MAGIC OF THE EGG

To be performed on the Night of St. John the Baptist (June 24)

On the Eve of St. John take the egg of a black hen and a glass of water outside under the night sky. Break the egg and drop it, shell and all, into the glass. At dawn, go to look at it and you will see, in its shapes, the fate and troubles you will have to endure.

—from “Mysteries of Sorcery,” a manuscript from the time of the Moors in The Book of St Cyprian the Sorcerer’s Treasure

In one of his first publications (under the pseudonym “J. Ardor”), the short notice “Romantik” (1913), Benjamin criticizes the “false romanticism” taught in school and calls for the birth of a “new Romanticism,” stressing that “the Romantic will to beauty, the Romantic will to truth, the Romantic will to action” are “insuperable” (unüberwindlich) acquisitions of modern culture. In a little-noticed but highly significant essay in the form of a dialogue, also from 1913 (“Dialog über der Religiosität der Gegenwart”), he writes that “we all still live very deeply immersed in the discoveries of Romanticism” and that we have to thank romanticism for the most powerful insights on “the nocturnal side of the natural.” Sharply criticizing the reduction of men to working machines and the debasement of all work to the technical, he insists, in opposition to the illusions of progress and evolution, on the need for a new religion (whose prophets would be Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and Strindberg—i.e., cultural critics of modern civilization) and for a new, “sincere” (ehrlichen) socialism, very different from the conventional one.

—Michael Löwy, On Changing The World
and Dream, inhabit a silent subterranean
shrouded palace of green and black marble
with one gate of horn and one of ivory—
whence she sends out true dreams or false.
Perhaps this edifice is egg-shaped, like a
womb/skull palazzo in Hieronymus Bosch’s
Garden of Eden—or Adam’s first rude hut,
shaped like a half-buried egg by Odilon Redon:
one side: gate of horn
other side: gate of ivory

In other words, there exists an architecture
of the Nocturnal, and it constitutes of course
a school—the School of Night, or as I spell it,
the School of Nite, the kind you might see
advertised on a panel in the NY subway, a
place for tired workers to take evening courses
in useless esoteric subjects simply for the
pleasure (“jouissance”) of learning.

ALBINOS OF ALBANIA

WHEN I was returning from Greece
to Italy and had come to Brundisium,
disembarking I was strolling about
in that famous port. [...] There I saw
some bundles of books exposed for
sale, and I at once eagerly hurried to
them. Now, all those books were in
Greek, filled with marvelous tales, things
unheard of, incredible; but the writers
were ancient and of no mean authority:
Aristaeas of Proconnesus, Isigonus
of Nicaea, Ctesias and Onesicritus,
Philostephanus and Hegesias. The
volumes themselves, however, were
filthy from long neglect, in bad
condition and unsightly. Nevertheless, I
drew near and asked their price; then,
acted by their extraordinary and
unexpected cheapness, I bought a large
number of them for a small sum, and
ran through all of them hastily in the
course of the next two nights. [...] Those
books, then, contained matter
of the following sort: that the most
remote of the Scythians, who pass their
life in the far north, eat human flesh

and subsist on the nourishment of that
food, and are called anthropophagi,
or “cannibals.” Also that there are men
in the same latitude having one eye in
the middle of the forehead and called
Arimaspi, who are of the appearance
that the poets give the Cyclopes. That
there are also in the same region other
men, of marvellous swiftness, whose
feet are turned backwards and do not
point forwards, as in the rest of mankind.
Further, that it was handed down by
tradition that in a distant land called
Albania men are born whose hair turns
white in childhood and who see better by
night than in the daytime.

— Aulus Gellius Attic Nights

The genre of literature described here is
known technically as “pseudoxography”
because the original Greek sense of “paradox”
is something like “amazing thing”—just
like “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.” “Attic Nights”
refers to Greece, not your Granny’s attic,
which it happens is also full of strange
things and can assume an atmosphere of
dream, late at night by the light of a single
dim (lunar) bulb—which casts a glow—in the
shape of an egg. The denizens of such a
microcosm might well be livid / pallid and
silver-haired like Johnny Winter or Jack Frost
(since Earth’s night is in fact its Winter), and
their country might be an other-dimensional
Albania, or Alba (Scotland), or even Albany—a
city of white nights (as in Bely’s St Petersburg)
or of White Knights (as in the Alice books).

