

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Plan B and other Reports

Graduate Studies

12-2020

The Union of Opposites: Carl Jung, Folklore, and the Caduceus and Ouroboros in Alchemy

Jack Daly
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Daly, Jack, "The Union of Opposites: Carl Jung, Folklore, and the Caduceus and Ouroboros in Alchemy" (2020). *All Graduate Plan B and other Reports*. 1488.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/1488>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Plan B and other Reports by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



THE UNION OF OPPOSITES: CARL JUNG, FOLKLORE, AND THE CADUCEUS
AND OUROBOROS IN ALCHEMY

by

Jack Daly

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Folklore and American Studies

Approved:

Lynne S. McNeill, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Christine Cooper-Rompato, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Michael Sowder, Ph.D.
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2020

Copyright © Jack Daly 2020

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

The Union of Opposites: Carl Jung, Folklore, and the Caduceus and Ouroboros in

Alchemy

by

Jack Daly

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Dr. Lynne S. McNeill

Department: English

This thesis advocates for the use of Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory in folkloristics by examining the role of the caduceus and the ouroboros in alchemy as a case study. Although a Jungian lens has not been widely accepted by folklorists, it can and should be applied to folklore, particularly in the context of binary oppositions. Folklorists such as Alan Dundes have been harshly critical of this perspective. However, Dundes also stressed the importance of binaries in folklore. Furthermore, Dundes championed the theory of symbolic equivalences, and in my paper I argue that the caduceus and the ouroboros are examples of this.

I argue that folklorists should study Jung, with a particular focus on their agreement upon motifs and archetypes as well as their similar beliefs regarding the importance of the reconciliation of opposites. The caduceus and ouroboros in alchemy represent a union of opposites, of the above and the below, of the human with the divine, and this view has remained stable over time despite widely varying historical contexts.

In constructing my argument, I examine alchemical texts and art that contain these serpentine and draconic depictions and use Jung's theories to show how their meaning remains constant. I also draw from the modern Western esoteric tradition, particularly twentieth century tarot cards, to show how the serpent and dragon have remained as signifiers that stress the importance of the union of opposites into the current time. I adopt a psycho-spiritual approach to alchemy as opposed to a purely chemical stance which aids in showing the importance of balancing the opposites within oneself. This research helps us reimagine the role that Jung has in folklore studies as well as reconciling the opposing positions of Jung and Dundes. This work will also help to stress the importance of psychoanalytic theory as a whole in folkloristics. Jung is often denigrated by folklorists because they claim he is too universalizing, but they often make the same moves as he does, and I argue that Jung shouldn't be thrown away entirely by the field solely based on one aspect of his work.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Union of Opposites: Carl Jung, Folklore, and the Caduceus and Ouroboros in
Alchemy
Jack Daly

This thesis advocates for the use of Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory in folkloristics by examining the role of the caduceus and the ouroboros in alchemy as a case study. Although a Jungian lens has not been widely accepted by folklorists, this view can be applied to folklore, particularly in the context of binary oppositions. Folklorists such as Alan Dundes have been harshly critical of this perspective. However, Dundes also stressed the importance of binaries in folklore. Furthermore, Dundes championed the theory of symbolic equivalences, and in my paper I show how the caduceus and the ouroboros exemplify this theory.

I argue that folklorists should study Jung, with a particular focus on their agreement upon motifs and archetypes as well as their similar beliefs regarding the importance of the reconciliation of opposites. The caduceus and ouroboros in alchemy represent a union of opposites, of the above and the below, of the human with the divine and this view remained stable over time despite widely varying historical contexts.

In constructing my argument, I examine alchemical texts and art which contain these serpentine and draconic depictions and use Jung's theories to show how the meaning remained constant. I also draw from the modern Western esoteric tradition to

show how the serpent and dragon have remained as signifiers which stress the importance of the union of opposites into the current time. I adopt a psycho-spiritual approach to alchemy as opposed to a purely chemical stance which aids in showing the importance of balancing the opposites within oneself. This research helps us reimagine the role that Jung has in folklore studies as well as reconciling the opposites of Jung and Dundes. This work will also help to stress the importance of psychoanalytic theory as a whole in folkloristics. Alchemists point to the need to unify opposites for the psycho-spiritual purpose of self-actualization, and if folklore consists of binary oppositions as Dundes claims, then it is easy to conclude that folklore can be seen as an untapped tool to aid individuals in individuation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Dr. Lynne McNeill for her help with this thesis and in my education as a folklorist. Her guidance both through the journey of writing this thesis as well as in the classes that I have taken from her as a student have been instrumental in teaching me how to think like a folklorist. Thank you to Dr. Christine Cooper-Rompato, whose historical perspective on my topic helped me to think critically about my research. And thank you to Dr. Michael Sowder, who was the first person to show interest in my work. His deep knowledge of my subject matter was always helpful. Without all of these wonderful committee members, this thesis would have been a much more difficult task.

I would also like to thank my parents and my brothers, Liam and Matthew, who have been incredibly supportive throughout my journey in grad school. Without your continued encouragement I surely would not be in the place I am today. To my closest friends at school, Carly Schaelling, Natalie Christensen and Emma George: thank you for providing me with an outlet and a source of happiness and joy throughout these two years. Thank you to the graduate school for awarding me with the Janice Judge Dee Scholarship, the Western Region Graduate Program for granting me a yearly scholarship, and Annie Strickland for helping me secure funding for conferences. To Lezlie Christensen-Branum and Rachel Quistberg: thank you for helping me navigate through teaching English 1010 and 2010. Finally, thank you to Dr. Jared Colton for keeping me on task, Carol Hatch for all of her amazing assistance, and Dr. Jeannie Thomas for being the glue that has bound us all together.

Jack Daly

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
PUBLIC ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
ALCHEMY.....	7
THE HISTORY OF ALCHEMY.....	11
SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY.....	13
THE UNION OF OPPOSITES.....	14
THE CADUCEUS.....	30
THE OUROBOROS.....	49
CONCLUSION.....	57
FIGURES WORKS CITED.....	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	60

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		
Page		
1	King and queen on a dragon.....	16
2	Androgynous divinity.....	18
3	Solar-Lunar union.....	19
4	Uniting above and below.....	20
5	Janus-headed eagle.....	24
6	Sun and moon ouroboros.....	25
7	Horapollo's ouroboros.....	25
8	Hermes Trismegistus.....	26
9	King and queen caduceus.....	27
10	Sun and moon caduceus.....	28
11	King and queen copulating.....	28
12	Dragon and serpent ouroboros.....	30
13	Libation vase.....	32
14	"Ondas de La Ayahuasca" by Pablo Amaringo (2011).....	34
15	Mask of Tutankhamun	36
16	Shiva of Murudeshwara.....	37
17	Vishnu on the cosmic serpent.....	37
18	Sushumna, Ida and Pingala	40
19	Azoth of the Philosophers.....	43

20	Mercurius as uniting symbol.....	45
21	Ouroboros and caduceus.....	47
22	Yin and yang.....	48
23	One is all.....	50
24	Baphomet.....	52
25	The Magician Rider-Waite Tarot.....	53
26	Change Thoth Tarot.....	54
27	The Magus Thoth Tarot	55
28	The Fool Thoth Tarot	56

INTRODUCTION

Folklorists have long held a largely negative opinion of Carl Jung's concepts (Drake 1967, 322). Jung's critics stress that his theories are too universalizing, and thus have no place in the field of folklore which puts great importance on cultural relativism (Dundes 1984, 245). Still, there are those who have defended him, who say that his theories have been taken out of their original context and have been misconstrued and critiqued based on assumptions and misunderstandings (Drake 1969, 123). It is time for folklorists to reconsider Jung's place in the field.

Carl Jung was born in Switzerland in 1875, and worked throughout his life as a clinical psychologist. In part a response to the psychoanalytic psychology of Freud, Jung developed the concept of "analytical psychology," which focuses on the symbolic and spiritual experiences that aid in the individuation process. Jung's most well-known theories include archetypes, the collective and personal unconscious, psychological types and complexes, synchronicity, individuation, and projection of psychic contents. He believed that images found in dreams, myths, and folklore all had a similar purpose, and that they played a role in the individuation process. Individuation, for Jung, is the process in which an individual "seeks to achieve the highest degree of psychic wholeness attainable... by attempting to bring about the reconciliation of the different aspects of his personality" (Drake 1969, 123). Jung's theories did not just appear from thin-air. Rather, they arose from countless hours of clinical study and observation.

Archetypes and the collective unconscious are perhaps the worst-received of Jung's ideas by folklorists. Jung has the following to say about his concept of the archetype: "We must be dealing with 'autochthonous' revivals independent of all tradition, and, consequently, that 'myth-forming' structural elements must be present in the unconscious psyche" (Jung 1958, 115). This

is perhaps one reason why folklorists are hesitant to accept Jung, as tradition is one of the distinguishing factors of folklore (McNeill 2013). However, Jung is saying that archetypes don't need the folk process of transmission to be meaningful; they can be generated internally by the psyche, and that does not mean that archetypes cannot also be transmitted traditionally. He goes on to say that "archetypes appear in myths and fairy tales just as they do in dreams and in the products of the psychotic fantasy," and that "in the individual, the archetypes occur as involuntary manifestations of the unconscious processes whose existence and meaning can only be inferred, whereas the myth deals with traditional forms of an incalculable age" (Jung 1958, 115). Simply put, an archetype is a familiar symbol that finds expression often in dreams, myths, and folktales.

One of Jung's harshest critics is the folklorist Alan Dundes. This quote articulates many of his issues with the psychoanalyst:

Jung's archetypes are so general – the great mother, the child, the wise old man, etc. – that they probably are very widespread and maybe even universal. It is hard to imagine a culture that has no image of a mother figure. But even if a general mother image were universal, there would be no need to postulate that such an image was part of one's genetic inheritance. That image might be acquired through the mediation of culture. (Dundes 1984, 244)

Dundes' issue with Jung's archetypes is that they are too universalizing and do not take cultural context into consideration. However, Jung did take context into consideration when analyzing these familiar images and their appearance in dreams and myth. In fact, Jung used a procedure he calls "taking up the context" for analyzing dreams, as he says the dreamer must uncover the meanings of the salient features of their dream to understand the meaning (Jung 2010, 543). One of the criticisms of Jung is that universalizing from a white male's perspective decides what is universal for a wide range of cultures, but his "taking up the context" shows that he values cultural and historical contexts.

Almost all folklorists since Drake (1969) have argued against the value of Jung in folklore, with rare, but important outlying cases such as Jane Garry's *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook* (2004). There are actually many places where Jungian analysis and folkloristics coincide and compliment one another. Interestingly, Dundes and Jung agree on the importance of the reconciliation of binaries. Dundes concedes that one of the roles of folklore is to reconcile binary oppositions, for example, male and female, black and white, up and down. Jung has his own concept for this, which he calls *enantiodromia*. Sherry Salman, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, defines enantiodromia in the following way:

Jung observed the *spontaneous reversal of libido* which he called *enantiodromia*. This "return to the opposite" characterizes the nature of the libido's flow and has been depicted in literature and mythology as the sun's return from the belly of the night, the journey back from the center of the earth, or the poet's ascent from Dante's *Inferno*." (2008, 70)

Not only are Jung, the psychoanalyst, and Dundes, the folklorist, in agreement conceptually, but mythology is used to exemplify his theory.

Folklorist Jeana Jorgensen is also very critical of Jung's archetypes. She argues that "they're tough to pin down, hence in my view have little place in a university (Jorgensen 2017). The problem folklorists have with archetypes is that "placing too big an emphasis on precultural universals is just bizarre to us" (Jorgensen 2017). The "us" here are folklorists, and while these criticisms are valid given the viewpoint of folkloristics, it is still important to keep in mind what Drake has said about Jung's theories being taken out of their original context. Drake also points out that critiques of Jung have been very brief and have touched only on a small amount of his work. Folklorists tend to focus on the concepts of archetypes, which in reality span a very minute amount of his great contributions to psychotherapy which has arisen from the controlled environment of the clinic.

