

# 1 ■ The Ambiguities of Paracelsus

Despite the tremendous advances in the scholarly knowledge of Hohenheim of the last hundred years, the myth of Paracelsus has proven remarkably resilient against adverse evidence. Before examining the beginnings of Paracelsian theory in the context of the early Reformation, I want to suggest that his received image has been greatly affected by perspectival distortions, wrought by his Faustian and Renaissance associations, by certain categorical prejudices that induced scholars to look for and perceive what was required to sustain the myth, and by a scholarly division of labor that tends to exaggerate the distinction between the scientific and religious components of his thought and even to skew the dating of his work. Other factors rendering the Paracelsus myth impervious to outside challenges include the relative inaccessibility of his remaining unedited writings and the role of patriotisms, national as well as local, in setting the agenda for the journals and congresses devoted to his study.

Much Paracelsus scholarship has followed from an overriding fixed certainty, by way of a subordinate and variable procedure. The certainty is that the aim of scholarship is to discover what makes him great. The variable procedure is represented by the many divergent approaches, by the great variety of *Paracelsuses*—Humanistic, scientific, occultist, proto-Jungian, Fascist, devout, or dissenting—that have been proposed in order to flesh out his presumed stature. Moreover, because the ideological shifts in the reception of Paracelsus have come and gone with no decisive endeavor to reassess him as a whole, hardly any other author or oeuvre of German literature has remained more shaped and colored in presentation by ideologies than Paracelsus. During the last hundred years, the period in which the scholarly understanding of his person and work has been elaborated, his image has reflected several very distinct ideologies: scientific positivism, *völkisch* biologicistic racism,

and Christian social ethics, as well as other religious or occult beliefs. Throughout these transformations, a number of characteristics have remained widespread: the tendency to identify Paracelsus with the Renaissance, the underestimation of his religious point of departure, and the indiscriminating impulse either to embrace or discount him as a whole—always the charlatan or the persecuted saintly genius. Before investigating the coherence of his ideas, it is therefore essential to examine some of the assumptions that have generated the Paracelsus myth.

The received notions of Luther and Paracelsus contrast as Reformationist single-mindedness and spirituality contrast with Renaissance universality and openness to natural experience. The portrait of Paracelsus as Faust has been retouched from era to era, yet it has persisted in nearly every era from Paracelsus's own down to the twentieth century. In the late sixteenth century, the Humanist Conrad Gesner compared the wandering philosopher-physician to the wayward magician Faust,<sup>23</sup> thereby associating Paracelsus with the same powers of illicit magic that incited Luther's hatred of the nefarious scholar. Gesner also remarked on the reputation of Paracelsus as a physician and alchemistic innovator with efficacious cures. We have no means of assessing either the true similarity with the shadowy Faust or the degree of success of Paracelsus's medicine; what is certain is that his reputation remained largely dependent upon a variable relation of transgression and knowledge, dominated always by the same extreme alternatives of charlatanism versus idealistic truth-seeking.

Again and again, the association of Paracelsus with the Renaissance spirit and with Faust has been reasserted. In 1789, Johann Christoph Adelung assigned Paracelsus along with Faust to a rogues' gallery of charlatans. Only a year later, Goethe's *Urfaust* appeared, reflecting, according to scholars, its author's early interest in Paracelsus. Goethe, Wieland, and the Romantics defended Paracelsus against the aspersions of charlatanism and thereby reinforced the extreme options governing his reputation as mountebank or misunderstood genius.<sup>24</sup>

The rehabilitated Faust would be perceived as a vindication of a belated German Renaissance suppressed by Luther. Faust was to become an emblem of progress and enlightenment for the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. Karl Sudhoff, the great medical historian who edited the writings of Paracelsus, subtitled his 1936 biography, *Ein*

*deutsches Lebensbild aus den Tagen der Renaissance*. With a different idea of genius, Jung's discussion of Paracelsus adhered to much the same concept of progress—though recognizing that, in addition to his “revolutionary” status in the history of science, he was a “conservative” with respect to Church doctrine.<sup>25</sup> Even in scholarship not obsessed with Faust, the Renaissance portrait of the anti-Luther continued to prevail. Walter Pagel's classic study, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, conceded superficial resemblances to Luther, but nonetheless insisted that Paracelsus was a man of the Renaissance, who could not have been more strictly opposed to the “religious dogmatism” and “mystical belief” of Luther.<sup>26</sup> Though Pagel could also argue the mysticism of Paracelsus, he meant by this a syncretic, Renaissance mysticism, decisively influenced by Neoplatonism.<sup>27</sup> The fine recent survey by Allen G. Debus of *The French Paracelsians* presents Hohenheim in much the same light, as a representative of Renaissance “Hermeticism and natural magic.” Debus relegates the “religious issues” accompanying Paracelsian chemistry and medicine to a “sociological study,” extraneous to “intellectual history.”<sup>28</sup>

In the history of Paracelsus reception, the turning point that proved most prodigious and far-reaching in its consequences came toward the end of the nineteenth century, at around the time of the four-hundredth anniversary of his birth. Though scholars in the nineteenth century had already investigated the status of Paracelsus in medical and scientific history, a broader interest was now kindled by the stimulating and controversial appraisals of Friedrich Mook, Karl Sudhoff, Eduard Schubert, and others.<sup>29</sup> After 1900, the era of fervent interest in Paracelsus began to unfold, climaxing in the veritable mania of the 1930s and 1940s.

