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**Under the Volcano.  
Warburg's Legacy**

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# Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

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# A forgotten essay by Fritz Rougemont on Warburg and the use of “bibliophily” as a scientific tool (1930)

Fritz Rougemont, edited by Monica Centanni and Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, with a Preliminary Note by Monica Centanni

§ Preliminary Note to the 1930 Essay and its Author  
§ Fritz Rougemont, *Aby Warburg, a scientific “bibliophily”*

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## Preliminary Note to the 1930 Essay and its Author

Monica Centanni

The name of Fritz Rougemont is well known to scholars of Warburg because, together with Gertrud Bing, he co-edited the *Aby Warburg* edition *Gesammelte Schriften*, published by Teubner in 1932. This article presents an important contribution by Rougemont, published in 1930, a few months after Warburg’s death, in the first volume of “*Imprimatur*”, the yearbook of the “*Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde zu Hamburg*”.

The yearbook “*Imprimatur*” was founded in 1930 by the “*Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde zu Hamburg*”. Following the acquisition of the yearbook by the “*Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen*” in 1936, it became the most significant official publication of the Society. The final volume of the former series was published in 1954-55. Three years later, in 1958, the inaugural volume of the new series was published, with essays focusing on Venetian book culture in the 15th and 16th centuries. Following the death of the first editor of “*Imprimatur*”, Siegfried Buchenau, in 1964, the yearbook was edited by Konrad F. Bauer, Bertold Hack and Heinz Sarkowski. The focus of the journal shifted from bibliographical interests and purely art-historical questions to suggestions for collectors. Since 2003, the yearbook has been published every two years; the new editor is Ute Schneider. The journal is aimed at a diverse readership, including antiquarians, private collectors, book historians, bibliophiles, and artbook enthusiasts. The articles encompass a broad range of topics, including collecting, restoration, incunabula, bindings, and current trends in illustration and book design (for further details, please refer to the Yearbook webpage).





Hans Joachim Staude, Fritz Rougemont (1922)

The reputation of Fritz Rougemont (1904-1941) is almost exclusively associated with his collaboration with Bing on the German edition of Warburg's writings. Petrarchan studies occasionally mention his two contributions to the field – an article on a hypothetical portrait of the poet, also published in "Imprimatur" (Rougemont 1937), and the edition of some of Petrarch's writings (Rougemont 1939).

In 1929, the young Rougemont was employed at the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg in Hamburg to work on a series of transcriptions and translations from Dutch into German and Italian (especially for research on the Baroque of Johannes Albertus Franciscus Orbaan), as Saxl reports in a series of letters to Warburg dated 25 February [WIA GC/24956], 22 March 1929 [WIA GC/25087] and 1 June 1929 [WIA GC/25014]. On the Petrarchan field, the relationship with Arturo Farinelli, who sent him material on Petrarch, as reported by Rougemont himself in a letter to Saxl dated 5 July 1929 [WIA

GC/24336], and as seen in a note by Bing dated 26 October 1929 (*Tagebuch*, GS, 555), remains to be explored.

Still we know that Fritz Rougemont had been participating in KBW activities since 1927. In particular, he was present at Warburg's lecture on Burckhardt at the summer seminar that year (Sears 2012, 38 and n. 1; on the seminar, see: Roeck 1991, in general on Warburg's seminars at KBW, see *Seminario Mnemosyne* 2007 e Mazzucco 2007). A letter between the Institute and an insurance company indicates that Rougemont's employment contract started on 1 January till 31 May 1929 [WIA GC/23110]. Nevertheless, the collaboration persisted, both actively and continuously, even in the following months, as evidenced by some letters and notes preserved in the KBW's *Tagebuch*.

In a note of the end of September 1929, Warburg wrote that Rougemont had been entrusted with an important role in the Library's ordering project:

Warburg | Rougemont schon seit Wochen beauftragt, einen vernünftigen Prospekt für die KBW.  
Warburg | For week Fritz [...] Rougemont has been in charge of the drafting of an appropriate prospectus for the KBW.  
(ca. 27 September 1929, GS *Tagebuch*, 536)

As we can learn from another note in the *Tagebuch*, on the evening of 23 October 1929 Rougemont was with Warburg while they were discussing some images of *Picatrix*, on which the KBW group of scholars was working, in order to integrate them into the Atlas:

Warburg | Nachmittags Ueber *Picatrix* vor erweitertem Quartett (Mary, Frede, Meyer, Jaffé,

Freund, Rougemont). War inhaltsreich und sehr förderlich für Jaffé und Meyer, aber sonst entsprach ich nicht meinen Erwartungen. Hatte vorher Reminder für von Wrochem geschrieben  
Bing | Der Abend war, wenn er auch gezeigt hat, daß die ganze Frage für den Atlas noch nicht ganz so darstellbar ist, doch sehr lehrreich und als Zusammenarbeit unter lebhafter Beteiligung der andern höchst erfreulich. War auch, für jeden nach seiner Art, folgehaft.