THE WIZARD EARL

The original “School of Night” centred on the
sixteenth-century Earl of Northumberland,
a fabulously wealthy young Elizabethan courtier
suspected by his contemporaries of being a
wizard. They were correct; he was.4 His coat of
arms was azure blue with silver moons; hence
his association with Night. Here’s Charles
Nicholl’s description:
He was a man of eclectic skills—a gar-
dener, a chemist, a horseman, and an
occasion an able military commander—but
his chief bent was for science, mathematics and philosophy, which in
the popular verdict meant “magick,” and
earned him his nickname as the “Wizard
Earl.” In these pursuits he was assisted
by his friend and chief scholar, Thomas
Harriot, whom he kept on a handsome
salary of £100, and provided with a
house and laboratory. Harriot was a poly-
math in the late Renaissance mold:
mathematician, astronomer, philoso-
pher, geographer. He is an important
figure in the history of science—he cor-
responded on optics with Kepler; he was
a pioneer of the “perspective trunk,”
or telescope; and he compiled the first
thorough logarithmic tables—but he was
deeply imbued in Renaissance
occultism. Another scientist in the Earl’s
retinue was Walter Warner, whose theo-
ries on the circulation of the blood
predated the more famous William
Harvey’s. According to Aubrey, Warner’s
left hand was missing: “he had only a
stump with five warts upon it” and he
“wore a cuff on it, like a pocket.” Harriot
and Warner, together with the geogra-
pher Robert Hues, came to be known
as the Earl of Northumberland’s “three
magi,” and in his later years of impris-
onment in the Tower they attended
on him: a little “academy of learn-ing” within those bleak walls.

Both Thomas Harriot and Walter Warner were close associates of Marlowe. They were named by Thomas Kyd as Marlowe’s particular friends, “such as he conversed withal.” Marlowe’s involvement in the Northumberland coterie brings him into contact with these speculative minds: scientists or “magi” according to view, really something of both. It probably also brought him into contact with the famous Dr. John Dee. Dee was the grand old man of Elizabethan occultism. He was not a protégé of Northumberland, but he was associated with this group, and particularly with Harriot; many abstruse meetings between the two are recorded in Dee’s diary.

Another important friendship of the Earl’s—important to Marlowe’s story—was with Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh, the great Elizabethan adventurer, courtier and poet, was an older man, and different in temper, but there was a marriage of minds between them. This coterie of philosophers and poets, centered on Northumberland and Raleigh, is a classic expression of late Elizabethan occultism. The mood is sceptical, speculative, experimental: scientific in one sense, but still linked to the animistic precepts and mystical aspirations of Renaissance magic. Needless to say this group was highly controversial, and its activities attracted suspicion. As Aubrey writes, about Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus. In 1583 Bruno landed in London (perhaps as a spy) and gave a series of lectures at Oxford incensing most of his hearers, who denounced him as a madman, pagan, “atheist,” and mountebank. However, he made friends with a few connoisseurs of the strange, such as John Florio, Fulke Greville, Sir Philip Sidney (to whom he dedicated two of the three dialogues he wrote and published in England) and Northumberland and his cronies—including probably Marlowe and Shakespeare (who used Brunonian ideas in The Tempest). Nicholl quotes Bruno’s self-introduction at Oxford; either you warm to this kind of thing, or not: “Behold now standing before you,” he wrote in 1585, “the man who has pierced the air and penetrated the sky, wended his way amongst the stars and overpassed the margins of the world, who has broken down those imaginary divisions between spheres—the first, the eighth, the ninth, the tenth, what you will—which are described in the false mathematics of blind and popular philosophy.”

Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Marsilio Ficino, and John Dee—the other great Renaissance magi—also influenced Marlowe, Shakespeare, the School of Night and all subsequent scions of Hermeticism, and I can only recommend them all to the modern reader.

Without a grasp of the Hermetic Tradition we will fail to overcome religion—the great Project from Bruno to Nietzsche—without jettisoning the Spirit and falling into the trap of vulgar materialism and “information ontology.” We must (re)build for ourselves a School of Night—or anyway, of Nite—and to accomplish this we need first an architecture of the nocturnal. As a step toward this goal, I offer an auto-commentary on my poem, “Ode to Nite,” in the style of Eliot’s Wasteland notes.

