

**Alchemy: An Introduction to the
Symbolism and the Psychology**

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Natural Science and Alchemy

- Alchemy is natural science approached from a perspective of divine energy or power
- It is human nature to look for root causes. early natural science was inextricably linked with notions of divinity and causality. Even Descartes associated the idea of causality with the immutability of God.
- Mankind has always tried to find the elemental substance, the smallest possible particle, the reduced essence, or that which is timeless and immutable.
- It is dangerous when we move away from our natural instinctual roots. When natural science is in the possession of one with a demonic drive to reduce all to causality, this upsets the balance of civilization.
- The search for the incorruptible and immutable essence is the search for immortality, the incorruptible essence which survives death.

Entantiodromia, Matter, and the Feminine

- Often at the end of a civilization, there is an *enantiodromia*, where power is handed over to a feminine figure. Certainly the cult of Isis and the Virgin Mary give witness to this.
- *Enantiodromia* is when there is an abundance or plenitude of any one energy which, in a self-healing way, generates its opposite. It is an abundance of force that can cause an opposite reaction.
- Matter – *mater* – typically seen as feminine
- Plato – space is like a nurse to the whole cosmic order, thus space is a feminine container, a nourishing function of the mother
- Matter is always secretly connected with the mother archetype

Prima Materia and Unio Mystica

- The *prima materia* - the basic matter of the world, that upon which the alchemical process is performed. Dark matter. The raw original “stuff”.
- True understanding and deep communication result in a *unio mystica*, when the opposites unite and are reconciled, when death and immortality are one.

Resurrection, Osiris and Immortality

- Myths of the resurrection of Osiris often represented by a simile of the resurrection of the corn – a tree is hollowed out and filled with corn like planting corn on Osiris' mummy - his coffin is the mother goddess, it is filled with corn – when the corn grows, it is a sign that the dead are resurrected
- In the story of Osiris we see the famous archetypal mystery of the death and resurrection of a young spring god
- We are so desperate to find our own resurrection, our own immortality, the piece within us that is immutable, that we must solve the problem of the corpse and what happens to us – if you wish for resurrection, you must see that the disintegrated body can somehow be put back together again
- Before there can be a resurrection, there must be a re-membering of the body
- Here, we are getting to the root of it – matter, through alchemical process, is transformed. It must be transformed before it can be resurrected.
- So the problem of resurrection is linked with the problem of matter and that if it has a basic form, it can be transformed.
- We must prove that basic matter is immortal.

Birth of Alchemy – Hellenized Egypt

- Medieval alchemists look back to Hellenized Egypt for their influences
- Mastering how to make certain alloys was a well-guarded secret – the smith was a key figure, a craftsman that created metals
- Greek natural philosophy gets in the act by speculating extensively about time, space, atom, matter, and energy, building an environment where alchemy is ripe
- Alchemy was born when the thought models of Greek philosophy met with experimental practices of Egyptian traditions – Ptolemaic Egypt was fertile – as Egyptian recipes and religious thought met with the scientific thought of the Greeks.

Olympiodorus and Osiris

- Olympiodoros showed that he was less interested in the alchemical experiments than with the theoretical and symbolic aspects of alchemy
- Olympiodorus is driving at an inner experience which the alchemists had in their experiments with material phenomena.
- Olympiodoros also speaks of black lead – a basic substance with which you must experiment – refers to Osiris' coffin
- Osiris was slain by his brother Seth and buried in a lead coffin and thrown into the sea. – The sea is the beginning of all moist substances – i.e., basic matter, the moist substances stands for the basic material of the cosmos.
- Just as matter is put in a bottle, sealed securely, and then cooked, this is considered an exact parallel to the divine spirit Osiris lying dead in a lead coffin
- Imprisonment in a coffin, which is an alchemical vessel – the death of the prima materia is by suffocation

Egyptian Alchemy

- The vessel represents a basic attitude of introversion – it is a symbol for the attitude that prevents anything from escaping outside
- When the flow of intensity of psychological processes becomes roasted. You become roasted in yourself, just as the tomb and the dead god are roasted as one
- The black lead also transforms. This produces drops, which go down to earth and join with the vapour, with the wife of vapour, until the bitter water comes out.
- Adam gets together with his wife the vapour until the divine bitter water arises. This is the *coniunctio*, the bringing together of opposites and the result is mystical divine water
- Steam or vapor always carries the idea of psyche, sublimated matter, a subtle body, something half material.
- The bitter water is sulphur water, which was regarded as a divine substance. Also urine, carries this association

