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THE SPIRIT MERCURIUS

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Ἑρμῇ κοσμοκράτωρ, ἐνκάρδιε, κύκλε σελήνης,
στρογγύλε καὶ τετράγωνε, λόγων ἀρχηγέτα γλώσσης,
πειθοδικαίουσνε, χλαμυδηφόρε, πτηνοπέδιλε,
παμφώνου γλώσσης μεδέων, ὕνητοῖσι προφήτα . . .

(Hermes, ruler of the world, dweller in the heart, circle of the moon,
Round and square, inventor of the words of the tongue,
Obedient to justice, wearer of the chlamys, shod in winged sandals,
Guardian of the many-sounding tongue, prophet to mortals.)

—A Magic Papyrus (Preisendanz, II, p. 139)

1. THE SPIRIT IN THE BOTTLE

239 In my contribution¹ to the symposium on Hermes I will try to show that this many-hued and wily god did not by any means die with the decline of the classical era, but on the contrary has gone on living in strange guises through the centuries, even into recent times, and has kept the mind of man busy with his deceptive arts and healing gifts. Children are still told Grimm's fairytale of "The Spirit in the Bottle," which is ever-living like all fairytales, and moreover contains the quintessence and deepest meaning of the Hermetic mystery as it has come down to us today:

Once upon a time there was a poor woodcutter. He had an only son, whom he wished to send to a high school. However, since he could give him only a little money to take with him, it was used up long before the time for the examinations. So the son went home and helped his father with the work in the forest. Once, during the midday rest, he roamed the woods and came to an immense old oak. There he heard a voice calling from the ground, "Let me out, let me out!" He dug down among the roots of the tree and found a well-sealed glass bottle from which, clearly, the voice had come. He opened it and instantly a spirit rushed out and soon became half as high as the tree. The spirit cried in an awful voice: "I have had my punishment and I will be revenged! I am the great and mighty spirit Mercurius, and now you shall have your reward. Whoso releases me, him I must strangle." This made the boy uneasy and, quickly thinking up a trick, he said, "First, I must be sure that you are the same spirit that was shut up in that little bottle." To prove this, the spirit crept back into the bottle. Then the boy made haste to seal it and the spirit was caught again. But now the spirit promised to reward him richly if the boy would let

¹I give only a general survey of the Mercurius concept in alchemy and by no means an exhaustive exposition of it. The illustrative material cited should therefore be taken only as examples and makes no claim to completeness. [For the "symposium on Hermes" see the editorial note on p. 191.—EDITORS.]

him out. So he let him out and received as a reward a small piece of rag. Quoth the spirit: "If you spread one end of this over a wound it will heal, and if you rub steel or iron with the other end it will turn into silver." Thereupon the boy rubbed his damaged axe with the rag, and the axe turned to silver and he was able to sell it for four hundred thaler. Thus father and son were freed from all worries. The young man could return to his studies, and later, thanks to his rag, he became a famous doctor.²

²⁴⁰ Now, what insight can we gain from this fairytale? As you know, we can treat fairytales as fantasy products, like dreams, conceiving them to be spontaneous statements of the unconscious about itself.

²⁴¹ As at the beginning of many dreams something is said about the scene of the dream action, so the fairytale mentions the forest as the place of the magic happening. The forest, dark and impenetrable to the eye, like deep water and the sea, is the container of the unknown and the mysterious. It is an appropriate synonym for the unconscious. Among the many trees—the living elements that make up the forest—one tree is especially conspicuous for its great size. Trees, like fishes in the water, represent the living contents of the unconscious. Among these contents one of special significance is characterized as an "oak." Trees have individuality. A tree, therefore, is often a symbol of personality.³ Ludwig II of Bavaria is said to have honoured certain particularly impressive trees in his park by having them saluted. The mighty old oak is proverbially the king of the forest. Hence it represents a central figure among the contents of the unconscious, possessing personality in the most marked degree. It is the prototype of the *self*, a symbol of the source and goal of the individuation process. The oak stands for the still unconscious core of the personality, the plant symbolism indicating a state of deep unconsciousness. From this it may be concluded that the hero of the fairytale is profoundly unconscious of himself. He is one of the "sleepers," the "blind" or "blindfolded," whom we

² [Author's paraphrase. Cf. "The Spirit in the Bottle," *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (trans. Hunt, rev. Stern), pp. 458–62.—EDITORS.]

³ Concerning personification of trees, see Frazer, *The Magic Art*, II, ch. 9. Trees are also the dwelling places of spirits of the dead or are identical with the life of the newborn child (*ibid.*, I, p. 184).

encounter in the illustrations of certain alchemical treatises.⁴ They are the unawakened who are still unconscious of themselves, who have not yet integrated their future, more extensive personality, their "wholeness," or, in the language of the mystics, the ones who are not yet "enlightened." For our hero, therefore, the tree conceals a great secret.⁵

242 The secret is hidden not in the top but in the roots of the tree;⁶ and since it is, or has, a personality it also possesses the most striking marks of personality—voice, speech, and conscious purpose, and it demands to be set free by the hero. It is caught and imprisoned against its will, down there in the earth among the roots of the tree. The roots extend into the inorganic realm, into the mineral kingdom. In psychological terms, this would mean that the self has its roots in the body, indeed in the body's chemical elements. Whatever this remarkable statement of the fairytale may mean in itself, it is in no way stranger than the miracle of the living plant rooted in the inanimate earth. The alchemists described their four elements as *radices*, corresponding to the Empedoclean *rhizomata*, and in them they saw the constituents of the most significant and central symbol of alchemy, the *lapis philosophorum*, which represents the goal of the individuation process.

243 The secret hidden in the roots is a spirit sealed inside a bottle. Naturally it was not hidden away among the roots to start with, but was first confined in a bottle, which was then hidden. Presumably a magician, that is, an alchemist, caught and imprisoned it. As we shall see later, this spirit is something like the numen of the tree, its *spiritus vegetativus*, which is one

⁴ Cf. the title-page of *Mutus liber*, showing an angel waking the sleeper with a trumpet ("The Psychology of the Transference," Fig. 11). Also the illustration in Michelspacher's *Cabala, speculum artis et naturae* (*Psychology and Alchemy*, Fig. 93). In the foreground, before a mountain upon which is a temple of the initiates, stands a blindfolded man, while further back another man runs after a fox which is disappearing into a hole in the mountain. The "helpful animal" shows the way to the temple. The fox or hare is itself the "evasive" Mercurius as guide (ὁδηγός).

⁵ For additional material on the tree symbol, see *infra*, "The Philosophical Tree," Part II.

⁶ This motif was used in the same sense by the Gnostics. Cf. Hippolytus, *Elenchos*, V, 9, 15, where the many-named and thousand-eyed "Word of God" is "hidden in the root of All."

definition of Mercurius. As the life principle of the tree, it is a sort of spiritual quintessence abstracted from it, and could also be described as the *principium individuationis*. The tree would then be the outward and visible sign of the realization of the self. The alchemists appear to have held a similar view. Thus the "Aurelia occulta" says: "The philosophers have sought most eagerly for the centre of the tree which stands in the midst of the earthly paradise."⁷ According to the same source, Christ himself is this tree.⁸ The tree comparison occurs as early as Eulogius of Alexandria (c. A.D. 600), who says: "Behold in the Father the root, in the Son the branch, and in the Spirit the fruit: for the substance [*ousia*] in the three is one."⁹ Mercurius, too, is *trinus et unus*.

²⁴⁴ So if we translate it into psychological language, the fairytale tells us that the mercurial essence, the *principium individuationis*, would have developed freely under natural conditions, but was robbed of its freedom by deliberate intervention from outside, and was artfully confined and banished like an evil spirit. (Only evil spirits have to be confined, and the wickedness of this spirit was shown by its murderous intent.) Supposing the fairytale is right and the spirit was really as wicked as it relates, we would have to conclude that the Master who imprisoned the *principium individuationis* had a good end in view. But who is this well-intentioned Master who has the power to banish the principle of man's individuation? Such power is given only to a ruler of souls in the spiritual realm. The idea that the principle of individuation is the source of all evil is found in Schopenhauer and still more in Buddhism. In Christianity, too, human nature is tainted with original sin and is redeemed from this stain by Christ's self-sacrifice. Man in his "natural" condition is neither good nor pure, and if he should develop in the natural way the result would be a product not essentially different from an animal. Sheer instinctuality and naïve unconsciousness untroubled by a sense of guilt would prevail if the Master had not interrupted the free development of the natural being by introducing a distinction between good and evil and outlawing the evil. Since without guilt there is no moral consciousness and

⁷ *Theatrum chemicum*, IV (1659), p. 500.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 478: "(Christ), who is the tree of life both spiritual and bodily."

⁹ Krueger, *Das Dogma von der Dreieinigkeit und Gottmenschheit*, p. 207.

without awareness of differences no consciousness at all, we must concede that the strange intervention of the master of souls was absolutely necessary for the development of any kind of consciousness and in this sense was for the good. According to our religious beliefs, God himself is this Master—and the alchemist, in his small way, competes with the Creator in so far as he strives to do work analogous to the work of creation, and therefore he likens his microcosmic opus to the work of the world creator.¹⁰

²⁴⁵ In our fairytale the natural evil is banished to the "roots," that is, to the earth, in other words the body. This statement agrees with the historical fact that Christian thought in general has held the body in contempt, without bothering much about the finer doctrinal distinctions.¹¹ For, according to doctrine, neither the body nor nature in general is evil *per se*: as the work of God, or as the actual form in which he manifests himself, nature cannot be identical with evil. Correspondingly, the evil spirit in the fairytale is not simply banished to the earth and allowed to roam about at will, but is only hidden there in a safe and special container, so that he cannot call attention to himself anywhere except right under the oak. The bottle is an artificial human product and thus signifies the intellectual purposefulness and artificiality of the procedure, whose obvious aim is to isolate the spirit from the surrounding medium. As the *vas Hermeticum* of alchemy, it was "hermetically" sealed (i.e., sealed with the sign of Hermes);¹² it had to be made of glass, and had also to be as round as possible, since it was meant to represent the cosmos in which the earth was created.¹³ Transparent glass is something like solidified water or air, both of which are synonyms for spirit. The alchemical retort is therefore equivalent to the *anima mundi*, which according to an old alchemical conception surrounds the cosmos. Caesarius of Heisterbach (thirteenth century) mentions a vision in which the soul appeared as a

¹⁰ In the "Dicta Belini" Mercurius even says: "Out of me is made the bread from which comes the whole world, and the world is formed from my mercy, and it fails not, because it is the gift of God" (Distinctio XXVIII, in *Theatr. chem.*, V, 1660, p. 87).

¹¹ Cf. the doctrine of the *status iustitiae originalis* and *status naturae integrae*.

¹² Cf. Rev. 20 : 3: "and set a seal upon him."

¹³ "The Fift is of Concord and of Love, / Betweene your Warkes and the Spheare above."—Norton's "Ordinall of Alchimy," *Theatrum chemicum Britannicum*, ch. 6, p. 92.

spherical glass vessel.¹⁴ Likewise the "spiritual" or "ethereal" (*aethereus*) philosophers' stone is a precious *vitrum* (sometimes described as *malleabile*) which was often equated with the gold glass (*aurum vitreum*) of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21 : 21).

²⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the German fairytale calls the spirit confined in the bottle by the name of the pagan god, Mercurius, who was considered identical with the German national god, Wotan. The mention of Mercurius stamps the fairytale as an alchemical folk legend, closely related on the one hand to the allegorical tales used in teaching alchemy, and on the other to the well-known group of folktales that cluster round the motif of the "spellbound spirit." Our fairytale thus interprets the evil spirit as a pagan god, forced under the influence of Christianity to descend into the dark underworld and be morally disqualified. Hermes becomes the demon of the mysteries celebrated by all *tenebriones* (obscurantists), and Wotan the demon of forest and storm; Mercurius becomes the soul of the metals, the metallic man (*homunculus*), the dragon (*serpens mercurialis*), the roaring fiery lion, the night raven (*nycticorax*), and the black eagle—the last four being synonyms for the devil. In fact the spirit in the bottle behaves just as the devil does in many other fairytales: he bestows wealth by changing base metal into gold; and like the devil, he also gets tricked.

¹⁴ *Dialogus miraculorum*, trans. by Scott and Bland, I, pp. 42, 236.

2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SPIRIT AND TREE

²⁴⁷ Before continuing our discussion of the spirit Mercurius, I should like to point out a not unimportant fact. The place where he lies confined is not just any place but a very essential one—namely, under the oak, the king of the forest. In psychological terms, this means that the evil spirit is imprisoned in the roots of the self, as the secret hidden in the principle of individuation. He is not identical with the tree, nor with its roots, but has been put there by artificial means. The fairytale gives us no reason to think that the oak, which represents the self, has grown out of the spirit in the bottle; we may rather conjecture that the oak presented a suitable place for concealing a secret. A treasure, for instance, is preferably buried near some kind of landmark, or else such a mark is put up afterwards. The tree of paradise serves as a prototype for this and similar tales: it, too, is not identical with the voice of the serpent which issued from it.¹ However, it must not be forgotten that these mythical motifs have a significant connection with certain psychological phenomena observed among primitive peoples. In all such cases there is a notable analogy with primitive animism: certain trees are animated by souls—have the character of personality, we would say—and possess a voice that gives commands to human beings. Amaury Talbot² reports one such case from Nigeria, where a native soldier heard an *oji* tree calling to him, and tried desperately to break out of the barracks and hasten to the tree. Under cross-examination he alleged that all those who bore the name of the tree now and then heard its voice. Here the voice is undoubtedly identical with the tree. These psychic phenomena

¹ Mercurius, in the form of Lilith or Melusina, appears in the tree in the Ripley Scowle. To this context belongs also the hamadryad as an interpretation of the so-called "Aenigma Bononiense." Cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, pp. 68f.

