

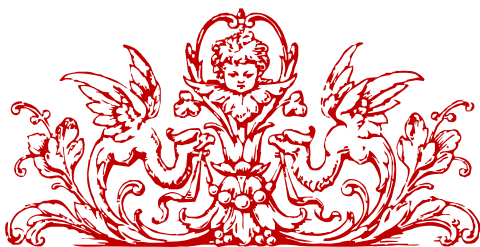
ALCHEMY

THE DIVINE WORK



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EXCERPT: CHAPTER 20



CHAPTER 20

HUMANITY'S TRANSFORMATION FROM LEAD TO GOLD

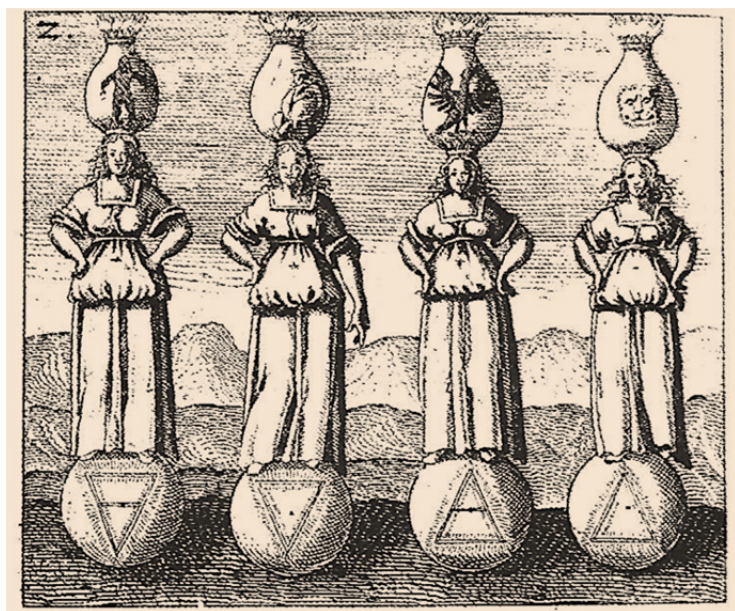


Figure 134 – The elements as representatives of the four phases of alchemy, wherein development proceeds from the caveman of earth to the white rose of water, through the eagle of air to culminate in the red lion of fire.

Philosophia reformata by Johann Daniel Mylius (1622)

And יהוה Elohim said: »Behold, the humans are become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest they put forth their hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.« Therefore יהוה Elohim sent them forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence they were taken.



UMANITY'S PROCESS OF individuation is described by C. G. Jung as the psychological process of development in the individual that coordinates opposing inner motives and orientations into a functioning whole.

Through contact with both the personal and the collective unconscious, as well as with the archetypes, humanity can even liberate the specific individual and re-create one's own being. It enables self-realisation in its most profound sense through the creation of the Self as the archetype. Jung saw this inner journey towards the Self as perfectly represented by alchemy in which the gold or the hermaphroditic child symbolised the birth of the Self. Humanity's inner path to wholeness or synthesis is what Jung referred to as the process of individuation.

In psychological alchemy, *prima materia* symbolises the original self of a human that has not yet begun the individuation process. The human psyche is then either virginally unconscious or in the darkest chaos, often both. In the *magnum opus* of alchemy, four stages are distinguished, each of which is characterised by one colour: *nigredo* – the blackening, *albedo* – the whitening, *citrinitas* – the yellowing and *rubedo* – the reddening. The alchemical operations circulate through these phases, which are described in Chapters 16 and 19.

NIGREDO

Nigredo is the first and black phase of the alchemical work, in which Saturn rules with his scythe, and a great darkness settles over the inner landscape. He brings death into the *opus* and ensures that the old self cracks and dies away through the often heavy-handed torture of *mortificatio*. Saturn rules over the lead-heavy consciousness that makes us realise our vulnerability to the inscrutableness of life and death.¹¹³ In the encounter with death, we are all equal, and the material perspective of existence suddenly becomes palpable. One begins to ponder eternal existential questions such as: Who am I? What is the meaning of life? Where am I going?

The fire is relatively weak at the beginning of *nigredo*, and the focus is on purifying our earthly nature through the slow and humid degradation of

¹¹³ Sic transit gloria mundi – Thus passes the glory of the world.

putrefactio in a process of decay. Vapours and fumes of the dying matter rise out of one's unconscious as the alchemist processes the old self in the inner vessel or retort. *Nigredo's* eclipse of both emotional life and the mind generates a great void in the psyche, which is often experienced as extreme hopelessness, but which also allows for new patterns to be formed and new lines of thinking to be established.



Figure 135 – The dissolution of the bodies in the dark retort of putrefactio.
Pretiosissimum Donum Dei by Georgium Anrach (17th Century)

Discovering the inner other often increases the fire in the black phase. The encounter with our inner opposite, in Jungian psychology called *anima/animus*, usually has an external reflection in, for example, falling in love. When Eros' arrow hits so that the heart opens, it prepares one to face the unknown. Love prepares us to face life and sacrifice the old self already wounded by Saturn's painful scythe.

The emotional storm and vulnerability to both love and death open the door to the dark waters of the unconscious, which are now given an

opportunity to wash over us. If a crush fires up the encounter with the inner opposite, the beloved is seen at first as in a beautiful mirror, coloured by our wishful projections. But over time, the regained contact with one's emotional life will also reveal other more painful and dark dimensions as the old traumas of loss and abandonment surface. The conflict in the relationship leads to a darkening of the mind, eliciting a feeling of depression. We descend into the dark unconscious through depression and, like the alchemical figures, become enclosed in a dark grave. This introverted or depressive attitude shuts off the possibilities of external projection, and we can no longer place our shadow on anyone other than ourselves. The alchemical imagery portrays this process as both the feminine and masculine sides of the soul, the *anima & animus*, symbolised by the king and queen, trapped in a grave. From the darkness of the grave, our negative patterns and destructive impulses emerge like a sinister shadow and put us to the test.

