Paracelsus Studies and the Early Modern Paradigm Shift

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Much of my scholarly career has been devoted to studying, translating, and rendering accessible the writings of Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493/94-1541), known as Paracelsus. He was born in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, the son of a physician father of Swabian origin, and raised in the South Austrian province of Carinthia. He is said to have studied medicine in Ferrara and wandered afar as a military surgeon. From the 1520s on, he led a conflict-prone and migratory life as a religious dissenter, physician, and medical author with relatively brief sojourns in Austrian, South German, and Swiss cities. His writings, which were mostly unpublished until after he died in Salzburg in 1541, have been referred to as the second largest sixteenth-century literary corpus in German.

To the American ear, "Paracelsus" might suggest a detergent or a stimulant drug, but the man was and is one of the most famous and contested figures in German intellectual history. Numerous institutions and streets are named in his honor. He has been linked at times with the archetypal Dr. Faustus. His trajectory through the early modern landscape trailed afterimages of a subversive heretic, an alchemist and herbalist, a miraculous healer, a *magus* and keeper of esoteric secrets; a prophet of his own age and a harbinger of a green vision of nature, an heroic embodiment of the German spirit and an apostolic healer who sought to alleviate suffering but reaped nothing but scorn for his humanism.

This thumbnail review of his associations might suggest that his admirers tend to project their own preoccupations onto Paracelsus. I think that this is true, perhaps for me as well. Anyone with an "impostor syndrome" experiences a pang of self-recognition in the *Rohrschach* of his life, in his obscure provincial origin (Switzerland and Austrian Carinthia), uncertain educational credentials *(Did he complete his studies in Ferrara? Did he learn anything on his early travels? Was his Latin proficient?),* in his career driven

and derailed by the radicalism of his time, and in his protracted self-vindications, the repetitions that occur when one is ignored. Although I, too, as a provincial semi-autodidact, molded by the radicalism of the 1960s, have undoubtedly insinuated myself into the outline of his existence, I have compensated by translating his work from optimal facing-page sources, thereby letting him speak for himself as no other scholar had since his first editor, Johannes Huser (1545-1600).

For this venue, I have summarized my Paracelsus scholarship in the essay below. The links provide access to my studies of Paracelsus in English and German.

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The first words that I, at the time still an outsider to the field, published on Paracelsus were the preface of my book *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation:*[1]

> Paracelsus is an errant star in the firmament of sixteenth-century aspirations. Born roughly 500 years ago in 1493 or 1494 at Einsiedeln in Switzerland, he appears to have been destined for the life of a restless wanderer whose travels and stations in mature years would be concentrated in South Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. As a medical theorist and philosopher of nature, Paracelsus met with many setbacks and few successes in life, but soon after his death in 1541, his few printed tracts and myriad scattered manuscripts would make him one of the most famous and controversial figures of his age. In character, language, and scope, the writings of Paracelsus are certainly among the most formidable documents of early German literature. However, their content often rambles toward uncertain ends, dissipating between the elaborations of a physician and those of a philosopher and mystic. (AW 1997 ix)

[1] Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), subsequently cited as AW 1997 with page reference.

Immediately, a rather off-key but influential review misstated the crux of my argument.[2] I had argued that scholars had misunderstood the *sequence* of Paracelsus's early writings, as well as the priority of his theological writings within that sequence (36-44). This was misstated by the reviewer to the effect that I claimed to discover what scholars already knew: *that Paracelsus had indeed authored theological writings.* In truth, I had traced the scholarly awareness of those writings to the early nineteenth and further to the late sixteenth centuries (32-35). I had argued that due to their modern neglect, Paracelsus had not been properly evaluated in relation to medicine and theology or the Renaissance and Reformation (22-23). The trajectory of his writing is erratic and conditioned by the incidental events of a failed revolution.

The essential context for the emergence of Paracelsus's work is the first third of the sixteenth century, especially the years 1524 to 1532, that is, between a plebeian insurrection and the suppression of dissent in South Germany and the death of Zwingli in Switzerland in 1531. These years coincided with a crisis of the early Reformation which had by then spread throughout German lands and led in mid-decade to the violence known as the Peasant War. Beginning with his encounter with the violence of plebeian strife in Salzburg and continuing with his sojourns in Strasbourg, Basel, Nuremberg, and St. Gallen, Paracelsus was confronted everywhere with the turbulence and dissent of the Reformation. Certainly, there are occasions in his previous life which also merit attention; but the crisis of the mid 1520s elicits his earliest known writing: the theological tracts and anticlerical polemics that responded to the upheaval in Salzburg during the years 1524-25. The crux of my argument was that these writings were seminal for his authorial development. When a dam breaks, eddies swirl and diverse currents mix and surge forth together. When authority collapses, not just one but all sorts of impulses are liberated. An impassioned antiauthoritarian, Paracelsus defiantly re-envisioned science, medicine, and society.