² *In the Shadow of the Bush*, pp. 31f.

suggest that originally the tree and the daemon were one and the same, and that their separation is a secondary phenomenon corresponding to a higher level of culture and consciousness. The original phenomenon was nothing less than a nature deity, a *tremendum* pure and simple, which is morally neutral. But the secondary phenomenon implies an act of discrimination which splits man off from nature and thus testifies to the existence of a more highly differentiated consciousness. To this is added, as a tertiary phenomenon testifying to a still higher level, the moral qualification which declares the voice to be an evil spirit under a ban. It goes without saying that this third level is marked by a belief in a "higher" and "good" God who, though he has not finally disposed of his adversary, has nevertheless rendered him harmless for some time to come by imprisonment (Rev. 20 : 1-3).

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Since at the present level of consciousness we cannot suppose that tree daemons exist, we are forced to assert that the primitive suffers from hallucinations, that he hears his own unconscious which has projected itself into the tree. If this theory is correct—and I do not know how we could formulate it otherwise today—then the second level of consciousness has effected a differentiation between the object "tree" and the unconscious content projected into it, thereby achieving an act of enlightenment. The third level rises still higher and attributes "evil" to the psychic content which has been separated from the object. Finally a fourth level, the level reached by our consciousness today, carries the enlightenment a stage further by denying the objective existence of the "spirit" and declaring that the primitive has heard nothing at all, but merely had an auditory hallucination. Consequently the whole phenomenon vanishes into thin air—with the great advantage that the evil spirit becomes obviously non-existent and sinks into ridiculous insignificance. A fifth level, however, which is bound to take a quintessential view of the matter, wonders about this conjuring trick that turns what began as a miracle into a senseless self-deception—only to come full circle. Like the boy who told his father a made-up story about sixty stags in the forest, it asks: "But what, then, was all the rustling in the woods?" The fifth level is of the opinion that something did happen after all: even though the psychic content was not the tree, nor a spirit in the tree, nor indeed any spirit at

all, it was nevertheless a phenomenon thrusting up from the unconscious, the existence of which cannot be denied if one is minded to grant the psyche any kind of reality. If one did not do that, one would have to extend God's *creatio ex nihilo*—which seems so obnoxious to the modern intellect—very much further to include steam engines, automobiles, radios, and every library on earth, all of which would presumably have arisen from unimaginably fortuitous conglomerations of atoms. The only thing that would have happened is that the Creator would have been renamed Conglomeratio.

²⁴⁹ The fifth level assumes that the unconscious exists and has a reality just like any other existent. However odious it may be, this means that the "spirit" is also a reality, and the "evil" spirit at that. What is even worse, the distinction between "good" and "evil" is suddenly no longer obsolete, but highly topical and necessary. The crucial point is that so long as the evil spirit cannot be proved to be a subjective psychic experience, then even trees and other suitable objects would have, once again, to be seriously considered as its lodging places.

3. THE PROBLEM OF FREEING MERCURIUS

250 We will not pursue the paradoxical reality of the unconscious any further now, but will return to the fairytale of the spirit in the bottle. As we have seen, the spirit Mercurius bears some resemblance to the "cheated devil." The analogy, however, is only a superficial one, since, unlike the gifts of the devil, the gold of Mercurius does not turn to horse droppings but remains good metal, and the magic rag does not turn to ashes by morning but retains its healing power. Nor is Mercurius tricked out of a soul that he wanted to steal. He is only tricked into his own better nature, one might say, in that the boy succeeds in bottling him up again in order to cure his bad mood and make him tractable. Mercurius becomes polite, gives the young fellow a useful ransom and is accordingly set free. We now hear about the student's good fortune and how he became a wonder-working doctor, but—strangely enough—nothing about the doings of the liberated spirit, though these might be of some interest in view of the web of meanings in which Mercurius, with his many-sided associations, entangles us. What happens when this pagan god, Hermes-Mercurius-Wotan, is let loose again? Being a god of magicians, a *spiritus vegetativus*, and a storm daemon, he will hardly have returned to captivity, and the fairytale gives us no reason to suppose that the episode of imprisonment has finally changed his nature to the pink of perfection. The bird of Hermes has escaped from the glass cage, and in consequence something has happened which the experienced alchemist wished at all costs to avoid. That is why he always sealed the stopper of his bottle with magic signs and set it for a very long time over the lowest fire, so that "he who is within may not fly out." For if he escapes, the whole laborious opus comes to nothing and has to be started all over again. Our lad was a Sunday's child and possibly one of the poor in spirit, on whom was bestowed a bit of the Kingdom of Heaven in the shape of the self-

renewing tincture, with reference to which it was said that the opus needed to be performed only once.¹ But if he had lost the magic rag he would certainly never have been able to produce it a second time, by himself. It looks as though some Master had succeeded in capturing the mercurial spirit and then hid him in a safe place, like a treasure—perhaps putting him aside for some future use. He may even have planned to tame the wild Mercurius to serve him as a willing “familiar,” like Mephisto—such trains of thought are not strange to alchemy. Perhaps he was disagreeably surprised when he returned to the oak tree and found that his bird had flown. At any rate, it might have been better not to have left the fate of the bottle to chance.

²⁵¹ Be that as it may, the behaviour of the boy—successfully as it worked out for him—must be described as alchemically incorrect. Apart from the fact that he may have infringed upon the legitimate claims of an unknown Master by setting Mercurius free, he was also totally unconscious of what might follow if this turbulent spirit were let loose upon the world. The golden age of alchemy was the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century. At that time a storm bird did indeed escape from a spiritual vessel which the daemons must have felt was a prison. As I have said, the alchemists were all for not letting Mercurius escape. They wanted to keep him in the bottle in order to transform him: for they believed, like Petasios, that lead (another arcane substance) was “so bedevilled and shameless that all who wish to investigate it fall into madness through ignorance.”² The same was said of the elusive Mercurius who evades every grasp—a real trickster who drove the alchemists to despair.³

¹ “For he that shall end it once for certeyne, / Shall never have neede to begin againe.”—Norton’s “Ordinall of Alchimy,” *Theatr. chem. Brit.*, ch. 4, p. 48.

² Olympiodorus in Berthelot, *Alchimistes grecs*, II, iv, 43.

³ Cf. the entertaining “Dialogus Mercurii alchymistae et naturae,” in *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), pp. 449ff.

1. INTRODUCTORY

252 The interested reader will want, as I do, to find out more about this spirit—especially what our forefathers believed and said about him. I will therefore try with the aid of text citations to draw a picture of this versatile and shimmering god as he appeared to the masters of the royal art. For this purpose we must consult the abstruse literature of alchemy, which has not yet been properly understood. Naturally, in later times, the history of alchemy was mainly of interest to the chemist. The fact that it recorded the discovery of many chemical substances and drugs could not, however, reconcile him to the pitiful meagreness, so it seemed to him, of its scientific content. He was not in the position of the older authors, such as Schmieder, who could look on the possibility of goldmaking with hopeful esteem and sympathy; instead he was irritated by the futility of the recipes and the fraudulence of alchemical speculation in general. To him alchemy was bound to seem a gigantic aberration that lasted for more than two thousand years. Had he only asked himself whether the chemistry of alchemy was authentic or not, that is, whether the alchemists were really chemists or merely spoke a chemical jargon, then the texts themselves would have suggested a line of observation other than the purely chemical. The scientific equipment of the chemist does not, however, fit him to pursue this other line, since it leads straight into the history of religion. Thus it was a philologist, Reitzenstein, whom we have to thank for preliminary researches of the greatest value in this field. It was he who recognized the mythological and Gnostic ideas embedded in alchemy, thereby opening up the whole subject from an angle which promises to be most fruitful. For alchemy, as the earliest Greek and Chinese texts show, originally formed part of Gnostic philosophical speculations which also included a detailed knowledge of the techniques of the goldsmith and ironsmith, the faker of precious stones, the druggist and

apothecary. In East and West alike, alchemy contains as its core the Gnostic doctrine of the Anthropos and by its very nature has the character of a peculiar doctrine of redemption. This fact necessarily escaped the chemist, although it is expressed clearly enough in the Greek and Latin texts as well as in the Chinese of about the same period.

253 To begin with, of course, it is almost impossible for our scientifically trained minds to feel their way back into that primitive state of *participation mystique* in which subject and object are identical. Here the findings of modern psychology stood me in very good stead. Practical experience shows us again and again that any prolonged preoccupation with an unknown object acts as an almost irresistible bait for the unconscious to project itself into the unknown nature of the object and to accept the resultant perception, and the interpretation deduced from it, as objective. This phenomenon, a daily occurrence in practical psychology and more especially in psychotherapy, is without doubt a vestige of primitivity. On the primitive level, the whole of life is governed by animistic assumptions, that is, by projections of subjective contents into objective situations. For example, Karl von den Steinen says that the Bororos think of themselves as red cockatoos, although they readily admit that they have no feathers.¹ On this level, the alchemists' assumption that a certain substance possesses secret powers, or that there is a *prima materia* somewhere which works miracles, is self-evident. This is, however, not a fact that can be understood or even thought of in chemical terms, it is a psychological phenomenon. Psychology, therefore, can make an important contribution towards elucidating the alchemists' mentality. What to the chemist seem to be the absurd fantasies of alchemy can be recognized by the psychologist without too much difficulty as psychic material contaminated with chemical substances. This material stems from the collective unconscious and is therefore identical with fantasy products that can still be found today among both sick and healthy people who have never heard of alchemy. On account of the primitive character of its projections, alchemy, so barren a field for the chemist, is for the psychologist a veritable gold-mine of materials which throw an exceedingly valuable light on the structure of the unconscious.

¹ Von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, pp. 352f., 512.

²⁵⁴ Since in what follows I shall often refer to the original texts, it might be as well to say a few words about this literature, some of which is not easily accessible. I shall leave out of account the few Chinese texts that have been translated, and shall only mention that *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, published by Richard Wilhelm and myself, is representative of its class. Nor can I consider the Indian "Quicksilver System."² The Western literature I have used falls into four groups:

1. *Texts by ancient authors.* This group comprises mainly Greek texts, which have been edited by Berthelot, and those transmitted by the Arabs, likewise edited by him. They date from the period between the first and eighth centuries.

2. *Texts by the early Latinists.* The most important of these are translations from the Arabic (or Hebrew?). Recent research shows that most of these texts derive from the Harranite school, which flourished until about 1050, and was also, probably, the source of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. To this group belong certain texts whose Arabic origin is doubtful but which at least show Arabic influence—for instance, the "Summa perfectionis" of Geber and the Aristotle and Avicenna treatises. This period extends from the ninth to the thirteenth century.

3. *Texts by the later Latinists.* These comprise the principal group and range from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.

4. *Texts in modern European languages.* Sixteenth to seventeenth century. After that, alchemy fell into decline, which is why I have only occasionally used eighteenth-century texts.

² Cf. Deussen, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, I, Part 3, pp. 336ff. This undoubtedly alchemical philosophy belongs to the fairly late (medieval) *Upa-Puranas*, more particularly to the *Maheshvarapurana*, hence to a doctrine principally concerned with Shiva. "Pāra-da" (bestowing the Other Shore) signifies quicksilver.

2. MERCURIUS AS QUICKSILVER AND/OR WATER

255 Mercurius was first understood pretty well everywhere as *hydrargyrum*¹ (Hg), quicksilver or *argentum vivum* (Fr. *vif-argent* or *argent vive*). As such, it was called *vulgaris* (common) and *crudus*. As a rule, *mercurius philosophicus* was specifically distinguished from this, as an avowedly arcane substance that was sometimes conceived to be present in *mercurius crudus*, and then, again, to differ from it completely. It was the true object of the alchemical procedure. Quicksilver, because of its fluidity and volatility, was also defined as water. A popular saying is: "Aqua manus non madefaciens" (the water that does not make the hands wet).² Other designations are *aqua vitae*,³ *aqua alba*,⁴ *aqua sicca*.⁵ The last designation, dry water, is paradoxical, for which reason I should like to call special attention to it as characterizing the nature of the object described. *Aqua septies distillata* (seven times distilled water) and *aqueum subtile*⁶ point to the sublimated ("spiritual") nature of the philosophic Mercurius. Many treatises simply speak of Mercurius as water.⁷ The doctrine of the *humidum radicale* (root-moisture or radical moisture) underlies such designations as *humidum album*,⁸ *humiditas maxime permanens incombustibilis et unctuosa*,⁹ and *humiditas radicalis*.¹⁰ Mercurius is also said to arise from the moisture like a vapour¹¹ (which again points to his spiritual

¹ From ὕδωρ, 'water,' and ἀργυρος, 'silver.'

² E.g., Hoghelande, "De alchemiae difficultatibus," *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 161.

³ "Aquarium sapientum," *Musaeum hermeticum*, pp. 84, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84. Hence also *lac virginis, nivis, terra alba foliata, magnesia*, etc.

⁵ Hoghelande, p. 161.

⁶ Mylius, *Philosophia reformata*, p. 176.

⁷ "Novum lumen," *Mus. herm.*, p. 581; "Tractatus aureus," *ibid.*, p. 34; "Gloria mundi," *ibid.*, p. 250; Khunrath, *Von hylealischen Chaos*, p. 214.

