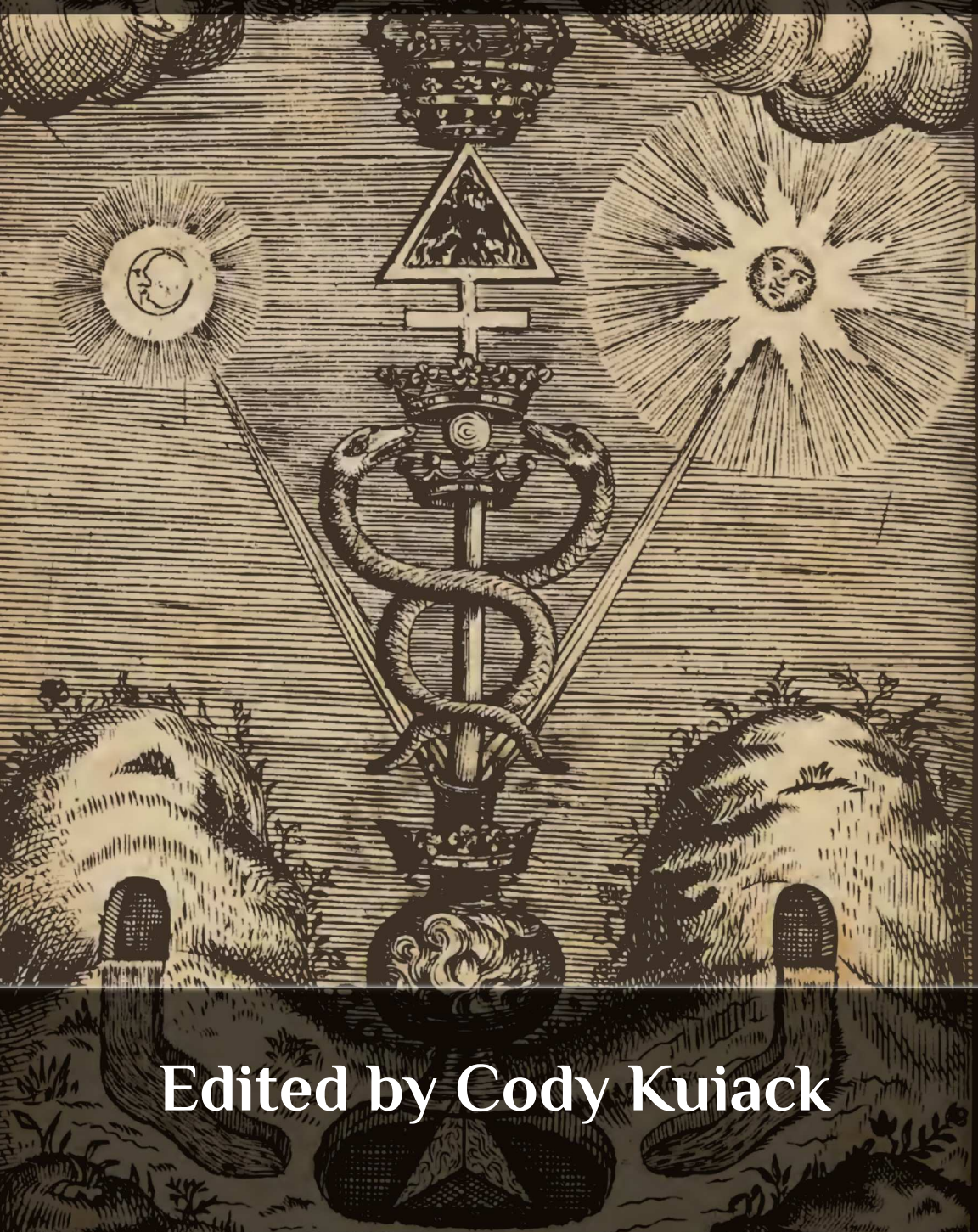


The Book of Mercurius



Edited by Cody Kuiack

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Jung argues that various aspects of the unconscious are expressed by salt. His reflections begin in a chapter concerned with the notion of opposites and their union, and follow a section devoted to lunar symbolism in which salt is a special instance. Jung places salt in an alchemical triad of Sulphur-Mercurius-Sal, where it is found that Mercurius partakes of both masculine (red, sulphur) and feminine (lunar, sal). If Jones finds his “seminal substance” confined to the masculine, Jung finds it beyond gender, an arcane substance closer to the understanding of Paracelsus. Jung states, “Mercurius is not just the medium of conjunction but also that which is to be united since he is the essence or ‘seminal matter’ of both man and woman.” Jung explains that Mercurius “usually stands for the arcane substance, whose synonyms are the panacea and the ‘spagyric medicine.’... The latter [is identified] with the balsam of Paracelsus ... [which] is to be found in the human body and is a kind of aetheric substance,” or, we might say, an imaginal substance.

Jung amplifies his supposition by noting salt’s appearance in the aqua permanens. Jung quotes Seniors’ unequivocal statement: “Mercurius is made from salt”. In Latin alchemy, Sal Alkali plays the role of the arcane substance.

Hermes, the Tractatus Aureus, Mercurius says: “I beget light but the darkness too is of my nature”. In alchemy, light and dark, male and female, are joined together in the idea of the chymical marriage; and from the marriage (of light and dark), the filius philosophorum emerges and a new light is born: “They embrace and a new light is begotten of them, which is like no other light in the whole world.”

Jung traces the idea of the filius to the archetypal image of the Primordial Man of Light, a vision of the Self that is both light and dark, male and female, and for which Jung finds amplification in Prajapati or Purusha in India, Gayomort (“mortal life”) in Persia – a youth of dazzling whiteness like Mercurius – and in Metatron, who in the Zohar was created together with light. The Man of Light was also described by Paracelsus as identical with the “astral” man: “The true man is the star in us. The Star desires to drive men towards great wisdom”.

The Philosophers' Stone requires a relationship with the ongoing deconstructive principle of the black sun. Perhaps this recognition of sol niger is related to why, for Giegerich, the imaginal requires continuing negative interiorization. But, if this is so, just as Giegerich deconstructs the residues of the imaginal, so imaginal psychology continues to give flesh to the unseen. Solve et coagula, say the alchemists. In Hillman and Giegerich, we have two moments of the Stone that not only can live together but also belong together in the same living mosaic – or do they? Jung has noted: “sometimes Mercurius is a substance like quicksilver [image], sometimes it is a philosophy [thought]. To put it another way, if Paul Ricoeur is correct that the symbol gives rise to thought, then perhaps it is also the case that thought gives rise to symbol.

For Giegerich, a psychology informed by alchemy has its goal the task of totally liquefying and freeing the spirit of Mercurius – the spirit that is imprisoned in matter, in nature, in the image, in emotion, and in the body.

To what extent is it possible to pass over to a strictly logical psychology in Giegerich's sense? Can one go over to the other side and not return? Philosophically, is there any such thing as a complete sublation, a complete cut or break that takes us beyond our human ego – beyond life – to a total liquefaction, even vaporization, in the name of alchemical Mercurius as the goal of psychology?

In Buddhism, the caustic work of sunyata, of the vajra or diamond cutter, reduces all attachment to nothingness, but nothingness itself needs to be logically void itself, which returns the soul to the world in an ever-recurring circle of life. Thus, liberation is not beyond or transcendent to the world of samsara image and illusion. It is one with it or, as the Buddhists say, there is not a hair's-breadth difference between them (i.e. yet they remain both samsara and nirvana). Seen alchemically, this is a hermetic circle embodying the dual aspect of Mercurius, which to my mind is not only the liquefying solvent, but the coagulatory agent as well. The liquefaction of Mercurius is also not a liquefaction in any literal sense, and the caustic work of analysis need not be literally caustic. For Jung, the imaginal is not simply a mental process, but also a

subtle body, corporeal yet semi-spiritual, not unlike the alchemist's idea of Mercurius: it is said "sometimes Mercurius is a substance like quicksilver, sometimes it is a philosophy". Mercurius is both "material and spiritual" and "the process by which the lower material is transformed into the higher and spiritual. And vice versa". Likewise, active imagination is a mercurial process, an embodiment of imaginal life incarnating the spiritual and psychizing nature.

Seeing the Stone as both unus mundus and a multiplicity is an aspect of the paradox Jung calls a *complexio oppositorum*, which is an attempt to render a description of what appears as incompatible dimensions of the Stone and one of alchemy's great mysteries. Jung writes: "In order to attain this union, [the alchemists] tried not only to visualize the opposites together but to express them in the same breath". Hierosgamos, sacred marriage, chemical wedding, *filius philosophorum*, Mercurius duplex, *mysterium coniunctionis*, *anthropos*, Abraxas, Adam Kadmon, *coniunctio*, lapis, *philosophorum*, and so on were Jung's attempts to render complexity and multiplicity in a single gesture. To this list, I would like to add the term *chaosmos*, which was used by James Joyce to describe the structure of his book *Finnegan's Wake* and is a term that brings together chaos and cosmos. Unity and multiplicity. *Finnegan's Wake* has been called Joyce's "Philosopher's Stone" and to contend that the notion of *chaosmos* applies equally well to his other major work, *Ulysses*. In both works, separation and synthesis are oddly expressed together, in one breath as it were. Jung proposed a solution to the perennial problem of unity and multiplicity in the figure of Mercurius, who lies between opposites and is the means of bringing them together. As the mercurial body that bridges the divide, he was called a "mediator". Mercurius links heaven and earth and, as such, is both "prima materia" and "ultima materia" - and, therefore, called "lapis" and "the stone", as the great principle of unification. But Jung was also aware that this unity was subject to a deconstruction and a division. He notes that Mercurius "is namely a unity despite that his innumerable inner contradictions can dramatically fly apart into equal numbers of disparate and apparently independent figures."

For Jung, the coniunctio opens toward images of wholeness: the birth of the filius philosophorum (the philosophical child), the Self, and the most famous of all alchemical images, the Philosophers' Stone, an emergent image of transcendental wholeness. The stone then is the alpha and omega of the process, and, like Mercurius, it is the mediator and the intermediary of the goal of the work and has the power to transform earthly man into an illuminated philosopher.

What is the point, the ontological pivot point? In the "Paradoxa" chapter of the *Mysterium*, Jung takes up the symbolism of the point, which for him is a creative center where things and beings have their first origin. As such, the point is an expression of the divine, which, like Mercurius, appears to be before, beyond, and between binaries. In *Mysterium*, the point also symbolizes the Godhead, and the light and fire that connect the divine to the scintillae, to sparks that shine in the darkness and then are related to the solificatio, illumination, enlightenment, gnosis, and the illuminated body that dwells in the heart of man. As the light of nature, it is also the radical moisture and healing balm that is the gold of wholeness, which Jung called the Self.

C.G. Jung and the Alchemical Imagination, Stanton Marlan

I am the poysonous dragon, present everywhere and to bee had for nothing. My water and my fire dissolve and compound; out of my body thou shalt draw the Green and Red lion; but if thou dost not exactly know mee thou wilt with my fire destroy thy five senses. A most pernicious quick poyson comes out of my nostrils, which hath been the destruction of many ... I am the Egg of Nature known only to the wise ... I am called ... Mercury ... I am the old dragon that is present everywhere on the face of the earth; I am father and mother; youthful and ancient; weak and yet most strong; life and death; visible and invisible; hard and soft; descending to the earth and ascending to the heavens' most high and most low' light and heavy ... I am dark and bright; I spring from the earth and I come out of heaven.

A most formidable beast! Notice in its description of itself that the dragon unites within its own nature all of the opposites: heaven and earth, light and dark, life and death, and so on. It is found everywhere and originates from the earth while coming forth from heaven. The dragon relates itself to Mercurius, and by so doing, places itself at the center of all alchemical symbolism.

The symbolism of fire is so complex that a simplistic interpretation does not suffice. However, there is one major motive that is most relevant to our emblem. Fire is often seen as a spiritual force of hidden or occult power. Eirenaeus Philalethes, in "introitus apertus", calls fire the "secret infernal fire, the wonder of the world, the system of higher powers in the lower. Mercurius is often equated with the fire, and as such, he is called the "fire in which god himself burns in divine love." In other words, fire is a spiritual principle that acts in such a way as to create transformation. It fuels the process, and need not be created by the frustration of desire or in any other conscious act, for it emerges from within the spiritual world itself. It is certainly related to the symbolism of the self, and might be thought of as the inner power of the self to create its own transformation.

In the alchemical imagination, the old man parallels the Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit on the one hand, and on the other hand Mercurius, the psychopomp and agent of transformation. This figure is winged, which means that he is of a spiritual nature. On all counts, he seems to symbolize the process that gives rise to the third coniunctio and that subsequently maintains it. If we think back to the discussion about the nature of the fire and its close association with Mercurius, it seems reasonable to suppose that the old man and fire are one. Hence, the old man personifies the motive power and means of effecting the third union. Mercurius is, in fact, described in just this way many times in alchemical literature. As mentioned earlier, this motive power seems to derive in equal measure from the manifest self and the divinity desiring its own transformation. Earlier emblems showed them busily at work with their own solutions and extractions. In this one, though, they appeal to the world above, where Mercurius stands on the sun and moon while the stone forms. Notice that Mercurius stands in an oval shaped container in the upper world, which perfectly matches the vessel in the furnaces below. The process occurring in the furnace below are reflected in the processes of the heavens above, and vice versa. The alchemists knew that whatever they transformed in the physical world would be correspondingly transformed in the spiritual world.

The salamander is the manifest self that can survive any process, no matter how intense, and the fire is the manifestation of its own drive to transform. At this stage of the work, the fire does not just belong to the manifest self, however. The references to the fire of God and to the higher powers being hidden in the lower, suggest that the process is being fueled, not only by the self, but also by the divinity that exists beyond the self. The process by which the third coniunctio comes into being aims at a new union of opposites – the union binds the individual to the unus mundus, the world of pure spirit and divine unity. The motivating force of this merger comes not only from the individual self, but from God itself, as the two entities are pulled together in the highest of all marriages. The fire is the spiritual force creating a final transformation in the self, through which the divine is incarnated in the human psyche.

