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# Correspondences

Online Journal for the  
Academic Study of Western Esotericism

*Editors*

Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

2.1 (2014)

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## Editorial

### Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

Welcome to the second issue of *Correspondences*, the first (and to date only) open access journal for the academic study of Western esotericism. In our last editorial we invited you to learn about the history and purpose of this journal, and we are happy to be able deliver another issue of cutting-edge research into what is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating and up-and-coming fields of research in the humanities. Since some time has passed since the inaugural issue was released last summer, we thought that we'd update you on what has been going on in the *Correspondences* family and share some of our plans for the future.

First of all, we would like to welcome Egil Asprem as the book review editor of *Correspondences*. Egil's been with us from the start as an active member of our editorial board, and we are happy to now promote him to the position of Book Review Editor. He has already started working with us in preparation for this issue, but the next issue will feature his first fully curated review section. Read Egil's own musings about his new position on pages 105–107.

We've also been in discussions with the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) to include the journal in an open access database. While *Correspondences* is already freely available to all, this will enable us to give our published authors more exposure, as their articles will turn up more easily in searches generated from sources such as university libraries.

Journal publishing, particularly online publishing, is a continually ongoing process, so we're already thinking about issue number three (Fall 2014) and invite submissions for this issue up until 1 June 2014. Of course, we're not complete futurists – we are extremely excited about the issue that you're

about to click, swipe, or voice command your way through. *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014) features a balance between theory and application that we'd like to see in every issue. Egil Aspren provides the theory in "Beyond the West," an analysis of research structures in the field of Western esotericism; Kristoffer Noheden provides the application in "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation," analysing the esoteric context of the French surrealist's work; and Mike A. Zuber offers a thorough examination of Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann's (1633–1679) life and works in "Between Alchemy and Piety," arguing that the notion of ancient wisdom, *prisca sapientia*, is a crucial key to understanding the synthesis between alchemy and piety in Kriegsmann's thought. We are also happy to include two reviews written by J. Christian Greer and Ethan Doyle White. We hope you find this research valuable and stimulating, and that you'll consider joining the discussion by submitting your own high quality academic research for publication in *Correspondences*.

# Beyond the West Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esoteri- cism

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## **Abstract**

This article has two main objectives: 1) to account for the relation between definitions, boundaries and comparison in the study of “esotericism” in a systematic manner; 2) to argue for an expansion of comparative research methods in this field. The argument proceeds in three steps. First it is argued that a process of academic boundary-work has been instrumental in delimiting esotericism as a historical category. Second, a Lakatosian “rational reconstruction” of competing “research programmes” is provided to clarify the relationship between views on definition, boundaries and comparison. Third, a typology of different comparative methods is constructed along two axes: a homological-analogical axis distinguishes between comparison based on shared genealogy (homology) versus purely structural or functional comparisons (analogy), while a synchronic-diachronic axis picks out a temporal dimension.

Historical research programmes have typically endorsed homological comparison, while analogical comparison has remained suspect. This limitation is shown to be entirely arbitrary from a methodological point of view. It is argued that a reconsideration of analogical comparison has the promise of shedding new light on fundamental problems and must be a part of the ongoing theoretical reorientations in the field.

## **Keywords**

comparative method; homology and analogy; Imre Lakatos; research programmes; boundary-work



### Three problems: Boundaries, definitions, and comparison

The “Western” in “Western esotericism” has received increased critical attention in recent years. A growing number of studies critique the fluid boundaries of “the West” as a category, and bring attention to “esoteric” currents that seem to challenge such classification – typically focusing on Islamic, Jewish, or Eastern European cases.<sup>1</sup> The combined evidence provides a strong case for dismissing the categorisation of esotericism as intrinsically Western, on historical and terminological grounds.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, also another and rather different way to go about critiquing this classification. This second way proceeds by pointing to *structural similarities* with phenomena that originate in other historical, cultural and geographic contexts. Instead of asking where the boundaries of the West are drawn, or probing cultural transfers across European and near-Eastern territories, this strategy asks more fundamental questions: Why, despite evident structural similarities,

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Pasi organised an important two-session panel at the Twentieth Quinquennial World Congress of the IAHR in Toronto (August 15–21, 2010) on “Western esotericism and its boundaries: Between discourses of identity and difference,” which included papers by, among others, Egil Asprem, Henrik Bogdan, Gordan Djurdjevic, Kennet Granholm, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Marco Pasi, and Steven Wasserstrom. The boundary of esotericism was also on the agenda of the ESSWE4 conference in Gothenburg, Sweden (26–29 June 2013), which featured panels on “Western Esotericism and Islam,” as well as a keynote by Mark Sedgwick on “Western Esotericism and Islamic Studies” that focused on ways to conceptualise esotericism in the Islamicate sphere. In published form, the question was at the heart of the exchange between Kocku von Stuckrad and Antoine Faivre in the mid-2000s: See, e.g., von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,” *Religion* 35 (2005): 83; Faivre, “Kocku von Stuckrad et la notion d’ésotérisme,” *Aries* 6, no. 2 (2006); von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 46–49. The problem of boundaries in the modern period is addressed in a recent collected volume, Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (eds.), *Occultism in a Global Perspective* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013). The best systematic discussions of the problem are found in Kennet Granholm, “Locating the West: Problematizing the *Western* in Western Esotericism and Occultism,” in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, eds. Bogdan and Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013); Pasi, “Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West in the Early Theosophical Society,” in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Despite this development, it still remains the case that *every single one* of the existing introductory textbooks to the field employs the term “Western” in the title. Thus, the coming generation will have to deal with the very same problems over again, uninformed of the theoretical reorientations that are currently underway. This is even the case for the most recent textbook, published in 2013 by the field’s most prominent scholar: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). For a review of the other relevant textbooks, see Hanegraaff, “Textbooks and Introductions to Western Esotericism,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013).

are Indian Tantric groups, yogic practice, Zen Buddhism, Taoist alchemy, Amerindian “shamanic” practices, or Melanesian initiatic societies automatically excluded from analysis in terms of “esotericism”? Why can we not have a comparative study of esotericism on a truly global rather than a narrowly conceived “Western” scale?<sup>3</sup>

These two lines of critique follow separate logics, going to the heart of the question of how to define “esotericism” to begin with. The first line sees “esotericism” as a *historical category* (a name for a class of historical phenomena), while the second understands it as a second-order *typological concept* (a type of practice, organisation, or discourse).<sup>4</sup> These two separate scholarly intuitions about how to go about defining esotericism are related not only to the question of boundaries and delimitations of the scope of the field, but also to the question of *comparison*. While typological constructs are often produced precisely for the sake of doing useful comparative research, historicists have commonly viewed the comparative method with suspicion.<sup>5</sup> The origin of this suspicion is obvious enough: it has been a reaction to the eclectic use of comparison in “religionist” scholarship that, under the influence of perennialism and Traditionalism, aimed at establishing cross-cultural similarities pointing to a universal “esoteric core” of all religions.<sup>6</sup> While the

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<sup>3</sup> Arguments of this type have often been put forward against the research programme associated with Antoine Faivre and his famous six characteristics. Several examples are found in the now dormant journal *Esoterica*. See, e.g., Harry Oldmeadow, “The Quest for ‘Secret Tibet,’” *Esoterica* 3 (2001); Arthur Versluis, “What Is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 4 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> The central importance of this distinction was first discussed by Olav Hammer, “Esotericism in New Religious Movements,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 445–46.

<sup>5</sup> This has also been the case in religious studies and neighbouring fields such as anthropology, but the pathologies of the aversion have differed slightly from field to field. See, e.g., Robert A. Segal, “In Defense of the Comparative Method,” *Numen* 48, no. 3 (2001). Meanwhile, religious studies never lacked attempts to create new and methodologically improved forms of comparativism in light of the criticism. See, e.g., Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8, no. 1 (1996); Jeppe Sindig Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Methodological Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2003). For a sophisticated recent contribution, see Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 120–60.

<sup>6</sup> This polemic is made clear in, e.g., Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 1 (1999). For an assessment of the religionist research tradition in the study of esotericism, see especially Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 277–314. For useful discussions of the intellectual background, see Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after*

rejection of these untenable projects was understandable, a regrettable long-term side effect has been a suspicion of *all* comparativist projects.<sup>7</sup>

The issues of definition, boundaries, and comparison are thus intimately interwoven; one cannot hope to address one without touching on the other two. The present article thus has two aims: first, to *clarify the conceptual relations* that are at play in discussions on this complicated definition-boundary-comparison nexus; second, to call for an *expansion of comparative research* in the study of esotericism.

I will proceed in three steps. First, I suggest that the characterisation of esotericism as “Western,” the rejection of typological approaches, and the scepticism towards comparison were the result of professional *boundary-work* within a contested discursive field. While this does not amount to an independent argument for a comparativist position, it does pose serious questions about the theoretical and methodological soundness of some of the delimitations that have been made.

Second, and turning to the positive project of this article, I suggest that Imre Lakatos’s concept of “research programmes” is useful for systematically mapping how perspectives on definitions, boundaries and comparison are bound up in different positions in the field.<sup>8</sup> The advantage of a Lakatosian approach is that we can see how definitions, far from living in a theory-free void, are related to the key objectives, theoretical assumptions and methodological heuristics of a given research programme. Framing the study of esotericism in terms of *competing research programmes* offers a clearer picture of the sources of disagreement and the possibility of a more fruitful scholarly conversation.

The metatheoretical analysis of research programmes leads to the third and final point: that a mutually fruitful interaction between typological and historicist conceptualisations of esotericism depends on a better understanding of the *forms* and *functions* of comparative methodology. The final part of this article develops a typology of comparative approaches. Borrowing the

*Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> While there are undoubtedly still scholars who practice comparative research along religionist and perennialist lines, I will not discuss these in the present article. It is by now very marginal to professional research in this field and cannot any longer be considered a serious force that needs to be addressed. We have moved beyond, and should conserve our energy for discussing the challenges of the future rather than those of the past.

<sup>8</sup> Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, eds. Alan Musgrave and Imre Lakatos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Cf. Lakatos, “History of Science and Its Rational Reconstructions,” *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* (1970).

distinction between *analogical* and *homological* comparison from biology, and that between *synchronic* and *diachronic* from linguistics, I suggest a typology of four distinct forms of comparison. Discussing the uses of comparison in esotericism research by reference to these four types highlights an implicit separation of scholarly labour: while both historicists and typologists are engaged in synchronic and diachronic research, historicists are biased towards genealogical relationships (homological comparison) while typologists seek general features unrestrained by genealogy (analogical comparisons). Instead of seeing these as irreconcilable approaches, I suggest that an expansion of the comparative project of esotericism research to include both homological and analogical methodologies is paramount to the further theoretical development of the field.

### **Constructing Borders: The delimitations of “Western esotericism” as a product of boundary-work**

The institutionalised form of esotericism research that is currently embodied in organisations such as the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) and in a number of publication outlets<sup>9</sup> arose from a contested discursive field. In this “discourse on the esoteric,”<sup>10</sup> sociologists and historians of religion had to compete with practitioners, journalists, and the standard dictionary definitions for discursive control over the term. The conceptualisation of “esotericism” that emerged, and won out through institutionalisation (journals, societies, book series, conferences, university chairs) reflects this origin.

The main spokespersons advocating the professionalisation of esotericism research in the 1990s initially sought to emancipate the field from approaches singled out as “religionist.” This was a necessary step. But it was not religionists alone that were seen as the problem. It was, for example, argued that “reductionism” – associated with the social sciences, and seeking explanations of cultural and religious phenomena on broadly naturalistic grounds – was a threat as well.<sup>11</sup> While the main stratagem for keeping

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<sup>9</sup> E.g., the journal *Aries* and the *Aries* Book Series, along with the SUNY Press series on *Western Esoteric Traditions* in the United States, the *Gnostica* series on *Acumen*, etc. The current journal is a young member of the family.

<sup>10</sup> I borrow the useful distinction between “esoteric discourse” and “discourse on the esoteric” from Kennet Granholm. Cf. Granholm, “Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes,” *Religion* 43, no. 1 (2013): 51.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995). For an overview of the already long-winded “reduction-

reductionism at bay was to invoke a brand of “methodological agnosticism,” “reductionist” research was also problematic due to the *universalistic* tendency that its explanatory ambitions superficially shared with the religionists. Thus, in a move that resonated well with dominant trends in the humanities at the time, the twin dangers of religionism and reductionism could be fought with the same weapon: an emphasis on the particular, unique, situated, and contextual. This is the context in which emphasis was put on the qualifying term “Western.” The term stands in opposition not so much to “Eastern” (or “Northern” or “Southern”) esotericism as to *universal* esotericism. It functions as a marker of *specificity* rather than as a geographical index term.<sup>12</sup>

The giving of boundaries to “esotericism” as a historiographical category in this period parallels the attempt to create a *professional* boundary around a *field of study*.<sup>13</sup> The ways that the term was defined entitled some types of experts to speak about it, while other types of expertise were excluded. Generally speaking, European and North American historians were in, while sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists of religion were out – along with the Indologists, Tibetologists, and Sinologists. Historians of Islam and Judaism might occasionally be hired as consultants, but they too would stand outside of the main action.<sup>14</sup>

The *political* ambition of defining the professional boundaries of a field of research was explicitly present in some of the programmatic texts on esotericism in this period. For example, in the context of presenting his own historical definition of esotericism, Antoine Faivre lamented the fact that expertise from other disciplines had access to relevant forums: “We now see appear, in impressive numbers, ... specialists of one discipline or another, who get involved speaking authoritatively on esotericism when they have no

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ism controversy” that this article ended up elongating, see Thomas Indinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (eds.), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> It is on this background that some scholars have argued for finding alternatives that more effectively pick out the intended specificity. See, e.g., Pasi, “Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West.” Cf. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, “Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800: Prolegomena zu einer Bestimmung ihrer Differenz,” *Aries* 3, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> For the concept of boundary-work, see Thomas Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists,” *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983). Cf. idem, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> This division of labour is clearly reflected in the landmark *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, where Islamic esotericism primarily appears as the Arabic *transmission* of alchemical and hermetic texts, and Judaic esotericism is treated under separate entries on “Jewish influences.”

particular competence.”<sup>15</sup> In a situation without a hegemonic class of experts, esotericism becomes a “choice prey for imperialist projects.”<sup>16</sup> The result is that “today almost anybody thinks he has rights to esotericism; almost anybody speaks of almost anything with impunity, with the complicity of the editors and the public.”<sup>17</sup> The implication is clear: the editors should police boundaries differently; the discourse should be restricted so that certain actors (European historians of “esotericism”) should be given priority over others (sociologists, anthropologists, amateurs).

The implicit “specialist-amateur” dichotomy and the attack on academic competitors are two classic characteristics of boundary-work. Through these social distinctions, writes Thomas Gieryn, “[r]eal science is demarcated from several categories of posers: pseudoscience, amateur science, deviant or fraudulent science, bad science, junk science, popular science.”<sup>18</sup> Boundary-work typically occurs when “two or more rival epistemic authorities square off for jurisdictional control over a contested ontological domain.”<sup>19</sup> If we substitute ontological domain for *discursive* domain, this is an entirely apt description of the condition in which Faivre was writing in the early 1990s. What we see is an attempt at establishing jurisdictional control over the academic discourse on the esoteric. While winning over the popular, practitioner, and religionist voices was important enough, it was even more important to challenge the jurisdiction of competing academic authorities who would employ the term in typological rather than historical senses.

It is notable that in the struggle to secure dominance of historical definitions, key argumentative strategies were unavailable to the historicists. The most effective strategies of definition were simply not viable:<sup>20</sup> etymology, common understandings and lexical definitions all pointed in an opposite direction. Meanwhile, the “historical object” imagined by historicists was far from tangible enough to provide an effective ostensive definition or an unambiguous appeal to prototype.<sup>21</sup> One could not find grounding in actors’

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<sup>15</sup> Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Anil Gupta, “Definitions,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/definitions/> (accessed August 13, 2013). The argument I am making here owes much to the discussion in Hammer, “Esotericism in New Religious Movements”, 445–49.

<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, an ostensive component is often added to the mix when esotericism is being introduced to new audiences, and often in revealingly long-winded terms. Thus, for example, from the description of the pioneering journal, *Aries*: “This field [Western esoteri-

categories either, since “esotericism” had only emerged as an emic term quite recently. You will not find it in the “referential corpus” delineated by Faivre as the historical wellspring of “Western esotericism.”<sup>22</sup> Even the history of use provided obstacles: The first time the term was employed in a technical sense was in Jacques Matter’s *Histoire critique du gnosticisme* in 1828, and there it was concerned precisely with “secret teachings” and “higher knowledge” (*gnosis*).<sup>23</sup> Only when French occultists adopted the term did esotericism start to take on a historical, yet heavily perennialist, shape. It is only in the cauldron of 19th century occultism that “esotericism” is imagined as a historical phenomenon with an extension reminiscent of the later concept – but looking at the details, this was still only a distant cousin from the concept later projected backwards in history by the historicists.

These reflections do not serve to say that historicist delimitations and conceptualisations are *illegitimate*. That would be committing a genetic fallacy. However, they do remind us that the historical programme exists in a pluralistic academic landscape where competitors, defining the term along diverging lines, have at least *just as* legitimate a claim to “esotericism.” Indeed, typologists operationalising “esotericism” along the lines of “religious secrecy” have a stronger historical precedence for their choice: they can amass

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cism] covers a variety of ‘alternative’ currents in western religious history, including the so-called ‘hermetic philosophy’ and related currents in the early modern period; alchemy, paracelsianism and rosicrucianism; christian kabbalah and its later developments; theosophical and illuminist currents; and various occultist and related developments during the 19th and 20th centuries, up to and including popular contemporary currents such as the New Age movement.” As for intuitive prototype definitions, the problem remains that there are diverging intuitions about what this term refers to. This even holds among those who *share* an intuition that esotericism is a historical phenomenon. As Hanegraaff pointed out in his recent introduction to the field, scholars appear to be working from at least three different historical “prototypes” of esotericism: as an early-modern “enchanted worldview,” as secret, “inner tradition,” and as modern, post-Enlightenment occultism. Cf. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 4–13. These, of course, are indicative of three radically different ways of conceptualising the historical object.

<sup>22</sup> The first known use was in German in the late 18th century, with a more influential application being found in Jacques Matter’s *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence* in 1828, discussed below. For the earlier German reference, see Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, “Der Esoteriker und die Esoterik: Wie das Esoterische im 18. Jahrhundert zum Begriff wird und seinen Weg in die Moderne findet,” *Aries* 10, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>23</sup> See Hanegraaff, “The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism,” *Aries* 10, no. 2 (2010): 202. We might also refer to the ongoing and groundbreaking genealogical research of Wouter J. Hanegraaff, which suggests that the reification of a cluster of intellectual currents into a semi-coherent whole, which today forms the starting point for historical esotericism, took place in the context of the Protestant polemical discourse sometimes known as “anti-apologetics,” in which one wished to purge Christianity of its claimed “pagan” corruptions. See Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

etymological arguments, refer to common understandings as fortified in lexical definitions, and even point to a history of use that massively predates the contemporary historicist understanding. Behind the boundary-work tactics and jurisdictional skirmishes we are left with a radically pluralistic academic field, and it behoves us to judge each option seriously on its own merits.

### **“Esotericism” between a Plurality of Research Programmes**

The academic pluralism that currently exists in the study of esotericism may fruitfully be construed in terms of Imre Lakatos’s notion of competing “research programmes.”<sup>24</sup> Viewed this way, we should expect historical and typological programmes to ask different questions in the pursuit of separate theoretical goals. A Lakatosian perspective can give us a better overview of the key differences and overlaps between research programmes, and help resolve some of the controversies in the field. Most importantly, it can help us distinguish pseudo-debates from real conceptual disagreements within the field.

In Lakatos’s historically oriented philosophy of science, scientific research programmes revolve around a “hard core” of key theoretical propositions and philosophical assumptions, which together define the goals of each programme.<sup>25</sup> Out of this hard core springs a set of *positive* and *negative* heuristics, creating a “protective belt” of auxiliary hypotheses surrounding the programme. Positive heuristics consist of tacit or explicit guidelines that advise the researcher on how to gather and analyse data, form and test hypotheses, constitute and arrange “facts,” and generate new knowledge within the programme. Conversely, negative heuristics inform the researcher about which questions *not* to ask and which research methods to avoid. Above all, the function of negative heuristics is to direct any attempts at

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that Lakatos had *natural* science in mind when he constructed this approach to the history of science. More particularly, the methodology of research programmes was designed to find a balance between the historicising (and relativising) approaches of Kuhn and Feyerabend on the one hand, and the austere logical but utterly ahistorical reconstructions resulting from Popper’s falsificationism on the other. It is thus not obvious that this approach should make a perfect fit when reconstructing theoretical constellations in a humanities discipline. Nevertheless, I maintain that the key framework introduced here *does* make sense, while the rest of Lakatos’s ambitions, notably to distinguish between progressing and degenerating programmes in terms of their heuristic power, is harder to transfer – if, indeed, they ever worked out for the natural sciences to begin with.

<sup>25</sup> Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” 132–37.



falsification *away* from the hard core of the programme, leading them instead to the protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses.

The combination of protective belt and heuristics keep the hard core of the programme *unfalsifiable*. In other words, one cannot distinguish “good” from “bad” research programmes based on epistemological principles such as falsifiability alone. What matters is whether the total structure of a certain programme retains predictive power and is able to generate new hypotheses and produce new discoveries: what Lakatos calls “progressive problemshifts.” Thus one may distinguish between *progressive* and *stagnating* research programmes: stagnating programmes are characterised by an inflation in the protective belt: it does not produce novel hypotheses that generate new knowledge, but merely adjustments in the existing belt of hypotheses that serve to protect the hard core from falsification (i.e., *ad hoc* hypotheses). It does not produce any progressive problemshifts, but instead slips back to address the same basic problems.

I will briefly sketch a small variety of approaches that conceptualise esotericism in typological and historical senses. My purpose is to argue that one cannot expect any fundamental agreement on the *concept* of esotericism between these different programmes, since the word is defined and used to serve very different, yet equally legitimate purposes. This rational reconstruction can, however, help us free the discussion of “esotericism” from a tiresome quarrel over disconnected definitions, and turn fresh attention to its heuristic power (or lack thereof) within specific research programmes.

## Historical research programmes

We may distinguish several slightly diverging historicist programmes in the study of esotericism. These programmes revolve around the same hard core: that *esotericism is a specific historical phenomenon, grounded in specific historical events and processes*. Despite a lively discussion about definitions among historicists, this assumption is not really a topic for argument; rather, it is the undisputed starting point. From this hard core spring positive heuristics that tell researchers how to go about building knowledge about “esotericism.” I will suggest that it is on this *heuristic* level, rather than on the core level of the historicity of esotericism, that historicist programmes tend to diverge.

This point may be illustrated by a simple reconstruction of some diverging historicist positions.<sup>26</sup> For example, we may construe the 4+2 character-

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<sup>26</sup> I will only discuss a small selection of influential historicist programmes here. These have been selected primarily for their influence in the field as presently institutionalised, and

istics of the classic Faivrean programme as a *positive heuristic*: analysing (historically related) material in terms of these characteristics provides a way to generate new knowledge about “esotericism,” conceptualised as a historical object that can be described and traced by inductive historical methods. Through the 1990s, this research project led to some relevant problemshifts: the increased attention to esoteric dimensions in domains such as art, music, literature and ritual is a primary example.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the *diachronic* study of characteristics led to the discovery that esoteric material was being reinterpreted and transformed in specific ways with the advent of modernity.<sup>28</sup> This, however, was a challenging find that led to a questioning of the heuristic itself and a call for new definitions and research procedures. A moderate solution adopted by some historians has been to redefine the 4+2 characteristics as a *polythetic family-resemblance relation* between historically related currents, rather than essential elements in a “form of thought.”<sup>29</sup> From a Lakatosian perspective, this manoeuvre could be interpreted as a sign of a *degenerating* problemshift. The programme does not easily accommodate new empirical developments, so changes in auxiliary hypotheses and positive heuristics are needed for its survival. We should however note that Lakatosian reconstruction does not provide reason to *reject* such efforts; indeed, “it occasionally happens that when a research programme gets into a

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partly because they have been associated with theoretical and methodological reflection to a larger extent than their competitors. Among the programmes that will not be included, special mention should be made of Arthur Versluis’s work, which constitutes an independent and alternative way to conceptualise esotericism as a historical phenomenon in (predominantly) “Western” culture. See, e.g., Versluis, “What Is Esoteric?”; cf. Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esoteric Traditions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Many examples are sketched in Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, e.g. 93–94, 105–108. For other examples, see, e.g., Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds. Roelof van den Broek and Hanegraaff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007); Antoine Faivre, “Borrowings and Misreading: Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘Mesmeric’ Tales and the Strange Case of their Reception,” *Aries* 7, no. 1 (2007). Nevertheless, the vast majority of innovative esotericism scholarship in this period proceeded *without* following the Faivrean programme, or indeed any significant theoretical orientation at all. Good examples of this trend are the works of central scholars such as Joscelyn Godwin and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke.

<sup>28</sup> This point was already present in Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism.”

<sup>29</sup> For this strategy, see especially Marco Pasi, “Il problema della definizione dell’esoterismo: analisi critica e proposte per la ricerca futura,” in *Forme e correnti dell’esoterismo occidentale*, ed. Alessandro Grossato (Milan: Medusa, 2008).

degenerating phase, a little revolution or a *creative shift* in its positive heuristic may push it forward again.”<sup>30</sup>

While “neo-Faivrean” approaches cannot thus be discounted out of hand, it is also quite natural that other historicists have left Faivre’s framework and gone on to proscribe entirely new heuristics (opting for “little revolutions” rather than “creative shifts”). As a key example, we may construe the programme articulated by Hanegraaff in a number of publications since 2001, as following a heuristic that emphasises a *genealogical* approach to key terms (e.g. “esotericism,” “magic,” “occult”) aimed at uncovering their shifting use in different historical contexts.<sup>31</sup> This heuristic emphasises historical “epistemic” breaks and rupture, and seeks to locate the discursive construction of semantic fields related to “the esoteric.” Moreover, it is characterised by a suspicion of established secondary literatures, so it calls for a return to the diligent study of primary sources. This programme has already contributed to progressive problemshifts, taking the study of “esotericism” in new directions (e.g. polemical discourse, mnemohistorical shifts, paganism and heresiology, political dimensions, etc.).<sup>32</sup>

We can also identify *negative* heuristics in the historicist programmes. As it happens, these appear intimately connected with the boundary-work discussed in the previous section. One explicit example is the insistence on “methodological agnosticism,” originally designed to discourage “religionist” and “reductionist” approaches. In practice, this heuristic discourages the use of metaphysical concepts related to the religionist school (such as Corbin’s *mundus imaginalis*, Jung’s “collective unconscious,” Eliade’s theologising

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<sup>30</sup> Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” 137.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity,” *Aries* 1, no. 1 (2001). For later examples, see, e.g., Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research,” *Aries* 5, no. 2 (2005); “The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism”; *Esotericism and the Academy*.

<sup>32</sup> The main achievement of this programme is Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Western Esotericism,” in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, eds. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Other research building on it can be found in recent work such as Jacob Senholt Christensen, “Radical Politics and Political Esotericism: The Adaptation of Esoteric Discourse within the Radical Right,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Asprem and Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2013); Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms: Sociological, Historical, and Critical Approaches to the Invention of Tradition,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013); Asbjørn Dyrendal and Egil Asprem, “Sorte brorskap, mørke korrespondanser og frelsende avsløringer: Konspirasjonsteori som esoterisk diskurs,” *Din: Tidskrift for religion og kultur* 2 (2013); Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900 – 1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

“Sacred,” or post-psychedelic concepts of “transpersonal reality”), but it also bars the incorporation of genuinely *naturalistic* methods that would explain elements of “the esoteric” in terms of, for example, cognitive mechanisms, neurophysiology, economic or social factors.<sup>33</sup> More importantly for our present purposes, the qualifying adjective “Western” also functions as a negative heuristic device: it discourages attempts to find esotericism in contexts considered foreign to “the West.” Closely related to this, the suspicion against cross-cultural comparative research also serves as a negative heuristic, discouraging historians from developing and applying comparative methodologies.<sup>34</sup> The combined function of these negative heuristics is to save the historicist hard core by refusing to discuss empirical or theoretical challenges that would point to non-historical conceptualisations and modes of explanation (e.g. sociological, psychological, cognitive).

### Typological research programmes

When we look to the programmes that employ esotericism in a *typological* sense, there is one crucial difference that must be noted with care. In these programmes, assumptions about “esotericism” are *not* part of the hard core. These programmes do not chiefly aim to study “it.” Instead, the concept is employed *heuristically* in the service of other goals. This is a very significant difference that merits closer attention. I will briefly discuss two different programmes of this type, namely the comparativist approach proposed by Hugh Urban, and the discursive model of Kocku von Stuckrad.<sup>35</sup>

In a programmatic article from 1997, Urban suggested “a new approach to the phenomenon of esotericism by placing it within a cross-cultural framework, and by focusing specifically on its socio-political implications.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For a criticism of methodological agnosticism on these and related grounds, see Olav Hammer and Asbjørn Dyrendal, “Hvad kan man vide om religion? En kritik af den metodologiske agnosticisme,” in *At kortlægge religion: Grundlagsdiskussioner i religionsforskningen*, eds. Torben Hammersholt and Caroline Schaffalitsky (Højbjerg: Forlaget Univers, 2011). Unfortunately, this important article is currently only available in Danish.

<sup>34</sup> Clear formulations of these negative heuristics are found in Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 16–18.

<sup>35</sup> As with the historical programmes, other examples could easily be adduced. The two examples discussed here have been chosen because of the conceptual clarity with which they have been proposed. For a general defence of the value of typological conceptualisations of esotericism, see Hammer, “Esotericism in New Religious Movements.”