Certainly, the climate of the times shaped the perceptions of the Faustian and Renaissance giant. In the late nineteenth century, Jacob Burckhardt's celebrated study of the Renaissance had encouraged enthusiasm for a heroic founding epoch of the modern individual and the modern state. Some Germans aspired to recoup a glorious medieval past after founding the Hohenzollern *Reich*. In the same vein, Richard Wagner's operas were reviving and reinterpreting Germanic mythology. Perhaps the heroic world was not a myth after all. If the scene of the great Homeric poem known to the graduates of humanistic *Gymnasien* could be unearthed when Schliemann undertook the remarkable step of digging in Asia Minor in order to

discover the historic Troy—perhaps one could unearth a true historical prototype for Goethe's Faust as well.

In 1911, the Germanist Agnes Bartscherer published a study of Goethe's *Faust* as a work inspired by the life and writings of Paracelsus. She based her arguments on Goethe's account of his alchemical avocation during his early convalescence in Frankfurt and on a close examination of the writings of Paracelsus. Though she was not the first to draw such connections, Bartscherer drew them more specifically than any scholar before her. Interpreting *Faust* in the light of Paracelsus's writings, she in fact *improved* the image of the fictional character, as others were resurrecting that of his real prototype. Thus, citing an alchemical work *De Spiritibus Metallorum*, she attempted to upgrade the understanding of the fictional father of Faust by what amounts to a vindication of progress. According to Goethe's poem, father and son poisoned more people in treating the plague with alchemistic remedies than the plague itself killed. Bartscherer made much of a clue to the good intentions of Faust father and son, when Goethe hints of the alchemistic symbol of "the young queen":

Since Faust's father in time of plague is only concerned with helping against the Black Death, not with making gold, it is understandable that he makes do with the queen, instead of transforming her through a further drawn out process of heating, into the king who produces golden treasures, and about whom the book of *Alchimia* speaks further.

*Da es sich für den Vater Fausts in der Pestzeit nur um Hilfe gegen den schwarzen Tod, nicht um Goldmachen handelt, ist es verständlich, daß er sich mit der Königin begnügt, statt sie durch weitere langwierige Erhitzung in den König zu verwandeln, der goldene Schätze verschafft und von dem die Schrift Alchimia weiter redet.*<sup>30</sup>

In killing their patients, father and son rose above base intent. Bartscherer recognized in Faust's reference to his father an echo of the filial piety of Paracelsus. Neither the idealizations of Faust and Paracelsus, nor the filial trust that stirred the heart of more than one generation of Paracelsus admirers, nor the lofty ideals of service to humanity and progress (superimposed upon the poison kitchen of

Faust père, as on his presumed prototype) were compatible with Goethe's knowing cynicism regarding the misguided trust of the common folk in their revered benefactors, father and son: well-intentioned betrayers of the people and perpetrators of a deadly mass malpractice.<sup>31</sup>

More significant in the present context than the influence of Paracelsus on Goethe's *Faust* is the erosion of the boundary between fiction and historical fact in German attitudes toward Paracelsus. The breakdown has roots in *Geistesgeschichte*, in its recognition that forms or archetypes are cultural forces, virtual actors in history. Thus, for Friedrich Gundolf, Paracelsus was a figure of "macrocosmic zeal" (*makrokosmischen Eifer*), who knew no match in Georg Agricola, Kepler, Leibniz, or any other scientific mind prior to—and here Gundolf leaps from history into literature—the Goethe of the first *Faust* poem (*Urfaust*).<sup>32</sup>

In the aftermath of the defeat of 1918, the intellectual historian and *Kulturpessimist* Oswald Spengler (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*) presented what he characterized as "Faustian Man": the archetypal "culture soul of Western man" (*die abendländische Kulturseele*). Faustian man was a generalized archetype that bore as much resemblance to the refurbished stylizations of Paracelsus as to Goethe's Faust, or to the obscure sixteenth-century Faust. Rising above the horizon of *Neuzeit*, Faustian Man represented an underlying quest for infinite knowledge and experience in Western culture after the Middle Ages. *Kultur*, to the extent that it had not yet been corrupted by the *Zivilisation* of England or America, was centered in Germany. In this light, the German proto-heroes, Faust or Paracelsus, seemed harbingers of something far greater and more fateful that had yet to yield its full consequences.

Vague intimations were offered in the Paracelsus trilogy of Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer, of which the first part (*Die Kindheit des Paracelsus*) was published in 1917, the second (*Das Gestirn des Paracelsus*) in 1921, and the third, with its ominous title, *The Third Reich of Paracelsus* (*Das dritte Reich des Paracelsus*), in 1925.<sup>33</sup> Kolbenheyer was not only an imaginative writer. He was an assiduous researcher of Paracelsus who copied the language and followed the outline of the known biography, though with much unavoidable embellishment. What was more problematical than mere imaginative license was Kolbenheyer's attempt to incorporate the hysterias and anxieties of the post-war period into a sixteenth-century life

