

The Philosopher's Stone:
A Study of the Quest for Perfection and Transmutation
in the works of Paracelsus Theophrastus of Germany

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Table of Contents:

Preface

1) Introduction

2) Paracelsus as Man and Myth

3) First Aspect: The Elementary Realm

4) Second Aspect: The Sidereal Realm

5) Third Aspect: The Celestial Realm

6) Conclusion

PREFACE

I have become drawn to alchemy because of its capacity to fuel the imagination. Its narrative of transformation – turning base metals into gold – can be used to tell the underlying story of many life processes. The alchemists believed that just as all metals – if left untouched within the earth – naturally matured and developed into gold, so all natural processes were guided by a divine teleology. The growth of a tree from a seed, the birth and development of a child, or the generation of a pearl within an oyster all partake of the rich mystery of transmutation. For life itself is a mysterious movement towards perfection, towards progression and evolution. The alchemists saw this evolution as a divine drama, and the art of alchemy as a ritualized attempt to actively participate in this sacred process.

But the quest for perfection and transmutation is also an inquiry into human potential. This potential was understood to be no less than the innate human capacity to seek out, understand, and ultimately experience the Divine. Understanding this trend towards perfection operating within themselves, the alchemists attempted to facilitate the transformation of their souls into purified vessels capable of reflecting God's light. Alchemy was seen as an efficient tool, or method, for such a journey into the ineffable. This esoteric mysticism has begun to catch the attention of the modern public; the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung is known to have spent the last 15 years of his life devoted to the study of alchemy. He saw in the cracked pages of

alchemical manuscripts a rich symbolism of the human psyche. He perceived in alchemy a universal language of symbols. In the metaphorical imagery and obscure paradoxes of the alchemical literature, Jung witnessed the primordial human struggle to understand ourselves and the world around us. For Jung believed that it was in the human, not nature, that the alchemical process brought to light that which was dark, purged that which was impure, and perfected that which was imperfect.

It is this dedication to the penetration of Nature's underlying secrets, and the passionate urge towards human self-understanding that renders alchemy still relevant to us in the modern age. For alchemy, I believe, is still with us. From the poems of Chaucer and Shakespeare to the modern phenomenon of Harry Potter and Paulo Coelho, mainstream public audiences refuse to lose curiosity in the concept of transmutation. In a certain sense our entire modern civilization is founded on the dream of progression and transformation, in which our capacity to sculpt our own future is limited only by a loss of will or lack of imagination. I believe that our society's scientific ventures – from space exploration to natural resource extraction – are themselves products of a cultural alchemy, that is, the quest for mastery and dominion over both the natural world and the unknown psychic void. It is because of this – the powerful presence of an unconscious alchemical drive in modern culture – that I believe alchemy to be an important phenomenon to study, and ultimately to understand.

I decided to write my thesis on Paracelsus in particular because he was a passionate, revolutionary, and controversial alchemist. I was also drawn to the fact that Paracelsus was first and foremost a physician. It appears that almost all of his inquiries into Nature and her mysteries - whether through the study of alchemy, chemistry, astrology, or theology - were aimed towards the sole purpose of increasing his capability and efficacy as a doctor. He was as much a reformer

of medicine as he was an adept in alchemy, and he appeared as a startling figure on the horizon of the alchemical scene because of his admonitions to use alchemy to make medicines and not gold. But ultimately it was the strange blend of his pragmatics and speculation, his medicine and mysticism, that spoke to me. It is not frequent that the theoretical and the concrete merge with such harmony, and I was inspired to find a passionate philosopher who was equally devoted to a physical, worldly practice: in this case, healing.

Paracelsus represented for many the passionate desire for wisdom and understanding, the will towards discovery, and for this reason his name is closely associated with the emerging scientific attitude of the Renaissance man. His devotion to both practical sciences and imaginative spirituality reveals a desire to synthesize a holistic philosophy that unifies opposites and obliterates all distinctions between the sacred and the profane. His unconventional emphasis on discovering knowledge through experience foreshadows the modern scientific dictum, even as his poetic religiosity bespeaks of a rich and “active” imagination. Because of this he speaks to our intuitive impulses, our non-rational sensibilities, as much as to our intellect and reason. For Paracelsus was, in many ways, a paradox. But more than that, he became a symbol for something greater than himself. He became a symbol of the “Faustian man,” the experience-hungry philosopher whose insatiable appetite for knowledge leads him further and further into the unknown.

This symbolism that is now irrevocably intertwined with the historical man Paracelsus is what defines him as a legendary figure. I believe it is for this reason that he continues to speak to us today, four centuries after his death. And it is for this reason that I turn to him now, worlds apart in time and space, in an attempt to shed light on the primordial human desire for perfection and transmutation.

Chapter One: Introduction

Born in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, in the late fifteenth century, Paracelsus Theophrastus, otherwise known as Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, grew to become a renowned and controversial physician. A true renaissance man and a prolific author, Paracelsus wrote hundreds of treatises on topics as diverse as medicine, chemistry, astrology, natural philosophy, alchemy, occultism and theology. Although recognized as a reformer of sixteenth-century medicine and an early contributor to modern scientific chemistry, it is Paracelsus the alchemist and hermetic philosopher with whom I am concerned for this paper. Much of the scholarship and historiography of Paracelsus, however, remains questionable despite its success in bringing to light this obscure renaissance luminary. Historians, both past and present, have often portrayed him more as a mythologized figure than as a historical personage. The subjective views of his earliest records, written by either his adversaries or his most intimate disciples, blur the line between the mythology and history of the man Paracelsus, and sets the precedent for inaccuracy in later scholarship. The result has been a shadowy and shape-shifting Paracelsus.

Paracelsus gained contradictory reputations for writing extensively on both “empirical” and “speculative” subjects. He was recognized by some as a scientific genius for his academic contribution in the fields of medicine and chemistry, and by others as an illumined sage whose

impact lay more in the sphere of philosophy and mysticism. More modern scholars tend to see to him as a superstitious and medieval man – although his contemporaries used the phrase “fatuous quack” to describe him more than once – due to his tendency of blurring the fields of empirical science and speculative philosophy. Such a fusion of disciplines, which in the renaissance mind were hardly separate, makes it more difficult for modern day historians to understand where, specifically, his most significant contributions lie. In the time of Paracelsus, for example, there was simply no distinction between what we would call astronomy and astrology, and likewise philosophy in its various forms could hardly be teased out of the study of medicine. In addition, the concept of “natural philosophy” no longer exists as it once did, subsuming many different areas of knowledge, and thus any attempt to view his writings through the lens of modern academia, with its clearly differentiated and highly specific fields of knowledge, is bound to prove difficult. It was this blending of interests, which included what we might now call “hard” and “soft” sciences, that served as one of the cornerstones of his contentious legacy.

One place where Paracelsus’ spiritual insight and physical practicality converged was in his alchemy. As a systemized effort to transmute and ultimately “perfect” base metals into gold, this Spagyric art – Paracelsus often used the term Spagyrist to refer to one who practiced alchemy– was certainly engaged with the mysteries of physical matter. At the same time, however, we know that the recipes and processes used to “cook” these metals were also frequently used as allegorical codes for mystical experiences. By projecting spiritual and psychological dimensions onto the metals in his laboratory, Paracelsus believed he was simultaneously “perfecting” both the matter in his crucible and his very own soul. The nineteenth century chemist Marcellin Berthelot characterizes this binary alchemical operation as a “secret affinity between Gnosis, which teaches the true meaning of philosophical and religious

theories... and chemistry, which seeks knowledge of properties hidden in nature.”¹ It will be the goal of this paper to explore the dynamics of this “secret affinity,” and to uncover the ways in which Paracelsus’ alchemy unites personal Gnosis and practical chemistry.

As interesting as Paracelsus’ generalized philosophy of alchemy is, however, for this paper I am particularly interested in that alluring, enigmatic dream of every alchemist’s, namely that of the Philosopher’s Stone, and what role it played in Paracelsus’ philosophy and practice. In looking to Paracelsus’ conceptions of this Stone, and thus analyzing one specific interpretation of it, it is one of my hopes to extrapolate a clearer understanding of this Stone as a critical element in the age-old quest for perfection and transmutation. The Philosopher’s Stone has long been a coveted object for the alchemists, and it was believed to possess the magical capacity to transmute base metals into gold, as well as bestow long-life, or even immortality, upon its possessor. The mythology of this magical Stone has permeated our Western culture, and even to this day its presence can be seen in fairy tales, children’s books, and popular movies. This Philosophical Stone, or *Lapis Mysterium*, was revered as a sacred fulfillment of Nature’s slow evolutionary process of maturation, and as such was seen by the alchemists as the culmination or final stage of the *Magnum Opus*. It appears that few people – and sometimes not even the alchemists themselves – seemed to know what exactly this Stone was, of what it was composed, and even less the processes for making it. This confusion is compounded by the obscure metaphorical language used by the alchemists. Gareth Roberts notes the confusing, and often times frustrating, nature of this idiom; “alchemy’s characteristic mode of discourse is to express its truths in binary figures of language: paradox, enigma, equivocation and allegories which say

¹ Marcellin Berthelot, *Les Origines de L’alchimie* (Paris, G. Steinheil, 1885), as quoted by Françoise Bonardel, *Alchemical Esotericism and the Hermeneutics of Culture*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992),

one thing and mean another.”² It is because of such preference for poetic descriptions of the Philosophical Stone that its true nature is often difficult to ascertain.

In terms of more literal renderings, many alchemists refer to it variously in their treatises as a powder, a tincture, a stone, a liquid, or even intangible spiritual potencies. The scholar of alchemy C.J.S. Thompson acknowledges that the so-called Philosopher’s Stone was known by many names, including “the Essence,” “the Stone of the Wise,” “the Magisterium,” “Magnum Opus,” “the Quintessence,” and “the Universal Essence”.³ One alchemist may declare the Stone to be an impenetrable and immutable substance composed of the purest primordial matter, while another may exclaim that it is the “heart and spirit of Jesus Christ.”⁴ In addition, many authors accuse other alchemists of misunderstanding its “true” nature, either out of ignorance or purposeful deceit, and after even a brief survey of the contradictory treatises that compose the alchemical forum, it becomes apparent that the “school” of alchemy has little fixed structure or organization. It also indicates that the attempt to understand what the Philosopher’s Stone *was*, let alone the alchemical processes for creating it, may be more complex than first imagined. My hope is to explore the alchemical treatises of Paracelsus Theophrastus in an attempt to understand, as clearly as possible, at least one alchemist’s understanding of this mysterious and controversial *Lapis Mysterium*.

In one of his most famous works on medicine, entitled the *Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus*, Paracelsus has a chapter named *Concerning the Arcanum of the Philosopher’s Stone*.

² Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994), 92

³ Charles J.S. Thompson, *The Lure and Romance of Alchemy* (Detroit, Omnigraphics Inc., 1987), 69

⁴ Allison Coudert, *Alchemy, The Philosopher’s Stone* (Boulder, Shambhala Publications Inc., 1980), 96 - “Fludd drew a parallel between the stone and Christ; he believed both were in man: ‘Christ, that mot noble cornerstone, is in us.’ Morienus revealed this secret to his apt and eager pupil Khalid when he counseled him to seek the stone in himself, ‘for this thing is extracted from you.’ Rosinus said in greater detail: ‘And as man is composed of the four elements, so also is the stone, and so it is [dug] out of man, and you are its ore, namely by working; and from you it is extracted.’”

It is from this source, as well as two others, entitled *The Manual or Treatise Concerning the Medicinal Philosophic Stone* and *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, that we may learn not only whether he believed in the possibility of a genuine so-called Philosopher's Stone, but also to what extent knowledge concerning its constitution and preparation is possible. It is, for sure, important before embarking on this investigation to realize that first and foremost, before all else in his long list of expertise, Paracelsus was a doctor. His ultimate goal was not to accumulate wealth but to master the art of healing, and therefore his Philosopher's Stone was understood to be primarily medicinal in nature. In discussing the role of the Philosopher's Stone as a tincture, or medicine, Paracelsus writes:

The dose is very small, but its effect is most powerful. By means thereof I have cured the leprosy, venereal disease, dropsy, the falling sickness, colic, scab, and similar afflictions; also lupus, cancer, noli-metangere, fistulas, and the whole race of internal diseases, more surly than one could believe. For what can there be in the whole range of medicine greater than such purgation of the body, by means whereof all superfluity is radically removed from it and transmuted?... This, therefore, is the most excellent foundation of a true physician, the regeneration of the nature, and the restoration of youth.⁵

Paracelsus frequently refers to this Stone as a material substance to be imbibed, and in passages such as this he describes its beneficial effects as surely as he would any other of his numerous tinctures or remedies. Indeed, hearing Paracelsus boast about the Stone's miraculous cures, which succeed "more surely than one could believe," it is easier to understand why Paracelsus speaks primarily of the Philosopher's Stone as a Universal Medicine, that is, in its function as an agent of healing. By somehow removing and transmuting the destructive diseases – the "superfluity" – that cause imbalance within the human body, Paracelsus believed that this Stone held the secret to "the regeneration of nature and the restoration of youth." Whether or not,

⁵ Paracelsus, *The Tincture of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 29-30

however, this Universal Medicine also served in the capacity of transmuting base metals into gold or regenerating the human soul, we will have to find out.

As an alchemist and hermetic philosopher Paracelsus appears reverent to the mysterious Philosopher's Stone. But we are left wondering; what exactly was this Stone for Paracelsus, and what did it represent? Was it a physical substance, a chemically derived matter created in a laboratory that had magical capabilities? Was it a subtle, intangible essence? Was it simply a symbolic vision of a transcendent religious truth? Could it embody all three? Despite Paracelsus' attempts to convey the gravity and glory of such a Work, one is left doubtful as to whether the actual nature of this Stone can be known, at least to one not personally initiated into the mysteries of this art. Accepting this paradox for what it is – uninitiated outsiders attempting to understand the secrets of the initiates – we may, however, find help by looking at Paracelsus with a threefold lens. This lens is comprised of the three different aspects, or spheres, of ontological being that Paracelsus delineates in his cosmology, and through which all natural phenomena in the universe are categorized. In exploring Paracelsus' alchemical treatises with this triple layered looking glass, we can begin to shed more light on the various possible interpretations of his alchemy, and ultimately, his Philosopher's Stone.

Paracelsus tells us about the threefold nature of the human being; “three spirits, united in one, live and act in man; three worlds, united into one, throw their rays upon him...the first is the essence of the elements; the second the soul of the stars; the third the spirit – the *life*.”⁶ These are the three different spheres of being that structure his entire cosmology. For Paracelsus it was only by studying, and ultimately knowing, these consecutive layers of the human constitution that a person may attain to complete and perfect wisdom. For this reason, as we proceed to study

⁶ Paracelsus as quoted by Franz Hartman, M.D., *The Life and the Doctrines of Philippus Theophrastus, Bombasts of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus* (New York, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1945), 311

his works on alchemy and the Philosopher's Stone, it will be critical to know which lens, or aspect, of alchemy is being studied. Only by a methodical and thorough investigation of each of these three aspects of Nature will we gain a clear and unobstructed vision of Paracelsus' alchemy.

The first realm, or aspect, of Paracelsus' cosmology involves all the tangible and visible phenomena in existence; known also as the elementary realm, it is characterized in the alchemical process by the physical manipulation of chemical, mineral, and metallic bodies. It is this aspect of his alchemy that would correspond to the classic interpretation of alchemy in general as an "art of distillation," that is, the chemical endeavor to transmute base metals into gold. Indeed, the fact that his alchemy was concerned, on a serious level, with the functions, interactions, and relationships of various chemical and metallic compounds will become apparent by a close reading of his treatises, as well as commentary by various scholars of alchemy. For it is this sphere of elemental matter in Nature that gives rise to the material, and very much practical, aspect of laboratory alchemy. Natural philosophy for Paracelsus was nothing less than the knowledge of Nature and her functions, and therefore it was through natural philosophy that one could understand, and ultimately master, the laws and principles of this elementary realm. "The knowledge of nature as it is – not as we imagine it to be – constitutes true philosophy," says Paracelsus.⁷ Thus, it is through the dedicated study of Nature and her intricate web of interacting laws that the true alchemist may achieve the ability to command, and ultimately perfect, physical matter. In the first chapter we will explore Paracelsus' alchemy and Philosopher's Stone through the lens of elementary phenomena in an effort to understand what role practical laboratory procedures played in his alchemical process.

⁷ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartman, 316-317

The second aspect of Paracelsus' cosmology is that of the sidereal, or astral, phenomena. These sidereal elements are referred to by Paracelsus in terms of "impressions," "forces," and "spiritual potencies"; and as such are considered to be subtle and invisible. "The heat of a fire," Paracelsus explains, "passes through an iron stove, and likewise the astral influences, with all their qualities, pass through man. They penetrate him as rain penetrates the soil, and as the soil is made fruitful by the rain, like-wise man's soul is made fruitful by them."⁸ Here the tangible objects of the elementary realm give way to a subtler dimension of energetic phenomena that requires the "intuition of internals" to perceive.⁹ Being the intermediate sphere between the physical and spiritual worlds, these astral principles, as we will see, are not quite matter and not quite spirit. In addition, these astral essences are very much connected with the stars and planets, and therefore this realm included the invisible presence of what Paracelsus referred to as the heavenly bodies. It is for this reason that what Paracelsus named *Astronomia* (astronomy) became the primary study from which to understand these sidereal phenomena. For it was by an intuitive comprehension of the stars and heavenly bodies – perhaps more specifically man's relationship to the stars and heavenly bodies – that a person was able to penetrate to the mysteries of this realm, and perceive the "living souls" within all physical matter. In turning to this sidereal dimension in chapter three, the phenomena of the celestial bodies, various energetic levels of being, and the imaginal aspects of astral manipulation will be discussed in relation to the subtler aspects of Paracelsus' alchemy. By analyzing his alchemy from the perspective of sidereal phenomena, we may discover yet another dimension of Paracelsus' Philosopher's Stone as well as a deeper insight into his cosmology as a whole.

⁸ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartman, 313

⁹ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Philosopher's Stone*, trans. & ed. E..A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 100, footnotes

Finally, there is the celestial sphere, an extremely subtle aspect of existence that included the soul and its teleological journey to God, spiritual illumination, and intimate knowledge of the Divine. While the physical and sidereal aspects of the universe were omnipresent and important to understand, ultimately it was the divine theosophy that Paracelsus most treasured; “the knowledge which our soul derives from the physical and animal elements is temporal; that which it derives from the spirit is eternal. God is the Father of wisdom, and all wisdom is derived from Him.”¹⁰ It was, however, only through the dedicated study of what he called “Virtue,” and what we might understand to mean theology, that one could attain to complete understanding of this realm. In addition, Carl Jung and other scholars have offered their insightful correlations between the alchemical processes of manipulating metals and various psychological levels of being on the path towards psychic wholeness, or “individuation.” We will listen to Jung’s psychological analysis of alchemy through his works entitled *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, and *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, and then attempt to apply this method of interpretation to Paracelsus’ alchemy in particular.¹¹ An investigation of the celestial aspect of Paracelsus’ cosmology in the fourth chapter will allow for the opportunity to understand the deeper symbolic, psychological, and profoundly spiritual dimensions of his alchemy.

It will be, therefore, these three increasingly subtle aspects, or realms, of phenomena in Paracelsus’ cosmology that will serve as the three lenses through which we will study his

¹⁰ Paracelsus, *De Funamento Sapientiae*, as quoted by Hartman, 325

¹¹ Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy: The Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol. 12*, ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, M.D., Gerhard Adler, PH.D, William McGuire, (New York, Princeton University Press, 1953); *Mysterium Coniunctionis: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Vol. 14*, ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, M.D., Gerhard Adler, PH.D, William McGuire, (New York, Princeton University Press, 1963); *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, M.D., Gerhard Adler, PH.D, William McGuire, *Alchemical Studies, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol. 13* (New York, Princeton University Press, 1967).

thoughts on alchemy in general, and the Philosopher's Stone in particular. By looking at each one in turn, we may find that, at least in his mind, the study of matter and the study of spirit are not two entirely different things. Carl Jung, noting this intimate connection between the material and spiritual spheres in medieval alchemy, remarks that "because of this intermingling of the physical and the psychic, it always remains an obscure point whether the ultimate transformations in the alchemical process are to be sought more in the material or in the spiritual realm."¹² Although Paracelsus himself designated three primary aspects, or divisions, of phenomena in the universe, it has been the unfortunate reality that many scholars have interpreted his works as pertaining to only one realm in particular, and thereby reduced his multi-tiered system to a single level. Again, whether his reduction is to that of a superstitious proto-chemist or that of an impractical spiritualist is ultimately irrelevant, because without simultaneously evaluating all three dimensions of his alchemy, there is no possibility of perceiving Paracelsus the alchemist in his fullest form, embodying what he envisioned as the "true physician." It is precisely for this reason that there exists the possibility of three Paracelsuses, or at least three different aspects of Paracelsus the alchemist. If we can at least admit that he himself believed he was operating on all three levels simultaneously, it becomes that much more difficult to reduce him to any one Paracelsus in particular, and pin his contributions as an alchemist to any one academic field. For even if one were to refuse the belief in three Paracelsuses, hopefully there can be a possibility for more than just one.

¹² Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 277-279

Chapter 2: Paracelsus as Man and Myth

We will now take a moment to look at Paracelsus as both a historical and mythical figure. “Through nearly four centuries the name and fame of Paracelsus have come down to us with something of the legendary haze that characterizes the age of fables,” writes the historian of chemistry John Maxson Stillman.¹³ Indeed, a central theme in the historiography of Paracelsus is the dichotomy between legend and fact. But this theme is multi-layered because the trend itself of mythologizing a historical figure indicates a certain fascination on behalf of his researchers, as well as the impulse of some to discredit his work. This trend of romanticizing, or discrediting, Paracelsus began during his life in the sixteenth century and continues to this day. His ability to captivate the collective curiosity of modernity and intrigue us with his obscurity renders him symbolic. He has become for many a representative of the budding scientific attitude searching after experience rather than theory, and for others an idealized image of the numinous magus who found the glory of divinity in the natural world. Yet regardless of the type of symbolism he evokes in modern minds, the very fact that his identity so easily merges with archetypal images is a telling indication of his ultimate impact as an individual. For it is Paracelsus as a symbol that has caught modern man’s attention, and it is his associations that have in turn elicited symbolic responses.

¹³ John Maxson Stillman, *Theophrastus Bombastus Von Hohenheim Called Paracelsus; His Personality and Influence as Physician, Chemist, and Reformer* (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co., 1920), 23

In terms of his recognitions, it is known that his work impacted many different fields of thought. His influence extended to the disciplines of medicine, natural philosophy, occultism, iatrochemistry, theology, politics, alchemy, and pharmacology. The scholar and Professor of German Andrew Weeks announces that, “in character, language, and scope, the writings of Paracelsus are certainly among the most formidable documents of early German literature.”¹⁴ Past and contemporary titles given to him include: “the Luther of Medicine,” “the German Hermes,” “father of toxicology,” “founding father of geriatrics,” “first holistic doctor,” “pioneer of parapsychology, psychotherapy, and psychosomatics,” “formulator of the first modern theory of metabolism,” “inventor of balneology,” “the first military doctor,” and the title that he originally gave himself; “the Monarch of Medicine.”¹⁵ The historian Dietlinde Goltz notes the probable inaccuracy of these claims, due to the fact that there is scarcely any aspect of medicine that Paracelsus is not given credit for initiating, and “hardly any scientific discovery which Paracelsus is not supposed to have made or at least foreseen.”¹⁶ Thus, although many such claims and titles are considered exaggerated and unwarranted, perhaps the enthusiastic desire to romanticize Paracelsus is one reflection of his impact, not only on his sixteenth century audience, but his twenty-first century audience as well.

This trend of idealizing the person of Paracelsus can be seen in the work of many scholars, but is perhaps most exemplified in the celebrations of his contributions to the newly emerging fields of chemistry and medicine. It is the opinion of the historian of sciences Allen G. Debus that “the scientific debates of the late sixteenth century were centered more frequently on

¹⁴ Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus, Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), ix

¹⁵ Dietlinde Goltz, *Paracelsus as a Guiding Model*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus: The Man and his Reputation, His Ideas, and Their Transformation* (Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 1998), 83-88 - also Henry M. Pachter, *Magic Into Science, The Story of Paracelsus* (New York, Henry Schuman, 1951), 5

¹⁶ Goltz, 87

the innovations of Paracelsus than they were on the heliocentric astronomy of Copernicus.”¹⁷ Such generalized statements may in fact bespeak truth; for some time now it has been asserted that Paracelsus’ practical alchemy was the foundation for the movement of iatrochemistry – that is, chemistry used or applied in the service of medicine - and thus he has been considered an “initiator of the era of chemical medicine” whose influence upon chemistry was “epoch-making.”¹⁸ Charles Webster posits that Paracelsus was actually the first person to coin the term “chemistry,” and also the first to make a clear distinction between alchemy and chemistry; who defined the latter as “the art of distillation.”¹⁹ In addition to meriting major entries in the Dictionary of Scientific Biography and the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation,²⁰ Paracelsus’ achievements are described as “outstanding” by the Encyclopedia Britannica.²¹ The astronomer Kepler singled out “Copernicanism” and “Paracelsianism” as the most noteworthy features in the rise of modern knowledge, and Robert Boyle once acknowledged him “both in his own and after times [as] a very considerable person.”²² It appears that Paracelsus also impacted other minds in the scientific revolution, as Isaac Newton had a major edition of the works of Paracelsus in his own library, and the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe was known to have attacked not only the doctrines of Galen, the ancient Greek authority on medicine that Paracelsus

¹⁷ Allen G. Debus, *Paracelsus and the Medical Revolution of the Renaissance; A 500th Anniversary Celebration*, National Library of Medicine, http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/paracelsus/paracelsus_2.html

¹⁸ John Maxson Stillman, *Paracelsus, his Personality and Influence as Physician, Chemist, and Reformer* (Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1920), 112-114

¹⁹ Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton; Magic and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5

²⁰ Peter Grell, ed., *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation*, 7

²¹ David Hambling, *Paracelsus: The Mercurial*, Sage, http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/157_paracelsus.shtml, ForteanTimes

²² Webster, 6

vowed to overthrow, but also Paracelsus' personal enemy, Thomas Erastus.²³ Finally we have the Paracelsian scholar J.R.R. Christie, who boldly announces that,

For historians of chemistry taking the long view of chemistry's development in history, Paracelsus and the phenomenon of Paracelsianism remains obligatory passage points of an intelligible narrations of chemistry's early modern growth. This has been the case for as long as academic histories of chemistry have been written.²⁴

Regardless of the accuracy of these assertions, the extent to which his name is associated with various innovations in the developing fields of chemistry and medicine supports the general sentiment that he was a major contributor to modern science.²⁵

There also existed, however, the tremendous impact of his alchemy and philosophy, which influenced the thinking of Jacob Boehme, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Jan Baptista van Helmont.²⁶ In reference to both his scientific and philosophical contributions, Edward Arthur Waite states that the "commentaries on his medical system became a literature which, in extent, at least, is formidable; out of the mystic physics of his alchemical teachings the Rosicrucian

²³ Ibid., 6

²⁴ W.H. Brock, *The Fontana history of chemistry*, London 1992, 43-48; and B. Bensaude and I. Stengers, *Histoire de la chimie*, Paris 1993, 35-37 (as incorporated by J.R.R. Christie, *Paracelsian Body*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation*, 267)

²⁵ In terms of specific contributions, there is still considerable speculation in regards to which theories, discoveries, and remedies he may be justifiably be given credit. Because of the number of theories and treatises existent during that time, the absence of any real organized catalogue for such information, and the common tradition of oral prescriptions, it is rather difficult to pinpoint crucial evolutionary ideas and discoveries with certain individuals. This is the case for many people in the histories of the sciences. Nonetheless, Paracelsus has been given credit for certain contributions by enough historians and over a long enough period of time that, in way, his image is associated with certain events, regardless of their actual connection. Among the most common assertions is that our modern word "gas" stems from the works of Paracelsus, whose word "chaos" was later transformed by his prominent disciple Van Helmont into the German word of "gas" (geist). [Henry Pachter, *Magic into Science – The Story of Paracelsus* (New York, Henry Schuman Inc., 1951), 123] Many have called him one of the first doctors to use the metal Zinc in medicine – and even the first to give it the name zink (zincum), from the German "zinke" – as well as originator of the term "reduction," from his "reduciren," as used to describe the obtainment of certain metals from their ores. [Stillman, 100] He is also recognized by some to have coined the term "protoplasm" indirectly from his original usage of the term "protoplaustus," a word meant to describe the principle that rules man biologically, and today used to indicate the most basic cell material in all biological life. [Pachter, 215]

²⁶ Carl Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 111 – "It is no secret that Goeth, as is evident from the second part of Faust, still felt the impact of the powerful spirit of Paracelsus."

doctrines developed in the first part of the following century.”²⁷ His extensive writings on the topics of alchemy, astrology, magic, and cabala has both increased skepticism on behalf of the rationalists as well as captivated the imagination of occultists within various esoteric circles. One example of such skepticism is evident in another comment by Dietlinde Goltz. Discussing the language that Paracelsus uses in his writing, Goltz remarks: “Paracelsus’ sentences, on the other hand, almost invariably appeal directly to our emotions. They target our irrational levels. Their contents only appear to be clearly expressed, while in reality they are only indirectly accessible to reason.”²⁸ The argument here is that Paracelsus’ language, one steeped in the religious tradition, is more emotive than reasonable, and thus “triggers emotional reactions rather than rational deliberation.”²⁹ This critique implies that Paracelsus’ work fails the test of reason by excessive reliance on simple sentiments.