Zosimos, Adam and the Search for the Incorruptible

- Olympiodorus comes 200 years after Zosimos and knows of him
- Zosimos speaks of Adam and restoring the fallen Adam, reassembling Adam, the light spark that exists in every human being
- Adam is liberated from nature.
- The search for Self in matter is sought after.
- To understand the mystery of matter and the real emotional drive behind the desire to find the immortal part of man.
- Something immortal that survives death, an aspect of the Self, that incorruptible essence in man which survives death
- This search for immortality continues until the 17th century, with all the theories about the elixir of life, the *pharmakon*

Primitive Religion and the Experience of the Divine

- Religious attitude towards life is completely self-evident for primitive peoples.
- In his primitive condition, man is naturally religious and religion pervades all his activities
- Return to the primitive self-evident attitude towards life is requisite for the experience of the Self, which cannot be found through the conscious mind
- Primitive mind observes synchronistic events, signs, inner and outer symptoms, careful attention to unknown factors – the primitive mind naturally has symptoms of *participation mystique*
- There is an instinctive functioning in higher animals and we have it
- It is healthy to pay attention to such impulses
- The basic religious attitude is linked with the idea of survival, and therefore being religious ensures survival

Ancient Alchemy

- In alchemy, the idea of steam or vapour always carries the idea of the psyche, of sublimated, a subtle body that is half material
- Out of the divine union of the male substance with the vapour comes the divine bitter water, the sulphur, which was regarded as a divine substance or material.
- Often the truth given by the unconscious is very bitter.
- Water carries the projection of knowledge. *The extractio of the anima is watery knowledge.*
- Lead was the metal of the planet Saturn, and is often seen as the enemy. In certain depressions, one feel like lead, one just sits like a block of heavy matter.
- The great difficulty is to extract Osiris from the lead, to save the fantasy that is life giving and cut away the childishness of the wish to realize it. The divine man must be extracted from the lead coffin.

Islamic Alchemy – Senior and the Tabula Smaragdina

- Mohammed ibn Umail – probably lived 900-960 and became famous in European alchemy
- In the Latin texts, his name is given as “Senior”, but this must be a translation for “The Sheikh”, which actually means “The Old Man” in Arabic.
- The Latin text of “Senior” was published under the name *De Chemia, or Silver Water and Starry Earth*
- He was probably Shi-ite because they had a more symbolic and mystical interpretation of the Koran, not so much dogma and holy text
- They looked back to the ancient Egyptians, who mummified their dead in order to obtain immortality. Alchemy too, tries to produce the immortal man
- There is a picture of a statue of an old man holding a tablet. This is a classic alchemical image of the *tabula smaragdina*, the emerald tablet. This image must go back to Greek sources, where it is speculated there must have been a story of a Hermes statue found in a tomb which had the whole secret on its knees.

Arabic Alchemy and the Process of Transformation

- Senior speaks of a wingless and exalted bird united together
- The wingless bird is spoken of as red sulphur. Jung spoke of sulphur as an active and corrosive substance. It is associated with drivenness, the part of the psyche with a definite goal
- The *prima materia* can be seen as basic instinctive desires of the personality, which, when cooked, emanate steam which flies above matter. We meet the drives at the bottom, in a depression. There you meditate on it and do active imagination.
- Instead of arguing with the desires, we cook them and fantasize about them.
- In active imagination, we experiment with reality with an introverted attitude of observing objectively what the desires really want. But we do not merely want something psychological; we want the real thing, the material thing.
- Our drive is to become something special, a unique son or daughter of god, deriving from the intuition of one's inner nature
- Each human life is a unique spiritual adventure and a unique meeting with God

Consciousness and the Unconscious

- Collective consciousness is where humans flock together, in society. The originality of the individual consciousness fades
- But there are two suns in consciousness – the rigid one and the one with a paradoxical attitude
- In other words, one keeps the door to the unconscious open, one is never too sure about oneself or too sure about a decision. One should always have an eye or an ear open to the opposite or the other thing
- The unconscious is dependent upon consciousness. But consciousness is only a good channel of communication through which the unconscious can speak if the consciousness has a double, paradoxical attitude
- The unconscious is the *nigredo*, the destructive aspect of the unconscious. But we penetrate it deeper and see something light and meaningful. We warm it up with our conscious attention, then something white comes out of it. Out of the dark place comes the moon, something white, enlightenment.
- Within the disgusting shell of depressing blackness is the light of the unconsciousness.
- In a state of depression or conflict, one is forced to pay attention to the unconsciousness