<sup>36</sup> Urban, “Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry,” *Numen* 44, no. 1 (1997): 2. Cf. Urban, “The Torment of

Urban's starting point was the recognition that analysis of the socio-political contexts of esotericism were lacking in the historical programmes that were practiced at the time, a neglect that could be remedied by a cross-cultural comparative approach. In the article, Urban went on to compare and analyse the structures of 18th century French Freemasonry with traditions of South-Indian Tantra – a comparison that would certainly fall outside the scope of the “Western”-delimited historicist programme.

Urban's approach is embedded in the wider programme of a sociologically oriented comparative history of religion. His research questions are not essentially linked to a certain intellectual current in “the West.” Instead, the questions are of *general* import: how is power constructed, distributed and enforced in religious systems? How do these systems interact with wider social processes? “Esotericism” is taken out of the hard core and plays a heuristic role in exploring such questions. Thus, the concept must also be defined in ways that break with historicist assumptions. Urban's definition is instead very close to the more common *lexical* meaning of the term: “[E]sotericism refers to what is ‘inner’ or hidden, what is known only to the initiated few, and closed to the majority of mankind in the exoteric world.”<sup>37</sup> This secrecy-oriented definition is theorised and worked into an operative analytical concept by being embedded in a “sociology of secrecy,” with Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieu as central points of reference.<sup>38</sup> “Esotericism” is thus *not* a historical phenomenon that can be compared to other historical phenomena with regards to some aspect of doctrine, practice or social organisation: instead, esotericism itself becomes a *tertium comparationis*, an analytic construct that enables a comparison of two (or more) historically and culturally unrelated forms of social organisation.<sup>39</sup> This is how Urban can compare French Freemasonry and Indian tantric groups *with regards to* their “esotericism” – not entailing thereby any shared connection to a “referential corpus” established in the European Renaissance.<sup>40</sup>

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Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions,” *History of Religions* 37, no. 3 (1998).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> See especially Urban, “The Torments of Secrecy.” Cf. Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies,” *American Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 4 (1906).

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> In later work, this sort of comparison of structural features connected to secrecy and concealment has been expanded to include e.g. secrecy in the Bush administration, and the Church of Scientology. See, e.g., Hugh Urban, “Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration: The Gentleman, the Prince, and the Simulacrum,” *Esoterica* 7 (2005); “The Secrets of Scientology: Concealment, Information Control, and Esoteric Knowledge in the World's Most Controversial New Religion,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

Something similar goes for von Stuckrad's discursive programme. His "integrative model of interpretation," initially proposed to contrast with the Faivrean approach,<sup>41</sup> is inscribed in the "European history of religions" programme – the hard core of which revolves around a model of European history characterised by shifting and interlocking systems of pluralism.<sup>42</sup> The programme is interested in understanding regimes of pluralism, identity constructions, and social and cultural negotiations of identity in European religious history. Thus, "the academic study of Western esotericism should be understood as part and parcel of a broader analysis of European history of religion, with all its complexities, polemics, diachronic developments, and pluralistic discourses."<sup>43</sup>

While the programme *itself* is historically grounded, "esotericism" becomes a second-order analytical construct that is employed typologically (i.e., a type of discourse) as part of the heuristics of the programme. Esotericism becomes "esoteric discourse," defined in terms of claims to higher knowledge, and means of achieving it, and linked to a dialectic of the hidden and the revealed, claims to mediation, experiential gnosis, prophecy, and so on. Its function is to analyse certain types of knowledge claims that arise in the pluralistic competition of systems of (religious) knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

As to the West/non-West divide, von Stuckrad's operationalisation of esoteric discourse is *in principle* open for application to any knowledge claim in any culture at any time in history. As we can read in von Stuckrad's introductory textbook to the field,

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<sup>41</sup> von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism," 81–83.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Kocku von Stuckrad, "Esoteric Discourse and the European History of Religion: In Search of a New Interpretational Framework," in *Western Esotericism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Western Esotericism, held at Åbo, Finland on 15-17 August 2007*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donne Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 2008); *Locations of Knowledge*. For general reference to the European History of Religion programme, see especially Hans Kippenberg, Jörg Rüpke and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Europäische Religionsgeschichte: Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009). Cf. Burkhard Gladigow, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte," in *Lokale Religionsgeschichte*, eds. Hans Kippenberg and B. Luchesi (Marburg: Diagonal, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> von Stuckrad, "Esoteric Discourse and the European History of Religion," 217.

<sup>44</sup> "On the most general level of analysis, we can describe esotericism as the claim of absolute knowledge. From a discursive point of view, it is not so much the *content* of these systems but the very fact that people *claim* a wisdom that is superior to other interpretations of cosmos and history. What is claimed here, is a totalizing vision of truth that cannot be subject to falsification, a master-key for answering all questions of humankind. Not surprisingly, the idea of absolute knowledge is closely linked to a discourse on *secrecy*, but not because esoteric truths are restricted to an "inner circle" of specialists or initiates, but because the dialectic of concealment and revelation is a structural element of secretive discourses." (Ibid., 230)

I do not doubt that large parts of what I understand by esotericism can also be found in other cultures, and that a transcultural and comparative approach can be most valuable for our understanding of esotericism. Nevertheless, I derive my account from European and American culture and therefore wish to apply my findings to this field only.<sup>45</sup>

It is not the *concept itself* that limits the application of “esoteric discourse” to the West. It only happens to be employed in a research programme that has its particular focus on Europe (and North America). That is, while “esoteric discourse” becomes part of the positive heuristics for generating knowledge about competing knowledge claims, there is a *negative* heuristic at work in the *Europäische Religionsgeschichte* school similar to that of the historicist programmes of esotericism research: the scope is limited to Europe, with the occasional excursion to other territories of that ephemeral place, “the West.”<sup>46</sup>

### **A Preliminary Conclusion: The looming danger of equivocation**

This Lakatosian rational reconstruction of some research programmes that operationalise “esotericism,” “the esoteric,” or “esoteric discourse” in their work emphasises one key point: behind uses of the same *term* we find a range of dissimilar *concepts*, working on various theoretical and heuristic levels within their respective research programmes. This brings a considerable danger of equivocation fallacies.<sup>47</sup> Equivocation is a key cause of false agreement as well as false disagreement, and we find both in the academic discourse on the esoteric.

I suggest that an equivocation with regards to “esotericism” is the core reason for at least some of the apparent disagreements in print between Faivre, von Stuckrad, and Hanegraaff. Thus, von Stuckrad has criticised Faivre’s definition for being an inadequate *typology*, whereas Faivre’s concept really functions as an inductively based *description* of a (supposed) historical reality, which is then employed as a heuristic device.<sup>48</sup> Esotericism<sub>KVS</sub> and

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<sup>45</sup> von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), xi–xii.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., contributions to the *Journal of Religion in Europe*, which inevitably have to touch on “non-European” developments as well – especially when discussing modern and contemporary religion.

<sup>47</sup> That is, the fallacy of using one word in two or more different senses within the same argument, without acknowledging the semantic shift.

<sup>48</sup> von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism,” 83.

Esotericism<sub>AF</sub> are *not* competing descriptions of the same scholarly object – they are entirely different concepts doing different work in their respective research programmes. Thus, Faivre only contributed to the conceptual morass by calling von Stuckrad’s discursive model “circular,” implicitly castigating it for not having emerged from the sources in an inductive fashion in the same way as his own definition was supposed to have done.<sup>49</sup> This completely misses the point about “esoteric discourse” working as a *deductively* based heuristic, rather than an *inductively* based description of a historical phenomenon. True – the two approaches differ and are irreconcilable, but that is not because one knows the “right” way to go about defining esotericism and the other does not. Rather, it is because the same term has been operationalised to do very different work within two divergent research programmes.

A similar confusion can be found in attempts to relate von Stuckrad and Hanegraaff’s later work. As Bernd-Christian Otto has pointed out, the dichotomy of Stuckradian “discourse theory” versus Hanegraaffian “historiography” is superficial and characterises the difference between these two approaches on false grounds.<sup>50</sup> They are in fact *both* working on broadly discursive grounds, but pursuing different theoretical goals. Again, the real difference appears to be what function the term “esotericism” is given within the broader (discursively oriented) research programme: is it an analytical heuristic tool *for doing* discursive analysis (Esotericism<sub>KVS</sub>), or an object *to be* discursively analysed (Esotericism<sub>WJH</sub>)?

These pseudo-disagreements testify to the need for a clearer and better dialogue. Since issues such as universality/particularism and Western/global remain at the heart of these controversies, I suggest that a clearer understanding of the forms and functions of the *comparative method* is a crucial prerequisite for having a fruitful exchange between research programmes. In the following section, I will propose a fourfold typology of comparative approaches, and illustrate their import for the conceptualisation of esotericism. My primary goal is to identify the role of comparativism in the institutionalised historicist programmes, and provide suggestions for an *expansion* of this research. In practice, this will allow for a more inclusive attitude to disciplinary approaches that have commonly been neglected or outright rejected, including sociological, psychological, and cognitive approaches. These, I will suggest, can easily be incorporated in an expanded comparativist study of esotericism, without threatening the historical specificity of the

<sup>49</sup> Faivre, “Kocku von Stuckrad et la notion d’esoterisme,” 209.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 362–67. Otto, “Discourse Theory Trumps Discourse Theory: Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013).



concept. However, it means that the negative heuristics of historicist research programmes will have to go. Since these heuristics were largely a result of boundary-work during the professionalisation process anyway, I say good riddance.

## Comparing Comparativisms

On the surface, the study of esotericism appears to be divided on the issue of the comparative method: typologists are for it, historicists against it. However, this impression relies on a too narrowly conceived notion of comparison. When historicists discourage comparative research, what they really mean is *cross-cultural* comparison aimed at finding *similarities*. This is of course a very specific form of comparison, employed in the pursuit of very specific aims. It is not so much “*the* comparative method” that is at issue, but rather certain research programmes that have used such methods to establish and uphold a cross-cultural, cross-historical (and religionist) category of “esotericism.”

Under closer analysis, historicist and typological programmes are not divided over the comparative method *as such*, but rather over how, when, and why it should be applied.<sup>51</sup> Understood in a wider sense, comparison is in fact essential to the very project of defining esotericism as a historical category to begin with. Consider the following passage from Faivre’s methodological discussion in *Access to Western Esotericism*. After denouncing universalising definitions that work deductively, Faivre writes that:

It appears more fruitful to start with its [i.e. esotericism’s] *variable usages within diverse discourses* and to query what observable realities these usages stem from; then to take as material for study, the appearances of fields that explicitly present themselves as esoteric as well as those discourses that may implicitly present themselves as esoteric.<sup>52</sup>

What he describes is an inductive method that starts by *comparing particulars* (“variable usages”) and developing generalisations on the basis of these

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<sup>51</sup> The situation is, in other words, similar to the misguided anti-comparativism in religious studies in the 1990s. For an instructive assessment, see Robert Segal, “In Defense of the Comparative Method.”

<sup>52</sup> Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 4. Emphasis added.

findings.<sup>53</sup> It is a (admittedly rather convoluted) prescription for comparative research.

An understanding of comparative method is crucial not only for seeing the differences between historicist and typological approaches, but for analysing how comparison is *already* used within historical programmes. We may do this systematically by introducing a distinction between different types of comparison. For the present purposes I propose a fourfold typology, based on the combination of two sets of distinctions. Most importantly, I borrow the distinction between *analogical* and *homological* comparison from evolutionary biology. In biology, homological similarities between two species are due to the existence of a common ancestor (i.e., a genealogical constraint), while *analogical* similarities have emerged independently of common ancestry. Analogical similarities may nevertheless be explored in functional terms and explained as examples of “convergent evolution” – that is, adaptations to similar environments and selection pressures, yielding functionally similar designs.<sup>54</sup> The distinction between *synchronic* and *diachronic* comparison is borrowed from structural linguistics and is well known to scholars in the humanities.<sup>55</sup> While there are also other aspects to this distinction in the linguistic literature, here they will be employed simply to indicate a *temporal* dimension of comparative analyses: synchronic comparison looks at two or more phenomena *at the same time*, while diachronic analysis compares across historical periods. Thus, the analogical-homological axis picks out a *genealogical* dimension, while the synchronic-diachronic axis picks out a *temporal* dimension (see figure).<sup>56</sup>

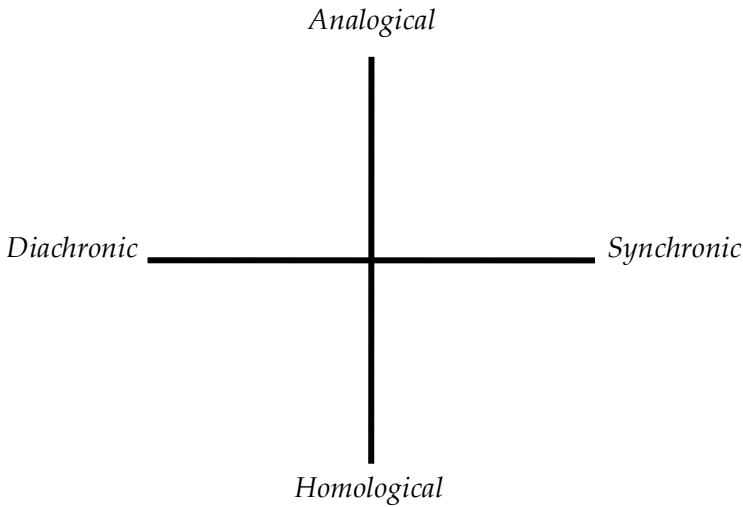
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<sup>53</sup> There are, however, some intriguing problems with the procedure as presented. Since the term esotericism simply did not exist before the late-18th century, what would it mean to look at “variable usages” of “it” in the Renaissance? How to locate currents that “explicitly present themselves as esoteric” *before* a concept of esotericism has been established? And how to distinguish this “explicit” self-representation from the “implicitly esoteric” fields and discourses? It appears that such an inductivist procedure cannot possibly be undertaken on those terms: at the very least, one will need to generate a working definition in terms *other* than the native categories in order to pick out elements that can be compared in the process of making an inductively based generalisation.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., entries on “analogous,” “homologous,” and “convergent evolution” in R. J. Lincoln, G. A. Boxshall, and P. F. Clark, *A Dictionary of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> The distinction originates with Ferdinand de Saussure. See, e.g., Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Reidlinger (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959 [1915 1st ed.]).

<sup>56</sup> Each of these distinctions have been imported to the study of religion before, but as far as I am aware, they have never previously been merged to create a typology. For a previous importation of the analogy-homology distinction, see J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 47.



Four general types of comparison result from these dimensions. Each type has a distinct logical structure. We may see this more clearly by formalising the four types of comparison as follows:

- C1) Analogical-Synchronic:  $C(a, b)$  with respect to  $p$
- C2) Analogical-Diachronic:  $C(a, b)$ , where  $b$  is later than  $a$ , with respect to  $p$
- C3) Homological-Synchronic:  $C(a, b)$ , where  $c \rightarrow a$  and  $c \rightarrow b$ , with respect to  $p$
- C4) Homological-Diachronic:  $C(a, b)$ , where  $b$  is later than  $a$  and  $a \rightarrow b$ , with respect to  $p$

The formalisation should be read as follows: Comparison (C) of two phenomena  $a$  and  $b$ , with respect to property  $p$ . In each type,  $p$  functions as *tertium comparationis*, while  $a$  and  $b$  refer to the particular phenomena that are being compared. In the homological-synchronic (C3) type,  $c$  stands for a common ancestor. The arrow sign is defined as a *genealogical implication*:  $c \rightarrow a$  means that  $c$  is an ancestor of  $a$ .<sup>57</sup> Note that this relation differs from, and is stronger than, the purely temporal “later than”/“earlier than” relation. While the former signifies *genealogical* relation, the latter merely concerns temporal succession.

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<sup>57</sup> This homological implication should thus *not* be confused with the operator for material conditionals or material implication in classical logic. That would have very different, teleological ramifications that are nowhere implied here.

We can find examples of all four types of comparison in scholarship on “esotericism.” Moreover, the use of different types is unevenly distributed among typological and historical programmes. Thus, historicist comparison is most often grounded in the two *homological* types, while analogical-synchronic comparison is found almost exclusively in connection with typological constructs. This indicates that, at least in terms of comparative methodologies, the analogy-homology distinction is a crucial fault line between different research programmes in the current academic discourse on esotericism. Let me illustrate this with reference to some examples.

### The analogical types (C1 and C2)

The *analogical-synchronic* type (C1) could also be called “pure analogy.” It compares unrestrained by genealogy or historical succession, and thus includes the cross-cultural or “universalist” comparative projects that historicists have, traditionally, rejected as misguided. Urban’s comparison of Masons and Tantrics with regard to “esotericism” has this form. As noted before, esotericism stands in the *tertium comparationis* position and *not* as an object compared to other objects. While this typological sense happens to be the most common way to operationalise “esotericism” in C1-type comparisons, we should note that there is nothing *inherent* in that form of comparison that makes it necessary to put esotericism in the *tertium* position. That is, we could envision projects that would place a *historically* conceived “esotericism” in the position of variable *a* and compare it to a “non-esoteric” (or non-Western) phenomenon *b* with respect to some analytic construct or feature. For example, one might compare the modern Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn to the Vajradhatu movement of Tibetan Buddhism with regards to the legitimisation of authority. Such a comparison could find interesting similarities and differences concerning, for example, the routinisation of charisma in genealogically unrelated movements.

The *analogical-diachronic* type (C2) compares phenomena that are separated by historical periods, but without grounding the comparison in a genealogical link between them. This type of comparison is widely used by scholars working within an explicitly comparative history of religion (think, for example, of Jonathan Z. Smith’s comparisons of the Jonestown massacre with the Dionysian cults of the Hellenes).<sup>58</sup> We do also find examples of it among historians of esotericism, but for the most part, this use is implicit and not

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 102–20.

framed as part of a grand comparativist project. The main function of C2 comparison in historicist esotericism research is to shed light on historical examples by comparing them with contemporary ones, on the basis of which one might try to infer some knowledge that is not available from historical evidence alone. Thus, we find this method used quite frequently – although often implicitly – with regards to categories such as “experience.”<sup>59</sup> One might, for example, compare John Dee’s scyer, Edward Kelley, with contemporary psychiatric patients, with regard to exceptional experiential and behavioural categories (e.g. “visions” and “fits”).<sup>60</sup> Or, one may compare the reports of visual experiences in late antique theurgy or ecstatic kabbalah to those of the modern psychedelic and neoshamanic literatures, with regard to “altered states of consciousness.” This latter comparative project has recently been suggested by a new historiographical category, “entheogenic esotericism,” that would cover cases with evidence of dramatic manipulations of experience, whether through psychoactive substance use or by other means.<sup>61</sup> These examples all have “esoteric currents” in one of the variable positions (*a*, *b*), and better-known contemporary material in another.

### The homological types (C3 and C4)

While we do find some (mostly implicit) historical uses of C2, historical approaches to esotericism are grounded on the homological types of comparison. To begin with, the *homological-synchronic* type (C3) is crucial to all talk about esotericism as “related currents” classified under an “umbrella term.” Since such pragmatic definitions are extremely common, even in major authoritative works in the field such as the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, this is a significant point. By looking at how the concept of esotericism is employed within the formal structure of C3-type comparisons we can also highlight something important about the conceptualisation of esotericism and the boundaries drawn around it.

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<sup>59</sup> On comparing experience, see the detailed methodological discussion in Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 120–40. Taves develops methods for refining experiential categories (through a close dialogue with contemporary psychology and cognitive science) to do useful work as *tertium comparationis* – or what she calls “stipulated points of analogy” between the things being compared.

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., James Justin Sledge, “Between Loagaeth and Cosening: Towards an Etiology of John Dee’s Spirit Diaries,” *Aries* 10, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>61</sup> I.e. Hanegraaff, “Entheogenic Esotericism,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

The Anthroposophical Society and the Church of Satan are considered “related currents” within the historical class “esotericism,” *not* because they both possess some specified property *p*, but because they *share common ancestors*. Seeing that Anthroposophy leans mainly on Theosophical and neo-Theosophical currents, while modern Satanism builds on the ritual magical currents springing out of the Golden Dawn, we might have to go all the way back to Eliphas Lévi to find a clear “common ancestor.”<sup>62</sup> Precisely how one draws up the genealogy is of lesser importance – the point is that a homological grounding in a shared cultural heritage *defines* the boundaries of the esoteric umbrella category.<sup>63</sup> Once heritage has been established, the currents may be compared with regard to a theoretically relevant *tertium comparationis*. In the Faivrean programme, this could be a characteristic such as “correspondences” or “living nature,” supplied by the heuristics of the programme; in more open-ended historical approaches it could be claims to higher knowledge, the role of initiation, or the functions of secrecy.

Finally, the *homological-diachronic* type of comparison (C4) has been much used in esotericism scholarship since the 1990s. It has been a central methodology for the scholarship that started questioning the static nature of Faivre’s original approach by uncovering the significant *discontinuities* in the historical development of “esoteric” subject matter. Hanegraaff’s thesis on the disenchantment of magic is about as clear an example as one can get.<sup>64</sup> He compared early modern magicians (Marsilio Ficino, Cornelius Agrippa) to their modern descendants (Israel Regardie, Golden Dawn), with respect to selected aspects of “theory,” “practice,” and “legitimation.” Based on this homological-diachronic approach Hanegraaff uncovered dissimilarities that seemed to make sense in terms of a theoretical framework involving the Weberian disenchantment thesis. The same comparative method was at work in Hanegraaff’s influential conceptualisation of occultism as “secularized esotericism.”<sup>65</sup>

Considering historicist research in terms of homological comparison may also shed new light on some long-standing conceptual problems. To begin with a minor point: this typology provides a way to express the “check-list-approach” *misuse* of Faivre’s six characteristics, typically found among stu-

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<sup>62</sup> This is an idealised and simplified genealogy of both, but it serves to clarify the logic of comparison at work.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. the related point made by Hammer, “Esotericism in New Religious Movements,” 447–48.

<sup>64</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World,” *Religion* 33 (2003).

<sup>65</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

dents and in published research on the outskirts of the field.<sup>66</sup> The *correct* use<sup>67</sup> of this heuristic is as *tertium comparationis* for comparison between phenomena that share a common genealogy (i.e., that are grounded in homological comparison). By contrast, the common misuse results from employing the characteristics as necessary and sufficient criteria for use in *analogical* comparison, thus insinuating some cross-cultural and ahistorical *type* instead of a historically grounded “form of thought.”

A more important point concerns the open question of how far back homological relations go. What constitutes the beginnings of the “esoteric heritage”? Who is the first “esotericist”? Answers will differ significantly depending on how the historical category “esotericism” is defined. The conventional wisdom following Faivre has been that esotericism is grounded in a “referential corpus” created in the Renaissance. The rest is reception history, and can be reconstructed in homological fashion fairly easily. But many if not most historicists today *reject* the thesis of a referential corpus defining the core of historical esotericism. This presents some serious questions about the hard core of historicist programmes, for if esotericism is still to be conceived of as a historical object (and not a *typological* construct) it must have some sort of material extension.

One significant recent proposal is that the historiographic category first took shape as a *polemical* construct during the Reformation and the Enlightenment.<sup>68</sup> If we are to take this argument very seriously, candidates for “first esotericist” emerge a lot later than the Renaissance. Indeed, we may have to begin with the 19th century occultists. Before that time there would have been many alchemists, pietists, mystics, theurgists, hermeticists, Rosicrucians, kabbalists, Masons, astrologers, and ceremonial magicians – but no *esotericists*. Crucially, an aspect of cultural stigma stemming from a newly gained status

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<sup>66</sup> Plucking a few random recent examples that tend in this direction, we find Faivre’s characteristics invoked to show “esoteric dimensions” of the Russian cosmist Nikolai Fedorov (despite the fact that Fedorov wanted nothing to do with the historically esoteric currents of his day); to establish relations with Chinese “alternative” healing practices; and to demonstrate that the contemporary Otherkin movement does *not* fit in the category of “esotericism” because it does not share all the characteristics. See George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 76–77; Ruth Barcan and Jay Johnston, “The Haunting: Cultural Studies, Religion and Alternative Therapies,” *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 7 (2005): 70–71; Danielle Kirby, “From Pulp Fiction to Revealed Text: A Study of the Role of the Text in the Otherkin Community,” in *Exploring Religion and the Sacred in a Media Age*, ed. Christopher Deacy and Elisabeth Arweck (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 143.

<sup>67</sup> I.e., one that is theoretically well conceived and follows the logic of Faivre’s strategy of definition.

<sup>68</sup> I.e., Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

of “rejected knowledge” was now bringing these currents together, but this status and stigma would not necessarily have been present in earlier periods. This puts a new limit on the application of homological-type comparison in historical research: while we can continue to compare “related currents” *after* the Enlightenment, homology is insufficient as a rationale for selecting and comparing material under this umbrella in the early-modern period and before. We are, perhaps, left with the possibility of applying a *retrospective* homological strategy (i.e., studying currents, texts, and persons that have *later* been reified as belonging to “esotericism”), but this is highly problematic. It is essentially a form of presentism that selects material of the past as relevant for study only insofar as it has later been constructed as “pointing towards” certain contemporary (or in this case, “modern”) phenomena. Ironically, it creates and reifies a canon in the same way as the “Whiggish” history of science created a canon of “scientists.” If we accept this new research programme, and we wish to avoid presentism (call it a negative heuristic), we are left with a new place for comparison in the programme’s positive heuristic. To go backwards in history, one cannot avoid the analogical types. This leaves the door wide open for other applications of analogical comparison as well.

### **On Wings and Bats: A Concluding Lesson from Evolutionary Biology**

The above classification has revealed an uneven distribution of analogy-type and homology-type comparisons among historical and typological programmes in the study of esotericism. As I hope to have shown, there are no methodological reasons why this should be so – and the *strategic* reasons that have so far caused the selection are rapidly corroding as well. Historicists can perfectly well include analogy-type comparison as part of their methodological toolkit without threatening the homological basis of their research. I will suggest that an *expansion* of the scope of comparative research in the direction of the analogical types is crucial for meeting several of the big challenges that historicist programmes of esotericism research are currently facing. The West/non-West issue is an obvious case in point, but analogical comparisons that emphasise *explanation* are also crucial for shedding new light on the controversial question of definition, delimitation and origins. In these concluding paragraphs I will attempt to demonstrate this point by looking to the discipline from which the analogy-homology distinction has been borrowed in the first place: evolutionary biology.



The study of traits that are similar because they have their origin in common ancestors (homology) is as essential to evolutionary biology as it has been to the study of esotericism. This is, after all, how the phenotypical “tree of life” is constructed: the similarity between the arms and legs of *homo sapiens* and the four legs of reptiles is grounded in our common ancestors among the *tetrapodia*. The similarities between the brains of *homo sapiens* and those of chimpanzees and gorillas are grounded in a much closer common ancestor among the *Homininae*. However important this study of ancestry is, our understanding of evolution would be woefully incomplete if this was the end of the story. The study of *analogically* similar features is equally important for understanding the generation of nature’s “endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful.”<sup>69</sup> Not all similarities between organisms are due to a common ancestor; there is also “convergent evolution,” the emergence of similar traits through separate genealogical lines. These similarities are studied by analogical comparison, and the reasons for their similarity has to be sought not in genealogy, but in shared environmental constraints and selective pressures.

Consider the study of bats. Bats are fascinating creatures: with the possible exception of the Pegasus, they are the only mammalian species endowed with wings and capable of flying. Besides pure fascination, there are (at least) two different scientific reasons why a biologist would study the wings of bats. One would be to trace the evolution of wings in bats from their earlier mammalian ancestors, thus delineating the origins of the order of *chiroptera* from the class of mammals. This would make one a chiropterologist (a specialist of bats) or perhaps a mammalogist (a specialist of mammals), and the wings would be studied synchronically and diachronically as an important evolutionary trait of these particular beasts. However, one might also research the wings of bats as a generalist in evolutionary biology interested in convergent evolution. Wings are an example of a trait that has emerged more than once in evolutionary history: birds and bats, despite their similarity, do *not* share a common ancestor with wings. Why and how this happens is an important *explanandum* of evolutionary theory, and requires looking at and comparing all species where wings have independently evolved (including the flying insects).

In other words, we must distinguish between the *homological* study of winged mammals and the *analogical* study of wings as a feature of convergent evolution. However, *distinguishing* does not mean *separating* approaches. If a chiropterologist claimed the evolution of wings among the mammalia as the *only* proper way to study wings, that would not only enrage ornithologists

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909 [1859]), 529.

around the world, but also create an unreasonable impediment to the study of evolution in general. Moreover, a chiropterologist who is interested in the evolution of wings among mammals cannot afford to ignore the evidence gathered in the study of wings among other classes.

The parallel should be clear enough. If (historical) esotericism is a bat, the traits associated with it (secrecy, a form of thought, gnosis) are its wings. The historicist who discourages cross-cultural comparison and rejects looking at “esoteric features” beyond the West is doing the same thing as the chiropterologist who insists on only studying bats in relation to other mammals. That species of other classes, such as the *aves* (birds) have very similar traits is not important; they do not share a genealogical heritage, and so their study has nothing to do with the study of bats. The researcher taking this strategy may go quite far charting out the genealogy of bats by studying the fossil record and the variation among contemporary species. However, she will very likely fall short of making any sense of *why* certain traits emerged rather than others, at the times and places they did. She will remain unable to explain why some mammals started developing wings in the first place. Only a synchronic study of how certain traits emerge under certain environmental constraints and selection pressures could provide sufficient grounds for such explanations. Put shortly: the general study of wings is relevant for the particular study of bats.

