradum suę penetrantiae in metalla agere, eaque alterare et transmutare...”

⁶³ Becher recommended smelting silver *Thaler* with sea-sand using certain salts as a flux. The Brabant *Thaler* he used in his demonstrations probably contained small amounts of gold; see Karpenko, “The Chemistry and Metallurgy of Transmutation,” p. 50. Gold can in fact be extracted conveniently from sand with the help of quicksilver - but only if the sand contains gold in the first place!

⁶⁴ In Becher’s work, the Paracelsian principle of combustibility (Sulphur) became a *terra pinguis* (‘fatty earth’), which was renamed phlogiston by Stahl; on the subject of gold-making with sand, see Pamela H. Smith, *The Business of Alchemy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 253-255.

⁶⁵ Hans-Werner Schütt, *Auf der Suche nach dem Stein der Weisen*, Munich: C. H.

Beck, 2000, p. 499.

⁶⁶ Becher, *Supplementum Secundum*, pp. 28-29: “Porro solvatur argentum in aqua forti vel spiritu nitri, abstrahatur solutio lento calore ad consistentiam salis, quod postea solvatur aliquoties spiritu aceti, semper abstrahendo et resolvendo tandem cum spiritu vini sic procedatur, ultimo relinquitur in spiritu vini sal argenti sine abstractione, hic spir. vini sine ulla corrosione, aut violentia, instillatur argento vivo communi, quasi in momento illud figit, ac in argentum transmutat...”

⁶⁷ Becher, *Supplementum Secundum*, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁸ Becher, *Supplementum Secundum*, p. 14; Schütt, *Auf der Suche nach dem Stein der Weisen*, pp. 132-133.

⁶⁹ Becher, *Supplementum Secundum*, pp. 25-27.

⁷⁰ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 66 ff.

⁷¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 70: “Dieweil dann alle und jede wahre Philosophi/ aus gutem Natürlichem Grunde und eigner Erfahrung/ das Quecksilber in ihren Schrifftten (als zu ihrem Universal-Werck/ an und vor sich selbst/ und auch hohen Special/ aus Gold oder Silber güldischen oder Silberischen die *imperfecta Metalla in perfecta* Tingirenden Steinen/ so nur alleine Azoth daraus zubereitet werden/ gantz undienlich) mit einhelliger Stimme verwerffen und verdammen/ auch aus ihren *Laboratoriis* dißfalls relegiren und verweisen...” etc.

⁷² Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 67: “Die Arg-Chymisten wolten Quecksilber gerne einschieben und substituiren/ daß es Mercurius *Philosophorum* seyn solte/ es gehet ihnen aber bey wahren Naturkündigern nicht an/ man kennet (Gott lob) ihre Possen. [Margin: Quecksilber soll Gerne Mercurius heissen. Wie der Teuffel sich in ein Engel des Lichts verhellet, und grossen Schaden thut...]”

⁷³ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 66-67, 69.

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Schneider, *Lexikon alchemistisch-pharmazeutischer Symbole*, Weinheim: Verlag Chemie, 1981, p. 80.

⁷⁵ In his *Chrysopoeia*, (manuscripts published in Hamburg: Heil, 1718, p. 51), Schwaertzer also mentions a means of producing a ‘ferment’ of gold indispensable for the production of the Philosophers’ Stone by means of tetrachloroauric acid and potassium carbonate (*oleum tartari per deliquum*, K_2CO_3) - a rather dangerous procedure, as these are the ingredients of the high explosive known as *Blitzgold* or fulminating gold. See Willhelm Ganzenmüller, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Technologie und der Alchemie*, Weinheim: Verlag Chemie, 1956, p. 111. The wife of Christian I of Saxony, Sophie von Brandenburg (1568-1622), became Elector after her husband’s death; and the fact that Conrad Khunrath dedicated his *Vier Schöne Medicische Tractat* (1597) to her may also point to the circles in which his brother Heinrich moved whilst he was in Leipzig and Magdeburg. The harsh words Heinrich directed towards Thomas Erastus, the prominent Calvinist theologian, are at least congruent with the campaign waged against crypto-Calvinism in Saxony by Elector Sophie.

⁷⁶ Schwaertzer, *Chrysopoeia* (cited in Kunckel, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum*, p. 292).

⁷⁷ Schwaertzer, *Chrysopoeia* (cited in Kunckel, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum*,

p. 293).

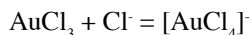
⁷⁸ Cassius, *De Auro*, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁹ Cassius, *De Auro*, p. 97.

⁸⁰ The reaction of *aqua regia* with gold to produce tetrachloroauric acid proceeds in two stages:



Whilst the chemical equilibrium established by treating gold with *aqua fortis* or nitric acid alone allows only a negligible amount of trivalent gold cations (positively charged ions, Au⁺⁺⁺) to form, the generation of chloride ions in *aqua regia* produces a cascading reaction which leads on to the formation of the stable tetrachloroaurate complex ion:



See Egon Wiber and A. F. Holleman, *Lehrbuch der anorganischen Chemie*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971, p. 565; also E. Zschimmer, "Der Goldrubin," *Sprechsaal für Keramik, Glas- und verwandte Industrien*, Vol. 63, No. 34, October 1930, p. 642. H[AuCl₄] or tetrachloroauric acid forms the golden-yellow or red crystals which the author of *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (see below, n. 98) found at the bottom of his vessel once he had reduced a solution of gold in *aqua regia* to an oily 'phlegm' and set it aside in a cool place. The production of red crystals of gold chloride was first described with precision by Cassius in *De Auro*, p. 100 f.; Johann Juncker, *Conspectus Chemiae Theoretico-Practicae*, Vol. 2, Halle: In Verlegung des Waisenhauses, 1750 (original Latin edition 1738), p. 282, describes the production of red gold crystals through the reduction of tetrachloroauric acid to a 'phlegm'; Peter Joseph Macquer, *Chymisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 2, Leipzig: M. G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1781 (French edition first published in 1766), p. 702, describes the growth of yellow crystals similar to topaz when tetrachloroauric acid is left to cool. According to Juncker (*Conspectus Chemiae*, Vol. 2, p. 282), such crystals "smell like violets".

⁸¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 93-94: "Es ist ein Wunder-Ding mit euch Alchymistischen Künstlern; Ihr brauchet neben Metallischen Silber oder Gold/ auch Quecksilber/ *Mercurios* (wie mans pflegt zu nennen) *Corporum Argenti vel Aurum Corporeos, Aquas fortes, Aquam Regis, Aquas Salium Nitri, Gemma* oder *Communis; Spiritus Vini, Urinae, Sulphuris, Antimonii etc.* Und andere dergleichen Dinge/ auch sehr wunderbarliche/ beydes einfache und *componirte* starcke scharffe Wasser/ müssen auch mit herhalten: Warum thut ihr dieses? ists nicht wahr/ ihr vermeint wahre *Solutiones Argenti* und *Auri* dardurch zu erlangen? Da ihr doch die *Metalla* also nicht *radicaliter et interne* solviret/ sondern darinnen nur zerbeisset und zerstreuet in gar Subtile Theile/ die nachfolgends zu Metallischen Silber und Gold/ durch bequeme Reduction wiederum können geschmelzt werden." On Khunrath's censure of various acids as candidates for the Universal Mercury, see below, n. 124.

⁸² See, for example, Macquer, *Chymisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 2, p. 699; Johann Joachim Becher, *Chymischer Glücks-Hafen*, Frankfurt am Main: Johann Georg Schiele, 1672, p. 535, gives 10 *Loten* (160 grams) sal ammoniac to 1 pound (500 grams) of *aqua fortis*.

⁸³ E.g. Lazarus Ercker, *Aula Subterranea, d.i. Beschreibung Allerfürnemisten Mineralischen Ertz- unnd Bergwercks arten*, Frankfurt am Main: Feyerabend, 1580, p. 68.

⁸⁴ On this matter see Edmund O. von Lippmann, *Entstehung und Ausbreitung der Alchemie*, Vol. 1, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1919, pp. 487-488.

⁸⁵ Used to warm the vessel without applying the direct heat of the fire.

⁸⁶ See Macquer, *Chymisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 2, p. 699, who also mentions the heating of gold leaf together with alum, saltpetre and sodium chloride, thus making a 'kind of *Königswasser* which is named the quiet solvent, *menstruum sine strepitu*, because it dissolves the gold without any noise' (p. 708). For related techniques for dissolving metals, see Conrad Gesner, *The treasure of Evonymus Conteyninge the wonderfull hid secretes of nature*, London: Daie, 1559, p. 318 and Georg Agricola, *De Re Metallica Libri XII*, Berlin: VDI-Verlag, 1928 (German translation of the 1556 Basel edition), pp. 384-385.

⁸⁷ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 84-85: "Die nachgesetzten Philosophi aber haben durch Säung ihres Metallischen *Grani* oder Körnleins in den Universal-Acker/ als in die Wässerige Azotische *Materiam Primam*, das ist/ durch künstliche Zusammensetzung Metallisches Silber oder Gold/ und *Mercurium Philosophorum Catholici*, stracks in erster ihres Wercks Einrichtung die Fermentation verrichtet/ und also gesagte Metalla darinnen Naturgemäß-Alchymisch/ nach dem Universal-Proceß/ mit und zugleich regeneriret/ und *plusquamperficiret*/ oder mehr dann vollkommen gemacht/ und ihre specificirten Silberische oder aber Güldische Philosophischen *perfect* transmutirende/ auch die Fleischlichen Körper Medicinaliter fruchtbarlich operirende Steine und Tincturen (die sie suchten) überkommen." See also n. 81 above.

⁸⁸ The manuscript, *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674 (17 pp.), was used as the basis for another tract of the same name printed in the *Alchimia Vera* of 1604 (see endnote 103 below), and it also contains a reference (p. 5) to a work attributed to Hortulanus (Martinus Ortulanus, a 14th century commentator on the *Tabula Smaragdina*) entitled *Studium Consilii Coniugij de massa Solis et Lunae*, which first appeared in print in *Ars Chemica*, Strasbourg: Emmel, 1566 (although it had probably circulated for some time prior to this date in manuscript form). The testimony of an unknown hand given on the title-page of *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* ("I have seen the Latin manuscript, Cologne 1514") is of dubious worth, as the tract mentions a *mercurius praecipitatus* (mercuric oxide, HgO) or 'angel powder' first described by Niccolò Massa in his *De morbo gallico liber*, which was only published in 1527. According to Carlos Gilly of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam, the same *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* is bound together with a manuscript copy of the 'tenth book' of the *Archidoxes* of Paracelsus in the Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, Ms. Q 462, ff. 86 *recto* -101 *verso*, alongside other tracts transcribed

by the same hand (including a recipe entitled “Goltt in ein durchsichtig Glaß zu transmutiren”, f. 81 verso); interestingly, the title *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* is also given to the ‘tenth book’ of the *Archidoxes* (ff. 63 recto - 81 recto), although it is not clear that this work actually stems from Paracelsus; on the matter of its authenticity, see Karl Sudhoff, *Versuch einer Kritik der Echtheit der Paracelsischen Schriften*, Vol. 2, Berlin: Reimer, 1899, pp. 174-176; on its transmission see Carlos Gilly, *Adam Haslmayr: Der erste Verkünder der Manifeste der Rosenkreuzer*, Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 1994, pp. 93-105). The ascription of Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674 to Heinrich Khunrath on the front page of the manuscript stems from its eighteenth century owner, Rudolph Johann Friedrich Schmidt, who cites the following words of the Paracelsian alchemist Ludwig Combach from the foreword of the compendium *Tractatus aliquot chemici singulares summum philosophorum arcanum continentis* (1647), Hofgeismar: Sebald Köhler, 1647, p. 13: “Erat... in manibus opusculum Dr. Henrici Khunrath Lipsens, Lux Lucens in tenebris, Germanice scriptum, Isagogicum plaene et tyronibus procul dubio utilissimum, quod dignum iudicabam ut primum locum inter hosce tractatulos occuparet, eaque de causa in Latinam linguam transfundere volebam, quo Philochemia haberent quasi Mercurium aliquem in bivio, legitimam viam monstrantem, sed nescio quo casu exciderit libellus ille, ut hisce nundinis publicari non potuerit.” [“I had to hand a little work by Dr. Heinrich Khunrath of Leipzig, *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, written in German, a clear introduction and without doubt most useful for beginners, which I deemed to be deserving of the first place amongst these tracts, and for that reason I wanted to translate it into the Latin tongue, so that lovers of chemia might possess it, like some Mercury at a cross-road indicating the right direction. But I do not know by which circumstance that little book happened to vanish, so it could not be made available for the markets.”] According to Gilly, Schmidt made the ascription “without knowing that the true *Lux in Tenebris* of Khunrath had already appeared in print in 1614” (and I cite here from a list of “false ascriptions” in a draft of Carlos Gilly’s forthcoming edition of Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, kindly supplied to me by the author). Whilst Gilly surmises that “neither the language nor the content” of the Hamburg *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* allow it to be simply declared as a work of Khunrath’s, there are in fact some striking similarities on both counts (see the following endnotes), and the lack of certain key terminology could be ascribed to the length of Khunrath’s career (according to *Vom Chaos*, p.)(4 recto, he began his study of alchemy at the age of 13). One might also point to the fact that the work of Khunrath mentioned by Gilly is entitled *Lux in Tenebris* (s.l., 1614, Copenhagen KB, GKS 1765 4°, 141r-151v, and Erlangen UB, Ms. B 266) rather than *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*; nevertheless, the fact that Combach mentions Mercury at a cross-road and that Khunrath’s *Lux in Tenebris* is described on its title-page as a “*Wegweisung*” settles the matter decisively, and it is surely incumbent on any researcher to prove rather than disprove its supposed authorship by Khunrath.

⁸⁹ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), pp. 11-

12: “Darumb ist die Seele ein band des geistes, gleich wie der geist ein band der seelen ist, noch dennoch ist der band nichts gegen dem bande der Natur, Verckehren alles zu waßer werden mus, wil man etwas guttes damit außbrichten, daher den der Philosophen saget. Solviret die Körper in unser quecksilber welches ist das waßer der Kunst, und wird im bestendig waßer. Den gleich wie in erschaffung der welt alles waßer gewesen, und der Geist Gottes darauff geschwebt: Also ist es auch in anfrage dieses werckes in der solution...”; *ibid*, p. 6: “...den es ist gewis das ein iegliches ding von dem und auß dem herkommt, in welches es gehet in seiner auflösung.” Cf. Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p.194: “Sintemahl nichts Natürlicher ist/ als daß ein Ding durch dasjenige/ darauß oder darvon es gemacht ist/ in dasselber wiederum auffgelöset werde.” For Khunrath’s correspondences between Genesis 1 and alchemical process, see his *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 17.

⁹⁰ See endnote 152 below.

⁹¹ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 7: “Den so bald du solches Mercurium Solis hast, so glaube festiglich, das du in kurtzen zeit und mit wenig muhe eine solche Medicin den Menschlichen Körper damit zu vernewen und zu restituiren oder wieder aufzubringen draus machen kanst, das auch keine krankheit, sie sey wie sie wolle, außhalb derer die einem Menschen durch die vorsehung Gottes alß eine Straffe, der sunden auferleget verstehen mag”; *ibid*, p. 13: “Wen du nun siehest das es also coaguliret und beginnet stiller zu stehen, auch nicht mehr aufsteiget, so hat die Natur die wahre Philosophische vereinigung zu volbringen angefangen, den es wird immer dicker und die Element sambt der Seeles mit dem Geiste fügen den Spiritual Körper zusahmen und vereinigen sich, wird also das rechte oleum incombustibile daraus, zu welches so du ein glüendes silberblech stecket, so wird von stunden an Gold darauß.” Cf. Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 145.

⁹² *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 5, where Sol is given as *super omnia lucens*.

⁹³ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 1: “Wie aber über solchen Göttlichen willen und wolthat in diesen letzten Zeiten alle dinge in verachtung stehen und ein jeder nur auf sein selbst eher und nutz trachtet, daneben Gottes und seine Kreatur vergiset, auch also dem aller unreinesten, das ist dem Teuffel dienet, das ist fur augen. Ist deshalb kein wunder, das wir bißweilen Gottes ernstliche straffe daruber dulden und leiden müssen”; *ibid*, p. 3: “...man wolle dieses buchlein das lästermauler nicht zukommen lassen, sondern der Philosophorum meinung nach geheim halten, und fur eine sonderliche gabe Gottes bewahren.”

⁹⁴ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 1: “Es habe aber unter den heyden die alten wahren Philosophi und Magi solche schöpfung hoher betrachtet, und gantz emsig derselben tag und nacht wargenommen...” Cf. Heinrich Khunrath, *De Igne Magorum Philosophorumque secreto externo et visibili*, Straßburg: Zetzner, 1608, p. 22: “Freylich ist (als auß vorhero gesagten/ und auch nachfolgenden übrig gnugsam erscheinet) etlichen uhralten/ mit bey und unter den Heyden/ jedoch nit allerdings Heydnisch/ sondern in Tugenden

und guten wercken der Liebe gegen den nechsten villeicht besser Christlich als etwan heutigs tages etliche auch Geistlich genante vermeinte und Maulchristen/ lebenden und wohnenden SOPHIS, daß ist/ Weisen/ alß auch Naturkündigen/ unnd von Gott gelehrten MAGIS...”

⁹⁵ See endnote 88 above.

⁹⁶ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 1:

“Gebenedeÿet sei der nahme des Herren von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit den er hat der weißheit und kraftt grundgelegt, Er verendert zeit und alter, bestetiget setzet und versetzt die Reiche der welt, er giebet verstand den Klugen und weißheit den Weisen, er offenbahret das tieffe und verborgene, und kennet das so im finsternuß und dunkeln wohnt und mitt Ihm ist das liecht. Herr bei dir ist der brun des lebens und in deinem liechte werden wir erleuchtet und sehen wie du alles durch deine gebenedeÿete weisheit wunderbahrllich geordnet hast, dir Gott der Väter dancke ich, dich lobe ich daß du mir verstand und kraftt gegeben, und mir gezeigt hast dieses, darumb ich gebeten.” [“Blessed be the name of the Lord from eternity to eternity, for He has laid the foundations for wisdom and power. He changes time and epochs, He sanctions, installs and overthrows the empires of the world, He gives knowledge to those who have understanding and wisdom to the wise, He reveals that which is deep and hidden, and knows that which lies in dusk and darkness, and the light is with Him. Lord, the fountain of life is with you, and in your light we are enlightened and see how you have miraculously ordered all that there is through your blessed wisdom. I thank you, God the Father, I praise you for giving me understanding and power, and for showing me that which I have prayed for.”] Cf. *Daniel* 2.20-23, *Psalms* 36.9; in the works of Paracelsus the Light of Nature refers to a principle that constitutes and penetrates Nature, as well as a principle standing ‘behind Nature’ by which the constitution of humans and things in the world is made meaningful. The fountain of life mentioned by the author of *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* in his prayer had already been transposed from its Biblical context into the alchemical literature in the Middle Ages, where it denotes the life-impacting distillation processes within the alchemist’s vessel, which itself is a microcosm of God’s Creation.

⁹⁷ See endnote 89 above.

⁹⁸ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 6: “Nimm fein golt durch die quartier oder Antimonium zum allerhöchsten gereiniget, solches solvire in einem starken Aqua Regis zu Crystallen, das geschieht, wen die phlegma oder das Aqua Regis biß auf die olitet abgezogen und solche solutio in eine Kuhle stätt gesetzt wird.”

⁹⁹ Agricola gives a very clear description of the manufacture and use of *aqua fortis* or *Scheidewasser* in his *De Re Metallica*, pp. 381 ff.; cf. Gesner, *The Treasure of Evonymus*, pp. 320 f. Potash alum is a synonym for potassium aluminum sulfate; the vitriol (metallic sulfate) utilised was commonly iron sulfate.

¹⁰⁰ See Christophe Glaser, *Traité de la chymie, enseignant par une brève et facile méthode toutes ses plus nécessaires préparations*, Paris: Jean d’Hovry,

1668, pp. 84-87.

¹⁰¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 73-75: "...haben die Philosophi die Schwärzte ihres Catholischen Wercks/ Bley/ *Antimonium* und den Raben-Kopff genant/ nur Vergleichungs-weise/ wegen der schwarzen Farbe/ und gar nicht/ daß es aus Metallischem Bley/ Mineralischem *Antimonio*, oder aber eines Raben Haupt gemacht solle werden/... Ach Gott! was für eine Antimonialische *Pestis* regiert heutiges Tages nicht nur alleine unter den gemeinen Arg-Chymisten/ sondern auch bey sehr vielen derer/ die etwas studiert und vermeinen die Kunst gar mit Löffeln gefressen zu haben? Quecksilber hat nun fast bey vielen den Glauben verlohren/ jetzo soll *Antimonium* das beste thun. Ach ihr elenden Antimonialisten/ wie habt ihr doch im Licht der Natur so gar keinen Grund! Wäre *Antimonium*, oder etwas aus ihme/ der Löw der Philosophen/ so fresse er das Metallische Gold so wohl auch/ als die andern Metallen... das es forthin kein Metall ist/ noch wird."

¹⁰² *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674), p. 6: "Dieselbe Crystallen mache durch gebührliche putrefaction und zugethane mittel zu einem Mercurio wie dir bewust, so hastu das Corpus Solis das erste mahl gebrochen, und in die erste nahe materiam gebracht."