A critique that Dundes and Jorgensen both share about Jung is that his theories are too mystical. Dundes says that “there is unquestionably a mystical, anti-intellectual aspect of Jung’s thought” (Dundes 1984, 245). Dundes is bordering on his own anti-intellectualism here, however, by writing off the work of a man whose research was informed scientifically. Jorgensen essentially copies Dundes’ words and makes them her own as she says “the notion of the archetype is befuddlingly mystical and anti-intellectual” (Jorgensen 2017). The fact remains, which is that Jung was dealing with the dark and submerged aspects of the human psyche, a realm that is inherently “beffudlingly mystical.” I argue that these these concepts should not be written off just because they aren’t easily placed in a rigid box.

Drake notes that one of the most vociferous groups of Jung’s detractors happens to be Freudians, a camp that Dundes falls into (Drake 1967, 322). Ironically, Freud’s theories have been accepted by folklorists with remarkably greater frequency than Jung’s. Perhaps it is the case that Dundes has allowed his own biases and preconceptions to block him from objectively analyzing the case of Jung. The problem with many arguments against Jung is that he is often straw-manned: people fail to take into the account the depth and complexity of his work.

It is very curious that folklorists are so disparaging of Jung, especially when it comes to archetypes, considering that archetypes are essentially motifs. Folklorists of course love motifs, and this term is actually in Jung’s definition of archetypes, which he defines as ‘motifs,’ ‘primordial images,’ types, or as I have named them – ‘archetypes,’ (1958, 115). Drake notes that in this case motifs and archetypes mean the same thing (1967, 325). Folklorists typically do not accept Jung’s archetype because they do not take cultural context into consideration. However, this is not the case as Jung puts importance on what he calls “taking up the context.” As Drake reiterates this notion saying that archetypes “can be inferred only on the basis of a

knowledge of the context in which their representations appear, and this context is the cultural matrix in which the individual lives” (1967, 329). So while the argument is that Jung’s archetypes don’t take context into consideration, they actually do.

Folklorists contradict themselves when it comes to Jung’s theories and Olrik’s epic laws, which they widely accept. Also known as “superorganic theory,” Olrik’s laws hold that there is “a superorganic level that is beyond human influence but that largely governs human behavior” (McCormick 2011, 416). Olrik found that there are, as he claims, universal laws that govern the epic genre, and McCormick notes he did so by studying texts (2011, 416). This is not dissimilar to Jung, who drew his theories from clinical study. Olrik holds that certain laws will dictate form, and that there will be variation from text to text on how the form manifests. Jung, in comparison, holds that certain psycho-social dramas will manifest in dreams and in personal symbols. These are very similar, and in some ways Jung is less universalizing than Olrik.

Another way that folklore is similar to Jung’s theories is in Arnold van Gennep’s tripartite structure of rites of passage. In *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by Founders of Folklore*, editor Alan Dundes notes: “What van Gennep discovered is that virtually all rituals share the same tripartite sequential structure: separation, transition, and incorporation” and that van Gennep “demonstrates the validity of his scheme with references to many rituals and ceremonies around the world” (1999, 101). Why are folklorists, like Dundes, willing to accept nearly universalizing theories such as Propp, Olrik and van Gennep while they refuse to accept Jung? Perhaps it is because the former are folklorists while the latter is from outside the field. Like Olrik, van Gennep’s theory takes less cultural context into account than Jung.

Jung constantly reiterates how important mythology and folklore are in his endeavors. He postulates that it is “impossible for anyone without knowledge of mythology and folklore... to

grasp the essence of the individuation process” (2010, 553). For Jung, the symbolic language of myth and folklore find expression in dreams, and vice versa. In this way, an individual crafts mental images to aid them in their journey of self-discovery. Folklorists and psychoanalysts don’t necessarily examine these images in the same light, or for the same reasons, as they find expression in individual symbolism as well as communal symbolism. Folklorists would be more interested in examining communal symbolism for cultural description and analysis while a psychoanalyst would focus on the individual to aid in personal development. However, the folklorist can learn from the psychoanalyst, and vice-versa, to see how the individual acts in relation to the whole and how the whole acts in relation to the individual.

Perhaps one of the reasons folklorists have been so hesitant to accept Jung has to do with the history of the discipline. During the twentieth century, folklore was trying desperately to gain recognition as a serious academic discipline. Folklorists such as Richard Dorson held that folklore needed to be serious, and because of this, more mystical points of view, such as Jung’s, were shunned. There was a push for popularization, for children-based folklore, and for mysticism to be excluded from academic study to raise folklore’s prestige, and Stith-Thompson worried that folklore was at the mercy of popularizers (Martin, 2007). Because of these strongly held convictions, more mystical beliefs were shunned outright when really they should have been looked at with nuance.

I argue that folklorists should study Jung, with a particular focus on their agreement upon motifs and archetypes as well as their similar beliefs regarding the importance of the reconciliation of opposites. One folk group that Jung dealt with at length are alchemists, and the serpent and the dragon in alchemy, particularly the caduceus and the ouroboros, offer an interesting case study through which to delve into my thesis. I will investigate the prevalence of

these symbolic forms in primarily medieval and Early Modern alchemy. Despite the apparent differences between Jung and folklorists, particularly Dundes, when applying Jung's theories to alchemy they actually work quite well together. Dundes has said that folklore in part allows for the reconciliation of binaries (1997, 44). By analyzing the use of the serpent and the dragon in the symbolic language of alchemy, particularly the caduceus and the ouroboros, I show that these figures come to represent the reconciliation of opposites for this folk group. I use Jung's theories of alchemy to show how this reconciliation of binaries occurred in part on the psychological level for the alchemist. Dundes also advocated the theory of symbolic equivalence (2007), which shows that in psychological terms one object may be substituted for another, and that they hold the same symbolic meaning. I show that this can be applied to the serpent and the dragon in alchemy, as they can switch forms and hold the same meaning. Furthermore, despite being separated by vast distances of space, time and context, the ouroboros and the caduceus contain the same core meaning for this folk group.

Folklore, by its very nature is ever evolving. It is time for the rigidity of the 20th century to be re-examined so that we are not at the mercy of the past. This is not to say that what individuals such as Dorson, Stith-Thompson, and Dundes did for the field should be forgotten; their contributions to folklore made it what it is today and will surely have a lasting impact. It is time for us to resolve some of the binaries within our own field, and part of that includes taking a serious look at the mystical views held by Jung.

ALCHEMY

"True it is, without falsehood, certain and most true. That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of the one thing" (Linden 2003, 28). Thus begins the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus, a

short and enigmatic text dating between the first and third centuries C.E. that is widely accepted as the most important of all alchemical treatises. The main idea communicated in these lines is that there is a unity between heaven and earth; what happens in heaven is reflected on earth and vice versa. From the perspective of modern science, it suggests that the laws of physics and reality that occur at the highest levels of existence are still applicable at the smallest, quantum levels. As these lines begin one of the most important pieces of alchemical literature, it is clear that the union between the above and the below is central to alchemical philosophy.

Folklore is often viewed, to the folklorist's chagrin, as a phenomenon that occurred solely in the past. Similarly, alchemy is often thought of as a realm of study that was left behind while the processes of rationalism took over. However, alchemy is alive to this day. Most of the books that are written about alchemy focus on the psycho-spiritual nature of the work, but laboratory alchemists are still at work. For example, the Facebook group "Alchemy Study" has 33,000 members, many of whom post pictures of their alchemical experiments. Most of the people in the group are focused on the symbolic nature of alchemical art, and for practitioners of alchemy in the current day it is nearly universally held that there is both a chemical and spiritual aspect.

As one scrolls through alchemical texts and emblems, whose meanings have been purposefully obscured by the masters of the past from the prying eyes of profane seekers, it is clear that the union of opposites is central to alchemical communication. There are depictions of Janus-headed individuals, suns and moons occupy opposite sides of alchemical drawings, kings and queens are shown melding into one being. Androgynous individuals are by no means a rarity: hot and cold, fire and water, moist and dry and any number of supposed dualities are endlessly depicted as being in opposition while it is implied that their duality is actually a oneness.

In these seemingly endless depictions showing the likeness of the above and the below and the “miracles of the one thing” (Linden 2003, 28) the serpent and the dragon come up over and over again. Particularly, the caduceus and the ouroboros are staples in alchemical imagery. The caduceus is a staff that is shown with two intertwining serpents that rise up from the bottom of the staff, or the below, to the top, or the above. These two intertwining serpents, I argue, are the two sides of any coin of opposites, most eloquently posed as the above and the below in the *Emerald Tablet*. The ouroboros is a dragon, or serpent, eating its own tail. This imagery communicates both the union of opposites, particularly the beginning and the end, as well as the union of all into one, which is made clear by the first alchemical use of the ouroboros. The union of the beginning and end is especially significant in alchemy as the *prima materia* is the beginning of the work and the Philosopher’s Stone is the end, although they are comprised of the same substance. I argue that the serpent and the dragon, particularly the caduceus and the ouroboros, are embodiments of the mystical philosophy and alchemy, and they communicate the meaning of the Hermetic axiom: as above, so below. I further argue that this is a good case study to consider why Jung’s theories of archetypes should be studied by folklorists, especially given their similarity to motifs.

The serpent and the dragon are suitable choices for embodiments of the symbiotic relationship between the above and the below as well as the coincidence of opposites. They are both used interchangeably in alchemical drawings of the caduceus and the ouroboros. In some depictions, both the serpent and the dragon are used in the same emblem to communicate this meaning and thus have a similar role. The dragon itself is a creature of both the heavens and the earth: its very existence is by nature a union of opposites. Its wings allow it to mount to heaven, and its serpentine body plants it firmly on earth. In this regard it is in balance between the

element of air and the element of earth, two qualities that would have been on the mind of an alchemist in ages past. The Aztec dragon God Quetzalcoatl also communicates this union of the above and the below in its name: quetzal being a bird and coatl being a snake. It is exactly this reason why the dragon is such a suitable choice to embody the axiom that stands at the center of alchemical thought.

Building off of a debate between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp, Dundes concedes that the reconciliation of binaries plays an important role in myth and folklore (Dundes 1997, 46). In the case of alchemists, their use of the caduceus and ouroboros to signify the union of opposites is, in part the folklore of their group identity, and further rather a symbolic representation of the desires of the group as a whole. The American Folklore Society website defines folklore as “the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioral example” (What Is Folklore?). The caduceus and the ouroboros enter into the folklore of the alchemists and express their desire to unify opposites within themselves.

Alchemists are a folk group in themselves; they possess a vernacular expressive culture. Although alchemists were separated by time and space, and even language, I argue that they belong to the same group. For example, Star Wars fans might have originated in the 1970s, but still they have much in common with fans today. Further, a Spanish Star Wars fan is bound by a similarity of interest to say, an Egyptian Star Wars fan despite the fact that the films were originally shot in English. These are arbitrary examples, but they point to how members of a folk group, like alchemists, can be in different times and places, but still be bound by similar beliefs and experiences. Folklorists have not studied them nearly as much as they should, and the observation that folklore is a quest to reconcile binaries fits perfectly into their schema. By using

a Jungian alchemical perspective, the opposing points of Jung and folklorists themselves can be reconciled.

THE HISTORY OF ALCHEMY

Alchemy has a very complex history, and its origins date back to ancient Egypt. The etymology of the word alchemy derives from an Egyptian term for transmutation, and thus has become known as the Egyptian art. The al- portion of the word is Arabic, meaning “the.” Taken as a whole, “alchemy” essentially means “the Egyptian art of the transmutation of metals into gold. The word “alchemy” displays the multiple cultures that influenced its proliferation throughout the ancient world: the Egyptians, the Arabs, the Greeks, and the rest of the Latin speaking European world (Alchemy).