⁸ *Rosarium philosophorum*, in *Artis auriferae*, II, p. 376.

⁹ "Tractatus aureus," *Mus. herm.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 31.

¹¹ "Gloria mundi," p. 244.

nature), or to rule the water.¹² The "divine water" (ὕδωρ θεῖον) so often mentioned in the Greek texts is quicksilver.¹³ Mercurius as the arcane substance and golden tincture is indicated by the designation *aqua aurea*¹⁴ and by the description of the water as *Mercurii caduceus*.¹⁵

¹² *Aurora consurgens* II, in *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 189. This text remarks that the water is fire (p. 212).

¹³ Berthelot, *Alch. grecs*, IV, vii, 2.

¹⁴ Basilius Valentinus, "Practica," *Mus. herm.*, p. 404.

¹⁵ Philaletha, "Metallorum metamorphosis," *ibid.*, p. 771, and "Introitus apertus," *ibid.*, p. 654.

3. MERCURIUS AS FIRE

256 Many treatises define Mercurius simply as fire.¹ He is *ignis elementaris*,² *noster naturalis ignis certissimus*,³ which again indicates his "philosophic" nature. The *aqua mercurialis* is even a divine fire.⁴ This fire is "highly vaporous" (*vaporosus*).⁵ Indeed, Mercurius is really the only fire in the whole procedure.⁶ He is an "invisible fire, working in secret."⁷ One text says that the "heart" of Mercurius is at the North Pole and that he is like a fire (northern lights).⁸ He is, in fact, as another text says, "the universal and scintillating fire of the light of nature, which carries the heavenly spirit within it."⁹ This passage is particularly important as it relates Mercurius to the *lumen naturae*, the source of mystical knowledge second only to the holy revelation of the Scriptures. Once more we catch a glimpse of the ancient role of Hermes as the god of revelation. Although the *lumen naturae*, as originally bestowed by God upon his creatures, is not by nature ungodly, its essence was nevertheless felt to be abysmal, since the *ignis mercurialis* was also connected with the fires of hell. It seems, however, that the alchemists did not understand hell, or its fire, as absolutely outside of God or opposed to him, but rather as an internal component of the deity, which must indeed be so if God is held to be a *coincidentia opposi-*

¹ *Aurora consurgens* II, in *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 212; Dorn, "Congeries Paracelsicae," *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 502; Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 245.

² "Via veritatis," *Mus. herm.*, p. 200.

³ "Tractatus aureus," *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴ "Aquarium sapientum," *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶ "There is no fire in all the work save Mercurius" ("Fons chymicae veritatis," *ibid.*, p. 803).

⁷ "Metall. metamorph.," *ibid.*, p. 766.

⁸ "At the Pole is the heart of Mercurius, which is the true fire, in which is the resting place of his Lord, sailing through this great sea" ("Introit. apert.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 655). A somewhat obscure symbolism!

⁹ "Aquarium sap.," *ibid.*, p. 84.

torum. The concept of an all-encompassing God must necessarily include his opposite. The *coincidentia*, of course, must not be too radical or too extreme, otherwise God would cancel himself out.¹⁰ The principle of the coincidence of opposites must therefore be completed by that of absolute opposition in order to attain full paradoxicality and hence psychological validity.

²⁵⁷ The mercurial fire is found in the "centre of the earth," or dragon's belly, in fluid form. Benedictus Figulus writes: "Visit the centre of the earth, there you will find the global fire."¹¹ Another treatise says that this fire is the "secret, infernal fire, the wonder of the world, the system of the higher powers in the lower."¹² Mercurius, the revelatory light of nature, is also hell-fire, which in some miraculous way is none other than a rearrangement of the heavenly, spiritual powers in the lower, chthonic world of matter, thought already in St. Paul's time to be ruled by the devil. Hell-fire, the true energetic principle of evil, appears here as the manifest counterpart of the spiritual and the good, and as essentially identical with it in substance. After that, it can surely cause no offence when another treatise says that the mercurial fire is the "fire in which God himself burns in divine love."¹³ We are not deceiving ourselves if we feel in scattered remarks of this kind the breath of true mysticism.

²⁵⁸ Since Mercurius is himself of fiery nature, fire does not harm him: he remains unchanged within it, rejoicing like the salamander.¹⁴ It is unnecessary to point out that quicksilver does not behave like this but vaporizes under heat, as the alchemists themselves knew from very early times.

¹⁰ This is a purely psychological explanation having to do with human conceptions and statements and not with the unfathomable Being.

¹¹ Figulus, *Rosarium novum olympicum*, Pars I, p. 71. This is the "domus ignis idem Enoch." Cf. "Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon," supra, par. 186.

¹² "Ignis infernalis secretus . . . mundi miraculum, virtutum superiorum in inferioribus systema" ("Introit. apert.," p. 654).

¹³ "Ignis in quo Deus ipse ardet amore divino" ("Gloria mundi," p. 246).

¹⁴ "For it is he who overcomes the fire, and is himself not overcome by the fire, but rests in it as a friend, rejoicing in it" (Geber, "Summa perfectionis," *De alchemia*, cap. LXIII, p. 139).

4. MERCURIUS AS SPIRIT AND SOUL

259 If Mercurius had been understood simply as quicksilver, there would obviously have been no need for any of the appellations I have listed. The fact that this need arose points to the conclusion that one simple and unmistakable term in no way sufficed to designate what the alchemists had in mind when they spoke of Mercurius. It was certainly quicksilver, but a very special quicksilver, "our" Mercurius, the essence, moisture, or principle behind or within the quicksilver—that indefinable, fascinating, irritating, and elusive thing which attracts an unconscious projection. The "philosophic" Mercurius, this *servus fugitivus* or *cervus fugitivus* (fugitive slave or stag), is a highly important unconscious content which, as may be gathered from the few hints we have given, threatens to ramify into a set of far-reaching psychological problems. The concept swells dangerously and we begin to perceive that the end is nowhere in sight. Therefore we would rather not tie this concept prematurely to any special meaning, but shall content ourselves with stating that the philosophic Mercurius, so dear to the alchemist as the transformative substance, is obviously a projection of the unconscious, such as always takes place when the inquiring mind lacks the necessary self-criticism in investigating an unknown quantity.

260 As has already been indicated, the psychic nature of the arcane substance did not escape the alchemists; indeed, they actually defined it as "spirit" and "soul." But since these concepts—especially in earlier times—were always ambiguous, we must approach them with caution if we want to gain a moderately clear idea of what the terms *spiritus* and *anima* meant in alchemical usage.

A. MERCURIUS AS AN AERIAL SPIRIT

261 Hermes, originally a wind god, and his counterpart the Egyptian Thoth, who "makes the souls to breathe,"¹ are the forerunners of the alchemical Mercurius in his aerial aspect. The texts often use the terms *pneuma* and *spiritus* in the original concrete sense of "air in motion." So when Mercurius is described in the *Rosarium philosophorum* (fifteenth century) as *aereus* and *volans*² (winged), and in Hoghelande (sixteenth century) as *totus aereus et spiritualis*,³ what is meant is nothing more than a gaseous state of aggregation. Something similar is meant by the poetic expression *serenitas aerea* in the Ripley *Scrowle*,⁴ and by the same author's statement that Mercurius is changed into wind.⁵ He is the *lapis elevatus cum vento* (the stone uplifted by the wind).⁶ The expressions *spirituale corpus*⁷ and *spiritus visibilis, tamen impalpabilis*⁸ (visible yet impalpable spirit) might also mean little more than "air" if one recalls the aforementioned vapour-like nature of Mercurius, and the same is probably true even of the *spiritus prae cunctis valde purus*⁹ (pre-eminently pure spirit). The designation *incombustibilis*¹⁰ is more doubtful, since this was often synonymous with *incorruptibilis* and then meant "eternal," as we shall see later. Penotus (sixteenth century), a pupil of Paracelsus, stresses the corporeal aspect when he says that Mercurius is "nothing other than the spirit of the world become body within the earth."¹¹ This expression shows better than anything else the contamination—inconceivable to the modern mind—of two separate realms, spirit and matter; for to people in the Middle Ages

¹ This characteristic of Mercurius is stressed in *Aurora consurgens* II, in *Art. aurif.*, I, pp. 146 and 190: "He makes the nostrils [of the foetus] in the fifth month."

² *Rosarium*, pp. 252, 271.

³ *Theatrum chemicum*, I (1659), p. 169.

⁴ 16th cent. British Museum, MS. Add. 10302.

⁵ Ripley, *Opera*, p. 35.

⁶ "Tractatus aureus," *Mus. herm.*, p. 39.

⁷ *Rosarium*, p. 282.

⁸ Basilii Valentinus, "Practica," *Mus. herm.*, p. 404.

⁹ "Introit. apert.," *ibid.*, p. 654.

¹⁰ *Rosarium*, p. 252.

¹¹ *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 600.

the *spiritus mundi* was also the spirit which rules nature, and not just a pervasive gas. We find ourselves in the same dilemma when another author, Mylius, in his *Philosophia reformata*,¹² describes Mercurius as an "intermediate substance" (*media substantia*), which is evidently synonymous with his concept of the *anima media natura*¹³ (soul as intermediate nature), for to him Mercurius was the "spirit and soul of the bodies."¹⁴

B. MERCURIUS AS SOUL

²⁶² "Soul" represents a higher concept than "spirit" in the sense of air or gas. As the "subtle body" or "breath-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*.¹⁵ The *nostra* here does not mean "our own" soul but, as in *aqua nostra*, *Mercurius noster*, *corpus nostrum*, refers to the arcane substance.

²⁶³ However, *anima* often appears to be connected with *spiritus*, or is equated with it.¹⁶ For the spirit shares the living quality of the soul, and for this reason Mercurius is often called the *spiritus vegetativus*¹⁷ (spirit of life) or *spiritus seminalis*.¹⁸ A peculiar appellation is found in that seventeenth-century forgery which purports to be the secret book of Abraham le Juif, mentioned by Nicolas Flamel (fourteenth century). The epithet is *spiritus Phytonis* (from *φύω*, 'to procreate,' *φυτόν*, 'creature,' *φύτωρ*, 'procreator,' and *Python*, the Delphic serpent), and is accompanied by the serpent sign: .¹⁹ Very much more material is the definition of Mercurius as a "life-giving power like a

¹² P. 183.

¹³ P. 19.

¹⁴ P. 308.

¹⁵ "Tractatus aureus," *Mus. herm.*, p. 39.

¹⁶ Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 308: "(Mercurius est) spiritus et anima corporis." The same in Ventura, *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 282, and in "Tractatus Micreris," *ibid.*, V (1660), p. 92.

¹⁷ Aegidius de Vadis, *ibid.*, II (1659), p. 106.

¹⁸ Philaletha, "Metall. metamorph.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 766.

¹⁹ Abraham Eleazar, *Uraltes Chymisches Werck*, pp. 29ff. "Phyton is the life of all things," p. 34.

glue, holding the world together and standing in the middle between body and spirit.”²⁰ This concept corresponds to Mylius’ definition of Mercurius as the *anima media natura*. From here it is but a step to the identification of Mercurius with the *anima mundi*,²¹ which is how Avicenna had defined him very much earlier (twelfth to thirteenth century). “He is the spirit of the Lord which fills the whole world and in the beginning swam upon the waters. They call him also the spirit of Truth, which is hidden from the world.”²² Another text says that Mercurius is the “supracelestial spirit which is conjoined with the light, and rightly could be called the *anima mundi*.”²³ It is clear from a number of texts that the alchemists related their concept of the *anima mundi* on the one hand to the world soul in Plato’s *Timaeus* and on the other to the Holy Spirit, who was present at the Creation and played the role of procreator (*φύτωρ*), impregnating the waters with the seed of life just as, later, he played a similar role in the *obumbratio* (overshadowing) of Mary.²⁴ Elsewhere we read that a “life-force dwells in *Mercurius non vulgaris*, who flies like solid white snow. This is a spirit of the macrocosmic as of the microcosmic world, upon whom, after the *anima rationalis*, the motion and fluidity of human nature itself depends.”²⁵ The snow represents the purified Mercurius in the state of *albedo* (= spirituality); here again matter and spirit are identical. Worth noting is the duality of soul caused by the presence of Mercurius: on the one hand the immortal *anima rationalis* given by God to man, which distinguishes him from animals; on the other hand the mercurial life-soul, which to all appearances is connected with the *inflatio* or *inspiratio* of the Holy Spirit. This fundamental duality forms the psychological basis of the two sources of illumination.

²⁰ Happelius, “Aphorismi Basiliani,” *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 327.

²¹ *Verus Hermes* (1620).

²² “Aquarium sap.,” *Mus. herm.*, p. 85.

