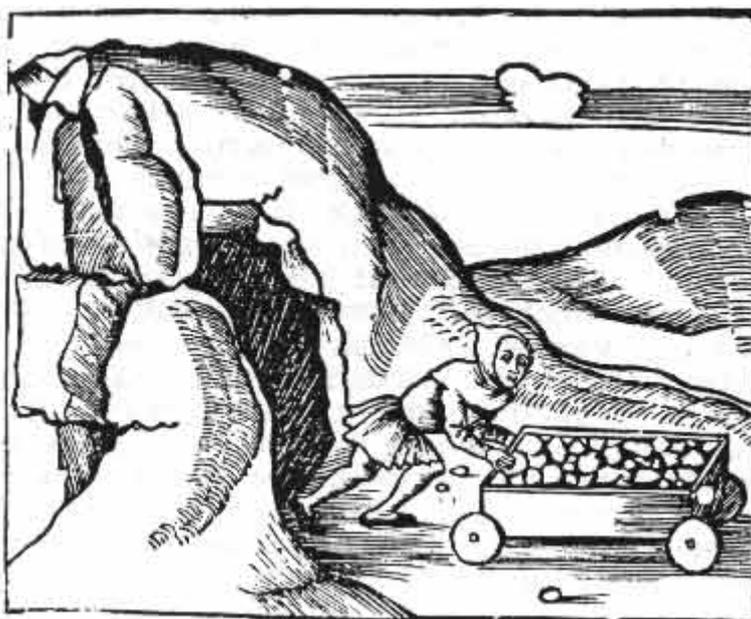


Vitriolum

Carl Gustav Jung said: " He who looks in the mirror of the water, first sees his own image. He who looks at himself, risks to meet himself. The mirror does not flatter, it shows accurately what is reflected in it, namely that face that we never show the world because we hide it by the persona, the mask of the actor. This is the first test of courage on the inner path, a test, which is enough to frighten most people, because the encounter with oneself belongs to those unpleasant things, one avoids as long as one can project the negative onto the environment."

The acronym V.I.T.R.I.O.L.U.M., used in alchemical literature, is formed by the Latin expression "Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem Veram Medicinam", what means "Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone which is the true medicine".

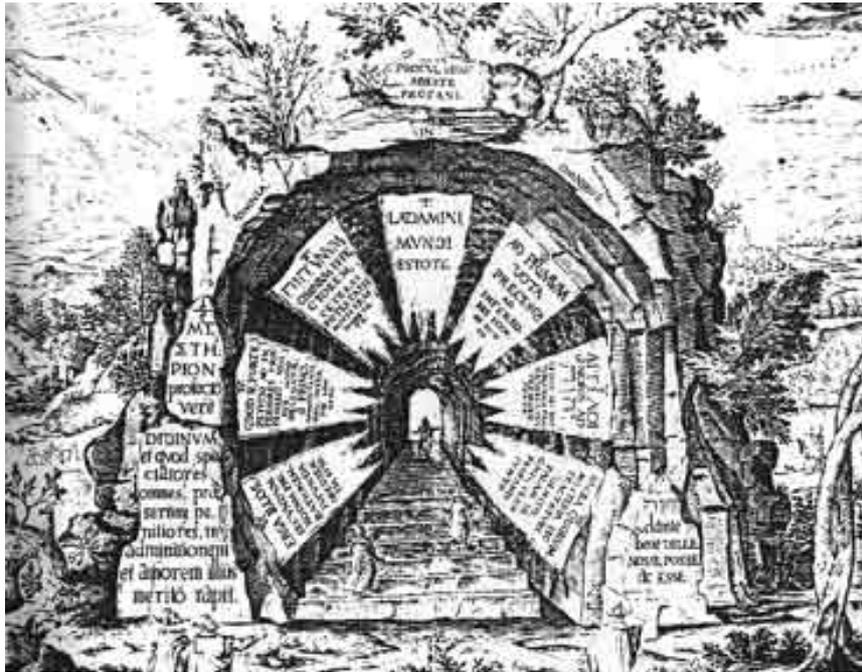


The alchemist mining the earth. Mining or going inside the earth is the first step in the alchemical process. The earth is the

body or oneself. Going inside the earth is equal to going into your inner self.

Thus we are invited to descend into the earth, into the underworld, or the unconscious. The earth is the symbol of physical man. Man needs to become conscious of his inner world, who he is, what he is doing, what his motives are, and so on. Once attention is directed inwards, a whole new world opens: the underworld of Hades, the dark realm of shadows and monsters. This descent is also called 'regressus ad uterum', 'the return into the uterus', a term often used in initiation rites. It is a symbolic return to a particular primal state of being that every man is carrying in his collective unconscious. Deep inside man, in the darkness of his psyche, are the causes or origins of man's actions. Therefore the 'regressus ad uterum' is a necessary condition to enter the moonlit area of death, and subsequently experience rebirth. Terra Mater, Mother Earth, has always been connected with birth, with the connection between man and woman (=the conscious and the unconscious), from which new life springs up after death.

