

# The Hermetic Art

## The process of embracing an alchemical shadow

By G.H. Fr. A.V.I.A.F. 7°=4°

A couple of years ago, I was asked by Darcy Kuntz to write the introduction for *Collectanea Hermetica* vol VII, the intriguing alchemical treatise *Euphrates or the Waters of the East*. Last spring, however, he asked if I could help out with the introduction to vol III, as another person apparently had felled out. Being in France at the time, I said it shouldn't be any problem. I was unable to recall when I last had read vol III, *The Hermetic Art*, or what I had thought about it, but if Westcott decided to publish it and Farr wrote the footnotes, it couldn't have been too bad...

Once back in Sweden, I brought out the Weiser edition of the C.H. and begun to read the treatise on my balcony. Within some 15 minutes, I started to remember the frustration from my last reading of it, several years earlier. Being only one chapter of 31 pages, it is a very short treatise. In fact, its full title is *A Short Enquiry Concerning the Hermetic Art*. The author's aim is thus not expound his own genius, but to make enquires and conclusions about the alchemical Art. For this purpose, he utilizes many quotations, as is of course the custom with alchemical books, and as is also often the custom, the quotes seem clearer than their explanations, or taken out of context.

Reading it and re-reading it three times, my frustration grew. Why had I agreed to write an introduction to one of the few books that I sincerely did not appreciate?! My problem was not really the complexity of the text, but that it was too short, i.e. it only enquired and elucidated about the first 'key' of the Art. Westcott and Farr had dealt with that problem in their own way; with Farr's Introduction being about alchemy from an 1890's perspective, and her footnotes ranging between extremely interesting, profound and profane. Still, it was clear that the book had been an inspiration to the GD adepts, as several remarks concerned the 5°=6° teachings. However, I did not want to write an introduction to Farr's introduction, but to the actual text.

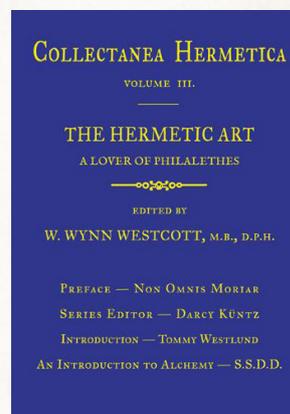
Thus, forcing myself to read, contemplate and meditate upon it again and again, parts of my frustration eventually transformed into insights and appreciation. But nevertheless the book still felt incomplete. As a token from Divine Providence, Darcy then sent me an email with the rough layout of the book. And lo and behold, he had found the two missing chapters that had never been re-published since 1715! Consequently, the treatise started to both unfold its riddles and become whole, as I was forced to embrace my own alchemical shadow of a text I had neither appreciated nor understood.

Synchronicity made my own alchemical works to mirror the treatise, or perhaps the treatise unfolded through my operations. True gems of alchemy were in any case recognized in all three chapters, and my own *Opus* thus furthered in a most peculiar way.

Back then, it was in particular the Fiery Waters and its operations do dissolve the Dragon in the Sol Niger, and coagulate as true Luna, in one operation that the treatise reflected in my consciousness and *Opus*. Hence I thought it fitting, especially since the author went to extremes not to 'prostitute the Art', to veil my own Solar operations through a Lunar lens in the introduction. This does not say that I consider my introduction to be a Solar work, or extremely good, but I had great fun in writing it! I remember a meeting I had with V.H. Sr. V.E.M. in July, who helped me with grammars etc., where I for almost an hour explained all the allusions and keys I had veiled in the introduction.

So with this in mind, I invite you all to try and find those keys, and if you happen to enjoy it, please also purchase the physical book (available through amazon and the publisher), so that Darcy will afford to publish the remaining volumes! From the original 10, he has planned to publish 22...

G.H. Frater A.V.I.A.F.



## HERMETIC ART

### Introduction

This anonymous treatise on the Hermetic Art was authored by an alchemist who did not wish for fame, or to portray himself as a teacher. Relying upon certain Masters, the author draws parallels, makes inquiries and elucidates the fundamental processes of the Art, hinting at certain areas where, apparently, many of his fellow alchemists were led astray. His commentaries and illustrative quotes may confuse and discourage readers who seek emblematic images upon which to meditate or a clear ABC book about Alchemy. The treatise, however, contains a multitude of gems for both the alchemist and Golden Dawn Adept.

