Picturing the Volk
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(Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich / Literature and Culture Studies), SWITZERLAND  
Depicting Alchemical Substances: Johann Joachim Becher’s Mineralogia (1662)
It testifies, the author notes, to the extraordinary impact National Socialism made on him when he was a student in Bavaria. He was equally impressed by the extraordinary evanescence of the Nazi experience as he experienced it 20 years later when he was a British diplomat in Hanover and Bonn. Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology. By Robert Cecil. Illustrated. 256 pp. Though Rosenberg was a man of relative probity by Nazi standards, "The Myth" incidentally made him rich. With the stoic heroism of the dedicated biographer, Cecil has demonstrably read it, which is more than can be said of Rosenberg's colleagues and contemporaries. The other Nuremberg defendants were unanimous, credible, and apparently rather proud, that they had not read it. In 1942, the Dutch weekly magazine Volk en Vaderland, which propagated the political opinions of the Dutch National Socialists in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands, published a comic strip, "Rare, maar ware commentaren" (Odd, but true comments). In it, the illustrator, Peter Beekman (1911–1959) depicted current events and the various perceived enemies of National Socialist society, Jews in particular, providing insight into how the genre was deployed in the Nazi propaganda machine. I will also focus on Beekman himself, an intriguing figure of the time, who joined the NSB, the country's National Socialist party, in 1940, and who continued to work as an illustrator after the Second World War. Historians trace the rise of National Socialism to the influences of nationalism, anti-liberalism, cultural pessimism and racism. The vision of the Volk, a national collectivity inspired by a common creative energy, was promulgated as the unique essence of the German people. Mosse has speculated that this ideological preoccupation resulted from Germany's delayed political unification and the Romantic reaction to modernity. Racism, too, had a place in volkisch ideology. By exploiting racial differences, Germans lent validity to the claims of national distinctions and superiority. In this direction, they were aided and abetted by Darwinism, purporting that the superior would prevail over inferior races. For example, "Master Race" is not a correct translation of "Herrenvolk." "Volk" is not the same as "Rasse." and "Herr" is not necessarily "Master." For example, the Jews will admit to being a "Volk," but never a "Rasse." This was the essential concept of National Socialism: a unification of the Socialist and Nationalist movements: that manual workers and intellectual workers -- "die Arbeiter der Stirne und die Arbeiter der Faust" -- would realize that they needed each other, and treat each other with respect. "Herr" simply means a gentleman. With this kind of ideology, is it of any surprise that the German Nation wanted to protect itself from alien elements within its borders and to preserve its own race? Self-Preservation is not Racial Superiority. Other sources Picturing the Volk: Colour Photography, National Socialist Ideology and the Myth of the Master Race. General rights Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research. You may not furth