Warburg | Afternoon Ueber Picatrix in front of an extended quartet (Mary, Frede, Meyer, Jaffé, Freund, Rougemont). Rich in content and very positive for Jaffé and Meyer, but otherwise did not meet my expectations. I had previously written a Memo for von Wrochem.

Bing | The evening, even though it showed that the issue as a whole is still not so presentable for the Atlas, was nonetheless very informative and very enjoyable due to the cooperation and lively participation of others. It was also, for each in his or her own way, coherent.  
(23 November [sic! true October] 1929, GS *Tagebuch*, 552-553).

Evidently enough, the work on this topic was not yet ready to be included in the Atlas, but the note confirms the fact that Rougemont was also actively collaborating on the Mnemosyne project until the last days of Warburg's life.

Two days later, Warburg notes:

Warburg | Veranlasse Rougemont die zitierten Quellen als *Desiderata* einzutragen.

Warburg | Asked Rougemont to add the cited sources as *desiderata*.

*Tagebuch* GS, 555 (25 October 1929)

On the other hand, Rougemont's direct and in-depth knowledge of the Mnemosyne materials is confirmed by various insights in the 1930 essay here republished. In a passage of his contribution, Rougemont writes:

[Warburg] collected literature on figurative thinking in magic and astrology, as well as late products of the formal language of antiquity, postage stamps and advertising images, but also photographs of significant events, newspaper cuttings and, finally, the illustrated pages of magazines, which – as the last descendants of cheap art prints – reveal the characters and trends of the times precisely in their random and curious composition.

As is clear, the reference goes to the last panels of the Atlas, in particular to the illustrated inserts from the magazine "Hamburger Fremdenblatt" included in the Mnemosyne Panel 79.

There may be little doubt, therefore, that Fritz Rougemont did not play only the important role of co-editor for the 1932 edition of Warburg's posthumous work. Before that, in the last, intense year of Warburg's life, and especially in the autumn of 1929, after Warburg and Bing had returned to Hamburg from their trip to Italy, Rougemont belonged to the KBW's close circle of collaborators and was actively involved in the research seminars, the Library's ordering project and the in-progress Atlas work. In the years immediately following Warburg's death, then, Fritz Rougemont played a prominent role within the Warburgkreis, as he was appointed to assist Gertrud Bing in publishing Warburg's complete writings. With all this in mind, however, the

question still remains: why have his figure and especially the important essay we republish here been forgotten in the critical literature of Warburg studies?



Maja Einstein, Fritz Rougemont e Paul Winteler at 'Samos' house, Quinto Fiorentino.

The answer can be found in Rougemont's complex biographical narrative. Despite the scarcity of information, some data on his biography can be gleaned from the materials published on the website dedicated to the painter Hans-Joachim Staude (1904-1973), whose schoolmate in Hamburg Rougemont had been.

In the fine essay *Einstein's Piano. A Chronology*, Jacob Staude presents some facts about the friendship between Fritz and his father. These facts can be summarised as follows: in 1923, Fritz, following in the footsteps of Warburg's youthful journey and with the intention of retracing his experience of Italian education, arrived in Florence before his best friend. There he was soon introduced to Maja Einstein (Albert's sister) and Paul Winteler and studied for some years. The forty-two year-old Maja took the brilliant youth under her wing and mothered him. Maja writes: "Fritz has a fine and good soul. He's the only person I've met so far who, as soon as he realises I'm embarrassed or in pain, immediately does all he can to relieve it. This, especially in such a young person, is truly a rare quality". After returning to Hamburg, in the following years Rougemont committed himself totally to the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, though always keeping in close contact with Maja and the intellectual community based in Florence. In 1931 he returned to Florence with Gertrud Bing for five months, in order to conduct research at various libraries and archives and gather data for the comprehensive collection of Warburg's writings that would be published the following year. In 1933 he converted to Nazism. In his intellectual circle, many of whose members were of Jewish origin (as was the case with Albert Einstein, who chose not to return to Germany from Princeton), there was a great deal of bewilderment and disbelief at the choice. Only Maja refused to believe in it and she continued for years to defend Rougemont fiercely in letters to common friends, until she had finally to recognise his evident devotion to the Nazi cause. Despite all this, Fritz maintained a relationship with Maja till 1939, when he sent her the fine volume containing his elegant translations of Petrarch. Then the war broke out and in 1941 Fritz Rougemont died as a faithful Nazi on the Eastern front.