¹⁰³ *Lux Lucens in Tenebris*, in *Alchimia Vera*, ed. I. P. S. M. S., s.l.: I. P. S. M. S., 1604, pp. 84-85: "Erstlich solte das fein Gold durch Quartier oder Antimonium zum aller höchsten reinigen/ Solviren in seinem eignen Wasser als denn die Phlegma abgezogen biß auff die Olitet/ dann sol die Solution sampt der Olitet in ein kühl und feucht Ort gesetzt werden/ so lange/ biß das solvirte Gold zu Cristall geschlossen schön und hell/ [cf. note 98 above] welche/ nach deme sie erschienen/ sollen sie durch gebührliche Mittel der *Putrefaction* und *Sublimation*, *decies reiteratam distillationem et deinde affusionem Quinta Essentiae Tartarisata cum Tartaro albocalci: per 42. dies putref. et postea ignis forti per 24. horas Sublimetur* in einen weissen darnach resuscitirten verwandelt werden wird/ welcher dann die *proxima materia lapidis Philosophorum* ist/ zu tingiren die Menschen und die Metall." The priority of the Hamburg manuscript ascribed to Khunrath is suggested by the manner in which the name of this medium has been inserted into the text in place of "wie dir bewust" (see previous endnote); what is more, if the printed text were anterior to the manuscript then the manuscript's author would have no cause for secrecy concerning the medium's identity. Interestingly, the tract in *Alchimia Vera* dispenses with the employment of acrostics, condemnation of calumniators, praise of the ancient *magi* and devotional employment of Biblical passages to be found in *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod. Alchim. 674). Further textual correspondences between the tracts are to be found on the following pages: pp. 89-90 (*Alchimia Vera* tract) p. 7 (Hamburg SUB tract); 90: 9; 92: 9; 93: 9; 94: 9; 97: 10; 97: 12; 97: 10-11; 98-99: 12, 101: 13,17; 104: 13; 105-106: 14-15; 108: 15; 108-109: 17; 111: 8; 112: 17. For Khunrath's repudiation of *oleum tartari*, see his *Consilium* (as in the following endnote), p. 9 verso; for Schwaertzer's procedure, see note 75 above. The *quinta essentia* in question may well also be *spiritus tartari*, a dilute solution of methylsuccinic and citric acids: see

Schneider, *Lexikon alchemistisch-pharmazeutischer Symbole*, pp. 82, 89.

¹⁰⁴ Prince August was the half-brother of the prominent Calvinist intellectual and general, Prince Christian of Anhalt-Bernburg (1568-1630), the military commander of the German Calvinists and their allies amongst the Lutheran states in the early years of the Thirty Years War.

¹⁰⁵ Heinrich Khunrath, *Consilium Philosophicum Practicum*, Halle ULB, Ms. 14 A 12 (2), p. 6 verso; for a comprehensive bibliography of Khunrath's printed works and manuscripts, as well as spurious works, see Carlos Gilly's forthcoming edition of Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, to be published by Frommann-Holzboog.

¹⁰⁶ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 5 recto - 6 recto: "Ich bezeuge es mit Gott, der ein herz kündiger ist... das E. f. G. der aller erste mensch sey, deme uf dieser weitten ganzen weld Ich solch geheimnis vom philosophischen CLAVE MAGNESIAE (mündlich) offenbart, wil geschweigen in Schriften mitteile. Ja, Ich habe mich denselben vor mich also und derogestalt noch nicht aufgeschrieben, als itzo vor E. f. G. Ich gethan habe. Solcher massen ist Er zuvor von mihr noch nie zu papier gebracht."

¹⁰⁷ *Alchemie: Lexikon einer hermetischen Wissenschaft*, Claus Priesner and Karin Figala (eds.), München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1998, entry for 'Magnesia'.

¹⁰⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://emedial.bsb-muenchen.de/han/OED/dictionary.oed.com/>, entry for 'Magnesia'; William Salmon, *Medicina Practica*, London: T. Howkins, 1692, p. 217.

¹⁰⁹ Heinrich Khunrath, *Naturall Chymicall Symbolum*, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1459, II, p. 101 (this is Elias Ashmole's copy of the English translation of Khunrath's *Symbolum Physico-Chymicum... de Chao Physico-Chemicorum Catholico...*, Hamburg: Heinrich Binders Erben, 1598).

¹¹⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 8 recto - 8 verso.

¹¹¹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 27 recto - 27 verso: "Es wurde sich erzeigen das DUENECH Liquidem, den die philosophi von schreiben; ja man würde überkommen das lieblich riechende Aromatische saltz der weisen; ja auch Acetum acerrimum und das volkommene philosophische Gold der weisen, als den Adern und geheimbsten SCHLUSSEL zu den Metallen, Gesteinen und welches, nach leher der philosophen, das gemeine Metallische Gold in einen eittelen Geist verwandelt."

¹¹² Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, p. 489, n. 24.

¹¹³ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 14 verso - 15 recto: "Man hatt bey der hand uf einem zimlich hohen block eingestellten einen kleinen goldschneider Ampos. Dan setzet man in ein vas oder kesten der höher sey als der block mit dem Ampos, darauf schneidet oder zerschlagt man MAGNESIAM mit einem starken hammer in stücklein, ohne-gefhar so gros als bonen und haselnusse."

¹¹⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 15 recto.

¹¹⁵ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 16 recto - 16 verso: "Thuet dessen etliche pfunde, sage Ich, so viel dem Artisten geliebe, in einem waldenburgischen oder Görlitzischen mit haarlaimb wol beschlagenen retorten, vichts ein in seinem ofen, mit verlegung eines gläsernen nicht gahr zu weitten recipienten,

den soersten verschmiere sich zuviel. Wie hieroben uf der andere seitten verzeichnete Einstopfts umb der mundloch der gläser mit nas gemachten oder gekawetten papire gar dichte, dieser Lutium helt gar wole darfte keiner andere hierzu.”

¹¹⁶ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 16 verso - 17 recto: “Halts erste mitt gar sehr gelindern Gefewerlein, so fangens im vorlegt glas ehe zuschwitzen, regirets in dem gradu forth, bis tropfen fallen, halt es also ein dreij oder 4 stunden, also dan immer mhelich und mhelich die Hitze ein wenig gesterckten, so siehet man weisse SPIRITUS kommen.”

¹¹⁷ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 17 recto - 17 verso: “...in solchem gradu halt mans den auch ein drey oder 4 stunden; nachfolgende den von stunden zu stunden das fewer immer ettwas gesterken, bis der retorte braun gluhte, also auch drey oder 4 stunden gehalten; letzlich den 3 oder 4 stunden bis es liecht und helle glüehet, so sublimiere sich weiter dessen über dem retorten halse im vohrlegte glase ein weis saltz ahn, bisweiter in Cypresen blättlein gestalt...”

¹¹⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 17 verso - 18 recto: “...bisweiter auch nur wie ein dichte dunst alles nach unterschiedlicher... materiae arten: Lassen es dan von sich selbst kalten, bis an den morgen. Wink das vhorlage glas ab, und gebst den Liquorem oder das wasser, so darinnen ist, (an der farbe bleichgrun, bisweiter auch weis) nach abwaschung (mit seinem eigene wasser) des subtilen flechigen SALTZES, so sich angelegt, in ein rein glas.Und verwahr es vleissig, wol verstopft, das man hernacher mher darzu samblen, dasselbe mit einander rectificieren, und ein guthes teil zum brauch im vorrhath haben kan.”

¹¹⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 18 verso - 19 verso.

¹²⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 19 verso - 20 recto: “Gesagte beiderley gestalte procediert man mit umbwechslung, so lange, bis keine FEUCHTIGKEIT noch SALTZ mher gibts. So ist MAGNESIA, wol calcinieret, und zum EXTRAHIREN recht disponiret; wird an der farb... etwas röthliche sein.”

¹²¹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 20 recto - 20 verso: “...und scheiden in lindern Balneo das wilde wasser und ubrige phlegma fein sanfte darvon, bis auf die spiritus, so hatt man das ERSTEN philosophischen CLAVEM oder SCHLUSSEL MAGNESIAE...”

¹²² Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 20 verso.

¹²³ See, for example, Beat Krummenacher’s interesting article *Verdigris, Green Lion and Vitriol: The Basis of the Philosopher’s Stone*, <http://www.triad-publishing.com/stone20e.html>

¹²⁴ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 9 recto - 9 verso: “Was hatt man doch nur für viele und mancherley vermeinte philosophische SCHLUSSELE (ja dietriche) hierzu angewenden! Einer hatte wollen auf solchen durch gemein Aquam fortum oder Scheide wasser; der andere durch gemein Aquam Regis; der dritte durch Spiritum urine; der Vierther durch spiritum Vitrioli; ein ander durch spiritum oder oleum SALIS; Andern, dieweil sie hören, das die philosophen sagen von Ihrem Aceto, brauchten destillierten wein essig...”

¹²⁵ Whilst English ‘copperas’ was primarily green vitriol or ferrous sulfate, the Hungarian ‘copperas’ was primarily blue copper (II) sulfate, or blue vitriol

(though there were often variable portions of copper and iron in both; see Schneider, *Lexikon alchemistisch-pharmazeutischer Symbole*, p. 92.) Copperas from Goslar was white vitriol or zinc sulfate (Goslarite); see Louis Bernard Guyton de Morveau, Antoine Lavoisier, Claude-Louis Bertholet, and Antoine de Fourcroysee, *Method of Chymical Nomenclature*, trans. James St. John, London: G. Kearsley, 1788, p. 169.

¹²⁶ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 56.

¹²⁷ Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 22 verso.

¹²⁸ Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 11 verso - 12 recto: "Andere, die nun durch vielhaltiger irren und schaden etwas klüger werden, ...khamen dem hendel etwas näher, in dem das sie die MAGNESIAM klein klopfen, und für sich selbste ohne frembden zusatz per retorta durch unterschiedliche grades des fewers ein wasser draustrieben; dieweil aber desselben wassers sehr sehr wenig, auch nicht sehr starck empfindlich an geruch und schmack, und solcher gestalt MAGNESIA nichts mher von sich gab, den weder mher tropfen noch spiritus folgten; desselbe wasser auch weder magnesiäm noch viel weniger Gold wolte angreifen, und auflösen, versagten sie auch disfals ganz und gahr, und liessens als eine verlohre arbeit liegen."

¹²⁹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 20 verso.

¹³⁰ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 21 recto - 23 recto.

¹³¹ Khunrath, *Consilium*, pp. 24 recto - 24 verso.

¹³² See n. 87 above.

¹³³ Johann Kunckel von Löwenstern, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum Experimentale, oder Laboratorium Chymicum*, Hamburg: Gottfried Richter, 1738 (first published posthumously in 1716), p. 290.

¹³⁴ Juncker, *Conspectus Chemiae*, Vol. 1, p. 680.

¹³⁵ Thompson once argued that a predecessor of Purple of Cassius is described in an Assyrian clay tablet on the production of artificial coral dating to the 7th century B.C.: see R. C. Thompson, *On the Chemistry of the Ancient Assyrians*, London: Luzar and Co., 1925, pp. 32, 34. His ascription of a knowledge of the mineral acids to the Assyrians has been largely dismissed, however, although it seems that some antique ruby glass may have been produced with gold rather than the then-customary cuprous oxide: see Ganzenmüller, *Beiträge*, pp. 85-89, who points to the expression 'coral gold' to be found in the Hellenistic (e.g. pseudo-Democritus) and Arabic (e.g. the *Turba Philosophorum*) alchemical literature. Incidentally, Cornejo ("Beiträge zur Geschichte des kolloiden Goldes," *Zeitschrift für Chemie und Industrie der Kollide*, Vol. 12, 1913, pp. 1ff.) looked to Johann Rudolf Glauber, and not Cassius, as the discoverer of 'purple of Cassius'.

¹³⁶ Kunckel, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum*, p. 4.

¹³⁷ Kunckel, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum*, p. 4.

¹³⁸ See the detailed discussion in Jutta Berger, *Ideen über die Verwandlung der Stoffe. Chemische Materietheorien und Affinität im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Preprint 88, pp. 18-20.

¹³⁹ Ganzenmüller, *Beiträge*, pp. 114-115.

¹⁴⁰ Dedo von Kerssenbrock-Krosigk, *Rubinglas des ausgehenden 17. und des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2001, pp. 27 ff.

¹⁴¹ For an in-depth description of Zsigmondy's conclusions, see E. Zschimmer, "Das Wesen der Rubinbildung," *Sprechsaal für Keramik, Glas- und verwandte Industrien*, Vol. 63, No. 44, October 1930, pp. 833-834.

¹⁴² The Svedberg, *Die Methoden zur Herstellung Kolloider Lösungen anorganischer Stoffe*, Dresden: Theodor Steinkopff, 1909, pp. 14, 213; Richard Zsigmondy, "Properties of Colloids: Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1926," in *Nobel Lectures, Chemistry 1922-1941*, Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1966, p. 46. A sol is to be distinguished from a solution, in which solvent and solute are entirely homogenous at the molecular level.

¹⁴³ Svedberg, *Methoden*, p. 213. I am unable to find the relevant passage in the works of Paracelsus which Svedberg adduces as evidence for this assertion; an *aurum potabile* is described in Paracelsus, "Das sechste, siebente und neunte Buch in der Arznei. Von tartarischen und psychischen Krankheiten und Von Kontrakturen und Lähmungen (1525?)," in Sudhoff (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1930, pp. 475-477, although here there is no mention of tin dichloride. Rather, the 'redness' is drawn from the gold with the help of a *quinta essentia*, a subject which we will address further below.

¹⁴⁴ Basab Chaudhuri and Syamal Raychaudhuri, "Manufacturing High-quality Gold Sol," *IVD Technology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, March 2001, pp. 47-48.

¹⁴⁵ Chaudhuri, "Manufacturing High-quality Gold Sol," p. 47.

¹⁴⁶ Svedberg, *Methoden*, p. 209; Elizabeth Fulhame, *An Essay on Combustion, with a View to a New Art of Dying and Painting, wherein the Phlogistic and Antiphlogistic Hypotheses are Proved Erroneous*, London: published by the author, 1794; cited in Keith J. Laidler and Athel Cornish-Bowden, "Elizabeth Fulhame and the Discovery of Catalysis: 100 years before Buchner," in *New Beer in an Old Bottle: Eduard Buchner and the Growth of Biochemical Knowledge*, ed. A. Cornish-Bowden, Valencia: Universitat de València, 1997, p. 124.

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Svedberg, *Methoden*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ Svedberg, *Methoden*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁹ Juncker, *Conspectus Chemiae*, Vol. 2, p. 288.

¹⁵⁰ Macquer, *Chymisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 733-734: "Uebrigens sind alle diese Goldtincturen nichts anders als ein überaus feingetheiltes und in einer ölichten Feuchtigkeit schwimmend gemachtes natürliches Gold. Sie sind folglich, eigentlich zu reden, keine Tincturen, und können... auch nur in so ferne trinkbares Gold genannt werden, in so ferne man mit diesem Namen keinen andern Begriff als den verbindet, daß das Gold in einer Flüssigkeit schwimmt, und in so feine Theilchen gebracht worden ist, daß es selbst unter der Gestalt einer Feuchtigkeit getrunken werden kann."

¹⁵¹ L. Vanino, "Zu der Geschichte des colloidalen Goldes," *Journal für praktische Chemie*, Vol. 78, 1906, p. 575.

¹⁵² Hence Khunrath, *Consilium*, p. 35 *recto*, speaks of the *Carbunckel-Stein*, whilst the author of the *Lux Lucens in Tenebris* (Hamburg SUB MS Cod.

Alchim. 674) speaks of the Stone as “radiant like the sun, clearer than a carbuncle” (p. 17).

¹⁵³ Krüger (Hofapotheker zu Rostock), “Ueber die Einwirkungen des Eiweisses, des Klebers und der Gallerte auf das salpetrichsalzsaure Gold,” in *Neues Journal für Chemie und Physik*, Vol. 3, 1821, pp. 211-212.

¹⁵⁴ Schütt, *Auf der Suche nach dem Stein der Weisen*, pp. 293-294, 308.

¹⁵⁵ Kunckel, *Collegium Physico-Chymicum*, p. 277.

¹⁵⁶ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁷ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁸ Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, ed. Erasmus Wolfart, Hanau: Wilhelm Antonius, 1609, Section 2, p. 129; the *Amphitheatrum* is divided into two numbered sections, the first giving the Biblical and apocryphal verses to which the commentary of the second refers.

¹⁵⁹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ Svedberg, *Methoden*, p. 210.

¹⁶¹ Basil Valentine, “Kurtzer Anhang und klare Repetition oder Wiederholung... vom grossen Stein der Uhr-alten,” in *Chymische Schriften*, Hamburg: Gottfried Richter, 1740, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶² Claus Priesner, “Spiritus Aethereus - Formation of Ether and Theories on Etherification from Valerius Cordus to Alexander Williamson,” *Ambix*, Vol. 33, Part 2/3, November 1986, p. 130. According to Priesner (private communication), an *aurum potabile* in the form of a colloidal gold-solution which is soluble in alcohol/ether can only be obtained if ammonia is applied (i.e. NH_4Cl), which would be the case if the *aqua regia* was prepared from sulfuric acid and salmiak (Ammoniumchloride).

¹⁶³ Macquer, *Chymisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 2, p. 708.

¹⁶⁴ *Duden-Lexikon*, Vol. 2, Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1972, p. 907.

¹⁶⁵ Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, p. 62; also pp. 205-207, 223; Walter Caseri, “Nanocomposites of Polymers and Metals or Semiconductors: Historical Background and Optical Properties,” *Macromolecular Rapid Communications*, Vol. 21, No. 11, 2000, p. 706. Caseri attributes the ‘waxiness’ or viscosity of some varieties of *aurum potabile* to the presence of impurities in the synthesising liquids, which form an adsorption layer around gold colloids.

¹⁶⁶ Paracelsus, “Von den natürlichen Dingen,” in Sudhoff (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1930, pp. 133, 154; priority for the discovery of diethyl ether is sometimes given to the German doctor Valerius Cordus (1515-1544), although this has been disputed: see Ernst Darmstaedter, “Zur Geschichte des Äthers (Diäthyläthers),” *Journal für Praktische Chemie*, Vol. 119, October 1928, pp. 74-88; Priesner, “Spiritus Aethereus,” p. 129.

¹⁶⁷ Schütt, *Auf der Suche nach dem Stein der Weisen*, p. 450.

¹⁶⁸ Although the *Deutscher Biographischer Index*, Vol. 2, München: K. G. Saur, p. 1599, lists both a “Frobenius, August Sigmund (U nach 1730), Chemiker” and a “Frobenius, Sigismund August (U 1741), Mediziner, Fachautor,” they are in fact one and the same man. The former variant of his name stems from the

Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie, and although it appears to be incorrect it is the one most often utilised by scholars; the latter variant, on the other hand, is in accord with the name given in the *Philosophical Transactions* itself, and as this journal is the only primary source relating to this mysterious figure, I follow the rendering there. See also Poggendorff, J. C., *Biographisch-Literarisches Handwörterbuch zur Geschichte der Exakten Wissenschaften*, Vol. 1, Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1863, p. 809.

¹⁶⁹ Sigismond Augustus Frobenius, “An account of a Spiritus Vini Æthereus, together with several Experiments tried therewith,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, No. 413, 1730, p. 286.

¹⁷⁰ Frobenius, “An account of a Spiritus Vini Æthereus,” p. 284.

¹⁷¹ Frobenius, “An account of a Spiritus Vini Æthereus,” p. 288.

¹⁷² Frobenius, “An account of a Spiritus Vini Æthereus,” pp. 285-286.

¹⁷³ Cromwell Mortimer, “Abstracts of the original Papers communicated to the Royal Society by Sigismond Augustus Frobenius, M.D., concerning his Spiritus Vini Aethereus,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, No. 461, 1741, p. 865.

¹⁷⁴ Mortimer, “Abstracts,” pp. 869-870; Mortimer appears to imply that the original *spiritus vini aethereus* did not belong to this class of æthereal spirits.

¹⁷⁵ Mortimer, “Abstracts,” p. 865.

¹⁷⁶ Priesner, “Spiritus Aethereus,” p. 130.

¹⁷⁷ Aristotle, *De Coelo*, 270b1-270b23 (Aristotle, *Vom Himmel*, Munich: DTV Verlag, 1987, pp. 62-63).

¹⁷⁸ William Newman, “Decknamen or Pseudochemical Language? Eirenaeus Philalethes and Carl Jung,” *Revue D’Histoire des Sciences*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1996, pp. 161, 174, 188; Principe and Newman, “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” in William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 2001, pp. 397, 401.

¹⁷⁹ Principe, Lawrence M., *The Aspiring Adept*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁸⁰ Khunrath’s Christian Kabbalah stems above all from the *Artis cabalisticæ scriptorum*, Vol. 1, of Johann Pistorius.

¹⁸¹ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 21: “Quales sint autem AQUAE SUPERCELESTES; cuius generis, substantiae atque Naturae, nobis Theosophicè percontandum. Influentia, igitur, Lumine et Motu SOLIS DIVINI doctus ac ductus, in Nomine DOMINI dico, AQUAS SUPERCELESTES esse unius eiusdemque generis et substantiae, cuius erat LATEX ille aethereus incombustibiliter ardens, repertus, patrum nostrorum memoria, Patavii in Italia, in monumento vetustissimo, intra urnulam fictilem, intra duas altera ex auro altera ex argento ampullas, cuius liquoris purissimi virtute per plurimos annos lucerna haec arsit...”

¹⁸² Cf. Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp.)(5 verso -)(6 recto.

¹⁸³ Peter Apian and Bartholomeus Amantius, *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis*, Ingolstadt: Peter Apian, 1534, p. 337.

¹⁸⁴ Gesner, *Evonymus*, p. Ai verso - Aii verso; Gesner cites the account of

Apian's *Inscriptiones* as proof of the antiquity of the art of distillation.

¹⁸⁵ Andreae, *Fama Fraturnitatis*, pp. 89-91.

¹⁸⁶ Bartholomäus Korndörffer, *Everburning Lights of Trithemius*, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1408, pp. 239-243.

¹⁸⁷ Hermolaus Barbarus, *In dioscoridem Corollariorum*, Köln: Johannes Soter, 1530, verse 623 (on *Aquae in Commune*): "Est et coelestis aqua, sive potius divina, chymistarum, quam et Democritus et Mercurius Trismegistus novere, ...modo Scythicum laticem appellantes, modo pneuma, hoc est spiritum ex aetheris natura et essentia rerum quinta: unde aurum poculentum, et iactatus ille necdum inventus philosophorum lapis et sabulum, constet."

¹⁸⁸ Gesner, *Evonymus, Ai verso - Aii verso*.

¹⁸⁹ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), pp. 21-22.

¹⁹⁰ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 17; cf. Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 121.

¹⁹¹ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 17: "Mercurius, h.e., Spiritus aethereus, operans pro Natura scintillarum NATURAE quibus conjungitur..."

