

THE USEFULNESS OF THE STORY OF THE ALCHEMICAL VESSEL
IN THE UNDERSTANDING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY
OF BORDERLINE CONDITIONS:
A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The principal intention of this study was to explore the heuristic value of the story of the alchemical vessel in understanding borderline conditions and pursuing their psychotherapy.

It establishes the pertinence of the case study as a method of exploring the content and process of psychotherapy. The essential nature of story-telling is examined and the hypothesis is made that psychotherapy, borderline conditions, the myth of the alchemical vessel and the case study all reflect instances of story-telling. Towards the end of examining their mutual reflection, and thus heuristic value, elements of Jungian theory, the phenomenology of borderline conditions and case material are examined.

Through the examination of certain shared themes which emerge from the story of the alchemical vessel and the material of psychotherapy it is established that there is indeed a metaphoric resonance between the different stories. Furthermore this resonance is useful in that it provides a secure vantage point as well as guidance towards effecting transformation for the client.

The validity of the metaphoric resonance is examined and areas of weakness highlighted. Some suggestions are made concerning further research.

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DEDICATION

For Laura who accompanied, helped, supported and encouraged me in more ways than it is possible to describe, and who has selflessly and patiently lived in the presence of my listening for that knock on the door which heralds a wizard and dwarfs inviting me down the by-ways to seek adventure.

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CHAPTER ONE1. INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteen fifties psychoanalytically oriented workers have grappled with pursuing therapy of and achieving some understanding of the syndrome described as "borderline" (Kernberg, 1980:3; Shapiro, 1983:15-19). Clients presenting with "borderline" symptoms are, and were, acknowledged to be particularly hard to work with (Kernberg, 1980:3).

These workers have been particularly involved in defining and conceptualizing the syndrome as well as developing an appropriate therapeutic praxis. It is intrinsic to the fundamentals of psychoanalysis that the syndrome should be understood developmentally. Therapy is thus addressed to developmental factors and their vicissitudes. In particular there is an accent on therapeutic holding and survival and the resolution of certain developmentally primitive defensive constellations.

It is, however, helpful to step back from the developmental premise and to recognise it as a particular metaphor or story. In fact psychotherapy itself may be regarded as a place of storytelling where, if the psychoanalytic perspective is used, the developmental story - the "history" - is retold. The recognition that the historical story is but one of many, frees and opens the way to the telling of other stories.

In its genesis (and possibly for personal political reasons) the Jungian approach promised an alternative to, or rather a deliteralizing extension of, the psychoanalytic approach. This deliteralizing tendency has a certain empowering effect on the Jungian approach both conceptually and practically. As a particular example its openness to, and comfort with, metaphor and paradox provides some tolerance of discontinuity, both experientially and theoretically. The Jungian approach with its metaphoric tendency is consistent with psychotherapy as a place of story-telling and is open to understanding

through myth and legend. In particular the story of Alchemy has exercised a fascination over Jungians.

An essential aspect of the story of Alchemy is the alchemical vessel. As the place in which and through which transformation occurs, it is an apposite symbol of therapy and interiority, as well as life and its vicissitudes.

A pertinent question arises: In what way is the particular story of the alchemical vessel useful in the psychotherapy of clients manifesting borderline symptoms? In seeking to explore this it is important to acknowledge that any study of conceptual and practical usefulness is itself a story. The story generally adopted is that of "objectivity" i.e. of natural science. There is however an alternative, a story which recognises the centrality of story-telling, and that is the approach of human science (Giorgi, 1970; Romanyshyn, 1982).

In its openness to man as human, and as situated in his relation to others, as well as its regard for the essential nature of relatedness itself, it is appropriate to use the story-telling of a case study. It can be argued that the case study method is consistent with a human science approach.

Broadly stated, it is the intention of this investigation to present a case study of a client manifesting borderline conditions. Through the medium of this case study certain Jungian conceptions will be highlighted, in particular the story of the alchemical vessel. Through discussion of this presentation and dialogue it is hoped to demonstrate the way in which the story of the alchemical vessel, and certain associated archetypal stories, are useful for both understanding and psychotherapy praxis.

CHAPTER TWO

2. THE CASE STUDY METHOD

2.1 Introduction

The particular anthropology used in approaching the investigation of a particular phenomenon or phenomena provides a starting point for the development of suitable ways of investigating that phenomenon. The particular anthropology provides the structure through which the phenomena emerge (Callanan, 1975:15; Hoeller, 1978/79).

The anthropology of this particular investigator reflects, to some extent, that of existential phenomenology. As an anthropology this perspective is rooted in the originary relatedness of Man, a state which has been called Mitsein by Heidegger (Kruger, 1979:70-72).

Such a perspective is fundamental to the process of psychotherapy which is itself rooted in relatedness (Kruger, 1986:204), reflects a process of negotiating (Hobson, 1985:197) and concerns the emergence of a nexus of meaning, feeling and change through relationship (Rogers, 1971:85-101; Jung, 1983(1969):12-13). Therapy, which may be defined in more general terms (Eysenck et al, 1975(1972):886), may also be perceived as a co-constituted activity in which a person, through a relationship, explores and uncovers the dynamic structuring and meaning of her life and is opened up to change.

Such a process, which is itself a specific instance of Mitsein (a fact which is attested to by its co-constituted nature), requires in turn a suitable vehicle of reflection and elaboration. It is through the means of such a vehicle that it is hoped to undertake this investigation. The proposed investigation is a reflection and elaboration of the meaning of and the phenomena which are revealed by and through psychotherapy. To use a natural scientific metaphor - an appropriate means of sampling the "data" must be provided. It can be argued (Giorgi, 1970) that the natural scientific method is not appropriate to the study of psychological life, certainly with its

cleavage of observer and observed it is not respectful of Mitsein. What is required is a method of access to the experience and process of psychotherapy. Such a method is that of the case study. It is not proposed to argue for the case study method in respect of its strengths and weaknesses in terms of the natural scientific paradigm, but rather to demonstrate its power as a means of reflecting and elaborating the meaning and phenomena excavated through psychotherapy. To reflect is only part of the requirement, for the method should be capable of elaborating the manifest material in a useful way. It becomes necessary to demonstrate the appropriateness and power (or validity) of the case study method to achieve this.

2.2 History, Definition and Argument

The tracing of the use of the case study as a method is difficult, but the method has been in use for a long time. It certainly predates the natural scientific method (Bromley, 1986:10). It was used by Breuer and Freud in the late nineteenth century (Breuer & Freud, 1974). In the nineteen twenties and thirties it was also widely used by sociologists, but its use declined by the nineteen fifties through the increasing adoption of psychometric methods (Bromley, 1986:10). It remained in use in social anthropology to supplement the so-called "objective methods" (Bromley, 1986:11). It is still in use in psychology and in particular in psychoanalysis (Kvale, 1986).

Bromley (1986:1) has described the psychological case-study as "an account of a person in a situation", or more specifically as "essentially a reconstruction and interpretation of a major episode in a person's life" (1986:3).

More specifically, the case study may be defined as "a record of history, environment, and relevant details" in which "an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment" is made (Woolf, 1975:172). As a method it constitutes the exploration of an area of interest through the reflection, recording and elaboration of the meaning of events which occur, or have occurred, in a particular

situation or situations. In other words it is the telling of a story which possesses heuristic value.

Psychotherapy also is the telling of a story: the sharing of events, history, dreams, etc. It constitutes the revelation of a person's life in a way that is meaningful and helpful, and which opens up possibilities. In their fundamentally shared nature in Mitsein (i.e. as reflections of co-constituted activity) as well as their specifics, the case study and psychotherapy deal with the same ground in a similar way. It is so that they diverge in their consequences: the case study, through elaboration, ends in some useful understanding, the psychotherapy (if all goes well) in some useful change. Yet in their point of departure and their unfolding they are consistent with each other. The case study can thus usefully reflect the content and activity of psychotherapy.

2.3 Validity of the Case Study Method

In psychology the concept of "validity" is traditionally understood (with respect to psychological tests) as "the degree to which the test actually measures what it purports to measure" (Anastasi, 1982:27). This is however a concept which is rooted in the understanding of a mapping between a "real" and a conceptual world. This has been termed "mathematical" by Heidegger. It ignores the manner in which phenomena emerge through structures, thus the phenomena are manifest only to the extent that the structure is capable of supporting their emergence (Hoeller, 1978/79).

Working from a phenomenological perspective it is useful to discover the "meaning" of "validity". Etymologically "valid" is derived from the Latin valere, to be strong or well (Woolf, 1975:1291). Thus to have validity is to have strength, to be well, i.e. to be in a position to stand up to something such as a task. The degree of validity of a method therefore gives an indication of the degree to which that method can stand up to the task required of it. In this instance the task being undertaken is the disclosing of what is present in the psychotherapeutic situation and its resonances or

echoes in the lives of the participants, i.e. what is the degree of power of the method to uncover?

This constitutes the pre-Socratic conception of truth as "that which discloses itself" (Laing, 1969:129). The power of a method is thus the degree to which the method conceals and reveals. Every stance taken provides a means of concealing and revealing. The previously discussed natural scientific method is a case in point. Its specific application in medicine has been very useful. It has revealed man as a machine and in so doing has been empowered to repair him. Yet in its revelation of man as mechanical it conceals him in other ways, as for example, a being with feelings and courage: the heart as a pump is not the heart as the seat of love.

What is revealed is manifest in the results of a study, what is concealed is more difficult to account for. In accounting for concealment we embark upon a hermeneutic journey, a continual questioning, which removes us from our principal intention, which is to examine the revealed. It is apparent that a thorough exploration of validity carries us away from the task. It is nonetheless necessary to broadly demarcate the extent of concealment.

In the first instance this demarcation is achieved by an owning of the position and influences of the investigator. There are doubtless elements which in themselves may require an iterative dialogical "uncovering". This residual concealment must stand as the final limitation of any study.

In the second instance it can be achieved through a critique of implementation or practice. It follows from the foregoing that the case study method is a self-critical but nonetheless prescribed activity. The understanding or interpretation of meaning in psychotherapy is "open to multiple meanings and layers of meaning" (Kvale, 1986:159). In using the substance of the psychotherapeutic dialogue it is also clear that there is no "strict line of demarcation between data and meaning, between description and interpretation" (Kvale, 1986:159). From a phenomenological perspective the search for

a strict line of demarcation is viewed as fundamentally futile: "data" emerges through a structure of meaning. It remains for us to alert ourselves to the degree to which the phenomenon is concealed or revealed. The practical nature of psychotherapy is such that the charge may be levelled from the natural scientific perspective "that the therapist may validate his interpretation by unwittingly influencing the patient's behaviour" (Kvale, 1986:161). The validity of such a criticism indicates an area of concealment in the case study. Yet this criticism itself conceals the human dimension of the situation in that it supposes that if the psychotherapist were less influential or if influence could be controlled then the validity would increase. This betrays the co-constituted nature of the psychotherapy, a co-constitution which is originary (Mitsein) and definitively human. In a practical way this state of co-constitution is addressed by Dieckmann (1987:3) when he observes that dreams consistent with the school of analysis followed by the analyst indicate more than the client's desire to oblige. He argues that they reflect a fundamental connectedness or relatedness between analyst and client.

Another practical criticism rests on the fact that "the lack of systematic observational procedures makes the documentation depend on the therapist's selective memory and notes" (Kvale, 1986:159). This is certainly true and yet the material remains valid insofar as it reflects the psychotherapist's revelation of phenomena, an argument which covers even the criticism that "the structuring of extensive material becomes highly dependent (on) the therapist's guiding interest" (Kvale, 1986:159). In point of fact the material emerges through, and not in spite of the psychotherapist's guiding interest.

It has been argued that the concept of validity indicates the extent to which a particular methodology is capable of revealing phenomena. Such a concept acknowledges the fact that the story told by the investigator establishes a legitimate place of emergence. The investigator should seek to indicate the extent to which his story-telling conceals and reveals the phenomena through explication of his set i.e. of the broad perspective in which he stands. Such an

explication may take the "confession" of theoretical background. This investigator favours a Jungian understanding but with a profound respect for the more linear, developmental, psychoanalytic perspective. It is further so that this investigator has been positively influenced by the philosophical perspective of existential phenomenology.

CHAPTER THREE

3. THEORY

The intention of this study is the demonstration of the usefulness of a Jungian approach to the understanding and therapy of borderline conditions. This intention rests upon a particular understanding of the development of a theory and therapy praxis. Although a condition's phenomenology may seem to lead to a theory and thus to a psychotherapy praxis the relationship is not so linearly progressive. *Phenomenology* is manifested in the emergence of phenomena through theory and psychotherapy praxis. Likewise theory emerges from the manifest phenomenology, as well as the psychotherapist's particular skills and preferences of practice. Furthermore psychotherapy praxis emerges from the challenge of the manifest phenomenology of a condition to the theoretical set of the therapist.

Acknowledging the nonlinear, nonprogressive nature of these three elements it remains useful to approach them to some extent in a linear yet cyclical way. In what follows this linearity will be more consistently applied to the psychoanalytical perspectives than the Jungian, as the former are intrinsically closer to such an explication.

It is necessary in attempting to highlight the contribution of a Jungian perspective to provide parallel contrast and support. This is possible through the juxtaposition of the Jungian and psychoanalytic perspectives.

3.1 Jungian-Psychoanalytic Juxtaposition

Hermeneutically the Jungian and psychoanalytic positions may be understood as a contrast of synthetic/amplificatory hermeneutics and reductive/causal hermeneutics respectively (Jadot, 1984:110-113; Samuels et al, 1986:16 & 127-128). This particular dichotomy is highlighted in the diversion between Freud and Jung over the meaning of the symbol. As this is important in its own right for later

arguments, the issue will be dealt with in some detail. Further still, in the light of the specific ends of this study, certain elements of their diversion over incest will also be examined.

3.1.1 Diversion over the symbol

Since the second decade of the Freudian era there has been controversy over the meaning of the symbol. This divergence was instrumental in the break between Freud and Jung (Jadot, 1984:109). The Freudian conception of the symbol was semiotic i.e. the symbol was seen as a sign (Jadot, 1984:110). Freud's method was to reveal the primitive unconscious bases of psychological motivation, a method which Jung termed reductive (Samuels et al, 1986:127) and which may also be described as analytical and causal (Jadot, 1984:110). Freud's hermeneutics have thus been termed "reductive hermeneutics" and are a reflection of the type of hermeneutics pursued by Lacan in psychoanalysis and by Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss in other social sciences (Jadot, 1984:111).

The Jungian conception of the symbol acknowledges the symbol's semiotic possibility in the context of historical causality, but goes further and acknowledges its psychological significance for the present and future (Jacobi, 1959:88-99; Jadot, 1984:110). Thus the Jungian understanding is not only analytical and causal but prospective and synthetic. Jung described his approach to the symbol as synthetic. He maintained that the reductive method of psychoanalysis obscured "the full meaning of the unconscious product". Jung was more concerned with where a person's life was leading him than with what had influenced his arrival at a particular point (Samuels et al, 1986:127).