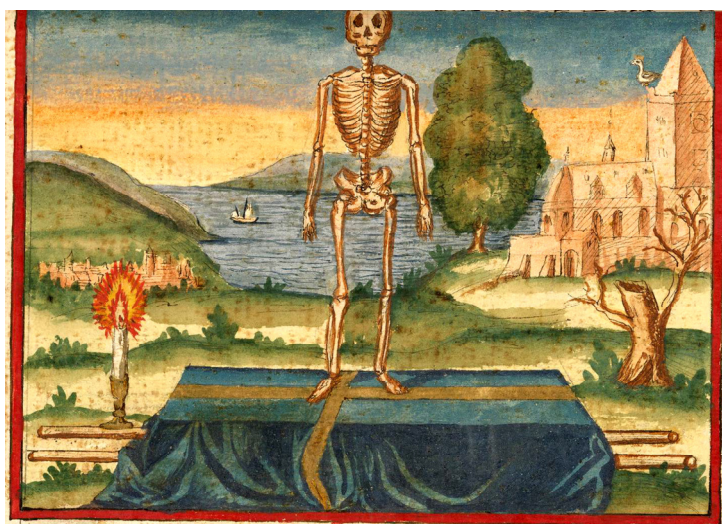


Figure 136 – The king and queen lie under the sarcophagus's pall.

Tripus aureus by Michael Maier (1618)

*This tomb holds no body
This body is not enclosed by a grave
But is itself both body and grave.*

The journey's goal into the underworld is for conflict and depression to force us to pay attention to the *prima materia* of the original self. The energy that was previously directed towards the outer is now drawn inwards and downwards. It's not so much an intellectual journey as a way to get to know

our emotions. When we direct a ray of light from our consciousness towards the dark, primordial chaos, it heats up and begins to differentiate so that we have an opportunity to discern various aspects of the *prima materia*. It allows us to labour on discernible and manageable pieces of the unconscious. It is often painful and leads to a temporary depression. Still, when we have sunk far enough into the darkness, we encounter a light – the very root cause of the problem, which is also the golden seed of the *prima materia*. We are hereby also given a meaning and an understanding that it is out of the darkness that light is born. The insight regarding the spark in the darkness is experienced with the entire register of emotions, which means that the fear of the dark and the unknown, to some extent, disappears and allows us to come into closer contact with our calling and task here on Earth. Finally, we heard the siren's song from the underworld and, like an Odysseus, survived our dark waters.

Various alchemical operations circulate during *nigredo*, and a significant focus is the work of purification through the various elements. *Calcinatio's* purification cleanses us through the burning heat of fire. When the fire burns the material, the energy in our being is also heated up and thus the process is activated and accelerated. The old parts of our psyche burn up and fall away like charred flakes of ash. In alchemy, this is often seen as the black wings of the raven falling off as the material is burned and transformed until there is only light ash left. The watery operation of *solutio* then washes the ashes (the remains of our former self) and *separatio* reveals the *shadow* so that it can be recognised, transformed and eventually incorporated. The blackness gradually whitens through the alchemist's processing of the matter, which consists primarily of one's own self in this phase. We realise that we must move towards the centre of the problem, towards the emotions and to the centre of ourselves because therein lies both the keys to our development process and the power to be transformed.

The black raven and crow symbolise the black phase, during which the alchemist practices fasting and prayer. Art and music are necessary as they lift the soul during the time of blackness. *Nigredo* ends in a death process where the old self, identified with the Earth, gives way to the new. Saturn has ensured that we have begun to take responsibility for ourselves and our lives, and the previously unimaginable suffering has now been given meaning. Through the *dark night of the mind* – which is a single, long operation of *mortificatio* or death expressed in varying gradations – the old self dies to make way for the new consciousness. The insights of the black phase prepare space for the next phase – the white *albedo*.



Figure 137 – The murky darkness of melancholy where all the tools are available and the ultimate destination is nearby but cannot be seen.

Melencolia by Albrecht Durer (1514)

OBSTACLES

In *nigredo*, it is not above all trials and darkness that are the main obstacles, but stagnation and resistance to letting life processes take their course. This stagnation locks us into a crippling depression and fear, for what we fear is always before us, like an abyss we never dare to face. The process then risks being reversed if some abuse follows the negative development. If one does not allow oneself to face the *shadow* within, it often takes on a menacing external expression, so one must pay attention to it. Fear of the surrounding world and change paralyzes us, and it becomes excruciating since we cannot get past the problem but are always faced with it. One may then lose trust in

the process or in the work of inner transformation. The key to overcoming the innumerable trials of this phase is fasting and prayer, for out of serenity grows confidence, and out of confidence hope is born again. So with the wings of hope, we take charge and throw ourselves into the unknown.



Figure 138 – The opposite poles unite through the salt and the rain of grace. The rainbow portends that the night of nigredo is about to pass into the white swan of albedo by a three-fold sublimation.