Sun and Moon Unite, The *Coniunctio Oppositorum*

- The sun imparts its light to the moon so that the moon may reach perfection
- What good is the sun if it cannot shed light on something else? The sun needs an empty vessel into which the light can be poured; it needs darkness into which light can shine.
- Duality of sun and moon – sun is warm and dry; moon is wet and cold
- When two people meet, there are always four (anima and animus in each) and a quaternity is present
- The *coniunctio* is the harmonious balance between moon and sun, masculine and feminine energies
- But the sun has two sides. One is open to the unconscious and the other is one-sided and destructive – Sun is an image of the self on one hand and the ego on the other – in its rightful function, the ego is the light in the darkness for the unconscious, an instrument for realization of the self, functioning with justice
- The Sol Niger refers to the dark shadowy aspect of consciousness – the sun god also has a destructive aspect. Apollo is also the god of mice, rats, and wolves. Demons of midday – Sol Niger is the Sun without justice, a sun that is too hot and that has a demonic side. If consciousness functions as it should, it should be helpful to life, not burning life to death.

Coniunctio

- Individuation too, happens in a shut chamber, just as the alchemical vessel is a closed space. This is the secret source of life, the unique creativeness in each moment of life,
- The *coniunctio* happens in the underworld, in the new moon, in darkness. In the deepest desolation, the new personality is born.
- If I am in harmony with the self, there is a feeling of absolute peace, and the Self is an indestructible thing
- Mercurius, the divine child, is born in the philosopher's egg.
- The philosopher's stone is an object of hard substance, something that remains through all of eternity
- There are divine moments in which things are clear and beyond suffering. If you work on yourself long enough, the stone slowly grows and becomes the solid nucleus of the personality. The Self is so present that the instinct of truth gets through quickly
- The moon coagulates, the life process is something eternal outside of life.
- In the *coniunctio*, a new third thing is born. The ouroboros where the opposites meet, there a flow is born, the mystical divine water, the meaningful flux of life

The *Aurora Consurgens* (“*Rising Dawn*”)

- Dr. Jung came across this text, a rather dry alchemical work.
- Some say it might be the text of St. Thomas of Aquinas as he was dying.
- There are reports that St. Thomas suffered from a strange alteration of his personality just before death.
- His dying words after giving a seminar on the Song of Solomon were “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field.”
- The text of *Aurora Consurgens* is a paraphrase of the Song of Solomon. (p. 183)
- First five books have to do with the apparition of a female figure called the Wisdom of God – mixed up with the Gnostic idea of Sophia
- i.e., holy ghost, i.e., *anima Christi*
- The Wisdom of God represents the sum of all archetypes, the *archetypi*, the idea of a thing existed in God’s mind before it existed in the world – God then cast his idea into matter – before the idea is the *unus mundus*

Logos and the Unconscious

- The unconscious and its incredible intelligence – the marvelous structure of a dream and the cunning way in which pictures are mixed – “I admire the thinking in the unconscious, the wonderful structure of it.”
- Logos represents the structural element of the unconscious – you can call it Sophia or just call it Logos
- Another way of thinking about it is the *nous poietikos*, the creative intelligence that is responsible for the meaningfulness of things – according to St. Thomas, the *nous poietikos* is not in the cosmos but the human mind