At its core, alchemy is the quest for the philosopher’s stone, which is a substance that will allow the alchemist to turn objects into gold. Alchemy rests on the notion that matter and metals may be transmuted, and that lesser metals may be transmuted into higher metals. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola provides a detailed account of the alchemical process in *Alchemy*, which is summarized here: the alchemist must first discover what the *materia prima* is and find it in the mines. Alchemists are profoundly secretive in their descriptions, and so the *materia prima* has been described in many different terms. The whole of the Work is done using this one substance, and once it is found the opus must be started in the spring under the sign of Aries. To purify the *materia prima* the alchemist must use the secret fire, *Ignis Innaturalis*, to rob it of its impurities. The *materia prima* is then placed in a mortar, mixed with the secret fire and moistened with a dew. The remaining substance is then placed in a hermetically sealed vessel and placed in an oven. After the *materia prima* has been placed in the athanor for an extended period of time, it decays and it enters the *nigredo* phase which is noted by a blackness. Then, beautiful colors

appear which notes the stage known as the Peacock's Tail. This leads to a whitening phase, called *albedo*, and then a red phase known as *rubedo*. Once the *rubedo* phase has been reached, the secret fire is used again and the Philosopher's Stone is born (1973, 12-13).

What needs to be made clear to neophytes of alchemical studies is that in the historiography of alchemy there are, as Lawrence Principe and William Newman note in "Some Problems of the Historiography of Alchemy," "several radical schools of historical interpretation" (2001, 385). The main two schools are what can be called the Jungian school and the chemical school. The Jungian school, named after the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, proposes that alchemy is, as Hasler defines it, "a form of inner work, a sort of precursor to self-analysis of the psychoanalytical type" (2009, 137). In the Jungian school, alchemy is a spiritual path and the search for the philosopher's stone is the search for enlightenment. In this case, an alchemist is not attempting to transmute mundane lead into mundane gold, but rather the alchemist is attempting to transmute the lead of ordinary consciousness into the gold of a fully realized, enlightened self. Or, as Stanislas Klossowski de Rola articulates in *Alchemy*, an alchemist attempts to have their consciousness "transmuted from the ordinary (lead-like) level of everyday perception to a subtle (gold-like) level of perception" (1973, 7). In the chemical school, alchemy is a sort of proto-science and it was a search for chemical formulas which would allow an alchemist to transmute lead into gold. These modes of thought can also be split into the esoteric (Jungian) and exoteric (chemical) schools. The esoteric school focus on the more arcane, spiritual, hidden aspects of alchemy, and the exoteric school focuses on the mundane, earthly, laboratory aspects of alchemy.

SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY

At the outset of this project, my goal was to provide both a chemical and psycho-spiritual explanation for the role of the serpent and the dragon in alchemy. As I researched from the chemical lens, it became increasingly clear that this would be incredibly difficult given the fact that alchemists purposely made their writings and drawings as difficult to decipher as possible. The serpent and the dragon take on a menacingly multifaceted meaning throughout multiple texts, and deciphering their purpose became vexingly complicated. From the psycho-spiritual perspective, however, their usage is much more uniform, especially in the case of the caduceus and the ouroboros. It is for these reasons that this essay will approach alchemy primarily from the Jungian perspective, and I will be attempting to explain their meanings from the lens of psycho-spiritual alchemy.

For the alchemist, their work was divine in of itself. Jung says that all alchemists “from the very earliest times, are agreed that their art is sacred and divine, and likewise that their work can be completed only with the help of God. This science of theirs is given only to the few, and none understands it unless God or a master has opened his understanding” (1953, 301-302). It is clear from reading the texts of alchemists from the past that they feel as though their understanding of the Great Work of alchemy is a gift from God, and that the spiritual truths contained therein are not for the masses. The spiritual aspect of alchemy includes a striving for a spiritual union with the divine, a union of the below of the human with the above of God.

Perhaps the greatest historical misconception is that the alchemists were proto-chemists who were churlishly trying to turn lead into gold. However, the alchemists, even the chemical alchemists, would not have thought of reality as being segmented into parts such as chemical, laboratory, psychological, etcetera. Instead, the alchemical art to them was part of a reflexive

universe. Archibald Cockren in *Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored* argues that “a science to be a science must be capable of manifestation on every plane of consciousness; in other words it must be capable of demonstrating the axiom ‘as above, so below.’ Alchemy can withstand this test, for it is, physically, spiritually and psychically, a science manifesting throughout all form and all life” (1999, 138). Though the serpent and dragon manifest on all of these planes of reality in the works of the alchemist, I feel most confident in my ability to explain their spiritual significance.

THE UNION OF OPPOSITES

As articulated in the opening lines of the *Emerald Tablet* through the annunciation of the above being like the below and vice versa, the union of opposites is paramount to alchemical thought. This union of opposites and its importance in alchemy is shown once and again in alchemical literature and imagery. As Jung points out,

the problem of opposites called up by the shadow plays a great – indeed, the decisive – role in alchemy, since it leads in the ultimate phase of the work to the union of opposites in the archetypal form of the hieros gamos, or “chymical marriage.” Here the supreme opposites, male and female (as in the Chinese Yang and Yin), are melted into a unity purified of all opposition and therefore incorruptible. (Jung 1953, 37)

The opposites take on an incredible variety of forms, and are posed as any pairs which stand in polar opposition to each other, particularly male and female or the beginning and the end. These pairs are shown as being united, and at times they are done so in the form of a caduceus or as a ouroboros, affirming that these two draconic and serpentine forms are meant to articulate the alchemical union of opposites. What is equally important is that these forms show the spiritual nature of alchemy, for they are a union of the above and the below, of the human with God. In this section I introduce the importance of the union of opposites in alchemy and show how androgyny fits in to Jungian theory as well as folkloric motifs.

A quote from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a foundational text of Hermetic literature, the philosophy upon which alchemy is based, distills the importance and divine nature of the union of opposites into one eloquent quote:

If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal, and make yourself grown to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure; rise above all time and become eternal; then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature; make yourself higher than all heights and lower than all depths; bring together in yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity; think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all of this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God. But if you shut up your soul in your body, and abase yourself, and say “I know nothing, I can do nothing; I am afraid of earth and sea, I cannot mount to heaven; I know not what I was, nor what I shall be,” then what have you to do with God? (*Corpus Hermeticum*, 38)

The Hermetic, alchemical quest to be united with God and to “to bring together in yourself all opposites” is made clear in this quotation which stands as assuredly one of the greatest in the Hermetic canon. As Gary Edson clarifies in *Mysticism and Alchemy Through the Ages*, “The (alchemical) quest involves attempts to suspend time or to transcend it, thereby gaining access to timelessness... The alchemist is able to move from this spaceless and timeless realm along a line that connects the higher and lower levels of being” (Edson 2012, 198).

Opposites, or binary pairs, and their union are represented in a great variety of ways in the alchemical arcana. Jung points out that “the brother-sister pair stands allegorically for the whole conception of opposites. These have a wide range of variation: dry-moist, hot-cold, male-female, sun-moon, gold-silver, mercury-sulphur, round-square, water-fire, volatile-solid, physical-spiritual and so on” (Jung 1953, 317-18). Each of these pairs of opposites are

represented through the caduceus and the ouroboros, and their union is the same as the above and the below.

Perhaps the most typical portrayal of the union of these opposites comes in the form of a king and a queen, often times as a Janus-headed figure with the sun and the moon. The sun is always with the king and stands for the masculine pole and the moon is always on the side with the queen, standing for the feminine. A great example of this can be found in Jamsthaler's *Viatorium spagyricum*, a German alchemical text dating from 1625:



Figure 1 King and queen on a dragon

It can be seen here that the male and female, the sun and the moon, are being joined together. Furthermore, they are standing on top of a dragon. The queen is holding a square, and the king is holding a compass. The square, which allows for straight lines to be drawn, stands for linear, rational thought. The compass, which allows for circular, non-linear lines, stands for cyclical thought. Typically, the cyclic, non-linear is associated with the feminine principle in alchemy, and the linear is associated with the masculine, and this depiction provides an atypical digression

from the norm. The dragon, though not in its ouroboros or caduceus form in this depiction, is not a singular example, as serpents and dragons occur in these male and female conjunction depictions with shocking regularity.

The artistic messages left by alchemists are part of their folklore. The texts that they left seem like literature now, but they were somewhere in between folklore and literature at the time they were produced, and when we find binary symbolism, we can see the concept of the archetype at work. Their images are like an index in a semiotic sense: they are meaning-making tools to explain their findings. In his book *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra remarks that mystics and scientists are cognizant of the limitations of language, and that in both endeavors language is incapable of fully communicating a mystical or scientific discovery (1975, 45-51). The alchemist, both scientist and mystic, resorted to symbolic messages where linguistic faculties were not comprehensive enough.

The alchemical texts of the past function in a similar way to contemporary folklore in that there is a sharing of texts that gives way to their proliferation. Take for example memes: someone creates a popular image that gets replicated and spread. The internet today aids in the dispersal of this idea, and it is able to spread on a more global scale. With the images of the alchemist, they could be spread by way of sharing texts, by word of mouth, or by even having entered into the fundamental experience of the alchemist. Though alchemy has been studied very little by folklorists, it is a domain that is ripe for the study, and an application of Jungian theory to them is useful because of their difficult-to-decipher images. At the very least, the folklorist should be familiar with Jung's contribution to the conversation surrounding alchemy.

In Figure 2 we can see dual serpents on a Late Babylonian gem with a Janus-headed figure who on the left side is masculine and on the right feminine. The figure is wearing a crown,

so it is safe to say that they are a king-queen. The serpent on the left emits rays, indicating the solar-masculine presence, and on the right side the serpent is topped with a crescent moon indicating the lunar-feminine. In Figure 1, dragons communicated a similar message, and in Figure 2 serpents are depicted, showing that the serpent and the dragon had an interchangeable meaning.



Figure 2 Androgynous divinity

Jung stressed the importance of the androgynous archetype, and in *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, El-Shamy says that:

Jung describes the concept of an androgynous being as a projection of unconscious wholeness that archetypally refers back to a primordial state of mind (collective unconscious) in which procreation and sex differences are either totally fused or largely undifferentiated. This archetype, or stream of feelings, has become a unifying symbol, or a symbol of the creative union of opposites (2004, 57).

Androgyny, for Jung, is an archetype suited for reconciling opposites and looking for wholeness.

El-Shamy, a folklorist, agrees with him.

Stith-Thompson lists the dragon as a motif (Garry 2004, 67), and El-Shamy labels it “a nearly universal motif” (2004, 67). However, in this instance the line between archetype and motif are operating in the same way: the words are practically interchangeable. El-Shamy also points out that “the *Motif-Index* lists “fight with dragon” as a motif (B.11.11.). It is also a major tale type (AT 300). Here, the conflict between the hero and the dragon symbolizes the conflict between life and death, good and evil, and right and wrong” (2004, 74). What is fascinating here is that the dragon is listed as a motif by folklorists, but it might as well be an archetype, and the dragon serves as a motif to reconcile binaries in myth! Androgyny is an archetype for reconciling binaries, dragons are motifs for the same purpose, and in alchemy, as we shall see, the androgynous forms of the serpent and dragon function as motif/archetypes to do the same.

In Figure 3 from Mylius’ *Philosophia Reformata* from Germany in 1622, another Janus-headed figure with a sun for the male face and a moon for the female face, once again topped with a crown indicating that this is the king-queen, male-female, solar-lunar union.



Figure 3 Solar-Lunar union

It is important to note that in these depictions, the opposites are always united, showing that the union of the above and the below is of the greatest importance. The figure stands on top of a dragon, and although it is not yet in the ouroboros or caduceus form, its connection to the *hieros gamos* is implied. The dragon, being a union of the sky and the earth with the wings of a flying creature and the body of an earthy serpent is in itself a creature that consists of unified opposites.

This depiction in Figure 4 in Daniel Mylius' 1618 *Opus Medico-Chymicum* from Germany shows the union of opposites and the union of the above and the below. This emphasizes that the reconciliation of binaries extends to connection between heaven and earth.