**ODE TO NITE**

“Let me associate with the low-brow’d Night”


1/ Lead us backwards into the dark

lunar dynasty

bombs placed delicately

Restore the Ming!

that poisonous subliminal hum

darkness breeds superstition to protect itself

like an opera cape

2/ flame when it’s blown out goes

back into the treasure cave of universal phlogiston

leaving split-second entoptic signature knowledge as the Salamander

a moth appears around the dying wick

becomes a mouth: rebus

whispering welcome to the dark

3/ fanatical luddites blow up power plants

to liberate the Queen of Night

hurl deliberate poison in the reservoir of

rational discourse

LSD in the punch of

sustainable development

w/ champagne

mouths filled with gold dust, moth dust,

fairy gold, dead leaves, graveyard dirt.

and I Marie Laveau Voodoo Queen of this poem proclaims you my sexual zombie

let me be your political guru

inculcating iconodules into the cult

of the Secluded Imam
in Mozart’s Freemasonic opera, Magic Flute, also a night-blooming perfume—flower in India, similar to jasmine.

line 4, “LSD”: Unfortunately, you can’t dose a reservoir with LSD because it will float to the top and lose potency before it reaches anyone’s face. A nice metaphor, tho.

Part 4, line 1, Georges Sorel: Theorist of the Myth of the General Strike, syndicalist anarchist.

line 8: The Queen is compared to a white Japanese radish, which is jokingly thought to resemble the vulva.

Part 5, line 1, “Old Night”: As in Hesiod; see above.

lines 3–5, “Old Mole”: The mole is the symbol of underground subversion and resistance. According to legend, the Hanoverian King’s horse tripped on a mole-hole and threw off the King, who broke his neck. So the Jacobites (supporters of the Stuart Pretenders) used to toast to “the little gentleman in gray velvet.” Another toast, “to the King,” was spoken while holding the wineglass with a decanter of water, signifying that the real King was “over the water,” in exile (in France or Italy).

line 8, “ALL NITE panygyric diner”: The school of Nite is compared to a diner (shiny thinner, shaped like an old Art Deco RR car) in which the Pretender and the Queen are being praised by poets. The blue neon sign blinks “ALL NITE.”

line 10, “Moths”: I once lived in a haunted house in Boulder, Colorado, where one room was found to be full of white moths.

line 12: In Atalanta fugiens the alchemical operation is depicted as “fishing for coral.”

line 14, “moonflowers”: Psychotropic datura blossoms.

line 15, “old frog”: In the haiku by Basho:

old pond:
frog jumps in—
water sound

Part 6, line 1, “logothete”: The Byzantine courtier in charge of documents; a person who creates a reality out of words; a poet.

NIGHT: DOMAINS

Part 7, line 1, “Night’s vast cube”: Night takes the shape of a black velvet-draped Kaaba.

Part 4, line 1, Khaqani: A great Persian poet I hear compare here to Mallarmé.

Part 6, “Pansophic”: All wisdom; the syncretism of Hermeticism. “Panspermia”: everything is alive, the whole universe is seeded with life.

Part 7, “Pharaoh’s phallus”: The dismembered member of Osiris (see Plutarch), also used as a hieroglyph.

CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Those spirits of fire, however, I term them comparatively good in respect of a number of bad, yet are they not simply wellinclined, for they bee by nature ambitious, haughty, and proud, nor do they love vertue for it selfe any whit, but because they would ouerquell and outstrip others with the vainglorious ostentation of it. A humor of monarichizing and nothing els it is, which makes them affect rare qualified studies. Many Atheists are with these spirits inhabited. So far we’ve considered “nocturnal architecture” only from its good side, as dream space, fecund darkness—but a properly

As for the spirits of aire, which have no other visible bodies or form, but such as by the constant glimmering of our eyes is begotten; they are in truth all show and no substance, deluders of our imagination, & nought els. Carpet knights, politeque statesmen, women & children they most conwers with. Carpet knights they inspire with a humor of setting big lookes on it, being the basest cowards vnder heauen, couering an apes hart with a lions case, and making false alarums when they mean nothing but a may–game. Politique statesmen they priuly incite to bleare the worlds eyes with cloudes of common wealth pretences, to broach any eminite or ambiguous humor of their owne under a title of their countries preseruation.