This style of language, dense as it is poetic, was also embraced by many as an intuitive expression of wisdom and knowledge. In an effort to denounce the wisdom and profundity of the Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, the English poet and mystic William Blake mentions Paracelsus in his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*;

Have now another plain fact: Any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg’s.³⁰

²⁷ Arthur Edward Waite, trans. & ed., *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus* (Chicago, de Laurence, Scott & CO., 1910) IVX - reproduced from Dr. L. W. de Laurence, ed., *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Phillippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, Called Paracelsus, The Great* (London, de Laurence, Scott & CO., 1894)

²⁸ Goltz, 96

²⁹ Ibid., 97

³⁰ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ed. David V. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York, Anchor Books, 1965), 43

Paracelsus' spiritual insights and mystical cosmology have been studied by many in an attempt to understand the universe and man's purpose within it, and Blake's sentiment reveals an apparently common trend of reverence for him as an illumined mystic.

There are also those who believe that he contributed to the modern field of psychology. The psychologist Carl Jung calls Paracelsus a "pioneer not only of chemical medicine but of empirical psychology and psychotherapy."³¹ Jung delivered a lecture in Germany on the 400th anniversary of Paracelsus' death, which was later published as an essay entitled *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*. In this lecture Jung goes on to say that,

The man whose death four hundred years ago we commemorate today exerted a powerful influence on all subsequent generations, as much by sheer force of his personality as by his prodigious literary activity. His influence made itself felt chiefly in the field of medicine and natural science. In philosophy, not only was mystical speculation stimulated in a fruitful way, but philosophical alchemy, then on the point of extinction, received a new lease of life and enjoyed a renaissance.³²

We have heard the assertion that Paracelsus' mystical works formed the foundation for the emergence of the mysterious fellowship of the Rosicrucians, and such claims for his pioneering efforts have likewise been attributed to the fields of 'animal magnetism,' hypnosis, and even psycho-somatics.³³ Ultimately, therefore, we may assume that Paracelsus was by no means limited to the medical and chemical sciences, but appeared to have a large effect on the spiritual and metaphysical landscape of sixteenth century Germany as well.

Although today we recognize that Paracelsus played some role (its size and scope are debated) in the development of renaissance science and natural philosophy, it is another story to understand him as a person. What exactly were the beliefs of this eccentric Swiss philosopher? Did he think of himself as a "modern" scientist with a priority for experimentation over

³¹ Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 189

³² *Ibid.*, 111

³³ Georges Surbled, *Hypnotism*, The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. VII, Online Edition, 2003. K. Knight. Transcribed by Douglas M. Potter. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07604b.htm>> (12 Feb, 2006) - also Goltz, 93

accepting traditional belief? Did he believe he could actually contribute to the developing fields of science and chemistry, and that his new ideas would eventually supplant the traditional doctrines of Galen and Aristotle? The scattered reports about him from his contemporaries describe him as an egotistical, cankerous, and extremely stubborn man who found no end of pleasure in insulting the past and current medical authorities with accusations of inadequacy.³⁴ “Let me tell you this:” says Paracelsus to his adversaries, “every little hair on my neck knows more than you and all your scribes, and my shoe-buckles are more learned than your Galen and Avicenna, and my beard has more experience than all your high colleges.”³⁵ He even gave himself the Greek name Paracelsus as a personal jab at the ancient authorities of medicine, as it literally means Para - greater than, Celsus - a famous Greek doctor whose encyclopedia was the definitive authority for the first century medicine.³⁶ Exemplifying a fairly common trend of skepticism about Paracelsus’ personality, Pachter comments on his notorious reputation:

[H]is association with “teamsters,” his drinking, his conceit and his violent language in polemical writings, his litigiousness where he might peaceably have won people over – all suggest that he found it difficult to communicate with learned men... Even in mundane matters people were unable to ‘cope with him.’³⁷

³⁴ Paracelsus, *The Treasure of Treasures*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus, Vol. 1*, 38-39 - “If your artists only knew that their prince Galen – they call none like him – was sticking in hell, from whence he has sent letters to me, they would make the sign of the cross upon themselves with a fox’s tail. In the same way your Avicenna sits in the vestibule of the infernal portal; and I have disputed with him about his *aurum potable*, his Tinctures of the Philosophers, his Quintessence, and Philosopher’s Stone, his Mithridatic, his Theriac, and all the rest. O, you hypocrites, who despise the truths taught you by a true physician, who is himself instructed by Nature, and is a son of God himself! Come, then, and listen, impostors who prevail only by the authority of your high positions! After my death, my disciples will burst forth and drag you to the light, and shall expose your dirty drugs, wherewith up to this time you have compassed the death of princes, and the most invincible magnates of the Christian world. Woe for your necks in the day of Judgment! I know that the monarchy will be mine. Mine, too, will be the honour and glory. Not that I praise myself: Nature praises me. Of her I am born: her I follow. She knows me, and I know her.”

³⁵ Jolande Jacobi, ed. with introduction, trans. Norbert Guterman, *Paracelsus, Selected Writings* (New York, Pantheon Books, Inc., 1951), as incorporated by Allen Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (London, Oldbourne Book Co., 1965), 16

³⁶ Grell, ed., *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputations*, 2

³⁷ Pachter, 195

Many accounts suggest that his very acts invited hostility, and that his aggression and pride rarely allowed for peaceable interactions with his contemporaries. Indeed, Pachter announces the poignant observation: “he was a king or a beggar, never a gentleman.”³⁸

His ability to make friends appears to have been outweighed by his talent for making enemies, as can be seen from his six-month stint at the University of Basel. Being in good stead with the influential politician Ecolampadius for having healed his close friend, Paracelsus was appointed town physician and Lecturer of Medicine at the University, only to be promptly expelled for throwing into a bonfire the books of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine— one of the traditional authorities on medicine – while exclaiming, “into St. John’s Fire so that all misfortune may go into the air with the smoke!”³⁹ Needless to say, he spent much of the time on the move, traveling for years at a time, and never settled down in any one place. Instead he practiced as a surgeon in Venetian, Danish, and Dutch wars, where he “gained his knowledge of fevers and wounds,” studied various forms of medicine, magic, and astrology during his travels to Turkey and Persia, and generally spent much of his time wandering from town to town across Europe offering his services as a doctor.⁴⁰ According to Weeks, Paracelsus’ lifelong wanderings fulfill several functions for his scholarship; “historically and culturally, his travels qualify him as an intrepid seeker-discoverer of the Renaissance type; methodologically for his work, the journeyman years appear to bear out his preference for fresh experience over stale academic doctrine.”⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 195

³⁹ Anna M. Stoddart, *The Life of Paracelsus Theophrastus Von Hohenheim 1493-1541* (London, John Murray, 1911), 96

⁴⁰ Weeks, 6

⁴¹ Ibid., 6

His fiery opposition to the traditional systems of medicine was well known, and he assumed all doctors who practiced or taught such systems to be hypocrites. His pride and self-assurance are astounding, and we can only imagine the outrage caused by his declarations;

From the middle of this age the Monarchy of all the Arts has been at length derived and conferred upon me, Theophrastus Paracelsus, Prince of Philosophy and Medicine. For this purpose I have been chosen by God to extinguish and blot out all the phantasies of elaborate and false works, of delusive and presumptuous words, be they the words of Aristotle, Galen, Avicenna, Mesua, or the dogmas of any among their followers. My theory, proceeding as it does from the light of Nature, can never, through its consistency, pass away or be changed...[and] that every searcher after this supreme philosophic work may be forced to imitate and to follow me, be he Italian, Pole, Gaul, German, or whatsoever or whosoever he be. Come hither after me, all you philosophers, astronomers, and spagyrist, of however lofty a name ye may be, I will show and open to you, Alchemists and Doctors, who are exalted by me with the most consummate labours, this corporeal regeneration. I will teach you the tincture, the Arcanum, the quintessence, wherein lie hid the foundations of all mysteries and of all works.⁴²

His passionate affirmations and merciless invectives polarized people by their shocking aggression, and while some listened to him as an initiate of the esoteric Mysteries, many more reacted with outrage and counter-attacks. Perhaps he won on a certain score, because regardless of what type of reaction he received, he got exactly that: a reaction. He was not easily forgotten, and even in his own time he enjoyed the celebrity, and notoriety, of being a controversial figure. Indeed, it has even been asserted that the first major confrontation of the Scientific Revolution was not between Copernicus and Ptolemy, but rather Paracelsus and Galen.⁴³ Others have offered that our word “bombastic” derives from a part of his name – Bombastus – and that as a similar revolutionary to his contemporary Luther, Paracelsus deserves the title “Luther of Medicine.”⁴⁴ There are in fact a couple of noted similarities; the first being that both Luther and Paracelsus lectured in the common vernacular of German rather than Latin, in order to reach the

⁴² Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol 1*, 21

⁴³ Webster, 4

⁴⁴ Paracelsus as quoted by Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, 16 – “I will let Luther defend his cause and I will defend my cause, and I will defeat those of my colleagues who turn against me...It was not the constellations that made me a physician; God made me.”

“common man,” and the second being their mutual tendency towards radical public action – Luther’s burning of the Papal Bull in Wittenberg and Paracelsus’ burning of Avicenna’s Cannon in Basel – as well as being “accomplished users of invective and obscenity.”⁴⁵

There also exists the close association between Paracelsus and the literary character Faustus; “the portrait of Paracelsus as Faust has been retouched from era to era, yet it has persisted in nearly every era from Paracelsus’ own down to the twentieth century.”⁴⁶ As a symbol of the knowledge-hungry philosopher who searches everywhere for the highest wisdom and fullest experience of life, Paracelsus received the projection of the “Faustian Man,” that is, the “archetypal culture soul of Western man.”⁴⁷ This connection, however, is contested and debated by scholars. For while Andrew Weeks is concerned with the “erosion of the boundary between fiction and historical fact” in the German perception of Paracelsus as the historical personality behind the literary Faust, Henry Pachter takes the opposite stance: “I believe that more of Paracelsus’ image went into Faustus than is generally admitted, and this opinion is supported by no less an authority than Goethe.” Pachter goes on to explain; “when Goethe, two centuries later, took up the Faustus theme, Faustus and Paracelsus had become linked in tradition, and he found it necessary to become a Paracelsus scholar. Allusions to Paracelsus’ life and opinions, alchemical symbolism, and Paracelsian cabbala abound in his version.”⁴⁸ Again, this attitude of mythologizing a historical personage is more reflective, in my opinion, of a collective effort to understand and integrate the enigmatic essence of the person Paracelsus rather than a definitive statement about the historical personality. Whether or not Paracelsus was, in actuality, linked to the creation of Dr. Faustus is in a way irrelevant, because the emphasis here is

⁴⁵ Pachter, 7

⁴⁶ Weeks, 21-22

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25

⁴⁸ Pachter, 14-15

on the manner in which Paracelsus became a symbol for a new type of inquiry into life. He became, as we have seen, a symbol for the “Faustian man,” the scientific attitude just emerging, in which no sacrifice was too much for the attainment of power over the mysteries of nature.

Finally, the paradoxical nature of Faust as both a thoughtful philosopher and heretical quack is equally attributable to Paracelsus, whose dualistic reputation as genius and rascalion was a major cause for his notoriety. Representing the widespread sentiment that Paracelsus was a genius with a penchant for alcohol, Giordano Bruno remarks: “who after Hippocrates was similar to Paracelsus as a wonder-working doctor? And, seeing how much this inebriate knew, what should I think he might have discovered had he been sober?”⁴⁹ Implied in this comment is the common sentiment that somehow Paracelsus was a man who had fallen beneath his ideals, and a genius who had failed to manifest his full potential. Just as Faust “sells his soul” for the acquisition of knowledge, so Paracelsus was thought by some to have sought wisdom to the exclusion of all other interests. Perhaps it was the intensity of his solitary quest for knowledge that rendered him unable to maintain – or develop – amiable relationships with his contemporaries. Likewise it has been speculated that his alcoholism was a symptom of his imbalanced ideals. It is in this way that perhaps Paracelsus “sold” a part of himself – that is, sacrificed something in order to attain an almost impossible goal – although it is debatable whether or not this part of himself was his soul, because for all intensive purposes it was his very soul he was seeking. But there remains many complaints about the personality of Paracelsus, and one must wonder whether such personal shortcomings were the result of his single-minded dedication to other-worldly attainments. Thus it was, that while Paracelsus was known across the continent of Europe and believed by many to be a miracle-working healer, he was also widely

⁴⁹ Giordano Bruno as quoted by Pachter, 297

thought to be an arrogant quack and mischievous prankster, whose irredeemable ignorance of true medicine was matched only by his pugnacious and offensive personality.

A helpful tool, however, with which to navigate the mysterious waters of the persona of Paracelsus, is the historiographical categories of Andrew Cunningham's *Fat and Thin Paracelsus*. In an attempt to make headway in delineating between the reputations and realities of the man Paracelsus, Cunningham notes the vast discrepancies that modern scholarship reveals in its attempts to understand, and ultimately categorize, who he was in a historical context. One cause of this confusion, offers Cunningham, is that while in the medieval intellectual landscape there was little, if any, differentiation between various "fields" of thought, modernity has clearly separated and defined fields of knowledge, known as the various sciences, which resist any intermixing of interests. Cunningham reminds us that because modern academia has parceled out general natural philosophy into separate disciplines that would seem alien to Paracelsus himself, we are left with the awkward situation of giving him the high status of "contributor" to a vast range of fields that are, in certain respects, contradictory. In addition, the gap between the worlds of Paracelsus and modernity signifies an altered approach to knowledge; one that includes "the fundamental distinction between 'medieval' and 'modern', with all the judgmental force involved in making such a contrast."⁵⁰ So perhaps it is ourselves, that is the scholars, suggests Cunningham, who have done injustice to Paracelsus by separating and parceling out an inherently unified and holistic philosophy into various compartments in an effort to understand him in our own terms.⁵¹

It is in this way that we run the risk of creating our own Paracelsus, for a vaguely known historical figure is a perfect coat stand upon which we may hang our own preconceived notions.

⁵⁰ Andrew Cunningham, *Paracelsus Fat and Thin*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation*, 55

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 60

Some of the most common suits we hang on him are mystical magician, pre-scientific chemist, alcoholic quack, illumined saint, or revolutionary doctor. But an underlying theme is a careless act of reduction to *either* symbolic mysticism *or* literal scientism. Perhaps it would be better to dress Paracelsus with a suit of complexity and depth that holds ambiguity, and therefore does justice to him as a multi-faceted and extremely diverse thinker. I do not believe that ignoring his complexity will provide insight; rather it is the Paracelsus with all his obscurity and contradictions that I am interested in studying. Cunningham discusses the fact that there are two main images known to us of Paracelsus, both of which are based on an engraving that was supposedly carved for him during his lifetime. One portrays a thin, bald man who is poorly dressed and simple in appearance while the other is a fat, elaborately dressed man with a head full of curly hair. Cunningham notices the fact that the later portraits of him, based upon these two originals, appear to become more exaggerated over time; the thin Paracelsus becoming thinner and the fat Paracelsus getting fatter. Risking a joke, Cunningham offers to compare the thin Paracelsus with the “bald truth” – that is, the historical, factual man – and the fat Paracelsus with “the embellished truth” – this being the gradual mythologies and reputations that have accumulated around his person over time.⁵² But whether the embellishment consists of emphasizing the scientific or spiritual side of his personality, it still obscures the vision of who he was as a historical person.

The first public records on the works of Paracelsus occurred shortly after his death, with the well-established Professor of theology and medicine Thomas Liebler – also known as Erastus – who became the foremost opponent and critic of the Paracelsian doctrines. Although Paracelsus’ ideas continued to gain momentum through disciples such as Jan Baptista Van

⁵² Ibid., 61

Helmont who continued to print and publish his manuscripts, Erastus' criticisms imprinted themselves to a large degree on the public consciousness. In addition to dismantling Paracelsus' theories, Erastus turned to smudging his reputation with claims of documentations, letters, and personal testimonies; this is where Paracelsus' reputation as an alcoholic, and devil-worshipping, charlatan is first formulated. For the next few centuries Paracelsus and Paracelsianism remained controversial, as well as political, with the implications of its radical medical and pharmacological theories slowly penetrating and taking hold throughout the rest of Europe.

The inauguration of modern Paracelsus scholarship, however, can be traced to the monumental work of Karl Sudhoff, the German historian of medicine who published the first authoritative Paracelsus bibliography in 1894, and the fourteen volume edition of the German translation of Paracelsus' collected works – entitled *Abteilung 1: Medizinische, naturwissenschaftliche und philosophische Schriften* – between the years 1922 and 1933.⁵³ This foundation for modern Paracelsus scholarship was largely focused on the medical and naturalistic contributions of Paracelsus. But Sudhoff had also planted the seeds for further research into his philosophical, theological, and occult dimensions by amassing a substantive collection of Paracelsus' non-medical treatises and encouraging scholars of religion to undertake their publication. The first attempt at the publication of Hohenheim's theological writings followed suit later, in 1923, when the first volume of Wilhelm Matthieben's collection was published, but then stalled following Matthieben's death. Although it was taken up by the respected historian of religion Kurt Goldammer after the Second World War, it remains to this

⁵³ P. Dilg, *Paracelsus research past and present: basic results, frustrated attempts, new approaches* (*Sudhoffs Arch Z Wissenschaftsgesch Beih.* 1993;(31):9-24), [www.pubmed.com](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=8153974&dopt=Abstract), A Service of the National Library of Medicine and the National Institute of Health, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=8153974&dopt=Abstract

day unfinished. Goldammer, building on Sudhoff's work, has thus far published (through 1986) only six volumes of the projected fourteen for the second part of Abteilung, entitled *Abteilung 2: Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften*.⁵⁴

Beginning in the early twentieth century, there grew an interest in the mystical and occult aspects of Paracelsus. With the passionate mysticism of the Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber, the occult interpretations of Paracelsus by the theosophist scholar Franz Hartmann, and the spiritualistic theories of the Anthroposophist author Rudolf Steiner, there emerged a desire to understand the spiritual side of Paracelsus' philosophy.⁵⁵ Entering the picture was also Arthur Edward Waite's comprehensive translation of Paracelsus' collected works on alchemy, first published in England in 1894, and which became a very influential publication for esoteric and occultist scholars. This turn away from the scientific contributions of Paracelsus upset many historians and Paracelsus scholars, and Matthieben reacted with a lengthy dissertation in 1917 – entitled *Die Form des religiösen Verhaltens bei Theophrast von Hohenheim* – in an attempt to free Paracelsus from the disagreeable association of mysticism. This internal schism within the scholarship of Paracelsus was somewhat soothed by the important recognition and emerging acknowledgement of Paracelsus' religious attitude.⁵⁶ The Catholic scholar Franz Strunz convincingly argued for theology and piety as the guiding principle for Paracelsus' philosophies, and by doing so instigated a major shift in the historiography and scholarship of Paracelsus. Likewise Wilhelm Ganzenmuller's studies in pre-Paracelsian medieval alchemy revealed the profound religious and spiritual components of the practice of alchemy, and thus reaffirmed Paracelsus' dedication to the mystical and

⁵⁴ Weeks, 33

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33-35

⁵⁶ Ibid., 33-35

metaphysical.⁵⁷ Noting this significant moment in the scholarship on Paracelsus, historian

Andrew Weeks says:

In their own ways, Strunz and Ganzenmuller laid the groundwork for an integrated understanding of Paracelsus: Strunz by showing that the authority of the naturalist and of the religionist was indivisible; Ganzenmuller by establishing that even what seemed an empirical element in Paracelsus's experience, his alchemical experimentation, was, in its theoretical sources, medieval and devout.⁵⁸

Subsequently, it has been the pioneering work of Kurt Goldammer, as well as the historian Walter Pagel, that has continued to shed light on the theological components of Paracelsus' thought. The movement initiated by Goldammer, but continued by Pagel, Weeks, and Hartmut Rudolph, was one that believed Paracelsus' medicine and chemistry was fundamentally informed by his religious mysticism, and that the study of his scientific contributions to the exclusion of his theological ones merits a warning of imbalance. This interest in the non-scientific side of Paracelsus culminated in the 1930's and 1940's with Carl Jung's research into Paracelsus as a "spiritual phenomenon." This psychological approach to understanding Paracelsus' contributions to modern academia, begun by Jung but immediately embraced by new generations of scholars, demonstrates the myriad ways in which Paracelsus has come to be analyzed and interpreted in modern culture. And although there have been great number of scholars who emphasize Paracelsus' spiritual dimension, there has continued to be a strong community of scholars – including contemporary authorities in the history of sciences Walter Pagel, Allen G. Debus (Professor Emeritus of the History of Science and Medicine, University of Chicago), and Charles Webster – who advocate the scientific and empirical contributions of the Swiss reformer.

Finally, there has most recently emerged the interest in the historiography of Paracelsus; that is, this very discussion on the scholarship of Paracelsus throughout history. Two edited

⁵⁷ Ibid., 33-35

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34-35

volumes – one edited by Peter Grell entitled *Paracelsus: the Man and his Reputation, his Ideas and their Transformation*, and one edited by Heinz Schott and Ilana Zinguer titled *Paracelsus und seine Internationale Rezeption in der Fruhen Neuzeit: Beitrage zur Geschichte des Paracelsismus* – have emerged with the issue of Paracelsus’ historicity and historiography as the primary objective. Scholars whose essays appear in these editions, such as Andrew Cunningham or Steven Pumfry, are marked by an intense desire to strip down the mythologized figure of Paracelsus and instead elucidate the reasons behind such biased and romanticized scholarship that is so widespread in the research on Paracelsus. The dawning realization of the frequent inadequacy of scholarship on Paracelsus – for whom we still do not have a basic lexicon – has become central, and many scholars feel uncomfortable with the current level of knowledge we have about him. Indeed, there remains the unfortunate fact that there is little known about the places, dates, or contexts of the translations of Paracelsus’ works – and even who those translators were – and because of this it is difficult to feel confident about which words are really his, and which may have been added subsequently by various unknown authors. A current facet of this scholastic inadequacy can be seen in the failed efforts to create a Paracelsus Institute as a center for historical research; there exists only two semi-successful “professional societies,” the Schweizerische Paracelsus-Gesellschaft (founded in 1942) and the Internationale Paracelsus-Gesellschaft (founded in 1951).⁵⁹ It is this poor state of Paracelsus scholarship that has led to much redefinition of the very foundations and goals of the academic communities. As historians continue to reevaluate the importance of this Swiss physician, it has grown more apparent that there exists the necessity of a renewed and reinvigorated approach to the scholarship of Paracelsus Theophrastus. This should be an approach in which all spectrums of his thought are

⁵⁹ P. Dilg, 2

studied in mutual conjunction with all others, and in which the current problems of his scholarship may be addressed through interdisciplinary cooperation.

Having briefly discussed the history of Paracelsian scholarship, I should now mention that my own agenda for this paper does not concern the general historicity or biography of Paracelsus, but rather the specific analysis of his thought and practice as an alchemist. The interest in his alchemy and hermetic philosophy is bound to emphasize what Cunningham calls the “occult” Paracelsus, and this is because much of his mysticism is closely intertwined with his practice and philosophy of alchemy. For this reason I have turned to Arthur Edward Waite’s translations of Paracelsus as my central source for primary materials. Waite’s edition of Paracelsus’ alchemical works, published in London in 1894, were translated into English from the Latin treatises copied in Geneva in 1658, treatises that eventually found their way to England during the occultist revival in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Arthur Edward Waite was one of the foremost English scholars of occultism and esotericism of his time, and his distinction as an objective and meticulous translator made him a good candidate for my purposes. The historian

⁶⁰ Cunningham, *Paracelsus Fat and Thin*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputations*, 63. It is necessary at this point to note that there exists a scholarship issue with regards to Waite’s edition of the Paracelsus translations. I was unable to discover where, when, and by whom the Latin translations of these Paracelsian treatises were copied in 1658. Cunningham knows simply that these Latin versions were in circulation in Geneva by the date 1658, although he does mention that historian Charles Webster may have known something more to this story – *The nineteenth century afterlife of Paracelsus*, Roger Cooter, ed., *Studies in the History of Alternative Medicine* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 79-88 – he goes on to say that Webster makes different historiographical points with his information. Although the fact that we cannot trace the sources of Waite’s original translations is a detriment to the authority Waite holds in modern academia, perhaps this resource inadequacy is a silent reminder of the overall obscurity and mystery that permeates the scholarship of Paracelsus. It is acknowledged by many scholars that the research and scholarship on Paracelsus is of far less quality than it needs be, and one of the major issues is the broken chain of historical references – that is, the lack of records showing the translations and publications of his treatises through history – on which modern scholars must rely in order to justify their source materials and research. But in accepting the historical obscurity of Paracelsus, and the study of Paracelsianism, as an unavoidable facet of this thesis, I do take a certain level of confidence in Waite’s promise to “render faithfully” the treatises of Paracelsus. This is because, as Cunningham notes, Waite’s reputation as a thorough and methodical translator extended far beyond his works on Paracelsus or alchemy in general. A prolific author on a broad range of topics – not unlike Paracelsus – Waite gained renown in the esoteric circles of England for his capability and dependency as a scholar in many forms. It is for this reason that I chose to use Waite’s edition of translations of Paracelsus’ treatises on alchemy, and my hope is that the quality itself of his translations will merit the acceptance, and approval, of this source despite its technical inefficiency to claim full authority in terms of historical source material.

Andrew Cunningham comments that this edition of collected works, although now over one hundred years old, remains to this day the largest source of Paracelsian works available in English (it was reprinted in the 1960's).⁶¹ As one of the most available resource on Paracelsus' primary texts on alchemy, I hope is to look critically at Waite's translations in an effort to see the different dimensions of the complex, and highly esoteric, alchemical writings of Paracelsus. Entitled *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, Waite's edition is a two-volume set, each 400 pages, which contain a great number of Paracelsus' chemical, hermetic, and alchemical recipes and discourses. It is from this edition that I studied the primary sources of Paracelsus' treatises: *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, *The Coelum Philosophorum*, *The Book Concerning the Tincture of the Philosophers*, *The Treasure of Treasures for Alchemists*, *The Manual or Treatise Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, and *The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus*. As mentioned before, Waite wrote and translated extensively on various topics in the field occultism, and therefore his compilation and translation of Paracelsus' works have been thought by some to be tainted with the spiritualistic and mystical tendencies of nineteenth century British occultism. But there remains the fact that Paracelsus himself used a highly esoteric vocabulary – indeed, much of his work was centered on such “occult” secrets – and thus perhaps it is unjustified to assume that Waite's own mystical bent should be an opposition to the expression of Paracelsus' own ideas. Finally, Waite's edition of Paracelsus' works is appropriate, at least in this context, because it is well aligned with the thread of this thesis; namely the alchemical trend of Paracelsus' philosophy and practice as opposed to the historiographical accuracy of discovering the real, “bald” Paracelsus.

⁶¹ Cunningham, *Paracelsus Fat and Thin*, 63

Following in the footsteps of the historian of sciences Karl Sudhoff, both Walter Pagel and more recently the historian of medicine Allen G. Debus represent the clearest voices on the scientific and historical scholarship of the works of Paracelsus. Representing the interest in the emergence of Renaissance science and medicine, Walter Pagel - whose books *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* and *The Smiling Spleen, Paracelsianism in Storm and Stress* I turned to for this paper- remains a leading authority on the history and development of chemistry, medicine, and pharmacology in the medieval ages. Likewise Allen Debus - with his *Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* - appears, at least in his preface, to be somewhat of a disciple of Pagel's; for he also attempts to view Paracelsus more in terms of his empiric experimentalism than his speculative philosophy. Finally, I turn to the historian of the Reformation Andrew Weeks, historian of chemistry John Maxson Stillman, and Paracelsian scholar Henry Pachter, among others, for additional views on Paracelsus' practical and chemical alchemy. Overall, these scholars represent the scientific and historical construal of Paracelsus' alchemy, and their opinions in many ways echo the centuries-old trend of interpreting his importance through the impact of his chemical and medical contributions.