¹⁹² Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1609 edition), Section 2, p. 196; see below, n. 195.

¹⁹³ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 22: "HOC, CELUM Empyreum, lucidissimum; imó, LUX, quam (tanquam rem Divinitati consentaneam) DEUS inhabitat inaccessibilis, 1. Timoth. 6.16. QUEM idcirco in ignea esse Essentia Divinus Plato ab Indorum Brachmanibus didicit, Quintamque Essentiam Divinitatis statuit mansionem."

¹⁹⁴ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 21: "Secundò, SUPERIUS, non mixtum Elementis eorundemque superfluitatibus, sed per et in se (animatum tamen NATURA) congelavit, solidavit, corpus durum ac solidum constituit atque effecit, hoc est, firmavit... Unde Latini FIRMAMENTUM, Germani *eine Veste* rectè dixerunt: nam quovis aere et adamante est durior et durabilior; Celi solidissimi, quasi aere, fusi sunt, Iob. 37.18 quare nec Lucis aut Ignis sui calore, nec motus pernecitate imminutionem patitur, nedum, antè diem novissimum DOMINI, consumatur... Et fecit DEUS Firmamentum, (ut sit tanquam firmissima fornix, quam DEUS subjecit aquis, et per quam retineret eas in sublimi) divisitque aquas, quæ erant sub Firmamento, ab his quæ erant super Firmamentum."

¹⁹⁵ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 5; in the extended 1609 edition of the *Amphitheatrum* the text surrounding the third emblem in the original version of 1595 has been removed and placed as an appendix to the main body of the work. Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1609 edition), Section 2, p. 196: "Quid est Cælum? CÆLUM est SPIRITUS ÆTHEREUS corporalis, vel, corpus æthereum spirituale, corruptioni non obnoxium, totius Mundi machinam permeans: superius, VERBO DOMINI, firmatum, hinc FIRMAMENTUM; inferius, massæ sublunari, toti incorporatum: Unius eiusdemque et essentiae et substantiae Cælum unum, id quod inferius, et id, quod superius. Illud, tamen, labore Physicochemiae sagaci, in usum hominum, ad sensum potest manifestari atque tractari." According to the 1595

version of the *Amphitheatrum*, the universal *prima materia* is composed of the Paracelsian (physico-chemist's) Sulphur and Salt rather than the Sulphur and Mercury given in *Vom Chaos*; nevertheless, the latter work also refers to this 'Mercury' as a 'salt' (p.142).

¹⁹⁶ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 22: "HOC, CELUM SECUNDUM, sublime; Regio purè ætherea. HOC, Solem, Lunam et Stellas habet; revera etiam PRIMUM et Inferius (suo modo) astra sua: id quod sciunt atque testantur Sapientes. Motu harmoniaco sive sympathico (erga se invicem) movetur utrumque: id quod inferius, sicut id quod est superius, et contra;" Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 4 (= Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1609 edition), Section 2, p. 195): "UNUS (essentia et numero) hic DEI Spiritus est; una, Universitatis perspicuæ et corporeæ huius unius, Anima catholica, tamen, h.e. multiformis (Sap. 7,22. Ephes. 3,10) et variæ eius radii atque SCINTILLÆ, per totius ingentem, materie primæ massæ, molem, hinc inde dispersæ ac dissipatæ..."

¹⁹⁷ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 4 (= Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1609 edition), p. 195): "RUACH ELOHIM, est SPIRITUS, spiraculum, anhelitus ætherei sancti, sanctus; Vapor virtutis DEI omnipotentis atque omni tenentis, et EMANATIO quædam, emmissio, fecunditatis vitalis, primi summique motoris, vivifica atque virtuosa, è profundissimo, Divinitatis suæ recessu; IDEARUM, videlicet, sive Exemplarium, Specierum, Rationum seminariorum, primordialium et radicalium, voluntatum opificum et causarum effectricum, in ARCHETYPIS, opificis summi, mente (âi èÄä® Hhochmah in SAPIENTIA, Bonitate eius, causante eas) conceptarum atque præexistentium, rerum omnium, in Mundo, postea futuro, producendarum et fiendarum." The doctrine of signatures is the subject of Khunrath's doctoral theses, *De Signatura Rerum Naturalium Theses*, Basel: Oporinianis, 1588; in his *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 17, Khunrath boasts that he publically defended this doctrine for the doctoral degree he received on the 24th of August 1588 in Basel, and that he was the first to do so after Paracelsus, as Giambattista della Porta's *Phytognomonica* (1588) was not known in Germany at that time.

¹⁹⁸ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), Emblem 3, Question 6 (= Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1609 edition), p. 197): "RUACH ELOHIM (descendendo demittendoque se per circumferentias partesque abditissimas omnes, et dispergendo in imum vel meditullium, Scintillas radiosve fecunditatis suæ) ad CENTRUM usque penetrabat, in ENS illud CREATUM, totum: massamque illam sive molem ingentem, rudem, (XAOΣ) confusam atque informem, Mundi futuri seminarium, sive materiam lutosam, VIRGINEAM, (nondum enim neque conceperat, neque produxerat antea) FORMA (semetipso) sic informavit, et ANIMA animabat, imprægnabatque purissima..."

¹⁹⁹ Ficino, *De Vita* 3.3.

²⁰⁰ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1595 edition), p. 17.

²⁰¹ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, pp. 40-41.

²⁰² Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum* (1609 edition), Section 2, p.131: "Mirabile DEI Mirabilis Laboratorium Macro Cosmicon, Natura praesidente aut Laborante,

perpetuum, Catholicon.”

²⁰³ Cf. endnote 89 above.

²⁰⁴ Khunrath, *Vom Chaos*, p. 40; cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 2.1, 412a-413a (Aristotle, *Über die Seele*, trans. Horst Seidel, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995, pp. 59-65).

²⁰⁵ One finds them, for instance, in the works of Fludd, Maier and van Helmont.

²⁰⁶ From Roger Bacon, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, London: Richard Olive, 1597, p. 17.

²⁰⁷ Bacon, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, p. 16.

²⁰⁸ Hermes Trismegistus, “Hermetis Trismegisti Tractatus Aureus,” in William Salmon (ed.), *Medicina Practica: or, Practical Physick*. London: Printed for T. Howkins, J. Taylor and J. Harris, 1692, p. 244.

²⁰⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, “Mysterium Coniunctionis,” *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 14, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 228.

²¹⁰ Michael Maier, *De Circulo Physico, Quadrato*, Oppenheim: Lucas Jennis, 1616, p. 7: “Utque Deus Soli, Sol auro, hoc denique cordi/ Vim dat...”; Héléne Metzger, “L’évolution du règne métallique d’après les alchimistes du XVIII^e siècle,” *Isis*, Vol. 4, 1922, pp. 466-482.

²¹¹ Principe and Newman, “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” p. 397.

²¹² Cf. William R. Newman, “The Corpuscular Theory of J. B. Van Helmont and its Medieval Sources,” *Vivarium*, Vol. 31, 1993, pp. 161-191.

²¹³ Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychology and Alchemy,” *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 12, trans. R. F. C. Hull, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 476.

²¹⁴ Principe and Newman, “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” p. 406.

²¹⁵ On this matter see Principe and Newman, “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” and their article “Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake,” *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1998, pp. 32-65.

²¹⁶ Unpublished manuscript; cf. Principe and Newman, “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy,” p. 387.

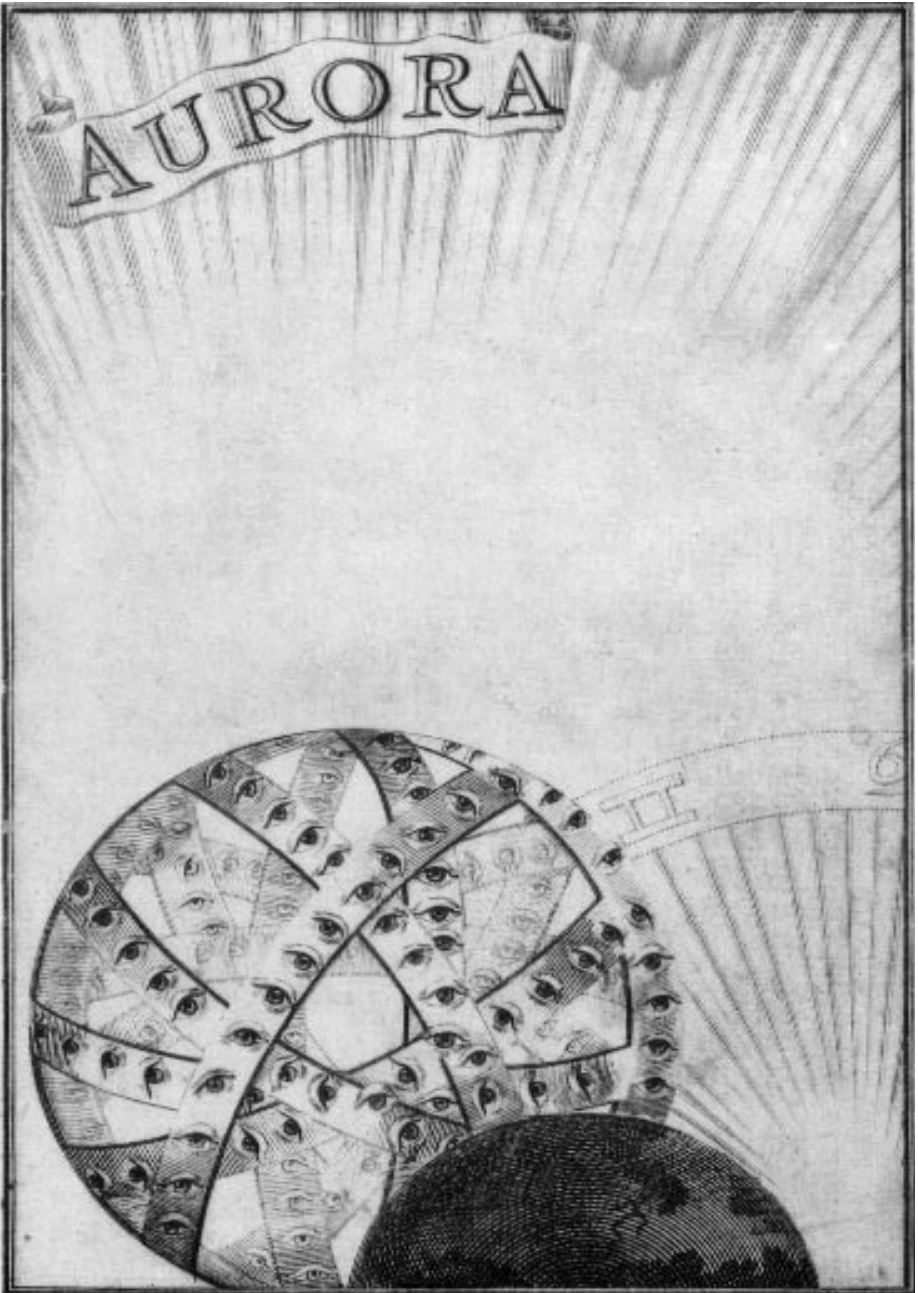
²¹⁷ Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, p.77.

²¹⁸ On this subject, see my *The Quest for the Phoenix*.

²¹⁹ Jung, “Psychology and Alchemy,” p. 218.

²²⁰ Newman, “*Decknamen* or Pseudochemical Language?,” p. 165.

²²¹ Georg Wilhelm Wegner (‘Tharsander’), *Adeptus Ineptus, Oder Entdeckung der falsch berühmten Kunst ALCHIMIE genannt*, Berlin: Ambrosius Haude, 1744, p. 80.



**‘The Teutonicks Writings’: Translating
Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh
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On 4 August 1653 Samuel Herring of Swan Alley in Coleman Street, London, petitioned Parliament to consider thirty suggestions for the good of the nation. The second was that two colleges at Oxford and Cambridge should be devoted to the study of “attaining and enjoying the spirit of our Lord Jesus.” Few books would be needed besides the Bible and English translations of “Jacob Behmen, and such like, who had true revelation from the true spirit.”¹ This proposal was not adopted, nor is there evidence for how much support it attracted among Herring’s fellow parishioners or in Parliament. Though he may have acted alone, it is equally possible that Herring represented the public face of a group promoting the dissemination of English versions of the German mystic’s writings. Indeed, it is significant that between 1645 and 1662 most of Boehme’s treatises and the majority of his letters were printed in English translation at London. Moreover, two shorter pieces were rendered from English into Welsh in 1655.

There are many twentieth-century studies of Boehme’s life and thought, as well as several scholarly discussions on the reception of his ideas in Germany, the Netherlands and the British Isles.² But why his writings were translated into English and the mechanisms behind this process has never been adequately explained. Among Boehme’s followers there circulated a garbled story that Charles I had been the main patron of the venture before his execution. Some also maintained, probably correctly, that after the Restoration the remaining works were brought out under the auspices of the Earl of Pembroke. In their eyes this tradition of royal and aristocratic support gave the undertaking prestige. Yet it simplifies developments, obscuring the involvement of a number of people with common aims. Actually there were three overlapping phases.

Initially several individuals with knowledge of Latin or German received abstracts of Boehme's teachings or selected treatises from their associates in Amsterdam. Then manuscript translations were made from German and Latin versions of works published at Amsterdam, as well as from copies of the original texts. These circulated privately in much the same way as had the writings of Hendrik Niclaes and other prominent members of the Family of Love. Finally there was an organized scheme for publishing the extant corpus. While some of the cost was met by the translators themselves, it is clear that Samuel Hartlib (c.1600–1662), a Polish émigré resident in London since 1628, and members of his circle acted as intermediaries by using agents to purchase books, subsequently shipping them to England.



Sparrow, John (1615–1670), by David Loggan, 1659

Among Hartlib's international network of correspondents and the people connected to them were several figures whom we shall encounter: Petrus Serrarius, Johann Moriaen, John Dury and Henry Appellius. As is well known, Hartlib's circle promoted reconciliation between the Protestant churches and planned to establish a University in London with a College for Oriental studies to assist with the conversion of the Jews. They also advocated educational and medical reform.³ Though it had gone unheeded by many of his compatriots, Boehme's announcement of the dawn of a new reformation thus chimed with their vision of universal reformation. Similarly, Boehme's principal English translators hoped their efforts would be rewarded with the settlement of religious controversies and the disappearance of sects and heresies. One of them also believed that knowledge of Boehme's "Three Principles" was both necessary for the advancement of "all Arts and Sciences" and conducive for the "curing, and healing of corrupt and decayed nature."⁴

This article uses several manuscript sources unknown to, or untapped by, all previous scholars – notably extracts made by an eighteenth-century antiquary from the diary of John Sparrow, Boehme's foremost English translator. It is mainly concerned with the dissemination of Boehme's writings rather than their reception and accordingly focuses upon the contribution of intermediaries (Samuel Hartlib, Petrus Serrarius, Johann Moriaen, John Dury, Henry Appellius); patrons (Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland, Charles I, the fifth Earl of Pembroke); translators (Johannes Angelius Werdenhagen, Michel le Blon, John Sparrow, John Ellistone, Charles Hotham, Morgan Llwyd); biographers (Abraham von Franckenberg, Durand Hotham); printers (Johann Janssonius, Matthew Simmons, John Streater, Lodowick Lloyd), and publishers (Humphrey Blunden, Giles Calvert). It shows how Boehme's texts were copied, transmitted, issued and translated, demonstrating the key role Hartlib's circle played in facilitating the project. Furthermore, it uncovers the translators' networks, revealing their ties through kinship and friendship, as well as

shared professional and commercial interests. Indeed, these extensive connections, which included sympathetic publishers, largely explains why Boehme's works were acquired so readily in printed English translations and later selectively rendered into Welsh.

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Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), came from Alt-Seidenberg, a village near Görlitz, a city of about 10,000 inhabitants in Upper Lusatia. The son of devout Lutheran peasants, he progressed from shoemaker's apprentice to journeyman, afterwards purchasing a cobbler's shop and marrying a local butcher's daughter. About 1600 he was possessed with a "*Divine Light*" and going out into an open field beheld "the *Wonder-workes* of the Creator in the Signatures of all created things, very cleerly and manifestly laid open."⁵ Between January and June 1612 Boehme made a fair copy of his celebrated "*Morgenröthe im Aufgang*" or Aurora (literally "Morning Glow, Ascending"), a long unfinished work that had been at least twelve years in the making. Following the circulation of the manuscript and the transcription of additional copies he was denounced by the city magistrates of Görlitz and then from the pulpit. Thereafter Boehme sold his cobbler's bench and began to engage in small-scale commerce, trading in yarns and woollen gloves. After an interval of some years he was said to have been stirred up by the Holy Spirit and, encouraged by the entreaties of certain people, took up his pen, producing *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1619), *The Threefold Life of Man* (completed and copied by September 1620), *Forty Questions on the Soul* (1620), *The Incarnation of Christ* (1620), and several other treatises such as *Signatura Rerum* (completed by August 1621), and *Mysterium Magnum* (completed by September 1623).⁶ He boasted that his writings were known to "nearly all of Silesia," as well as in many places in Saxony and Meissen. Nonetheless, they remained unpublished until the printing of *Der Weg zu Christo* (Görlitz, c.1624), which probably contained two shorter pieces,

“True Repentance” and “True Resignation.”⁷

Boehme’s death served only to increase the aura surrounding his life and teachings. A legend began to take shape of a simple, pious barely literate artisan who was given the gift of “Universall knowledge” and shown:

the Centre of all Beings; *how all things arise from God Originally: consist in God, and againe returne.*⁸

The Silesian nobleman Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652) praised his “*profound*” and “*deep-grounded*” writings, believing that they hinted at the great wonders God would perform in future generations. Indeed, in his last years some of Boehme’s followers began calling him “Teutonicus Philosophus,” regarding him as a prophet of the Thirty Years’ War.⁹

Boehme maintained that he wrote *Aurora* in sudden bursts of inspiration, like a shower of rain which hit “whatsoever it lighteth upon.” He claimed he had not received instruction from men or knowledge from reading books, but had written “out of my own Book which was opened in me, being the Noble similitude of God.”¹⁰ Doubtless this gave rise to the image of him having penned *Aurora* secretly for his own benefit, consulting “only the *Holy Scriptures*.”¹¹ Yet Boehme also acknowledged having read the writings of “very high Masters, hoping to find therein the ground and true depth.”¹² Indeed, the work’s success introduced him into the company of “learned men” such as Balthasar Walter, much travelled director of the Geheimes Laboratorium (Secret Laboratory) at Dresden, and Tobias Kober, Paracelsian physician at Görlitz.¹³ Equally significant were the mercantile journeys that took Boehme to Prague and brought him in touch with a network of tradesmen. From 1621, moreover, he began visiting supporters among the Protestant dissenters in Silesia and elsewhere. These contacts provided him with some information and probably made it easier to acquire texts in his native tongue. Though Boehme seldom named his sources, he appears to have been familiar with

doctrines enunciated by Spiritualist reformers like Sebastian Franck (1499–1542), Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561) and Valentin Weigel (1533–1588).¹⁴ In addition, he was influenced by the teachings of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and perhaps through his works of German mysticism such as the anonymous *Theologia Germanica* (fourteenth century). Arguably his most profound debt, however, was to the Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493–1541), from whom he derived the alchemical term *Tincture* and the three categories of Salt, Mercury and Sulphur.¹⁵ Taken together these sources help explain the presence of Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic ideas in Boehme’s writings, particularly several striking resemblances to concepts in *Sefer Ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendour*).

