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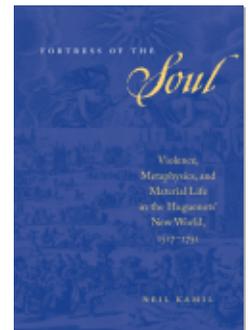
Fortress of the Soul

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Introduction

Fortress of the Soul is the story of a subterranean culture on the move, its membership fragmented by chronic warfare, exclusion, and political instability and actively in search of new modes of security. How, then, was security reinvented as a cultural practice by refugees from religious violence in the early modern transatlantic world?

Beginning with the French civil wars of religion in the 1550s, Huguenot artisans from the southwestern regional culture that supplied the vast majority of French refugee craftsmen and women to New Amsterdam and New York in the seventeenth century mastered an apocalyptic shift from the corporate and militaristic “*place of security*”—epitomized by the massive immobile (and hence militarily vulnerable) medieval fortress system protecting La Rochelle—to a reformed program of protection based on the skillful construction of portable and individualistic modes of personal security, deployed mostly in domestic space. What I call “artisanal security” was based on the rural craftsman’s traditional mastery of manual skills and knowledge of natural materials, which were enormously valuable and infinitely transferable in the Atlantic world, particularly in land- and resource-rich but labor-poor British America.

Artisanal security was deeply informed by models of Paracelsian natural philosophy. While Paracelsus believed in prophesy and the power of the stars to control the lives of men and women, at the same time he also believed that chance discoveries in Nature made by mobile individuals with hidden knowledge and skill would enable a few to change fate and resist the tumults and oppressions of history. Paracelsians promoted the secrets of such “rustic” knowledge internationally to technologically minded artisans through a new alchemic program of natural philosophy. This program also promoted natural camouflage through personal and religious dissimulation, inner spiri-

tual knowledge of local earth materials, and socioeconomic and spiritual cooperation across confessions and especially refugee groups exiled by persecution. Paracelsians simultaneously transmuted raw matter and refitted older cultural structures to meet the challenge of New World contexts and encounters. This was inner security without walls. Personal protection and family survival depended on creativity and innovation with available natural materials and commercial markets, exploitation of those materials suffused with hidden (that is, Neoplatonic) souliness that descended through angelic intermediaries from God, and the ability of mobile craft networks to respond skillfully to almost any contingency. Security depended on the rapidity with which dispersed fragments of Huguenot artisanal and mercantile culture converged on specific New World societies to exploit constantly shifting shortages of skilled labor. One such society was colonial New York, home to religious refugees from European wars from the beginning of its existence as New Amsterdam. Conditioned to quest for personal and economic security by a culture of violence and vulnerability, the Paracelsian material-holiness synthesis, created and diffused in domestic artifacts made by these shadowy New World travelers, is the focal point of the narrative.

The relationship between security, religiosity, and materialism in early American transatlantic history, as an artful product of interaction between written and oral culture, found its impetus in the bloody history of the expansion and persecution of heresy in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe during the wars of religion. That is why *Fortress of the Soul* places American colonial history and material life firmly within the larger context of early modern Atlantic history and culture. What I call the “new world” experience of Huguenot artisans in southwestern France began with the mimetic religious violence that exploded between the confessions during the early sixteenth century, continuing through the extended period of emigration to Protestant Europe, as well Latin America and colonial British America. New world historiography was actively written and reconstructed by southwestern Huguenot artisans during the long *désert* (“desert”) period in France during which French Protestants were disenfranchised and their churches demolished. This foundational historiography informed and long predated the large-scale emigration of Huguenots to the North American colonies.