²³ Steeb, *Coelum Sephiroticum*, p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁵ Happelius, *loc. cit.*

C. MERCURIUS AS SPIRIT IN THE
INCORPOREAL, METAPHYSICAL SENSE

²⁶⁴ In many of the passages it remains doubtful whether *spiritus* means spirit in an abstract sense.²⁶ It is moderately certain that this is so in Dorn, for he says that "Mercurius possesses the quality of an incorruptible spirit, which is like the soul, and because of its incorruptibility is called intellectual" ²⁷—i.e., pertaining to the *mundus intelligibilis*. One text expressly calls him "spiritual and hyperphysical," ²⁸ and another says that the spirit of Mercurius comes from heaven.²⁹ Laurentius Ventura (sixteenth century) may well have been associating himself with the "Platonis liber quartorum" and hence with the neo-Platonist ideas of the Harranite school when he defined the spirit of Mercurius as "completely and entirely like itself" (*sibi omnino similis*) and *simplex*,³⁰ for this Harranite text defines the arcane substance as the *res simplex* and equates it with God.³¹

²⁶⁵ The oldest reference to the mercurial *pneuma* occurs in an Ostanes quotation of considerable antiquity (possibly pre-Christian), which says: "Go to the streamings of the Nile, and there you will find a stone that has a spirit." ³² In Zosimos Mercurius is characterized as incorporeal (*ἀσώματον*),³³ and by another author as ethereal (*αιθερώδες πνεῦμα*) and as having become rational or wise (*σώφρων γενομένη*).³⁴ In the very old treatise "Isis to Horus" (first century) the divine water is brought by an angel and is clearly of celestial or possibly daemonic origin, since according to the text the angel Amnael who brings it is not a morally irreproachable figure.³⁵ For the alchemists, as we know not only from the ancient but also from the later writers,

²⁶ For instance, Djābir in Berthelot, *Chimie au moyen âge*, III, p. 169; *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 339; Hoghelande, *Theatr. chem.*, I (1602), pp. 153, 183.

²⁷ *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 419. The same in Ripley, "Axiomata," *ibid.*, II (1659), p. 123.

²⁸ "Tractatus aureus." *Mus. herm.*, p. 11. Here cited from Valentinus.

²⁹ Steeb, *Coelum Sefhiroticum*, p. 137.

³⁰ *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 231.

³¹ *Ibid.*, V (1660), p. 129.

³² Berthelot, *Alch. grees*, III, vi, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, xxviii, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, vii, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, xiii, 3. [Cf. *supra*, "The Visions of Zosimos," pars. 97ff.]

Mercurius as the arcane substance had a more or less secret connection with the goddess of love. In the "Book of Krates," which was transmitted by the Arabs and is possibly of Alexandrian origin, Aphrodite appears with a vessel from the mouth of which pours a ceaseless stream of quicksilver,³⁶ and in the *Chymical Wedding* of Christian Rosencreutz the central mystery is his visit to the secret chamber of the sleeping Venus.

266 The fact that Mercurius is interpreted as spirit and soul, in spite of the spirit-body dilemma which this involves, indicates that the alchemists themselves conceived of their arcane substance as something that we today would call a psychic phenomenon. Indeed, whatever else spirit and soul may be, from the phenomenological point of view they are psychic structures. The alchemists never tired of drawing attention to the psychic nature of Mercurius. So far we have concerned ourselves with, statistically, the commonest synonyms such as water and fire, spirit and soul, and it is now possible for us to conclude that these exemplify a psychological state of affairs best characterized by (or, indeed, actually demanding) an antinomian nomenclature. Water and fire are classic opposites and can be valid definitions of one and the same thing only if this thing unites in itself the contrary qualities of water and fire. The psychologem "Mercurius" must therefore possess an essentially antinomian dual nature.

³⁶ Berthelot, *Moyen âge*, III, p 63.

5. THE DUAL NATURE OF MERCURIUS

267 Mercurius, following the tradition of Hermes, is many-sided, changeable, and deceitful. Dorn speaks of "that inconstant Mercurius,"¹ and another calls him *versipellis* (changing his skin, shifty).² He is *duplex*³ 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."⁴ He is "two dragons,"⁵ the "twin,"⁶ made of "two natures"⁷ or "two substances."⁸ He is the "giant of twofold substance," in explanation of which the text⁹ 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."¹⁰ 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."¹¹ There is the "common and the philosophic" Mercurius;¹² he consists of "the dry and earthy, the moist and viscous."¹³ Two of his elements are passive, earth and water, and two active, air

¹ *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 470.

² Aegidius de Vadis, *ibid.*, II (1659), p. 105.

³ "Aquarium sap.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 84; Trevisanus, in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 695; Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 176.

⁴ "Aurelia occulta," *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 506.

⁵ "Brevis manuductio," *Mus. herm.*, p. 788.

⁶ Valentinus, "Practica," *ibid.*, p. 425.

⁷ Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 18; "Exercitationes in Turbam," *Art. aurif.*, I, pp. 159, 161.

⁸ Dorn, in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 420.

⁹ "Aquarium sap.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 111. [Cf. *infra*, par. 384. n. 5.]

¹⁰ "Summarium philosophicum," *ibid.*, pp. 172f.

¹¹ Cf. the snake vision of Ignatius Loyola and the polyophthalmia motif discussed in "On the Nature of the Psyche," pp. 198f.

¹² "Tractatus aureus," *Mus. herm.*, p. 25.

¹³ "Consilium coniugii," *Ars chemica* (1566), p. 59.

and fire.¹⁴ He is both good and evil.¹⁵ The "Aurelia occulta" gives a graphic description of him:¹⁶

I am the poison-dripping dragon, who is everywhere and can be cheaply had. That upon which I rest, and that which rests upon me, will be found within me by those who pursue their investigations in accordance with the rules of the Art. My water and fire destroy and put together; from my body you may extract the green lion and the red. But if you do not have exact knowledge of me, you will destroy your five senses with my fire. From my snout there comes a spreading poison that has brought death to many. Therefore you should skillfully separate the coarse from the fine, if you do not wish to suffer utter poverty. I bestow on you the powers of the male and the female, and also those of heaven and of earth. The mysteries of my art must be handled with courage and greatness of mind if you would conquer me by the power¹⁷ of fire, for already very many have come to grief, their riches and labour lost. I am the egg of nature, known only to the wise, who in piety and modesty bring forth from me the microcosm, which was prepared for mankind by Almighty God, but given only to the few, while the many long for it in vain, that they may do good to the poor with my treasure and not fasten their souls to the perishable gold. By the philosophers I am named Mercurius; my spouse is the [philosophic] gold; I am the old dragon, found everywhere on the globe of the earth, father and mother, young and old, very strong and very weak, death and resurrection, visible and invisible, hard and soft; I descend into the earth and ascend to the heavens, I am the highest and the lowest, the lightest and the heaviest; often the order of nature is reversed in me, as regards colour, number, weight, and measure; I contain the light of nature; I am dark and light; I come forth from heaven and earth; I am known and yet do not exist at all;¹⁸ by virtue of the sun's rays all colours shine in me, and all metals. I am the carbuncle of the sun, the most noble purified earth, through which you may change copper, iron, tin, and lead into gold.

268 Because of his united double nature Mercurius is described as hermaphroditic. Sometimes his body is said to be masculine and his soul feminine, sometimes the reverse. The *Rosarium*

¹⁴ *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 208.

¹⁵ Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 218.

¹⁶ *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), pp. 501ff.

¹⁷ I read *vi* instead of *vim*.

¹⁸ This paradox recalls the Indian *asat* (non-existing). Cf. Chhândogya Upanishad, VI, ii, 1 (Sacred Books of the East, II, p. 93).

philosophorum, for example, has both versions.¹⁹ As *vulgaris* he is the dead masculine body, but as "our" Mercurius he is feminine, spiritual, alive and life-giving.²⁰ He is also called husband and wife,²¹ bridegroom and bride, or lover and beloved.²² His contrary natures are often called *Mercurius sensu strictiori* and sulphur, the former being feminine, earth, and Eve, and the latter masculine, water, and Adam.²³ In Dorn he is the "true hermaphroditic Adam,"²⁴ and in Khunrath he is "begotten of the hermaphroditic seed of the Macrocosm" as "an immaculate birth from the hermaphroditic matter" (i.e., the *prima materia*).²⁵ Mylius calls him the "hermaphroditic monster."²⁶ As Adam he is also the microcosm, or even "the heart of the microcosm,"²⁷ or he has the microcosm "in himself, where are also the four elements and the *quinta essentia* which they call Heaven."²⁸ The term *coelum* for Mercurius does not, as one might think, derive from the *firmamentum* of Paracelsus, but occurs earlier in Johannes de Rupescissa (fourteenth century).²⁹ The term *homo* is used as a synonym for "microcosm," as when Mercurius is named the "Philosophic ambisexual Man."³⁰ In the very old "Dicta Belini" (Belinus or Balinus is a corruption of Apollonius of Tyana), he is the "man rising from the river,"³¹ probably a reference to the vision of Ezra.³² In Trismosin's *Splendor solis* (sixteenth century) there is an illustration of this.³³ The idea itself may go back to the Babylonian teacher of wisdom, Oannes. The designation of Mercurius as the "high

¹⁹ *Art. aurif.*, II, pp. 239, 249.

²⁰ "Introit. apert.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 653.

²¹ "Gloria mundi," *ibid.*, p. 250.

²² *Aurora consurgens* I, Parable VII.

²³ Ruland, *Lexicon alchemiae*, p. 47.

²⁴ *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 510.

²⁵ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 62.

²⁶ *Phil. ref.*, p. 19.

²⁷ Happelius in *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 327.

²⁸ *Phil. ref.*, p. 5.

²⁹ *La Vertu et propriété de la quinte essence*, p. 15. The "metal of the philosophers" will become like "heaven," says the "Tractatus Micreris," *Theatr. chem.*, V (1660), p. 100.

³⁰ Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 195.

³¹ Manget, *Bibliotheca chemica*, I, p. 478b.

³² IV Ezra 13 : 25-53. Cf. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, II, pp. 618f.

³³ In *Aureum vellus* (1598), Tract 3: *Splendor Solis* (1920 facsimile), p. 23, Pl. VIII.

man" ³⁴ does not fit in badly with such a pedigree. The terms Adam and microcosm occur frequently in the texts,³⁵ but the Abraham le Juif forgery unblushingly calls Mercurius Adam Kadmon.³⁶ As I have discussed this unmistakable continuation of the Gnostic doctrine of the Anthropos elsewhere,³⁷ there is no need for me to go more closely now into this aspect of Mercurius.³⁸ Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize once again that the Anthropos idea coincides with the psychological concept of the self. The atman and purusha doctrine as well as alchemy give clear proofs of this.

269 Another aspect of the dual nature of Mercurius is his characterization as *senex*³⁹ and *puer*.⁴⁰ The figure of Hermes as an old man, attested by archaeology, brings him into direct relation with Saturn—a relationship which plays a considerable role in alchemy (see *infra*, pars. 274ff.). Mercurius truly consists of the most extreme opposites; on the one hand he is undoubtedly akin to the godhead, on the other he is found in sewers. Rosinus (Zosimos) even calls him the *terminus ani*.⁴¹ In the Bundahish,⁴² the anus of Garotman is "like hell on earth."

³⁴ Ruland, *Lexicon alchemiae*, p. 47.

³⁵ John Dee in *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 195; *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 309.

³⁶ Elcazar, *Uraltes Chymisches Werck*, p. 51. Adam Kadmon is the Primordial Man; cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, ch. V.

³⁷ "Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon," *supra*, pars. 165ff., and *Psychology and Alchemy*, index, s.v.

³⁸ Gayomart also is a kind of vegetation numen like Mercurius, and like him fertilizes his mother, the earth. At the place where his life came to an end the earth turned to gold, and where his limbs disintegrated various metals appeared. Cf. Christensen, *Les Types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, pp. 26, 29.

³⁹ *Senex draco* in Valentinus, "Practica," *Mus. herm.*, p. 425. In *Verus Hermes* (1620), pp. 15, 16, Mercurius is also designated with the Gnostic name "Father-Mother."

⁴⁰ "De arte chimica," *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 581. *Regius puellus* in "Introit. apert.," *Mus. herm.*, pp. 678, 655.

⁴¹ *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 310. Here it is the stone identical with Mercurius that is so called. The context disallows the reading "anni." The passage which follows soon after, "nascitur in duobus montibus," refers to the "Tractatus Aristotelis" (*Theatr. chem.*, V, 1660, pp. 787ff.), where the act of defecation is described. (Cf. *supra*, "Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon," par. 182, n. 61.) Corresponding illustrations for *Aurora consurgens* may be found in the Codex Rhenoviensis.

⁴² Ch. XXVIII. Cf. Reitzenstein and Schaefer, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran und Griechenland*, p. 119.

6. THE UNITY AND TRINITY OF MERCURIUS

270 In spite of his obvious duality the unity of Mercurius is also emphasized, especially in his form as the lapis. "In all the world he is One."¹ The unity of Mercurius is at the same time a trinity, with clear reference to the Holy Trinity, although his triadic nature does not derive from Christian dogma but is of earlier date. Triads occur as early as the treatise of Zosimos, *περὶ ἀρετῆς* (Concerning the Art).² Martial calls Hermes *omnia solus et ter unus* (All and Thrice One).³ In Monakris (Arcadia), a three-headed Hermes was worshipped, and in Gaul there was a three-headed Mercurius.⁴ This Gallic god was also a psychopomp. The triadic character is an attribute of the gods of the underworld, as for instance the three-bodied Typhon, three-bodied and three-faced Hecate,⁵ and the "ancestors" (*τριτοπάτορες*) with their serpent bodies. According to Cicero,⁶ these latter are the three sons of Zeus the King, the *rex antiquissimus*.⁷ They are called the "forefathers" and are wind-gods;⁸ obviously by the same logic the Hopi Indians believe that snakes are at the same time flashes of lightning auguring rain. Khunrath calls Mercurius *triunus*⁹ and *ternarius*.¹⁰ Mylius represents him as a three-

¹ *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 253.

² Berthelot, *Alch. grecs*, III, vi, 18: "The unity of the composition [produces] the indivisible triad, and thus an undivided triad composed of separate elements creates the cosmos, through the forethought [*προνοία*] of the First Author, the cause and demiurge of creation; wherefore he is called Trismegistos, having beheld triadically that which is created and that which creates."