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[2] See Gerhild Scholz-Williams' review of Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* December 1998 *The German Quarterly* 71(1):78-79.

By now, thanks to the editorial scholarship of Urs Leo Gantenbein,[3] it is widely understood that this juncture was indeed essential for Paracelsus's authorship. For much of the twentieth century, however, scholars accepted the dating of several medical writings as "around 1520." This dating had enabled Sudhoff and those following his lead to insinuate a continuity from the learning experiences of his youthful wandering (richly mythologized as his *Peregrinatio Magna)* to an authorial debut around 1520 (38-39). It was thought that his medical authorship progressed, largely unaffected by incidental factors, throughout the decade and beyond. The star of his genius arose from obscurity and followed its destined and tragic path, not unlike the genius of Nietzsche or Hölderlin. Paracelsus's appointment in Basel appeared to be an integral link in this unbroken medical trajectory. In the Pabst film *Paracelsus,* Basel is no happenstance but a long-sought opportunity to disseminate medical theories and findings.

It is difficult for academics to imagine a life of the mind not aimed and driven toward achieving an academic position; however, the university was not the only sixteenth-century venue for a reformer. I noted in 1997 that the content of some of the writings dated around 1520 clearly excluded this dating (39). I remarked that prior to his unexpected summons to Basel in 1527, Paracelsus revealed no interest in academic medicine and favored residence in cities that lacked a university. In contrast to his evident lack of academic ambition, theological concerns inform his earliest work and accompany the evolution of his medical or speculative thought (79-99). Despite much evidence that supported my observations, the version of Paracelsus—taken for granted by German academics—could not be reassessed until the independent Swiss scholar, medical historian, and physician Gantenbein began editing, reediting, and publishing the theological works and reassessing their impact in the sixteenth century. From that

[3] *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim). Neue Paracelsus-Edition. Theologische Werke,* vol. 1, ed. and intro. Urs Leo Gantenbein in collaboration with Michael Baumann and Detlef Roth. (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008). For an overview of Gantenbein's initiatives, see the Zurich Paracelsus Project (https://www.paracelsus.uzh.ch/index.html).

point on, it was no longer possible to sideline the theologian in the larger picture puzzle of Paracelsus. An anomalous outsider can sometimes be studied more perceptively by scholarly outsiders.

We must base our understanding of the intellectual development of Paracelsus on the corpus of his extant writings. This entails acknowledging that the theological involvements which were once considered parenthetical or extraneous integrate his phases of development with the historical context. Medical and theological preoccupations are so intertwined that neither can be understood without the other. We would do well to regard Paracelsus in the light of Thomas Kuhn's influential theory of the structures of scientific revolutions.[4] From Kuhn, two basic understandings of scientific development are familiar. There is the "comprehensive paradigm shift." It presupposes a veritable "conversion" which renders the new understanding of the world incompatible with the old. And there is the pattern of continuity and incrementalism in scientific advancement. Bearing these seeming opposites in mind, revolution versus continuity, we can ascertain in Paracelsus that disruption is indeed pronounced, yet so is continuity. In fact, disruption and continuity are intertwined. An errant star indeed.

Disruption is flagrant because Paracelsus the theologian takes part in the upheavals of the early Reformation and echoes its antiauthoritarianism in his medical work. Already in 1524-25, his religious polemics hold out the promise of a comprehensive response in coming "paramiran" works,[5] a pledge repeated in Basel[6] and realized in major medical-theoretical writings at the end of the decade. It is no exaggeration to call these tracts revolutionary in tone and intention. They certainly envisage a radical break with medieval Galenic medicine and humanistic tradition. But revolutions often reconstruct the

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[4] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1962).
[5] Andrew Weeks, "Paracelsus, Verkünder und Querulant," *Nova Acta Paracelsica. Beiträge zur Paracelsus-Forschung.* Neue Folge 27 (2016): 91-123, esp. 105.
[6] See Theophrastus von Hohenheim, gen. Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke,* 1. Abteilung (Medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften), ed. Karl Sudhoff, vol. 5 (Munich, Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1931), 134 ("das gehet in tartarum, das ist der faex, den ich melt in paramiris. es ist auch das impurum, und das quintum esse ist das purum"). Subsequent references to this edition refer to S by volume and page.

new by repurposing the old. The revolutionary medical theories of Paracelsus are no exception. Their most radical features echo earlier medical theories of ancient and medieval provenance with which he would surely have been familiar. Confirming his sources is difficult since he so rarely acknowledged precursors. Stung by criticism, he tended to exaggerate the epochal significance of his initiatives.