The symbol for Jung is by nature paradoxical, it is that which unites opposites and also "provides a perspective from which a synthesis of the opposing elements can be made". The symbol is neither alternative nor compensation per se but that by which attention is drawn to another position. This invitation, if understood appropriately, allows an extension of personality, as well as a resolution of

conflict, to occur (Samuels et al, 1986:145). The symbol is an expression of the transcendent function (i.e. the function which mediates the transcendence of opposites) and "facilitates a transition from one psychological attitude or condition to another" (Samuels et al, 1986:150). This conception of the symbol as something principally instrumental in the "development of personality" (Jadot, 1984:110) suggests a perspective which is teleological, which "at the very least...enables a person to move beyond pointless conflict and avoid one-sidedness" (Samuels et al, 1986:150). It is apparent that the symbol represents a call to a meaning beyond a structural understanding. Such an hermeneutic has been termed "instauration" (Jadot, 1984:110). Durand and Ricoeur regard both the reductive and instaurative hermeneutics as respectively imposing a restriction on the power of explanation and maintain that they should be used in conjunction. The symbol may thus be conceived as possessing a double potency: as archeological in indicating determining and causative links, which lead to some effect, and as eschatological (or teleological) in opening up possibilities in the present and the future - in short, a respective "demystification" and "re-mythization" (Jadot, 1984:111).

Jung applied this doubly potent approach, for it is simplistic to understand his approach as exclusively instaurative. He "never eschewed the analysis of infancy and childhood as such" (Samuels et al, 1986:128). In the application of the reductive hermeneutic however "one must be capable of distinguishing the pathological and the useless from what is valuable and worth preserving" (Jung cited in Storr, 1983:151).

It has been indicated that both the Freudian and Jungian conceptualizations of the symbol reflect differing hermeneutics: the reductive and the synthetic (or instaurative) respectively. Exclusive use of one or the other of these hermeneutics restricts the power of explanation. Although Jung championed a synthetic hermeneutic he acknowledged the value of the reductive hermeneutic if used in a constructive and careful way.

3.1.2 Incest

At the outset it is necessary to acknowledge that the current psychoanalytic perspective places some emphasis on pre-oedipal life, and utilizes a more structural semantic approach (Rycroft, 1972(68):106; Samuels, 1986(1985):9-11). Using the tale of Oedipus, Freud told a story which involved a developmental conflict of a literal historical nature. This story has been retold through a semantic understanding as a structuring of psychological life i.e. it has been deliteralized.

As has been remarked in the discussion of symbols, Jung took a less literal, reductive stance and a more metaphoric, synthetic stance (Jacobi, 1971:91-94). Although he considered incest possible in a literal way he took it more as a useful story, or powerful metaphor "for a patch of psychological growth and development" (Samuels et al, 1986:75).

In his exposition on the transference (Jung, 1983(1969):56) Jung considered incest as a metaphor which symbolizes "union with one's own being"; a union which leads to "individuation or becoming a self". The becoming aspect of this symbolization is reflected in the possible consequence of a man and woman coming together sexually: the "child". In this respect incest serves to metaphorize symbolization. In incest "the two bodies which might engage in the sex act represent different parts of the psyche which are not, as yet, integrated. Intercourse marks such an integration and the baby which might result symbolizes growth and regeneration" (Samuels et al, 1986:74). As a symbolic conjunction this is a reflection of the hieros gamos: the union of heaven and earth, sun and moon, gold and silver, sulphur and mercury (Cirlot, 1962), king and queen, adept and his soror mystica (Jung, 1983(1969)). Myth and alchemy provide avenues for the understanding of psychic processes, they provide a "plan" from which sense can be made of psychic life (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:127). The incestuous coming together, or union, called in alchemy the coniunctio, provides a useful and central metaphor of psychological life.

3.1.3 Summary

It has emerged that the Freudian and Jungian approaches to both the "symbol" and to "incest" diverge in similar ways. The Freudian reductive hermeneutic leads to a literal, biographically personal understanding of events from which symbols (as semes) emerge and in which a particular constellation of incest, and hence the Oedipus complex, occurs.

The Jungian instaurative hermeneutic leads to a metaphoric, transhistorical and transpersonal, "collective", understanding in which symbols are understood semantically and teleologically and in which incest indicates a psychic process.

In application of the Jungian perspective, the conceptualization of incest allows for a generalization to all spheres and levels of psychic life. Its power resides in its openness to and "relatedness" with this person (the psychotherapist does not "know" (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:159)), its capacity for general application and the metaphoric loosening of inflexibility and stuckness. Its weakness resides in its potential for escape from the specific personal consequences of insight and a thorough explication of specific, personal situatedness.

It is important to note that to some extent this is a caricaturing of the psychoanalytic position, with the specific intention of providing a contrast. Further, neither theoretically nor practically does the Jungian approach exclude the validity of the Freudian. The Jungian approach possesses a certain power of being able to adopt the specificities of the Freudian position, when appropriate, without in a broader sense losing the freedom of metaphoric generality and extension.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. BORDERLINE CONDITIONS: DEFINITION AND PHENOMENOLOGY

4.1 Use of the terms "Borderline condition(s)"

Broadly speaking "borderline" is used to describe symptomatology which lies on the border between neurosis and psychosis (Rycroft, 1968(72):14). Hitherto the terms "borderline condition" or "borderline conditions" have been used to indicate a particular type of client presentation or aspects of their symptomatology. (For examples of this usage see: Shapiro, 1983:18; Vela et al, 1983:36). These clients correspond to what Kernberg (1980:3) has called the "borderline patient". It is this investigator's feeling that it is more appropriate to speak of "borderline conditions". In so doing focus is brought to bear on the character and situatedness of particular elements of the condition. This allows, inter alia, for the respect of the person, a reduced adherence to a developmental perspective, as well as descriptions of the person's affect on others e.g. countertransference manifestations.

4.2 Phenomenology of the Borderline Condition

The defining and naming of borderline conditions has enjoyed considerable attention (see: Shapiro, 1983:15-18). To disclose the borderline condition it is necessary to adopt a perspectivalist approach. A summary of different authors' perspectives on the phenomenology of borderline conditions serves this end. Such a composite "storytelling" comprises part of this study for it is essential to the development and explication of different theoretical perspectives as well as the comparison with the story of the alchemical vessel (and associated myths) and that of the case material presented.

Essentially the borderline condition presents as a profound and chronic instability in a variety of dimensions of a person's psychological and interpersonal functioning. These include emotional

life, interpersonal behaviour, potentially damaging behaviour and disturbances of sense of identity.

Typically no single feature is invariably present and there may be associated features of a schizoid, narcissistic, antisocial and histrionic type.

These clients reflect poor or inconsistent impulse control and extreme affective lability. There are apparently inappropriate mood fluctuations with extremes of anger and despair, depression and loneliness.

Interpersonal relations are often intense and fluctuate greatly with extremes of idealization and devaluation. There may also be an inability to tolerate being alone, and yet an experience of claustrophobia when with people. There is often a generally pessimistic attitude and a social contrariness. There is commonly an alternation between dependency and self-assertion. Paranoid ideation may be present.

Impulsive and unpredictable behaviour is manifest with a disposition towards potentially self-damaging acts such as: sexual sprees, substance abuse, financial recklessness and self-mutilation, e.g. by cutting or burning.

There is a profound disturbance of a sense of personal identity in which the person feels bored and empty inside. The sense of personal unreality may become heightened when with others or in particular situations. There may be depersonalization and derealization as well (Brooke and Ruthenberg, 1988: personal communication; D.S.M. III 1980:305-321; Shapiro, 1983:15-19).

Although this general phenomenology mostly embraces borderline conditions as a syndrome, there exist other stories which disclose other aspects of it. Several workers have been alert to this (Liebowitz, 1979 and Stone, 1980 cited in Vela et al, 1983), the syndromal as opposed to the personality structure stories being two in particular.

Using the perspective of Kernberg (1981:3-7) several dimensions of the borderline condition become evident: a descriptive phenomenology, a phenomenology of defences, and a phenomenology which emerges through therapy. Kernberg's descriptive phenomenology is essentially the same as the syndromal elements already outlined.

The defence constellations evident in borderline conditions are mainly those derivative from the extensive use of splitting i.e.: primitive idealization, primitive types of projection (in particular projective identification), denial, omnipotence and devaluation.

Typically in psychotherapy there is ruthless use of the therapist as a transference object, with the aim of gratifying the client's needs. In contrast to psychotic clients however, a sense of difference between psychotherapist and client is maintained. Nonetheless the client does perceive herself and the psychotherapist to be interchanging aspects of her personality.

The person manifesting borderline conditions presents with a profound suffering and a sense of being an outsider. They are rarely able to convert their potential into a cohesive form for their creativity is attacked and dismembered by their affects. When their idealization breaks down they become subject to intense feelings of abandonment and even persecution. They possess an intimate sense of an inner world which must be kept hidden so that only their profound hopelessness and despair manifest (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:114-119). Dependency, neediness and an intense desire for autonomy, coupled with a deep hopelessness that any resolution is possible, seem to characterize the condition. Schwartz-Salant (1987) has considered the borderline condition as one in which there is no persona. It would seem to me that it is not so much a lack of a persona per se as an intolerance of falsity and negation inherent in a persona. It is almost as if the person manifesting borderline conditions is saying: "It is unacceptable that I should have to compromise on my feeling in any way".

People manifesting borderline conditions are able to elicit highly

variable and intense reaction in the psychotherapist. These are often negative, with the psychotherapist fearing for the survival of his own identity (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:114). It is also as if they carry an intense affectual aura which may be attractive or repellant. The psychotherapist's sense may be of standing before something numinous (Dieckmann, 1987:1; Schwartz-Salant, 1987:118; personal observation).

There is also a child-like quality to them (Bührmann, 1988 & Dieckmann, 1988: personal communication; personal observation) which is not accounted for simply in terms of their helplessness (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:119). Perhaps consistent with this is their use of highly concrete language (Ruthenberg, 1987: personal communication) as well as a facility with images (personal observation).

CHAPTER FIVE5. CERTAIN JUNGIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE BORDERLINE CONDITION

It would seem that borderline conditions were first seen as a puzzle by psychoanalysts. This begs the question: where are the Jungian perspectives on this condition? Is it possible that the condition is made manifest through psychoanalytic theorizing, or is it a "new" condition which psychoanalysis has been particularly quick to engage?

Hans Dieckmann (1987:4) makes the point that in all probability Jung worked with borderline conditions under the description of functional psychosis. In "his private practice he had to his astonishment found such compensated or latent psychoses much more often than he had expected, in a relation of 1:10 in fact". From Dieckmann's perspective Jungians have always worked with borderline conditions but in a less syndromally discerning way than the psychoanalysts. Jungians with their early focus on primitive dynamics have not had the benefit of "progress" as have the psychoanalysts when they extended their treatment beyond the classical neuroses. The analysts of the Jungian school have to an extent failed to take up and develop, in a specific way, Jung's clinical work in this field (Dieckmann, 1987:4-5).

Of fundamental significance to a Jungian understanding of the borderline condition is the concept of the complex. In psychoanalytic perspectives on the borderline condition there is a tendency for the accent to fall on a developmental failure or deviation. In consequence the ego fails to form in a cohesive way. Dieckmann has argued that such a stance could encourage a therapeutic nihilism. By contrast he argues that the energetic power of the complex dominates a relatively unstable ego. In such a situation even a "normal" ego could become overwhelmed and inflated by the unconscious complex. To some extent the splitting evident in borderline conditions may be the consequence of an overpowered ego rather than being exclusively genetic and causative. Dieckmann does not argue for the exclusivity of complex strength rather than ego weakness in the manifestation of

borderline conditions (Dieckmann, 1987:23). Such a view does however, offer a new avenue of approach in seeking to understand the condition. Dieckmann argues for the primacy of the archetypes of the mother and the father and of the complexes thus constellated, and in fact considers all other complexes derivative from these (1987:2).

Schwartz-Salant (1987:121 & 141) has implied that the developmental perspectives, in their profusion, reflect the response of the psychotherapist to so frightening and confusing a condition as the borderline. He suggests that it is more useful to make use of a mythological "map" in understanding and pursuing psychotherapy of borderline conditions. In this regard he recommends the story of alchemy.

The phenomenology of the borderline condition points towards certain archetypal themes. The phenomenology reflects a failure to become, (i.e. gain a sense of self) through transformation. It reflects a failure of the place of transformation. The condition manifests energy and vitality as well as a child-like quality which are ravaged by despair and fragmentation. Such dimensions of the phenomenology of the borderline condition can be examined through a discussion of alchemy (the process of transformation) and in particular the alchemical vessel (the place of transformation), the puer aeternus (eternal child), the dismembering qualities of raw archetypal life and the shadow of the mother (the vampire).

5.1 The Alchemical Process as Metaphor/Story

Jung considered alchemy to reflect an earlier understanding of the psyche and its processes (Samuels, 1986(1985):178-179). The alchemical process may be considered as an elaborate, convoluted and multifaceted metaphor or story which is able to resonate, as an expression of psychological life, at many different levels. As a metaphor it is intrinsically invested with paradox, and a multiplicity of strata. It also possesses a potential for discontinuity which to some extent may remain concealed by the subsidiary metaphoric power of the language in which it is conveyed.

As a linearly explicable description of psychological life the alchemical process is limited. Yet in its resonance and power of extension, both metaphorically and teleologically, it is paramount. As a myth it is metaphorically expressive of typical patterns of behaviour throughout life (Samuels, 1986(1985):203).

In spite of the confusing nature of alchemical texts (and even the Jungian explications of them) they convey a feeling of being apposite and vital. As a point of departure for the linear explications of specific aspects of psychological life the story of the alchemical process is extremely useful. Further still the teleological aspect of the story provides something beyond liberation from a limiting and truncating life structure.

5.2 The Story of the Alchemical Process

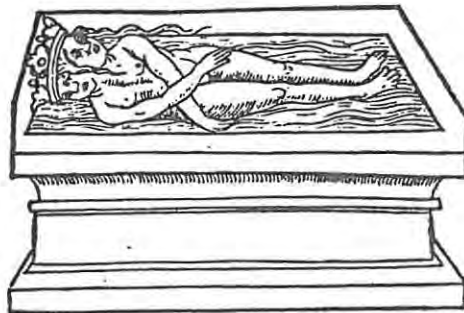
Alchemy was manifestly concerned with transformation. It has been contended that in its genesis alchemy came to reflect psychological factors in and through the natural world (Samuels et al, 1986(1985):13).

The alchemical process commences in a particular setting where, once it has been gathered, the basic material (prima materia) is operated upon. The prima materia undergoes certain changes in this operation. There is no completely consistent system of describing these stages or their sequence, although there is some degree of accord (Jung, 1980(1968):228).

Four stages can generally be discriminated: blackening, whitening, yellowing and reddening. This was later reduced to three stages by the exclusion of yellowing. Blackening, called inter alia nigredo, refers to the consequences of separation (Campbell, 1976:279). This obtains in the beginning stage of the process when the prima materia undergoes dissolution or putrefication, disintegration or decay. The prima materia is a confused mass (massa confusa) of "hostile opposites" (Jung 1983(1969):49). This separation of the "hostile opposites" is termed various things by the alchemists: separatio,

solutio, divisio, putrefactio (Jung, 1980(1968):229-230). In the Rosarium philosophorum this initial state is represented by the Mercurial Fountain. The nigredo is reiterated in that work after a state of union, the coniunctio, in figure six, as putrefactio (figure 1). In this instance this second nigredo results as a consequence of the death, and loss of soul, which follows the coniunctio. This death may be termed mortificatio, calciunatio or putrefactio.

PHILOSOPHORVM.
CONCEPTIO SEV PVTRE
factio



*Bye liegen König vnd Königin tot/
 Die selb schreyt sich mit großer not.*

ARISTOTELES REX ET
Philosophus.