This early Huguenot historiographical corpus was vital ideological and material preparation for the ultimate dislocation that occurred over a century later, in 1685, with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This event, played out on a much more familiar political and military terrain, outlawed Reformed religion in France and led to the “dispersion” of the majority of openly practicing Protestants. The Revocation also expedited reconstruction of fragments of Huguenot artisanal culture in colonial British America. While a vanguard of historians of early America has shifted to the study of transatlantic themes, with a few important exceptions, the ever-present European cul-

tural context seldom receives equivalent treatment. Complex and subtle historical patterns have often been reduced to stereotypes, undermining both the European and also the American milieu. This threatens the conceptual balance and unity that remains the great promise of transatlantic projects. In considering the conventionally separated “background” of Europe and the presumably independent historical “foreground” of colonial America together as a single entity, *Fortress of the Soul* devotes equal space and energy to both. By doing so, I hope to underscore the reality of their dynamic and inter-transactional nature in the early modern period.

To follow Huguenot artisans from Aunis-Saintonge in coastal France out into the expanding Atlantic world of international Protestantism is to journey from the great walled city of La Rochelle, whose rebellious citizens experienced the victory of the Reformation in 1568, followed in 1628 by its utter reversal and the annihilation of the fortress and most of its Protestant population by the absolute monarchy to rural artisans’ workshops, alchemic laboratories, and clandestine forest conventicles hidden from pursuing Counter-Reformation forces; to the courts, meetinghouses, and marketplaces of Protestant northern Europe and London; and finally to the competitive and diverse commercial and religious milieu that converged in colonial New Amsterdam / New York. In this heterogeneous port town, I explore social, cultural, economic, and spiritual interaction between Huguenot artisanal networks and the many other Protestant, spiritualist, and artisanal traditions that developed similar New World historiographies based on experience of religious violence, enlarging an international process of soulful convergence. Histories of experience of religious violence as an animating force in individual and group identity among the *artisanat* of early America suggest that we try to understand the “confusion” of middle colonial life by using the terms of coherence and unity applied by these fragmented and dispersed groups to their *own* historical conditions and memories, rather than by simply rehearsing conventional historiographical constructs of regional chaos and factionalism.

Combining documentary and artifactual evidence illuminates how the function of sacred violence may be perceived in artisanal adaptations of alchemic processes. Thus certain Huguenot artisans associated the metaphysical and regenerative functions of alchemy with their own experience of religious war. For alchemists, change and material reformation were constants of the natural world; decay, death, and growth were synonymous. The task, therefore, was to control and discipline this fundamental process. Emulating transmutation and change within the hidden recesses of the earth—and by analogy their own bodies—refugee artisans appropriated from Nature innovative and clandestine ways to “build with the destroyer.” This brought their personal and corporate history to bear on material life, as ways to survive exile and loss spiritually and finally to prosper materially. Natural artisanal languages were also mute. They functioned as spiritual and material modes of communication under the radar of

authority—means for sectarian and heretical groups to supplement voices silenced by military and religious authority.

Conflation of materialism and religiosity had the potential, therefore, to facilitate the social convergence of competing sectarian groups in the heterodox middle colonies. Quiet interaction with and visual perception of natural and hybrid cultural materials (including domestic furniture, pottery, houses, and books) were crucial to alchemical social processes. This, then, is also a history of the practice of spiritualized *perception* among Protestant groups central to the economic, cultural, and political landscape of the middle colonies. New York's Huguenots and Quakers, for example, forged common ground and combined extensive artisanal networks connecting Manhattan and western Long Island. This transpired, in part, by members of both groups privileging similar signifiers in the elemental attributes of available materials. Shared perceptions of natural and crafted materials among craftsmen, patrons, and consumers augmented the potential for communal skill and power through the practice of artisanal security. Common visual vernaculars were created that provided information to some viewers while excluding others. This is perhaps a truism among semioticians, yet it was no coincidence that artisans in New York's Huguenot and Quaker communities were deeply influenced by Germanic spiritualism, understood through the diffusion of Paracelsian texts and intensified by Neoplatonic souliness under pressure from religious violence. Both shared a messianic sense of visual perception in the natural and man-made worlds, based on the subtle agency of the light of the Holy Spirit in dark and occluded elemental matter.