Tripus aureus by Michael Maier (1618)

ALBEDO

Just as the night is followed by the day, we soar into a clearer, brighter existence in the *albedo* phase. The colour white represents this stage, and in alchemy, it is often seen as the rain of grace falling from the sky. The white swan, the white pigeon of the spirit or the lunar Moon queen, is often a common symbol of *albedo*. But just as the Moon reflects the light of the Sun, so is this world only a reflection of the primordial Source, which gives birth to a certain ambiguity that can confuse. In *albedo*, the duality of the universe is reflected, albeit not on a conscious level at the beginning of the phase. The previous insights from the journey down into the underworld during *nigredo* give birth to *albedo*'s freedom of movement between dimensions, worlds and extremes. A human can be anything and everything as endless possibilities suddenly open up.

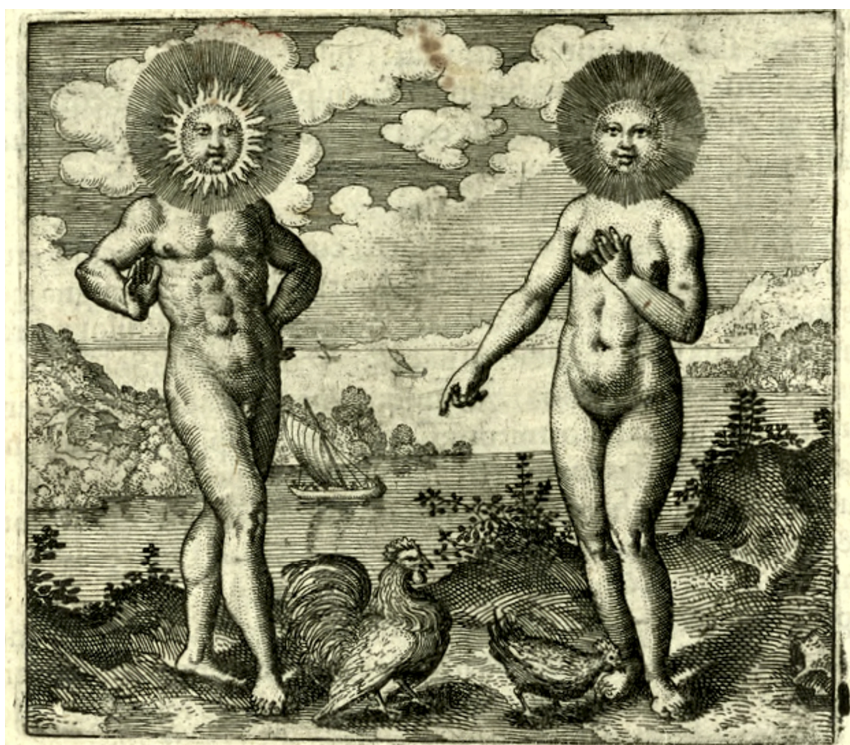


Figure 139 – The lunar Queen guides the solar King as the rooster follows the hen.
 Emblem 30 of *Atalanta Fugiens* by Michael Maier (1618)

The changing energy of the Moon prevails and nothing is fixed, constant or reliable. The Moon is the celestial body that stands between the Earth and the rest of the cosmos, and it needs to be illuminated by the light of consciousness to function fully. In alchemy, it is said that one must boil off the toxic moisture of the Moon, which otherwise will form a bitter water which threatens the alchemist's psyche. The poisonous water here is an expression of how painful it can seem to be a victim of one's feelings. As an alchemist, one seeks neither to suppress the emotions nor to give them full leeway to, like a poisonous decoction, wash over our fellow human beings. The art lies in being able to shelter, manage and transform the emotions. To be able to see and manage the emotions, it is also important here that the vessel is hermetically sealed, i.e. to allow the primordial water to surge forth and the fire of anger blaze through our being without trying to release the pressure by projecting it onto others. In alchemy, for example, this is portrayed by the old king who is trapped in the sauna and sweats out his emotions. The emotional life will then come to be purified and healed.

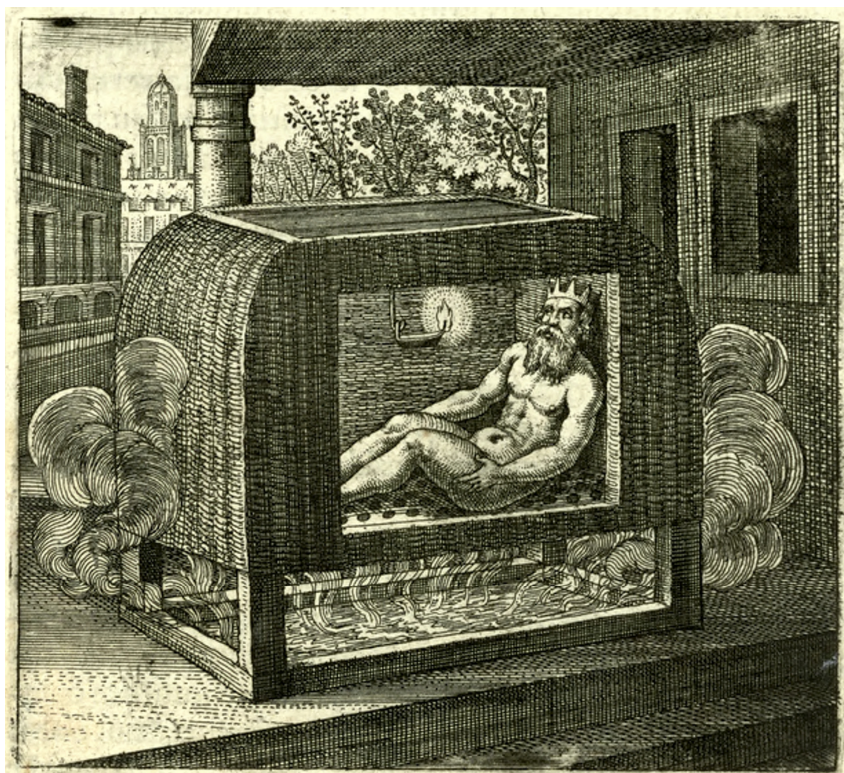


Figure 140 – By sublimation, the King sweats out the salt of melancholy in the sauna.
Emblem 28 of *Atalanta Fugiens* by Michael Maier (1618)