Jung and the Alchemical Imagination, Jeffrey Raff

The subtle medium partaking of both mind and substance is the soul realm referred to by the alchemists as 'Mercurius' - the subtle soul-form of the chemical element mercury, sharing many of its properties. The work of alchemy takes place in this liminality where visible time-bound, and invisible timeless worlds meet and something is born in us. Distilled down to its most fundamental elements, symbolic alchemy is comprised of symbol, process and journey. Mercurius, an over-arching alchemical, represents the base metal (lead) and the transmuted metal (gold) - the beginning and end of the opus. It is also the catalyst of transmutation. Its active aspect is symbolized by the alchemical sun (sol), the recapture aspect by the alchemical moon (Luna).

During ego development, our socially adapted personality and essential nature become separated. Between personality and essence lies the shadow land of self-deception, lies, anger, rejection, resentment, self-aggrandizement, shame, unacknowledged virtue and achievement, childish fantasy, secret desire, variance from social norms and broken taboos. This shadow-land is symbolized by Mercurius in its initial state of alchemical lead - trickster and chameleon shape-changer.

When the unconscious activates a thrust towards greater conscious awareness, this subterranean world rises into consciousness. If the ego can catch hold of something from this elusive shadow-land and hold it in awareness,, and if the ego is at the same time itself caught by the deeper psyche, the prima materia will have been found and work of alchemy through conscious endeavor can begin.

As an alchemist, it is for the ego to work with what emerges through dreams, symptoms. Images and the strong affects of inner/outer conflict.

Identifying modern subjectivity with the alchemical metaphor fails to recognize the historical and (psycho-) logical differences which alchemy exemplified. Some modern alchemically oriented approaches want this both ways: to assert both mythological and alchemical meanings - possible in medieval alchemy, but not in post-modern psychology. Ignorant of historical consciousness, analytic practice which draws upon alchemy often blends alchemical images with mythic ones. Mercurius, for instance, becomes equated with the god Hermes, as if likeness signifies identity. Such an approach treats the time of alchemy and our radically different time of post-modern subjectivity as if no historical transformation had occurred; as if we could unproblematically drop back into both historical alchemical world and, indeed, the ancient mythic world. This fails to perceive alchemy as different from the mythic mode of being-in-the-world.

Jung draws on Grimm's fairytale 'The Spirit in the Bottle', where a boy tricks the angry spirit Mercurius to go back into a bottle he was imprisoned in under the ground, amongst the roots of the tree. The boy is rewarded by Mercurius with a magic cloth for releasing him once more and the boy and his poor father suddenly have all the riches they need for the rest of their lives. Here is an archetypal template for the alchemical shift needed to free the boy from the claustrum: there needs to be a confrontation with the 'bottled up spirit' that does not destroy the hero/ego. Through trickery or a reconfiguration of power relations, there is a 'new deal' with 'spirit' and the archetypal masculine.

Mercurius is a trickster figure, a pagan god with a two-faced nature, as the boy in the story discovered. He contains all 'conceivable opposites' and is both 'material and spiritual'. Ultimately Mercurius represents the 'archetype of the unconscious' - the self prior to the dawn of consciousness, providing a counterpoint to the self in relationship to the conscious ego - symbolized by the image of Christ as God made man.

Alchemy and Psychotherapy: Post-Jungian Perspectives, Dale Mathers

Besides, there is a great difference between the Greek god, Hermes, and the alchemical spirit, Mercurius. They simply cannot be equated. To do so is a pure abstraction from their historical contexts, disguised as the personifying imagination.

Alchemy's truth was never the transformation of human personality. Writing in *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung says as much:

In a sense, the old alchemists were nearer to the central truth of the psyche ... when they strove to deliver the fiery spirit from the alchemical elements, and treated the mystery as though it lay in the dark and silent womb of nature.

Giegerich stresses this: 'the alchemist did not search for his self, but for the spirit Mercurius as the mystery deeply hidden in the real'. Alchemy was concerned with 'the inner truth or the inner nature of nature. It is a speculative kind of natural philosophy'.

Alchemical Imagination and the Soul's Logical Life, Stanton Marlan

Mercury as a planetary god was representative of man's soul. Frances Yates in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* speaks of a council summoned by Jupiter of the Olympian gods among whom Mercury was included. "Bruno explains that the gods represent "the virtues and the powers of the soul," and that, since "in every man ... there is a world, a universe," the reform of the heavens is the reform, or the production, of a personality. Thus Mercury as an Olympian god is associated with the soul of man, with his internal psychic universe, and his personality. Here there is a connecting link then between Mercury and Mercurius.

Another indication of the philosophical and mystical temperament of the time is an event described by Yates in which Catherine de' Medici encouraged representations of magical events, one of which was the Ballet comique de la reine of 1518, where "Jupiter and Mercury [descended] from heaven in response to the incantatory music and singing. This may be another method that Rabelais uses to consciously bring the world spirit into his work under the guise of the Olympian god. In this way, he can talk to the spirit – which turns out to be the spirit of his own subconscious – without fear of reprisal. This can be also another instance of Mercurius as a representation of a personality. Moreover, there is a possible subconscious influence as the next questions are raised: Is Rabelais then calling to the Mercurius within his own psyche when he calls upon Mercury? Is he calling to his own psychic powers to assert control over external events? Over his character? Over his own self?

The Spirit Mercurius of Rabelais, Dorothy S. Wyatt

I shall not go more closely here into the transits through the planetary houses, it is sufficient to know that Michael Maier, like Mercurius, passes through them on his mystic journey.

He can find Mercurius only through the rite of ascent and descent, the “circular distillation,” beginning with the black lead, with the darkness, coldness, and malignity of the malefic Saturn; then ascending through the other planets to the fiery Sol, where the gold is heated in the hottest fire and cleansed of all impurities; and finally returning to Saturn, where this time meets Mercurius and receives some useful teachings from him. Saturn has here changed from a Star of ill omen into a “domus barbae” (House of the Beard), where the “wisest of all,” Thrice-Greatest Hermes, imparts wisdom.

... I cause to come out of thee the spirits of thy brethren [the planets], O Sun, and I make them for thee a crown the like of which was never seen; and I cause thee and them to be within me, and I will make thy kingdom vigorous.

This refers to the synthesis of the planets or metals with the sun, to form a crown which will be “within” Hermes. The crown signifies the kingly totality; it stands for unity and is not subject to Heimarmene. This reminds us of the seven- or twelve-rayed crown of light which the agathodaimon serpent wears on Gnostic gems, and also of the crown of Wisdom in the *Aurora Consurgens*.

Maier’s journey through the planetary houses begins with Saturn, who is the coldest, heaviest, and most distant of the planets, the maleficus and abode of evil, the mysterious and sinister Senex (Old Man), and from there he ascends to the region of the sun, to look for the Boy Mercurius, the longed-for and long-sought goal of the adept. It is an ascent ever nearer to the sun, from darkness and cold to light and warmth, from old age to youth, from death to rebirth. But he has to go back along the way he came, for Mercurius is not to be found in the region of the sun but at the point from which he originally started. This sounds very psychological, and in fact life never goes forward except at the place where it has come to a standstill. The sought-for Mercurius is the *spiritus vegetativus*, a living spirit, whose nature it is to run through all the houses of the planets, i.e. the entire Zodiac.

We could just as well say through the entire horoscope, or, since the horoscope is the chronometric equivalent of individual character, through all the characterological components of the personality. Individual character is, on the old view, the curse or blessing which the gods bestowed on the child at its birth in the form of favorable or unfavorable astrological aspects. The horoscope is like the "chriographum", the "handwriting of the ordinances against us.. which Christ blotted out; and he took it out of the way nailing it to his cross. And after having disarmed the principalities and powers he made a show of them openly, and triumphed over them."

But not content with being an alchemist and astrologer, the physician had also to be a philosopher. What did Paracelsus mean by "philosophy"? Philosophy, as he understood it, had nothing whatever to do with our conception of the matter. For him it was something "occult", as we would say. We must not forget that Paracelsus was an alchemist through and through, and that the "natural philosophy" he practiced had far less to do with thinking than with *experience*. In the alchemical tradition "philosophia," "sapientia," and "scientia" were essentially the same.

Although they were treated as abstract ideas, they were in some strange way imagined as being quasi-material, or at least as being contained in matter, and were designated accordingly. Hence they appeared in the form of quicksilver or Mercurius, lead or Saturn, gold or *aurum non vulgi*, salt or *sal sapientiae*, water or *aqua permanens*, etc. These substances were arcana, and like them philosophy was as it were concealed in matter and could also be found there. We are obviously dealing with psychological projections, that is, with a primitive state of mind still very much in evidence at the time of Paracelsus, the chief symptom of which is the unconscious identity of subject and object.

So long as one knows nothing of psychic actuality, it will be projected, if it appears at all. Thus the first knowledge of psychic law and order was found in the stars, and was later extended by projections into unknown matter. These two realms of experience branched off into sciences: astrology became astronomy, and alchemy chemistry. On the other hand, the peculiar connection between character and the astronomical determination of time has only very recently begun to turn into something approaching an empirical science. The really important psychic facts can neither be measured, weighed, nor seen in a test tube under a microscope. They are therefore supposedly indeterminable, in other words they must be left to people who have an inner sense for them, just as colors must be shown to the seeing and not the blind.

Mysterium Coniunctionis, C. G. Jung

‘Mercurius’ describes a general process, involving not merely an ‘archetypal’ realm but seemingly involving embodiment. In any case, he seemed to shift away from the perspective of an overexciting, somewhat inflated, ‘archetypal’ realm that contrasted with the seemingly lesser dimension of the everyday, the personal. Edinger notes that the spirit Mercurius is a “peacemaker, the mediator between the warring elements and the producer of unity”. In mythology, Mercury was unique among the gods because he could transit between the worlds of divinities and men, and is concerned with everyday shopkeepers as well as gods. The end stage of the alchemical process is most often depicted in everyday ‘chop wood and carry water’ terms, not a dramatic transcendence.

Jung saw the Unicorn as a symbol of Mercurius, and the end plate of the Unicorn Tapestries at the Cloisters in Manhattan clearly shows, in the background, a symbolic ‘royal couple’ in jail, even as a lively marital festivity takes place. Perhaps this is a warning that there is danger in a too confident view of ‘unity’. In the hands of the ‘Spirit Mercurius’ the thread of life is always on the move!

This presents a view of a process that is experimental and inventive, in endless movement, yet remaining the same. “Mercurius is a psycho-logical concept [that] contains both reality and our subjectivity with itself”. This is an evolution beyond an exciting discovery of “the archetype,” and represents a process that cannot be bottled up in the form of static mythic entities and symbols. Now, “the history of the soul has entered a stage with which the stage of mythology is once and for all superseded”.

‘Mercurius’ has a strongly temporal sense of life flowing endlessly in all its strangeness and variations, its past, present and future. Each time and place has its own symbolic realm, its own temporal ‘realities’, and this is our fate, our ‘thrownness’. We are stuck with whatever our time’s real images and temporalities happen to be, and we are stuck with death at the end. It is part of ethics to know this, and to also know that life is change, and the future tends to appear in unexpected, even reviled forms. To disown or obstruct this temporal process is to disown life itself, and that is the essence of evil. This is what Jung seems to have learned from being tossed about, but not fleeing from, the strange and stormy vicissitudes of his many-sided life.

Jung and Philosophy, Edited by Jon Mills

At the conclusion of his work, Jung's imagination was captured by the ideas and metaphors of alchemy, with its dragons, suffering matter, peacock's tail, alembics and athanors; its red and green lions, kings and queens, fishes' eyes and inverted philosophical trees, salamanders and hermaphrodites; its black suns and white earth, and its metals—lead, silver, and gold; its colors—black, white, yellow and red; its distillations and coagulations, and rich array of Latin terms. All of these became the best possible expressions of a psychic mystery as yet unknown, and enunciated and amplified his maturing vision of the parallels between alchemy and his own psychology of the unconscious. All this and far more, Jung saw as projected by the alchemists into matter. Their effort was to bring about unity from disparate parts of the psyche, creating a *chymical* wedding. Jung saw this as the moral task of alchemy: to unify the disparate elements of the soul, both personal and ultimately cosmic, and thus to create the goal, the *lapis* or Philosopher's Stone. Likewise, Jung's psychology works with the conflict and dissociations of psychic life and attempts to bring about the mysterious "unification" and a sense of wholeness. We have seen such images in the benign form of the geometric conjunction and in the monstrous forms of the hermaphrodite, Mercurius, and Abraxas. All of these are images of supreme meaning (*Übersinn*) and thus images that move toward what Jung saw as the notions of the Self and the Philosophers' Stone. With the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung noted that his psychology was at last "given its place in reality and established upon its historical foundations."

If the linking of heaven and earth can be said to transcend the opposites, it is not in any kind of transcendental purity beyond the world but rather in the midst of things – in a oneness that is not oneness, in a multiplicity that is not simply multiple. In his essay on James Joyce, Jung imagines a view of the Self as "a being who is not a mere colorless conglomerate soul composed of an indefinite number of ill-sorted and antagonistic individual souls, but consists also of houses, street-processions, churches ... several brothels, and a crumpled note on its way to the sea – and yet possesses a perceiving and registering consciousness!" In short, what seems to express the transcendence of opposites is a world just as it is, conscious of itself in nuance and complexity as a living being in a way that reminds one of Hillman's call to return soul to the world. Like Jung, Hillman finds it particularly strange how personal life reflects the objective psyche. It is a "me-ness that is simply thatness" a deeply subjective expression that is also an objectivity.

C.G. Jung and the Alchemical Imagination, Stanton Marlan

At age 79, Jung still held firmly to the idea that the unconscious is timeless, although his attitude had mellowed to some degree, and there is less of a sense of tormenting division between archetype and everyday:

Through the progressive integration of the unconscious we have a reasonable chance to make experiences of an archetypal nature providing us with the feeling of continuity before and after our existence. The better we understand the archetype, the more we participate in its life and the more we realize its eternity or timelessness.

Alchemy grew in importance for him. In 1954, he describes a transition from the 'personal unconscious' to archetypal symbols, but he described the relationship between the personal and collective unconscious as a dissociation, more fluid, and seemingly closer to a relationship of equals:

the symbol is not reduced ... but is amplified by means of the context which the dreamer supplies ... the unconscious can be integrated and the dissociation overcome ... [through] an experience of a special kind, namely, the recognition of an alien 'other' in oneself, or the objective presence of another will. The alchemists, with astounding accuracy, called this barely understandable thing Mercurius ... he is God, daemon, person, thing, and the innermost secret in man; psychic as well as somatic. He is himself the source of all opposite, since he is utriusque capax ('capable of both').

