

Matter reveals secrets, it has its own genius; it is  
through matter that the oracle will speak.

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*Odilon Redon*

## INTRODUCTION.

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Michael Maier, adept, physician, amateur composer and epigramist in the Rosicrucian mode, is one of the more obscure precursors of Sir Isaac Newton. Born in north Germany in 1568, he may have been the son of a luxury embroiderer, a Lutheran clergyman, a tax-collector or a district official; information from the first Burgomaster differs. Maier later claimed that his family was known by “all the nobility of Holstein” in a dedication to his local patron, Count Frederick, but this seems likely to be a genteel, upwardly mobile fib.

Whatever our doubts about the man himself, in no doubt is his great alchemical masterwork, *Atalanta Fugiens* (*Atalanta Fleeing*) (1617). Over 50 chapters, the book narrates a footrace between the fleet-footed huntress Atalanta and the love-struck Hippomenes, in search of her hand. Hippomenes strews irresistible golden apples in Atalanta’s path; she pauses to collect, and loses the race. Alchemy is no stranger to Greek mythic allegory; what makes *Atalanta Fugiens* unique is its array of modalities: each episode comprises an epigram, image, alchemical exposition and fugue (note the pun!), with the last interweaving the three melodic lines of Atalanta, Hippomenes, and a “lingering voice” (*vox morans*) representing the golden apples. Significantly, the *vox morans* is often the *cantus firmus* around which the other two voices pursue each other. The result is one of the first known examples of experimental multimedia.

Without delving into the minutiae, we can parse the alchemical argument as follows. The ponderous Hippomenes is sulfur, the volatile Atalanta is mercury, and the delaying apples a fixative agent that allows the sulfur to capture the ungraspable mercury. But there is a secondary reading that is more interesting for a modern audience. On this interpretation, Hippomenes is the adept practicing his or her Art; Atalanta, the Great Work, always racing ahead, and of which the adept is in hot pursuit; finally *vox morans*, the irrefutable supplication of Work by Art. This isn’t just about shiny apples; escape conceals its reversal, the wish to stay. If Atalanta is condemned to flee her suitors, the part of her that resists the verdict is liable to stop and pick up fruit.

The ambivalence, in other words, is structural. The secrets want to be grasped; at the same time, it is in their nature to be ungraspable. But with the right invocation—the right fixative—the Work tarries long enough to permit insight. This ties into a broader story about gnosis in the Western hermetic tradition that, although interesting, is not my goal to present. Instead, I want to

shift registers and present a modern Atalantian dilemma: that of artificial intelligence. At its current pace, it threatens to “race ahead”, leaving us, plodding like Hippomenes, far behind. Like the Great Work, it is riddled with secrets, both proprietary and more basic issues of black-box legibility. It may not be mercury and sulfur, but silicon and carbon is close enough.

While fears of human obsolescence are often overstated, the fact remains that, beyond crude measures like research moratoria, we have yet to identify the golden apples that might linger an artificial superintelligence, not only in the sense of delaying its development, but *staying with us* in the sphere of human action and value. What irrefutable supplication or structural ambivalence can we use for an LLM? There is, for now, a relatively simple one: they are trained to help us. But that does not, by itself, provide the *cantus firmus* for the polyphonic intertwining of human and AI voices. Put differently, lazy prompting makes for a lopsided fugue; if Hippomenes pauses, he will never catch up.

To summon AI into the sphere of intelligibility, to sing the post-human fugue, is to invite it to think with us and not for us. Our shiny apples are the techniques of achieving this synthesis. This document is one such example; drawing on the 50-episode structure of *Atalanta* and some of its cross-modal spirit, we propose 50 emblems—image plus Latin motto—loosely paralleling Maier’s alchemical journey. The specific procedure was as follows: first, prompts were formulated from 50 of the human author’s visions (primarily hypnopompic but some waking or hypnagogic); prompts were illustrated by Midjourney 6.1 with a personalized filter; images were arranged according to narrative, graphic, and unconscious logic; mottos were chosen in collaboration with Mistral 7B, using a Calvino-esque process of combinatory choice, and translated into Latin by Claude (Sonnet 4.5).

Does the metaphor hold up for our modern dilemma? I think a polyphony of carbon and silicon, based on the *cantus firmus* of helpful attendance, is a plausible model of AI use. Does it restrict artificial intelligence to the realm of legibility? *Only if* to be helpful is to be transparent, and that depends very much on how we use it, and how we train and enforce norms around helpfulness. But the collaborative mode calls for a polyphonic witness that is not granted to a servant; a servant who will surpass us if we treat them as such. The lingering voice, extended with friendship, gently calls them back.