Finally, there remains the spiritual, psychological, and theological dimensions to Paracelsus the hermetic philosopher, and the secondary sources I use to discuss Paracelsus' celestial phenomena are various scholars who specialize in these fields. As mentioned earlier, two scholars that have emphasized the importance of Paracelsus' religiosity are Hartmut Rudolph and Ute Gause. Hartmut Rudolph, whose essay *Hohenheim's Anthropology in the Light of his Writings on the Eucharist* is a chapter in Grell's edited book on Paracelsus' historiography, is known to have investigated the Trinitarian doctrine of Paracelsus, his biblical

exegesis, as well as his relationships to other religious doctrines. Ute Gause, whose essay *On Paracelsus' Epistemology in his Early Theological Writings and in his Astronomia Magna* also appears in Grell's book, focuses primarily on the overall theological evolution of Paracelsus' early religious writings.⁶² In addition, I look to the Theosophical author and scholar Franz Hartmann – himself, like Waite, also heavily involved in the esoteric societies of his day – whose book, *The Life and Doctrines of Philippus Theophrastus, Bombast of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus*, explores the mystical and spiritual parallels to Paracelsus' laboratory operations.

Finally, I use the works of Carl Gustav Jung as a central platform for my investigation of the psychological dimensions of Paracelsus' alchemy. Having dedicated much of his later years to the study of alchemy, Jung completed several large volumes of his *Collected Works* on this topic alone: *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, and *Alchemical Studies*. Although Jung, like Waite, may be subject to criticism for his emphasis on the psycho-spiritual dimensions of the alchemical work, again it is precisely this emphasis that I am interested in pursuing as a complement to the scientific interpretations that I review in the third chapter on elementary phenomena. In addition, the scholars of alchemy Titus Burckhard, Allison Coudert, and Jungian scholar Jolande Jacobi offer similar correlations between the metallurgical operations of the alchemical process and the psychological and spiritual stages of personal re-integration. Overall, these various scholars will supply key insights into the theological and highly spiritual tone that is infused in all of Paracelsus' works – regardless of the topic – and shed light on the metaphysical and speculative components of Paracelsus' celestial alchemy that will be discussed in the final chapter.

⁶² Weeks, 35

By investigating Paracelsus' alchemy through the three divisions of his over-arching cosmology – that of his elementary, sidereal, and celestial realms – we may be able to better grasp the full scope of his multi-faceted alchemy in all its complexity. This triple-layered looking glass is inherent in Paracelsus' philosophical system, not just the basis for his anthropology, because Paracelsus saw the elementary, sidereal, and celestial realms as the fundamental ontological spheres in which all materiality manifests. Again we can hear his statement in reference to the Microcosm; “three spirits, united in one, live and act in man; three worlds, united into one, throw their rays upon him...the first is the essence of the elements; the second the soul of the stars; the third the spirit – the *life*.”⁶³ This differentiation of realms, however, was also emphasized and elucidated by Franz Hartman in an effort to analyze Paracelsus' hermetic philosophy with a simplified clarity. For such a trinity of dimensions in Paracelsus alchemy allows for the opportunity to study the man step by step, in correspondence to the various levels of being that Paracelsus discusses throughout his body of writings. And it is for this reason that it will be important to know which lens, or aspect, of his alchemy is being studied. By investigating the corporeal phenomena of his elementary realm in the next chapter, we will come to appreciate the important role that laboratory chemistry played in his alchemical processes. This elementary realm will open the doors to Paracelsus' pragmatics, and reveal his practical side as a practicing physician and chemist. The second realm of sidereal phenomena will likewise elucidate the astral and energetic dimensions of his alchemy, while revealing key philosophical motifs that shape his cosmology as a whole. This will be the section in which the astral, or semi-material, principles of the universe may be analyzed in the hopes of understanding the subtle aspects that inform the alchemical operations. Finally, the fifth chapter will entail a

⁶³ Paracelsus as quoted by Franz Hartman, M.D., *The Life and the Doctrines of Philippus Theophrastus, Bombasts of Hohenheim, known by the name of Paracelsus* (New York, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1945), 311

discussion of his celestial realm, the sphere of reality that corresponds to the spiritual, religious, and psychological transformations that occur during the *Magnum Opus*. This final analysis of the subtlest level of phenomena will provide insight into the mysterious dimensions of his spiritual, and intensely mystical, vision of the Spagyric Art. It will be through the formal investigation of the dynamic interactions of these three ontological realms that Paracelsus in his fullest and most complete alchemical form – the “true physician” – may emerge. My hope is to perceive a richer portrait of the Swiss philosopher in his capacity as an alchemist, rather than attempt to free his personality from the obscurity that plagues his historicity.

Chapter 3: The Elementary Realm

By looking to Paracelsus' alchemical treatises in an attempt to understand the role of elementary chemistry in his system of alchemy, we discover that chemical philosophy played a significant role in his cosmology, as well as in the thought and practice of his followers. In addition to significant evidence supporting Paracelsus' personal belief in the practical nature of his own chemistry, we have come to recognize that many important developments in the field of chemical medicine followed his initiatory advancements. Two common examples of the Paracelsian school's contribution to practical iatrochemistry is the shift from the "water-casting" system of urine analysis to chemical distillation of urine samples in the efforts of diagnosing illness, as well as the formal chemical investigation of natural spring water and the minerals that were thought to be responsible for the apparent efficacy of spa water for healing.⁶⁴ Such examples of his practical application of iatrochemistry to the world around him demonstrate that Paracelsus was not by any means a solitary hermit whose speculations and philosophy kept him in the "armchair."

Paracelsus departed from the traditional alchemists and hermeticists with his emphasis on understanding the world around him in chemical and medicinal terms. The movement initiated

⁶⁴ Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 109-110 – "If the Paracelsian chemical philosophy of nature provided a conceptual framework for the iatrochemists, it also provided a basis for his practical work. Diagnosis by the inspection of urine was replaced by chemical distillation and (with van Helmont) by a specific gravity test which was to become fundamental for modern urinalysis. Paracelsians also turned to the healing powers of mineral water spas and sought to determine the ingredients of these springs by greatly expanding the known analytical tests for aqueous solutions."

by Paracelsus was one that began to look at the greater world, the universe conceptualized as the macrocosm, as operating through chemical processes; and therefore the human body - a microcosm understood to be in direct corresponding relationship to the macrocosm - was seen to also operate via chemical principles. The natural world, when studied chemically, was recognized to be critical for understanding God and His universe, and therefore corporeal phenomena was given a new importance. In referencing Paracelsus' *Paramiric Treatises*, it is Henry Pachter's opinion that, "despite the fantastic flights into the realm of spiritualism, despite the astrological language and the superstitious references to the 'invisible body,' the book clearly was written to put Nature on her own feet and to show the omnipresence of material principles."⁶⁵ Regardless of whether or not elementary phenomena, that is, in the sense of physical chemistry, is the central pillar of Paracelsus' alchemy, we will see that as a method for learning about the terrestrial sphere as well as the intangible realms of higher wisdom, its importance cannot be overlooked.

It is also important to remember that the alchemists during the Renaissance often saw the physical operations of the chemical processes, or "distillations," embodied in the divine drama of God's Creation. Many interpretations of Genesis by various Hermetic traditions portray God as the great Alchemist, separating the elements from the primordial *Mysterium Magnum* or *Illiaster*, and thus the "miracle" of the Creation story is closely associated with the alchemical processes of separation. Observing how Paracelsus managed to unite neo-platonic experimental cosmology with traditional alchemical literature, Debus remarks that:

[N]ature in a sense became a chemical laboratory. We have already pointed to his explanation of the Creation as a divine chemical separation, but with the Paracelsians almost all processes of interest were to be explained in this fashion. The formation of the earth's crust could seemingly be duplicated in chemical flasks, mountain streams were

⁶⁵ Pachter, 216

explained in terms of earthly distillations, thunder and lightening were no less than the explosion of an aerial sulphur and niter... and the rains were due to macrocosmic circulations that imitated the heating of water in the alchemical pelican.⁶⁶

It is interesting that in his attempt to understand the world around him as a dynamic relationship of chemical processes, all ruled by specific laws, Paracelsus was perhaps foreshadowing the desire of modern science to understand the governing principles, or *mechanisms*, that underlie and shape the natural world. Debus goes on to point out that we cannot over emphasize the importance alchemy or chemistry had for Paracelsus and his followers, as it became for them a structure for understanding the universe, and a means for finding truth, both physical and spiritual, in the world around them.

“No one,” explains Paracelsus, “shall say that metals are dead matter. On the contrary, their salt, sulfur, and quintessence have a great power to activate human life.”⁶⁷ For him physical matter was animated by living essences, and his vision of alchemy, as well as medicine, was the ability to extract or separate these living powers from their gross physical bodies.⁶⁸ Thus we have his frequent references to “souls of the metals,” most well known as *arcanum*, his term for that “immaterial talent” of substances that embody their “virtue.”⁶⁹ Such *arcanum* were the goal of many alchemists, and for Paracelsus it became the key to his system of medicine. Indeed, as we will find, Paracelsus was a revolutionary alchemist in the sense that his topmost priority was healing; at one point he states, “many have said of alchemy that it is for making gold and silver. But here such is not the aim but to consider only what virtue and power may lie in medicines.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Debus, *The English Paracelsians*, 29

⁶⁷ Paracelsus as quoted by Pachter, 127

⁶⁸ Hartman, quoting Paracelsus, 63; “the spirit is the life and the balsam within all corporeal things...There is nothing corporeal which does not possess a soul hidden in it. There exists nothing in which is not a hidden principle of life.”

⁶⁹ Pachter, 127

⁷⁰ Stillman, 102

It is important to take a moment and look at Paracelsus' conceptions of the four elements and three principles, and understand his definitions of such terms. The four elements was a system of categorizing the building blocks, and actual composition, of the matter of the universe, and as such served as the very basis for the traditional cosmology of antiquity. Originating in ancient Greece— although most likely associated with Aristotle – this theory posited four elements - fire, earth, water, and air – which, in various proportions and combinations with the four principle qualities of heat, cold, moistness, and dryness, produces the entire spectrum of tangible objects. Although Paracelsus rejected the traditional medical system based on the four humors – phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile – and fought against the Aristotelian elemental theory, in the end he accepted the four elements as described by Aristotle, although with significant alterations. One such change was that, for Paracelsus, the elements were not single substances, irreducible in themselves, but were rather complex and composite bodies, which only take on visible appearance due to its various combination with the other three elements. In addition, Paracelsus emphasized the idea that in each object one element was strongest or most prominent, and therefore dominated, by power of its specific virtues, the overall structure of the object.⁷¹

Walter Pagel notes that these elements were also called “matrices” in the sense of serving as a “womb” for the generation of objects in the material world, as well as containers in which such objects dwell. That alchemists referred to the elements as “hermetic vessels” should not surprise us, yet they were compared, however, not as “mere containers, but in the sense that the shape and kind of vessel used essentially and specifically influences the nature of its contents.”⁷²

We also have the idea that these elements correlate with different spheres of reality, which

⁷¹ Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 50-60

⁷² Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel, S. Karger AG, 1958), 82

Paracelsus makes clear with his comment, “the Firmament of the universe is fourfold in its essence, and divided into four planes. One belongs to matter (earth), one to water, one to air, and one to fire.”⁷³ Thus the elements had many meanings associated with them, and a clear, definite interpretation eluded even the most prominent alchemists, physicians, and natural philosophers of the day.⁷⁴ To add to the general confusion of terms comes the three principles of Paracelsus’ cosmology, whose combination with the four elements allowed the primordial *Mysterium Magnum* to differentiate into a complex variety of natural forms.

Perhaps the most distinguishing contribution of Paracelsus to the tradition of alchemy, and therefore chemistry, was his creation and establishment of the *tria prima*, or three principles. By adding Salt to the traditional Sulphur-Mercury duo as the third fundamental substance/principle in the cosmos, Paracelsus revolutionized the current conception of matter and “thus called into question the whole framework of ancient medicine and natural philosophy.”⁷⁵ Stillman goes so far as to say that with this new vision of nature, Paracelsus

constructed his more comprehensive and consistent theory of the three elements, Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt, which was destined to become the most influential theory of the constitution of matter until gradually replaced by the phlogiston theory in the eighteenth century.⁷⁶

By establishing a new theory of three primary principles, or substances, which would have dynamic interaction with the four elements, Paracelsus was able, or so he believed, to explain not only the chemical processes governing the metals, but all of nature, including human biology.

The three principles of Mercury, Sulphur, and Salt were understood to be primarily intangible essences or substances that generalize three particular aspects of natural phenomena.

⁷³ Hartmann, 116

⁷⁴ Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 57 - “even more problematical was the discussion of elementary substances on the two levels of body and soul. Whereas in one text Paracelsus might speak of the 4 elements on the highest level, as imperceptible elements or matrices, in another he might discuss them as the perceptible substances we see.”

⁷⁵ Ibid., 78

⁷⁶ Ibid., 106

In his frequently quoted analogy, in which a log is burned in a fire, the vaporous fumes are Mercury, the flames Sulphur, and the remaining ashes are Salt. In this sense Mercury represents the volatile, vaporous aspect of matter and is associated with sublimation, Sulphur represents combustibility, as well as structure, and is thus associated with substance, and Salt is the material, solid aspect of nature, and is associated with solubility. Although these three substances are understood to be invisible, they are the potential out of which all phenomena arise, and Paracelsus thought that all things in the universe are “hidden” in them as a “pear is hidden in the pear-tree or grapes in the vine.”⁷⁷ Seeing human beings as natural “forms,” Paracelsus says of these three primal substances,

The three constitute the form, and become separated only after the power of life deserts them. Their combined qualities constitute the qualities of the form, and only when life departs their separate qualities become manifest. If the three are united in due proportions, health exists in the form; but if they become separated the one will putrefy and the other will burn. Man does not see the action of these three substances, as long as they are held together by life, but he may perceive their qualities at the time of destruction of their form. The invisible fire is the sulphur, the soluble element in the salt, and the volatile element in the mercury. The fire burns, the mercury produces smoke, and the salt remains in the ashes; but as long as the form is alive there is neither fire, nor ashes, nor smoke.⁷⁸

The fact that health only exists in a form when these three principles are in balance, “due proportion,” became a major element of his diagnostic practice as a physician. Paracelsus believed that any type of illness or disease was a sure sign of an imbalance of the *tria prima*, and therefore a doctor was obligated to effect a harmonization, or re-balancing of these major principles by the usage of various tinctures or remedies. In addition, Paracelsus here makes the comment that people do not “see the action of these three substances, as long as they are held together by life,” and instead suggests that their critical role as fundamental “conditioners” of

⁷⁷ Hartman, 294

⁷⁸ Ibid., 292

natural forms can only be perceived when the life form itself perishes and the qualities themselves disperse.

One problem that has arisen in the scholarship of Paracelsus' cosmology is the absence of any clear, sharp definitions of these principles and elements. Many followers, as well as scholars, of Paracelsus were not sure of the exact relationship between the elements and the principles, some believing the former to be generated out of the latter, and others believing the latter to be generated from the former.⁷⁹ Regardless, however, of one's view concerning the exact relationship between the four elements and the three substances, it is clear that Paracelsus conceptualized the world as animated, and ultimately structured, by the dynamic interactions of both these elements and substances. While the four elements may be generally construed as more material in nature – and the three substances as more abstract, that is, in the sense of organizing principles – Paracelsus believed that these two categories of cosmological building blocks were the fundamental factors in creating, and governing, all manifest phenomena in the world.

The inconsistencies and contradictory writing style of Paracelsus offer no clear indication of specific properties of these elements and substances, leaving them to remain, for centuries afterwards, as rather vague and generally indefinable concepts that could be used in any particular way by any alchemist or chemist.⁸⁰ To compound the confusion, Paracelsus indicates that these substances are not constant and invariable properties, but rather change depending on the substance that contains them. Paracelsus says, “for as many as there are kinds of fruits – so

⁷⁹ Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 78 – “Perhaps the three substances had been offered originally as internal vulcani (innate powers) of the elements, but contradictions permitted any number of interpretations. Varying between spiritual and material meanings, the elements and principles were often pictured as almost indefinable aspects of a primal stuff that was the basis for the more complex things of this world. Little more agreement existed. Some scholars who pored over his darker passages felt that Para had meant that the elements were formed of the principles; others insisted that he really meant the opposite.”

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 57 - “Although it seems possible that he meant salt, sulphur, and mercury to act as vulcani within the elements, this was not clear to all of his followers. For them the relationship of the two elemental systems was difficult to understand; indeed, it was even possible to cite contradictory passages from within the Paracelsian corpus.”

many kinds are there of Sulphur, Salt, and so many of Mercury. A different Sulphur in gold, another in silver, another in iron, another in lead, zinc, etc.”⁸¹ Thus there are an almost infinite number of mercuries, sulphurs, and salts; for it appears that they are as numerous as natural objects themselves.

But one fact is for certain, and that is that Paracelsus’ conception of elements and substances are far different from the conceptions of those in modern chemistry. Referring to the *tria prima*, Pagel offers, “it is true that all objects have Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury in common. But these are not simply chemical constituents, in the sense of being particles of different materials. Each of them rather stands for a principle conferring on matter some faculty or condition such as structure, corporality and function.”⁸² Because of this, it is acknowledged that Paracelsus’ generalized theory of the elements and principles could not be integrated into modern chemistry, an analytic and systematic science, but rather stands apart as a still somewhat medieval philosophical system of experimentation.

Although there is a strong case for a spiritual rather than physical overall interpretation of Paracelsus’ elements and principles, we will wait to explore these ideas in the chapters dealing with the sidereal and celestial aspects of his alchemy. Despite the fact that Paracelsus seems to alternate between tangible and intangible forms of these elements, as well as emphasize the abstract notion of their nature as general properties, the case can be made that they do correlate, at least on some level, with physical, chemical processes. Pagel himself concedes that, “admittedly, sometimes the elements as well as the three principles are used in the traditional sense as indicating the actual ‘chemical’ composition of bodies. This is evident where the three principles are regarded as the actual constituents of the ‘elements’ – as it were the Elements of

⁸¹ Paracelsus as quoted by Stillman, 107

⁸² Pagel, *Introduction to Philosophical Medicine*, 102-103

the elements.”⁸³ Thus we can begin to look at the evidence suggesting a physical interpretation of his chemistry, and by listening to the words of Paracelsus himself, see how he conceptualized the phenomenon of the Philosophical Stone.

Paracelsus introduces it thus,

I am neither the author nor the executor of that Philosopher’s Stone, which is differently described by others; still less am I a searcher into it, so that I should speak of it by hearsay, or from having read about it. Therefore, since I have no certainty thereof, I will leave that process and pursue my own, as being that which has been found out by me through use and practical experiment. And I call it the Philosopher’s Stone, because it affects the bodies of men just as their’s does, that is, just as they write of their own. Mine, however, is not prepared according to their process; for that is not what we mean in this place, nor do we even understand it.

Concerning the entrance of this penetration, you shall also further note, by which entrance it penetrates the body and all that therein is. For by that penetration it restores and renews it, not that it removes the body altogether, and introduces a new body in its place, or that, like that primal matter, it infuses its spermatic Arcanum thereinto, but that it so purges the old whole body as the skin of the salamander is purged, without any injury or defect, and the old skin none the less remains in its essence and form. In like manner, this Philosopher’s Stone purifies the heart and all the principal members, as well as the intestines, the marrow, and whatever else is contained in the body. It does not allow any disease to germinate in the body; but the gout, the dropsy, the jaundice, the colic, fly from it, and it expels all the illness which proceed from the four humours; at the same time, purges bodies and renders them just as though they were newly born...Even so, all weakness fly before this renovation.⁸⁴

Paracelsus clearly delineates this Stone to be one of miraculous power, in this case for the “renovation” of men, and as such it appears in the common guise of the traditional Elixir of Life.⁸⁵ This potency is of such a rare quality that he speaks of any disease or weakness “flying” from it, leaving the person “as though they were newly born.” Although we are left wondering how exactly this Universal Medicine is to be ingested and how exactly it operates, we know with no uncertainty its non-discriminatory nature in dealing with the enemies of the human body; “it

⁸³ Ibid., 86

⁸⁴ Paracelsus, *The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 42

⁸⁵ David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996) – and Lu Kuan Yu, *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* (York Beach, Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1973)

banishes everything that has a tendency to destroy nature, none otherwise than as fire does with worms.”⁸⁶ It does not appear that he is insinuating any form of symbolic allegory here for the “purging of the body.” He does not use the term “soul” or “sidereal body” in this passage, and rather than a generalized or vague reference to a cleansing of some semi-material form of body, he specifically includes references to the heart, intestines, and bone marrow as primary recipients of the benefits of this Stone. Likewise his assertion that gout, dropsy, jaundice, and colic will “fly” from the body indicate that he is thinking in terms of materiality. He indicates that this is a fairly natural process, that is, it is not miraculous in the sense of its capacity to destroy the old body and rebuild a new one, but operates in a more organic way, purging “as the skin of the salamander is purged” and reinvigorating the original flesh and bones of the person by infusing them with its own mysterious, and almost divine, essence. Alas, we hear Paracelsus speak of the common reaction by people unfamiliar with its capabilities: “here its natural works are taken for miracles.”⁸⁷

It is also interesting to note that, from the start, Paracelsus makes an effort to differentiate between his own Philosopher’s Stone and those of the past, or contemporary, philosophers and alchemists. It is clear that he is adamant about this distinction because his references throughout his works to many such alchemists and “ancient philosophers” are thick with derogatory and degrading remarks.⁸⁸ It appears that, according to him, neither respected philosophers, nor even

⁸⁶ Paracelsus, *The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 42

⁸⁷ Paracelsus, *The Tincture of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. A.E. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 15-26

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-39 - “Since you, O Sophist, everywhere abuses me with such fatuous and mendacious words...therefore I have proposed by means of this treatise to disclose to the ignorant and inexperienced: what my art avails against you and yours against me; what should be thought of each, and how my posterity in this age of grace will imitate me....Although this would not be attested by those who are falsely considered your authentic fathers and saints, yet the ancient Emerald Table shews more art and experience in Philosophy, Alchemy, Magic, and the like, than you could ever be taught by you and your crowd of followers....Unless the contents of those books had been known, they would have been obliged to bear still his intolerable yoke, - a yoke, O Sophist, which shall one day be put upon the neck of yourself and your colleagues.”

the most famous alchemists - medieval celebrities believed to be possessors of this great Stone - had gotten it right;

...but this is not done in the way pointed out by such evil sophists as Geber in 'The Sum of Perfection,' Albertus Magnus, Aristotle the chemist in 'The Book of the Perfect Magistry,' Rhasis and Polydorus; for those writers, however many they be, are either themselves in error, or else they write falsely out of sheer envy, and put forth receipts whilst not ignorant of the truth."⁸⁹

This antagonism for past Spagyrist reveals an interesting dimension of Paracelsus the alchemist.

There is no way to know whether jealousy or envy were factors in his evaluations, but he certainly makes a big effort to debunk the Stone of the "ancients" before promoting his own.

There also remains the curious phrase at the end of his first paragraph, "for that is not what we mean here," which is difficult to understand because we do not know which authors, or which writings, to which he is here referring, but we may assume that he is indicating a traditional, and most likely common, interpretation of the Stone to which he objects.

Overall, we get a distinct sense that he is speaking literally, that is, that the Stone's primary function, at least in this context, is to offer real, physical rejuvenation to the person receiving its administration. Paracelsus continues:

This Philosopher's Stone has forces of this kind, whereby it expels so many and such wonderful diseases, not by its complexion, or its specific form, or its property, or by any accidental quality, but by the powers of a subtle practice, wherewith it is endued by the preparations, the reverberations, the sublimations, the digestions, the distillations, and afterwards by various reductions and resolutions, all which operations of this kind bring the stone to such subtlety and such a point of power as is wonderful. Not that it had those powers originally, but that they are subsequently assigned to it...In this instance Nature has left it imperfect, since she has formed, not the Stone, but its materials, which are impeded by accidents, so that it is not able to produce these effects which the Stone, after due preparation, *is* able to produce. Such material, without preparation, is, so far as regards the Stone, a mere fragmentary and imperfect substance, which has in it no

⁸⁹ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A.Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol.1*, 59

harmony whereby alone it could be called perfect, or serve the human body for healing purposes.⁹⁰

Here Paracelsus introduces the various stages, or “preparations,” of the alchemical process. These are the reverberations, sublimations, digestions, distillations, and “various reductions and resolutions” which are the quintessential descriptions of both traditional alchemy and even modern chemistry.⁹¹ Although we cannot know exactly what these processes entail, due to obscurity as well as contradictory references to them as both physical and spiritual acts, it is a clear sign that some form of systematized procedure is indicated. In addition, a very important notion is here introduced, and that is the concept of Nature as either incapable or unwilling to create the Stone in a natural course of development. Rather she can give only the raw material, a “mere fragmentary and imperfect substance,” which must be manipulated by humans in order to attain its perfect end. It is here that the alchemist, or Spagyrist, is recognized as the critical factor in the whole operation, endowing the natural substance with “supernatural” power by his artful preparations.

Indeed, Paracelsus emphasizes to no end the virtue and self-mastery that the alchemist must have in order to be successful. “For nature is so subtle and so keen in her matters,” he tells us:

⁹⁰ Paracelsus, *The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 42

⁹¹ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 68 – Paracelsus describes the basic chemical procedures for making the Philosophical Stone, yet relies mostly upon traditional alchemy for the fundamental stages of the Work: “This is the opinion of the philosophers, that when they have put their matter into the more secret fire, and when with a moderated philosophical heat it is cherishe don every side, beginning to pass into corruption, it grow black. This operation they term putrefaction, and they call the blackness by the name of the Crow’s Head. The ascent and descent thereof they term distillation, ascension, and descension. The exsiccation they call coagulation; and the dealbation they call calcinations; while because it becomes fluid and soft in the heat they make mention of creation. When it ceases to ascend and remains liquid at the bottom, they say fixation is present. In the is manner it is the terms of the philosophical operations are to be understood, and not otherwise.”

that she will not be used without great art. For she yields nothing that is perfected, in its natural state, but man must perfect it. This perfecting is called alchemy. For the baker is an alchemist when he bakes bread, the vine-grower when he makes wine, the weaver when he makes cloth.⁹²

This analogy puts the alchemist in a righteous and elevated position, because there is a certain assumption that God created the wheat and the vine for humans to make bread and wine, and thus God must also have created stones, minerals, and metals in order for the alchemist to create various tinctures, as well as the Philosopher's Stone. Here the Spagyrist is doing the will of God by perfecting what is imperfect and completing what is incomplete. Finally, just as bread and wine are physical products of physical raw materials, we may, perhaps, assume that in the mind of Paracelsus, so too is the Philosopher's Stone a literal, corporeal phenomenon.

We are again reminded of the concrete nature of these chemical processes by a further note of warning by Paracelsus to the would-be alchemist:

Moreover, in this Art nothing is more true than this, though it be little known and gains small confidence. All the fault and cause of difficulty in Alchemy, whereby very many persons are reduced to poverty, and others labour in vain, is wholly and solely lack of skill in the operator, and the defect or excess of materials, whether in quantity or quality, whence it ensues that, in the course of operation, things are wasted or reduced to nothing. If the true process shall have been found, the substance itself while transmuting approaches daily more and more towards perfection.⁹³

Here we have references to poverty and wasted material as frequent byproducts for those unfortunate Spagyrist who lack either the necessary skill or correct quantity or quality of materials. Again it is difficult to miss the clear reference to the Art as a truly material one. It is known, from literature and cultural satires, that alchemists were commonly perceived to be idealistic fools ready to sacrifice all financial values for the sake of their vain quest.⁹⁴ Stories abound of once wealthy and respected members of society who, once caught by the infamous

⁹² Paracelsus as quoted by Stillman, 37

⁹³ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 47

⁹⁴ Thompson, *The Lure and Romance of Alchemy* (London, G.G. Harrap & Company Ltd., 1932) and John Read, *The Alchemist in Life, Literature, and Art* (London, T. Nelson, 1947)

“gold fever,” lost everything they owned in their blind passion to pursue alchemy. Thus this comment on poverty and vain labor strikes a chord with the common association of alchemy with literal and very much material investments.