The same point goes for historical esotericism and its related properties. Looking beyond the particular to see how similar “forms of thought,” secretive organisations, or claims to higher knowledge play out in contexts beyond the West (outside the class of mammalia, so to speak) can generate new insights into the general dynamics at play. It may even help uncover selection pressures and environmental factors that can help explaining the emergence of esotericism in “the West,” and formulate more precise and theoretically refined definitions. To give just a few examples: what can the sociology of secrecy tell us about the dynamic of esoteric movements basing themselves on secretive structures? What can the cognitive science of religion tell us about the generation and transmission of “forms of thought” or “cognitive styles” considered unique to Western esotericism? Is there a dynamic of “convergent cultural evolution” that sheds light on the formation of “esoteric-like” groups, movements, discourses, experiences, or idea-structures? Questions like these, and the analogy-type comparative methods required to explore them, have great potential to contribute fresh perspectives to fundamental debates in esotericism research.

Finally, it is worth noting that research in evolutionary biology frequently leads to classificatory changes in the tree of life. It was, for example, only in the 1980s that the chimpanzees and the gorillas joined our own species as

living members of the family *Homininae*.<sup>70</sup> Such drastic revisions to classification, rethinking the genealogy of various species, can only happen through the combination of analogical and homological comparison. This possibility might inspire historicists to look for surprising discoveries beyond the borders that have been constructed around the field. It is time to liberate comparison from pre-established genealogical relations, and explore the relation of known “esoteric” forms to the “endless forms” of human interaction and cultural production at large.

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<sup>70</sup> Goodman et al., “Primate evolution at the DNA level and a classification of hominoids,” *Journal of Molecular Evolution* 30, no. 3 (1990).

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# Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation

## Symbolic Death and Rebirth in *Little Francis* and *Down Below*

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### **Abstract**

In 1940, the surrealist artist and writer Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) was incarcerated in a Spanish mental asylum, having been pronounced “incurably insane.” *Down Below*, an account of the incident first published in the surrealist journal *VVV* in 1944, acted as an important part in her recovery from mental illness. In it, she works through her experience in the light of her reading of Pierre Mabille’s (1908–1952) book *Mirror of the Marvelous* (1940). This work let Carrington interpret the intricate correspondences she perceived during her illness through the imagery of alchemy, and allowed her to find a similarity between her experience and the trials depicted in many myths, thus infusing her harrowing experiences with symbolic meaning. This article discusses the significance of Mabille and his work for Carrington’s sense of regained health. This is further emphasised through a comparison of the motif of symbolic death in *Down Below* with its depiction in Carrington’s earlier, partly autobiographical, novella “Little Francis” (1937–38). The depiction of a loss of self in this work prefigures the ordeals in *Down Below*, but it is only in the latter text that Carrington also effects a form of rebirth. The article proposes that the enactment of a symbolic rebirth means that *Down Below* can be considered a form of initiation into the surrealist marvellous, and that Carrington’s experiences both parallel and prefigure surrealism’s concerns with esotericism, myth, and initiation, during and after the Second World War.

### **Keywords**

Pierre Mabille; alchemy; myth; André Breton; esotericism; psychosis



## Introduction: Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Esotericism

Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) is one of the many surrealists that have turned to esotericism for inspiration and alternative forms of knowledge, a pursuit that permeates much of her art, writings, and life alike.<sup>1</sup> Esotericism became of particular importance to her at a difficult time in her life. In August 1940, the then 23-year-old artist and writer was pronounced “incurably insane,”<sup>2</sup> and incarcerated indefinitely in a Spanish mental asylum. Still haunted by the episode three years later, she relived her experience of illness and imprisonment by narrating it. The account was subsequently published in 1944 under the title *Down Below* in the fourth and final issue of the surrealist journal *VVV*.<sup>3</sup> In this unusual autobiographical account, faithful descriptions of the external circumstances of Carrington’s journey and incarceration intermingle with vivid evocations of her psychotic delusions and paranoid projections of the imaginary onto the surrounding world. At the time of writing *Down Below*, her friend Pierre Mabille (1904–1952) was her most important source of knowledge of esotericism. Through his book, *Mirror of the Marvelous* (1940),<sup>4</sup> Carrington came to recognise her trials in a number of myths and esoteric texts. This made her realise that many of the images and delusions that had overwhelmed, disoriented, and terrified her could be interpreted through the imagery of alchemy and the esoteric notion of correspondences.<sup>5</sup> In that way, she managed to conceive of these perceptions as manifestations of “the marvellous” and her ordeals as a form of alchemical

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the term esotericism should be seen as equivalent with Western esotericism, a scholarly construct that encompasses a variety of currents including, among others, hermeticism, alchemy, astrology, and occultism. See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Esotericism,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 336–40. I discuss Carrington’s and surrealism’s idiosyncratic relation with esotericism below.

<sup>2</sup> Leonora Carrington, “Down Below,” in *The House of Fear: Notes from Down Below* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), 163.

<sup>3</sup> The *VVV* publication of *Down Below* was translated from the French by Victor Llona. The original French version was published as *En bas* in 1945. Carrington established a definite version of the text in English together with Paul De Angelis and Marina Warner for the collection *The House of Fear*. That is the version referenced here, but for comparison I have also consulted the original English version as reprinted in Carrington, *Down Below* (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1983). For a discussion of the different iterations of *Down Below*, see Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91–98.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous: The Classic Surrealist Work on Myth*, trans. Jody Gladding (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Mabille, *Traversées de nuit* (Paris: Plasma, 1981), 36–37.

transmutation. She describes this process as a search for “Knowledge,” which she manages to achieve through Mabilles’s “philosophy.”<sup>6</sup>

*Down Below* is one of Carrington’s most widely read and discussed texts, but, although the influence of Mabilles on the text is sometimes mentioned, there have been no thorough examinations of the significance his *Mirror of the Marvelous* held for it.<sup>7</sup> A careful reading of *Mirror of the Marvelous* can contribute to an enhanced understanding of the often bewildering *Down Below*; insight into the nature of Mabilles’s influence on Carrington and the text can in turn shed new light on their place in her healing process. The importance of Mabilles and his book for both Carrington and her writing becomes even more apparent if we turn to *Little Francis* (1937–38), a lesser known novella that Carrington wrote a few years earlier.<sup>8</sup> While *Little Francis* is a work of fiction, it has thinly veiled autobiographical content, and in its depiction of identity loss, a descent into the underworld, and the death of the protagonist, the novella prefigures the mental unrest that fed into *Down Below*. In writing *Little Francis*, however, Carrington does not seem to have been able to transform her experiences of dissolution and disorientation into insights, since the narrative ends in despair. A comparison of *Down Below* with *Little Francis* from the viewpoint of *Mirror of the Marvelous*, I argue, shows that the process of narrating *Down Below* can be interpreted as an enactment for Carrington of a form of symbolic rebirth and an initiation into the surrealist concept of “the marvellous,” as Mabilles defines it.

Jonathan Eburne makes the important point that in narrating her experiences through the framework of Mabilles, Carrington attempted to redirect earlier surrealist understandings of paranoia towards the contemporary surrealist commitment to developing new collective myths.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, along with Mabilles’s writings and person, surrealism’s overall concerns around the time of World War 2 are crucial for an understanding of Carrington’s approach to narrating *Down Below*, not least of her idiosyncratic use of esotericism as an interpretive framework. Carrington’s attitude towards esotericism was in many ways similar to that expressed within organised surrealism. The surrealist founder André Breton (1896–1966) was careful to emphasise that surrealism was not “fideistic” in its use of esoteric material, but that it was

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<sup>6</sup> Carrington, “Down Below,” 163, 164.

<sup>7</sup> See Susan Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004), 48; Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 62–63; Jonathan P. Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 217–18, 221; Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference*, 87–88, 92–93.

<sup>8</sup> Carrington, “Little Francis,” in *The House of Fear*.

<sup>9</sup> Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 218.

rather concerned with esotericism's potential to provide man with a fuller form of knowledge, based on analogies and correspondences, that could restore access to a "key" with which to decipher the world.<sup>10</sup>

Carrington herself pursued a lifelong path of exploration that led her to study a multitude of esoteric currents. In combination with her interest in worldwide mythology, Tibetan Buddhism, and G.I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949), this search for knowledge meant that she, as Susan Aberth puts it, "was fully versed in a number of esoteric traditions and her work fluidly employed a vast repertoire of subjects and symbols."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Carrington herself states emphatically that, "I've never been convinced by any sect or cult. The closest I've ever been to being convinced of anything was by the Tibetan Buddhists."<sup>12</sup> Along the same lines, Victoria Ferentinou points out that while Carrington drew from a wide range of esoteric sources as a means of gaining self-knowledge, "she did not become a devout follower of any form of religiosity."<sup>13</sup> Aberth also writes that "she was incapable of canonical veneration," which means that her treatment of esoteric and religious themes often "veer off into playful satire."<sup>14</sup>

According to Whitney Chadwick, Carrington was attracted to esotericism since it engages the point where scientific and spiritual knowledge converge,<sup>15</sup> thus dissolving a persistent antinomy in Western thinking. Just as importantly, she perceived it to be an area where women had historically been able to exercise powers that they had later been robbed of. Chadwick quotes Carrington: "The Bible, like any other history ... is full of gaps and peculiarities that only begin to make sense if understood as a covering-up for a very different kind of civilisation which has been eliminated."<sup>16</sup> Eburne writes that in telling the story that is *Down Below*, "Carrington's broader project takes shape as an investigation into alternative practices of social organization and knowledge production that had been lost, destroyed, or

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<sup>10</sup> André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 225, 229. See also Breton, *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 104–107.

<sup>11</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Paul De Angelis, "Interview with Leonora Carrington," in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years* (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1991), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13, no. 1 (2013): 115.

<sup>14</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 102–103.

<sup>15</sup> Whitney Chadwick, "Pilgrimage to the Stars: Leonora Carrington and the Occult Tradition," in *Leonora Carrington: Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures 1940–1990*, (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1991), 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

discredited.”<sup>17</sup> For Carrington then, esotericism spoke to her lifelong conviction that common-sense definitions of reality are arbitrary,<sup>18</sup> and acted as confirmation that there is a repressed history in which women had an influence later denied them. Together with her ironic distance towards her own esoteric readings and quest for Knowledge, this multifaceted use she made of her learning indicates that it is hardly meaningful to define Carrington’s engagement with esotericism as what Antoine Faivre calls a “form of thought.”<sup>19</sup> Faivre famously lists four constitutive components that are intrinsic for esoteric forms of thought. It is, in fact, certainly possible to detect the presence of these components in much of Carrington’s work. Particularly after the crisis that this article revolves around, her art and writings are ripe with correspondences, frequently depict a living nature, rely on her imagination’s creation and interpretation of often hieroglyphically dense images, and, not least, depict an experience of transmutation, often through alchemical symbolism.<sup>20</sup> However, relying on such a list of shallow similarities is a risky pursuit. Wouter Hanegraaff points out that Faivre’s definition of esotericism is firmly rooted in Christian theosophy, and as such is rather restricted.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence of Carrington’s meandering interest in a wide range of esoteric material, there is no such stable framework in which the manifestations of these components in her work can be anchored.<sup>22</sup> Carrington’s focus on repressed models of knowing and being suggest that her approach may be more appropriately defined as a search for “rejected knowledge,” as Hanegraaff describes the status of esotericism in Western intellectual and religious history.<sup>23</sup> This approach largely holds up for surrealism, too. If Carrington’s explorations are considered a pursuit of rejected knowledge, her search is similar in spirit to that of surrealism as an organised movement. The term’s elasticity, however, also has the advantage of accommodating her excursions into territory other surrealists have steered clear of, such as the teachings of Gurdjieff.

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<sup>17</sup> Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 243.

<sup>18</sup> Silvia Cherem, “Eternally Married to the Wind: Interview with Leonora Carrington,” in *Leonora Carrington: What She Might Be* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2008), 21–23.

<sup>19</sup> See Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–14.

<sup>21</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 354.

<sup>22</sup> See also Faivre’s discussion of the problems inherent in considering surrealism from the perspective of esoteric conceptions of the imagination. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 124.

<sup>23</sup> See Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, especially 152, 230, 233–39.

Speaking more specifically of the esoteric status of *Down Below*, it may be helpful to turn to Henrik Bogdan's sketch of four overarching categories of texts that are related to esotericism. The first three of these are texts that belong to esoteric currents in which Faivre's intrinsic components are either explicitly or implicitly present, or not present at all.<sup>24</sup> *Down Below* would seem to fit the fourth of Bogdan's categories, which he calls "migration of esoteric ideas into nonesoteric materials."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, *Down Below* is not an esoteric text in itself, but rather one in which Carrington makes extensive use of esoteric material. Carrington, however, does considerably more than add esoteric references as garnishes; rather than just dwelling on the surfaces of the symbols and tales she evokes, it seems that the act of interpreting her experiences through the marvellous lets her penetrate and activate them. Mabille writes that "[a] book on the marvelous ought to be an initiation tract," but that this is impossible to accomplish; instead, he more humbly proposes to suggest some directions into the marvellous.<sup>26</sup> Considered as such a journey aided by an occulted map towards initiation, what Carrington undergoes when retelling her experiences evokes symbologist and alchemy scholar René Alleau's proposition that a myth cannot be judged from value systems separate from it, and in fact is essentially "nothing other than the mutation that it brings about in us when we let ourselves dissolve into it."<sup>27</sup> Such a dissolution can only be achieved through precisely some form of initiation, and, as we will see more extensively later, Carrington can then indeed be considered to treat the esoteric and mythical content in her narrative as an initiate.

If organised surrealism's increased interest in myth, esotericism, and initiation at the time of World War 2 is reflected in *Down Below*, Carrington may in her turn very well have exerted a reciprocal influence on the movement's thinking about these topics. Marina Warner remarks that Breton admired Carrington because she "had realised one of the most desirable ambitions of surrealism, the voyage into madness."<sup>28</sup> While Breton was certainly impressed by the fact that Carrington had experienced madness and been able to return to tell the tale,<sup>29</sup> her experiences also had other, more profound

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<sup>24</sup> Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 18–20.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> René Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol: Understanding the Language of Higher Consciousness*, trans. Ariel Godwin (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2009), 132.

<sup>28</sup> Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, by Carrington, 16.

<sup>29</sup> See Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), 335–36.

implications. By emerging as an initiate into the marvellous after composing *Down Below* and permeating the text with correspondences and references to alchemy, Carrington may be said to have prefigured surrealism's post-war attempts, most notably in the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, to effect a magical rebirth and renewal through initiation into the new myth of surrealism.<sup>30</sup>

The purposes of this article are then twofold. I will examine how esotericism aided Carrington in regaining a sense of mental equilibrium, and how Mabile's writings imply that she emerged from her trials as an initiate into the marvellous. Further, I will show how this suggests that Carrington paralleled and to a certain extent prefigured surrealism's concerns with esotericism, myth, and initiation. First, however, I will briefly introduce Carrington to provide context for *Little Francis* and *Down Below*.

### Biographical Background and Two Forms of Autobiography

Leonora Carrington was born in 1917 in Clayton Green in northern England, into a wealthy family. She soon showed signs of being drawn to the more unusual side of existence. Ever since she was an infant, she had "very strange experiences with all kinds of ghosts and visions and things that are generally condemned by orthodox religion."<sup>31</sup> Early on, she developed a rebellious penchant for mischief. She was expelled from several Catholic schools, for instance, for her habit of mirror writing, sometimes with both hands at once. She also decided that she wanted to become a saint or a nun. "I liked the idea of being able to levitate mainly," was Carrington's characteristically dry explanation for this ambition.<sup>32</sup> The same taste for the unusual fed in to her receptivity to esotericism. "I do have that kind of mentality. It's certainly been natural to me,"<sup>33</sup> she comments.

As a teenager, Carrington realised that she desperately wanted to escape the life of an obedient society-wife that was staked out for her and become an artist. At the age of 18, in 1935, she went to London to attend art school, to her parents' – especially her father's – great dismay. The following year, she made two decisive discoveries when she started buying books on alchemy and was introduced to surrealism. She read Herbert Read's book *Surreal-*

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<sup>30</sup> For an extensive discussion of the exhibition, see Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938–1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 116–41.

<sup>31</sup> De Angelis, "Interview with Leonora Carrington," 42.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

*ism* (1936), a gift from her mother no less, where Read mentions alchemy in connection with surrealist art.<sup>34</sup> In June the same year, she was able to see a large selection of surrealist artworks in person at the *First International Surrealist Exhibition* in London.<sup>35</sup> For Carrington, the most striking work on display was that of Max Ernst (1891–1976), particularly his painting *Two Children Menaced by a Nightingale* (1924).<sup>36</sup> The following year, she was to meet the artist in person when he had a solo exhibition in London. A friend of Carrington invited her to an intimate dinner party for Ernst, where the two instantly fell in love, unhindered by the fact that Ernst was 26 years her senior and married. Aberth emphasises that meeting Ernst was a transformational experience for Carrington.<sup>37</sup> Through him, she was not only able to liberate herself fully from her family, but she also came into contact with wider artistic circles. When Ernst returned to Paris, Carrington followed. Many years later she was careful to point out that she did not run away with him, but on her own. “I always did my running away alone,” she told Paul De Angelis in an interview.<sup>38</sup> When Carrington arrived in Paris, Ernst separated from his wife, Marie-Berthe Aurenche (1906–1960), but neither she nor Carrington’s parents were pleased with the situation.

In Paris, Carrington completed her self-portrait *Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1936–1937), which she had started work on in London. The painting gives an intimation of her image of herself as something of a sorceress, and also provides an early example of some of her recurring motifs, not least her totem animal: the horse.<sup>39</sup> This was a productive time for Carrington, who also participated in the activities of the surrealist group, and exhibited in the large 1938 surrealist exhibition, *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*. She wrote, too, and published her surrealist short stories in the two small volumes *La Maison de la peur* (1938) and *La Dame ovale* (1939), both of which Ernst illustrated with collages.

After a while, Carrington and Ernst grew tired of Paris and sought to escape Ernst’s wife, who confronted them on numerous occasions.<sup>40</sup> They made their way to the French countryside and stayed in the village of Saint-Martin d’Ardèche.<sup>41</sup> The period seems to have been largely idyllic, but also

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<sup>34</sup> See Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> For a more extensive biography, see *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> De Angelis, “Interview with Leonora Carrington,” 34.

<sup>37</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> De Angelis, “Interview with Leonora Carrington,” 36.

<sup>39</sup> For an extended interpretation of the painting, see Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 30–34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> See Silvana Schmid, *Loplops Geheimnis: Max Ernst und Leonora Carrington in Südfrankreich* (Cologne: Klepenheur & Witsch, 1996).

marked by uncertainty since the relationship was still haunted by Ernst's marriage. At one point, he left the village to go back to Paris and resolve the problems with his wife, leaving Carrington on her own, desperate and disoriented. When Ernst had finally ended things definitely with his wife, a period followed which Carrington, although reluctant to look back, claimed to have been "paradise."<sup>42</sup> The lovers painted together and decorated their house with fantastic sculptures. Ernst famously had the bird as his totem animal, and his birds and Carrington's horses started living a shared life in their art. There was also an esoteric side to these playfully metamorphosing figures. In her study *Max Ernst and Alchemy* (2001), M.E. Warlick shows that Ernst was deeply affected by alchemy in both his art and thinking. She finds a shared esoteric element in the many manifestations of androgyny in his and Carrington's work. These "sexual inversions of traditional mythic characters" parallel central motifs in *Little Francis* and prefigure much of Carrington's later work.<sup>43</sup> The animal hybrids that Carrington and Ernst decorated their house with also show some signs of alchemical symbolism.<sup>44</sup> Altogether, this illustrates how the couple's interests and motifs fused, aided by a common interest in the esoteric. Their mutual influence upon each other also proved to last far longer than the relationship.<sup>45</sup> For instance, according to Aberth, the underlying alchemical motifs in Ernst's paintings partly explains the wealth of alchemical references in *Down Below*.<sup>46</sup> By the time of the composition of that text, though, Carrington had also been provided with a broader influx of ideas.

The idyll was not to last for long. When the French declared war on Germany in 1939, Ernst was interned because of his German citizenship. He was released through the influence of the surrealist poet Paul Éluard, but the following year he was taken prisoner again and placed in an internment camp.<sup>47</sup> When he finally managed to escape, he returned to Saint-Martin d'Ardèche only to discover that Carrington had left and sold the house. The stress, fear, and continuous separations had proved to be too much for her, and believing Ernst to be indefinitely lost to her, she had started experiencing the symptoms of a mental breakdown. Having sold their house, she fled to Spain with two friends. Soon thereafter, she developed a full-blown

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<sup>42</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 161.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 161, 166.

<sup>45</sup> See Renée Riese Hubert, "Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst: Artistic Partnership and Feminist Liberation," *New Literary History* 22, no. 3 (1991): 735.

<sup>46</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



psychosis, and was eventually interned in a mental asylum in Santander under terrifying conditions, seemingly with little hope of recovery. She nevertheless eventually regained enough sanity to flee. She subsequently arrived in New York, where she spent almost a year before travelling on to Mexico, which would become her adopted home for most of the rest of her life.

*Little Francis* is partly based on events that took place during the first year or so of Carrington and Ernst's stay in Saint-Martin. Carrington wrote the novella in 1937 and 1938, and the insecure and uncertain side of the couple's relationship at the time comes to the fore in the story. *Little Francis* does not seem to have been intended for publication and was long believed to be lost. Finally recovered, it was first published in French translation in 1986, and in the original English in 1988 in the volume *The House of Fear*. *Little Francis* is an autobiographical tale in disguise, where Carrington has turned herself into the young boy Francis, while Ernst has become Francis's beloved Uncle Ubriaco; his wife Marie-Berthe Aurenche is turned into Ubriaco's spoiled and jealous daughter Amelia.<sup>48</sup> The surroundings, events, and several other people have in turn been transformed by Carrington's imagination. For instance, the paralysed writer Joë Bosquet (1897–1950) takes the shape of Ubriaco's opium-smoking friend Jerome Jones, while the architect Serge Chermayeff (1900–1996), who had spied on Carrington in London on behalf of her father,<sup>49</sup> becomes the pompous Egres Lepereff.<sup>50</sup> When Ubriaco departs for Paris and leaves Francis alone, much like Ernst left Carrington to her own devices in the village, this transformation of reality is taken even further. In the fictional version of these events, the abandoned Francis meets the demonic woman Miraldalocks, who leads him down into the underworld. There, he soon realises that his head has turned into that of a horse. Later, Miraldalocks takes Francis with her to witness an execution. When the boy to be executed walks out in front of the guillotine, Francis realises that it is in fact his own doppelganger that stands before him. Eventually, Francis returns to the village, still horse-headed, where the local bar owner exploits his odd appearance in order to attract customers. The story ends with Francis back in Paris, where he gets into an argument with Amelia. Overcome by rage, she hits him over the head with a hammer; the blow cracks his head open, causing his death.

*Little Francis* switches back and forth between heartfelt descriptions of Francis's joyous life together with Uncle Ubriaco on the one hand, and

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<sup>48</sup> Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, 7–8.

<sup>49</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, 9.

carnavalesque and outright grotesque depictions on the other, as Carrington transforms her experiences into a black fairy tale with a significant number of references to death and identity loss. The novella's fairy tale character is enhanced by Carrington's idiom. Her authorial voice is deceptively casual, narrating events both fantastic and cruel with a wide-eyed sincerity that almost veils her piercing observations.

*Down Below* takes place about two years after Ernst abandoned Carrington for the first time. This more directly autobiographical text was composed in August 1943, three years after the events in it took place. Carrington retold her trials orally over the course of a few wrenching days, in an account that was directed to Pierre Mabile and transcribed by his wife Jeanne Megnen. The fact that *Down Below* started out as an oral account goes some way to explain the fact that it too has a distinctly anti-literary style; yet Carrington's deceptively everyday tone in the face of unimaginable horrors, together with her vivid depictions of hallucinatory delusions, render the text close in spirit to much of her fiction.<sup>51</sup>

*Down Below* is a highly unusual form of autobiography, to the extent that Riese Hubert claims that it reverses autobiographical standards through the interference of mythology and the imagination.<sup>52</sup> Carrington states at the outset that, by talking her memories through, she hopes to transform what she calls "an embryo of knowledge" into a fuller understanding of what had happened to her,<sup>53</sup> something that shows as well as anything that the narration is not just a matter of description but is ultimately an urgent quest for insights. She begins the narration just after Max Ernst had been interned for the second time. Left on her own once again, Carrington's behaviour soon becomes increasingly erratic. Escaping France with two friends, she ends up in Spain, where her delusions worsen. The on-going war plays a considerable part in her breakdown. Apart from being stricken with a crippling fear of

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<sup>51</sup> For Katharine Conley, *Down Below* reflects the fact that women traditionally have rather been storytellers than writers (Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 64). While Carrington's writing does have a marked tendency towards an oral style, it is evident that this is not her only mode of narration. In the case of *Little Francis* and *Down Below*, this anti-literary style may of course be an effect of Carrington's youth, but her later writings suggest that it may well have been a conscious choice. Her novel *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974), for instance, shifts between the meandering vernacular of the 92-year-old, slightly senile narrator Marian, and the archaic tone of a found manuscript that, in true gothic manner, occupies a considerable part of the novel. This variation in style can further be compared with Carrington's novella *The Stone Door* (1976), where the intricate symbolism culled from esotericism and the Kabbalah is entwined with the everyday in language that is far more conventionally "correct" than in the other examples mentioned.

<sup>52</sup> Riese Hubert, "Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst," 724.

<sup>53</sup> Carrington, "Down Below," 164.

what she perceives to be the robotic, inhuman Nazis, Carrington also seems to suffer an enormous sense of guilt since she believes it to be her responsibility to put an end to the war. Soon, she is incarcerated in a Spanish mental asylum in Santander. The major part of *Down Below* is devoted to Carrington's forced stay there, where she is subjected to humiliating treatment, like being strapped naked to her bed for days on end. She is also injected with the anti-psychotic drug Cardiazol, which provokes a horrible feeling that she is being torn apart in the very core of her identity.

At one point in the narration, Carrington declares that she is afraid that she will slip into fiction, since she is unable to recall all the details of the events. Ann Hoff has shown that it is nevertheless likely that much of the external circumstances that Carrington describes are accurate. Her horrifying depictions of the effects of Cardiazol and her physical maltreatment match both the recorded effect of the drug and the common treatment of psychotic patients at the time.<sup>54</sup> For the purposes of this article however, the most important aspect is not the veracity of the narrative, but its combination of external circumstances with subjective depictions of the surroundings and Carrington's own mental life as she perceived them at the time, affected as she was by her psychotic interpretative delirium. This retelling is then fused with her active interpretation of the events through the framework of Ma-bille's writings on the marvellous, which means that the imagery of alchemy and the structure of myths are imposed on the events in the course of re-counting them. This method is closely related to the preoccupations of other exiled surrealists at the time, even if Carrington approached it with a whole other urgency.

## Surrealism and the New Myth

Some time after her escape from Santander, Carrington reached New York, where she was reunited with several of the surrealists she had known in Paris. André Breton and many of his cohorts had managed to escape war-torn France and ended up in the United States in different stages. Carrington spent almost a year in New York, and this period constitutes her most active participation in organised surrealism.<sup>55</sup> She doubtlessly made an impact: in his "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not," published in the

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<sup>54</sup> Ann Hoff, "I Was Convulsed, Pitifully Hideous': Convulsive Shock Treatment in Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 3 (2009): 83–98.

<sup>55</sup> Penelope Rosemont, ed., *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 102.

inaugural issue of *VVV* in 1942, Breton praises Carrington as “one of today’s most lucid and daring minds.”<sup>56</sup> He mentions her alongside names like Pierre Mabille, the writer Georges Bataille (1897–1962), and the painter André Masson (1896–1987), as examples of thinkers and artists invested in examining the possibilities and nature of a modern mythology,<sup>57</sup> or what Breton in the prolegomena calls “a new myth.”<sup>58</sup> The new myth that Breton calls for here is central to surrealism’s concerns at the time,<sup>59</sup> and as his thinking about its possibilities and nature took a more pronounced shape, esotericism became an ever larger part of it. Breton’s book-length essay *Arcanum 17* (1945) shows this clearly. In it, he interweaves ancient myths, the esoteric content dormant in the poetry of surrealist forerunners such as Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), and 19th century occultist Eliphas Lévi’s (1810–1875) description of magic initiation, into a potent counterforce against the Christian myth that, Breton claims, has repressed vital knowledge about the world.<sup>60</sup> This synthesis of rejected knowledge, then, consists both of references to occultists, and the recognition that there is an esoteric content in poetry and myth. Central to all these, for Breton, is the role of analogies and correspondences as means of interpreting and give new knowledge of, and meaning to, the surrounding world. This search for the new myth was the driving force behind the short lived *VVV*, in the four issues of which surrealism radicalised its critique of Western civilisation and sought to construct an alternative to it by turning to “primitive” cultures, poetry, and esotericism.<sup>61</sup> Similar preoccupations seem to have predominated the surrealist activities in other ways. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) was exiled in New York together with the surrealists and contributed to

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<sup>56</sup> Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 287.

<sup>57</sup> See Nikolaj Lübecker, *Community, Myth, and Recognition in Twentieth-Century French Literature and Thought* (London: Continuum, 2009), 64.

<sup>58</sup> Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 294.

<sup>59</sup> For a concise and illuminating discussion of surrealist myth, see Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 13–19.

<sup>60</sup> Breton, *Arcanum 17: With Apertures Grafted to the End*, trans. Zack Rogow (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 115–19.

<sup>61</sup> See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 83–84. For more on the surrealists’ activities in New York, see Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 391–413; Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1995); Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009), 450–82.