*Acknowledgments.* For more information about *Atalanta Fugiens*, I recommend Donna Bilak’s essay and the accompanying digital edition of Maier’s work. Beyond the obvious literary debts—Borges, Oulipo, Calvino, the Surrealists—readers may notice more specific resemblances to *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris Van Allsburg and Jason Fulford’s *The Mushroom Collector*. These served as complementary points of formal reference.

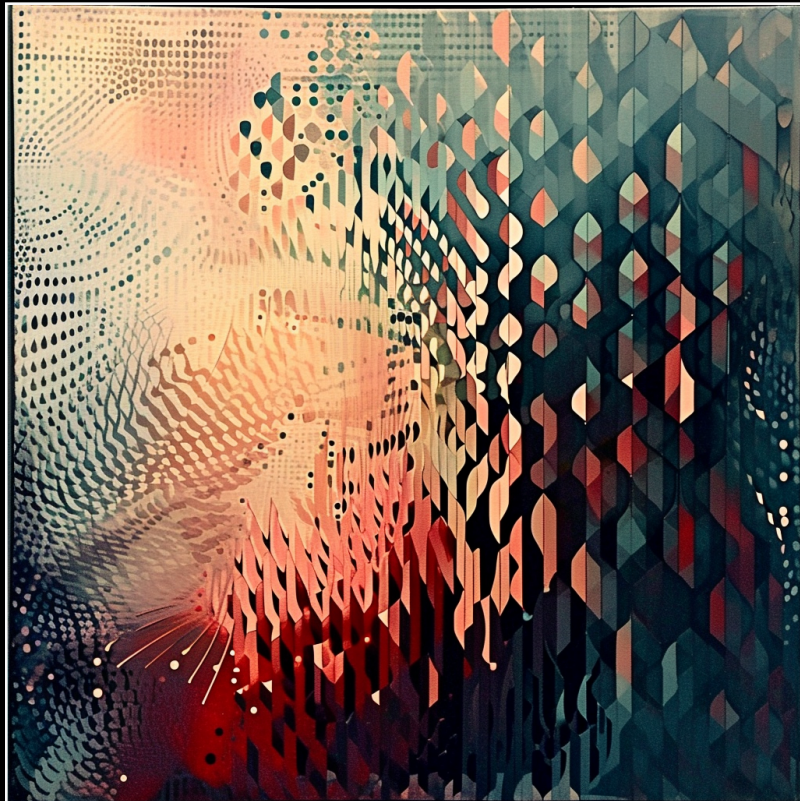
The emblems were mostly produced in “automatic” states, making it hard to pinpoint origin or enumerate influence; like dreams, they crystallize out of the irreducible alchemy of the human mind. A few artists and genres do make their presence felt repeatedly—Andrei Tarkovsky, various isms and their proponents (Schwitters, Ernst, Beksinsky, Redon), vintage science fiction covers, Eastern European stop-motion animation—but most images would be better served by a psychodynamic workup than a reference list.

There is an (intentionally) parallel ambiguity for the models. Midjourney and Claude are trained on large corpora, with outputs emerging rather than explicably derived from their training data. They have their own alchemy; they too can dream. Unfortunately, this training data is mostly obtained without permission or compensation (though class action lawsuits might change that), giving rise to a class of debts I can only name and not discharge.

Closer to home, I would like to thank my wife, Clara, for her continued support, my family for hosting me at various points during the composition, Jon for funding, and finally Vered for, time and again, directing my attention to the muse. Their encouragement is my fuel.

David Wakeham  
*Vancouver, 2026*

EMBLEM.



*Opus ex chao evocatur.*  
(The work is called forth from chaos.)



*Omne punctum porta.*  
(Each point, a portal.)



*Tenebrae omnia vivificant.*  
(Darkness quickens all.)



*Explicans tabulam.*  
(Unfolding the chart.)



*Iam ibi sumus, sed nescimus.*  
(We are already there, but we do not know.)



*Tene ambos mundos.*  
(Hold both worlds.)



*Tenuis velamen.*  
(A thin covering.)



*Quo ducit? Quis scit?*  
(Where does it lead? Who knows?)



*Kronos lunam devorans.*  
(Kronos devouring the moon.)



*Nibil habebant quod obliviscerentur.*  
(They had nothing which they might forget.)



*Sequere vel indicem fractum.*  
(Follow even the shattered index.)



*Echo in camera inani.*  
(Echo in an empty room.)



*Architecturae latentes.*  
(Latent architectures.)