Primitive people performed their initiations in darkness or under the ground, like in caves. In Egypt initiations were performed in the pyramids or in underground crypts of the temples. In Persia it was mostly in caves, with native Indians in special huts. The Mithras mysteries were conducted in temples built underground. The initiation itself was symbolized by the penetration of the belly of the Great Mother, or of the body of a sea monster or wild animal. In Greek mythology Orpheus descended into the Hades to look for Eurydice (=symbol of his lost soul). The Indian god Krishna descended into the hells to look for his six brothers (=the six chakras, Krishna being the crown chakra). There is a legend that after his death Jesus descended into the realm of Satan to save the soul of Adam (=the pure man).



The Gate to Eternal Wisdom (Heinrich Khunrath, Amphiteatrum Sapientiae, Hanau, 1604).

In alchemy, the entrance into the unconscious is represented by the entrance into caves, by reports of travels to the underworld or strange parts of the world.

Another important representation is the king who is taking a bath. The conscious is the king, and the bath or bath water is the unconscious. By bathing he enters into the unconscious. In alchemical terms he is being permeated by the water (aqua permanens) or quicksilver. Another symbol is the 'coniunctio' (conjunction) or 'conceptio' (conception) that primarily takes place in water, in a spring or a fountain. The queen then represents the feminine, water, the unconscious.

The descent into the unconscious is not without dangers. In the psychological sense it can result, for example, in schizophrenia. In mythology the hero penetrates the underworld to fight monsters and demons. The Great Mother appears to him in the image of a terrible being, often as the Ruler of Death. For his courage and bravery, the Great Mother, as goddess of fertility, offers him great

knowledge and wisdom. In alchemy, when working with (symbolic) metals, lead is used as initial material. The alchemists say that in lead there is a demon that can cause insanity. Lead as a metal is under the rulership of Saturn, the god of melancholy, who causes ailments and devilish visions.

Lead, the most impure metal, needs to be transformed into the pure metal, gold. In general, lead means impurity, the impure body, or impure man. After the alchemist has entered the earth, he must rectify (rectificando).

What does this mean? A text from the modern syncretistic Taoism: "That is why Buddha Jou-lai (Tathagata), in his great mercy, has revealed the method, the alchemical work of Fire, and taught people to rectify their true nature and fullness."



(Solomon Trismosinus, Aurum vellus, Hambutg, 1708)
In the outer circle is the Latin sentence of vitriolum.

The sun and the moon are the opposites in man that have to be united. The chalice is the alchemical 'vas' or vat, symbol for the body. The planetary signs represent different stages of the alchemical process. The double eagle is Mercury, the lion is Sulfur and the star is Salt, the three ingredients of the process. The left globe with clouds is the microcosmos; the right globe with the stars is the macrocosmos.

'Rectificando' in the middle of the acronym VITRIOLUM means 'to put right' in the moral sense, to reinstate the true nature, the purification of negative emotions and so on. It is to straighten that what has grown crooked during our lives. The alchemist must purify himself of all 'dirt', of all his 'dross'. He has to wash 'the body' to ameliorate and improve it.

The metals have to be purified from the 'external, impure and destructive elements'. The metals here can be seen as the emotions. Taoism stresses the importance of purifying the egotistic tendencies which distance man from his eternal nature. A man who strives for the Tao must give up all lusts and desires, and become a child joining the Tao. By this purification rebirth happens. Therefore an alchemist has to shy away from the masses, and start the process of 'meditatio', self-reflection, in silence. Buddhism also teaches purification. Man can reach salvation by disconnecting himself from the temporal things that make him stray off the true path. He sees that life is temporal and is by itself not satisfying. Man is unsatisfied because his desires are limitless. He has to unchain himself from his desires. Going into the unconscious also means to go into the collective unconscious we all share. In Greek mythology there was Tartaros, a name originally used for the entire underworld. Tartaros is the

psychic world deep in man where all those nasty emotions reside, like the lust for murder and destruction, thirst for blood, fear, hate, revenge, the lust for power, melancholy and so on. It is not easy to admit to oneself, but they all reside in ourselves. Because we don't like it, we have cut ourselves off from being aware of this dark realm. We have repressed all our dark emotions into this deep realm of Tartaros. This is the heritage of man, dating from ancient times. The task of man is to feel and be responsible for all his emotions, not to repress them, but to change and transmute them into higher feelings. Repression chains man to the very objects of repression, but purification will transmute them positive elements bringing him closer to his true essence. As long as we do not take up the Great Work, pain and misery will disturb our lives. We have to face the mythical monsters in the depths of our unconscious and shed light on them. As they are part of being human, we cannot discard them, but we can control them, master them, learn from them, and transform them into servants of the Divine. The monsters are not monsters by themselves. They are just characteristics of human nature that have become distorted. We can rectify them and make them shine in their original beauty. This task is not for the would-be initiate. It is only for the brave who dare to face the darkness of the soul. Many will fail in their courage and return home. Thus the pilgrim is not going on an easy path, as the world of pleasure is not his anymore. He has chosen the path of Arete (=goddess of Virtue), leading him to many dangers and difficult paths, in solitude and starvation, but eventually he will become immortal. He who will lose life, will gain it.

