

Jung and the Alchemical Imagination

For the sake of this phenomenology I have put myself to the trouble of reading nearly the entire classical literature of alchemy.

I am not interested in Jung in his entirety, but only in those respects of his work that clarify the spiritual meaning of alchemical symbols. In other words, I explore alchemical images to understand inner experience, and I explore Jung to understand the alchemical images.

The reverse holds true as well. Understanding inner experiences sheds light on the meaning of alchemical images that, in turn, amplify the concepts that Jung formulated.

Alchemy provides a model and a map for defining inner experiences, as well as a symbolic system for their expression.

I take the position that alchemical images symbolically portray psychological states and experiences.

Alchemy, like folklore, is a grand projected image of unconscious thought-processes.

Fundamentally, Jung's commitment to the processes of transformation and the creation of a new psychic center, which he termed the self, place him in the imaginative world of the alchemist.

We thus reach the conclusion that consciousness is somehow born out of the experience of opposites.... The process whereby a series of psychic contents...make connection with the ego and thereby generate psychic substance of consciousness is called the process of individuation.

We might think of alchemy as the art of transmutation.

The most outstanding symbolism pertaining to the creation of consciousness is found in alchemy.

The creation of gold from inferior metals was a goal that remained constant throughout alchemy's history.

Some alchemists seemed intent on creation of actual gold, physical gold, while others had a more spiritual "gold" in mind. In either case, gold was the image for the end result of the work.

Many alchemists were physicians who did not seek gold as much as a healing elixir.

To create gold or healing, most alchemists believed that they must first create the philosopher's stone, and that it alone had the power of effecting transmutations and healing.

The stone had another capacity as well: to open its possessor to the Divine mysteries.

In all their efforts and all the processes they devised, the alchemists' ultimate intention was the creation of the philosopher's stone.

We now know through Jung's profound researches that the alchemical procedure symbolizes the individuation process and that the Philosopher's Stone represents the realization of the Self, i.e., consciousness of wholeness.

To begin with, the alchemist had to find the right material from which to generate the stone. The nature of these materials remained one of the greatest secrets of alchemy that was never revealed, possibly because there was no one answer.

The aim of these [alchemical] processes was to destroy the original form, and to reduce it a pre-formed state. This preformed state was the prima materia.

Heaven above
heaven below
stars above
stars below.

All that is above
also is below.
Grasp this
and rejoice

**"A nature is delighted by
another nature,
a nature conquers another
nature,
a nature dominates another
nature."**