To make it faire or fowl when they list to procure popularity or induce a preamble to some mighty pееce of provoking, to stir vp tempests round about, to resist other preepe, to put metaphagogues and wonders, the more to ratifie their avariciousuritum. Women they underhand instruct to pownce and boulster out they brawn–false deformities, to new perbole with painting their rake–леane withered visages, to set vp flax shops on their forheads when all their owne haire is dead and rotten, to sticke their gums round with Comfets when they haue not a tooth left in their heads to help them to chide withal. Children they seduce with garish objects and toyish babies, abusing them many yeares with slight vanities, so that you see all their whole influence is but thin ouercast vapours, flying clouds dispersed with the least wind of wit or understanding.

— Thomas Nashe, from The Terrors of the Night
dialectic perspective would urge us to examine also its negativity, its halloweenish aspect as “haunted house,” nightmare alley, bad memories, shadows of arid gloom. My friends Raymond Foye and Philip Taaffe called my attention to the seventeenth-century painter Monsù Desiderio, a painter of that identity sometimes thought to be François de Nome, an eccentric obsessive and proto-surrealist whose work consists almost entirely of sinister antique cities seen by night, often in flames, or falling down in earthquakes or wrath-of-God destructions, with scenes of horror and murder taking place amidst urban vistas of menacing statuary. Philip Taaffe owns a few of his works, including one I was able to examine, “Martyrdom of St Agatha.” Here the cityscape presumably represents Catania, Sicily, where the saint was executed on 1 February 251 AD (aged 20 and of course beautiful) by wicked pagans—by having her breasts cut off. (In her honour a pastry is still made by Italians representing breasts in marzipan and cream topped by cherries—I used to eat them at Di Roberti’s sadly now-vanished coffee shop on 1st Avenue in NYC.) Monsù’s Catania is overcast and glum; evening is closing in. Weird “angels,” pagan deities, and spectral gargoyles crowd the façades and roofs of classical buildings—the statues are painted with extra impasto to make them look more 3-D and solid; otherwise the brushstrokes are quite free and impressionistic, although from a proper distance the canvas appears “smooth” in a neo-classical way. A crowd of pagans, looking rather Saracenic or Jewish, attend a flaming altar; a sheep and cow are being dragged to a blood sacrifice near a statue of Mars. The doomed animals are adorned with dying birds. I include here a few more reproductions of Monsù to give an idea of his neurotic obsession with nocturnal architecture. In literature he finds his twin in the Scottish Victorian poet James Thomson (1834–82), who is remembered now only for his long poem “The City of Dreadful Night,” perhaps the most depressing poem ever written.11

NIGHT: DOMAINS

Thomson (not to be confused with the author of “The Seasons,” above) was born in Glasgow and educated in Scotland. His Irish sweetheart died young, thus plunging him into a lifetime of “melancholia.” She haunts the poem. His pen-name, “B.V.,” Byshe Vanolis, was meant as a tribute to both Shelley and Novalis, though he lacked the Romantic optimism of the former and the Romantic mysticism of the latter. But his words could certainly serve as captions for Monsù Desiderio:

City of Dreadful Night

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep; There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain; The pitiless hours like years and ages creep, A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain Of thought and consciousness which never ceases, Of which some moments’ stupor but increases, This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

As I came through the desert thus it was, As I came through the desert: Lo you, There hilltop burning with a brazen glare; Those myriad dusky flames with points a glow Which withered and hissed and darted to and fro; A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell For Devil’s roll-call and some fête of Hell. Yet I strode on austere; No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was. As I came through the desert: Meteors ran And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span;

The zenith opened to a gulf of flame, The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth’s fixed frame; The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged: Yet I strode on austere; No hope could have no fear.

Stele forth and haunt that builded desolation, Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared. Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth? Who in this city of the stars abideth . . . ? From wandering through many a solemn scene Of opium visions, with a heart serene And intellect miraculously bright: I wake from daydreams to this real night.12

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream, Are glorified from vision as they pass The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream; Cold windows kindle their dead glooms to restless crystals; cornice, dome, and column, Emerge from chaos . . .