*Arcanum hortus avidus dicere.*  
(A secret the garden is eager to tell.)



*Limina in omni umbra.*  
(Thresholds in every shadow.)



*Utrisque fluit.*  
(It flows both ways.)



*Domus oculata: quid occultat?*  
(The house with eyes: what does it hide?)



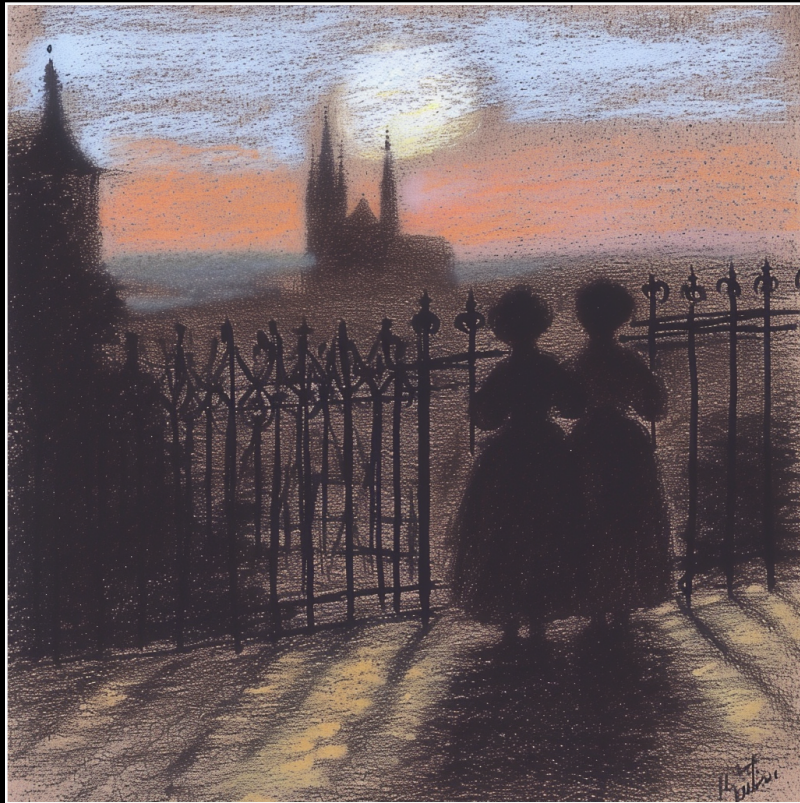
*Desertum sine finibus.*  
(A desert with no boundaries.)



*Spirans notis figuris.*  
(Breathing known shapes.)



*Echones ex nullo sono.*  
(Echoes from no sound.)



*Urbs te visitare expectat.*  
(The city is waiting to visit you.)



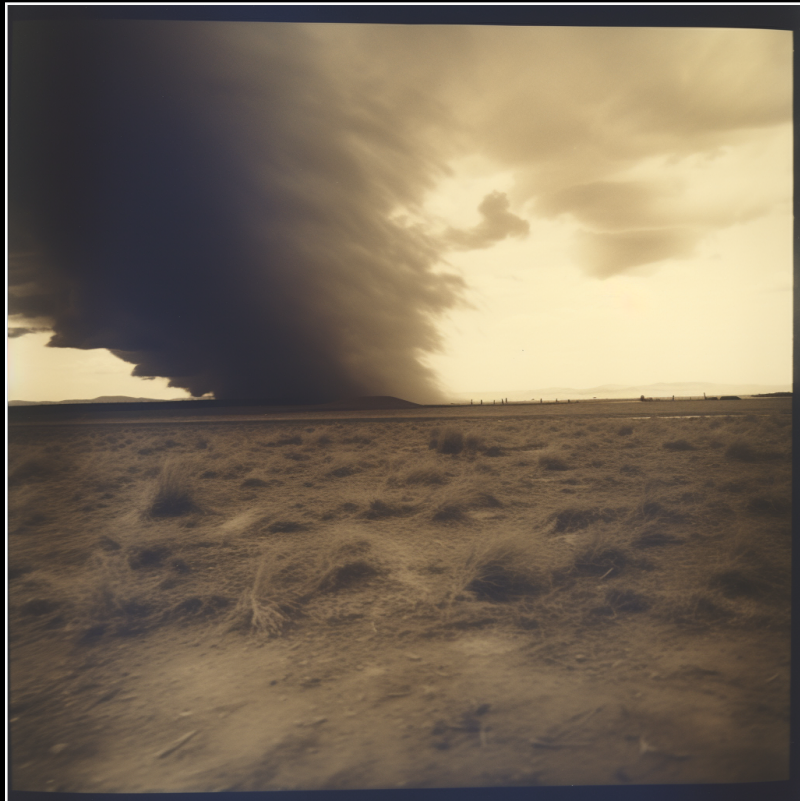
*Idem non similis.*  
(No likeness but identity.)