The phases of the Moon significantly characterise the course of *albedo*. The mobility may at first seem wonderful, but over time it gives birth to a need to make a distinction and take a position. Just as the Moon waxes from the new to the full Moon and then wanes back towards the black Moon, so does this phase move back towards the dark. The opposites that become especially clear are those between light and dark and good and evil. We must rediscover our morality beyond learned dogmas and social conventions. Now begins the operation of *ablutio* – the baptism – which tests us in the knowledge of evil and good. Our ethics beyond the morality of society will determine whether the *opus* can progress and allow us to reach deeper layers in both our being and the innermost nature of the universe.

If evil and good can be made visible, they can be integrated as pure light and darkness in the long term. The association of opposites into a unified *coniunctio* nurtures a mercurial principle that facilitates all transformation. Mercury is, therefore, a trickster figure that brings together good and evil,

light and darkness, deities and devils. Mercury thus weds the inherent dualism of the Moon-driven *albedo* and lays the foundation for a new awareness. The personal *shadow* is increasingly internalised and the journey towards unity can be experienced in a conscious way. Mercury is our spiritual potential, and it often manifests as an intense longing for something more and greater than the trivial worldly existence. We experience an urge away from that which binds the soul in matter and feel a strong yearning for unity and love. We become even more aware of our calling and feel the attraction to become again what we once were in the beginning – united with *The One*. This longing becomes the Red Thread of Ariadne that moves humanity forward in the *magnum opus*.

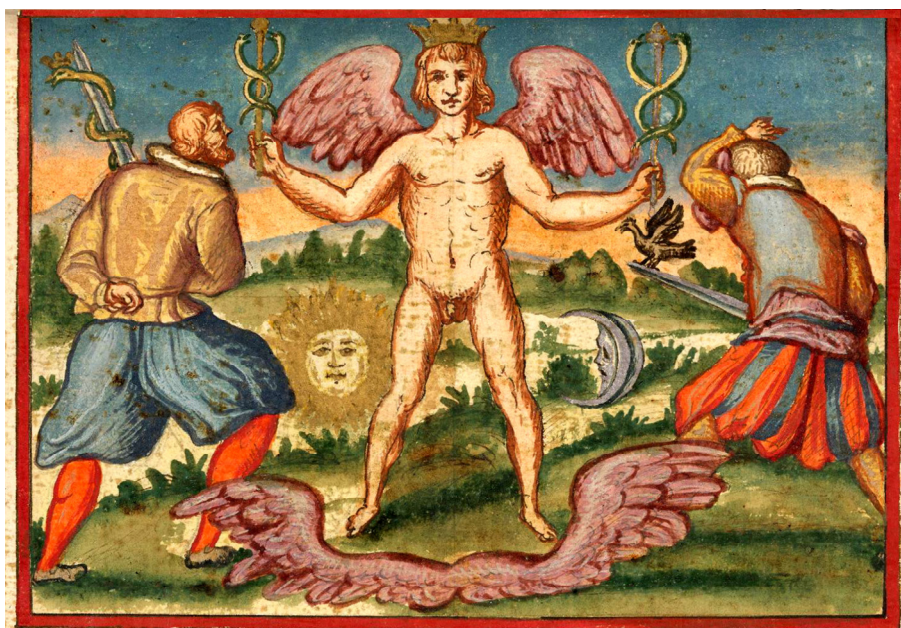


Figure 141 – The winged Mercury with double rods, which carry both the forces of life and death, permeates and balances all opposites.

Tripus aureus by Michael Maier (1618)

In the light of *albedo*, humans become willing to be transformed because the insights and the newly acquired freedom make us flexible in relation to the cosmos. We begin to stir, evolve and become co-creators with the divine. The arrow of Eros now hits us with an inspiring creative energy that seeks for opportunities to unfold. It takes strength, freedom and courage to dare to face all that we really are. We find love in who we are, those we meet, and the Deity. Life feels beautiful and bright.

When the alchemist sees the perfect white light, they have obtained the key that unlocks the hidden books. The alchemist completes the minor Arcana through *albedo* and prepares for the profoundly hidden secrets of the greater Arcana. Through countless operations, the alchemist has transformed the heavy lead consciousness into the silver splendour of the Moon. The black raven has risen from the soil of the Earth as the white swan. If Saturn ruled the black phase, the white virgin Sophia is now our guide. The goddess, who can also be seen as the archetype of our soul, has now chosen the light of the spirit in favour of the Earth's dark sphere.

In the Great Work that is now beginning, it is no longer possible to follow others. Instead, the path will produce visions, mystical experiences, collective archetypes and an embrace of the paradox between our heavenly and earthly natures. As the goddess of wisdom, Sophia becomes our guide and companion.



Figure 142 – The winged Sophia guides the alchemist to the alchemical pleasure garden.

Versamlungsreden der Gold und Rosenkreuzer (1779)

OBSTACLES

If the *ablutio* in *albedo* does not proceed well by means of recreating personal ethics through internalising and unifying light and darkness, then a critical point arises for us. A risk arises when we, after having been in contact with our spiritual Self, begin to suppress the bodily self with its instincts and desires. The dark, earthly and perhaps diabolical within begins to be projected onto the environment. One has felt all the possible worlds and dimensions of *albedo*. Still the *opus* of alchemy is stuck because the separation of dualism could not be transcended in the baptism of *ablutio*. We receive no new insights because we have not yet come to the consciousness that allows the conscious activation of the mercurial energy that eventually leads to the birth of Eros or *filius macrocosmis* – the creative love of the divine child.