³ *Epigrammata*, V, 24.

⁴ Reinach, *Cultes, mythes et religions*, III, pp. 160f.

⁵ Schweitzer, *Herakles*, pp. 84ff.

⁶ *De natura deorum*, 3, 21, 53.

⁷ There is also a *Zeus triops*.

⁸ Roscher, *Lexicon*, V, col. 1208.

⁹ *Hyl. Chaos*, pp. 6 and 199.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

headed snake.¹¹ The "Aquarium sapientum" says that he is a "triune, universal essence which is named Jehova.¹² He is divine and at the same time human."¹³

²⁷¹ From all this one must conclude that Mercurius corresponds not only to Christ, but to the triune divinity in general. The "Aurelia occulta" calls him "Azoth," and explains the term as follows: "For he is the A and O that is everywhere present. The philosophers have adorned [him] with the name Azoth, which is compounded of the A and Z of the Latins, the alpha and omega of the Greeks, and the aleph and tau of the Hebrews:

$$A \left\{ \begin{array}{c} Z \\ \omega \\ \hbar \end{array} \right\} \text{Azoth.}''^{14}$$

The parallel with the Trinity could not be more clearly indicated. The anonymous commentator of the "Tractatus aureus" puts the parallel with Christ as Logos just as unmistakably. All things proceed from the "philosophic heaven adorned with an infinite multitude of stars,"¹⁵ from the creative Word incarnate, the Johannine Logos, without which "was not any thing made that was made." The commentator says: "Thus the Word of renewal is invisibly inherent in all things, but it is not evident in elementary solid bodies unless they have been brought back to the fifth, or heavenly and astral essence. Hence this Word of renewal is the seed of promise, or the philosophic heaven refulgent with the infinite lights of the stars."¹⁶ Mercurius is the Logos become world. The description given here may point to his basic identity with the collective unconscious, for as I tried to show in my essay "On the Nature of the Psyche,"¹⁷ the image of the starry heaven seems to be a visualization of the peculiar nature of the unconscious. Since Mercurius is often called *filius*, his sonship is beyond question.¹⁸ He is therefore like a

¹¹ *Phil. ref.*, p. 96.

¹² This peculiar designation refers to the demiurge, the saturnine Ialdabaoth, who was connected with the "God of the Jews."

¹³ *Mus. herm.*, p. 112.

¹⁴ *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 507.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 614.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

¹⁷ Pp. 198f.

¹⁸ Cf. *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 248: "filius . . . coloris coelici" (cited from

brother to Christ and a second son of God, though in point of time he must be accounted the elder and the first-born. This idea goes back to the conceptions of the Euchites reported in Michael Psellus,¹⁹ who believed that God's first son was Satan-aël²⁰ and that Christ was the second.²¹ However, Mercurius is not only the counterpart of Christ in so far as he is the "son"; he is also the counterpart of the Trinity as a whole in so far as he is conceived to be a chthonic triad. According to this view he would be equal to one half of the Christian Godhead. He is indeed the dark chthonic half, but he is not simply evil as such, for he is called "good *and* evil," or a "system of the higher powers in the lower." He calls to mind that double figure which seems to stand behind both Christ and the devil—that enigmatic Lucifer whose attributes are shared by both. In Rev. 22 : 16 Christ says of himself: "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and the morning star."

- ²⁷² One peculiarity of Mercurius which undoubtedly relates him to the Godhead and to the primitive creator god is his ability to beget himself. In the "*Allegoriae super librum Turbae*" he says: "The mother bore me and is herself begotten of me."²² As the uroboros dragon, he impregnates, begets, bears, devours, and slays himself, and "himself lifts himself on high," as the *Rosarium* says,²³ so paraphrasing the mystery of God's sacrificial death. Here, as in many similar instances, it would be rash to assume that the alchemists were as conscious of their reasoning processes as perhaps we are. But man, and through him the un-

Haly's "Secretum"); Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, passim: "filius macrocosmi," p. 59: "unigenitus"; Penotus in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 601: "filius hominis, fructus virginis."

¹⁹ *De daemonibus* (trans. Marsilio Ficino), fol. N. Vv.

²⁰ Cf. the report on the Bogomils in Euthymios Zigabenos, "*Panoplia dogmatica*" (Migne, *P.G.*, vol. 130, cols. 129ff.).

²¹ The duality of the sonship appears to date back to the Ebionites in Epiphanius: "Two, they assert, were raised up by God, the one (is) Christ, the other the devil" (*Panarium*, XXX, 16, 2).

²² *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 151. The same is said of God in the *Contes del Graal* of Chrétien de Troyes:

"Ce doit icil glorieus pere
Qui de sa fille fist sa mere."

(Hilka, *Der Percevalroman*, p. 372.)

²³ *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 339.

conscious, expresses a great deal that is not necessarily conscious in all its implications. Nevertheless I should like to avoid giving the impression that the alchemists were absolutely unconscious of their thought-processes. How little this was so is proved by the above quotations. But although Mercurius, in many texts, is stated to be *trinus et unus*, this does not prevent him from sharing very strongly the *quaternity* of the lapis, with which he is essentially identical. He thus exemplifies that strange dilemma which is posed by the problem of three and four—the well-known axiom of Maria Prophetissa. There is a classical *Hermes tetracephalus* as well as the *Hermes tricephalus*.²⁴ The ground-plan of the Sabaeen temple of Mercurius was a triangle inside a square.²⁵ In the scholia to the “Tractatus aureus” the sign for Mercurius is a square inside a triangle surrounded by a circle (symbol of totality).²⁶

²⁴ Schweitzer, *Herakles*, p. 84.

²⁵ Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, II, p. 367.

²⁶ *Bibl. chem.*, I, p. 400.

7. THE RELATION OF MERCURIUS TO ASTROLOGY AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ARCHONS

273 One of the roots of the peculiar philosophy relating to Mercurius lies in ancient astrology and in the Gnostic doctrine of the archons and aeons, which is derived from it. Between Mercurius and the planet there is a relation of mystical identity due either to contamination or to an actual spiritual identity. In the first case quicksilver is simply the planet Mercury as it appears in the earth (just as gold is simply the sun in the earth);¹ in the second, the "spirit" of quicksilver is identical with the planetary spirit. Both spirits individually, or the two as one spirit, were personified and called upon for aid or magically conjured into service as a *paredros* or "familiar." Within the alchemical tradition we find directions for such procedures in the Harranite treatise "Clavis maioris sapientiae" of Artefius,² which agree with descriptions of the invocations mentioned by Dozy and de Goeje.³ There are also references to procedures of this kind in the "Liber Platonis quartorum."⁴ Parallel with this is the account according to which Democritus received the secret of the hieroglyphs from the genius of the planet Mercury.⁵ The spirit Mercurius appears here in the role of a mystagogue, as in the *Corpus Hermeticum* or the visions of Zosimos. He plays the same role in the remarkable dream-vision recorded in "Aurelia occulta," where he appears as the Anthropos with a crown of stars.⁶ As the little star near the sun, he is the child of sun and

¹ Maier, *Circulus physicus quadratus*, pp. 13ff.

² *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), pp. 198ff.

³ "Nouveaux documents pour l'étude de la religion des Harraniens," p. 341.

⁴ *Theatr. chem.*, V (1660), pp. 101ff.

⁵ Berthelot, *Alch. grecs*, Introduction, p. 236.

⁶ *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 510. [Supra, par. 106.] He corresponds to the *stella semptemplex* which appears at the end of the work. ". . . cook, until the seven-fold star appears, running about through the sphere" (*ibid.*, p. 508). Cf. the early

moon.⁷ But contrariwise he is also the begetter of his parents;⁸ or, as the treatise of Wei Po-yang (c. A.D. 142) remarks, the gold (sun) gets its qualities from Mercurius.⁹ (Owing to the contamination, the astrological myth is always thought of in chemical terms as well.) Because of his half-feminine nature, Mercurius is often identified with the moon¹⁰ and Venus.¹¹ 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."¹² 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 or evening sky, is like her a Lucifer, a light-bringer (*φωσφόρος*). He heralds, as the morning star does, only much more directly, the coming of the light.

²⁷⁴ 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 repre-

Christian idea of Christ as the leader of the "round dance" of the stars. ("Transformation Symbolism in the Mass," pp. 273ff.)

⁷ "Tabula smaragdina," *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 253, and Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 101.

⁸ "Allegoriae super librum Turbae," *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 155: "origo Solis"; Ventura, *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 296: "The sun rises together with the moon in the belly of Mercurius."

⁹ Wei Po-yang, "An Ancient Chinese Treatise," p. 241.

¹⁰ "Epistola ad Hermannum," *Theatr. chem.*, V (1660), p. 800; "Gloria mundi," *Mus. herm.*, pp. 224, 244. As the arcane substance magnesia he is called the "full moon" (*Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 231) and *succus lunariae* (p. 211). He has fallen down from the moon (Berthelot, *Alch. greccs*, III, vi, 9). The sign for Mercurius is ☿ in the "Book of Krates" (Berthelot, *Moyen âge*, III, p. 48). In the Greek Magic Papyri, Hermes is invoked as "circle of the moon" (Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, I, p. 195).

¹¹ Vision of Krates in Berthelot, *Moyen âge*, III, p. 63. As Adam with Venus in the bath, Valentinus, "Practica," *Mus. herm.*, p. 425 (cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, pp. 303, 383). As *Sal Veneris*, green and red lion (= Venus), Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, pp. 91, 104. The substance of Mercurius consists of Venus (Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 17). Since his mother Venus is the *matrix corrupta*, Mercurius as her son is the *puer leprosus* ("Rosinus ad Sarratantam," *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 318). In the Magic Papyri, the day of Aphrodite is associated with Hermes (Preisendanz, *Pap. Graec. Mag.*, II, p. 120). In Al-Îrâqî the attributes of Venus are identical with those of Mercurius: sister, bride, air, green, green lion, phoenix (Holmyard, p. 420).

¹² "Aurelia occulta," *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 480.

sents the prima materia. In the Arabic text of the *Turba*¹³ 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."¹⁴ This refers to the "eternal water" which is just what Mercurius is. Raymund Lully remarks that "a certain oil of a golden colour is extracted from the philosophic lead."¹⁵ In Khunrath Mercurius is the "salt of Saturn,"¹⁶ or Saturn is simply Mercurius. Saturn "draws the eternal water."¹⁷ Like Mercurius, Saturn is hermaphroditic.¹⁸ Saturn is "an old man on a mountain, and in him the natures are bound with their complement [i.e., the four elements], and all this is in Saturn."¹⁹ The same is said of Mercurius. Saturn is the father and origin of Mercurius, therefore the latter is called "Saturn's child."²⁰ Quicksilver comes "from the heart of Saturn or is Saturn,"²¹ and a "bright water" is extracted from the plant Saturnia, "the most perfect water and flower in the world."²² This statement of Sir George Ripley, Canon of Bridlington, is a most remarkable parallel to the Gnostic teaching that Kronos (Saturn) is a "power of the colour of water" (*ὕδατοςχρως*) which destroys everything, since "water is destruction."²³

²⁷⁵ Like the planetary spirit of Mercurius, the spirit of Saturn is "very suited to this work."²⁴ 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.²⁵ Khunrath calls him

¹³ Ed. Ruska, p. 204.

¹⁴ *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 379. The same in Dorn, *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), pp. 560f.

¹⁵ Cited in Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 302.

¹⁶ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 197.

¹⁷ "Aenigma philosophorum," *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), pp. 458ff.

¹⁸ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 195.

¹⁹ "Rhasis Epist." in Maier, *Symb. aur. mens.*, p. 211. Like Saturn, Mercurius combines all metals in himself (*ibid.*, p. 531).

²⁰ Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 305. "Saturn's Chyld" in Ripley's "Medulla" (*Theatr. chem. Brit.*, p. 391).

²¹ Pantheus, *Ars transmut. metall.*, fol. 9r.

²² Ripley, *Opera*, p. 317.

²³ Hippolytus, *Elenchos*, V, 16, 2.

²⁴ "Liber Platonis quattorum," *Theatr. chem.*, V (1660), pp. 127, 136.

²⁵ Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I, p. 43.

"the lion of the Catholic tribe,"²⁶ paraphrasing the "lion of the tribe of Judah"—an allegory of Christ.²⁷ He calls Saturn "the lion green and red."²⁸ In Gnosticism Saturn is the highest archon, the lion-headed Ialdabaoth,²⁹ meaning "child of chaos." But in alchemy the child of chaos is Mercurius.³⁰

²⁷⁶ The relation to and identity with Saturn is important because Saturn is not only a *maleficus* but actually the dwelling-place of the devil himself. Even as the highest archon and demiurge his Gnostic reputation was not the best. According to one Cabalistic source, Beelzebub was associated with him.³¹ Mylius says that if Mercurius were to be purified, then Lucifer would fall from heaven.³² A contemporary marginal note in a seventeenth-century treatise in my possession explains the term sulphur, the masculine principle of Mercurius,³³ as *diabolus*. If Mercurius is not exactly the Evil One himself, he at least contains him—that is, he is morally neutral, good and evil, or as Khunrath says: "Good with the good, evil with the evil."³⁴ His nature is more exactly defined, however, if one conceives him as a *process* that begins with evil and ends with good. A rather deplorable but picturesque poem in *Verus Hermes* (1620) summarizes the process as follows:

A weakling babe, a greybeard old,
Surnamed the Dragon: me they hold
In darkest dungeon languishing
That I may be reborn a king.

A fiery sword makes me to smart,
Death gnaws my flesh and bones apart.

²⁶ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 93.

