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M.W. Frater Supreme Magus

Alchimia Rosicruciana

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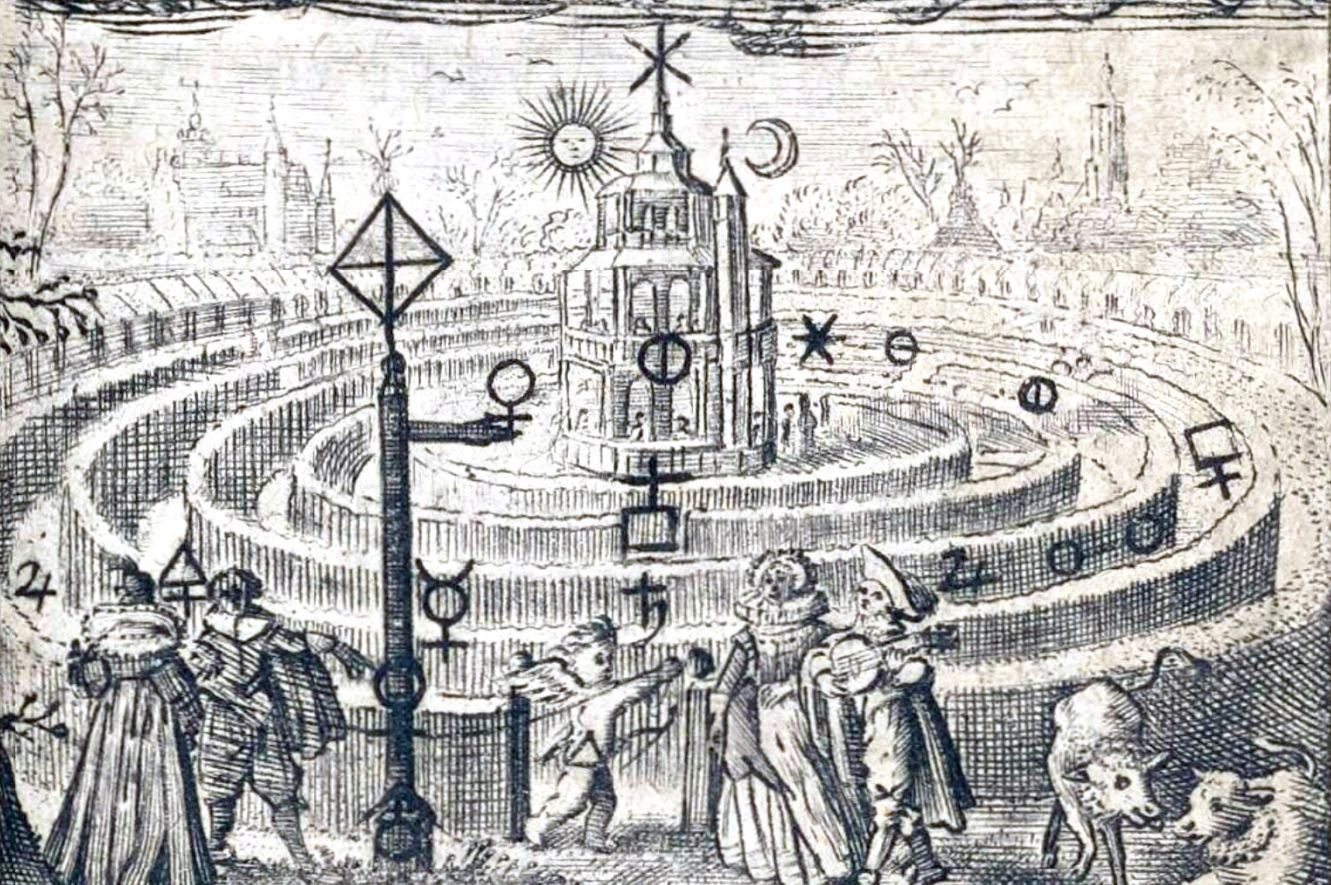
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This pamphlet has been published by the Metropolitan Study Group of the Metropolitan College No. 1, Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia. The MSG is an open forum and we welcome all individuals, men and women, who are interested in exploring the deeper mysteries of Nature, Science and Truth.

We normally meet on the 3rd Saturday of the month. All of our meetings can now also be accessed virtually, and we host attendees from many countries.

*If you would like to attend any future meetings, please sign up to our mailing list on our website at **srialondon.org***



Emblem from *De Groene Leeuw* (1674)

Circle of Unity

The Transmutation of the Intellect

Regardless of the tradition, lineage or methodology employed, the purpose of the practice of Spiritual Alchemy is to transform and sublimate the gross materials and constituents of our Being into a higher vibrational state.

Much is written about Alchemy from the Western Esoteric perspective, and even more is intellectually theorised upon and debated by scholars and learned students of the Mysteries.

Indeed and unfortunately, in some cases such individuals may become so attached to what they believe they 'know' about Alchemy that they are quick to force their opinions on others with an egoic pride in their own perceived knowledge.

The practice of Spiritual Alchemy is not just an aspect of the Western Esoteric tradition, as it is also an intrinsic part of the ancient Chinese practice of Qigong.

Qigong roughly translated means 'Energy' or 'Breath Skill'. Qi (in it's broader context) refers to the intrinsic energy within all creation, and in the human being Qi is intimately connected to the breath and blood, while the word 'Gong' or 'Kung' (as in 'Kung-Fu') refers to a disciplined practice which requires consistent effort over time in order to become skillful in it's application.

I have been involved in the study and practice of Qigong for almost 40 years currently, and would say that this practice has been a constant in my adult life which has kept me grounded and relatively safe and sane through some very challenging times.

My teacher has a saying, which I will share with you now:

"This is a Feeling Art... you can't think yourself into correct feeling, but you can feel your way into more correct thinking".

So, if we choose to apply this to the practice of Alchemy we will need to set aside the intellect in favour of our capacity to explore the practice through 'Feeling' more deeply.

Such a particular kind of 'Feeling' is intimately linked to intuition, and in my own opinion is also very directly linked with Self-Compassion and Forgiveness.

This process of 'Feeling our way into more correct Thinking' requires a transparent honesty toward ourselves as we identify the various blockages, tensions and aspects of the lower ego which have been holding us back and preventing us from making the progress we are capable of achieving.

What we 'think' we know can all too easily become a kind of dogma, and this is especially true for those of us who choose to study the Hidden Mysteries of Nature and Science.

The first passage of the Tao Te Ching (considered a classic text of the Taoist mystical tradition) cautions us as follows:

The tao that can be named is not the true Tao

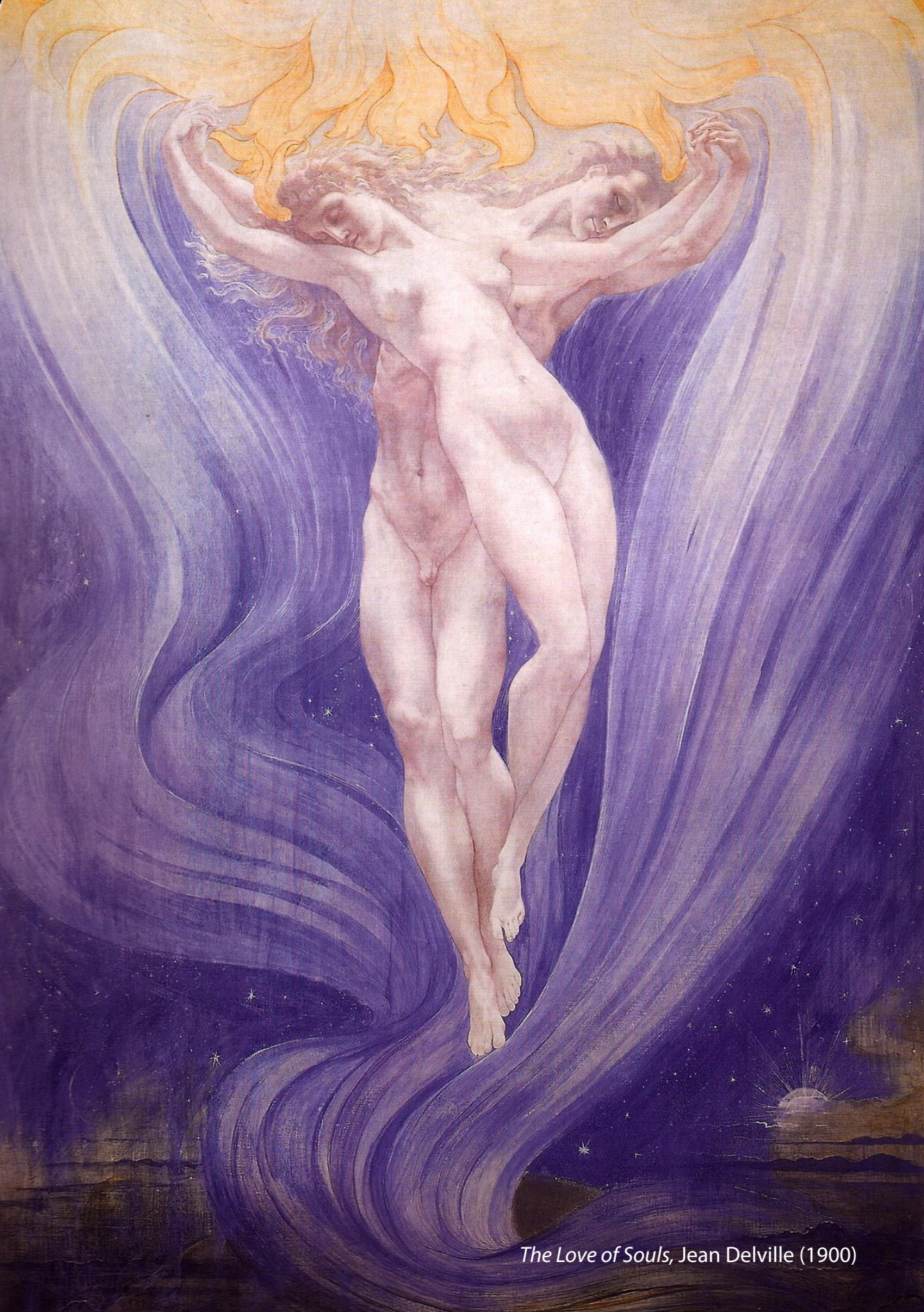
The Mysteries of Creation are infinitely more vast than our ability to intellectually comprehend...so, if we wish to make progress in our studies and Spiritual development, let us be prepared to let go of what we think we know.

When we do this, we may gain access to the key which unlocks a deeper level of 'Inner-Feeling' and experience which transcends the limitations of the intellect.

Wishing you all a very blessed Midsummer Solstice!

Frater Cheyne Towers
Suffragan of the Province of Greater London, SRIA





The Love of Souls, Jean Delville (1900)

Czech Alchemy in the 20th Century

The history of Czech Esotericism has two aspects. One aspect is publicly known – this includes the travels of Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley, the Prague work of Gustav Meyrink, and, for the magically-oriented audience, the magical school founded in the 20th century by Franz Bardon. And this, of course, applies to our Alchemy. This outward-facing part is something akin to the stone facade that an old house offers us to admire superficially. Behind this facade, however, there is always the interior of the house, the real world, the real living space, intimately known only to the inhabitants of the house. And since I myself inhabit this imaginary house, or if you prefer the beautiful city called Prague, I would like to invite you to a brief tour of the invisible inner aspect of the history of Czech Alchemy, which very few people know¹.

We will look at the history of modern Czech Alchemy with an emphasis on the physical work and initiatory lineages; it is a small glimpse into the vast inner world of Czech Alchemy that still exists and is being passed on to younger generations. This world has its own multi-volume literature. The adherents of this Tradition can quote those texts from memory, and also apply the principles contained in these works of the Czech masters in laboratory experiments, much as Fulcanelli is quoted and interpreted in the West.

Before I begin my explanation, I am obliged to mention that Czech Alchemy is an ancient tradition. The oldest extant bohemical alchemical manuscripts date back to 1395 and 1412, and we must reasonably assume that there was an older literature before them. Czech Alchemy entered history very quietly, and, with few exceptions, it avoided operating openly; thus easily escaped the attention of historians. Among those interested in the general Hermetic Tradition were also

1. Books that are not explicitly mentioned in the English edition exist only in Czech. Some important personalities of Czech alchemy at the end of the 20th century, who are still active and doing their good work, are not included for privacy reasons.

members of two important noble families – the Waldsteins and the Harrachs. It was likely thanks to their support that Czech alchemy survived into the 18th and 19th centuries², when the remnants of this Tradition sprang into a modern renaissance.

To start with, we must realize that for a large part of the twentieth century (1938–1945, 1948–1989), Czech Alchemists were exposed to persecution and the prohibition against any spiritual activity by political regimes that forbade such activity. Spiritual activities were punished it with severe penalties. Alchemical literature did not officially exist during this period; it was a closely guarded secret of a few very narrow circles that followed the *sign of Hermes* during this dark age.

Otakar Griese

The first key figure of 20th century Czech alchemy was Otakar Griese (19 October 1881–2 October 1932). This man was above all a tireless organizer of Czech Hermeticism and the greatest Czech occult publisher of the early 20th century. Between 1906 and 1924, he published 36 volumes of Hermetic texts, plus a total of eight volumes of three Hermetic journals: *Isis*, *The Initiation*, and *Lucifer*.



It is clear from the text of his books that Griese was primarily a Martinist; he maintained contacts with Papus, Paul Sédir, François Jollivet-Castelot, and especially with the Prague- and later Regensburg-based pharmacist-spagyricist, Dr. Theodor Krauss (1864–1924). Griese published an unfinished translation of Jollivet-Castelot's *Alchemy* (1914), which obviously appealed to him. According to his books *Mumial Hermetic Medicine* (1908), *The Problem of Enchantment* (1909), his translation of Maverick's *Hermetic Herbalism* (1913 and 1921), and his numerous articles, he seems to have been a fairly advanced spagyricist, electro-homeopath, and an expert in mumial and sympathetic medicine. He apparently paid only marginal attention to the Great Work of physical alchemy. For the upcoming generation of the time, however, he was a key figure who helped to connect their intellectual ideals and laboratory practice to the world.

2. It is worth mentioning that the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross was active in Bohemia.

Pierre de Lasenic

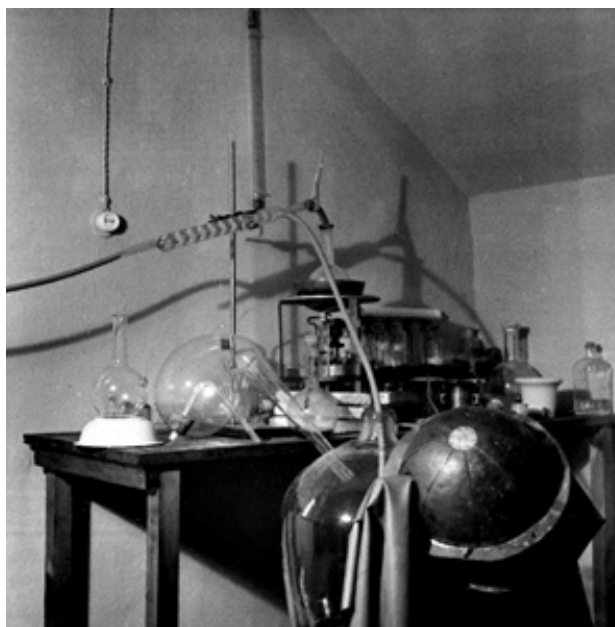


The second key figure of Czech alchemy was Petr Kohout, who published under the pen name Pierre de Lasenic (17 May 1900 – 23 June 1944). Lasenic's initiatic lines were Rosicrucian (he attained the 8th Grade) and Martinist (towards the end of his life, he became Grand Master of Czech Martinism).