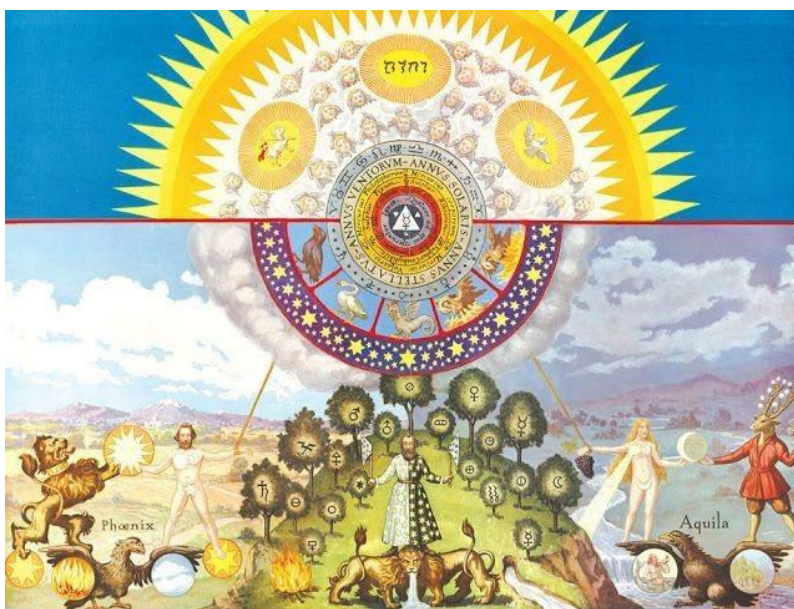


Figure 4 Uniting above and below

This image is full of dualities which are meant to be united: the male and female, the sun and moon, day and night, dry and moist, and most importantly, the above and the below. The top half of the picture shows the realm of the above, full of celestial beings and the tetragrammaton, the four letter name of God, while the below is full of the world of opposites. The continuation

between the above and the below indicates their co-operation. The importance of the union of opposites in alchemy is quite clear. As Jung says, “the union of opposites must play a decisive role in the alchemical process” (1953, 456).

A Hermetic text called *The Kybalion* covers several key points that will help expand upon the notion of the union of opposites in an alchemical context. Written by an anonymous, or possibly several anonymous authors under the pseudonym “Three Initiates,” *The Kybalion* was first published in 1908 and purports to be an articulation of the Hermetic teachings. Although this text would be of much greater use in backing up my argument if it were published, in say, 1500, I still feel like the information contained therein is applicable to the philosophical boundaries in which the alchemists of the past would have been operating under. Though alchemists have been separated by time and place, their work “shows a remarkable agreement on first principles” (Jung 1953, 301).

The Kybalion consists of seven principles which it claims are the basis of Hermetic philosophy, and are important to know as they are the foundation of alchemical thought. *The Kybalion* enumerates seven principles as follows: mentalism, correspondence, vibration, polarity, rhythm, cause and effect, and gender. Each principle is associated with one axiom which describes it. Several of these principles are more important than the others within the context of this paper. Mentalism states that “THE ALL is MIND; *The Universe is Mental*” (2008, 9). Correspondence states “*As above, so below; as below, so above*” (2008, 10), echoing the claim of the *Emerald Tablet*. Polarity postulates that “*Everything is Dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled*” (2008, 13). Gender posits that “*Gender is in everything; everything has its*

Masculine and Feminine Principles: Gender manifests on all planes” (2008, 18). While each of these principles are important in their own right, it is the principles of correspondence, polarity and gender which will help elaborate the thinking behind the alchemical union of opposites. Each of these principles support the importance of unifying opposites to an alchemist as well as the importance of the interior world stressed by mentalism.

The principle of correspondence “embodies the truth that there is always a Correspondence between the laws of and phenomena of the various planes of Being and Life” (Three Initiates 2008, 10). The axiom “as above, so below” is important for an understanding of this principle because they both are saying that the rules that govern the highest level of existence apply to the lowest levels of existence, and vice versa. Furthermore, the Hermetic alchemists believed themselves to be a part of divinity, and in themselves divine, which an understanding of this principle along with the others corroborates. Hermeticism posits that the Supreme Being is a mental entity, and that it is comprised of everything that is, has been, or will be. They refer to this as The All. *The Kybalion* makes the claim that “even the highest of these advanced Beings exist merely as creations of, and in, the Mind of THE ALL, and are subject to the Cosmic Processes and Universal Laws” (2008, 77). The alchemist then, exists within the universal mind of The All, alongside every other aspect of existence. By “studying the Monad,” *The Kybalion* says, an individual “understands the archangel” (2008, 11).

The principle of polarity “embodies the truth that ‘everything is dual,’ everything has two poles’, ‘everything has its pair of opposites’” (2008, 13). It states that “thesis and antithesis are identical in nature, but different in degree” (2008,13). A main teaching that this principle attempts to communicate is that two polar opposites are actual manifestations of the same phenomena but differ only in degree. *The Kybalion* uses many different examples, including that

of hot and cold. Heat and cold are two manifestations of the same phenomena and although they appear to be opposites they are both manifestations of the same thing. This principle teaches that “THE ALL and The Many are the same, the difference being merely a matter of degree” (2008, 90). Thus the above and below, heaven and earth, human and God are manifestations of the same phenomena, their difference being only a matter of degree.

The principle of gender “embodies the truth that there is GENDER manifested in everything – the Masculine and Feminine Principles ever at work” (2008, 18). The male and female effectively work as the two poles, and their union is once and again shown in the alchemical art which so often shows duality in male and female forms. Although it was not codified until the twentieth-century, the thought process of *The Kybalion* is clearly present in earlier alchemy.

We have already seen that the union of opposites is often portrayed as male and female conjunctions, of the sun and moon cohabitating, and of Janus-headed figures, and in Figure 5, from a sixteenth-century edition of Thomas Aquinas’ *De Alchimia* printed in Germany, the ouroboros takes the form of a Janus-headed eagle flying over the back of a tail-eating dragon. This shows that the dragon, the serpent, and now the ouroboros have the same semiotic function.

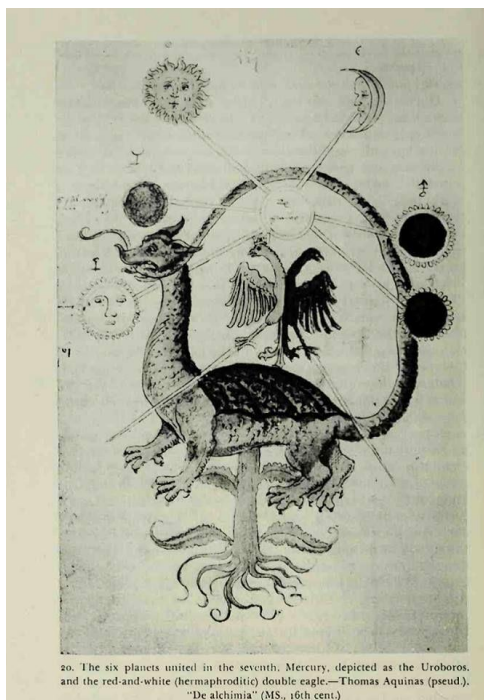


Figure 5 Janus-headed eagle

This image comes from Thomas Aquinas' *De Alchimia*, an alchemical text written by the prolific thirteenth century theologian. The sun and moon are in their usual places, except here they are situated in their roles as two of the planets and their planetary metals: the sun representing gold and the moon silver. What makes this piece of art a clear manifestation of the union of opposites is the Janus-headed eagle in the middle: one half of it is dark, the other light. Darkness and light, according to Hermetic-alchemical thought are manifestations of the same phenomena. It is encircled by a dragon eating its own tail, the end of its tail and the beginning of its mouth being the same as the two sides of the eagle.

The manifestations of the ouroboros in depictions with other polar pairs is vast and used time after time in alchemical art. Here are three more examples of the ouroboros paired with the sun and moon from alchemical texts.

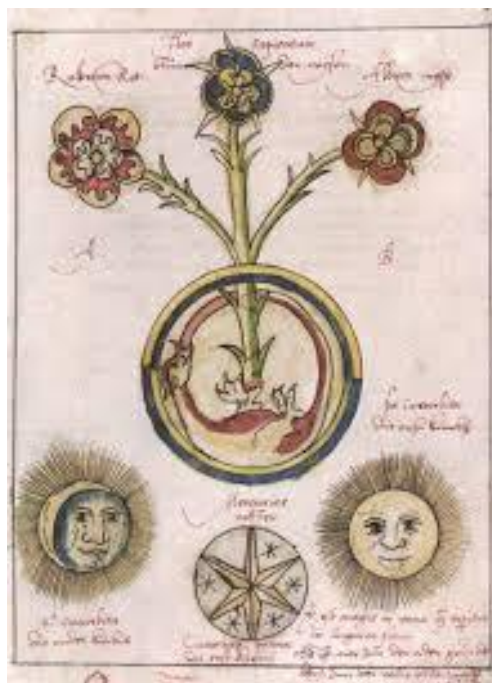


Figure 6 Sun and moon ouroboros

In Figure 6, we have an ouroboros in Hieronymus Reussner's 1582 alchemical treatise *Pandora* from Switzerland. The sun and moon are again shown.



Figure 7 Horapollon's ouroboros

Figure 7 is another tail-eater from Horapollo's 1505 *Selecta Hieroglyphica* shown with the sun and moon. Horapollo was an Egyptian writer living in the fifth century C.E. whose work was rediscovered in the 15th century.



Figure 8 Hermes Trismegistus

Figure 8 from Zadith's *De Chemia Senioris* printed in Basel during the sixteenth century shows Hermes Trismegistus, mythical founder of Hermetic philosophy and of alchemy with a book containing an ouroboros, again with the sun and moon. It is important to note that the ouroboros consists of both a dragon and a serpent, showing that the two are intrinsically linked.

The caduceus, like the ouroboros, is also shown in alchemical art that are full of opposites.



Figure 9 King and queen caduceus

Figure 9, from the eighteenth century *Figurarum Aegyptiorum*, shows a caduceus in between a king and queen. The figure holding the caduceus at the top of the page is making a gesture in which one hand is lifted up to the above and the other is pointed down to the below. There is a sun and a moon, once again in their planetary metal forms as the other planets are represented as well.

Figure 10 from *Figurarum Aegyptiorum* is very similar to the ouroboros in Aquinas' *De Alchemia* in that there is a Janus-headed eagle only here there is a caduceus instead of an ouroboros, demonstrating that the two figures serve a similar purpose.



Figure 10 Sun and moon caduceus

Once again in Figure 10 we have the Janus-headed eagle, a king and queen, and the sun and moon, except this time a caduceus is shown instead of the ouroboros.

The caduceus form is also shown in alchemical art in which a king and queen are copulating, i.e. uniting. This shows that there is a procreative or generative aspect to the usage of the caduceus.



Figure 11 King and queen copulating

Figure 11, from *Rosarium philosophorum* dating from 1550 in Germany, shows a king and queen uniting in a serpentine, caduceus-like form. A sun is with the king and a moon is with the queen.

The union of opposites is central to the alchemical opus, and in particular the mystical experience that the alchemist undertakes. “This,” the *Corpus Hermeticum* emphasizes, is “the good end for those who have gained gnosis – to be made one with God” (Mead 2018, 6). This union is the human coming to understand their link to the divine – the drop of water realizing it is the ocean. As Jung says, “even if it were only the relationship of a drop of water to the sea, that sea would not exist but for the multitude of drops” (1953, 10). It is clear that the dragon, symbol of the union between heaven and earth, is central to the alchemical union of opposites. Take this quotation from the *Aurelia Occulta* that Jung cites in his *Alchemical Studies*: “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” (1967, 218). Here, the dragon is connected to the union of opposites: young and old, hard and soft, and that is the role it and the serpent fill in alchemy.

Dundes established his theory of “symbolic equivalence” in relation to folktales and legends. He noted that in legends, a hook hand could be replaced with a phallus, and because of that he posited they held the same psychological meaning. If the serpent and the dragon have the same meaning, as I have argued, one would expect for them to be used in an interchangeable manner, and that is exactly what we find in Figure 12, from the German Abrahamic Eleazar’s 1734 *Uraltes Chymisches Werk*, which depicts an ouroboros that has a dragon and a serpent, both intertwined.