VVV, and he even likened some of the games the surrealists played there with an “initiation rite.”<sup>62</sup>

Many of Carrington’s New York activities suggest that she not only shared this interest in esotericism and mythology, but contributed to their development in a surrealist context. In the first issue of VVV, Carrington took part in an enquiry, “Concerning the Present Day Relative Attractions of Various Creatures in Mythology & Legend,” where the twenty one participants ranked “fifteen creatures of diverse mythological derivation in order of their attraction.”<sup>63</sup> The Sphinx turned out to be the most highly favoured creature, but Carrington only ranked it as number six and, significantly, preferred the unicorn, the werewolf, and the vampire. The first of these is of course closely related to her totem animal the horse, while the latter two may have appealed to her due to their liminal nature and dependence on transformation – something that Carrington, having suffered a mental breakdown, must have been able to sympathise with. VVV number 2–3, published in 1943, featured a “non-euclidian” tarot design, which Roberto Matta had conceived together with Carrington. As mentioned earlier, *Down Below*, too, was first published in VVV, in its fourth and last issue in 1944. Eburne considers the text an example of the pursuit of rejected knowledge that took place in the journal. Carrington’s overall insistence on the function of the myths she creates as “the sacred origins of new patterns of behavior and new social arrangements” is certainly close to Breton’s goal of delineating a new collective myth.<sup>64</sup>

Carrington also took part in the 1942 exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, which was organised by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Much like the reworked tarot, her contributions to the exhibition are significant as an example of her unorthodox engagement with esotericism.<sup>65</sup> Carrington exhibited the painting *La Chasse* (1942), but, more importantly in this context, she also contributed an ink drawing to Breton’s enigmatic compendium, “On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation,” which was featured in the catalogue.<sup>66</sup> Carrington’s *Brothers and Sisters Have I None* (1942) is included there as an example of the

<sup>62</sup> Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 453.

<sup>63</sup> Reprinted in Rosemont, *Surrealist Women*, 166–67.

<sup>64</sup> Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 242.

<sup>65</sup> For descriptions of the exhibition, see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 84–88, and Lübecker, *Community, Myth, and Recognition in Twentieth-Century French Literature and Thought*, 58–60.

<sup>66</sup> Breton, “On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation,” in *First Papers of Surrealism* (New York: Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, 1942).

myth of the androgyne. Aberth describes the image as a “cross between a personal drawing and a hermetic diagram,” where “the details coalesce to chart an inner topography.”<sup>67</sup> The drawing is accompanied by an alchemical etching where the intermingling of water and fire is depicted as a man and a woman embracing, a unification of opposites which does not lead to resolution and harmony but to the productively tension-filled co-existence of antinomies that surrealism strived for.<sup>68</sup> On this page then, myth and alchemy fuse with personal experience in a way that may be considered a tentative example of the interpretation of madness through the marvellous that Carrington herself would enact in *Down Below*. The androgyne is also an appropriately selected myth for Carrington, which points back to her earlier exploration of the motif together with Max Ernst, while simultaneously affording a glimpse of the future, where androgynous figures, often both ageless and ancient, would populate her stories and paintings.

Half a decade earlier, in “The Political Position of Surrealism” (1935), Breton had claimed that surrealism would prove to have the ability to transform the personal myths of artists into collective myths, and he made a direct connection between this new collective myth and the emancipation of man.<sup>69</sup> If surrealism’s concerns during the war were to a large extent directed towards tracing the contours of this myth, Carrington’s activities in New York, and to an even greater extent later in Mexico, have to be considered striking examples of a similar pursuit. In her interpretation of personal experience through the imagery and language of esotericism and myth, Carrington translated highly personal obsessions into bewildering yet more universally recognisable imagery. *Down Below* is undoubtedly the most accomplished example of such a transformation. But to approach a fuller understanding of the significance of her use of alchemy and myth in order to transform intolerable suffering into knowledge, we need to turn to the influence of Pierre Mabille.

### **Pierre Mabille and the Marvellous as Surrealist Esotericism**

Pierre Mabille had a crucial role in the conception of *Down Below*. Carrington had first attempted to write about her psychosis and internment when she was still in New York, at the encouragement of Breton, but that version of

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<sup>67</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 123–24.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 210, 230–33.

the text was never published and the manuscript was lost.<sup>70</sup> In Mexico, she met Mabile through her friend Remedios Varo (1908–1963) and her husband, the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret (1899–1959). Carrington knew Mabile from her time in Paris, where he had introduced her to the Kabbalah and the writings of Gershom Scholem,<sup>71</sup> prefiguring the role of a spiritual guide of sorts that he would now assume for her. This time around, he was to introduce her to a much larger body of rejected knowledge. He provided her with a copy of his book *Mirror of the Marvelous*, and then convinced her to make a second attempt at recounting her experience of psychosis and incarceration.

It is worth taking a closer look at Mabile's person, in order to get a sense of the importance he had for Carrington, as well as for surrealism, at the time. Born in 1904, Mabile first came into contact with the surrealists in 1934. He soon started contributing to the journal *Minotaure* (1933–1939), where he eventually came to serve as an editor alongside Breton. He was a physician by profession, but also had an extensive knowledge of psychoanalysis, art, and, not least, esotericism. Mabile was a disciple of the contemporary French occultist Pierre Piobb (1874–1942), who was thus one of the decisive influences in his intellectual and spiritual development.<sup>72</sup> Through the teachings of Piobb, along with his wider readings in esotericism, Mabile developed a monist philosophy that was based on the belief that “everything is in everything,”<sup>73</sup> that mind and matter must cease to be considered separate from each other, and that man should perceive himself as a microcosm regulated by the same laws that structure the entire universe.<sup>74</sup> Mabile was also a Freemason,<sup>75</sup> which may go some way to explain his persistent preoccupation with initiation,<sup>76</sup> an aspect of his thinking that permeates *Mirror of the Marvelous*. While Mabile is a relatively seldom discussed figure in the history of surrealism, José Pierre claims that he “supplied the ‘scientific’ endorsement that made it possible for a twentieth century observer to venture into the occult without too great risk to his reputation,” and that he was

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<sup>70</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 47–48.

<sup>71</sup> Salomon Grimberg, “Leonora Carrington, What She Might Be,” in *Leonora Carrington: What She Might Be*, 80.

<sup>72</sup> See Sarane Alexandrian, *Le surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 444; Remy Laville, “Pierre Mabile ou la route vers l'Âge d'Homme,” in *Mélysine VIII: L'âge ingrat*, eds. Henri Béhar and Pascaline Mourier-Casile (Paris: L'âge d'homme, 1986), 73; Breton, “Drawbridges,” in Mabile, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, x.

<sup>73</sup> Laville, “Pierre Mabile ou la route vers l'Âge d'Homme,” 73.

<sup>74</sup> Breton, “Drawbridges,” xi. See also Mabile, *Traversées de nuit*, 35–36.

<sup>75</sup> Laville, “Pierre Mabile ou la route vers l'Âge d'Homme,” 73.

<sup>76</sup> Alexandrian, *Le surréalisme et le rêve*, 444.

inspirational in his steadfast preference for the poetical imagination's supremacy over stale dogma.<sup>77</sup> According to Sarane Alexandrian, Mabille significantly enough also "initiated" Breton in geomancy and astrology.<sup>78</sup> Overall then, Mabille appears to have been a strong force in the surrealist movement's already discussed focus on myth, esotericism, and initiation during the war.<sup>79</sup> He also took this interest further than many other surrealists. If Breton cautiously maintained a certain playful distance from esotericism and initiation,<sup>80</sup> Mabille, being a Freemason with a radically monist view of the world, seems to have had a deeper, if somewhat idiosyncratic, engagement with these phenomena – still marked by a synthetic approach that prevented him from adhering to one particular "form of thought," but with an acute sense of the radical, transformative possibilities inherent in esoteric experience.

The marvellous has been one of the central concepts in surrealism ever since the inception of the movement: in the first surrealist manifesto, Breton exclaims that "only the marvelous is beautiful."<sup>81</sup> While the marvellous thus signifies the surrealist conception of beauty as something shattering and convulsive, it also has broader implications, since at the same time it describes the central surrealist experience of reality as something more than meets the eye; the marvellous, in other words, pertains to surrealism's attempts to dissolve the definite borders between reality and the imagination, detect correspondences that are obscured by rationalist thinking, and reveal the adventure in everyday life.<sup>82</sup> Mabille's book-length charting of the topography of the marvellous is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious attempts to explore the concept in all its richness. For Mabille, "[the marvellous] evokes all the extraordinary and unbelievable phenomena that together constitute the essential domain of fantasy," and it speaks to its audience's longing for "a world custom-built according to their desires."<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, the marvellous is a life-altering search for a different form of knowledge, for "[t]heir desire is to rip away the veil that hides from them the total reality of

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<sup>77</sup> José Pierre, "André Breton and/or 'Minotaure,'" in *Focus on Minotaure: The Animal-Headed Review* (Geneva: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1987), 106.

<sup>78</sup> Alexandrian, *Le surréalisme et le rêve*, 444.

<sup>79</sup> See Pierre, "André Breton and/or 'Minotaure,'" 118. See also Tessel Bauduin, *The Occultation of Surrealism: A Study of the Relationship Between Bretonian Surrealism and Western Esotericism* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2012), 27.

<sup>80</sup> See Breton, *Free Rein*, 96.

<sup>81</sup> Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 14.

<sup>82</sup> See also Mabille, *Traversées de nuit*, 31.

<sup>83</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 4.



an incomprehensible universe.”<sup>84</sup> His faith in this potential is reflected in the book’s erudition and scope, for Mabille interweaves explication of the nature of the marvellous with examples of it in the form of excerpts from a vast number of sources, ranging from ancient myths to folktales, from gothic novels to modern poetry. They also include a masonic initiation ritual, “Reception of a Master Following the Scottish Ritual” (n.d.), and excerpts from alchemical writings by Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) and Basil Valentine.<sup>85</sup> The approach is methodologically close to Breton’s construction of the surrealist tradition, in which he considers a dizzying number of forebears to be surrealist in one respect or another,<sup>86</sup> and is also a revealing example of the logic behind surrealism’s appropriation of culturally and historically distant sources.

The texts in *Mirror of the Marvelous* that belong to commonly recognised parts of esotericism may be quantitatively few. Mabille’s charting of the marvellous, though, does not only stand out in its scope, but also in his distinction between what might be called a popular, or exoteric, and a hidden, or esoteric, side of the marvellous. For Mabille, the surface meanings of folklore and myth display the popular side of the marvellous. In this respect, the marvellous is an inherent feature of storytelling before it is turned into either religious morality or high culture; in other words, before it is made to serve a fixed purpose. He considers this popular side of the marvellous highly valuable since it acts as a reservoir of poetic knowledge that can be turned against the strictures of classicism and Christianity, as well as against conventional morals and demands of good taste and moralistic utility in storytelling.<sup>87</sup> In this, the marvellous speaks to the unconscious of all those who do not have the time or means to penetrate its secrets.<sup>88</sup>

In Mabille’s definition, myths and esoteric texts that manifest the marvellous are united in their more or less veiled initiatory patterns, but the relevance of this esoteric side of them only becomes fully clear to those initiated. Mabille even states that certain people are predestined for such an initiation into the marvellous.<sup>89</sup> In connection with this, Mabille’s reasoning often

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> There are no exact biographical data available for the latter. As Mabille himself remarks, “the very person of Basile Valentin[e] is shrouded in mystery,” and, like many other authors of alchemical texts, he is “no doubt fictitious, a means of concealing collective works” (Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 58–59n3).

<sup>86</sup> See for instance the list that begins with “Swift is surrealist in malice,” in “Manifesto of Surrealism,” in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26–27.

<sup>87</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 31.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

approaches the idea of the esoteric marvellous as a repository of “rejected knowledge,” particularly when he describes the diminished insights into its initiatory structure in the contemporary world and bemoans the disappearance of a succession of men who held “the true keys to the marvellous.”<sup>90</sup> While the marvellous can serve as a vital source of inspiration for everyone then, it is only those initiated into it who are able to perceive its function as a transmitter of knowledge that can be used to enact an ontological transformation. For Mabille, this transformation requires both “an outward conquest of nature and a constant inward searching,”<sup>91</sup> and takes the shape of a perilous journey that “goes from the depths of the abyss to sheer peaks.”<sup>92</sup> Hence, the marvellous is certainly not exempt from discomfort; there is a cost to the increased knowledge brought by a journey to the heart of it.

### Initiation into the Marvellous

Leonora Carrington talked her way through *Down Below* with Pierre Mabille and Jeanne Megnen almost immediately after having read *Mirror of the Marvellous*. Prior to this, her time at the mental asylum in Santander had figured in some of her artworks. One example is the etching *The Dogs of the Sleeper* (1942), which Salomon Grimberg describes as “painful to look at.” According to him, Carrington herself is here represented by the tormented dog that is contorted, tied to a tree, and desperately howling.<sup>93</sup> She also titled a painting *Down Below* (1941), which shows suitably grotesque figures that presumably reflect her distorted view of the world at the time of her mental illness.<sup>94</sup> Mabille, however, seems to have provided her with a framework that allowed her to do more than represent the horrors, and instead see a pattern in the signs that overwhelmed her, and so reach new insights that allowed her to interpret them. In this way, her trials became charged with meaning in a manner that allowed her to use them as raw material for further knowledge about herself and the world.<sup>95</sup> This search for lost meaning is also related to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>93</sup> Grimberg, “Leonora Carrington, What She Might Be,” 61–63.

<sup>94</sup> See Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 50.

<sup>95</sup> As touched upon earlier, *Down Below* has gone through many revisions. Part of these consisted in Carrington playing down the references to Mabille, but also eliminating a mention of Pascal. Alice Gambrell discusses the alterations in some detail, and comes to the conclusion that they are a sign of Carrington’s wish to avoid what she, in another context,

historical context. Carrington's breakdown may largely have been triggered by the imprisonment of Ernst, but her psychosis was also deeply entangled in the horrors of the on-going world war as a whole. Alice Gambrell claims that with external circumstances so horrible that they in themselves resembled frightening hallucinations, Carrington's identification of herself and her body with the surrounding world could in fact be "read as an extreme form of lucidity."<sup>96</sup> Likewise, even the Santander psychiatrist, Dr. Luis Morales, so demonically depicted in *Down Below*, wondered in retrospect if Carrington "was actually sane in her adaptation to society as it was at that time and if now she would even be classified as ill."<sup>97</sup> Carrington herself leaves less room for doubt on the matter. In *Down Below*, she even claims that her incarceration was "a godsend, for I was not aware of the importance of health, I mean of the absolute necessity of having a healthy body to avoid disaster in the liberation of the mind."<sup>98</sup> Just before that, she states that in living through the experience of insanity, she had begun collecting "the threads which might have led me across the initial border of Knowledge."<sup>99</sup> This harrowing episode then also brought with it a potential for knowledge, but one which she did not know how to extract. In order to do this, she needed to talk her experiences through and interpret them. Eburne points out that the symbolism in many of her delusions resembles that of other recorded cases of paranoia.<sup>100</sup> Carrington however differs significantly in her use of them as fodder for subsequent interpretation, in which she superimposes her newfound knowledge on the events as she revisits them.

Mabille provides us with some insight in the relationship between madness and the marvellous. In a later comment on *Down Below*, he writes that reading his *Mirror of the Marvelous* gave Carrington the insight that one should not try and repress an experience like the one that she had gone through, but instead sift through it for valuable knowledge by examining it unflinchingly.<sup>101</sup> In the stories contained in Mabille's book, she found several images that were similar to those that she had perceived during her illness; she also

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called "opinion dependency." See Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference*, 91–98. For the purposes of this article, it is enough to consider Mabille's role in the text's genesis, and to carefully note the probable impressions his writings made on Carrington's interpretation. Her subsequent attempts to temper the allusions to his work also may not serve to discredit it, but merely to mark her independence.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>97</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 46.

<sup>98</sup> Carrington, "Down Below," 164.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>100</sup> Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 222–23.

<sup>101</sup> Mabille, *Traversées de nuit*, 36–37. See also Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 48.

recognised planetary symbols and alchemical imagery which correlated with the signs she used to transform mundane things with during her psychosis, a connection that now lent her delusions a heightened esoteric significance. In the narration this is expressed in the many densely meaning-charged constellations of symbols that are rapidly transforming and acquiring new layers of significance through Carrington's psychotic interpretative delirium. In Mabille's monist view of the relationship between mind and matter, such products of the imagination have the same ontological reality as physical experiences. He connects this with an esoteric notion of correspondences when he writes,

Paraphrasing Hermes who said, 'all is above as it is below to make up the miracle of a single thing,' we could say that all is within us as it is outside of us to make up a single reality. Within us, scattered fantasies, distorted reflections of reality, and repressed expressions of unfulfilled desires mingle with shared and familiar symbols.<sup>102</sup>

To transform this fluid mass of intuitions and half-formed experiences into contact with the marvellous, the habitual way of regarding one's inner and outer surroundings must be disrupted. Mabille finds some "ways into the realm of the marvellous" in "magical ceremonies, psychic exercises leading to concentration and ecstatic states, the freedom of mental automatism, and simulating morbid attitudes," which, he claims, can all result in clairvoyance.<sup>103</sup> Carrington's experience of mental illness appears to have been a particularly perilous journey along these paths to the marvellous.

"After the experience of *Down Below*, I changed. Dramatically. It was very much like having been dead," Carrington tells Marina Warner.<sup>104</sup> On a map of the asylum in Santander that Carrington drew to accompany *Down Below*, the radiography house where she underwent her Cardiazol treatments has the form of a coffin that contains a two-headed person. "Was this 'treatment' to her a kind of death and thus the coffin image with its implications of transformation and resurrection?" Susan Aberth asks.<sup>105</sup> Carrington does indeed describe the effect of Cardiazol as a disruption of her very being, an annihilation of her deepest self. *Down Below* is then not just a harrowing account of mental illness and incarceration. Its depictions of dissolved identity and Carrington's wish to go "down below" mean that it can also be

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<sup>102</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Carrington quoted in Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 50.

read as a description of a symbolic death, which is essential both as an alchemical stage and as an element in initiation rituals of diverse kinds.<sup>106</sup> The importance of esotericism and Mabile's sketch of an initiation into the marvellous for Carrington's search for meaning in this experience of dissolution stand out even more clearly if we compare the treatment of this theme with the depiction of symbolic death in *Little Francis*.

*Little Francis* also fits many of Mabile's definitions of the marvellous, but rather of the popular kind that Mabile finds manifest in folktales – that is, an unconscious version that has the force to excite the imagination and stimulate cravings for a world that contains more than what meets the eye. In this case, the marvellous appears as a product not just of Carrington's unfettered imagination but of her lack of literary ambition, too. This point is valid for all of Carrington's writings, but it is particularly apt when it comes to *Little Francis*, since the tale was written “in an exercise book with very few corrections” and appears to have never been intended for publication.<sup>107</sup> Carrington's disregard not just for perfection, but also for classical conventions and literary propriety, means that her tone and characteristic unpredictable humour approach the mode of folktales, if with an added surrealist black humour. In this approximation and perversion of the folktale, *Little Francis* also seems to show some influence from the German Romantic tales that Ernst introduced her to at the time.<sup>108</sup> As Warner puts it, Carrington's “authentic simplicity of manner” also merges with “an inconsequent, dry tone and well-bred English manners,” at the same time as it borrows freely from both English nursery rhymes and Irish fairy tales.<sup>109</sup> This incongruence lies at the heart of Carrington's literary style throughout her oeuvre. There is also much in the novella that looks forward to Carrington's continued preoccupations, such as “her lifelong exploration of the potential of the androgyne.”<sup>110</sup> Carrington's transformation of herself into the young boy Francis also revealed aspects of her relationship with Ernst to her of which she was not aware before,<sup>111</sup> something that implies a transmutation of biographical facts through the intervention of the imagination, and so looks forward to the method she employs in *Down Below*.

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<sup>106</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*.

<sup>107</sup> Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, 8. See also the discussion in note 45.

<sup>108</sup> Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Warner, introduction to *The House of Fear*, 10, 13–14.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet, in writing *Little Francis* Carrington appears to have only taken the first few steps on her journey towards the marvellous. Much like Mabelle claims that all tales of the marvellous conceal a theme of initiation, so it is possible to make out a tentative initiatory pattern in *Little Francis*. Warner points out that the novella appears to foreshadow the breakdown Carrington experienced a few years later.<sup>112</sup> This can be seen in her descriptions of the insecurity Francis feels towards his beloved Uncle Ubriaco, or his desperation at being abandoned by his uncle and left alone in the village. Viewed from the perspective of a tentative initiation into the marvellous however, the imminent breakdown is even more apparent in the many symbolic deaths Francis is made to undergo throughout the novella.

To begin with, the horse's head Francis suddenly acquires is a significant detail. While the horse otherwise tends to stand for liberation in Carrington's works, here the horse's head becomes a sign neither of independence nor of marvellous metamorphosis, but rather of a monstrous form of loss of identity. Warner points out that the name Francis is significant since it is that of a saint "closely associated with the understanding of animals."<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, in *Little Francis* there is a recurring and, for Carrington, unusual ambivalence towards animals. Francis is equally attracted to and repulsed by a mysterious woman called Pfoebe Pfadade, who initially seems to be enigmatically and intimately connected with the horse, as Francis hears her galloping away into the night after their first encounter. Later however, he sees her riding a horse, violently whipping the tortured creature. Pfoebe also has an intimidating goat-like smell and at one point performs a frightening dance with a goat. This can be contrasted with the central, and much more positive, role the goat has in the open-ended utopia that takes shape at the close of Carrington's later novel, *The Hearing Trumpet* (1974).<sup>114</sup> This ambivalent depiction of animals suggests that Carrington experienced a general sense of disillusion and loss of anchoring at the time, as otherwise positively represented totemic beings appear frightening.

When Amelia hits Francis over the head with a hammer towards the end of the novella, "a big hole appeared in the horse's skull and streams of blood made a strangely shaped pool on the floor."<sup>115</sup> Francis's fractured and bleeding head corresponds with an event at the very beginning of the novella.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Warner, "Leonora Carrington's Spirit Bestiary; or the Art of Playing Make-Believe," in *Leonora Carrington: Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures 1940–1990* (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1991), 15.

<sup>114</sup> Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet* (Boston: Exact Change, 1996).

<sup>115</sup> Carrington, "Little Francis," 147.

When Ubriaco and Amelia are on their way home from a concert, they see a dead horse that has been killed in an accident lying on the road. Amelia is so terrified by the “horrible blood pouring and pouring out of the big hole in his head,” that she jumps out of the taxi they’re in.<sup>116</sup> There is no key given to the exact meaning of the repetition of this motif, but its character of both divination and esoteric correspondence positions it as an intimation of the correspondences that would so overwhelm Carrington during the time of *Down Below*. A similarly vague and hazy causality is established earlier. When Miraldalocks makes the horse-headed Francis watch the decapitation of his double, the event acts as a dreamlike retroactive explanation of Francis’s loss of his own head.<sup>117</sup> In line with these half-formed peeks into a world governed by esoteric laws, Carrington’s intuitive approach in writing *Little Francis* seems to have meant that her feelings of impending doom and approaching mental instability truly remained in the embryonic form that she mentions in the beginning of *Down Below*. *Little Francis*, then, indicates that Carrington was already stricken at that point with a crisis intense enough for her to experience it as a form of symbolic death. Lacking insight into the esoteric side of the marvellous, she was however incapable of perceiving this death as a way towards a corresponding symbolic rebirth.

Francis’s descent into the underworld is another poignant example of a motif with obvious correlations to both symbolic death and psychological crisis; it also links *Little Francis* further with *Down Below*. While the “down below” that Carrington is so intent on visiting in the latter narrative is in fact merely a pavilion for the mentally ill, its very name, together with Carrington’s intense attraction to the place, posits it as an imagined, mythological underworld.

In an essay prompted by the French edition of *Down Below*, *En bas*, in 1946, Mabille himself comments that *Down Below* is similar to the French romantic writer Gérard de Nerval’s *Aurélia* (1855), and that, much like that book, it also resembles an alchemical manuscript.<sup>118</sup> Both of these references are important for the argument in the rest of this article. Nerval’s *Aurélia*, which Carrington was not familiar with at the time,<sup>119</sup> is the depiction of the writer’s own bouts with mental illness. He finishes his account by likening

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> The motif of the double may in itself be argued to be a symbolic signal of death. As the psychoanalyst Otto Rank (1884–1939) has famously shown, the double in literature, particularly that of the German romantics that Ernst acquainted Carrington with, is often a sign of impending death and the perils of narcissistic introspection. See Otto Rank, *The Double*, trans. Harry Tucker Jr. (London: Karnac, 1989).

<sup>118</sup> Mabille, *Traversées de nuit*, 37–38.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

his trials with what the ancient people describe as a descent into the underworld, or “the initiatory ordeal *par excellence*,” as Mircea Eliade phrases it.<sup>120</sup> Eliade references Jean Richer’s claim that “the theme of Orpheus’ descent into Hell dominates the entire literary creation of Nerval,” and agrees that this initiatory pattern could be a sign that “Nerval traversed a crisis comparable to a *rite de passage*.”<sup>121</sup> He seems more sceptical towards the role played in this construction by Nerval’s readings in esotericism, and finds it “difficult to believe that a poet of his scope chose the initiation structure because he had read a number of books on that subject.”<sup>122</sup> Eliade seems to imply that in a great poet the appropriation of an initiation structure is an intuitive act that necessarily predates readings on the subject; it is, as it were, immanent within great poetry. This approach appears close to that of Mabille, for whom the initiatory structure, as we have seen, is ever-present in tales of the marvellous, often without the knowledge of either the narrator or the reader. Yet in Carrington’s case it is exactly her readings in esotericism, primarily as they are mediated by Mabille, that allows her to discern a similar structure, and this insight into the esoteric side of the marvellous is what marks the greatest change between *Little Francis* and *Down Below*. Variations on the motif of the descent into the underworld are important in both stories, but for all the changes Francis experiences he is unable to undergo a real transmutation, and there is no possibility of rebirth from his multiple deaths.

If Mabille’s comparison of *Down Below* with *Aurélia* emphasises the nature of the former as an initiatory journey, his likening of it with an alchemical manuscript is equally important. M.E. Warlick writes that the alchemical references in *Down Below* suggest “that [Carrington] viewed her descent into madness and recovery as a type of alchemical journey, not unlike the psychological ‘introversion’ described by [the early psychoanalyst] Silberer long ago.”<sup>123</sup> In *Down Below*, then, the horrors of identity dissolution are used much as prime matter that can be refined through the alchemical work that consists of reliving them and interpreting them. The resulting alchemical transmutation effects a symbolic rebirth, which is the outcome of any successful initiation.

In retracing the events as seen through the rich topography of the marvellous, Carrington is able to discern a revelatory meaning in the patterns and correspondences she perceived at the time of her crisis. When the world appears to her as a network of intriguing symbols and signs, revisiting it she

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<sup>120</sup> Eliade, *The Quest*, 123.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 123, 124.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>123</sup> Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 166.



is able to make out their alchemical significance. For instance, she writes, “I was transforming my blood into comprehensive energy – masculine and feminine, microcosmic and macrocosmic – and into a wine that was drunk by the moon and the sun.”<sup>124</sup> She explains that her interpretation of these notions through alchemical imagery is an at least partly conscious method, something that rhymes well with Mabille’s conviction that mental trials can provide access to the esoteric meaning of symbols. At one point she reveals that in revisiting her memories, she uses the idea of the egg “as a crystal” to look at the period she treats. She explains herself by claiming that “[t]he egg is the macrocosm and the microcosm ... the task of the right eye is to peer into the telescope, while the left eye peers into the microscope.”<sup>125</sup> As one of the central alchemical symbols, the egg stands for the alembic vessel in which the work takes place. Here, Carrington combines the egg with the figure of the union of microscope and telescope to fuse her reliance on alchemy with an expression of her insight into the need to take both the great and the small into account, to see them as complementary and interdependent phenomena rather than be overwhelmed by either self or world.<sup>126</sup> This dual focus and its attendant reconciliation of opposites can also be seen as an allusion to the hermetic motto “as above, so below,” which Mabille, as mentioned earlier, uses as a foundation to elaborate on his own belief in the interrelationship between exterior and interior, reality and the imagination, upon which his monist philosophy rests.

The alchemical nature of Carrington’s initiatory journey is made even more explicit in a passage where she assigns an alchemical meaning to the few objects she possesses in captivity. Most significantly, her “face cream Night, in the black-lidded jar, contained the lemon, which was an antidote to the seizure induced by Cardiazol.”<sup>127</sup> This description encapsulates the alchemical process, with the black lid and the name Night signifying the stage of putrefaction, and the lemon the yellow pre-stage to the completion of the Work. Here, alchemical symbolism is brought to bear on the everyday in order to transform it and refine its mundane contents into a veritable key to the esoteric mechanisms discernible in her crisis. The passage then also encapsulates the meaning and purpose of the entire narrative, where the initiatory patterns inherent in stories of the marvellous are brought to bear on horrifying experiences in order to refine them into esoteric knowledge.

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<sup>124</sup> Carrington, “Down Below,” 177.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>126</sup> See also Gloria Orenstein, *The Theater of the Marvelous: Surrealism and the Contemporary Stage* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 124.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

Carrington may also have found some solace in Mabile's belief that only those predestined for the adventure that is the marvellous journey can carry it out to the fullest. "[T]here are a few rare individuals destined to reach the farthest limits, to surmount the ultimate obstacles,"<sup>128</sup> writes Mabile. This triumph comes at a cost, for they are "subject to a series of trials and tribulations others will never experience."<sup>129</sup> Hence, Carrington's own sufferings are made meaningful not just through the imagery of the marvellous, but through Mabile's very definition of the nature of the marvellous journey as something inherently taxing and potentially lethal that only a select few can complete.