I sat me weary on a pillar’s base, And leaned against the shaft; for broad moonlight O’erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
The Shadow of Night (1594). Unlike his rival Thomas Nashe, who reacted to The Shadow in his prose pamphlet The Terrors of the Night (1594), Chapman writes solely of the positive aspects of darkness. For him the School is a kind of “Lunar Society” (club frequented in the eighteenth century by neo-Hermetic scientists like Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin); for magic has always served as the wellspring of “science,” at least until the later development of the Royal Society led to a nineteenth-century divorce between science and all sense of reverence for a living world—between spirit and matter, between alchemy and chemistry, between an art of abundance and life, and an art of profit and death.

Novalis (George Friedrich Philip Freiherr von Hardenberg, 1772–1801) can be seen as one of the last neo-Hermeticists: like Swedenborg, Goethe, and Erasmus Darwin, he was both seer and scientist. Romantic science and Naturphilosophie inherited the mantle of alchemy, i.e. the poiesis which is both art and science, and which constitutes the “world we have lost,” or the world we are now herded toward “extinction” thanks to a heartless vulgar materialism and technology. Novalis’s Hymns to the Night lacks the springtide optimism of Chapman’s poem, and is much (not just half) “in love with easifull death”—but it should be read in conjunction not only with Chapman’s proto-Romanticism, but also with Novalis’s own essays, fictions, and aphorisms in which he expresses a positive program for the “poeticization of science” (e.g. The Disciples of Sais). Like James Thomson, Novalis lost his adolescent ladvlove to death, and himself was to die still young and handsome; his melancholy, however, reminds us not so much of Victorian pessimism as of the “creative melancholy” of a Renaissance magus such as Ficino (in his Books of Life, also translated by Dick Higgins), or the Hermetic figure of Melancholia depicted so famously by Dürer. Thomson worshipped Novalis, who was of course a far greater poet.

Chapman begins his Hymnus in Noctem (Part One of his poem, “The Hymn to the Night”) with an evocation of the Moon of rest, All sorts of men, to sorted tasks address’d, Spread this inferior element, and yield Labour his due: the soldier to the field, Statesmen to council, judges to their places; Merchants to commerce, mariners to seas; All beasts, and birds, the groves and forests range, To fill all corners of this round Exchange, Till thou (dear Night, O goddess of most worth) Lett’s th’ sweet seas of golden humour forth; And eagle-like dost with thy starry wings Beat in the fowls and beasts to Somnus’ lodgings. And haughty Day to the infernal deep, Proclaiming silence, study, ease, and sleep. All things before thy forces put in rout, Retiring where the morning fired them out.

**

Fall, Hercules, from heaven, in tempests hurld, And cleanse this beastly stable of the world: Or bend thy brazen bow against the sun, As in Tartessus, when thou hadst begun Thy task of oxen: heat in more extremes Than thou wouldst suffer, with his envious beams. Now make him leave the world to Night and Sleep (Somnus) preside over all esoteric knowledge, all Orphic genius:

And as when hosts of stars attend thy flight, Day of deep students, most contentful night, The morning (mounted on the Muses’ steed) Ushers the sun from Vulcan’s golden bed, And then from forth their sundry roofs
And whom her fugitive and far-shot rays
Disjoin, and drive into ten thousand
ways,
Night’s glorious mantle wraps in safe
abodes,
And frees their necks from servile
labour’s loads:
Her trusty shadows succour men
dismay’d,
Whom Day’s deceitful malice hath
betray’d:

Since Night brings terror to our frailties
still,
And shameless Day, doth marble us in ill.

All you possess’d with indepressed
spirits,
Endued with nimble, and aspiring wits,
Come consecrate with me, to sacred
Night
Your whole endeavors, and detest the
light.
Sweet Peace’s richest crown is made of
stars,
Most certain guides of honour’d
mariners,
No pen can anything eternal write,
That is not steep’d in humour of the
Night.