These are the biographical events and more generally the historical details that caused the final *damnatio memoriae* of Fritz Rougemont, also erasing the traces of his scholarly activity almost completely.

The essay that is here published in a new edition of the original German version of 1930, and in the first English translation and first Italian version, constitutes the first testimony of a specific interpretation of Warburg's "bibliophily" as a scientific instrument. Originally and by means of important hermeneutic clues, the essay illuminates Warburg's unprecedented method of study, his analysis of the mechanisms of the classical tradition, and innovative tracing

in his research with respect to the contemporary disciplinary dictates. The text is brimming with a fervid and impassioned tone, written in the enthusiasm of the moment, just a few months after that fateful evening in October 1929. On that day, the young Rougemont was with Warburg just three days before his death, engaged in a discussion with Bing and others on the integration of the images of *Picatrix* into Mnemosyne Atlas.

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## Aby Warburg, a scientific “bibliophily” (1930\*)

Fritz Rougemont, translated by Monica Centanni

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With the death of Professor Aby Warburg (26 October 1929), the “Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde zu Hamburg” (“Society of Book Friends in Hamburg”) has lost one of its oldest and most active members. It is not our task, not now, not here, to remember Warburg the scholar or the man in all his depth, richness and versatility of his intellectual energies. Nor is it appropriate here to offer a mere chronicle of his activities within the Society, as lively as they were expressed in lectures and inspiration. Ambitious as the former may be, the latter nevertheless appears inadequate. For Warburg was one of those people whose richness, in all the different fields of their activity, is not limited and exhausted in what they do. Their real significance and importance, and at the same time the inestimable gain that others get from their presence, is given by the fact that they are larger than life, that the deepest influence they can have on others derives from their existence, from the forces, tensions, and problems to which their daemon compels them – like us – to face.

So, if we are to speak of a legacy at all, it will be of tasks rather than results, and of the significance that Warburg’s research could have, should have, for bibliophilic work. That he himself was a passionate lover of books from his earliest youth, that all his collecting and searching for books was based on an original *sympatheia* and found its constantly renewed motivation in it, we wish to state from the outset. Warburg thus stands in that great line of humanists for whom education and the book have always formed an inseparable unity starting from the days of the Renaissance and on to Burckhardt. The ethics of the *paideia*, or in other words the responsibility towards the heritage of ancient Western culture, led Warburg to the book. It became for him both a source of knowledge and a path of self-education and self-formation.

“The book is one of the least known means of self-education”, he used to say. And Warburg knew how to read; he viewed reading in a broad and new sense that boldly embraced every human expression, from the developed word to the pre-conceptual image. Just as Warburg liked to be surrounded by his books wherever he went, on short and long journeys, they also accompanied him to the remotest areas of his research. It can be said that through his discoveries in the field of intellectual history, he contributed to the rediscovery of the book and its value as a source, as a document. His tendency to read wherever he turned his gaze had deeper roots than mere bibliophilic interest. Nor did he think of interpreting human forms of expression by analogies among them. But his peculiar way of thinking, which passionately broke down and

blurred the boundaries between these various “forms” – boundaries that had been drawn by a belated geography of knowledge, though finally leading to drawing new distinctions time and again – opened up to him the understanding of a historical world in which, under the reign of myth and its symbols, art, science, and religion were still unseparated and merged into a unity. It was necessary to read these symbols, and hence it was necessary to recognise words and signs, books and images alike, as their bearers.

For the art historian, such as Warburg originally was, this appreciation of the book is by no means self-evident. Aesthetic interpretation will never be willing to understand the work of art as such from its material or from the life of its creator. The literary source, which provides both, is a service tool, nothing more. It was Warburg’s groundbreaking development, from a purely aesthetic vision of the work of art to a cultural and iconographic vision of it, that broke down the old boundaries. The act shows a profound understanding of what pictorial expression means, even beyond and before any ‘art’, in the entirety of human symbolism and its history, transformations and migrations.