Carrington's interpretation of the motif of symbolic death through alchemical transmutation culminates in a form of symbolic rebirth, since it transforms gruesome experience into Knowledge. Carrington's narration of *Down Below* can then also be considered an initiation into the marvellous, as Mabile defines it. With this said, it may be worth repeating that to the extent that the marvellous in Mabile's definition can be considered esoteric, it rests on a specifically surrealist treatment of esotericism. And the form of initiation Carrington went through, after first experiencing her illness and then reliving it, is undeniably a highly private one. It nevertheless seems meaningful to describe the outcome of *Down Below* in precisely those terms. As Henrik Bogdan points out, many esoteric rituals of initiation depend just as much on the initiate's subsequent interpretation of their experience as on the ritual itself.<sup>130</sup> In fact, rituals of initiation cannot be understood without an interaction between experience and interpretation: "Without the experience there is nothing but meaningless symbols for the esotericist to interpret, and without the interpretation the experience fails to become initiatic."<sup>131</sup> This is especially pertinent when it comes to the case of Carrington. Her experience of an initiatory symbolic death is what makes the imagery of the marvellous accessible and meaningful to her on a more profound level, but without the interpretative guidance provided by Mabile's philosophy, she would not have been able to use her sufferings as a way towards transmutation.

Mabile underlines the fact that an intensified encounter with the esoteric side of the marvellous leads to an ontological transformation. In his words:

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<sup>128</sup> Mabile, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 207.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 47–48.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 48.

[T]hose led by their destiny to abandon the ordinary way and overcome the obstacles have been so profoundly changed by the time they enter the marvelous building that they haven't been able to return to the crowd afterward to give them their impressions and tell them what they've seen. With an altered mental state comes an altered language that makes communication impossible, whether or not it's desired.<sup>132</sup>

The fact that Carrington, contrary to Mabille's statement here, actually managed to communicate her experiences, is one reason why *Down Below* has become one of the most important surrealist texts of the 20th century, considered an unmatched report from the other side of the mirror of sanity.<sup>133</sup> The narrative can also be said to exemplify the dual side of the marvelous, since its fascinating autobiographical content has attracted many readers as well as researchers for whom its esoteric significance has most likely gone unnoticed.

### Closing Remarks: Post-War Surrealism and Initiation

If Carrington's political guilt in the face of the world war was a contributing factor to her breakdown, she may have found some comfort in the fact that there is an indirect political significance to her plunge into the marvellous. This brings us back to her intimate relation with surrealism's wartime concerns and their post-war development. In *Mirror of the Marvelous*, Mabille describes the marvellous as a necessary antidote to "the inadequacies of outdated mysticism and academic rationalism," which can furthermore be put in the service of "human victory," words that assumed new significance in the face of the disasters of war.<sup>134</sup> In 1944, in Mexico, he made some important additions to his thinking about the marvellous in *Le Merveilleux* (1946). He concludes this brief book with the utopian statement that the marvellous is a force of renewal, which unites all of humanity and is the only way for it to regain hope.<sup>135</sup> In the light of this, with *Down Below* Carrington can be said to have refined personal anguish and withdrawal not only into Knowledge, but also into an inspirational example of the benign and transformative potential of the modern marvellous.

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<sup>132</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 18.

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. the entry on Carrington in Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, 335–36.

<sup>134</sup> Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 43–44.

<sup>135</sup> Mabille, *Le Merveilleux* (Saint-Clément-la-Rivière: Fata Morgana, 1992), 53.

Mabille's line of reasoning here corresponds as closely as ever with Breton's hopes for the new myth, which was meant to provide a new foundation for a society caught between narrow-minded rationalism and reactionary repression. The similarities between Carrington's initiatory experience and surrealism's evolution on this point come to the fore with the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, which Breton organised at the Galerie Maeght when he had returned to Paris after the end of the war. The exhibition had esotericism, myth, and magical rebirth as its main themes, and it was conceived as an initiatory passage for the visitor to wander through.<sup>136</sup> Much like Breton's *Arcanum 17*, *Le Surréalisme en 1947* brought together surrealist forerunners, esotericism, and mythology in order to create a fertile environment for the emergence of the new myth.<sup>137</sup> The initiatory structure was meant to contribute to the exhibition's function as a "force of magnetization and cohesion," which could channel the fragmented collective desire and let it converge "toward a single point where a new myth awaits us."<sup>138</sup> Breton's ideas are not only clearly indebted to Mabille's writings on the marvellous, with their intricate intertwining of poetry and myth with esotericism, initiation, and renewal. His goal of initiating contemporary man into a surrealist outlook coalescing around the tentative new myth was also more concretely prefigured by Carrington's ordeals and her subsequent transformation of them. At the time of the exhibition, Breton even remarked on the crucial role of poetry and art in surrealism's interest in initiation, which was important enough for him to claim that "that is what surrealism intends to keep on pursuing."<sup>139</sup> Much like Nerval, Carrington showed the experiential reality underlying such poetic initiation.

Carrington's use of the "rejected knowledge" inherent in the esoteric side of the marvellous thus did not just serve to bring her a regained sense of health and meaning, but both paralleled and contributed to the development of surrealism. Most importantly, by interpreting her highly personal experiences as expressions of the marvellous, Carrington enacted precisely that transformation of personal mythology into the type of collective modern myth that Breton went to such lengths to explore.

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<sup>136</sup> See Breton, "Projet initial," in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Galerie Maeght, 1947), 135–38.

<sup>137</sup> For an exhaustive description and analysis of the exhibition, see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938–1968*, 117–41.

<sup>138</sup> Breton, *Free Rein*, 92.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

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## Between Alchemy and Pietism Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann's Philological Quest for Ancient Wisdom\*

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### Abstract

A minor figure undeservedly forgotten, Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann (1633–1679) has received only limited attention from historians of alchemy and church historians. He is known chiefly either for his idiosyncratic Phoenician reconstruction of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, a foundational text of alchemy attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, or alternatively for writing one of the earliest sustained defenses of Pietist conventicles to appear in print. In an attempt to bridge this unsatisfactory segregation, this paper argues that the notion of ancient wisdom (*prisca sapientia*) provided a crucial link between these seemingly disparate areas. First, Kriegsmann's largely philological works on alchemy published between 1657 and 1669 are discussed, with particular emphasis on how they framed the relationship between alchemy and religious piety. As Kriegsmann joined the cause of the first Pietists in

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the early 1670s, he was inspired to announce a whole range of books, some of which were never published. In the year 1676, he made the transition from an occult reading group to a Pietist conventicle. In its explicit combination of complete knowledge and practical piety, Kriegsmann's call to restore the Bible wisdom (*bibliosophia*) of the ancient Jews is considered and placed in the context of other spiritualist and Pietist appropriations of ancient wisdom.

### Keywords

Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann; *Tabula Smaragdina*; Hermes Trismegistus; Plato; alchemy; ancient wisdom; Pietism

## Introduction

In spite of his relatively short life, Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann (1633–1679) wore many different hats: he was a political advisor, literary translator, lay theologian, oriental philologist and armchair alchemist.<sup>1</sup> While his political and literary activities lie beyond the scope of this paper, it is my aim to show how the latter three roles relate to each other. Predicated on ancient wisdom (*prisca sapientia*), oriental philology and antiquarianism provided a crucial link between the two aspects of his life that have hitherto always been studied in complete isolation: alchemy and Pietism.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, historians of alchemy have noted Kriegsmann's idiosyncratic work on the *Tabula Smaragdina* (1657), which argued that this brief text had originally

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<sup>1</sup> A recent summary of his life can be found in Joachim Telle, "Kriegsmann, Wilhelm Christoph," in *Killy Literaturlexikon: Autoren und Werke des deutschsprachigen Kulturraumes*, ed. Wilhelm Kühlmann, 13 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008–12), vol. 7, 47–48. Among the older biographical outlines mentioned there, I have found the following treatment to be particularly valuable: Friedrich Wilhelm Strieder, *Grundlage zu einer Hessischen Gelehrten und Schriftsteller Geschichte: Seit der Reformation bis auf gegenwärtige Zeiten* (Kassel: Cramer, 1781–1817), vol. 7, 341–46. The biographical data given are largely derived from these two sources.

<sup>2</sup> For a seminal essay in the recent historiography of alchemy, see William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographical Mistake," *Early Science and Medicine* 3, no. 1 (1998): 32–65. As chemistry and alchemy were synonymous throughout the seventeenth century, Kriegsmann used the terms "chemia" or "chymia" mostly with reference to what is usually held as the key area of alchemy, *chrysopeia*, the art of making gold. For a survey of early-modern alchemy and its wider scope as chymistry, see Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), chs. 5–7. For accounts of Pietism generally, see Douglas H. Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Martin Brecht et al., eds., *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 4 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993–2004).

been written by Hermes Trismegistus in the lost Phoenician language.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, church historians have focused on Kriegsmann's role as one of the earliest defenders of Pietist conventicles in print through his *Symphonesis Christianorum* (1677/78).<sup>4</sup> Yet in spite of twenty intervening years, I would argue that the disconnect apparent in existing scholarship is unjustified. This observation is also borne out by taking into account Kriegsmann's less known publications and other activities: his first work of lay theology, *Eusebie* (1659), was written only two years after his study of Hermes' emerald tablet, whereas his continued interest in alchemy is documented into the 1670s.

When talking of Pietism within the scope of this paper, I am largely referring to the moderate, Lutheran variety, though admittedly at a time before the various strands differentiated themselves. I attempt to describe the connection between alchemy and Pietism (a specific historical movement in Lutheran Germany) as evident in the life and work of Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann. Hence, Pietism is not to be confused with piety even though these terms are sometimes used in almost the same sense, especially in Anglophone scholarship.<sup>5</sup> As a historian, I am interested in Pietism, whereas Kriegsmann—who died when the movement was still in its formative phase and the term was not yet coined—was concerned with piety. While a number of figures in the period connected alchemy and Pietism, Kriegsmann is an unusual case because he made the connection between alchemy and Pietism through ancient wisdom. In nearly all other cases in which alchemy and Pietism occur together, in whatever form, another element best identified as spiritualism took the place of ancient wisdom, though this did not rule out the integration of appeals to the latter.<sup>6</sup> Ancient wisdom was, after all, the dominant paradigm through which the early-modern period under-

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<sup>3</sup> Julius Ruska, *Tabula smaragdina: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1926), 220–24; Thomas Hofmeier, "Exotic Variations of the Tabula Smaragdina," in *Magic, Alchemy and Science 15th–18th Centuries: The Influence of Hermes Trismegistus*, ed. Carlos Gilly and Cis Van Heertum, 2 vols. (Venice/Amsterdam: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana/Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2002), vol. 1, 540–63.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Tietz, *Johann Winckler (1642–1705): Anfänge eines lutherischen Pietisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 179–270, esp. 200–209; Heinrich Steitz, "Das antipietistische Programm der Landgrafschaft Hessen-Darmstadt von 1678," in *Der Pietismus in Gestalten und Wirkungen*, eds. Heinrich Bornkamm, Friedrich Heyer and Alfred Schindler (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1975), 444–65.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Christian T. Collins Winn et al., eds., *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Though dated in opposing alchemy and chemistry, a valuable survey is provided by Christa Habrich, "Alchemie und Chemie in der pietistischen Tradition," in *Goethe und der Pietismus*, eds. Hans-Georg Kemper and Hans Schneider (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 45–77.

stood human history and the transmission of culture.<sup>7</sup> Not to be confused with spiritism, the term “spiritualism” refers to a strain of religious thought particularly strong in post-Reformation German lands that privileged the inner dimension of faith over outward expressions, sometimes going as far as deeming the latter wholly irrelevant.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, spiritualist rhetoric was often used to denounce institutionalized churches as mere walls of stone. Though the connection between spiritualism and Pietism remains under-researched, scholars increasingly agree on its importance and note the direct continuation of spiritualism in radical Pietism, which thus replaces moderate Pietism as the more original form.<sup>9</sup> While evidence from his own writings is scarce, Kriegsmann moved in circles that eagerly discussed spiritualist literature. Beyond this, his interest in alchemy confirms the growing scholarly awareness of the importance alchemy and esoteric currents played in the pre-history and early phase of Pietism.<sup>10</sup>

The connection between spiritualism and alchemy can be traced back to Paracelsus (1493–1541), who left behind an enormous body of works

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<sup>7</sup> This argument is advanced with particular force by Daniel Stolzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus: Athanasius Kircher and the Secrets of Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> An excellent introduction can be found in Volkhard Wels, “Unmittelbare göttliche Offenbarung als Gegenstand der Auseinandersetzung in der protestantischen Theologie der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Diskurse der Gelehrtenkultur in der Frühen Neuzeit: Ein Handbuch*, ed. Herbert Jaumann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 747–808. Though slanted towards Anabaptism, see also John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Shantz, *An Introduction to German Pietism*, ch. 6; Johannes Wallmann, “Kirchlicher und radikaler Pietismus: Zu einer kirchengeschichtlichen Grundunterscheidung,” in *Der radikale Pietismus: Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Wolfgang Breul, Marcus Meier, and Lothar Vogel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 19–43. A very early statement of this view can be found in Heinrich Bornkamm, *Mystik, Spiritualismus und die Anfänge des Pietismus im Luthertum* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1926).

<sup>10</sup> W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. ch. 1; Andreas Deppermann, *Johann Jakob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 7–30; Ulrich Bubenheimer, “Schwarzer Buchmarkt in Tübingen und Frankfurt: Zur Rezeption nonkonformer Literatur in der Vorgeschichte des Pietismus,” *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 13 (1994): 149–63. For a general discussion of the relation between Christianity and esotericism in the early-modern period, see Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, “Esoterik und Christentum vor 1800: Prolegomena zu einer Bestimmung ihrer Differenz,” *Aries* 3, no. 2 (2003): 127–65. The following address the relation between Pietism and esotericism specifically: Dietrich Blaufuß, “Pietism,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill 2006), 955–60; Markus Meumann, “Diskursive Formationen zwischen Esoterik, Pietismus und Aufklärung: Halle um 1700,” in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption, Integration, Konfrontation*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2008), 77–114; Lucinda Martin, “The ‘Language of Canaan’: Pietism’s Esoteric Sociolect,” *Aries* 12, no. 2 (2012): 237–53.

providing crucial stimuli in both areas.<sup>11</sup> The link was passed on to the seventeenth century through Valentin Weigel (1533–1588), a Lutheran pastor with a posthumous career as a heretic, and Johann Arndt (1555–1621), a Paracelsian and Lutheran minister considered to be an important ancestor of Pietism. Their influence also reached Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the controversial cobbler-gone-mystic.<sup>12</sup> Thence it was spread among the radical Pietists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including, among others, Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), the controversial church historian.<sup>13</sup> As there are only the faintest echoes of spiritualism in his works, Kriegsmann largely falls outside of this trajectory. Due to his education and interest in philology, he is much better associated with late Renaissance humanism than with German spiritualism. While his early work is characterized by a fascination with pagan antiquity, Kriegsmann only shared the Biblicism and anti-academicism of many other Pietists to a limited extent in that he argued, later in life, that the Bible should be privileged over pagan sources of learning.<sup>14</sup> But, in contrast to Boehme, who treated the German translation of the Bible as divinely inspired, this still meant studying the Bible in Hebrew and Greek as well as applying philological methods.

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<sup>11</sup> The literature on Paracelsus is vast; I only mention two important monographs: Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, 2nd, revised ed. (Basel: Karger, 1982); Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). Webster, in particular, argues convincingly that Paracelsus needs to be seen in the context of the radical Reformation, in spite of having remained nominally Catholic.

<sup>12</sup> On Weigel, Andrew Weeks, *Valentin Weigel (1533–1588): German Religious Dissenter, Speculative Theorist, and Advocate of Tolerance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); “Valentin Weigel and *The Fourfold Interpretation of the Creation: An Obscure Compilation or Weigel’s Crowning Achievement at Reconciliation of Natural and Spiritual Knowledge?*,” *Daphnis* 34, no. 1/2 (2005): 1–22. On Arndt, Hanns-Peter Neumann, *Natura sagax – Die geistige Natur: Zum Zusammenhang von Naturphilosophie und Mystik in der frühen Neuzeit am Beispiel Johann Arndts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004); Hermann Geyer, *Verborgene Weisheit: Johann Arndts “Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christentum” als Programm einer spiritualistisch-hermetischen Theologie*, 3 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001). On Boehme, Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Lawrence M. Principe and Andrew Weeks, “Jacob Boehme’s Divine Substance *Salitter*: Its Nature, Origin, and Relationship to Seventeenth Century Scientific Theories,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 22, no. 1 (1989): 53–61.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding Arnold, I would like to single out a paper that draws attention specifically to his treatment of alchemists: Douglas H. Shantz, “The Origin of Pietist Notions of New Birth and the New Man: Alchemy and Alchemists in Gottfried Arnold and Johann Heinrich Reitz,” in *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn, et al. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 29–41.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *De bibliosophia Ebraeorum veterum in orbem literarium reducenda. Dissertatio epistolaris* (Darmstadt: Typis Henningi Mülleri, 1676). This text will be discussed in greater detail below.

After briefly outlining his upbringing and university studies, I turn to Kriegsmann's treatises on alchemy as well as Hermes Trismegistus and Plato, published between 1657 and 1669. He described both Hermes and Plato as having had insights paralleling Christian doctrines due to the observation of alchemical processes. This shows that, for Kriegsmann, alchemy occupied a key position in the wisdom of the ancients. The early 1670s brought with them a number of changes in Kriegsmann's life; most importantly, he made contact with the nucleus of Lutheran Pietism, the conventicle in Frankfurt am Main led by Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705), an important Lutheran minister and networker who became the leading figure of Pietism during its first three decades. Kriegsmann published another work of devotional theology, *Theopraxia* (1675), followed by a short treatise on the Bible wisdom (*bibliosophia*) of the ancient Hebrews in 1676. I explore the links between these two publications and place them in the context of other spiritualist and Pietist appropriations of ancient wisdom. The epilogue is dedicated to the final years of Kriegsmann's life, during which he wrote his defense of Pietist conventicles. As Pietism had to defend itself against charges of novelty, Kriegsmann was able to present this practical approach to religion as the true, original form of faith by appealing to the ancient Hebrews and early Christians. Since little is known about Kriegsmann, I will present my argument with an account of his life that will be more detailed than is perhaps conventional.

### Kriegsmann's Early Life and Studies (1633–1657)

Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann was born to Barbara, née Ulrich, and Alexander Veit Kriegsmann (1604–1681) in 1633. At the tender age of fifteen—in the year that finally brought peace to German lands after the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)—Wilhelm Christoph embarked on his university education in Jena, where he studied theology for three years, and then went on to Helmstedt for another two years. Throughout the entire seventeenth century, Helmstedt theology was characterized by the irenic approach of Georg Calixt (1586–1656) and his son, Friedrich Ulrich (1622–1701).<sup>15</sup> Kriegsmann mentioned the latter affectionately in his disputation analyzing the notion of God's omnipresence, held in October 1653.<sup>16</sup> In spite of a curriculum fo-

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<sup>15</sup> Johannes Wallmann, "Helmstedter Theologie in Conrings Zeit," in *Hermann Conring (1606–1681): Beiträge zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Michael Stolleis (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1983), 35–53.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann and Johannes Homborg, *Exercitatio philosophica de omnipraesentia Dei* (Helmstedt: Typis Henningi Mulleri Acad. typ., 1653).

cused on theology and philosophy, it appears that oriental languages were Kriegsmann's real passion, and due to his great skill in philology, he was even offered a professorship at the age of twenty, which he declined.<sup>17</sup> His inclination towards devotional and practical faith may have influenced this decision not to pursue a university career, and his later publications contain outspoken rejections of academic disputations, particularly in theology.<sup>18</sup> Instead, he became private tutor at the court of Landgrave Friedrich Emich von Leiningen-Dagsburg-Hardenburg (1621–1698). Kriegsmann served this lord for the next twenty years, eventually as an advisor on matters of the church. This is the setting in which he first found the leisure to study ancient alchemy.

### Kriegsmann's Philological Study of Alchemy (1657–1669)

As the study of languages was Kriegsmann's favourite intellectual pursuit, it is with alchemy at its most philological that he engaged in his first independent publication: in 1657, roughly four years after his graduation, he published his reconstructed Phoenician rendering of the *Tabula Smaragdina*. One of the most mysterious but also most influential texts in the canon of alchemical literature, this short work—barely a paragraph in length—was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical inventor of both alchemy and the art of writing. The *Tabula Smaragdina*, transmitted in several Latin versions, was held to contain all the secrets of alchemy in a nutshell. Accordingly, numerous alchemists—including Isaac Newton (1642–1727)—wrote hundreds of pages trying to unravel its meaning.<sup>19</sup> Hermes Trismegistus was a striking figure for another reason as well: the *Corpus Hermeticum*, containing his philosophical works, was interpreted as conveying a very clear description of Christian doctrines in spite of the fact that it was held to antedate Christianity by many centuries. When Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) translated most of the philosophical, Hermetic treatises from Greek into Latin for the first time, he introduced Hermes Trismegistus with quotations from Cicero

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<sup>17</sup> Strieder, *Grundlage*, vol. 7, 342. The university at which this took place is unfortunately not mentioned.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Symphonesis Christianorum Oder Tractat Von den einzelnen und privat-Zusammenkunfften der Christen/ Welche Christus neben den Gemeinen oder Kirchlichen Versammlungen zu halten eingesetzt* (Frankfurt a.M.: Bey Johann David Zunnern, 1678), 47–50.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. B. J. T. Dobbs, "Newton's Commentary on the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus: Its Scientific and Theological Significance," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Washington: Folger Books, 1988), 182–91.

and the church fathers Lactantius and Augustine. They situated the Egyptian sage firmly in the pre-Christian era, though a chronologically precise placement remained uncertain.<sup>20</sup>

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, the authority of Hermes had experienced a harsh blow: for philological reasons, a number of scholars came to doubt the authenticity of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, transmitted only in Greek.<sup>21</sup> In 1614, drawing on previous discussions, the Calvinist scholar Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) proved that it stemmed from the early Christian era and not from the time of Moses, as widely believed.<sup>22</sup> In Kriegsmann's day, then, Hermes Trismegistus had many critics, and a particularly outspoken one lectured at the University of Helmstedt: Hermann Conring (1606–1681), a professor of law who also taught medicine. Conring's *De Hermetica Aegyptiorum vetere ac Paracelsorum nova medicina* (1648) mounted a devastating critique of so-called Hermetic medicine and a polemical attack on Paracelsianism at the same time.<sup>23</sup> Kriegsmann was familiar with Conring's work and quoted it several times; he may well have met the author during his studies in Helmstedt.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he was convinced that Hermes Trismegistus was authentic and much older even than Moses.

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<sup>20</sup> A classic account can be found in Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), ch. 1; see also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 45–46.

<sup>21</sup> This discussion is documented in Martin Mulso, ed. *Das Ende des Hermetismus: Historische Kritik und neue Naturphilosophie in der Spätrenaissance. Dokumentation und Analyse der Debatte um die Datierung der hermetischen Schriften von Genebrard bis Casaubon (1567–1614)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Grafton, "Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus," in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800*, ed. Anthony Grafton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 145–61.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Conring, *De Hermetica Aegyptiorum vetere et Paracelsicorum nova medicina liber unus* (Helmstedt: Typis Henningi Mulleri acad. typ. Sumptibus Martini Richteri, 1648). For brief summaries of the arguments against the authenticity of the Hermetic writings and medicine, see Nancy G. Siraisi, "Hermes among the Physicians," in *Das Ende des Hermetismus: Historische Kritik und neue Naturphilosophie in der Spätrenaissance. Dokumentation und Analyse der Debatte um die Datierung der hermetischen Schriften von Genebrard bis Casaubon (1567–1614)*, ed. Martin Mulso (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 189–212; Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 97–100. For Conring's attack on Paracelsus, see Edwin Rosner, "Hermann Conring als Arzt und als Gegner Hohenheims," in *Hermann Conring (1606–1681): Beiträge zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Michael Stolleis (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1983), 87–120.

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Conjectaneorum de Germanicae gentis origine, ac conditore, Hermete Trismegisto, qui S. Moysi est Chanaan, Tacito Tuito, Mercuriusque gentilibus; Liber unus; isque in Taciti de moribus Germanorum opusculum, diversis locis commentarius posthumus*, ed. Johann Ulrich Pregizer (Tübingen: Impensis Philiberti Brunni, Bibl. Tub. Typis Johann-Henrici Reisi, 1684), 4, 19, 29, passim.

Kriegsmann argued these claims in two treatises that had been meant to appear around the same time (1657), but one of them was only published posthumously. Considering the strong presence of Conring in Helmstedt, Kriegsmann's enthusiastic support of Hermes might be surprising, but there was another, perhaps more dominant side to Helmstedt as well: the city was known for the irenic theology of Georg Calixt.<sup>25</sup> Denounced by the theologians of Wittenberg as syncretistic, Calixt emphasized the church fathers and ancient authorities in a manner reminiscent of late Catholic humanism.<sup>26</sup> This background accounts for Kriegsmann's far from typically Lutheran approach to the wisdom of the ancients.

For the same reason, it made sense that Kriegsmann dedicated his work to a Catholic potentate, Johann Philipp von Schönborn (1605–73). Like the theologians of Helmstedt, the archbishop of Mainz was known and esteemed for his tolerant and irenic attitude.<sup>27</sup> Kriegsmann introduced himself to Schönborn as “a youth investigating the *arcana* of things after studies in divinity and humanities.”<sup>28</sup> This was neither the first nor the last time that the archbishop became the dedicatee of books touching on matters of chymistry: the young philologist also found himself in the company of such practically-minded practitioners as Johann Rudolph Glauber (1604?–1670) and Johann Joachim Becher (1635–1682).<sup>29</sup> Yet Kriegsmann's approach was very different, philological rather than entrepreneurial: whereas Glauber presented a new way to industrially manufacture *tartarus* or *Weinstein* (a salty sediment found in wine barrels), Kriegsmann offered “an emerald which value, not weight, commends,” a priceless insight that could not be turned into financial gain, though it might ultimately lead to the philosophers'

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<sup>25</sup> Kriegsmann and Homborg, *Exercitatio philosophica*, fol. B2v.

<sup>26</sup> On the profile of theology in Helmstedt, see Wallmann, “Helmstedter Theologie in Conrings Zeit.”

<sup>27</sup> Allison P. Coudert, *The Impact of Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1614–1698)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1999), 29, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Hermetis Trismegisti Phoenicium Aegyptorum sed et aliarum gentium monarchae conditoris ... Tabula Smaragdina a situ temerariique nunc demum pristino genio vindicata* (Frankfurt a.M.: [Apud Thom. Matt. Götzium], [1657]), dedicatory epistle, no pagination. “Juvenis post divina et humanitatis studia, arcanis rerum operans.”

<sup>29</sup> Johann Rudolph Glauber, *Gründliche und warbafftige Beschreibung/ Wie man auß der Weinbefen einen guten Weinstein in grosser Menge extrahiren soll* (Nürnberg: In Verlegung Wolfgang des Jüngern/ und Johann Andreae Endter, 1654); Johann Joachim Becher, *Parnassus medicinalis illustratus*, 4 vols. (Ulm: In Verlegung Johann Görllins, 1662–63). In Becher's case, only the third volume deals with alchemy, integrating chrysopoetic clues into a natural history of metals and minerals. On Becher, see Pamela H. Smith, *The Business of Alchemy: Science and Culture in the Holy Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).



stone.<sup>30</sup> Kriegsmann was hoping that his philological insights would prove useful in *chrysopoeia*—the branch of chymistry that investigated how base metals could be turned into gold.

On another level, Kriegsmann also saw his work as a defense of Hermes Trismegistus against the doubts of Casaubon and others. As he explained in the dedicatory epistle, the differing and even contradictory interpretations of the *Tabula* “erode the dignity of the Hermetic name.”<sup>31</sup> His philologically restored version was intended to redress this wrong and finally bring clarity regarding the meaning of the *Tabula Smaragdina*. But not only its inventor, the Hermetic art of alchemy itself was also the subject of criticism. For this reason, Kriegsmann added “A Defense of Our Chemical Studies against the Censors” as the final chapter of his treatise.<sup>32</sup> “To me,” he clearly stated, “the chemical philosophy ought to follow after theology, the disciplines and philology.” This tied in both with his education and the marginal status of chymistry as an artisanal practice in the world of learning. After arguing that he was still young enough to potentially waste his time with “chemical pursuits” (*chemica studia*), he stated that “Hermes had exercised the powers of the mind and was as if inspired by a certain divine spirit.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, he ought to be valued in the same manner as other ancient authorities. Kriegsmann’s attempt to restore the *Tabula* to its pristine shape and alchemy to its rightful status was therefore also a defense of Hermes and the art he had invented.

Based on his philological skills, Kriegsmann sensed a Semitic original behind the Latin renderings of the famous *Tabula Smaragdina*. (As Julius Ruska noted after the discovery of the Arabic source, Kriegsmann’s basic intuition had indeed been correct.)<sup>34</sup> Yet according to the young philologist, Hermes was neither Egyptian, as tradition held, nor had his *Tabula* first been written in Greek, as those who held the writings of Hermes to be forgeries would have it.<sup>35</sup> Rather, the ancient sage was identified as Phoenician and had thus originally composed the *Tabula* in this lost language. Taking his cue from the magnificent *Geographia sacra* (1646) by the Huguenot scholar

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<sup>30</sup> Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, dedicatory epistle, no pagination. “Smaragdum enim offero, quem pretium commendat non pondus.”

<sup>31</sup> *Tabula Smaragdina*, dedicatory epistle, no pagination. “Dignitatem Hermetici nominis erodant.”