Even if we assume, as German scholars have preferred to do, that Paracelsus was first and foremost a medical author, one must nevertheless recognize that his earliest writings—the theological treatises of mid-decade, the lectures recorded in Basel, and the academic medical works of 1529-31—were conditioned by impromptu quarrels that affected everything that followed. His earliest conflicts resulted in the fiery anticlerical polemics of Salzburg in 1524-25. The writings of 1529-31 responded no less fiercely to conflicts in Basel and Nuremberg. His academic medical theories emerged only after his chance appointment with the city and university of Basel in 1527, an appointment that ended with scandal and a headlong flight echoed in bitter authorial retrospectives. There is less a gradual maturing of insights in his work than an improvised ad hoc reaction to bitter unanticipated conflicts. This was hardly less the case with Luther and the early Reformation itself, in which Paracelsus was passionately engaged. A pitched battle cannot be evaluated like a research protocol implemented in an ivory tower.

Since the ferocity of Paracelsus's tone has been cited against his intellectual seriousness by his detractors (who at one time even falsely claimed that his family name Bombastus was the root of the word "bombastic"), his defenders initiated a century-long tradition of ignoring those rants; yet since they are hard to disregard in authentic writings, German disciplinary habits simply encouraged scholars to ignore the writings altogether, either in favor of his teachings which were extracted and cleansed of bile or in favor of his impact on posterity. There was an almost comic obfuscation when Karl Sudhoff treated an anecdote related by Paracelsus's erstwhile Basel follower and assistant Johannes Oporinus

(1507-1568) as the indiscretion of a student who should have been more loyal and respectful, much like the obeisance an aspiring German *Assistent* is expected to accord his benevolent *Doktorvater*.[7]

The truth is that Oporinus faithfully accompanied Paracelsus even after his flight from Basel; and the loyal pupil later distinguished himself as a bold and principled publisher. I summarized the letter to Johann Weyer in which Oporinus recalled his now deceased master, reminiscing how

> Sometimes Paracelsus would fall into bed fully clothed and then wake up in a fit of rage, terrifying young Oporinus by banging against the wall the sword he carried with him at all times and claimed to have received from an executioner. But it could also happen that the master would arouse himself and his amanuensis from sleep, and, though still inebriated, dictate forth his philosophy with such fluidity and clear sense that, as Oporinus recollected, a sober person might not have improved on it. (AW 1997 4)

Only a conformist scholarly establishment could remain sufficiently oblivious to the tone and content of Paracelsus's works to blithely ignore such a first-hand report. What the report suggests is precisely what the writings tell us: an inspired yet frustrated author dictated his discourse in the white heat of an ambient struggle where vital questions were bitterly contested. His expositions are more consistent in what they revile than in what they resolve. He shares the opposition of the early Reformation to humanism, Aristotelian philosophy, and medieval scholastic tradition. He reaffirms the Reformation's fealty to Holy Scripture, augmented in his case by elusive signs or signatures of divine origin revealed in nature. His mystical intuition recognizes endless particularities in nature and life. He is a pluralistic visionary who sees more things in heaven and earth than a school philosophy had dreamt of.

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[7] See Karl Sudhoff, *Paracelsus. Ein deutsches Lebensbild aus den Tagen der Renaissance* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1936), 46ff. Cited AW 1997, 197 n. 3.

Paracelsus embodies a challenge to tradition instigated by Luther's radical break with authority. Luther's sweeping, influential *Letter to the German Nobility* of 1520 had called for general reforms, not only of theology and law, but of medicine (which the reformer avowed to leave to the professionals). Paracelsus's response to Luther's appeal was his own rejection of humoral medicine. Much in the spirit of the reformers, he lambasted "heathenish," "foolish" Aristotle, scholasticism, and the elemental-humoral medicine associated with their false and pernicious tradition. The initiatives of Paracelsus can be understood as corollaries and offshoots of the general crisis of authority which informed the early Reformation and incited the Peasant Wars. Hence the *appearance* of a radical paradigm shift.