Imaginative thought does not end in the work of art. Art, meant in the mere sense of aesthetics, is rather the belated glorification and humanisation of the general mythical view of the world. Art must always set the image free from the shackles of magic and astrology, in order to treat it in its ‘pure light’. In its own way, art also takes part in the battle waged by science, albeit with a different radicalism and according to its own principles. This is the special feature that lies at the basis of Warburg’s methodology. The works of Raphael, Dürer and Rembrandt had yet to be studied and analysed. In their ingenious originality, they are both a significant contribution to the tradition of pictorial thinking and of art-historical consideration.

It goes without saying that this knowledge opens up for the researcher a plethora of new perspectives. Considering the consequences of all expressions of life leads to the conclusion that they are ultimately part of the same process. This process is not limited by the boundaries that have been set for it. The problem of their emergence, resolution and liberation is therefore included within the ambit of historical investigation. Once this principle has been recognised, once it has been translated into an array of concrete historical problems – and this is particularly true for Warburg, in the issue of the confrontation of the Western spirit with the ancient dual heritage (i.e. the artistic freedom of the human being and the obscure belief in demons) – then the historical-intellectual research opens up to a material of “speaking” sources that still remains to be explored and elaborated. In fact, this very material has been hitherto regarded as fragile and uncertain, and consequently despised. The pathetic content of a work of art enters into the closest contact with feelings, thoughts, customs and ritual celebrations of a social community, and thus with those documents of everyday life in which they find their direct and unmanipulated expression. Thus Warburg sought to visualise the intellectual milieu of the Medici circle and the Florentine merchants through a variety of sources, including letters, documents, inventories, and wills. This approach enabled him to gain insight into the work of Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. By “intercepting” the whole eventful life of an era and “re-

ording” its tensions, as Warburg often put it, he sought to achieve a level of precision and sensitivity akin to that of a seismograph. The book becomes part of this circle of sources, like a younger brother. It is here that Warburg’s real significance for “bibliophily” must be sought. His new way of using the book for all areas of historical research, in terms of cultural psychology, could only be of directly benefit to the study and systematic treatment of books, as he himself had hoped for at the founding meeting of the Hamburg Society. Obviously, “bibliophily” in its purest form is not compatible with the applied arts. The problem that Warburg was interested in developing led him to pursue a different line of enquiry, just as it had in the field of his specific discipline: art history. His work did not focus on the beautiful, but on the “interesting” book, on “bibliophily” in the scientific, not aesthetic sense.

At a first glance, it may seem that in Warburg’s case the mere passion of an eccentric has led him to the strange, the remote and the curious. In his works, past and present literature and bizarre monstrosities of a journalism driven by superstition were revived as documents that other historians would have overlooked in order to – as Warburg himself once put it – “bury the curiosity and strangeness that are, in fact, the deepest sources of ethno-psychological insight”. As we have seen, these documents mark a crucial turning point in the study of the Renaissance. It is in the expressions of everyday life – in the religious or political pamphlets which, as is also done by prophecies, astrological calendars, or hermetic practices, reflect the real life of the people day by day and hour by hour, with its fears and hopes – that the cultural situation manifests itself most directly. The almost subterranean flow of belief and faith in images and the tradition of images, as well as the extent and character of the reception of Antiquity, become evident. In addition, the printed book becomes the crucial vehicle of development at the time of its origins and first use. Manuscripts, altarpieces and tapestries had hitherto served the purpose of international cultural exchange in a laborious and clumsy manner; they were the vanguard in which North and South fought for the Classical heritage with their intellectual and artistic means of expression. What now replaces these cumbersome messengers, what, in a spiritually tolerant era, makes the great flooding of Europe with Classical forms, but also with the ancient pagan magic of images, possible is a much lighter, more agile, more popular medium of exchange: the book.

In a lecture to the “Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde zu Hamburg”, Warburg once traced the migration of ancient pictorial forms from the Upper Italian card game to the Lübeck “Nygen calendar” by Steffen Arndes:

The literature indicates that this calendar of 1519, which appears to be a simple product of popular literature, is in fact a significant artistic product in terms of evolutionary history and cultural-historical interest. Its impact goes beyond local historical interest. In fact, it testifies to the loss of the communication channel through which these images could travel back and forth, liberated and mobilised by the art of printing, initiating and mediating a new era of artistic and cultural exchange between North and South.