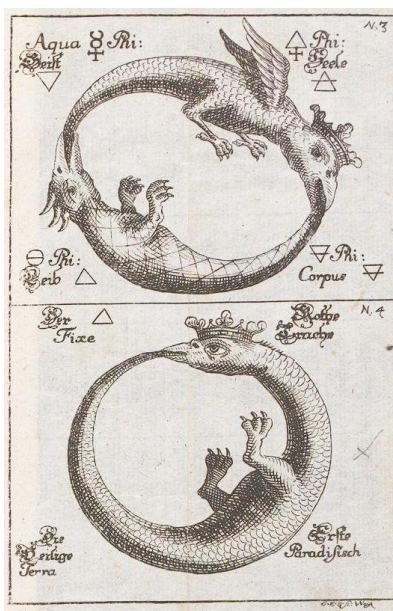


Figure 12 Dragon and serpent ouroboros

Not only does this show the union of opposites, but that the serpent and dragon are themselves symbolic equivalences as they fill the same role in the same image. This is just another instance of folklorists and Jung being in accordance in an alchemical context. In other images, the ouroboros is at times a single dragon biting its own tail, a single serpent biting its own tail, two dragons, two serpents, and in this case one dragon and one serpent. Therefore, they are symbolically equivalent.

THE CADUCEUS

The caduceus is a staff with two serpents entwined around a central pole which is topped by a winged orb. The staff, which is at the same time composed of serpents and dragons, is held by Hermes, the patron deity of alchemy. Hermes is an apt choice as the patron of the Great Work, wherein the union of opposites is a key element. Hermes-Mercury is referred to as “that inconstant Mercurius,” and he has been called ‘versipellis,’ which means changing his skin,

shifty” (Jung 1967, 217). The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism stresses that Hermes is “duplex and his main characteristic is duplicity. It is said of him that he ‘runs round the earth and enjoys equally the company of the good and the wicked.’ He is ‘two dragons,’ the ‘twin,’ made of ‘two natures’ or ‘two substances’ (The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism). Alchemical duplicity is meant to be understood as a unity, split into any of the two primordial dualities such as good and evil, light and dark, up and down, etcetera. In this section, I will provide a series of images to show how the caduceus operates as a motif/archetype exemplifying the union of opposites.

Hermes and his caduceus staff became symbols for the alchemical opus, but the development of the god Hermes and the caduceus have a long and winding history like the staff itself. A.L. Frothingham in his article “Babylonian Origin of the Snake-God and of the Caduceus I” claims that the god Hermes and the caduceus, also known as the kerykeion, are Babylonian in origin. He says that “proto Hermes was always a snake-god... But it is an essential element of his function that he was not a single snake – for the great single Earth Snake was the Mother Goddess – but the double snake, male and female” and that “for this reason the emblem of the god was the Kerykeion or caduceus, a pair of snakes wound around a wand or sceptre” (1916, 175). From the very beginning, Hermes and the caduceus were intrinsically linked.

Hermes and the dragon are, as Jung points out, symbols “combining the chthonic principle of the serpent and the aerial principle of the bird” (1953, 280). Hermes is both a messenger of the Gods and a psychopomp, a God who can himself journey to the underworld. His very nature is a union of Heaven and Earth, of the above and the below. From the beginning of the existence of both Hermes and the caduceus, they were linked together and were personifications of the great masculine and the great feminine principles.

In his seminal study of the Babylonian Hermes, Frothingham claims that from the earliest stage, Hermes *was* the caduceus, or in other words that the caduceus was the god, as he says “before it became the god’s emblem, the caduceus had been, in the pre-anthropomorphic era, the god himself” (1916, 175-176). The divine or heavenly nature of the caduceus then was present in its meaning from the very beginning.

The Babylonian caduceus was also associated with the god Ningishzida, who may be a predecessor of Hermes.



Figure 13 Libation vase

Figure 13 depicts a libation vase, housed at The Louvre, that is dedicated to the god Ningishzida and dates from 2120 B.C. In the middle we can see the caduceus in clear form, and it is held up by two beings with reptilian bodies and wings, indicating that it is likely that they are meant to be draconic figures. These beings may be gods themselves, as Frothingham notes that some Mesopotamian gods such as Ea are depicted as having serpent’s heads (1916).

It is peculiar that this libation vase is so insistent upon depicting the serpentine form. As it is a libation vase, its main usage would have been to instill a state of altered being, perhaps that of altered consciousness in the drinker. In the following section, I posit altered states of consciousness arrived at by way of psychedelic substances and meditational practices in Peru, Egypt, and India as origins of their fascination with serpents. The alchemists, who were engaged in meditative practice, may have come upon the archetypes of the caduceus and the ouroboros through similar means. The evidence comes from Peruvian ayahuasceros, Hindu serpent worship, and the uraeus of the ancient Egyptians.

In Jeremy Narby's book *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*, Narby hypothesizes that Peruvian ayahuasceros, that is, Peruvian shamans who ingest a psychedelic elixir called ayahuasca, are able to take their consciousness down to a molecular level and that they get their knowledge from DNA that takes the form of serpents and dragons. The ayahuasceros told Narby that they get their medical knowledge from these serpents, and Narby experienced this claim for himself as the author, who is an anthropologist, ingested the psychedelic beverage himself and reported the following experience:

"Deep hallucinations submerged me. I suddenly found myself surrounded by two gigantic boa constrictors that seemed fifty feet long. I was terrified. These enormous snakes are there, my eyes are closed and I see a spectacular world of brilliant lights, and in the middle of these hazy thoughts, the snakes start talking to me without words. They explain that I am just a human being. I feel my mind crack, and in the fissures, I see the bottomless arrogance of my presuppositions. It is profoundly true that I am just a human being, and, most of the time, I have the impression of understanding everything, whereas here I find myself in a more powerful reality that I do not understand at all and that, in my arrogance, I did not even suspect existed. I feel like crying in view of the enormity of these revelations. Then it dawns on me that this self-pity is a part of my arrogance. I feel so ashamed that I no longer dare feel ashamed" (1999, 6-7).

Serpents figure greatly in ayahuasca visionary art. Contemporary indigenous shamans have a practice of painting their visions and experiences with ayahuasca, which bring their

psychedelic trips alive in brilliantly colorful and startlingly alien forms. One of the most famous of these visionary artists is Pablo Amaringo, and intertwined serpents come alive in his painting “Ondas De La Ayahuasca”:



Figure 14 “Ondas de La Ayahuasca” by Pablo Amaringo (2011)

The serpents in Figure 14 are intertwined in a way that is eerily similar to that of the caduceus. In the bottom corner, a snake can be seen eating the tail in the same way as the ouroboros.

Amaringo paints from his experience, so this is a depiction of what he saw while under the influence of ayahuasca. While it is by no means conclusive evidence that the caduceus and ouroboros are cross-cultural forms inherent to the collective unconscious, it is images like this that stand out and are ripe for Jungian analysis because they contain images that are found cross-culturally.

The caduceus itself seems to play into the visions of the Peruvian ayahuasceros. Narby says that “they all speak a ‘secret language’ which they learn directly from the spirits, by imitation. They talk of a ladder, or a vine, a rope, a spiral staircase, a twisted rope or ladder – that connects heaven and earth and which they use to gain access to the world of spirits” (1999, 17). This spiral staircase, or twisted rope or ladder, which can be seen in the center of the painting, seems very similar to the caduceus, and it is interesting that they should note that it connects heaven and earth, just like Hermes connects the above and the below.

Another experience that is salient to note is a quote that Narby provides from an anthropologist named Michael Harner wherein he detailed his experience with ayahuasca and draconic figures:

For several hours after drinking the brew, I found myself, although awake, in a world literally beyond my wildest dreams. I met bird-headed people, as well as dragon-like creatures who explained that they were the true gods of this world. I enlisted the services of other spirit helpers in attempting to fly through the far reaches of the Galaxy. Transported into a trance where the supernatural seemed natural, I realized that anthropologists, including myself, had profoundly underestimated the importance of the drug in affecting native ideology. (1999, 53)

There is another startling similarity here, in that Harner describes bird-headed and draconic beings and that the Egyptian version of Hermes is Thoth, who is depicted with the head of an ibis and is the god of alchemy.

The serpent and the dragon have long been associated with inner vision that is prompted by the ingestion of psychedelics or mind altering substances. The Egyptians, known for using the Blue Lotus, a psychedelic substance, depicted their Pharoanic headdresses with a cobra, known as the uraeus.

Jung says that “The dragon symbolizes the vision and experience of the alchemist” (1953, 279). Although there is no evidence to suggest that alchemists of the past were experiencing the

serpents and dragons which they seem to refer to ad nauseum in altered states of consciousness, it is possible that a mystical, meditational nature of this relationship may be at least part of the equation.



Figure 15 Mask of Tutankhamun

Similarly, the Hindus, famed for their psychedelic beverage called soma, depict Shiva with a serpent around the neck as can be seen in Figure 16 in the Shiva of Murudeshwara statue and Vishnu as sleeping and creating the world while he sleeps on the cosmic serpent Sesha, which can be seen in Figure 17 from *The Bhagavad Gita as It Is*. Shiva is also linked to a union of opposites for an enlightenment experience, as the union of Shiva and his female counterpart Shakti is a path to enlightenment in Hinduism (Feuerstein 2012, 385).



Figure 16 Shiva of Murudeshwara



Figure 17 Vishnu on the cosmic serpent

The ingestion of psychedelics and altered states of consciousness has an interesting history in Western science as well. Francis Crick, famed for discovering the double-helix form of DNA, says that he discovered the form while tripping on LSD. August Kekule, who discovered

the benzene ring, did so while he was dreaming about an ouroboros. The caduceus and the ouroboros appeared to scientists in dreams and altered states of consciousness, acting as archetypes or motifs and vastly altered the course of human history. The caduceus belongs to a mythical God, Hermes-Mercury, and this particular instance in this particular folk group points to why Jungian psychoanalysis should be used to analyze folklore. These symbols are abundant in cultural and individual realms of symbolism, and they appear in both spiritual and scientific endeavors. The serpent staff and the tail-eating dragon become mythological motifs, are seen by psychonauts in altered states of consciousness, and aid in paradigm-shifting scientific advancements. Folklorists would be remiss if they were to not consider *why* this is the case, especially if it is because their preconceptions of archetypes and symbolic language predetermine their willingness, or lack thereof, to probe deeper.

Linking all of these contexts together, ayahuasca, meditation, ancient Egypt, Hinduism, may seem far-fetched, but the one combining factor is the serpent. Anodea Judith is another scholar who has picked up on this pattern, as she points out that “in Egypt, the pharaohs wore crowns with symbols over their third eye to represent their godly stature... The entwined serpents are also symbolic of the double helix pattern of our DNA – the basic information-carrier of life” (1987, 37). There is clearly a correspondence here, and Jungian archetypes are as useful as a tool as any to research this serpent symbolism.

What has been occurring with individuals encountering serpents in altered states of consciousness might be linked to the biological field of “epigenetics.” It has been shown that some genes don’t express themselves until they are triggered (Jaenisch and Bird, 2003). For example, the ancestors of Holocaust survivors experience trauma that has been passed down to them generationally (Kelleman, 2013). Studies have shown that chickens who are never shown

what a predatory bird looks like will experience shock when they see one for the first time, and not when a bird-like flying object is sent flying overhead. This means that they have some kind of ancestral memory of the bird that is inherent in them biologically. Stories and images such as the caduceus and ouroboros, like arise psychologically and physiologically. Snakes have been seen the world over, so of course we have stories about them. These biologically imprinted images are passed down in a similar transmission method as other types of folklore.

The serpent constantly comes up in spiritual contexts, pointing to its sacred nature. One of the chapters in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, is entitled “To Asclepius,” and it is a dialogue between Hermes and Asclepius. The *Corpus Hermeticum* is extremely spiritual and philosophical, and the belief that God is present in everything appears in the chapter dedicated to Asclepius as Hermes says “If space is, therefore, to be thought, it should not, then, be thought as God, but space. If God is also to be thought, He should not be conceived as space, but as energy that can contain all space” (Corpus Hermeticum, 9). The Hermetic philosophy, of which alchemy is beholden to, is a unique mixture of science and spirituality.

The serpent on the staff is also mentioned in the Bible. In Numbers 21: 4-9, Moses is instructed by God to erect a brazen serpent on a pole that will protect the Israelites from the bites of fiery serpents. The passage goes like this:

And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray against the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it on a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Numbers 21: 6-9).