The Dragon

In alchemy the dragon corresponds closely with what Carl Gustav Jung called the Shadow. The Shadow is the name for a collection of characteristics and impulses which could be conscious, but which are denied. At the same time we recognize and see them in other people. Some examples of the Shadow are: egotism, laziness,

intrigues, unreal fantasies, indifference, or being obsessed by money and possessions. The Shadow is the inferior being in us that desires what we do not allow ourselves because it is uncivilized, because it is incompatible with society's rules and with the image of our ideal personality. It is all that what we are ashamed of.



(Johann Daniel Mylius, *Philosophia reformata*, Frankfurt, 1622)

To the right we have the alchemist with a dark face what relates to the first phase of Nigredo during which the dragon is killed, that is transformed by the penetration of the secret fire (the arrow) of the archer.

The drawing is based on the myth of Apollo who killed the python of Delphi. The lion is the image of the animal passions.

The dragon always resides in caves, and thus in the earth, the underworld, and the unconscious. When the dragon leaves his cave he devours virgins. It is our inner emotional dragon that destroys our virgin consciousness, as when he appears in the conscious, expressing negativity, like envy, jealousy, hate and so on. The dragon is never satisfied. He ever wants more treasures, more virgins. Is this not a true image of common man? Consciousness and alertness are enchanted by the dragon. The mythological dragon has the power to enchant, to hypnotize with his voice the brave knight who dared to challenge him. The dragon can also impose riddles in which the knight gets lost. If we want to save the pureness of consciousness (=the virgin), then the dragon has to be killed. Actually this expression is not quite right. In a few tales where the dragon is conquered and made tame, he is penetrated by a lance with an iron point. Iron was always regarded a special metal, as it was found in meteorites. As the metal associated with Mars, iron has an active, destructive force. The lance, as a phallic symbol, is the alchemical 'secret fire'. The penetration of 'the body' (here the dragon) with a lance is the penetration of physical matter with the alchemical fire. In the same manner the Greek god of the sun, Apollo, penetrated the Python of Delphi, with arrows, and let the Python rot away next to the temple. Since then this place is called Pytho (=putrefaction). Putrefaction is the first phase of the great Work. The dead dragon undergoes a transmutation. The dead dragon is not an end, but the beginning of the Great Work. From the dead dragon, vapors and volatile substances arise, often seen in alchemical images. In other terms, the earth is partly being transformed into water, it ascends as vapor. Some sources say that in the head of the dragon is a stone, a clear reference to the rough stone, or 'prima materia' (=first matter). Killing the dragon also refers to a cosmic happening. It is the penetration of the 'prima materia' as primal ocean, or primal chaos by the secret fire or the divine spirit. The fiery serpent emanated fire and light into the primal waters. When the dragon (or serpent, as the cat of Ra the sun god cut off the head of the serpent Apophis), is killed, the original chaos ceased and the process of cosmic

evolution

started.

In Greek mythology the hydra of Lerna was also a kind of dragon with similar symbolism. Hercules killed the hydra in the second of his twelve works. The hydra of Lerna lived in a swamp, the residence of primal instincts, passions, lusts, desires. Anyone who gets involved with these emotions gets into a swamp in which he drowns. Therefore Hercules shot fiery arrows (the alchemical fire) to get her out of her hiding place. First he cut off the hydra's heads, but they grew back.

A energetic approach is not the right way. Then his nephew Joales comes to rescue. He starts to singe the cuts with flaming tree trunks, so new heads cannot be formed. It is a systematically, patient, reflective and profound attitude that is required. When the alchemists talk about the Green Dragon then they are talking about the universal spirit that is present in everything, it is not the same as the dragon of the underworld.

Nigredo – Blackness

“This melancholic state is so powerful that, according to scientists and doctors, it can attract demons to the body, even to such an extent that one can get into mental confusion or get visions.”

Agrippa

Nigredo, or blackness, in the alchemical sense, means putrefaction, decomposition. By the penetration of the external fire, the inner fire is activated and the matter starts to putrefy. The body is reduced to its primal matter from which it originally arose.

This process is also called 'cooking'. The black earth is closed up in a vessel or flask, and heated.



