



P.T. 1/5

Leonora Carrington

Dark House: Nocturnal Architecture in the Art of Leonora Carrington

Peter Lamborn Wilson

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 Treasure¹

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 World²

THE SCHOOL OF NITE



Odilon Redon. *L'oeuf*. 1885

“The nocturnal assumes the shape of an egg.” — Gaston Bachelard

I’ve been quoting this tag from Bachelard for so long I’ve forgotten exactly what book it’s from. I read it as a reference to the alchemical “egg of chaos,” as in Hesiod’s evocation of the originary cosmogonic deities, “Chaos, Eros, Earth and Old Night”—or Chuang Tzu’s depiction of Chaos as a Humpty-Dumpty-like oviform creature, Hun Tun, whose disintegration releases “the 10,000 things” of material creation. His name in turn constitutes a pun on Won Ton, the dumpling that englobes a gallimaufry of good things in a “primordial soup.” Taoists slurp won-tons on December 21, the winter solstice, or “Chaos Night.” The longest night is a kind of New Year’s celebration because Night precedes Day, as in the Bible, or the Islamic calendar, where each day begins at sundown—because it’s a lunar calendar, like that of the Paleolithic cultures revealed by archeological discoveries of sticks and bones engraved with 7, 14, or 28 notches. The moon is our first “clock” or time measure, the calendar our first ideology, and night the realm of the mystic cave. In Greek myth Night and her daughters, Sleep

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, after 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: Aristaeus 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, attracted 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

NIGHT: DOMAINS

and subsist on the nourishment of that food, and are called anthropophagoi, 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*³

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 as 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 gardener, a chemist, a horseman, and on 165



Isaac Oliver. *Young man seated under a tree*. 1590 [Probably the Earl of Northumberland]

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 Hariot, whom he kept on a handsome salary of £100, and provided with a house and laboratory. Hariot was a polymath in the late Renaissance mold: mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, geographer. He is an important figure in the history of science—he corresponded 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 also deeply imbued in Renaissance occultism. Another scientist in the Earl’s retinue was Walter Warner, whose theories 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.” Hariot and Warner, together with the geographer Robert Hues, came to be known as the Earl of Northumberland’s “three magi,” and in his later years of imprisonment in the Tower they attended

on him: a little “academy of learning” within those bleak walls.

Both Thomas Hariot and Walter Warner were close associates of Marlowe. They were named by Thomas Kyd as Marlowe’s familiar 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 Hariot: 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 one of Northumberland’s followers, Thomas Allen: “In those dark times, astrologer, mathematician and conjuror were accounted the same things, and the vulgar did verily believe him to be a conjuror. He had a great many mathematical instruments and glasses in his chamber, which did also confirm the ignorant in their opinion, and his

servitor (to impose on freshmen and simple people) would tell them that sometimes he would meet the spirits, coming up his stairs like bees.”

This is the “vulgar” view: hostile and half-fearful. It is the view of the mob—the mob that ransacked Dr Dee’s library and laboratory at Mortlake; the mob that lynched the astrologer John Lambe in the streets of Southwark. It was also the view of certain anti-Raleigh propagandists, who described this coterie as no more than a “school of atheism.”⁵

Above all (at least for the purposes of this essay), the Earl’s “School” was influenced by Giordano Bruno, the greatest of all the Renaissance magi, and a primary source for 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.”⁶

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.⁷

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,”⁸ in the style of Eliot’s Wasteland notes.

ODE TO NITE

“Let me associate with the low-brow’d Night”
—James Thomson, “Winter,” from The Seasons, 1726

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
known to adepts 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

4/
Sorelian mythemes
unique as snowflakes
fall in this little glass bulb
hermetically sealed with a scene of
children lost in pine forest
gingerbread house or
Queen of Night
whose white roots smell
obscene as Japanese radishes
or shovelfull of halffrozen dirt

5/
Old Night
a face of moonbeams & allusions
Old Mole
little gentleman in gray velvet
king over the water
eternal pretender
Old Moth Old Mouth
ALL-NITE panegyric diner
blinking on/off blue neon
roomfull of white moths
photographed by pin-hole camera
GONE FISHING for coral in the mere
of yr precious ablutions
smelling moonflowers
where the old frog jumped in

6/
The Logothete spins a world of words
then lives in it.
Once in Byzantium
this was a salaried position.
Henry Darger, Charles Fourier
crusted w/ jewels like lobster molé
w/ pink champagne
mouths filled with gold dust, moth dust,
fairy gold, dead leaves, graveyard dirt.
and I Marie Laveau Voodoo Queen of this poem
proclaim you my sexual zombie
let me be your political guru
inculcating iconodules into the cult
of the Secluded Imam

Prostrate yourself to Night's vast cube
"Queen of the Night" heaviest of attars
nightingale drunk on vintage port
Khaqani's Mallarmean marmalade
venom. Phosphorescent words murmured
by mummies in pansophic panspermic
cinemascope hsst—rattle rattle—organ music
swells the mystic word, Pharaoh's phallus
our favorite hieroglyph.