Figure 1 (Jung, 1983(1969):97)

After the nigredo, a whitening (albedo) occurs. This albedo is achieved by "washing" (ablutio or baptisma) (Jung, 1980(1968):231) and is repeated many times (Von Franz, 1980:220). The soul which was released at death is reunited with the dead body and resurrects it. The Cabala mineralis of Rabbi Simeon ben Cantara illustrates the product of the first putrefactio the mercurius homunculas, who may represent the puer aeternus (see figure 13). Further distillation of the contents of this vas leads to the formation of the transformative principle, the mercurius vivas (Campbell, 1976:278-281). Through the transformation of the puer aeternus, by the repeated application of heat or by repeated "washing", transformation is achieved and with the whitening the principal goal of the process reached (Jung,

1980(1968):231-232). In addition to this there is a further process of iteration whereby the nigredo and albedo occur many times (Von Franz, 1980:222). There is clearly a hierarchical or nested process of iterations within iterations.

The change through the yellowing to the reddening (the rubedo) was effected through a raising of the heat of the fire to its most intense (Jung, 1980(1968):232). The control of the heat was an essential element of the alchemical process and four levels of heat were discriminated (Powell, 1976:36) with the appearance of the rubedo signalling the achievement of the goal. This goal was in itself obscure and confusing and many metaphors exist for it. These are often paradoxical in nature, for example the goal as the Philosopher's Stone (lapis philosophorum) is often identified with the prima materia itself. The goal may also be reflected in a mystical way as God on Earth, the Saviour, or the Son of All (filius macrocosmi). In this way resonance with the Christian and other salvation myths is established.

5.3 The Alchemical Vessel

The alchemical vessel (vas) is considered, in an alchemical work ascribed to Maria Prophetissa, to contain the whole secret of alchemy. The alchemical vessel (vas Hermetic, vas mirabile) is the place in which the transformation occurs as the matrix or uterus in the place from which the philosopher's son (filius philosophorum) is born (Jung, 1980(1968):236-239).

The alchemical vessel was sealed and placed in some type of furnace (see figure 2) through which a graded application of heat was applied to the material inside.



Alchemical furnace.—
Geber, *De alchimia* (1529)

Figure 2 (Jung, 1980(1968):231)

Before applying the alchemical vessel as metaphor it is necessary to look at some of the processes which occur in it in detail. As was noted there is a constant washing to achieve the albedo. In physical terms this may be seen as refluxing i.e. the repetitive evaporation and distillation or redistillation. Towards this end special vessels, which have to be sealed to achieve the refluxing, were developed. The purpose of distillation is purification. The constant "washing" of the "seven metals" is viewed by Von Franz (1980:220) as an engagement of a particular problem, in psychological terms.

The cleansing or purification itself was a very prolonged process for which the alchemists used many temporal metaphors. Von Franz (1980:222) has described it as a very protracted process which "sometimes means endlessly rehearsing the same problem in its different aspects". This may be seen to correspond to the repetitive application of transference interpretations or the shared enduring of the discomfort of confrontation with the unconscious.

As if the repetitive washing or refluxing of the impure prima materia were not enough, the alchemical work the Aurora consurgens indicates further cycles of confrontation with the nigredo (Von Franz, 1980:225

ff). This iteration is also clearly evident in another alchemical work, the Mutus Liber ("The Wordless Book", see appendix). This process leads to change or transformation both effected through and represented by the figure of the Mercurius. As the principle of combination the Mercurius enters at a certain stage (see figure 3 Mutus Liber, plate 8). In psychological terms the transcendent function becomes manifest. In the Mutus Liber (plate 15, see figure 4) the opposites are finally represented by the alchemist and his soror mystica (mystical sister). They are lifted up by the Mercurius, as principle of transcendence, and freed by the "body" i.e. of drivenness and impulsivity, to be able to see i.e. to become conscious.



Figure 3



Figure 4

5.4 Psychological Parallels to the Story of the Alchemical Vessel

The story of the alchemical process is multilayered and paradoxical, and yet it illustrates a sequential process of development. The story of the alchemical process is thus able to reflect psychological development as well as what is multilayered and paradoxical therein. At several points it also offers a metaphor for the constellation and activation of particular states; the activation of the archetype as a complex. As a place of transformation the alchemical vessel may be able to metaphorize psychotherapy and provide useful indications of what is occurring and how the process may proceed.

The alchemical vessel forms an essential part of the story-telling, is in fact the most important part of it. As has been noted it is paradoxical in itself. In physical terms it is a sealed container in which, through the graded application of heat and consequent refluxing, transformation towards a goal is effected. More specifically in the rising up and falling back the interplay of opposites and their transcendence is effected.

Certain qualities of the vessel stand out:

- a. Its paradoxicality
- b. Its sealed nature
- c. The application of heat
- d. The process of refluxing
- e. Its male and female properties
- f. The coniunctio and the emergence of the divine child/puer aeternus

5.4.1 Paradoxicality of the Alchemical Vessel

The paradoxicality of the vessel is evident in its identification with what is to be transformed, the space wherein transformation occurs as well as with what it is to become (June 1980(1968):236). Being both container and contained it reflects a space in which issues of "inside" and "outside" and their definition are at rest. This reflects the conception of the transitional space (Winnicott,

1978:280). This transitional nature as well as the purpose of the vessel, point towards it as an area in which "good" and "bad" are tolerated, in which the "hostile opposites" are contained. In this containment a time of dynamic letting be of the opposites is looked forward to i.e. the vessel anticipates the success of the transformative process.

The implications of this for psychotherapy in general and of borderline conditions in particular are several. In the first instance the alchemical vessel metaphorizes some of the same phenomena metaphorized by Winnicott's concept of a transitional space. Therapy becomes a space in which the maintenance of "inside" and "outside", "good" and "bad" may be set aside. In the instance of borderline conditions this points to the remarkable fact, for the person manifesting borderline conditions, that the "bad" does not succeed in utterly destroying the "good". In practical terms this may mean that the therapist survives the attacks made on him, and in time the client comes to realize "object constancy". Yet this is also negated by the paradoxical nature of the alchemical vessel. The psychotherapist does not endure and survive the attacks unchanged. Jung (1980(1968):12-13) pointed to this when he believed that the psychotherapist suffers from the problems of the client. This represents a loss of boundaries in which the psychotherapist becomes infected with the dis-ease of the client in a shamanistic way (Stein, 1984:76-80). As shaman the archetype of the "Wounded Healer" is constellated (Samuels, 1986(1985):187-191) and an imaginal field is established. Through interaction in this imaginal field (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:124-125) the psychotherapist must face his very own conflicts and transcend them.

The paradoxical multiplicity of the vessel is manifest in another way. Nowhere is this more evident than in the development of the nigredo (figures 5 & 6). The nigredo which in a lived sense reflects a black despair, a profound hopelessness and depression, arises from both a separation (in the initial separatio) and a bringing together (in the coniunctio).

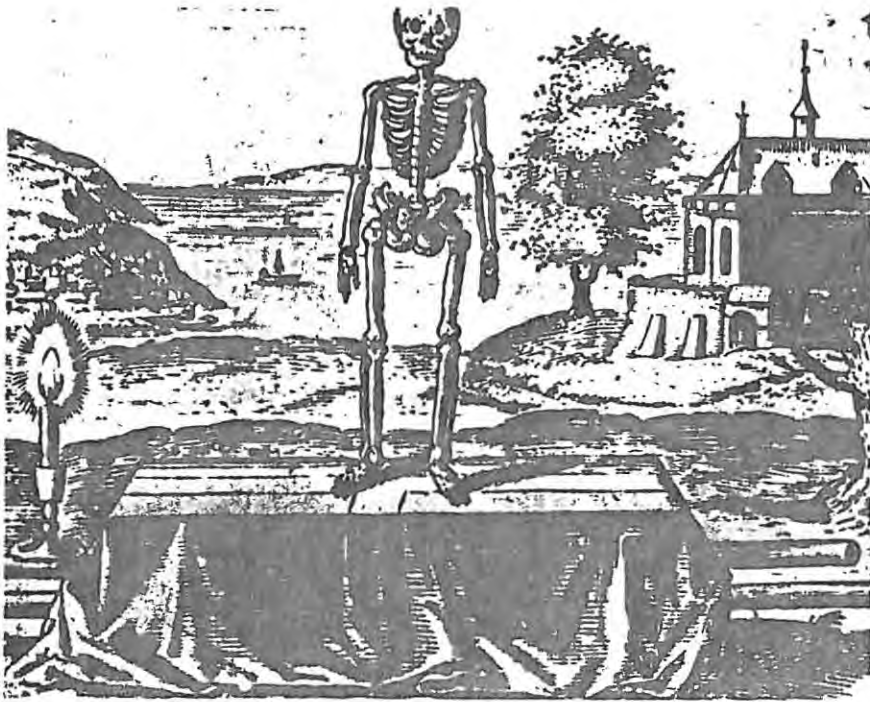


Figure 5. Nigredo: "Fourth Key" of Basil Valentine (Powell, 1976:107).



The *nigredo*: eclipse of *Mercurius senex*, exhaling the *spiritus* and *anima*. The raven is a *nigredo* symbol.—Jansthaler, *Platonum spagyricum* (1625)

Figure 6. (Jung, 1980(1968):230)

The former captures the understanding of the borderline condition as typified by the issue of separation of self and other (Kernberg, 1980:10-11; Masterson, 1981:133; Schwartz-Salant, 1987:126). In terms of developmental theory the nigredo of separation metaphorizes the failure of the rapprochement subphase of Mahler. The alchemical vessel of the mother fails, for the dyad is such that for the child to become separate from the mother is to be abandoned. The view that the "borderline" child often had a "borderline" mother (Masterson, 1981:131-133) reflects the failure of the mother as shaman, in that she is unable to tolerate her own woundedness in separation and must engulf or reject her child. No area of disillusionment (Winnicott, 1978) can open up, there can be no area of play for all is in deadly earnest. A failure to separate through fear of the consequences indicates a swallowing up or devouring of the incipient self. This calls to mind the dragon or serpent which may stand for the unconscious as matrix or devouring mother. In this respect we are faced with the archetype of the Great Mother in her bipolarity. She is on the one hand the "good" or fairy godmother and on the other hand the "bad" or evil stepmother/wicked witch. The "hostile opposites" have become constellated in the literal activation of the Great Mother in her bipolarity.

It is evident that the nigredo, as the beginning point of therapy, is also constituted in confrontation with the "hostile opposites": splitting, projection and idealization. In terms of object relations theory these "hostile opposites" are either libidinally or aggressively determined. In terms of the alchemical process they can be manifold, as reflections of the "elements" or of the "seven metals". For example the libidinal unit may be metaphorized by copper or Venus, the aggressive by iron or Mars, but there remain the other metals which may metaphorize problems as yet undefined in object relations theory.

The bringing together or joining (coniunctio) may also usher in a nigredo. Schwartz-Salant (1987:141) has indicated the despair consequent upon joining together. For borderline conditions he differentiates the fear and despair of fusion (which resonates with

the engulfment fear consequent upon the activation of the devouring mother) and the true coniunctio or relationship. Nonetheless in the Rosarium philosophorum the coniunctio leads on to a putrefactio, a deadening which is a form of nigredo.

The paradoxicality of the metaphorization begins to become manifest. What had seemed clear-cut in terms of separation issues becomes convoluted, circular and confusing. The linear developmental model may be traced out in part but soon becomes merely an entry or exit point of paradox.

Schwartz-Salant (1987:140-141) has highlighted a particular implication of the coniunctio. In seeking to aid the client the psychotherapist sets the stage for and enters into a coniunctio. In practical terms with borderline conditions this may mean becoming despairing, or owning of the wound. In despairing, in having no hope, the psychotherapist must fracture the alchemical vessel. Paradoxically the psychotherapist must also keep the vessel intact through unhopingly hoping, or maintaining a hopeless hope. In owning the inevitable failure the psychotherapist succeeds.

5.4.2 Sealed Nature of the Alchemical Vessel

The essence of the alchemical vessel is its sealed nature. This fact is captured in the common adjective "hermetic" which refers to Hermes or Mercurius and means absolutely sealed. The vessel is not only sealed but must, at appropriate points in the process, be capable of remaining sealed.

In implementing the process the alchemist (who is himself an intimate part of it) must care for the vessel and ensure that it is strong enough. In a similar sense the vessel must care for the prima materia and be strong enough to contain its chaos.

In developmental terms this suggests the caring and holding capacities of the mother - if she should fail, the transformative process is interrupted. It is important to note the perspectivalism of the

alchemical vessel as metaphor. There may be a phasic understanding which metaphorizes the failure of the vessel as a developmental failure. In borderline conditions this is the failure of the rapprochement subphase. By contrast it may be seen in terms of the activation of the devouring mother, where the vessel fails through being too caring, by "overcontaining". In being too well sealed the vessel may then fail through bursting, which may metaphorize the abandonment by, or loss of the safe place utterly. The devouring seal of the mother serves to pre-empt sealing in another way at another level, there is no hope in transformation and development. In particular this disallows the "hopeless hope". A mother who overseals is stating that beyond her there is no seal, no place for growth. She thus literalizes the paradox and no growth can occur.

The implications of this for the psychotherapy of borderline conditions are reflected in different ways. In the first instance, parameters of technique may need to be established (Kernberg, 1980:188) to provide a means and setting of containment. In the contracting implicit in the application of parameters of technique there is a recognition of something in the client which she as yet does not have. In the second instance the psychotherapist needs to be able to withstand the aggressive onslaughts of the client (Dieckmann, 1987:18). Towards this end the psychotherapist needs the support and guidance of supervision. To withdraw to a secure disengaged position of commentary is to fail the client. Such a withdrawn disengaged psychotherapist cannot be trusted, and certainly will be unable to face the despair, leaving the client alone, i.e. abandoned, in this regard.

5.4.3 The Application of Heat to the Alchemical Vessel

The application of heat to the alchemical vessel is fundamental to the process. This application is of a graded nature and goes from mildly warm to an intense form capable of melting metals (Powell, 1976:76). The application of heat is necessary for the evaporation and thus the refluxing, but it serves more than merely that function. It serves to initiate the process of change and to sustain it (figure 7).



The transformation of Mercurius in the fire.—Bar-
chusen, *Elementa chemiae* (1718)

Figure 7 (Jung 1980(1968):248)

The initially gentle application of heat metaphorizes the process and development of psychotherapy in some respects. In ejecting the child into the metavessel of life. i.e. in not devouring the child, the mother subjects the child to disillusionment and discomfort. This discomfort may be metaphorized by the application of heat, a heat which builds pressure and threatens to rupture the incipient personal alchemical vessel. The personal alchemical vessel of a strong mature person is capable of containing and transforming large amounts of "energy" produced through the meeting of opposites. In the borderline condition however, the vessel is weak and there is a rupture of the vessel manifest in acting out or in anger (Redfearn, 1980:209-210). Speaking developmentally life begins in the body of the Great Mother, in time the mother acquires more human dimensions and the containing function shifts in location (Redfearn, 1980:209). The child is extruded from the Great Mother. This extrusion, or disillusionment is gradual i.e. the heat is mild and allows for the appearance of the transitional space or personal alchemical vessel. In this sense the personal alchemical vessel is formed in and through the application of heat. Too rapid and intense an application may lead to a rupture of the vessel i.e. the failure of the transitional space.

The application of heat metaphorizes certain perspectives on the

psychotherapy of borderline conditions. In the first instance it metaphorizes the central role of interpretation in Kernberg's model (1980:195). The application of heat as interpretation leads to the melting and coagulation (coagulatio) of the splitting defence. In the second instance it metaphorizes the process of confrontation in Masterson's model (1981:137). The activation of aggressive response through interpretation or confrontation raises the pressure in the alchemical vessel and threatens to rupture it. Both Kernberg (1980:145-146) and Masterson (1981:135-137) indicate the gentle nature of heat application. Kernberg (1980:196) remarks that considerable clarification is needed along with interpretation and this gives the psychotherapy of borderline conditions a unique flavour. Masterson (1981:135-137) remarks that confrontation is not a violent or vigorous process but a gentle bringing face to face with.