<sup>32</sup> *Tabula Smaragdina*, ch. 9, 29. “Apologia studiorum nostrorum chemicorum adversum censores.”

<sup>33</sup> *Tabula Smaragdina*, 30. “Ego fateor, me chemicae philosophiae post theologiam, disciplinas, ac philologiam esse debitum”; “Hermetem natura ... mentibus viribus excitatum, et quasi divino quodam spiritu afflatum fuisse.”

<sup>34</sup> Ruska, *Tabula smaragdina*, 220–23.

<sup>35</sup> Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, 11–12.

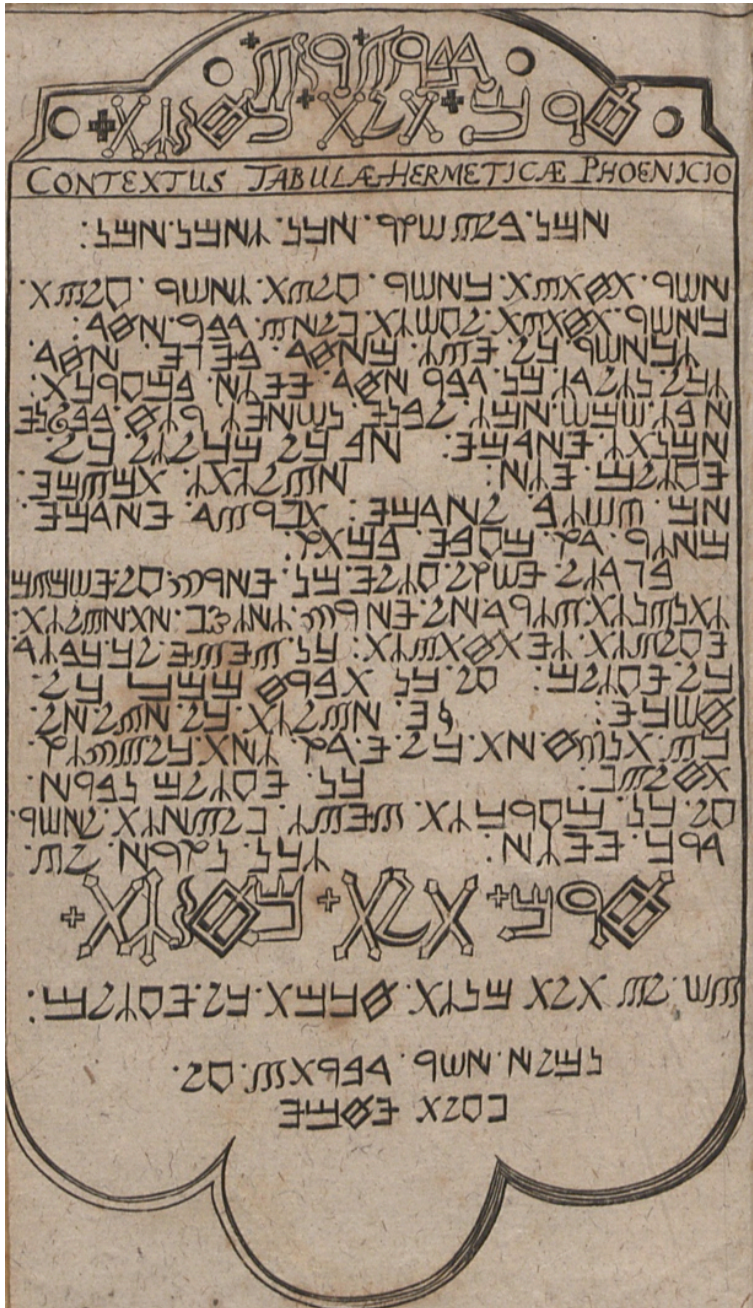


Fig. 1. Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, the Phoenician reconstruction in the shape of a tablet, just as Abraham's wife, Sarah, would have found it.

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Samuel Bochart (1599–1667), Kriegsmann understood Phoenician to be a dialect variant of Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> Due to this insight, Kriegsmann claimed that “light was born everywhere, which—after the fogs had been dispersed—allowed me to clearly understand that recondite mind of Hermes, to penetrate into which is permitted to hardly a single wit out of a thousand.”<sup>37</sup>

After meticulously taking his readers through the whole text to establish its original meaning, Kriegsmann concluded “that the emerald tablet treats of the universal mercury of the philosophers, which lays bare subtle as well as solid bodies for penetration, ... [and] of the fifth, catholic essence of the four elements.”<sup>38</sup> The *Tabula Smaragdina* treated the quintessence and the mercury of the philosophers. Most alchemists would have agreed that these are both greatly relevant for accomplishing the great work of the philosophers’ stone, though precious few of them would have agreed as to what was meant by these terms in practice. Kriegsmann’s philological reconstruction and interpretation was probably of little help when it came to actual laboratory work.

In *Conjectaneorum de Germanicae gentis origine ... liber unus*, a related publication that had been announced and was meant to appear at roughly the same time as the restored *Tabula Smaragdina*, Kriegsmann identified Hermes Trismegistus as both Noah’s grandson, Canaan, and the founding father of the Germans. The book catalogue for the Frankfurt Easter fair of 1657 announced both Kriegsmann’s *Tabula Smaragdina* and his edition of Tacitus’ *Germania*, accompanied by his conjectures on the origin of the Germans. The *Tabula Smaragdina* was published according to plan and in time for the fall fair of 1657, whereas Kriegsmann’s Tacitus edition was not.<sup>39</sup> A professor at the University of Tübingen, Johann Ulrich Pregizer (1647–1708), posthumously published Kriegsmann’s conjectures surrounding Hermes as the founding father of the German nation in 1684. Based on his baroque etymologizing, Kriegsmann proved to his own satisfaction that Hermes Trismegistus was identical not only to Canaan but also to Taaut as he was called among the Phoenicians, Theut among the Egyptians, and Teutates

<sup>36</sup> On Bochart and this monumental work, see Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700*, Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), ch. 4, esp. 180–85.

<sup>37</sup> Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, dedicatory epistle, no pagination. “Lux undique coorta fuit, quae dispulsis nebulis clare intuendam mihi obtulerit abstrusam illam Hermetis mentem, in quam vix e mille uni ingenii perspicacia penetrare licuit.”

<sup>38</sup> *Tabula Smaragdina*, 29. “Agere tabulam smaragdinam de *universali philosophorum mercurio*, qui et tenuia et solida corpora penetrando enodat, ... de quinta scilicet illa quatuor elementorum essentia catholica.”

<sup>39</sup> B. Fabian, ed., *Kataloge der Frankfurter und Leipziger Buchmessen 1594–1860* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1977–85), 1657 (Ostern), fol. E2r; 1657 (Michaelis), fol. B4r.

among the ancient Germans. According to Kriegsmann, all these variants were used by different peoples to refer to one and the same person. The approach of using etymological arguments for making far-reaching claims on ancient history was common enough, and similar claims were made in other national contexts: in Sweden, Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702) argued that the fabled Atlantis was actually Scandinavia, and Aylett Sammes (1636?–1679?) had claimed that the Phoenicians were the ancestors of the British people.<sup>40</sup> What made Kriegsmann special was that he specifically wanted to claim Hermes Trismegistus for the genealogy of the Germans, even as the ancient sage was no longer an unquestioned authority.

Besides providing further support for the authenticity and great age of Hermes Trismegistus, Kriegsmann's argument had two important consequences for alchemy. First, it helped sever the associations between alchemy and sorcery that critics often brought to bear. According to Kriegsmann, since the invention of chymistry could be attributed to a human actor genealogically tied to the patriarchs, its "origins were undeservedly and through error attributed to evil spirits."<sup>41</sup> Kriegsmann traced this mistaken assumption back to Zosimos of Panopolis (fl. 300 CE), who had attributed the invention of chymistry to the fallen angels who seduced women (Genesis 6:1–4) based on a simple misreading of one Hebrew letter.<sup>42</sup> Second, and more importantly, the fact that alchemy had been invented by none other than Noah's grandson firmly embedded it within the trajectory of divine providence. According to Kriegsmann, in the promised land of Canaan, "in a cave near Hebron," the tablet "was taken out of the hands of Hermes' corpse by a woman, Zara." This woman was none other than "Abraham's wife, Sarah."<sup>43</sup>

This discovery tied in with accepted chymical lore and, moreover, served to explain it historically. It was a commonplace that the biblical patriarchs, for instance, were extremely knowledgeable in alchemy. Chymists had long known that the episode in which Moses destroyed the golden calf and made the Israelites drink it (Exodus 32:20) was a reference to *aurum potabile*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gunnar Eriksson, *The Atlantic Vision: Olaus Rudbeck and Baroque Science* (Canton, MA: Science History Publications, 1994); Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, 29 and 31–33, resp. "Chemia, cuius initia immerito et per errorem in malos genios referunter."

<sup>42</sup> *Conjectaneorum de Germanicae gentis origine*, 32. For an account of Zosimos, his alchemy and Gnostic faith, see Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 15–24.

<sup>43</sup> Kriegsmann, *Tabula Smaragdina*, 13. "In antro prope Hebron a muliere Zara manibus cadaveris Hermetis exempta ... de Abrahami uxore Sara intelligatur."

<sup>44</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 37.

Moses' sister, Miriam, in particular, was often included among the greatest *adepti* as “Mariah the prophetess” or “Jewess,” for instance in Michael Maier's *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum* (1617).<sup>45</sup> As Kriegsmann related elsewhere, it was rumored that she had “completed the great work in three hours.”<sup>46</sup> He went beyond this commonplace in providing a historical explanation: since he held Phoenician to be a dialect of Hebrew, Abraham and Sarah were able to readily understand the emerald tablet. This accounted for the fact that they and their descendants possessed the greatest secrets of alchemy—why else would Abraham have been so rich in gold and silver (Genesis 13:2)?<sup>47</sup> For the young philologist, the philosophers' stone was therefore part and parcel of the temporal blessings God bestowed upon the ancient Hebrews and, by extension, his faithful followers. Alchemy was thus part of the ancient wisdom of the biblical patriarchs and they acquired it at a precisely identifiable point in time.

The title that Kriegsmann chose for his second treatise on alchemy, *Taaut Oder Außlegung der Chymischen Zeichen* (1665), contained the original Phoenician name of Hermes Trismegistus. Based on the assumption that Hermes had invented not just writing in general but the signs still used by alchemists in particular, Kriegsmann argued that these conveyed knowledge regarding the hidden properties of alchemical substances.<sup>48</sup> Due to the origin of these signs, it would be sorely mistaken to assume that they were arbitrary: every dot and line used to form a given character had to convey knowledge about the hidden qualities of the alchemical substance it designated. As a lot of time had since gone by, Kriegsmann suspected that many of the signs in use had become corrupted, though he was confident regarding others.<sup>49</sup> Based on this assumption, Kriegsmann was fairly convinced that it was also possible to investigate substances by solely analyzing their signs—instead of analyzing their behavior in the alchemist's furnace.

It is also in Kriegsmann's *Taaut* that we find the first evidence of his contact with the court of Darmstadt. There, Kriegsmann managed to estab-

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Maier, *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum* (Frankfurt a.M.: Typis Antonii Hummii, impensis Lucae Jennis, 1617), bk. 2. On the actual historical background, see Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 15–16. On Maier, see Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569–1622)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Taaut Oder Außlegung der Chymischen Zeichen; Damit die Metallen und andere Sachen von Alters her bemerckt werden: Auff Begehren beschrieben* (Frankfurt a.M.: Bey Thoma Matthia Götzen, 1665), 64. “*Maria Prophetissa* aber sol das hohe Werck in drey Stunden verrichtet haben.”

<sup>47</sup> E.g. Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Kriegsmann, *Taaut*, 4–7.

<sup>49</sup> *Taaut*, 25.

lish a long-lasting intellectual exchange with a highly learned practitioner of alchemy, Johann Tackius (1617–1676). His senior by twenty-five years, Tackius was both court physician in Darmstadt and university professor in Gießen, where he spent most of his time unless “court business” called him away.<sup>50</sup> Kriegsmann himself, before moving on to Darmstadt, was based in Hardenburg (today a part of Bad Dürkheim). An ideal meeting place, Darmstadt was situated halfway between Gießen and Hardenburg. During their encounter, Tackius had given Kriegsmann several of his own chymical works, for which the latter thanked him through the dedication of *Taaut*.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Kriegsmann was grateful to have made contact with Landgrave Ludwig VI of Hessen-Darmstadt (1630–1678) through the mediation of Tackius.<sup>52</sup> Taken together with other printed documents, this allows us to establish that their exchange on chymical matters began as early as 1665 and continued beyond the *Epistola* (1669), as Kriegsmann’s laudatory poem in the third volume of Tackius’ *Triplex phasis sophicus* (1673) documents.<sup>53</sup> There is no reason to suppose that it did not last until the physician’s death in 1676.

The intellectual exchange among them also directly inspired Kriegsmann’s next work on alchemy. Sometime in the winter of 1668/69, Kriegsmann visited Tackius in Darmstadt. Together they studied a canonical text of alchemy, “the excellent chymical treatise of Petrus Bonus the Lombard of Ferrara, who gave it the title *Precious Pearl*.”<sup>54</sup> The *Margarita pretiosa novella* by Petrus Bonus (fl. 1330) was a famous work of late-medieval alchemy that saw its first edition at the Aldine press in 1546 and was reprinted several times throughout the seventeenth century: the Strasbourg-based printer Lazarus Zetzner (d. 1616) alone published two editions in 1602 and 1608, and the work was also included in his monumental *Theatrum chemicum*, a collection of alchemical treatises that kept growing throughout the century.<sup>55</sup> Inspired by the *Margarita pretiosa* and the conversation that had revolved

<sup>50</sup> Geneviève Miller, “An Autograph of Johannes Tackius (1617–1675),” *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 5 (1937): 933–35. “Aulica ... otiosa.” For an outline of Tackius’ life, see Strieder, *Grundlage*, vol. 16, 93–96.

<sup>51</sup> Kriegsmann, *Taaut*, fol. )(2r.

<sup>52</sup> *Taaut*, fol. )(1v.

<sup>53</sup> Johann Tackius, *Triplex phasis sophicus: Solis orbe expeditus, Humanaeque fragilitati et Spei resurrectionis rerum consecratus*, 3 pts. (Frankfurt a.M.: Sumptibus Johannis Petri Zubrodt & Haered. Joh. Baptistae Schönwetteri, 1673), pt. 3, fol. )(2r.

<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Epistola quod Plato Evangelio S. Johannis conformia aliqua doceat, sitque insignis scriptor Chymicus* (Darmstadt: Typis Christophori Abellii, 1669), fol. A2r. “Incidimus in egegium [sic] Petri Boni Lombardi Ferrariensis Tractatum Chymicum, cui Margaritæ pretiosae titulum fecit.”

<sup>55</sup> Chiara Crisciani, “The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara,” *Ambix* 20, no. 3 (1973): 165–81; Rita Sturlese, “Lazar

around it, Kriegsmann returned to Hardenburg and wrote an epistolary treatise addressed to Tackius, dated February 8, 1669, and subsequently printed in Darmstadt.

Kriegsmann's *Epistola* (1669) argued "that Plato taught certain things conforming to the Gospel of St John and was a distinguished chymical writer," as its title indicates.<sup>56</sup> It deals with Plato, but in a context that might seem strange to modern readers: Plato is presented both as a pagan philosopher, who nevertheless taught much that agrees with the Gospel of John, and as an authority on chymistry. The ease with which Kriegsmann moves from theology to alchemy and back suggests that, to him, there were close links between these two aspects of Plato's wisdom. Yet as the epistle also notes, Tackius was much more sceptical on this matter.<sup>57</sup> To understand what their debate was about, the chapter of the *Pretiosa margarita* from which they took their point of departure must be taken into account.<sup>58</sup> Petrus Bonus argued that God had revealed himself to the pious, wise pagans of old through alchemy. In part, this argument hinged on a peculiarity of alchemical jargon: as alchemists often simply referred to themselves as philosophers, the ancient philosophers in turn were held to have been alchemists as well. This conflation is even apparent in the name given to the ultimate goal of alchemy: *lapis philosophorum*, the philosophers' stone.

Bonus described alchemy as an art that was partly natural and partly divine. A secret stone, *lapis occultus*, was an important prerequisite for success, yet it was only attainable through initiation, when the aspiring alchemist was guided by an experienced adept, or alternatively through divine revelation. Due to this, the hidden stone was God's gift—*donum Dei*. The divine component of alchemy also became apparent in the prophetic revelations it afforded the wise ancients: "And beyond this, in describing this divine art, the ancient philosophers of this art prophesied of certain future things in a way."<sup>59</sup> Specifically, they perceived that the world was not eternal and would be judged by God at the end of time, that there would be a bodily resurrecti-

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Zetzner, 'Bibliopola Argentinensis'. Alchimie und Lullismus in Straßburg an den Anfängen der Moderne," *Sudboffs Archiv* 75 (1991): 140–62. The *Theatrum chemicum* first appeared in three volumes in 1602; a fourth volume was added upon re-edition in 1613, a fifth in 1622 and, finally, a sixth in 1661.

<sup>56</sup> Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, title page. "quod Plato Evangelio S. Johannis conformia aliqua doceat, sitque insignis scriptor Chymicus."

<sup>57</sup> *Epistola*, 4 and 21.

<sup>58</sup> Petrus Bonus, *Margarita pretiosa novella exhibens introductionem in artem chemiae integram ante annos plus minus ducentos septuaginta composita* (Strasbourg: Impensis Lazari Zetzneri Bibliop., 1608), ch. 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Margarita pretiosa novella*, 143. "Et praeterea antiqui philosophi hujus artis, in quibusdam futuris, hanc artem divinam scribendo, quoquo modo prophetaverunt."

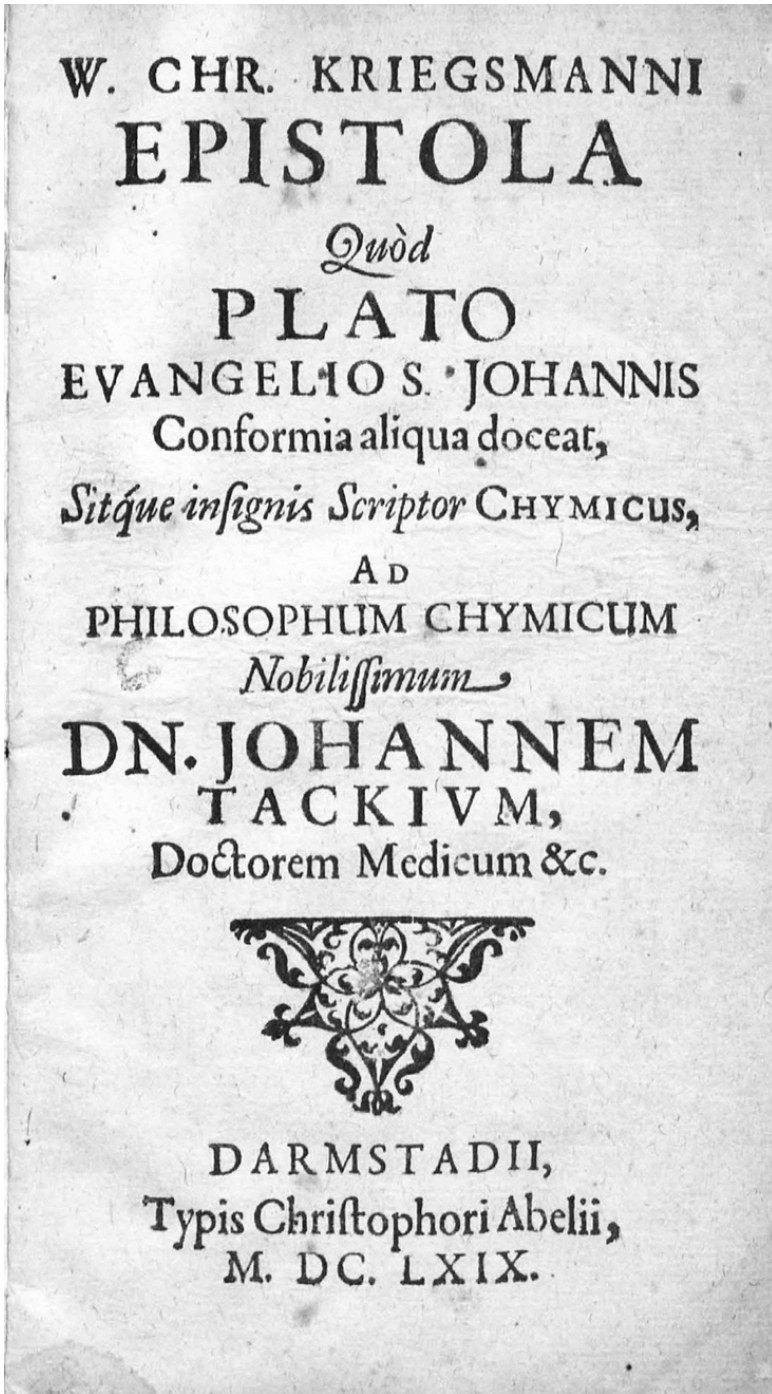


Fig. 2. Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, title page mentioning the addressee and the bold claims argued.



on of the dead—with bodies subtle enough to pass through coarser masses. Additionally, they knew about the immaculate conception and God’s incarnation.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the wise ancients had had profound insights into key doctrines of Christianity. According to Bonus, the piety of the ancients was therefore based on their knowledge of chymistry. Kriegsmann followed him in this and even tended to emphasize this aspect more strongly.

One of the philosophers that Bonus singled out in this respect was Plato: “Similarly, when Plato wrote on alchemy, he wrote a gospel that, a long time after him, John the Evangelist more clearly wrote and completed.”<sup>61</sup> In Kriegsmann’s rendering, we find the even more striking statement that “Plato wrote a chymical gospel.”<sup>62</sup> To support the statement regarding the gospel Plato had supposedly written, Bonus quoted a central passage from Augustine’s *Confessiones*, in which the church father narrated his turn towards Christianity through the mediation of neo-Platonic writings.<sup>63</sup> And while the Italian author had excluded an important hedging remark, Kriegsmann consulted the original and reproduced the passage in full. Augustine related that he had found the prologue of John’s gospel in the writings of the Platonists, “of course not in the same words, but nevertheless the same on the whole [in meaning].”<sup>64</sup> But that did not prevent Kriegsmann from intensifying Bonus’ claim. For him, the only decisive difference that placed Plato and John in different categories was that the latter had been “directly inspired by the Holy Spirit,” whereas the former had had to work hard for his knowledge of alchemy and, by the same token, Christian theology.<sup>65</sup> Hermes Trismegistus, as the inventor of alchemy, was placed somewhere between these two extremes: it is worth reminding ourselves that Kriegsmann had characterized him as someone who was “as if inspired by a certain divine spirit.”<sup>66</sup>

To make sense of these surprising claims, we need to consider an account of Plato’s life that was defining for the early modern period—Ficino’s *De vita Platonis*, which accompanied his Latin translation of Plato’s works.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Margarita pretiosa novella*, 143–46.

<sup>61</sup> *Margarita pretiosa novella*, 146. “Similiter Plato scribens in alchemicis, scripsit evangelium, quod post eum per tempora longa valde scripsit Joannes Evangelista et complevit.”

<sup>62</sup> Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, 9. “Platonem chymicum scripsisse evangelium.”

<sup>63</sup> William Watts, ed., *St. Augustine’s Confessions*, 2 vols. (London/New York: William Heinemann/The Macmillan Co., 1912), vol. 1, bk. VIII, ch. 9, 364–67.

<sup>64</sup> Qtd. in Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, 7. “Non quidem his verbis, sed hoc idem omnino.”

<sup>65</sup> *Epistola*, 12. “Immediato Spiritu S. afflatu.”

<sup>66</sup> *Tabula Smaragdina*, 30. “Quasi divino quodam spiritu afflatum fuisse.”

<sup>67</sup> On the context and Ficino’s conception of Plato “as a Christ-like *primus philosophus*,” see Denis J.-J. Robichaud, “Marsilio Ficino’s *De vita Platonis*, *apologia de moribus Platonis*. Against

Kriegsmann used Ficino's biography to support his arguments. According to this biography, Plato travelled widely to attain his great wisdom, and the most important station in this context was Egypt, traditionally considered the origin of both Hermes and his art, alchemy. In spite of Kriegsmann's earlier case for a Phoenician Hermes Trismegistus, he also allowed for the standard account and simply called the ancient sage the "founding father of both the Phoenicians and the Egyptians."<sup>68</sup> According to Ficino, Plato had visited the wise men of Egypt: "From these [the Pythagoreans in Italy] he went to the prophets and priests in Egypt. He had also decided to travel on to the Indians and the *magi* [associated with Persia]; yet because of the wars in Asia, he desisted from this endeavor."<sup>69</sup> Instead, Plato returned to Athens. Kriegsmann commented that, therefore, Plato "had met the most distinguished teachers of this art."<sup>70</sup> And that was, of course, the art of "the Egyptian, i.e. chymical philosophy," the central aim of which consisted in turning base metals into gold.<sup>71</sup> This was in keeping with the Renaissance understanding of Plato that saw in him an important link in the transmission of *prisca sapientia*, along with Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Pythagoras and Moses.<sup>72</sup>

To complete his argument that Plato was an adept of alchemy who held genuine Christian beliefs, Kriegsmann needed to prove that Plato had indeed known much about alchemy. According to him, the Greek philosopher hid his alchemical knowledge in *Critias*, which dealt with the war between the peoples of Atlantis and of Athens: "Here, one will find, if one will have considered the issue carefully, the matter of the philosophers together with the solvent, as well as the vessel, the oven, the weight, the colours, the decoction and whatever is necessary for the knowledge of all these."<sup>73</sup> Kriegsmann was aware that he was making a novel claim, perhaps even with no small measure of pride.<sup>74</sup> Yet the pattern of his argument would have been familiar to many: in fact, alchemical readings of ancient mythology—

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the Poetasters and Cynics: Aristippus, Lucian, Cerberus, and Other Dogs," *Accademia* 8 (2006): 23–59, on 28.

<sup>68</sup> Kriegsmann, *Taant*, 6. "Stamm-Vatter der Phönicië und Egypter."

<sup>69</sup> Marsilio Ficino and Simon Grynaeus, eds., *Omnia divini Platonis opera* (Basel: In officina Frobeniana, 1546), fol. α3r. "Ab his Aegyptum ad prophetas et sacerdotes se recepit. Deceverat ad Indos Magosque progredi: verum propter Asiae bella a proposito destitit."

<sup>70</sup> Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, 14. "Praeceptores in hac arte praestantissimos nactus est."

<sup>71</sup> *Epistola*, 14. "Philosophiae Aegyptiacae i. e. chymicae."

<sup>72</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 7–17.

<sup>73</sup> Kriegsmann, *Epistola*, 18. "Reperient hic, ubi rem probe consideravint, materiam Philosophorum una cum menstruo, vas furnum, pondus, decoctionem, ac quicquid cognitu ipsis necesse est."

<sup>74</sup> *Epistola*, 14–15.

especially Ovid and Virgil—were common, and many myths were investigated for clues as veiled descriptions of the great work.<sup>75</sup> With this, Kriegsmann considered he had done enough to overcome Tackius' doubts about the proto-Christian piety and alchemical insight of Plato.

### From the Darmstadt Circle to the Pietist Conventicle (1670–1676)

As the 1670s began, a number of decisive events took place in Kriegsmann's life that affected his career, intellectual ambitions and religious convictions, as well as his private life. On March 10, 1670, Kriegsmann dedicated his *Pantosophae sacro-profana ... tabula* to Landgrave Ludwig VI of Hessen-Darmstadt (1630–1678).<sup>76</sup> Inspired by Athanasius Kircher (1601/02–1680) and his new *Ars magna sciendi* (1669), this short work summarized the combinatorial art of the Franciscan Raymond Lull (1232–1315), an attempt to attain complete knowledge by generating all possible, true statements.<sup>77</sup> Along with the support of the Landgrave's physician, Tackius, this gesture doubtlessly facilitated Kriegsmann's later transition to the court of Darmstadt, where he served as political advisor from 1674 until 1678. Likely before Easter 1671, Kriegsmann visited Frankfurt am Main, at the time one of the most important centers of the book trade, and was planning to publish a whole range of works. These included a number of devotional titles alongside what would have been Kriegsmann's final work on alchemy,

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Joachim Telle, "Mythologie und Alchemie: Zum Fortleben der antiken Götter in der frühneuzeitlichen Alchemieliteratur," in *Humanismus und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Schmitz and Fritz Krafft (Boppard: Harald Boldt, 1980), 135–54.

<sup>76</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Pantosophae sacro-profanae a Raymundo Lullio in artem redacta nunc elimatae ac locupletatae Tabula cum synoptica in eandem introductione* (Speyer: Excudebat Matthaues Metzger, 1670), dedicatory epistle, fols. A2r–A3v.