Such research problems thus led Warburg to “bibliophily”. Or should we rather say: the collector’s original passion was directed and enriched by such scientific questions? There is one aspect of Warburg’s collecting activity that may still appear incomprehensible, dubious, and whimsical to the more penetrating eye. This is the archive of everyday contemporary documents, especially newspapers, which he started and completed with passionate consistency. On a closer examination, however, it becomes clear that these documents are nothing more than those rarities and curiosities of the past that Warburg the historian had elevated to the status of the most valuable sources. It is considered a professional rule of historical research to exclude the present and its development from the scope of the work, because the too personal proximity of the events, the bias of the researcher himself, could confuse the “objective” view. Actually, for Warburg, the historian’s detached and objective view was constantly influenced by his personal sympathies, which could be perceived as a threat to the stability of the past. Conversely, he could not ignore the changes occurring in the present that challenged established cultural values. Nevertheless, his particular kind of psycho-cultural intuition did not allow itself to be drawn into hasty solutions, dogmatic prophecies of doom and dangerous predictions; it grasped the problems directly and took care to provide the appropriate material for their solution, if only to understand their meaning. In this context, Warburg collected literature on figurative thought in magic and astrology, as well as belated products of the formal language of antiquity, postage stamps and advertising images, but also photographs of significant events, newspaper cuttings and, finally, the illustrated pages of magazines, which – as the last descendants of cheap art prints – reveal the characters and trends of their times in their random and bizarre composition. Ancient values and forms of expression persist in various forms in modern times. In some cases, these values and forms of expression have been “inflated” to a considerable extent. Furthermore, the ancient relationships and tensions between North and South continue to manifest themselves in various contexts: the modern “working man” fights for his intellectual freedom, and yet the Hydra of mythical-magical thought rises against him and breaks into the hard-won “thinking space of contemplation”. Warburg himself fought in the same battle. Cultural psychology and cultural politics joined there for him at a final stage. The problems of research became the tools for the confrontations and decisions of the present.

But this is not what we should have talked about. Rather, we should have talked about highlighting once again, and from a new angle, the peculiar perspective Warburg opened up for “bibliophily” in a scientific sense.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about Warburg’s work, which he left us as a monument and testimony of his deep love of books. His *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek* is a testament to the equal contributions of the scholar and the collector. The project, which he often presented with great passion, consisted of two main elements. The first was to place the book at the service of historical-intellectual research, with a particular emphasis on the history of images. The second was to bring that same research closer to the book, leading it towards the text and the “word”. The aim of this approach was to familiarise the researcher with the most exclusi-



ve areas of bibliophilic knowledge. The entire structure of his Library was designed with this objective in mind, thus forcing the researcher to approach books. The Library organising principle is provided by the thematic areas derived from Warburg's studies. These areas are not to be understood as groupings of "objective" subjects, ordered in the sense of a traditional theory of science. It is precisely this structure that characterises the growth and development of the Library as well as, of course, its necessary limitations. A *Problembibliothek* – a "Library organised by problems" – cannot and will not claim the universality of a generalist library. Rather, it must gradually complete itself from within. And so, Warburg collected the materials and instruments necessary for his research in various fields, going beyond the current solutions and their intrinsic functionality. This was, I repeat, probably driven by his original passion, but with the *ratio* and intention behind the collection of materials and tools becoming increasingly clear and defined. Those materials and instruments were collected for the benefit of Warburg himself, his colleagues and future researchers in the "Laboratory of History by Images of the Science of Culture" – i.e. for all the people in charge of the management of Mediterranean cultural heritage.

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\*"Imprimatur" I (1930), 11-17.

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### **English abstract**

The name of Fritz Rougemont (1904-1941) is known to Warburg scholars because he appears as a co-editor, together with Gertrud Bing, of the edition of Aby Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*, published in Leipzig by the publisher Teubner in 1932. Since 1927 Rougemont had actively collaborated with the Kulturwissenschaft Bibliothek Warburg, but later his biographical events, and in particular his adhesion to Nazism, caused a definitive *damnatio memoriae* of his figure, also erasing the traces of his scholarly activity almost completely. We present here an important contribution of his published in 1930 in the first volume of "Imprimatur", the Annuary of the "Gesellschaft der Bücherfreunde zu Hamburg". The essay, hitherto neglected in the extensive literature of Warburgian studies, is presented in a new edition of the original German version of 1930, and in the first English and Italian translations. Rougemont's contribution represents a primary testimony of the specifically scientific meaning of Warburg's "bibliophily", which originally illuminates his unprecedented method of study, the analysis of the mechanisms of the Classical tradition, and the innovative trajectory of his research with respect to his contemporary, and dominant, disciplinary dictates.

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*keywords* | Fritz Rougemont; Warburg; Bibliophily; Hamburg KBW.



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