The author can be viewed as a representative of the Rosicrucian tradition of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Whereas,

Westcott, et al, could be viewed as furthering the Rosicrucian current by re-publishing *The Hermetic Art* in the late 19th century. These works demonstrated to the Western world a living esoteric tradition for which Divine providence and the Hermetic societies could provide the keys.

Westcott published only the first part of the treatise, unfortunately. Nor were the latter two sections captured in Florence Farr's Notes. Significantly, they are now being republished for the first time since 1715. The three parts transform the complete treatise into a coherent document that will guide the reader in and around the Hermetic labyrinth of Ariadne, where the author's discourses, quotes and the different questioning voices seek to penetrate the veils and allegories of the noblest Art without prostituting it.

It is thus a great honour to write a new introduction to the Hermetic Art for the 21st century, continuing in the path of a long historical tradition of Alchemy. This was especially imbued by two of my favourite sources of inspiration in the Golden Dawn tradition, Westcott and Farr, who laid the path a century ago.

Our unknown author also wrote an introduction for Parts II and III, containing a complaint that seems to be timeless concerning not only Alchemy, but any kind of spiritual work: that so many people spend their time and money deceiving both themselves and others in terms of the Art, where elusive theories and experiments lead them further and further away from the foundation of the work.

The treatise is not an attempt to attract more people to study the Hermetic Art. Rather, the author seeks to influence the majority of those who are already studying and practicing Alchemy to stop for a moment and ask themselves tough but fundamental questions: Do they know the foundation and basis of the Art? Do they comprehend the theory? Are the pillars of reason and experience built upon solid ground? And most importantly, do they work in accordance with Nature?

We can read the author's criticism of his contemporary alchemists, who prepare various vulgar materials and achieve fascinating effects through chemical experiments, yet which do not belong to the Art of Hermes. We can see a similar situation today, where chemical, psychological and magical artists create evocative art based on alchemical symbolism, but who are still not gardeners working with Nature herself. Or self-proclaimed Adepts and Masters build illusory castles within the darkness of ignorance that will only trap consciousness, instead of releasing it or unfolding the divine spark and thereby multiplying the Light.

The notion of Alchemy as a broad or specific term raises several questions. Does it require a general comprehension of a universal Art, which could be worked with in many different ways? Or is it rather a specific operative Art with only one or a very few true substances and techniques available? Is the underlying intention and philosophy able to make more or less anything into Alchemy? Or is such an idea further proof that the secrets of the alchemists have never reached the vulgar world, not even most of those who have studied and practiced it?

When studying the history of the Western esoteric tradition, it is apparent that Alchemy has faded in and out of esteem. The understanding of purpose and means, relation to the religious, philosophical and scientific matrixes, and the way Nature itself is viewed are historically and culturally bound. In particular,

if Nature is considered to be fallen, then why should the alchemists study and imitate it to learn its secrets, especially for a pious student of the spiritual? Consider prospect of making gold, producing elixirs of longevity, and reaching the *Summum Bonum*. This has certainly been a stumbling block for many Christians in the past. It also spreads an archetypal shadow upon present times, given our tendency to exploit and violate a Nature devoid of any spiritual values.

Scrutinizing the history, philosophy and practice of Alchemy, it becomes apparent how certain axioms reoccur at the foundation of its theory. By utilizing these, we can understand the purpose and extent of Alchemy better.

The alchemist must first study the cycles and processes of Nature to be able to see beyond the surface and comprehend its qualities and characteristics. Thereby, these cycles are imitated, accelerated and refined in the *Opus*, the aim of which is, in the words of the present treatise, to multiply Light. This practice should further be done with devotion, where prayer and work go hand in hand. The tradition is at once an ancient Art and a progressive Science requiring self-knowledge, perseverance and diligence. There is a correspondence between the outer and the inner, the above and the below. Everything is derived from a primordial matter. Substances can be transformed and transmuted once both the impediments and external and temporary forms break down and are removed. The Agent and the Patient are brought together, where essence is revealed, purified and combined with another principle. Such transmutations occur regularly through birth, life, death and rebirth in both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. However, like produces like: a lion begets a lion, a flower begets a flower, Man begets its own kind, and gold produces gold. It is therefore of utmost importance to realize the purpose, in order to know with what to work. By means of his or her work, the alchemist therefore becomes a co-creator of Creation's process of refinement, as a true philosopher and lover of wisdom, bringing the hidden powers into action, allowing Life to die in order to be reborn as living and philosophical.