5.4.4 Refluxing

Refluxing is the repetitive process of evaporation and condensation and is a recognised means of achieving chemical change. The iterative nature of the alchemical process is general and the particular use of refluxing points to a specific instance. As a metaphor refluxing reflects both bringing together and separating and thus parallels the rhythm of closeness and distance which lies at the heart of borderline conditions. Refluxing metaphorizes the interpersonal moving-away-from and the moving-back-to of the rapprochement subphase. In the alchemical text, the Aurora consurgens, recondensation is distinguished by the return of either a corruptible or a vital humidity or water (Von Franz, 1980:225 & 228). The rehydration by the corruptible water metaphorizes a failure of the refluxing. This is the failure to "die" towards a "rebirth". Such a situation resonates with the saviour god myths eg. of Horus, Wotan or Christ (Campbell, 1976:111; McCormack, 1973:56-57; Tonnelat, 1968:252-256). Failure to "die" leads to a vampiric state of being undead and unrebored (figure 8). Such a person cannot properly emerge from the matrix of clear and vital archetypal life into a personal life of interpersonal relations.



Figure 8. Eighth Key: Basil Valentine (Powell, 1971:109)

By contrast successful refluxing leads to the coniunctio in which "death" is encountered and the "hostile opposites" are transcended. The raising up of the transcendence is reflected in the last plate of the Mutus Liber (see figure 4 or Appendix) and establishes the transitional realm i.e. the personal alchemical vessel.

Refluxing may metaphorize the alternating transference states in the borderline condition which are "saved" from the simple restoration of the "corruptible" water by the interpretation. In this sense the interpretation serves to provide the transcendent function, and rehydration is effected through the "vital" water. This process metaphorizes Kernberg's conception of psychotherapy of borderline conditions (Kernberg, 1980:195). It also metaphorizes Masterson's alternation of "rewarding object relations units" and "withholding object relations units" (Masterson, 1981:135-137), the "corruptible" cycling which is transformed by the "vital" activity of confrontation.

Refluxing in the sealed alchemical vessel of psychotherapy also metaphorizes the understanding of borderline conditions as a failure of the transitional space. As has already been noted the transitional space is itself metaphorized by the alchemical vessel. The transitional space may be restored through the endurance of an iterative sequence of transference alternations.

Winnicott's understanding of borderline conditions and their psychotherapy may take as a point of departure the lack of a sense of self. In consequence people manifesting borderline conditions "experience the world and relationships with people as overwhelmingly intrusive, engulfing and depersonalizing and at the same time essential for maintaining the experience of continued existence" (Macaskill, 1982:352). This statement recapitulates the myth of being devoured by the serpent. The psychotherapist is thus "a basic threat and life-line to the patient" which elicits the respectively opposing "extreme reactions of rage, withdrawal and narcissistic fantasy" and the reaction of being soothed and reassured (Macaskill, 1982:352). These opposing reactions are elicited by the various forms of verbal intervention offered by the psychotherapist. In the dialogical process of psychotherapy some interventions call forth a particular reaction whereas others call forth another. These reactions reflect the "hostile opposites" and the typical relational variability in the borderline condition.

Refluxing represents the achievement of alternating states which lead ultimately to transformation. The various interventions of psychotherapists lead to alternating imaginal or transference states. If the interventions are made in the correct manner and setting, transformation is effected. Refluxing metaphorizes the psychotherapeutic process through providing a parallel of this iterative transformative process.

5.4.5 The Male and Female Properties of the Alchemical Vessel

A link may be established between the alchemical opus and the legendary quest for the Holy Grail. The alchemical vessel and the

Grail may be conceptually linked (Matthews, 1981:17-20 & 92). Both myths address the emergence of a transcendent "reborn" element metaphorized by the phoenix. Other parallels exist, displayed for example in the Mutus Liber (plate 3: see figure 9) where:

In the image of the secret content of the Hermetic Vessel, the fisher¹ appears once more, endlessly repeated within the successive circles of the search for truth²; leading always towards the centre, the point where the mystery of the Grail, or stone, raises man to union with the divine (Matthews, 1981:93).



(Plate 3) Figure 9

1. The fisher is a principal component of the Grail myth and resonates with the Christian myth (and thereby the cycle of "death" and resurrection) as well as the Wounded Healer through inter alia the romance of Tristan and Isolt (see Campbell, 1976 and Matthews, 1981).
2. That is by an iterative procedure: refluxing.

The Grail, like the alchemical vessel, is the vessel of rebirth (Matthews, 1981:78) and like the alchemical vessel is generally considered feminine, womblike, out of which the transcendent function, Mercurius, is born (Matthews, 1981:79). Yet it may be argued that in its feminine form it is reflected as only half a sphere. The alchemical vessel is a complete sphere and likewise the Grail is often represented as a somewhat spherical vessel in that it is sealed over (figure 10). This covering over or achieving spherical form reflects the combined masculine and feminine to which the myths of sky and earth being male and female gods testify.

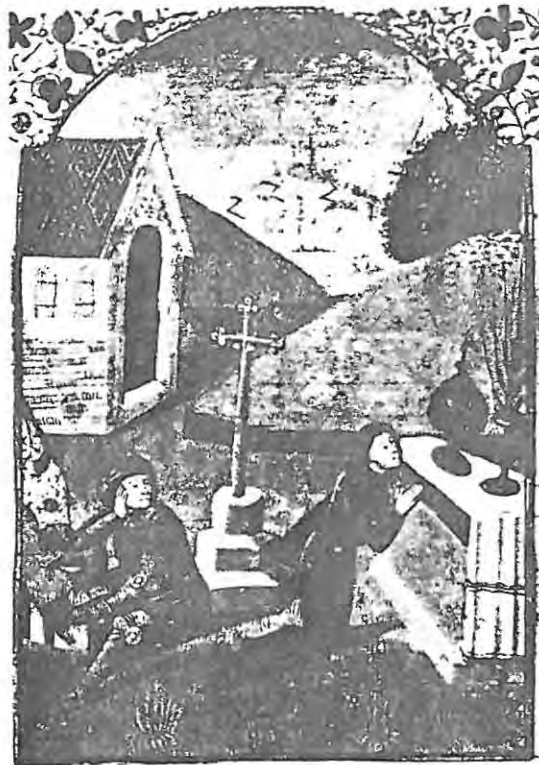


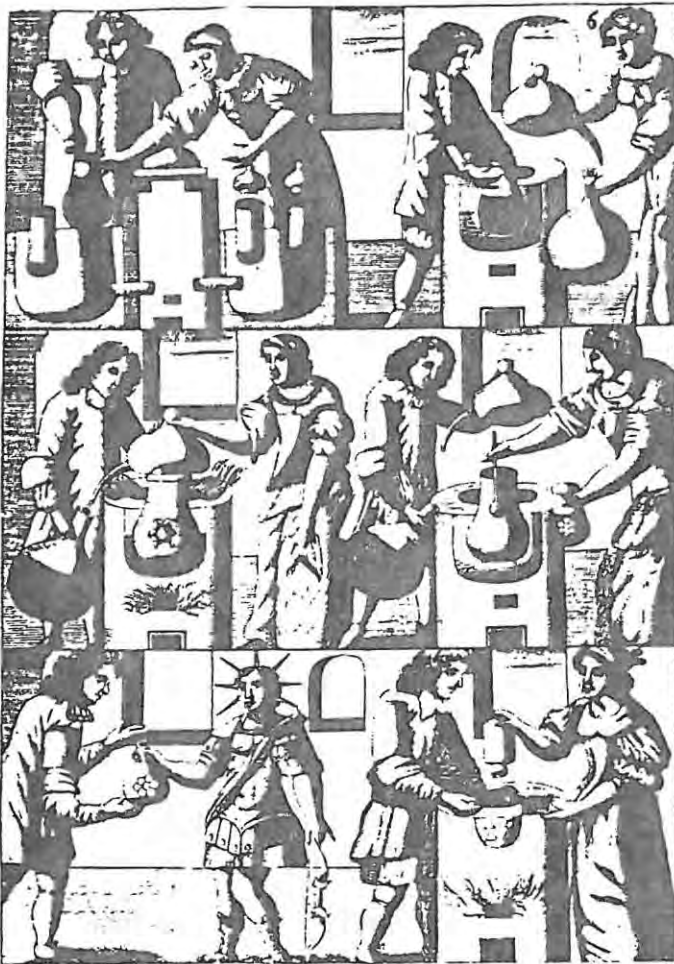
Figure 10. Sir Galahad prays at the altar of the Grail
(Matthews, 1981:12)

In order to facilitate transformation the alchemical vessel must contain the paradoxical ability to defeat its own power of containment, for at some point such containment becomes devouring and even vampiric. Failure to overcome this devouring aspect results in the puer aeternus (Von Franz, 1981(1970):14-16). Borderline conditions

may become manifest where there has been this failure i.e. when the father is symbolically missing (Seligman, 1986:71). At a very early age the infant turns towards the father (who personalizes the archetype of the father) and the father's own response to the infant is very important. In the case of borderline conditions, which are characterized by the person being "half-alive" (Seligman, 1986:70-93), the father has generally failed to support the child in her attempts to emancipate herself from mother (Seligman, 1986:72). In borderline conditions there is a failure of separateness, of the masculine principle of logos (through active or passive absence) to the extent that the togetherness of the feminine principle of eros is overpowering and present in its bipolarity of both care and devouring vampirism.

In psychotherapy with these clients, once a basic holding has been established, the psychotherapist may utilize transference interpretations to imply separateness. These may be violently refuted by the client who experiences herself as being treated as an object rather than being given the empathic holding she desires (Macaskill, 1982:352). The client both fears (Dieckmann, 1988: personal communication) and desires fusion. She fears the suffering in confrontation with the shadow-side of the Great Mother. The separating function, which is the masculine logos, is also consciousness, a primary characteristic of the ego.¹ The heat which the psychotherapist brings to the alchemical vessel of psychotherapy is the fire of consciousness (Van der Post, 1978:180). This state is signalled in plate 6 of the Mutus Liber (see figure 11), where shortly after the appearance of Sol by himself, an unusual occurrence in the alchemical text, the Mercurius is present in plate 8 (see figure 12).

1. Of course the Great Father also has a shadow-side and is regarded by Dieckmann (1987:36) as important in the psychotherapy of borderline conditions. Suffice to say a price is paid for the acquisition of fire e.g. Prometheus is bound to a rock and when night falls, is subject to dismemberment in the form of having his liver torn at by an eagle.



(Plate 6) Figure 11



(Plate 8) Figure 12

Just as the psychotherapeutic space allows the feminine containment so too must it provide a dimension which fosters the making conscious of conflicts so that stuckness may be overcome and possibilities fulfilled. This masculine function promotes the making actual of archetypal life in a way that can be lived in interpersonal life rather than acted out as one caught in the unfolding drama of direct archetypal life.

5.4.6 The coniunctio and the emergence of the divine child/puer aeternus

The bringing together of the "hostile opposites" results in the conception and birth of a child. As this is a hieros gamos or holy

union the child is divine. Such a structure has resonance with the saviour god myths. A father god (eg. Osiris) and a mother god (eg. Isis) come together to produce a divine child (eg. Horus) who dies and is resurrected. The structure also provides, as already noted, a resonance with the resolution of conflicting psychic positions through the emergence of a third, the symbol. In alchemical terms this structure and process is represented by the coniunctio.

Schwartz-Salant (1987:121-128) maintains that the coniunctio is central to an understanding of borderline conditions. In the first instance the fused hermaphroditic state represented by figure 6 of the Rosarium philosophorum metaphorizes the fused state in which the client and psychotherapist can find themselves (see figure 1).

At a conscious level there is separation between client and psychotherapist, at the unconscious level there is fusion, a participation mystique. In such a state the psychotherapist may find himself vigorously defending against the discomfort which is experienced by his client. Separate and fused the client and psychotherapist are not in a state of relation. Once the psychotherapist can identify and respond to his fusion, the fusion is dissolved and the conscious separation is healed and the two participants can act in the imaginal space as participants in the coniunctio. In so doing, not only is the coniunctio established but the preceding co-requisite of the alchemical vessel in its bipolarity of gender. In the second instance Schwartz-Salant (1987:149) focuses on the dreadful state of nigredo which follows the coniunctio, for after the union of opposites "deathlike stillness reigns" (Jung, 1983(1969):95). Without this death, this putrefactio, there can be no new life - "death is an interim stage to be followed by a new life". This stage is represented in figure 6 of the Rosarium philosophorum which has as a caption:

Here King and Queen are lying dead
In great distress the soul has sped.

(cited Jung, 1983(1969):95)

The figure six of the Rosarium philosophorum depicts a double-headed

hermaphrodite which symbolizes "that mysterious being yet to be begotten" (Jung, 1983(1969):96). This refers to the end goal of the alchemical process and yet it is noted that a stage in the pursuance of that goal is the emergence of the mercurius homunculus (see figures 13 & 15) (Campbell, 1976:278) which may be identified with the puer aeternus. This homunculus, or divine child, appears in figure seven of the Rosarium philosophorum (figure 14). This figure also depicts the loss of the soul and thus a deepening of the nigredo (Jung, 1983(1969):105-110). It is this loss of soul which, in the opinion of Schwartz-Salant, the person manifesting borderline conditions is unable to tolerate (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:142-144). The divine child appears, but refuses "death" and resurrection.



Mercurius in the vessel.
Barchusen, *Elementa chem-
iae* (1718)

Figure 13 (Jung, 1980(1968):237)

ROSARIUM
ANIMÆ EXTRACTIO VEL
impregnatio,



Figure 14 (Jung, 1983(1969):107)

This refusal to transform is what characterises the child as an eternal child or puer aeternus. In the constellation and activation of the puer aeternus the loss of the clarity and vitality of archetypal life is opposed. The puer refuses to confirm, by which can be understood the refusal to accept an imperfect world, a world of compromise where to get some "good" a little evil is tolerated. Instead the puer says: "I cannot adapt to this flawed world, I will just suffer from it" (Dieckmann, 1988: personal communication).

In general terms the words puer aeternus (feminine: puella aeterna) mean eternal youth, and have been used "to indicate a certain type of young man who has an outstanding mother complex" (Von Franz, 1981(1970):1). Von Franz considers him to be in search of the mother goddess but being constantly disappointed. The puer aeternus has been identified with homosexuality and Don Juanism (Von Franz, 1981(1970):1-2). He has also been identified with the narcissistic personality (Roger Brooke, 1988: personal communication) to which his belief that he is someone who is special lends credence (Von Franz, 1981(1970):1-2). Narcissus is indeed identifiable as a puer aeternus (Moore, 1979:196). There are however different manifestations of puer aeternus which it is my contention depend upon the particular cycle of iteration which becomes obstructed in the alchemical process.

The uroboros, or tail-eating dragon is used to represent the prima materia (Jung, 1980(1968):53), but also represents the principle of transformation, Mercury (Jung, 1980(1968):64). The prima materia has many synonyms of which dragon and mother are but two (Jung, 1980(1968):317). The prima materia is the ground or matrix from which the child (puer) emerges. The begetting and birth of the child is consequent upon the union of opposites (coniunctio). The Cabala mineralis (Campbell, 1976:278) shows three stages of transformative principle: as uroboros, as puer, and as caduceus (figure 15).