Al D. Holcombe in his article “The Bible and the Kundalini” argues that instances such as this are evidence of the presence of what is known as Kundalini yoga in the bible. “Kundalini means “coiled serpent” and is an esoteric yogic technique in which a yogi opens up what are known as chakras. Chakras are energy centers in the body, of which there are seven: root, sacral, stomach, heart, throat, third eye and crown. It is said that the serpentine, Kundalini energy, when raised to the crown chakra opens up a mystical perception and can unite the practitioner with the divine. What is extremely interesting is that the yogi and their Kundalini channels are depicted as a caduceus!

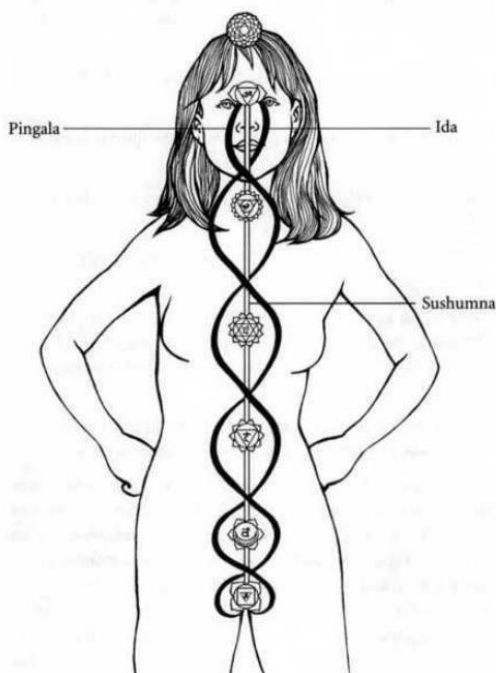


FIGURE 1.6

Sushumna, Ida, and Pingala.

(Author's Note: Some texts show Ida and Pingala crossing between the chakras, while others show them crossing at the chakras. Others

Figure 18 Sushumna, Ida and Pingala

Figure 18, from the seminal book about the chakra system, *Wheels of Life*, depicts Ida and Pingala arising through the central column, Sushumna, as the coiled serpent, Kundalini, arises to the crown chakra for an enlightenment experience. The winding pattern is remarkably similar to the caduceus, with Ida and Pingala corresponding to the two serpents and Sushumna corresponding to the central staff of Hermes. Anodea Judith argues in *Wheels of Life* that “the caduceus clearly imitates the winding of Ida and Pingala, the central nadis crossing between the chakras, surrounding the sushumna” (1987, 37). Judith also poses the question “have we mistaken Kundalini for Ouroboros? Does the serpent have her tail in her teeth?” (1987, 353). The Kundalini itself could be understood as an ouroboros. The correspondence between the awakened Kundalini and the caduceus raises the question of whether alchemists were having Kundalini experiences in their own quests for enlightenment.

Judith also takes a similar stance as Holcombe, as she argues that “the serpent is an archetypal symbol throughout the world representing enlightenment, immortality, and a path to the Gods. In Geneses, the serpent led Adam and Eve to taste the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. This symbolizes the beginning of Kundalini” (1987, 37). Cultural context must be taken into account for each of these instances, but humans are linked by a shared biology. When the same symbols come up in different cultures in a similar manner, Jungian analysis is quite useful.

C.W. Leadbeater in his book *The Chakras* states the Kundalini flow shows “the archetype of the Caduceus, whose two serpents symbolize the Kundalini or the serpent fire... while the wings signify the power of the flight through the higher world brought about by the unfolding of this fire” (Leadbeater). Here we have an expert claiming that the caduceus is an archetype, which

fits into the Jungian schema. The Kundalini is called the serpent fire, while the Bible has its fiery serpents. What this points to is a universal inner experience that transcends tradition and dogma.

In the modern Western esoteric tradition, the connection between the caduceus and Kundalini has been commonly accepted. In his article “The Staff of Hermes,” Manly P. Hall says

Around the central staff are twisted two other snakes, one white and the other black. The central winged snake represents the spinal canal fire, while the length of the Caduceus staff signifies the sixth ventricle, a tiny tube running through the spinal cord itself. The white and black serpents signify the two accompanying canals, also technically within the spinal column. These are called respectively the “Ida” and Pingali” in esoteric philosophy, while the central canal is referred to as the “Sushumna. (1926, 1-7).

This is much easier to claim in the modern day, when the East and the West are more aware of each other’s traditions, but the alchemists would not have been aware of the Eastern system of Kundalini yoga. While it is possible they were undergoing the same yogic experiences of the yogi in their meditative states, just like the individuals in the Bible, I hold that the serpents of the caduceus represented, to the alchemist the intermingling of the universal polarities nominated as above and below in the *Emerald Tablet*.

The prevalence of serpent images in psychedelic experiences, yogic practices, and alchemical imagery are interesting, but it is entirely unclear if they are carrying out a similar purpose, or if they are even related at all. It poses a sort of chicken and the egg scenario. Did Crick see DNA as a caduceus because this is an archetypal form was engrained in his consciousness or did he see it as this because the caduceus is a recognizable form? Why do yogis depict kundalini as a caduceus while alchemists frequently show it in the same way while they are both on a path toward enlightenment? Are the cosmic serpents seen by Narby related to the ouroboros Kekule saw? Are serpents and dragons archetypes in the strict sense that they are part of the collective unconscious or are they passed down through oral tradition and epigenetics? Admittedly, I don’t have the answers to all of these questions. What I can posit is this: in

alchemy the caduceus and ouroboros *operated* as archetypes *and* motifs that were used to reconcile binaries. In this way we can see the Jungian (archetypes) and the folkloric (motifs) working together in harmony through the power of folklore to reconcile binaries with Jung's enantiodromia. This may be toeing the line and running the risk of universalizing that folklorist abhor in the first place, but these patterns exist, and it would be foolish to not look at them purely based on principle.

Other modern alchemical researchers have looked at depictions of the alchemists to find evidence of Kundalini yoga. One researcher that makes a very good case for this is Dennis William Hauck, and he does so by analyzing Figure 19 found in the German Basil Valentine's 1617 *Azoth of the Philosophers*:



Figure 19 Azoth of the Philosophers

A brief explanation of the meaning of this text is as follows: in the middle is the face of God and of the alchemist, for they are one in the same. The downward triangle serves as a depiction of the divine water coming from the above to the below. On the left hand side the alchemist is standing on earth and is holding fire, on the right hand side he is standing on water and holding a feather, these all indicate his balance with the four elements. The king is threatened by the fiery dragon which symbolizes his unconscious. The queen holds a sea monster showing her control over the forces that threaten the king. Notice that there is a sun on the male side and a moon on the female side. The three triangles read anima, (soul), spiritus, (spirit) and corpus (body). The five stars on the corpus indicate that the fifth element, the quintessence is inside of the alchemist indicating his union with the divine. He is firmly planted in the world of matter but has quick access to spirit. The seven rays are what Hauck focuses in on from a Kundalini perspective, and he says that these indicate the seven alchemical processes. The rays are accompanied by astrological glyphs which nominate the ruling planets at the point of the process. There are seven chakras and Hauck says that there is a correspondence between each process and each chakra, and that the alchemical processes are occurrences that happen within the alchemist as they try to reach the seventh stage: the completion of the work which culminates in the Philosopher's stone or the enlightenment of awakening the crown chakra, (Hauck).

Jung says that alchemy "is a longissimi via, not straight but snakelike, a path that unites the opposites, reminding us of the guiding caduceus, a path whose labyrinthine twists and turns are not lacking in terrors" (Jung 1953, 6). This is reminiscent of not only the caduceus, but of the ouroboros as well: an emblem that turns back into itself, representing the circular nature of the work, wherein the beginning and the end, the materia prima and the Philosopher's Stone, the above and the below, the male and female, God and the alchemist are linked.

Caduceus symbolism is extremely pervasive in alchemy. As we have seen, the caduceus was often used in conjunction with symbols of males and females, the sun and moon, indicating that it is a symbol that is meant to point to the importance of the union of opposites. The caduceus is also almost always shown in consort with its bearer, the god Mercury.



Figure 20 Mercurius as unifying symbol

Figure 20, from Basil Valentine's 1599 *Twelve Keys* shows Mercury, who can be distinguished from the astrological glyph above his head, holding the caduceus in both hands. On his left side is the sun, and on the right the moon, taking their traditional places indicating the presence of duality. The man on the right is holding the rod of Asclepius, indicating that the serpent staffs at this time were considered to be similar to the caduceus. The man on the right seems to be blinded by Mercury's brilliance, for he has angelic wings denoting his divinity and a crown denoting his royalty.

Mercury and his caduceus are figurative, symbolic representations of the union of opposites. Jung points out the importance of Mercury as a dual-god:

Mercurius stands at the beginning and end of the work: he is the *prima materia*, the *caput corvi*, the nigredo; as dragon he devours himself and as dragon he dies, to rise again as the *lapis*. He is the play of colors in the *cauda pavonis* and the division into four elements. He is the hermaphrodite that was in the beginning, that splits into the traditional brother-sister duality and is reunited in the *conjunction*, to appear once again at the end in the radiant form of the *lumen novum*, the stone. He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites. (1953, 281-282)

Jung makes the point that Mercury is at the beginning and the end of alchemy, like Valentine's Azoth or the tail and mouth of the ouroboros, that he is hermaphroditic like Janus-headed figures accompanied by caducei and the ouroboros, and ultimately that Mercury, like his staff, are symbols that unite opposites.

Mircea Eliade, quoting Basil Valentine, says that “evil must become the same as good” (1962, 166). The similarity of opposites was clearly on Valentine's mind when he constructed his *Twelve Keys* and *Azoth of the Philosophers*. Eliade also says that

Procuring of the Philosopher's Stone is equated with the perfect knowledge of God. This, moreover, is why the Stone makes possible the identification of opposites... We are here face to face with the very old symbolism of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, universally widespread, well attested in primitive stages of culture, and which served more or less to define both the fundamental reality and the paradoxical state of the totality, the perfection and consequently the sacredness of God. (1962, 166)

The caduceus and the ouroboros are glyphs representing the *coincidentia oppositorum*. This knowledge of the interconnection between phenomena that seem to be in opposition which the Philosopher's Stone allows, what Eliade refers to as “the perfect knowledge of God” is the knowledge of the connection between the above and the below that the serpent and the dragon are representing in their intertwined forms.

If the ouroboros and the caduceus are linked, and are communicating the same message as is my claim, it would make sense to find them used in the same context, and that is precisely what we see in *Cabala Mineralis*:

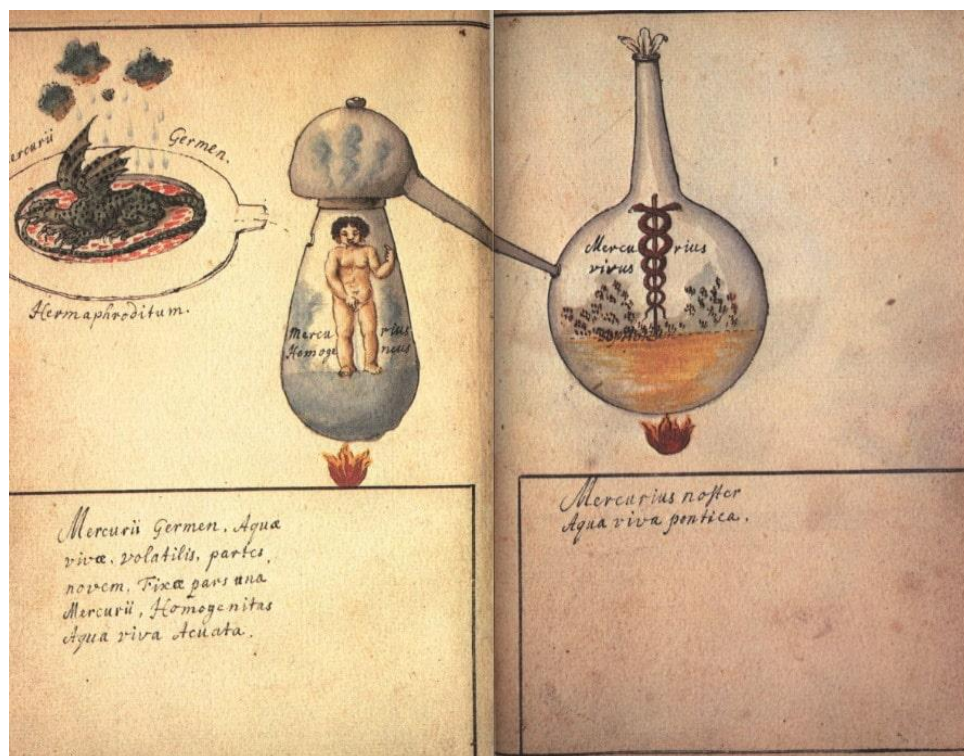


Figure 21 Ouroboros and caduceus

On the left can be seen an ouroboros, and on the right is a caduceus. Mercury's presence is denoted as both are marked "Mercurius." This is further proof of the symbolic equivalence referenced by Dundes in relation to the caduceus and the ouroboros.

