



Adam McLean's Study Course on Inner alchemy and alchemical symbolism

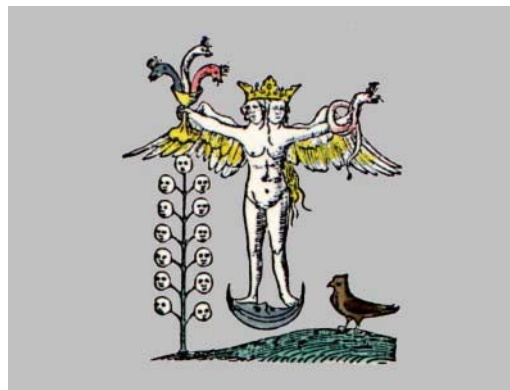
Lesson Five : Resolution of opposites (Male/female)

In the previous lesson we looked at symbols in opposition to one another. Now we shall begin look at how some of these oppositions become resolved, reconciled or integrated in some way.

Sun and Moon, the best known set of opposites, only rarely is brought into some kind of resolution, but the other well known opposition, that of male and female is found to resolve in various ways in alchemical emblems.

So let us look now at the resolutions of the male and female.

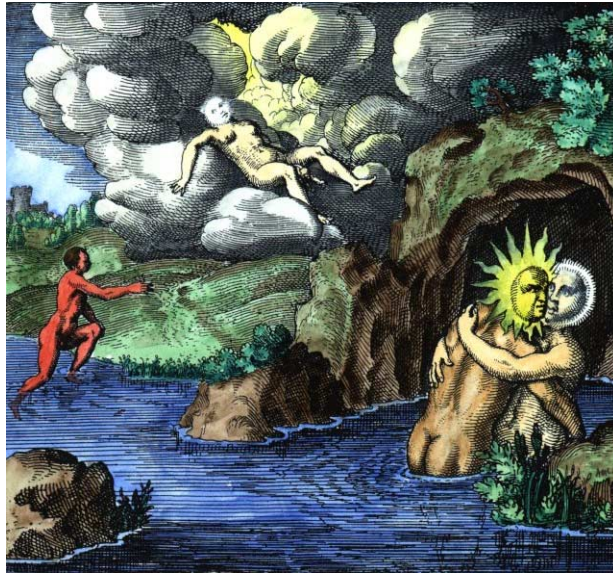
The first most obvious resolution is that of the hermaphrodite. This is well pictured in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* series.



A second resolution of these opposites is seen in the marriage of the male and female, as in Basil Valentine's Sixth Key.



A third resolution of the oppositeness of male and female is pictured by the birth of a child, as in emblem 34 of the *Atalanta fugiens*, where we see the lunar-headed woman in the clouds in the act of giving birth.

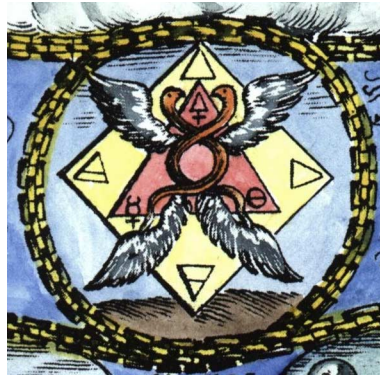


We will try and recognise these three main resolutions of the male-female opposition in the exercises.

There are other opposites which in become resolved in like manner. One common image is that of the polarity of head and tail. We find this in various dragons and snake-like forms in alchemical imagery. This head-and-tail opposition contained in the image of the snake-dragon is resolved in two main ways. The first occurs by the snake seizing it own tail and forming a circle, the ouroboros.



Another resolution of the opposite natures bound in the symbol of the snake is the formation of the caduceus shape from two snakes (sometimes dragons). Here the opposites are intertwined.



We will leave off examining the resolutions of the serpent/dragon and other oppositions till the next and subsequent lessons. For this lesson we will just focus on the resolutions of the masculine and feminine in alchemical symbolism.

We will now look at various examples of the three main resolutions of the male-female symbols, and try to perceive differences between these resolvings. We notice immediately that the formation of the hermaphrodite is a kind of inner resolution, a fusion, of the different qualities of male and female, while the birth of a child is a resolution by creating a third facet outside of the initial two opposites. We can see the marriage then as a meeting of the two, without an inner fusion, or the birth of a third balancing aspect.

It is instructive to examine the other symbols that are found in emblems which present this resolution of the male and female. The key focus may be on the resolution, but the emblem often points, through the other symbols found in its space, to parallel resolutions occurring between other facets, pictured by other opposing symbols in the emblem. This should become clear as we look at the examples.