Not unlike the Reformation which aimed at restoring Christianity to its pure and original state, the paradigm shift of Paracelsus is intended as a return to an earlier pristine medicine. When he finds himself suddenly catapulted into a position of academic authority in Basel, the program of instruction he announces to the students and faculty promises to restore medicine "ad pristinam suae authoritatis laudem."[8] Central to his initiative are the "primary three," that is, his teaching of *sulphur, mercurius,* and *sal.* Elsewhere, he equates these three to the persons of the Holy Trinity.[9] While their identification as *sulphur, mercurius, sal* is remarkably constant, their application to maladies such as *pestilentia, dolores capitis,* and the *tartarus* diseases is adaptive.[10] The three are associated with fire, with *spiritus vitae,*[11] and with a prime material of God's creation: the *yliaster* or *yliadum.*[12] Paracelsus thus theologizes medicine even while casting off the humanistic, "heathen" authorities of Galen, Avicenna, or Hippocrates,

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[8] See *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541): Essential Theoretical Writings,* ed., trans. and intro. Andrew Weeks (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 9. Henceforth cited as ETW by page.

[9] Theophrast von Hohenheim, genannt Paracelsus, *Sämtliche Werke, zweite Abteilung (Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften,* Kurt Goldammer (Ed.), vol. 3 (*Dogmatische und polemische Einzelschriften)*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1986), references to G by volume and page, here G III, 63f. ("daß dergleichen alle creaturn geschaffen seindt in die zal der trinitet"). See also *Liber Meteorum,* Philippus Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim genannt Paracelsus, *Bücher vnd Schrifften,* achter Theil, ed. Johann Huser (Basel: Waldkirch, 1590; reprint Hildesheim, New York, Olms, 1972), 188.

[10] S 5: 82, 256, 133.

[11] See S 4:15 ("exemplum habes in igne. in hoc enim accidens innatum est calor et natura trium primarum, quae palam calida est. . . . principio confer medicam ad eum, qui separat duas essentias, aliam in substantia et aliam in spiritu vitae").

[12] S 5:127 ("Sed quidquid ex internis tribus fuerit de yliastro…").

thereby rendering medicine more compatible with the Bible. The Bible by itself, however, offered only very general or specific pretexts. A medieval Bible-based tradition undergirds his worldview. Hildegard of Bingen whose name was indeed known to Paracelsus[13] and whose medical vocation matched his own, recognized three divine aspects of fire in nature, as well as the presence of the more generally acknowledged divine "virtues" in nature. Her medicine of a self-declared "ignorant woman" did not depend on the tutelage of Aristotle, Avicenna, or Galen. Paracelsian terms which seem redolent of the Renaissance—the light of nature, microcosm and macrocosm, or the signs or signatures in nature—were of a more general medieval origin. No less than Luther's reform of theology, Paracelsus's reform of medicine sought to return to once sovereign truths by a radical cleansing of pristine authority of all false accretions. Pursuing this course, Paracelsus discovers what he decries as the "labyrinth of errant physicians."[14] His readers may at times wonder whether he did not err about in that labyrinth himself.

There are tangents in Paracelsus's medical reform which distinguish it from the profile of the Reformation, but Luther's casual utterances accommodate much that looks un-Lutheran in Paracelsus, including alchemy, planetary astrology, and the presence of evil spirits.[15] Where Luther sought the one true doctrine, the "one necessary thing," Paracelsus tended toward syncretism in combining divergent medical approaches. This is evident in the reputedly pioneering *Volumen Paramirum*, his treatise on the five *entia* or causes of disease. A close look at the five *entia* reveals that all five were known in traditional

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[13] See S 13:334 (The context of materials pertaining to *De Fundamento Scientiarum Sapientiaeque* has to do with Hildegard's dreams or visions with reference to a wisdom in the arts conferred by God). Cf. ETW 359, n. 2 on the divine triad and fire.

[14] See S 11:161-220.