Jung and Philosophy, Edited by Jon Mills

On the gravestone of C.G. Jung we can read : "Primus homo de terra - terrenus," "the first man is from this earth - earthly." Actually this is Adam. Adam is the first man. Also he is the terrestrial man. We all share with him through our shadow, our body or our affective and emotional life. It is important that we don't identify with him or her, but know that this inferior man in us is something bigger than we. He is also a God. In alchemy it is Mercurius. C.G. Jung called him the spirit of the unconscious. At first he appears as overwhelming darkness, as shadow, chaos, or *massa confusa* in the alchemical work. This material, this psychic state wants to be transformed. It is that *prima materia* out of which according to the words of Dorneus the *quinta essentia* can be extracted by the help of the "vas pellicanicum". Dorneus says "by the help of the vessel." Thus the vessel, the "vas

pellicanicum” is not just a container or a box. It is something active and alive. It mobilizes something. It generates that out of the primordial chaos, through a rotating and circulating process of distillation something of an utmost psychic value, namely the *quinta essentia* will be extracted. This means, it becomes conscious and can be experienced.

Time is a child - playing like a child - playing a board game - the kingdom of the child. This is Telesphoros, who roams through the dark regions of this cosmos and glows like a star out of the depth. He points the way to the gates of the sun and to the land of dreams.

Telesphoros, the one who completes or the one who guides to the final goal, the divine child and the carrier of the new light, all this is closely tied to Mercurius and thus to the little circle with the A in the middle of the mandala in the *Tractatus aureus*. Only two details are different. On Jung’s stone in Bollingen all notions are assembled inside the bigger circle, not outside. This points to a wholeness, which in the *Tractatus aureus* is mentioned only as a goal. Also the whole circle is framed and limited by a square. The square points to the earth and represents realization. Thus Jung’s stone in Bollingen with the circle in the square would indicate, that a potential wholeness (the circle) has become a true reality in a human being, namely in C.G. Jung.

In this sense the mandala with the seven letters on the inside would express the entire, individuated personality, who as “a unique and closed system ... centers round a source of life.” This source of life is Mercurius. It is the little circle in the middle with the A. Mercurius with all its opposites, as C.G. Jung writes, an image for the mystical experience of the artifex during his work. “As such he represents on the one hand the self and on the other the individuation process and, because of his limitless number of his names, also the collective unconscious. Here in this text he is called “Septenarius,” hidden magical Septenary.” This living seventh” contains - actually as does the eight - all the other letters as a whole in itself, however on a new level that is transformed and inside. Mercurius, we could say, is the beginning of the process, the source of life. Out of it everything is initiated. He is the process itself, which here leads over various levels. But he is the goal as well, namely the eight, by containing within himself all the remaining seven letters together in anew form.

With this I come back to the gravestone of Marie-Louise von Franz and Barbara Hannah. What can we see here? We see the alchemical vessel, depicted as a mandala. It is called pelican thus it means love, wound, sacrifice and new life. We see the beginning and the aim of the alchemical process, as it is described in the *Tractatus aureus*. We can see the center of this mandala, the little circle in the middle. In the middle of the mandala dwells the Godhead. According to the text of the *Tractatus aureus* this is Mercurius. This means that on the gravestone in the cemetery of Küsnacht we see a mandala in the center of which dwells Mercurius, the spirit of the unconscious. It is the spirit to whom Marie-Louise von Franz and Barbara Hannah committed their whole lives.

This “orienting factor” in the unconscious is a great mystery. The unconscious seems to have something like its own will and its own direction or tendency. When we speak of the “spirit of the unconscious” or “the autonomous psyche,” then we think of this autonomous “will” or of this orienting tendency of the unconscious. The rod of Moses, which we encounter in the fifth and in the sixth parable, corresponds to the staff of Mercurius or Hermes, the Caduceus with the double snake. And Mercurius is the spirit of the unconscious. It is the spirit who strikes or splits the rock and who causes water to flow. Thus, when the stone or rock opens it is not the work of man. Above I mentioned that the inscription on the gravestone of Marie-Louise von Franz and Barbara Hannah only once appears literally in the *Aurora Consurgens*, namely in a footnote at the beginning of the second parable and that it corresponds to verse 20 in psalm 77. According to the context I translated this verse as following: “He, God, Yahweh, struck the rock and the waters did flow.” Now after we have had a look at the other passages in the text, we can translate anew and more precisely. The rod of Moses, which apparently is mentioned in the fifth and in the sixth parable, and also the “blood of the most best buck-goat,” which Marie-Louise von Franz described as the warm, human, life-affirming, also libidinous aspect of the human personality, indicates the figure of Mercurius. Therefore we may translate: He, Mercurius, this *spiritus rector* of the alchemical work and thus of the process of individuation, “struck the rock, and the waters did flow,” “percussit pertram et fluxerunt aquae.”

Stone by Stone: Reflections on the Psychology of C.G. Jung, Andreas Schweizer, Regine Schweizer-Vüllers

Perhaps because of the expression “magic tricks” or “conjuring tricks”, the figure of Trickster comes immediately to mind when one thinks of the magician.

Primarily, the Trickster is a figure in mythology and folklore who has entered our psychological vocabulary through Jung’s essay “On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure,” in Paul Radin’s *Der göttliche Schelm*. As Jung puts it, “The trickster is a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. Although Radin focused his attention on the Trickster stories of the Winnebago Indians, Jung is reminded of the practices of carnival, the medieval Feast of Fools, the pranks and shape-shifting of Mercurius, and of the shaman.

There is something of the trickster in the character of the shaman and medicine-man, for he, too, often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured. This side of the shaman, however, as of the magician, is his shadow side. And, of course, just as we all need to become conscious of our shadows to keep, for example, from simply projecting them on our neighbors, so the shaman or magician needs consciousness of his shadow/trickster side. And, on the other hand, the prankishness of the trickster can serve to “leaven the loaf” of an all-too-serious magician’s personality. Jung notes in the same essay that the trickster is “a forerunner of the savior.”

The Archetype of the Magician, John Granrose

“The successful adept must be endowed with a knowledge of the material of the Great Work; also with faith, silence, purity of heart, and prayerfulness. After passing through the gate surmounted with the hieroglyph of philosophic mercury he traverses the seven angles of the citadel, representing the chief operations of the Great Work - calcination, dissolution, purification, introduction into the sealed Vase of Hermes, transference of the Vase of the Athanor [furnace], coagulation, multiplication and projection. And even upon reaching the *Petra Philosophalis*, he finds it is held in custody by a formidable dragon.”

Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, Hienrich Khunrath

Saturn is related to Mercury in alchemical text, and is given the same ambiguous sexuality or androgyny, and named it 'Mercurius senex' Mercury is certainly one of the most significant of alchemical images, and the range of its meaning is quite wide. So diverse and profound are its ramifications that Jung wrote a long essay trying to uncover its essential meaning. He wrote by way of summary:

Mercurius ... is the arcanum, the prima materia, the "father of all metals"; the primeval chaos, the earth of paradise, the "material upon which nature worked a little, but nevertheless left imperfect." He is also the ultima materia the goal of his own transformation, the stone, the tincture, the philosophic gold, the carbuncle, the philosophic man, the second Adam ... the king, the light of lights ... indeed the divinity itself or its perfect counterpart.

The Philosophers' Stone: Alchemical Imagination and the Soul's Logical Life, Stanton Marlan

Hermes said that the secret and the life of every thing is water ... and that water contains the greatest secret.

Water, as is generally known, occupies a central role in alchemy, because it symbolizes the destructive and life-enhancing aspects of the unconscious. And since redemption is about becoming conscious, water, as a symbol, is always involved in this process. So why, we may wonder, did the alchemists not express themselves in clearer and simpler terms? They claimed to possess a secret that must be concealed from the uninitiated. Similarly, the Gnostics maintained that their treatises were intended for the chosen only, This is not secretiveness, but the secret of the soul, which can convey itself only symbolically, through images. Moreover, it was not until the sixteenth century that the alchemists began to realize that the philosopher's stone that they were creating was something within themselves. This withdrawal of the projection from matter also heralded the end of alchemy. The ancient alchemists conducted depth psychology in the guise of chemistry, just as the Gnostics did that of theology.

Water is not only holy and eternal. It is also the secret. Thus in medieval alchemy, it is the mysterious figure of Mercurius. Horos cleanses and fortifies the fallen Sophia, and returns her to her consort (syzygos). He detaches and crucifies the *enthymesis* (intention) along with her passion.

Such a rescuing intervention does not transform the rescuer, but the incongruous is cast out of the pleroma (the perfect higher order). Alchemy embraced this expelled *prima materia*, precisely because it belongs to the totality. Although Gnosticism is also obsessed with cleanliness, at least it attends to the fallen soul. There, too, the brother sent forth to rescue her is not blackened.

The ancient *Dicta Alani* state:

The water of Mercurius is absorbed by the soul of the sun and the moon. What was concealed, namely, the soul, now becomes visible. Conversely, the visible, Mercurius, is concealed. Thus occurs the extraction of the soul (*extractio anime*) through the spirit of Mercurius, not just once and at the same moment, but many times.

Psychology and Alchemy, C.G. Jung

There is the so-called “Great Dream,” a dream that conveys not simply a message to the dreamer but to humanity as a whole. It concerns medical practice, the physician’s activities, in general. Tuberculosis used to be a very severe chronic and almost incurable disease. It mostly occurred in patients unaware of their own state of resignation or depression: they did not breathe freely! The physician is always confronted with the decision about which patients he can help and which he cannot not. He or she must take a decision that exceeds his or her strength is limited. Physicians are always combating death and the devil; the somatic physician confronts death, the psychiatrist the devil and evil.

The alchemists, many of whom were physicians, grappled with this problem for centuries. In contrast to Christianity, their god Mercurius had integrated all aspects. Mercurius is said to have been good with the good, and evil with the evil. He is simultaneously a substance, i.e., mercury, and a spirit. His nature is most controversial and as difficult to grasp as the metallic liquid. In his image one recognizes the reality of matter. In him, moreover, evil is a reality and not merely the absence of good.

Hermes-Mercurius is the *actual redeemer figure of alchemy*. He is the *prima materia* to be redeemed and transformed, like the complete end-product, the *filius makrokosmi* (Son of the Great World). But he is also the spirit who guides the work (*spiritus rector*) and plays tricks on the alchemist. According to the Tabula Smaragdina, which is attributed to him, Hermes unites the upper and lower spheres. In “The Spirit Mercurius,” Jung writes:

So it is not a question of a one-way ascent to heaven, but, in contrast to the route followed by the Christian Redeemer, who comes from above to below and from there returns to the above, the *filius macrocosmi* starts from below, ascends on high, and, with the powers of the Above and Below united in himself, returns to earth again. He carries out the reverse movement and thereby manifests a nature contrary to that of Christ and the Gnostic Redeemers, while on the other hand he displays a certain affinity with the Basilidian concept of the third sonship. Mercurius has the circular nature of the uroboros, hence he is symbolized by the circular simplex of which he is at the same the center. He can therefore say of himself: “I am One and at the same time Many in myself.” This same treatise says that the center of the circle in man is the earth, and calls it the “salt” to which Christ referred when he said: “Ye are the salt of the earth”.

In a codex found at Nag Hammadi, the Trimorphic Protennoia speaks about herself in an aretology:

I am the Invisible One within the All. It is I who counsel those who are hidden, since I know the All that exists in it. I am numberless beyond everyone. I am immeasurable, ineffable, yet whenever I [wish, I shall] reveal myself of my own accord

I [descend to the] midst of the underworld and I shone [down upon the] darkness. It is who poured forth the [water]. It is I who am hidden within [radiant] waters. I am the one who gradually put forth the All by my Thought. It is I who am laden with the voice. It is through me that Gnosis comes forth.

While the similarity between this Gnostic text and alchemical ones is obvious, it goes much further than the above passage reveals: the trimorphic Protennoia, who at times appears as female, at others as male, is not merely a kind of *anima mundi* (world-soul), but indeed comes very close to alchemy's spirit Mercurius.

One peculiarity of Mercurius which undoubtedly relates him to the Godhead and to the primitive creator god is his ability to beget himself.

Our discussion of Heracleon's first fragment did not consider his subtle distinction. Writing about John 1:3, "All things came into being through him [i.e., the Word, the Logos], and without him not one thing came into being," he remarks that the Logos merely gives the impulse for the creation of the world without, however, entering it. It leaves the work of creation to a demiurge, who logically enough stands under the Logos. Through the mediation of the Logos, the demiurge creates the All.

Origen considers such psychological subtlety incomprehensible. It seemingly contradicts the alchemist's notion of "Mercurius as the Logos become world." One needs to consider, however, that the latter idea represents a later, more mature mindset; also worth recalling in particular is that alchemists projected their world-creating spirit into matter. In Heracleon and the Gnostics in general, the world-creating spirit does not wholly enter its creation, but remains partly outside of time and space, and is hence eternal. This explains the denigrating attitude of Gnosticism toward the material world. In this respect, the Gnostics differ fundamentally from the alchemists, who, as is well known, were natural scientists and fascinated by matter.

What we now call the process of becoming individual (*individuation*, in Jungian terms) was Gnosis of Hellenism, a process aimed not at the ego but at knowing God. Both the old Gnostics and the modern person are conscious of their ability to gain knowledge on their own. They realize that this is possible only with divine assistance. Therefore Gnosis is not, as is often mistakenly assumed, self-redemption. To be sure, the redeemer has a different function in Gnosis: he awakens human beings and guides them in the right direction. Hermes has a similar function in Hermeticism, as does Mercurius in alchemy. They represent the first approaches to self-becoming and to the redemption of the divine spark in the human being. Due to a curious synchronicity, these spiritual currents converged in the same span of time. Thus, a new level of consciousness was reached at the turning of the ages.

Every person finds himself or herself in darkness to begin with, and thus contributes to the darkness in the world. The more conscious we become, the more we carry the light of consciousness into the world. In their work, the Hermeticists have Hermes, and the alchemists Mercurius, as their inner guide. This corresponds to the guiding function of the Self in the manifestations of the unconscious. Feeling that one is being guided in one's difficult work not only presupposes a religious stance, but also constitutes a religious experience.