He was also a prominent esoteric philosopher and, among other things, the author of fundamental Czech books dealing with the meaning of Rosicrucianism (*Hermetic Initiation into the Rhodostaurotic System*, 1937, reprinted in 1990) and Martinism (*The Hermetic Initiation into Martinism*, a typescript originally written between 1940-1944, but not published until 2011, with English editions in 2019 and 2021). He was also a member of Memphis-Misraim and other esoteric orders.

Lasenic studied alchemy, especially between 1930 and 1931, when he lived in Paris. According to testimonies of his students, he spent long hours in the library of the Arsenal, where he studied the then-unpublished manuscripts of *The Diaries of Abraham the Jew* and Nicolas Valois, as instructed by his French teachers. Thanks to his Egyptological interests, he was also able to orient himself in the texts of Egyptian-Hellenic Alchemy. Based on his experiences, he wrote and published the book *Alchemy, Its Theory and Practice* (1936, reprinted in 1997 and 2007).

He was also well versed in spagyrics, which he taught his students until the end of his life. His treatments were very effective preparations of plant pollen. He had a well-equipped spagyric laboratory in his villa in Káraný, which was considered the best spagyric laboratory in Bohemia at that time. Some of the equipment from this laboratory have been preserved to this day in a private collection. Under



Lasenic's direction, there were at least fifteen practically conceived collections of the texts of the Alchemical masters, which cannot be described in detail here because of the vastness of the material.

Pierre de Lasenic was persecuted, and imprisoned by the Gestapo during World War II. He died as a result of his previous imprisonment two days after the summer solstice in 1944.

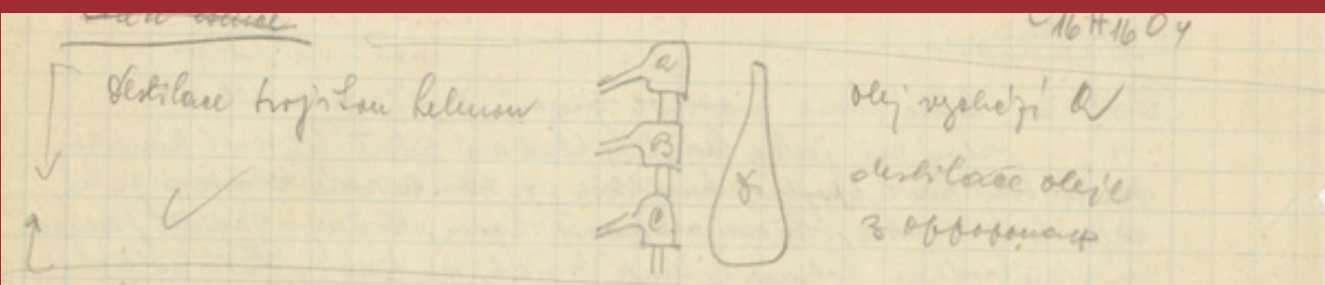
He wrote an extensive hermetic work, which has 14 volumes, and has been published in book form. However, some of Lasenic's other manuscripts, which he wrote in French, have not yet been found. It is possible that they still exist in private hermetic collections in the UK, France, or Italy. These are *L'Histoire de l'Esotérisme*, *L'Esotérisme de la Culture Egyptienne*, *Pantheon Aegyptiorum*, *La Magie Sexuelle* (Paris, 1930 or 1931), *La Philosophie de l'Esotérisme*, *Metaphysique et la Science Moderne*, *Symbolique et Parures Occultes*, among others. Finding them would be a great discovery.

František Kabelák



The third key figure of Czech alchemy was the Viennese Czech, František Kabelák (8 November 1902 – 5 September 1969). Unlike the previous figures, he was not a member of any initiatory orders, as he was more of a solitary disposition. Kabelák was the most important expert on the Kabbalah as well as the most important esoteric philosopher of modern Czech Hermeticism. In his youth, he was in personal contact with Otakar Griesse, and was one of the best friends of Pierre de Lasenic, whose legacy he carried forward.

During his lifetime, Kabelák gradually wrote a very extensive Hermetic work, which synthesizes the problems of practically the entirety of Hermeticism. Although some of his writings have been lost, we know that he translated and wrote two works devoted to Alchemy. These are the informative book *Practical Spagyrics* (1940, new edition 1996), which is actually a translation of Gunter Helmont's



famous German work *Magia Metachemica* (1930). The second title is *Practical Spagyric-Alchemy* (1945), which has been mostly lost. From the surviving parts, it is evident that this book was devoted to Alchemical Philosophy, the problem of the Alkahest, and the history of Hellenistic, Arabic, and Western Alchemy. From the Alchemical point of view, the passage on sunlight contained in Kabelák's treatise, *Ancient Egyptian Philosophy of Fire Hrw* (written in 1961, published in 2016), is also very interesting and will be appreciated especially by followers of the Way of Cinnabar.


Kabelák was also an expert in Hermetic Medicine, which is closely related to the issue of Spagyrics. He devoted his writings, *Herbarium spirituale siderum* (1940) and *The Hermetician's Herbarium* (written in the late 1960s, published in 2011), to this subject. He was a Paracelsian, just like Lasenic.

As an Austrian national, Kabelák was persecuted in Czechoslovakia from 1945 onward, and was also a victim of political persecution – for example, his house was confiscated and demolished, he was forced to accept hard manual labour, etc... Nevertheless, in the 1960s he managed to rebuild a functional Spagyric laboratory in which he devoted himself to his research.

In connection with František Kabelák it is necessary to mention his son Z. K., who learned the basic techniques of Spagyric Work from his father.

František Bardon

The fourth key figure of Czech Alchemy and Spagyrics was František (Franz) Bardon (1 December 1909 – 10 July 1958) from Opava. Franz Bardon is well known to the worldwide Hermetic community as an expert in the magic of


initiator R.C. :.
27. 1. 54.

the spheres and the author of an advanced system of hermetic training. It is much less well known that he, together with his closest disciples, subscribed to Rosicrucianism. He sometimes signed his private writings in the manner of a Rosicrucian Initiator.

Bardon planned to write a treatise on Alchemy as the fifth book of his teaching system. However, judging by the surviving correspondence, it was to be more Spagyrically-oriented, namely in the production of Harmonious Spagyric Essences and Quintessences, which the author rightly considers to be fluid condensers from a magical point of view, i.e. as a kind of reservoirs of differently coloured Elemental or Planetary Energies.



One of the bases for this book was to be Naxagoras: *Chymischer oder Alchymistischer Particular-Zeiger*, a copy of which, corrected by the hand of Bardon, is preserved in the estate of one of his pupils. In the end, the book on alchemy was not written; František Bardón was arrested in 1958, and died in prison the same year as a victim of communist persecution.

František Bardón worked semi-publicly as a folk healer, and used, among other things, homeopathic and Spagyric remedies, which he mostly produced himself. His interest in Spagyrics was practically oriented and was also practically successful. However, the details of the Great Work of Physical Alchemy scattered throughout the Bardón's books seem somewhat fantastic, and do not show the practical experience of the author.

In connection with Bardón, we should also mention his son Dr. L. B., who learned the basic techniques of Spagyric Work from his father.

Petr Klíma-Toušek

The fifth key figure of Czech alchemy was Czech-Austrian mystic Petr Klíma-Toušek (11 May 1901-29 May 1979). This remarkable man has a place in the history of Czech Hermeticism primarily as a contemplative philosopher, and an expert in both medieval and early modern mysticism of the East and West, to which he devoted his extremely extensive work.



In his youth, he lived in Vienna, where he met many Austrian esotericists. He was especially influenced by the famous theosophist, Dr. Frederick Eckstein. According to his testimony, he became a Rosicrucian himself in Vienna in the 1920s, but this information is brief and without further details. He has a place in the history of Czech alchemy as a translator of a number of rare historical texts that otherwise would not have reached Czech readers, imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain by a political regime that suppressed all spiritual teachings. He did not deal with laboratory aspect, though.