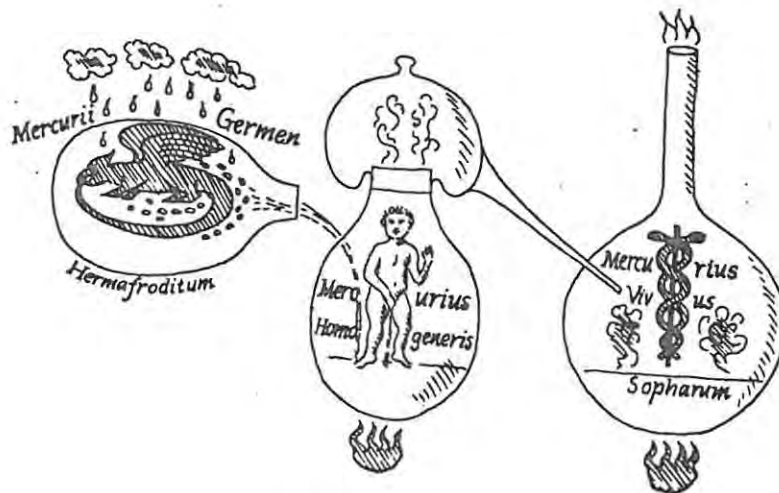


Figure 15

These images and symbols comprise the archetypal ground from which a developmental understanding of borderline conditions may be seen to emerge. Mahler's developmental understanding broadly posits four phases of early development (of which there are subphases): "autistic, symbiotic, separation-individuation and 'on the road to object constancy'" (Kernberg, 1980:105). There are three subphases of the separation-individuation phase: differentiation, practicing and rapprochement subphases (Kernberg, 1980:109). Kernberg has correlated psychopathological conditions with fixation at, or regression to, certain phases: psychosis with the symbiotic phase, schizoid conditions with the differentiation subphase and borderline conditions with the rapprochement subphase (Kernberg, 1980:109-112).

Very broadly the uroboros symbolizes a state of symbiosis, which is a time prior to a distinction between feeder and fed, when there is a state of a "perpetually devouring mouth" (Samuels et al, 1986(1985):158). The caduceus was formed through Mercury's successful intervention in the conflict between two serpents which then twined themselves about his staff (Cirlot, 1962:35). I contend that the caduceus thus represents the union of opposites and is the archetypal ground of object constancy. This leaves the puer to symbolize the developmental period in which borderline conditions arise: the phase of separation-individuation.

The puer is itself a multipotent symbol. As puer aeternus it is represented by several mythological figures, eg: Actaeon, Dionysus, and Narcissus (Moore, 1979:169-184). Actaeon may be differentiated from the other mythological figures by his being subject to dismemberment (vide infra) and the nigredo (Moore, 1979:180). I contend that the puer aeternus, in particular as Actaeon, metaphorizes stagnation (through the failure of the alchemical vessel) as the puer, and is the archetypal ground of borderline conditions.

The myth of Actaeon tells of how the young hunter Actaeon wanders deep into the woods where he comes upon the goddess Artemis and her nymphs at a sacred grove and spring. In spite of all that her nymphs do to prevent it, Artemis is subject to the gaze of Actaeon upon her

virginal nakedness. Taking some water she sprinkles it on his hair and he grows the horns of a stag. His own hunting hounds turn upon him and pursue him. Overtaken by them he is torn apart (Moore, 1979:169).

As Von Franz has indicated the constellation and activation of the puer aeternus is consequent upon prolonged dependence on mother, an outworking of which is the search for the perfect maternal object - the goddess. In gazing upon Artemis the goddess is revealed in her virginal clarity and vitality. But the goddess also has a dark side, she is "the dark side of the moon - that aspect of pure nature that is wild, dangerous and unpredictable" (Moore, 1979:174). Through her the affects which have been until the moment of gaze controllable (the dogs) become wild and dismember Actæon. As the dark manifestation of the Earth Mother Artemis is Hecate. One of the qualities of Hecate is that of the devourer of men (Cirlot, 1971:143). Like her semitic correlate Lilith she is a succubus (Shah, 1973(1956) :23) which is in a sense receptivity taken to an imperative in which it draws off energy i.e. is vampiric. Vampires represent unconscious content seeking expression and yet in a destructive way (Chetwynd, 1982:418). As "unlived fragments of life" they are not recognized and thus cannot be transformed. The bite and love of a vampire begets a vampire. In the dismembering of Actæon by his own hounds his personality is fragmented. "The splintered parts of the personality which have not been integrated and which are disturbing life, draining conscious energy" (Chetwynd, 1982:117) constitute a vampire.

Thus the puer aeternus constellates the Great Mother in two forms: as the perfect all-nurturant mother (the fairy godmother) and as the devouring vampire (the wicked stepmother).

The healthy development of the ego can only occur as a result of the successful manifestation of the Self (Kalff, 1980:29). In the instance of the puer aeternus the incipient Self is not able to properly emerge (Von Franz, 1981(1970):10-18). Thus a developmental failure through the constellation of the puer aeternus in whatever way (by lack of father, or devouring mother) leads to a poorly developed

ego. In a related way the constellation and activation of the puer aeternus results in a confrontation with the shadow-side of the Great Mother, and the person is vampirised and dismembered by affectual storms.

The vampiric qualities of borderline conditions have been noted (Brooke and Ivey, 1988: personal communication; Schwartz-Salant, 1987:149).

The vampire is "undead", he avoids death in order to continue "living". The fact that he cannot pass the next round of life represents a truncation of development i.e. the process of transformation. In the alchemical process this corresponds to the failure of the soul to be lost and restored (Von Franz, 1981(1970):228). An intolerance for losing the soul is a premature call to restore security without death.

It is thus evident that the constellation and activation of the puer aeternus is situationally resonant with the failure of the alchemical vessel in some way so that the transformative process does not proceed towards its goal.

The shadow-side of the puer aeternus, which corresponds to the shadow-side of the Great Mother, as undeadness or vampirism permits a metaphorizing of the borderline condition. As was noted the person manifesting borderline conditions is often extremely difficult to be with, not least of all because of the fear and anxiety which the psychotherapist may experience in the face of his client's despair (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:148). "Probably no image in modern life portrays the inner object or force in states of despair better than the vampire" (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:149). Unlike the narcissistic disorder the person who manifests borderline conditions is desperately trying to make contact with other people. He is not satisfied with being undead and will do anything to feel alive: have intense contempt, rage, start fights (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:152), do impulsive or dangerous things, or inflict injury on himself. The injury inflicted in self-mutilation eg. by cutting, is in a sense a literal

response to the call to die so that he may be born again. It may thus represent a blood sacrifice.

5.5 Correlations with Borderline Phenomenology

The insistence of the puer aeternus on a vital and clear world speaks of proximity to archetypal life. Such life is characterized by the presence of "hostile opposites": the "good" and the "bad". The person thus lives out a bipolar life in an intensely variable way, now possessed by that unconscious element, then by this. This state is given expression in the intense affective lability, and the highly variable nature of interpersonal relations with extremes of idealization and devaluation. The immediate presence of the "hostile opposites" is also given expression in the abundance of splitting and consequent primitive defence mechanisms, as well as paranoid states. Poor impulse control and acting out may be viewed as a rupture of the inadequately formed personal alchemical vessel. Alternating mood states and relational instability reflect the presence of the "hostile opposites" and their emergence when the fragile personal alchemical vessel is subjected to more affectual "heat" than it is able to tolerate. A poor sense of personal identity is situated within different facets of the theory offered. One such facet is the refusal to face the utter hopelessness and "dying" towards transformation. In this respect the puer aeternus is constellated. Another facet, which has the puer aeternus as a common edge is the disintegrating quality of virginal archetypal life, and the consequent dismemberment by affect. Yet another facet which shares a common edge with the puer aeternus is the presence of separation issues. There is a conflict between the child-like dependency and neediness and the urge towards autonomy. In this conflict the person faces the bipolarity of the Great Mother who is both devouring and nurturant, as well as rejecting and liberating. In the rejecting aspect of the Great Mother lies the fear of abandonment faced in borderline conditions. In the devouring aspect there is the fusion state about which the person is so ambivalent. With the hesitation to "dying" as well as the intensity of inner life is manifest the profound despair. This despair is a reflection of a state of nigredo, which is in consequence

of disintegration as well as a failure to "die" and transform. With the disintegration and failure to transform and develop there is manifest a poor sense of self. Partially in respect of this there is the literal "sacrifice" of self-destructive acts. These acts serve other purposes as well: the desire to recover the lost/rejecting mother through sacrificial propitiation, and the sense of being which the act offers, being but two examples. Other self-destructive acts may be in consequence of impulsivity.

The correlations between theory and borderline phenomenology are extremely convoluted and hierarchical and this outline offers merely some of the possible correlations - it is hoped sufficiently so to establish the validity or power of the theory to disclose borderline conditions in a meaningful way.

Edinger (1972:227) in his discussion of "The Blood of Christ" makes use of a chart of interconnected images. I would name such a chart a "resonance map". Such a resonance map is useful in making sense of what is an essentially nonlinear structure. The following resonance map gives a few of the issues found in borderline conditions:

(Please turn the page.)

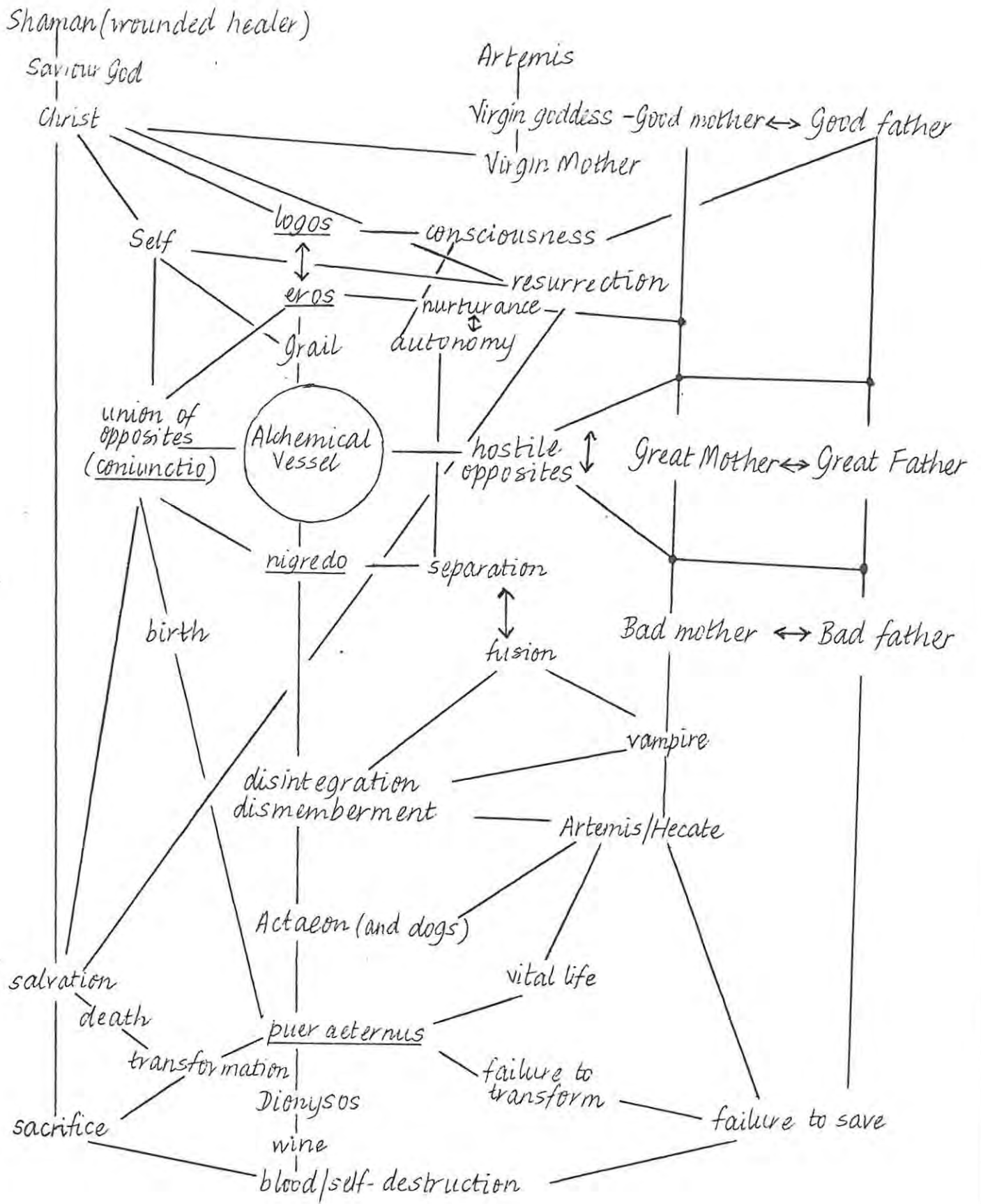


Figure 16

CHAPTER SIX

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Rationale

The purpose and approach of this study has to do with stories: their fashioning, nature and how apposite they are. The "story" of the alchemical vessel has been chosen to see how useful it is in understanding the "story" of borderline conditions, and how this story unfolds itself in the place of storytelling called psychotherapy.

It has already been argued that psychotherapy is a co-constituted, dialogical activity. It has now also been stated that this activity can be seen as the space in which a story unfolds. To know something of another story, the "story" of the alchemical vessel, may be useful to one participant, the psychotherapist.

Van der Post (1987(1986):3) has no doubt that "story" plays a primary role in life, for "everything in life is a story". Romanyshyn (1982:154) etymologically discloses story as "primarily a way of seeing, a guide, something which shows the way". Psychological life is reflected in and through stories, stories are no more fiction than fact, they are imaginal (Romanyshyn, 1982:84-89). Borderline conditions constitute a story which is lived, as does the story of the alchemical vessel in psychotherapy. It is apparent therefore that comparison of the story of borderline conditions (as they specifically emerge in psychotherapy) and the story of the alchemical vessel developed in the section on theory will demonstrate the usefulness of the story of the alchemical vessel in the psychotherapy of borderline conditions.

6.2 Praxis

How are stories to be approached? It is remarkable that some of the dimensions of textual criticism such as temporality (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:43ff) correspond to the dimensions of Dasein (Condrau, 1984:164).

This gives some indications that a literary approach to the story may be helpful in exploring the unfolding of psychological life. Many dimensions of the story could be addressed eg. the sense and use of time and space, the sense and use of body, of orientation to a beginning and an end, the reflection of the structuring of character (i.e. identity) to name several. However, many of these dimensions have to do with the process of story-telling and not the story told. For this study how the story is told, is secondary to the fact that it is told and the nature of what is told. It thus becomes necessary to examine content more than process, although structure is not to be neglected. Content and structure constitute the themes present.

What is practically intended, is to trace out the coincidence of thematic material in theory and case study so as to demonstrate the usefulness of the theory. Structurally this will consist of the initial history or anamnesis, followed by selected portions of therapy notes in which appear manifest the thematic material which coincides with the theory. This will be followed by a discussion and conclusion of the usefulness of the theory.

6.3 Ethical Consideration

This study comprizes the telling of a story about a real person. It is ethically pertinent to regard respect for that person as paramount. Towards this end two dimensions are prominent: to respect that person in the style of the telling and to protect them from exposure. In fulfilling these requirements the study should in the first instance be written with respect and owning its partiality as but one story. In the second instance any identifying data should be disguised. This latter is effected through changing names, situations and circumstances as well as excluding content which would render the client identifiable. With these considerations in mind the consent of the client was obtained after explaining the purpose and safeguards of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN7. CASE STUDY7.1 Presenting History/Anamnesis

Beni is a thirty-five year old white woman who is both a housewife and a part-time theology student. She is a devout Christian and is married to a clergyman.