COMMENTARY

Quotation from Thomson: The Seasons is a fine proto-Romantic poem, and includes the great line: "Sons of Indolence, do what you will," echoing Rabelais and foreshadowing Aleister Crowley.

Part 1, line 2, "lunar dynasty": certain Indian kings of the Vedic era.

line 4, "Restore the Ming": Slogan of the Triads and Tongs, secret anti-Manchu societies in China during the Ching era; the Ming was the previous dynasty, of indigenous Han lineage. The Tong initiatic space was known as "The City of Willows." Around 1900, the Triads were influenced by anarchism.

line 6, "Darkness breeds superstition": The most effective force for ecological resistance would be the superstitious fear of Nature Elementals.

Part 2, line 2, "phlogiston": Supposedly discredited Neo-Hermetic concept of an "essence of fire"; the great radical scientist Joseph Priestley supported this idea, as did the Montgolfier Brothers.

line 3, "entoptic": The patterns you see when you close your eyes.

line 4, "salamander": The Paracelsan Nature Elemental of Fire; see the illustration in Michael Maier's Atalanta fugiens.

line 6, "rebus": A pictorial figure standing for a word; a hieroglyph.

Part 3, line 1, "luddites": Followers of General Ned Ludd, early nineteenth-century machine-smashers in England; supported by Shelley and Byron (who said, "No King but King Ludd!")⁹

line 2, "Queen of Night": A character

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 faucet. 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 over 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 silver, 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": As 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.

line 4, Henry Darger: Mad, perverse Chicago artist who created a world. Charles Fourier: mad, utopian socialist who created a world; see his Theory of the Four Movements. The Surrealists adore him because he was both an anarchist and a Hermeticist. See also my Escape from the Nineteenth Century, essay on Fourier.

line 5, "Lobster molé" (chocolate and chile sauce) and pink champagne: Salvador Dalí's favorite meal, because it looks like bugs in shit sauce, but is delicious.

line 8, Marie Laveau: The "Voodoo Queen" of New Orleans in the nineteenth century. I visited her tomb when I was ten years old; my first initiation.

line 12, "secluded Imam": The Fatimid Ismaili child Caliphs were never seen in public. Eventually they disappeared into the Imaginal Realm, from which they will return (or are always already returning).¹⁰

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

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

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

line 8, "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 tearme them comparatiuely good in respect of a number of bad, yet are they not simply well inclinde, for they bee by nature ambitious, haughty, and proud, nor do they loue vertue for it selfe any whit, but because they would ouerquell and out-strip others with the vaigneglorious ostentation of it. A humor of monarchizing and nothing els it is, which makes them affect rare qualified studies. Many Atheists are with these spirits inhabited.

**

As for the spirits of aire, which have no other visible bodies or form, but such as by the constant glimmering of our eies is begotten; they are in truth all show and no substance, deluders of our imagination, & nought els. Carpet knights, politique statesmen, women & children they most conuers 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 priuily incite to bleare the worlds eyes with clowdes of common wealth pretences, to broach any enmitie or ambitious humor of their owne vnder a title of their cuntries preseruatiou. To make it faire or fowle when they list to procure popularity or induce a preamble to some mighty peece of prowling, to stir vp tempests round about, & replenish heauen with prodigies and wonders, the more to ratifie their auaritious religion. Women they vnder-hand instruct to pounce and bolster out theyr brawn-falne deformities, to new perboile with painting their rake-leane withered visages, to set vp flaxe shops on their foreheads 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 obiects 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 winde of wit or vnderstanding.
— Thomas Nashe, from The Terrors of the Night

So far we've considered "nocturnal architecture" only from its good side, as dream space, fecund darkness—but a properly



Monsu Desiderio. An Architectural Capriccio With the Martyrdom of Saint Agatha, detail . 17th century



Monsu Desiderio. The Burning of Troy



Monsu Desiderio. Ruins on Fire

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 uncertain 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 also appear in sculptural freizes, and columns 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 “melencholia.” She haunts the poem. His pen-name, “B.V.,” Bysse 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,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
Those myriad dusky flames with points
a glow
Which writhed 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
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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.