and, at the same time, to arrange the whole panorama of Paracelsus beneath the pantheon of his German cultural idols. In the age of trench warfare, Kolbenheyer recreates hand-to-hand front-line combat in the Swiss-Swabian battles of Paracelsus's century; and he exploits the *Heimkehrer*-motif of the returning warrior. Moral decadence and racial degeneracy are coupled in the person of Cursetta, courtesan to a papal legate who cavorts with a homosexual African. Paracelsus is Nordic Man. Wagner's Wotan and Luther's Christ augur and contend for the German soul. The North Wind is "the Hater of Pestilence." Remaining in step with the times, Kolbenheyer subsequently explicated the socio-biological racism of his so-called *Bauhüttenphilosophie*. In the trilogy, the Nordic hatred of pestilence is embodied in Paracelsus's steadfast struggle to halt a plague epidemic in Ferrara. It is here that the Nordic hero develops his alchemical medicine and breaks with Galenism.<sup>34</sup> Entranced by premonitions of an eternal German *Kulturseele*, Kolbenheyer adorned the final novel of his trilogy with a phrase popularized by Moeller van den Bruck's fatal title: *Das dritte Reich des Paracelsus*.

Kolbenheyer was an independent theorist of *Deutschtum* and a philosopher of race and folk. He was midwife to the Paracelsus cult of the Nazi era that yielded an enormous progeny of novels, poems, dramas, operas, studies, dissertations, and journalistic or propagandistic articles championing the German and "European" facets of the incomparable German folk genius.<sup>35</sup> A typical (and for its period, by no means ideologically extremist) expression of this cult can be found in Franz Spunda's biography, published in the banner year of Paracelsus writings, 1941. It begins with this characterization:

The Faustian Man, in the final form acquired through Goethe, is the outcome of a spiritual struggle (*eines Geisteskampfes*) that has extended over many millenia. The German soul of the Middle Ages, threatened and frightened by images of terror, almost expiring under the burden of its religious duties, sought peace and calm in fervent devotion to God without in the process being hemmed in by church dogma.

*Der Faustische Mensch, wie er durch Goethe seine endgültige Gestalt gewann, ist das Ergebnis eines Geisteskampfes, der sich über viele Jahrhunderte erstreckt hat. Die deutsche Seele des*

*Mittelalters, die unter der Last ihrer religiösen Verpflichtungen fast erlag, von Schreckbildern umdroht und verängstigt, suchte Ruhe in einer inbrünstigen Hingabe an Gott, ohne dabei vom kirchlichen Dogma eingeengt zu sein.*<sup>36</sup>

As if in order to break out of such encirclements by initiating a second military front, the German soul recognizes with the aid of the concepts of macrocosm and microcosm that it is able to have an impact upon the external world: "Such a worldview explains the essence of the Faustian Man" (*Ein solches Weltbild erklärt das Wesen des faustischen Menschen*).<sup>37</sup> The Faustian Paracelsus prevails over the medieval contempt for the flesh, according to Spunda. For Paracelsian medicine, the body is sacred. As one who dwells in the twilight between ages, the figure of Paracelsus remains ambiguous in a way that that of Luther or Faust does not, writes Spunda. Faust represents striving; Paracelsus, experience and observation. What distinguishes him from the other Faustian natures of the late Middle Ages is his view to the future.<sup>38</sup> In an age of strong personalities, strength for him is only a means to the end of assisting his fellows. This echoes the Paracelsus of Bartscherer, Spengler, Kolbenheyer, or Gundolf. The dawn hues of *die Neuzeit* are always glimmering in the background.

It is not difficult to uncover and itemize the ideological myths. What is harder to explain, and rather more disturbing to contemplate, is the extent to which many of the same traits are found in portrayals written before, during, and after the period of extreme German nationalism—written by Nazis, nationalists, or democrats. The Paracelsus myth remains at root much the same: he is the Faustian, the man of the people, the new man, tragically in advance of his time.<sup>39</sup> What, we must ask, are the qualities that make it possible for Paracelsus to attract the interest of politically varied groups? What in general are the allures of the Faustian man of the dawning *Neuzeit*? Does Paracelsus truly possess the qualities of such a figure?

We can best answer these questions by offering a credible presentation of his life and thought. But before turning to the life and times of Paracelsus, it is also necessary to suggest to the reader that historians of science and medicine have often engaged in circular demonstrations of his status as an initiator of a new science and medicine, a preordained fulfillment of the Faustian-Renaissance

image of Paracelsus that renders the image virtually impervious to counter-demonstration.

This is not to deny Paracelsus's innovations or his sense of a reforming mission. It is generally agreed that he effectively challenged the hegemony of Galenic medicine; that he inaugurated an alternative school of iatrochemical medicine; and that his example encouraged others to search for healing powers in herbs and substances and to experiment in what would become chemistry. From the nineteenth century to the recent work of Debus, chemistry has had the least difficulty acknowledging a debt to his work. Though many claims for his achievements have proven exaggerated,<sup>40</sup> occupational pathology, toxicology, and dietetics are among several specific fields in which he is regarded as a pioneer. Historians of science and medicine have investigated Paracelsus's work for evidence of discoveries. This study will not undertake an inexpert revision of their specific claims.