Klíma-Toušek mainly translated texts of the Rosicrucian Tradition. In particular, he is the author of the first known Czech translation of the *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (1938). This print was published in an edition of 50 copies in the form of hand-coloured lithographies and marked a great advance in the study of the true content of authentic Rosicrucianism in Bohemia. A second, somewhat modernized edition of his translation was reissued in 2010.

Among his other manuscript translations or studies that have some relation to Alchemy are the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1938 typescript) and the undated typescripts *Hermes Trismegistos: on the Inner Birth*, Johannes de Monte Snyder's *Metamorphosis Metallorum*, *The Coronation of Nature*, *On the Manufacture of the Philosopher's Stone*, and Paracelsus' *Chemical Psalter*. In addition, he also translated the fundamental Rosicrucian writings, which included the *Fama fraternitatis*, *Confessio fraternitatis*, *The Chymical Wedding* (undated typescript), and Theophilus Swieghardt's *The Mirror of Wisdom of the Rosicrucians* (1937).



Theofanus Abba

The sixth key figure of Czech Alchemy was Josef Louda, publishing under the pen name Theofanus Abba (14 December 1901 – 22 December 1975), who is rightly considered the most important Czech Alchemist of the 20th century.

Abba's journey towards the Great Work was inspired by his stays in Belgium and France between 1925 and 1931, where he met François Jollivet-Castelot, who introduced him not only to Alchemy but also to Martinism and Rosicrucianism. Abba continued to work in this vein with his circle of friends until 1948, when his esoteric activities were for a long time prevented by everything that was going on at that time (Abba was a victim of communist persecution, and a large part of his property was confiscated).

His work is contained in four comprehensive volumes. His initiatic trilogy is called *From the Legacy of the Prophets* and consists of the following volumes: 1. *Physical Transmutation* (1930), 2. *The Interpretation of the Revelations of John the Theologian* (1939), and 3. *Letters to Paracelsus* (typescript written between 1939 and 1974 and published in 2011 and 2019). An additional volume containing all the author's other works, entitled *Corpus Hermeticum Theofani*, was published in 2017. He is also the creator of the *Alchemical Tarot of Theofanus Abba*, the graphic design of which was created by Abba's disciple, alchemist and prominent Czech surrealist **Martin Stejskal** (born 19th February 1944). Martin Stejskal gave the final colour form to this initiatory tarot deck in 2018, in collaboration with Czech Hermeticist and artist **Michal Stránský** and the author of this present article.

Abba wrote quite openly that in 1928, he first achieved success in making *argyrophé* (albedo), and he tested the transmutative efficacy of the white powder with success. His students still possessed samples of silver transmuted in the same way in the 1980s.

Theofanus Abba was an extremely educated man, fluent in Czech, French,



6 - 1

AMANS



2 - 2

ISIS



14 - 3

MICHAEL

German and English, he also had considerable knowledge of Hebrew and Latin. He studied Hermetic doctrines all his life, so that he eventually became a profound student of almost all of Hermeticism. His written work is very close to both the Czech and French esoteric traditions, and its depth cannot be sufficiently appreciated.

Dr. Jiří Ryšánek

The seventh key figure in Czech Alchemy was Dr. Jiří Ryšánek (8 January 1926 – 27 May 1988). Compared to the previously mentioned masters, he was already a representative of a new generation. He worked as a medical specialist in a psychiatric hospital in Kroměříž. Dr. Ryšánek was also engaged in practical laboratory work. However, he was particularly an expert in medieval and early modern alchemy, of which he became a leading Czech translator. In the 1970s and 1980s he created a monumental translation work, *Anthology of Alchemical Texts I-IV*, which contains comprehensive Czech translations of all the main representatives of European Alchemy, along with basic interpretations. The entire typescript, which has never



been published in full, is 1448 pages long. A kind of supplement to this corpus of Alchemical masters is Rysanek's 1985 book *Spiritual Alchemy and its Relation to Mystical Practice*, which precisely formulates the alchemical philosophy of the author.

Vladislav Zadrobílek

The eighth key figure of Czech alchemy was Vladislav Zadrobílek, writing under the pen name D. Ž. Bor (14th November 1932 – 11th December 2010). As Dr. Jiří Ryšánek, with whom he was intimately acquainted, Bor was a representative of the new generation of Czech alchemy. D. Ž. Bor was an exceptionally creative person: he wrote scientific treatises, prose literature, and poetry; he also painted pictures using a wide range of techniques, produced artistic book bindings, organised exhibitions, and was a cultural organiser.



In the period when Hermetic literature was not allowed to be published in books, he began to publish samizdats³ of various Hermetic texts at great personal risk. Between 1979 and 1989 he published 25 hermetic titles in this way, most of which were oriented specifically towards alchemy. He published translations of his friends as well as his own translations and studies.

His major samizdat editions were the eleven-volume *Tresor of Hermetism*, containing mostly Alchemical and Kabbalistic classics, and the five-volume "Document", covering a wide area from Pythagoras and Pythagorean studies through Dr. John Dee's *The Hieroglyphic Monad* to a reflection on alchemical themes in the field of surrealism (the last one being credited to Martin Stejskal). Since Zadrobílek was the only one of the above mentioned who lived to see the Velvet Revolution, and thus the democratization of Czechoslovakia in 1989, he had the opportunity to publish his samizdats as standard editions. He founded the publishing house, Trigon, which is mainly oriented towards Alchemical literature; and it has published a number of very valuable books. The highlight

3. Bootlegged version of banned books.

of his publishing output was the publication of the thirteen-volume *Alchemical Edition of Logos*, which he jokingly called *Theatrum alchemicum Bohemicum* when in private, containing the works of the major classics of Alchemy



He was an advocate of classical Alchemy and a great lover of Fulcanelli, whom he translated into Czech with his friends **Tomáš Vondrovic** (born 18th August 1948) and **Vlastimil Šimek**. The translators were hidden under the cipher T. F. C., Tres Faciunt Collegium. By the time I met him, he was no longer actively interested in Spagyric, although he was remarkably knowledgeable about it, and gave me a number of very valuable pointers, including helping me to study the labyrinth of writings of Paracelsus' student Leonhradt Thurneysser zum Thurn. But he himself was oriented towards the Great Work, which was everything to him.

Vladislav Zadrobílek was a warm-hearted man with a jovial exterior, a true teacher with a comprehensive knowledge of Alchemy and Hermeticism in general. He loved humour and young people and tried to help them in their lives and in their study of Hermeticism. He profoundly influenced the new generation that gathered around him, of which I was one. With his lively interest in alchemy, Martinism, and Rosicrucianism, he imprinted Czech Hermeticism of the beginning of the 21st century once again with that ancient seal which opens the true *way of the heart*, and is accepted exclusively *sub rosa*.

Frater Lukáš Loužecký

Lukáš Loužecký (born 1983) is a private historian of Central European Hermeticism. He lives in Prague and works as editor-in-chief of the Czech hermetic publishing house Vodnář. In the "Bibliotheca Horev" series, which he created, he has so far published 27 volumes of basic sources of Hermeticism in Czech and 3 translated volumes in English in the "Czech Hermetics" series. He is a member of the Martinist Order in Bohemia, and the Societas Italica Rosae+Crucis.





Illustrations from *La Pater* by Alphonse Mucha (1899)

Alchemy and Rosicrucianism: ***the perennial tension towards what has been lost***

Part I. A Contradictory Relationship

The link between the Rosicrucian tradition and Alchemy is definitely 'discovered'; deliberately highlighted from the manifestos. However, this relationship is far from being devoid of intrinsic tensions and contradictions, which seem to me to be the key to attempting a spiritual approach to the subject, an approach that would bring tangible repercussions to our initiatory and spiritual journey.

Jean-Pierre Bayard has pointed out that the Alchemist Paracelsus is the only real person referred to in the *Fama Fraternitatis*. It is said that although he was not a member of the Brotherhood, he diligently read the Liber M[undi]. We find here a first level of alchemical definition, as a synonym of knowledge of nature and corresponding therapeutic ability, and the *Fama* is keen to point out that such activity meets with the strenuous opposition of the ignorant.