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In the summer of 1631 the latter part of Boehme’s lengthy commentary on Genesis, “Mysterium Magnum,” was issued in German as *Iosephus Redivivus Das ist Die Vberaus Lehr vnd Trostreiche Historia von dem Ertzvatter Joseph* (Amsterdam, 1631). Printed by Veit Heinrichs, the book was enlarged with excerpts from the writings of the German Dominican and mystic Johannes Tauler (c.1300–1361). It was edited by Abraham von Franckenberg, who also supplied a memoir of Boehme.¹⁶ The next year Boehme’s “Forty Questions on the Soul” appeared in a Latin translation by the “noble and very learned” German professor Johannes Angelius Werdenhagen (1581–1652) in a work printed by Johann Janssonius entitled [*Psychologia*] *vera I.B. T[eutonicus]* (Amsterdam, 1632).¹⁷ Two years later, despite the concern of the Lutheran classis of the North German city of Lübeck, Janssonius printed a corrupt copy of Boehme’s *Avrora Das ist: MorgenRöthe im Auffgang vnd Mutter der Philosophiæ* ([Amsterdam], 1634). Over the next six years several more writings by Boehme were issued in German at Amsterdam, including; *De Signatura Rerum* (1635), *Trostschrift, Von vier Complexionen* (before 1636), *Der Weg zu Christo* (1635), *Bedencken Vber Esaia Stiefels* (1639), and

a complete if unreliable edition of *Mysterium Magnum* (1640). At least two of these publications were supported by Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland (1587–1648), an Amsterdam merchant and leading member of the Dutch civet cartel.¹⁸

Van Beyerland had purchased the extensive manuscript collection of Boehme's patrons, the brothers Carl and Michael von Ender, in 1637 from Hans Roth of Görlitz for 100 thalers. Packed into a chest they fortuitously survived the hazardous journey by wagon via Leipzig to Hamburg and thence by ship to Amsterdam.¹⁹ By 1640 van Beyerland had also acquired an autograph of *Mysterium Magnum*, which he subsequently annotated and published. In addition, through the mediation of von Franckenberg and others, he was able to obtain several manuscript examples of every work by Boehme, as well as autographs and letters. His prized possession was undoubtedly the confiscated autograph of *Morgenröthe im Aufgang* which had been brought to light in November 1641 by Dr Paul Scipio a burgomaster at Görlitz and afterwards presented to Georg Pflugden, Hausmarschall (Marshal of the house) of Johann Georg, the Elector of Saxony.²⁰ Van Beyerland, moreover, was responsible for collating and then translating most of Boehme's texts into Dutch. Between autumn 1634 and 1635 he issued at his own expense four small anthologies, the first entitled *Hand-boecken (Manual)*. These were followed by further Dutch editions such as *Hooge ende diepe gronden van 't drievoudigh leven des menschen (High and deep grounds of the threefold life of man)* (1636) and *Van de drie principien (Of the three principles)* (1637).²¹ Another important Boehme translator was the German-born Hermetic engraver and diplomatic agent of the Swedish crown at Amsterdam, Michel le Blon (1587–1656). An acquaintance of van Beyerland and Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657) as well as a correspondent of von Franckenberg and Christian Bernhard of Sagan, le Blon acquired 25 autograph letters which he translated while staying at Stockholm in 1647. These were later published together with his version of the "Little Prayer-book" under the title *Gulde Kleynoot eener Aandachtighe Ziele (Golden gem of a devout soul)* (1653).²² Significantly, it

was the German and Latin versions of Boehme's works published at Amsterdam, together with van Beyerland's and le Blon's manuscripts that provided the source for English translations of the Teutonic Philosopher's writings.²³

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In February 1633 an unnamed writer directed a Latin compendium of Boehme's theosophy to "his very loving friend Mr Theodorick Gravius at Linford."²⁴ Gravius (*fl.*1631–1658), an iatrochemical physician and translator of alchemical works, was to be presented by Richard Napier to the rectory of Great Linford, Buckinghamshire.²⁵ He was also a friend and correspondent of Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669).²⁶ Born in London and educated at Oxford, Serrarius was a member of an affluent Walloon family. Having studied theology at the Walloon seminary in Leiden, he was appointed minister of the French Church in Cologne. Serrarius, however, was removed by the Walloon Synod after less than two years. Thereafter, he studied medicine at Groningen University, where he developed an interest in iatrochemistry that matched his enthusiasm for mystical theology. Sometime in 1630 Serrarius settled in Amsterdam, making it likely that it was he who sent an abstract of Boehme's teachings to Gravius in England.²⁷

In early 1634 Samuel Hartlib recorded in his ephemeris that Joachim Morsius (1593–1643), a Hamburg doctor and Rosicrucian sympathizer, possessed Boehme's books. He added laconically that Hans van Keerbergen of Hamburg, Johannes Sack of Amsterdam and the Austrian chiliast Johannes Permeier (1597–1644?) were members of "the fraternity" of the Rosy Cross and had some manuscripts of Boehme.²⁸ A few years later Hartlib remarked that "Teutonicus" had "far higher" and soaring notions "in the creating or speaking word" than did the Caroline divine John Gauden (1605–1662), "which are but a little glimpse of that light." Though Hartlib did not specify which of Boehme's works

had made this impression on him, a terse entry in his ephemeris for 1639 indicated that “Teutonici Commentarium in Genesi” was being printed at Amsterdam. Another entry in his ephemeris about August 1640 noted that more “opuscula” of Jacob Boehme “Sancti Teutonici” had lately been printed at Amsterdam, notably a treatise on the Creation in quarto. Hartlib’s references probably alluded to the German edition of *Mysterium Magnum* issued anonymously at Amsterdam in 1640.²⁹ On 26 October 1640 Johann Moriaen (c.1591–1668?), a former minister at Cologne with interests in Helmontian medicine and chemistry, wrote to Hartlib from Amsterdam concerning the delivery of one of Boehme’s books to Theodore Haak (1605–1690), a German-born theologian resident in England. Moriaen, however, did not state its title.³⁰

Sometime in 1644 a manuscript entitled “The most Remarkable History of IOSEPH Mystically expounded & interpreted” was completed. Rendered into English from “out of y^e German Tongue” the text consisted of a translation of Boehme’s *Mysterium Magnum* “beginning at y^e 36th Chapt^r of Genesis and continuing to y^e end of y^t booke.” The translator was probably John Sparrow and it appears that his source was *Iosephus Redivivus* (Amsterdam, 1631).³¹ On 8 November 1644 the London bookseller George Thomason acquired a copy of *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen* (printed by L.N. for Richard Whitaker, at the sign of the Kings Armes in Pauls Church-yard, 1644). Though the translator of Franckenberg’s brief biography declined to supply his name, it is possible that the pamphlet was issued to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of Boehme’s death.³² The following year there appeared an edition of Boehme’s *Two Theosophicall Epistles* (printed by M[atthew] S[immons] for B[enjamin] Allen, and are to be sold at his shop, at the Crown in Popes-head Alley, 1645). The work was described on the title-page as “Lately Englished out of the *German Language*.” Thomason dated his copy 2 May 1645.³³

On 11 December 1645 an unknown translator completed the rendering of several more treatises by Boehme into English, namely; “The Way to Christ Comprehended,” “The third booke,

of regeneration,” “The 4 booke, being a dialogue betweene a master and a schollar, of the super-sensuall life,” “A compendium of repentance,” “Of the mixt world and its wickedness,” “A letter to a good friend of his” and “An exposition of some words” used in Boehme’s writings. This manuscript survives in a fair copy. Significantly it predates and differs from a printed version entitled *The Way to Christ Discovered* (1648). It may, moreover, be connected with another carefully transcribed translation of Boehme’s “The Way to Christ Comprehended” apparently derived from *Der Weg zu Christo* (Amsterdam, 1635). This was once in the possession of William Clopton – perhaps the Emmanuel College graduate and Essex clergyman of that name.³⁴ Another extant manuscript translation of Boehme’s writings probably copied by the grammarian and physician Joseph Webbe (fl.1612–1633) is preserved in the papers of the antiquary, astrologer and botanist Elias Ashmole (1617–1692). This is an extract from a letter written in 1622 to the physician Christian Steinberg of Lübeck. It differs substantially from the version printed in *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen* (1649).³⁵

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On 21 November 1644 John Dury wrote to Samuel Hartlib from Rotterdam to inform him that he had let Serrarius know that “I will pay him that which Mr. Sparrow hath giuen you for him.”³⁶ Dury (1596–1680) was the son of a Presbyterian minister. Born in Edinburgh, educated at the Walloon seminary in Leiden, the Huguenot academy in Sédan and briefly at Oxford, he was Serrarius’s predecessor as minister of the French Church in Cologne. Afterwards Dury became pastor of the English and Scottish merchant congregation at the Baltic port of Elbing (now in Poland), where he became acquainted with Hartlib. The “Mr. Sparrow” that Dury refers to in his communication with Hartlib was the barrister John Sparrow (1615–1670). Educated at Trinity College, Cambridge and the Inner Temple, he was later

appointed a treasurer and collector of prize goods, a member of the Parliamentary committee to consider reformation of the law and a judge for the probate of wills. His father, John Sparrow the elder (1592–1664) of Stambourne, was a Captain of one of the Essex Trained Bands in 1634. Following promotions during the Civil War he was appointed Colonel by the committee of Essex and by October 1644 had been given command of an entire regiment serving as part of the garrison of Abingdon, Berkshire. The elder Sparrow was to be described as a gentleman of “rare Accomplishm^t.”³⁷ No doubt this was for his ingenious schemes, one of which had been recorded in Hartlib’s ephemeris for 1640:

Perpetuus Motus will not so much take away worke from Men as facilitate and ease them in their great toyles and labours. Captain Sparrow.³⁸

Dury’s letter to Hartlib indicates that the younger Sparrow was using his association with Hartlib to buy something available on the continent and that the agent used for this transaction was Serrarius. Sparrow’s request had been made within two weeks of the publication of *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen* (1644), and as Sparrow was to translate several treatises by Boehme into English it seems probable that Serrarius procured editions of Boehme’s works printed at Amsterdam for Sparrow.³⁹

The first published English translation of Boehme’s writings that can certainly be attributed to Sparrow is *XL. Qvestions Concerning the Soule* (printed by Matth[ew] Simmons, 1647). In his preface to the reader Sparrow declared that he had:

taken in hand to put this Treatise into English, which I chose to doe rather out of the Originall then out of any Translations, because they many times come short of the Authors owne meaning, and because I found many errours in some of them, and he is so deep in his writings, that we have need to desire that our soules may be put into such a condition as his was in, else they cannot be fully understood.

Sparrow conceded that he had been reluctant to issue his English translation from the German, fearing “*to make such things knowne in my Native Language*” to “*so many various minds, as are now sprung up.*” Yet he contented himself with the thought that:

*our troubled doubting Soules may receive much comfort leading to that inward Peace which passeth all understanding: that all the disturbing Sects and Heresies arising from the Darknesse and malice of men and Devils, will be made to vanish, and cease by that understanding which may be kindled in them from it.*⁴⁰

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© NPG 252

John Lambert (1619-1684), after Robert Walker, c.1650–55.

On 16 August 1647 Henry Appelius wrote to Hartlib from Purmerend in the United Provinces informing him that Dury’s friend Abraham Willemsz van Beyerland “desireth 2 coppyes of I. Bohmens XL questions of the Soule, Mr Iohannes et Samuel who are by Mr Serrarius can deliver them unto him.” Appelius, who was acquainted with the alchemist Johann Rudolph Glauber (1604–1670), added that “Behm hath much written of the times of

Wonders, wherein wee live or come, the Lord fitt us for him.”⁴¹ It is not known if van Beyerland’s request was fulfilled, but one man who did possess a copy of Boehme’s *XL. Qvestions Concerning the Soule* (1647) was Major-General John Lambert.⁴² Lambert’s opinions of Boehme are unrecorded, but his continuing interest in mystical theology was confirmed while on campaign in Scotland in 1651, for his agent recorded that he had received a little bag containing copies of Jean d’Espagnet’s *Enchyridion Physicæ Restitutæ* (1651), a book by Juan de Valdés – probably *Divine considerations treating of those things which are most profitable* (Cambridge, 1646) – and *Theologia Germanica. Or, Mystically Divinitie* (printed for John Sweeting, at the Angell in Popes head Alley, 1648).⁴³

Another likely reader of Sparrow’s translation of Boehme’s *XL. Qvestions Concerning the Soule* (1647) was Charles I. In his preface to a new edition entitled *Forty Questions of the Soul* (printed for L[odowick] Lloyd, at the Castle in Cornhil[1], 1665), Sparrow related how:

When this Book was first Printed, I endeavoured by a Friend to present one of them to his Majesty King *Charles* that then was, who vouchsafed the perusal of it; about a Month after was desired to say what he thought of the Book, who answered, that the Publisher in English seemed to say of the Author, that he was no Scholar, and if he were not, he did believe that the Holy Ghost was now in Men, but if he were a Scholar, it was one of the best Inventions that ever he read.⁴⁴

Sparrow’s account appears trustworthy, for it suggests that Charles I was given an edition of Boehme’s work during the period of his confinement by the army in 1647. Nevertheless, passed around by word of mouth the story became embellished. After staying some months in London in 1676 a foreign traveller enthused how some trustworthy Englishmen had told him:

It is but too true, that the King of England, *Charles I*, before his

martyr-death not only gave the means for the printing of Jacob Böhme's writings, especially of the *Mysterii Magni*, but also that he was astonished, after having read A°. 1646 the "40 Questions of the Soul," and called out: Praise be to God! that there are still men to be found, who are able to give a living witness of God and his word by experience. And this caused him to send a habile person to Görlitz in Lusatia, to learn there the German language, and thus to become more able to understand better Jacob Böhme's style in his own mother-tongue, and to translate his writings into English. At the same time he was ordered to note down all and everything he could learn at Görlitz of J. Böhm's life, writings and circumstances; which things all have been executed and done.⁴⁵

This anecdote is probably attributable to the "learned" poet Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1689) of Breslau who, while in London in October 1676, "defended Jacob Boehmen against the Academicos (regarding philosophy) in published writings."⁴⁶ Evidently it had an enduring appeal for about 1701 Francis Lee (c.1662–1719), former Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, Nonjuror and a founder of the Philadelphian Society, wrote to Pierre Poiret (1649–1719) in Holland, informing him:

Forty Questions on the Soul came out here in England a little before the martyrdom of King Charles the First, and was put into his hands and read by him with great admiration, for he quickly perceived that something remarkable was concealed under the enigmas of the writer.⁴⁷

Accepting his source without question, Poiret incorporated a summary of Lee's epistle in *Bibliotheca Mysticorum Selecta* (Amsterdam, 1708), remarking that the "pious King Charles I and several nobles from his court" thought highly of Boehme - "even when they had read only very little from his writings."⁴⁸ This tradition was also preserved in an anonymous account sent from London after 1715 and published in Johann Wilhelm Ueberfeld's complete edition of Boehme's works entitled *Theosophia Revelata* ([Leiden?], 1730). According to this version some said that

Charles I had supplied the funds for the publication of Boehme’s writings and that therefore they had been “printed royal.”⁴⁹ The truth was that Sparrow had stipulated in his contract with the publisher and bookseller Lodowick Lloyd that four copies of *Several Treatises: of Jacob Behme Not printed in English* (1661) were to be on “Royall paper.”⁵⁰



Philip Herbert, 5th Earl of Pembroke (1619-1669),
Member of Parliament.

Lee’s letter to Poiret also stated that Boehme’s remaining works were “brought out under the auspices of the Earl of Pembroke.”⁵¹ Philip Herbert (1619–1669), fifth Earl of Pembroke, acceded to his titles in January 1650, inheriting a fortune estimated at £30,000 per annum, but also rumoured debts of £80,000. It is not known when he first read the Teutonic Philosopher, but some of Boehme’s teachings – notably on the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper – were assimilated in a treatise attributed to the “Earle of Pembrok” entitled *Of the Internal and Eternal Nature of Man in Christ* (printed by John Macock, 1654).⁵² At an unknown date Pembroke joined a Behmenist community established at Bradfield, Berkshire by the rector John Pordage (1607–1681). These ties endured for Pordage was to be received “most friendly” at Pembroke’s country seat in Wilton, Wiltshire as was Thomas Bromley (1630–1691) another member of the community.⁵³

According to the antiquary John Aubrey, the Earl of Pembroke had:

an admirable Witt, and was contemplative but did not much care for reading. His chiefest Diversion was Chymistrie, which his Lordship did understand very well and he made Medicines, that did great Cures.⁵⁴



Pordage, John (bap. 1607, d. 1681), by William Faithorne the elder, published 1683

Pembroke's reputation as a devotee of this "most Divine and

Mysterious Art” was indeed widespread. Hartlib, for example, recorded in his ephemeris that Pembroke had paid an alchemist a pension of £100 and created a medicine which cured “dropsies and other incurable diseases.”⁵⁵ Nor was his patronage confined to this sphere. The heresiarch John Reeve addressed an epistle to him hoping Pembroke would support its publication. Likewise, a Quaker woman was apparently given £20 by Pembroke, using some of it to finance the printing of books.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Pembroke employed John Milton’s nephew Edward Phillips “to interpret some of the Teutonic philosophy, to whose mystic theology his lordship” was “much addicted.”⁵⁷

About 1661 Sparrow loaned Pembroke his English translations of four treatises by Boehme; “An apologie concerning perfection”; “Of the four complexions”; “Of the Earthly and the Heavenly Mystery”; “Exposition of the Table of the Three Principles.” The first couple were either manuscripts or printed copies taken from *The remainder of the books written by Jacob Behme* (1662), the latter printed copies from *Several Treatises: of Jacob Behme* (1661).⁵⁸ It was these two publications that Lee afterwards claimed were issued with Pembroke’s backing.

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On 1 July 1665 John Bolles of St. James, Clerkenwell made his will. To Captain Francis Stacy living on Tower Hill he bequeathed “All my books written by Jacob Behme Teutonick Philosopher, and Cornelius Agrippa.” Having commended his “Spiritt and soule into the hands of the Tri=une God” he named John Sparrow of the [Inner] Temple as one of his executors.⁵⁹ Stacy, “a wise and moderate Man,” had once invited the heresiarchs John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton to dinner at an inn where they disputed with a minister whom Reeve soon pronounced cursed and damned to eternity.⁶⁰ Bolles had served as deputy clerk of the Crown

in Chancery and afterwards as the Commonwealth's clerk in Chancery until at least April 1654. He had also been one of the original backers of the Eleutheria project.

On 9 July 1647 articles and orders were made out on behalf of a company of Adventurers for the colonization of the Islands of Eleutheria, formerly known as Buhama in the Americas. Adapted from the Greek word for liberty, the Eleutheria plantation in the Bahamas was to be a republic with no "names of distinction or reproach, as *Independent, Antinomian, Anabaptist*, or any other cast upon any such for their difference in judgement."⁶¹ Following some amendments an act was passed on 31 August 1649 for "settling the Islands in the *West Indies*' between 24 and 29 degrees latitude. Though there appears to be no official record of this act a letter of attorney from Bolles to his brother dated 15 August 1654 names the twenty-six original investors in this utopian scheme.⁶² Drawn from the government, army and churches these men included Colonel Nathaniel Rich (*d.*1701), a veteran of the battle of Naseby and speaker at the Council of Officers at Whitehall; John Rushworth (1612–1690), an under-Clerk to the Parliament and Secretary to Lord General Fairfax; Gualter Frost the elder (*d.*1652), Secretary to the Council of State; John Hutchinson, regicide and member of the Council of State; Peter Chamberlen (1601–1683), physician and subsequently Sabbatarian pastor of the Baptist church in Lothbury Square, London; Arthur Squibb the younger (*d.*1680), a Parliamentarian clerk, republican and lay preacher, who became a Fifth Monarchist, Sabbatarian and member for Middlesex in the Barebone's Parliament; Captain John Blackwell (1624–1701), a Deputy War Treasurer and republican; Captain Robert Norwood, who like Blackwell had commanded a troop of horse in Colonel Edmund Harvey's regiment; Colonel John Sparrow, who with Norwood was to be made a member of the High Court of Justice; and John Ellistone the elder (*c.*1599–1652), whose will was to specify a bequest of his "adventure in the Elutherian plantation with the profitts thereof."⁶³

The son of an eminent clothier, Ellistone was educated at Corpus

Christi College, Cambridge. On 22 April 1622 Ellistone's father and grandfather purchased the manor of Overhall in Gestingthorpe, Essex for £3600 from John Sparrow the elder and his father. Before 1625 Ellistone married Elizabeth (*d.*1632), a younger sister of John Sparrow the elder.⁶⁴ Their eldest son, John Ellistone (c.1625–1652), was admitted to Gray's Inn on 3 February 1644 and later married Winifred, daughter of Robert Barrington. Working from a German edition the younger Ellistone translated into English *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen aliter, Tevtonicvs Philosophvs* perhaps together with *A reall and unfeigned Testimonie, Concerning Iacob Beme Of Old Seidenberg, in upper Lausatia* and *A Warning From Iacob Beem The Teutonique Phylosopher* (printed by Matthew Simmons in Aldersgate-Street, 1649). In his preface Ellistone defended the author, claiming that his language was neither "trimmed up" in the scholastic "pompe, and pride of words" nor savoured of "a Sectarian spirit of Hypocrisie and affectation." Like Sparrow he too hoped that all "Sects" and "Controversies in Religion" would be settled "on the true ground."⁶⁵ Ellistone next translated Boehme's *Signatura Rerum: Or The Signatvre of all Things* (printed by John Macock, for Gyles Calvert, at the black spread Eagle, at the West end of Pauls Church, 1651) from an "Original Copy" in his possession.⁶⁶ He also translated "more than half" of Boehme's *Mysterium Magnum, or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (printed by M[atthew] Simmons for H[umphrey] Blunden at the Castle in Cornehill, 1654); John Sparrow his "dear kinsman" completed the work. Ellistone drew up his will on 21 August 1652 in the presence of Sparrow and others, appointing Sparrow one of its supervisors. He died the next day at Gestingthorpe about 1 o'clock in the morning.⁶⁷

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On 25 October 1647 George Thomason acquired a copy of *The Way to Christ Discovered. By Iacob Behmen. In these Treatises. 1. Of true Repentance. 2. Of true Resignation. 3. Of Regeneration. 4. Of the Super-rationall life. Also, the Discourse of Illumination.*

The Compendium of Repentance. And the mixt World, &c (printed by M[atthew] S[immons] for H[umphrey] Blunden, at the Castle in Corne-hill, 1648). Some, if not all of this translation, was by Sparrow. Sparrow next translated Boehme's *A Description Of the Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (printed by M[atthew] S[immons] for H[umphrey] Blunden at the Castle in Cornhill, 1648). It also seems likely that Sparrow and Ellistone collaborated in translating a compilation of Boehme's prophetic writings under the title *Mercurius Teutonicus, or, A Christian information concerning the last Times* (printed by M[atthew] Simmons, for H[umphrey] Blunden, at the Castle in Corn-hill, 1649). The copyright of this tract was entered in the Stationers' Register on 2 February 1649, only days after the execution of Charles I.⁶⁸ Afterwards, Sparrow translated a number of other works by Boehme, including; *The Third Booke of the Author, Being The High and Deep Searching out of the Three-Fold Life Of Man* (printed by M[atthew] S[immons] for H[umphrey] Blunden, at the Castle in Cornhill, 1650);⁶⁹ *Of Christs Testaments, viz: Baptisme and the Supper* (printed by M[atthew] Simmons, and are to be sold neare the signe of the Golden Lyon in Aldersgate-streete, or by H[umphrey] Blunden at the Castle in Cornhill neere the Exchange, 1652);⁷⁰ *Concerning the Election of Grace. Or Of Gods Will towards Man. Commonly called Predestination* (printed by John Streater, for Giles Calvert, and John Allen, and are to be sold at their shops, at the Black-spread-Eagle at the West End of Pauls; and at the Sun Rising in Paul's Church-Yard in the New Buildings between the two North Doores, 1655);⁷¹ *Aurora, That is, the Day-Spring, or dawning of the day in the Orient* (printed by John Streater, for Giles Calvert, and are be sold at his Shop at the Black-Spread-Eagle at the West-End of Pauls, 1656);⁷² *The Fifth Book of the Authour, In Three Parts* (printed by J[ohn] M[acock] for Lodowick Lloyd, at the Castle in Cornhil[l], 1659);⁷³ *Several Treatises: of Jacob Behme Not printed in English before* (printed by L[odowick] Lloyd at the Castle in Corn-hill, 1661); and *The remainder of the books written by Jacob Behme* (printed by M[atthew] S[immons] for Giles Calvert, at the Sign of the Black-Spread-Eagle, at the West End of St. Pauls, 1662). Recognizing

this achievement the poet and future dramatist Samuel Pordage (1633–1691?) penned an encomium on Boehme and his interpreter:

learned *Sparrow* we thy praises too
Will sing; Rewards too small for what is due.
The gifts of Glory, and of Praise we owe:
The English *Behman* doth thy Trophies shew.
Whilst English men that great Saints praise declare,
Thy Name shall joyn'd with His receive a share:
The Time shall come when his great Name shall rise,
Thy Glory also shall ascend the Skies.
Thou mad'st him English speak: or else what Good
Had his works done us if not understood?⁷⁴