²⁷ Cf. Christ as lion in the *Ancoratus* of Epiphanius and as lion cub in St. Gregory, *In Septem Psalm. Penit.*, Ps. 5: 10 (Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 79, col. 609).

²⁸ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 195.

²⁹ Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, pp. 10, 321, 352.

³⁰ For Saturn's day as the last day of creation, see *infra*, par. 301.

³¹ Codex Parisiensis 2419, fol. 277r. Cited in Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 75.

³² *Phil. ref.*, p. 18.

³³ Sulphur is the "fire hidden in Mercurius" (Trevisanus in *Theatr. chem.*, I, 1659, p. 700). He is identical with Mercurius: "Sulphur is mercurial and Mercurius is sulphureal" ("Brevis manuductio," *Mus. herm.*, p. 788).

³⁴ *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 186. Therefore, he says, we should pray to God for the spirit of discretion, that it may teach us the distinction between good and evil.

My soul and spirit fast are sinking,
And leave a poison, black and stinking.

To a black crow am I akin,
Such be the wages of all sin.
In deepest dust I lie alone,
O that the Three would make the One!

O soul, O spirit with me stay,
That I may greet the light of day.
Hero of peace, come forth from me,
Whom the whole world would like to see!

- ²⁷⁷ In this poem Mercurius is describing his own transformation, which at the same time signifies the mystic transformation of the artifex; for not only Mercurius but also what happens to him is a projection of the collective unconscious. This, as can easily be seen from what has gone before, is the projection of the individuation process, which, being a natural psychic occurrence, goes on even without the participation of consciousness. But if consciousness participates with some measure of understanding, then the process is accompanied by all the emotions of a religious experience or revelation. As a result of this, Mercurius was identified with Sapientia and the Holy Ghost. It is therefore very probable that those heresies which began with the Euchites, Paulicians, Bogomils, and Cathars, and which developed the concept of the Paraclete very much in the spirit of the founder of Christianity, were continued in alchemy, partly unconsciously and partly under a deliberate disguise.³⁵

³⁵ It is conceivable that the curious name for the alchemists in Rupescissa's *La Vertu et propriété de la quinte essence*, "les pources hommes evangelisans," goes back to the Cathar *perfecti* and *pauperes Christi*. Rupescissa (Jean de Roquetaillade) lived about the middle of the 14th cent. He was a critic of the Church and the clergy (Ferguson, *Bibliotheca chemica*, II, p. 305). The Cathar trials lasted into the middle of the 14th cent.

8. MERCURIUS AND HERMES

278 We have already met with a number of alchemical statements which show plainly that the character of the classical Hermes was faithfully reproduced later in the figure of Mercurius. This is in part an unconscious repetition, in part a spontaneous re-experience, and finally also a conscious reference to the pagan god. There can be no doubt that Michael Maier was consciously alluding to Hermes as pointer of the way (*ὁδηγός*) when he said that he found on his mystic peregrination a statue of Mercurius pointing the way to paradise,¹ and that he was referring to Hermes the mystagogue when he made the Erythraean Sibyl say of Mercurius: "He will make you a witness of the mysteries of God and the secrets of nature."² Again, as the *divinus ternarius*, Mercurius is the revealer of divine secrets,³ or in the form of gold is conceived to be the soul of the arcane substance (magnesia),⁴ or the fructifier of the philosophical tree.⁵ In the "Epigramma Mercurio philosophico dicatum"⁶ he is called the messenger of the gods, the hermeneut (interpreter), and the Egyptian "Theutius" (Thoth). Maier even goes so far as to relate him to Hermes Kyllenios when he calls him "this faithless and all too elusive Arcadian youth,"⁷ for in Arcadia was the sanctuary of Kyllenios, the ithyphallic Hermes. In the scholia to the "Tractatus aureus" Mercurius is named outright the "Kyllenian hero."⁸ Maier's words might also be a reference to Eros. And in fact, in Rosencreutz's *Chymical Wedding*, Mer-

¹ *Symb. aur. mens.*, p. 592. [Cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, pars. 276ff.]

² *Ibid.*, p. 600.

³ Dorn, in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 547.

⁴ Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 233.

⁵ Ripley, in *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 113.

⁶ *Mus. herm.*, p. 738.

⁷ *Symb. aur. mens.*, p. 386.

⁸ *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 673.

curius does appear in the form of Cupid,⁹ and punishes the adept for his curiosity in visiting the Lady Venus by wounding him in the hand with an arrow. The arrow is the "dart of passion" (*telum passionis*), which is also an attribute of Mercurius.¹⁰ He is an "archer," and indeed one who "shoots without a bow-string" and is "nowhere to be found on earth,"¹¹ so is obviously a daemon. In the Table of Symbols in Penotus¹² he is associated with nymphs, which reminds one of the pastoral god, Pan. His lasciviousness is borne out by an illustration in the *Tripus chimicus* of Sendivogius,¹³ where he appears on a triumphal chariot drawn by a cock and a hen, and behind him is a naked pair of embracing lovers. In this connection may also be mentioned the numerous somewhat obscene pictures of the conjunctio in old prints, often preserved merely as pornographica. Pictures in old manuscripts of excretory acts, including vomiting, likewise belong to this sphere of the "underworldly Hermes."¹⁴ Again, Mercurius represents the "continuous cohabitation"¹⁵ which is found in unalloyed form in the Tantric Shiva-Shakti concept. Connections between Greek and Arabic alchemy and India are not unlikely. Reitzenstein¹⁶ reports the story of Padmanaba from a Turkish book of folklore¹⁷ about the forty viziers, which may date back to the time of the Moguls. Already in the first centuries of our era, Indian religious influences were at work in southern Mesopotamia, and in the second century B.C. there were Buddhist monasteries in Persia. In the royal temple of Padmanabhapura in Travancore (c. fifteenth century) I found two reliefs representing an entirely non-Indian *senex ithyphallicus* with wings. In one of them he stands up to his waist in the bowl of the moon. One is reminded of the winged ithyphal-

⁹ Also in the form of the boy showing the way and the "age-old son of the mother."

¹⁰ Ripley, *Opera*, pp. 421ff.

¹¹ "Introit. apert.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 653.

¹² *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), facing p. 109.

¹³ P. 67.

¹⁴ E.g., Codex Rhenoviensis, Zurich, and Codex Vossianus, Leyden.

¹⁵ For this motif see *Symbols of Transformation*, pp. 209f.

¹⁶ *Alchemische Lehrschriften und Märchen bei den Arabern*, pp. 77f.

¹⁷ Belletête, trans., *Contes turcs*.

lic old man who pursues the "blue" or "doglike"¹⁸ woman in Hippolytus. Kyllenios does in fact appear in Hippolytus¹⁹ as identical on the one hand with the Logos and on the other with the wicked Korybas, the phallus, and the demiurgic principle in general.²⁰ Another aspect of this dark Mercurius is the mother-son incest, which may be traceable to Mandaean influences: there Nabu (Mercurius) and Istar (Astarte) form a syzygy. Astarte is the mother and love goddess throughout the whole Near East, where she is also tainted with the incest motif. Nabu is the "Messiah of the Lie," who because of his malice is punished and kept in prison by the sun.²¹ The texts remind us again and again that Mercurius is "found in the dung-heaps," but they add ironically that "many have grubbed in the dung-heaps, but extracted nothing thereby."²²

²⁷⁹ This dark Mercurius must once again be understood as representing the initial *nigredo* state, the lowest being a symbol of the highest and vice versa:

Anfang und Ende
Reichen sich die Hände.²³

He is the uroboros, the One and All, the union of opposites accomplished during the alchemical process, of which Penotus says:²⁴

Mercurius is begotten by nature as the son of nature and the fruit of the liquid element. But even as the Son of Man is begotten by the philosopher and created as the fruit of the Virgin, so must he [Mercurius] be raised from the earth and cleansed of all earthiness, then he ascends entire into the air, and is changed into spirit. Thus

¹⁸ κυανοειδῆ or κυνοειδῆ. Hippolytus, *Elenchos*, V, 20, 6 and 7 (ed. Wendland) has the latter reading. The alchemical equivalents of this strange mythologem support both possibilities: Dog as Logos, psychopomp, and *filius canis coelici coloris* (puppy of celestial hue), all referring to Mercurius. [Cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, pars. 174ff.]

¹⁹ *Elenchos*, V, 7, 29.

²⁰ The duality of the Mercurius concept has a parallel in the syncretist views of the Naassenes, who sought to grasp and express the psychological experience of the paradoxical First Cause. But I must be content with this hint.

²¹ Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, pp. 43, 55, 142.

²² *Rosarium*, in *Art. aurif.*, II, p. 243.

²³ "Beginnings and ends/Touch hands."

²⁴ *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 601.

is fulfilled the word of the philosopher: He ascends from earth to heaven and receives the power of Above and Below, and puts off his earthy and impure nature and clothes himself in the heavenly nature.

280 Since Penotus is here referring to the "Tabula smaragdina," it must be emphasized that he departs from the spirit of the "Tabula" in one essential point. In the version of Penotus, the ascent of Mercurius is in entire accord with the Christian transformation of the hylic into the pneumatic man. The "Tabula," on the other hand, says: "He ascends from earth to heaven and descends again to earth, and receives the power of Above and Below. His power is complete when he has returned to earth." 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 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 *circulus simplex* of which he is at the same time the centre.²⁵ He can therefore say of himself: "I am One and at the same time Many in myself."²⁶ This same treatise says that the centre 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."²⁷

281 Hermes is a god of thieves and cheats, but also a god of revelation who gave his name to a whole philosophy. Seen in historical retrospect, it was a moment of the utmost significance when the humanist Patrizi proposed to Pope Gregory XIV that Hermetic philosophy should take the place of Aristotle in ecclesiastical doctrine. At that moment two worlds came into contact, which—after heaven knows what happenings!—must yet be

²⁵ "Tractatus aureus cum scholiis," *ibid.*, IV, p. 608.

²⁶ "Aurelia occulta," *ibid.*, p. 507.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

united in the future. At that time it was obviously impossible. A psychological differentiation of religious as well as scientific views is still needed before a union can begin to be brought about.²⁸

²⁸ [This paragraph originally ended the monograph.—EDITORS.]

9. MERCURIUS AS THE ARCANE SUBSTANCE

²⁸² Mercurius, it is generally affirmed, is the arcanum,¹ the prima materia,² the "father of all metals,"³ the primeval chaos, the earth of paradise, the "material upon which nature worked a little, but nevertheless left imperfect."⁴ He is also the ultima materia, the goal of his own transformation, the stone,⁵ the tincture, the philosophic gold, the carbuncle, the philosophic man, the second Adam, the analogue of Christ, the king, the light of lights, the *deus terrestris*, indeed the divinity itself or its perfect counterpart. Since I have already discussed the synonyms and meanings of the stone elsewhere there is no need for me to go into further details now.

²⁸³ Besides being the prima materia of the lowly beginning as well as the lapis as the highest goal, Mercurius is also the process which lies between, and the means by which it is effected. He is the "beginning, middle, and end of the work."⁶ Therefore he is called the Mediator,⁷ Servator, and Salvator. He is a mediator like Hermes. As the *medicina catholica* and *alexipharmakon* he is the "preserver [*servator*] of the world." He is the "healer [*salvator*] of all imperfect bodies"⁸ and the "image of Christ's incarnation,"⁹ the *unigenitus* "consubstantial with the paren-

¹ "Tract. aur. cum scholiis," *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 608.

² Mylius, *Phil. ref.*, p. 179; "Tract. aureus," *Mus. herm.*, p. 25; Trevisanus in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 695.

³ "Exercit. in Turb.," *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 154.

⁴ *Rosarium*, *ibid.*, II, p. 231.

⁵ Ventura, in *Theatr. chem.*, II (1659), p. 232: "lapis benedictus"; Dorn, in *Theatr. chem.*, I (1659), p. 510: "fiery and perfect Mercurius"; p. 520: "The Adamic stone is made out of the Adamic Mercurius in the woman Eve"; Lully, *Codicillus*, pp. 88of.: "The good that is sought is our stone and Mercurius."

⁶ "Tract. aur. cum scholiis," *Theatr. chem.*, IV (1659), p. 608.

⁷ "Exercit. in Turb.," *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 170; Ripley, *Chymische Schriften*, p. 31; "Tract. aur. cum scholiis," p. 610: "A mediator making peace between enemies."

⁸ "Aquarium sap.," *Mus. herm.*, p. 111.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

tal hermaphrodite.”¹⁰ Altogether, in the macrocosm of nature he occupies the position which Christ holds in the *mundus rationalis* of divine revelation. But as the saying “My light surpasses all other lights”¹¹ shows, the claim of Mercurius goes even further, which is why the alchemists endowed him with the attributes of the Trinity¹² in order to make clear his complete correspondence to God. In Dante, Satan is three-headed and therefore three-in-one. He is the counterpart of God in the sense that he is God’s antithesis. The alchemists did not hold this view of Mercurius; on the contrary, they saw him as a divine emanation harmonious with God’s own being. The stress they laid on his capacity for self-generation, self-transformation, self-reproduction, and self-destruction contradicts the idea that he is a created being. It is therefore only logical when Paracelsus and Dorn state that the prima materia is an “increated” and a principle coeternal with God. This denial of *creatio ex nihilo* is supported by the fact that in the beginning God found the Tehom already in existence, that same maternal world of Tiamat whose son we encounter in Mercurius.¹³

¹⁰ Khunrath, *Hyl. Chaos*, p. 59.