We should bear in mind that the creator of an alchemical emblem wanted us to view the image, say of the fusion into the hermaphrodite, as being paralleled in other domains pictured through the subsidiary symbols in the emblem. Thus what is happening in the background or on the ground beneath is vitally important for us understanding the symbolic force of the emblem.

Armed with this theoretical view you should now work through the exercises. Unless you try and apply this theoretical knowledge in your direct working with the symbols you will merely tickle your mind with a little theory. Next month it will mean nothing to you. Unless you deeply contemplate and investigate these emblems inwardly, you will achieve nothing, and this course will be useless for you, and become like just another book you have read and forgotten. The point of this course is to lead you to develop your own inner abilities to interpret the symbolic space of alchemical

emblems. You cannot do this unless you encounter this through an active work with this symbolism.

Exercises:

In the first groups of four exercises you are presented with various depictions of the hermaphrodite. Pay especial attention to any other symbols that are found in the emblem and try to identify opposites which are being presented as being brought in parallel with the hermaphrodite into a state of fusion or resolution. Thus if we look at the third engraving from the Hermaphrodite child of the Sun and Moon :



You will notice that in the sphere below a green lion is seen on the earth while above him shines a strange sun. The green lion is often shown as devouring the sun, uniting himself with it. Here things seem to have resolved, and the sun shines through a sevenfold star. This is the seven planets united into one (we will see this in later lessons in this course). The green lion symbol has also become associated with another symbol, that of an orb bearing the symbol for nitre. To grasp this emblem as a totality we have to pay attention to the subsidiary symbols such as the sevenfold star and the orb.

It is not necessary at this stage for you to be able to interpret them, but just to be aware of how they contribute to the nature of the emblem. Please now look at the examples in turn and note down the relationships between the subsidiary symbols.

Example 1. Hermaphrodite from an 18th century version of the *Rosarium*.



Example 2. Sixth woodcut from the series in Basil Valentine's *Azoth*. The 'rebis' or 'twofold thing'.



Example 3. Woodcut 3 from the *Pandora*. Note clockwise - anticlockwise.