The seminal figure in the southwestern Huguenot adaptation of the ideas of the German-Swiss alchemist and physician Paracelsus (1493–1541) into the broad program of artisanal security developed by refugees during the civil wars of religion of the mid sixteenth century was the autodidactic potter, natural philosopher, lay preacher, local historian, and self-promoting courtier Bernard Palissy of Saintes (1510–90), the principal town in La Rochelle's agrarian hinterland of Saintonge. Palissy's presence was felt through the diffusion of his books throughout Protestant France, England, and America, as well as his influential ceramic production. Palissy's voice reverberates throughout my narrative, helping to link the story together on both sides of the Atlantic. The potter's self-proclaimed "rustic" writing and craftsmanship give spiritual, scientific, ideological, and material coherence to the practice of artisanal security. His self-consciously heroic stories resonate with a transatlantic chorus of painful and intensely personal efforts to master the confluence of words and things, spirit and matter, life and death.

Palissy claimed to have "invented" the concept of artisanal security—which he opposed to traditional militaristic principles practiced by the Calvinist nobility of the sword—for his co-religionists in rural Aunis-Saintonge. This claim was elucidated in

his essay on the vulnerability of the fortress city (implicitly La Rochelle) written in the war year of 1563 while he was imprisoned for heresy. The potter represented himself as singularly responsible for teaching these naturalistic strategies for survival to local artisans and other refugees from confessional violence. Personal piety, artisanal skill and industriousness, soulful refinement in the sacred fire of persecution, and the traditional mobility of craft culture were all at the core of his program. New ideas about security were incorporated into his ceramic production as well. His pottery featured microcosmic worlds materialized out of the interaction of elemental earth with inner spiritual and psychological life to re-form his historical, millennial, and alchemical experience and that of his patrons. Palissy and his refugee followers displaced fear of violence and anxiety over salvation into mastery of natural materials and the pious manipulation of manual arts.

Palissy devised the miniaturized, skillful empirical science of his security system from natural-philosophical observation of the tiny, vulnerable, and overlooked “artisans” of the Saintongeais salt marshes. He did most of his research on the amphibious flora and fauna that lived in flux around his laboratory, surviving predators by shape-shifting in the interstices of earth, water, and air. The role of the alchemist-artisan who labored to rise to the status of manual philosopher was mastery of the element of fire, to forcibly combine the quintessence of all the other elements.

The emblematic creature in his system was the deceptively simple snail. Palissy observed that the common mollusk constructed a portable fortress from hidden interior resources and carried it everywhere on its back, as did the pious Huguenot artisan his craft knowledge and tools. Snails, alongside a ubiquitous army of earth-hugging, shape-shifting chameleons, snakes, little fishes, frogs, tadpoles, and metamorphosing insects, were the Huguenots of Nature’s periphery. These were the adaptable subjects of the potter’s art and science; the busy, if imperceptibly small, slow, and silent protagonists of his “art of the earth.” Such vulnerable prey animals were chosen by God to survive—singled out in Scripture to lead the natural world into the millennium—precisely because they were the smallest and weakest. As God’s favored creatures, they were least corrupted by the Fall. As vulnerable prey animals, they escaped devouring enemies by developing natural skills of dissimulation and camouflage.

Unlike large, powerful predators, God gave snails the skill to craft mobile, secure domestic environments—elegant baroque shell houses—wherein the weak communicated silently with one another through a shared language of material elements, unified by the universal spirit revealed to the smallest members of the microcosm by the light of Nature. By analogy, Huguenot artisans concealed their soulful knowledge of materials from predatory enemies, congregating with other refugees on the rustic periphery, where they imperceptibly built security and continued to ply the trade of social, cultural, and economic survival.