[15] On Luther's favorable view of alchemy, see Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [cited as "WA"] *(Tischreden Bd.* 1) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912), 566 ("Ars alchimica est vere illa veterum philosophia naturalis, quae mihi vehementer placet, cum propter alias multas utilitates, quas secum affert in excoquendis metallis, item herbis et liquoribus distillandis ac sublimandis, tum etiam propter allegoriam, quam habet pulcherrimam resurrectionem mortuorum in die extremo"). On Luther's acceptance of planetary influence, see WA 10, Abteilung 1. Hälfte 2:106.27-29 ("alle creaturn unter dem hymel werden regirt und bekrefftigt durch das licht, hitze, bewegung der hymel; was were die wellt on hymel, denn eyn wust, willt finsterniß?"). On the error of playing off Melanchthon against Luther with regard to the role of astrology, see Jacob Boehme, *Aurora (Morgen Röte im auffgang, 1621) and Fundamental Report (Gründlicher Bericht, Mysterium Pansophicum, 1620),* ed., trans. and intro Andrew Weeks with Günther Bonheim and Michael Spang (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 27.

medicine, particularly in the durable genre of the plague treatise which retained its relevance while the plague continued to recur. The five are *ens naturale* (corresponding to the elemental humors and natural disturbances), *ens astrale* (astral events), *ens venale* (miasmic vapors), *ens spiritale* (imagination, anger, fear, or malevolent magic), and *ens deale* (plague as a "scourge" inflicted as a punishment from God). They were familiar at least in outline in the ever-relevant plague literature. Paracelsus explicitly rejected the authority of humanistic medicine, tainted for him by the odium of the Aristotelian, Galenic, or pagan. Yet traditional concepts, causes, and cures, known from such sources as the plague literature, were subsumed in the four "pillars" of medicine, canonized in his *Paragranum* of 1529-30 (AW 1997 64-74).

In the Basel materials of 1527-28, the pillars are anticipated, but not systematically defined.[16] In and after Basel, the pillar of philosophy evolves as a theory of the microcosm and earthly elemental nature;[17] that of astronomy as a theory encompassing anatomical configurations, omnipresent *arcana, astra,* and celestial influences;[18] and of alchemy as a theory comprising the three primary things. The spirit-like etiology of imagination, malevolence, and magic persists in his medical universe, treated in dedicated works. The divine *ens* is explicit or implicit. The prior sources of medical authority (excepting those associated with the vile Aristotle, Galen, or Avicenna) are absorbed and reconfigured into the new medical *theorica* which, according to the *Labyrinthus medicoroum errantium,* is inspired by God.[19] Paracelsus was persistent in this devout attribution. Already in his earliest theological writing, the light of nature is said to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.[20] This allows him to incorporate various voices of medicine, even while attributing supreme authority to divine inspiration in conformity with the anti-

[16] See "Auslegung primae sectionis Aphorismorum Hippocrates," S 4:494 ("Die kunst der arznei stet in der philosophia, astronomia, alchimia und physica . . . die vier seulen der arznei zu ergründen braucht zeit).
[17] See S 4:444 ("so wird in der philosophei begriffen, das der mensch in im beschließe die ganze welt").
[18] See S 4:453 ("aus der astronomei muß der arzt die anatomei nemen"); S 4:495 (the physician must know how, through "influenz," "die eußeren die innern regirn"); S 4:446-47 (the "firmament" operates by means of "kreften und arcanis" on the human microcosm).
[19] S 11:199.
[20] See Andrew Weeks, "Theorie und Mystik in der Nachfolge des Paracelsus," *Morgen-Glantz. Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschafti* 13 (2003): 285.

scholasticism of Luther's Reformation. It may be that the canonical "Luther" of confessional theology has no truck with an unscriptural syncretism. The living Luther was not averse to alchemy, planetary astrology, or nature theology.[21]

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In Paracelsus's maturing work, the incorporation of multiple sources of authority is expressed by means of allusion and insinuation. This aspect imposes demands on the commentator, editor, or translator—as do the uncertainty surrounding the sequence and authenticity of many of his writings and the obscurity of his terms. How can we elucidate his terminology when he so rarely acknowledges his sources? How should we proceed when Sudhoff's claims of sequence and authenticity are dubious and we are not certain how the writings should be organized or prioritized? Which writings should be recognized as authentic; which take priority; and how should those of dubious authenticity be treated?

In an article on translating Paracelsus, I used the analogy of the reconstruction of the mosaic at Aquileia.[22] First the intact central sections should be restored, repaired, and studied. This equates to the writings of 1530-31 which I translated and published in 2007. They take priority as well-elaborated compositions aspiring to a system or *summa.* Other pieces of the puzzle can be meaningfully placed with reference to this central section. We see how the writings beginning in Salzburg or Basel—all those prior to 1530—lead toward and develop in the direction of this centerpiece of our reconstructed mural. We know much about the dating of the writing that follow this juncture, so that from 1527 on, it is possible to recognize continuous threads of development extending to the end of the 1530s and to Paracelsus's death. The writings that defy such dating, I suggested, should be grouped thematically.