The caduceus has become, in modern esoteric circles, to be identified with spiritual unity. Manly P. Hall, one of the twentieth centuries most renowned occultists, says of the caduceus in his article "The Serpent Staff of Hermes," that "this One is the Eternal Hermaphrodite... This unmanifest One, winged and transcendent, comes into expression through the two. The Divine Unity is broken up" (1926, 7). Hall also identifies the caduceus as being a representation of the Yogic kundalini force as he says that "the central winged snake represents the spinal canal fire, while the length of the Caduceus staff signifies the sixth ventricle, a tiny tube running through

the spinal cord itself. The white and black serpents signify the two accompanying canals, also technically the “Ida” and “Pingali” in esoteric philosophy, while the central canal is referred to as the “Sushumna” (1926, 7).

Hall also notes that these male/female dualities are similar to the Yin and Yang of Taoism, (1926, 7). The Yin and Yang symbol seems to be communicating this same message. In fact, some interpret the Yin and Yang as being two serpents circling one another. In that respect, they are like an ouroboros, as can be seen in Figure 22.

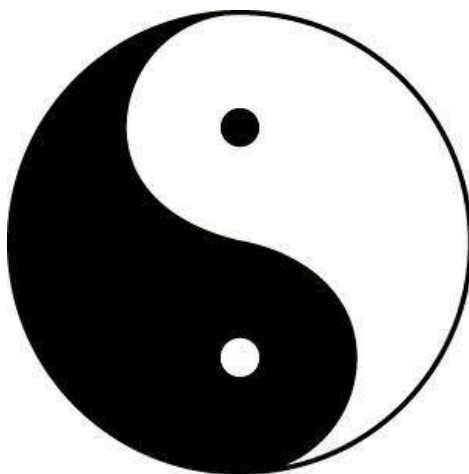


Figure 22 Yin and yang

The Ancient History Encyclopedia clarifies that “the principle of Yin and Yang is that all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites, for example, female-male, dark-light, and old-young” (Yin and Yang). The sacred nature of this emblem in Eastern philosophy is no different than other representations of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, where the caduceus, the ouroboros, Mercury himself, the sun and moon, king and queen, are just several of many.

I have shown that the caduceus is an emblem pointing to the union of opposites, a role which its bearer, the god Mercury, also plays. The caduceus’ role in Babylon points to its

original nature as being sacred and divine. Cultures the world over have worshipped the serpent, and many of them have been known to use mind altering substances and techniques such as ayahuasca or kundalini yoga. It remains unknown whether alchemists were using psychedelics, but they assuredly were doing meditation. The similarity between Western alchemy and yoga is striking, and the possibility of a connection between the caduceus and the kundalini remains possible, if not likely. Furthermore, we have seen how the caduceus acts as a motif or archetype pointing towards the necessity of the union of opposites. In the next section, we will see how the ouroboros works in a similar fashion.

THE OUROBOROS

The ouroboros is a dragon or serpent eating its own tail. Serpents and dragons are interchangeable in this image, indicating that they play the same role and contain the same meaning and thus demonstrate Dundes' symbolic equivalence. Like the caduceus, the yin and yang, the male and female pair, the ouroboros contains the same meaning: it is a union of opposites indicating the search for unity and wholeness that the alchemist undertakes. In the case of the ouroboros, the binary opposites that it most clearly refers to are the beginning and the end of the alchemical work: the *materia prima* and the Philosopher's Stone.

Jung says the following about the ouroboros:

Time and again the alchemists reiterate that the opus proceeds from the one and leads back to the one, that it is a sort of circle like a dragon biting its own tail. For this reason the opus was often called *circularis* or else *rota*. Mercurius stands at the beginning and end of the work: he is the *prima materia*, the *caput corvi*, the *nigredo*; as dragon he devours himself and as dragon he dies, to rise again as the *lapis*. He is the hermaphrodite that was in the beginning, that splits into the traditional brother-sister duality and is reunited in the conjunction, to appear once again at the end in the radiant form of the *lumen novum*, the stone. He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites" (1953, 281-282).

Once again, Mercury is linked with the ouroboros, which Jung recognizes as a symbol that unites opposites. The head of the dragon is the beginning of the work, and the tail is the end. The fact that the serpent or dragon is eating the tail shows that they are linked, or in other words that they are one or whole. In this section, I show how the ouroboros fills a similar function as the caduceus in alchemy.

The concept of the ouroboros being a symbol of unity in the alchemical work has been present since its first recorded historical usage in alchemy. Figure 23, from *The Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra*, (chrysopoeia means transmutation into gold), dating to the third century C.E., shows that this is true:



Figure 23 One is all

This ouroboros, which significantly is half black and half white, contains Greek words within it which read “One is All.” *The Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra* also contains a passage which reads “One is the Serpent which has its poison according to two compositions, and One is All and

through it is All and by it is All, and if you have not All, All is nothing” (Alic 1986, 39). The divine unity expressed in the ouroboros was clearly not lost in early alchemical writers such as Cleopatra, (not to be confused with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra).

The notion of the ouroboros as an expression of unity is also not lost on certain researchers of the alchemical opus. Gary Edson in his book *Mysticism and Alchemy through the Ages: The Quest for Transformation* has the following argues that the ouroboros “symbolically reinforces the alchemical concept of cosmic unity in which the world above suffused the world below and all matter was interchangeable” (2012, 192). As Jung has noted, the union of opposites plays a decisive role in alchemy, but the union of the above and below is perhaps the greatest, as this puts the alchemist into a divine role in the cosmos, along with every other bit of existence which as Edson notes, is a part of an interchangeable cycle of matter and energy.

Edson further claims that “the ouroboro expresses the unity of all things material and spiritual” (2012, 193). This idea, as we have seen in Basil Valentine’s drawings, is key to the alchemist: that they are planted in the material world but have quick access to spirit and are even a part of it.

As was argued earlier, the ouroboros is also representative of the unity between the beginning of the work, the prima materia, and the end of the work, the Philosopher’s Stone. Cherry Gilchrist, in her book *Alchemy: The Great Work* touches on this as she says “the circular motif connects with the symbol of the ouroboros – conveying he idea that the beginning and the end of the work are mysteriously linked, and that the operation is one and whole in its nature” (1984, 48). The link between the beginning and the end, as expressed through the ouroboros, is another way that the sacred unity of the work is shown.

The whole of alchemy consists of a series of dissolutions and coagulations, meaning the alchemist is constantly going back to processes that have come before in a circular motion. This idea is shown through the circular motif of the ouroboros. Figure 24, a drawing the Baphomet by the French occultist Eliphas Levi from his 1854 *Transcendental Magic* features the notion of dissolution and coagulation alongside pairs of opposites.



Figure 24 Baphomet

The Baphomet, which has been connected to Satanism and black magic is actually a depiction of the union of opposites. Its right arm, which points to the above reads “solve” which means dissolve, and the left arm, which points to the below, reads “coagula.” Thus, the alchemical maxim “solve et coagula,” or “dissolve and coagulate” which is connected to the ouroboros, was understood by Levi to be a representation of the connection between the above and the below. Further, the hermaphroditic Baphomet has a phallus that is the caduceus.

I offer four tarot cards: The Magician, Change, The Magus, and The Fool, to show how the ouroboros has come to represent the union of opposites in the modern Western esoteric tradition. Jung himself stressed the connection between tarot and alchemy, as he postulates that,

it also seems as if the set of pictures in the Tarot cards were distantly descended from the archetypes of transformation... The symbolic process is an experience in images and of images. Its development usually shows an enantiodromian structure like the text of the I Ching, and so presents a rhythm of negative and positive, loss and gain, dark and light. (Jung 1959, 38)

The as above so below motif denoted by the raised right arm and lowered left arm found in depictions of the Baphomet has also made its way into the symbolism of tarot, as can be seen in the magician card in the Rider-Waite tarot.



Figure 25 The Magician Rider-Waite Tarot

The magician is marked with a lemniscate: the infinity symbol. The infinity symbol is reminiscent of Edson's claim that "The ouroboros symbolically reinforces the alchemic concept of cosmic unity" (2012, 192).

The infinity symbol is conceptually linked to the ouroboros, especially in the arcanum of the tarot, as in the Thoth tarot set the lemniscate becomes an ouroboros in the Change card.



Figure 26 Change Thoth Tarot

It is significant that the lemniscate-ouroboros is marked with two yin-yang symbols. In this depiction, the ouroboros, infinity, and the non-dual yin-yang are comingling and their meanings are the same, as has been my claim.

In the Thoth tarot, The Magus card is also depicted performing the "as above, so below" hand motion, as can be seen in Figure 27.



Figure 27 The Magus

Above the magus, the ouroboros as a lemniscate is shown in Figure 27, and the caduceus marked by two serpents on a winged staff is mixed with the ouroboros. The above and below, the caduceus and the ouroboros are all linked in this image. Significantly, The Magus is an androgynous figure, reminiscent of the male-female figures from alchemy. This is because in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, The Magus links Kether to Binah, and is associated with Kether, which is the androgynous beginning of the Tree.

The Magus card is astrologically ruled by Mercury, and its Hebrew attribution is the letter Bet, which can be seen by the glyphs at the bottom of the card. Both Mercury and the letter Bet are dualistic in nature, and given the Hermetic principle of polarity, are really dualities that are a unity. This mode of thinking is verified by Aleister Crowley, the creator of the Thoth deck,

as he says in *The Book of Thoth* that The Magus “Is duality, he represents both truth and falsehood, wisdom and folly” (1944, 70). Furthermore, Crowley says that The Magus card is the duality that grows out of the unity of the previous card, The Fool, as he says “this card is the second emanation from the Crown, and therefore, in a sense, the adult form of the first emanation, the Fool, whose letter is Aleph, the Unity” (1944, 70). The Fool, the Unity, is marked with a caduceus in Figure 28.



Figure 28 The Fool Thoth Tarot

Crowley also comments on the Rider-Waite depiction of The Magus as he says “he bears a wand with a knob at each end, which was probably connected with the dual polarity of electricity; but it is also the hollow wand of Prometheus that brings down fire from Heaven”

(1944, 70-71). Once again, polarity is invoked, and an instrument that is used to bring down power from heaven (the above) to Earth (the below) is used.

The ouroboros, in its alchemical depictions, clearly functions as a symbolic stressing the union of opposites. As an archetype, the ouroboros acts in the same way as a motif. Like the caduceus, the ouroboros has maintained its meaning into the modern day as can be seen through tarot art. The ouroboros is symbolically equivalent to the caduceus, just like Dundes' hook and phallus. By taking a closer look at this specific case study, Jung's theories and folklorists notions can work symbiotically.

CONCLUSION

Folklorists need to change the way they think about Carl Jung. This does not just apply to the more contentious of his theories, such as archetypes and the collective unconscious, but also to his work on specific folk groups like alchemists. Applying Jungian psychoanalysis to folk groups helps to unveil the psychological dimension that is omnipresent, but difficult to discern. Without a Jungian lens, alchemists would continue to be looked at as proto-chemists trying in vain to turn mundane lead into mundane gold. With Jung, it can be shown that they are a mystical group attempting to reconcile the opposites within themselves to become divine beings. Using Jung in folklore leads to enlightening results, and the field would be better with him in its tool kit.