The molluscan fortress and house was not merely defensive. Hidden refugee artisans, now a ubiquitous established feature of the periphery in Old World and New, might expect in God's time to become instruments of his "Just-Vengeance." By 1635, for example, plate 19 of George Wither's influential *Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne* (an English compendium, much used by artisans, of mostly Continental emblemata) depicted a Palissian snail in the process of negotiating a rustic bridge to safety in the woods; crossing over a dangerous precipice, with a dynamic urban port scene lurking in the chasm below (fig. I.1).¹ "When thou a Dangerous-Way dost goe," the epigram reads, "Walke surely, though thy pace be slowe." Wither explained that time was on the side of the industrious snail, who refused to "trifle" it away, unlike "many Men [who] have sought / With so much *Rashnesse*, those things they desir'd, / . . . And, in the middle of their *Courses*, tir'd." Rash men, "seeing [God] deferres his *Judgements* long," thought "His *Vengeance*, he, forever, would forbear." But contemplating "the slow-pac'd *Snaile*, . . . we learne," the primary axiom of Paracelsian alchemy: "that *Perserverance* brings Large Workes to end, though slowly they creepe on; And, that *Continuance* perfects many things, Which seeme, at first, unlikely to be done." Chief among those "Large Workes," for tiny creatures, was "*Just-Vengeance* [which] moveth like a *Snaile*, / and slowly comes; her coming will not faile." God's millennial time paralleled the slow and industrious artisan.

For Palissy and his artisan followers, the failure of frontal resistance to overcome the superior military power of Counter-Reformation forces during the wars of religion signaled the slow advent of final things and the ultimate victory of skill as the power of weakness. Yet millennial expectations merely provided the teleology for mastery of these new forms of security, based on innovation and craftsmanship and adapted from the artisanal emulation of the underground obstetric processes of Nature, to the domestication of an eschatology of waiting. The weak will certainly inherit the earth that they refine continually through the growth of matter in agriculture and artisanry. So they must also develop the skills to produce material life that supported patience and endurance, if only to survive the "end times" when the harvest will be reaped. Huguenots in southwestern France began to reconfigure their world around this paradigm in the 1550s, and artisans used Palissy's artifacts, as well as stories of his life and painful labor, as inspirations, talismans, and guides. Artisanal security allowed refugees, working within the chameleon structures of their homespun Neoplatonic philosophy and subterranean lives to transmute and reconstruct the boundaries of power into permeable materials. With the complicity of their merchant patrons and clients, they insinuated silent mastery over the economic and social structure of host countries' craft networks.

If Palissy's sixteenth-century artisanal ideology resonated through the inner life of rustic workshops, meeting houses, and domestic settings of the Huguenots' New

World, the operatic and transformational historical event in *Fortress of the Soul* is the fall of the Huguenot fortress of La Rochelle to Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu in 1628. This resulted from a year-long siege that cost perhaps 20,000 lives, or nearly the entire population of the city. It is impossible to overestimate the effect that this apocalyptic event, and the response in its wake of the Protestant forces, which retreated to colonize the Americas, had on the religious, political, military, and scientific worldview of international Protestantism. Palissy predicted the events of 1628 as early as the 1550s, and encouraged artisans to prepare for events that would take place after his death in “end times” when artisanal security must flourish. The destruction of the fortress led to activation of his security system among survivors in the crafts, now mostly in Palissy’s home region of rural Saintonge, who now prepared their escape to northern Europe, England, and, over time, New Amsterdam / New York.

The Christic ordeal and annihilation of La Rochelle—the genocide of its population and the leveling of its iconic walls—was witnessed by the reformed world as an event of enormous cosmological implications. This was true not only in France, but also in England (which shared a long political, economic, and religious history with the city), particularly among what would become the first wave of English Calvinist settlers in colonial America. The fortress’s capitulation effectively broke the back of Huguenot military resistance in France’s western maritime provinces, with their ties to the large Protestant trading nations of the North Atlantic, thus laying the foundation for the Revocation, which marked the beginning of the final, massive Huguenot exodus to northern Europe and the New World. This event sent shock waves through the fast-growing refugee workshops and alchemic laboratories of London, where all eyes focused on the meaning of “the Rock’s” shocking “disintegration into powder.” The effects of 1628 were still being felt, remembered, and acted upon in the metropolis, as we shall see, during Hogarth’s time.