<sup>77</sup> Athanasius Kircher, *Ars magna sciendi, in XII libros digesta* (Amsterdam: Apud Joannem Janssonium à Waesberge, & Viduam Elizei Weyerstraet, 1669). For a brief account of Lull's combinatorial art, see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress, Europe in the Making (London: Blackwell, 1995), ch. 4. On other appropriations in the seventeenth century, see Thomas Leinkauf, "Der Lullismus," in *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Helmut Holzhey, Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, and Vilem Mudroch, vol. 4/1: Das heilige römische Reich deutscher Nation (Basel: Schwabe, 2001), 239–68. Lull also had a reputation as the supposed author of a great number of pseudepigraphic alchemical texts; see Michela Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull* (London: Warburg Institute, 1989).

which promised to revisit the connection between the great work and the religions of the ancient Orient, but was never published.<sup>78</sup>

It is tempting to assume that this inspired bustle of activity was triggered by Kriegsmann's encounter with Spener and his conventicle in Frankfurt, the nucleus of a highly significant religious movement that would become known as Pietism.<sup>79</sup> While some scholars trace Pietism back to much earlier in the seventeenth century, most agree that it really took shape as a social movement in the 1670s, when its distinctive organizational form spread—the conventicle, in which small numbers of believers met to discuss matters of the faith and exhort one another to a pious lifestyle. Whether it was on this occasion or during another visit to Frankfurt in the first half of the 1670s, Kriegsmann found himself actively in alignment with the early stirrings of Pietism. After all, already his *Eusebie* (1659) had testified to his proximity to currents within Lutheranism that wanted to extend the Reformation beyond doctrine to everyday life.<sup>80</sup> Apart from one or more visits to the Frankfurt Pietists, however, Kriegsmann at first had only limited opportunity to participate in the small, devout gatherings that were a hallmark feature of Pietism. Meanwhile he remarried in 1672, as his first wife had died in 1666, and soon afterwards he finally made the transition to Darmstadt, facilitated by almost ten years of intellectual exchange.

In his new surroundings, Kriegsmann managed to finish one of the devotional works announced several years earlier: the *Theopraxia* (1675) outlined Kriegsmann's emphatically Lutheran version of devotional Christianity, appealing to the authority of Paul and Martin Luther (1483–1546). Even critics, he proudly proclaimed in the preface to the second, posthumous edition (1681), would “clearly see that they wholly and precisely coincided with one another,” if they “held the pure Lutheran theory against this practice.”<sup>81</sup> He wanted to address the problem that “popish, Calvinist and enthusiastic etc. practical writers” were widely read among Lutherans—at the

<sup>78</sup> Fabian, *Kataloge der Frankfurter und Leipziger Buchmessen*, 1671 (Ostern), fol. E2v. “Dissertatio de secreto Philosophorum igne: ubi simul de igne sacro Hebraeorum, Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Arabum, Graecorum, Romanorum: deque igne terræ centrali.”

<sup>79</sup> In a later letter, dated January 15, 1678, Spener mentioned that Kriegsmann had visited his conventicle personally; see Philipp Jacob Spener, ed., *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit 1666–1686*, eds. Johannes Wallmann, Martin Friedrich, and Markus Matthias (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992 ff.), vol. 3, nr. 114, esp. 557.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Eusebie; Von der wahren Gottseligkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: In Verlegung Johann Wilhelm Ammons und Serlins. Getruckt bey Johan Georg Spörlin, 1659).

<sup>81</sup> *Theopraxia Oder Evangelische Übung Des Christenthums: Nach den wahren/ von vielen nicht genug verstandenen Gründen S. Pauli und seines Jüngers Lutheri* (Darmstadt: Gedruckt bey Henning Müllern, 1681), fol. A2v. “die reine Lutherische *Theoriam* gegen diese *Praxin* gehalten/ und klar gesehen/ daß sie gänzlich und genau miteinander übereintreffen.”

expense of Luther's own writings—and subtly influenced them in ways diverging from their actual confession.<sup>82</sup> The intended audience of the work was, therefore, chiefly among Lutherans, and Kriegsmann asked for a sympathetic hearing on their part while he did not care much about what other confessions might make of it.<sup>83</sup> Spener discussed the *Theopraxia* at length, noting that it was heavily indebted to the *Geistliche Schatzkammer der Gläubigen* (1622), devotional writings by Stephan Praetorius that had been compiled by Martin Statius and prefaced by Johann Arndt.<sup>84</sup> On the whole, Spener agreed with Kriegsmann's theology but lamented that some passages should have been phrased more carefully so as not to give rise to perfectionism at the expense of salvation through faith and grace alone.

This leads us to what is probably the central aspect of Kriegsmann's theology, present from first to last: the distinction between a state of being saved (*Seligkeit*) and a state of being saved *and* doing good works while leading a truly godly life (*Gottseligkeit*).<sup>85</sup> The latter state had already been the subject of his first devotional work, *Eusebie; Von der waren Gottseligkeit*. The term Kriegsmann chose as the title for his first devotional work stemmed from the New Testament and had been translated by Luther as "Gottseligkeit." In Latin it could be rendered as *pietas* or even *praxis pietatis*, a term that frequently appeared in devotional literature throughout the seventeenth century and eventually provided the basis for coining the term "Pietism."<sup>86</sup> True to Kriegsmann's Lutheran convictions, good works were not a prerequisite for salvation but a consequence thereof. By definition, only the works of someone who had already been saved and born again could be good.

Shortly before the Darmstadt conventicle took shape, Kriegsmann called for the Bible wisdom of the ancient Hebrews to be restored to the republic of letters. Similar in format to the *Epistola* on Plato's chymical gospel, *De bibliosophia Ebraeorum veterum* was addressed to the nobleman and diplomat Johann Eitel Diede zum Fürstenstein (1624–1685) and dated June 16, 1676.<sup>87</sup> Sharing an interest in alchemy with Kriegsmann and Tackius, Diede

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<sup>82</sup> *Theopraxia*, fol. A2r. "Päbstische/ Calvinische/ Enthusiastische &c. *Scriptores practicos*"

<sup>83</sup> *Theopraxia*, fol. A4v.

<sup>84</sup> Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 2, nr. 118, esp. 542. The letter was addressed to Johann Winckler, dated December 15, 1676.

<sup>85</sup> Kriegsmann, *Theopraxia*, 16; see also 83–85.

<sup>86</sup> Johannes Wallmann, "Pietismus," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, vol. 7: P–Q (Basel: Schwabe, 1989), 972–74.

<sup>87</sup> Kriegsmann, *De bibliosophia*, title page and 24. On Diede's life, see Lupold von Lehsten, *Die hessischen Reichstagesgesandten im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Selbstverlag der Historischen Kommission Darmstadt und der Historischen Kommission für Hessen, 2003), vol. 2, 243–55.

was the third interlocutor in their small circle affiliated with the court of Darmstadt. As early as 1657—while Kriegsmann was still poring over the *Tabula Smaragdina* and the true identity of Hermes Trismegistus—Tackius had already been communicating alchemical recipes to Diede, whom he addressed with deference as his benefactor.<sup>88</sup> Scholars of Pietism have suggested that these three men formed some kind of occult reading group at the court of Darmstadt.<sup>89</sup> Together with Kriegsmann's *Epistola* of 1669, *De bibliosophia Ebraeorum veterum* provides crucial support for the conjecture that these three courtiers did indeed exchange their views on alchemy, ancient wisdom and, conceivably, religious dissent over a number of years.<sup>90</sup>

Circumstantial evidence suggests that both Tackius and Diede had a common interest in writers of questionable orthodoxy and were in contact with figures who played, or went on to play, leading roles in radical, dissenting circles. None other than the patriarch of Pietism, Philipp Jakob Spener, had borrowed Tackius' copies of books by the radical spiritualist Christian Hoburg (1607–1675) and Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652), a Silesian nobleman and propagator of Jacob Boehme's works.<sup>91</sup> As a graduate student and junior lecturer in Gießen (1675), Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727) served as the intermediary between Tackius and Spener and later went on to become the leading theologian of radical Pietism.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, Spener also knew Diede as someone well read in the works of Boehme, and Tackius occasionally quoted Boehme in his alchemical works, referring to him as *Philosophus Teutonicus*.<sup>93</sup> Friedrich Breckling (1629–1711), the spiritualist dissenter and networker, later remembered Tackius as his

<sup>88</sup> Universitätsbibliothek Gießen, Cod. 152o, e.g. fol. 6r–v.

<sup>89</sup> Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 2, nr. 32, 156 (n. 1). Cf. Tietz, *Johann Winckler*, 156–57; Markus Matthias, “‘Preußisches’ Beamtentum mit radikalpietistischer ‘Privatreligion’: Dodo II. von Innhausen und Knyphausen (1641–1698),” in *Der radikale Pietismus: Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Wolfgang Breul, Marcus Meier, and Lothar Vogel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 189–209, on 190.

<sup>90</sup> Kriegsmann, *Epistola; De bibliosophia*. The latter work seems to be extant in a unique copy at Universitätsbibliothek Marburg only, as the one at Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar was lost in the fire of 2004.

<sup>91</sup> On Hoburg, see below and Brecht et al., *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 1, 223–28.

<sup>92</sup> Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 2, nr. 50, 232; nr. 55, 250; nr. 57, 267. The letters are dated November 13 and 30, and December 28, 1675, respectively. On Petersen's studies in Gießen and his own reading, see Markus Matthias, *Johann Wilhelm und Johanna Eleonora Petersen: Eine Biographie bis zur Amtsenthebung Petersens im Jahre 1692* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 38–45 and 104–105. (On 105, n. 58, Matthias mistakenly speaks of Tackius' son, Ludwig Christian, instead of the father.)

<sup>93</sup> Letters identified as addressed to Diede can be found in Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 2, nr. 32; vol. 3, nr. 130; vol. 4, nr. 28, 111, and nr. 58, 224. For Tackius' mentions of Boehme, see e.g. Tackius, *Triplex phasis sophicus*, pt. 1, 32; pt. 2, 23.

most inspiring academic teacher.<sup>94</sup> For his part, Kriegsmann publically presented himself as a Lutheran. Even if his later writings betray a decided antipathy towards orthodox heresy hunters, he was smart enough not to refer to the writings of controversial dissenters and spiritualists.<sup>95</sup> Yet both Hoburg and Franckenberg fit that description, and they were certainly read and discussed by Kriegsmann's closest interlocutors at the court of Darmstadt. In the later controversy surrounding the conventicle, critics did not fail to accuse participants of spreading spiritualist ideas.<sup>96</sup> While the lack of written documentation renders it difficult to assess whether they actually did so, it is likely that Kriegsmann would have been familiar with the writings of controversial figures.

Early in 1676, Johann Winckler (1642–1705), one of Spener's protégés, arrived in Darmstadt as newly appointed court preacher. Later in the same year, the death of Tackius on August 30 left Kriegsmann without one of his most important intellectual interlocutors. Due to these two events, the occult reading group of Tackius, Diede and Kriegsmann appears to have given way to a Pietist conventicle: already by October of the same year, there is documentary evidence for the new devotional gatherings led by Winckler, and these may even have started a month or two earlier.<sup>97</sup> The temporal continuity can thus only be described as striking, and in Kriegsmann there is also a measure of personal continuity. But in reality, Winckler first started an entirely independent conventicle for older students and eventually, perhaps prompted by Kriegsmann, a second one for a less restricted membership: gradually even women were allowed to join, a fact that was sharply criticized by Winckler's superior, Balthasar Mentzer (1614–1679).<sup>98</sup> Against these and other accusations, Kriegsmann would later prove to be the conventicle's most articulate defender.

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<sup>94</sup> E.g. Friedrich Breckling, *Autobiographie: Ein frühneuzeitliches Ego-Dokument im Spannungsfeld von Spiritualismus, radikalem Pietismus und Theosophie*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005), 17–18. Breckling's autobiographical statement in his *Catalogus theodidactorum et testium veritatis inter nos* (Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Chart. A 306, 182–91, esp. 183) describes Tackius in even more glowing terms. See also Brigitte Klosterberg, Guido Naschert, and Mirjam-Juliane Pohl, *Friedrich Breckling (1629–1711): Prediger, "Wahrheitszeuge" und Vermittler des Pietismus im niederländischen Exil* (Halle a.d.S.: Verlag der Frankeschen Stiftungen, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Kriegsmann, *Symphonesis Christianorum*, 22–24.

<sup>96</sup> Balthasar Mentzer, *Kurtzes Bedencken/ Von den Einzelen Zusammenkunfften/ Wie dieselbe etlicher Orten wollen behauptet werden/ Beneben auch andern nothwendigen Erinnerungen*, ed. Philipp Ludwig Hanneken (Gießen: Bey Henning Müllern, 1691), e.g. 17–20 and 26. Composed in 1678, this treatise was only published in 1691, when new controversies surround the Pietist movement in Darmstadt and Gießen; cf. Steitz, "Das antipietistische Programm."

<sup>97</sup> Tietz, *Johann Winckler*, 166–69, esp. 183–87.

<sup>98</sup> Mentzer, *Kurtzes Bedencken*, 6–7 and 25.

*De bibliosophia Ebraeorum veterum* provided a final testament to Kriegsmann's continued exchange with Tackius and Diede zum Fürstenstein. Here he argued that the Bible, and particularly the Hebrew Old Testament, should be understood as a repository of all wisdom. This represented Kriegsmann's personal variation on the theme of *prisca sapientia*, a primordial wisdom in which philosophy and theology were not yet separated, though scholars of his day increasingly started to challenge this notion.<sup>99</sup> This was readily recognizable for his contemporaries: when commenting on Kriegsmann's bold claims, Spener even explicitly used the phrase *prisca sapientia*.<sup>100</sup> Several years before writing *De bibliosophia*, Kriegsmann had already explored another approach to the totality of wisdom in *Pantosophae sacro-profanae ... tabula*. But at this stage, what was still lacking was a component that had long been important for Kriegsmann and only gained in relevance as his ties to Pietism took hold: while Lull's combinatorial art may have been able to produce true statements of theology, it had little to do with practical piety. By referring to ancient wisdom instead of the Lullian art, Kriegsmann was able to integrate complete knowledge and practical piety.

Kriegsmann traced the transmission of wisdom (*translatio sapientiae*) from Adam to Seth, who wrote the famous "sophic columns," and Enoch.<sup>101</sup> When the Deluge struck, Noah passed it on, followed by Sem, Melchizedek, Eber and Abraham, who "was the first cultivator of astrology, which he taught to the Egyptians publically, and he also taught them arithmetic."<sup>102</sup> Abraham, Joseph and Moses were responsible for the great flowering of wisdom that took place in Egypt and then spread throughout the pagan world. As the *Epistola* suggested, Plato was perhaps the most important intermediary who brought Egyptian wisdom to Greece. While not spelt out by Kriegsmann, it is important to note that most of these men were represented as especially faithful and pious in the Bible. Enoch was so close to God that he did not see death but was taken straight to heaven (Genesis 5:24). Noah and his descendants were the only survivors of the Deluge that almost eradicated sinful humankind (Genesis 6–9). The apostle Paul, Kriegsmann's favourite commentator on the Old Testament, placed great emphasis on Abraham's simple faith that was credited to him as righteousness before the Mosaic Law even existed (e.g. Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6). In

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<sup>99</sup> For an elaborate study on this issue, see Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte: Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 3, nr. 12, esp. 66.

<sup>101</sup> Kriegsmann, *De bibliosophia*, 11. "Columnae sophicae."

<sup>102</sup> *De bibliosophia*. "Abrahamum primum fuisse cultorem astrologiae, atque hanc docuisse Aegyptios in cathedra publica et docuisse eos etiam arithmeticae."



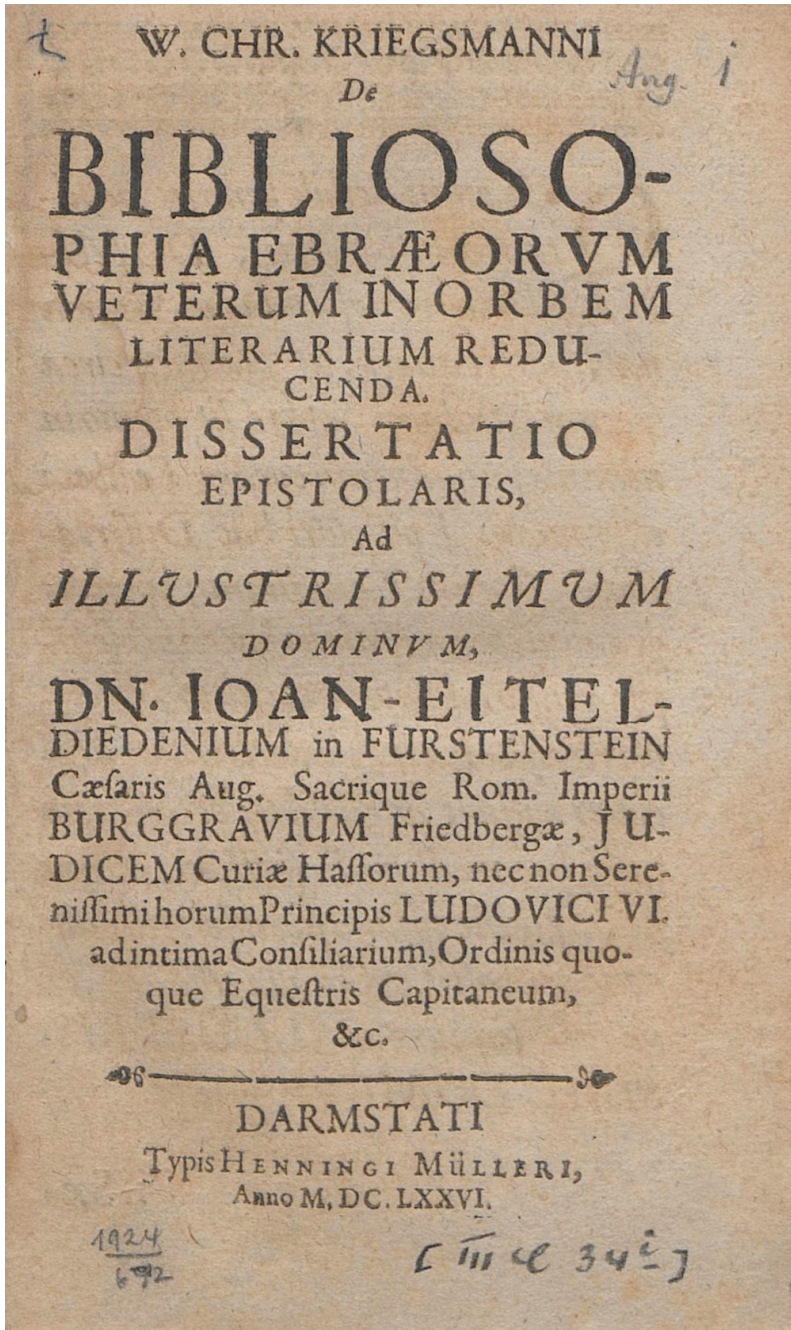


Fig. 3. Kriegsmann, *De bibliosophia*, title page mentioning agenda and addressee.

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the Epistle to the Hebrews, also attributed to Paul in Kriegsmann's time, the significance of Melchizedek as a high priest independent of the Levitic line was expounded (Hebrews 17:1–10). Thus, Kriegsmann constructed a genealogy of God's true, faithful followers that coincided with the genealogy of great philosophers and keepers of knowledge.

However, Kriegsmann believed that in the process of dissemination among the pagans, the original, pristine wisdom was also tainted and distorted. Hence, he argued, it was a mistake to study the ancient monuments of pagan learning; instead, one ought to return to the true source, the Hebrew Bible, and the commentary that the writings of the New Testament provided on it. In doing so, he criticized the learned world of his age that was so fascinated by pagan authors: "For I am certain that whatever good and true the gentile monuments promise out of themselves, all of it is contained in a better and truer manner in Holy Writ."<sup>103</sup> Kriegsmann was far from alone in making such claims; earlier in the century, the Calvinist theologian Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) provides a prominent example. Kriegsmann explicitly referred to Alsted's *Triumphus Bibliorum Sacrorum* (1625), though not the vast *Encyclopaedia* (1630), which spelt out what the *Triumphus* had merely sketched.<sup>104</sup> Just as Alsted traced all knowledge back to "the scripture of the Old and New Testaments," Kriegsmann aimed to lead "the Bible wisdom of the ancient Hebrews back into the world of learning."<sup>105</sup> This heightened focus on biblical as opposed to pagan sources is striking when held against Kriegsmann's youthful enthusiasm for Hermes Trismegistus. It corresponds to the strong emphasis on the Bible in Pietism, though Kriegsmann still relied on the academic learning that other Pietists tended to criticize: his philological approach remained unchanged through the twenty years that separated his *Tabula Smaragdina* from *De bibliosophia*.

Kriegsmann also systematized the Bible wisdom of the ancient Hebrews. Based on "the fourfold light of intelligence," he distinguished its mental, natural, angelic and divine aspects and coined four terms to describe the different areas of biblical wisdom, each of which was associated with one of the four lights.<sup>106</sup> Corresponding to his Pietist leanings, *theopraxia*—the ancient Hebrew and practical version of what had been perverted into theo-

<sup>103</sup> *De bibliosophia*, fol. A5v. "Quin certum mihi est, quicquid boni ac veri gentilia monumenta ex se promittunt, id omne longè meliori ac veriori modo Sacris literis contineri."

<sup>104</sup> *De bibliosophia*, 6. On Alsted, see Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588–1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

<sup>105</sup> Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Triumphus Bibliorum Sacrorum seu encyclopaedia biblica* (Frankfurt a.M.: Apud Bartholomaeum Schmidt, 1625), title page. "Scriptura V. et N. T." Kriegsmann, *De bibliosophia*, title page. "De bibliosophia Ebraeorum veterum in orbem literarium reducenda."

<sup>106</sup> *De bibliosophia*, 17. "Quadruplex est intelligentiae lumen."

retical *theologia*—was “the true cognition of God and saving faith in Christ, which lead to sincere piety and a sanctified life.” *Logonomia* essentially encompassed philosophy or reason on the one hand and law as well as politics on the other—*logos* and *nomos*. Breaking with the traditional segregation of natural philosophy and the mechanical arts, Kriegsmann also combined “knowledge of nature’s marvels and the secrets of art” in a single term, *physiotechnia*. All of these novel terms abandoned the traditional divide between theory and practice in matters of religion, politics and science. Lastly, *cabbala sancta* allowed for “the reception of angelic light towards the ensuing particular gifts of temporal happiness according to the will of God, the beneficent, liberal giver of presents.”<sup>107</sup> Considering the fact that Kriegsmann also wrote works with titles corresponding to two of these areas, it seems likely that *bibliosophia* as a concept also represented a belated program for all his efforts.<sup>108</sup>

There might, at first glance, seem to be a tension between Kriegsmann’s call to return to the *bibliosophia* of the ancient Hebrews and his Lutheran brand of devotional Christianity. But even as *prisca sapientia* had a history, so too did the true faith: based on the notion of *translatio religionis* he shared with Luther, Kriegsmann had argued elsewhere that the true faith, as God revealed it progressively throughout history, had first been among the Jews.<sup>109</sup> Since its state deteriorated over time and led to the theological nitpicking of the Pharisees, Jesus Christ stepped in to found a new church. Through the centuries, however, even the Catholic Church suffered gross errors and impiety that distorted the true faith, which was then restored by Luther and the Reformation.<sup>110</sup> This pattern is similar to the one used in accounts of transmission of *prisca sapientia*, or *translatio sapientiae*. Besides the original fervor of the reformers, Kriegsmann also harkened back to the early Christians in *Symphonesis Christianorum* (1677/78), his defense of the Darmstadt conventicle: by listing a number of early Christians mentioned in the

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<sup>107</sup> *De bibliosophia*, 19. “Veram Dei agnitionem salvificamque in Christum fidem, quae sinceram pietatem vitaeque sanctimoniam operetur”; “Notitiam mirandorum naturae et artis secretorum”; “Receptionem luminis angelici ad consequenda singularia felicitatis temporariae dona ad nutum Dei, benefici donorum largitoris.”

<sup>108</sup> *Theopraxia*; קבלה oder: die wahre und richtige Cabalah mit Kupfer und Tabellen erläutert (Frankfurt a.M., 1774). In spite of its publication almost one hundred years after Kriegsmann’s death, it seems likely that the latter treatise is authentic, though it may have been adapted and/or translated from the Latin.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. John M. Headley, *Luther’s View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 240–44.

<sup>110</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Gegen-Schrifft Auff das listige Sendschreiben eines so genannten Christiani Conscientiosi an alle Evangel. Universitäten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Zufinden bey Wilhelm Serlin, 1672), 32–36.

New Testament, such as Timothy or Philemon, he encouraged his readers to find the appropriate role model for their profession. In Kriegsmann's own case, that turned out to be a politician famous for the mystical writings attributed to him, Dionysius the Areopagite. He stated that even today it was possible "for a politician [to attain] the perfection of the councillor Dionysius."<sup>111</sup>

If the importance of early Christianity for Pietism has often been noted, the fact that the high regard in which it was held could be, and was in fact, readily combined with the notion of ancient wisdom has gone mostly unnoticed. But there are also antecedents for this amalgamation of ancient wisdom and devotional Christianity within German spiritualism, as the examples of Franckenberg and Hoburg show. And it is important to note that Tackius owned books by both of these authors, making it likely that Kriegsmann was no stranger to their work. Around the same time as he developed his notion of ancient Jewish Bible wisdom, *Via Veterum Sapientum* (1675) by Abraham von Franckenberg was published posthumously.<sup>112</sup> Based on a scriptural saying (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10), it was divided into two parts—*Timor domini* and *Initium sapientiae*—excerpting all the relevant verses in the Bible, accompanied by Franckenberg's trademark marginalia. At the end, however, it featured another part, containing "several testaments and admonitions from the books of the ancient sages," short texts by, among others, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras and Plato, which Franckenberg had translated from the Latin out of Francesco Patrizi's *Nova de universis philosophia* (1591).<sup>113</sup> The pious pagans were thus not out of place in the context of Christian, devotional literature.

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<sup>111</sup> *Symphonies Christianorum*, 44. "Einem Politico, zur Vollkommenheit des Raths-Herrn Dionysii."

<sup>112</sup> Recent papers on Franckenberg include Sibylle Rusterholz, "Abraham von Franckenbergs Verhältnis zu Jacob Böhme: Versuch einer Neubestimmung aufgrund kritischer Sichtung der Textgrundlagen," in *Kulturgeschichte Schlesiens in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Klaus Garber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005); Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Abraham von Franckenberg als christlicher Kabbalist," in *Realität als Herausforderung: Literatur in ihren konkreten historischen Kontexten. Festschrift für Wilhelm Kühlmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ralf Bogner, et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 233–48. An indispensable bibliographical guide to genuine and spurious Franckenbergiana is János Bruckner, *Abraham von Franckenberg: A Bibliographical Catalogue with a Short-List of His Library* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988). On his posthumous Amsterdam publisher, see Willem Heijting, "Hendrick Beets (1625?–1708), Publisher to the German Adherents of Jacob Böhme in Amsterdam," *Quaerendo* 3 (1973): 250–80. A revised, Dutch version of this paper can be found in *Profijtelijke boekskens: Boekcultuur, geloof en gewin. Historische studies* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 209–42.

<sup>113</sup> Abraham von Franckenberg, *Via veterum sapientum. Das ist: Weg der Alten Weisen* (Amsterdam: Gedrukt by Christoffel Cunradus, Buchdrucker. In verlegung Henrici Betkii, und

Though the title was not specified, it is conceivable that Franckenberg's *Via veterum sapientum* was among the books that Tackius lent to Spener via Petersen. What is certain is that Hoburg's *Theologia Mystica* (1655/56) was among them. On the title page this mystical theology was described in German as the "secret power theology of the ancients."<sup>114</sup> Thus, Hoburg presented a hidden theology of the ancients, which he opposed to the powerless, disputatious theology of the Lutheran clergy.<sup>115</sup> Around 1700, the Pietists Balthasar Köpke (1646–1711) and Johann Wilhelm Zierold (1669–1731) both remodeled narratives of ancient wisdom—understood by them as the true Christian faith—to counter the accusation made by Friedrich Christian Bücher (1651–1714) that Pietism represented a form of Christianity perverted by pagan mysticism.<sup>116</sup> By framing their Pietist accounts of church history in terms of ancient wisdom, Köpke and Zierold were able to present the emphasis on practical piety and devotion—often seen as a dangerous innovation by critics—as the actual core of the one, true faith that extended throughout the ages from the patriarchs to the Pietist conventicles across the Holy Roman Empire. In Kriegsmann's writings of the 1670s, this strategy had already been anticipated.

### Kriegsmann's Defense of Pietist Conventicles (1677–1679)

As Winckler's conventicle in Darmstadt was increasingly exposed to sharp criticism by Balthasar Mentzer, Kriegsmann wrote his *Symphonesis Christianorum* to defend the practice of believers meeting in small groups that came to be characteristic of Pietism.<sup>117</sup> Based on Matthew 18:15–20, Kriegsmann argued that Jesus Christ had instituted two kinds of gatherings: one was limited to small circles or private congregations (*Privat-Zusammenkunfften*), the other corresponded to conventional church services.<sup>118</sup> Christ himself had

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Consorten, 1675), 239–58. "Etliche Zeugnisse und Ermahnungen aus den Büchern der Alten Weisen."

<sup>114</sup> Christian Hoburg, *Theologia Mystica, Das ist; Verborgene Krafft-Theologie der Alten* (Amsterdam: Gedruckt bey Cornelio de Bruyn ... verkaufft bey Christoffel Luycken, 1655–56), title page. "Geheime Krafft-Theologia der Alten."

<sup>115</sup> Martin Schmidt, "Christian Hoburg and Seventeenth-Century Mysticism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 18 (1967): 51–58; "Christian Hoburgs Begriff der 'Mystischen Theologie'," in *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz zum 60. Geburtstag am 17. November 1967*, eds. Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 313–26.

<sup>116</sup> Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, 237–265; Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 114–27.

<sup>117</sup> Steitz, "Das anti-pietistische Programm," 448–56; Tietz, *Johann Winckler*, 179–270, esp. 200–209.