The unresolved problem attending all such assessments is that the assertion of his advances is not accompanied by any attempt to demonstrate just how he arrived at his conclusions. Among his edited works, there are many drafts and repeated treatments of the same theme. Yet almost no attempt has been made to establish from these drafts that the emergence of his results was an outcome based on experience, logic, or gradual reflection on a rationally conceived problem.<sup>41</sup> It would be difficult to imagine scholars failing to analyze the papers of a Newton or Kepler in order to ascertain their paths to discovery. What are we to make of Pagel's puzzling judgment that Paracelsus was not a scientist—yet he “produced scientific results from a non-scientific world of motives and thoughts”?<sup>42</sup> What does it mean to say that non-scientific thoughts produce scientific results? Are such results perhaps comparable to the explorations encouraged in Paracelsus's time by late medieval writings on the legendary Kingdom of Prester John? No one would place the legend of Prester John in the history of scientific navigation on a level with the invention of the compass or the improvement of cartography—just because the lore of the priest-king's fabled realm obliquely reflected an awareness of Abyssinia and the East. The writings on Prester John pertain to the world of medieval legend; the stimulation they provided to geographical exploration derived from their religious-political agenda.

How should we regard the supposed “scientific results” found in Paracelsus's work, if for every valid precept there are dozens of

credulities—for every existent Abyssinia countless chimerical monsters? There has been no consistent attempt at separating the wheat from the chaff in Paracelsus's work, no general comparison of the relative weights of either. It is a circular argument to suggest that what we now regard as his advances were the basis of his sixteenth-century reputation, as if he and his supporters had been prescient. It would be more accurate to say that much of what we now see as progressive insight was the by-product of a garrulous propaganda aimed at inflating his fame. Modern natural science can no more provide an adequate retrospective on the experienced world of Paracelsus than modern mathematics might reconstruct out of itself the beliefs of an ancient Pythagorean mystery cult. What seems to render Paracelsus so keenly modern is the belief, his as well as ours, that he stood at the dawn of a new age.

Because of its circularity and status as a modern article of faith, the Paracelsus legend has proven resistant to reversals in evidence. Thus, in 1911, the Viennese medical historian J. K. Proksch offered a knowledgeably documented, balanced though still devastating, rebuttal to what he criticized as blind hero worship in Sudhoff. Contrary to Sudhoff's views, Proksch demonstrated that Paracelsus was considerably less original and less guided by practical medical experience than his self-praises would lead us to expect. Indeed, Proksch made a compelling case that, even by sixteenth-century standards of progress, Paracelsus was much less progressive and rather more given to credulous superstitions than Sudhoff had allowed.<sup>43</sup>

The last point is crucial, since in defense of Paracelsus's scientific leanings, one might think that the rules and devices of empiricism were altogether unknown in the sixteenth century. This would be a misleading defense. A century before Paracelsus, Nicholas of Cusa called for quantitative research in medicine—empirical experience in our sense. Paracelsus's contemporary Georg Agricola was a man who shared his medical and alchemical interests, along with some of his superstitions and prejudices. Though a Galenist and a Humanist who gleaned the writings of the ancients for naturalistic information, Agricola accumulated and ordered a wealth of information on mining, mineralogy, and the composition of streams and waters. He also composed a work on weights and measures, and a plague tract<sup>44</sup> that, though guided by humoral theory, is less phantasmagorical than Paracelsus's theory of epidemics. Hieronymus Brunschwig, a barber-surgeon and older contemporary of Paracelsus, had already applied antiseptic procedures to wounds, and argued

that the surgeon should possess the knowledge of the physician.<sup>45</sup> Medieval alchemists had long since taken the first steps toward chemical therapy. True, their thinking was rife with mystical beliefs. But should one suppose that the thinking of Paracelsus is less so? A thirteenth-century physician, Nicholas of Poland, had long before denounced medieval medical tradition and broken ranks with the medical establishment at the University of Montpellier, to champion specific remedies.

Nancy Siraisi has summarized his Paracelsus-like opposition to scholastic authority and advocacy of a natural medicine utilizing latent healing virtues:

As a result of his experiences there, Friar Nicholas wrote a poem denouncing the characteristic features of university medical training—reliance on ancient authorities, scholasticism, and rationalism. In his native Poland he tried to develop his own “natural” alternative medicine; it consisted of the idea that God had implanted special healing virtues in revolting things and led him to urge his patients to eat snakes, lizards, and frogs.<sup>46</sup>

This sounds like and unlike Paracelsus: unlike him in appearing to embody medieval contentions rather than Renaissance openness to true naturalistic experience. We might assume that Paracelsus is in a very different category from Nicholas of Poland; that when he proposes strange and seemingly worthless diagnoses and remedies, he is at least doing so on the basis of empirical experience; that he has at least gotten onto the right bus, even if he gets off it at the wrong stop. This assumption is as incorrect for Paracelsus as it is for Nicholas of Poland.<sup>47</sup>

All claims made with respect to his status in the history of science rest in the final analysis on the pivotal assertion that he was, as he himself often proclaimed, an advocate of experience over tradition. Paracelsus’s announcement of his lectures in Basel promised a program based on *experientia ac ratio*. It can be argued that if, and only if, this “experience” was on the side of naturalistic observation, are the successes attributed to him recognizable as scientific advances. However, when one compares the experiential findings of Paracelsus with those of others in his century, his “experience” appears to fall into a different category, more akin to religious contemplation than to rigorous observation by the senses.