(Basilius Valentinus, Azoth, Paris, 1659)

The Body is to be decomposed, that is one shifts one's awareness to the inner self. The planets are both stages of the process and

energies in the body to be transmuted. The Saturn star is black as Saturn reigns over Nigredo. Sun and Moon are the opposites to be united, and fire and air are the elements stimulating the decomposition. The black crow is another symbol for Nigredo. The two birds coming out of the body are the soul and the spirit. One needs to become aware of one's soul and spirit. The circle emphasizes the idea of union or unification.

"Putrefaction is so effective that it destroys the old nature and form of the rotting bodies; it transmutes them into a new state of being to give them a totally new fruit. Everything that has live, dies; everything that is dead putrefies and finds a new life." (Pernety, 1758)

On the mythological level, nigredo signifies the difficulties man has to overcome on his journey through the underworld. Nigredo is sometimes called 'blacker than the blackest black'. Hercules had to accomplish twelve, almost impossible, tasks. The pilgrim traditionally encounters shadows, monsters, demons. In the ancient mysteries the candidates had to undergo difficult, sometimes painful and even dangerous initiation tests. In alchemy, one of the symbols of nigredo is the 'decapitation', and also the 'raven's head' (caput corvi). Those symbols refer to the dying of the common man, the dying of his inner chaos and doubt because he is unable to find the truth in himself. In one of his works, Hercules

cleanses the Augias stables. It is the cleansing of all the impurities in oneself.

(Johann Daniel Mylius, *Philosophia reformata*, Frankfurt, 1622)



A monk in meditation in an earth crevice, shows that alchemy was in first instance a spiritual practice. The two bird-figures are the soul and spirit to become aware of.

Psychologically, nigredo is a process of directing oneself to find self-knowledge. A problem is given full attention and reduced to its core. This is not done so much in an intellectual way, but especially by feeling the emotions. By really going into to it, one causes putrefaction, the decomposition of that in which one had been stuck. The confrontation with the inner reality is often painful, and can lead to depression. But once in the depth of the darkness, with the discovery of the seed of the problem, the seed in the 'prima materia', the

white light is born (=albedo, whiteness, the next phase). A state of rest arises. Insight into the problem has been gained, it has been worked out emotionally, and knowledge arises on how to handle it in a more positive way and to build a more pure attitude.

Alchemists talked about unraveling 'the mixture' (=man with all his complexities) in order to return to the germ. "That from which a thing has been made in a natural way, by that same thing it must return to a dissolved state into its own nature. Everything has to be dissolved and reduced into that form from which it arose." (Anton Joseph Kirchweger, 1728)

'Matter' has to be stripped of its superfluities in order to arrive at the center, which contains all the power of 'the mixture'. The seed is the essence and contains all the essential powers of the body. One has to go to the center of his problems, to the center of his emotions, to the center of himself. There is the power of transformation.

Saturn is the planet that rules nigredo. Saturn as an alchemical symbol is used, like Mercurius, as a symbol of chaos, the prima materia as rough stone, and as the philosopher's stone. These are all symbols for man at the beginning of the alchemical process. Saturn, with his traditional scythe and hourglass, is the god of death and putrefaction, from which new life will arise. The scythe is another tool for penetration, as is the lance and the sword.

Saturn is the philosopher's lead. He is the god that can cause melancholy and devilish visions. 'Melancholia' is another term for nigredo. As melancholy can arise when alchemically working on oneself, the alchemists advised the use of music to lift the soul. Saturn is also a god of fertility. Therefore "our black earth is fertile earth", an alchemical expression to express the transformation of death into new life, which is also clearly depicted in the thirteenth tarot card. The putrefaction is a necessary phase to start a new beginning. Life itself is a cycle of death and birth, ever creating new life, giving man the opportunity to work on himself and strife to improve his condition. The alchemists say that nigredo lasts forty days. Forty days has a symbolic value. Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert. There are forty days of fasting between Easter and Ascension Day. The Israelites wandered for forty days in the desert. Saint Antonius spent forty years in the Sahara desert, being plagued by visions of extreme erotic scenes and devils.

The Peacock's Tail

"What hinders men from seeing and hearing God, is their own hearing, seeing and willing; by their own wills they separate themselves from the will of God. They see and hear within their own desires, which obstructs them from seeing and hearing God. Terrestrial and

material things overshadow them, and they cannot see beyond their own human nature. If they would be still, desist from thinking and feeling with their own self-hood, subdue the self-will, enter into a state of resignation, into a divine union with Christ, who sees God, and hears God, and speaks with him, who knows the word and will of God; then would the eternal hearing seeing and speaking become revealed to them. "
Jacob Boehme (1575-1624 C.E.)

'Cauda Pavonis', the peacock's tail, or the peacock itself, is a phase in which many colors appear. Many alchemists place this phase before albedo, whiteness, although some of them place it after albedo. Gerhard Dorn (16th century): "This bird flies during the night without wings. By the first heavenly dew, after an uninterrupted process of cooking, ascending and descending, it first takes the shape of a raven's head, then of a peacock's tail; its feathers becoming very white and good smelling, and finally becoming fiery red, indicating its fiery character."