A further reference to Alchemy is presented in the *Confessio Fraternitatis*, where we read in chapter twelve:

In concluding our Confession we must seriously urge you to discard, if not at all, then most of the vile books of the pseudo-chemists. They amuse themselves by abusing the Holy Trinity for foul purposes, or deceiving men with monstrous figures and riddles. Our age has produced many of this type: one of the foremost is the "Amphitheatrical" comedian, a man most ingenious in deceit.¹

This passage seems extremely important. On the one hand, it warns the reader against unclear publications, it reiterates that the "operative" and "chemical"

1. *Rosicrucian Trilogy: Modern Translations of the Three Founding Documents* by J. Godwin, C. McIntosh & D.P. McIntosh, Weiser books, 2016

aspects of the Royal Art are secondary to the spiritual ones; it considers in all probability the *Tria Prima* (Sulphur, Salt and Mercury) as symbols of the Trinity that should not be abused by exchanging the signifier with the signified. However, the author does not reject the alchemical practice en bloc. He could not do so on the one hand because he declared that Paracelsus had a vocation akin to that of the Brotherhood, and on the other because the “Amphitheatrical Comedian” - who is none other than Heinrich Khunrath, author of the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Eternae* - is hardly to be dismissed as a charlatan in the eyes of the Rosicrucians. Frances Yates reminds us of this in the third chapter of her seminal text on the Rosicrucian Enlightenment, where she states that Khunrath’s work was strongly influenced by John Dee, whose *Monas Hieroglyphica* he adopts, and constitutes a link between Dee’s philosophy and the philosophy expressed in the manifestos². In this presentation of Khunrath we might then see at work that *ludibrium* which Johann Valentin Andreae would explicitly refer to in his *Chemical Wedding*.

The sense of the phrase, in light of the obstacles and the need to camouflage oneself set out in the first manifesto with respect to Paracelsus, is that the climate of scarce freedom requires natural scientists to veil their communications. This leads to the proliferation of pseudo-scientists, yet Khunrath is the foremost (one of the most advanced) in the art of deceit, understood here as the ability to camouflage and hide.

Finally, Alchemy literally dominates the scene in the third Rosicrucian publication, the *Chemical Wedding*, which nevertheless has an enigmatic ending. This text, even more strongly than the two manifestos, underlines the tension and conflict between the two poles, Alchemy and Rosicrucianism, that are the subject of this essay.

On the one hand, we have a further criticism of the puffers and those who misunderstand Art in the belief that it should be directed exclusively at material ends. In this regard, the Italian scholar Gianfranco De Turreis rightly says that, while it is true that in part Andreae’s *ludibrium* should be interpreted in the sense of “mockery” or “derision”, it is nevertheless addressed:

2. F. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 1972. Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2002 p.51

ESTOTE.



ADMINISTRATIVE
NON-ESTO.

OMNIVM EFFECTOREM,
CETERAS POTES TATES,
MINISTRAS HABETOTE.

AD
PRIMUM
VOTA PRAECESQ.
AD
INFERIORES
HYMNI SVNTO.

*Not against the Rose-Cross itself, but against two categories of characters who are well highlighted in the narrative: those who, at the beginning of the story, manage not to reach the King's castle by taking the first of the four routes available to travellers invited to the wedding, but who turn out to be nothing more than braggarts, and who fail to pass the decisive test of the Scales of the Artists, and are therefore expelled or even condemned.*³

So there is a distancing, again, from those who would be guilty of a misunderstanding. However, as De Turrís rightly notes, Christian Rosenkreutz himself is the victim of an unexpected ending. Although he has understood the true extent of the operations he has witnessed and is *Equus Aurei Lapidis*, he is nevertheless destined to perform a menial task in order to serve out the punishment of having seen “Venus without veils”. Moreover, in the truncated finale, in which two sheets are lost, the author briefly says that Christian Rosenkreutz did not even undertake this task, but simply returned home.

To summarise what we find in the three manifestos, we have a perfect identity with the three meanings of Alchemy described by Bayard in his study dedicated to the history of the Brotherhood⁴: the simple transformation of metals (despised in the *Confessio*), the knowledge of nature and the consequent therapeutic ability (Paracelsus in the *Fama*, the Brotherhood's medical vocation) and lastly the transformation of the inner being, the noblest operation in respect of which, however, *something has been lost* as the author of the *Chemical Wedding* tells us.

Part II. Paradise Lost

The proximity with another Western Initiatic Way that confronts the candidate with *something lost* seems evident, and my thesis is that Alchemy represents within the Rosicrucian tradition precisely the symbol of a fragmentary knowledge, belonging to a past that is difficult to recover, susceptible to a profound corruption over the centuries. This trace of nostalgia for a lost past can also be found in the words of a previous Supreme Magus, and therefore affects us directly as members of the SRIA. I refer specifically to William Wynn Westcott's

3. G. De Turrís, *L'immaginario dei Rosacroce*, [available online here](#), English translation by author.

4. J.P. Bayard, *I Rosacroce – Storia, Dottrine, Simboli*, 1975, Ed. Mediterranee, Roma, 1990 p. 83

The Rosicrucians: past and present, at home and abroad, in which we read:

*The Rosicrucian Societies of Anglia, Scotia and the United States, alike Masonic bodies, are by no means the only descendants of the original Collegium, for in Germany, and Austria there are other Rosicrucian Colleges of more direct descent than our own, which are not fettered by any of the limitations which Freemasonry has imposed upon us, and some of these, although not composed of many members, include students who understand many curious phenomena, which our Zelators have not studied. The German Rosicrucians keep their Colleges and membership entirely secret, they print no transactions nor even any notices, and it is almost impossible to identify any member.*⁵

It is difficult to say exactly what he was referring to. The reference to Germany cannot but make us think of the Brotherhood of the Golden and Rosy Cross, whose regulations have recently been illustrated in a detailed historical reconstruction by Pascal H. Gregoire in a research paper available on the SRIA London website⁶. These rules explicitly mention, in Article 27 of the Naples manuscript, the fact that the Brothers had to change their age by means of the *Stone*, and subsequently change their name and surname, and lead a wandering existence in order to camouflage the privileges linked to their alchemical knowledge. Apart from the fact that such documents exist, and that there is a substantial concordance between the various manuscripts that have come down to us, none of us is today able to properly decode the truth they conceal. In this respect, there is certainly some truth in what is not real.

Part III. Longevity, Transformation and Transmutation

The question of longevity lends itself well to symbolise the deeply critical issue of operativity, the notions related to it and the *vexata quaestio* whether only the mastery of such notions and skills can grant the authorised attribution of the title of initiate. We are, after all, confronted with an issue that is historically close to us and concerns the stormy relations between SRIA and the Golden Dawn first, and then within the Golden Dawn itself.

5. W.W. Westcott, *The Rosicrucians: past and present, at home and abroad*. London, 1915

6. Pascal H. Gregoire, *Spreading of the Rosicrucian Ideals*, 2021. Available at srialondon.org

I believe that the most profound message that can be gleaned from the documents presented so far has been well summarised by René Guénon in Chapter XLII of his *Considerations on Initiation*⁷, dedicated to the subject of the difference between Transformation and Transmutation. The author bases his considerations on the fact that longevity constituted in the past, according to some, the distinctive characteristic of the *true* Rosicrucians. Subsequently, he considers how this faculty, beyond the material aspects, has a profound spiritual value and is linked to the biblical notion that the patriarchs had lives significantly longer than ours, and that in general human life has been shortening over the millennia.

If the objective of initiation is the re-establishment of an Edenic state, it goes without saying that the privilege of longevity must be included in the privileges that it grants. Nevertheless, Guénon specifies that, generally, those who dedicate themselves to the study of the traditional doctrines accord little importance to the material aspect of the prolongation of the earthly existence, and in general to the domain of *transmutation* that constitutes the second of the three alchemical aspects analyzed in this paper. This is for the simple reason that, in the eyes of the initiate, contingency is of secondary importance, and his ultimate goal is the *transformation* of his own being. A true change of state beyond the limitations of form, then, rather than a quantitative prolongation of the current state.