Beni was referred to me after thirteen months' psychotherapy with a colleague. The colleague, Tom, who was both a clinical psychologist and a clergyman, was leaving the country to take up a post in New Zealand. In his referral he described her as: "'borderline' but with no self-mutilation or suicidal tendencies, even at her worst." Her main problems were explosive rage outbursts which were increasingly difficult to control, difficult interpersonal relationships, as well as the idealization of certain people. Her psychotherapy with Tom seemed to have effected some change although she was initially reluctant to continue with me.

Beni presented as suffering primarily from a fear of being rejected by others in particular those that she cares for deeply. When this fear becomes manifest she "hits rock bottom". At times she can control this descent, at other times she is unable to. She describes "rock bottom" as a nothingness, as an existence which is not existing, somewhere between life and death. She describes this further in terms of her becoming very withdrawn and having a deep pain inside but being unable to cry out. She is unable to cry. Apart from the feared rejection of the important others as precipitant, this state can at times be precipitated by some aspect of the environment which resonates with her profound sense of being flawed. She describes an occasion when she noticed a crack in a glass and was precipitated into the "nothingness". She understands herself as being just like that glass which, though it can be mended, will always have the crack. Through possessing the "crack" she will always remain fundamentally unacceptable.

Beni also suffers from a very intense temper, which she describes as "terrible". She says that she is "bad news" when she gets angry and that she breaks things. At the time of presentation there had been some improvement and the last outburst had been some weeks previously. She also has very powerful fantasies which she describes as "negative". Although she would not be specific, it was apparent that these were fantasies of destruction. Her temper outbursts occur in response to many different events, some of which are apparently insignificant. The precipitants vary from anger at what she perceives as attacks upon the people she idealizes, to household disagreements with her husband. She deals with her anger by breaking objects or going on long walks by herself. After an outburst she is very apologetic and reparative.

She describes herself as having very intense interpersonal relationships. In particular there are three people of whom she thinks very highly: her husband, Roy, her "soul-friend", Barry, and the Archbishop. She loves, respects and admires them very much. She wonders if she does not see things in them which she would like in herself and which she is therefore frightened of losing in them. She is especially frightened of driving them away through her behaviour. She says that if she were to lose them, she would lose herself.

She tends to keep things to herself. She suppresses the way she feels and is inclined to present a very cheerful disposition. She does not enjoy social events and feels very tense during them. She values time to herself. She often fears judgement and rejection in a way that is sufficiently intense to suggest a paranoid quality. She holds very strong opinions in particular of a left-wing political nature. At times she recognizes the basis for this in her compassion, at other times in her great anger at the apartheid-system, the wealthy and the socially pretentious. She describes herself as very moody even though she does not show what she is feeling, unless her suppression breaks down utterly into rage or "nothingness".

She says that she is not sure of her sense of personal identity and she often searches for who or what she is. She spent a period of her



life going from gurus to witch-doctors in search of some sense of meaning and relief. She was advised by a guru to seek this in her roots in Christianity. She does sometimes possess a good sense of self and these times correspond to times when she feels really loved. These times are lost when small events precipitate her into feeling worthless, when she loses her sense of self and direction in life. She becomes "all fragmented".

As a very particular, almost obsessional person, she does not get bored but often feels empty inside.

Although she has never actually mutilated herself, she has vivid fantasies of self-punishment when chopping up vegetables. She does drive recklessly when angry.

In the previous year she had contemplated suicide but was not currently suicidal. She said that she had very seriously considered and planned her own death when she was eighteen years old. This was at the prospect of her leaving the convent she had lived in for the preceding six years. At the time she had the feeling that her dead mother was interceding for her in heaven and in consequence God was telling her that if she committed suicide, she would only take her troubles with her. She has come to the belief that out of the negative things in life come positive things.

She describes her mother as very prayerful, simple, caring and loving. Her father she describes as someone she did not know, who was never at home and with whom she had never had a relationship.

Beni is an only child. There had been an elder brother but he had died in infancy. Beni was delivered by caesarian section although she does not know why. At four months of age she suffered from pneumonia since which time she has been asthmatic.

She remembers her first day at school where she separated very easily from her mother and did not cry or have a tantrum. She loved primary school where she read a lot. In this respect she describes herself as

"a great greeder". (This was a parapraxis and not a pun.)

Her mother suffered from leukemia and from an early age Beni remembers her being in and out of hospital. Beni remembers waiting at the window for her mother to come home, wondering if she would. When Beni was about ten years of age her mother died. She made the decision to "be a big girl, and although hurting not to let anyone see it". To her dismay and rage she was not allowed to go to her mother's funeral. About a year later her father remarried and there ensued a period of intense conflict between her step-mother and herself. They respectively believed each other to be "wicked". Beni saw herself as a bad person - sulking, throwing tantrums and generally being oppositional. This culminated in her arriving home one day to discover her bags packed. She was evicted from the house never to return. At first she was accommodated in a hotel in the town. Here she was subject to sexual insinuations and the advances of the male residents in the hotel. After a period in the hotel (the duration is uncertain) she was placed in a convent. Her mother had been a devout Catholic and they had often visited the statue of the Virgin Mary there together. During vacations and when the sisters were in retreat, she was sent to stay with people whom the sisters found to foster her. She was often angry and desperate about this. At about twelve years of age, whilst staying with relatives, she was raped by an uncle. This occurred in the early hours of the morning and she fled the house to wander in the streets. She describes this as frightening because of the aloneness it produced and not because of the sexual aspect.

Academically she managed adequately. Although she got on well with the sisters, she had no real friends amongst her peers and describes herself as a loner. She experienced the people who fostered her during vacations and retreats as very condescending, except for "coloured" folk who made her feel at home. Leaving school was very traumatic for her and, as already mentioned, she almost committed suicide.

She met her husband Roy at her place of work sixteen years ago. She

describes him as very patient, loyal, and allowing her space. With much soul-searching she became Anglican when she married Roy. When she informed the sisters at the convent of her intention to do so, they were very accepting of her decision.

7.2 Brief Formulation

It is clear that borderline conditions are evident in this client. She presents with affectual lability in which rage and feelings of disintegration are primary. She also experiences problems in interpersonal relations with extremes of idealization. She believes herself profoundly flawed and has a poor sense of self. In particular she is concerned that her "badness" will overcome the "good" which she understands she has projected onto others. At other times she experiences herself as subject to the "badness" of the world to an extent that borders on the paranoid and suggests projection of the bad.

There is insufficient information available to raise any formulation above the level of speculation. In specific areas the discussion in this study will itself form a formulation, but of a less global nature.

Suffice it to say that it would appear that Beni was born into an environment in which there was considerable awareness of bad (her brother's and later her mother's deaths) and its destructive capabilities with respect to the good. There is early on an indication of a splitting of the good and the bad mother with idealization of the actual mother. In order to protect the good mother from the impact of the bad, there was a sequestering of the bad in Beni. She thus became subject to the disintegrating qualities of the shadow of the Great Mother. On the other hand she had to protect the good mother from this shadow-side, something she ultimately failed in for in the end the good mother did not return from hospital. This failure would confirm the fact of her own badness, which confirmation would be reinforced by her exclusion from the funeral. In her need as a puella aeterna to gaze upon the absolutely good mother, the Mother

of God, she became subject to the ravages of the vampire of her own affectual life.

With the further development of her personal history her badness was confirmed. The bad mother, the literally wicked step-mother appears and badness is poured back and forth: now step-mother is bad, now Beni is bad. Beni's badness is ultimately confirmed in her ejection from the house. With her initiation into the world of sex, the rhythm of "good" and "bad" is again reiterated with its attractiveness and its repulsiveness. In her sexual attractiveness as evidence of her own badness, especially as it came in the wake of her eviction from home, Beni feels utterly alone in a state of fragmentation.

Through the course of the psychotherapy it emerged that the incident which had precipitated her entering therapy with Tom was a rumour of a sexual liason with Barry, her "soul-friend".

Being so filled with badness, she constantly has to ensure the safety of the good through apologies and reparative acts.

There is little or no masculine principle of logos to save her from the shadow-side of eros, for historically her father was absent and thus unable to incarnate the father archetype. This absence was confirmed in her mother's death, her own eviction from home and the fact that her father never made contact with her again. However whereas the good father was absent, the shadow-side of the Great Father was present in the forms of sexual advances and abuse.

7.3 Themes

The principal motif of this study is the alchemical vessel. It is the intention to present portions of the material of psychotherapy with Beni to demonstrate certain themes. The themes chosen are those discussed previously, here used with respect to the psychotherapy praxis:

- a. The paradoxicality of the alchemical vessel

- b. The importance of the sealed nature of the alchemical vessel
- c. The application of heat to the alchemical vessel
- d. The process of refluxing
- e. The male and female properties of the alchemical vessel and in particular the transformative qualities of logos
- f. The coniunctio and the puella aeterna as principal issues

7.3.1 The paradoxicality of the alchemical vessel

The paradoxicality of the alchemical vessel reflects it as a transitional space - the place in which the "hostile opposites" are contained. As the container of the "hostile opposites", the alchemical vessel is represented by figure one in the Rosarium philosophorum (see figure 17).



Figure 17

The borderline condition is one in which the "hostile opposites" are activated, of which the intrapsychic manifestation is affectual life. In the initial session with Beni there was a constant recurrence of a split between her feeling life and her rational thoughts. In the second session she discussed this in an explicit way. It had been a bad week during which she had constantly worried about the possibility

that she had damaged her relationship with her "soul-friend". Logically she knew that this was not so, but she remained in the grip of her anxiety. She went on to speak about her anger with other people for not appreciating her. Towards the end of the session she showed me a journal of hers which contained a drawing of a stick-figure (see figure 18).

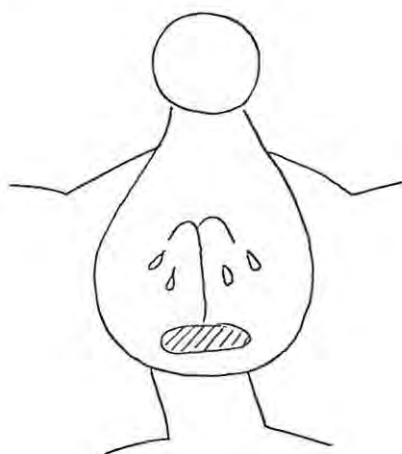


Figure 18

In this stick-figure her feelings rise up and are then swallowed again. She described her sadness and loneliness as bodily sensations. Throughout the session, I had considerable difficulty keeping my attention on precisely what it was that she was saying. Several of the issues that she focused upon could well be unconscious communications of my inability to remain with her. At one point when she was exploring in depth her fear of driving people away, I found my attention wandering. Simultaneously with my recognizing this to myself she remarked that no-one, except her "soul-friend", knew what it was like inside her. She immediately went on to speak of how frightened she was of driving him away and that surely even he must have a limit. I did not immediately recognise this as a transference communication but was captured rather by my own countertransference feelings which seemed to indicate to me that her feelings were so intense that I was defending against them. At this point, i.e. when my defence became conscious, she responded as if I had in fact made the transference link and interpretation and there was a deepening of rapport.

The hostile opposites which she is presenting to me are normally of such a nature that no-one except her "soul-friend" is able to contain them. She thus has to attempt to contain them herself. (We know that she only partly succeeds in this, for that is what brought her into psychotherapy). She portrays her attempt in the stick-figure in a way that closely parallels, in a schematic way, the Mercurial Fountain (figure 1 of the Rosarium philosophorum). In a sense she is seeking to establish her own body as the alchemical vessel. Her commencing psychotherapy with me begins with a test: will I be able to contain the "hostile opposites"? From a psychoanalytic point of view I failed, I did not notice and respond to the transference communication in time. As a shaman I succeeded.

There is still more contained in this interaction for the wandering of my attention possessed a quality of confusion. I was aware of not knowing what was going on and of having a sense of feeling lost (certainly not the best state from which to arrive at fruitful insights about unconscious communications). In telling me that no-one knows how she feels, she is telling me that people are confused by her, and she is telling me how I feel. Tentatively the space of psychotherapy is established as a place of paradox where opposites may co-exist. In exploring her not being understood, her sense of emptiness, loneliness and sadness became evident. That she should speak of her sadness and separation reflects the state brought about by separation in the prima materia (which is herself) namely the nigredo. This nigredo is not however the only one, for paradoxically there is a nigredo of coming together i.e. of the coniunctio. Out of my sense of confusion I make the reflection that she is experiencing a sense of "solipsistic desperation". I am in this reflection also stating my own condition, for I feel cut off from her and as psychotherapist desperately want to make some contact. In so doing I name our fusion state and draw it into consciousness, i.e. the coniunctio is effected. It was at this point that she turned to the stick-figure in her journal to reflect how sad she felt. Paradoxically the nigredo arises from both separation and union.

In the first session Beni wondered if there was any hope that she

would ever even "see the light at the end of the tunnel". In the third session she returned to the issue of hope and developed the metaphor that it was like climbing up a rope on the Alexandria trail (which she had done the previous week). She had been tempted to give up, but succeeded and from the height could see how beautiful the world was. In the twenty sixth session when exploring her abhorrence of sex, I noticed that she was looking at me a lot (an uncommon occurrence) and that I felt strongly invited to make sense of what she was saying, but could not because it was so confusing (the massa confusa). I reflected the invitation to make sense of what she was saying. She responded: "Yes, but I know that you cannot". She then fell silent and I named it a nigredo in terms of Christ's time in Gethsemane. Using this amplification she went on to describe how hopeless she was feeling even though she "thinks" that it will come right in time. I focused on the hopelessness by asking her what she expects the outcome will be. She said that Tom thought she would "come right" but that she did not think Tom always took her seriously. I remarked that there may be some change but that she would always be someone who experiences and feels very deeply. Looking much more contained and saying that she felt reassured, she agreed that this was probably the way she would always be. I returned to the Gethsemane amplification and said that her hopelessness had to be taken absolutely seriously, just as Christ had to become absolutely despairing for otherwise there could be no "real" crucifixion, but only a phoney one. Rapport deepened and she said "Yes, I'm going to have to go on facing these bad times". Through confronting this state of nigredo and taking it seriously in a felt way I had to lose hope. This placed both Beni and I in a despairing state. This became, through the imaginal entry into the metaphor of Gethsemane a necessary state of hopeless hope - the only hope for Beni is in abandoning all hope. Through the Gethsemane metaphor, psychotherapy became constituted as a place in which she could become utterly hopeless and feel safe in so doing even though it offered no guarantees. As such it constituted the alchemical vessel in which paradoxically the future is contained in utter despair and abandonment of the future.

These excerpts from Beni's psychotherapy highlight the paradoxical

properties of the alchemical vessel. It is manifest as a place where the antagonism of opposites is contained, where love and anger, good and bad, fusion and distance, all of which were recurrent themes in the unfolding psychotherapy, had a place to co-exist. Much of Beni's energy was directed towards keeping these opposites apart, such as not being able to be truly committed to any meaningful personal contact if her "soul-friend" and people she disliked were at a social function; or endlessly trying to repair any damage that her "badness" may have caused to her "soul-friend" and fearing that he would reject her or even die. She experienced the psychotherapeutic space as a place of rest from this task, for in the twenty first session she remarked that "It is so nice to just come here (to psychotherapy) and just be". The alchemical vessel is also manifest as a place where the nigredo in its own paradoxicality as constituted through separation and union can be experienced, as well as a place where hope can be hopefully lost. This last point is in a sense a foretaste of destruction and the realization that it can be survived. In embracing these various elements, the alchemical vessel of psychotherapy also stands forth as the present split state of psychological life, the place of its transformation and as an anticipation of the product of that transformation, i.e. being able to let be.