The image of Paracelsus not only overshadows precursors. It eclipses his contemporaries. This is especially evident when one compares Paracelsus with two medical authors who were younger by only one generation: Paré and Servetus. Even a practice-oriented work such as *Die große Wundarznei* (*The Great Wound-Surgery*), which presumably derived from Paracelsus's early activities in ministering to armies, can be searched in vain for the sort of precise clinical findings and fine accounts of wound dressings recounted of military surgery by Ambroise Paré (1510–1590).<sup>48</sup> As a craftsmanlike barber-surgeon who utilized his labors and expended his leisure in the study of anatomy, Paré stood in the forefront of a medicine contrasting with that of Paracelsus (though, like his older German counterpart, Paré wrote in the vernacular, believed in monsters, and knew that nature could heal wounds without drastic interventions by the practitioner).

Another figure of this century was closer to Paracelsus's dual preoccupations with religion and medicine: Miguel Servetus (1511–1553). Servetus was the tragic critic of the trinitarian doctrine who was burned at the stake for this heresy in Calvin's Geneva. Denying that a divisibly threefold vital spirit inhabits the human organism, and stimulated also by his awareness that in Hebrew the word for *spirit* also signifies *air*, Servetus arrived at the discovery of the circulation of blood through the lungs, in a work completed around the time of Paracelsus's death bearing the title *Restitutio Christianismi*.<sup>49</sup> Like Paracelsus, Servetus was an individualist who distanced himself from the Catholic and Protestant camps of his time. Like him, he adhered to the belief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. But where Paracelsus insisted on the triadic structure of human being and of nature in the image of the triune Creator, Servetus's skeptical critique of trinitarian doctrine went hand in hand with an innovative study of the inner organic workings of life. Like Servetus, Paracelsus was a theologian-physician. Unlike him, theology did not orient the more renowned physician toward the observable structures of the body.

Servetus could only achieve his discovery as an experienced student of dissection. As such, he stood in the most productive current of sixteenth-century medicine, the century that brought forth Vesalius's great anatomical compendium *De Humani Corporis Machina*, published in 1543 by Paracelsus's erstwhile amanuensis Oporinus. The new anatomical studies proceeded from a critical

reediting and revaluation of Galen's ancient writings. It was discovered around this time that these had been based on animal anatomy. The judgment of Paracelsus is quite as firm in regard to the close study of the human body as it is in reference to the study of Galen: he condemns the new approach as folly, but at the same time he appropriates the term *anatomy*, applying it not to the interior of the body but to his own theoretical framework of mystical correspondences, reflecting the image of the Creator:

all things stand in the image. That is, all things are formed. In this image [or form] lies anatomy. The human being is formed, his image is his anatomy which the physician must know. For thus, too, there are the anatomies of diseases.

*alle ding in dem bild stent. das ist alle ding sind gebildet. in diser biltnus ligt die anatomei. der mensch ist gebildet; sein bilt-nus ist die anatomei, einem arzt voraus notwendig zuwissen. dan also seind auch anatomien der krankheiten. (I,9:62)*

Sixteenth-century critics recognized that Paracelsus was opposed to Renaissance anatomy.<sup>50</sup> His substitution of his own mystical anatomy rendered observational or diagnostic experience at best imprecise and at worst utterly fanciful—indeed, rendered the very term *experience* questionable as employed by this ardent adherent of supernatural phenomena.

As Goldammer has stated, Paracelsus's outlook was in many respects medieval.<sup>51</sup> The image correspondences of macrocosm and microcosm are bound up with the medieval understanding of analogy and symbol, derived from a concept of *analogia entis* and closely intertwined with the spiritual sense of the Bible. The medieval doctrine of the fourfold meaning of Scripture was undermined by the Lutheran Reformation; Paracelsus reconstructed his symbolic vision of nature in part with remnants of a medieval biblicistic authority. Compared to the most advanced cosmologies of the late Middle Ages, nature in Paracelsus's *Astronomia Magna* represents a *return* to biblical authority. In this, the physician was not so much an anti-Luther as a variant Luther, a *Lutherus medicorum*.

The Faustian image of Paracelsus, reiterated throughout so much of the German literature, not only subordinates him in the

popular conception to a Renaissance which seems to contrast with what we understand by the Reformation; it also affects the way in which his writings are classified, subdivided, and even dated. As a result, the religious components of his writing are perennially segregated and underestimated. A very long, halting process has restored an understanding of his religious profile. In the late sixteenth century, the compiler of the first extensive edition of Paracelsus is said to have excluded his religious writings to avoid risking the sponsorship of the archbishop of Cologne.<sup>52</sup> Manuscripts as well as imitations circulated. The religious influence of Paracelsus survived in the works of Valentin Weigel and Jacob Boehme, in the writings of despised "enthusiasts," or in Pietists, who transmitted a knowledge of his mystical theory to Goethe and the Romantics. During the nineteenth century, the scholarly recovery of the theology of Paracelsus began in 1839 with Preus's collection of his religious pronouncements.<sup>53</sup> The founder of modern Paracelsus scholarship, Karl Sudhoff, stressed the medical side to the detriment of the religious; but, to his lasting credit, he helped initiate the edition of the religious works by collecting them and encouraging scholars of religion to undertake their publication. While Sudhoff was still carrying out the monumental task of examining the writings attributed to Paracelsus in order to publish the medical-naturalistic work, a younger collaborator, Wilhelm Matthießen, was encouraged to begin editing the theological writings. One volume was published in 1923.<sup>54</sup> However, Matthießen's early death and the difficulties of the editing process prevented the continuation of the second division. Publication could not be resumed until Kurt Goldammer took up the effort after World War II. Even today, the division of the religious writings is only about half finished, after nearly a century of attention.