It is true, however, that although making brief appearances in the individuation process, the girl-child is not to the fore like the son, who develops into the full male Self. So from this view, just as Mercurius is the "age-old son of the Mother" that copies Christ so that the Lower Self copies the Higher Self, so Osiris copies the higher Horus in becoming the Lower Self. In this way, Osiris takes on the form of Horus as the lower Son, which is why there is a form of Horus form both above and below. Christ himself actually has higher and lower forms in the Gospel symbolism, though this fact has not been generally recognized.

As well as being identified with the subterranean depths, Osiris is also associated with water, perhaps the main symbol of the collective unconscious. Osiris is designated "Thy name is Ocean," and among his many other titles are "The Shoreless" and "Lord of the Water." A hymn to Osiris states, "King of the gods, of many names and holy transformations, and mysterious forms"; this could equally be applied to Mercurius with his own many mysterious forms.

Osiris as the Self exemplifies the lower unconscious in highest aspect, the light twin of Set, prefiguring the dual-natured Mercurius, who was "good with the good, and evil with the evil," as alchemist Heinrich Khunrath expressed it. Considering that both alchemical transmutation and ancient Egyptian Osirification had their foundations in the transformation processes of the unconscious, it is small wonder that the medieval alchemists used Osiris to symbolize part of their opus.

Turn of an Age: The Spiritual Roots of Jungian Psychology In Hermeticism, Gnosticism and Alchemy, Alfred Ribi

Mercurius consists of all conceivable opposites. He is thus quite obviously a duality, but is named a unity in spite of the fact that his innumerable inner contradictions can dramatically fly apart into an equal number of disparate and apparently independent figures.

He is both material and spiritual.

He is the process by which the lower material is transformed into the higher and spiritual, and vice versa.

He is the devil, a redeeming psychopomp, an evasive trickster and God's reflection in physical nature.

He is also the reflection of a mystical experience of the artifex that coincides with the *opus alchymicum*.

As such, he represents on the one hand the self and on the other the individuation process and, because of the limitless number of his names, also the collective unconscious.

Jung's depiction of Mercurius also places it, arguably as quintessential shaman within the context of the disenchanting and ailing Christianity. Indeed, the idea of Mercurius as culture-specific shaman for the west can be argued for, based on renditions from specialists in this area such as Mircea Eliade (1951) and, more recently, Halifax (1979), Hutton (1993) and Kottler, Carlson and Keeney (2004). However, post-Jungians on shamanism, such as Sandner and Wong and their colleagues (1997), Ryan (2002) and Smith (2007) have not explored this specific topic.

Jungian scholars tracing the historical and philosophical influences of analytical psychology, such as Clarke (1992) and Paul Bishop (2007a, b) fail to adequately explore such key areas as Hermeticism and astrology. A notable exception here is Wolfgang Geigerich (1999) whose discourse, in some ways, is imbued with the flavor of Hermeticism. Indeed, he even equates *The Logical Life* with Mercurius. However, in faking to engage with precessional astrology and the grail legend he falls short, in my opinion, of comprehensively locating this figure within Jung's life myth.

Apart from Jungian materials, further key directions pursued have included research into Hermeticism, alchemy, precessional astrology and the grail legend. Texts on these topics are introduced, as appropriate, in the forthcoming chapters.

The above literature overview, by no means exhaustive, hopefully captures the gist of my point: that the alchemical Mercurius, although found scattered in the first-generation and post-Jungian literature in many contexts, has not been dealt with sufficiently. To reiterate: as far as I am aware (and apart from von Franz and Emma Jung's work) we do not see a single book, article or even chapter dedicated to this theme, despite the centrality of this figure in Jung's primary writings.

Indeed, turning from the celestial heights to the alchemical *vas*, we can only ponder what Newton's "inner light" might have revealed as he contemplated, in the twilight of old age, such marvels as the extraordinary transformations of mercury.

Mercury appears ... sometimes in the form of a tasteless, pellucid white Earth, call'd Mercurius dulcis, or in that of a red opake volatile Earth, call'd Cinnabar; or in that of a red or white Precipitate ... and in distillation it turns into a Vapour, and being agitated in vacuo, it shines like Fire. And after all these Changes it returns again into its first form of Mercury.

Both Dee and Jung were also enmeshed in a radical shift of scientific worldview. The Copernican revolution brewing in Dee's life was matched by the impact of relativity and quantum physics during Jung's life. Interestingly, the shift to a heliocentric world-view during Dee's life corroborated ancient Hermetic views. Similarly, Einstein's space-time model and the consideration of a psyche/matter entanglement in the Jung-Pauli model resonate with Hermeticism's unitary and living universe. In particular, Jung's sophisticated portrayal of Mercurius accommodates such a re-enchantment on a grand scale as a motion toward a re-assertion of the world soul, in stark contrast to the prevailing twentieth century scientific view of a largely dead 'clockwork universe'.

The Alchemical Mercurius: Esoteric Symbol of Jung's Life and Works, Mathew Mather

From Jung's point of view, the image was a depiction of how the new emerging pagan spirit. Symbolized by the snake, was seeking to devour the Christian spirit, symbolized by the fish. The interplay of these two opposite, it should be pointed out, was full of import for Jung because he believed that through the clash of the pagan and Christian spirits a uniting symbol would arise that would be of particular healing significance to our present age.

Aziz, however, does not expand on this theme, and nowhere does he mention such figures as Mercurius or Merlin (symbols which represent such a unification of the pagan and Christian spirits). We can add to this Jung's idea of humanity being on the cusp of the Age of Aquarius, when the symbols would die and new symbols would be born. For example, in 1930, in the *Visions Seminars*, he states: 'Now if ,, , about 2150 years after the end of Aries, a new symbol should be produced. It would be a sacrificed fish, because ours is the age, or the platonic month, of the Fishes.'

These ideas, often veering towards the speculative, contribute towards the general picture created by many Jungians, even those of the hagiographic ilk, that he 'slipped up'.

More specifically, my focus on the Mercurius side of the Wotan-Mercurius binary has allowed for an interpretation that, by including his concept of individuation. emphasized the transformative potential of the irrational and dangerous Wotanic spirit. This affords deeper insight into Jung's hope that National Socialism initially held initially held potential for a positive outcome as a 'religious revitalization of the nation'. I also speculated that Jung harbored 'prophetic inflations' and opportunistically viewed his analytical psychology as the mantic side of a new spiritual dispensation aligned to the dawning of a new astrological age.

Furthermore, 1942 was highlighted as a critical year, centered on his Eranos lectures 'The Spirit Mercurius' and his purported role as a 'secret agent'. Reading a subtext to 'The Spirit Mercurius' has also revealed a 'united double nature' that perhaps sheds further light concerning his ambiguous position on crucial issues. Consequently, the year 1942 in particular might be considered an addition to Adams and Sherry's chronological profile of Jung's Significant *Words and Events*, to be found in the appendix of *Lingering Shadows*. Finally, I have noted a 'reinvented Jung based on confessional interpretations of his 1944 illness, as well as a de-coupling of Mercurius-Wotan towards a Mercurius-Merlin identity, indicative of a shift of sentiment away from the politically sensitive Aryan-Germanic.

In the spirit of the Hermeticist project, we also witness in his *mysterium coniunctionis* a chimera of conflicting traditions (Christian, Cabalistic, pagan) representing, amongst other things, an essential spiritual-chthonic resolution that finds ‘coherence’ in the figure of the alchemical Mercurius - that paradox *par excellence*.

This visionary sojourn, in broad perspective, also has a likeness to the path of the alchemical Mercurius as *filius Macrocosmi* (son of the world). In ‘The Spirit Mercurius’, we read:

The *filius macrocosmi* starts from below, ascends on high, and, with the powers of Above and Below united in himself, returns to earth again. He carries out the reverse movement and thereby manifests a nature contrary to Christ and the Gnostic redeemers.

In Aion, apart from the more obvious complementary features of Christ and Mercurius as self symbols as indicated above, are a range of other symbols. Prominent amongst these are serpent and lapis (stone). A Christ-serpent identity is mentioned. However, he highlights that the serpent is more usually associated with Mercurius. For example, the serpent of Eden is represented as more knowledge, wise, and ‘trickier’ than Adam: ‘she is older than he’. Expressed variously as *anima mundi*, *deus terrestris*, *serpens mercurialis*, etc., it is none other than the alchemical Mercurius. As such it is described variously as a ‘vegetation numen’, a ‘blessed greenness’, a serpent dwelling in the interior of the earth and ‘the pleroma that lies hidden in the stone’.

This ‘tricky spirit’ is said to eventually become transformed into the *lapis*, considered one of the main alchemical accomplishments. In alchemy the redemption of the ‘spirit slumbering in matter’ consists of not only its extraction, but also a transformation that ultimately reconciles this spirit back with matter. This partially explains the alchemical terminology of Mercurius as ‘son of the world’ or *filius macrocosmi*, compared to Christ as ‘son of man’ or *filius microcosmi*. Here Jung’s bias is predominantly towards a *Mercurius-lapis* identity, though he also makes strong associations to a *Christ-lapis* identity.

To summarize: a dialog between ‘The Spirit Mercurius’ and *Aion* revealed an interpretation of Mercurius as a ‘living myth’ projected as divine numinosum onto the astrological constellations. In the Age of Pisces we saw Mercurius duplex incorporating both Christ as the first ‘spiritual’ fish and the Antichrist as the second ‘matter’ fish, yet taking on the role of ‘uniting third’ as a coniunctio to be transformed into a unitary spirit-matter amalgam in the *vas* of the water bearer in the Age of Aquarius. In this conception the ‘turning of the Great Wheel’ as the precession of the equinoxes synchronizes with the alchemical transformation of the god-image. In this grand narrative the Age of Pisces and Christianity was considered a mere chapter in the epic struggle of human consciousness in relation to the divine numinosum.

Interestingly, the hare is a symbol of the Lower Self, partly as a guide, and appears as a symbol of Mercurius in alchemy, again as a guide through the unconscious, confirming Mercurius as a type of Osiris. We find the hare connected with the Moon in the myths and folklore of many lands, particularly in Native American myths, in which the hare is a symbol of the Self. Budge stated that with some scholars there was doubt as to whether Un-nefer actually was a hare god, but the first ideograph in the hieroglyphic name *Un-nefer* is that of a hare, and, as I mentioned, the literal interpretation of the name is “Beautiful Hare.”

The hare appeared in my dreams in more or less the same role as it did in ancient Egypt and medieval alchemy. Here is the first of several short dreams I had confirming the hare as an important symbol of the unconscious.

I see a hare hopping along and device to look up its symbolic meaning in a book, probably one of Jung’s.

Now this is very interesting because Osiris is Lord of the Underworld, and therefore of the lower unconscious, just as Mercurius is. Mercurius is dual, having light and dark aspects, good and evil ones, which reflects Osiris with his dark twin, Set. Horus is the higher spirit counterpart to this lower twin spirit, Osiris/Set. And as such comes forth from Ra; although Horus is seen as the son of Osiris, he is really the higher power that comes forth in response to the lower Osiris, the Son of God. Horus is also twinned with Set to reflect his own dark shadow in the lower unconscious, the Mercurial serpent, of which, as just said, Osiris is the light side.

The Higher Self, Son of God, and the Son of the World, Soul unified must be born twice, as Son of the Father and Son of the Mother. The fish symbolizes the son of the Mother. As the Lower Self is a part of the total Self, the fish also symbolizes the total savior, incorporating lower soul and higher spirit aspects within its nature. It seems strange at first that it is not Osiris, as he is Lord of the Waters, who has the fish as a symbol, but his higher counterpart. Horus, Horus, “the fish in the form of a man.” This is partly explained by the fact that it may be the lower form of Horus, son of Osiris, who is the fish, not Horus as Son of Ra.

The fish played an important role in alchemy and had to be cooked to be edible. This meant that the Self had to appear in the form that could be assimilated by consciousness, as Mercurius in positive form or as the *filius macrocosmi* (son of the Earth spirit or Great Mother). The fish could also be salted, and as salt symbolized wisdom, this meant that the fish would be sure to prefigure the *filius sapientiae*, which Jung said is the divine child we see in Revelation. The *filius sapientiae* is the divine Son that equals Christ, while the *filius macrocosmi* is a lower parallel of Christ.

The *filius macrocosm* is the single point in which all things are unified, and this can be identified as the Higher Self in ultimate form, Christ and so on. The *filius macrocosm*, on the other hand, alluded to the son of the Earth spirit, the macrocosm referring to the circumference of the world. Mercurius was identified with the *filius macrocosm*, as was the Philosopher’s Stone. The *filius macrocosm* was thus a form of the Lower Self that counter-matched the *filius microcosm* as divine Son of God.

It is worth noting that the animal is the symbolic carrier of the self. This hint is borne out of modern individuals who have no notion of alchemy. It expresses the fact that the structure of wholeness was always present but was buried in profound unconsciousness, where it can always be found again if one is willing to risk one’s skin to attain the greatest possible range of consciousness through the greatest possible self-knowledge - a “harsh and bitter drink” usually reserved for hell.

At the end of his journey, Maier realizes that the secret of the phoenix was with him all along and thus there was no need to await its return to Egypt. The secrets that Mercurius imparted to him appear to have altered his plans. Jung discerned this possibility: “Let us assume that Maier’s sudden silence is no mere accident but was intentional or

even a necessity.” Perhaps Mercurius helped Maier understand that the phoenix was actually not a thing but a living idea which he had possessed all along, a sort of inner desideratum. Jung alluded to this point:

It is characteristic of Maier’s views that the idea of most importance is not Mercurius, who elsewhere appears strongly personified, but a substance brought by the phoenix, the bird of the spirit. It is this inorganic substance, and not a living being, which is used as a symbol of wholeness, or as a means towards wholeness, a desideratum apparently not fulfilled by the Christ-symbol.

The phoenix then could be viewed as a uniting symbol that can reconcile the opposites and create a sort of gnosis. Interestingly, Maier places the phoenix as the object of his journey rather than Mercurius, who fulfills his role as a psychopomp and revelator. Mercurius, as in the mythic tradition, acts as a guide to the alchemist on his peregrination. Thus, one could essay that Mercurius constitutes the means of the peregrination whereas the phoenix suggests its *telos*.