When this happens, we may eventually believe that everything was an illusion or a great cosmic deception. As grist to one's mill, one sees all the spiritual leaders of different sects and communities caught up in the dualism of *albedo* and engaging in spiritual deception, albeit not on an entirely conscious level. A similar problem is when the practitioner seeks to hurry over *ablutio* through drugs or other shortcuts. Eventually, one will often come to the same conclusion that nothing divine exists and that the spirit cannot be united with the soul. Since we have become stuck in the phase and, at the same time, deprived ourselves of the possibility of God's existence, it is assumed that there is no help either. This is perceived as extremely painful for the soul, and the disillusioned individual begins to war against what was previously sought – the Deity. Through this conflict, one aims to gather some energy to continue on in life.

The most challenging ordeal in *albedo* often concerns the illusory perception of oneself being light, full of love and whole when the dark *shadow* is completely projected out. One unconsciously lives in a strongly dualistic world when one believes that the Moon's light is the true source, when it is in fact a reflection. It is tempting to seek to act as an exalted guru or to adhere to traditions that highlight the leader's exaltation above the followers. The dark and the bad are placed on others who are not "spiritual" or follow the "wrong" path. This leads, in the long run, to stagnation and destruction.

The process between the white of *albedo* and the following yellow of *citrinitas* is particularly fragile. A danger lies in beginning to intellectualise the *opus* instead of living it, or in separating the spiritual work from oneself and one's own life. If one succeeds in the ethical perfection offered by baptism in *albedo* and sees darkness as part of oneself, a transformation takes place in

which a new consciousness is created. The projections of the self then become much more visible and something that will be constantly worked on during the path back to the whole. Those who are able to pass through the eye of the needle have, above all, succeeded in yielding up to the alchemy of the dark emotions and acting on the basis of their true Self. The alchemist accepts the heights and depths of one's being and sacrifices oneself before the altar of the Deity. Then, the light of the spirit with which the alchemist unites is received. The completion of the white phase takes place through the *white wedding* of soul and spirit, which produces the *hermaphrodite of the Moon*. When this consciousness is manifested, the *silver body* is created.



Figure 143 – The white wedding's lunar hermaphrodite in which the forces of the raven and the serpents transcend matter and bring forth the Moon's silvery fruits.

Philosophia reformata by Johann Daniel Mylius (1622)

CITRINITAS

In the third and yellow phase, an *illuminatio* or enlightenment occurs when the active solar principle comes to life. The solar power transforms us so that we reach a spiritual awakening that is manifested from without. It is a

metaphysical state that cannot be expressed in general words or described in psychological terms. *Citrinitas* is experienced by visions materialising and is best portrayed through the paradoxes of life and art.



Figure 144 – Enlightenment through the descent of the winged Sun into matter.

Rosarium Philosophorum (1550)

The awakening solar consciousness in *citrinitas* causes the alchemist to experience direct revelations and not just reflections as during the lunar phase of *albedo*. Knowledge is gleaned directly from the Source, and the alchemist bathes in the golden glow that emanates from the highest through the divine son, who in alchemy is embodied as the Solar King. The alchemist hereby gains access to unimagined knowledge and talents. In the yellow phase, intuition becomes an increasingly reliable and precise guide. Synchronicities, which can be seen as the imprints of the spirit in matter through the mediation of the soul, reveal the divine order.

The adept's internal guidance can here change character to a more direct communion and communication with the primordial Source. This is done through the feminine side of the Deity, referred to as Shekinah, Sophia or the Holy Spirit. The Mother Goddess is also the original mother of creation and is thus accessible in the material sphere of Earth. Former masters of alchemical art such as Mary the Prophetess and Hermes Trismegistus can be contacted and serve as initiated guides on the subtle planes.

In *citrinitas* it is easier to distinguish between authentic communication with the divine Source and the wishful dreams of the ego. The adept distinguishes between fantasy, which serves the ego, and active imagination, which serves the Self and is referred to as the star of the soul in alchemy.

The next step in the yellow phase involves the spirit re-entering the body or underworld. This occurs in *coagulatio* whereby the volatile soul-spirit is fixed in the encounter with the heavy frequency of matter. In the *nutrimentum*, our solar consciousness drops deep into the earth to transform the dark unconsciousness of the black *sol niger* into a fertile soil. The opposing pairs are now spirit/matter and body/soul. Our consciousness and our soul are transformed within the earthly soil of the primordial mother's womb. The parallel between this operation and pregnancy is evident, as the new life will enter the womb of a foreign body in order to grow whole and strong before birth. The process of physical creation takes place outside the apparent visible will. However, the adept has initiated the process, and just as with pregnancy and the pains of childbirth, it turns out to be worthwhile when the child sees the light of day.

The Lunar Queen Diana's arrow hits us right in the heart of the inner king, who then falls headlong into the depths. This descent into the alchemical well can be experienced as a dying – the yellow death.



Figure 145 – The Lunar Queen's arrow sinks the Sun into the well.
Philosophia reformata by Johann Daniel Mylius (1622)

The process takes place rather reluctantly on the side of the adept, and a new form of depression can manifest itself. The soul-spirit of the *white wedding* experiences it as dying when it returns to the bodily prison. The awareness that everything has a meaning, even when no sense is experienced, saves the human soul in this dark process. The light of our consciousness must descend into the dark underworld, which in this phase is portrayed as a fall into the sacrificial well.