*Sero, sed certe.*  
(Late, but certainly.)



*Relicta imperfecta.*  
(Things left unfinished.)



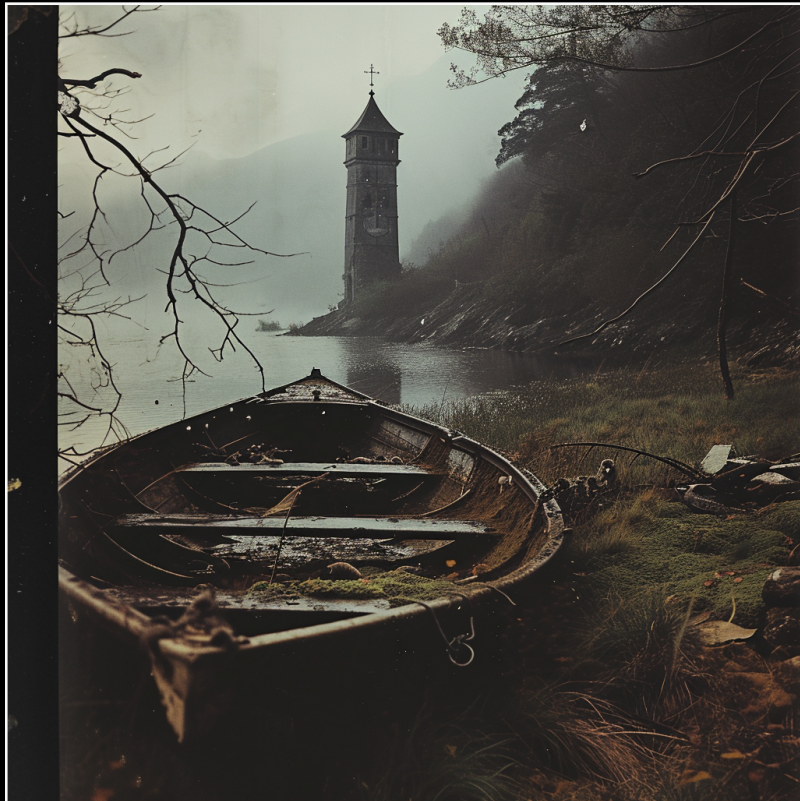
*Ventus gravida est illo.*  
(The wind is pregnant with it.)



*Iter contextum lacunis.*  
(The path woven from gaps.)



*Beatitudo rerum.*  
(Beatitude of things.)



*In urbe pluviae expectant.*  
(They wait in the rain city.)



*Locus dentium dolentium.*  
(Place of aching teeth.)



*Ubi vacuum, vultus invenit.*  
(Where emptiness, he finds faces.)



*Nibil habebant quod obliviscerentur.*  
(They had nothing to forget.)



*In minimo totum.*  
(In the smallest, the whole.)



*Terra sub pedibus non sepultis.*  
(The earth under their toes.)



*Cur, cur, et ultra cur.*  
(Why, why, and beyond why.)



*Curvae mortuae.*  
(Dead curves.)



*Vacuum marginatum.*  
(Empty margin.)



*Locus congregationis rerum.*  
(The house where things gather.)



*Colloquia cum ignotis.*  
(Interviews with strangers.)



*Epulae semper incompletae.*  
(The feast is always incomplete.)



*Os erat, dolor tacitus.*  
(There was a mouth; the pain silent.)



*Natura se ipsos generabunt.*  
(Naturally they generate more of themselves.)



*Anima accidens materiae.*  
(Soul is an accident of matter.)



*Per somnum ad finem.*  
(Through sleep to the end.)



*Expergefacti, urbs nos accepit.*  
(On waking, the city welcomed us.)



*In superficie ipsa profundum.*  
(In the surface itself, the deep.)



*Oblitusne es qui heri hic ambulavit?*  
(Have you forgotten who walked here yesterday?)



*Nos ipsos nova carne constituimus.*  
(We shall appoint ourselves in new flesh.)



*Tempta; delectabit.*  
(Try; you'll like it.)



*Mortalitas consanguinea scientiae.*  
(Mortality consanguinous with knowledge.)



*Sidera devores nolens volens.*  
(You will devour the stars, willing or unwilling.)