The Alchemical Mercurius: Esoteric Symbol of Jung’s Life and Works, Mathew Mather

I have said nothing of Hermes-Mercury, who is the planetary ruler of Virgo, in part because we have already met him in Gemini and many of his attributes belong to Virgo as well. But I have never been comfortable with Mercury as the sole description of the complex web of character that lies in Virgo. Perhaps there is another planet waiting to be found which might be a co-ruler; or perhaps not. Hermes may sometimes be seen in feminine form in alchemical texts, where he/she is shown as a mermaid or melusine with a fish’s tail. This fish-tailed lunar Hermes is the ancient image of the Syrian goddess Atargatis, who is herself half fish and whom Frances Yates felt had the closest affinity to Virgo. In his feminine form, the Mercurius of the alchemists is the virgin mother, the womb of matter which will bring forth the divine son – who is also Mercurius, in his masculine form. If we are to be content with Mercury as the planetary ruler of Virgo, then we must extend our understanding of him into his paradoxical lunar dimension. For lunar it is, and despite the expressiveness, cleverness, dexterity and shrewdness which are Hermes’ gifts to Virgo as well as Gemini, the figure of the virgin goddess looms behind all in her unfathomable mystery.

The Astrology of Fate, Liz Greene

The numerous names given to Mercurius are cited and explained. The firsthand widely accepted term to Mercurius was quicksilver, crude or philosophic, the latter being the arcane substance to be produced by alchemy. Because of its fluidity, quicksilver was also defined as water, with many variations in its description to point to the spiritual nature or golden tincture of this arcane substance.

The alchemical definitions of Mercurius as fire are presented, and the paradoxical nature of this designation indicated. As natural or elemental fire, he was considered to be the source of mystical knowledge, a kinsman of the ancient Hermes. Although not ungodly by nature, the mercurial fire was believed to contain the fires of hell, which was considered to be a component of the deity since God was a coincidence of opposites. The locus of this mercurial fire was thought to be the center of the earth where heavenly spiritual powers are rearranged in the chthonic world of matter. Therefore this evil hell fire was considered to be identical in substance with its spiritual counterpart. Mercurius, of course, could not be destroyed by fire, but because of his fiery nature, he rejoiced in it.

The contradiction between the fiery nature of Mercurius that fire itself does not change and the vaporous nature of quicksilver under heat is examined and explained as an indication of the highly specialized projection of psychic content. Since the alchemists themselves identified this arcane substance as spirit or soul, it is evident that they too recognized its psychic nature. However, because of the ambiguous nature of the concepts, it is necessary to proceed slowly in order to understand the full import of these alchemical terms.

The Spirit Mercurius, C.G. Jung

Alchemists usually personified the mediating figure which formed between these opposites as Mercurius, or Hermes Trismegistos, a legendary figure who was the Greek god Hermes made man, much as Jesus is considered to be God made man. Thus Mercurius represented perfectly the struggle between matter and spirit which we have come to consider our unique problem. The god Hermes was the messenger of the gods, thus admirably suited to moving easily between the world of gods and the human world: that is, the world of the unconscious archetypes and the world of consciousness.

The alchemists grounded their beliefs in a creation myth; they said that in the beginning there existed a primal quaternio of the four elements: Fire, Air, Water, and Earth. Fire acted upon Air to create Sulphur, Air upon Water to create Mercury, Water upon Earth to create Salt. Since there was nothing left for for to act upon, only three principles were created. Then the Sulphur and Mercury combined to create Male, Salt and Mercury to create Female. In each case, Mercury (i.e., Mercurius) was the mediating element. The goal of the alchemical process was then to join Male and Female into a new union that combined all the opposites from which they were created.

Interestingly, the alchemical creation myth goes beyond this point, and shows the four elements combining to form the three key alchemical substances: salt sulphur and mercury. Clearly this corresponds to a progressive development of consciousness, which is much less in danger of falling apart into the chaos of unconsciousness. Of the three; mercury - or Mercurius, as it was personified - was special. It alone was able to join with either of the other two elements, thus reducing the original quaternio into a polarity of masculine and feminine. That split stood for the current state of affairs to the alchemists. Their task was to combine the masculine and the feminine, both in nature and within themselves. In form to the magical unity of the philosopher's stone - quite a remarkable mythology to describe first how primitive consciousness arises, then how it progressively becomes more unified; with the goal of a new conscious entity.

Jungian Archetypes: Jung, Gödel, and the History of Archetypes, Robin Robertson

Just as the elements were separated, purified, changed, and reunited, so have the divine sparks of creation been separated from their source, changed by earthly experience, and purified by the trials they encountered. They will, like the elements, return to the primal unity. The figures of Adam Kadmon in the Kabbalah, the Gnostic anthropos, and the elusive Mercurius in alchemy are paradigms of the same esoteric truth. One touchstone is always the symbol of the scattered Body of Light.

To the regenerated king, now endowed with the qualities of the cosmic Anthropos, God gives four elements as the weapons with which he shall conquer the world. It is a figure that reminds us of the Manichean “First Man,” who, armed with the five elements, came down to fight against the darkness. The elements are evidently conceived as circles, for the Quinta Essentia, the “Maid,” appears in the fifth. The circular representation of the elements was well known in medieval alchemy. The Maid is “crowned” (*redimita*), and in her we recognize the crowned Virgin, the Queen of Heaven, who recalls the old pictures of the *anima media natura* or *anima mundi*. She is the divine life indwelling in the world, or the pneuma that moved over the waters, implanted its seed in them, and so was held captive in the body of Creation. The *anima mundi* is the feminine half of Mercurius.

Walkers Between the Worlds: The Western Mysteries from Shaman to Magus, Caitlín and John Matthews

Because of his half-feminine nature, Mercurius is often identified with the moon and Venus. As his own divine consort he easily turns into the goddess of love, just as in his role of Hermes he is ithyphallic. But he is also called the “most chaste virgin.” The relation of quicksilver to the moon (silver) is obvious enough. Mercurius as the shining and shimmering planet, appearing like Venus close to the sun in the morning and evening sky, is like her a Lucifer, a light-bringer. He heralds, as the morning star does, only much more directly, the coming of the light.

But the most important of all for an interpretation of Mercurius is his relation to Saturn. Mercurius *senex* is identical with Saturn, and to the earlier alchemists especially, it is not quicksilver, but the lead associated with Saturn, which usually represents the *prima materia*. In the Arabic text of the *Turba* quicksilver is identical with the “water of the moon and of Saturn.” In the “Dicta Belini” Saturn says: “My spirit is the water that loosens the rigid limbs of my brothers.” This refers to the “eternal water” which is just what Mercurius is.

Like the planetary spirit of Mercurius, the spirit of Saturn is “very suited to this work.” One of the manifestations of Mercurius in the alchemical process of transformation is the lion, now green and now red. Khunrath calls this transformation “luring the lion out of Saturn’s mountain cave.” From ancient times the lion was associated with Saturn. Khunrath calls him “the lion of the Catholic tribe,” paraphrasing the “lion of the tribe of Judah: an allegory of Christ. He calls Saturn “the lion green and red.” In Gnosticism Saturn is the highest archon, the lion-headed ladabaoth, meaning “child of chaos.” But in alchemy the child of chaos is Mercurius.

The Collected Works, C.G. Jung

In this fire God himself glows in divine love Likewise the Natural Master says regarding the art of fire, that Mercurius is to be decomposed ... and fixed in the unquenchable or living fire, wherein God himself glows, together with the sun, in divine love, for the solace of all men; and without this fire can the art never be brought to perfection. It also the fire of the Philosophers, which they keep hidden away and concealed.

It is also the noblest fire which God created upon earth, for it has a thousand virtues. To these things the teacher replies that God bestowed upon it such virtue and efficacy ... that with this fire is mingled with the Godhead itself. And this fire purifies, as purgatory does in the lower regions.

Aion, C.G. Jung

There is a figure in alchemy named Mercurius, who was referred to in two very contrasting ways. He was called “the word-creating spirit” (the spirit that created the world), but he was also referred to as “the spirit imprisoned and concealed in matter.” Somehow he creates the world and then finds himself trapped in the world he himself has created. Let’s dwell a while on this, because many psychologists and philosophers believe that we are similar to Mercurius in this way: we shape our lives according to our beliefs, precepts and perception of “reality,” and then we get stuck in our own creation: we are limited by our own perceptions. This is what I was on about when I said if you wish to change something, you first have to alter your attitude and beliefs, your way of looking at it. You’ve probably heard of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, which states that the act of observation itself affects that which is being observed. Our mind (Mercury) plays a major part in determining what the world is like for us. For example, let’s say you are someone who is very overweight or obese, and you work hard to slim down. That’s great. But if you still have an inner image of yourself as fat, you’ll eventually just put this weight on again.

Hermes-Mercury is the guardian of crossroads, of liminal spaces. He is the god of journeyers, and as the mythic *psychopompos*, had the special task of escorting the souls of the departed to Hades. His function in the mind is to descend into the unconscious and bring forth information to be processed in the conscious mind. Saturn’s function is to repress information and keep it static, so it remains forever bound and crystallized. Whereas Saturn is the boundary, Mercury is the transition, the liminal space between; Saturn is the temporal realm and Mercury is atemporal, so incorporating the two defines a boundary in time. Both are terminus gods; however, Mercury is a transitional, crossroads point, whereas Saturn is an ultimate limit or boundary.

In the complex literature of alchemy, there is an interconnection between Saturn and Mercurius. The *opus* - the work - are considered *prima materia*, base substances through which the work of life, or the turning of gold into lead, is processed. Astrologically, the work of individuation is turning Saturn into your Sun, turning your lead into gold.

Although the two alchemical symbols, *Saturn and Mercurius*, originate as one agency, as the opus evolves, Mercurius and Saturn perform entirely different functions and represent distinct stages. Mercurius is insinuated into every facet of the entire opus, facilitating every transition and every stage, eventually becoming unified with the alchemist himself; whereas Saturn is the *nigredo*, the blackening stage that demarcates and identifies the putrefaction and decay which precede each new stage. Saturn is the darkening before the light, the *albedo*.

Mercury is the archetype of the puer aeternis (the eternal youth) whereas, Saturn is the archetypal senex (the wise old man). These polarities of age and attitude are activated when Saturn transits Mercury and aspects it in the birth chart. Within each of us are the characteristics of both; in the psyche they struggle in a tension of opposites resulting in a tentative maturation process, accented every time a Saturn-Mercury contact is made.

Saturn contacts to Mercury bring about the birth of a new, unconsidered, and serious side to circumstances in life. If we have been skipping along the surface of life, a Saturn transit will alter that perspective and bring solemnity to the time of the transit.

Saturn in Transit, Erin Sullivan

During the first centuries after Christ the words *nous* and *pneuma* were used indiscriminately, and the one could easily stand for the other. Moreover the relation of Mercurius to “spirit” is an extremely ancient astrological fact. Like Hermes, Mercurius (or the planetary spirit Mercury) was a god of revelation, who discloses the secret of the art to the adepts. The *Liber quartorum*, which being of Harranite origin cannot be dated later than the tenth century, says of Mercurius: “Ipse enim aperit clausiones operum cum ingenio et intellectu suo” (For he opens with his genius and understanding the locked [insoluble] problems of the work). He’s is also the “soul of the bodies,” the “anima vitalis,” and Ruland defines him as “spirit which has become earth.” He is a spirit that penetrates into the depths of the material world and transforms it. Like the *nous*, he is symbolized by the serpent. In Michael Maier he points the way to the earthly paradise. Besides being identified with Hermes Trismegistus, he is also called the “mediator” and, as the Original Man, the “Hermaphroditic Adam.” From numerous passages it is clear that Mercurius is as much as a fire as a water, both of which aptly characterizes the nature of spirit.

The Collected Works, Volume 2, C.G. Jung

Besides these half chemical, half mythological definitions there are also some “philosophical” ones which have a deeper meaning. Thus in the treatise of Komarios we find the definition “Hades”. In Olympiodorus the black earth contains the “accursed of God”. The “Consilium coniugii” says that the father of gold and silver - i.e., their *prima materia* - is the “animal of earth and sea,” or “man,” or a “part of man,” e.g. his hair, blood, etc. Dorn calls the *prima materia* “Adamica” and - basing himself on Paracelsus - *limbus microcosmicus*. The material of the stone is “no other than the fiery and perfect Mercurius” and the true hermaphroditic “Adam and Microcosm” (= man). Hermes Trismegistus is said to have called the stone the “orphan.” Since Dorn was a pupil of Paracelsus his views are probably connected with the Anthropos doctrine of his master. For this I must refer the reader to my essay “Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon.” Further connections between man and the *prima materia* are mentioned in other authors, but I cannot quote them all here.

The Collected Works, Volume 12, C.G. Jung

In alchemical writings the word “Mercurius” is used with a very wide range of meaning, to denote not only the chemical element mercury or quicksilver, Mercury (Hermes) the god, and Mercury the planet, but also - and primarily - the secret “transforming substance” which is at the same time the “spirit” indwelling in all living creatures. These different connotations will become apparent in the course of this book. It would be misleading to use the English “Mercury” and “mercury”, because there are innumerable passages where neither retain the Latin “Mercurius” as in the German text, and to use the personal pronoun (since “Mercurius” is personified), the word quicksilver” being employed only where the chemical element (Hg) is plainly meant.

Psychology and Alchemy, C.G. Jung

“Soul” represents a higher concept than “spirit” in the sense of air or gas. As the “subtle body” or “breathe-soul” it means something non-material and finer than mere air. Its essential characteristic is to animate and be animated; it therefore represents the life principle. Mercurius is often designated as *anima* (hence, as a feminine being, he is also called *foemina* or *virgo*), or as *nostra anima*. The *nostra* here does not mean “our own” soul but, as in *aqua nostra*, *Mercurius noster*, *corpus nostrum*, refers to the arcane substance.

Mercurius, following the tradition of Hermes, is many-sided, changeable, and deceitful. Dorn speaks of “that inconstant Mercurius,” and another calls him *versipellis* (changing his skin, shifty). He is a *duplex* and his main characteristic is duplicity. It is said of him that he “runs round the earth and enjoys equally the company of the good and the wicked.” He is “two dragons,” the “twin,” made of “two natures” or “two substances.” He is the “giant of twofold substance,” in explanation of which the text cites the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, where the sacrament of the Last Supper is instituted. The Christ analogy is thus made plain. The two substances of Mercurius are thought of as dissimilar, sometimes opposed; as the dragon he is “winged and wingless.” A parable says: “On this mountain lies an ever-waking dragon, who is called Pantophthalmos, for he is covered with eyes on both sides of his body, before and behind, and he sleeps with some open and some closed.” There is the “common and the philosophic” Mercurius; he consists of “the dry and earthy, the moist and viscous.” Two of his elements are passive, earth and water, and two active, air and fire. He is both good and evil. The “Aurelia occulta” gives a graphic description of him.