Even the Lunar Queen's light later fades away from consciousness and from the underworld the feminine principle is now heard instead in the form of the siren's song. Her sad and meandering tones rise from the murky water, enveloping the alchemist like an illusory web. The alchemist enters total darkness in the original matrix of creation, where the black light radiates. The glow of the black stone is so intense that it must be veiled from our earthly eyes. It is the fallen Sophia who is covered by the veil of the dark planets, and she is portrayed in alchemy as the seductive mermaid or the siren Melusine. She is a mercurial aspect beyond good and evil, and with her seductive song she lures the alchemist into the deep sea of the Primordial Mother. There await treasures for those who can withstand this chaotic water but otherwise, a wicked and hasty death or the dissolution of the mind.

In Kabbalah, we can see an equivalent in the well of knowledge within the sephirah Daath on the Tree of Life.¹¹⁴ The well is also a gateway into the abyss that formed due to the fall that once occurred at the beginning of time. As a result of the fall, we lost access to the forces of the Tree of Life in its entirety and became mortal. As we seek to regain our lost paradise, we must once again bridge the abyss that separates the higher worlds from the lower ones.

The alchemist who has fallen into the dark chaos of the well is easily lost in the goddess Maya's illusory web. Therefore, the pilgrim crawls on his or her knees through the labyrinth of Chartres Cathedral. By meeting the inner beast and the fears deep down at the bottom of one's essence, one finally arrives at the core, the heart of the central sun where all the illusory veils of mist dissolve. Like Theseus, who, according to legend, killed the beast Minotaur in the middle of the labyrinth and then, with the help of Ariadne's Red Thread, found a way out of the labyrinth's stone corridor, we can, with the help of Ariadne's Red Thread of love, find the exit and rise from the ocean's primordial chaos – *massa confusa*. One has then overcome the lower self or beast through love and, as a result, the monster that previously

¹¹⁴ See the following chapter for an analysis of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and the mystical sephirah of Daath.

threatened to devour us now becomes the aspect that carries forth the light and the divine child, as in the legend of the giant St. Christopher who carried the Christ child on his shoulders.

In alchemy, the fateful threads of life and death are entwined, and when one has persisted long enough, one finally begins to see the web, the very matrix of creation. When the matrix becomes visible, we can participate in the destiny of our own lives because we then work together with divine providence. With the help of Ariadne's Red Thread, we spin our reality around our realised centre – our Self – and are no longer hurled around the periphery of the wheel of destiny. We thus abolish the effect of the goddesses of fate by walking into the centre of the labyrinth where the gold, the treasure or the realised Self is revealed. The goddesses of fate are then transformed into Faith, Hope and Love.

The adept carries the *salt of wisdom* in one's hand, which in alchemy symbolises the wisdom conferred by life experience. An alchemical metaphor also portrays it as tasting the milk of wisdom from the full breasts of the mermaid. The goddess Sophia, who first appeared in her fallen and degraded aspect as Maya or the siren, then changes shape and appears in her nourishing and motherly aspect. She offers her elixir of wisdom to those who have dared to step down into their own deepest darkness. The symbol of the process is the Black Madonna, and it is her love that is discovered here and that guides the alchemist further into the *dark night of the soul*. The night finally leads to the extinction of dualistic perspectives such as subject-object, inner-outer and spirit-matter.

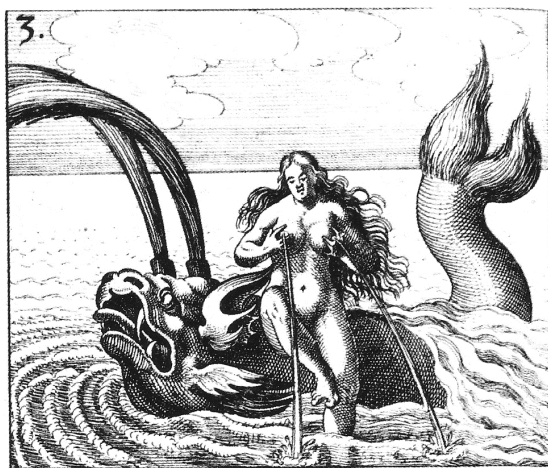


Figure 146 – The mermaid's milk of wisdom which feeds the alchemists' opus.
Philosophia reformata by Johann Daniel Mylius (1622)

Through *coniunctio* a union takes place between body, soul and spirit. This eventually creates the *yellow stone* and the birth of the winged *Hermaphrodite of the Sun*. Just as the birth of a child brings joy to earthly existence, the realisation of our inner winged hermaphrodite means that life on Earth is not experienced as something evil or good in itself. Creation is the foundation on which we can manifest our soul and spirit in enjoyable harmony with other living beings. The Earth and matter are not in negation of thoughts, truths and visions, but are the place where they can be anchored and realised.

With the birth of the winged hermaphrodite, the alchemist is given in-depth insights and experiences about the original Unity which can then be completed in the final red phase. The alchemist experiences clear effects in external existence due to imaginative processes in the alchemical room. One obtains the masterful knowledge of how to influence and rule matter in accordance with one's own unified will and love.

The alchemist realises in the yellow phase that the body is a cosmic laboratory where experiments with the mind, soul and spirit can be performed. Through the consciousness of *citrinitas*, the alchemist can complete creation, together with the Deity, and can guide one's body and soul to receive the frequency of the spirit or Deity. In this way, the *yellow wedding* between soul, spirit and body can be celebrated. When this consciousness manifests, the transfiguration body or the *angelic body* is created.