During much of this time, there was no lack of interest in the non-scientific aspect of Paracelsus. The period around the turn of the century brought a wave of fresh curiosity regarding the varieties of mysticism, occultism, and ecstatic experience. This gave rise to the Paracelsus studies of Franz Hartmann and the Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, as well as a Paracelsus-inspired revival of mystical nature philosophy by Professor Karl Joël.<sup>55</sup> The so-called Expressionistic decade (1910-1920) intensified the interest in religious mysticism with works such as Martin Buber's dissertation on Boehme or his *Ecstatic Confessions*, dramatizing the experiences of

mystics and visionaries. This excitement was undoubtedly a mixed blessing for Paracelsus scholars. Given the rational viewpoint maintained by Sudhoff, the orientation toward the mystical and the occult threatened to undermine the scientific stature of Paracelsus, lowering his status as an object of scholarship.

Against this trend, Matthießen's dissertation on *Die Form des religiösen Verhaltens bei Theophrast von Hohenheim* at the University of Bonn, published in 1917, tried to clear Paracelsus of disagreeable associations with an irrational mysticism.<sup>56</sup> If anything, the character and importance of the religious elements in Paracelsus now became somewhat clouded and marginalized within the interpretations of serious scholars. In 1935, Bodo Sartorius Freiherr von Waltershausen convincingly argued for Paracelsus's affinity with the Protestant Spiritualists who had followed the lead of Luther's rejection of Scholastic authority by rejecting a new Lutheran Scholasticism and authoritarianism founded on the outer "letter" of Scripture: *Mit den Autoritäten verwirft [Paracelsus] nun auch die Tradition; er entwertet sie zur Menschenlehre, zur Lehre des Buchstabens*. Unfamiliar with the scope and importance of the theological writings of Paracelsus, Waltershausen erroneously asserted that their author had viewed them as an "extraneous work" (*Außenwerk*), for which no expertise comparable to that of the philosophical work was claimed.<sup>57</sup> In 1937, the devout Catholic scholar Franz Strunz correctly, if somewhat tendentiously, revised the assessment of Waltershausen by proving that Paracelsus's assertions of natural knowledge rested on faith and divine authority: "Religion is the real and essential principle of natural understanding and action" (*Die Religion ist das eigentliche und wesentliche Prinzip des natürlichen Erkennens und Handelns*).<sup>58</sup> This was a turning point in Paracelsus scholarship: the religious writings were not only important in their own right; they were essential to the work as a whole. Similar in significance were Wilhelm Ganzenmüller's researches into medieval and Paracelsian alchemy, demonstrating that pre-Paracelsian alchemy was in its main currents devout and that his adaptation followed in the pious tradition.<sup>59</sup> In their own different ways, Strunz and Ganzenmüller laid the groundwork for an integrated understanding of Paracelsus: Strunz by showing that the authority of the naturalist and of the religionist was indivisible; Ganzenmüller by establishing that even what seemed an empirical element in Paracelsus's experience, his alchemical experimentation, was, in its theoretical

sources, medieval and devout. After the war, dissertations on Paracelsus's religious work were written by Stephan Török and Michael Bunnens.<sup>60</sup>

However, by far the most substantial revision has come about through the lifelong work of Prof. Kurt Goldammer in preparing the second division of the complete writings. His contributions to Paracelsus research also include many books and trailblazing articles cited in this study. Among the more recent scholars who have further explored the ground broken by Goldammer, and whose works were of particular interest in considering the theme of this study, are Ernst Wilhelm Kämmerer, who has written on the trichotomous anthropology of Paracelsus; Hartmut Rudolph, on the trinitarian doctrine of Paracelsus, his biblical exegesis, and his relation to other religious doctrines of the period; Arlene Miller-Guinsburg, who has investigated the Matthew commentaries in connection with the magic of Paracelsus; Katharina Biegger, who has examined the mariology of the Salzburg writings, as well as the ambiguous position of Paracelsus between the confessions of his period; and Ute Gause, who has comprehensively considered the theological evolution of the early religious writings. These studies offer the only readily accessible glimpses into the still unedited religious works.

This study has been written without a first-hand knowledge of the manuscript materials awaiting publication in the second division, and hence can claim to be neither comprehensive nor conclusive. Certainly it would have been preferable otherwise. Nevertheless, the view from this distance in examining the great mass of published primary and secondary materials does bring out some questions and inconsistencies that seem to have escaped the notice of those more directly involved. These questions concern the dating of Paracelsus's work, especially the earlier writings, the fragments, and the undated materials in the second division. The problem of dating his writings is especially important here, because, to some extent, a doubtful periodization recapitulates the old divorce between the religious and medical-philosophical Paracelsus.