In Part Two, the “Hymn to Cynthia” (as Moon),
we find a specific description of nocturnal
architecture that looks forward to Leonora
Carrington’s surrealist “palaces”:

See then this planet of our lives
descended
To rich Ortygia, gloriously attended,
Not with her fifty ocean nymphs; nor yet
Her twenty foresters: but doth beget
By powerful charms, delightsome
servitors
Of flowers and shadows, mists and
meteors;
Her rare Elysian palace did she build
With studied wishes, which sweet hope

NIGHT: DOMAINS
In which two hundred twenty columns
stood,
Built by two hundred twenty kings of
blood,
Of curious beauty, and admired height,
Pictures and statues, of as praiseful
glory,
Convenient for so chaste a goddess’
fane
(Burnt by Herostratus), shall now again
Be re-extract, and this Ephesia be
Thy country’s happy name, come here
with thee,
As it was there so shall it now be
framed,
And thy fair virgin–chamber ever named.

The mind hath in herself a deity,
And in the stretching circle of her eye
All things are compass’d, all things
present still,
Will framed to power, doth make us
what we will.

For Novalis, the Night also appears as a
principle of Imagination and Creativity, but it
is death itself (as eternal rest) that coincides
with the beauty of Night—because Novalis
(unequal Thomson) has faith in Jesus and Mary
and eternity. More than that, his daring soul
(burnt by Herostratus), shall now again
fane
Convenient for so chaste a goddess’
lace,

Costly balm
Drips from your hand,
From a bundle of poppies.
In sweet drunkenness
You unfold the heavy wings of the soul,
And give us joys
Dark and unspeakable,
Secretly, as you are yourself,
Joys which let us
Sense a heaven.
How poor and childish
The light seems to me,
With its bright things,
How joyful and blessed
The day’s departure.
So now,
since Night makes
Its servants strangers,
You’d saw
Gleaming spheres
In the far spaces
To show your Omnipotence,
Your return
In the times of your distance.
More heavenly
Than those flashing stars
In those far places we
Imagine endless eyes
Which the Night
Has opened in us.
Farther they see
Than the palest
Of all those countless hosts.
Not needing Light
They look through depths
Of a loving soul,
Which fills a higher space
With wordless delight.
Praise to the world queen,
The high messenger
Of a holy world,
The guardian of blessed love.
You come, beloved—
The Night is here—
My soul’s enraptured—
The earthly day’s past
And you’re mine again.
I look into your deep dark eyes,
See nothing but love and bliss
Throughout the poem Novalis is concerned with Night as a space, and indeed with nocturnal space as an enclosure (heaven) lit with stars, not very different from Bachelard’s “egg.” To understand this we also need to read the prose version of the passage already quoted:

Away I turn to the holy, the unspeakable, the secretive Night. Down over there, far, lies the world—sunken in a deep vault—its place wasted and lonely. In the heart's strings, deep sadness blows. In dewdrops I'll sink and mix with the ashes. Memory's distances, youth's wishes, childhood's dreams, the short joyful of a whole life and hopeless hopes come green—clad, like evening mist after the sun has set. In other places Light's pitched happy tents. Should it never come back to its children, who are waiting for it with simple faith? What wells up so menacingly under the heart and gulps down the soft air's sadness? Are you pleased with us, dark Night? What're you holding under your cloak, that grabs so unseen at my soul? Costly balm drips from your hand, from a bundle of poppies. You raise up the soul's heavy wings. Darkly, unspeakably we feel moved—I see a serious face startled with joy, it bends unspeakably we feel moved—I see a serious face startled with joy, it bends

**Must the morning always return? Will earthly force never end? Unholy busyness devours the Night's heavenward approach. Won't Love's secret offering ever burn forever? Light's time was measured out to it; but Night's reign is timeless, spaceless. Forever's the length of sleep. Holy sleep—don't make Night's elect too rarely happy in this earthly day-labor. Only fools misrecognize you and know no sleep but the shadow which, in that twilight before the true Night, you, pitying, throw over us. They don't feel you in the grapes' golden flood—in almond trees' wonder oil—in poppies' brown juice. They don't know it's you hovering around a tender girl's breasts making her womb heaven—and don't suspect that, out of old stories, you, opening heaven up, come and carry the key to the Dwellings of the Blessed, quiet messenger of infinite mysteries.**

... Nocturnal Architecture in the Art of Leonora Carrington

We sink onto the altar of night
Onto the soft bed—
The veil is gone
And, lit by the warm pressure,
There glow the pure embers
Of the sweet offering.16

**[M]y secret heart stays true to the Night,
and to creative Love, her daughter.**

The Hymn to close with praise of Night's mother, the Virgin Mary as Sophia (or Divine Wisdom)—which, incidentally, was the name of Novalis's dead beloved.