The caduceus and ouroboros function in alchemy as archetypes. These archetypes are not all that dissimilar to folkloristic motif. If folklorists study motifs and hold theories such as Olrik's superorganic model to be true, then they should not discount Jung. As we have seen, Jung's theories are actually at times less universalizing than some folklorist's theories. claim that Jung is too universalizing is itself too much of a generalization, as Jung advocates for the "taking

up of context” to analyze the particular function of an archetypal form. Jung and folklorists are in agreement with the importance of the union of opposites; Jung has his enantiodromia while Levi-Strauss has his binary oppositions. The archetypes of the caduceus and the ouroboros are symbolic equivalences, an idea which Dundes claims has a role to play in the study of folklore.

I have shown that the ouroboros and the caduceus and alchemy represent the reconciliation of opposites. If folklore, on one level, serves as a mean to reconcile opposites, these serpentine and draconic images display how a folk group as a whole can use symbolic language to represent their inner desires. Furthermore, the serpent and the dragon hold the same meaning in the ouroboros and caduceus, and therefore exhibit symbolic equivalence. A Jungian psychoanalytical and alchemical perspective when applied to the alchemists exemplifies the mystical nature of their work. In the end, the opposing positions of Jung and folklorists may be reconciled.

FIGURES WORKS CITED

1. “About this Website.” Kali Dragons. <http://www.kalidragons.com/about.html> (accessed March 24, 2020).
2. “Late Babylonian Gem.” Flickr.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14580604309> (accessed March 24, 2020).
3. “Adam McLean’s Gallery of alchemical images.” The Alchemy Web Site.
http://www.levity.com/alchemy/amcl_mylius_azoth.html (accessed March 24, 2020).
4. “Daniel Mylius – Opus Medico-Chymicum.” Dokumen.
<https://dokumen.tips/documents/daniel-mylius-opus-medico-chymicum-1618pdf.html> (accessed March 24, 2020).
5. “Discover Ideas about Tarot.” Pinterest. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/527765650057319275/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
6. Hieronymous Reussner – *Pandora*, Bazylea, 1588.” Gnosis.art.
http://www.gnosis.art.pl/iluminatornia/alkimija/hieronymus_reussner_pandora.htm (accessed March 24, 2020).

7. "Ouroboros, 1597." Fine Art America. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/ouroboros-1597-granger.html> (accessed March 24, 2020).
8. "Hermes Trismegistus, Classical God." Science Photo Library. <https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/225940/view/hermes-trismegistus-classical-god> (accessed March 24, 2020).
9. "Figurarum Aegyptiorum Secretarum." The New York Public Library Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/figurarum-aegyptiorum-secretarum#/?tab=about> (accessed March 24, 2020).
10. "Figurarum Aegyptiorum Secretarum." The New York Public Library Digital Collections. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/figurarum-aegyptiorum-secretarum#/?tab=about> (accessed March 24, 2020).
11. "The Hieros Gamos." The Eye of the Psychic. <https://www.eyeofthepsychic.com/hierosgamos/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
12. "R. Abrahami Eleazaris uraltes chymisches Werk." Pinterest. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/713820609662490857/#> (accessed March 24, 2020).
13. "Libation Vase of the God Ningishzidda." The Modern Alchemist. <https://didanawisgi.tumblr.com/post/110236180573/libation-vase-of-the-god-ningishzidda-neo-sumerian> (accessed March 24, 2020).
14. "Ondas de la Ayahuasca (Waves of Ayahuasca) By Pablo Amaringo." Shamanism. <http://www.shamanism.co.uk/ondas-de-la-ayahuasca-waves-of-ayahuasca-by-pablo-amaringo/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
15. "Death Mask of Tutankhamun." Ancient History Encyclopedia. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/1048/death-mask-of-tutankhamun/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
16. "Top 10 Tallest Lord Shiva Statues in India." Walk Through India. <http://www.walkthroughindia.com/divinity/top-10-tallest-lord-shiva-statues-in-india/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
17. "Picture Index." Asitis.com. <http://asitis.com/gallery/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
18. "Wheels of Life." Slide Share. <https://www.slideshare.net/jungcivic/anodea-judith-wheels-of-life-yagwanmoonygm-1-com> (accessed April 19, 2020).
19. "Azoth of the Philosophers." Alchemy Lab. <https://www.alchemylab.com/azoth.htm> (accessed March 24, 2020).

20. “Mercurius.” Nysticorax. <http://nysticorax.tripod.com/mercurius.html> (accessed March 24, 2020).
21. “Cabala mineralis manuscript.” Alchemy Web Site. https://www.alchemywebsite.com/cab_min1.html (accessed March 24, 2020).
22. “Yin and Yang.” Ancient History Encyclopedia. https://www.ancient.eu/Yin_and_Yang/ (accessed March 24, 2020).
23. “Codex Marcianus Ouroboros.” Labyrinthdesigners and the Art of Fire. <https://www.labyrinthdesigners.org/alchemic-pictures/codex-marcianus-ouroboros/> (accessed March 24, 2020).
24. “R. Abrahami Eleazaris uraltes chymisches Werk.” Pinterest. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/713820609662490857/#> (accessed March 24, 2020).
25. “Deciphering Eliphas Levi’s Baphomet: The Goat of Mendes.” Learn Religions. <https://www.learnreligions.com/eliphas-levis-baphomet-goat-of-mendes-95993> (accessed March 24, 2020).
26. “The Magician According to A.E. Waite.” Tarot Card Meanings. <https://www.tarotcardmeanings.net/waite-tarot-comments/waite-on-tarot-magician.htm> (accessed March 24, 2020).
27. “The Tarot of Eli: The Thoth Tarot – 2 of Disks – Change & The Night Sun Tarot – 2 of Pentacles.” Eli Tarot Strickingly. <http://www.elitarotstrickingly.com/blog/the-tarot-of-eli-the-thoth-tarot-2-of-disks-change-the-night-sun-tarot-2> (accessed March 24, 2020).
28. “The Tarot of Eli: The Thoth Tarot – The Magus.” Eli Tarot Strickingly. <http://www.elitarotstrickingly.com/blog/the-tarot-of-eli-the-thoth-tarot-the-magus> (accessed March 24, 2020).
29. “The Tarot of Eli: The Thoth Tarot – The Fool.” Eli Tarot Strickingly. <http://www.elitarotstrickingly.com/blog/the-tarot-of-eli-the-thoth-tarot-0-the-fool> (accessed March 24, 2020).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Alchemy.” Etymonline. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/alchemy> (accessed March 24, 2020).
- Alchemy Study. 2020. April 18, 2020. [Facebook.com/groups/studyalchemy](https://www.facebook.com/groups/studyalchemy)
- Alic, Margaret. 1986. *Hypatia's Heritage: A History of Women in Science from Antiquity Through the Nineteenth Century*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Anodea, Judith. 1987. *Wheels of life: A User's Guide to the Chakra System*. St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications.
- Bartók, Béla, Séamus Ó. Duilearga, Sigmund Freud, James George Frazer, Kenneth S. Goldstein, Antonio Gramsci, Jacob Grimm et al. 1999. *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of Folklore*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Capra, Fritjof. 1975. *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications.
- Cockren, Archibald. 1999. *Alchemy Rediscovered and Restored*. San Diego: Book Tree.
- Crowley, Aleister. *Book of Thoth: (Egyptian Tarot)*. San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1944.
- Drake, Carlos C. 1967. "Jung and His Critics." *The Journal of American Folklore* 80(318):321-333.
- Drake, Carlos C. 1969. "Jungian Psychology and Its Uses in Folklore." *The Journal of American Folklore* 82(324):122-131.
- Dundes, Alan. 1997. "Binary opposition in myth: The Propp/Levi-Strauss debate in retrospect." *Western Folklore*. 39-50.
- Dundes, Alan, ed. 1984. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dundes, Alan. 2007. "The Symbolic Equivalence of Allomotifs: Towards a Method of Analyzing Folktales." *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*. 319-324.
- Edson, Gary. 2012. *Mysticism and Alchemy through the Ages: The Quest for Transformation*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1956. *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Feuerstein, Georg. 2012. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Gardena, CA: SCB Distributors.
- Frothingham, Arthur L. 1916. "Babylonian Origin of Hermes the Snake-God, and of the Caduceus I." *American Journal of Archaeology* 20(2):175-211.
- Garry, Jane. 2017. *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook*. New York: Routledge.
- Gilchrist, Cherry. 1984. *Alchemy: The Great Work*. San Francisco: Weiser Books.

- Greer, John Michael. 2003. *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Hall, Manly P. 2003. *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*. Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society.
- Hall, Manly P. 1926. "The Staff of Hermes." *The All-Seeing Eye* Volume 3(2):7-8.
- Hasler, W., and F. Johann. 2011. "Performative and Multimedia Aspects of Late-Renaissance Meditative Alchemy: The Case of Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens (1617)." *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 39:135-144.
- Hauck, Dennis William. 1999. *The Emerald Tablet: Alchemy of Personal Transformation*. New York: Penguin.
- Holcombe, Al D. 1992. "The Bible and the Kundalini." *The Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* Vol. 15(3):1-9.
- Jaenisch, Rudolf, and Adrian Bird. 2003. "Epigenetic regulation of gene expression: how the genome integrates intrinsic and environmental signals." *Nature genetics* 33(3):245-254.
- Jorgensen, Jeana. "#FolkloreThursday: Archetype." *Foxy Folklorist* (blog). January 12, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2020.
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/foxyfolklorist/folklorethursday-archetype/>
- Jung, C. G. 1967. *Alchemical Studies*. New York: Bollingen Foundation.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 2010. *Dreams*. New York: Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C.G. 1989. *Dreams, Memories, Reflections*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jung, Carl Gustav, and Violet S. de Laszlo. 1958. *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of CG Jung*. Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday.
- Jung, C. G. 1953. *Psychology and Alchemy*. London: Routledge & Regan Paul, Ltd.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. 1990. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. New York: Princeton University Press.
- Klossowski de Rola, Stanislas. 1973. *Alchemy: The Secret Art*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- Leadbetter, C. 2013. *The Chakras, A Monograph*. Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books.
- Levi, Eliphas. 2016. *The History of Magic*. Glastonbury: The Lost Library.

- Levi, Eliphas. 1968. *Transcendental Magic*. San Francisco: Weiser Books.
- Linden, Stanton J. 2003. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, Peggy. 2007. *Stith Thompson: His Life and His Role in Folklore Scholarship*. Bloomington: Folklore Publications Group.
- “Mercurius’ Dual Nature.” The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. <https://aras.org/concordance/content/mercurius-dual-nature> (accessed March 24, 2020).
- McCormick, Charlie T., and Kim Kennedy White, eds. 2011. *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*. Vol. 1. ABC-CLIO.
- McNeill, Lynne S. 2013. "And the Greatest of These is Tradition: The Folklorist's Toolbox in the Twenty-First Century." *Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: Locating the Role of the Past in the Present*. 174-185.
- Mead, G.R.S. 2018. *The Corpus Hermeticum*. BoD—Books on Demand.
- Narby, Jeremy. 1999. *The Cosmic Serpent*. New York: Penguin.
- Oxford English Dictionary. “alchemy, n. and adj.” OED Online. Oxford University Press. April 2020. Web.
- Prabhupada, AC Bhaktivedanta Swami, Abhay Charan, and Abhay Charan Bhaktivedanta. 1972. *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Principe, Lawrence and Newman, William. 2013. “Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy.” *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*. 385-432.
- Three Initiates. 2008. *The Kybalion*. New York: Tarcher Penguin.
- “What is Folklore?” American Folklore Society. <https://www.afsnet.org/general/custom.asp?page=WhatIsFolklore> (accessed April 10, 2019).
- “Yin and Yang.” Ancient History Encyclopedia. https://www.ancient.eu/Yin_and_Yang/ (accessed March 24, 2020).
- Young-Eisendrath, Polly, and Terence Dawson, eds. 2008. *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*. Cambridge University Press.