OBSTACLES AND ASSISTANCE

In the yellow phase, a danger lies in falling back into a dualism which sees a fundamental separation between the Self and the Deity. The illusion of separation between the highest and the lowest, between Deity and Devil, is also an obstacle because it does not allow the spirit to incarnate fully in the body. Hereby, identification arises either with an irresponsible and dualistic spirituality or with the egotistical manipulation of matter by dark magic. The alchemist then begins to separate spirituality from life, which leads to a separation between spirit and matter. One then begins to look for shortcuts that can manifest as illusions emanating from the bottom or dark side of the Tree of Life instead of from the fountainhead in the tree's crown.

There is a danger when the adept begins to assume the role of a master and, with it, wants to consolidate one's position on the throne. If the master is not in touch with the personal darkness, fear and the inner beast, it leads to the once living and knowledgeable master stagnating and creating the dictatorship of a tyrant. The master who once worked for the whole and the good then struggles

above all to maintain the old order and thus prevent the dark twilight of the *dark night of the soul* from settling over the kingdom. To prevent this development, the “good king” within the alchemist must open the gates to his kingdom and invite in the unknown that he cannot control or rule over. The alchemist then fully sacrifices the refined soul and the golden kingdom to divine wholeness through the *dark night of the soul*. The boundary between humanity and Deity is transcended and the eternal world meets the temporal.

Life itself constitutes the alchemical process in the *opus magnum*, and if the adept is patient and has faith, hope and love as virtues, then the exact trials and initiations needed to eventually create the *Stone of the Wise* will occur. Much of the work of realising *citrinitas* involves embracing, loving and sanctifying everything. Then the rejected part of our essence can re-enter the whole within us and in the cosmos. The process follows the *quaternary model* in which two upper and two lower male and female aspects fit into the microcosm and the macrocosm. If the quaternity can be integrated, then the quintessence, the winged solar hermaphrodite, is created, which flows with the mercurial fire water; this quintessence can heal and bring about rebirth. (See also Chapter 30 on the *quaternary model*.)



Figure 147 – The winged Solar Hermaphrodite who, through the lion’s power and the pelican’s sacrifice, masters the three-headed dragon so that the golden fruits of the Sun flourish.

Rosarium Philosophorum (1550)

RUBEDO

The transition between the yellow and the red phase, both of which involve an increasing degree of red colouration in the material, is often depicted by the green mercurial lion devouring the Sun. Whether we identify with the lion or with the Sun, we will experience this eclipse of the soul in different ways. For example, the lion, whose dark interior is illuminated by the bright solar consciousness, receives light and energy, while the conscious self and soul experience a total solar eclipse.

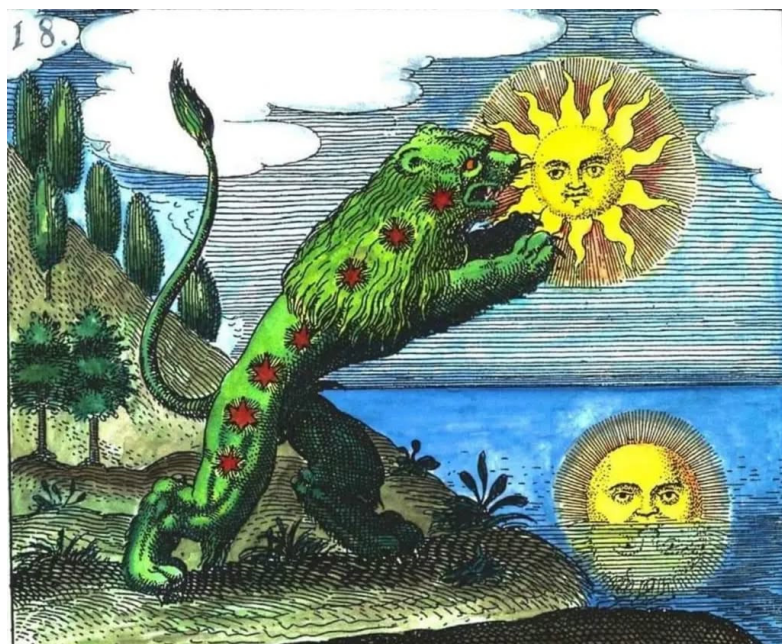


Figure 148 – The green lion devours the Sun so that the inner seals are broken and the divine seals are lit up in an apocalypse.

Philosophia reformata by Johann Daniel Mylius (1622)

The journey of the solar consciousness into the jaws of the beast can also be experienced as a journey into a black hole in the universe, where all opposites cease and only a singularity remains. The ecstatic dance of the goddess Kali is another fitting metaphor for this journey into the Source of Unity. Here the alchemist must face one's fears and let go of all defences in order to dance with the dark Mother and her guardian Saturn. Through Kali, the alchemist meets the primordial Source that rules over the dark antimatter where all things can be abolished. Kali signifies time and she gives the alchemist the secret to the cessation of linear spatial time. The alchemist can then act in the

other time – *kairos* – where transmutation is possible. This and many other occult keys to the *secret of the secrets* are obtained in the dance with the black Primordial Mother. *Rubedo* gives birth to a quantum reality beyond known existence.

As the lion devours the Sun, the consciousness of the dark planets, or the unlit chakras, are lit up so that they can be purified, ignited, and then re-enter the Self. There, they serve the Lunar Queen and the Solar King in their alchemical *red wedding*. It is the alchemical process of transcending the seven planets, the seals and the chakras that John reveals in the apocalypse of the alchemically tinged *Book of Revelation*. When the seven seals are broken, the bride and groom can unite in the *alchemical wedding*. Then the new Jerusalem and the *Stone of the Wise* are created.