By breaking down the impediments of matter, or the soul's outer shell and alloys—which have been shaped by the ephemeral existence, self, or society—the philosophers lead us into their Chaos, where the inner hidden essence or gold can be revealed. This gold is the pure imprint of Divinity within matter, as well as its sacred Fire, which combines the above with the below in an eternal cycle. From this essence a new form can be created, which reflects and unites both spirit and matter, and heaven and earth, in a divine sanctification of Life and perfection of Light through universal Love. This is the Heavenly Jerusalem, which has no need of the Light of the Sun by Day, nor of the Moon, for there is no Night there.

From this short summary, we can see how the alchemical tradition can in fact be regarded as the foundation of the world's mystery traditions that seek to unveil hidden virtues and qualities, and utilize processes of transformations—a *philosophia perennis*. On the one hand, it seeks an experience-based knowledge about the relationship between God, Man, and Nature, which microcosmically corresponds with the spirit, soul, and body. Such a knowledge about the matrix of creation and its exoteric and esoteric laws will then allow the alchemist to both pray and work, *ora et labora*, for a lesser and greater transmutation and generation. Experiencing how the inner world corresponds with the outer world and the microcosm with the macrocosm,

the alchemist can thus affect both, regardless in which kingdom or realm of consciousness the Opus is carried out.

Alchemy is consequently a study that requires the whole of man. To unveil the abstract symbolism, we need to imprint it in our minds, read, re-read and meditate upon alchemical texts and allegories, and dream about them, contrasting our comprehensions with Nature. Indeed, we need to be possessed by it. Thus it requires self-knowledge, in that we will always express our own ideas and visions through the work.

But even with self-knowledge, and conscious awareness of our projections, a Master is needed to provide the Key that unlocks the Hermetic Art. While we live in a time when a multitude of old and rare alchemical treatises are available, and the Art is once again attracting philosophers and students alike, the need for a Master has not disappeared. So where do we find such a Master? Our author recommends reading and studying several books and taking the philosophers as counsellors, as no single source unveils the Magistry nor explains all its steps. By comparing and analysing how different Alchemists describe the Opus, the persisting student can raise the two mystical pillars of Reason and Experience and open the door to the Mystery.

This exercise only takes us to the gateway between the Mystical Pillars of Hermes. It does not necessarily lead us into the philosophical Light of the Art. A Master or Divine providence is still needed to guide us through the Labyrinth of Ariadne. We may recall how the 3rd century alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis explained to his Soror Mystica, Theosebeia, that his Master was none other than the Greek natural philosopher Democritus, regardless of the fact that more than 600 years separated their worldly life spans. Such a Master can be known through magical imagination, meditation, inspiration and dreams, where we are shown the essence of the operation we are working upon. Or, we can in accordance with the Hermetic tradition, define such a Master as Nature's Light or consciousness. The practical implication and combination of Nature and Divine providence also relates to the first Hermetic Key and its secure lock, as the two legs that will be able to explore the Rosary of the Philosophers.

The traditional Keys to illumination are through the study of the Book of Nature, which will unlock the even more occult Book of Man. With the understanding and the opening of these two Books, a true and philosophical gnosis of God will unfold as the realization and implication of the most Holy and Royal Secret—that secret that all true mystery traditions contain as their root—that which is the end of the beginning. This secret can only be spoken about through allegories, but for a son or daughter of the Art the rays of this Sun will transcend one's perception and transmute and transform Creation.

In alchemical language, this Royal Secret is the Key of the Art that unlocks the first Gate. With the attainment and realization of this Key, every alchemical and spiritual treatise can be discerned, whether it is written from a solar or a lunar perspective. With this Fiery Water, the seeds can be made and brought out from the body. This is the Adept who has unfolded and unveiled solar consciousness and realized the philosophical Chaos which contains the Sun, Moon, Stars, and the whole of Heavens and the Earth—a true Body of Light, as our author asserts.

Our author spends the first chapter (Part I); the only one published by Westcott, in describing this most fundamental Key.