[21] See above note 15.

[22] Andrew Weeks, "Das fragmentierte Mosaik des Paracelsischen Schriftencorpus – Welche Aussichten haben die Übersetzungs- und Editionsarbeit? *Nova Acta Paracelsica. Beiträge zur Paracelsusforschung.* Neue Folge 24, 25 (2010/2011): 103-24.

I would now revise my projected outline for a translation-edition of the writings of Paracelsus, placing at the forefront a volume of the early or foundational theological writings, including those that can be firmly dated to 1524-25, plus several that are probably from the same interval but, in any case, inform the essential concepts and anticipate the development of the later works, whether of theology or medicine. This would then be followed by volumes for the foundations of Paracelsus's philosophy of nature. One that encompasses cosmological and meteorological writings (the difference of the two is less clear than it might seem) is in preparation in collaboration with Didier Kahn. It will include on thematic grounds the influential, disputed *Philosophia ad Athenienses*. The cosmological-meteorological writings should be complemented by another volume encompassing his most important but undated speculative work, a task for an editor with a sound knowledge of the history of alchemy. This volume would include the valuable *De Mineralibus*.

Further volumes in planning should contain work written between 1527 and 1530 tracing the evolution of his thinking from Basel through Sankt Gallen. They could include academic medical work that can stand on its own (*De Gradibus et Compositionibus Receptorum et Naturalium, De Modo Pharmacandi, Deutsche Kommentare zu den Aphorismen des Hippokrates),* as well as drafts, fragments, and an appendix containing significant passages from his students' lecture notes. Though not all drafts or fragments can be conclusively dated, the writings of this interval contain allusions referring back to the Basel dispute, as well as preliminary allusions to the four pillars of *Opus Paramirum.*[23] They promise insights regarding the rationale and motives of his maturing production, as well as some more finished writing of thematic interest. His *Volumen Paramirum,* the treatise encompassing the five *entia,* could be included here, since it shows signs of a tentative effort in the direction of the middle period.

[23] See above, note 15.

A translation of the late *Astronomia Magna* or *Philosophia Sagax* by Dane Thor Daniel is nearing publication. Another volume should contain the "Carinthian Writings" and another still the surgical ones, with further volumes devoted to Paracelsus's work on magic or superstition, as well as the most important theological works. Finally, the reputedly pseudepigraphic works are more important for our understanding of Paracelsus's impact than many documents and letters contained in the painstakingly produced *Corpus Paracelsisticum*. An unjustifiable categorization allows the spurious, unauthenticated, or "deutero-Paracelsian" works to vanish between an authentic Paracelsus and his well-documented but often shallow reception. Disposal by categorization should not be allowed to obscure the relevance or limit the accessibility of those disputed works.[24] Their presumed negligibility is the shadow cast by the unexamined glory of the master. If they are to be classified as negligible, the judgment must be based on comparison with Paracelsus's own writing, not on anachronistic standards. The larger project can only come to fruition through the open-minded collaboration and shared interest of a larger group of scholars working in several fields. In my own labors so far and in those of my collaborators in Paracelsus research, two sources of smaller grants and seed money have proved indispensable: the Theophrastus Stiftung and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Without their ready assistance, several vital projects would not have been possible. In proportion to their resources, they have proven more effective in advancing our research than the main American, German, or Swiss research foundations. The completion of Paracelsus's *Essential Theoretical Writings* drew upon the advice and experience of Hartmut Rudolph, then director of the Leibniz archive in Potsdam, in a project supported by the DAAD. The Theophrastus Stiftung has again and again supported and encouraged the work of an international network of Paracelsus scholars.

[24] See Andrew Weeks, "Paracelsus and the Idea of the Renaissance," in Frank Baron and Helmut Koopmann (eds.), *Die Wiederkehr der Renaissance in der Literatur und Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, mentis, 2013), 89-113.