An eighteenth-century writer likewise commended Sparrow as a man of “true virtue,” who seemed to have penetrated “very deeply into the spirit of the author.” Nevertheless, he noted that while his translation was regarded as faithful and correct except for some of the most obscure passages, it was “not the most beautiful.”⁷⁵ Wishing to justify the undertaking of a new translation of Boehme into English the Nonjuror and mystic William Law (1686–1761) was even less charitable:

The translators of J.B., Ellistone and Sparrow, are much to be honoured for their work; they had great piety and great abilities, and well apprehended their author, especially Ellistone; but the translation is too much loaded with words, and in many places the sense is mistaken.⁷⁶

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According to Richard Baxter's edited memoirs, when aged about eighteen, he made the acquaintance in London of Humphrey Blunden (1609–*fl.*1654), “a sober, godly understanding” apprentice “whom I very much loved,” and who “is since turned

an extraordinary Chymist, and got *Jacob Behem* his Books translated and printed.”⁷⁷ Blunden’s shop was at “The Castle” in Cornhill near the Royal Exchange and during the latter half of the 1640s he entered into partnership to issue the writings of the astrologer William Lilly. Blunden also published six works by the alchemist Thomas Vaughan and may be the H.B. who appended an encomium to “his ever honour’d” friend’s *Anima Magica Abscondita* (printed by T.W. for H[umphrey] B[lunden], 1650).⁷⁸ In his ephemeris for 1648 Hartlib remarked that Blunden had gotten “an Instrument for curing deafness” from the alchemist Johann Rudolph Glauber; he apparently intended to apply it to his wife but was reluctant to pay £5 for it.⁷⁹ Blunden, moreover, queried some passages in Glauber’s books – probably those translated as *A Description of New Philosophical Furnaces* (1651), as well as reportedly corresponding with Serrarius in Amsterdam.⁸⁰ In addition, he published a number of works by or derived from the writings of Jacob Boehme, several in association with the printer Matthew Simmons. Indeed, such was Blunden’s enthusiasm for that “deep illuminated man of God” that he “furnished” Durand Hotham with material for the latter’s *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (printed for H[umphrey] Blunden, and sold at the Castle in Cornhill, 1654).⁸¹ He is most likely the H.Blunden who supplied a prefatory epistle to Boehme’s *Four Tables of Divine Revelation* (printed for H[umphrey] Blunden, and sold at the Castle in Cornhill, 1654). This treatise was rendered into English by H.B. - a monogram that may be identified with either Blunden, a namesake licensed to practise medicine or Humphrey Blundell (c.1622–fl.1644), Shropshire educated and a former pupil of Charles Hotham’s.⁸²

Charles Hotham (1615–1672), third son of Sir John Hotham of Scarborough by his second wife, was educated at Westminster school, Peterhouse and Christ’s College, Cambridge. In June 1644 Hotham was intruded Fellow of Peterhouse and was afterwards nominated as junior Proctor of the University. He was presented on 22 July 1646 and continued in the post until March 1647. One former student recalled that “besides some other of his

singularities” Hotham “made the sophisters to say their positions without book.”⁸³ While junior Proctor Hotham also engaged in a public debate before Thomas Hill, the Vice-Chancellor on the question of whether the soul was transmitted from the parent or created by God out of nothing and infused into the body. This was later published as *Ad Philosophiam Teutonicam Manuductio* (printed by T.W. for H[umphrey] Blunden, 1648) with a commendatory verse by his friend the Platonist Henry More. An English translation by Durand Hotham appeared as *An Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie* (printed by T.M. & A.C. for Nath[aniel] Brooks at the Angel in Corn-hill, 1650). In his dedication to the Vice-Chancellor Hotham explained that he sought to make these “*abstruse Notions*” more accessible by “*taking off the dark style*” of Boehme’s “*magick language,*” for:

*Whatsoever the Thrice-great Hermes deliver'd as Oracles from his Propheticall Tripes, or Pythagoras spake by authority, or Socrates debated, or Aristotle affirmed; yea, whatever divine Plato prophesied, or Plotinus proved; this, and all this, or a far higher and profounder Philosophy is (I think) contained in the Teutonicks writings.*⁸⁴

On 12 September 1648 Drew Sparrow (1630–*fl.*1648), a younger brother of the Boehme translator, was admitted to Peterhouse under Hotham’s tutelage. How long he remained in his charge is unknown as he did not take a degree.⁸⁵ Hotham afterwards preached a notable sermon against taking the oath of Engagement and was eventually deprived of his Fellowship. In 1653 he was presented rector of Wigan, Lancashire where he remained until his ejection for nonconformity in 1662. During this time Hotham translated Boehme’s *A Consolatory Treatise of the Four Complexions* (printed by T.W. for H[umphrey] Blunden, and sold at the Castle in Corn-hill, 1654).⁸⁶ He was later elected Fellow of the Royal Society before emigrating to the Bermudas where he was appointed a minister. Shortly before his death Hotham drew up his will. His “Astrologically Books” – so far as they could be “singled out from the rest” – were to be burnt “as monuments of

living vanity and remnants of the heathen Idolatry.” He possessed, in addition, some works on astronomy and “Chimicall Iron Tooloes” valued at about £10.⁸⁷ The nonconformist and biographer Edmund Calamy (1671–1732) regarded him as:

An excellent Scholar, both in Divinity and human Literature. A great Philosopher, and Searcher into the Secrets of Nature, and much addicted to Chymistry.⁸⁸

Durand Hotham (c.1617–1691), fifth son of Sir John Hotham by his second wife, was educated at Westminster school, Christ’s College, Cambridge and the Middle Temple. His father was Parliament’s appointed governor of Hull, but was arrested in June 1643 when it was feared that he and his eldest son would betray the garrison to the royalists. Durand was also taken into custody but was soon discharged on the intervention of William Fiennes, Viscount Saye and Sele. He defended his father and half-brother before a court martial, albeit unsuccessfully, and was present at his half-brother’s execution on 1 January 1645.⁸⁹ Afterwards he returned to Yorkshire, settling at Hutton Cranswick in the East Riding. By February 1651 Durand had been appointed a Justice of the Peace. About December that year George Fox went to “Justice Hothams: a pretty tender man y^t had had some experiences of Gods workeinge in his hearte.” According to Fox’s account they discoursed of “ye thinges of God,” Durand saying privately that he had known the “principle” of the inner light for ten years and was glad that “ye Lord did now publish it abroad to people.” The following Sunday evening Fox came to Durand’s house again:

& hee tooke mee in his armes & saide his house was my house: & hee was exceedinge glad att ye worke of ye Lorde & his power.⁹⁰

Afterwards Fox submitted twenty queries to Durand. Loath to enter into a dispute with “any sort of men y^t pretend religion, and a Command and Notion about y^e reach of mans naturall frame to comprehend,” Durand eventually responded with a lengthy letter

to Fox.⁹¹ About this time Durand began gaining a reputation as one of two Justices of the Peace in the East Riding sympathetic to the Quakers, later meeting with James Nayler as well.⁹² Indeed, Fox reported that Durand was glad that “ye Lords power & truth was spreade & soe many had received it,” attributing to him the remark:

if God had not raised uppe this principle light & life: ye nation had been overspread with rantisme & all ye Justices in ye nation could not stoppe it with all there lawes.⁹³



George Fox (1624-1691), Founder of the Society of Friends.

In February 1653 Hartlib noted in his ephemeris that Durand had “elegantly” retranslated Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (probably from Latin into English), and that it was to be printed shortly.⁹⁴ There is, however, no known copy of this work. On 7 November 1653 Durand completed *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (1654). Addressing the reader he conceded finding many “obscure” things as well as “highly honest, pious” and “just” sentiments in Boehme’s writings. Yet he trusted that this short relation would stir up more “searching Spirits” to thoroughly weigh his publications. Durand concluded by proposing Boehme’s inclusion at the head of a new roll of

“Civil Saints,” hoping that in these “last generations” he would be joined by such as have “cry’d out against, acted, and suffer’d, to redeem that part of mankind joyn’d in the Communion of a nation with them, from the captivity of tyrannous usurpation, and pretence, to rule by servile and customary Lawes.”⁹⁵

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The diffusion of Boehme’s texts from east to west, from Görlitz to Amsterdam and thence to the port of London, Essex and the East Riding, continued with their translation from English into Welsh at Wrexham by Morgan Llwyd (1619–1659) of Gwynedd. Regarded as the greatest Welsh prose-writer of the seventeenth century, Llwyd was probably educated at Wrexham grammar school – where according to tradition he heard the local curate Walter Cradock preach. During the Civil Wars he seems to have served as a chaplain and was associated with the Welsh army officers and regicides John Jones and Thomas Harrison, justifying the execution of Charles I with the lines “The law was ever above Kings.”⁹⁶ By October 1651 Llwyd was pastor of the gathered church at Wrexham. He considered the Welsh preacher William Erbery (1604–1654) his “*ever remembred friend*” and “*once-dear School-master*”; significantly, Cradock had been Erbery’s curate at St. Mary’s, Cardiff before he went to Wrexham.⁹⁷ Erbery knew Boehme’s *Mercurius Teutonicus* (1649), paraphrasing a prophetic passage that “the Turks shal yet turn to be true Christians, and that Christians shall all know the Truth as it is in Jesus.”⁹⁸ Perhaps he introduced Boehme to Llwyd, who by June 1651 was studying the Teutonic Philosopher. Llwyd was also known to some in London that waited for the “kingdome of God & the saluation of Israel” and emboldened by reading Michael Gühler’s *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1651) he wrote to Hartlib in December 1652 to know the truth about a rumour concerning the appearance of “the signe of the son of man” in the clouds above Germany or Poland.⁹⁹ One of Llwyd’s earliest published works was an allegory on contemporary

A V R O R A.

That is, the

Day-Spring.

Or

Dawning of the Day in the Orient

Or

Dawning-Rednesse

in the Rising of the

S V N.

That is

The Root or Mother of

Philosophie, Astrologie & Theologie
from the true Ground.

Or

A Description of Nature.

- I. How All was; and came to be in the Beginning.
- II. How Nature and the Elements are become Creaturely.
- III. Also of the Two Qualities Evill and Good.
- IIII. From whence all things had their Original.
- V. And how all stand and work at present.
- VI. Also how all will be at the End of this Time.
- VII. Also what is the Condition of the Kingdom of God, and of the Kingdom of Hell.
- VIII. And how men work and act creaturely in Each of them.

All this set down diligently from a true Ground in the Knowledge of the Spirit, and in the impulse of God.

By

Jacob Behme

Teutonick Philosopher.

8^{tes} 17:

Being his FIRST BOOK.

Written in *Geulitz* in *Germany* Anno Christi M. DC. XII. on Tuesday after the Day of Pentecost or Whitsunday *Ætatis sue* 37.

London, Printed by *John Streater*, for *Giles Calvert*, and are to be sold at his Shop at the *Black-Spread-Eagle* at the West-End of *Pauls*, 1656.

religious and political divisions entitled *Dirgelwch i rai iw ddeall, ac i ereill iw watwar, sef, Tri Aderyn yn ymddiddan yr Eryr, a”r Golomen, a”r Gigfran* (A Mystery for some to understand and others to mock at, that is to say, Three Birds discoursing, the Eagle, the Dove, and the Raven) (1653). The title-page indicated that it was also a sign to address the Welsh “before the coming of 666 [anti-Christ]” (Revelation 13:18).

In July 1656 Llwyd wrote from Wrexham to the Baptist preacher Henry Jessey recommending that he peruse “Jac. Behmens three-fold life, & especially his booke of Baptisme & lords supper.”¹⁰⁰ Another of Llwyd’s correspondents was Richard Baxter, whose understanding of God’s “first and second” will he questioned:

None knowes the will before the revealed essence of God. Know wee him (as immanent), then all is plaine & the key is found, though philosophy could never well attend to the eternall word who is the only begotten Image and universall declaration of the wonderful everblessed Godhead & is God eternall.¹⁰¹

Baxter responded on 10 July 1656, complaining that he could not understand Llwyd’s meaning. Furthermore, having looked into Sir Henry Vane’s and Boehme’s writings he was dissatisfied with their use of allegory and their obscure manner of revealing “y^e whole fabricke & systeme or body of truths w^{ch} they p[ro]fess to have attained.”¹⁰² Llwyd replied in December 1656 acknowledging that some things concerning God, paradise and new Jerusalem were either impossible to comprehend, difficult to speak of, unlawful or inconvenient to have all made known. Indeed, the “present writings of men” lagged far behind Paul for “elegant expressions and depth of understanding.”¹⁰³ Yet Llwyd had turned to Sparrow’s version of Boehme’s *The Way to Christ Discovered* (1648, 1654), translating “Of True Resignation” and “A Dialogue between a Scholar and his Master, Concerning the Super sensuall life” into Welsh as “Yr Ymroddiad” (“Resignation”) and “Y Discybl ai Athraw O newydd” (“The Disciple and his Teacher Anew”) (1655). These were published in London together with two works by

Y R
Y M R O D D I A D
N E U
B A P U R Y N
A
G Y F I E U T H I W Y D
D D W Y W A I T H
I

Helpu y cymru unwaith
allan or Hunan ar
drygioni.

Fc ai cyfieithwyd yn y flwyddyn 1654.
Ag ai printiwyd 1657.

Llwyd as *Yr ymroddiad neu Bapuryn a gyfieuthiwyd ddwywaith*

i helpu y cymru unwaith allan or Hunan ar drygioni (Self Resignation, or a Paper translated to help the Welsh out of Self and Evil) (1657). His objective was explained in the preface; “to bring the spirit of man into entire submission to God by subduing the natural self to the spiritual self.”¹⁰⁴

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The dream of Boehme’s principal English translators that his writings would put an end to religious strife proved to be a vain hope. Instead of a new reformation there was a new Babel. Condemned by some as a mixture of incomprehensible nonsense and vile falsehoods, the Teutonic Philosopher’s ideas and vocabulary were appropriated and reworked into a variety of belief systems, ranging from the syncretism of the Cambridge Platonists to alchemists’ experiments to discover the secrets of nature, and several early Quakers’ notions of the unfolding of divine mysteries. Like other continental European works sold in English versions at London during the 1640s and 1650s, Boehme’s texts were issued as a result of co-operation between translators, patrons, facilitators, printers and publishers. This was at a time when legislation empowered civil and military officials to fine or imprison the authors, printers, publishers and booksellers of unlicensed material. Indeed, while Boehme’s writings were not suppressed (the copyright of four books was entered in the Stationers’ Register) a few of his readers were imprisoned for blasphemy or punished by authority. Their fate falls beyond the scope of this article, though it serves to emphasize the English translators’ inability to control how Boehme would be interpreted.¹⁰⁶

Bibliographic Note

Unlike the complete German editions of Boehme's writings *Des Gottseeligen Hoch-Erleuchtenen Jacob Bohmens Teutonici Philosophi* (Amsterdam, 10 volumes, printed for Hendrick Beets, 1682) and *Theosophia Revelata* ([Leiden?], 21 parts, 1730), it was more than a century before something approaching a complete English edition of his writings was published as *The Works of Jacob Behmen* (4 volumes, printed for M. Richardson, Joseph Richardson and G. Robinson in Paternoster Row, 1764–81). With the exception of Francis Lee's rendering of a dialogue "Of the Supersensual Life" and a version of *The Way to Christ discovered* issued at Bath in 1775, this translation – with some slight alterations in phraseology – was by Sparrow and Ellistone. Though it is a lasting monument to their endeavours this edition was still incomplete, lacking several important treatises and Boehme's letters.¹⁰⁵

Notes

* An earlier version of this article was read at a conference on mysticism and spiritualism held at the University of Szeged, Hungary. I would like to thank the participants for their helpful comments and suggestions. In addition, I have profited from the advice of Mario Caricchio and John Morrill as well as two anonymous referees. Place of publication, where known and unless otherwise stated, is London. The year is taken to begin on 1 January and English dates are "old style," while European are "new style." I alone am responsible for any mistakes or shortcomings.

¹ John Nickolls (ed.), *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell; Concerning the Affairs of Great Britain* (1743), p. 99.

² Margaret Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme: A study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York, 1914); Reginald Maxse, "The reception of Jacob Boehme in England in the XVII and XVIII centuries," Unpublished Oxford University B.Litt., 1934; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948); Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1960); Nigel Smith, *Perfection*

Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 185–225; Brian Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996); A. Hessayon, “Jacob Boehme and the early Quakers,” *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 60 (2005), pp. 191–223.

³ George Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius. Gleanings from Hartlib’s papers* (Liverpool, 1947); Charles Webster, *The great instauration: science, medicine and reform, 1626–1660* (1975); Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib and universal reformation: studies in intellectual communication* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁴ Jacob Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen*, trans. J[ohn] E[llistone] (1649), sigs. a2^v–a2^{r2}.

⁵ [Abraham von Franckenberg], *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen* (1644), sig. A2.

⁶ [von Franckenberg], *Life of Boehmen*, sig. A2^v; Boehme, *Epistles*, 2.65–74, 18.6, pp. 32–33, 143; “A Catalogue of All The Books that are known to be Extant written by Jacob Behme” in *The remainder of the books written by Jacob Behme*, trans. John Sparrow (1662).

⁷ Boehme, *Epistles*, 33.10, p. 204; Andrew Weeks, *Boehme. An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany, New York, 1991), pp. 184, 187, 205–06.

⁸ *A reall and unfeigned Testimonie, concerning Iacob Beme* (1649), p. 2.

⁹ *A reall and unfeigned Testimonie*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Boehme, *Epistles*, 2.10, 2.14, pp. 20, 21.

¹¹ [von Franckenberg], *Life of Boehmen*, sig. A2^v.

¹² Jacob Boehme, *Aurora, That is, the Day-Spring*, trans. John Sparrow (1656), 10.45, p. 184.

¹³ Durand Hotham, *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (1654), sig. E2.

¹⁴ Boehme, *Epistles*, 2.51–54, 2.59–60, pp. 29–30, 31.

¹⁵ Boehme, *Epistles*, 23.18, p. 171; Weeks, *Boehme*, pp. 29–30, 49–50, 197–98.

¹⁶ John Bruckner, *A Bibliographical Catalogue of Seventeenth-Century German Books Published in Holland* (The Hague and Paris, 1971), pp. 47–48.

¹⁷ “De vita et scriptis Jacobi Böhmii” in Johann Wilhelm Ueberfeld (ed.), *Theosophia Revelata. Das ist: Alle göttliche Schriften des Gottfeligen und hocherleuchteten Deutschen Theosophi Jacob Böhmens* (21 parts, [Leiden?], 1730), partly translated as “VI. Of the old and new editions and impressions of these writings; also of the Dutch, English, Latin and French translation of the same” in Dr. Williams’s Library, London (hereafter DWL), MS 186.17 (15), “Introduction to Philosophy” (1858), fol. 61; Francis Okely (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life, Death, Burial, and Wonderful Writings, of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton, 1780), p. 13.

¹⁸ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fols. 52–53; Bruckner, *Bibliographical Catalogue*, pp. xvi, 64–66, 76–77, 82.

¹⁹ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fols. 62–64.

²⁰ Boehme, *Aurora*, “To the Reader”; DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fols. 65–66; Okely (ed.), *Memoirs of Jacob Behmen*, p. 10.

- ²¹ F.A. Janssen, “Böhme’s *Wercken* (1682): its editor, its publisher, its printer,” *Quaerendo*, 16 (1986): 138–39.
- ²² DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fols. 67–68, 69–70; University Library of Amsterdam (UvA), MS III E 9 (31, 37, 76).
- ²³ “Theosophick Letters or Epistles’ p. 31 in *The remainder of the books written by Jacob Behme*, trans. John Sparrow (1662); W. Heijting, “Hendrick Beets (1625?–1708), publisher to the German adherents of Jacob Böhme in Amsterdam,” *Quaerendo*, 3 (1973): 259.
- ²⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter Bodl.), MS Ashmole 1399, fols. 88r–93v.
- ²⁵ Bodl., MS Ashmole 756; British Library, London (hereafter BL), Add. MS 5829, fol. 92v.
- ²⁶ Bodl., MS Ashmole 1458, fols. 157r–58v.
- ²⁷ UL Amsterdam (UvA), MS N a–e.
- ²⁸ Sheffield University Library, Sheffield (hereafter SUL), Hartlib Papers, 29/2/12A–B.
- ²⁹ SUL, HP 30/4/27A, 27B; SUL, HP 30/4/53A.
- ³⁰ SUL, HP 37/70A; SUL HP 37/71A.
- ³¹ BL, MS Harleian 1821.
- ³² [Abraham von Franckenberg], *The Life of one Jacob Boehmen* (1644) [Thomason E 16(16)]. This translation differs from that contained in Jacob Boehme, *Forty Questions of the Soul*, trans. John Sparrow (1665).
- ³³ Jacob Boehme, *Two Theosophicall Epistles*, (1645), title-page [Thomason E 1170(1)].
- ³⁴ Bodl., MS Rawlinson C 763; Bodl., MS Eng.th.e.103.
- ³⁵ Bodl., MS Ashmole 1499, fol. 279r-v; cf. Boehme, *Epistles*, 23.15–18, pp. 170–71.
- ³⁶ SUL, HP 3/2/77.
- ³⁷ Essex Record Office, T/P 195/12, fol. 22.
- ³⁸ SUL, HP 30/4/44A.
- ³⁹ SUL, HP 21/15/1
- ⁴⁰ Jacob Boehme, *XL. Qvestions Concerning the Soule*, trans. J[ohn] S[parrow] (1647), “To the Reader.”
- ⁴¹ SUL, HP 45/1/33B–34A; SUL, HP 45/1/47A.
- ⁴² Cambridge University Library, Syn.7.64.145, flyleaf.
- ⁴³ BL, Add. MS 21,426, fol. 349r.
- ⁴⁴ Jacob Boehme, *Forty Questions of the Soul*, trans. John Sparrow (1665), “Preface.”
- ⁴⁵ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fols. 60–61; cf. DWL, MS I.1.62, p. 176, partly printed in Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme*, p. 196 n. 24.
- ⁴⁶ E. Bernstein, “Letters of Hilary Prach and John G. Matern,” *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, 16 (1919): 5.
- ⁴⁷ DWL, MS 186.18 (1) a, Epistle I (c.1701), printed in [R.C. Jenkins], ‘Miracles, Visions, and Revelations, Mediaeval and Modern’, *British Quarterly Review*, 58 (1873): 182, and in Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme*, pp. 195–96 n. 24.