The colors refer to the three stages of the Great Work, with rubedo or redness, being the last one.



(18th century manuscript from the Collection of Dr.C.Rusch, Appenzell)

The drawing represents Distillatio, 'distillation'. At a certain point in the distillation the peacock ('s tail) will appear.

The symbol of the peacock's tail was chosen because of the many colorful and brilliant 'eyes'.

The peacock's tail can have two meanings in the Great Work. It can be the collection and totality

of all colors in the white light. Remember, the white light refers to the second stage, albedo, or whiteness. In this sense the peacock was seen as a royal bird in ancient times, and it corresponded with the phoenix.

The second meaning is that it represents the failure of the alchemical process. When the conscious enters the unconscious "each part of a thought can take shape and become visible in color and form", according to a Chinese text about yoga exercises. One starts seeing all kinds of forms which look real and which look like they have an independent life. But one cannot go into it as it leads to discord of the mind, and possibly to schizophrenia. The alchemist is seeking unity, expressed in the white light.

It is known that during meditation exalted feelings and unusual observations can happen. In essence there are two kinds of observations. The first one is wanting to escape the discipline of meditation, which Zen practitioners call makyō. Makyō are illusions we project onto reality in order to escape the guidelines of meditation. For example, the object of meditation is starting to radiate with a wonderful light or color, or it expands and contracts rhythmically. One starts to feel lighter or heavier, or one feels pleasant energies going through the body. All kinds of sensations can happen. Many meditators are readily distracted by these phenomena, and even take great interest in them, thereby neglecting the real purpose of their meditation. One needs to be aware of this.

A second cause of distraction is a change in consciousness whereby we look at the world in a different way than we did in the past. It can be quite a shock reverberating on the psychic or bodily level. The accompanying feelings can be quite wonderful. But the advice is: enjoy it, do not take it seriously, and continue with the meditation.

Visions are also distracting. Many wise men and mystics have pointed to this kind of danger.

"We should not long for or expect visions. With all our power we should refrain from them and look at them with suspicion." (Ignatius of Loyola).

They always stress that visions of lights, of angels, yes even of the great masters, should be neglected, because they block inner progress.

Albedo – Whiteness

*"I was not afraid to die,
but to die without having been enlightened"*

*Comte de Saint-Germain, La Tres Sainte
Trinisophie*

Being deep in nigredo, a white light appears. We have arrived at the second stage of the Great Work: albedo, or whiteness. The alchemist has discovered within himself the source from which his life comes forth. The fountain of life from which the water of life flows forth giving eternal youth.

The source is one: male and female are united. In alchemical images we see a fountain from which two streams of water flow into one basin.

Albedo is the discovery of the hermaphroditic nature of man. In the spiritual sense each man is a hermaphrodite.

We can also see this in the first embryonic phase of the fetus. There is no sex until a certain number of weeks after conception.

When man descended into the physical world his body entered a world of duality. On the bodily level this is expressed by the sexes. But his spirit is still androgen, it contains duality in unity. Its unity is not bound to space, time or matter. Duality is an expression of unity in our physical world. It is temporal and will eventually cease to exist. When male and female are united again, one will experience his true self. Conscious and unconscious are totally united.

Albedo happens when the Sun rises at midnight. It is a symbolic expression for the rising of the light at the depth of darkness. It is the birth of Christ in the middle of the winter.

In the depth of a psychological crises, a positive change happens.



(L'Aurore, Henri de Linthaut)

Albedo, symbolized by Aurora, by the dawn, the morning star (Venus-Aphrodite), and by the sun rising up from the Philosopher's Sea.

Albedo is also represented by Aurora, the Roman goddess of the dawn. Her brother is Helios, the Sun. With a play of words aurora was connected with aurea hora, 'the hour of gold'. It is a supreme state of conscious. Pernety (1758): "When the Artist (=Alchemist)

sees the perfect whiteness, the Philosophers say that one has to destroy the books, because they have become superfluous." Albedo is also symbolized by the morning star Venus/Aphrodite. Venus has a special place in the Great Work. In ancient times Lucifer was identified with the planet Venus. Originally Lucifer has a very positive meaning. In the Bible we find Petrus 1:19 "...till the day arrives and the morning star rises in your hearts". In ancient times Lucifer was a positive light being. It was just one man who changed all that: when a certain Hieronymous read a phrase from Jesaja 14:12 (Jesaja talking to a sinful king of Babylon): " How did you fall from heaven, you morning star, you son of the dawn; how did you fall to earth, conqueror of people". Hieronymous used this phrase to identify Lucifer with the dragon thrown out of heaven by Michael. By the interpretation of this one man, Lucifer was tuned from a shining light being into the darkest devilish being in the world. We find Lucifer in alchemy associated with impure metals polluted by rough sulfur. It means that the light being Lucifer in ourselves is polluted by what the alchemists call 'superfluties', 'dross', caused by man himself. Mercury and Lucifer are one and the same. One talks about Mercury when he is pure, it is the white sulphur, the fire in heaven. As 'spiritus' he gives life. As 'spiritus sapiens' he teaches the alchemist the Great Work. Lucifer is the impure Mercury. Lucifer is the morning star fallen from (the golden) heaven. He descended into the earth and is now present in all humans. Lucifer is Mercury mixed with impure elements. He