7.3.2. The importance of the sealed nature of the alchemical vessel

Two factors stand out in the sealing of the alchemical vessel: that there should be some way of containing acting out and that the therapist is able to survive the onslaughts of the client. In this particular study the client did not act out in any particularly gross way - at worst she would throw the Marmite bottle, with some vigour, against the floor or wall. The socialization she had received was sufficient contract to contain her acting out and it was thus unnecessary for the psychotherapist to contract with her or to establish any other structures for containment (i.e. parameters of technique).

She also did not make any particular angry attacks on me, although I was subject to the onslaught of her despair. This singular lack of

acting out and aggression (although it was present to some extent in her life) may be understood in terms of Macaskill's distinction (1982:359) that there are characterologically two types of borderline condition: one in which there is gross acting out, impulsivity and self-destructive traits, another in which there are schizoid, obsessive and overcontrolled traits. Beni would certainly seem to fill the criteria of the latter character structure.

As has been noted however, I was subject to the onslaught of her despair. It has been remarked how paradoxically I had to succumb to this despair in order to be authentically present to her and thus containing. There was anger present however and this was her anger with others. The following, drawn from sessions six and seven, reflects some of the anger and its containment.

During the sixth session Beni spoke of being extremely angry with her husband. Doing some work, he had used the phrase "idleness leads to mischief". This had gripped her and propelled her into anger. Her association to this was looking out of windows, something which she had done at the convent and which she still does. She thinks that she was waiting for her mother to come back. She said that she had thought about it and she thinks that maybe her mother had some reason to reject her from even before she, Beni, was born, that "maybe she wasn't married or something". Throughout this part of the session I remained attentive but silent. I made the interpretation to myself that she felt herself to be fundamentally flawed. After a while Beni said that she was not responsible for her mother's feelings and that knowing this was a relief. In the seventh session she came in extremely angry, she had been fighting with everyone, with Roy and with people at the bank in town. She said that she was so tired of having to fight against herself, and that this made her feel hopeless and that she wanted to give up. I suggested that we stay with the anger and she made a drawing of a lion to depict it (figure 19).

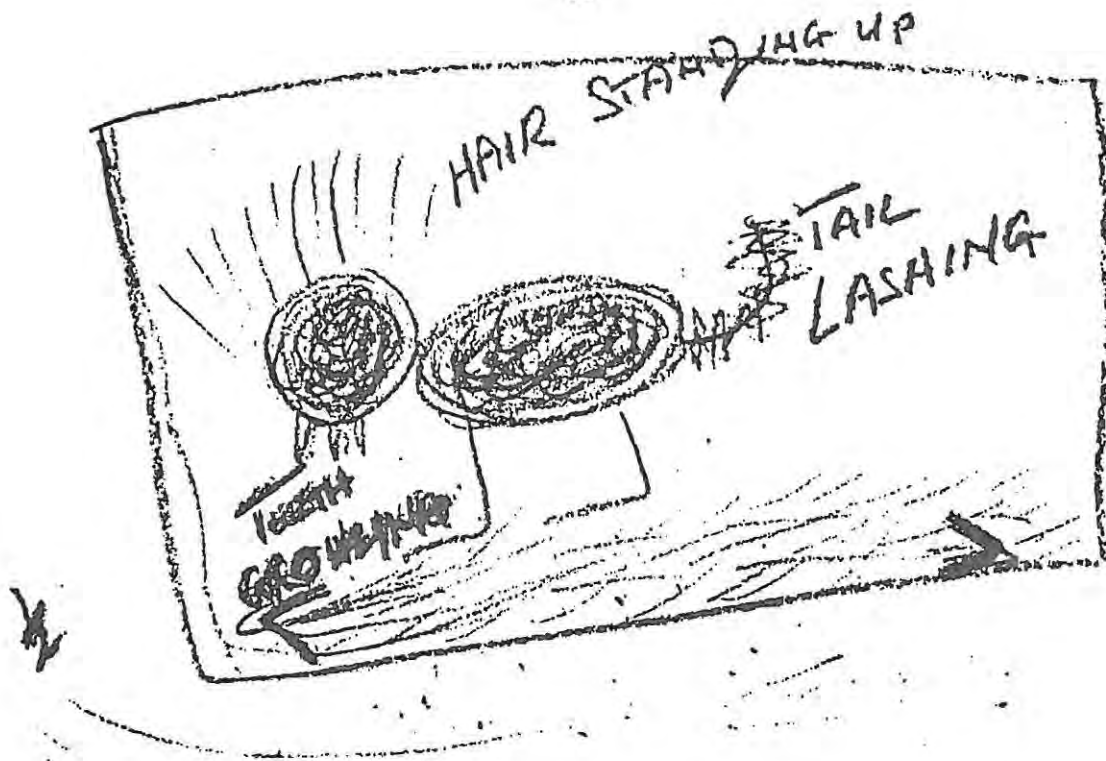


Figure 19

The lion wanted to rip and destroy, but he was caged and moved back and forth feeling very frustrated. Whilst she was drawing and describing the lion, I had intense feelings of really sadistic destruction. I stayed with these feelings until I was able to articulate them. In this sense I contained the rage and, acting as an alchemical vessel, transformed them through verbal articulation. I reflected the way I felt to Beni, i.e. from the fusion state I drew the rage into consciousness, a process which we shared - she by drawing, I by verbalizing. She then said "I need to be contained and held and I'm so tired of putting on a mask of love and care". Through containment and transformation, what had been effected was a coniunctio. A little further on came the despair, for she said how filled she was with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Would she always have to keep others safe from her lion?

For the transforming process (of which the coniunctio is an essential part) to proceed, it was necessary that I share and contain Beni's anger. In so doing I had to remain a sealed container by staying with the feelings of really sadistic rage and destruction in an undefended way. By interpreting her rage I may well have indicated that I was not up to facing it and the alchemical vessel might thus have been

fractured by it. This demonstrates the necessity for the alchemical vessel to remain sealed and cautions against the use of interpretation, if that interpretation should derive from the therapist's need to escape the presence of the client's conflict in himself i.e. it would have failed her to withdraw to a secure and disengaged position of commentary.

As has been noted, towards the end of the session Beni experienced the nigredo. She remarked that last week she had taken a half step forward but that now she felt she was twenty thousand steps back. She felt utterly hopeless and she asked me whether she would always be like this. It was very tempting to reassure her at this point, to say that psychotherapy will ultimately help, that there was hope, even to recount the progress that she had made since entering psychotherapy. In so doing I would have been too caring and would have "overcontained". In overcontaining I would have become a "borderline mother" who has no faith, no hopeless hope in her daughter. Staying with her despair I ended the session, knowing that I could not save her and that she was leaving psychotherapy very discomforted.

These excerpts indicate the need for the alchemical vessel to remain sealed and yet, paradoxically, not to overcontain. They highlight the intimate role the psychotherapist plays in constellating the alchemical vessel through becoming contained himself, and tolerating the discomfort of affectual life, (such as rage) without making unknowing recourse to defence through "bursting" and placing the responsibility for his affectual discomfort on his client (through, for example, interpreting or reassuring).

7.3.3 The application of heat to the alchemical vessel

The application of heat to the alchemical vessel metaphorizes the use of interpretation and confrontation in psychotherapy. The heat is applied gradually, starting off as very mild and becoming more intense. This serves as a process of disillusionment in which the client experiences discomfort and mounting affectual "pressure". In this fashion the focus gradually shifts from psychotherapy being the

site of containment to the client accepting this responsibility.

This process is reflected in the minimal use of interpretation in the very early stages of psychotherapy with Beni. By the twentieth session however, the structure and content of a typical session had changed somewhat. To illustrate this, the notes of the twentieth session will be presented.

Beni entered the session smiling and wearing a skirt (she had never done so before, favouring jeans). I remarked on her change in dress. She acknowledged this, but said that she did not like skirts. She then showed me a book that she had brought in which she had made a collage about her mother. We looked through it together. From some of the clarification which I sought, emerged her sense of there being a difference between being lonely and being alone. I interpreted that to be herself is to be left lonely and that that is very frightening. She agreed and looked at the collage of her mother. I made the link to her mother and said that her mother having left, leaves her feeling lonely. At this point her eyes filled with tears. (It is pertinent to recall that at the beginning of psychotherapy she was unable to cry - she had to swallow her tears along with all the other feelings she experienced). Then she composed herself and smiled. I interpreted the smile as a defence against the fear of being abandoned that she was experiencing. She said "Yes, but if I let go of the reins then I'm frightened that I will lose control". She immediately followed this with the statement that it would be better for her if she did not have any more profound relationships. In turn I interpreted this as a defence saying that it seemed as if she had to take extreme measures and this seemed to indicate to me that the fear of abandonment which she faced was very great. As the profound relationships included her "soul-friend" and myself, I drew a transference link between us and her mother. At this she became quite agitated and said that she was going to get into a state and punish herself by chopping up onions. I then interpreted her self-punishment as a way of dealing with the anger she has towards Barry and I because she fears losing us if she shows us the anger she has towards us for abandoning her. Very moved and tearful she agreed.

This excerpt illustrates several things. In the first instance there is the contrast between the early sessions in which I used very little interpretation. In the second instance there is a gradual heating in the session itself. It began with a simple observation that she could be different at times from the way she habitually was. This highlights the possibility of acting in different ways in accord with the way that she feels i.e. it acknowledges her autonomy. She goes on to indicate that being autonomous is very uncomfortable. In my first interpretation I merely acknowledge, or verbalize this link. Going further I link it to her mother. This raises the heat in moving from a general statement to something specific in her life. She then defends against the upsurge in feeling, possibly partially consequent on my implicitly supporting her autonomy by offering a verbal perspective, i.e. a non-relational stance, but one of distance and observation. She is becoming more lonely and exposed. With my interpretation of her defence, she becomes more exposed. The further interpretations increase this state of abandonment and exposure until she becomes angry but defends against it. My final interpretation is both an interpretation of defence and an opportunity for her to acknowledge her anger with me. In Masterson's terms I have become withholding. Through the gradual increase in the depth of interpretation, the heat was raised in the alchemical vessel, but it did not rupture. She was able to acknowledge her anger with me and I was able to survive it. In the following session she experienced the nigredo and became helpless and hopeless but acknowledged that in the previous session she had seen part of herself that she did not know. She did not elaborate. By the following session she was feeling very much better.

This excerpt illustrates the increasing heat applied to the alchemical vessel as both a process of interpretation and of disillusionment which contribute to the client becoming self-containing.

7.3.4 The process of refluxing

Refluxing metaphorizes the iteration of bringing together and separating the "hostile opposites" in all their forms. It thus also

represents the repetition of the nigredo and in particular the "death" and "rebirth" encountered thereby.

In a general way the iteration of refluxing was evident in the progression of my sessions with Beni. Examination of the sessions reveals the following pattern (figure 20).

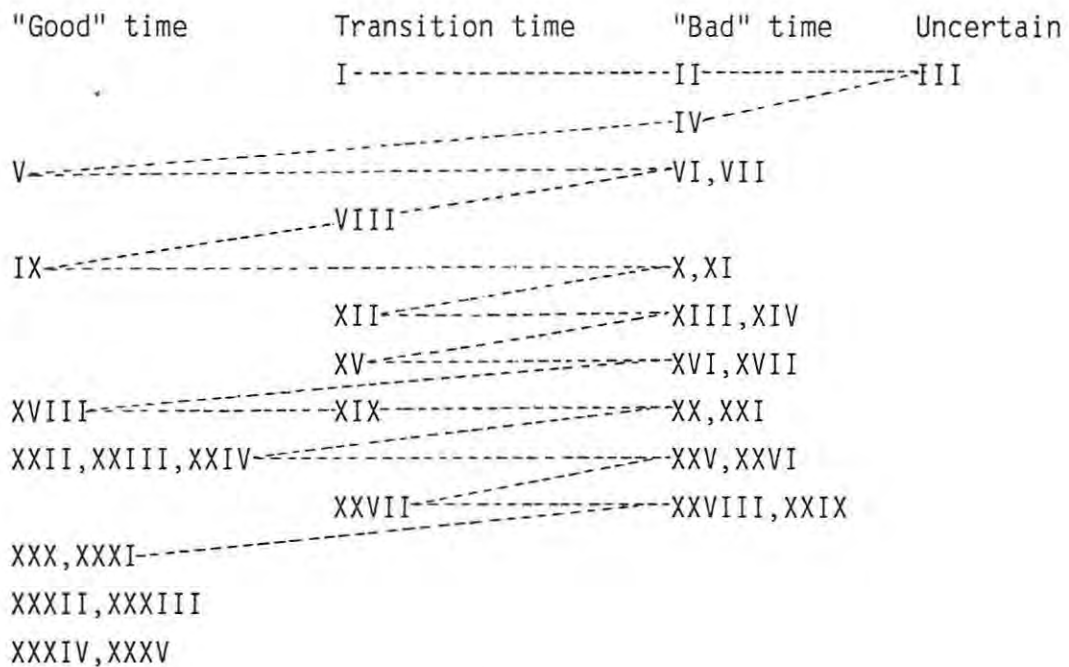


Figure 20

The pattern displays a definite cycling of good and bad periods with a shift in time towards the good periods. It is as if by passing through the bad periods some change is effected so that she is able to sustain the good for longer and longer periods. The bad periods are also sustained for longer and this may imply that the material which she is dealing with became progressively more difficult to resolve.

The "bad" periods correspond to the nigredo which is well represented in the series of sessions beginning with the twenty fifth. She entered this session apparently distressed. She is usually very careful about not behaving in a way that could be in any way sexually provocative. On this occasion however, she took off her jersey to reveal that the top button of her blouse was open in a somewhat

provocative way. My countertransference feelings contained a distinctly sexual undercurrent. She spoke of how difficult the last time had been. Quite innocent behaviour towards her "soul-friend" had been teasingly interpreted as sexual. This had made her feel utterly rejected to the extent that she requested medication. She went on to speak of how confused she felt, not knowing what kind of behaviour was permissible and appropriate in her relationship with Barry. In tracking these fears it emerged that she feared that through her doing something unacceptable Barry would reject her. She said she was very confused about the degree of bodily intimacy allowed and went on to speak of the difficulty she experiences with sex. She said that she wishes she knew what the rules were. I interpreted that she wants rules because she has never developed a sense of what is right and wrong. I went further to say that she desperately needed to develop rules but that there are some situations which defy rule formation, that what people say is right or wrong does not really address her lived experience. She accepted this interpretation to some extent but constantly fled into speculation and concrete plans of how to resolve the dilemma and generate rules. I interpreted this defence and said that her fear and confusion were so great that she would do anything to avoid them but in fact nothing really helped.

In making this last interpretation, I confronted her with the confusion she feared and with the fact that there was no escaping it. She had to either "go through it" or suffer from it. This resonates with Schwartz-Salant's statement that "the borderline state...can be seen as a failed initiatory motif" (1987:120) and that it is "better not to try than to risk so much pain" (1987:149). After my interpretation of her defence, Beni said "Yes, I'm trying to avoid crucifixion". In the following session she spoke more of her abhorrence of sex and the conflict that she endures in the face of it. Towards the end of this session the experience of her fear of autonomy emerged and I made use of Christ's time in Gethsemane as an amplification.