He talks about the true nature of the Green Lion, the Doves of Diana, the devouring dragon, the Fire of Hermes, the Menstruum, and the Fiery Water. If and when this Key is unveiled, the Hermetic gate will be opened and with the help of books and one's own ingenuity, the remaining processes will be clear. This Key is indicated in the famous alchemical saying of "children's play and women's work", which shows a specific process for creating the philosophical salt out of the Anima Mundi, marrying above with below. This is also one of two instances where the power is above Nature alone, as the Alpha and Omega.

The second and third chapters (Parts II and III), however, take the form of a dialogue or debate between our author (now the Investigator) and a multitude of alchemical practitioners. They question our author about what still remains obscure. The dialogues are engaged by five representatives (A, B, C, D, & E). Two are active, as they have actually performed the work they describe. Three are passive since they ask questions of work and processes performed by colleagues. In the second chapter, the questions deal with, to the outer eye, profound matters and processes of Alchemy: the problem of destroying the corrosive nature of nitre (salt-petre), whether gold should be added to the Prima Materia and double mercury, the secret of the Menstruum that purify crystals in the cold, the true matter to put into the alchemical furnace, and how to successfully fix Sol and Luna.

The discouraging answer is always the same, as our author, the Investigator, views understandings and operations as vulgar expressions of the Art, created of mistaken symbols for reality and truth for allegories. Nevertheless, he communicates the secret philosophical process, which is also depicted in the Splendor Solis emblems.

The third and final chapter articulates more philosophical responses to the questions posed by the five representatives, which eventually explore the duality of Matters as Sol & Luna, Saturn & Rhea, Osiris & Isis, the triune aspect of the Stone and the One and only process.

As all volumes of the *Collectanea Hermetica* were, we can assume, mandatory reading for the Golden Dawn Adepts, it may be fitting to end this introduction with a general outline of the alchemical symbolism of the Golden Dawn.

The Golden Dawn system provides philosophical, spiritual as well as veiled practical keys into the Art of Hermes. In contrast to certain other Hermetic societies, the Golden Dawn does not typically teach specific alchemical keys and techniques in the initiation rituals. It instead presents the candidate with different symbolic experiences clothed in mythical, magical and mystical allegories designed to enhance one's growing awareness of the Hidden Light.

There are great benefits for a student who attempts to unlock the more practical mysteries when aspects of the essence have already been experienced. Personal work is used to extract these mysteries in a continuously circulating process, where the tail of one thing will nurture the head of another thing, until we realize that there is only One breath, inhaling and exhaling, dissolving and coagulating, threefold in essence, quadruple in qualities, pentagonal as Man, hexagonal as Divine, through the seven divine operations.

The alchemical colours related to the three main phases of the Art are one of the first experiences that a student of the Golden

Dawn tradition will encounter. These are seen in the cloaks of the three greater Officers of the Outer Order where the Hieres wears a black cloak; the Hegemon wears a white cloak, while the Hierophant wears red. The peacock's tail of wondrous colours is indicated in the Rainbow of Promise, the Qesheth, which the Zelator will see in the East, and as the Path of the Chameleon which will guide the various Inner Order work and tools. The initiatic journey throughout the Outer Order will imprint the magico-alchemical processes in one's consciousness. The Adept will then be given the Keys to utilize and unfold further mysteries. The  $0^{\circ}=0^{\circ}$  formula is the formula of the Magic of Light, whereas the  $1^{\circ}=10^{\circ}$  formula is the general formula of Alchemy. The Neophyte advances into the black stage of Nigredo, starting to learn techniques of introspection and comprehending esoteric symbolism. True, outer guides are necessary, but the participants wear red socks indicating that the hidden Fire is already present. Indeed, the first thing a Neophyte sees in the Temple is a symbolical expression of that Fire, upon the Banner of the West.

Advancing through the Golden Dawn system, one contemplates diagrams, analyses experiences, learns hierarchies, and practices meditation, whereby the hidden Light of occult Wisdom is gradually unveiled and entered. The position, movement and juxtaposition of Temple Officers and diagrams as well as the various myths behind ritual concepts and God-forms hint at hidden formulas that the Adept will later use. The Adept has not left the darkness, but found the hidden spark in the midst of Mount Abiegnus, the mystical mountain of the Rosicrucians. The Nigredo (blackness) of the Outer Order and the dark Night of Ignorance transforms into the Albedo (whiteness) of the Inner Order, where Diana unveils herself and the Fountain radiates the glorious Morning of Light and Knowledge. The Adept explores the regions of the great Unknown, both within and without, and learns through labour the difference between imagination and fantasia. The Higher Genius and the Divine, through the means of the traditional keys, enable the Adept to transcend into and beyond the elementary and planetary spheres.