In the *Essential Theoretical Writings* of 1530-31, I adopted a four-part format. Beneath the source text on the left, I situated a commentary extracted from the authentic or attributed works of the author and, on the right, beneath the translation, a commentary drawing upon all text-external sources, from writings by contemporary authors, dictionaries, and secondary literature to my own explication. The objective was to place the best source at the center of concentric circles comprised by the author's full corpus, contextual and interpretive sources, and finally the translation itself. The latter is both a close reading and an interpretation juxtaposed with its source as a foregrounded standard of accuracy. For Paracelsus studies, edition, translation, and commentary serve to overcome the institutionally driven one-sidedness of a German scholarship which has sought for the better part of a century to separate the practical physician and alchemist from the theologian or religious dissenter and the much-vaunted influence exerted by the German genius from the neglected sources of his impact, namely his writings.

Not everyone agrees on the merits of Paracelsus as a stylist.[25] What is certain is that his writings are literary in the sense that they make use of motifs and extended constructions which are lost to the normalizing tendency of translation and to an overreliance on excerpts in studying him.

> The loss of context within treatises obfuscates one of the most important facets of his argumentation: his use of extended allusions. These can span entire works, sometimes mutating when a biblical metaphor is taken literally or a literal meaning is redirected to a novel purpose. Biblical allusions become intertwined with medical and philosophical references. For example, the biblical-theological tension between Old Testament law and the Evangelical theme of rebirth accompanies and informs the contrast between the older, rules-based medicine of the *regimina sanitatis* and the new regenerative medical alchemy espoused by Paracelsus. Throughout these works, a scriptural-

[25] See Joachim Telle, Sven Limbeck (eds.), *Paracelsus im Gedicht. Theophrastus von Hohenheim in der Poesie des 16. Bis 21. Jahrhunderts* (Hürtgenwald: Guido Pressler Verlag, 2007).

> medical keynote is incorporated in recurrent, literal and metaphorical, allusions to "seed." These references tap a broad register of biblical citations. Among them, the grain of wheat which must die and rot in the ground to bring forth fruit (John 12:24) sounds a recurrent alchemical and theological chord. (ETW 36)

Biblical contexts, obfuscated in translation or lost in his excerpt-based reception, are essential to the intentions of Paracelsus's gynecology, his theory of mental illness, and his faith in the healing powers of nutrition or specific medications. The facing-page source text maintains the presence of his voice while explicating his intentions.

In addition to exposing these structures for the reader, the editor-translator faces a challenge in glossing the terms of the Paracelsian *materiae medicae.* The terms themselves are often obscure. Some are not found in any available lexicon, although the Grimms' *Deutsches Wörterbuch* and Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (1730-1750) were compiled by contributors who gave Paracelsus close attention; and three early modern *lexica* were compiled specifically to assist his readers. For rendering obscure terms intelligible context is necessary. The translator of his work is often surprised to learn that what seems arcane was actually a common usage. His Latin terms can be explicated with the help of the *Lexicon des Mittelalters, The Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* (since English words often have Latin roots and cognates familiar throughout the Latin culture of Europe), and surprisingly the *Concordance des Œuvres de François Rabelais.* Rabelais's vocabulary overlaps with the terminologies of Paracelsus. They were after all contemporaries and physicians. Scholars of literature who do not translate but instead publish articles and monographs might find such referencing dubious, since customary scholarship considers it necessary to establish direct influences in the way that a lawyer adjudicates property and inheritance claims. Lexicographers, editors, and translators understand that any term is best explicated by the broader context of its use. Lexicographic examples are not presented

as evidence that the particular use of a word was influenced by the lexical citation; and yet we all rely on dictionaries. My approach aims to show that Paracelsus spoke a language common to his age and that he engaged in dialog with contemporaries. Though he can hardly have responded to Shakespeare, John Donne, or Cervantes, it is noteworthy that his obscure terminologies were common enough to remain intelligible to the audience of *As You Like It,* "The Anatomy of the World," or *Don Quixote.*

It is above all important that his terms, concepts, or preoccupations coincided with concurrent controversies or publications. Paracelsus's concern with the bread and wine of Communion coincided with the Eucharistic controversies of the later 1520s and his biblicism with the proclamation of the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura.* His attention around 1530 to native medicinal herbs coincided with the publication in that same year of Otto Brunfels's *Herbarum vivae eicones;* his preoccupation with the "French disease" with the publication of Fracastoro's work on syphilis in that year; and his alchemical-metallurgical-medical interests with Georg Agricola's *Bermannus, sive de re metallica dialogus* all in the same year (ETW 4-5). Coincidences aside, such topics had been of pressing general interest for some time already. The publication of popular medical or naturalistic writings had been a growth industry which conferred fame and success distinct from the abortive academic career which more or less by chance seems to have diverted and then haunted Paracelsus. The errant star that meandered like a prodigious comet wended its way through gravitational fields that defined its trajectory. To highlight those fields is to observe that his oracular obscurity was in fact an impassioned interaction with the dominant and suppressed voices of his time. No royal road led from his moment of crisis into the future, no more than one does for us now. This is perhaps the profoundest way in which we can project our concerns into the *Rohrschach* of his existence. We are closest to Paracelsus when groping our way toward a future as obscure and endangered for us as his was for him.