This possibility, the third and noblest one, the one that Christian Rosenkreutz is on the verge of realising in the Alchemical Wedding, is the true aim of the initiatory path, the attainment of an internal primordial state, to which nothing necessarily bombastic on the material plane corresponds, but which constitutes the true liberation reserved for the initiates. Our Zelator ritual alludes to this, dare I say it be said, laying the foundations for its realisation, at a moment that can be precisely identified.

Part IV. Origin or End?

In some ways, the Chemical Wedding has a disappointing aspect in its ending, and the whole relationship between Alchemy and Rosicrucians, as it comes

7. R. Guénon, *L'intégrale, Ethos*, Barcelona, 2020 p.413 and following

down to us today, could be defined as one of irretrievable loss. Frater Westcott's nostalgia, his longing for purer forms of Rosicrucianism, can certainly become ours too. And yet I would like to propose to you, with this paper, to keep the perspective open to a symbolic reading of precisely this feeling of lack, of this nostalgia that touches us whenever we go in search of our initiatory origins in the past. In this sense, Alchemy can become an extremely powerful and effective symbol of a *lost good*. Paraphrasing Guénon, who said that 1717 does not mark the birth but the degeneration of Freemasonry, so we could perhaps say that the Manifestos and the Alchemical Wedding mark in some ways the end of the Rosicrucians as far as their alchemical knowledge is concerned.

When we move in the initiatic sphere, the *coniunctio oppositorum* is constantly realised, also from the historical point of view, and so it happens that every foundation of an initiatic order is in reality also its end. For to speak of esoteric realities is to speak of the human being, and does not the Bible teach us that the beginning of humanity coincides with its fall? So probably the highest teaching that the initiatic orders impart to us is precisely the lesson of a deep longing, the non-depressive but deeply yearning awareness of being fallen, of not being in the full possibilities of our being. I think I can say, from the perspective of a Frater who walks the Rosicrucian path, that when I confront Alchemy it appears to me accompanied by the words of Federico Garcia Lorca in his *Guitarra*:

Llora flecha sin blanco, / la tarde sin mañana, / y el primer pájaro muerto / sobre la rama.

It cries arrow without a target / in the evening without tomorrow / and the first dead bird / on the branch.

And it is precisely this, perhaps, that is its highest *raison d'être* today.

The theme of nostalgia, of the yearning melancholy towards a truth *beyond form* and which, therefore, in its own sense requires *transformation*, is well exemplified by Dürer's well-known engraving, *Melencolia I* of 1514. In this image, we find an alchemical allegory of the yearning for an unattainable and longed-for good. I have always found it very curious that the author indicated *Melencolia I* in the inscription held up by the bat in the upper left-hand corner, since the engraving

is not part of a series that presupposes subsequent iterations of other types of melancholia. With regard to this question, I find fascinating the answer suggested by art historian Erwin Panofsky in his study of Dürer's work⁸.

In chapter five of this essay, we read that Dürer most likely referred to the three types of furor melancholicus characterised by Cornelius Agrippa in his *De Occulta Philosophia*. In the first type of melancholy, the imagination is stronger than the mind, and characterises the temperament of artists. When the ratios are reversed we have the second type, and we have the scientists. Lastly, the melancholy in which intuition exceeds the other faculties is described, a configuration that belongs to the theologians. Thus, Dürer's indication would be relative to a *first melancholy* in a qualitative, rather than quantitative, sense. We see then that in reconciling Alchemy and Melancholia we find ourselves projected into an exquisitely Rosicrucian cultural climate, as can be understood by reading these lines taken from the well-known monograph by Frances Yates already quoted:

*I said that the Rosicrucian was one fully in the stream of the Renaissance Hermetic-Cabalist tradition, but distinguished from the earlier phases of the movement by his addition of alchemy to his interests. This did not alter the basic adherence of the Rosicrucian to the scheme of "occult philosophy" as laid down by Cornelius Agrippa.*⁹

Melancholy, the nostalgic contemplation of otherworldly truths, seems to me to be a particular type, historically determined, of a sentiment proper to Gnostic Christianity: Desire. Once again we find confirmation of the fact that an essential feature of the Initiatory Path is its unveiling in the eyes of the neophyte of his state of need, of deficiency, of need for reintegration.

To conclude, I would like to share with you my innermost feelings on these issues, and as is often the case, words are not the best means to convey such perceptions. I would therefore like to invite you to listen to one of my compositions for guitar, a short piece played by the talented Italian-Mexican musician Gianluca Daglio:

Sarabanda della Nostalgia (Link)

Frater Kevin Swierkosz-Lenart

8. E. Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 1955. Princeton University Press

9. F. Yates, o.c., p. 279



Melencolia I by Albrecht Dürer (1514)



The Layer Monument, Church of St John Maddermarket, Norwich

Is Alchemy but a Melancholy Vanity?

All things are artificial for nature is the art of God.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)

In this coffin, by the dust of his alchemic body, he converts the lead into gold.

Plate upon the coffin of Sir Thomas Browne

I am... Sir Thomas Browne.

Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940)

A monument to our Art

There are forty medieval churches within the city of Norwich, a greater number than that of any other European city north of the alps. Such a gothic patrimony has inevitably ensured the preservation of many remarkable monuments that justify the attention of a student of *our Art*. Indeed, one such is to be found in the church of St John Maddermarket. It is extraordinary that I stood in front of this monument for the first time so recently despite being born in Norwich. So long a journey to take in preparation for my encounter. Ostensibly a memorial monument to Christopher Layer (1531-1600), it contains such a profusion of alchemic imagery that one cannot but be left with the conclusion that it truly is an expression of the achievement of those dedicated students of *Hermes* who practised their *Science and Art* in Norwich.

What do we see?

Marsilio Ficino and the Florentine Academy posited that when one looks at an object a quality of light projects from the eye and, after reaching the object, returns with an image that can live within the mind of the viewer. That image, a phantasy, if of an exalted quality can act as an intermediary between the mind of the viewer and the unseen spiritual world that seeks to communicate with us.

The purpose of the art of the renaissance was to provide a language of imagery through which the dedicated artist could know God.

In an exactly analogous way words on a page when read move from the mind of the author into that of the reader. If well-chosen they might have the most profound effect, forming an interior image through which a mental energy, even a spiritual power, may perhaps affect the reader. Thus, the careful description of an ancient monument to our art might transform the reader in an entirely unexpected way, even one resident in a distant land.

What should I write?

To create a paper that is an adequate response to such a profound monument, one must avoid detached academic analysis which would be dead to the inner life of *our Art*, the legerdemain of a dilettante puffer. Instead, I will attempt to combine literature, writing from the heart, with our science, which is the *Art and Craft* of the form and spirit of Nature.

An unexpected perspective on the history of Norwich

I am aware that I will have already made some statements that require more elaboration regarding the city of Norwich and how it came to support a community of alchemists.

Norwich rose to prominence in the late 10th century as the main town in the Earldom of East Anglia, which was coterminous with the former Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of the same name. Its fertile hinterland, commercial activity and trade routes to northern Europe hastened its rise and by 16th and throughout 17th centuries it was the second largest city in England. Of its population of 25-30,000 almost a quarter were from what is now Belgium and the Netherlands creating a cosmopolitan, international city with French and Dutch being widely spoken. Sadly, its prominence was not to last, never-the-less, Norwich retains its medieval splendour and is the most complete Tudor city in England.