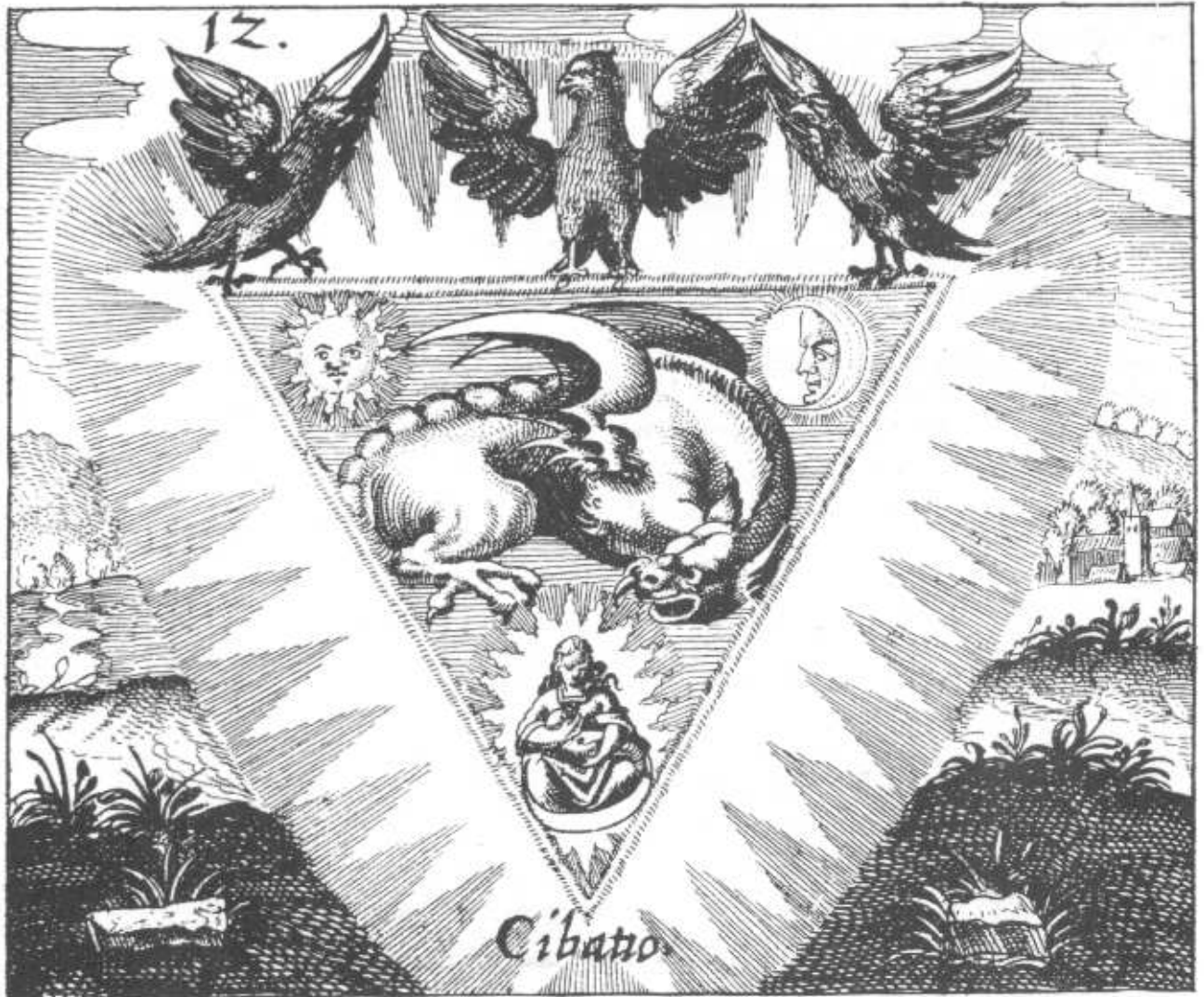


Example 4. Engraving of the Hermetic Androgyne from Khunrath

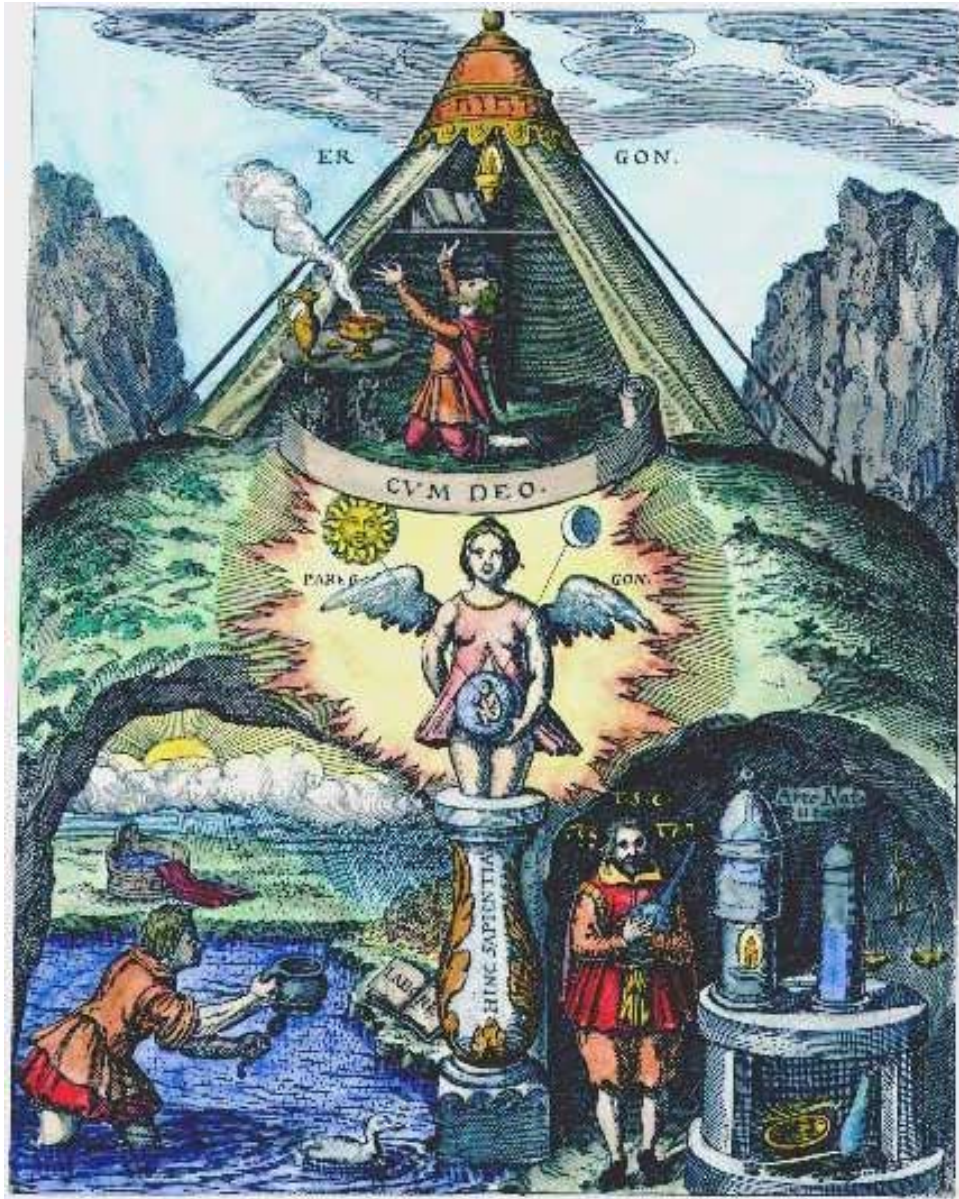


Now we will look at the resolution of the male and female through the emanation of a third facet, the birth of a child. As with the previous four examples, you should try and identify all the subsidiary symbols.