One of the commonest and most important of the arcana is the *aqua permanens* of the Greeks. This, according to the unanimous testimony of both the ancient and the later alchemists, is an aspect of Mercurius, and of this divine water Zosimos says in his fragment:

This is the great and divine mystery which is sought, for it is the whole. And from it is the whole and through the same is the whole. Two natures, one substance. But the one [substance] attracts the one, and the one rules the one. This is silver water, male and female, which forever flees ... For it is not to be ruled. It is the whole in all things. And it has life and spirit and is destructive.

With regard to the central significance of the *aqua permanens* I must refer the reader to my earlier writings. The “water” is just as much the arcanum of alchemy as are Mercurius, the lapis, the *filii philosophorum*, etc. Like them it is a totality image, and as the above Zosimos quotation shows, this was so even in the Greek alchemy of the third century A.D. The text leaves no doubt in this respect: the water is wholeness. It is the “silver water” (= hydrargyrum), but not the ‘ever-moving water,’ i.e. ordinary quicksilver which in Latin alchemy was called *Mercurius crudus* as a distinct form of *Mercurius nonvulgi*. In Zosimos the quicksilver is a spirit.

Our Mercurius is therefore that same [Microcosm], who contains within him the perfections, virtues, and powers of Sol [in the dual sense of sun and gold], and who goes through the streets [vicos] and houses of all the planets, and in his regeneration has obtained the power of Above and Below, wherefore he is to be conjoined in him. The sages have affirmed in their wisdom that all creatures are to be brought to one unified substance.

Accordingly Mercurius, in the crude form of the prima materia, is in very truth the Original Man disseminated through the physical world, and in his sublimated form he is that reconstituted totality. Altogether, he is very like the redeemer of the Basilidians, who mounts upward through the planetary spheres, conquering them or robbing them of their power. The remark that he contains the powers of Sol reminds us of the above-mentioned passage in Abu'l-Qasim, where Hermes says that he unites the sun and the planets and causes them to be within him as a crown. This may be the origin of the designation of the lapis of the “crown of victory.” The “power of the Above and Below” refers to the ancient authority the “Tabula Smaragdina,” which is of Alexandrian origin. Besides this, our text contains allusions to the Song of Songs: “through the streets and houses of the planets” recalls Song of Songs 3 : 2: “I will ... go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.” The “white and red” of Mercurius refers to 5 : 10: “My beloved is white and ruddy.” He is likened to the “matrimonium” or coniunctio; that is to say he is this marriage on account of his androgynous form.

Mysterium Coniunctionis, C.G. Jung

The alchemists seem to have visualized their lapis or prima materia in a similar manner. At any rate they were able to cap the paradoxes of Monoïmos. Thus they said of Mercurius: “This spirit is generated from the substances of the sea and calls himself moist, dry, and fiery, in close agreement with the invocation to Hermes in the magic papyrus entitled “The Secret Inscription,” where Hermes addressed as a “damp-fiery-cold spirit.”

The mystery of the smallest written sign, the point, is also known to alchemy. The point is the symbol of a mysterious creative center in nature. The author of the “Novum lumen” admonishes his reader:

But you, dear reader, you will have above all to consider the point in nature ... and you need nothing else, but take care lest you seek that point in the vulgar metals, where it is not. For these metals, the common gold more especially, are dead. But our metals are alive, they have a spirit, and they are the ones you must take. For know that fire is the life of the metals.

In keeping with its dual nature sulphur is on the one hand corporal and earthly, and on the other an occult, spiritual principle. As an earthly substance it comes from the “fatness of the earth,” by which was meant the radical moisture as prima materia. Occasionally it is called “cinis extracus a cinere” (ash extracted from ash). “Ash” is an inclusive term for the scoriae left over from burning, the substance that “remains below”—a strong reminder of the chthonic nature of sulphur. The red variety is thought of as masculine, and under this aspect it represents the gold or Sol. As a chthonic being it has close affinities with the dragon, which is called “our secret sulphur.” In that form it is also the *aqua divina*, symbolized by the uroboros. These analogies often make it difficult to distinguish between sulphur and Mercurius, since the same thing is said of both “This is our natural, most sure fire, our Mercurius, our sulphur,” says the “Tractatus aureus de lapide.” In the Turba quicksilver is a fiery body that behaves in exactly the same way as sulphur. For Paracelsus sulphur, together with Sal (salt), is the begetter of Mercurius, who is born of the sun and moon. Or it is found “in the depths of the nature of Mercurius,” or it is “of the nature of Mercurius,” or sulphur and Mercurius are “brother and sister.” Sulphur is credited with Mercurius’ “power to dissolve, ill, and bring metals to life.

Owing to the theory of “correspondentia,” regarded as axiomatic in the Middle Ages, the principles of each of the four worlds - the intelligible or divine, the heavenly, the earthly, and the infernal - corresponded to each other. Usually, however, there was a division into three worlds to correspond with the Trinity: heaven, earth, hell. Triads were also known in alchemy. From the time of Paracelsus the most important triad was Sulphur-Mercurius-Sal, which was held to correspond with the Trinity. Georg von Welling, the plagiarist of Johann Rudolf Glauber, still thought in 1735 that his triad of fire, sun, and salt was “in its root entirely one thing.” The use of the Trinity formula in alchemy is so common that further documentation is unnecessary. A subtle feature of the Sulphur-Mercurius-Sal formula is that the central figure, Mercurius, is by nature androgynous and thus partakes both of the masculine red sulphur and of lunar salt. His equivalent in the celestial realm is the planetary pair Sol and Luna, and in the “intelligible” realm Christ in his mystical androgyny, the “man encompassed by the woman.” i.e., sponsus and sponsa (Ecclesia). Like the Trinity, the alchemical “triunity” is a quaternity in disguise owing to the duplicity of the central figure: Mercurius is not only split into a masculine and a feminine half, but is the poisonous dragon is analogous to the devil and the lapis to Christ, in accordance with the ecclesiastical view of the devil as an autonomous counterpart of Christ. Furthermore, not only the dragon but the negative aspect of sulphur, namely *sulphur comburens*, is identical with the devil as Glauber says: “Verily, sulphur is the true black devil of hell, who can be conquered by no element save by salt alone. Salt by contrast is a “light” substance, similar to the lapis, as we shall see.

The Collected Works, C.G. Jung

In his quest for wholeness so far, Michael Maier, besides crossing three continents and traveling in three directions, has discovered a statue of Mercurius pointing the way to paradise; he has glimpsed paradise from afar, he has found the animal soul and the sibylline anima, who now counsels him to journey to the seven mouths of the Nile (Ostia Nili), in order to seek for Mercurius. The continuation of his pilgrimage recalls the flight of the phoenix from Arabia, where it lives, to Egypt, where it dies and rises anew. We may therefore expect that something similar will befall the author. We are not told anything of his crossing of the Red Sea and of his recapitulation, in the reverse direction, of the miraculous wanderings of the children of Israel. We do, however, soon learn that something like a rebirth mystery is to take place, because Maier compares the seven mouths of the Nile to the seven planets. He first reaches the Canopic Gate, the western mouth of the delta where he finds Saturn domiciled. Of the remaining planets we can recognize only Mars with certainty, as the description of the cities where the others dwell is not very clear. Amid innumerable hazards he traverses the seven regions without meeting Mercurius. He does not find him even in his own city. Finally he has to turn back and retrace his steps until he reaches the Canopic Gate, where this time he finds Mercurius. Although he learns from him all sorts of secrets, he fails to find the phoenix. Later, he will return again in order to discover the panacea. In his “Epigramma ad Phoenicem” he begs the wonderful bird to give the wise man its feathers, and in his epigram to the “Medicina Phoeniciae” he rates it above “riches and gold, and he who does not think so is not a man but a beast.”

On returning to the house of Saturn our pilgrim finds the long sought Mercurius. Maier passes remarkably quickly over this highly significant encounter and mentions merely their “numerous conversations” without, however, disclosing their content. This is the more surprising in that Mercurius either personifies the great teacher or else has the character of the arcane substance, both of which would be a fruitful source for further revelations. For Mercurius is the light-brining Nous, who knows the secret of transformation and of immortality.

Just as Maier on his return to meet Mercurius, so Hermes in his next vision met the Poimen, the shepherd, “a white fleece round his shoulders, a knapsack on his back, and a staff in his hand.” Hermes recognized that “it was he to whom I was handed over;” namely the shepherd has the closest connections to Hermes Kriophoros (the lamb-bearer); thus even in antiquity these two savior figures coalesced, Whereas Hermas is “handed over” to his shepherd. Hermes hands over his art and wisdom to his pupil Maier and thus equips him to do something himself and to work with the aid of the magic caduceus. This, for a physician who was an alchemist, took place of the staff of Asklepios, which had only one snake. The sacred snake of the Asklepeion signified: The god heals; but the caduceus, or Mercurius in the form of the coniunctio in the retort, means: In the hands of the physician lie the magic remedies granted by God.

Just as the world-soul pervades all things, so does salt. It is ubiquitous and thus fulfills the main requirement of an arcane substance, that it can be found everywhere. No doubt the reader will be as conscious as I am of how uncommonly difficult it is to give an account of salt and its ubiquitous connections. It represents the feminine principle of Eros, which brings everything into relationship, in an almost perfect way. In this respect it is surpassed only by Mercurius, and the notion that salt comes from Mercurius is therefore quite understandable. For salt, as the soul or spark of the *anima mundi*, is in very truth the daughter of the spiritus vegetativus of creation. Salt is far more indefinite and more universal than sulphur, whose essence is fairly well defined by its fiery nature.

Despite all attempts at denial and obfuscation there is an unconscious factor, a black sun, which is responsible for the surprisingly common phenomenon of masculine split-mindedness, when the right hand mustn't know what the left is doing. This split in the masculine psyche and the regular darkening of the moon in woman together explain the remarkable fact that woman is accused of all the darkness in a man while he himself basks in the thought that he is a veritable fount of

vitality and illumination for all the females in his environment. Actually, he would better be advised to shroud the brilliance of his mind in the profoundest doubt. It is not difficult for this type of mind (which besides other things is a great trickster like Mercurius) to admit a host of sins in the most convincing way, and even to combine it with a spurious feeling of ethical superiority without in the least approximating to a genuine insight. This can never be achieved without the participation of feeling; but the intellect admits feeling only when it is convenient. The novilunium of woman is a source of countless disappointments for man which easily turn to bitterness, though they could equally well be a source of wisdom if they were understood. Naturally this is possible only if he is prepared to acknowledge his black sun, that is, his shadow.

The Collected Works, C.G. Jung

His curiosity will entail his banishment at the end of the story, for Cupid is one of the numerous aspects of Mercurius, namely *Mercurius sagittarius* (the archer), whose arrow is called *telum passionis* (the weapon of suffering) in some alchemical writings. The exciting spectacle of the naked Venus in a cellar intends to convey the notion that the way to genuine alchemical transmutation must begin with a descent into Tartarus. Now, it is remarkable that the chemical symbol for *spiritus tartari* is nearly the same as for copper, and that the word "copper" is related to the Greek name *Kypris*, which precisely designates Aphrodite or Venus. It is no wonder that Mercurius is frequently connected with quicksilver, and thus Christian sees on the mausoleum of Aphrodite an angel holding an unknown tree, from which fruits continually fall into a kettle and then turn into water - that is to say, into philosophical mercury.

The alchemical work has three stages: the *nigredo*, the *albedo*, and the *rubedo*. It is true that other stages corresponding to nuances of the alchemical process are mentioned in the texts but, although these would be of the utmost importance for an alchemist, they are not so critical for us. The essence of the alchemical movement is contained in the oft-quoted motto: *solve et coagula*, “divide and unite.” Like the three stages discussed above, these two movements are essential to the work and comprise cycles that are repeated over and over again, on increasingly subtle levels. Alchemy aimed at the resolution of material and spiritual opposites as conventionally understood. This resolution took place on different levels, corresponding to deepening levels of understanding of the true nature of the alchemical work. At a certain point, a mediating term (often under the form of the alchemical Mercurius) would intervene in the process. The ultimate resolution was characterized by a mode of subtle mutual reciprocity and interpenetration in which each term of an opposition entered fully into the being of the other, transforming and being transformed. This union was frequently imaged as a *hieros gamos*, and its fruit was the Philosopher’s Stone.

From the perspective of the “unknown god,” the Self emerges from potentiality to actuality when it enters consciousness, entering time and space and becoming human. Hogenson presents the emergence of the Self in terms of a higher level phase transition within the symbolic system humans live in. Von Franz describes the emergence of the Self in the individuation process from both sides - consciousness and the unconscious:

From the state of unconsciousness, the Self collects itself in the action of self-reflection on man’s part and emerges as a unity. Inasmuch as the Self existed prior to the ego, it is the ego’s father, but inasmuch as it can become manifest only through the work done by the ego, it is our son - hence the identity of senex and puer in the Mercurius symbolism.

This means that the Self has as strong an inclination to become conscious in us, as we have to find our redemption in the Self.

Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity in Modern Times, Edited by Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff

Mercurius is the pivotal point in the alchemical process of liberation. The goal of this process, as we saw before, is the discovery of the *lapis philosophorum*, the Philosopher's Stone - seen from a psychological perspective, the deepest Self. So Jung translates the alchemical symbology into a psychological one. For him, the *materia* in alchemy stands for the (unconscious) self, which needs to be examined carefully. According to Jung, in the alchemical "matter" - and thus in the self - lies the *anima mundi* ("soul of the world"). And this world soul is personified by the spirit Mercurius.

The Hermetic Link: From Secret Tradition to Modern Thought, Jacob Slavenburg

Both material and spiritual alchemists proceeded towards their goal with a linear understanding of the process: through a series of causes and effects the object would be transmuted into the final form sought, the Philosopher's Stone, which in the material world would be in the purest of metals - gold, and in the spiritual world, the perfected pneuma/psyche of the individual alchemist. As this process could not be undertaken without some assistance, in material alchemy that assistance came in the form of Mercurius, the reconciler of opposites, and in the spiritual the Holy Spirit, whose similarities with Mercury had long been noted.