¹¹ “Septem Tract. hermet.,” *Ars chemica*, p. 22. *Rosarium*, p. 381: “I illumine the air with my light and warm the earth with my heat, I bring forth and nourish the things of nature, plants and stones, and with my power I take away the darkness of night, and cause day to endure in the world, and I lighten all lights with my light, even those in which there is no splendour nor greatness. For all these are of my work, when I put upon me my garments; and those who seek me, let them make peace between me and my bride.” This is cited from the “Dicta Belini” (printed in Manget’s *Bibl. chem.*, I, p. 478). There are variations in the text. I have quoted the passage in full because of its psychological interest.

¹² “For in the Stone are body, soul, and spirit, and yet it is one stone” (“Exercit. in Turb.,” *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 170).

¹³ Cf. *Psychology and Alchemy*, par. 26.

10. SUMMARY

284 The multiple aspects of Mercurius may be summarized as follows:

(1) 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.

(2) He is both material and spiritual.

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

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

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

(6) 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.¹

285 Certainly goldmaking, as also chemical research in general, was of great concern to alchemy. But a still greater, more impassioned concern appears to have been—one cannot very well say the “investigation”—but rather the *experience* of the unconscious. That this side of alchemy—the *μυστικά*—was for so long misunderstood is due solely to the fact that nothing was known of psychology, let alone of the suprapersonal, collective unconscious. 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 astron-

¹ Hence the designation of Mercurius as *mare nostrum*.

omy, 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 or under a microscope. They are therefore supposedly indeterminate, in other words they must be left to people who have an inner sense for them, just as colours must be shown to the seeing and not to the blind.

286 The store of projections found in alchemy is, if possible, even less known, and there is a further drawback which makes closer investigation extremely difficult. For, unlike the astrological constituents of character which, if negative, are at most unpleasant for the individual, though amusing to his neighbour, the alchemical projections represent collective contents that stand in painful contrast—or rather, in compensatory relation—to our highest rational convictions and values. They give the strange answers of the natural psyche to the ultimate questions which reason has left untouched. Contrary to all progress and belief in a future that will deliver us from the sorrowful present, they point back to something primeval, to the apparently hopelessly static, eternal sway of matter that makes our fondly believed-in world look like a phantasmagoria of shifting scenes. They show us, as the redemptive goal of our active, desirous life, a symbol of the inorganic—the stone—something that does not live but merely exists or “becomes,” the passive subject of a limitless and unfathomable play of opposites. “Soul,” that bodiless abstraction of the rational intellect, and “spirit,” that two-dimensional metaphor of dry-as-dust philosophical dialectic, appear in alchemical projection in almost physical, plastic form, like tangible breath-bodies, and refuse to function as component parts of our rational consciousness. The hope for a psychology without the soul is brought to nothing, and the illusion that the unconscious has only just been discovered vanishes: in a somewhat peculiar form, admittedly, it has been known for close on two thousand years. Let us, however, not delude ourselves: no more than we can separate the constituents of character from the astronomical determinants of time are we able to separate that unruly and evasive Mercurius from the autonomy of matter. Something of the projection-carrier always clings to the projec-

tion, and even if we succeed to some degree in integrating into our consciousness the part we recognize as psychic, we shall integrate along with it something of the cosmos and its materiality; or rather, since the cosmos is infinitely greater than we are, we shall have been assimilated by the inorganic. "Transform yourselves into living philosophical stones!" cries an alchemist, but he did not know how infinitely slowly the stone "becomes." Anyone who gives serious thought to the "natural light" that emanates from the projections of alchemy will certainly agree with the Master who spoke of the "wearisomeness of the interminable meditation" demanded by the work. In these projections we encounter the phenomenology of an "objective" spirit, a true matrix of psychic experience, the most appropriate symbol for which is matter. Nowhere and never has man controlled matter without closely observing its behaviour and paying heed to its laws, and only to the extent that he did so could he control it. The same is true of that objective spirit which today we call the unconscious: it is refractory like matter, mysterious and elusive, and obeys laws which are so non-human or suprahuman that they seem to us like a *crimen laesae majestatis humanae*. If a man puts his hand to the opus, he repeats, as the alchemists say, God's work of creation. The struggle with the unformed, with the chaos of Tiamat, is in truth a primordial experience.

287 Since the psyche, when directly experienced, confronts us in the "living" substance it has animated and appears to be one with it, Mercurius is called *argentum vivum*. Conscious discrimination, or consciousness itself, effects that world-shattering intervention which separates body from soul and divides the spirit Mercurius from the *hydrargyrum*, as if drawing off the spirit into the bottle, to speak in terms of our fairytale. But since body and soul, in spite of the artificial separation, are united in the mystery of life, the mercurial spirit, though imprisoned in the bottle, is yet found in the roots of the tree, as its quintessence and living numen. In the language of the Upanishads, he is the personal atman of the tree. Isolated in the bottle, he corresponds to the ego and the principle of individuation, which in the Indian view leads to the illusion of individual existence. Freed from his prison, Mercurius assumes the character of the supra-personal atman. He becomes the *one* animating principle of all

created things, the *hiranyagarbha* (golden germ),² the supra-personal self, represented by the *filius macrocosmi*, the one stone of the wise. "Rosinus ad Sarratantam" cites a saying of "Malus Philosophus"³ which attempts to formulate the psychological relation of the lapis to consciousness: "This stone is below thee, as to obedience; above thee, as to dominion; therefore from thee, as to knowledge; about thee, as to equals."⁴ Applied to the self, this would mean: "The self is subordinate to you, yet on the other hand rules you. It is dependent on your own efforts and your knowledge, but transcends you and embraces all those who are of like mind." This refers to the collective nature of the self, since the self epitomizes the wholeness of the personality. By definition, wholeness includes the collective unconscious, which as experience seems to show is everywhere identical.

288 The encounter of the poor student with the spirit in the bottle portrays the spiritual adventure of a blind and unawakened human being. The same motif underlies the tale of the swineherd who climbed the world-tree,⁵ and also forms the *leitmotiv* of alchemy. For what it signifies is the individuation process as it prepares itself in the unconscious and gradually enters consciousness. The commonest alchemical symbol for this is the tree, the *arbor philosophica*, which derives from the paradisaical tree of knowledge. Here, as in our fairytale, a daemonic serpent, an evil spirit, prods and persuades to knowledge. In view of the Biblical precedent, it is not surprising that the spirit Mercurius has, to say the least, a great many connections with the dark side. One of his aspects is the female serpent-daemon, Lilith or Melusina, who lives in the philosophical tree. At the same time, he not only partakes of the Holy Spirit but, according to alchemy, is actually identical with it. We have no choice but to accept this shocking paradox after all we have learnt about the ambivalence of the spirit archetype. Our ambiguous Mercurius simply con-

² Cf. Maitrayana-Brāhmana Upanishad, V, 8 (Sacred Books of the East, vol. 15, p. 311). He occurs as the *spiritus vegetativus* and collective soul in the Vedānta-Sūtras (ibid., vol. 34, p. 173, and vol. 48, p. 578).

³ The treatise of Rosinus (Zosimos) is probably of Arabic origin. "Malus" might be a corruption of "Magus." The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (A.D. 987) lists, along with writings of Rimas (Zosimos), two works by Magus one of which is entitled "The Book of the Wise Magus (?) on the Art" (Ruska, *Turba*, p. 272).

⁴ *Art. aurif.*, I, p. 310.

⁵ Cf. "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales," pp. 231ff.

firms the rule. In any case, the paradox is no worse than the Creator's whimsical notion of enlivening his peaceful, innocent paradise with the presence of an obviously rather dangerous tree-snake, "accidentally" located on the very same tree as the forbidden apples.

289 It must be admitted that the fairytale and alchemy both show Mercurius in a predominantly unfavourable light, which is all the more striking because his positive aspect relates him not only to the Holy Spirit, but, in the form of the lapis, also to Christ and, as a triad, even to the Trinity. It looks as if it were precisely these relationships which led the alchemists to put particular stress on the dark and dubious quality of Mercurius, and this militates strongly against the assumption that by their lapis they really meant Christ. If this had been their meaning, why should they have renamed Christ the *lapis philosophorum*? The lapis is at most a counterpart or analogy of Christ in the physical world. Its symbolism, like that of Mercurius who constitutes its substance, points, psychologically speaking, to the self, as also does the symbolic figure of Christ.⁶ In comparison with the purity and unity of the Christ symbol, Mercurius-lapis is ambiguous, dark, paradoxical, and thoroughly pagan. It therefore represents a part of the psyche which was certainly not moulded by Christianity and can on no account be expressed by the symbol "Christ." On the contrary, as we have seen, in many ways it points to the devil, who is known at times to disguise himself as an angel of light. The lapis formulates an aspect of the self which stands apart, bound to nature and at odds with the Christian spirit. It represents all those things which have been eliminated from the Christian model. But since they possess living reality, they cannot express themselves otherwise than in dark Hermetic symbols. The paradoxical nature of Mercurius reflects an important aspect of the self—the fact, namely, that it is essentially a *complexio oppositorum*, and indeed can be nothing else if it is to represent any kind of totality. Mercurius as *deus terrestris* has something of that *deus absconditus* (hidden god) which is an essential element of the psychological self, and the self cannot be distinguished from a God-image (except by incontestable and unprovable faith). Although I have stressed that the lapis is

⁶ [Cf. *Psychology and Alchemy*, ch. 5, "The Lapis-Christ Parallel," and *Aion*, ch. 5, "Christ, a Symbol of the Self."—EDITORS.]

a symbol embracing the opposites, it should not be thought of as a—so to speak—more complete symbol of the self. That would be decidedly incorrect, for actually it is an image whose form and content are largely determined by the unconscious. For this reason it is never found in the texts in finished and well-defined form; we have to combine all the scattered references to the various arcane substances, to Mercurius, to the transformation process and the end product. Although the lapis in one aspect or another is almost always the subject discussed, there is no real consensus of opinion in regard to its actual form. Almost every author has his own special allegories, synonyms, and metaphors. This makes it clear that the stone, though indeed an object of general experiment, was to an even greater extent an outcropping of the unconscious, which only sporadically crossed the borderline of subjectivity and gave rise to the vague general concept of the *lapis philosophorum*.

290 Opposed to this figure veiled in the twilight of more or less secret doctrines there stands, sharply outlined by dogma, the Son of Man and Salvator Mundi, Christ the Sol Novus, before whom the lesser stars pale. He is the affirmation of the daylight of consciousness in trinitarian form. So clear and definite is the Christ figure that whatever differs from him must appear not only inferior but perverse and vile. This is not the result of Christ's own teaching, but rather of what is taught about him, and especially of the crystal purity which dogma has bestowed upon his figure. As a result, a tension of opposites such as had never occurred before in the whole history of Christianity beginning with the Creation arose between Christ and the Antichrist, as Satan or the fallen angel. At the time of Job, Satan is still found among the sons of God. "Now there was a day," it says in Job 1 : 6, "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." This picture of a celestial family reunion gives no hint of the New Testament "Get thee hence, Satan" (Matthew 4 : 10), nor yet of the dragon chained in the underworld for a thousand years (Rev. 20 : 2). It looks as if the superabundance of light on one side had produced an all the blacker darkness on the other. One can also see that the uncommonly great diffusion of black substance makes a sinless being almost impossible. A loving belief in such a being naturally involves cleansing one's own house of black filth. But the

filth must be dumped somewhere, and no matter where the dump lies it will plague even the best of all possible worlds with a bad smell.

²⁹¹ The balance of the primordial world is upset. What I have said is not intended as a criticism, for I am deeply convinced not only of the relentless logic but of the expediency of this development. The emphatic differentiation of opposites is synonymous with sharper discrimination, and that is the *sine qua non* for any broadening or heightening of consciousness. The progressive differentiation of consciousness is the most important task of human biology and accordingly meets with the highest rewards—vastly increased chances of survival and the development of power technology. From the phylogenetic point of view, the effects of consciousness are as far-reaching as those of lung-breathing and warm-bloodedness. But clarification of consciousness necessarily entails an obscuration of those dimmer elements of the psyche which are less capable of becoming conscious, so that sooner or later a split occurs in the psychic system. Since it is not recognized as such it is projected, and appears in the form of a metaphysical split between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. The possibility of this projection is guaranteed by the presence of numerous archaic vestiges of the original daemons of light and darkness in any age. It seems likely, therefore, that the tension of opposites in Christianity is derived to a still unclarified degree from the dualism of ancient Persia, though the two are not identical.

²⁹² There can be no doubt that the moral consequences of the Christian development represent a very considerable advance compared with the ancient Israelite religion of law. The Christianity of the synoptic gospels signifies little more than a coming to terms with issues inside Judaism, which may fairly be compared with the much earlier Buddhist reformation inside Hindu polytheism. Psychologically, both reformations resulted in a tremendous strengthening of consciousness. This is particularly evident in the maieutic method employed by Shakyamuni. But the sayings of Jesus manifest the same tendency, even if we discard as apocryphal the clearest formulation of this kind, the logion in Codex Bezae to Luke 6 : 4: "Man, if thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed. If thou knowest it not, thou art accursed and a transgressor of the law." At all events, the para-

ble of the unjust steward (Luke 16) has not found its way into the Apocrypha, where it would have fitted so well.