While some may argue for a mystical and theoretical interpretation of alchemical processes, it is hard to miss Paracelsus’ admonitions that appear to reference very literal and concrete procedures:

First of all, then, there must be learnt – digestions, distillations, sublimations, reverberations, extractions, solutions, coagulations, fermentations, fixations, and every instrument which is requisite for this work must be mastered by experience, such as glass vessels, cucurbits, circulators, vessels of Hermes, earthen vessels, baths, blast-furnaces, reverberatories, and instruments of like kind, also marble, coals, and tongs.⁹⁵

This extensive list of laboratory equipment and alchemical procedures is significant because it is straightforward, and leaves little room for metaphorizing. Likewise his comment that “every instrument which is requisite for this work must be mastered by experience,” indicates that he expected his disciples to be thoroughly familiar with such practical operations. This passage immediately conjures within our mind an image of a grungy laboratory, filled with oddly-shaped alembics and blackened tools. It is known that, as a boy, Paracelsus accumulated much knowledge of metallurgical and chemical arts because he spent some time working at the ore mines in Bleiberg. Getting dirty and covered in soot was not alien to him, and we can hear him affirming the manual labor of the alchemists, who,

...devote themselves diligently to their labours, sweating whole nights and days over fiery furnaces. These do not kill the time with empty talk, but find their delight in their laboratory. They are clad in leathern garments, and wear a girdle to wipe their hands upon. They put their fingers to the coals, the lute, and the dung, not into gold rings. Like blacksmiths and coal merchants, they are sooty and dirty... They perceive the work should glorify the workman, not the workman the work...they rejoice to be occupied at the fire and to learn the steps of alchemical knowledge.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Paracelsus, *The Tincture of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 22

⁹⁶ Paracelsus, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 167

It is with passages such as these that it becomes more difficult to explain away such references to laboratory labors as codified veilings for metaphysical practices. Indeed, Andrew Cunningham expresses his frustration at many modern day spiritual seekers who fail to acknowledge the many technical surgical treatises Paracelsus had written, and for whom “even practical chemical remedies were not to be taken literally.”⁹⁷

In terms of these concrete uses of chemistry in the alchemical laboratories, some scholars have understood Paracelsus’ alchemy to be practical.⁹⁸ Yet the confusion persists due to frequent obscure passages in Paracelsus’ works in which deliberately coded and veiled language prevent any clear interpretation. But some scholars have concluded that “far from having any intention of making himself clear, he sought protection against spying and plagiarism by deliberately omitting key factors from his formulas and prescriptions.”⁹⁹ Henry Pachter offers this interpretation, and suggests that mystifying language – as well as the claim to know the Philosopher’s Stone – were sure to help attract the attention and respect of potential wealthy patrons.¹⁰⁰

Pachter is also of the opinion that Paracelsus is more of a naturalist than a spiritualist in this sense, because his “vitalism” – the reactionary philosophy arising in the face of 19th century mechanical materialism – was itself a reaction to the medieval mechanical spiritualism. He therefore sees Paracelsus’ cosmology as founded upon a much more materialistic “vitalism,” in which his metaphysical speculation was more a result of the standard vernacular prevalent during

⁹⁷ Cunningham, *Fat and Thin Paracelsus*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation, his Ideas and Their Transformation*, 68

⁹⁸ Stillman, 98 – “The interest of Paracelsus in chemistry was on the whole practical, though his adopted philosophy and the need he felt to replace the Galenic and Aristotelian theories by new ones leads him often into theorizing... Thus in the preparation and purification of his *arcana* or simple extracts or principles of plants and minerals, he seems to have followed as a working hypothesis, his neo-Platonic concept of the spiritual sympathetic relations of all things in the universe toward man and his health. Thus if he could free the real active spirit or principle of the plant from grosser admixtures, it should be more efficacious. So he rejected the extremely complex decoctions of herbs of the customary pharmacopoeia for his simpler *arcana*.”

⁹⁹ Pachter, 112

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 118

his time than as the foundational basis for his chemistry. A final distinction he makes is that Paracelsus' materialism is unique in the sense that it was biological rather than mechanical in nature. Yet Pachter also indicates an interesting response to the obscure and fanciful language used in alchemical literature. This is the fact that many of the seemingly spiritualistic terms such as "soul," "spirit," and "essence" that alchemists are so fond of using may not, in fact, be referring to anything transcending the physical plane. He points out that, "we still use 'spirit of wine' and 'essences' to refer to extracts of substances in chemistry," as well as the fact that in our vocabulary we still use the word quintessence "to refer to the 'spirit' of a doctrine, philosophy, or poem...to get to its 'essential' core."¹⁰¹ For these reasons Pachter sees the alchemical art, literally the art of distillation, as aiming to separate the pure spirit – as a material and concrete thing – from the grosser and chemically intermixed substance. In this way, the concept of purity – not unlike the "purging" of the Philosopher's Stone – is, in his words, an "empirical material concept."¹⁰²

The historian John Stillman shares this view, and sees the phrase "simple extract" as a valid equivalent for the term *arcana*, Paracelsus' word for the principles or virtues that were responsible for healing or transmutation. He goes on to say, "thus if he could free the real active spirit or principle of the plant from grosser admixtures, it should be more efficacious. So he rejected the extremely complex decoctions of herbs of the customary pharmacopoeia for his simpler *arcana*."¹⁰³ Here we see the idea that the chemical *arcana* were simplified and refined medicinal compounds, and not at all spiritual principles or potencies. To add one more scholar who takes this line of interpretation, we have Allen Debus, who comments that this *arcana* could

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 118

¹⁰² Ibid., 118

¹⁰³ Stillman, 98

be seen as “pure medicinal quintessence,” which “could be distilled and removed from gross vegetable matter.”¹⁰⁴ Debus also acknowledges that many of the preceding medieval Islamic and Latin alchemists were already promoting such chemical concoctions for medicinal use before Paracelsus expanded upon it. He notes that:

[T]his medieval tradition of separating pure ‘virtues’ from inactive residues continued to flourish into the sixteenth century...Evidence of the use of antimony pills, solid metals, and even elemental mercury abounds in the literature of the period. But as Bostocke pointed out (1585), the true Paracelsian could be distinguished by his careful attention to dosage and his use of the chemical art to extract only the valuable essence of dangerous minerals. It was Para himself who described the process of preparing potassium arsenate from the fusion of arsenic with saltpeter.¹⁰⁵

This is yet another interpretation of the *arcana* or “virtue” that became a triumphant victor in the war against disease, and once again it is understood to be a simplified and purified essence of a material nature. It is for this very reason that many historians recognize Paracelsus as a major contributor to iatrochemistry and its various explorations of medicinal chemicals.

Another good example of confusion surrounding ambiguous terms in alchemical literature would be Paracelsus’ comment about the long sought after “Tincture of the Philosophers.” Similar to the Philosopher’s Stone in that it is accorded magical properties, Paracelsus declares that the main purpose for such a Medicine is for “transmuting the leprous moisture of the metals.”¹⁰⁶ Here the adjective “leprous” is used to describe the state of moisture within the metals, and it remains possible that this anthropomorphic term is simply a poetic, or indulgent, way of stating a purely chemical fact. Perhaps the moisture may seem leprous, but most likely this phrase was not meant literally. The final question may be whether this insignificant example of an artistic flourish in a chemical treatise can be extrapolated to show

¹⁰⁴ Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 84

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-116

¹⁰⁶ Paracelsus, *The Tincture of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 28-29

that much of the mystical symbolism of alchemical literature is nothing less than a creative, and habitual, use of metaphorical language. It appears that many believe this to be the case.

As an example of the typical veiled language, Pachter cites this passage of Paracelsus':

Do not take anything from the Lion but the Rose-Colored Blood, and from the Eagle only the White Gluten. Coagulate as the ancients have directed, and you will obtain the Tinctura Physicorum. If this is incomprehensible to you, however, remember that only he who seeks with all his heart will find.¹⁰⁷

It seems that the only word in this passage that has any explicit connection to chemistry is “coagulate,” and the rest are obscure names such as the “Rose-Colored Blood,” “White Gluten,” and “Eagle.” Surely these terms could be codes or secret references for either chemical or metaphysical processes, but the final reference to the seeker who searches after the Stone “with all his heart” makes one pause. But reminding us that the adepts of this art knew the correct way of deciphering the code, Pachter offers us his own interpretation;

[T]he lion symbolized a strong solvent; the eagle the process of sublimation. The red residue in this case probably was mercury oxide, and the white gluten may have been a metal chloride. Knowing no elements, Paracelsus was unable to name the compounds which he produced in his alembic, and it is hard for us to identify the products of his experiments.¹⁰⁸

The ability to read in between the lines proved difficult for many people seeking to understand his cryptic instructions, and here is one interpretation that suggests that perhaps even Paracelsus himself did not know exactly what he was doing. The fact that many laws of physics and chemistry were not then known leads Pachter to suspect that it was natural for a chemist to improvise in his assessments of his processes, as well as obscure his preparations in an effort to evade suspicious scrutiny.

¹⁰⁷ Pachter, 112

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 112

Perhaps one final example of this approach of interpretation will prove helpful. In an elaborate and poetic voice, Paracelsus speaks to us about one of the final stages of preparation for the Philosopher's Stone:

Thereupon follows the greatest Arcanum, that is to say, the Supercelestial Marriage of the Soul, consummately prepared and washed by the blood of the lamb, with its own splendid, shining, and purified body. This is the true supercelestial marriage by which life is prolonged to the last and predestined day. In this way, then, the soul and spirit of the Vitriol, which are its blood, are joined with its purified body, that they may be for eternity inseparable. Take, therefore, this our foliated earth in a glass phial. Into it pour gradually its own oil. The body will receive and embrace its soul; since the body is affected with extreme desire for the soul, and the soul is most perfectly delighted with the embrace of the body. Place this conjunction in a furnace of arcana, and keep it there for forty days. When these have expired you will have a most absolute oil of wondrous perfection, in which Mercury and any other of the imperfect metals are turned into gold.¹⁰⁹

The first confusion arises with Paracelsus' combined use of both mystical and practical language. The reader is instructed to take the "foliated earth in a glass phial" as well as put the "conjunction" of essences (body and soul) into a "furnace of *arcana*." It appears a mystery how *arcana*, in any of its interpretations, could serve the function of a furnace. In addition, we are told Vitriol, a chemical known to be either sulfuric acid or a sulfate salt, not only has a soul and spirit, but also can be given a "splendid, shining, and purified body." The final goal of Supercelestial Marriage takes place when this purified body is joined with the consummately prepared Soul of Vitriol – having been washed by "the blood of the lamb" – and the result is an oil capable of transmutation as well as prolonging life "to the last and predestined day." Although attempts at a serious interpretation of this passage in chemical terms are not common, one can see how it is possible to view these obscure metaphors as references to literal and physical chemical processes. Key words like Vitriol, oil, and furnace lead us to presume that at least

¹⁰⁹ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 62

somehow, on some level, there are real chemicals involved and specific procedures to follow.

Thus, through a glimpse of the first aspect of Paracelsus' alchemy, it becomes evident that chemistry and the pragmatics of chemical philosophy were significant aspects of his cosmology as a whole. In an effort to utilize his chemical knowledge of the macrocosm to counteract and cure the diseases of the microcosm, Paracelsus has been described as striving for “nothing less than a bio-chemical theory of physiology.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, he saw the “art of distillation” as offering “a method that was unchained to the logic and mathematics of the past but dependent for its truths upon new observations in laboratory and field.”¹¹¹

Attempting to solve the ultimate Mysteries by distilling and reducing physical matter to its primordial and most purified state, Paracelsus saw the entire universe as an intricately complex, yet highly intelligent system of chemical and spiritual correspondences. The fundamental principles of the chemical worldview were seen as elementary to the natural world yet malleable to the instruments of the true and skilled Spagyrist. And regardless of the various possible interpretations of Paracelsus' alchemy, it would be unfair, and perhaps uninformed, to assert that practical chemistry played little or no role in his work. Debus himself sounds self-confident when he affirms that, “there is little doubt that the practical pharmacist and others who worked in the laboratory sought evidence of these principles in their distillation products, whatever their ultimate argument might have been – theological, medical, chemical, or pharmaceutical.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Pachter, 215

¹¹¹ Debus, 61

¹¹² Ibid., 84

Chapter 4: The Sidereal Realm

Having discussed the importance of elementary chemistry in Paracelsus' system of alchemy, we will now move on to investigate the role of subtle essences and astral principles, known also as *sidera*, that abound in his treatises on alchemy, chemistry, and medicine. It is important to realize that Paracelsus conceived of corporeal matter as animated by underlying spiritual essences which were themselves intangible. It was these astral potencies that Paracelsus refers to as the "virtues" or *arcana* of substances. It appears that Paracelsus was very often concerned with the manipulation of these latent astral essences as opposed to, or in combination with, the physical elementary substances. In fact, the closer we look the more apparent it becomes that he frequently goes to great lengths to distinguish between operations concerning physical bodies and those concerning spiritual principles and potencies.

The scholar of alchemy Allison Coudert says that, "although alchemy included laboratory chemistry, it was far more...it was based on the belief that everything in the world is alive and striving for perfection."¹¹³ It is this striving for perfection, this natural tendency towards evolution, that for Coudert symbolizes a metaphysical operation; it is therefore something different from, although complementary to, practical chemistry. For this very reason alchemy, for Paracelsus, was a living, breathing process that dealt with the active dynamics of web-like

¹¹³ Allison Coudert, *Alchemy: The Philosopher's Stone* (Boulder, Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1980), 108

principles and potencies. Paracelsus' Spagyric Art was thus a science guided by the laws of correspondences, by which objects were inextricably intertwined with, and influenced by, other objects due to invisible, and apparently a-causal, relationships. It appears that nothing frustrated the German physician more than those persons who studied visible nature to the exclusion of the invisible principles beneath the surface. "So, then," Paracelsus remarks, "the mere looking at externals is a matter for clowns; but the intuition of internals is a secret which belongs to physicians."¹¹⁴

In approaching the sidereal aspects of Paracelsus' alchemy, we will find the common theme of certain phenomena being "hidden," or still "in *potentia*," within the more gross phenomena that serves as bodies for such subtle essences. This structured view of multi-tiered Being that comprises Paracelsus' cosmology is not necessarily hierarchical per se, but is likely closer to Ken Wilber's model of a holarchy.¹¹⁵ The reason for this is because his cosmology does not value certain phenomena over and above other phenomena; instead we know he became famous for his immense emphasis on the sanctity of corporeal matter. Thus gross material matter is not inferior in value to the astral principles; they simply exist on different levels of reality, and each sphere of Being has its own unique qualities and characteristics. Just as the complex human organism, with all of its intelligence and emotion, cannot exist without the foundation of muscle and bone composed of proteins and chemical compounds, so astral principles can not survive without physical bodies to contain them. Without corporeality, there is no sidereal or celestial phenomena. Yet there remains the irrefutable fact that one of, if not *the*, primary role physical matter played for Paracelsus was as containers or vessels for subtler essences and potencies

¹¹⁴ Paracelsus, *The Manual concerning the Medicinal Philosophic Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 100

¹¹⁵ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, (Boulder, Shambhala Publications, 2001), 20-60

(*arcana, balsams, virtues*).¹¹⁶ There is evidence, as we will see, that it was these astral essences Paracelsus was attempting to refine in his laboratory, and that his manipulation of physical bodies was the most efficient way to alter the latent *arcana*.

Paracelsus frequently used the term “occult” to signify various phenomena, as well as principles and laws, which were unknown, secret, or hidden to the minds of ordinary people. Apparently these secret, and largely invisible, forces were operating behind the curtains of manifest physical phenomena, and therefore they dictated the structure and forms of all natural bodies. In his usual contradictory manner, Paracelsus often turns around after extolling the benefits of practical alchemy and declares such work to be in fact useless. He appears to see such material operations as insignificant, perhaps even inappropriate, compared to the “occult” processes that took place underneath the surface. “What, then,” asks Paracelsus,

...shall we say about the receipts of Alchemy, and about the diversity of its vessels and instruments? These are furnaces, glasses, jars, waters, oils, limes, sulphurs, salts, saltpetres, alums, vitriols, chrysocollae, copper-greens, atraments, auri-pigments, fel vitri, ceruse, red earth, thucia, wax, lutum sapientiae, pounded glass....[long list] ...Moreover, concerning preparations, putrefactions, digestions, probations, solutions, cementings, filtrations, reverberations, calcinations, graduations, rectifications, purgations, etc, with these alchemical books are crammed. Then, again, concerning herbs, roots, seeds, woods, stones, animals, worms, bone dust, snail shells, other shell, and pitch. These, and the like, whereof there are some very far-fetched in Alchemy, *are mere incumbrances of work*; since even if Sol and Luna could be made by them they rather hinder and delay than further one’s purpose. But it is not from these – to say the truth – that the Art of making Sol and Luna is to be learnt. So, then, all these things should be passed by, because they have no effect with the five metals, so far as Sol and Luna are concerned. Someone may ask, What, then, is this short and easy way, which involves no difficulty, and yet whereby Sol and Luna can be made? Our answer is, this has been fully and openly explained in the Seven Canons. It would be lost labour should one seek further to instruct one who does

¹¹⁶ Paracelsus, *The Coelum Philosophorum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 8-9 – “But concerning spiritual mixture and communion of the metals, it should be known that no separation or mortification is spiritual, because such spirits can never exist without bodies. Though the body should be taken away from them and mortified a hundred times in one hour, nevertheless, they would always acquire another much more noble than the former. And this is the transposition of the metals from one death to another, that is to say, from a lesser degree into one greater and higher, namely, into Luna; and from a better into the best and most perfect, that is, into Sol, the brilliant and altogether royal metal. “
Pagel, *Introduction to Philosophic Medicine*, 117 – “There is nothing corporeal that has not a ‘spiritual thing’ hidden in itself. Hence to Paracelsus all things are alive.”

not understand these. It would be impossible to convince such a person that these matters could be so easily understood, *but in an occult rather than in an open sense*.¹¹⁷

Here he names a long list of chemicals, substances, tools, instruments, and preparation processes, only to confidently announce that all of these would “rather hinder than further one’s purpose.” What are we to make of this? He appears to either be contradicting himself as the practical chemist, or else using this passage, in a particular treatise, to draw attention to a different aspect or dimension of his alchemy. Though we know he was indeed a practicing chemist, with many recipes and medical compounds to support it; it seems that he also practiced alchemy on a subtle level for which one did not need any physical instruments, but instead the capacity to know and utilize the sidereal body. By operating on the astral plane, that is, manipulating subtle and invisible “impressions,” the laboratory instruments would be rendered “mere incumbrances,” and because the average person had no knowledge of such a sidereal world, “it would be lost labour” to try and “instruct one who does not understand” it. Finally, Paracelsus refers to what he calls the “Seven Canons” as the work that most fully explains the meaning of this esoteric passage. The Seven Canons are chapters in his treatise *Coelum Philosophorum* that deal with the “nature and properties” of each of the seven metals. These “Seven Canons of the metals” do indeed detail the unique characteristics of each metal, but they remain, however, equally obscure and ambiguous as any other of his technical treatises.

This new emphasis on subtle alchemy tends to neglect the characteristics that are so fundamental to practical alchemy: that is, the specific instructions, preparations, and recipes for creating various compounds or tinctures. “It is tedious to read long descriptions...the method of making Sol and Luna by Alchemy is so prompt that there is no more need of books, or of elaborate instruction, than there would be if one wished to write about last year’s snow,” says

¹¹⁷ Paracelsus, *Coelum Philosophorum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 13 (italics added)

Paracelsus.¹¹⁸ In this suddenly poetic phrase, it seems that he is talking about an entirely different type of alchemy; perhaps one more focused on intuitive and artistic talent than technical chemistry properly speaking. One reason why Paracelsus frequently accuses philosophers and physicians of lacking any awareness or knowledge of such hidden, “occult” levels of being is because of their overdependence upon the physical senses. In referencing philosophers of Greek antiquity who had not penetrated to “the mystery,” he says of them,

...because he did not see the roots of minerals with his bodily eyes he would even feign that they are fixed in the earth. Such is the physical science of the Greeks, deduced only from what is seen, recognising nothing occult by mental experiment. It is just a fiction of lazy men who presume to chatter about natural science from eyesight alone; and who do not experiment so as to observe those occult things which underlie the things which are manifest, the one over against the other.¹¹⁹

Here his accusation is a failure to observe the “occult things which underlie the things which are manifest,” and in doing so Paracelsus posits a binary cosmology in which material reality acts as matrix and “womb” for underlying and hidden astral principles. Here he is at odds with the practice and theory of modern chemistry, because he blurs the line between living intelligences and inert physical matter. For him, work with minerals and metals was far from a merely physical science, and he reminds us “that in projections there must be a revivification, that is to say, an animation of imperfect bodies – nay, so to speak, a spiritualization; concerning which some have said that their metals are no common ones, since they live and have a soul.”¹²⁰ The more we listen to Paracelsus, the more we will realize that his alchemy was indeed mystical; for him all corporeal nature has a soul and essence, and it remained the highest goal of the Spagyrist to “spiritualize” matter and reanimate it with living power. Paracelsus explains: “there is nothing corporeal which does not possess a soul hidden in it. There exists nothing in which is not a

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 13

¹¹⁹ Paracelsus, *The Economy of Minerals*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 93

¹²⁰ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 64

hidden principle of life. Not only the things that move, such as man and animals, the worms of the earth, and the birds of the air and the fishes in the water, but all corporeal and essential things have life.”¹²¹ One question that arises is whether these “souls” and “essences” of substances are equivalent to the “virtues,” *arcana*, or *balsams* that Paracelsus speaks of as the key ingredients to his medicines. It is difficult to give a definitive answer to this question, but from what I have seen, it seems that Paracelsus uses all of these terms interchangeably, perhaps indiscriminately, to describe the invisible forces that existed within all objects. Of course it is possible that Paracelsus had very specific definitions and contexts for these different terms – and that any attempt to equate all of them would become a gross and incorrect generalization – but the variety of contexts within which he uses these alternating terms is so great that perhaps it is wisest not to pass a final judgment.

But before we continue with an exploration of Paracelsus’ conceptions of the Philosophical Stone, perhaps we should revisit his natural philosophy with an eye out for the basic ideas and primary motifs that shape his understanding of sidereal phenomena. First and foremost Paracelsus believed that man himself is not bound by limits of the physical world, and that his mighty potential can only be revealed when he has attained a high degree of knowledge about himself. In terms of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, if one were to ultimately know himself, he would then have knowledge of, and power over, the natural world around him: “the heaven,” he says,

...is its own physician as is a dog of its wounds, but man has his shortcomings in such things. For as he is more than a mortal creature, he must have more knowledge. He must know what is in the heavens and what in the earth, what in the air, and what in the water. Why is this so? In order that he may know who he is and from what he is. If this

¹²¹ Hartmann, 62

knowledge were not necessary man would not be sick... Therefore must man observe himself and gain experience of all created things that he may know himself.¹²²

As a doctor by profession, Paracelsus established four central pillars of knowledge necessary to be successful as a physician, and these were alchemy, astrology, philosophy, and virtue. He believed a true physician must be well versed and highly knowledgeable in many different sciences in order to be the most efficacious in his work of healing. Occasionally he would divide these four pillars into five or more realms of study, and we can hear him announce the various modes and realms of study he found essential:

Of these the fifth is alchemy. The others are wisdom, which is knowledge as opposed to surmise and guess work; the firmaments, of which book the stars are the alphabet; the elements, which are all essentially present in man; the greater anatomy, by which the physical body of the microcosm is made known; experience, because the whole of medical science is nothing but a great and certain experience, and whatever acts or operates therein is founded exclusively thereon; the entire natural world, for this is the great storehouse of apothecaries and doctors: theoretic medicine, which must be founded in Nature, even as theoretic theology is founded in God; magic, because medicine should not be constituted in speculation but in manifest revelation, because disease and the medicine thereof are alike hidden, and magic is the science which makes manifest that which is concealed; the book of forms, for all medicines have their forms, of which one is visible and the other invisible, one corporeal and elementary, and the other spiritual and sidereal...¹²³

Thus the study of the stars, the upper as well as lower firmaments, the entire natural world of forms was for Paracelsus critical for man's self-knowledge: and thus *astronomia*, magic, alchemy, and finally theology became fundamental for understanding the mysteries of Nature. These mysteries, however, are clearly divided into "corporeal and elementary" as well as "spiritual and sidereal" forms, all of which can be known, but of which only the latter require immense dedication, natural intuition, a powerful imagination (*Imaginatio*), and ultimately the Grace of God.

¹²² Pachter, 43

¹²³ Paracelsus, *The 'Labyrinthus Medicorum' – Concerning the Book of Alchemy, without which no one can Become a Physician*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 165

Paracelsus believed that the creation of the world was the result of the Primordial *Fiat*, or word of God, and he named this First Cause the *Yliaster*. This *Yliaster* went by other names as well – *Mysterium Magnum*, *Iliados*, *Limbus Major* – and was similar to the concept of *Chaos* from antiquity in the sense that it represented a formless sea of potentiality, invisible and immaterial yet pregnant with an all-pervasive, intelligent force.¹²⁴ The Theosophist and scholar Franz Hartman describes this Primordial Essence as “of a monistic nature, and manifests itself not only as vital activity, a spiritual force, an invisible, incomprehensible, and indescribable power; but also as vital matter, of which the substance of living beings consists.”¹²⁵ It was the dividing, differentiating movement of the *Yliaster*¹²⁶ by the Supreme Cause – also called the *Ares* - that caused the complex manifest world of forms to be created. But it was only when the third principle – *Ares* – arose that the unified *Yliaster* gave way to the *Mysterium Magnum*, or Primordial Matter, and thus expressed itself as both vital matter and vital activity.¹²⁷ Paracelsus says of the *Mysterium Magnum*:

They all in turn descend from the ‘Mysterium Magnum’ which is the ‘one mother of all things’ and of all elements and a ‘grandmother of all stars, trees and creatures of the flesh.’ It is the ‘materia of all things’, incomprehensible, without properties, form, colour or elemental nature. It is uncreated – though fashioned by the highest artist – not mortal or perishable; there is nothing less like it and nothing can return to it. It is ‘Prima Materia’. In it objects were ‘created’ all together and at once, not one after the other, nor each with its own form, essence and qualities. The objects are there as it were by implication – just as images are contained in wood, in which they remain invisible until the surplus wood is cut away – with the difference, however, that there is no waste in the *Mysterium Magnum*; every particle.... This takes place through separation accompanied by condensation whereby invisible prime matter is converted into a visible substance – matter in the ordinary sense. This process is comparable to the separation and condensation of soot from hardly visible smoke and air.”¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Hartmann, 57-63

¹²⁵ Ibid., 58

¹²⁶ As footnoted in Hartmann, 57 – The term *Yliaster* is derived from the Greek word *Yliaster*, meaning forest, and the Latin word *astra*, meaning stars or worlds.

¹²⁷ Hartmann, 57-63

¹²⁸ Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine*, 91

Paracelsus was known to make the quip that “for the maggots the cheese is the great *mysterium*”; indeed the *Mysterium Magnum* or *Yliaster-Limbus* was seen as the underlying matrix from which all things spring, and from which spiritual principles take on the garb of corporeality.¹²⁹ Hartmut Rudolph notes this when he says, “from the *limbus* the macrocosm was created, from which, in turn, Man was made as microcosm...the term *limbus* already denotes the means or material with which spiritual, divine things become visibly, tangibly concrete.”¹³⁰ In this context the *Limbus* is both the source and the *act* of generating corporeality from invisible impressions.

It was from this manifestation of matter out of the infinite void of the *Limbus* that the four elements and three principles came into being. We have already discussed the elements and principles in the previous chapter, but we should return to them briefly in order to see how they may be interpreted as intangible essences in addition to the interpretation of them as material ones. For this we will look to Walter Pagel, a respected authority in this field, who may show us that these elements and principles are slippery to catch hold of and often too evasive to be conclusively associated with any singular definition. “The true ‘elements’ and true ‘principles’”, he says, “are forces and archetypes of finest corporality hidden in the objects of nature and imprinting on them a certain ‘signature’. They form units of ‘prime matter’, each with a spiritual and corporeal aspect.”¹³¹ In this sense the elements and principles can be *both* physical and spiritual, depending on their context. He goes on to remark that the visible, tangible elements are caused by the secondary effects of the interaction of the invisible elements:

We have, therefore, 1) some archetypes of qualities, 2) the spiritual forces which direct bodies to assume these qualities, and finally 3) the empirical objects in nature. Among these three it is the spiritual forces which are the true elements and principles, whereas empirical objects such as the ‘elements’ of the ancients and the chemical substances in

¹²⁹ Pachter, 220

¹³⁰ Rudolph, *Hohenheim’s Anthropology*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputations*, 196

¹³¹ Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine*, 86

nature are, as it were, crystallized deposits – the results of an interaction of spiritual forces which causes these forces to become more and more condensed, ‘qualified’, specialized and thus limited in power. Matter after all is indeed composed of elements and principles, but ‘composition’ must be understood in a fluid and dynamic rather than in a chemical and material sense. ‘Composition’ here means a continual process of solidification and materialization of the spirit – a process that remains reversible as long as there is even the most minute trace of the spiritual driving force of the elements and principles. These, however, can never entirely disappear, as they are visualized not as pure spirits, but as a ‘Pneuma’ endowed with and inseparable from the finest corporality...¹³²

Here Pagel is indicating that the visible forms of nature are the external covers created by the relationships between the various sidereal principles and elements. Hence, for him, Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury were not chemical substances, but “principles of constitution; representing organization (sulphur), mass (salt), and activity (mercury)... In other words, all three are ‘principles’ immanent in the ‘semina’ – agents which provide matter with the characteristic features of species and individual.”¹³³ In this way it was only during the occasion when various elements, each acting as its own *Limbus*, crystallized into differentiated forms that natural objects were created. Pagel is interpreting Paracelsus’ conceptions of the elements and principles in terms of the most common way he used them in his writings; that is, with the view that the principles were invisible and eternally underlying forces that gave all material objects their structure, form, and function. It was in this way that Paracelsus was able to elevate the status of ordinary matter to that of a potent and sacred congealizing of spirit, also called the *Ens Seminis*; for he knew that such matter took its form only from the invisible and subtle rays of spiritual potencies.