The most influential British-American witness to the siege of 1627–28 was John Winthrop Jr. The younger Winthrop, the alchemist son of the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, lobbied his father to accompany the duke of Buckingham’s failed expeditionary force. Buckingham’s armada was sent by Charles I and Parliament to capture the strategic Île de Ré and use the island as a base of operations to compel Richelieu’s forces to lift the siege of La Rochelle. The younger Winthrop and his transatlantic scientific community read deeply from Huguenot science and history during this formative period of colonization. Winthrop possessed at least one of Palissy’s two books (his personal copy survives), and so it is plausible that his experience at La Rochelle, and the potter’s published views of the weakness of the medieval fortress system and frontal security in this region of France, played a key role in the young military planner’s future strategic thinking. This was evident in New World settlements and in international Protestantism’s deepening concern with acquiring a

practical understanding of the Huguenot adaptation of Paracelsian science to refugee life. Given the victories of the Counter-Reformation at La Rochelle and in the Palatinate, many European Protestants now perceived their own refugee status as an intractable reality of history.

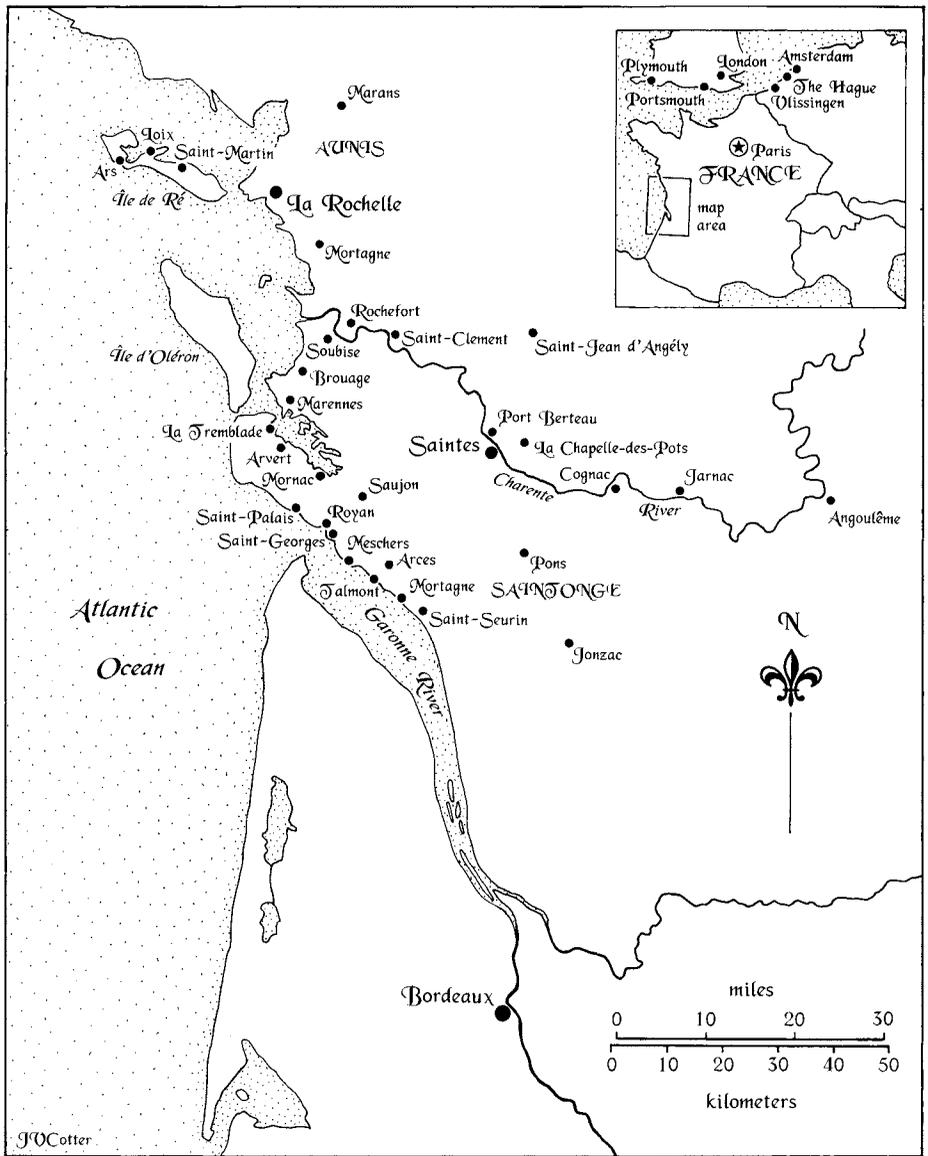
The experience and enduring memory of this singular event was seminal in the younger Winthrop's emergence as early colonial America's leading Paracelsian natural philosopher, physician, alchemist, bibliophile, and military strategist, and in his relatively pluralistic and latitudinarian view of the growing confessional diversity of the Protestant world, so very different from his absolutist father's. This cosmology, and his privileging of skill in New World history, were essential to John Winthrop Jr.'s consuming interest in personal resettlement in the middle colonies, and especially to his long-held, if finally unsuccessful, plan to absorb New Amsterdam into the Connecticut Colony. The linchpin of this plan was control of the Long Island Sound region. The younger Winthrop concluded—after consulting with European colleagues—that this was the American “Mediterranean”; a “middle” gateway to the Northwest Passage, and therefore the philosopher's stone—the ultimate weapon of the skilled elite.