dissolved 'in sulfur and salt', 'is wrapped with strings', 'darkened with black mud'.

Keep in mind we are always talking about our consciousness. Lucifer represents our everyday consciousness, all the (psychological and other) complexes have clouded our pure consciousness, Mercury. The light of Mercury that appears to us as Lucifer, because of the distortion caused by the impurities, gives the impression of what the alchemists called 'red sulfur'. The red sulfur of Lucifer, as traditional devil, is actually an illusion. It does not exist by itself because it is only an image, a distorted image of Mercury. We ourselves caused the impurities, the blackness that veils our true light being. Red sulfur is the same as what is called Maya in eastern philosophies. Maya is the world of illusions, or the veil that prevents us from seeing and experiencing true reality, where the eternal light is. By the impurities of Maya, man has become ignorant. He has forgotten his origin and thinks he is in a world which in actuality is an illusion.



(Les Rudiments de la Philosophie, Nicolas de Losques, Paris, 1665)

The union of Hermes and Aphrodite. The moon is above the retort, indicating this is the stage of Albedo. The sun above is the next stage of Rubedo. At the same time sun and moon are again the opposites to be united. Aphrodite has two torches. One pointing down, representing the lower passions to be transmuted. The upside down torch is the purified energies. Aphrodite is standing on a tetrahedron, the perfect three dimensional body, as all corners are equally distant from each other, resulting in a lack of tension.

As we mentioned above, Aphrodite/Venus as the morning star is a central image for the albedo phase of the Great Work. Aphrodite was born from the foam that arose when the

genitals of Uranus (cut of by Chronos, out of hate and jealousy) fell into the sea. The cutting of the genitals represents repressed and tormented love. The sea, symbol of the soul, however will bring forth the love goddess. Liberation will happen when we become conscious again of the contents of the soul. As Aphrodite is born from the sea, she is the guide through the fearful world of the unconscious (the sea, or the underworld).

The alchemist descends into these depths to find the 'prima materia', also called the 'green lion'. The color green refers to the primal life forces. Venus also has the green color. An important characteristic of Aphrodite is that she helps us in our human shortcomings. She gives ideals and dreams to fulfill. But she also gives frightening images in order to make man aware of his lower nature. "By her beauty Venus attracts the imperfect metals and gives rise to desire, and pushes them to perfection and ripeness." (Basilus Valentinus, 1679) Liberation can only happen by becoming conscious of the lower nature and how we transmute it.

In Jungian psychology Venus/Aphrodite is the archetype of the anima (in alchemy also the 'soror' or 'wife' of the alchemist). The anima is the collective image of the woman in a man. It is an image especially tainted by his first contact with his mother. The anima represents all the female tendencies in the psyche of a man, such as feelings, emotions, moods, intuition, receptivity for the irrational, personal love and a feeling for nature. She is

the bearer for the spiritual. Depending on the development of the man she can also be the seductress who lures him away to love, hopelessness, demise, and even destruction. Other alchemical images for albedo are baptism and the white dove, both derived from Christianity. Baptism symbolizes the purification of both body and soul by 'living water'. 'Living water' was regarded as the creative force of the divine. It allowed the soul to be received into the community of the holy spirit. Thus baptism allows the purified soul to bring forth the resurrection of Christ in oneself. This is the 'hieros gamos', the 'sacred marriage' between the soul and Christ. Christ here represent our own inner divine essence. There are many other symbols in alchemy for the second phase, or albedo: the white swan, the rose, the white queen, and so on. As lead is the metal of nigredo, silver is the metal of albedo, transmuted from lead. As silver is the metal of the moon, the moon was also a symbol for albedo. Alchemists also talk about the white stone or white tincture. They all means basically the same thing, although one has to understand them in the context in which they were written.

Rubedo –Redness

The alchemical process is a method for self knowledge that the soul undergoes far outside its realm of existence.

Marry Anne Atwood

Albedo is a phase of which the meaning was kept secret for many centuries. The meaning of the third alchemical phase, rubedo or redness, is even more secret and not easy to explain or understand.