Having raised and spiritualized matter, the soul encounters a union with the Mystery that only Silence can express, symbolized by the white alchemical wedding. Thus, the Minor Adept advances to the stage of Major Adept. The white must transmute into the redness of Rubedo. In the work of corporifying the spirit where the Philosophical Child will be born and nurtured by the rays of Sol & Luna and the double blood of the Lion, there is a return to the earth, to the Dragon on the floor of the Vault. The Exemptus Adept manifests the Philosophical Child into perfection and multiplies the Light of the worlds beyond.

The same is described in the third chapter of this book regarding the riddle of the Sphinx:

*A Quadrangle or Four Elements are first of all to be considered, from hence we come to the Hemisphere, having two lines, a right and a curve, that is to the White Luna, from thence to the Triangle, which consists of Body, Soul and Spirit, or Sol, Luna and Mercury. The Stone, says Rafis, is a Triangle in its Essence, a Quadrangle in its Qualities. And another adds, a Circle, in its invariable Redness.*

From such a general overview of the alchemical process within the Golden Dawn system, there are specific keys hidden therein.

Westcott provides a perfect example in a footnote, elucidating the author's description of the relationship between the Burnt Offering, the Doves of Diana, Nogah and Venus. To the Golden Dawn student, this immediately brings to mind the diagram of the Burnt Offering in the  $4^{\circ}=7^{\circ}$  grade of Philosophus, which is placed in juxtaposition with the diagram of the Brazen Sea. These two contain reference to the Fiery Water that does not wet hands, which, from an alchemical perspective, casts forward the Philosophus initiation into the Sephirah of Netzach. Later on, it is through the door of Venus that the Adept enters into the mystical Vault of CRC. The sections in this treatise that deals with the Doves of Diana should hence be contemplated in depth by any Golden Dawn Adept.

The Portal initiation continues with the keys for the Magistry of the philosophical Water or the Menstruum, drawn from the beams of the Sun and Moon. The energy currents and the sphere in the Temple show the divine nitre and the earthly salt, the heavenly dew and the red Adamic earth. The marriage of these subtle salts and virtues requires a Priest and a wedding bed, and will produce the Agent.

From the initiatic perspective, the Portal process should manifest the Menstruum that will dissolve the candidate, congealing or giving birth to the Minor Adept. This is accomplished through the marriage of opposites, symbolized by the Cross, bringing forward the analogy of the human with its corruptible body and its relation with the ocean of consciousness. From a magical and hermetic perspective, we need to fully unveil the Doves of Diana so that the poison of the Dragon will be transmuted into the most precious elixir. This is the task of the Adept who seeks to become more than human, unfolding the mystical Rose that blooms upon the Cross of Victory.

Contrary to materialistic beliefs, the Great Work is not essentially focused upon the manufacture of gold. Rather, it is the Art of understanding the origin of worlds in order to create on a microcosmic scale. In a word, it is to be the confidant of the Source. The Great Work is especially the crowning of knowledge and understanding. Thus, the Wise knows the past and future of the worlds and understands its mysteries. Applying this spiritual concept on a physical level may then accomplish the transmutation of plants, minerals, metals, and the bodies of consciousness; the purification of our "I" energy going hand in hand with the process of the Great Work.

Such are the philosophical gems of the Hermetic tradition that run as the Scarlet Thread of Ariadne throughout all volumes of the Collectanea Hermetica, where the secret philosophy is expounded for those seeking the Divine and Mysterious Truth.

*Thus have the Philosophers pointed out this Secret Art under Veils and Allegories, not to prostitute it, no; God and Nature forbidding; it is a Science too excellent and admits of no compare, though there are many very useful ones, but this may rather be said, virtually, to contain them all, and is even the best Expositor of Divinity itself, not only by showing the Creation and Destruction of the World, but the true Figure of Mortification, Regeneration, Redemption and Exaltation, set before the Eyes of the Body, and which are in a most lively manner impressed upon the Soul; and the Mind is so furnished with the Knowledge of a Trinity in Unity, as not to admit of a doubt concerning so Divine and Mysterious a Truth.*  
—A Lover of Philaletha.