Example 5. Engraving from Mylius *Philosophia reformata*



Example 6. The birth of the child - engraving from Theophilus Schweighardt.
The 'Ergon' above is the greater work in the spirit, the 'Parergon' is the lesser but parallel work in the earthly realm.

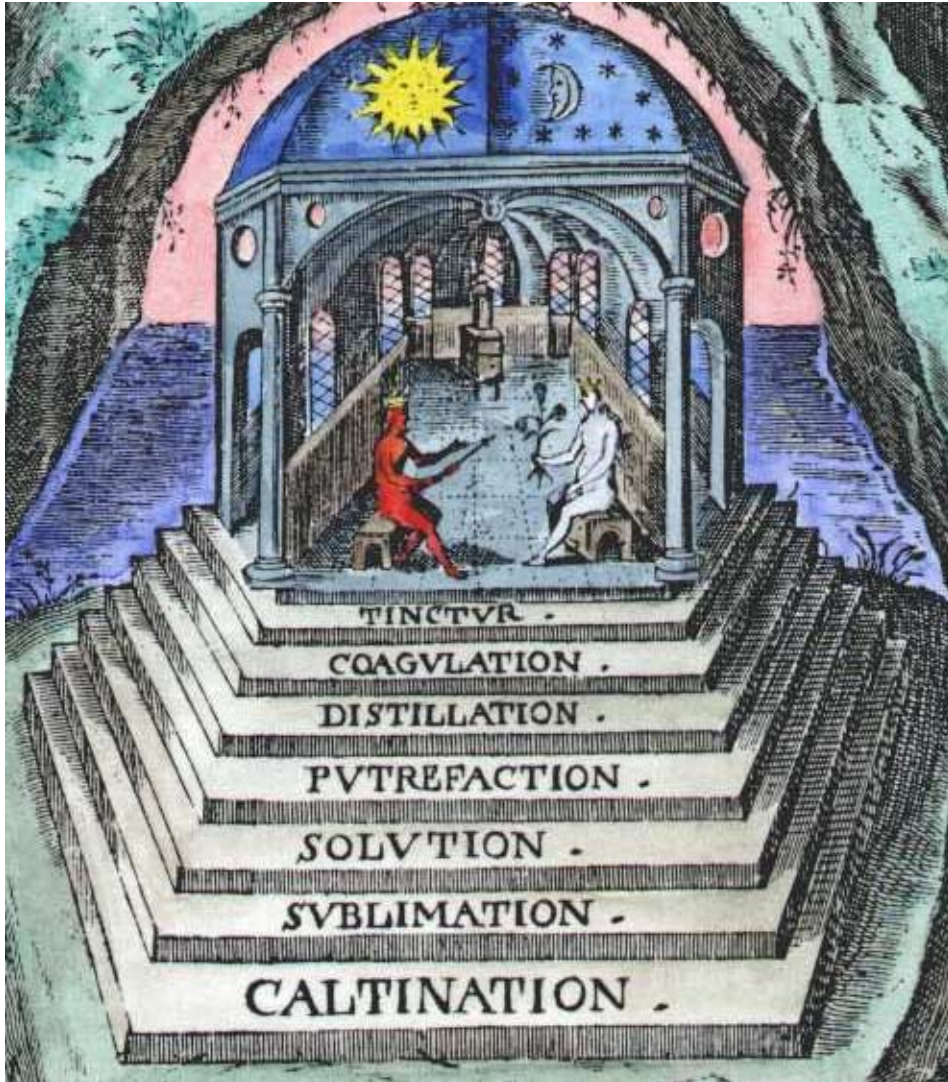


Example 7. Illustration from manuscript of *Donum Dei*.



Finally here are a few examples of the marriage or interlinking of male and female.

Example 8. A part of an engraving of Michelspacher 'Mirror of Art and Nature'.



Example 9. Coniunctio from Mylius *Philosophia reformata*.



Example 10. Emblem 30 from *Atalanta fugiens*. Note gestures of figures.