The alchemist's journey through the seven planetary spheres towards its centre results in an apocalypse of the heart that colours the material red. The pelican that nurtures its children with its own blood symbolises this process. Old wounds and ancient pain from the initial incarnation until the present one now come to the surface. The red blood from the wounds of the heart hereby colours the stone dark red. The spirit sacrifices to matter in the *dark night of the spiritual body*. The alchemist's heart burns with the flame of eternity.

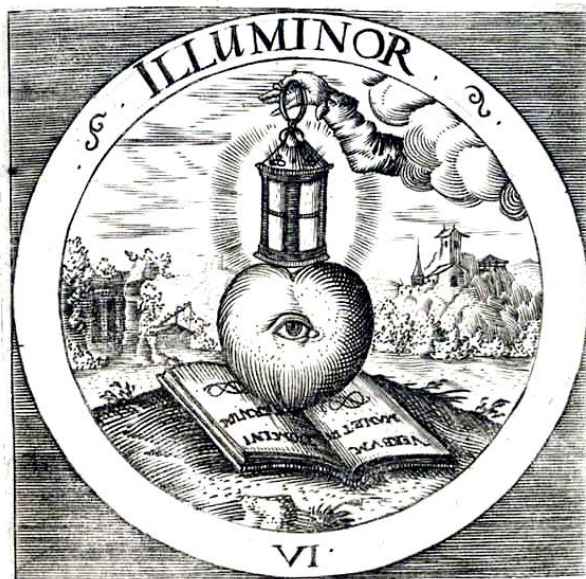


Figure 149 – A seeing heart and watchful eye illuminated by Christ's radiance.

In the darkness there is little, in the light there is wisdom's brilliance.

Emblemata Sacra by Daniel Cramer (1617)

THE FLAMING HEART

The fire burns my heart. I'm burning with an eternal flame and I can no longer resist. How I have been waiting to lay down my sword and unite my arrogant pride with Your wisdom. I see You smile at me and know right away that the time is now. The fight is over and You have won. I am on fire with Your fire. I am burning with the fire of eternity, and I am forever grateful ... forever grateful.

My heart bleeds when I pull the sword out of its dark crypt. The last armour of iron falls from the holiest of rooms, and the fire melts its dark blackness into a golden vessel. The beauty of fear draws me down to Earth and out of the crypt rises the red river of Rubedo. Bright red drops, one by one they fill my grail with eternal life. A flaming red heart shines like a Sun in the void.



Figure 150 – The red and crowned Sophia in royal blue dress nourishes the alchemists with the elixir of wisdom.

Aurora Consurgens (15th Century)

BEYOND THE BLACK HOLE

A new universe is born on the other side of the black hole, beyond the solar self-consciousness that interprets the angry Kali as something that threatens its existence. The alchemist gets to experience how the black Primordial Mother removes her veil and reveals herself as the red Sophia, who nourishes the alchemist with the red elixir. From now on, a pendulum swings between being human, with all the limitations that entail, and being divinely unlimited. This dual perspective means that the *dark night of the soul* that was entered during *citrinitas* is experienced as an oscillation between light and darkness and between hellish suffering and jubilant coronation. The alchemist wanders up and down Jacob's ladder, and these perpetual ascents and descents make us humble and deeply devoted to both creation and the Deity.¹¹⁵ The oscillation ceases during the *dark night of the spiritual body* until the matter is crowned.

When the alchemist meets the primordial Mother, stripped of the dark veils she wears to protect us from being burned by her fiery water, she appears as divine Wisdom, the feminine side of the godhead – the red Sophia who lovingly guides the alchemist back to divine Unity. Her red elixir imbues a wisdom that permeates the alchemist's being like a beneficial radioactive emission which in turn radiates out from the alchemist so that everyone around is affected by this outflow. Through the alchemist's work with the *opus magnum*, the goddess Sophia is restored, and the alchemist is crowned by the red Solar King. We often see this portrayed as the Virgin Mary being crowned at the end of the *opus* in the alchemical works. This motif shows that the soul and matter have now reached their absolute perfection and are therefore crowned. The Lunar Queen, as well as the alchemist, who previously only reflected the light of the Sun, now shine by their own power. Sun and Moon, spirit and matter, Deity and human now await their final *alchemical wedding* in order to transcend binary reality.

During *rubedo*, all opposites are neutralised over time. As the phase progresses, the opposites will approach each other until they finally oscillate in a harmonious equilibrium. This intertwining of light and darkness, life and death, divine and human in the red phase is what ultimately creates the *corpus glorificatum* – the immortal *golden body*. As long as the alchemist is alive, the dance of the universe cannot cease entirely. The complete consummation of the *red wedding* occurs through death, when the *angelic body* stands face to

¹¹⁵ In the book *The Dark Night of the Soul*, the Catholic mystic John of the Cross (1542-1591) wrote about this process that one must go through to be united with God.

face with the Deity and becomes one with the world soul – *anima mundi*. When the adept has completed the alchemical journey on Earth, he or she can take on the shining resurrected body and, like Christ, rise fully conscious from the grave. All opposites have finally been united through the *red wedding*. The *magnum opus* is completed when our lead has been transformed into the *philosophical gold* and through the Phoenix bird is incarnated as the lustrous *golden body* of wisdom. Through the four phases, the alchemist has then recreated paradise, eaten of the fruits of the Tree of Life and regained access to the Garden of Eden. The *golden body* unites with the solar Elohim for the birth of the new creation.

Omnia ab uno
Omnia ad unum



Figure 151 – The glorified and resurrected Stone, the alchemist and Christ in one and the same figure.

Rosarium Philosophorum (1550)