Winthrop did not simply experience the siege as an event fraught with powerful alchemic implications. His presence on the Île de Ré, within sight of the dying La Rochelle, had sanctified him, conveying enormous prestige within the international community of Protestant natural philosophers. He had “been,” in person, at the event that led to the catastrophic outcome that Palissy had predicted in the previous century. Following Palissy's example, the younger Winthrop—himself silent, dissimulating, innovative, and industrious in the flexible space he fashioned for himself between Counter-Reformation genocide and his father's notorious practice of orthodoxy—pursued his own “rustic” program of artisanal security on the southern periphery of New England and the northeastern frontier of New Netherlands. He searched for the philosopher's stone in isolation at his new alchemical laboratory and compound on the north shore of Long Island Sound, just across the American “Mediterranean” from heterodox New Netherlands. Having attended the event that many in his religious and scientific community believed marked the death of the orthodox Reformation in Europe, Winthrop was now perfectly positioned to serve as the alchemist of its latitudinarian rebirth in British colonial America.

Winthrop's alchemical experiences, and Palissy's—as well as those of all the mostly obscure philosophers, artisans, and scientists who pass through the pages to follow—are best understood if historians are prepared to enter a murky, monistic universe of mystical connectedness, quite alien to our own. Theirs was an interactive world of macrocosm and microcosm, where well into the Enlightenment and beyond, spirit mixed easily with matter, while apocalyptic time was counted in ages of the earth. The subterranean experiences of refugee artisans must be unearthed *watchfully*, by looking

closely at small lives moving in slow motion through shadowy spaces. Our practice of close perception will parallel their own wary ways of seeing and stress points of focus that may sometimes seem marginal or even repulsive to modern eyes. These viewpoints, however, were central to artisanal perception. By custom and training, historians have focused on the written word. Yet to engage the culture of the word in isolation from material life obscures the nature of the Huguenots' New World.

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MAP 1. Aunis-Saintonge. Drawn by John Cotter.