- ⁴⁸ Pierre Poiret, *Bibliotheca Mysticorum Selecta* (Amsterdam, 1708), p. 169.
- ⁴⁹ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fol. 60; cf. DWL, MS I.1.62, p. 175, printed in Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme*, p. 195 n. 22.
- ⁵⁰ Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 294v.
- ⁵¹ DWL, MS 186.18 (1) a, Epistle I.
- ⁵² [Philip Herbert, fifth Earl of Pembroke], *Of the Internal and Eternal Nature of Man in Christ* (1654), title-page [Thomason E 734(1)].
- ⁵³ Bodl., MS Rawlinson D 833, fol. 64r; DWL, MS 186.18 (1) a, Epistle I; Marjorie Nicolson and Sarah Hutton (eds.), *The Conway Letters* (Oxford, 1992), p. 280.
- ⁵⁴ Oliver Dick (ed.), *Aubrey's Brief Lives* (1949; reprinted, Boston, 1999), p. 146.
- ⁵⁵ Afonso V et al., *Five Treatises of the Philosophers Stone*, trans. Henry Pinnell (1651), sigs. A2–A3; SUL, HP 28/1/69A; Bodl., MS Aubrey 26, fol. 7v; SUL, HP 29/4/4B.
- ⁵⁶ John Reeve, *Sacred Remains, or a Divine Appendix* (3rd edn., 1856), pp. 53–68; Friends House Library, London (hereafter FHL), William Caton MS III no. 74, fols. 181–85.
- ⁵⁷ David Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (7 vols., 1881–94), vol. 6, p. 764.
- ⁵⁸ Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 294r.
- ⁵⁹ National Archives, London (hereafter NA), Prob 11/320 fols. 173r–75r, printed in Henry Waters (ed.), *Genealogical Gleanings in England* (2 vols., Boston, Mass., 1901), vol. 1, pp. 606–07.
- ⁶⁰ Lodowick Muggleton, *The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit*, (1699), pp. 64–66.
- ⁶¹ F. Mood, “A Broadside Advertising Eleuthera and the Bahama Islands London, 1647,” *Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 32 (1933–37): 82.
- ⁶² *Journals of the House of Commons* vi. 288; J.T. Hassam, “The Bahamas: Notes on an Early Attempt at Colonization,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 2nd series, 13 (1899): 4–58.
- ⁶³ NA, Prob 11/225 fol. 218r.
- ⁶⁴ Essex RO, D/P 85/1/1; R.R.A. Walker, “John Elliston and John Sparrow,” *Notes & Queries*, 14th series, 167 (1934): 312; Anon., “The Sparrow Family of Gestingthorpe,” *Essex Review*, 48 (Colchester, 1939): 214–16.
- ⁶⁵ Boehme, *Epistles*, sigs. a^v–a2, a2^{r-2}.
- ⁶⁶ Jacob Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, trans. J[ohn] Ellistone (1651), p. 207. Thomason dated his copy 2 July 1651.
- ⁶⁷ G.E. Brisco Eyre (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, 1640-1708* (3 vols., privately printed, 1913), vol. 1, p. 459 (28 October 1654); Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum, or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, trans. John Ellistone and John Sparrow (1654), “To the Reader”; NA, Prob 11/225 fols. 218v–19r; Bodl., MS Rawlinson Essex 23, fol. 296r.
- ⁶⁸ Brisco Eyre (ed.), *Transcript*, vol. 1, p. 309; *A Perfect Diurnall* No. 288, 29 January – 5 February 1649, p. 2319; *Perfect Occurrences of Every Daies iournall in Parliament* No. 110, 2–9 February 1649, p. 830; *A Perfect Summary* No. 3,

5–12 February 1649 p. 21. Thomason dated his copy 5 February 1649.

⁶⁹ *A Perfect Diurnall* No. 22, 6–13 May 1650 p. 256; *Several Proceedings in Parliament* No. 33, 9–16 May 1650 p. 486.

⁷⁰ *A Perfect Diurnall*, No. 125, 3–10 May 1652 last page. Thomason dated his copy 22 May 1652.

⁷¹ Thomason dated his copy 13 November 1655.

⁷² Brisco Eyre (ed.), *Transcript*, vol. 2, p. 91 (18 October 1656). Thomason dated his copy 17 October 1656.

⁷³ Thomason dated his copy 12 April 1659.

⁷⁴ S[amuel] P[ordage], *Mundorum Explicatio or, The Explanation of an Hieroglyphical Figure* (1661), sig. a4^{r-2}.

⁷⁵ DWL, MS 186.17 (15), fol. 59; cf. DWL, MS I.1.62, p. 175, printed in Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme*, p. 195 n. 22.

⁷⁶ DWL, MS I.1.143, printed in Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an adequate Biography of the celebrated divine and theosopher, William Law* (1854), p. 45 n.

⁷⁷ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (1696), part 1, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Thomas Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650), last page.

⁷⁹ SUL, HP 31/22/4A; SUL, HP 23/6A; SUL, HP 60/14/39B–40A; SUL, HP 28/1/83B.

⁸⁰ SUL, HP 60/3/6A; SUL, HP 42/2/5A.

⁸¹ Jacob Boehme, *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*, trans. H. B. (1654), sig. H3; Durand Hotham, *The Life of Jacob Behmen* (1654), sig. B2.

⁸² Boehme, *Four Tables*, “To the Reader.”

⁸³ Richard Parkinson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome*, Chetham Society, 26 (2 vols., 1852), vol. 1, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Charles Hotham, *An Introduction to the Tevtonick Philosophie*, trans. Durand Hotham (1650), “Epistle Dedicatory.”

⁸⁵ Thomas Walker (ed.), *Admissions to Peterhouse* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 91.

⁸⁶ Brisco Eyre (ed.), *Transcript*, vol. 1, p. 459 (28 October 1654).

⁸⁷ NA, Prob 11/344 fol. 282v.

⁸⁸ Edmund Calamy, *An Abridgement of Mr. Baxter’s History of his Life and Times* (2nd edn., 2 vols., 1713), vol. 2, p. 413.

⁸⁹ *CJ* iii. 153, 158; Hull University Library, DDHO/1/62; Hull UL, DDHO/1/64.

⁹⁰ Norman Penney (ed.), *The Journal of George Fox edited from the MSS* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1911), vol. 1, pp. 18–19.

⁹¹ Hull UL, DDHO/1/58.

⁹² Penney (ed.), *Journal of George Fox*, vol. 1, pp. 29, 32, 51, vol. 2, p. 134; FHL, MS Swarthmore III 39; FHL, MS Swarthmore III 41; FHL, MS Swarthmore III 6.

⁹³ Penney (ed.), *Journal of George Fox*, vol. 1, p. 29; cf. William Penn, *Judas and the Jews* (1673), p. 30.

⁹⁴ SUL, HP 28/2/53A.

⁹⁵ Hotham, *Life of Jacob Behmen*, sigs. B2, G2^{r-2}–G2^{v-2}. Thomason dated his

copy 29 September 1654.

⁹⁶ National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (hereafter NLW), MS 11434 B, printed in T.E. Ellis and J.H. Davies (eds.), *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd O Wynedd* (2 vols., Bangor and London, 1899–1908), vol. 1, p. 55.

⁹⁷ William Erbery, *A Call to the Churches* (1653), pp. 21, 22; William Scott and James Bliss (eds.), *The Works of ... William Laud* (7 vols., Oxford, 1847–60), vol. 5, p. 329.

⁹⁸ William Erbery, *The Testimony of William Erbery* (1658), p. 333.

⁹⁹ SUL, HP 65/8/1A.

¹⁰⁰ NLW, MS 11438 D, Letter 86, printed in D.S. Katz, “Philo-Semitism in the Radical Tradition: Henry Jessey, Morgan Llwyd, and Jacob Boehme,” in J. van den Berg and E.G.E. van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents* (Dordrecht, 1988), pp. 197–98.

¹⁰¹ DWL, MS Baxter, Letters, I 52, printed in Ellis and Davies (eds.), *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd*, vol. 2, p. 271, and calendared in N. Keeble and G.F. Nuttall (eds.), *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (2 vols., Oxford, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 209–10.

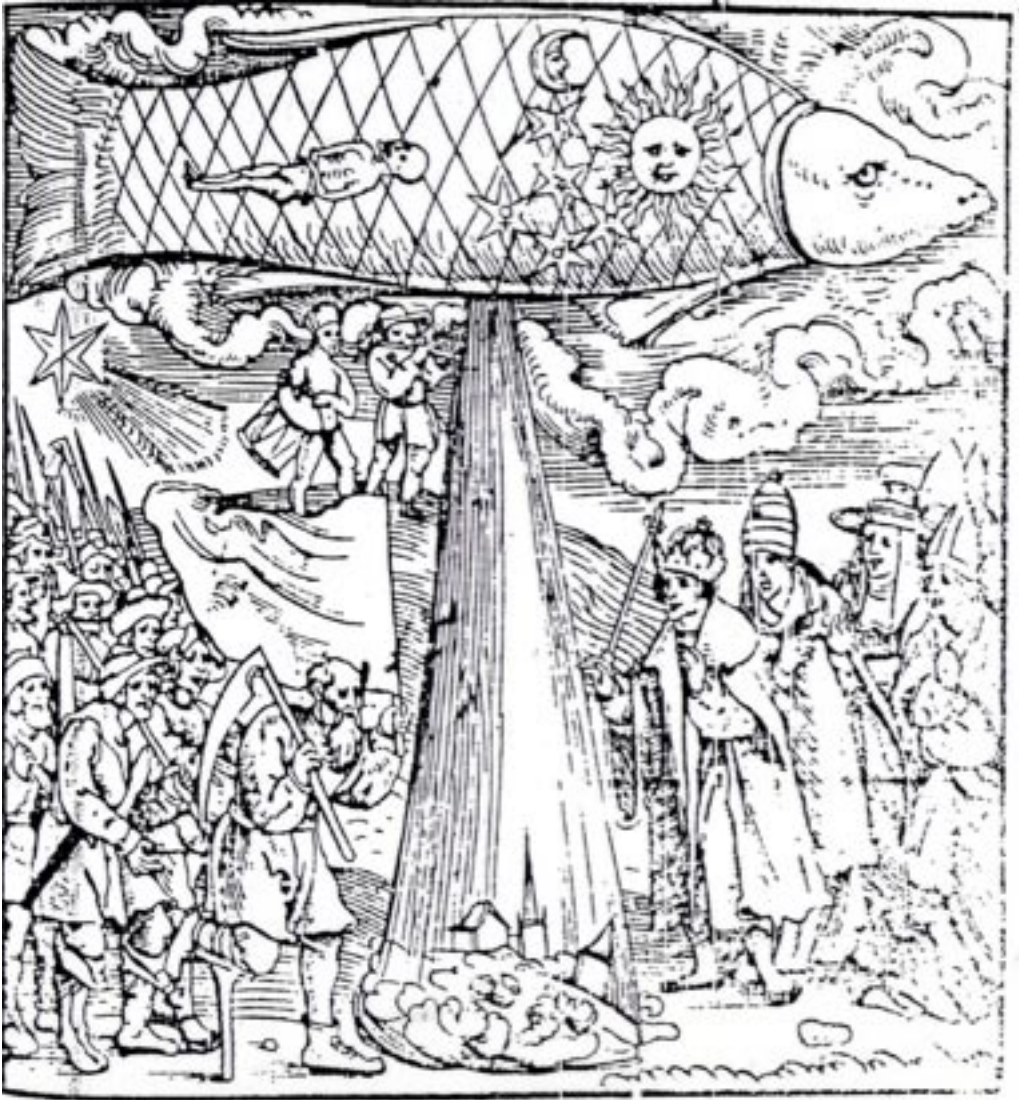
¹⁰² DWL, MS Baxter, Letters, I 53, calendared in Keeble and Nuttall (eds.), *Calendar of Baxter Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 217–18.

¹⁰³ Ellis and Davies (eds.), *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd*, vol. 2, p. 273; Keeble and Nuttall (eds.), *Calendar of Baxter Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 234, 248–49.

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Palmer, *A History of the Older Nonconformity of Wrexham and its Neighbourhood* (Wrexham, [1888]), p. 14; Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature* (Oxford, 1955), p. 246.

¹⁰⁵ J. Yeowell, “Jacob Böhme, or Behmen,” *Notes & Queries*, 1st series, 8 (1853): 246.

¹⁰⁶ Boehme’s readership is explored in my forthcoming book *‘Teutonic Philosophy’: Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) and the reception of his writings in the English speaking world to c.1850*.



**„The Flood’ of 1524 – The First
Mass-media Event in European
History
Gustav-Adolf Schoener
Universität Hannover**

*The Flood of 1524:
The First Mass-media Event in
European History*

Gustav-Adolf Schoener

Universität Hannover

What I would like to present to you here is a bit like a serial novel: at the first Association for the Study of Esotericism conference in East Lansing, I discussed a group of astrological pamphlets that announced the “arrival of a ‘little prophet’” for the year 1484. This prediction was later taken to indicate Martin Luther and played an important role in the Reformation process. This prediction was occasioned by a so-called “Grand Conjunction”, a conjunction of the slow planets Jupiter and Saturn in November 1484 in the sign of Scorpio. Italian and German astrologers took that as an indication of the Reformation and an aid in interpreting it. These “Grand Conjunctions” occurred (and still occur) every 20 years – each time in a different sign of the zodiac. But depending on the features, the Renaissance astrologers distinguished between important and less important “Grand Conjunctions.” The next very important “Grand Conjunction” after 1484 took place in 1524 in the sign of Pisces. All seven planets joined together in February of that year to a kind of super conjunction – and that did not augur well! This prediction has gone down in history as the “The Flood-Prediction.” And it inflamed passions all over Europe.

Pamphlets

But before I get to this prediction, I would like to make a few remarks on the function of literature and journalism in the period around 1500. For it was not until literature assumed a *journalistic* function that a purely “scholarly” discussion of astrology could become a Europe-wide event, an event that for a short time overshadowed even the events surrounding Martin Luther. Literature (and the entire culture of communication) went through a change in function around 1500, the effects of which can hardly be overestimated. The cause for this change was the development of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg. But that was only the trigger. Only the new printing technology could have brought about the change in *function*.

The literature of the Middle Ages was handwritten. Writing a book could take months or years and it was done quietly, mostly in secluded monasteries, and also at universities, but here for academic circles only. The authors of the Middle Age were not seeking to reach the public. Literature served the purposes of *remembering* and *preserving*, of *edifying* (in the case of religious literature), and of *transmitting knowledge* (in the case of scientific literature).¹ But in Early Modern Times Societies in many European countries, especially in Italy and in Germany, were in a state of ferment political, artistic, and religious. Literature was now intended to dominate through new ideas, personal opinions of the authors, was intended to influence society and bring about change. This desire to argue and agitate could only be realized by mass media. And that was now made possible by the so-called “pamphlets”, a result of the new printing technology.

These pamphlets consisted of a few pages of personal statements on important topics – including woodcut illustrations. Editions of up to 4000 copies could be printed. Preachers in their pulpits, public postings at the town hall, and readings in private

homes served to spread the word. These pamphlets were thus the first real mass medium in the history of communication. The rapid rise of this medium began around 1500, and we will see that this development ran parallel to the announcement of “The Flood.”

The ‘Grand Conjunction’ of 1524

The history of the “Flood Predictions” began in 1499, when the two German astrologers Jakob Pflaum and Johann Stöfler in Ulm printed their “Ephemerides” (Stöfler was a professor of mathematics in Tübingen and a famous teacher of many Protestant reformers such as Philipp Melanchthon). In these Ephemerides, Stöfler declared that a “Grand Conjunction” in Pisces would occur in February of 1524:

That will show an indubitable transformation (mutatio), change (variatio), and reversal (alteratio) over nearly the entire world, the climate zones, empires, countries, cities and classes, in insensible creatures, the creatures of the sea, and everything born on earth, as forsooth has not been heard of for many years, neither by historians nor by the forefathers.²

Thus an avalanche was set off, but it first began slowly. Alarm was, for the time being, kept in bounds; there was no mention of a “Flood” yet, and the Latin terms “mutatio”, “variatio” and “alteratio” were still undramatic and led to anticipate rather mild and reforming developments. At any rate there was still no cause for catastrophe alarm. The prediction was also so general, that no particular country was indicated, no particular religious or political group, and most important: it was composed entirely in Latin, so it was discussed solely in academic circles. But it was discussed thoroughly, and reprints appeared again and again over the years, in 1506, 1507, 1513, 1518, and 1521.³

This didn’t change until the most famous Italian astrologer of the time, Luca Gaurico, intervened. Luca Gaurico was appointed

to the faculty of astrology at the University of the Vatican in 1520 by Pope Leo X. But he was also highly regarded by humanist and Protestant theologians such as Philipp Melanchthon and Prince Joachim I of Brandenburg. Referring to Johann Stöffler's prediction, he dramatized the prophecy and introduced in his "Prognosticon 1503-1535"⁴. The main theme that was to influence the entire debate which followed: natural catastrophes of enormous dimensions, floods, destruction of entire cities by unbelievable storms. He was the first astrologer to use the term "The Flood" and substantiate it astrologically with the "watery" zodiac sign of Pisces.

It was also Gaurico who brought this vision of horror onto the stage of European politics: in 1512 he sent the "Reichstag of Trier" his proclamation of impending natural catastrophes, supplemented by predictions of social unrest.⁵ This so impressed and alarmed Prince Ludwig V (and the entire German "Reichstag") that the astrologer Johann Stöffler, author of the first mild prediction and Johann Virdung of Hassfurt were commissioned to compile counter statements. Johann Stöffler rightly defends himself in his appraisal: he had never predicted a "Flood" and Virdung of Hassfurt refers to the Bible in his expertise to Genesis 9:11, where God had promised Noah that there would never again be a flood which would destroy the earth.⁶ The astrologer Gaurico thus appears to have been found guilty by other astrologers of exaggeration at least, and the sharp tone of the prognostication (sent to the German Reichstag) gives rise to the suspicion of a secret attempt to exercise political influence against Emperor Maximilian and the Habsburgs, who were involved in an external conflict with France.

Whether by design or not: Gaurico had politicized the prediction and exaggerated it to an inevitable "Flood." Thanks to his prediction, a veritable flood of pamphlets now poured over many European countries, leading to the first mass media event.⁷ The nearer the event came, the more pamphlets were printed and the more agitation was caused. Gaurico had many imitators and freeloaders, especially among Italian, German, and also Spanish and Polish astrologers, who joined in the horror vision by means of pamphlets

and leaflets. They predicted –, as the Italian astrologer Tommaso Giannotti, a “flood of unimaginable proportions” (*ingentissimum diluvium*).⁸

One example: most of the flood predictions have illustrations like this on the front page:

Illustration 1: Carion

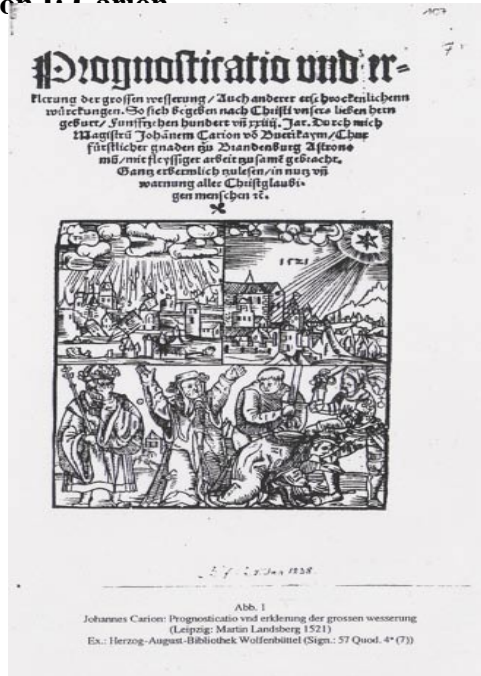


Abb. 1
 Johannes Carion: Prognosticatio und Erklärung der grossen weßung
 (Leipzig: Martin Landsberg 1521)
 Ex.: Herzog-August-Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel (Sign.: 57 Quod. 4* (7))

The great flood prediction made by Johannes Carion in 1521 (Carion was an astrologer and advisor to the court of Prince Joachim I of Brandenburg and another friend of Melancthon). The title above the illustration says: “Prognosticatio and Explanation of the Great Watering and Other Terrible Effects.”⁹ The picture above shows a still peaceful scene in the sunshine in the year 1521. The next picture shows the great Flood and the destruction of a city. The lower picture shows the revolt of the “peasant folk” (executing a clergyman).

Illustration II: Carion



A year later, in 1522, Carion published a second prediction, with an even more dramatic title illustration: here, there is no peaceful scene anymore, only destruction caused by storms and class wars.

Illustration: Copp



The pictures demonstrate the increasing alarm: This prediction by Johann Copp was made in the year 1523. Here, the vision of war was in the foreground –, the “Flood” in the background. The drama is increased by these written three cries of woe: “Woe! Woe! Woe!”, an allusion to Jesus’ cries of “woe” to the three cities of Galilee ¹⁰, which didn’t accept his teachings: “it will be more tolerable for the unbeliever cities (like Tyros and Sidon) on the Day of Judgment!” It is not just a scene of calamity that is depicted here through pictures and texts, it is the apocalyptic vision of the end of

days itself. Johannes Carion commented on that in great detail in his text and announced the coming of the reign of the “Antichrist” for the year 1789, to be followed by the second coming of Christ. The flood of 1524 was just the beginning of the end of days.