Hermes, Arlene Allan

The achievement of the *lapis*, the stone, the gold, is a redemptive union of psyche and matter that produces an “incorruptible body” which arises as a “liberation of the divine soul or pneuma from the chains of the ‘flesh.’

The psyche previously imprisoned in the elements and the divine spirit hidden in the flesh overcome their physical imperfection and clothe themselves in the noblest of all bodies, the royal gold. Thus the “philosophic gold” is an embodiment of psyche and pneuma, both of which signify “life-spirit.” It is in fact ... a living being with a body, soul, and spirit, and it is easily personified as a divine being or a superior person like a king, who in olden times was considered to be God incarnate.

Flesh itself “is a synonym for the *prima materia* and hence for Mercurius, which is Agathodaimon, the spirit of the cold part of nature. So Mercurius, as the arcane substance, “stands at the beginning and the end of the work” and “was believed to contain the opposites in uncombined form as the *prima materia*, and to amalgamate them as the *lapis philosophorum*. In the crude form of the *prima materia* Mercurius is “in very truth the Original Man disseminated through the physical world, and in his sublimated form he is that reconstituted totality.”

Green Man, Earth Angel, Tom Cheetham

Interestingly, the alchemical creation myth goes beyond this point, and shows the four elements combining to form three key alchemical substances: mercury, salt, sulphur. Clearly this corresponds to a progressive development of consciousness, which is much less in danger of falling apart into the chaos of unconsciousness. Of the three, mercury - or Mercurius, as it was personified - was special. It alone was able to join with either of the other two elements, thus reducing the original quaternio into a polarity of masculine and feminine. That split stood for the current state of affairs to the alchemists. Their task was to combine the masculine and the feminine, both in nature and within themselves, to form the magical unity of the philosopher’s stone - quite a remarkable mythology to describe first how primitive consciousness arises, then how it progressively becomes more unified, with the goal of a new conscious entity.

Jungian Archetypes: Jung, Gödel, and the History of Archetypes, Robin Robertson

Jung proposed a solution to the perennial of unity and multiplicity in the figure of Mercurius, who lies between opposites and is the means of bringing them together. As the mercurial body that bridges the divide, he was called a “mediator”. Mercurius links heaven and earth and, as such, is both “prima materia” and “ultima materia” - and, therefore, called “lapis” and “the stone”, as the great principle of unification. But Jung was also aware that this unity was subject to a deconstruction and a division. He notes that Mercurius “is named a unity in spite of the fact that his innumerable inner contradictions can dramatically fly apart into equal numbers of disparate and apparently independent figures.”

C.G. Jung and the Alchemical Imagination, Stanton Marlan

For a woman alchemist, Sophia represents the Philosopher’s Stone perhaps more clearly than for the male alchemist. Nevertheless, as I have stressed, though at the psychological level Sophia represents different things for men and women, especially in regards to their work with the self, as a psychoidal figure Sophia is a force or power that must not be related to a specific gender, any more than may the *filius*, or Mercurius, or other alchemical images. Gender is a symbolic form chosen by a specific entity. Sophia appears as a feminine being, but she is not a woman. Women, as much as men, may embrace her with love and ecstasy as divine partner and lover.

Still, von Franz’s whole commentary is a good example of how this material is worked on a psychic level. But how do we work with the image from psychoidal point of view?

The Redemption of Goethe's Eternal Feminine, Mariana Weister

Moreover, we are entitled to compare Merlin with the alchemical Mercurius since the alchemists themselves did so. Verses about a Mercurinus are quoted in the *Rosarium philosophorum* (probably fifteenth century). The joining of the two names in this instance could have arisen out of a misreading of Mercurius, but even so it is no coincidence. In addition there is also another well-known alchemical writing, the *Allegoria Merlini*, which describes *the mystery of the murder and the transformation of the king*. Merlin stands equally behind Arthur and the Grail King as maker, guardian and counselor of the King, as well as being in the background behind Perceval. Officially he is a helper, but he also possesses another side which comes to our attention in the description of the Saturnian man with the wooden leg. Like Merlin the latter is also an astronomer and magician, indeed of a rather more dangerous and uncanny aspect, and for this reason we have emphasized his role as the figure of the Grail King's opponent. The King himself has a "ghostlike" background.

In these utterances, Taliesin describes himself as a kind of cosmic spiritual being, creative and divine and capable of self-transformation. At the same time, he suggests the figure of Mercurius who is frequently described by the adepts as just such a spirit, also capable of transforming himself. One text calls him "the spirit of the world become body within the earth." He is also a wind or *pneuma* and the water of the sea, he incarnates in the eagle and other animals, as well as in the sunbeam. The alchemist Avicenna says of him: "He is the spirit of the Lord which fills the whole world." We are forcefully reminded of Merlin who was accustomed to telling the truth and who lived hidden away from the world. Mercurius likewise is cunning and duplex (double); one text says of him that "he runs around the earth and enjoys equally the company of good and the wicked." He is an embodiment of the original man, a figure that unites Christ, the light half of the symbol of the Self, with its dark half, the Antichrist, in *one* being. If we think of Merlin as a parallel to Mercurius it becomes understandable that de Boron should describe him as the Antichrist and then conversely depict him once more as a servant of Christ.

The Grail Legend, Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz

His fiery aspect was sulphurous, active and masculine, and yet invisible and working in secret. He was the fire of hell, “a rearrangement of the heavenly, spiritual powers in the lower, chthonic world of matter,” found in the center of the earth, in the dragon’s belly. At the same time, he was “the universal and scintillating fire of the light of nature, which carries the heavenly spirit within it.” This fiery spiritual seed impregnated the Virgin, i.e. the feminine aspect of the hermaphroditic Mercurius. He was also synonymous with divine water, “the spirit of life, not only indwelling in all living things, but immanent in everything that exists.” Further, he is the “great south wind.” who is both an active agent in its fiery aspect and a passive receptacle in its watery, quicksilver aspect. Jung reminds us that Hermes was originally a wind god, and so was the Egyptian Thoth, who made the souls breathe. As quicksilver, Mercurius was imagined as fluid and volatile, like water “that does not make the hands wet,” “that indefinable, fascinating, irritating, and elusive thing which attracts an unconscious projection”. Like the serpent of wisdom that encircles everything, Mercurius “has something of everything in herself.” As the World Soul, the mercurial serpent was said to impart “beauty and ripeness to all things, life-giving power like a glue, holding the world together and standing in the middle between body and spirit”. He was present when the world was created, his role was to impregnate the waters with the seed of life. Although he bore the light that filled the whole world, he remained hidden and worked in secret.

The Collected Works, C.G. Jung

The tale of man battling beast is the oldest of archetypal motifs. We have already met it in the myths connected with the first four signs... In the broadest sense, it is the battle between the developing ego and its instinctual roots, which must be tamed before the individual can become truly individual. But it is the particular sort of beast which is most relevant here, for this is a lion and not a ram, a bull, a dragon or sea-monster, or a hostile brother.. Sekhmet, as we have seen, typifies the aggressive, fiery nature of the lion. Kybele, the Great Goddess of Asia Minor, rides on a chariot drawn by two lions, and Dionysos, whom we will meet later, also wears a lion skin like Herakles and is often associated with the feminine, are very hot-blooded and fiery attributes, far from the cold-blooded snake-wisdom of the reptilian Mother. Jung has the following to say about the lion:

In alchemy, the lion, the 'royal beast', is a synonym for Mercurius, or, to be more accurate, for a stage of his transformation. He is the warm-blooded form of the devouring, predatory monster who first appears as the dragon ... This is precisely what the fiery lion is intended to express - the passionate emotionality that precedes the recognition of unconscious contents.

The theme of dark and light extends even deeper into myth, and permeates the vision of the world's greatest religions. Hermes, whom we will explore in greater detail shortly, enters alchemy as Mercurius, the ambiguous and unpredictable, dark-light spirit that guides the *opus* yet threatens always to destroy it. He/she is volatile, androgynous, both matter and elixir, the carrier of every conceivable opposite, and is portrayed as the dark twin to Christ. Thus Mercurius is the chthonic double of the Son of God, who is born to the darkness of Mother Earth. Dualistic religions such as Zoroastrianism also reflect this ambiguity of a double-faced universe. Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd) is the light principle, while Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) is the dark one. Ormuzd promotes life, happiness and eternal well-being; Ahriman seeks only death, misery and suffering. Through Gemini's eyes the cosmos falls into opposites, just as Castor and Polydeuces spend half their time in Hades and half on Olympus, so too does Gemini, perceiving now only the good in life, now only the evil.

For Ficino, the world of images - whether these were derived from dreams (his own) or myth (Greek and the syncretistic mythic variations of the first centuries AD) - were a kind of middle ground, a place in between the abstract and inaccessible world of imageless Ideas and the dense world of Moira-bound matter. For Jung, likewise, symbolic products of the psyche hold the borderland between the formal world of the archetypes and the daylight world of consciousness. These images are the 'stuff' in between, the *anima mundi* or soul of the world. They and their ground of psychic substance fall under the governorship of Hermes, lord of borders and roadways and crossroads, who in alchemy is called Mercurius. The planets, in Ficino's new astrology, are not only physical bodies in space but images within the psychic world of man, and also metals within the earth itself. Somewhere in the 'intelligible' world are the Ideas which correspond to these mortal expressions. The planetary images as Ficino conceived them are the bridge between worlds, through which the individual can slowly unite what is below with what is above, so that, in the words of the *Corpus*, the miracle of the One may be accomplished. This raises a very profound question about exactly what 'happens' when the astrologer interprets a horoscope to a client, for both astrologer and client inhabit, for that time, the 'middle ground' that unites the above and below.

The Astrology of Fate, Liz Greene

Jung was fascinated by the sometimes brilliant, sometimes murky figure of the trickster, and in particular by the Mercurius of the alchemists. To him, the figure represented the mysterious momentum of the unconscious, sometimes destructive, sometimes humorous, sometimes terrifying; but always ambiguous, and always fertile. This ceaseless fertility that weaves the dreams and nightmares of our sleep was embodied by the pre-classical Greeks, who placed Herms - votary statues of the god - at every crossroads. The Herm was nothing more than a slyly smiling bearded head placed at the top of a rectangular pillar, with an erect phallus pointing the way. Jung writes in his essay on the trickster archetype:

The trickster motif does not crop up only in its mythical form but appears just as naively and authentically in the unsuspecting modern man - whenever, in fact, he feels himself at the mercy of annoying 'accidents' which thwart his will and his actions with apparently malicious intent.

The cross and the tree both refer to the crucifixion in some aspects. The "serpent' hung on the wood' and "serpent on the cross" in Mysteries correspond to Christ on the cross, as both serpent and Christ symbolize the Higher Self and the unconscious in all its aspects. This occurs, for instance, when Moses nails the serpent to a pole: *"And the Lord said unto Moses, make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that is a serpent had bitten any man, when he held the serpent of brass, he lived."*

As Jung tells us, the crucified serpent of Moses was identified with Mercurius by the alchemists as being *serpens Mercurialis*, the dragon that must be transformed, meaning the lower side of the Self (the lower Horus). This meant that the spirit of the unconscious in base aspect had to be transformed. Jung also mentioned the medieval depictions of the serpent on the cross in place of Christ, for both Christ and serpent represent the Self. Jung said that the spiritualization of the sacrificing priest or initiate was the chief purpose of the transformation.

Later, the alchemists understood the "mystery of the rock producing water" as the analogy of their own extraction of the *aqua permanens*, or "spiritual waters," with Maria Prophetissa, the ancient female alchemist. Names and words beginning with *Mer*, *Mir*, *Mar*, and so on are usually connected with water in myth and legend, and this is not only true of the Middle East.

Merlin, the magician, the alchemical Mercurius, and the god Mercury all express the spirit of the unconscious, the main symbol of which is water. So we can see why Miriam, representing the feminine unconscious, is buried at the place of the spiritual waters. In fact, we can take the Mer of Meribah and the Mir of Miriam to be from the same root. The was originally Meri-am, and so the waters of Meribah would be the waters of Miriam. Furthermore, the Hebrew for water is *mem* or *maim*, and another form of Miriam is Mariam, of which *maim* might be a contracted version.

Within the opus, the original hermaphroditic matter as the *Principium Mercurius* gets differentiated out into gendered opposites, as Sol and Luna (Rex and Regina, etc.), as the active aspects of Mercurius duplex respectively. Through an alchemical mystery wedding, as the *coniunctio*, Sol and Luna then unite and give birth to the *Filius Mercurius* as lapis, which combines Sol and Luna into an enigmatic unity. This many-named lapis - as *filius macrocosmi*, *filius regius*, *filius Mercurius*, etc. - is considered the Saviour of the natural world who thereby completes the work of the Christian redeemer, who was the Saviour of humanity only.

These descriptions, admittedly simplistic, afford insight into how the Christian and alchemical conceptions are both similar and different. Of note, is the extent to which the figure of Mercurius features in the alchemical myth. Indeed, Jung emphasizes that “The opus is a ... transformation whose subject and object is the elusive Mercurius.”

A further important difference in the alchemical and Christian ‘myths’ concerns the idea of the opus as a passion. Thus, according to Jung, the transformations and operations on the various substances in the retort signified for the alchemist not only a transformation of the deity slumbering in matter, but also corresponded to a profound psychological and spiritual transformation of the adept, which he likened to a passion. However, this passion is described as different to the ‘imitation of Christ’. Rather, it is described as ‘the exact opposite,’ as a ‘spontaneous’ and ‘involuntary experience of the sacred [alchemical] legend’ whereby the ‘true man’ as a Christ image is assimilated to his self. He emphasizes that such a tortuous passion ‘happens not to the alchemist himself but to the “true man,” who [he] feels is near him and in him and at the same time in the retort.’

Such ideas, to an extent, correlate to the Christian mystics' personal experience of divinity through the grace of the 'blessed greenness' of the 'spermatic and procreative' Holy Ghost. However, for the alchemist, such grace had a subtle difference, as it was thought of as emanating from nature through Mercurius in his form as a *spiritus vegetativus* or as the *lumen naturae* - a figure with origins from an immanent alchemical deity as opposed to a transcendent Christian deity. Another crucial difference is the deeply feminine connotations of alchemy. The royal art is thus described as 'queen of the alchemist's heart, she is at once his mother, his daughter, and his bellowed, and in his art and its allegories the drama of his own soul, his individuation process, is played out.'