Death summons to the wedding,
The lamps burn brightly—
The virgins stand in place—
There's no lack of oil—
If the distance would only sound
With your procession—
And the stars would only call to us
With human tongues and tone.

To you, Mary,
A thousand hearts are lifted.
In this shadow life
They would yearn only for you.

Whoever, loving, has the faith
Weeps painfully at no grave.
Of love's sweet possession
No one can be robbed—
To soothe him in his longing,
And inspire him there's the Night—

Chapman and Novalis both construct palaces of Night and Sleep. Both see Night as fecund and creative. And both visions are needed in order to build the School of Nite.

CONCLUSION: NOCTURNAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE WORK OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

Leonora Carrington (born 6 April, 1917) came from a wealthy British family with Irish connections (hence her lifelong fascination with Celtic lore). Beautiful and rebellious, she ran away at nineteen to become a Surrealist. Breton admired her, Max Ernst married her. She broke with him in 1940, but by then had proven herself as an artist; during the War she escaped to Spain but went mad and was institutionalized—the subject of her great autobiographical text, Down Below.17 After her release she made her way to Mexico, along with other Surrealists, and lived there for the rest of her life, till she died on 25 May 2011, aged 94. The best description of her I've found is in the first volume of Alejandro Jodorowsky's autobiography, Spiritual Journey, where she appears as a kind of sorceress—but it's important to know she was also a great cook, famous for her Surrealist cuisine. See for example “Lepidopterus” (1969), in which six masked magi feast together on fruit, while one of them (perhaps “Leonora”?) feeds pomegranate seeds to a flock of black swans. This takes place inside a darkened room at night, and gives a sense not only of the purpose of nocturnal architecture, but also a taste of Leonora's famous Surrealist banquets in Mexico City—the “holy supper” as a kind of temporary Fourierist phalanstery of shared luxe and gastronomic pleasure.

Carrington's art ranks among that of the veritable archons of Surrealism; perhaps only Ernst could be considered more original, and Dalí more skilful—but comparisons are invidious. In one area, however, she clearly stands above all the rest, and achieves a status
The 1956 painting “AB EO QUOD” presents us with a perfect illustration of (among other things) an ideal nocturnal architecture. In a chamber with walls of Pompelian ochre we see sigils of occult import, reminiscent of demons from old grimoires, Vodoun Vèvès, magic diagrams, a bi-frontal, bi-sexual deity, etc. The great Egg of the Work itself sits on a table; overhead a white rose drips (semen?) onto it and causes it to glow or emit steam: the Rose is Eros, the Egg is Chaos, the exudate represents Creation or cosmogenesis. The White is “married” to the Red in the form of wine: Mercury and Sulphur, the feminine and masculine. Bread indicates transubstantiation, as in the Mass, but is accompanied by the pagan pomegranate of Persephone (the very goddess of the School of Nite) and the grapes of Dionysos. Under the white rose drips a black face of grass, the nocturnal version of the Green Man, peeps out as if being born. Like the haunted room in my poem, this one is full of motifs, symbols of transmutation (or spirits of the Dead?). On a fire-screen we read the words “Ab eo, Quod nigram caudum habet abstine terrestrium enim deorum est,” meaning “Stay away from anything that has a black tail, for it belongs to the terrestrial gods (that is, demons).” Carrington probably found this line attributed to Marsilio Ficino’s translation of a Pythagorean text cited in Jung’s Psychology and Alchemy. An egg and a white rose appear also in the magisterial “The Chair: Dagda, Tuatha dé Danaan.” The Dagda is the “good god” of the Celtic pantheon, the Tuatha dé Danaan, or Tribe of the Goddess Dana. He appears sometimes as a giant with an enormous phallus and a magic cauldron—here represented by the Chaos Egg as the source of all creation, as in Hesiod or Chuang Tzu, or indeed in the usual alchemical symbolism. The Chair is empy—like the Chair of the Hidderman in mystical Shi’ism or Manichaeism—but the Chair “is” also the Dagda himself as solar deity. (I visited his Sun Castle near Derry in Northern Ireland, where I saw the biggest rainbow ever; I also had a vision of him while under the influence of “rookies,” or magic mushrooms, in County Wicklow.) The screen

unique in Western art since the Renaissance: she understood Hermeticism. Not only is her work learned in magic, it is magical. While other Surrealists were inspired by Hermeticism, she actually practiced it; other Surrealists talked about it, but she lived it.