The parish of St George, Tombland

Arthur Dee (1579-1651) was the son of John Dee (1527-1608), the Elizabethan magus, statesman and polymath, and travelled with him and Edward Kelly throughout Germany, Bohemia, and Poland. Arthur Dee's life has largely been overshadowed by that of his more famous and extraordinary father. Yet his own achievements were considerable. He completed his medical training at the University of Basle and became by 1615 court physician to Queen Anne, wife of King James I. On the recommendation of James I, he was appointed physician to Tsar Michael I of Russia, the first Tsar of the Romanov dynasty. During the fourteen years he spent in Russia he was able to continue his hermetic work and wrote his great unpublished book *Arca Arcanorum* (1634). He returned to England in 1635 and then retired to Norwich in the early 1640's bringing with him his collection of books and hermetic artifacts many of which he had inherited from his father. He lived in the parish of St George Tombland close to the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity.

John Dee had visited Norwich twice and maintained some correspondence with people in Norwich and Norfolk so it may well be that a small community had been established who practised our Art and that this was the reason that Arthur Dee retired to Norwich. It cannot have been a coincidence that in 1637 Thomas Browne had also travelled from London also to live in St George Tombland.

Thomas Browne (1605-82) was been educated at Oxford University and continued his medical training at the Universities of Montpellier, Padua, and Leiden. Completing his training in 1633 he chose to move to Norwich in 1637 and practised medicine in the city until his death.

Dee and Browne became close friends and upon Dee's death both his and his father's books and papers passed to Thomas Browne.

A melancholy alchemist

In so short a paper it is not possible to do justice to the work of Thomas Browne. He was a polymath who lived when it was possible for one man to seek to

encompass all the knowledge that is. Apart from his practise of medicine, his interests included hermeticism, theology, antiquarianism, science, and alchemy. He was immersed in allusion, symbolism, word play, riddles, codes, and cyphers.

His published work includes *Religio Medici* (The Religion of a Doctor) published in 1643 which was his spiritual testament as a physician. In *A Letter to a Friend* (published posthumously in 1690) he writes of the death of a patient with the deepest humanity and empathy.

His book *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) concerned scientific experiment as a way of knowing the world and finding truth. His final two works were *Urn Burials* (1658) and *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658) which were written to be read together.

Urn Burials whilst ostensibly concerning the discovery of a number of cremation urns near the village of Great Walsingham in North Norfolk is actually a *memento mori*, a meditation on death and our return to the womb of the earth. It contains the declamation:

But man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, pompous in the grave, solemnising natiivities, and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery, in the infamy of his nature. Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within.



The Garden of Cyrus (1658) considers the history of gardens and the nature of the Quincunx. The book opens with what purports to be the rediscovery of an ancient English secret, which is of the ideal pattern for the planting of apple trees when creating an orchard. This pattern is the Quincunx, a rhomboidal figure of fivefold geometry that permits the maximum light to reach each tree. Browne then goes on to meditate on how the Quincunx is part of divine creation. The book's many themes are a metaphor for his theories of alchemy and the hermetic significance of the Quincunx.

But it is in his friendship with Sir Robert Paston that Thomas Browne's reputation and authority as an alchemist was acknowledged. Sir Robert Paston, later 1st Earl of Yarmouth (1631-83), was educated at Oxford University and France before beginning his political career. Despite his political activity he maintained a wide range of scientific, philosophical, and hermetic interests becoming a Founding Fellow of the Royal Society in 1663. He also, with the support of Thomas Browne, established an alchemical laboratory at his family seat, Oxnead Hall in Norfolk. Little remains of the striking interior of Oxnead Hall, but it can perhaps be imagined from the extraordinary painting 'The Paston Treasure' commissioned by Sir Robert Paston as shown here.



The Paston Treasure commissioned by Sir Robert Paston (c.1670)

This painting was the subject of an exhibition at Norwich Castle Museum:

The Paston Treasure: A Painting Like No Other ([Link](#))

The purpose and success of Sir Robert's laboratory work remains controversial. Some believe that it was a desperate attempt to restore the fortune that Sir Robert Paston had squandered and that he himself was a relic of the pre-scientific age. But perhaps it is better for him to speak for himself. In a letter to Thomas Browne, Sir Robert Paston wrote:

I have at Oxnead seen this salt change black as ink and hope to have an excellent aurum potable, and if the signs in Sendivogus description be true, I have the key which answers to what he says that if a man has that which will dissolve gold as warm water doth ice, you will have that which gold was first made in earth.

In 1671, King Charles II and his Court visited Norwich, during which King Charles called upon Thomas Browne at his home. The culmination of the visit was a banquet held by the city at which the King had decided to confer the honour of knighthood on a leading citizen. That citizen, proposed by the Mayor and Corporation was Thomas Browne. Sir Thomas Browne died in 1682.

Alchemy in Norwich

Norwich of the 17th Century, as we have learned, was an open thriving city with a diverse and international population. Its aristocrats, civic leaders, physicians, theologians, and citizens lived as Dame Frances Yeates has said, in a 'world of spirits, fairy folk, demons, witches, ghosts, and conjurors. Its intellectual leaders influenced by neoplatonic, hermetic, and cabbalistic traditions.'

However, we must briefly take our leave of Norwich and travel to Madrid where Sir Thomas Browne was awakened by the opening of a book.

Metempsychosis in Madrid

In 1920/21, Jorge Luis Borges, a young Argentinian student in Madrid, came

across the work of Sir Thomas Browne. Reading his books, Borges had an overwhelming personal experience such that he saw himself as a fitting vessel into which Browne's ideas could reincarnate. Indeed, throughout his life Borges never ceased to 'converse' with Browne over their shared interest in wordplay, masque, symbolism, hermeticism, literary style, and wit.

Borges, a committed agnostic, speculated on the theory of metempsychosis, the transmigration of the soul from one incarnation into the next. Browne admitted the possibility of reincarnation through the Grace of God. Borges regarded metempsychosis as the reincarnation of ideas, culture, and civilisation but found himself compelled 'to be Sir Thomas Browne.'

Borges became one of the greatest writers in the Spanish language of the 20th Century.

Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius

In 1940 Borges wrote one of his most famous short stories 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. Writing in the first-person Borges described the discovery of a fragment of a faked encyclopaedia that included an entry for a previously unknown land called Uqbar situated near Armenia and Persia. All of the legends, myths, and religion of Uqbar concerned a world called Tlon whose inhabitants believed in magical idealism and so denied objective reality.

As the story unfolds books written in English begin to appear that describe Tlon in comprehensive detail and finally physical artifacts of that mythical world manifest. In a postscript Borges recounted how he discovered that the existence of Uqbar and the myth of Tlon was the creation of Orbis Tertius. Orbis Tertius was a hidden fraternity created in the 17th Century dedicated to hermetic and social renewal. However, over time their spiritual purpose was lost and the creation of Uqbar and Tlon was undertaken with the purpose of Orbis Tertius seizing power and reshaping the world in the form of the myth of Tlon.

Borges realises that so successful will be their enterprise that the language, culture, science, and civilisation of the world as was then known would be

extinguished and entirely replaced by that of Tlon.

At the conclusion of the story Borges makes a single act of defiance, one that would create a text of infinite variety: the translation of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial* into the Spanish of its greatest poet of the Golden Age, Francisco de Quevedo.

An allegorical satire on the failure of Rosicrucianism

'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' cannot be read as having a single meaning but there are clues in the text. For our purpose, the most interesting is that Borges identifies the earliest faked reference to Uqbar in a fictitious work he attributes to Johannes Valentinus Andrea. From that and the description of Orbis Tertius, the hidden fraternity devoted to hermeticism, cabbala, and social renewal, we are to realise that the text is a biting satire on Rosicrucianism. Borges had also made a study of *Sartor Resartus* (1831), a parody written by Thomas Carlyle that prefigures events that occur in the genesis of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA) and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

In the alternative history Borges creates, he identifies a moment of crisis for Orbis Tertius, that is Rosicrucianism, when the fraternity loses its faith in its mission and in the Holy Trinity, and placing itself under American leadership, follows its new head in pursuing power and world domination. It seeks to recreate this world as Tlon because it can.

In his final sentence Borges turns to the man that, for him incarnates Christian Rosencreutz, none other than Sir Thomas Browne. Borges most ominous warning is not that if Rosicrucianism loses its faith in God and spiritual knowledge, and instead glories in politics and power, that it will fail. No, it is that something far worse would happen, darkness could invade its philosophy, its colleges, and its fratres, so turning them to a malevolent purpose.