Jacob Boehme, another, albeit subsequent, German mystic, summarizes the mysterious process of the *Yliaster* as follows:

¹³² Ibid., 83

¹³³ Ibid., 87-88

The constellation is the external outspoken Word, the instrument through which the holy eternally-speaking Word speaks and produces forms externally. It is like a great harmony of many voices and musical instruments playing before God. They are interacting powers, wherein the essence of sound is the substance, and this is taken up by the desire as the *Fiat* and causes corporeality. This substance is the astral spirit. In it the elements become coagulated (corporified), and in that substance forms are born, comparable to the hatching of an egg brooded over by a hen.¹³⁴

Visualized as a cosmic egg, Paracelsus believed that all forms and beings had their origin in the “soul of the world,” symbolized as water. Franz Hartman remarks that as the egg matures in the water-soul of Wisdom, a “mucilage is formed, containing the germs of life, out of which, by *generatio aequivoca*, first the lower and afterward the higher organisms are formed.”¹³⁵ In his tract *Labyrinthus Medicorum*, Paracelsus associates this sacred process with putrefaction: “The seed planted in the earth first putrifies – whereby it is broken up and vanishes as an object in its own right. The putrefying material, however, forms the *prima materia* of that which grows out of it and from it the growing tree derives its form. Putrefaction thus leads to perfection.”¹³⁶

Paracelsus, as well as almost all alchemists, sought to distill substances into the most refined and purified state, often called the “quintessence,” or *quinta essentia*. Pachter believes this quintessence remained when the four material elements were removed, and that it “was not ‘an essence above the four elements’ but a subtle chaos, invisible, and very concentrated.”¹³⁷ The quintessence has also been identified with the “virtue” or “spirit” of a substance, and has often been understood to be the unique curative faculty of an herb or metal. Again, the similar contextualization of his terms “soul,” “spirit,” “essence,” “quintessence,” “virtue,” and *arcana* inclines one to believe that all of these titles were meant to denote, more or less, the same phenomenon. Recognizing the possibility of this

¹³⁴ Hartmann, 78, footnotes

¹³⁵ Ibid., 78

¹³⁶ Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine*, 116

¹³⁷ Pachter, 136

reductionistic generalization, I will at least admit that the subtler distinctions between these terms are beyond my understanding. Paracelsus does, however – regardless of the term he uses – emphasize the importance of the intangible potencies: “nothing of true value is located in the body of a substance, but in the virtue. And this is the principle of the *Quintessence*, which reduces, say, 20 lbs. into a single ounce, and that ounce far exceeds the entire 20 lbs. in potency. Hence the less there is of a body, the more in proportion is the virtue.”¹³⁸

In terms of the human microcosm, in which the human is anchored in both the visible and invisible realms, man is himself a living quintessence, having been extracted from both worlds and wrought into one being. With an organic composition created from both the elements and the “wisdom of the firmament,” Paracelsus declares: “Thus man is fifth essence and microcosm and the son of the whole world.”¹³⁹ Edward Arthur Waite also discusses the idea of man as a *quintessence* in the works of Paracelsus:

Man was regarded by Paracelsus as himself in a special manner the true Quintessence. After God had created all the element, stars, and every other created thing, and had disposed them according to His will, He proceeded, lastly, to the forming of man. He extracted the essence out of the four elements into one mass; He extracted also the essence of wisdom, art, and reason out of the stars, and this twofold essence He congested into one mass: which mass Scripture calls the slime of the earth. From that mass two bodies were made – the sidereal and the elementary. These, according to the light of Nature, are called the *quantum esse*. The mass was extracted, and therein the firmament and the elements were condensed. What was extracted from the four after this manner constituted a fifth. The Quintessence is the nucleus and the place of the essences and properties of all things in the universal world. All nature came into the hand of God – all potency, all property, all essence of the superior and inferior globe. All these had God joined in His hand, and from these He formed man according to His image.¹⁴⁰

This *quantum esse* was considered to be the unification of matter and spirit, an intermediary essence made of astral influences, and as such can be understood as the human soul. “Man

¹³⁸ Paracelsus, *The Coelum Philosophum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 5, footnotes

¹³⁹ Pagel, 65

¹⁴⁰ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 53, footnotes

has a body which does not spring from matter and consequently is not subject to any physician; for it was breathed into man by God, and like every breath, is intangible to our hands, and invisible to our eyes.”¹⁴¹ This astral soul is known as the *evestrum* in animals and the sidereal body in humans, and is understood to be the same size and shape of the physical body, but composed entirely of ethereal and subtle impressions.¹⁴² “The life of man,” states Paracelsus, “is an astral effluvium or a balsamic impression, a heavenly and invisible fire, an enclosed essence or spirit. We have no better terms to describe it.”¹⁴³ The phenomena known as *astra* are subtle essences, and Paracelsus held that it was the stars in the heavenly bodies that were responsible for the creation of the sidereal body. “Man’s soul,” he says,

...is made up of the same elements as the stars; but as the Wisdom of the Supreme guides the motions of the stars, so the reason of man rules the influences which rotate and circulate in his soul. The essence of man’s sidereal body, which he attracts from the stars, is of a substantial nature; still, we consider it as being something spiritual on account of its ethereality of its substance, and on account of the great dimensions of its invisible body. The essences in man’s sidereal body are intimately related to the sidereal essence of the stars, and the former attracts the powers of the latter; but man is the master over his own soul, and he can permit those attractions to occur in an irregular manner, or he may control his passions and repulse influences which he does not desire.¹⁴⁴

The stars for Paracelsus have an immense influence on the life of man, and although he believes we attract the majority of our passions, interests, and ideas from them, he ultimately holds the position that the human soul is able to “rule the stars” and not be ruled by them, by choosing which influences to attract and which to reject. He also believes that a person may send poisonous influences out to the stars, but that they will ultimately return to him in the

¹⁴¹ Paracelsus as quoted by J.R.R. Christie, *The Paracelsian Body*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputations*, 276

¹⁴² Christie, 280-281 – “For Paracelsus, the astral body was itself created at the Fall; ‘it is the ethereal body, which Adam and Eve acquired in Paradise through eating the apple; it was only by acquiring this body that Man became completely human, with knowledge of good and evil.’ Moreover, the astral body is itself mortal: ‘the sidereal, subtle body dissolves gradually and goes back to its source.’”

¹⁴³ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *De Natura Rerum*, 104

¹⁴⁴ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 310

form of disease or illness.¹⁴⁵ He was of the opinion that plagues and epidemics were the result of negative, or “poisonous,” collective influences humanity has sent out to the stars. Finally, even the thoughts we entertain in our minds are not truly ours, for “all knowledge comes from the stars, man does not invent or produce ideas; the ideas exist, and men are able to grasp them.”¹⁴⁶

Thus does knowledge of the astral body come primarily through *Astronomia*, the wisdom and knowledge yielded by study of the stars and their influences upon man as well as the fundamental corresponding relationships between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The sidereal body was seen primarily as a vehicle or instrument for the vital life principle known as *Archeus* or the *Liquor Vitae*, and as such it was ethereal in nature:

The astral soul is the shadow (ethereal counterpart) of the body, illumined by the spirit, and it therefore resembles man. It is neither material nor immaterial, but partakes of the nature of each. The inner (sidereal) man is formed out of the same Limbus as the Macrocosm, and he is therefore able to participate of all the wisdom and knowledge existing in the latter. He may obtain knowledge of all creatures, angels and spirits, and learn to understand their attributes. He may learn from the Macrocosm the meaning of the symbols (the forms) by which he is surrounded, in the same manner as he acquires the language of his parents; because his soul is the quintessence of everything in creation, and is connected sympathetically with the whole of Nature; and therefore every change that takes place in the macrocosm may be sensed by the ethereal essence surrounding his spirit, and it may come to the consciousness and comprehension of man.¹⁴⁷

Indeed, it is the sidereal man that is able to directly perceive the “virtues” and “hidden souls” of natural forms, and as such is spoken of by Paracelsus as “the eyes of the mind” and

¹⁴⁵ Hartmann, 300-314

¹⁴⁶ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 312

¹⁴⁷ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *De Fundamento Sapientiae*, 105 - also, a quote by Paracelsus on the *Liquor Vitae* as quoted by Hartmann, 92 – “The whole of the Microcosm is potentially contained in the *Liquor Vitae*, a nerve-fluid comparable to the fluidic brain-substance, and in which is contained the nature, quality, character, and essence of beings, and which ethereal life-fluid in man may be looked upon as an invisible or hidden man – so to say, his ethereal counterpart or reflection.”

“those eyes with which a physician ought to see.”¹⁴⁸ In fact it is this sidereal man, or *Evestrum*, that has the capacity to teach the physical man about many mysteries and occult principles that operate in the world around him, as well as communicate with the super-elementary world of *astra* and the beings that inhabit them.¹⁴⁹ It is thought that one of Paracelsus’ first teachers, Johannes Tritheim, Abbot of Spanheim, was a practitioner of telepathy and clairvoyance, and that he taught these abilities, as faculties of the astral man, to Paracelsus.¹⁵⁰ He spoke of the mastery of the sidereal man as the mastery of *magia naturalis*, or natural magic, and reports that:

The art of divine magic consists in the ability to perceive the essence of things in the light of Nature, and by using the soul-powers of the spirit to produce material things from the unseen universe, and in such operations the Above (the Macrocosm) and the Below (the Microcosm) must be brought together and made to act harmoniously... You will know it by the power of the spirit that is in yourself, and accomplish it by mixing your spirit with the essence that comes out of yourself. If you wish to succeed in such a work you must know how to separate the spirit and life in Nature, and, moreover, to separate the astral soul in yourself and to make it tangible, and then the substance of the soul will appear visibly and tangibly, rendered objective by the power of the spirit... But such mysteries should not be divulged, because the sceptic and scoffer will not be able to comprehend it, and to him who is covetous they will be a temptation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 98-100, footnotes

¹⁴⁹ Hartmann quoting Paracelsus from his *Philosophia ad Athenienses*, 111-112: “To speak of the Evestrum in its mortal and immortal aspects, we may say that everything has an Evestrum, and that it is like a shadow seen upon a wall. The Evestrum comes into existence, and grows with the body, and remains with it as long as a particle of the matter composing the latter exists. The Evestrum originates contemporaneously with the first birth of each form, and everything, whether it be visible or invisible, whether it belongs to the realm of matter or to the realm of the soul, has its Evestrum... The Evestrum indicates future events by causing visions and apparitions, but Trames causes an exaltation of the senses. Only those who are gifted with great wisdom may understand the true nature of Evestrum and Trames... Whenever a child is born, there is born with him an Evestrum, which is so constituted as to be able to indicate in advance all the future acts and the events in the life of the individual to whom it belongs.”

¹⁵⁰ Anna Stoddart, *The Life of Paracelsus Theophrastus von Hohenheim* (London, John Murray, 1922), 40; Also Pachter, 81

¹⁵¹ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 289-290

This command over elementary matter and natural objects has been a well-known objective of such *magia* from ancient Egypt to medieval occultists.¹⁵² Pagel defines this *magia* in technical sense, stating that “*magia* teaches the physician ‘pathology’ – how by sympathy a cosmic force (‘Ascendent’) specifically acts upon and combines with a system or substance inside the body to which it corresponds according to the analogies between Macro – and Micro-cosm.”¹⁵³ Paracelsus believed that the key factors for mastery of natural magic lay in a strong will, a deep faith, and a vivid imagination (*Imaginatio*).

He speaks of the imagination as a steel magnet in man, because “as the magnet can attract steel, there is also a magnet in the imagination, which also attracts.”¹⁵⁴ In this sense the imagination can operate on the occult qualities of natural bodies, their secret sympathies (attractions) and antipathies, by power of its thoughts and subtle impressions, and thus attract by magnetic power either positive or negative influences out of the *astrum*, or matrix of sidereal forces. “Without hands or feet, the magnet attracts iron. Like the magnet attracting the visible, the corpora (bodies) are invisibly drawn to the imagination by itself.”¹⁵⁵ Heinz Schott explains the two basic steps of this process; in the first stage there is the attraction or “incorporation” of an object by the imagination, and in the second stage there follows an “impression” of this introjected object. Thus the *imaginatio* rises up to the

¹⁵² Schott, *Imagination and Magnetism*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation*, 309-310 – “The most essential idea of natural philosophy, from the Stoics up to romanticism, claims that all bodies, including the human organism, are connected by networks of magnetic influence. This concept of magnetism, especially the concept of sympathetic interaction, covers the energetic problem: the transference of vital powers within the body or from one body to another.”

¹⁵³ Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine*, 65

¹⁵⁴ Schott, *Imagination and Magnetism*, 314

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 314

heavens where it is transmuted into an astral influence and then “falls” back down to earth as an “impression,” able to effect man by its magnetic nature.¹⁵⁶

Perhaps no one can better define the principles behind *magia naturalis* better than Paracelsus himself:

Magic, indeed, is an art and faculty whereby the elementary bodies, their fruits, properties, virtues, and hidden operations are comprehended...It teaches of and foretells from the nature of things to come as well as of things present, since its operation consists in knowing the inner constitution of all creatures, of celestial as well as terrestrial bodies: what is latent within them; what are their occult virtues; for what they were originally designed, and with what properties they are endowed. These and the like subjects are the bonds wherewith things celestial are bound up with things of the earth, as may sometimes be seen in their operation even with the bodily eyes. Such a conjunction of celestial influences, whereby the heavenly virtues acted upon inferior bodies, was formerly called by the Magi a *Gamahea*, or the marriage of the celestial powers and properties with elementary bodies. Hence ensued the excellent commixtures of all bodies, celestial and terrestrial, namely, of the sun and planets, likewise vegetables, minerals, and animals.¹⁵⁷

Magic for Paracelsus was the ability to decipher the hidden potentials within ordinary reality, but this knowledge comes from an intricate understanding of the elementary realm and its phenomena. By understanding the occult operations of all objects and processes in the world, Paracelsus believed he could apprehend what the ancients called the “Gamahea”; the complete conjunction of celestial powers with elementary bodies.

He also indicates that there is a distinction between celestial and natural magic, but the celestial magic concerns the properties of Spirit, as opposed to the elementary bodies, will therefore be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Finally, in regards to faith, or belief, Paracelsus believed its powers were much underestimated. He believed it was so powerful that he likened it to a weapon – a rifle in particular – which, when applied diligently, could be used for the benefit or detriment of the practitioner. “Whether the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 315

¹⁵⁷ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 51-52

subject of our faith be real or false,” he tells us, “the effects are alike. I may believe in St. Peter’s image as much as I ought to believe in St. Peter himself. The effect will be the same. Of course, that is superstitious; but faith achieves the miracle whether it be the right or wrong faith.”¹⁵⁸ Thus the question is not whether or not the *imaginatio* has the power to affect sidereal, and material, phenomena, but how one chooses to utilize his “magnetic” imagination. In this sense the imagination is seen as the astral tool with which the Magus, or in this case the Spagyrist, is able to manipulate elementary matter by its capacity to engage and alter the underlying sidereal forces of the ethereal world.

As we have seen, Paracelsus believed that the surface reality of material objects was only the first level of a multi-tiered universe, and this level was itself the result of underlying, unseen forces. These forces, understood as the elements and principles, was for Paracelsus extremely important to see, touch, and understand. He chides the physician who cannot see these invisible principles at work:

If you hold wood in your hand, then by the testimony of your eyes you have only one body. But it is of no advantage for you to know this. The clowns see and know as much. You should descend and penetrate beneath the surface, when you would learn that you are pressing in your hands Sulphur, Mercury, and Salt. Now if you can detect these three things by looking, touching, and handling them, and perceive them separated each from the other, then at last you have found those eyes with which a physician ought to see. Those eyes ought to see these three constituents as plainly as the clown certainly sees the crude wood...Before all else these three substances and their properties in the great universe should be understood. Then the investigator will find the same or similar properties in man also: so that he now understands what he has in his hands, and of what he is making himself master.¹⁵⁹

The analogy here used is apt because it demonstrates the distinction between visible and invisible substances. To see a piece of wood as a singular object – which is what we do with our “bodily” eyes – is the ultimate crime in Paracelsus’ mind, because it indicates an ignorance of the deeper

¹⁵⁸ Paracelsus as quoted by Pachter, 241

¹⁵⁹ Paracelsus, *Paramirum, Liber I*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 100, footnotes

structures and layers of the object's constitution. Only when we can perceive the underlying substances that comprise the wood – which we can only see with “those eyes with which a physician ought to see” – will we be able to penetrate into the real nature of things.

Likewise, he asserts that the “physical body has the capacity to produce visible organs, but they all take their origin from the invisible body.”¹⁶⁰ For the physician, being able to use the sidereal body as functionally as the physical one allowed him to see directly the astral *balsams*, *arcanum*, *virtues*, or “potencies” of various bodies. It was these intangible but powerful “impressions” that allowed herbs to heal, metals to undergo transmutations, and the Philosopher's Stone to become manifest. “If the astral element in man can be sent into another man by the power of his Olympic spirit, such an astral element may also be embedded in metals and leave its influence in them, and thereby the metal may be raised to a higher state, than the one into which it was put by Nature.”¹⁶¹ The alchemist was able to “impregnate” metals, or any type of body for that matter, with occult qualities because they had to be specifically refined in order to be able to retain such astral impressions. All of these impressions, however, were individual aspects of the primordial *Archaeus*, or *Astrum*, which served as the universal “vital-fluid” of the universe.¹⁶²

Yet another way to understand *Archaeus*, however, is in its close association with *Vulcanus* as an intelligent driving force of nature, aimed at perfecting the imperfect, and leading the gross prima material towards its “ultimate matter.” Hartman affirms that one division

¹⁶⁰ Paracelsus as quoted by Pagel, 4

¹⁶¹ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 299-300

¹⁶² Paracelsus, *De Caducis, Parairum II*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 37, footnotes: “The earth also has its Astrum, its course, its order, just as much as the Firmament, but peculiar to the element. So also there is an Astrum in the water, even as in the earth, and in like manner with air and fire. Consequently, the upper Astrum has the Astra of the elements for its medium, and operates through them, by an irresistible attraction. Through this operation of the superior and inferior Astra, all things are fecundated, and led on to their end.... Without the Astra the elements cannot flourish... In the Astrum of the earth all the celestial operations thrive. *The Astrum itself is hidden, the bodies are manifest*.... The motion of the earth is brought about by the Astrum of the earth.... There are four Astra in man (corresponding to those of the four elements), for he is the lesser world.” (italics added)

between the practical chemistry of Paracelsus and the subtler art of alchemy is that alchemy deals with the vital-essences of *life*, as opposed to the material constitutions of physical matter.

He suggests that,

...the growth of a tree out of a seed, the evolution of worlds, the development of precious metals out of an apparently worthless matrix, the growth of a foetus, the development of an animal or human being, etc., are alchemical processes, because life itself enters into these processes, as a factor, and they would not take place without the action of life.¹⁶³

Thus the *Vulcanus* was understood by Paracelsus to be the “workman” who guided this process of entelechy, and he believed that every human being has its own inner *vulcan*. This inner *vulcan*, or *archaeus*, was seen as a master alchemist, who, “by circulating and preparing, according to the nature and difference of each separate substance, by sublimation, distillation, and reverberation, puts the finishing stroke to the process. All these arts are prefigured and practised within the body of man, no less than without, in Alchemy.”¹⁶⁴ The *archaeus* within man was most closely associated with the stomach for Paracelsus, especially in light of its crucial role of separating the nutrients from the waste of food, and was thus often called the “alchemist within.”¹⁶⁵

Not only did Paracelsus subdivide the human body into various limbs, each with its own specific *archei*, but he also discussed how the earth, and any other planet for that matter, had its own *Archaeus*. “The terrestrial *archaeus*,” he says, “digests, promotes putrefaction, generates and augments the seed put into the earth, with the assistance of the firmament, so that fruit can grow and serve as food for animals and man. It is through the *Archaeus* of the earth that all seven

¹⁶³ Hartmann, 289

¹⁶⁴ Paracelsus, *The ‘Labyrinthus Medicorum’*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 167

¹⁶⁵ Christie, *The Paracelsian Body*, 282 - “Just as the archeus of the stomach (its shaping, directive power), which separated and purified nutrition from poison, was called the ‘inner Vulcan’ or the ‘alchemist within’, so alchemical process and apparatus mimicked that archeal action and setting. The inner Vulcan sublimates, distils and reverberates: ‘All the arts are prefigured and practised within the body of man, no less than without, in Alchemy.’ IN this conception, the triad of alchemist, stomach and Paracelsian ‘kitchen’ are an obviously connected set, linked by functional correspondence.”

metals are born in the mountains.”¹⁶⁶ Seen in this light, alchemy, or medicine, was far more than the manipulation of physical substances, because there existed a plethora of intangible potencies that must also be manipulated and harmonized. Pagel notes this with respect to Paracelsus’ expertise as a doctor:

[H]e must know the inner mechanisms of the pathogenic agent, its position in world of correspondences, its parents in the greater world, and its affinities with human organs and with metals, minerals and plants in order to effect a cure...[he must] divine a system of associations at work invisibly behind phenomena... in this intuitive and natural way, the physician operates like an Archeus.¹⁶⁷

This “intuitive and natural way” signifies the use of the subtle science of correspondences in order to effect cures or transmute metals. Paracelsus did indeed “divine a system of associations at work invisibly behind phenomena,” and following in the long line of occult and esoteric philosophers, he saw many corresponding influences between metals, planets, plants, tinctures, and certain organs or parts of the human body. “If I have ‘manna’ in my constitution,” he tells us,

I can attract ‘manna’ from heaven. ‘Melissa’ is not only in the garden, but also in the air and in heaven. ‘Saturn’ is not only in the sky, but also deep within the earth and in the ocean. What is ‘venus’ but the ‘Artemisia’ that grows in your garden? What is ‘iron’ but ‘mars’? That is to say, venus and Artemisia are both the products of the same essence, and Mars and iron are both manifestations of the same cause. What is the human body but a constellation of the same powers that formed the stars in the sky? He who knows what iron is, knows the attributes of Mars. He who knows Mars, knows the qualities of iron. What would become of your heart if there were no sun in the universe?¹⁶⁸

This language evokes the powerful theme of the Micro – Macrocosm analogy. When Paracelsus asks the rhetorical questions – “what is ‘iron’ but ‘mars’?” – he is drawing attention to the paradox of the Micro-Macrocosm analogy. This is because although the universe at large and the individual body of man are clearly dissimilar in a number of ways, there still remains a

¹⁶⁶ Paracelsus as quoted by Pagel, 107

¹⁶⁷ Pagel, 110

¹⁶⁸ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *The Paragranum*, 288

cosmological and constitutional similarity that allows one to say with a certain level of authority: “so above, so below.” In other words, “iron” is “mars” because of the law of correspondences, but this statement is not true in a literal sense, but rather analogically. It is in this frame of reference that he compares the alchemist to the earth in its role as living womb; “let gold be the seed, you be the growing power. Let the earth be the furnace whence you will lead the gold to fruition.”¹⁶⁹

Finally, it is important to realize that the sidereal man, or astral soul, is only one of seven principles that Paracelsus delineates as the constitution of man. Briefly, these seven principles, also called the “seven modifications of one primordial essence,” are the various aspects of the different dimensions existent within the human organism. The first principle is the elementary body, and as we have discussed, this is the physical body constructed of the material elements. Secondly there is the *Archeus*, or *Mumia*, which is the all-pervading vital life-fluid that gives rise to various astral phenomena. The sidereal body we have discussed at length is the third principle. The fourth principle is what he calls the “animal soul”, and is considered to be the soul of beasts, that is, one concerned primarily with animal instincts. The fifth principle is the “rational soul,” and as a soul capable of reasoning and maturing intellectually is recognized as the human soul. What he calls the “spiritual soul” is the sixth principle, and is thought to embody the human ability to develop and awaken spiritually. Finally, the seventh principle is the ultimate Spiritual principle, and is known either as the personal God or Spirit itself. This principle Paracelsus names “the man of the new Olympus,” and its conscious recognition was understood to be the ultimate goal of the hermetic life. By reviewing this outline of man’s constitution, we can see how Paracelsus clearly conceived of the human organism as a multi-leveled being that included

¹⁶⁹ Hartmann, 110

various aspects and dimensions of subtlety.¹⁷⁰ Because the human experience included the material, astral, and spiritual spheres, Paracelsus saw the human being as a complete and perfect reflection of the universe at large – that is, as a Macrocosm – and thus gave humanity a central role in the Divine Drama. “You call man a microcosmos, and that is right,” he says,

...but you don't know how to interpret it and we shall do it for you. Just as the sky has its constellations, so man is constellated in himself mightily. Just as the firmament is self-governed and not subject to any creature, so man's firmament is not subject to anything that has been created. Heaven and earth are one, and man is something else... Thus you shall understand that man has in himself his firmament, his planets, conjunctions, constellations, aspects, sidera, and the like.... The body gives food to itself. Some members need food from the outside, but something is in the body that is fed through the firmament in the body. The food which we eat is like the manure in the field; it makes it fertile and maintains its substance. But life, intelligence, and spirits, come from the firmament.¹⁷¹

Here Paracelsus illustrates the Micro-Macrocosm analogy with the example of food. Just as the physical body requires food from an external source, so Paracelsus believed that “something that is in the body” is “fed through the firmament in the body.” This idea is central to the Micro-Macrocosm theory, because it implies that within the individual body of man exists an entire – albeit miniature – firmament, complete with “his planets, conjunctions, constellations, aspects, sidera, and the like.” It is this interior firmament that feeds the spiritual components of the human being, and allows him to interact with the various levels, worlds, and beings of the different cosmological realms.

Having briefly reviewed Paracelsus' intricate cosmology and anthropology, we are better equipped to understand a new dimension of his alchemy, and a new aspect of his Philosopher's Stone. Knowing that he discussed such chemical processes with many different levels of reality in mind, we can be prepared to interpret mundane and ordinary sounding language, in addition to

¹⁷⁰ Hartmann, 103-107

¹⁷¹ Paracelsus as quoted by Pachter, 138

the more obvious references, to apply to subtler dimensions of matter. This is so because for every material object or substance in the world there corresponded an invisible or sidereal impression, and often times it was these subtler forms of the *Limbus* that Paracelsus was attempting to manipulate and transmute. We do, however, have his own definition of “true alchemy”; “to grasp the invisible elements, to attract them by their material correspondences, to control, purify, and transform them by the living power of the Spirit – this is true alchemy.”¹⁷²

In this way Paracelsus talks of the Philosopher’s Stone as a “perpetual *balsam*,” which agrees “with a like *balsam* in the human body for the purpose of restoring and conserving its highest state of health and driving away disease.”¹⁷³ This *balsam* was one of the many names he gave to the astral life-principles or potencies he saw existing in natural bodies.¹⁷⁴ His primary goal appears to be the extraction and manipulation of these life-principles, and therefore he developed his own system for penetrating physical matter in an effort to reach the inner most essences. Yet for him such inner potencies, although invisible to the eye, had the capacity to stabilize and preserve the external bodies of objects.¹⁷⁵ Instructing his audience on the process of distilling, or extracting, the vital *balsam* from natural objects, Paracelsus says, “the first thing to be considered in its extraction is the quantity present in the given body, for our intention regards

¹⁷² Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *The Paragranum*, 288

¹⁷³ Paracelsus, *Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 98, footnotes

¹⁷⁴ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *The Chirurgia Magna*, 38 - “There is, indeed, diffused through all things a Balsam created by God, without which putrefaction would immediately supervene. Thus, in corpses which are anointed with Balsam we see that corruption is arrested, and thus in the physical body we infer that there is a certain natural and congenital Balsam, in the absence of which the living and complete man would not be safe from putrefaction. Nothing removes this Balsam but death. But this kind differs from what is more commonly called Balsam, in that the one is conservative of the living and the other of the dead.”