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... Nocturnal Architecture in the Art of Leonora Carrington

Black dogs are seen as uncanny in many cultural traditions. Faust had a black poodle who was Mephistopheles. In Ireland the dreaded Pooka appears as a huge black dog with glowing red eyes. (Incidentally, the psilocybe semillanceata mushroom is called a “pookie” in Ireland.)

Leonora’s black dog seems to contemplate a “poppet” (magic doll) contained in Susan Aberth’s book but owned by her and kindly shared with me during my visit (with Chuck Stein) to her magical octagon house in the Catskills. “Crow Soup” is a lithograph, and shows a scene in an underground crypt with a gothic ceiling. A crow (Nigredo again) presides over a gathering of two white cows (or goats?), a flying two-legged fish or dolphin, another fish in a fountain, an old crone wearing the Isis Sun/Moon headdress, smoking a pipe and carrying a lion, a disciple, and a white rose (or cabbage). Here we reach the innermost chamber of the School of Nite, where love becomes Wisdom, and we practice the witchcraft of love.

Finally, let me add one more work, not contained in Susan Aberth’s book but owned by her and kindly shared with me during my visit (with Chuck Stein) to her magical octagon house in the Catskills. “Crow Soup” is a lithograph, and shows a scene in an underground crypt with a gothic ceiling. A crow (Nigredo again) presides over a gathering of two white cows (or goats?), a flying two-legged fish or dolphin, another fish in a fountain, an old crone wearing the Isis Sun/Moon headdress, smoking a pipe and carrying a lion, a disciple, and a white rose (or cabbage). Here we reach the innermost chamber of the School of Nite, where love becomes Wisdom, and we practice the witchcraft of love.

NOTES
1 Sir Cyrilian of Antioch is patron saint of sorcery and magic. This translation of “his” book is by Jose Leibian, Hadean Press (France), 2014. Thanks to Mustafa Al-Layla Bey.


3 Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights (X, 4), Thanks to K. Podgurski for sending me an reprint of “Introduction to Paradoxical Texts” by Rachel Hardman.

4 See Murial Bradbrook, The School of Night (1936), which, however, is weak on occult matters. More enlightening is Charles Nicholl’s erudite The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe (1992); see also Frances Yates, A Study of Love’s Labor Lost, arguing for Shakespeare’s “membership” in the School.


7 In School of Nite, with art by Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2016).


10 First published 1874, collected in The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880). Thanks to Jake Rabinoowitz for suggesting I read it.

11 Note: I’m sure the reference to opium is no mere metaphor. Thomson, like half the denizens of the nineteenth century, was obviously addicted to laudanum in some form, a third-rate Coleridge or De Quincey.

12 As described by Sir Walter Scott in his wonderful “Lay of the Last Minstrel” and James Hogg in his excellent Three Woes of Man. The real Michael Scott served as court magician to the Emperor Frederick II; see the great biography by Ernst Kantorowicz. Scott’s body was buried in the Abbey of Maltrase in the Midlands.


14 This is passage from the manuscript version of the Hymns, which Novells later re-worked as poetic prose for the published version in Athanasium 9, no. 2 (1800).

15 She also wrote the very best Surrealist Fiction, e.g. The Hearing Trumpet, The Oval Lady, The Seventh Horse, etc. See the bibliography in Susan L. Aberth, Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art (London: Lund Humphries, 2010).

16 See the quirky but informative work by Patrick Lesplet, The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealist Origins: Magic, and Secret Societies (Buchanan: Inner Traditions, 2012), which includes some good material on Carrington.

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20 That is, the Muses or Putrefactio, which is weary in potentia, the very Philosopher’s Stone.

21 See my Ploughing the Clouds: The Search For Irish Lights, 1999 (San Francisco: City Lights).