In the typologies of world literature, certain writings are compositional masterpieces, polished and abstracted from spoken discourse. Others convey a less refined spoken word which can be crude and contingent. One attends to the voice in the reading. Paracelsus is a voice of a kind that demands to be imagined as spoken in the public spaces he frequented, where he most likely dictated his work with little privacy (AW 1997 59-60). His writings are performative, combative, exhortatory, tinged with hyperbole and with a coarse humor that now requires glossing to flash through. Regarding the marvels of the generation of life, he writes, "Just look at the dung-beetle, and consider what it emerges from: not from horse dung *[Roßzirck],* but from the constellation with which it coincides" (ETW 167). This is a typical play on words. According to Grimm, *zirk* refers both to dung and to the starry firmament. The juxtaposition and equivocation of the realms of the exalted heavens and of a debased excrement are typical not only of Paracelsus's favor of the crass effect but equally for a worldview and cosmology in which the hierarchically relegated realms of the medieval cosmos were crashing into one another, mingling the high with the low, celestial with earthly, sublime with vile. The transforming energies of the stellar world are manifest in his *astra* which are omnipresent, transformative, and more conducive to health and healing than the dietary strictures of the traditional *regimen sanitatis,*[26] the latter analogous both to the humors and to the Jewish law; the former to the in-dwelling grace of a transforming Savior. Luther's doctrine of the *Abendmahl* asserts the physical omnipresence of God. Paracelsus's recognition of the *arcana* and *magnalia dei* and his thesis of the two bodies in the *Abendmahl* correlate with his similar preoccupation with the visible and invisible human bodies and their transformations. His teaching of a mortal "sidereal spirit" as well as an eternal soul might be read with reference to Pietro Pomponazzi's controversial discovery that Aristotle had not recognized an eternal soul.[27] Paracelsus's invocation of

[26] See S 5:43 (Paracelsus contrasts the old medicine of the *regimina sanitatis* with his alchemically conceived *tartarus* theory and treatment: "non curo regimina veterum, quia causas tartari ignorarunt"); S 4:506 ("dan die arznei sol heilen, nicht das diaet").
[27] See Weeks, "Theorie und Mystik" (2003): 287-88.

things vile, vulgar, or excremental reminds us that he was contemporary with a scatological Luther, a grotesque Rabelais, and a humanist-baiting generation that lent raw material to Dedekind's *Grobianus*. His affinities with Pomponazzi or Rabelais do not rest on their acknowledgment in his citations. They derive instead from the dialogical aspect that responds to contemporary tendencies and issues—issues probably familiar to him and certainly to many in his time.

Those who followed him were not only the imitators and pseudo-Paracelsians who have long dominated scholarly attention, but just as importantly such original thinkers as Valentin Weigel, Jacob Boehme, or Johann Arndt. They developed his work in new directions and magnified its impact. With Weigel or Boehme, Paracelsus shares the originality of the radical biblical exegesis, the criticism of the church and academy, the focus on epistemology and cosmology, the use of the terms macrocosm and microcosm, the two lights of nature and spirit, the triad of *sulphur, mercury,* and *salt,* the trichotomy of spirit, soul, and body, and the notion of a divine wisdom and power informing nature. Only Weigel is not concerned with medicine, alchemy, magic, or the divine forces, signs, or signatures in nature.[28]

Together, these authors constitute an important and long neglected current of early modern intellectual history which is of particular relevance to the Baroque, Romantic, and Modernist periods, as well as to the history of science and philosophy. Motivated by the same anti-authoritarianism that inspired his work, the writings can only be rendered accessible if and when scholarship "lowers" itself to the humble and subordinate tasks of edition and translation. Then as now, the voice of Paracelsus strains against the superciliousness of an academic establishment which would prefer to know him as the mute object of its own magisterial pronouncements. The translation from the facing page source text with commentary maximizes the reader's proximity to his authentic voice from another historical world, a voice that speaks to us of a chaotic transitional moment not unlike our own.

[28] See Weeks, "Theorie und Mystik" (2003), 301