The adversaries of such fear-and-panic-causing predictions, who were astrologers as well, attempted to conciliate. In addition to Stöffler and Virdung, for example, there is Agostino Nifo da Sessa, whose pamphlet was distributed all across Italy, and who presents astrological arguments¹¹ against the interpretation of a “universal Flood” (diluvium universale). He conceded local flooding in far-off countries as a worst-case scenario.¹² In his pamphlet “The true liberation from the Flood panic” Giovanni Elisio of Naples tried to contrast a real “Flood” with a spiritual one: he predicted that the anticipated conjunction would bring about a “spiritual renewal of Christianity”.¹³

But that was of no help now! The peak phase of pamphlet production and atmosphere of fear began in 1519, and lasted until 1523: more than 60 authors had written over 160 pamphlets at an average of 1000 copies each at least 160,000 copies had been circulated. Some of them were commissioned works, some theological discussions, and some direct warnings to the public. The dedications show that popes, cardinals and bishops, emperors, kings and princes are all involved. Many pamphlets are dedicated to Charles V and Popes Julius II, Leo X, Hadrian IV, and Clemens VII. The flood of pamphlets coming from Italy spread across Austria, Switzerland, South Germany, North Germany, Flanders, France, and further to Spain, England, and Poland.¹⁴

The Viennese court astrologer Georg Tannstetter saw the increasing alarm in all classes of the population as a mainly *journalistic* problem: “A great cry has been sounded,” he wrote in 1523, “because many papers and pamphlets were circulated this year which I do not consider to be the righteous work of a learned man.”¹⁵ Tannstetter was particularly enraged that “a treatise on the ruin of the city of Vienna has been distributed under my name.” In his prediction

of 1519, he had expressly warned against such statements, so as not to alarm “the fearful people.” For “what the conjunction signifies, should not be discussed in public, but at a higher level”.¹⁶ Several astrologers are uneasy about the consequences of the media effect, and even Gaurico, who contributed greatly to this atmosphere, tries to defuse the situation with a “consolation treatise”, shortly before the expected events.¹⁷ But these warnings came too late, panic had seized all levels and classes.

Illustration: Leonardo



Just how deep the fear of catastrophe was rooted in the consciousness of contemporaries, can be seen in ten drawings by Leonardo da Vinci from 1514, inspired by Gaurico’s “Prognosticon 1503-35”¹⁸ which refer directly to the Flood, and each show an apocalyptic scene.¹⁹

Illustration: Dürer



Traumansichte
Wasserfarben, 300 x 425. Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum
[Winkler 944]

Im Jahre 1525 nach dem Pfingsttag in der Nacht zwischen dem
Mittwoch und Donnerstag [30.--31. Mai] habe ich im Schlafe
diese Erscheinung gesehen, wie viele große Wasser vom Him-
mel fielen; und das erzeu traf das Erdrich ungefähr vier Meilen
von mir mit einer solchen Furchbarkeit und einem überaus
Geräusch und es zerprügte und zerrißte das ganze Land. Da-
bei erschrak ich so gar schwer, daß ich davon erwachte.
Dann fielen die andern Wasser, und die da fielen, die waren
sehr mäßig und es waren deren viele, einige weitere, einige
näher, und sie kamen so hoch herab, daß sie sichtbar gleich-
mäßig langsam fielen. Aber als das erste Wasser, welches das
Erdrich traf, nahere herabkommen war, da fiel es mit einer
solchen Geschwindigkeit, mit Wind und Brausen, und ich er-
schrak so sehr, daß mir, als ich erwachte, mein ganzer Körper
zitterte und ich lange nicht reden zu mir selbst kommen konnte.
Als ich aber am Morgen aufstand, merkte ich es hier oben, wie
ich es gesehen hatte. Gott wende alle Dinge zum Besten!
Albrecht Dürer, 1525

And the artist Albrecht Dürer reports a “dream” that he had still around Pentecost of 1525: formidable masses of water plunge down to Earth, with such might and ferocity that he wakes up trembling. He recorded this vision in an aquarelle with a short report attached. At the end is the desperate plea: “May God let all things turn for the best.”²⁰

But what about the common people? In Italy they began building arks in November of 1523, the nobility went to the mountains for “hunting” or “farming”, as it was officially called. - Huge bands of common people were preparing themselves for the flight to the nearest mountains.²¹ In Germany the atmosphere of fear had already culminated in 1520, there was also talk here of building arks. - Some

wanted to leave coastal cities, others sold their household goods and didn't want to marry or work any longer. - Fields were not being tilled.²²

And then the year 1524! No “terrible Flood”! But a flood of pamphlets as had never been seen before! So did nothing come of the prophecies and astrology? Was this the first European event, that took place only in the media? As far as the Flood is concerned, yes! The year 1524 is said to have been extremely dry. And as far as the “peasant revolt”²³ was concerned? That actually took place even though a few months later, in the summer of 1524, and even though it had been announced years earlier by a series of local peasant uprisings. On the whole the entire affair was quite certainly a “multi-layered event” that could not have happened in that manner had it not been for the first mass media.

Notes

¹ Among these were astrological treatises such as that of the Arab astrologer Abu Ma'shar from the 9th century AD “De magnis coniunctionibus”, a standard astrology work that had been translated into Latin in the 12th century by John of Seville and Hermann of Carinthia.

² Hubertus Fischer: *Grammatik der Sterne und Ende der Welt*, in: Hans Georg Soeffner (Ed.): *Kultur und Alltag (Soziale Welt – spec. volume 6)*, Göttingen 1988, 1996, 196. Latin text in: Heike Talkenberger: *Prophetie und Zeitgeschehen in Texten und Holzschnitten astrologischer Flugschriften 1488-1528, Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur Bd. 26*, Tübingen 1990, 161.

³ Fischer: 196, annot. 27.

⁴ Compiled around 1501. The exact title of the print of 1522 is: *Prognosticon ab Incarnationis Christi anno MDIII usque ad XXXV ualiturum*, cf. Hubertus Fischer: 206.

⁵ Paola Zambelli: *Many ends of the world – Luca Gaurico Instigator of the Debate in Italy and in Germany*, in: dies.: *'Astrologi hallucinat' – Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, Berlin 1986, 248.

⁶ Zambelli: 249f.

⁷ Fischer: 195.

⁸ As Giannotti in: “Wahre Voraussage der Sintflut“ 1522. *De vera diluvii prognosticatione*, Rom 1522 in: Fischer: 206.

⁹ Johannes Carion: *Prognosticatio und Erklerung der großen Wesserung*, Leipzig 1522, Ex.: Herzog-August-Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel.

¹⁰ Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Kapernaum. Matt. 11: 20-24.

¹¹ Referring to Ptolemy, he stated: Other conjunctions do not play any role in solar eclipses! The conjunction of planets in Pisces can thus be seen to have no dramatic consequences. Fischer: 207.

¹² Agostino Nifo: *De falsa diluvii prognosticatione*, Naples 1519, later in Italian and Castilian also, in: Hubertus Fischer: 207.

¹³ Giovanni Elisio: *Satis metuendi diluvii verissima liberatio*, Naples 1523, in: Hubertus Fischer 209

¹⁴ Fischer: as annot. 20, 197.

¹⁵ Georg Tanstetter: *Zw eren und gefallen des durchleuchtigsten Fürsten und Herrn (...)*, Vienna 1523, in: Hubertus Fischer: as annot. 20, 211f.

¹⁶ Tanstetter: 212.

¹⁷ Paola Zambelli: 243.

¹⁸ Reported by, among others, the cleric and historian Sigismondo Tizio of Siena and Leonardo Richi of Lucca. Fischer: 206.

¹⁹ These are the sheets 12378 (“Deluge“), 12380 (“Deluge Formalized“) and 12383 (“Climax of the Deluge“), Codex Windsor, cf.: Marco Rosci/Enrico Seprè: Leonardo da Vinci, Wiesbaden 1977, 164f and 174f.

²⁰ Albrecht Dürer: *Das gesamte Werk in zwei Bänden*, Vol. 1 Handzeichnungen, ed. by Wolfgang Hütt, Frankfurt/M. 1970, 1091. His famous “Melancholia I“ of 1514 has been considered by researchers to be a contribution to the deluge debate. Heike Talkenberger 338.

²² From the dedication by the physician of the Cardinal Archbishop of Salzburg, Leonard Schmaus, to Nifo da Sessa’s print: Fischer: 211 and the literature listed there.

²¹ Fischer: 211.

²² Leonhard Reymann: *Practica vber die grossen vnnd*

Book Reviews

ROBERT LIMA

stages
of
EVIL

Occultism in Western Theater and Drama

Lima, Robert, *Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005)

Reviewed by Lance Gharavi

Stages of Evil: Occultism in Western Theater and Drama, published by the University Press of Kentucky in a handsomely bound volume, is an enormously ambitious work in terms of scope. It attempts to examine, according to the dust jacket, “the representation and relationship of evil and the occult from the prehistoric origins of drama through to the present day.” Given his long and impressive resume, list of accomplishments, and obvious expertise, the book’s author would certainly seem to be up to this frankly breathtaking task. Robert Lima is a professor emeritus of Spanish and comparative literature and fellow emeritus of the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Pennsylvania State University. In his distinguished career, he has authored twenty-two books, edited several others, and published dozens of scholarly articles on Spanish art, literature, and esoteric subjects. In addition, he is a published poet, a translator, a Corresponding Member of the Royal Academy of Spain, and a Knight Commander in the Order of Queen Isabel of Spain.

Yet even in the face of these daunting qualifications, there are things that may make the contemporary scholar or student of esotericism suspicious about this work—things that may just set her teeth on edge—prior to even cracking the first chapter.

The first of these is the title itself. The title of this work unambiguously connects occultism and occult beliefs, philosophies, and practices with evil (the latter word appears on the book’s cover in the largest, most imposing, all-caps font, and is made even more prominent by the fact that “stages of” is printed in a smaller font, with all lower case letters), thus re-inscribing a hoary old prejudice that scholars of Western esotericism still battle in the academy and in popular culture.

Scholars of esotericism might be further dismayed upon reading the table of contents. While there are a few of the “usual suspects” one might expect in a volume addressing occultism—magic and witchcraft, for example—the table of contents also

indicates that the book addresses representations of hell, the “daemonic” and “demonic,” possession and exorcism, “voodoo” (Lima uses this popular spelling), Satanism, and vampires. Lima is clearly operating under a different understanding of the term “occultism” than is current in contemporary scholarly discourses on Western esotericism. He does not use the term as a synonym for esotericism or for the so-called “occult sciences,” as some twentieth-century scholars have done. Nor does he reserve the term, as has become common in current discourse within the field, to indicate certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in the history of Western esotericism—e.g. the work of Éliphas Lévi and those whom he influenced, Theosophy, spiritualism, Crowley, etc. Rather, Lima seems to use the term as it is understood in the popular sense, from pulp novels and commercial film, as a kind of catch-all for beliefs and practices that may be deemed reprobate superstitions by the “common” (read: “white,” and “mainline Christian”) Westerner, a grab-bag of beliefs and practices, narratives and phenomena that James Webb has referred to as “rejected knowledge.” Lima projects this more contemporary and popular category back thousands of years, using it to frame the Dionysian frenzy of the female worshipers in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, the stage convention of the “Hell Mouth” in European medieval theatre, the depiction of Afro-Caribbean religion in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*, and more, placing all of these very different representations of culturally and historically diverse practices, beliefs, and phenomena under the grim and forbidding heading of “evil.”

Specifically, Lima defines the occult as the trans-historical and trans-cultural belief in “a hidden, supernatural dimension whose denizens—from gods to demons—can and do intervene in human affairs of their own volition or at the behest of an individual adept in the arts of summoning them, either in a religious or secular venue” (4). It is difficult to see, from this definition, how Lima manages to cordon-off mainline religious beliefs and practices (prayer, for instance) from qualifying as occult, and he gives no space to a serious discussion of the complexity of such distinctions. Furthermore, I find problematic his use of the term “supernatural”

as a blanket epithet that functions without regard to history or culture; it is a term Lima deploys with frank glibness and with no examination or contextualization.

Concepts like “the supernatural,” “liveness,” or, as Foucault has proposed, “the homosexual,” are contingent on certain sets of conditions for their emergence as historical possibilities; the first two in particular are predicated on the existence, the invention, of their opposites. Just as “live theatre” was invented sometime after the technological means to record performance (i.e. film) became a wide-spread cultural phenomenon, so the supernatural was an invention preceded by the construction of its negation: a consensus regarding a material and scientific “natural order” governed by laws whose legitimacy and consequences are observable and verifiable. Put very simply, modern science created the supernatural. I therefore find it as inappropriate and misleading to analyze the supernatural in classical Greek, medieval, or Elizabethan drama—as Lima does here—as it would be to discuss the practice of “live theatre” in these same periods. The words are meaningless and historically inappropriate in these contexts. The supernatural does not have a timeless ontological status as a category that transparently circumscribes a set of existent or non-existent entities and forces. Rather, it is an historically situated invention; though from this, it does not follow that what falls within its purview is therefore a fiction.

A contemporary Western witch or practitioner of magic may be untroubled by references to her spell-craft as “supernatural,” even as she might regard magic as wholly indistinguishable or inseparable from nature. Yet perhaps this is so only because the scientific understanding of nature as “natural law” is an inescapably dominant and assimilated paradigm in Western culture—one that constructs, through exclusion, the supernatural. If so, it is likewise a philosophy whose dominance is only reinforced and underscored by a resistance that identifies itself as other.

Some may find—regardless of their personal beliefs—Lima’s act of associating the religious and spiritual practices of paganism, witchcraft, and “voodoo” with evil deeply offensive and even

racist. I believe there is some justice in this perspective. Yet Lima does not unambiguously rail against the “evils” of any of the esoteric or religious forms he discusses. His book is serious and scholarly; it is not a paranoid rant. At the same time, however, he makes no effort to reveal his title as even mildly ironic, nor does he seriously attempt to trouble or interrogate the relationship between the representations he discusses, on the one hand, and the historical/cultural conceptions of “evil” relevant to the artists, their contemporary audiences and cultures, or to present reception, on the other. This is a shame, because in so glibly connecting the representations he discusses with evil—as he does several times in this book—Lima misses the opportunity to discuss how these theatrical representations *stage* evil, that is to say, how they performatively constitute various historically-situated cultural identifications of the diabolical and “the occult.” This strategy is one that the title—if so interpreted—may seem to imply, though one that the book itself never delivers.

In what appears to be the thesis statement of the book, however, Lima doesn’t even mention the occult. His concern seems to be with the “multifaceted aspects of evil” as represented on the Western stage (6). But Lima is clearly not concerned with *all* of those facets, multiple though they may be. Rather, his focus is on a particular, if somewhat ill-defined, type of evil. He does not, for instance, bother with examining, say, Richard the Third or Macbeth himself. The book, claims Lima, is intended as a “comparative study of Western mythological, folkloric, and religious beliefs regarding evil as expressed in theater and drama from classical times to the modern era” (6). Lima is interested in what a confirmed secularist might refer to as superstitious representations of evil. Macbeth and his wife may be evil, to be sure, but it is the witches—and other representations that are somehow “like” them—that are the focus of Lima’s critical eye.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, entitled “The Matter of the Underworld,” consists of a single chapter focusing on medieval representations—on the stage and elsewhere—of the “Mouth of Hell.” Part II, “Metamorphoses of Gods,” contains two chapters. The first of these is a provocative piece

of historical detective work tracing the daemonic origins of the popular commedia dell'Arte character, Arlecchino. Chapter Three compares and contrasts representations of magic and witchcraft in Fernando de Rojas's early sixteenth-century work, *Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea*. Like Chapter Three, all of the chapters in Part III, entitled "Possession and Exorcism," take a dramatic analysis approach. In each of these chapters, Lima focuses on a single play by a Western writer, examining representations relating to possession. Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Sholem Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, Miller's *The Crucible*, John Whiting's *The Devils*, and Francisco Nieva's *Nosferatu* are all given critical treatment in individual chapters. The final section, Part IV, entitled "Cauldron and Cave," contains two chapters examining, respectively, representations of witchcraft on Elizabethan and Jacobean stages and representations of the magician's cave in European drama.

Lima finishes his volume with an appendix that consists of an extensive bibliography of "European and American Drama of the Occult." Though I find it a misleading stretch to refer to these plays as dramas "of the Occult," the appendix constitutes an impressive list of plays containing representations of "occult themes," as characterized by Lima. This bibliography should prove useful to students of both Western esotericism and theatre/performance studies and, I believe, constitutes the book's most valuable contribution to both fields. The bibliography is arranged as a pair of lists. The first list orders the plays alphabetically by author. The second list arranges them by "prominent occult themes or motifs." Some of the themes/motifs Lima categorizes as occult include the expected: alchemy, astrology, and magic. But Lima also includes categories such as Cassandra/Sibyls, the Devil, Fairies, Ghosts, Joan of Arc, The Last Judgment, and Lycanthropy. Oddly, Lima neglects themes that would seem appropriate to a listing of occult motifs, including Kabbalah, the tarot, secret societies, gnosis, and many, many others. Lima doesn't include any of the dramatic works of Crowley or Steiner, the list is noticeably slim on symbolist playwrights (only a single play by Maeterlinck, for instance, and nothing by Bely, Blok, Briusov,

or Rachilde), and is heavily weighted towards pre-modernist plays. The list also contains several oddities, like Brecht's *Galileo* and *Good Woman of Setzuan*—included because they contain representations of the “Italian Inquisition” and “Dream interludes. Three gods,” respectively. The bibliography is not exhaustive—it would be a true wonder if it were—and it is difficult to discern what criteria Lima is using for including or excluding works from this list.

The field of theatre studies is ripe for a volume—or several volumes—that gives a rigorous, thoughtful, and well-researched historical account of how certain strands of Western esoteric thought interact with the theatre and drama of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and the Americas. This is not one of those volumes. One of the conspicuous aspects of *Stages of Evil* is that the chapters of dramatic analysis/criticism are strangely disconnected from the vast body of scholarly discussions surrounding both the plays themselves and the “occult” subject matter under analysis. Plays like *The Bacchae*, *The Emperor Jones*, and *The Crucible* are monumental classics of Western dramaturgy and have received an enormous amount of critical and historical scholarly attention. Yet the chapters on these works show little evidence of the author's awareness of, or engagement with, the larger scholarly conversations concerning these plays, much less the current state of those conversations. For instance, the list of works cited for the chapter on O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*—a rich but politically difficult play with a long history of critical scholarship around it—contains only five sources: Dante's *Inferno*, two works by Jung, the script of *The Emperor Jones*, and another book by Lima on the occult in Hispanic drama. One can only conclude that it is because of his apparent disconnect from the scholarly discourse around O'Neill's drama—the first to feature a black actor in a major role on the Broadway stage—that Lima re-inscribes the play's racist qualities, citing the title character's “regressive swell taking him into African life itself” (142, emphasis added) and referring to “the killing power of civilized man's rifles in the hands of natives” (144, emphasis added). Indeed, the title of this chapter is “The Savaged Mind: Voodoo

Terror in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*,” yet Lima never hints that any part of the title is meant ironically, nor does he ever seem to challenge the ways in which the play—written by a white playwright for white audiences in a white theatre—constructs a white man’s fantasy of the black body as “savage” through, among several other things, the demonization and eroticization of “exotic-other” spirituality. On the contrary, Lima’s analysis uncritically participates in such a construction.

I do not mean to suggest that Lima’s work suffers because he does not take an explicitly or exclusively historicizing or cultural studies approach to his analysis. Rather, the work suffers because the author seems, by all evidence, critically unaware of the complex and problematic historical, political, racial, and gender issues raised by the construction of spirituality, “occult” figures and practices, and “evil” in the dramas he examines, and equally unaware of the history of, much less the current state of, scholarship on these works. Thus, Lima unwittingly and uncritically swallows several poisonous cultural tropes and narratives. Worse, he passes these on to his readers. For instance, in the chapter entitled, “Satan in Salem: Sex as *Grimoire* in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*,” Lima describes the influence that Tituba—a black slave—has on the young white women of the village: “[Tituba’s] tales of the *unfettered actions of her people—bred in a tradition of living natural lives—have fired the girls’ imaginations*” (151, emphasis added). In describing Abigail’s reaction to Proctor’s rejection—particularly her accusation against Proctor’s wife, Elizabeth—Lima baldly and blithely states, “Abigail’s actions prove the truth of Congreve’s poetized observation that hell has no fury like a woman scorned. (150). So “proven” is this “truth,” that Lima invokes it again in the next chapter, “A Matter of Habit: The Politics of Demonic Hysteria in John Whiting’s *The Devils*,” which, despite its title, manages to avoid critically engaging with the familiar and problematic gender politics of the play. He describes Sister Jeanne in a manner almost identical to his description of Abigail: “Beneath the calm with which she makes the accusation lies the hellish fury of a woman scorned” (165). Were Lima to make such pronouncements at, say, a

conference of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), I suspect the response he would receive would cause him to quickly and vividly identify with the unfortunate witches of Salem.

Lima's book also exhibits a surprising and disappointing lack of awareness of the more recent discourses and scholarship on Western esotericism. Nearly all of his sources pre-date the emergence of Western esotericism as a self-conscious field of study. Most of them are prior to the 1970s, and even these are not extensive. This causes some problems. For instance, among his principle sources for the history of witchcraft are Margaret Murray's scurrilous and long-discredited studies; thus he reiterates the mythological history of witchcraft as a practice that has endured since pre-Christian times as if this narrative were an accepted historical fact. His chapter on *The Dybbuk*—a landmark play in the history of Jewish theatre—focuses on metempsychosis, possession, and exorcism. Lima's critical strategy is to frame these beliefs and practices within the context of "cabala." Yet his repeated quoting of the *Zohar* adds little to the reader's understanding of the play, and the treatment of kabbalah in this chapter seems positively pre-Scholem-esque. The only kabbalah-related source in this chapter's works cited is a 1933 translation of the *Zohar*. Finally, it is telling that one of Lima's most frequently cited sources for occult and mythological matters is Barbara G. Walker's widely inaccurate and fanciful tome, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. Lima cites this work in seven of his book's eleven chapters. He might have been better off going with Wikipedia.