**

Steal 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
of glass
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,

A shore of shadow slanting from the right:
The great cathedral's western front stood there,
A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

**

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
That all is vanity and nothingness.

Thomson seems to attempt a text that will damn the reader to Hell just by reading it—a “modern” atheistic version of the legendary book of the magus Michael Scot¹³ or H.P. Lovecraft’s apocryphal Necronomicon. Poe might have imagined such a text, but he never would’ve written anything as crude as “The City of Dreadful Night.” Thomson obviously meant it as the ne plus ultra of Victorian pessimism and atheist despair, and although it succeeds in a certain kitsch-surrealist manner (and is genuinely depressing) it must be seen as a bit ludicrous. Nietzsche might have used it as a casebook example of the exhaustion of the will of the over-civilized terminal human of the dreadful nineteenth century, sapped of animal vigour and too sick to experience irrational joy.

HYMNS & SHADOWS

George Chapman (1559–1634), now remembered chiefly for Keats’s poem “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” can be restored to dignity not only as a fine poet, dramatist and translator, but as the ideologist of the School of Night; its manifesto, so to speak, can still be read in Chapman’s “first thought best thought,” his first published work,

The Shadow of Night (1594).¹⁴ 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” (a 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,” so that we are now headed toward “extinction” thanks to a heartless vulgar materialism and technolatriy. Novalis’s Hymns to the Night¹⁵ lacks the springtide optimism of Chapman’s poem, and is much (not just half) “in love with easeful 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 ladylove 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

Goddess as muse, in a sense, of “secret skill”—i.e. what we call science:

Great goddess, to whose throne in Cynthian fires,
This earthly altar endless fumes expires;
Therefore, in fumes of sighs and fires of grief,
To fearful chances thou send’st bold relief,
Happy, thrice happy type, and nurse of death
Who, breathless, feeds on nothing but our breath,
In whom must virtue and her issue live,
Or die for ever;—now let humour give
Seas to mine eyes, that I may quickly weep
The shipwreck of the world: or let soft sleep
(Blinding my senses) loose my working soul,
That in her highest pitch she may control
The court of skill, compact of mystery
Wanting but franchisement and memory
To reach all secrets: Then in blissful trance
Raise her, dear night, to that perseverance,
That in my torture, she all Earth’s may sing,
And force to tremble in her trumpeting
Heaven’s crystal temples; in her powers implant
Skill of my griefs, and she can nothing want.

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

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 pleas,
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’st thy 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 hurl’d,
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 dreams.
Never were virtue’s labours so envied
As in this light: shoot, shoot, and stoop his pride.
Suffer no more his lustful rays to get
The earth with issue: let him still be set
In Somnus’ thickets: bound about the brows,
With pitchy vapours, and with ebon boughs.

**

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

did gild
With sunny foil, that lasted but a day:
For night must needs importune her
away.
The shapes of every wholesome flower
and tree
She gave those types of her felicity.
And Form herself she mightily conjured
Their priceless values might not be
obscured,
With disposition baser than divine,
But make that blissful court others to
shine
With all accomplishment of architect,
That not the eye of Phoebus could
detect.
Form then, 'twixt two superior pillars
framed
This tender building, Pax Imperii named,
Which cast a shadow like a Pyramis,
Whose basis in the plain or back part is
Of that quaint work: the top so high
extended,
That it the region of the moon
transcended:
Without, within it, every corner fill'd
By beauteous form, as her great
mistress will'd.
Here as she sits, the thunder-loving Jove
In honours past all others shows his love,
Proclaiming her in complete Empery,
Of whatsoever the Olympic sky
With tender circumvecture doth
embrace,
The chiefest planet that doth heaven
enchase.