Notwithstanding the cautionary intimations of Goldammer, Rudolph, Gause, and others—suggesting that Paracelsus was either more religiously engaged, or more “medieval” than had previously been assumed—a vestige of the old scientific/mystical split has been conserved not only by the organization of his works into the two

divisions (an organization valid for parts of his work, yet misleading for the whole), but, just as importantly, by the assumption that his life alternated between divergent engagements, between his major medical-philosophical preoccupation and a minor religious one. If one considers the widely accepted progression of his career as an author, it is presumed to have begun around 1520 with a first naturalistic phase. This is followed in 1524–1525 by the relatively brief but intensive religious interlude in Salzburg. After this, he continues as a naturalist, but with a concurrent religious phase of writing in the early 1530s, when he is attracted to the thinking of the religious outcasts of the period. This is followed at last by the ultimate period of the *Astronomia Magna* and the Carinthian writings addressed to Catholic men of influence in Austria. The last years include some of his most conceptually ambitious and programmatic tracts, as well as, again, some religious writing. It is a period concluded by his untimely death in 1541, a death thought by some to have prevented him from articulating the full system of his speculative thought.

This is the biography of a naturalist who merely *reacts* to extraneous concurrent developments in the Reformation. Instead of this biography, with its medical-scientific continuity and its bracketed periods of religion, we should reverse the relation and recognize that the naturalism of Paracelsus turns on a religious center from the very beginning. The brackets are in reality the comprehensive context. First of all, there is no evidence at all to suggest that he really *had* his often-cited early naturalistic phase of writing around 1520, prior to the religious period in Salzburg, which therefore may well have been his seminal period as a writer and thinker. Second, the presupposition that Paracelsus's religious writing was episodic is groundless. And, finally, as I will argue in the main part of this study, no aspect of his work can be understood rationally without considering his religious-theoretical premises, as conditioned by the crisis of the early Reformation. If a complete study of his authorial development is ever undertaken, it will need to evaluate his work by comparing alternate drafts of the same tract and successive treatments of the same theme. On the same grounds, it will be necessary to reassess the temporal beginning of his work, as represented in the above commonplace periodization of his writings.

Based on not much more than the editorial circumstance that Sudhoff chose to place the very approximate date *um 1520*, "around

1520," at the fore of volume one of the first division, published in 1929, Paracelsus scholarship has continued to hold the notion that around that time the young Theophrastus, returning from his journeyman years, initiated his authorial career with works in a medical-philosophical vein. Indeed, the studies that emphasize his scientific profile often stiffen Sudhoff's approximation into a definitive "of 1520." This dating suggests that by 1524 the scientific-medical enterprise was well underway even *before* being briefly interrupted by the Salzburg lapse, during which external events involved Paracelsus with religious questions. The thesis of an early period of medical-philosophical writing purports to identify the point of departure of Paracelsus's work. However, the date 1520 is usually simply taken for granted; and not only by those with a scientific approach: even studies of his religious work assume that he began writing around the year 1520, perhaps while still wandering through Europe.<sup>61</sup>

However, this early period of medical-philosophical writing, beginning around 1520 and presumably lasting until 1524, appears to be based on a conjecture to which even the acknowledged master of scientific Paracelsus studies, Sudhoff himself, did not adhere with any precision or consistency. In Julius Pagel's *Geschichte der Medizin*, which Sudhoff reedited and published in 1922, the discussion of Paracelsus envisages a very different time frame:

Full of great conceptions, he began already in the first half of the Twenties, probably already in 1524 in Salzburg, his authorial elaborations, with a great pathological-therapeutic work, which was to treat related groups of diseases in individual sections; only fragments of it have survived. . . . Alongside this, an outline of the great etiology of diseases was composed in one great endeavor, in grandiose conception and compelling enthusiasm.

*Großer Konzeptionen voll, hat er schon in der ersten Hälfte der zwanziger Jahre des 16. Jahrhunderts, wohl schon 1524 in Salzburg, seine schriftstellerischen Ausarbeitungen begonnen mit einem großen pathologisch-therapeutischen Werke, das in einzelnen Abschnitten zusammengehörige Krankheitsgruppen behalten sollte; nur Fragmente davon sind uns erhalten. . . . Daneben wurde in einem großen Wurf ein Abriß der gesamten Krankheitsätiologie verfaßt, in grandioser Konsequenz und drängender Begeisterung.*<sup>62</sup>

The pathological-therapeutic work is presumably the one known as the *Eleven Treatises* (which is associated here with other works that Sudhoff later ascribed to a *subsequent* period); the “great” attempt at a “comprehensive etiology” is that of the so-called *Volumen Paramirum* which, judging by its contents, could indeed be one of the very earliest writings. Here, however, this early work is placed *no earlier than Salzburg, 1524*, thus contradicting the date *um 1520* offered in volume one of Sudhoff’s own first division. There is in fact a glaring contradiction between the dating in the collected works and the formulations submitted by Sudhoff here and elsewhere.