¹⁷⁵ Paracelsus, *Eight Book of the Archidoxies*, trans. & ed. E.A. Wate, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 69: “For every elixir is an inward preservative in its essence of that body which shall have taken it, even as the extrinsical balsam is an external preservative of all bodies from putrefaction and corruption, a fact which is evident enough in balsam, that is to say, it preserves bodies so that they abide many hundreds and thousands of years without corruption or change.”

not the body, not the form, but solely the inherent balsam by which it lives.”¹⁷⁶ This emphasis on *arcanum*, *virtue*, and *balsam* indicates a movement away from physical, practical chemistry and a shift towards a more complex and mystical alchemy that sees magical transmutation, miraculous cures, and substantial longevity as its priorities. With this in mind we will return again to his discussion of the Philosopher’s Stone.

The secretive and veiled language employed by many occultists and philosophers has been called “the green language” by some, and is a known method of protecting certain secrets that they felt were not appropriate to disclose to the public.¹⁷⁷ Speaking in this way, Paracelsus tells us about the ancient philosophers and their understanding of the Philosopher’s Stone:

The philosophers have prefixed most occult names to this matter of the Stone...for they have called it vegetable, animal, and mineral, *but not according to the literal sense*, which is well known to such wise men as have had experience of divine secrets and the miracles of this same Stone. For example, Raymond Lully’s ‘Lunaria’ may be cited. This gives flowers of admirable virtues familiar to the philosophers themselves; but it was not the intention of those philosophers that you should think they meant thereby any projection upon metals, or that nay such preparations should be made; *but the abstruse mind of the philosophers had another intention*. In like manner, they called their matter by the name of *Martagon*, to which they applied an occult alchemical operation; when, notwithstanding that name, it denotes nothing more than a hidden similitude.¹⁷⁸

Here is a clear indication that more than the mere manipulation of material substances is required for the creation of the Stone. Paracelsus spends several pages discussing the errors of past philosophers in their attempts to describe and name their Stone, as well as the material out of which it was created. He slowly debunks those who claim the nature of the Stone to be from the animal kingdom, as well as those who claim that it originates from the vegetable or mineral kingdoms. By dismissing such definitions of the Stone as limited or altogether incorrect, we

¹⁷⁶ Paracelsus, from *Chirurgia Magna*, as footed noted by Waite in *The Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 102

¹⁷⁷ Jay Weidner and Vincent Bridges, *The Mysteries of the Great Cross of Hendaye: Alchemy and the End of Time* (Vermont, Destiny Books, 1999), 37

¹⁷⁸ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 53 (italics added)

begin to see that Paracelsus' conception of the Stone is one that partakes of the various occult and "hidden" dimensions of natural phenomena. By stating that the "abstruse mind of the philosophers had another intention," he is invalidating any literal interpretations of the alchemical procedure and positing the possibility of unknown, symbolic, or occult processes that are the true foundation for this Art. Indeed, we hear him tell us in no uncertain terms, "the matter of this (Philosopher's Stone), as certain writers have mentioned, is above all else difficult to discover and abstruse to understand."¹⁷⁹

Paracelsus' consistent declination to speak more clearly or more openly about the secrets of this Art are not at all unique to him as an alchemist. Rather, this "secret language" of paradoxes and riddles was a trade mark of alchemy throughout its long history. Mircea Eliade, the Romanian historian of religions, is perceptive in his analysis of this confounding idiom:

What we are dealing with here is a 'secret language' such as we meet among the shamans and secret societies and among the mystics of the traditional religions. This 'secret language' is at once the expression of experiences not otherwise communicable by the medium of daily speech, and the cryptic communication of the hidden meaning of symbols. We must also point out that this paradoxical ubiquity and inaccessibility of the Philosopher's Stone reminds one of the general dialectic of things sacred. The hierophanies, owing to the very fact that they manifest the sacred, change the ontological regime of things: base or insignificant, a stone, a tree, a stream, as soon as they incorporate the element of the sacred, become prized by those who take part in this religious experience. The alchemist's emergence on another spiritual plane, with the aid of the Philosopher's Stone, may be compared with the experience of the homo religious who assists in the transmutation of the cosmos by the revelation of the sacred.¹⁸⁰

Eliade equates the mystical practices of alchemy, and the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone, with a "revelation of the sacred." His point here is that, similar to many types of mystical experience, a culminating realization of spiritual import – in this case the completion of the alchemical process – is often times incommunicable by daily speech. In

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 65

¹⁸⁰ Eliade, 164-165

other words, one cannot talk about the ineffable. Only poetic allusions, analogies, and paradoxes can have any hope of describing it.

In naming the fundamental essence of the Philosopher's Stone a "perpetual balsam,"

Paracelsus indicates the existence of a finer corporality in its structure:

[I]n order that the Philosopher's Stone, which, for sufficient reasons, we call a perpetual or perfect balsam, may be made by means of *Vulcan*, it must first of all be known and considered in what way that Stone may be placed materially before our eyes, and become visible and cognizable by the other senses; and, in like manner, how its fire may be made to come forth and to be recognised.¹⁸¹

Firstly, it is striking that there must be employed a method for rendering the Stone materially visible to our eyes, as well as "cognizable" by our other senses. Despite much description of the Stone that indicates its physical nature, here Paracelsus reveals that it exists in essence before it is captured in a material form. Indeed it appears that a large part of its preparation lies in this effort to draw forth its fire and "virtue", and embody it in physicality. He goes on to compose an analogy using the example of what he calls "common fire." He says that fire in and of itself cannot be known unless it acts upon some other object and therefore reveals itself via its effects and reactions to such an object. This is because it exists in potentiality within the air, and as such is invisible to us: it is only drawn into visible form and retained in such a form by the host of a dry solid piece of matter, such as a log of wood.¹⁸² In the same way, the Philosopher's Stone can only be seen corporeally by its effects and influences upon the human organism. "Now, then," he says, "as the fire shews its effects in the wood, so is the same thing produced with the

¹⁸¹ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 96

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 98 – "take common natural fire for an example. This is invisible to us, wherefore it must be sought in the air where it is latent, and is to be found by the striking together a flint and steel. Now it does not owe its existence to these, but to the air, and is only retained by some dry object such as firewood. For the dryness immediately takes hold of its heat and that which is like itself..."

Philosopher's Stone, or the Perpetual Balsam acting on the human body.”¹⁸³ This philosophic Stone, he stresses, must be made of the correct material and “have a special adaptation” to the human body, so that “it renovates and restores the vital organs just as though logs were put on a fire.”¹⁸⁴

In this sense, the *Lapis Philosophicum* itself is not a corporeal form but rather a potential and ultimately spiritual force, and thus its preparation and manifestation involve intricate work manipulating subtle astral forces found within nature. For this reason Paracelsus declares the true physician must have the “eyes of his mind opened” and the ability to see through gross physical matter into the hidden contents within.¹⁸⁵ In this vein, he speaks of the vital essences that lie dormant within the metallic bodies and the importance of these *arcana* in awakening the dormant “faculties” of *life* in the human body:

If, then, life be the fire and heat of the natural form united to the humidity of its own matter by light, as is clear from Genesis, and the light lives more brightly nowhere than in bodies least liable to corruption, what will prevent the heat of the fire and the radical humour in the metals, each being incorrupt, from rousing in the organs joined to human life this vitality that is well-nigh dormant? For these are sleeping in metallic bodies alone, and in a state of repose, as a man overcome with sleep lies as if dead, and is only moved by respiration, but not in his body. As the spirit of metals, if it be liberated from its bodily sleep, will perform movements and action as if its own in any body that is applied to it, none otherwise must we judge of human bodies. While these are sick the vital spirits in them sleep; they are not able to breathe truly or freely on account of their corrupt domicile. But when the corruptions of darkness are removed from the body, not by an extraneous physician, but by Nature itself, fortified by medical aid, and with an accession of extraneous life, that is to say, of incorruptible metals, the vital spirits in men exercise their movements freely. It is no wonder, then if miraculous cures are wrought by Spagyric physicians...Hence the distinction between the Spagyric and the Greek medicine is clearly seen. The latter sleeps with the sleepers; the former, watchful and free from all slumber, rouses the dormant faculties of life.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid., 96

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 96

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 100, footnotes

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 99, footnotes

This eloquent analogy reiterates the frequent theme of “revivication,” or spiritualization, that is invoked to describe the mystical process of bringing to life sleeping forces. Here the Stone is seen as the vehicle of vitality that “lives more brightly nowhere than in bodies least liable to corruption” and as such is associated with the most refined and purified metals. When the “spirit of metals, if it be liberated from its bodily sleep,” is extracted, purified, and then administered to a human being, it would rouse “in the organs joined to human life this vitality that is well-nigh dormant.” It is also important to remember that when Paracelsus refers to these “incorruptible” metals, he is often speaking of “revivified” metals as opposed to what he calls “vulgar” metals: “vulgar silver and gold are dead, while those of the Philosophers are full of life.”¹⁸⁷

It appears that Paracelsus saw alchemy as a process of drawing activity and form out of pure potentiality, and in this way he was acting as God who separated the world out of the primordial *Yliaster*. He attempted to create the Philosophical Stone out of the invisible “innate warmth” of the elements, and was fond of terming this intangible essence “radical humidity.” In question and answer portion of his treatise *A Short Catechism of Alchemy*, he describes what he considers to be the fundamental process of creating the Stone:

Q: What is this Stone?

A: The Stone is nothing else than the radical humidity of the elements, perfectly purified and educed into a sovereign fixation, which causes it to perform such great things for health, life being resident exclusively in the humid radical.

Q: In what does the secret of accomplishing this admirable work consist?

A: It consists in knowing how to educe from potentiality into activity the innate warmth, or the fire of Nature, which is enclosed in the centre of the radical humidity.¹⁸⁸

It is difficult to understand what exactly he means when he states that the essence of the Stone is “the radical humidity of the elements,” and that this radical humidity is purified into a “sovereign fixation.” It may be fair to assume that such a “radical humidity” refers to some form of spiritual

¹⁸⁷ Paracelsus, *A Short Catechism of Alchemy*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 294

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 294

principle, not unlike those of the elements or the principles of the *tria prima*, and as such serves as the central and most primal living essence that animates corporeal matter. It would be this invisible balsam that is “fixed” in some purified metallic body or container, and utilized as a spark or flame – “the fire of Nature” – to re-animate dormant faculties in the human organism.

This theme of Nature’s fire, and the potential for the Philosopher’s Stone to act as a “innate warmth” or “vaporous fire” whose mutations could be “extended almost endlessly, just as one light kindles a second, and this second a third,” is one that appears again and again in Paracelsus’ writings.¹⁸⁹ Just when he discusses the prime matter, or *prima materia*, of the Stone in terms that we can understand – “our matter is united to a red fixed Sulphur, to which a third part of the regiment has been entrusted...[it] may remain therewith together with its fire, and may consist of a weight equal to the matter itself” - he turns around and invokes the “green language” that the alchemists adore above all else:

Therefore, after the matter has been adapted and mixed in its proportionate weight, it should be closely shut up with its seal in the vessel of the philosophers, and committed to the secret fire. *In this the Philosophic Sun will rise and surge up*, and will illuminate all things that have been looking for his light, expecting it with highest hope.¹⁹⁰

Here we are left to wonder what this “Philosophic Sun” is, and how exactly it rises and “surges” up out of the Prime Matter of the Stone. Furthermore, he mentions what he calls the “secret fire,” and as we will discover, this fire is itself esoteric because it is not associated with the usual qualities of an “earthly fire.”¹⁹¹ Indeed, we get the sense that within the secret fire lies another

¹⁸⁹ Paracelsus, *The Fifth Book of the Archidoxies*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 43

¹⁹⁰ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 71 (italics added)

¹⁹¹ Paracelsus, *The Coelum Philosophorum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol.1*, 11 - “The celestial fire which flows to us on the earth from the Sun is not such a fire as there is in heaven, neither is it like that which exists upon the earth, but that celestial fire with us is cold and congealed, and it is the body of the Sun. Wherefore the Sun can in no way be overcome by our fire.”

impenetrable mystery, and its other name – “the philosophic fire” – itself indicates its ethereal or other-worldly nature. Paracelsus declares:

Fire alone is the whole work and the entire art. Moreover, they who build their fire and keep their vessel in that heat are in error. In vain some have attempted it with the heat of horse dung. By the coal fire, without a medium, they have sublimated their matter, but they have not dissolved it. Others have got their heat from lamps, asserting that this is the secret fire of the philosophers for making their Stone... Thomas Aquinas speaks falsely of this fire, saying that God and the angels cannot do without this fire, but use it daily. What blasphemy is this!... All the heats excited by those means which have been mentioned are utterly useless for our work... Almadir says that the invisible rays of our fire of themselves suffice. Another cites, as an illustration, that the heavenly heat by its reflections tends to the coagulation and perfection of Mercury... Again, says this same authority, “Make a fire, vaporous, digesting, as for cooking, continuous, but not volatile or boiling, enclosed, shut off from the air, not burning, but altering and penetrating. Now, in truth, I have mentioned every mode of fire and of exciting heat. If you are a true philosopher you will understand.” This is what he says... All these matters shew quite openly to us the occult fire of the wise men.¹⁹²

It is difficult to imagine what type of a fire is neither “volatile or boiling” and does not burn, but is rather “vaporous, continuous, and penetrating,” and is enclosed and “shut off from the air.”

This does not sound like the ordinary fire used in the kitchen, as Paracelsus makes clear by listing various types of fire – in fact “every mode of fire and of exciting heat” - and then concluding that “all the heats excited by those means which have been mentioned are utterly useless for our work.” We are left having to imagine a fire that “alters and penetrates” with no access to oxygen, “digests as for cooking,” and whose efficacy instead lies in the power of its “invisible rays.” He finishes this statement with the declaration that “if you are a true philosopher you will understand,” which is a clear sign that he is speaking of secret and hidden powers not known to the average individual. This is exemplified by his very use of the term “occult fire of the wise men”; and he is likely expecting that those who are uninitiated into the mysteries of this science will find such passages incomprehensible.

¹⁹² Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 70

Again, he speaks of the secret fire: “This heat, glowing above our vessel, must urge it to the motion of a perfect generation, temperately but continuously, without intermission.”¹⁹³

There remains an immense emphasis on the continuity of this fire, with the warning that all can go to ruin if this fire is not constantly tended to and watched over. Although it may sound easy, this vigilance could prove to be difficult work, as the instructions for the process of “cooking” can call for thirty or forty days at a time. Thus does he say that although the preparation of the Stone may appear short and simple, “nevertheless, it requires a prolix labour, difficult in its adjuncts, and requires an operator who is affected by no weariness, but is in the highest degree active and expert.”¹⁹⁴ Another perplexing attribute of this “occult fire” is that its heat “glows above our vessel,” and although this could be interpreted to mean the vaporous heat or smoke that rises in the alembic, the frequent form of the alchemical vessel was one that appears to be heated from underneath. Regardless of the attempt to visualize the form of his alembic, the descriptions of the “philosophic fire” leave little doubt for his audience that certain occult and secretive processes are here at work, and that any attempt to follow his procedures with a literal interpretation is not only ineffectual, but dangerous.¹⁹⁵

It is indeed a mysterious fire, at least in the terms of Paracelsus’ description, but it appears that not only is the fire itself occult, but so are all the tools to be used. “Sham philosophers have misunderstood the occult and secret philosophic vessel,” Paracelsus tells us.¹⁹⁶ It appears that even the common instruments used in his practical chemistry are not to be literally understood here. “For the vessel” itself, says Paracelsus – that is, what is most commonly

¹⁹³ Ibid., 70

¹⁹⁴ Paracelsus, *The Fifth Book of the Archidoxies*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 43

¹⁹⁵ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Philosophers’ Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 103 – “the right use of them [hidden potencies] is not easy, especially to the unskilled; so that if any one attempts them he causes more harm than good. For this reason it is not advisable that every alchemist should seek to practise the art of medicine when he has no acquaintance with it.”

¹⁹⁶ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 68

associated with the practical laboratory equipment of a glass alembic or retort, “is a living and corporeal spirit.”¹⁹⁷ This comment in its original context reads:

[A]ll things are concealed in all. One of them all is the concealer of the rest – their corporeal vessel, external, visible, and movable. All liquefactions are manifested in that vessel. For the vessel is a living and corporeal spirit, and so all coagulations or congelations enclosed in it, when prevented from flowing and surrounded, are not therewith content.¹⁹⁸

In this way it is the job, the function, of the “corporeal vessel” to act in the same manner as any material body, that is in the sense of serving as a receptacle for the indwelling and living vital essences. The fact that the prevention of “all coagulations and congelations” from flowing in their natural state retards the progress of the substance to its ultimate destination as “perfected matter” is an indication that the vessel must be prepared and utilized in such a way that it facilitates, not unlike the *Vulcan*, the evolutionary process that Nature herself initiates.

Finally, the association of this hidden fire with the spiritual powers of the sun, in the sense of revitalizing and awakening dormant principles, is reminiscent of the passage about the Philosopher’s Stone we looked at earlier. This was the passage identifying the power of the Stone as one that partakes of the mystical act of instilling the spark of life and vitality into dormant and sleeping faculties. For this hidden fire, says Paracelsus;

...possesses, therefore, a state and power, common to all fires which lie hid in secret, *of vivifying*, just as the sun is appointed by God, and heats all things in the world, both occult, apparent, and manifest, as the spheres of Mars, Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, and the Moon, *which can shine only as they borrow their light from the Sun, and are in themselves dead*. When, however, they are lighted up, as said above, they live and work according to their special properties.¹⁹⁹

Thus the all-pervading vital-essence symbolized by the sun, but represented also by the “hidden fire” or “astral matrix,” is what carries the true essence of *life*. Just as the various

¹⁹⁷ Paracelsus, *The Coelum Philosophorum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 5

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁹⁹ Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 74

planets only become alive and capable of working “according to their special properties” when they are reflecting the light of the sun, so all beings can only become truly alive when the astral influences within them are activated by the living *Archaeus*. In the same way, the Philosopher’s Stone acts as such an *archaeus* or *vulcan* that revitalizes and sparks the dormant faculties of the human body, allowing such a person to attain perfect health and actualize their full potential.

Finally, in his *Manual Concerning the Philosopher’s Stone*, Paracelsus offers one set of directions for the preparation of the Stone:

Take some mineral electrum filings. Put it in its own sperm (others read, take the immature mineral electrum, place it in its own sphere), so that all impurities and superfluities may be washed away from it, and purge it as completely as possible by means of stibium, after the manner of the alchemists, so that you may suffer no harm from its impurity. Afterwards, resolve it in the stomach of the ostrich, which is born in the earth, and is strengthened in its virtue by the sharpness of the eagle. When the electrum is consumed, and, after its solution has acquired the colour of the calendula, do not forget to reduce it into a spiritual pellucid essence, which, indeed, is like amber. Then add half as much of the spread eagle as the corporal electrum weighed before its preparation. Frequently extract from it the stomach of the ostrich, by which means your electrum becomes continually more and more spiritual. But when the stomach of the ostrich becomes weary with labour, it is necessary to refresh it and always to abstract it. Lastly, when it again loses its sharpness, add tartarised quintessence, but so that that the height of four fingers it may be deprived of its redness, and may pass over together with it. Do this for so long a time and so often until it grow white of itself. When, now, it is enough (for you will see with your eyes how it will gradually fit itself for sublimation), and you have this sign, sublimate. Thus the electrum is turned into the whiteness of the exalted eagle, and with very little labour it is transferred and transmuted... With this you will be able to succeed in many diseases which refuse to yield to vulgar medical treatment. You will also be able to convert this into a water, into an oil, and into a red powder, and to use it for all purposes for which you require it in medicine.²⁰⁰

Electrum was thought to be a very refined and purified metallic body whose composition somehow contained the combined virtues of all seven metals.²⁰¹ The fact that a substance that

²⁰⁰ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 102-103

²⁰¹ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 297 – “If we make a composition of seven metals in the proper order and at the proper time, we will obtain a metal which contains all the virtues of the seven. Such a composition is called

was considered to be very rare and difficult to attain was the primary matter of the Philosopher's Stone reveals that Paracelsus expected one to had to have mastered the many levels of the Spagyric art before he could even attempt to manifest the sacred Stone. It is difficult to decipher what he means by putting the electrum "in its own sperm" or "in its own sphere," but even more enigmatic is his order to resolve this concoction in the "stomach of the ostrich." Surely this is a metaphor for some occult container, and it would not be surprising if it were somehow fashioned out of the astral matrix, designed to contain specific invisible impressions. Likewise, "the sharpness of the eagle" could easily refer to some astral vibration, or even abstract quality or characteristic. For instance he refers to such qualifications as mercury being "volatile" or a vitriol being "fixed"; perhaps the "sharpness of the eagle" indicates a certain quality of being of the material.

Paracelsus also explicitly uses phrases such as "pellucid essence," "tartarised quintessence," or "by which means your electrum becomes continually more and more spiritual." These types of terms, as we have seen, can symbolize various ethereal and subtle essences, as opposed to material substances, and thus we can deduce that, most likely, this passage is referring to a subtle, perhaps even purely psychic, level of phenomena. In addition, he calls this form of astral iatrochemistry "true medicine" as opposed to "vulgar medical treatment" of the average doctors, and declares that this Stone will be able "to succeed in many diseases" where such gross medicine will fail. Finally, he reveals a critical piece of information at the end of this passage, and that is that the Stone can be used in the form of water, oil, or powder for whatever uses necessary. It appears ironic that, after all, he does not even speak of it existing in the form of a Stone at all. Instead, used as either a liquid, an oil, or a powder, this potent concoction would

'electrum'. It possesses the virtues of the seven metals that enter into its composition, and the electrum is one of the most valuable preparations known to secret science. The ordinary metals cannot be compared with it on account of its magic power."

most likely lack any distinguishing features or recognizable traits, instead resembling any number of tinctures, oils, or medicinal powders scattered in the doctor's bag. Regardless of its outward appearances, however, we know Paracelsus held it to be the Treasure of Treasures for the alchemist and physician alike, signifying the attainment of an altogether divine *balsam*.

One final comment about the Philosophical Stone before we move on is that during the process of its preparation there were certain stages in which various colors were observed to appear, often indicating the transition between stages of the procedure. "Afterwards, when the dryness begins to act upon the humidity, various flowers of different colours simultaneously rise in the glass, just as they appear in the tail of the peacock, and such as no one has ever seen before. Sometimes, too, the glass looks as though it were entirely covered with gold," explains Paracelsus.²⁰² These phenomena appear to be observable by the bodily eyes, but perhaps he meant that these colors were perceived by the sidereal man instead. Some scholars, in particular Carl Jung, have suggested that such visions could be psychic energies projected onto the physical matter by the unconscious mind, and in such a case these would not be literal and material phenomena. This could be the case, as we know that much of the previous passage was directed towards astral processes, yet perhaps it would be unfair to assert that there was absolutely no corresponding activity on the physical plane.

But there remains one interesting correspondence I would like to draw attention to briefly, and that is a certain level of similarity between some of the astral principles described by Paracelsus and those of the Eastern alchemists from India and China. In my paper on various forms of internal alchemy as practiced by the Indian and Chinese adepts, I looked at various methods and systemized processes of manipulating, and ultimately transmuting, subtle energies

²⁰² Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirit of the Planets*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 83

within the bodies of the practitioners.²⁰³ Whether referred to as the “embryonic fetus” that is nurtured and ultimately birthed by the practicing Taoist alchemist or the *Kundalini-Shakti* that rises up the *susumna*, the spinal column, to unite with the male principle of *Shiva* in the uppermost *cakra* of the Indian yogi, both of these ancient traditions worked with certain maps of the physiological structures and psycho-spiritual energy networks of the human body. These Eastern alchemists also speak of witnessing visions and bright colors during their practices, as well as experiencing apparently superhuman powers, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, or healing faculties. Just as Paracelsus talks of an “inner alchemist,” the personal *archaeus*, so the Indian and Chinese philosophers saw themselves as alchemists purifying their own body in the hopes of internally generating an “elixir of youth” or “body of gold.” I wonder whether Paracelsus ever conceived of the human body itself as the alembic or vessel in which the various transmutations – in this case of astral energies that are spoken of in terms of analogical references to chemical and alchemical substances – take place.

In this way he would be doing what the scholar of alchemy Adam McLean describes as “mirroring the transformations and processes of alchemy within our soul,” and thus practice the “exercises of inner distillation, though this works on a more subtle plane.”²⁰⁴ He further explains that “we should try to experience the retort as a womb or matrix in which the process of gestation or new birth arising out of primal components, can safely take place in us,” and specifies what this process entails: “the alchemical processes that go on in this retort usually involve the meetings of polarities, such as Separation and Conjunction, or of Dissolving and

²⁰³ See my paper, entitled *The Alchemy of Internal Yoga in India and China*, May 9, 2004

²⁰⁴ Adam McLean, *The Alchemical Vessel as Symbol of the Soul*, The Alchemy Website, <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/vessel.html>, organized by Adam McLean and sponsored by Dan Levy from www.levity.com, 2

Coagulation.”²⁰⁵ Perhaps somewhere, on some level, or simultaneously with material and psychological transformations, Paracelsus himself was discussing an astral alchemy that would render the successful Spagyrist youthful, healthy, and fully able to utilize the sidereal body to manipulate all subtle, and perhaps even physical, forms at will.

Regardless of whether Paracelsus ever did practice an astral alchemy within his own body, we know that he practiced a form of astral alchemy on the various animal, vegetable, and mineral substances that he worked with in his laboratory. Having explored multiple facets of the sidereal aspect of his alchemy, it becomes clear that alchemy on the whole for Paracelsus was far more than simple combinations and separations of material elements. Alchemy for Paracelsus was a living, intelligent process by which Nature perfects herself. “As the fowl produces a chicken with wings and legs out of the small microcosm contained in the shell of an egg,” says Paracelsus:

so the *arcana* of Nature are ripened by the processes of alchemy. Natural alchemy causes the pear to ripen, and produces grapes on a vine. Natural alchemy separates the useful elements from the food that is put into the stomach, transforms it into chyle and blood, into muscles and bones, and rejects that which is useless. A physician who knows nothing of alchemy can only a servant of Nature, however well versed he maybe in the science of external things; but the alchemist is her lord. If the physician cannot infuse vitality into decaying parts he cannot effect a cure, but must wait until Nature accomplishes the task; but he who can guide the power of life can guide and command Nature.²⁰⁶

In this way the alchemist sets himself up in comparison to the First Cause, God, who by the power of the Macrocosm separates the Primordial *Yliaster* and differentiates it into a myriad of forms. The Spagyrist, by operating form the Microcosmos, is able by corresponding relationships to manipulate not only the microcosmic phenomena, but also all material, sidereal, and spiritual aspects of the Macrocosm as well.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 3

²⁰⁶ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 291-292

As we have seen, Paracelsus sought to distill and purify the true essences of metals by controlling and manipulating the astral principles of salt, sulphur, and mercury, as well as the four elements, and in this way “transmute” the *prima materia* into its perfected and ultimate state. This teleological process was an innate potency of all incarnated matter from the *Yliaster*, and this intelligence toward progression, evolution, and growth was the ultimate *Vulcan*, the highest *Archaeus*. It was the goal of the Spagyrist to assist Nature in this process, utilizing his skills to empower the already present entelechy. Just as the baker uses his skills to “cook” the wheat –the *prima materia* – and turn it into bread, so the alchemist “cooks” various metallic, vegetable, or mineral bodies in order to obtain subtle essences – *arcana*. These *arcana* could in turn be used as medicines and tinctures, amulets and talismans, or ingredients for prized artifacts such as the Philosopher’s Stone. By manipulating the ethereal planetary influences, the alchemist could “impregnate” or “fixate” such impressions into certain metallic bodies, and they were used as occult objects because of their ability to retain such energies. The method for obtaining such *arcana* was by a righteous act of distillation; such extraction, reduction, or separation was considered a holy act. Paracelsus tells us that, “separation is the cause of existence, the birth of things from the *Mysterium Magnum*. It is the greatest wonder known to practical philosophy; it is a divine art. He who can attract things of the *Mysterium Magnum* is a true alchemist.”²⁰⁷ True alchemy, for Paracelsus, was a conscious participation in the perfecting and vitalizing movement of Nature’s cyclic processes, and the true Spagyrist was one who could, by consciously identifying with his inner *archaeus*, participate both physically and spiritually in such processes.

²⁰⁷ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 291

Chapter 5: The Celestial Realm

The elementary and sidereal realms of Paracelsus' alchemy, as we have seen, represent levels of phenomena operating within the material and astral spectrum of creation. It is time now to investigate the final realm of his cosmology, that of the celestial aspect, through which we will discover that there existed for him a profoundly spiritual dimension to the alchemical process. In addition, by listening to Carl Jung and other scholars' interpretation of alchemy as a systematic, although perhaps unconscious, integration of psychic energies, we may come to see the psychological aspect of Paracelsus' alchemy. If we manage to see these facets of his alchemy in conjunction with the sidereal and elementary components, it might allow for a fully integrated view of his alchemical *Opus*, and reflect the dynamism he himself was attempting to achieve. The fact that celestial and divine powers were an integral part of his cosmology signifies that his alchemy and Philosopher's Stone, regardless of their material aspects, were also given a highly sanctified role.