Return from Buenos Aires

After a somewhat longer digression than I had anticipated let us now consider

the monument to Christopher Layer.

The Church of St John Maddermarket

The Pyramids are pillars of snow and all passes in a moment

Sir Thomas Browne

St John, Maddermarket and its Churchyard were situated between the guildhall close to the city market, and the houses of civic leaders. It is dedicated to St John the Baptist whose feast day is midsummers day. He is revered by all who labour to achieve success in *our Art* for it was he who was called by God to baptise our Lord, to dissolve his form in the living water of the Jordan and reform him as he lifted our Saviour to receive the descending spirit. Thus transmuted our Lord could begin the three years of his ministry.

'Maddermarket' is taken to refer to the trading of madder in and around the site of the church. Madder is a plant from which a red dye can be extracted and would have been widely used in the city's weaving industry. However, no historical reference to such a market has ever been found. Yet to us it cannot but be clearer, for this is a church that *dyes red*, that colours without increase in mass, it is a church of *Our Art*.

Many city churches in Norwich still have their churchyard and St John's is no exception. However, one tombstone quite extraordinarily contains the unmistakable image of a serpent biting its tail, the Ouroboros:



And so, I find an image that unexpectedly refers to my earlier paper published in the June 2021 pamphlet... *My end is in my beginning.*

The Layer Monument

*Time which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things,
hath yet spared these monuments.*

Sir Thomas Browne, *Urn Burials*

The Layer Monument is situated on the south wall of the west aisle. It is dedicated to Christopher Layer (1533-1600) and was commissioned in his memory by his youngest son. It bears the inscription:

This urn of cold marble covers Christopher Layer who bore Christ in his heart along with Imperial Minds, Numa known for Justice, Fabius for his legal robe, and Cato for his civic morals. He had seen thrice twenty and thrice three years when he gave his body to this earth. He was great in years but greater in honour, for twice was he Mayor of Norwich...

The monument thus represents an Urn Burial and so prefigures, perhaps inspires, the book by Thomas Browne.

The inscription mentions three classical figures. Numa Pompilius was the second King of Rome after Romulus. Known for his piety and wisdom, he requested that books containing the knowledge that he had received from the gods *be buried with him*. These books were rediscovered during the time of Cato the Elder who decreed that they should be destroyed as no one then living was wise enough to be entrusted with the wisdom Numa had preserved. *Ours is a secret art*. The Fabians were a Patrician family who won fame for dedicating themselves to the defence of Rome unto their death. Thus, this inscription tells us of the secret knowledge hidden in a tomb that can only be recovered by the wise and that death awaits those who seek it by force.

Let us now look at the images on the monument...



The overall conception and execution of this monument, by an unknown artist, is in the Mannerist style. Mannerism of the late Renaissance emphasised the use of art in an intentionally symbolic way using classical and antique visual references to convey spiritual intensity.

At the centre of the monument are Christopher Layer, his wife Barbara and their three sons and five daughters. Above the heads of the couple are their respective family shields - that of a stripped unicorn and a red lion. These are intended to convey the status, achievement, and *qualities of each family*. The figures are clothed in black except for Christopher Layer who wears his scarlet mayoral robe. The figures face an urn which represents the location of the earthly remains of the couple. A death's head faces us from the centre of the monument, above the skull the cloud's part to reveal the sky-blue heavens and a golden sun.

In four niches on each side of the monument are figures representing Pax (Peace), Gloria (Glory), Vanitas (Vanity), and Labor (Labour). Together with the skull they form a fivefold Quincunx.

What are we to see?

From a cursory glance at the monument, it is impossible to ignore its resemblance to Plate Eleven of the *Mutus Liber* (1677). Here we see the Artist and his Soror



Mutus Liber, Plate 11 (1677)

Mystica kneeling before the furnace in which the work of the second stage is taking place within the sealed vessel above an inverted cone and flaming fire. There are four open windows, or empty niches behind them. In the upper panel two angels bear the descending spirit of Mercurius who will enter the form that the kneeling couple are refining.

Christopher and Barbara Layer are positioned, as are the artist and his wife, on the right and left of the memorial, as it faces us, that is the active and receptive positions, respectively. The Urn between them is a representation of the furnace within which their dust, their enduring matter, will be transmuted by prayer and the Grace of God, into a new and perfect form.

In this coffin, by the dust of his alchemic body, he converts the lead into gold.

Contrasting with the four empty windows in the *Mutus Liber*, the niches of the monument are filled. Those of the two upper niches represent *Gloria* and *Pax*. *Gloria* stands robed as a goddess of antiquity with her feet placed on a crescent moon. She sways as if in an ecstatic trance, 'stepping out of herself,' full of the spirit of God. She represents both Gloriana, Elizabeth the Virgin Queen, and The Queen of Heaven. *Pax* is the heavenly king who triumphs over all and brings peace, who is known as Apollo, Sol Invictus, Christ Pantocrator. Together these two images represent the King and Queen, the Bride and Bridegroom, of the alchemical marriage.

Those of the lower niches represent *Vanitas* and *Labor*. *Vanitas* is portrayed as a laughing young boy standing on a golden globe, This a traditional portrayal of Mercurius, or Hermes. *Labor* is an old man carrying a scythe and a shovel two objects that are carried by Saturn who presides over our melancholy art. Saturn is much more than the aged dotard whose time is at an end. As father of Jupiter, he was king of the gods before his overthrow. He had lordship over creation and destruction. His scythe represents the abundance of the harvest as well as the weapon he wielded against his own father. He had a subsidiary name of Sterculius, deriving from *dung* or *manure* referring to the emergence of *life from death*. *The shovel is used to move the verdant manure*. He rises as the hero in the *cloak of red*. He is present at each moment when the fixed matter decays and the

volatile is liberated, and when the volatile is fixed into evolved form. He signifies the descent of the spirit, the entry of the monarch into the holy city.

The apotheosis of Christopher and Barbara Layer

Christopher and Barbara Layer have knelt together in prayer for over four hundred years. Prayer was the ritual act that they and almost all families performed together every day. it suffused daily life. As we see from the *Mutus Liber* it was the supreme gesture of spiritual alchemy accompanying each stage of our work.

Under the guidance of the King and Queen, they seek by *our Art* (Hermes) to *transmute* (Saturn) the old man into the young child and unite the form of the second stage with the spirit of Hermes. Thus, matter itself will teach us that final gesture when at last the cloak of red will clothe the hero of *our Art* who can thus ascent through the cloudy canopy unto the golden sun. And thus Christopher and Barbara Layer will rise in union from their dusty tomb by the light of the Son of the Sun unto eternal perfection.

Rosicrucianism

Sir Thomas Browne tells us that our jewel, the rhomboidal shield, worn by all those who are admitted to the SRIA is of the greatest significance. The jewel is described as a shield which in heraldry bears an image of the *qualities* of, he who bears it. Its fivefold geometric form, the Quincunx is present at the centre of divine creation and so designates all those who pledge themselves as living agents of divine genesis. Jorge Luis Borges cautions us that if we fail it is not our own light that will disappear but the light of the world itself.

Is Alchemy but a Melancholy Vanity?

In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Sir Thomas Browne disputes the Platonic notion according to which knowing is remembering things that our souls once learned and then forgot after crossing the Lethe on their journey to a new incarnation. Browne argued the very reverse; knowing is achieved as we gradually forget all our false notions and erroneous beliefs. Therefore oblivion, for Browne, is the fate of all as we forget who and what is false and find what we know to be true. Thus, *our Art* is a *Melancholy Vanity* as we come to understand how all that we

know and indeed who we have known will inevitably be forgotten. Even Hermes, *our Art*, and Nature herself, whose spirit directs our work will be forgotten by us. It will be vanity to hope to remember but so melancholy to foresee the loss, as by God's Grace perfected matter tinges all that is in the Golden Dawn of the Reddening East.

Frater Stephen Goulder

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