Nigredo and Albedo

- Aurora Consurgens: Starts to describe the alchemical process. In the original text, the author refers to a big black cloud. This cloud is the *massa confusa*, *the prima materia*. The black cloud is an alchemical symbol for the the state called *nigredo*.
- Sometimes referred to as “The Cloud of Unknowing”, sometimes compared to the confusion or unconsciousness. This describes a state of utter confusion, of complete unhappiness, which is at the same time the beginning of the alchemical work.
- The *nigredo* is often depicted as Ethiopian, a personification of the unknown dark side of the personality, the primitive, natural man in his ambiguous wholeness. This is the genuine man within us who does not fit into conventional patterns.
- The cult of Mary is a type of *enantiodromia*, an unobtrusive return to matriarchy and materialism. The only way to fight the materialistic aspects is by raising to a higher position the symbol of the feminine godhead and along with it, matter.
- Many creation myths describe the creation of the Earth as the Godhead falling from Heaven
- In alchemy, it is often said that the greatest trouble comes between the nigredo and the albedo. That is where one does the hard work of constant washing, constant distilling, with the object of purification, as the metal is evaporated and precipated into another vessel.
- The *prima materia* has to be constantly washed and distilled and cleansed over and over again.
- In psychological terms, it is the first stage of becoming quieter and more detached, more objective relative to the problem.
- As Jung comments on the birth of the divine child, when the hero is born, there is always an outburst of destructive powers. There is a crisis of healing, so to speak. The light is born in utter darkness. When the savior is born, the powers of darkness attack even more.

Extractio animae

- The extraction of the Soul during the alchemical process is a distillation
- If you evaporate a substance, it assumes a vapourlike form. That is its soul.
- When you coagulate it again, then it returns into the body
- By a fire, the corruptible humidity has to be distilled and the vivifying humidity is then poured in
- First we drive out the corruptible humidity, those blind and unconscious spots that hamper our living existence. But if we do things only with unconscious feeling, then we are responding only to the corruptible humidity.
- We cannot get in with the fish and swim for we are not a fish. But we can return to the water, going completely into the experience yet remaining outside of it.
- The spirit falls into matter upon the coagulation phase of the soul distillation process.

Alchemy and Psychology

- Dr. Jung says one does not solve conflicts, one outgrows them.
- What is the resurrection that Osiris undergoes? The goal is to change into any shape and to move about through the material world.
- The philosopher's stone is the divine nucleus in man which is immortal and ubiquitous and able to penetrate any material object.
- Interpreted: If one is connected with the Self inwardly, then one can penetrate all life situations. One walks through life's situations, but the innermost Nucleus of the personality remains detached. Even when something horrible happens, one's first concern is an interest in the meaning of the event.
- There is the innermost part of the personality which remains free and cannot be caught anymore.
- To remain detached from experience is to return to experience but not in a corruptible approach.
- Jumping into life is like spirit falling into matter. Spirit is coagulating into soul. The soul is returning incorruptible to matter.
- Don't just act, that is, spirit in its corruptible state, but act consciously.

Prima Materia and Active Imagination

- The *prima materia* is the matter which is treated.
- Dr. Jung calls the active imagination the process whereby the *prima materia* is treated, a sort of voluntary psychosis.
- Winged Mercurius, spirit of the unconscious, aka the Holy Ghost, sitting between king and son
- The Holy Ghost remains behind and can descend upon individuals time and time again. *Ubi spiritus, ubi libertas – This interpretation of the Holy Ghost is a danger to the organization of the church*
- Many religions speak of a divine energy, mana, mulungu, a mystical kind of electricity that pervades certain objects and people. The mana is the Holy Ghost of Christianity, which is water, wind, and fire.
- The Holy Ghost works upon the *prima materia*, washes it and fills it with blood, then vivifies it by heating it up with fire, which is giving it life and resurrection.

Psychological Transformation

- Emotion. Emotion transforms, cooks, and enlightens. When I am emotionally gripped with something, I can grapple and wrestle with it. But one has to burn in the emotion till the fires dies down. The fire must burn the emotion until the last unclean element has been consumed.
- Sitting in hell and roasting there is what brings forth the philosopher's stone.
- This is why the urge for individuation often seeks impossible situations, because it seeks conflict and defeat and suffering because it seeks its own transformation.
- During the whitening, problems become clear and life feeling begins to flow again. The spirits separates the pure from the impure. In the alchemical process, not everything has to be integrated. There is the terra damnata, some things that just have to be thrown away.
- Individuation means separation, differentiation, the recognition of what is yours and what is not.
- Incarnation – when you recognize something is right and you put it into action
- All outer events are only parables of an inner process, synchronistic symbolizations
- You have to solidify the spirit and recognize the symbols and similes within the concrete. If it's true, it will become real, its natural flow will be into reality. You are no longer just dissociated and swept away by emotion, losing one's point of view. A balanced temperament
- The *coniunctio* ends with an incarnation of Divinity, it is God coming down into the human being.