(Philosophia reformata, Johann Mylius,
Frankfurt, 1622)

The union of the Red King with the White Queen, symbolic of the union of male-female, albedo-rubedo. In other words, when after having attained albedo (having discovered the divine light in oneself), the 'spirit' must be fixated (the descending eagle), resulting in rubedo. The two lions with one head signifies the unified nature that has been attained. Out of its mouth flows the water of life.

Rubedo is the continuation of albedo. That is why they are often seen connected to each other, like the White Queen and the Red King. Once the inner light has been discovered it must be made into the only reality in our consciousness. After having descended into the unconscious, into the darkness, into the underworld, we found the Light, we found the volatile Spirit. Now the volatile Spirit, or quicksilver, has to be fixated or coagulated. This means that our conscious, or attention, must completely penetrate our unconscious, or soul, or everything that lies hidden in ourselves. By doing this we fixate (that is bring it into the conscious) the volatile and make it durable. When everything in ourselves has been purified and the Light appears, we have to fixate this Light and make it durable so it remains always present.

White sulfur, attained during albedo, is also called: "the bodies composed of pure essence of the metals". The metals are the contents of the soul, and now they have been reduced to their pure essence. Now that the soul has been

penetrated with the pure light, the alchemist has to make it permanent. In the eastern philosophies rubedo corresponds with the formation of the 'diamond body', an term fitting for the pure and permanent Stone of the Philosophers.



(*Scrutinium cinnabarium seu triga cinnabriorium*, Godfred Schulz, Halle, 1680)

The ressurected alchemist stepping from the shadow into the Light.

In Christianity, rubedo corresponds with the resurrection of Christ. Jesus 'fixates' the light

garment of Christ. Jesus has left behind the old body and brought his inner divine self, the Christ body, into his consciousness, and made it his own reality. What Jesus did two thousand years ago, each of us can do the same, because we are all sons and daughters of the divine, and we all carry the divine essence, or the Christ body, within ourselves.

When rubedo has been realized the alchemist has accepted his spiritual inheritance. He has become what he always has been, but never knew he was. He has realized his divine essence while still in his physical body. It is the same as what the gnostici called pneuma, the divine spirit in each man that is concealed in the deep darkness of the world, but can be made conscious again. When rubedo has been manifested man is master over both the physical as the spiritual world. He has become a King master over himself. When the unification of all energies of the four aspects of totality has been achieved, a new state of being arises that is no longer subject to changes. Chinese alchemy calls it the 'diamond body' which corresponds with the 'corpus incorruptibile' (untouchable body) of the European alchemy. It is also the same as the 'corpus glorificationis' (glorified body) of the Christian tradition.

In yoga traditions, rubedo corresponds with the unification of the spirit of man, called atman, with brahman. Atman is a part of brahman.

Brahman is the soul of the All, it is the breath or the energy flowing through you and giving you life and consciousness. Atman is the individual self, brahman is the univerself self.

"As the body used to be slow, rough, impure, dark and destructible because it lacked power and energy, so rebirth unifies it with the soul and spirit, vivified and volatile, light and penetrating, pure, refined and clear, overflowing with energy, indestructible and full of energy, and it is able to maintain this." (Franciscus Kieser, +/-1600).

“Ascend above any height, descend further than any depth; receive all sensory impressions of the created: water, fire, dryness and wetness. Think that you are present everywhere: in the sea, on earth and in heaven; think that you were never born and that you are still in the embryonic state: young and old, dead and in the hereafter. Understand everything at the same time: time, place, things: quality and quantity.” (Corpus hermeticum, 1460).

Gold

The attainment of rubedo, or redness, is symbolized by the transmutation into gold.

The alchemists often talk about 'living gold'.

The 'living gold of the philosophers' is the pure fire that is in the philosopher's stone, or in quicksilver, or in the root humidity of nature which is completely penetrated by the fire.

The living gold is the fixated seed that vivifies the philosopher's quicksilver and the matter of the stone, that is the root humidity of metals. It is a light that is clothed by a perfect, pure ethereal body.

It all sounds mystifying, but read it again and know that the living gold is actually pure consciousness, or pure awareness.



(Actorum Laboratoriichici Monacensis, seu Subterraneae, Johann Joachim Nercher, Frankfurt, 1669)

The alchemist has been reborn as the Sun which is equal to Gold. He has been enlightened, he has become light himself, and now he rules over the three kingdoms of nature.