The 'cosmic anthropos' is not directly referred in the text. By inference, however, it can be shown to relate to the water-bearer constellation of Aquarius. The water in this picture undulates in the same manner as the Aquarian glyph, which is also composed of 'two waters'. In addition, prior to Aquarius is a 'quadratus' constellation, often depicted as a celestial temple, as we see in this image (also often depicted as the winged horse Pegasus). Of further relevance is that Jung, in Vision Seminars, considered this constellation in terms of Hermes-Mercurius: 'Aquarius represents the thing above as well as the thing below. Therefore in the semi-antique representations of Aquarius ... he is shown as an ithyphallic figure, like a very primitive god of fertility.'

Apart from an overview of Jung's alchemical and astrological worldview, I also alluded to a convergence of these myths. For example, the instinctual yet spiritual Pegasus was compared to the alchemical coniunctio, as a union of the chthonic and the spiritual. We also witnessed a historical *Triangulum* in relation to a 'contemporary' quadrangulum (trinity and quaternity), which also affords an astrological nuance to Jung's renowned 'three-four problem.'

As shall become apparent in forthcoming chapters, such symbols and themes are intrinsically interwoven into the various shape-shiftings of a central character of interest, the alchemical Mercurius. Indeed, as I shall try to reveal, Jung's portrayal of this figure contributes significantly toward a convergence of his life myth.

The old man corresponds to the archetype of meaning, or of the spirit, and the dark chthonic figure to the opposite of the Wise Old Man, namely the magical (and sometimes destructive) Luciferian element. In alchemy it is Hermes Trismegistus versus Mercurius the evasive ‘trickster’

Hermes Trismegistus is Hermes in the guise of the Wise Old Man, but Mercurius (also associated with the ambiguous figures of Loki and Hephaistos) is likewise Hermes, in the guise of the trickster. Philemon, who contains both, is thus not only Saturnian, but also Mercurial: he is a bright angel like Raziel, but also a dark angel like Lucifer. Each is secretly contained in the other, and although they are opposites, they share a single core that Jung attempted to articulate within a psychological framework in his three volumes on alchemy, in which Saturn, the dark *prima materia* portrayed as the Old King, transforms into Mercurius, the magical alchemical agent who is also the Philosopher’s Stone. Jung’s ideas about Saturn had come a long way from the cold, dry malefic of Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*.

The third-century Christian Patrist Origen, whose work Jung possessed in an English edition, declared in his *Contra Celsum* that Saturn is the ‘rational ruler of pure mind ... and opening to the world the gate which thou didst close against thy kingdom. Philemon, like Origen’s Saturn, is the daimon who opens the gate: and *angelos* or ‘messenger’ who serves as an intermediary between revealed and concealed worlds, the role most often assigned to Hermes-Mercury in classical myth. Jung cited the alchemist Mylius to support the idea that Saturn contains and brings forth Mercurius, the daimonic spirit that animates and brings to fruition the alchemical *opus*. This idea is suggested in *Liber Novus* by Philemon’s possession of the Hermetic treatises, and by Jung’s stone cube at Bollingen with its figure of the youthful dwarf. Philemon/Telesphoros, crowned by the astrological glyph for Saturn and bearing the glyph for Mercury on his breast. Jung also declared that ‘Mercurius *senex* is identical with Saturn’, that both are ‘hermaphroditic’ and that Saturn is the ‘father and origin of Mercurius, therefore the latter is called “Saturn’s child”. Jung further pointed out: ‘Mercurius is closely related ... especially to Saturn. As Mercurius, he is *juvenis*, as Saturn, *senex*’.

The Alchemical Mercurius, Mathew Mather

But it must be realized that what these artists were concerned with was something far greater than a problem of form and the distinction between “concrete” and abstract,” figurative and non-figurative. Their goal was the center of life and things, their changeless background, and an inward certitude. Art had become mysticism.

The spirit in whose mystery art was submerged was an earthly spirit, which the medieval alchemists had called Mercurius. He is a symbol of the spirit that these artists divined or sought behind nature and things, “behind the appearance of nature.” Their mysticism was alien to Christianity, for that “Mercurial” spirit is alien to a “heavenly” spirit. Indeed, it was Christianity’s dark adversary that was forging its way in art. Here we begin to see the real historical and symbolic significance of “modern art.” Like the hermetic movements in the Middle Ages, it must be understood as a mysticism of the spirit of earth, and therefore as an expression of our time compensatory to Christianity.

No artist sensed this mystic background of art more clearly or spoke of it with greater passion than Kandinsky. The importance of the great works of art of all time did not lie, in his eyes, “on the surface, in externals, but in the root of all roots - in the mystical content of art.” Therefore he says: “The artist’s eye should always be turned in upon his inner life, and his ear should be always alert for the voice of inward necessity. This is the only way of giving expression to what the mystic vision commands.”

Man and His Symbols, C.G. Jung

The subtle medium partaking of both mind and substance is the soul realm referred to by the alchemists as ‘*Mercurius*’ - the subtle soul-form of the chemical element mercury, sharing many of its properties. The work of alchemy takes place in this liminality where visible time-bound, and invisible timeless worlds meet and something is born in us. To access the insight and knowledge of the mysterious philosophy of the alchemists we have to be willing and able to hover between manifest life and its subtle essence through metaphor and symbol. Indian Vedic philosophy describes it as the eternal dance between Shiva (essence) and Shakti (form). Chinese Taoist philosophy pictures it as the Yang/Yin symbol which provides the fundamental structure of the I Ching (Book of Changes). Alchemists describe it as the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the sacred marriage of *Sol* and *Luna*, the solar and lunar principles. Jung’s analytic psychology describes it as the masculine/feminine *Dance of Opposites* resolved through the *Transcendent function*.

Greed for money and status is a common fairytale theme. Some alchemists claimed they could turn lead into gold, other fairytale fathers made ludicrous claims about their daughter's cleverness. Millers are often tricksters, turning wheat into flour and thence into material gold, but the Devil outsmarts them, luring the gullible into making stupid bargains without considering the consequences. Donkey in *Shrek* is just such a trickster, and Lord Farquaad is a greedy and stupid bully. For children, there is a sense of gleeful irony, almost relief, in the recognition that evil and injustice do exist and have to be reckoned with. For instance, the miller in *The Handless Maiden* is seduced by promises of huge wealth and doesn't anticipate the Devil's trap. Another miller, in *Rumpelstiltskin* is caught by a similar devilish impulse, to the consternation of his daughter. There are analogies here with alchemy. Turning base metal into gold is no more possible than spinning straw into gold, unless you have magic powers, but the raw material of the personality can change and the trickster element (Mercurius) is part of that transformation.

Alchemy and Psychotherapy: Post-Jungian Perspectives, Dale Mathers

By finding the Self in matter, the alchemists found God there as well. "The *anima mundi* was conceived as that part of God which formed the quintessence and substance of Physis." Thus alchemists came to project even the highest value - God - into matter."

Mercurius is a hermaphrodite and contains "both the feminine element, Sapientia and matter, and the masculine, the Holy Ghost and the devil." Here we encounter that difficult relationship among matter, the feminine, and evil that continues to haunt our culture. Mercurius "is not only spiritual and physical but unites in himself the morally highest and lowest." On Jung's account, the alchemists sought not only the redemption of the *anima mundi* who must be "freed from the shackles of matter" but also the inclusion of the "prince of this world," the devil. "He is the metaphysical figure who is excluded from the Trinity, but who, as counterpart of Christ, is the *sine qua non* of the drama of redemption."

From the point of view of Jung's psychology, the conjunction of opposites at which alchemy aims requires understanding that good and evil both are projections. The "moral problem of opposites" is a psychic problem, Christianity partially recognizes evil as a human "projection" and alchemy was in part successful in recognizing the psychic origin of good. For dogmatic Christianity God is wholly Good. Evil is "laid at man's door."

Green Man, Earth Angel, Tom Cheetham

Merlin represents an attempt by the medieval unconscious to create a parallel figure to Parsifal.

Parsifal is a Christian hero, and Merlin, son of the devil and a pure virgin, is his dark brother.

In the twelfth century, when the legend arose, there were as yet no premises by which his intrinsic meaning could be understood. Hence he ended in exile, and hence "le cri de Merlin" which sounded from the forest after his death.

This cry that no one could understand implies that he lives on in unredeemed form.

His story is not yet finished, and he still walks abroad.

It might be said that the secret of Merlin was carried on by alchemy, primarily in the figure of Mercurius.

Then Merlin was taken up again in my psychology of the unconscious and - remains uncomprehended to this day!

That is because most people find it quite beyond them to live on close terms with the unconscious. Again and again I have had to learn how hard this is for people.

Memories, Dreams, Reflections, C.G. Jung

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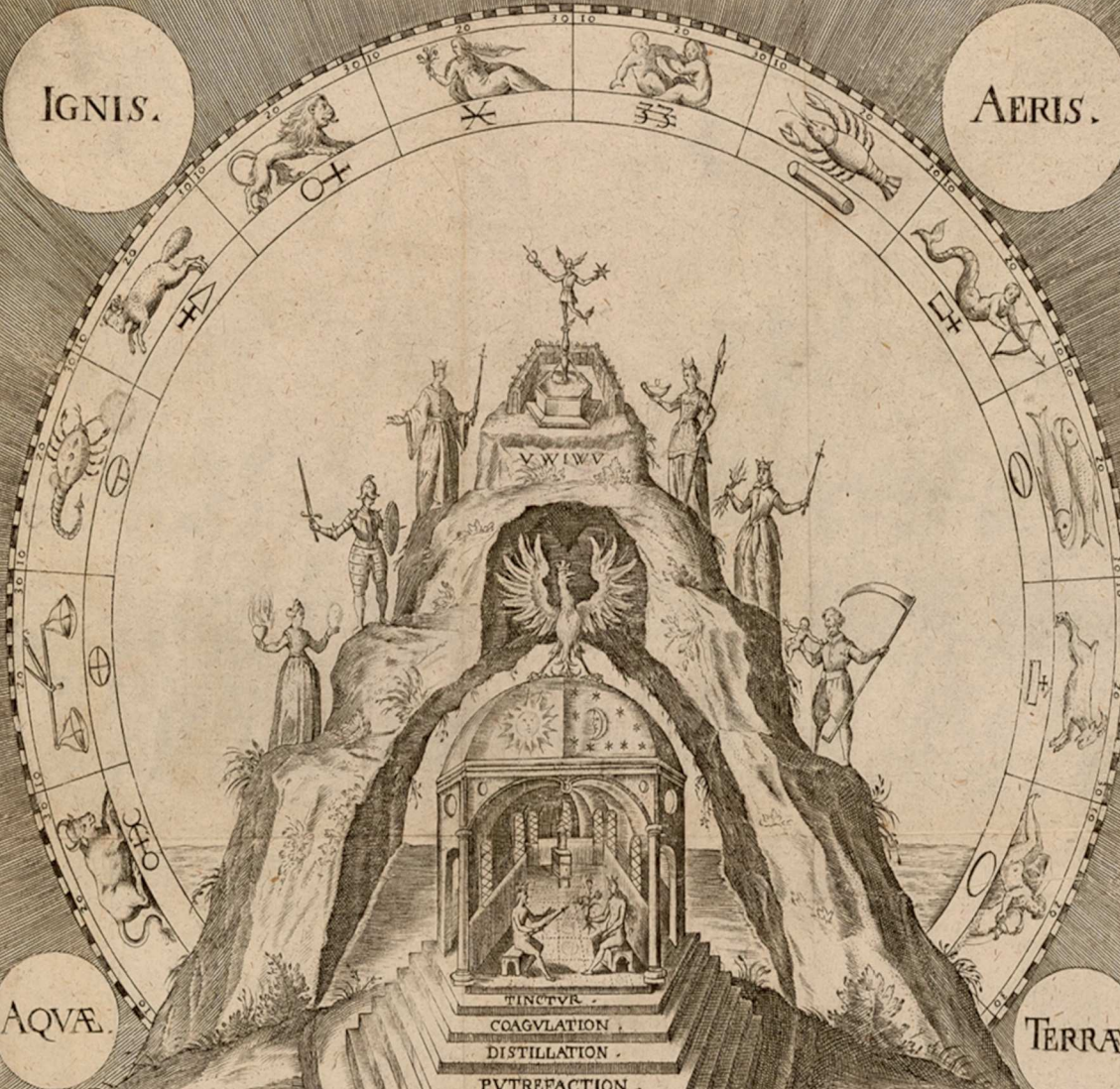
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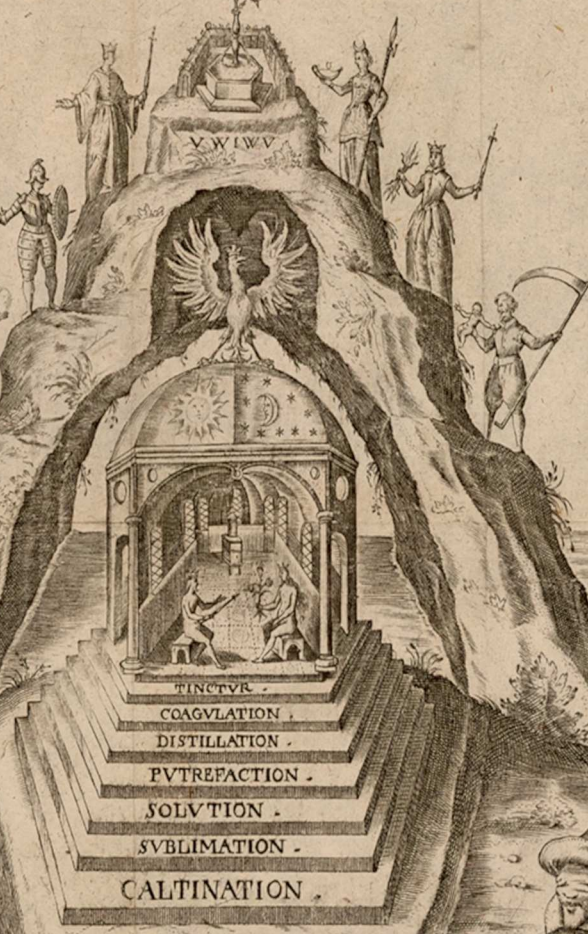
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