293 The rift in the metaphysical world has slowly risen into consciousness as a split in the human psyche, and the struggle between light and darkness moves to the battleground within. This shift of scene is not entirely self-evident, for which reason St. Ignatius Loyola considered it necessary to open our eyes to the conflict and impress it on our feelings by means of the most drastic spiritual exercises.⁷ These efforts, for obvious reasons, had only a very limited range of application. And so, strangely enough, it was the medical men who, at the turn of the nineteenth century, were forced to intervene and get the obstructed process of conscious realization going again. Approaching the problem from a scientific angle, and innocent of any religious aim, Freud uncovered the abysmal darkness of human nature which a would-be enlightened optimism had striven to conceal. Since then psychotherapy, in one form or another, has persistently explored the extensive area of darkness which I have called the shadow. This attempt of modern science opened the eyes of only a few. However, the historic events of our time have painted a picture of man's psychic reality in indelible colours of blood and fire, and given him an object lesson which he will never be able to forget if—and this is the great question—he has today acquired enough consciousness to keep up with the furious pace of the devil within him. The only other hope is that he may learn to curb a creativity which is wasting itself in the exploitation of material power. Unfortunately, all attempts in that direction look like bloodless Utopias.

294 The figure of Christ the Logos has raised the *anima rationalis* in man to a level of importance which remains unobjectionable so long as it knows itself to be below and subject to the *κύριος*, the Lord of Spirits. Reason, however, has set itself free and proclaimed itself the ruler. It has sat enthroned in Notre Dame as Déesse Raison and heralded events that were to come. Our consciousness is no longer confined within a sacred temenos of otherworldly, eschatological images. It was helped to break free by a force that did not stream down from above—like the *lumen de lumine*—but came up with tremendous pressure from below and increased in strength as consciousness detached itself from the

⁷ *The Spiritual Exercises* (trans. Rickaby), pp. 75ff.

darkness and climbed into the light. In accordance with the principle of compensation which runs through the whole of nature, every psychic development, whether individual or collective, possesses an optimum which, when exceeded, produces an enantiodromia, that is, turns into its opposite. Compensatory tendencies emanating from the unconscious may be noted even during the approach to the critical turning-point, though if consciousness persists in its course they are completely repressed. The stirrings in the darkness necessarily seem like a devilish betrayal of the ideal of spiritual development. Reason cannot help condemning as unreasonable everything that contradicts it or deviates from its laws, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Morality can permit itself no capacity for change, for whatever it does not agree with is inevitably immoral and has therefore to be repressed. It is not difficult to imagine the multitude of energies which must flow off into the unconscious under such conscious domination.

²⁹⁵ Hesitantly, as in a dream, the introspective brooding of the centuries gradually put together the figure of Mercurius and created a symbol which, according to all the psychological rules, stands in a compensatory relation to Christ. It is not meant to take his place, nor is it identical with him, for then indeed it could replace him. It owes its existence to the law of compensation, and its object is to throw a bridge across the abyss separating the two psychological worlds by presenting a subtle compensatory counterpoint to the Christ image. The fact that in *Faust* the compensatory figure is not, as one might almost have expected from the author's classical predilections, the wily messenger of the gods, but, as the name "Mephistopheles" ⁸ shows, a *familiaris* risen from the cesspits of medieval magic, proves, if anything, the ingrained Christian character of Goethe's consciousness. To the Christian mentality, the dark antagonist is always the devil. As I have shown, Mercurius escapes this prejudice by only a hair's breadth. But he escapes it, thanks to the fact that he scorns to carry on opposition at all costs. The magic of his name enables him, in spite of his ambiguity and duplicity, to keep outside the split, for as an ancient pagan god he possesses a natural undividedness which is impervious to logical and moral contradictions. This gives him invulnerability and incorrupti-

⁸ [From *L. mephitis*, a noxious exhalation from the earth.—TRANSLATOR.]

bility, the very qualities we so urgently need to heal the split in ourselves.

296 If one makes a synopsis of all the descriptions and alchemical pictures of Mercurius, they form a striking parallel to the symbols of the self derived from other sources. One can hardly escape the conclusion that Mercurius as the lapis is a symbolic expression for the psychological complex which I have defined as the self. Similarly, the Christ figure must be viewed as a self symbol, and for the same reasons. But this leads to an apparently insoluble contradiction, for it is not at first clear how the unconscious can shape two such different images from one and the same content, which moreover possesses the character of totality. Certainly the centuries have done their spiritual work upon these two figures, and one is inclined to assume that both have been in large measure anthropomorphized during the process of assimilation. For those who hold that both figures are inventions of the intellect, the contradiction is quickly resolved. It then merely reflects the subjective psychic situation: the two figures would stand for man and his shadow.

297 This very simple and obvious solution is, unfortunately, founded on premises that do not stand up to criticism. The figures of Christ and the devil are both based on archetypal patterns, and were never invented but rather *experienced*. Their existence preceded all cognition of them,⁹ and the intellect had no hand in the matter, except to assimilate them and if possible give them a place in its philosophy. Only the most superficial intellectualism can overlook this fundamental fact. We are actually confronted with two different images of the self, which in all likelihood presented a duality even in their original form. This duality was not invented, but is an autonomous phenomenon.

298 Since we naturally think from the standpoint of consciousness, we inevitably come to the conclusion that the split between consciousness and the unconscious is the sole cause of this duality. But experience has demonstrated the existence of a preconscious psychic functioning and of corresponding autonomous factors, the archetypes. Once we can accept the fact that the voices and delusions of the insane and the phobias and obsessions of the neurotic are beyond rational control, and that the ego cannot voluntarily fabricate dreams but simply dreams what

⁹ Evidence for this is the widespread motif of the two hostile brothers.

it has to, then we can also understand that the gods came first and theology later. Indeed, we must go a step further and assume that in the beginning there were two figures, one bright and one shadowy, and only afterwards did the light of consciousness detach itself from the night and the uncertain shimmer of its stars.

299 So if Christ and the dark nature-deity are autonomous images that can be directly experienced, we are obliged to reverse our rationalistic causal sequence, and instead of deriving these figures from our psychic conditions, must derive our psychic conditions from these figures. This is expecting a good deal of the modern intellect but does not alter the logic of our hypothesis. From this standpoint Christ appears as the archetype of consciousness and Mercurius as the archetype of the unconscious. As Cupid and Kyllenios, he tempts us out into the world of sense; he is the *benedicta viriditas* and the *multi flores* of early spring, a god of illusion and delusion of whom it is rightly said: "Invenitur in vena / Sanguine plena" (He is found in the vein swollen with blood). He is at the same time a Hermes Chthonios and an Eros, yet it is from him that there issues the "light surpassing all lights," the *lux moderna*, for the lapis is none other than the figure of light veiled in matter.¹⁰ It is in this sense that St. Augustine quotes I Thessalonians 5 : 5, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness," and distinguishes two forms of knowledge, a *cognitio vespertina* and a *cognitio matutina*, the first corresponding to the *scientia creaturae* and the second to the *scientia Creatoris*.¹¹ If we equate *cognitio* with consciousness, then Augustine's thought would suggest that the merely human and natural consciousness gradually darkens, as at nightfall. But just as evening gives birth to morning, so from the darkness arises a new light, the *stella matutina*, which is at once the evening and the morning star—Lucifer, the light-bringer.

300 Mercurius is by no means the Christian devil—the latter

¹⁰ Cf. the saying of Ostanès concerning the stone that has a spirit.

¹¹ "For the knowledge of the creature, in comparison with the knowledge of the Creator, is but a twilight; and so it dawns and breaks into morning when the creature is drawn to the love and praise of the Creator. Nor is it ever darkened, save when the Creator is abandoned by the love of the creature."—*The City of God*, XI, vii.

could rather be said to be a "diabolization" of Lucifer or of Mercurius. Mercurius is an adumbration of the primordial light-bringer, who is never himself the light, but a *φωσφόρος* who brings the light of nature, the light of the moon and the stars which fades before the new morning light. Of this light St. Augustine says that it will never turn to darkness unless the Creator is abandoned by the love of his creatures. But this, too, belongs to the rhythm of day and night. As Hölderlin says in "Patmos";

and shamefully
A power wrests away the heart from us;
For the Heavenly each demand sacrifice,
But if it should be withheld,
Never has that led to good.

301 When all visible lights are extinguished one finds, according to the words of the wise Yajñavalkya, the light of the self. "What then is the light of man? Self is his light. It is by the light of the self that a man rests, goes forth, does his work and returns." ¹² Thus, with Augustine, the first day of creation begins with self-knowledge, *cognitio sui ipsius*,¹³ by which is meant a knowledge not of the ego but of the self, that objective phenomenon of which the ego is the subject.¹⁴ Then, following the order of the days of creation in Genesis, comes knowledge of the firmament, of the earth, the sea, the plants, the stars, the animals of the water and air, and finally, on the sixth day, knowledge of the land animals and of *ipsius hominis*, of man himself. The *cognitio matutina* is self-knowledge, but the *cognitio vespertina* is knowledge of man.¹⁵ As Augustine describes it, the *cognitio*

¹² Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, IV, 3, 6 (cf. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 133).

¹³ "And when it [the creature's knowledge] comes to the knowledge of itself, that is one day" (Et hoc cum facit in cognitione sui ipsius, dies unus est).—*The City of God*, XI, vii. This may be the source for the strange designation of the lapis as "filius unius diei." [Cf. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, pp. 335, 504.]

¹⁴ "Since no knowledge is better than that by which man knows himself, let us examine our thoughts, words, and deeds. For what does it avail us if we are to investigate carefully and understand rightly the nature of all things, yet do not understand ourselves?"—*Liber de Spiritu et Anima*, LI (Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 40, cols. 816–17). This book is a very much later treatise falsely attributed to Augustine.

¹⁵ "Wherefore the knowledge of the creature, which is in itself evening knowledge, was in God morning knowledge; for the creature is more plainly seen in

matutina gradually grows old as it loses itself in the "ten thousand things" and finally comes to man, although one would expect this to have happened already with the onset of self-knowledge. But if this were true, Augustine's parable would have lost its meaning by contradicting itself. Such an obvious lapse cannot be ascribed to so gifted a man. His real meaning is that self-knowledge is the *scientia Creatoris*,¹⁶ a morning light revealed after a night during which consciousness slumbered, wrapped in the darkness of the unconscious. But the knowledge arising with this first light finally and inevitably becomes the *scientia hominis*, the knowledge of man, who asks himself: "Who is it that knows and understands everything? Why, it is myself." That marks the coming of darkness,¹⁷ out of which arises the seventh day, the day of rest: "But the rest of God signifies the rest of those who rest in God."¹⁸ The Sabbath is therefore the day on which man returns to God and receives anew the light of the *cognitio matutina*. And this day has no evening.¹⁹ From the symbolological standpoint it may not be without significance that Augustine had in mind the pagan names of the days of the week. The growing darkness reaches its greatest intensity on the day of Venus (Friday), and changes into Lucifer on Sat-

God than it is seen in itself."—*Dialogus Quaestionum LXV*, Quaest. XXVI (Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 40, col. 741).

¹⁶ The *Liber de Spiritu et Anima* attributes very great importance to self-knowledge, as being an essential condition for union with God. "There are some who seek God through outward things, forsaking that which is in them, and in them is God. Let us therefore return to ourselves, that we may ascend to ourselves. . . . At first we ascend to ourselves from these outward and inferior things. Secondly, we ascend to the high heart. . . . In the third ascent we ascend to God" (chs. LI-LII; Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 40, col. 817). The "high heart" (*cor altum*; also "deep heart") is the mandala divided into four, the *imago Dei*, or self. The *Liber de Spiritu et Anima* is in the mainstream of Augustinian tradition. Augustine himself says (*De vera religione LXXII*, Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 34, col. 154): "Go not outside, return into yourself; truth dwells in the inner man. And if you find that you are by nature changeable, transcend yourself. But remember that when you transcend yourself, you must transcend yourself as a reasoning soul."

¹⁷ "Evening descends when the sun sets. Now the sun has set for man, that is to say, that light of justice which is the presence of God."—*Enarrationes in Ps. XXIX*, II, 16 (trans. Hobgin and Corrigan, I, p. 308). These words refer to Ps. 30: 5 (A.V.): "Weeping may tarry for the night but joy cometh in the morning."

¹⁸ *The City of God*, XI, viii. Cf. also *Dialog. Quaest. LXV*, Quaest. XXVI.

¹⁹ *Confessions* (trans. Sheed), p. 289.

urn's day. Saturday heralds the light which appears in full strength on Sun-day. As I have shown, Mercurius is closely related not only to Venus but more especially to Saturn. As Mercurius he is *juvenis*, as Saturn *senex*.

302 It seems to me that Augustine apprehended a great truth, namely that every spiritual truth gradually turns into something material, becoming no more than a tool in the hand of man. In consequence, man can hardly avoid seeing himself as a knower, yes, even as a creator, with boundless possibilities at his command. The alchemist was basically this sort of person, but much less so than modern man. An alchemist could still pray: "Purge the horrible darknesses of our mind," but modern man is already so darkened that nothing beyond the light of his own intellect illuminates his world. "Occasus Christi, passio Christi." ²⁰ That surely is why such strange things are happening to our much lauded civilization, more like a *Götterdämmerung* than any normal twilight.

303 Mercurius, that two-faced god, comes as the *lumen naturae*, the Servator and Salvator, only to those whose reason strives towards the highest light ever received by man, and who do not trust exclusively to the *cognitio vespertina*. For those who are unmindful of this light, the *lumen naturae* turns into a perilous *ignis fatuus*, and the psychopomp into a diabolical seducer. Lucifer, who could have brought light, becomes the father of lies whose voice in our time, supported by press and radio, revels in orgies of propaganda and leads untold millions to ruin.

²⁰ *Enarrationes in Ps. CIII*, Sermo III, 21 (Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 37, col. 1374).