A description of what alchemists understood by the term gold is found in a manuscript, called 'La Lumiere sortant des Tenebres' (The Light coming forth from the Darkness) (remember that sulphur and gold are always about consciousness, awareness): " The philosophers have given sulfur, or fire, the name gold not for nothing, because it is truly gold both in essence and in substance, but much more perfect than common gold. It is a gold that is completely sulfur, or rather a true sulfur of gold, a gold that is entirely fire, or the true fire of gold that develops; in philosophical caves and mines; a gold that cannot be changed or surpassed by any element, because it is itself the master of elements; a very fixed gold in which is only fixity; a very pure gold, because it is purity itself; a very powerful gold because without it everything else pines away; a balsamy gold, because it preserves all bodies against decomposition; an animal gold because it is the soul of elements of the entire lower nature; a vegetable gold, because it is the principle of the entire vegetation; a mineral gold, because it is sulfury, quicksilvery, and salty; an ethereal gold, because it is of heavenly nature and it is a true earthly heaven that is veiled by another heaven; finally it is a solar gold, because it is the rightful son of the Sun and the true Sun of Nature; its power gives force to the elements of which the warmth vivifies the souls and of which the movement of the entire Nature is brought into movement; from its influence the power of things arises, because it is the influence of the light, a part of the heavens, the lower Sun and the Light of Nature, without which even science would be blind; without its warmth reason would be stupid; without its rays imagination would be dead; without its influences spirit is sterile; and without its light intellect renaming in eternal darkness."

Sometimes the alchemists talk about three kinds of gold. The first one is an astral gold, the center of which is in the Sun, it transfers this gold by its rays and with its light at the same time to all the lower planets. It is a fiery substance and it is a constant emanation from the stellar bodies, which permeates the entire universe. Space, the atmosphere on the planets, and the planetary bodies themselves are completely filled with it. We constantly absorb this

astral gold by our breath. The astral gold particles then spread themselves all over our bodies.

This alchemical description corresponds very well with what is called 'prana' in the eastern philosophies.

The second kind is the elementary gold. It is the purest and most fixated part of the elements, and of all substances that are made thereof. All living beings of the three nature realms have this priceless elementary gold within themselves. It is also called the central fire of the earth.

The third kind is the common metal gold. The alchemists also say that the elementary gold (pure consciousness) is the philosopher's stone made pure and perfect by the Great Work.

Gerhard Dorn (16th century) describes the alchemical gold as the divine, creative influence present in all matter. "Gold is the medicine that in its original workings is tempered by the art of alchemy, and therefore it can influence all other earthly and material things in a positive way...Gold is the form that has been separated or taken away from its exterior body, and it is so penetrating that by its heavenly form, it influences every exterior thing. Gold is the divine seed that is concealed in all things, not only in metals, but in all material things, and it can be made visible by heating. And just like in the beginning, when God created the world and had a creative influence on matter, with this gold (that you have obtained from matter) you have that which repeats Gods' creative work - with that you have a little bit in your own hand. With this, from God derived power, one can create and transform things. Gold has its power because it has the virtue of being one. Even vegetable things can bring forth a medicine that one can use in this manner."

The Philosopher's Stone

*You will not find
the philosopher's stone
until you are perfect.
Grillot de Givry*

Kabir Sahib



From the 12th century on alchemists talked about an 'agens' that is necessary for the transmutation. This agens had many names but the most well-known is the 'philosopher's stone'. Other names are: the philosophical powder, the great elixir, the quintessence. This philosopher's stone could transmute metals into gold. In the Great Work, the philosopher's stone is man himself, being at the beginning of the Great Work, or at the very end of it. In general the stone is the universal spirit, present in everything that has been created, and thus also in the alchemist himself.

The philosopher's stone is a symbol of perfect man, the end result of the philosophical work. Although it is often connected with

quicksilver and sulfur, the philosopher's stone is difficult to describe with words. We just do not have the proper language for it. "One has never been able to understand what the ancient philosophers meant with the philosopher's stone. One can not answer this question before one realizes that the alchemists directed their attention on something from the unconscious. Only the psychology of the unconscious can explain the secret. The theory of the unconscious teaches us that as long as this projection is directed onto that something, it remains inaccessible. Therefore the works of the ancient alchemists reveal so little of the secret of alchemy." (Carl Gustav Jung).

One should also consider that alchemists often used symbolic language. Symbols are means to convey information, but it demands a whole different approach of understanding, something we have difficulty with in our modern society.

"Almost everybody who has heard about the philosopher's stone and its power, asks where it can be found. The philosopher always answers twofold. First, they say that Adam has taken the philosopher's stone with him from Paradise, and that it is now present within you, within me, and within everybody, and that the birds of far countries has taken it with them. Second, the philosophers answer that it can be found in the earth, in the mountains, in the air and in the river. Now what way should one seek? To me, both ways; but each way has its own way." (Michael Maier, 1617).

"The philosopher's stone is first and for all the creation of man by himself, that is the entire conquest of his potentials and his future; it is especially the complete liberation of his will, that will give him the absolute rulership over the Azoth and the realm of magnetism, that is the absolute power over the universal magnetic force." (Eliphas Levi, 19th century).

The philosopher's stone can also be seen in relation to the life force. On some alchemical engravings water flows out of a stone. The

stone is the philosopher's stone which is the source of the elixir of life 'the is like fire but flows like water". We all have it within us.

(...)