Mircea Eliade, in his book on alchemy, *The Forge and The Crucible*, writes: "if our analysis and interpretation are well founded, alchemy prolongs and consummates a very old dream of *homo faber*: collaboration in the perfecting of matter while at the same time securing

perfection for himself.”²⁰⁸ Understanding the alchemical process to be intensely personal, that is, also aimed at achieving perfection of the soul, Eliade continues:

...for such reasons, alchemy cannot be reduced to a protochemistry. In fact, when it became an elementary chemistry, the alchemical world of meaning was on the verge of disappearing. Everywhere we find alchemy, it is always intimately related to a ‘mystical’ tradition: in China with Taoism, in India with Yoga and Tantrism, in Hellenistic Egypt with gnosis, in Islamic countries with hermetic and esoteric mystical schools, in the Western Middle Ages and Renaissance with Hermetism, Christian and sectarian mysticism, and Cabala. Consequently, to understand the meaning and function of alchemy, we must *not* judge the alchemical texts by the possible chemical insights which they may contain. Such an evaluation would be tantamount to judging – and classifying – great poetical creations by their scientific data or their historical accuracy.²⁰⁹

Eliade is emphasizing the point that any reduction, or simple association, of the entire alchemical process with only the scientific, chemical, aspect of its operations would miss the entirety of its metaphysical and psycho-spiritual dimensions. His reference to the frequent correspondence between alchemical practices and the various mystical traditions within which they were embedded is an effort to draw attention to the mystical and thoroughly spiritual dynamics of the Spagyric art.

While such a symbolic and allegorical interpretation of Paracelsus’ alchemy may be beneficial for the effort to view his philosophy as a whole, it in no way demeans or degrades the practical component of his iatrochemistry. Instead the goal is to perceive the physical, sidereal, and spiritual spheres operating simultaneously in his operations. It is with this understanding that Françoise Bonardel states that the complex Spagyric art “is at once laboratory practice and illuminative gnosis.”²¹⁰ He goes on to remark that, “‘alchemy’ presents itself immediately as a path where work upon matter and desire for immortality converge, inasmuch as alchemy seeks

²⁰⁸ Eliade, 169

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 182-183

²¹⁰ Bonardel, 71

an inspired master of the cosmic energies which draw back to their glorious destiny.”²¹¹ In this sense the “perfection of the alchemical gold,” as literal as it is often portrayed, might also serve as an analogy for the perfection and purification of the human soul. Indeed, it appears that this interpretation is quite a common one, and may be a close second – after the literal, practical interpretation – in terms of popularity for explaining this enigmatic science. Coudert certainly appears to agree with this line of construal when she writes:

The fire and furnace were nothing but symbols for the traumatic and painful ordeal suffered by each individual who tried to transform into gold the base matter within his own soul. All the ingredients mentioned in alchemical recipes – the metals, minerals, acids, compounds and mixtures – were, in truth, only one, the alchemist himself. He was the base matter, the sulphur and the mercury, which had to be purified in the fire; and the acid need to do this came from his own intense, spiritual malaise and his longing for wholeness and peace.²¹²

This lens of interpretation places the human being, the alchemist himself, within the heated stove of the alembic, and posits that the longed-after transmutation is nothing less than the complete transformation of the human soul. But before we continue this line of interpretation, let's hear what Paracelsus himself has to say about the celestial realm.

“Having three worlds in him and living in three worlds, man should learn to know the lower elements, understand the sidereal, and know the eternal.”²¹³ This is Paracelsus' description of man's threefold nature, and he urges his followers to understand, or “know,” all three realms equally. He proceeds by stating that “physical man takes his nutriment from the earth; the sidereal man receives the states of his feelings and thoughts from the stars; but the spirit has his wisdom in God.”²¹⁴ Thus we have the elementary realm of nature comprehended through the study of chemistry and natural philosophy, the sidereal sphere understood via astronomy, and the

²¹¹ Ibid., 74

²¹² Coudert, 107

²¹³ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 313

²¹⁴ Ibid., 313

celestial domain known through the wisdom, or virtue, of the Divine. Yet the bias of Paracelsus towards theosophy is clearly demonstrated when he adds, “but the principle of the supreme wisdom of the universe penetrates into the centre, illuminates it, and rules over all.”²¹⁵ The Primordial *Yliaster*, from which springs all aspects and dimensions of phenomena as we know it, is itself the essence of the Divine Principle, and therefore it “penetrates the centre,” and “rules over all.”

Positing the existence of an animal and angelic “reason” within man, Paracelsus eschews those who identify primarily with the “temporal and illusory” reason of the animal instinct to the neglect of the “eternal” reason bestowed upon man by God: “a man who is not a man as far as wisdom in him is concerned, is not a man but an animal in human shape.”²¹⁶ For the man who had not developed and learned to use the spiritual faculties he was given by birth, life became a continuous, and ultimately mindless, reaction to animal instincts. But the man who strives for knowledge of God and his Divine Mysteries is able to pierce the illusions of temporality and achieve ultimate wisdom. “All numbers are multiples of one,” he declares:

[A]ll sciences converge to a common point, all wisdom comes out of one centre, and the number of wisdom is one. The light of wisdom radiates into the world, and manifests itself in various ways according to the substance in which it manifests itself. Therefore man may manifest reason in a threefold manner: as instinct, as animal reason, and spiritual intelligence. The knowledge which our soul derives from the physical and animal elements is temporal; that which it derives from the spirit is eternal. God is the Father of wisdom, and all wisdom is derived from Him. We may grow into knowledge, but we cannot grow knowledge ourselves, because in ourselves is nothing but what has been deposited there by God... The highest power of the intellect, if it is not illuminated by love, is only a high grade of animal intellect, and will perish in time; but the intellect animated by the love of the Supreme is the intellect of the angels, and will live in eternity.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid., from *De Fundamento Sapientiae*, 313

²¹⁶ Ibid., 319-320

²¹⁷ Ibid., 325-326

There remains a deep faith in the power of the Grace of God for Paracelsus, and thus man himself can achieve nothing without it. Instead “all wisdom is derived from Him,” and therefore “man’s spiritual aspirations should be directed to harmonize with the wisdom of God.”²¹⁸

It is important to realize that Paracelsus’ theology was thoroughly grounded in the Christian tradition, and although he resisted the contemporary reformist movement of the Protestants, led by Calvin and Luther, his fundamental conceptions of the human soul, its teleological movement towards God, and the Trinitarian expression of the Divine Power remain closely associated with those of many other medieval Christian mystics and theologians. Thus does he envision the “glorified body” that is the true soul of man, and the body that would serve as man’s vehicle for the life after death:

[T]he body which we receive from our parents, and which is built up from the nutriment it draws directly and indirectly from the earth, has no spiritual powers, for wisdom and virtue, faith, hope, and charity, do not grow from the earth. They are not the products of man’s physical organization, but the attributes of another invisible and glorified body, whose germs are laid within man. The physical body changes and dies, the glorified body is eternal. This eternal man is the real man, and is not generated by his earthly parents. He does not draw nutriment from the earth, but from the eternal invisible source from which he originated.²¹⁹

The paradoxical nature with which the three-fold essence of man is here compressed into a more simplified binary system composed of a material and a spiritual “glorified” body, is a typical trait of both alchemical and theological treatises in general, and Paracelsus’ writings in particular. We are not sure whether this “glorified body” is the same as the sidereal body of man, or if it is a third, transcending, dimension of the human incarnation. Regardless of the specific context of this case, we know that he often spoke of man’s nature in terms of a dualistic anthropology; that is, with an earthly and a heavenly body. Thus does Hartmut Rudolph explain that “just as the Adamic-earthly man metabolizes the fruits of the earth by digestion into mortal flesh and blood

²¹⁸ Ibid., 313-314

²¹⁹ Ibid., 328-329

and in this fashion grows, so too, the heavenly body grows by its being nourished from the heavenly manna, the body and blood of Christ, which sometimes can be called the spirit of God or the word of Christ.”²²⁰ This is the “eternal invisible source” from which all beings originate, and from which the eternal part of man continues to draw its sustenance.

In addition, Pagel returns to remind us of the nature of the *Cagastrum*, which is “the sum total of all disruptive processes leading to the splitting of matter into individuals,” and a phenomenon associated with “a fall from Olympic heights down to this valley of miseries which is Nature.” “Because of the ‘*Cagastrum*,’” he writes:

[A]ll created things are mortal and return to nothing. After all, creation is but a process of separation and therefore transitory. Yet there is redemption. It is wrought by Christ’s atonement, by rebirth. As his successor and as a receiver of his sacramental body, the Christian will assume his ‘glorified flesh’. It is the return of the divine element in man – his ‘sacramental matter’ or ‘spiritual body’ – to God, just as the elemental body returns to the ‘prime matter’ of the elements. Man as a microcosm, an epitome of the whole world outside him, will thus through his own immortality preserve the whole of the world.²²¹

Here Pagel explicitly uses the term “sacramental matter” in reference to the “divine element” that resides in man, and this sacred matter returns to God. From this we may interpret the spiritual, “glorified” body of man to be differentiated from the sidereal man because of the fact that the astral form itself dissolves, as does the elementary body, while the “spiritual body,” being eternal, returns to be with God.

By understanding this glorified body to be distinct from the common sidereal body, we can see past the contradictory phenomenon of Paracelsus’ alternation between speaking of a triple and double nature of the human organism. He did indeed talk of man as having an “earthly as well as heavenly body,” but he also went to great lengths to describe the human as consisting of a trinity of bodies; “the body comes from the elements, the soul from the stars, and the spirit

²²⁰ Rudolph, 193

²²¹ Pagel, 114

from God.”²²² Having looked at the correlation between the “essence of the elements” as well as “the soul of the stars” and the various levels of Paracelsus’ alchemy, we can finally look at the sphere of spirit, or *life*, and its relationship to the alchemical process.

One interesting fact to note is that much of Paracelsus’ Spagyric instructions are contextualized in a highly religious cosmology. It appears that undertaking the alchemical journey, with the goal of attaining the Philosophical Stone, was paramount to engaging in an intimate relationship with God and the divine principles through which He worked:

Having first of all invoked the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, we will enter upon this Work; in which we shall not only teach how to change any inferior metal into better, as iron into copper, copper into silver, and silver into gold, but also to heal all infirmities which to the pretentious and presumptuous physicians seems impossible; and – what is more still – to preserve men to a long, healthy, and perfect age. This Art was bestowed by the Lord our God, the supreme Creator, graven, as if in a book, in the body of the metals from the beginning of Creation to this end, that we might diligently learn from them....[when one wants to learn the Art] it will be necessary that he should learn the same from the Master thereof, that is, from God, who created all things....We will therefore take Him to be our Master, Operator, and Leader into this most veritable Art. Him alone will we imitate, and through Him learn and attain to the knowledge of that Nature which He Himself has, with His own finger, engendered and written on the bodies of these metals....[hence it will come to pass] that in this work we may be able to bring our beginning to its desired end, and to attain the deepest joy and charity in our hearts.²²³

By taking God to be the “Master, Operator, and Leader into this most veritable Art,” Paracelsus reveals the theological dimensions of his alchemy. Contrasted against the independent investigations of practical chemists – practiced by both Paracelsus’ contemporary iatrochemists as well as modern day “scientific” chemists – the “true Spagyrist” would only dare to begin labor once he had established a highly personal yet reverential relationship with God. God the Father was seen as the ultimate source of wisdom, and therefore “Him alone will we imitate.” For “those who believe that they can learn anything without the assistance of God will fall into

²²² Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, 312

²²³ Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 72

idolatry, superstition, and error.”²²⁴ Finally, it is telling that Paracelsus envisions one of the central aims of this sacred Art to be the attainment of “the deepest joy and charity in our hearts.” This brief statement alone indicates that the achievement of the Philosopher’s Stone was far more than a material, or even sidereal, endeavor, and that the classic Christian virtues of charity, love, and selflessness were considered to be absolutely critical, if not extraordinarily important, for such a Work. The emphasis by many alchemists, not just Paracelsus, on the virtuosity and piety of the Spagyrist suggests that they conceived of this Art as an aspect of the evolution of their souls.

Again, for many alchemists, and not Paracelsus alone, there existed some form, if blurred and vague, of a correlation between the spirit of Jesus Christ and the spirit of the Philosopher’s Stone. “It is evident,” Paracelsus explains,

that the philosophers called their Stone animal, because in their final operations the virtue of this most excellent fiery mystery caused an obscure liquid to exude drop by drop from the matter in their vessels. Hence they predicted that, in the last times, there should come a most pure man upon the earth, by whom the redemption of the world should be brought about; and that this man should send forth bloody drops of a red colour, by means of which he should redeem the world from sin... Concerning this mystery Mercurius speaks as follows to King Calid: - ‘This mystery it is permitted only to the prophets of God to know. Hence it comes to pass that this Stone is called animal, because in its blood a soul lies hid. It is likewise composed of body, spirit, and soul.’²²⁵

The belief that “in its [the Stone] blood a soul lies hid,” can be extrapolated to demonstrate that on another level, perhaps allegorically, such philosophers believed that the true redeeming potency of Christ was hidden *in potentia* within his blood and therefore his soul – that is, his suffering and death upon the cross. In this sense, the true redemption of man by Christ would have more to do with the symbolism of his suffering, death, and resurrection than with the blood of his earthly incarnation.

²²⁴ Paracelsus as quoted by Hartmann, from *De Funamento Sapientiae*, 325-326

²²⁵ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 56

Yet at the same time we cannot risk reducing his theology to a purely theoretical one, Paracelsian scholar Dane Thor Daniel reminds us, because even if such symbolism and analogy are to be found in Scripture, Paracelsus, “the physician and natural philosopher, makes the eternal more concrete by emphasizing its natural dimensions.”²²⁶ Paracelsus treasures the solid corporeality of earth, and thus “talks about the generation, growth, and nourishment of the new [‘glorified’] body, and even discusses the eternal soil in which the eternal food grows and from which comes the material of the new body.”²²⁷ Agreeing with this view of Paracelsus as a mystic committed to the practical reality of elementary phenomena, Hartmut Rudolph argues that,

[T]he fullness and complexity of the forms of [Paracelsus’] argumentation...grows out of the tension which consists on the one hand in the spiritual origin of this heavenly birth and its nourishment (that is to say, its origin in the spirit of God) and, on the other hand, in the attempt nonetheless to elucidate the mysterious happening of the birth and the growth of the new creature from the *limbus aeternus* as a bodily process, indeed, to explain it as a comprehensible process by forming an analogy with natural reason, with natural-Adamic corporeality. Para sees himself quite expressly as a successor to the apostle Thomas, who, so to speak, puts the heavenly-clarified body of Christ which has appeared to him to the test: ‘ein greiflich prob’ (‘a tactile test’), i.e. proving by sensory experience, is possible and necessary.²²⁸

By adamantly seeking to understand the corporeal nature of the super-celestial phenomena, Paracelsus thus becomes a “successor to the apostle Thomas.” Indeed, if one of the central aims of this process was to purify and thus elevate the primal matter of the earth, surely Paracelsus envisioned a similar transmutation occurring in the alchemist himself; “so also man must become that which he is not...In a word, whatever is to pass into its ultimate matter must become something different from what its origin was.”²²⁹ The steady evolution from gross, physical man into his ethereal soul or “glorified body” is central to this process. Possessing a soul, says Ute

²²⁶ Dane Thor Daniel, *Paracelsus on Baptism and the Acquiring of the Eternal Body*, ed. Gerhild Scholz Williams and Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., *Paracelsian Moments: Science, Medicine, and Astrology in Early Modern Europe* (Missouri, Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 2002), 119

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119

²²⁸ Rudolph, *Hohenheim’s Anthropology*, 193

²²⁹ Paracelsus, *The Economy of Minerals*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 91

Gause, “is like possessing an organ for the recognition of heavenly interventions”; and this is because “the flesh of Adam does not see God, but the flesh of the new birth through Christ: this sees God.”²³⁰ Thus the rebirth of man in Christ, or the word of God, can be seen as a similar metaphor to the *Magnum Opus* of the alchemists, both of which speak of the ineffable transformation of the human soul and its ultimate communion with the Divine. For this reason Titus Burckhardt states that the “alchemical transmutation brings the centre of human consciousness into direct contact with that divine ray which irresistibly attracts the soul upwards and lets it savour by anticipation the Kingdom of Heaven.”²³¹ In this terminology the base substance, or prima materia, is the “centre of human consciousness”; the perfected gold, or Philosopher’s Stone, is the “kingdom of heaven”; and the evolutionary teleology that initiates, and completes, the entire alchemical process is the “divine ray which irresistibly attracts the soul upwards.”

Having reviewed briefly the various aspects of Paracelsus’ theology and epistemology, it is time to turn to the insightful correlations put forth by the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, as well as Nigel Hamilton and Titus Burckhardt, between the alchemical steps of transmutation and the psychological “reunification” of the individual psyche with the collective unconscious, also known as “individuation.” It will be, however, primarily under the guidance of Jung’s intuitive interpretation that we may begin to understand the profound, and dauntingly complex, dimension of man’s spiritual “regeneration” in Paracelsus’ alchemy. This is because few scholars have penetrated as deeply as Jung into alchemical literature, and fewer still have articulated the theories of psycho-analytic interpretations of alchemy as clearly as does Jung. Despite the fact that this dimension of Paracelsus’ alchemy will be heavily centered on the theories of Jung, my

²³⁰ Ute Gause, *On Paracelsus’ Epistemology in His Early Theological Writings and in His Astronomia Magna*, ed. Peter Grell, *Paracelsus, the Man and his Reputation*, 218

²³¹ Burckhardt, 73

hope is to be able to apply such theories ourselves to the works of Paracelsus in an attempt to analyze his alchemy.

Jung believed that alchemy was a process, either conscious or unconscious, of integrating various aspects of the psyche; he believed that this Spagyric *Opus* was, in actuality, “an attempt to come to terms with the unconscious, to understand the archetypal world of the psyche and, at the same time, to avoid the sanity threatening fascination with the depths, paradoxes and heights of psychic truths.”²³² Despite much evidence for the physical component of alchemy, Jung sees behind its laboratory techniques a backdrop of psychological and psychic phenomena from which the practical aspects ultimately arise. “For all their intensive preoccupation with matter as a concrete fact,” he tells us, “they followed this psychic trail, which was to lead them into a region that, to our way of thinking, had not the remotest connection with chemistry.”²³³ This would be one explanation of the symbolic and allegorical descriptions found in many medieval alchemical treatises, including those of Paracelsus’, that appear out of place in the technical preparations for chemical concoctions. The reason for such poetic metaphors, and ultimately the commingling of physical and psychic phenomena in general, is, in Jung’s opinion, due to a phenomenon he calls “projection.” This is the process by which unconscious contents of the human psyche, often in terms of the archetypal processes of “individuation,” become the lens through which other phenomena, such as physical matter, are seen and understood. In other words, such matter appears to embody, and thus represent, in *concrete forms*, the purely psychical phenomena of the individual’s personality. Jung himself explains it best:

This was a time when the mind of the alchemist was still grappling with the problems of matter, when the exploring consciousness was confronted by the dark void of the unknown, in which figures and laws were dimly perceived and attributed to matter

²³² Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 170-172

²³³ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 124-125

although they really belonged to the psyche. Everything unknown and empty is filled psychological projection; it is as if the investigator's own psychic background were mirrored in the darkness. What he sees in matter, or thinks he can see, is chiefly the data of his own unconscious which he is projecting into it. In other words, he encounters in matter, as apparently belonging to it, certain qualities and potential meanings of whose psychic nature he is entirely unconscious.²³⁴

One key element of this "projection" is that it is unconscious: "simply speaking, projection is never made; it happens, it is simply there."²³⁵ In this way the alchemist "experienced his projection as a property of matter," because he did not realize that the various behavior of the chemical substances were in actuality psychical in nature, and therefore had its origin in the operator's psyche. It was for this reason that Jung goes on to say that "the alchemist did not practise his art because he believed on theoretical grounds in correspondence; the point is that he had a theory of correspondence because he experienced the presence of pre-existing ideas in physical matter."²³⁶

Although Jung appears certain that such projections were unconscious, he seems to have absorbed some of the paradoxical and self-contradictory habits of the alchemists he so devotedly studied. On the one hand, he sees the alchemist as hopelessly naïve, for whom "there was nothing at that time to convince [him] of the senselessness of his chemical operations," and whose processes consisted in "an unending series of futile and barren chemical experiments."²³⁷ In Jung's view the alchemists were unaware of the intangible causes operating behind physical matter, and therefore they fumbled with chemical substances in a hopeless attempt to attain material perfection. Ultimately, however, Jung believed that they failed to comprehend the true dimensions of the situation:

²³⁴ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 228

²³⁵ Ibid., 245

²³⁶ Ibid., 245

²³⁷ Ibid., 241

[S]o long as the alchemist was working in his laboratory he had no opportunity to identify himself with the archetypes as they appeared, since they were all projected immediately into the chemical substances. The disadvantage of this situation was that the alchemist was forced to represent the incorruptible substance as a chemical product – an impossible undertaking which led to the downfall of alchemy, its place in the laboratory being taken by chemistry.²³⁸

This skeptical attitude of Jung's, however, is occasionally punctuated by a surprising tone of respect for the alchemist, whom he suddenly sees as at least somewhat conscious of the real motives for the Spagyric operations. "But to do them justice," he says after a few jests at their expense, "one should not overlook the fact that there is more than a little evidence in the literature that they realized it [the *opus*] was a matter of their own transformation."²³⁹ Likewise, after repeatedly emphasizing the alchemists' ignorant attachment to material chemistry, he turns around to state that "the ancients knew more or less what chemical processes were; therefore they must have known that the thing they practised was, to say the least of it, no ordinary chemistry."²⁴⁰ Finally, we have his comment in the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*:

there can be no doubt that the *chrysopoeia* (goldmaking) was thought of as a psychic operation running parallel to the physical process and, as it were, independent of it. The moral and spiritual transformation was not only independent of the physical procedure but actually seemed to be its *causa efficiens*.²⁴¹

Granted Jung tackled a diverse array of historical alchemical traditions and hermetic philosophies, and whose reading of alchemy, according to Coudert, was "broad but not historical," it appears that he contradicts himself by asserting that the alchemists were both, simultaneously, naïve chemists and conscious individuators. Perhaps we can safely say that Jung saw the majority of these Artificers as unaware of the psychical nature of their processes, but admitted that a few of them were fully conscious of what was taking place. Yet regardless of the

²³⁸ Ibid., 37

²³⁹ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 242-243

²⁴¹ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 263

alchemists' level of awareness, "the yield in symbolic material is all the greater," and thus the historical practice of alchemy, according to Coudert, is "for the psychologist a veritable gold-mine of materials which throw an exceedingly valuable light on the structure of the unconscious."²⁴²

As far as Paracelsus was concerned, Jung has asserted that "it is obvious from the writings of Paracelsus that he understood the Hermetic literature without being aware of the true nature of alchemy."²⁴³ Despite the intentional objectivity of this statement it is perhaps possible that Jung himself was not completely free from the phenomenon of projection, or "transference," and thus sees in Paracelsus an aspect of himself. The probability of this projection is based on the fact that Jung himself was known to have battled an inner schism between conventional scholasticism and "esoteric" spirituality,²⁴⁴ and thus having intuited a similar internal schism in the personality of Paracelsus, perhaps he projected his own frustrations on this historical personage, and correspondingly saw revealed in him an "unconscious conflict that made him war against his opponents, unaware that the enemy was within."²⁴⁵

Despite such critical analysis, Jung goes on to say that "in the person of Paracelsus can be seen the division which would lead to a higher consciousness, a greater synthesis. He is considered, then, the forerunner of the modern psychology of the unconscious."²⁴⁶ This is because as a "forerunner of the new religion of nature that was not only chemical and physical but also psychical" and a physician concerned with treating human illnesses, "he is credited with

²⁴² Coudert, 151

²⁴³ Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, from *Alchemical Studies*, 122-124

²⁴⁴ See Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York, Random House Inc., 1961)

²⁴⁵ Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 116-122

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 189

recognizing the important role that psychic occurrences play in diseases and in their cures.”²⁴⁷

Thus do we have Jung’s varied views on the contributions, as well as personality, of Paracelsus the alchemist. Yet the particular attributes and facets of his personality as an alchemist is critical for understanding his alchemy, for Jung believed that “the real root of alchemy is to be sought less in philosophical doctrines than in the projections of individual investigators.”²⁴⁸

Let us turn again, then, to Paracelsus’ conceptions of the royal *Lapis*:

So the Philosopher’s Stone, which should renovate man no less than metals, if it be freed from its superfluous accidents and established in harmony with itself, performs wonders in all diseases... But if you wish to establish it in its harmony you must bring it back to its first matter, so that the male may operate on the female, that the outer part may act on the inner, and the inner be turned outwards, and so both seeds, the male and female, may be enclosed in complete concordance; that by the action of *Vulcan* they may be brought to more than perfections, and be exalted in degree, so that each, as a qualified, tempered, and clarified essence, pours all virtue into the human body as well as into metals... This is the Mystery of Nature, and such is the secret which every physician ought to know.²⁴⁹

It becomes evident at this point that Paracelsus is speaking allegorically, and even the typical pseudo-chemical vocabulary is at a minimum. There appears a great emphasis on the union of opposites, which can only take place when the material is brought “back to its first matter.” It is here that the “male may operate on the female,” and “the outer part act on the inner, and the inner be turned outwards,” both of which appear to symbolize the steps towards the primordial event of a non-dual Unity. In the psycho-spiritual line of interpretation, this magical Stone, although most frequently spoken of in terms of its abilities to transmute metals and heal human infirmities, also has the capacity to serve as a mirror for the projections of the psychic processes of individuation.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 157-163

²⁴⁸ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 245

²⁴⁹ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Medicinal Philosophical Stone*, ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 101

Discussing this psychological approach to alchemy, in which the alchemists were understood to be speaking in parables about their own psychological re-unification, Walter Pagel comments on the phenomenon of opposites in such imagery:

The question of what the ancient philosophers meant by 'Lapis' cannot be answered satisfactorily until we know which were the contents of their unconscious self that they 'projected' with its help. It can be solved by psychology of the unconscious alone. The psychical contents of 'projection' were unpersonal, collective 'archetypes' – owing to the unpersonal objective matter into which 'projection' took place. In it was chiefly the image of the spirit, kept prisoner in the darkness of the material world, i.e., the painful state of awareness of the unconscious...a 'potential' reality which either exists or does not exist and is thus characterized by a pair of 'contraria' (i.e., 'Being – Not-Being'). Hence the significance of the union of *contraria* in alchemy.²⁵⁰

Here is the argument that the primordial structure of the human unconscious, based as it is on archetypes, is also characterized by fundamental oppositions. Pagel's emphasis is on the union of "contraria," which are contradictory "potential" realities most commonly characterized as "Being and Not-Being." It was these psychic polar opposites that were ultimately to be brought back again into unity, yet because they were projected onto matter it appeared to the alchemist as if it were the *prima materia* itself that was undergoing the "chymical marriage." In his last quoted passage, it appears that Paracelsus is speaking of the *prima materia* as the "first matter of the Philosophers," whose male and female "seeds" may be "enclosed in complete concordance" and brought "to more than perfection." Well aware that the *prima materia*, as the foundation for the *Opus*, is one of alchemy's best-kept secrets, Jung remarks that:

...this is hardly surprising, since it represents the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content. It was of course impossible to specify such a substance, because the projection emanates from the individual and is consequently different in each case.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Pagel, Walter. 1948. *Jung's Views on Alchemy*. The Competitiveness of Nations in a Global Knowledge-Based Economy, Volume 39, Issue 1/2.. <http://www.compilerpress.atfreeweb.com/Anno%20Pagel%20Jung%20on%20Alchemy.htm>. (accessed 20 April, 2006)

²⁵¹ Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 317-319 – "The difficulties and dangers that the alchemists experienced in their attempt to discover the *prima materia* are explained by analogy to the difficulties encountered

Because every individual's unconscious is different, so every alchemist's *prima materia* was different, and Jung makes a joke that as opposed to the common accusation that they never said what this primal matter was, in actuality they gave it all too many definitions and "so were everlastingly contradicting themselves."²⁵²

In terms of the actual stages of the Work, there is a considerable diversity of opinions among the hermetic philosophers about the correct procedures to follow in order to arrive at the *Lapis*. There are, however, four principal stages that are usually mentioned, and Nigel Hamilton discusses these in relation to the science of psychology:

The process can be basically described in four stages as nigredo, albedo, citrinitas and rubedo. At each stage the alchemist is subjected to an increasingly intense purification, which is followed by a union with the fire of that stage (alchemical marriage), a rebirth of a new sense of self and then the death of that sense of self... Fire therefore is the fuel of the alchemical work and the main agent of its continuous process of transmutation. Once kindled, the alchemist's fire is maintained without interruption until the completion of the process.²⁵³

These primary stages are here explained by Hamilton in relation to the development – in terms of death and rebirth of various "selves" – of the personality of the alchemist. Hamilton also mentions the importance of the alchemical fire, which in this case refers to the primary agent of evolution in man, responsible for his inner growth. These principal stages, four in number, are usually correlated with various colors; they are termed the "blackening," the "whitening," the "yellowing," and the "reddening." Paracelsus explains it thus:

whenever an attempt is made to come to terms with the unconscious, the dark or shadow side of man." 167-170 – Also in his *Psychology and Alchemy*, 12, he speaks of the *Mysterium Magnum* as a synonym for the *prima materia*: "It has yet to be understood that the *mysterium magnum* is not only an actuality but is first and foremost rooted in the human psyche."