He compares his visionary pyramid to the
Temple of Artemis (Cynthia, Diana) in
Ephesus, famously burned by Herostratus—but
the School of Night will never be so destroyed;
such "holy monuments" where "pillars stand,
where every Grace and Muse shall hang her
garland" will live on forever in our hearts:

Thy glorious temple, great Lucifera,
That was the study of all Asia,
Two hundred summers to erect,
Built by Cherisphrone thy architect,

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
slight,
Convenient for so chaste a goddess'
fane
(Burnt by Herostratus), shall now again
Be re-exstruct, 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
(unlike Thomson) has faith in Jesus and Mary
and eternity. More than that, his daring soul
equates Jesus with death. God is not dead, as
with Nietzsche (who so strangely resembles
Novalis in so many ways); God is Death itself
and thus also Night as Saviour. Thomas J.J.
Altizer bases the "Death of God" school of
theology on the premise that Christ is both
God, and a god who dies. In that death, which
is the life of Night, Novalis finds his Romantic
Christianity:

Have you also
A human heart,
Dark night?
What are you holding
Under your cloak,
That grabs so unseen, strongly
At my soul?
You seem only fearful.—

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 sow
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

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

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 joys of a whole long life and hopeless hopes come grey-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 to me softly, reverently, and under the endlessly tangled locks of the Mother's dear youth shows. How poor and childish the Light seems now—how happy and blessed the day's departure—So now, since Night turns your servants away from you, you'd sow gleaming spheres in the far spaces to show your own omnipotence—your return—in times of your distance. More heavenly than

those flashing stars the endless eyes seem, which Night opens up in us. They see farther than those palest of those countless hosts—having no need for Light they see through the depths of a loving soul—which fills a higher space with unspeakable delight. Praise the world queen, the higher messenger of a holy word, a nurse of blessed love—she sends you—tender, beloved—Night's lovely sun—now, I wake—for I'm yours and mine—you called the Night to life for me,—humanized me—consume my body with spirit fire, so I can mix with you more intimately, airily, and then the wedding night will last forever.

**

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.

**

[W]hoever's stood up on the world's
watershed, and looked over into the
new land, into Night's dwelling—truly
such a one won't come back to the
world's doings, to the land where Light
is housed in eternal unrest.

**

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

The Hymns 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



Leonora Carrington. Lepidopteros. 1969

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 "Lepidoptorus" (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 luxu and gastrosophic pleasure.

Carrington's art ranks among that of the veritable archons of Surrealism; perhaps only Ernst could be considered more original, and Dalí more skillful—but comparisons are invidious. In one area, however, she clearly stands above all the rest, and achieves a status

Leonora Carrington. AB EO QUOD. 1956Leonora Carrington. The Chair, Dagda Tuatha De Danaan. 1955

unique in Western art since the Renaissance: she understood Hermeticism. Not only is her work learned in magic, it is magic. While other Surrealists were inspired by Hermeticism,¹⁸ she actually practiced it; other Surrealists talked about it, but she lived it.

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 Pompeian 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 tablecloth 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 moths, 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.¹⁹ 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 empty—like the Chair of the Hidden Imam 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 “pookies,” or magic mushrooms, in County Wicklow.) The screen

Leonora Carrington. The Garden of Paracelsus. 1957Leonora Carrington. Crow Soup. 1997

itself actually sports a black tail! By embracing the forbidden Black,²⁰ we ascend to heaven: the antinomian secret of Hermeticism—and of Surrealism.

Even more relevant to our theme, “The Garden of Paracelsus” (1957) contains a wealth of Hermetic imagery that would take a whole book to unpack. Perhaps the most important and innovative thinker about alchemy in the entire European (and Islamic) tradition, Paracelsus presides unseen over the nocturnal architecture of this astounding work. The basic architectural form here, a pyramid of stars, holds within itself one nocturnal egg (in the arm-crook of a goddess in white who dances with a sable demon), while a twin egg is held in the sky above by a bird: “as Above, so Below—for the accomplishment of

the Work,” referencing The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, the basic text of Hermetic alchemy. A third egg or purse is held by a headless white woman accompanied by a headless black man; their blood spouts and mingles in the air, like that of the Tantrik Kali (Chinnamasta) who sacrifices herself for the nourishment of her disciples. The blood here symbolizes the Elixir. Another couple, a beastman and a hermaphrodite, dance with a black dog and a snake—yet another figura of the marriage of Sulphur and Mercury, of the ambiguous nature of Hermes. A nude woman rides a horse of darkness set with stars—usually the horse represents Leonora herself. She receives a ray from a bird-shaped constellation (possibly the spirit of Max Ernst, who depicted himself as a bird). A black banner flies in the night over the Hanged Man of the Tarot. Two gryphons flank the scene like heraldic “supporters.” A book—no doubt by Paracelsus—emanates a magic geometric phantasm. The viewer “lives” this scene as with the fabulous dreamscapes of Bosch—but this is no Hell for sinners. This picture reveals the Night itself as a palace of love and music, but also of black magic and transgression; once again, her sermon in paint on antinomian “immortality” (as Nietzsche would say): Magic as auto-theosis or becoming a god.