Though they appear to be much more thoroughly researched than the chapters of dramatic criticism, the chapters dedicated to theatre history, or to analysis of the dramas of certain periods, appear to take a kind of pre-Foucault, pre-Lyotard, and pre-Greenblatt (i.e. New Historicism) approach to their subjects. This is not necessarily problematic in and of itself. It is not as though no good or useful histories were written prior to the historiographic revolutions brought about by these, and other, late twentieth-century theorists; nor is it the case that good histories cannot be, and are not still, written without regard for these perspectives. But

the historical chapters (chapters one and two) depend largely on constructing narratives of influence and evolution—an approach that the aforementioned theorists have so rigorously critiqued. Furthermore, these narratives are constructed largely of what may best be described as historical, evolutionary, and genealogical speculations—often of the wildest sort.

For instance, in his chapter entitled, “The Mouth of Hell: Damnation on the Stage of the Middle Ages,” Lima describes, and attempts to trace the lineage of, the “Hell Mouth,” a monstrous iconic and scenographic device that vomited forth demons and swallowed sinners in certain works of European medieval theatre. Lima cites the Old Testament story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a “great fish”—a story that he bizarrely suggests “may disguise the initiation ritual of an ancient mystery religion” (15)—as an obviously traceable ancestor of the Hell Mouth. Though this makes a kind of sense, Lima offers no evidence for influence or evolution other than observing that both the Jonah story and the Hell Mouth involve narratives of people being swallowed. Lima continues this strategy of drawing conclusions about lineage based on similarity, citing other narratives of swallowing, tales of great fish or serpents, and myths of hell-like afterlives. Among these, Lima includes the story of the Greek Kronos who swallowed his children, as well as the biblical story of how the staff-turned-serpent of Moses and Aaron swallowed the staffs-turned-serpents of Pharaoh (I would note that, in citing the latter story, Lima erroneously, or at least, misleadingly, connects the Hell Mouth with Hermetic traditions by stating that the serpent is a symbol for the Egyptian god, Thoth). Despite Lima’s firm conviction that the story of Kronos and other narratives influenced the emergence of the Hell Mouth device, he offers no hard evidence for his speculations. At times, Lima drops the aura of certainty and adopts qualifying language, pointing to the speculative nature of his assertions and assumptions. But it is difficult to see what use these speculations serve, especially as he often seems to throw, quite indiscriminately, whole armfuls of Western and Middle Eastern myths, narratives, folklore, and popular or esoteric history at the issues he addresses. Such strategy is not unique to this chapter.

The following paragraph is typical:

Perhaps the classical and Oriental conceptions of exotic beasts that had informed the apocalyptic vision of Saint John the Divine early on had been strengthened in the European consciousness through the travel accounts of such as Marco Polo. Perhaps it was through the Crusaders, especially the Templars, who, according to their accusers, had become imbued with esoteric Aryan, Islamic, and other heterodox beliefs. Perhaps it was through the symbolism of alchemical and cabalistic practices in the Middle Ages or even through the diffusion of such Oriental tales as those Scheherezade told her sultan. Whatever the provenance, the theme of the whale-dragon-serpent that swallowed living human beings was widely spread throughout medieval Europe.

In light of Lima's invocation of "the Orient" in this Dan Brown-esque paragraph, perhaps I should add "pre-Said" to the above list of "pre-s" describing his work.

Lima continues this strategy in the chapter entitled, "The Masks of Harlequin: Daemonic Antecedents of the *Commedia dell'Arte* Character." Here, he takes an essentialist approach to Arlecchino, perhaps the most widely recognizable of all the *commedia* characters. He is searching for the character's "complex essence," and he does so by tracing its "ancient and exotic" ancestral lineage to various "daemonic" figures from European and Mediterranean folklore, mythology, and religion. In doing so, he repeatedly describes the European pre-Christian pagans and pre-Christian traditions as "barbaric" and refers to those who brought about the fall of Rome—those of "Teutonic" origin—as "barbarians" and as "hirsute elements from beyond the borders." Though Lima seems to use the adjective "hirsute" to tie these peoples to figures like the "Wild Man" and thence to the sometimes hairy masks worn by Arlecchino, his use of this adjective to denote ethnicity essentializes the "alien-body-as-excess"—reasserting a trope criticized by cultural studies scholars—and marks it as simultaneously barbaric, daemonic, and "natural" (thus, prefiguring a position he will take in subsequent chapters regarding Tituba and

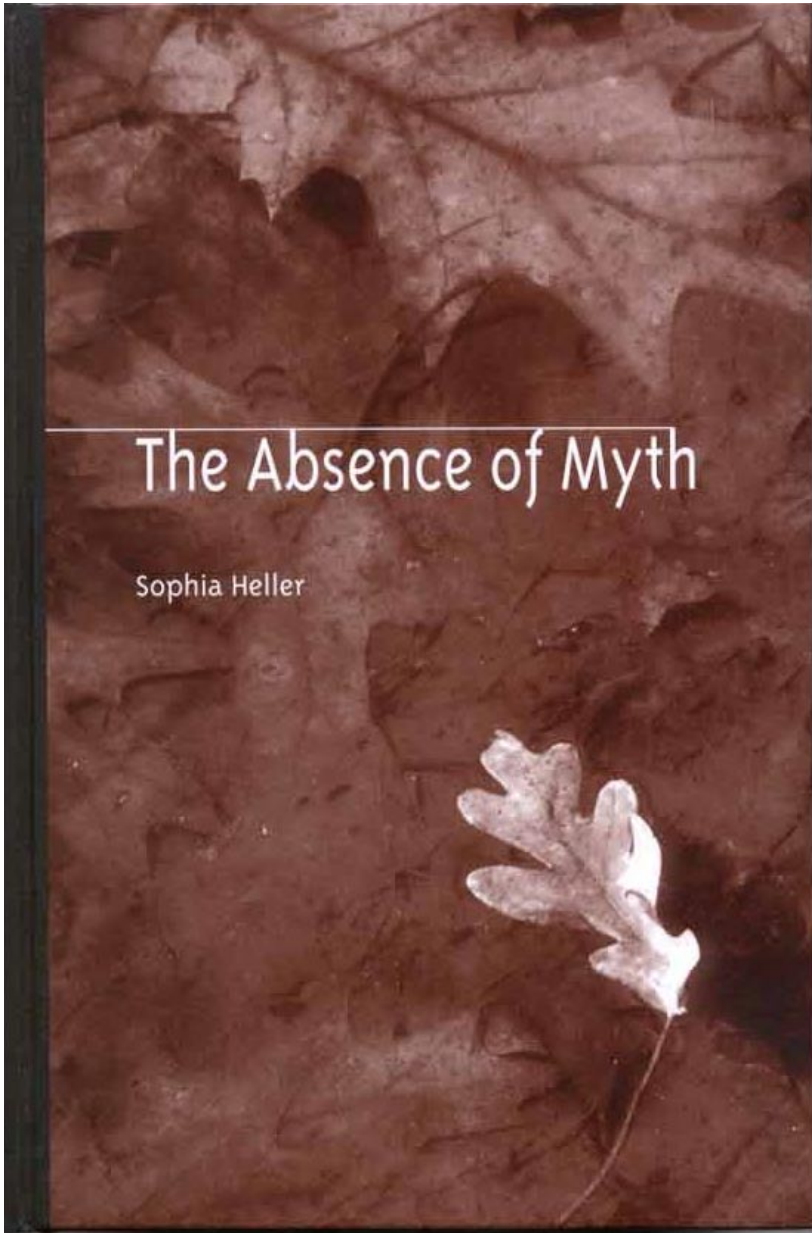
Brutus Jones).

As in the previous chapter, Lima mixes various myths, legends, history and folklore from across cultures and times in a manner that stretches credibility and assumes connections with little or no evidence. Arlecchino, in this formulation, becomes the evolutionary result of an astoundingly broad and diverse set of figures ranging from The Wild Man, The King of the May, The Green Man, Robin Hood, Hellekins, the Norse goddess, Hel, Enkidu (from *Gilgamesh*), the Greek Silenus, Hercules, Polyphemus (the giant from *The Odyssey*), Hermes, Dionysus, Thoth, Hermes Trismegistus, centaurs, satyrs, and more. All of these somehow come together to form the daemonic “essence” of Arlecchino, but Lima’s assertions seem largely speculative and associative. This argument, while profound and provocative if true, sometimes appears grandiose and wholly conjectural here. For Lima, Arlecchino’s “genealogical tree is replete with telluric and cosmic ancestors out of...diverse systems of belief *with probable origins at the dawn of humanity*” (56, emphasis added).

In constructing his argument, Lima draws lines of influence and evolution based most often on purely behavioral, iconic, or associative similarities. Drawing such connections is certainly an appropriate strategy for literary or performance criticism—as for instance probing the implications of two characters, in a novel or stage play, who both wear red hats, have similar names, share physical characteristics, or behave in a similar manner might prove keenly enlightening—but as an historiographic methodology it seems somewhat more suspect. Yes, Hermes is sometimes depicted as carrying a caduceus, and Euripides associated Dionysus with the thyrsus. Yes, both of these staffs may be understood as phalluses. Yes, Arlecchino carried a slapstick that may also be read as phallus. But Lima invites us to conclude from these true observations that the zany Arlecchino is the direct descendant of Hermes Trismegistus himself. If these were all stick-carrying characters in the same play, such inferences might carry some weight. Here, they seem the stuff of Frazerian fantasy.

If little else, in this, Lima’s book raises some interesting epistemological and historiographical questions. History may

certainly be read as literature, but should it be written as such?
And are we fooling ourselves to assume that there might be, in
fact, any other option?



Heller, Sophia, *The Absence of Myth*

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006)

Dr. Melinda Weinstein, Associate Professor of Humanities
Lawrence Technological University

There is a profound difference and unbridgeable divide between myth as it is experienced by pre-historical and indigenous cultures and myth as it is experienced today. The fact that we can even conceptualize “myth,” as stories apart from us, to be analyzed and applied to our lives indicates that myth is dead. In oral/aural, ritual based traditions, myth cannot possibly be “conceptualized ...myth stands for the whole truth, it was the ritualized enactment of the whole of existence itself” (7). In a mythic world view, meaning is self-evident. A modern striving for meaning, seen in the proliferation of self-help books, is further evidence that myth, in its original and true sense, no longer exists. God is dead too. “For religion as well as myth has fallen out of conviction if the question of what makes life meaningful has to be asked” (6). The state of being in myth, the experience of myth as primal fact, as living myth, is not only an impossibility for us today (and has been at least since the classical period), but to see myth in culture, or strive to live mythically, is to willfully constrict one’s consciousness and deny reality. “Without attending to the reality or logic of one’s own time,” Heller writes, “one leaves the demands of consciousness now for something perhaps more appealing or comfortable” (200).

Much of Heller’s book is taken up with critiquing philosophical and psychological approaches to the self and reality that assume the presence and utility of myth. These fields “apply critical thought and analysis to myths in order to glean insights about human beings,” but for Heller, this is the opposite of “the acceptance of truth as literal and embodied experience....as was the condition of myth” (9). To refute the absence of myth or to restructure the absence of myth in the name of consciousness answers “a familiar call to comfort rather than accepting the rigors of reflecting in a no-longer deified world”(9). Heller is especially

critical of Jungian depth psychology. “The problem arises when one likens one’s story to that of the immortals imagining that, even if they no longer exist for the culture, they are inside the individual, potential resources just waiting to be tapped” (72). For Heller, to understand one’s life within larger archetypal patterns provided by myth is to inflate the ego. She writes, “The problem arises when people ascribe to experiences a higher significance than they warrant; when, for example, motherhood must take on the sacred qualities associated with earth and mother goddesses and cannot just be plain motherhood” (73).

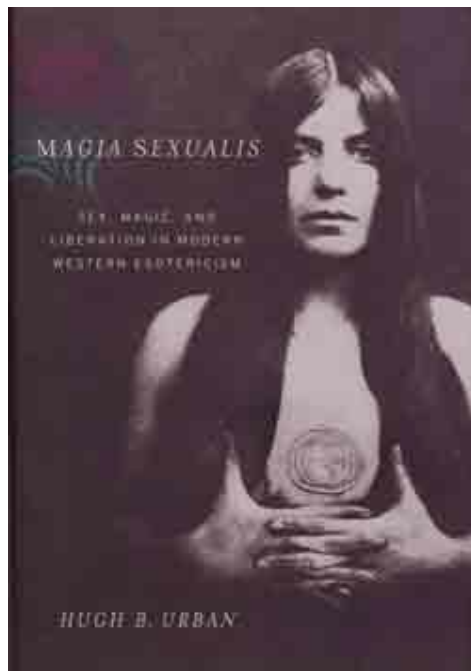
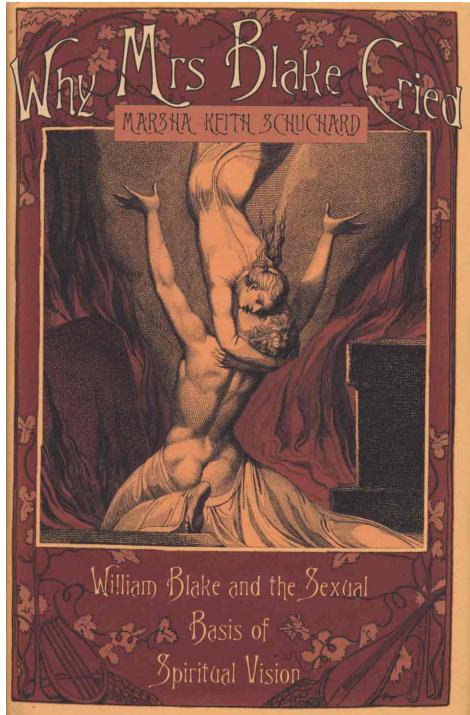
For Heller, life is what it is, and only that: banal, ordinary, mundane, decidedly non-mythic. One should live one’s life without the expectation that it be any different or “addled” with an extra layer of meaning (222). “An average ordinary life should be enough” (157). At times, she is rather harsh. The idea that we all matter for example “may comfort or inspire those besieged by low self-esteem,” she writes, “but the truth is, most people do not matter a whole lot, except to maybe a small group of friends and family. And there are even those without that circle, those who when they die are little more than a statistic, easily forgotten, and or perhaps having made no essential contribution other than to reduce the population” (90). Heller substitutes Being with Nothing. Heller purpose here is nevertheless esoteric. She seeks a state of knowing beyond the Cartesian cogito that does not point to god or myth. Instead of god or myth, Heller investigates the experience of soul as “logical negativity”(109). The Void, the “gap” between narratives, is where consciousness might fully realize itself. She proposes that we “work through” myth, dwelling in the images until the images dissolve, “in order to know the soul as soul and not mistake it for its images” (171). Heller describes the process of bringing soul to light as “dissolution.” “What I mean by negated myth,” she proposes, is “the penetration into the nature of myth itself such that its form has no choice but to dissolve, to give way to the consciousness that has endeavored to comprehend the myth” (180). For Heller, this Nothing, the absence that is the ground of being for her, can be numinous,

but she resists making a narrative out of or making concrete this nothing as a parent or king, “immune to criticism.” Instead, she takes a postmodern point of view regarding this negative space. “What is perceived as nothing need not be equated with emptiness, but, rather, a transparency allowing for a comprehensive vision that holds presence and absence together without succumbing to either one”(99). Opposites are played against each other rather than moving upward to an ontological all-encompassing source. We should leave the unknown as unknown, she argues, and learn to tolerate not knowing. It is in the depths of not-knowing that an essentially human, reflective consciousness can flourish.

From the outset, Heller establishes herself as a postmodern theorist. She finds in the postmodernist’s decentering of the individual and deconstruction of binary distinctions “a purposeful darkening of one’s sight that leads to insight, depth and complexity” (118). She advocates a postmodern approach to myth that “opts for imagination and alternating perspectives over literalized and fixated assumptions as to the nature of reality.” She “welcomes absence or negativity as a general principle because it undermines false or egotistical claims to that which ultimately remains unknowable and is therefore not for the taking.” She adds, “Ambiguity and equivocation are deemed necessary precisely because they resist a clear, rational approach and compel one to enter the murky ‘in-between spaces,’ those liminal spaces between all binary oppositions, such as present-absent, truth-falsehood, inner-outer, and so on.” In the liminal space between oppositions one can fully engage, “the complex, paradoxical nature of life, a truth that can only be apprehended by standing outside one’s habitual mode of understanding” (10). For Heller, a healthy, fully realized consciousness would sustain “the accurate reflection of the unknown” and would accept the “inevitable alienation of human experience.” A healthy consciousness would not bridge the gap between opposites with myth or mythopoesis but “leave the gaps as they are” and in this way, “recognize the limits of representation and the impossibility of original knowledge without pessimistically or passively yielding to it or trying to amend it” (146).

Ultimately, Heller is seeking a way of being in which human beings are wholly responsible for their actions in and perceptions of the world. “Recourse to myth and the gods only shifts the onus off of oneself to an outside, magical, meaning-laden source. Consciousness then becomes unconconsciousness, and all the power is invested in an unknown, symbol-laden, and sacred entity (the unconscious) that then is ultimately responsible for upholding life” (209). In negating god and myth, she suggests, one is psychologically born, one cannot remain, figuratively speaking, a child. One can no longer be an innocent bystander (156).

The *Absence of Myth*, is densely written. While I find the thrust of her conclusions, outlined here, to be quite interesting, the bulk of the book is taken up with exposing the blind sides of major and minor myth theorists. To Heller, those who believe in the presence of myth are unconscious of the fact that their arguments prove the absence of myth, and those who argue the absence of myth, nevertheless, in subtle ways, cling to myth. I found the logic of her arguments with these theorists hard to follow. She also presumes “a general acknowledgement of a lack of a transcendent God” in the world today (10). I don’t think this is true given the present strength of Islam and Christianity. As a professor of mythology, however, I find her book worth reading. She has given me insight into that inevitable, uncomfortable, disenchanting moment in my mythology class when I have to remind students that what we are doing is completely artificial. We cannot hope to know. The myths we analyze so carefully, picking apart themes and plots and motifs, and patterns are so embedded in their cultures and their conditions of performance that we cannot hope to know them for what they truly are. We can only know ourselves.



Urban, Hugh B., *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, (California: University of California Press, 2006)

ISBN: 978-0-520-24776-5

Schuchard, Marsha Keith, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision*, (London: Century, 2006)

ISBN: 0-7126-2016-8

The last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first represent an unusual period, one in which many previously little known esoteric figures, traditions, movements and works have come to light. But works like these two represent more than most what we might call the return of the suppressed, for no topic is more charged in the West than one concerned with sexuality. In *Magia Sexualis*, Hugh Urban, a specialist in Hindu forms of Tantra, offers a comprehensive and balanced historical introduction to one of the most influential esoteric developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—that of sexual magic. And in *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, Marsha Keith Schuchard sheds new light not only on the sexual and spiritual life of the well-known British poet William Blake, but also on Emanuel Swedenborg and a host of lesser known figures, images, and works.

In a forthright and engaging preface, Urban relates how he was discouraged from writing on this subject by some colleagues, and observes that despite such discouragement, the fact remains that sexuality “lies at the center of a series of much larger social, political, economic, moral, and religious issues that have become increasingly volatile in our own increasingly sex-obsessed late capitalist consumer culture.” The topic of sexual magic, he continues, “offers some surprising new perspectives [on] our own cultural history, not to mention the tense, often conflicting relationship between sexuality and spiritual in the modern era.”

Drawing on a wide array of theoretical and historical sources, Urban shows both the overarching historical narrative and the theoretical underpinnings of sexual magic as it emerged and mutated over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

What makes this book especially important is that, in addition to its theoretical sophistication, it is the work of a well-known scholar of Hindu Tantra, so that it is also implicitly and sometimes explicitly also a work of comparative religion. But the words “comparative religion” do not quite express what this book is really about, because that term implies the “comparison” of discrete religions, whereas in fact under consideration here is the twilit and extraordinarily creative borderland between religious traditions where all the interesting things happen.

Urban devotes chapters to the remarkable figure Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), who was the subject of a definitive book by Richard Deveney, to the founding of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), to Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), to Julius Evola (1898-1974), as well as to movements including Wicca, Satanism, and Chaos magic. In other words, by focusing on major figures and movements, he manages not only a nuanced historical overview, but also a detailed and theoretically sophisticated analysis that places the emergence of modern sexual magic in relation to the thought of more well-known figures like Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, and Michel Foucault.

In *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, Schuchard’s *modus operandi* is quite different. She clearly has spent a great deal of time in historical archives in Britain and on the Continent, and so her work is more what we might term historical reconstruction drawing on primary archival sources. Delving deeply into the lives and works of Blake, Swedenborg, and Zinzendorf, and drawing on the archives of the Moravian Church, she argues that what we see in Blake’s work is a visionary tradition with roots in Jewish Kabbalah, and with analogues in Hindu Tantrism. But whereas Urban’s book focuses on sexual magic, Schuchard concentrates more on sexual mysticism, and in particular on how sexual practices very well might be conducive to a rich visionary life—which of course we indeed see in both Swedenborg and Blake. *Why Mrs Blake Cried* suggests, indeed, insists that there is a continuing tradition in the West of sexual mysticism, and that in such traditions of Western Tantra, Blake must be recognized as one of its prophets.

This is an entertaining and rewarding book, and is filled to the

brim with exotic works and figures and, yes, esoteric dimensions of sexuality as well. As I read and thought about this book, I wondered what Kathleen Raine, herself a poet and Blake scholar, would have said concerning it. I suspect that she would not have cared for the sexual interpretations of some of the poems, but she would have recognized none the less that the book really does unveil many sexually explicit illustrations by Blake and others, and really does present a coherent and extensive interpretation of them and of this poetic visionary tradition represented also, after all, by William Butler Yeats. Critics of the book there may be, but the fact remains that Schuchard is on to something here, and she's found enough to keep a dozen scholars in a dozen areas going for years.



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