<sup>118</sup> Kriegsmann, *Symphonesis Christianorum*, 5–13 and title page.

thus pioneered the conventicles now rediscovered in Pietism. Spener not only gave the work his blessing but actively made sure that it was printed in Frankfurt.<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately, Ludwig VI did not approve of the fact that his political advisor publicly took such a controversial position on the issue of Pietist conventicles: he had 800 copies of the first edition bought up and destroyed. But this did not mean that Kriegsmann had fallen out of favor, as his enemies presumed. In close contact with both Kriegsmann and Winckler during the ensuing controversy, Spener was able to testify that Kriegsmann remained in good standing with his lord until the end.<sup>120</sup> One might take this to imply that, for political reasons, the Landgrave had to ensure that members of his court did not compromise themselves in this manner, even as he may have sympathized with them personally. Apparently, there were no hard feelings on Kriegsmann's part either: the advisor honored his deceased lord through the translation of a Latin poem by Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655), the famous Dutch scholar and poet, expressing his heartfelt memory of “the many high and gracious good deeds” he had enjoyed “until his most blessed death.”<sup>121</sup>

Unfortunately, the succeeding Landgrave Ludwig VII (1658–1678), who reigned for only four months, dismissed Kriegsmann along with many other courtiers. For the short remainder of his life, Kriegsmann moved to Mannheim and served the Calvinist Elector Palatine Karl Ludwig (1617–1680), thus leaving Lutheran territory. Since the population of the Palatinate had been severely decimated during the Thirty Years' War, the Elector pursued a policy of religious toleration to build it up again—this made it a suitable choice after Kriegsmann's clash with the conservative, Lutheran orthodoxy. The fact that Winckler—having fallen out with his superior, Mentzer—was made pastor to the Lutheran community in Mannheim led Kriegsmann to hope for a new Pietist community.<sup>122</sup> However, Kriegsmann did not live long enough to see it flourish: he died on September 29, 1679, leaving be-

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<sup>119</sup> Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 3, nr. 97; nr. 114, esp. 557.

<sup>120</sup> *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 3, nr. 221, esp. 1049–1050.

<sup>121</sup> Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann, *Todes-Verachtung/ In teutschen Versen/ Nach dem Lateinischen des Welt-berühmbten Danielis Heinsii. Zum Ehren-Gedächtniß Des Durchleuchtigsten Fürsten und Herrn/ Herrn Ludwigs des Sechsten/ Landgraafen zu Hessen/ etc.* (Hanau: Verlegts Carl Scheffer/ Buchhändler ... Druckts Joh. Burckh. Quantz/ in der Aubryschon Officin, 1678), 1. “In tieffster Erwegung Der vielen hohen Gnaden-Wohlthaten/ so von S. Hoch-Fürstl. Durchl. biß in Dero seeligsten Tode genossen/ Dero gewesener Cammer-Rath zu Darmstadt.”

<sup>122</sup> Tietz, *Johann Winckler*, 223–32, esp. 224.

hind his second wife and the two children of his younger brother, who had died less than a year earlier.<sup>123</sup>

## Conclusion

From a young age until his early death, Wilhelm Christoph Kriegsmann had been fascinated by the great wisdom of the ancients that, for him, united learning and piety. His philological skills determined how he approached alchemy. By restoring the *Tabula Smaragdina* to its pristine, Phoenician form, he contributed to contemporary debates surrounding Hermes. Moreover, by identifying him as Noah's grandson, Canaan, Kriegsmann proposed a solution to the vexing problem of Hermes' historical existence and chronological placement. Bringing the same philological approach to bear on the characters used by alchemists to represent their substances, Kriegsmann argued that these signs had been instituted by Trismegistus and were far from arbitrary: originally, they had corresponded to the true nature of alchemical substances. In his *Epistola*, addressed to Johann Tackius, Kriegsmann argued that Plato was a great alchemist and had achieved significant theological insights due to his laboratory work, culminating in what he called Plato's chymical gospel.

As Kriegsmann became involved with the nucleus of Lutheran Pietism in Frankfurt, he continued his exchange with Tackius and Johann Eitel Diede zum Fürstenstein, whom he eventually joined at the court of Darmstadt. Diede was the dedicatee of Kriegsmann's conception of ancient wisdom as the *bibliosophia* of the ancient Hebrews. Besides his unconventional understanding of *cabala sancta*, this concept entailed not only a complete grasp of nature and art, philosophy and politics, but also practical, lived piety. Taken together with the *Symphonesis Christianorum*, ancient Jews and early Christians both provided role models for this understanding of religion. Through the ages, they were linked to Luther's reformation and the first Pietists by *translatio religionis*, a process analogous to the peregrinations of *prisca sapientia*. As briefly indicated with reference to Johann Wilhelm Zierold and Balthasar Köpke, Kriegsmann was not the last to defend Pietism with recourse to the devout and knowledgeable ancients.

Contrary to what the heritage of Paracelsus, Arndt and Boehme might seem to imply, Kriegsmann's example serves to show that the connection between alchemy and Pietism ought not to be considered self-evident. Rather, for reasons that could be highly individual, Pietists approached

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<sup>123</sup> See Spener, *Briefe aus der Frankfurter Zeit*, vol. 5, nr. 7, 33. Tietz mistakenly holds them to have been Wilhelm Christoph's own children; *Johann Winckler*, 190, n. 55.

alchemy from a number of different angles and engaged with it to varying extents. Not least due to his philological approach, Kriegsmann was singular in how he made the link between alchemy and Pietism through ancient wisdom. It was clear to him that all the secrets of alchemy were contained in Hermetic and Platonic writings (specifically, the *Tabula Smaragdina* and Plato's *Critias*), as well as the Hebrew Scriptures. In keeping with the notion of *prisca sapientia*, the authors of these ancient documents—be they pagans or patriarchs—were assumed to have led exemplary lives of piety that Kriegsmann strove to imitate. In all of this, ancient wisdom provided him with the common denominator for alchemy and Pietism.

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## Letter from the Book Review Editor

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The number of academic books published annually in the field of Western esotericism appears to be growing rapidly. While this publishing boom began in the 1990s, coinciding with the professionalisation of the field, certain developments over the past few years signal that a new rush is about to begin. Weighty titles on the subject are now being picked up by big prestigious publishers. An introduction to esotericism has just appeared in Bloomsbury's popular *Guides for the Perplexed* series. The dormant *Gnostica: Texts and Interpretations* series has suddenly been revived after moving from Equinox to Acumen, increasing its catalogue from 1 to 5 books in about a year's time. Acumen is in fact putting out exciting esotericism related titles in other series too, while publishing houses such as Routledge and Palgrave are starting to sign relevant titles as well. All of this, of course, adds to existing book series such as SUNY's *Western Esoteric Traditions*, and not least the healthy activity at Brill's *Aries Book Series* – which has produced some groundbreaking volumes recently, with promise of more to come. This steady stream of new publications makes it more relevant than ever to establish forums for critical discussion and assessment of the growing academic literature. I am therefore excited to have the opportunity of developing a new review section for *Correspondences*, starting as of this issue as the journal's first Book Review Editor.

The goals for the new book review section follow from the general philosophy of this journal, making use of its unique position in the market and its open-access policy. We will continue to receive unsolicited pieces, but

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now we will also start soliciting reviews of specific books and approach readers whom we deem particularly suited for reviewing them. We hope that this organised effort, combined with all the benefits of our free, online, open-access publication strategy, makes it possible to establish *Correspondences* as the first place to go for up-to-date, quality reviews of recent titles in our field.



Table 1: Occurrences of the word “esotericism” in English language books has soared since the 1990s. And it’s the academic literature that makes the difference. Image from Google nGram Viewer.

That is our ambition. We may need a few issues to get there, but the work begins now. If you are an author or publisher with a book or catalogue you think we should consider for review, do not hesitate to get in touch with me. The same, of course, goes if you are interested in reviewing a title for us.

Esotericism is a fluid concept, and the boundaries of the field that studies “it” are far from fixed. We fully acknowledge this. As a result, we are not only seeking to review books that are marketed as belonging squarely within this specialisation. We are just as interested in exploring relevant titles from other fields – intellectual history, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, media studies, etc. Neither do we feel bound to the West. We will especially look to solicit work in Middle Eastern studies, along with work on South Asian and Far Eastern contexts. We are particularly happy to consider unsolicited reviews in these areas, as the expertise of the editorial board knows its limits. Finally, it goes without saying that we are not pre-judging that esotericism is confined to a specific historical period. Thus we hope to review works spanning from antiquities through to all sorts of late-, post-, and neo-modernities. If anyone were to write on esotericism and the future, we would even (or especially!) review that too.



A few remarks on the ideal book review. There are different views on what book reviews are for, and what makes a particularly good one. I will come out openly with my own opinion on this, seeing that it will in any case guide my work with shaping this new section. The purpose of the book review is *not* to generate quotable words for flattering back cover blurbs. Such quotable words may of course result as by-products of a review, but the review's function as a genre is quite distinct from that of the blurb. The blurb aims to flatter and seduce – the review aims to criticise. It should not be an instrument for marketing, but an extension of the peer review process. Good reviews remain civil in language and tone, but they do not shy away from asking tough questions, taking arguments apart, identifying errors and inaccuracies. They make no compromises in assessing the merits of the work through rigorous criticism. The truly great review is able to do this against the background of previous work, seeing the book under review not only on its own terms, but in a wider scholarly context of existing arguments, evidence, and hypotheses. This sort of reflective criticism makes the book review into a truly integral part of the development of scholarship.

In the present issue we publish two reviews that already illustrate some of the above points. One of the reviewed volumes is part scholarship, part practitioner texts, which offers opportunities for the reviewer to comment on problematic aspects in the borderlands of esotericism studies and pagan studies. The other review is of a recent but already influential book on the interface of fiction, esotericism, and new religious movements. The book has been warmly received in a number of previous reviews – *Correspondences*, it seems, is the first to publish a more critical take, one which not only highlights crucial shortcomings, but also suggests how these ought to be fixed.

Both reviews in this issue were unsolicited ones. The organised effort to expand the section through solicited reviews of hand-picked books begins now, and should start bearing fruits over the summer. By next issue (2.2) we hope to be able to publish on a more extensive collection of recent titles in this rapidly developing field.



## Book Reviews

Carole M. Cusack. *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. vii + 179 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6780-3.

Cusack argues for the typological designation ‘invented religion’ by way of illustration with chapters dedicated to Discordianism, The Church of All Worlds, The Church of the SubGenius, and a final concluding chapter on Jediism, Matrixism, and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. As it is the first scholarly study devoted to these religions, the book marks a notable contribution to the study of new religious movements. Furthermore, her pioneering analysis convincingly challenges the tendency to dismiss religions that openly incorporate fictitious (and humorous) elements into their worldviews. Despite these obvious virtues though, *Invented Religions* suffers from two serious flaws: first, large portions of it are not sufficiently grounded in primary source research, and second, Cusack’s ahistorical, top-down approach distorts the highly idiosyncratic natures of these religions to suit the ‘invented religion’ typology.

The first chapter, “The Contemporary Context for Invented Religions,” offers a concise outline of the sociological trends that characterize late modern capitalism in so-called Western democracies, specifically individualism, secularism, and the rise of consumerism. The most substantive aspect of this chapter is Cusack’s assertion that science fiction and popular culture serve as rich inspirational resources for the new forms of spiritualities shaped by the aforementioned sociological trends. Indeed, this assertion forms the basis of the new ‘methodological paradigm’ (113) Cusack introduces, insofar as the ‘invented religion’ typology was created as a means to explain the ‘realness’ of religions that incorporate fiction into their overarching narratives. Unfortunately, Cusack fails to seriously engage the critical

discussion associated with religion as a concept, and as such, the new ‘methodological paradigm’ she attempts to justify remains underdeveloped. The most definitive assertion Cusack makes concerning religion is that the “fundamental building block of religion is narrative” (25), and that humans are meaning making agents who find stories involving unseen agents affecting the world particularly compelling (139). This approach, more directed towards how religion works than what it means, draws on cognitive theorist Pascal Boyer’s explanation of religion, which Cusack inaccurately construes as arguing that religious narratives serve an advantageous evolutionary purpose. Actually, Boyer argues that religions are not ‘adaptive,’ but non-adaptive by-products of other adaptive traits. Nevertheless, Cusack uses Boyer’s focus on narrative as the basis for her typology insofar as invented religions are defined as religions that announce their invented status (commonly originating in pre-fabricated fictional narratives), openly integrate pop culture narratives into their scripture (73), and refuse the strategies of legitimization commonly present in new religious movements, such as claiming to be a development upon a preexisting religious tradition.

The second chapter is devoted to Discordianism, the oldest invented religion under scrutiny, founded in 1958 (though Cusack follows Hugh Urban in misdating its origin to 1957). Cusack does an admirable job relaying biographical details of Discordianism’s founders, in addition to explaining its origin and rise to underground acclaim as a result of a trilogy of mass-marketed paperback novels collectively entitled *Illuminatus!* She also provides summaries of the most memorable vignettes in the 4/5th edition of the principal Discordian text (the *Principia Discordia*), details the connections between Discordianism and the JFK assassination, and concludes by reaffirming the emic assertion that Discordianism is an American form of Zen. The depth of her account is severely limited though, as Cusack displays only the most superficial awareness of Discordianism’s primary source material. Her knowledge of these essential sources seems entirely drawn from the secondary resources she consults; what’s more, her heavy reliance on these secondary sources makes her writing largely derivative.

According to her footnotes and bibliography, Cusack’s textual resources for Discordianism essentially amount to three non-academic secondary sources, *Illuminatus!*, and two redacted variants of the 4/5th edition of the *Principia*. Cusack undoubtedly knows of the existence of Discordianism’s primary sources and so it is surprising that she doesn’t attempt to explain their content, how they were produced, or the context in which they circulated. Furthermore, there are substantial oversights in the material she does reference: for example, she does not take into account that the *Principia* went

through three dramatically different versions before the Loompanics version of the 4/5th edition of the *Principa* (1979) from which she quotes; and that the two 4/5th editions she cites represent only a fraction of the innumerable versions of the Rip Off Press 4th edition (which she does not cite). The fact of the matter is that the initial 4th edition of the *Principa* published by Rip Off Press was published under an anti-copyright, and thus numerous independent publishers have issued their own variant versions of the text.

To the detriment of her analysis, Cusack neglects to explain that from 1958 to the early 1990s Discordianism was an underground religion that flourished exclusively in a D.I.Y. ('do it yourself') subculture known as the 'zine scene.' Composed of a network of cultural radicals sending self-produced anarchist, occult, and queer texts through the mail, the zine scene composed the context in which Discordianism was born, grew, and frequently mutated. Analyzed through the full range of its primary sources, namely, zines and A.P.A.s (amateur press associations), Discordianism reveals itself to be a complex and influential historical phenomenon, not least because it was the first expression of what would later develop into the Chaos Magick paradigm, to which the Church of the SubGenius also belongs.

Since the historical significance of Discordianism's ontology is absent in Cusack's text, it bears explication here. The central metaphysical tenet of Discordianism is that the absolutely generative force of Chaos, personified by Eris, characterizes existence. Based on this metaphysical supposition, Discordians have concluded that reality is not only a negotiable construct, but entirely based on self-willed creation. Ideological abstractions, belief systems, and language itself, are identified as mere tools for the construction of other, less oppressive realities. Under his *nom de plume* Hakim Bey, zine scene luminary Peter Lamborn Wilson (who Cusack mistakenly refers to as Stephen Lamborn Wilson) described Discordianism's chaos ontology as 'ontological anarchism' because it not only criticized authoritarian structures, but sought to undermine the very possibility of their existence. It is not difficult to see how this line of thinking acted as the basis for the catchphrase later adopted by the entire Chaos Magick milieu: "Nothing is True; Everything is Permitted." Lastly, it is important to note that the scholarly preoccupation with the integration of fiction into the Discordian mythos fails to appreciate how Discordians, as well as other ontological anarchists, treat *all* ideas as socially constructed 'convenient fictions' that are equally true, false, and meaningless.

The third chapter focuses on The Church of All Worlds (CAW), founded in 1962 and inspired by Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel *Stranger in a*

*Strange Land*, published a year earlier. Cusack has primary source material and upon this surer footing provides a cogent summary for the novel on which the religion is based, as well as explains how the CAW came to integrate goddess worship, ceremonial magick, and eco-consciousness, and outlines the continued influence of its founders on North American Paganism. Following Margot Adler, Cusack identifies the CAW's publication *Green Egg* as formative for the nascent Neo-Pagan movement, and draws attention to the leading role the religion has played in the elaboration of polyamory (a term coined by a leading member of the church). The most salient aspect of her chapter on the CAW is her description of the religion's use of legitimization strategies to cope with its origin in a work of science fiction. In fact, the CAW utilizes one of the exact strategies that Cusack claims 'invented religions' reject, namely, claiming to be development from a preexisting religious tradition. As Markus Davidsen points out in his review of this book (*Literature and Aesthetics*, 21, no. 1), members of the CAW, like those who ascribe to Jediism, Matrixism, and Discordianism, inscribe their beliefs in larger non-invented traditions (Paganism, Buddhism, Bahá'í, and Zen respectively), and thereby present themselves not as 'invented religions' but simply as new ones. This oversight not only problematizes the internal consistency of the 'invented religions' typology, but, more immediately, its necessity.

The Church of the SubGenius (COSG) is the subject of the fourth chapter. The chapter contains comprehensive overviews of both the emic account of the religion's origin and its historical origin, biographical accounts of its founders, and a detailed synopsis of the concepts upon which its beliefs and major holidays are based. Cusack does a commendable job explaining the SubGenii activities and mythos according to the four mass-marketed anthologies of SubGenii material (culled predominantly from SubGenii zines) published by the corporate firm Simon and Schuster and information retrievable on the internet. Sadly, the same problems that characterize her study of Discordianism return here, in that the full range of the COSG's primary sources and the historical context in which they were disseminated, attacked, and revised are generally ignored.

The limitations of an approach exclusively based on religion as narrative become especially evident in this chapter, in that Cusack devotes page after page to untangling the Gordian Knot of the COSG mythos instead of analyzing the metaphysical assumption or heuristic utility which these myths serve. The COSG cannot be understood apart from its role in articulating the ontological anarchism sub-zeitgeist, which characterized the 'zine scene' and the Chaos Magick milieu that developed within it. Both official SubGe-

nii zines like ‘The Stark Fist of Removal’ and anti-SubGenii zines like ‘Crawl or Die’ make clear that the COSG represents an innovative development of Discordianism’s ontological anarchism. Cusack does repeatedly mention the similarities between Discordianism and the COSG; however, without any historical information or material from the zine scene, she is unable to state succinctly how they are contextually connected, or, more importantly, identify their place in the larger history of 20th century religion. Again, the lacuna in Cusack’s scholarship justifies a few words of explication. The COSG was instantly popular when it debuted in the zine scene in the late 1970s, and succeeded in attracting the primary architects of Discordianism (Kerry Thornley and Robert Anton Wilson) to its cause; that said, the latter has differentiated itself from the former in two important ways. Whereas Discordianism is highly individualistic and premised on widening consciousness, the COSG functions as a coalition and is dedicated to the realization of the mutual aspirations of its devotees. Their differing agendas are illustrated in the expressions they use to mark their respective ‘gnostic’ breakthroughs. Discordians exclaim, “I have seen the Fnords!,” signaling their ability to comprehend the hidden mechanisms that control reality, whereas SubGenii claim the attainment of ‘slack,’ which is unalienated activity.

While Cusack defines slack as a mix between Buddhist notions of enlightenment (87) and culture jamming (95), slack can in fact be anything from orgiastic parties to playing music. Most significantly though, slack is the ideal that is achieved when a SubGenius can leave conventional modes of employment behind and live off the profits made through their promotion of the Church via zines, amateur films, and bacchanalian events. Therefore, Cusack’s meticulous detailing of the mythos included in the edited anthologies misses its true significance because the mythos exists not to be revered, but rather to be expanded, revised, and in all manners manipulated for profit so that SubGenii need not work conventional jobs. Space constraints prevent detailing how an anti-work philosophy was converted into the spiritual ideal of slack in the 1980s zine scene, thus it must suffice to mention that the ‘abolition of work’ philosophy was first articulated by the once prominent SubGenius and anarchist luminary, Bob Black, in the zine scene.

The final chapter, “Third-Millennium Invented Religions,” reads as though it was intended as a stand-alone piece, partly due to the fact that the religions it analyzes (Jediism, Matrixism, and The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster) are decades younger than the other three. The chapter opens with a renewed focus on theoretical issues concerning religions based on popular culture. Cusack is at her most insightful here, especially in re-

gards to clarifying the dynamics that undergird the discursive transfers between science fiction and new religions. As is the case with the other religions, however, the lived experience of members of Jediism and Matrixism are hardly explained. This could be due to a number of factors, but chief among them seems to be Cusack's investment in narrative as the basis of religion, which predisposes her to attempt to justify the study of religions that openly announce their constructed status, at the expense of providing a more comprehensive assessment of them as religious systems. Another possible reason for the lack of information on the lived experience of these religions is that the sheer disparity between the religious practices and worldviews may have undermined the typological similarity they supposedly possess. The inclusion of The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (COFSM) in her 'invented religions' typology is exemplarily in this regard. As an explicit critique of Creationism, the COFSM is closer to a ludic form of atheism than the other religions being analyzed. The COFSM has no need for any of the legitimization strategies the other religions employed as it has no pretensions concerning the veracity of its theological claims, nor does it oblige its adherents to adopt an ontology that would necessitate such strategies; yet, according to Cusack, it is typologically identical to religions like Discordianism, which has an elaborate means of reconciling its fictitious components with its ontology. Essentially, this indicates that the integration of explicitly fictional elements into broader religious narratives is not a substantial enough characteristic to build a typology upon.

Cusack's research on the six religions under scrutiny in *Invented Religions* represents a major contribution to their legitimization as worthy objects of research. However, in basing her typology on a single narrative feature and neglecting primary source research, the category of 'invented religions' lets apparent similitude take precedent over the actual character of the religions studied. In addition to being somewhat arbitrary, typological approaches like Cusack's offer little in terms of explanation in cases where the metaphysical commitments of a religion refashion the function of conventional narrative forms (like fiction) in unconventional ways as part of larger, idiosyncratic worldviews. Ultimately, *Invented Religions* provides a solid introduction to an array of unconventional and previously neglected religious movements; yet, its typological approach fails where careful history will undoubtedly succeed, that is to say, in elucidating the idiosyncratic dynamics of contemporary religiosity.

J. Christian Greer



Nevill Drury, ed. *Pathways in Modern Western Magic*. Richmond, CA: Conrescent Scholars Press, 2012. 470 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0984372997.

The late Anglo-Australian Dr. Nevill Drury (1947–2013) was known internationally for his works of popular scholarship, helping to bring an understanding of Western esotericism and contemporary Paganism to a global audience. The book under review here, an edited volume containing contributions from fifteen different scholars and esoteric practitioners, represents his penultimate publication. *Pathways in Modern Western Magic* covers a wide range of different magical groups, from Wicca to Cyber-Shamanism, and from the Golden Dawn to the Left-Hand Path. In doing so, it provides a good primer for those making their first foray into the academic study of Western esotericism or Pagan studies, allowing the reader to appreciate the great variety and diversity found within these broad movements.

*Pathways* has its origins in *The Handbook of Modern Western Magic*, a volume that Drury was to co-edit for Brill alongside the University of Gothenburg's Henrik Bogdan. When Brill's editorial board rejected many of the contributions as being too emic, Bogdan converted part of the project into a special issue of *Aries* (12, no. 1), while Drury took the other half to Conrescent Press, the U.S.-based creation of doctoral student Sam Webster. Although not an academic press, Conrescent has published the book under a new imprint, Conrescent Scholars, through which it seeks to release peer-reviewed works of scholarship on Paganism, esotericism, and magic that bring together the views of both academics and occult practitioners. This is an ethos that was shared by Drury; as both an esotericist and a scholar, he championed the value of emic, insider perspectives in the academic study of magic. Thus, most contributors to this volume are those who can offer an emic perspective on the subjects that they are studying; they are insiders to the world of magic, practitioners belonging to the traditions they are discussing. Although predominantly emic anthologies on this subject have been published before (James R. Lewis' 1996 *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* springs to mind), most recent volumes of this sort have had a slightly etic focus, and for this reason it is possible to view this book as a counterbalance to such publications.

Drury opens the anthology by advocating the unique utility of emic perspectives. Criticising the views of anthropologist Tanya Luhmann, he instead champions the anthropological perspectives of Jeanne Favret-Saada, Paul Stoller, and Susan Greenwood, all of whom have emphasised the value of “insider-practitioner” perspectives for the scholarly understanding of magical beliefs and practices. In doing so, Drury appears to construct a firm

emic-etic dichotomy, which does not reflect the work of anthropologists like Sabina Magliocco who have straddled both positions. Drury's ideas are expanded on in the following chapter by the anthropologist Lynne Hume of the University of Queensland, in which she defends emic approaches to those who – in her words – “know” magic to exist. Hume is herself a practising Pagan and believer in magic, and in places I felt that her argument veered from advocating emic approaches in anthropology to actively championing the idea that magic objectively exists, which I found difficult to accept.

The next three chapters are devoted to Wicca and other forms of contemporary witchcraft. Dominique Beth Wilson of the University of Sydney starts with an examination of how members of the Sydney-based Wiccan Applegrove coven understand the numinous through material items such as altars and costume, while Iowa State University's Nikki Bado follows with a broad discussion of the Triple Goddess from her perspective as a feminist and Wiccan. Many interesting points are addressed, although I felt that it was aimed more at a practising Wiccan audience than a (multi- and non-religious) scholarly one. Marguerite Johnson of the University of Newcastle, Australia continues this exploration of Pagan female divinity, exploring the “dark aspects” of this deity. In doing so she looks at a variety of witchcraft traditions, although it would have been good to see parallels drawn with “dark” traditions like Typhonian Thelema or the Left-Hand Path.

An exploration of Neo-Shamanism follows, kicked off by Andrei A. Znamenski of the University of Memphis, who gives a good overview of the subject in the United States; unfortunately, the chapter is slightly marred by some dubious generalisations, such as the statement that “[h]istorically, Americans have been more religious and spiritual than Europeans” (106). Archaeologist and Neo-Shaman Robert J. Wallis of Richmond University, London follows with his discussion of the same subject in Europe, providing an interpretation influenced by the developments of the “New Animism.” Finally, Wallis' oft-time collaborator Jenny Blain of Sheffield Hallam University proceeds to look at contemporary *seiðr*, a form of Neo-Shamanism based in large part on a practice found in Early Medieval Scandinavia.

Drury then takes us to explore the ceremonial magic of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain, starting with his own chapter on the magical practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, focusing on the group's use of symbolism and visionary texts, and making good use of quotations from practitioners themselves. He follows this with another chapter in which he explores the realms of Thelemic sex magic, and the

influence that figures like Pascal Beverly Randolph exerted on the thought of Thelema's founder Aleister Crowley.

Proceeding with the Left Hand Path (LHP), Thomas Karlsson provides a strongly emic discussion of the occult order that he co-founded, the Dragon Rouge. It's an interesting paper, but I disagree with Karlsson's assertion that the LHP is not a religion; he chooses to define "religion" as "various obligations, rules and beliefs that assist the religious person to re-establish a sense of order in a presumed original ideal state" (247), something that does not accord with most recent definitions of the term used within religious studies. The University of Tromsø's James R. Lewis then explores legitimation strategies in American LaVeyan Satanism, looking at how the Church of Satan's founder Anton LaVey (1930–1997) used claims of science to legitimate his arguments, and how subsequent Satanists have used LaVey's magnum opus, *The Satanic Bible*, to legitimate their own arguments. Don Webb, of the University of California, Los Angeles, then offers an emic discussion of the beliefs and worldviews of the Temple of Set, a Church of Satan offshoot of which Webb is a member.

Moving on to the subject of esoteric art, Amy Hale of St. Petersburg College discusses the occult beliefs of British Surrealist painter and writer Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), although unfortunately she has not been able to illustrate her piece with relevant images of the artists' work. Keeping with the theme, Drury then examines the commonalities between the work of Englishman Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956) and the Australian Rosaleen Norton (1917–1979), drawing on interesting points that are expanded upon in his book *Dark Spirits* (Salamander and Sons, 2012).

The final chapters represent a miscellany of eclectic magical traditions that have received little academic attention before. First up is a chapter from the late scholar and occultist Dave Evans which examines Chaos Magic, followed by a piece from Libuše Martínková of Charles University, Prague, which returns us to the realms of Neo-Shamanism to discuss Techno- and Cyber-Shamans. The anthology's final paper is provided by occultist Phil Hine, and consists of an emic discussion of how Indian Tantra can be adopted within the framework of Western esotericism.

*Pathways* brings together an interesting and diverse selection of papers on different aspects of Western magic. In doing so it ably accomplishes what Drury did best; producing clear, accessible introductions to the realms of the occult. Established academics will perhaps be frustrated that most of the authors have written at length on the same subjects before, but this should not be of concern for a novice scholar just embarking on their studies, for whom this volume is probably best suited. More problematic is that not all

of the chapters are strictly scholarly; those of Hine, Webb, and Karlsson are essentially insider descriptions of their beliefs. They thus provide valuable source material for researchers of these traditions, but do not constitute scholarly papers in themselves. On a related note, I must admit to being a little disconcerted by some of the approaches on offer here, which to my mind verge into the borderlands of apologetics. Although I would commend Conrescent for their new series of scholarly publications, greater editorial discipline would certainly have benefited the work; in particular, the fact that each chapter uses a different system of referencing was a distraction.

The complex issues of the emic versus the etic, and the religionist versus the reductionist approach, have dogged both Pagan studies and the academic study of Western esotericism in recent years, and this work is far from bringing that debate to an end. However, it is particularly timely given the recent charges (made by the likes of Markus Altena Davidsen<sup>1</sup>) that scholarship in this field has relied far too heavily on emic, religionist views. *Pathways* constitutes a powerful argument that emic perspectives should have a place in the study of modern Western magical groups.

Ethan Doyle White

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<sup>1</sup> See Markus Altena Davidsen, “What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 24 (2012): 183–99.