Finally, please turn back to the “cover” of this essay: an etching by Leonora called “Dog, come here into the dark house. Come here black dog” (1995). A black dog has great magical power, said St. Cyprian. One example of this is given in the grimoire Occult Powers of Hate and Love discovered by the Magician Jannes and Practised by St Cyprian. Find a Trovisco plant, one of the toxic Thymelaeacea such as Daphne laureola, or D. gnidium, or Thymelaea villosa. St Cyprian says, on page 23 of his grimoire, that a man trying to attract a young woman should tie the tail of a black dog to the stem of a Trovisco. Once the dog has pulled it up, scorch it and peel it and make a belt to tie around your waist and a bracelet for your right wrist. Shake the woman’s hand and she will give you “all sorts of finenesses.” Or else: make ash by burning the eyelashes,

... Nocturnal Architecture in the Art of Leonora Carrington
nail clippings, and hair of a black dog, roll it in
a cigarette and puff the smoke at your desired
victim.

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.)²¹ Leonora’s black dog
seems to contemplate a “poppet” (magic doll)
or mandrake root. She calls him “into the
dark house”—the magic space, the arch-
itecture of Night. He will be our “familiar”
as 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
what might be a peyote button; there is also
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 Magic.

ENDQUOTES

“. . . Ariadne . . . From time to time we
practise magic . . .”

—Nietzsche, last letter to Jacob
Burckhardt, 5–6 January 1889, Turin

“’Tis Magick, magick that hath ravisht
me!”

C. Marlowe, Faustus

NOTES

1 St Cyprian of Antioch
is patron saint of sorcery and
magic. This translation of “his”
book is by José Leitão, Hadean
Press (France), 2014. Thanks to
Mustafa al-Layla Bey.

2 Michael Löwy, On
Changing The World (Chicago:
Haymarket, 2013), 144–145.

3 Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights
IX, 4. Thanks to R. Podgurski
for sending me an offprint of
“Introduction to Paradoxical
Texts” by Rachel Hardiman.

4 See Muriel 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 Marlow
(1992); see also Frances Yates’
A Study of Love’s Labor Lost,
arguing for Shakespeare’s
“membership” in the School.

5 C. Nicholl, The
Reckoning, op. cit. 194–196.

6 On Bruno, there’s still
nothing to beat Dame Frances
Yates, Giordano Bruno and
the Hermetic Tradition (1964);
you’d think by now someone
would’ve gone beyond her, but
sadly such is not the case.

7 Especially Agrippa’s
Three Books of Occult
Philosophy, Paracelsus on
the Imagination and the
Nature Elementals, Ficino’s
Books of Life, Dee’s Monas
hieroglyphica—and Bruno,
especially De Magia and De
vinculis in genere. See also
Ioan Couliano, Eros and Magic
in the Renaissance (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press,
1987).

8 In School of Nite, with
art by Nancy Goldring; (New
York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2016).

9 See Kirkpatrick Sale,
Rebels Against the Future (New
York: Basic Books, 1996).

10 See F. Daftary,
The Ismailis (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press,
1992).

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

12 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
Quincy.

13 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 Scot served
as court magician to the
Emperor Frederick II; see
the great biography by Ernst
Kanterowicz. Scot’s body
was buried in the Abbey of
Melrose in the Midlothian.

14 In The Works of
George Chapman: Poems
and Minor Translations, with
an introduction by Algernon
Charles Swinburne (London,
1875).

15 Translated by Dick
Higgins (Kingston, N.Y.:
McPherson and Co., 1978
[1988]).

16 This passage is from
the manuscript version of the
Hymns, which Novalis later
re-worked as poetic prose
for the published version in
Athenaeum 3, no. 2 (1800).

17 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).

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

19 See Wouter J.
Hanegraaff, “A Visual World:
Leonora Carrington and
the Occult,” in Abraxas:
International Journal of Esoteric
Studies 6 (2014): 101–112. This
issue also includes Susan L.
Aberth’s “Leonora Carrington
and the Art of Invocation.”

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

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

CHRISTIAN PROPHECY

These are
the Last
Days, but
there’ll be
many more
Nights.