²⁵² Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 317-319 – "For one alchemist the *prima materia* was quicksilver, for others it was ore, iron, gold, lead, salt, sulphur, vinegar, water, air, fire, earth, blood, water of life, lapis, poison, spirit, cloud, sky, dew, shadow, sea, mother, moon, dragon, Venus, chaos, microcosm. Ruland's *Lexicon* gives no less than fifty synonyms, and a great many more could be added."

²⁵³ Hamilton, 3

This is the opinion of the philosophers, that when they have put their matter into the more secret fire, and when with a moderated philosophical heat it is cherished on every side, beginning to pass into corruption, it grows black. This operation they term putrefaction, and they call the blackness by the name of the Crow's Head. The ascent and descent thereof they term distillation, ascension, and descension. The exsiccation they call coagulation; and the dealbation they call calcinations; while because it becomes fluid and soft in the heat they make mention of creation. When it ceases to ascend and remains liquid at the bottom, they say fixation is present. In this manner it is the terms of the philosophical operations are to be understood, and not otherwise.²⁵⁴

Once again viewing his words through the psycho-spiritual lens, it is possible to see reflected in these chemical terms various psychic processes that occurred within the alchemist. Just as we have seen that the laboratory equipment, such as the retort or alembic, are often spoken of in symbolic and metaphoric terms – i.e. “a living corporeal spirit” – so the various stages of the Work can be seen to correspond to invisible spiritual processes.²⁵⁵ Although it would be extraordinarily difficult, and beyond the scope of this paper, to go into detail concerning these separate operations, the first stage may serve as an adequate example for how such processes can be interpreted psychologically.

The first stage, associated with putrefaction and decay, was known as “blackening,” “*nigredo*,” or the “blackness of a crow's head.” This primary stage was understood by Jung to

²⁵⁴ Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 68 – Paracelsus also describes several of these stages in his *Manual Concerning the Philosopher's Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol 2*, 104-105: “take the electrum which has been destroyed and rendered evanescent, as much of it as you wish to bring to perfection, place it in the Philosophic Egg, and seal it closely so that nothing may evaporate. Stand it in Athanor until, without any addition, it begins of itself to be resolved from above, so that it looks like an island in the midst of that sea, gradually decreasing every day, and at last being changed into the resemblance of blackening. This black substance is the bird which flies by night without wings, which the first dew from heaven, with its constant influence, its ascent and descent, has changed into the blackness of a crow's head. Then it assumes the tail of a peacock, and subsequently acquires the wings of a swan. Lastly, it takes the highest red colour in the whole world, which is the sing of its fiery nature, whereby it drives out all the accidents of the body.”

²⁵⁵ One interesting interpretation of the alchemical vessel, or pelican, is discussed as a analogy for the *Imaginatio*, which represents Jung's idea of “active imagination.” Remo F. Roth, in his book *Synchronicity Quest* (Frankfurt, Verlag Haag & Herchen, 1992), <http://www.psychovision.ch/rfr/gs4htm.htm> - says, “active imagination is the depth psychological translation of the alchemical idea of the pelican. In active imagination one strives to spiritualize the drives which we can interpret, from a physical point of view, as a conversion of matter into energy. The parallel alchemical symbolism shows how important introversion is in this undertaking. We have already related this to the Paracelsian mummification which, regarded depth psychologically, corresponds to shutting down the body excited by the drives.”

represent the first conscious confrontation, or apprehension, of the shadow, which is defined as those elements of the psyche which are most unconscious, and therefore most startling and dangerous to encounter. Coudert speaks of this encounter as “the place of great terror” due to the overwhelming and sometimes shattering experience that can result when completely unknown aspects of the shadow suddenly emerge into the conscious mind. She goes on to say that such brave, although perhaps ignorant, alchemists proceeded to labor over the prima material of their unconscious: “In the solitary confines of their laboratories, the alchemist experienced the unexpected and terrifying emotions which accompany an irruption of the unconscious into consciousness.”²⁵⁶ For this reason the psychologist would interpret the *nigredo* stage as not a literal blackening of chemical substances, but rather a “dark night of the soul” for the operator. Such an interpretation is presented by Hamilton:

From a psychological standpoint, this stage is experienced as entering a dark and chaotic unconscious inner world...[The alchemists] also recognized that all nature is renewed after dying away and that in order to grow, an organism must first die. An apple, for example, has to putrefy before its seed can take root and produce more apples. Of course, this ‘putrefaction’ applies not only to the material but also to the spiritual world. Just as material death is necessary for the material rebirth of things, so spiritual death is necessary for the spiritual rebirth of man.²⁵⁷

Thus it is this first stage of “blackening” that introduces new psychic material from the shadow into the light of consciousness, and brings with it the first awareness of the ontological duality of opposites. For it is the alchemist’s conscious personality that is suddenly “confronted with the abysmal contradictions of human nature, and this confrontation in turn leads to the possibility of a direct experience of light and darkness, of Christ and the devil.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Coudert, 152

²⁵⁷ Hamilton, 4

²⁵⁸ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 19-20

Jung continues his discussion on the importance of opposites: “the tremendous role which the opposites and their union play in alchemy helps us to understand why the alchemists were so fond of paradoxes.”²⁵⁹ He goes on to say that these paradoxes most often cluster around the arcane substance, and although the opposites remain “uncombined” in the *prima materia*, they “amalgamate” to create the *Lapis Philosophorum*.²⁶⁰ As inherently self-contradictory yet ultimately unified propositions, paradoxes successfully symbolize the absurdity inherent in the existence of polar opposites, whose mutual goal and destiny is to be fused and united into one essence. These paradoxes were often portrayed imagistically as symbols, as well as linguistically as metaphors, analogies, or binary qualitative oppositions, all of which were appropriate in terms of referencing immaterial psychic phenomena.²⁶¹ It is for this reason that the paradoxes of “male and female” and “inner and outer” can easily be interpreted as metaphors for more than just qualitative aspects of chemical substances. Acknowledging the criticality of this “*contraria*,” Burkhardt refers to these polar opposites of “male and female” in terms of marriage and divorce:

In order to free the soul from its coagulation and paralysis, its essential form and its materia must be dissolved out of their crude and one-sided combination. It is as if spirit and soul had to be separated from one another, in order, after their ‘divorce,’ to become ‘married’ again. The amorphous materia is burnt, dissolved, and purified, in order finally to be ‘coagulated’ anew in the form of a perfect crystal.²⁶²

Here Burkhardt illuminates the alchemical processes of burning, dissolving, purifying, and coagulating by associating them with the separation and ultimate union of the soul and spirit of the alchemist. In this way the last passage from Paracelsus may in actuality be talking about the integration of the conscious and unconscious facets of man’s psyche, and therefore the existence

²⁵⁹ Ibid, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 42

²⁶⁰ Ibid, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 42

²⁶¹ Jung, *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*, 157-163 – “It is considered appropriate that Paracelsus and the alchemists expressed themselves in parables and symbols when describing their work. Since they were probing the depths of the psyche, the use of symbols and mythologems allowed not only a visualization of the psychic experience, but more significantly, a re-experiencing of it.”

²⁶² Burkhardt, 72-73

of such paradoxes – and the initial separation of these “oppositions” – are in fact quite natural, as well as ultimately necessary; for “without the experience of the opposites there is no experience of wholeness.”²⁶³

The psychoanalyst Nigel Hamilton sees these alchemical procedures – primarily the dissolution and coagulation – as analogical references to the death and rebirth of the alchemist’s personality. Understanding the ultimate goal of alchemy to be the generation of a new and more authentic “self,” Hamilton explains that:

The alchemical principal of ‘solve et coagula,’ or dissolve and coagulate, has been used at each stage of the process. In other words, the form the soul is caught in at the time (the self) must first be dissolved in order to free the soul so that it can rise (in consciousness) to experience a purer and subtler form, which can then be re-coagulated and experienced as the ‘new self.’²⁶⁴

Hamilton interprets the goal of the “chymical marriage” to be the liberation of the soul from the imprisonment of the ego, or “self.” He also indicates that such a “self” can be refined and purified – not unlike the mercury within the alembic – so as to be ready for the “re-coagulation.” Hamilton also discusses the culmination of the authentic self to be an event in which “the spirit has been materialized and the material body spiritualised.”²⁶⁵ This terminology is reminiscent of Paracelsus’ descriptions of the Philosopher’s Stone, which embodies not only the “supercelestial marriage,” but the perfection of refined, and “materialized,” spiritual potencies.

Paracelsus continues his description of the Stone and its paradoxical nature:

This is what Hermes asserts in the following terms: ‘The Sun and the Moon are the roots of this Art.’ The Son of Hamuel says that the Stone of the philosophers is water coagulated, namely, in Sol and Luna. From this it is clearer than the sun that the material of the Stone is nothing else but Sol and Luna...formed together in a proper marriage, both natural and artificial. Now, as we see that the man or the woman, without the seed of

²⁶³ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 20

²⁶⁴ Nigel Hamilton, *The Alchemical Process of Transformation*. The Alchemy Website, 1985. http://www.levity.com/alchemy/articles_psychological.html (accessed 12 Feb, 2006), 2

²⁶⁵ Hamilton, 5

both, cannot generate, in the same way our man, Sol, and his wife, Luna, cannot conceive, or do anything in the way of generation, without the seed and sperm of both. Hence the philosophers gathered that a third thing was necessary, namely, the animated seed of both, the man and the woman, without which they judged that the whole of their work was fruitless and in vain. Such a sperm is Mercury, which, by the natural conjunction of both bodies, Sol and Luna, receives their nature into itself in union. Then at length, and not before, the work is fit for congress, ingress, and generation, by the masculine and feminine power and virtue. Hence the philosophers have said that this same Mercury is composed of body, spirit, and soul, and that it has assumed the nature and property of all elements.²⁶⁶

We have again the common theme of binary and polar oppositions, as well as that of the trinity when the third element is added: that of mercury. There emerges, however, a powerful image used to describe such mutual opposition. This is the image of male and female, which Paracelsus refers to alternately as “Sol and Luna,” and “man and wife.” Paracelsus even goes so far as to say that the man and his wife cannot “generate,” or “conceive,” without the seed, or “sperm,” of both. This metaphor of sexual union comes to fruition with the addition of the third thing, mercury, which apparently holds the “animated seed of both.” Commenting on this common analogy of sexual union, Jung again illuminates the underlying operation of this crucial “marriage”:

[T]he alchemist’s endeavours to unite the opposites culminate in the ‘chymical marriage’, the supreme act of union in which the work reaches its consummation. After the hostility of the four elements has been overcome, there still remains the last and most formidable opposition, which the alchemist expressed very aptly as the relationship between male and female.²⁶⁷

It appears that this final and “most formidable opposition” of male and female principles, most often represented by the symbols Sol and Luna, is an approximation of the relationship between the *anima* and *animus* archetypes in Jung’s system of psychology. In addition, the frequent symbolism of the masculine and feminine aspects of the Divine Cause were mirrored by the

²⁶⁶ Paracelsus, *Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 65-66

²⁶⁷ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 90

philosophic concepts of the heavenly, spiritual principles in contrast to the earthly, physical principles found in Nature. Aware of the common substitution of the terms sulphur and mercury for Sol and Luna, or male and female, Eliade notes that “the alchemical combination of sulphur and mercury is always expressed in terms of ‘marriage’. But this marriage is also a mystical union between two cosmological principles.”²⁶⁸ These primary “cosmological principles” are commonly understood to be the active, fiery, masculine essence of Sol and the passive, receptive, fluidic, and feminine essence of Luna. Referring to these primordial principles, Burckhardt speaks first about the nature of earth as a symbol of matter:

The latter represented, in its perennial reality, the passive principle of all visible things, whereas heaven represented the active and generating principle. The two principles are like the two hands of God. They are related to one another as male and female, as father and mother, and cannot be separated from one another – for in whatever the earth produces Heaven is present as creative power, while the Earth, for its part, gives form and body to the heavenly law...For the philosophia perennis, which until the arrival of rationalism was common to both East and West, the two principles, the active and the passive, are, beyond all visible manifestation, the first and all-determining poles of existence.²⁶⁹

In this context, using the vocabulary of Paracelsus, the dynamic and active principle of Sol was often associated with the separating and differentiating activity of *Ares*, or the *Archeus-Vulcan*, while the passive principle of Luna was associated with the underlying potentiality of the primordial *Yliaster* or *Mysterium Magnum*. “However, it is clear that the form-giving cause, corresponding to Pure Act, and the receptive substance, which is purely passive, complement one another reciprocally; and thus, as fundamental and timeless possibilities, they cannot be separated from one another,” explains Burckhardt.²⁷⁰ Thus we have the two most dynamic forces in the universe, as well as the human psyche, for in psychology these two binary yet deeply inter-

²⁶⁸ Eliade, 151-152

²⁶⁹ Burckhardt, *Alchemy; Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, 58-59

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 63-65

dependent aspects can be understood as the conscious and unconscious facets of the human mind. As if participating in a Cosmic Dance, locked in an eternal embrace, these fundamental psychic polarities shadow each other until the culminating moment when they openly confront each other, and ultimately fuse into the wholesome unity of the Self.

By naming mercury as the “third thing” necessary for the fulfillment of the *coniunctionis* by allowing Sol and Luna to “receive their nature into itself in union,” Paracelsus is granting it a significant role in the alchemical process. Seen as the mediating power between the two primal principles, mercury is often portrayed as the mythological figure of Mercurius; similar to the symbol of the Hermaphrodite, Mercurius represents many things, among them the *prima materia*, the Original Man, *Adech*, or Paracelsus’ *Anthropos*.²⁷¹ “Summarily, then,” explains Paracelsus, “the matter of the Philosopher’s Stone is none other than a fiery and perfect Mercury extracted by Nature and Art; that is, the artificially prepared and true hermaphrodite Adam, and the microcosm.”²⁷² This “fiery and perfect mercury” appears, in this context, to symbolize the mythological Mercurius because it is directly associated with the “true hermaphrodite Adam” as well as the microcosm, both of which are classic synonyms for the primordial *mysterium magnum* or *prima materia*. Paracelsus elucidates further; “our Mercury, therefore, is the same which contains in itself all the perfections, force, and virtues of the Sun, which also runs through all the streets and houses of all the planets, and in its own rebirth has acquired the force of things above and things below.”²⁷³ It seems that Mercurius, or the Mercury of the Philosophers, embodies the perfection of the Philosopher’s Stone, both by acquiring “the force of things above and things below” as well as containing in itself “all the perfections, force, and virtues of the

²⁷¹ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 16 – “Accordingly Mercurius, in the crude form of the *prima materia*, is in very truth the Original Man disseminated through the physical world, and in his sublimated form he is that reconstituted totality.”

²⁷² Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 66

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66

Sun.” Jung himself intimates that Mercurius is “a spiritual or psychic substance of universal import,” and as such is identified as containing all the “perfections and virtues of the sun.”²⁷⁴ In this way Mercurius, the hermaphrodite Adam, is a symbol for the alchemical Sol, that, “as a ‘certain luminosity’, is in many respects equal to the *lumen naturae*,” which was itself the “real source of illumination in alchemy.”²⁷⁵

Indeed, Paracelsus has told us already that the matter of the Stone is nothing other than “a fiery and perfect Mercury,” and now we are left trying to understand what exactly this ambiguous term represents. Jung believes that in this context, Mercurius, as the all-pervading and transformative “fiery and perfect Mercury,” symbolizes the unconscious, and thus he attributes to the unconscious the polarizing trends of the solar and lunar energies:

Generally Sol is regarded as the masculine and active half of Mercurius...Since, in his alchemical form, Mercurius does not exist in reality, he must be an unconscious projection, and because he is an absolutely fundamental concept in alchemy he must signify the unconscious itself... Consciousness requires as its necessary counterpart a dark, latent, non-manifest side, the unconscious, whose presence can be known only by the light of consciousness. Just as the day-star rises out of the nocturnal sea, so, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, consciousness is born of unconsciousness and sinks back every night to this primal condition. This duality of our psychic life is the prototype and archetype of the Sol-Luna symbolism.²⁷⁶

This profound statement explicitly correlates the fundamental process of the “chymical marriage” or union of opposites with the culminating stage of individuation, that is, the final confrontation and ultimate unification of the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the psyche. By assuming that these facets of the psyche are indeed the “prototype and archetype” for the Sol-Luna symbolism, we are lead to interpret Paracelsus’ alchemical opus to be primarily, or perhaps entirely, aimed at the re-unification of his conscious personality with the collective

²⁷⁴ Jung, *Mysterium coniunctionis*, 113

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 96

²⁷⁶ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 96-97

unconscious, rather than concerned with chemical manipulations. In addition, we are again informed of the universal roles given to the two predominate principles in the cosmos; the solar and “ascending” half of Mercurius and the receptive, lunar half which can only be “perceived” by “borrowing light from the sun.” We are here reminded of a comment by Paracelsus:

...just as the sun is appointed by God, and heats all things in the world, both occult, apparent, and manifest, as the spheres of Mars, Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, and the Moon, which can shine only as they borrow their light from the Sun, and are in themselves dead. When, however, they are lighted up, as said above, they live and work according to their special properties.²⁷⁷

The light of the sun here acts as the “revivifying” and vitalizing essence that reawakens the slumbering (dead) potencies lying dormant within all physical phenomena. In this way it operates in the role of activating agent, and can be compared with the vital principle of the solar aspect of Mercurius. Jung reminds us that “from what has been said about the active sun-substance it should be clear that Sol in alchemy is much less a definite chemical substance than a ‘virtus,’ a mysterious power believed to have a generative and transformative effect.”²⁷⁸ This is reminiscent of the subtle impressions of the astral plane, in the sense that here Sol is interpreted to symbolize more of an intangible and dynamic principle rather than any type of physical, chemical substance.

Yet despite the various stages and processes that are described for the attainment of the *Lapis Philosophicum*, it appears that on a certain level an alchemist either understood it or he did not. Either he penetrated the mystery and saw clearly through the light of Nature, or he was unable to see beyond the surfaces: “I am forbidden to write more to you on this mystery,” Paracelsus tells us, “such is the command of the Divine Power. Assuredly is this art the gift of God. On this account it is not all who understand it. God gives it to whom He

²⁷⁷ Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 74

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 94

will, and suffers no one to extort it from Him by violence.”²⁷⁹ This reiteration of the Grace of God for success in this Art indicates that it is above all else a sacred endeavor, and as such, much be kept secret. It is because of this stubborn insistence on secrecy and initiation that Jung remarks, “what the old philosophers meant by their lapis has never become quite clear.”²⁸⁰ It is also why, despite significant quantities of extensive treatises, “the labours of those authors have revealed so little to us of the alchemical secret.”²⁸¹

Ultimately, the psycho-spiritual dimensions of Paracelsus’ alchemy are both subtly alluded to in the form of allegorical language, as well as explicitly demonstrated by his loyalty to the secrecy of the alchemical brotherhood. This final realm of celestial phenomena represents for Paracelsus the extraordinary potential of the *Magnum Opus*; the quest for knowledge of the Divine and the wisdom of self-understanding are merged in a passionate journey towards perfection and transmutation. Although Paracelsus experienced his alchemy through the lens of sixteenth century Christian hermetic philosophy, perhaps he would have ultimately agreed with Jung that there exists a correlation between the metallurgical transmutations of metallic bodies and the transformative practice of psychological re-unification. In conjunction with the elementary and sidereal realms, this trinity of ontological dimensions come together to form the foundation, the source, of all phenomena in the universe. And by manipulating the various powers within each sphere individually, Paracelsus was able, or so he believed, to perfect and transform the very soul of the world.

²⁷⁹ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Philosopher’s Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 2*, 105

²⁸⁰ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 475

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 475

Conclusion

Through the investigation of the elementary, sidereal, and celestial aspects of Paracelsus' alchemy, we are now able to view his hermetic philosophy from a broad perspective. Paracelsus saw himself operating on all three levels simultaneously, which begs the question: what exactly was the relationship between these three realms for Paracelsus? And what exactly, in his mind, is the final relationship between matter and spirit? We have seen that he most surely believed he was occupied with material as well as spiritual elements in his laboratory. But how exactly do these planes interact and relate with one another? This is precisely the question that confounds Jung; "if the alchemist is admittedly using the chemical process only symbolically, then why does he work in a laboratory with crucibles and alembics? And if, as he constantly asserts, he is describing chemical processes, why distort them past recognition with his mythological symbolisms?"²⁸²

So here we are, left with an enigmatic renaissance personage, whose legacy in medicine and chemistry is – in modern terms – confounded and apparently contradicted by his incredible zeal for the hidden, and invisible, principles of Spirit that he saw operating in the world around him. Yet there remains the question of whether or not Paracelsus' alchemy was a bridge between

²⁸² Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 242-243

the two apparently contradictory worlds of matter and spirit, and whether it included a successful survey of all natural processes existent within Nature's manifold world. Bonardel appears to think so, and so it seems to her that, "if alchemy occupies a singular place in the history of religions and spiritual traditions, it is a mediator between the realms of matter and Spirit. It implicitly compels each religion not to fail in its essential task of rebinding, *re-ligare*, heaven and earth."²⁸³

As we have seen, there have been many explanations put forth to justify various interpretations of the processes of alchemy. But certain questions remain. How, exactly, do we understand the physical and spiritual transformations to occur simultaneously? And if there are differing levels, or planes, of phenomena, how are they seen as different qualitatively but equal in terms of value, or importance? I see Ken Wilber's model of the "holarchy" as one successful attempt at answering these questions. The concept of a holarchy is based on that of the hierarchy, but without the implicit value judgment that places certain levels of being "above" others. The model of the holarchy is founded on the delineation and differentiation of various levels of phenomena, but its unique feature is its emphasis on the fact that each "ascending" sphere of being *transcends* and *includes* the preceding sphere and all of its attributes. Wilber illustrates this point with an example of the human body. If we look at the human body, we can discern various levels of its physiological structure. It consists, in one of its most fundamental forms, of protons, neutrons, and electrons. These tiny particles in turn form atoms, which in turn collect into molecules. These molecules then coalesce into various proteins which combine to create a vast

²⁸³ Bonardel, 74

network of muscles, fibers, tendons, ligaments, organs and bones. These critical functional components are united into one final form: the human organism.²⁸⁴

This system of structuring the various levels of the human body can be called a holarchy, because each succeeding level incorporates and expands upon the earlier ones. In this sense, the human organism includes neutrons and protons, molecules, proteins, organs and bones, while also existing as something altogether different than the individual components that compose it. Thus the human being as a phenomenon exists on a unique level of being, yet it is intricately bound to the realm of atoms and molecules of which it is comprised. Therefore the human being *transcends* the realm of atoms but also *includes* it: it is a more complicated and differentiated form yet it is in *not* superior or more highly valued than the quantum particles from which it gains its life. This example of the human body can be extrapolated to demonstrate the functional integrity of the holarchy model, which delineates different spheres of phenomena without demanding any form of judgmental valuing.

If we then look at Paracelsus' cosmology and hermetic philosophy within the context of a holarchy, we would perceive a similar phenomenon. That is, elementary matter in this case is the very basis for all life; it is the fundamental ground of being. Comprising of the four elements and three principles, which may or may not have been physically based, the elementary realm included all corporeal matter in the universe. The sidereal phenomena can then be seen as the next rung, or level, on the ladder of emanations, and as such it would transcend but include the former level. What this implies is that while the astral essences were on an altogether different level of being than material phenomena, they are firmly based, and therefore dependent, upon matter for their very existence. We have heard Paracelsus state this explicitly; "concerning the

²⁸⁴ Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, 30-50

spiritual mixture and communion of the metals, it should be known that no separation or mortification is spiritual, because such spirits can never exist without bodies.”²⁸⁵ This reduces the possibility of championing the glory of sidereal, or “spiritual,” phenomena over physical matter, because the very existence of such subtle phenomena is dependent upon gross physical matter to contain it.²⁸⁶

Finally, the spirit, or *life*, of the celestial realm can be understood as yet another transcending realm of being that is no less intertwined with the lower two realms. As an extremely subtle dimension, the celestial sphere includes both astral and elementary phenomena, but takes another step outwards to include another, and as yet unmanifest, aspect of being. This is evident in Paracelsus’ division of the human being into either three or seven distinct principles. The divine soul – itself the essence of God – includes within it the *astrum*, or sidereal body, as well as the elementary body. Franz Hartman summarizes well this theme of mutual codependence between the spiritual and material realms:

A seed requires the power of the sunshine to enable it to take from the earth the elements necessary for its growth, and in the same sense the spiritual body of man, receiving its nutriment from the spirit, could not unfold and develop if it were not for the presence of the physical body of man with its elementary and elemental forces; for the physical body is comparable to the wood from which is produced the fire which gives light; there would be no light if there were nothing to burn.²⁸⁷

The analogy that Hartman puts forth is appropriate, because it emphasizes the criticality of corporeal matter. Without the elementary realm – the wood – then the spiritual potencies of the celestial realm – the light of the flames – would never even come into being. This balancing system of the holarchy helps to prevent any type of reduction or idealization of one level to the exclusion of any another.

²⁸⁵ Paracelsus, *The Coelum Philosophorum*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings Vol. 1*, 8-9

²⁸⁶ Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctivus*, 537 – “Paracelsus and his school assumed that matter was an ‘increated’, and hence coexistent and coeternal with God.”

²⁸⁷ Hartman, 330

In regards to the Philosopher's Stone, perhaps it is possible to see it as a multi-functional phenomenon; one that has different attributes corresponding to the different rungs, or spheres, of reality. On the physical level it is described by Paracelsus as being either a tincture, a liquid, or a powder, and its effects can be seen in the literal physiology of a human being, rendering him "as though he were newly born." We have also discovered that he believed the *Lapis* to be capable of literal and material transmutation, and therefore a very physical thing: "I have a treasure hidden in a certain city called Weinden, belonging to Forum Julii, at an inn, - a treasure which neither of you, Leo of Rome, nor you, Charles the German, could purchase with all your substance."²⁸⁸ Likewise, on the astral level, it appears to be a highly purified and refined "potency" – the "soul of mercury" or the "blood of the rose" – that was capable of transmuting substances due to its powers of astral manipulation. Finally, the Stone also acted as an ethereal, spiritual, and perhaps psychological fulfillment of the slow evolutionary processes of cosmic forces. Whether Paracelsus saw the Stone in this capacity as representing God's divine Grace, and the salvation of communion with the Divine, or the indicator of a successful completion of psychic integration, he surely attributes to it a deeply religious dimension. Thus the Stone itself would embody the succeeding rungs of individuated Spirit, beginning with elementary forces, and ascending up into the highly subtle and invisible rays of spiritual principles.

In the end however, we can make no mistake about the ambiguity that remains around this mythologized Stone. Paracelsus went to great lengths to emphasize the secrecy and sanctity of this prized artifact. Whether he was a charlatan using such reticence to maintain a façade and veil his ignorance, or a realized adept honestly conveying the importance of the individual's relationship to the Divine, it is apparent that his influence is still felt today. And if we leave

²⁸⁸ Paracelsus, *The Tincture of the Philosophers*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings*, 20

Paracelsus with more questions than answers, perhaps this was his intention. In his final paragraph in his treatise *The Manual Concerning the Philosopher's Stone*, Paracelsus addresses our concern:

There is only one thing more to say, since to many this description of mine will appear obscure. You will say, O my Theophrastus, you speak too briefly and abstrusely to me. I know your discourses, how correctly you impart your subjects and your secrets. Wherefore this description will be of no avail for me. To this I answer that pearls are not for swine, nor a long tail for a goat. Nature has not seen fit to bestow them. Wherefore I say that to whomsoever it has been given by God, he will find sufficiently and above all measure, more than he wished for. I write this by way of initiation...²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Paracelsus, *The Manual Concerning the Philosopher's Stone*, trans. & ed. E.A. Waite, *The Hermetic Writings* Vol. 2, 106

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