Sudhoff’s *Paracelsus* biography of 1936—a study with the announced purpose of eliminating the romantic accretions to the image of Paracelsus, and in a sense Sudhoff’s last testament to Paracelsus studies—states the matter again very differently: the “treatises on the origin, causes, signs, and cures of individual diseases” (the *Eleven Treatises*), are said to belong, together with some pharmacological drafts, to “the very earliest times [!] of Hohenheimian intellectual activity” (*in die allerfrühesten Zeiten Hohenheimischer Geistesarbeit*): all of these undertakings were already alive in mind at the time of the “first *Paramirum*” (the *Volumen Paramirum*); and Sudhoff would perhaps add some “chemical-alchemical preparations.” As for the date, Sudhoff concludes: “But I would prefer to put all this writing in the year 1526” (*Besser aber will ich dies ganze Schriftwerk erst ins Jahr 1526 verweisen . . .*). Why? Well, because it was during this period of wandering on the Upper Rhine that Paracelsus was “veritably stormed by such impulses which he willingly accommodated as a man given to the observation and experience of nature” (*denn dort stürmten solche Anregungen förmlich auf ihn ein, denen er als Mann der Naturbeobachtung und -erfahrung willig Raum gab*).<sup>63</sup> What is decisive for us here is that the last word submitted by this great Paracelsus scholar displays no loyalty whatsoever to the period “around 1520.” In fact, he expressly disavows the possibility of finding any proof that the contents of volumes one and two were composed *prior to 1526*: “Whether something of the early writing of Hohenheim which is found in volume one or two of my edition was worked out in the time of the first stay in Salzburg, or, as is to be expected, even prior to that, cannot be said with certainty” (*Ob irgend etwas von dem frühen Schriftwerke Hohenheims, das sich im ersten oder zweiten Bande meiner Ausgabe findet, in den Zeiten des*

*ersten Salzburger Aufenthaltes, oder sogar schon vorher, konzipiert oder gar ausgearbeitet wurde, wie zu vermuten steht, läßt sich nicht mit Bestimmtheit behaupten*).<sup>64</sup>

By Sudhoff's final assessment, then, the *Eleven Treatises* belong to the "earliest" period, which it is best to identify with the time on the Upper Rhine, the interval between Salzburg and Basel. The work of "around 1520" has therefore been displaced by half a decade to the year 1526. This is hard to fathom, inasmuch as the Salzburg religious writings bear dates as early as 1524 and 1525. Sudhoff apparently blotted out the religious tracts that did not fit into his preconceived opinion of Paracelsus as a Renaissance philosopher-physician. Even more perplexing is the fact that one of the *Eleven Treatises*—which Sudhoff, despite his other vacillations, still places at the very beginning of Paracelsus's intellectual labors—contains a passage that almost certainly identifies this writing with the period in or after Basel (1527–28). The passage instructs:

If one wants to be a city physician, a lecturer, and professor ordinarius, one should have the appropriate abilities. These [people], however, inasmuch as some of them are lazy from pedantry and others puffed up in rhetoric, [and] the other accustomed to [telling] lies in poetry and so on with other philistinism [schützerei]; so being that way, they can't be any different than the way the letters make them, which make many a fool more.

*So einer iedoch wil ein stattarzt, ein lector und professor ordinarius, so sol er können, das im zustat. dise aber, dieweil etliche in schulmeisterey erfault sind, andere in der rhetoric verschwollen, der ander in der poeterey mit liegen gewont und dergleichen mit anderer schützerei; so mügen sie nit anderst sein, dan wie sich die buchstaben machen, die manchen narren mer machen.* (I,1:150)

This passage cannot have been written prior to 1527, for it spells out the job qualifications of Paracelsus's position in Basel, with a jaundiced diatribe against his academic detractors in that city. There was no university in Salzburg or in Strasbourg (where he took rights of citizenship, apparently in anticipation of permanent residence there, before being summoned to Basel). Moreover, this passage reflects the antagonisms that led to his flight from Basel in 1528. As

we shall see, this diatribe resembles so closely those of the post-Basel period that it would be farfetched to imagine it as based on some similar, yet unknown and otherwise forgotten episode. The dating of Paracelsus's seminal works is a time-honored shambles.

Now of course one could ask: *does it really matter whether Paracelsus is thought to have begun writing in 1520 or in 1524?* Does it matter whether we imagine him taking this first step as an author in an attempt to evaluate all the information gleaned from countless observations and consultations on his travels in Europe? Or—as harried by sectarian quarrels and struggles in a situation which was compelling him to take sides and define his ideas? *To even ask such a question is to recognize at once that it matters immensely.* It matters, not least of all because the *scenario of 1520* provides us a meager access to the writings in volumes one and two of the first division. (Where *are* all those observations based on his journeys?) The scenario of a beginning in 1524, by contrast, refers us to anomalous characteristics in what is thought to be the earliest medical-philosophical writing: to the disputes of competing medical “sects” in the so-called *Volumen Paramirum*, and to the attempted resolution of the battle of these competing sects through a criterion of divine agency.

Even when the writings in the first two volumes of division one seem to embody allusions to his empirical observations during his travels—for example, in his references to the diversity of diseases and medicinal herbs from country to country: “Each land grows its own disease, its own medicine, its own physician (*einem ieglichen lant wechst sein krankheit selbs, sein arzney selbs, sein arzt selbs*—I,2:4)—the larger context fails to support such a conclusion. For his point here is that people need *not* rely upon herbs and medicines of other countries. The long and short of his familiarity with other lands, diseases, and medicines is that German diseases are different and German medicines as good or better. Arabia, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Gallia, and, most especially, Italy are trying “to turn us Germans into Latins” (*machen aus uns Teutschen Walen*), doing so for selfish reasons and not from “brotherly love” (I,2:3)—this was a common German sentiment, characteristic of the early Reformation. But its nationalistic stand is anomalous in a work on medicine. What, after all, can the healing powers of herbs have to do with the relative merits of nations? Given the atmosphere of the early Reformation, the association of healing with salvation was an obvious one. In an