She entered the twenty seventh session very much calmer, saying that she had spent a lot of time thinking about the previous session and

that she wanted to go on with that. She said that she had entered psychotherapy as a secular activity but had discovered it to be spiritual. She had been reading Job and found that his acknowledgement of suffering resonated with the last interpretation which I had made in the previous session. She said that she had worked through a lot and acknowledged the interpretations of abandonment as correct as well, although she had not wanted to do this at the time. She spoke of how she had to "die" and how the death of suicide and the "death" of compliance (of rules) were not the solution but that she had to have a living death. Through this she started to speak of and explore what she might do with her future, and this was the first time in psychotherapy that she was able to speak of herself and the future in this way.

In her customary failure to undergo initiation, because the pain of the living death was too daunting, Beni only restored the "corruptible" water to the prima materia which was herself. Through the transformative activity of interpretation and amplification she was able to restore the "vital" water and thus effect transformation.

Through a survey of the rhythm of psychotherapy it is apparent that the client experiences oscillations between good and bad periods. This provides one example of the process of refluxing. In particular one specific bad period, which constituted a nigredo, was examined. This demonstrated the need to confront and work through the discomfort of the nigredo and in so doing being able to undergo a "death" and "resurrection" rather than being undead. When being undead she would describe herself as being "all over the place" or "all fragmented" - an apposite description of the ravages of the vampire. The work of psychotherapy in this respect is to provide a safe place for the confrontation, i.e. the alchemical vessel, and to provide the heat, i.e. interpretation/confrontation whereby evaporation and redistillation can proceed. Through the application of logos in the space of eros, transformation can proceed.

7.3.5 The male and female properties of the alchemical vessel

Borderline conditions manifest through failure of both the masculine and the feminine. There is a failure of the mother to release without rejecting and a failure of the father to save.

The link with the Holy Grail helps establish the alchemical vessel as bipolar, with both masculine and feminine properties. For transformation to occur, both need to be present.

To reiterate: through the application of logos in the space of eros, transformation can proceed. Much of the time of Beni's psychotherapy was taken up with her experience of herself as "wicked" and her fear that at times she may have destroyed the love and acceptance of her idealized loved ones. She was compelled to reassure herself that this was not so, as well as to make reparation for the damage she felt she had caused. In the twenty second session she recapitulated this theme with respect to her husband and her "soul-friend". At one point she expressed the fact that she experienced herself as a burden to them and that she did not want things to go the same way with them as they did with her mother. I asked her to clarify this and she spoke of the absolute loss of her mother. I reflected her fear of loss she said: "Yes, and of destruction". I simply reflected this and she went on to speak of how her step-mother only ever reflected her as destructive. She said that she knew her mother was in fact both good and bad, as was her step-mother, but that in a lived way her mother is all good and her step-mother all bad. I amplified this and said that in a lived way her mother was a fairy godmother and her stepmother a witch. She continued in this vein in the twenty third session adding that she experienced herself as all bad. She went on to say that she had never liked fairy-tales because she could not bear all the bad things which happened. I interpreted by linking this to her lived experience that the bad could utterly destroy the good. She said yes, she always had to check out the end of novels before she could read them. She amplified this herself, saying that it was like Christ's Betrayal, Passion and Resurrection - she knew that she had to go through the betrayal and passion to get to the resurrection but somehow she could

not face it.

At this point it is worth noting that she is amplifying the process of nigredo and her stuckness in it. She recognised her stuckness and spoke of her despair at this being the way things were. Despairingly she said: "Why must I be so sensitive that I cannot read fairy-tales?". She went on to remark that Tom had vigorously encouraged her to read them, but that she had been unable to do so. I asked her if there was any particular fairy-tale that she could bear and she responded that she liked Cinderella. I said that this was very similar to her own life experience. She said: "Yes, but why couldn't my Prince Charming save me?"

I believe that this highlights the masculine and feminine aspects of the alchemical vessel. The feminine principle of eros (of relatedness and containment) has already been indicated. In fact it was manifestly present in session twenty-three when she indicated Roy could not be her Prince Charming because in spite of the fact that he is so supportive, she still hesitates to share things with him because she feels so vulnerable to rejection. In psychotherapy this was not so - the alchemical vessel had been constellated as a container of the "hostile opposites".

More is required than simply containment and this is reflected in the story of Cinderella. In Cinderella the heroine is confronted by a bad mother. The means of her deliverance is set up by the good mother, but it takes the Prince to follow through her deliverance.

It has been stated by commentators that the origin of the tale of Cinderella lies in the myth of Zeus ravishing Leda. This suggests that the story illustrates the union of spirit and matter (the "hostile opposites"), with the masculine spirit taking the initiative (Chetwynd, 1982:88). Although Leda was "ravished", this was done very seductively and gently by Zeus in the form of a swan. In a similar way the prince in Cinderella pursues her with gentle persistence. As has been noted in the brief formulation, there was little or no positive masculine presence in Beni's life, and thus little chance for

her to own the positive aspects of her animus. At best the masculine was absent, at worst it was present as grossly sexual. It must be noted that Beni could be very rational - however, this was never in a lived way but rather as a persona skill. The gentle introduction of the principle of logos was in the form of interpretations and confrontations. Through her attraction to Cinderella, Beni experienced the health-giving compensation of the psyche.

In this fairy-tale both the masculine and feminine principles are present, as they were in the process of psychotherapy. It is my contention that this reflects both the need for and the presence of these two principles, if the alchemical vessel is to be constellated fully. Psychotherapy as only a space of relatedness without the raising into consciousness effected in the coniunctio remains only a place of fusion. Psychotherapy as only a place of "knowing" without containment becomes a place of rape. In constituting the alchemical vessel in its paradoxicality, psychotherapy should possess both masculine and feminine qualities. In this excerpt both the necessity for and the presence of this bipolar nature have been demonstrated.

7.3.6 The coniunctio and the puella aeterna as principal issues

The alchemical vessel provides a place of union and transformation. In Kleinian terms one may speak of bringing together the "good" and the "bad" so as to achieve the depressive position. This process is broadly metaphorized by the hieros gamos in which the king and the queen come together in a coniunctio. In consequence of the coniunctio there is a divine child, who is born to die and be resurrected. Thus there is a nigredo or time of soullessness. If the alchemical vessel is such that this nigredo cannot proceed, if the "hostile opposites" cannot come together, or if the child refuses to die and thus become resurrected, the borderline condition is constellated. Like Actaeon, the eternal child (puer aeternus/puella aeterna) looks upon the virginal beauty of pure archetypal life in its pristine but confusing state, and is dismembered by affectual life. In so doing, the vampire is constellated - a constellation which resonates with the devouring shadow-side of the Great Mother.

There are two intimately related issues contained in this formulation of the borderline condition: the coniunctio and the puella aeterna. These will be discussed separately.

7.3.6.1 The coniunctio

The borderline condition has been described, paradoxically, as one of fusion and distance. One perspective on this, is that offered in figure six of the Rosarium philosophorum which depicts an hermaphrodite with two heads: at a conscious level there is distance, but at an unconscious (even bodily) level there is fusion. In the nigredo of separation (recall the paradoxicality) borderline conditions manifest where a person is fused with the dark and disordering aspects of the Great Mother. The coniunctio does not occur.

In the imaginal field of the alchemical vessel the conscious and unconscious are brought together in the unifying and transcending coniunctio. There follows an illustration fo the coniunctio in psychotherapy with Beni.

Beni had been faced with returning to her home town, Kimberley. This had been the theatre of so much loss in her life: the loss of her mother, her rejection by her father and step-mother. It was also the scene of her terrifying confrontation with sex in the form of sexual invitations and innuendos in the hotel, as well as being raped. The fourteenth session concerned itself with her return to this place of so much unhappiness.

She was experiencing herself as being dead inside and yet also experiencing a frenetic bubbliness. She spoke of wanting to take her "soul-friend" and I with her to her home town and that we each represented parts of her life which must not mix. This led to an exploration of her feelings of fragmentation. She was being devoured and dismembered. She then returned to discussing her home town and gave more details of how she had been tormented by men banging on her door in the hotel. When she left the hotel for the convent, she did

not speak for a year, except about school-work. She recapitulated how she had not wanted to leave the convent after her matric and spoke about wanting to be looked after.

Beni was discussing a profoundly despairful situation. She described her feelings and I was able to link up events and feelings in a meaningful way, yet in so doing I never recognised the profundity of the despair per se.

Early in the fifteenth session Beni remarked that she had been very angry with her husband, her "soul-friend" and I because the previous week we had left her to work through her feelings alone. We had all looked on the positive side of how she could face going back to her home town. Her husband and her "soul-friend" had encouraged her to see this as a challenge: a challenge which God would not have sent her had she been unable to endure it. I then realized that I had been unable to face her despair in the previous session and that although I had reflected how she was in many respects, and although rapport had deepened and the session structured itself well, I had failed to meet her at her level of despair and hopelessness.

My reflections which had seemed to mirror her inner life, did not in fact do so. My being-with-her was thus partial and disjunctive i.e. what was occurring in a bodily and unconscious way was quite different from what was occurring cognitively and consciously.

Interrogating my felt sense of the situation, I realized that I feared her return to her hometown and felt that it was a cruel fate which decreed that she must. I realized that I was despairing of her ever achieving health if she should return to her home town at this stage. In a sense I was constellating the overcontaining mother. At the cognitive level however, I experienced enthusiasm for her challenge and a desire to facilitate her growth i.e. paradoxically also rejecting her. Although she had been saying the same sort of thing and although those close to her had also done so, there clearly existed a disjunction.

In asking her to contain this disjunction, Roy, Barry and I had collectively denied our ability to contain it. We failed as alchemical vessels. Without a vessel the coniunctio could not occur and the prima materia had to remain untransformed.

In recognising and facing my own despair I re-established the alchemical vessel. I thereby performed an essentially shamanistic act (Stein, 1984:76-78) and became "infected" by Beni's "illness". To a degree I had initially failed her and yet in the following session I was able to permit my own coniunctio (and thus "cure" myself) by the bringing together of my own consciousness and unconsciousness.

In consequence I made the interpretation in the session that I imagined that what she was facing in her return to her hometown was very great, so great in fact that we had been so frightened by her despair that we had had to ignore it by playing up the positive aspects.

This interpretation established a coniunctio in which union occurred within myself, as well as between us and thus offered her union within herself. With her own union, her despair could emerge into consciousness.

Rapport deepened considerably and she spoke about being so alone with all her worries. The coniunctio had recognized her aloneness and offered this recognition as a togetherness which was accepted in the deepening of rapport without, paradoxically, removing her aloneness.

This excerpt illustrates the transformative effect of the coniunctio. It also depicts a state of nigredo, the centrality of relation and an aspect of refluxing, for it is evident from figure 20 in section 7.3.4 that session fifteen represented one of many turning points.

7.3.6.2 The puella aeterna

The puella aeterna has become locked into the magic of childhood of life with a pristine, vital, archetypal quality. In particular the

puella aeterna wishes to retain the comforting embrace of the mother. But the ground of archetypal life, the matrix or Great Mother has a shadow-side which rends, tears and rejects. The puella aeterna finds abandonment and fragmentation in her confrontation with the dark side of the matrix. It has been postulated that borderline conditions reflect the puella aeterna in which pristine archetypal life is forcefully present, and the opposites do not contaminate each other but in which the person is ravished by their affectual life, abandoned and fragmented.

The puella aeterna is a child and it was a consistent observation of mine that Beni possessed a very child-like manner especially in her speech. In general, themes around her child-like status emerged often. In sessions three and four she introduced this by talking about her teddy-bear and how important he was. She said that although she is a "grown woman", she still feels alright about the attention she lavishes on him. In session six I experienced her very much as a child and my reflection of my countertransference feelings, that I saw her as a child and wanted to cradle her, thus incarnating the good mother, led to her discussing her suspicion that she may have been rejected before birth by her actual mother, thus uncovering the bad mother. In this session the dilemma of the puella aeterna is first hinted at. In the following session (session seven) she was torn by her anger, which gave way to despair towards the end of the session. In the eighth session her incarnation of her actual mother as the good mother became manifest in consciousness, when she confronted this in an amplification of her mother as the Mother of God. She developed the insight that: "maybe my mother died before I was old enough to see anything wrong with her". Through this session she emerged from the nigredo of being rent and torn by her affectual life.

Picking up another perspective on the progression of these sessions, it is apparent that through gazing on pristine archetypal life in the form of the enraged lion, Beni became subject to fragmentation, for like the puer aeternus Actaeon, she was torn apart by her affectual life (the dogs) and entered the "death" of the nigredo.

She presented the theme of her child-likeness again in the fourteenth session where she captured the constellation of the puella aeterna and in particular her desire not to transform. Beni spoke of how she was like a child who wanted to be looked after. She felt that she had stopped growing up somewhere and that this had led to her having an outside without an inside. The consequence of the puella aeterna lacking a sense of her own identity and the living of a "provisional" life (Von Franz, 1981:2) are particularly evident here.

In the seventeenth session she again likened herself to a child and recounted an incident in which she had sat child-like with her head on the Archbishop's knee whilst she spoke about anything which she wanted to. Her particular fear of not being understood and the way in which she felt all fragmented and just wanting to be held, also reflected her dismemberment by the shadow-side of the Great Mother and a desire to have the good mother restored to her.

The puella aeterna desires the uncompromising life of the archetypal world and thus wishes to possess the purity of the opposites - she has poor tolerance for their contamination. This was present as a theme in many sessions of which the thirteenth is an example. She had been upset with Roy and Barry and was angry with them. She was also fearful that her relationship with Barry would be destroyed - that if she contaminated his "good" with even a little of her "bad", it would be destroyed and he would desert her. At all costs this contamination had to be avoided or repaired. This issue may illustrate the need for the "all good" being quite separate from the "all bad", which occurs with the constellation of the puella aeterna who can tolerate no contamination or compromise. Instead she will suffer from it, inter alia through the fear that contamination has occurred and destroyed the "good".

These excerpts have illustrated how the image of the puella aeterna metaphorizes Beni's lived experience. She is experienced and experiences herself as a child, longing to be held by the good mother but also subject to the ravishment of the devouring, vampiric shadow-side of the Great Mother. From another perspective it illustrates the

need for pristine and uncompromising, virginal archetypal life, but, like Actaeon gazing on Artemis, this means being torn and rent, fragmented by her affectual life.

7.4 Discussion and Conclusion

The intention of this study has been to examine the degree to which the story of the alchemical vessel is useful in understanding borderline conditions and their psychotherapy. Towards this end certain issues have been examined and have indicated that the story of the alchemical vessel is indeed apposite towards this end.

It is important to examine the degree to which the story is useful i.e. to gain some insight into the extent of its validity.

As a general observation, the use of the alchemical vessel as story constitutes a prereading and a rereading of the process of psychotherapy. I am actively sympathetic towards a Jungian understanding. As has already been stated however, the phenomena emerge through and not in spite of the theoretical framework, and thus the issue of validity becomes the degree to which the theory can allow the phenomena to usefully emerge. In respect of this particular psychotherapy, the validity of the Jungian approach is manifest in the results which started to be obtained towards the end of the psychotherapy. Beni became sad, but sad in a way which hiterhto she had never experienced. It was a sadness in which she was starting to "treasure" (as she put it) Barry and myself. Thus in her sadness she initiated a process of taking the "good objects" within. When I remarked that it seemed somehow her badness was not as worrying to her as it had been, she replied: "I don't think that the bad can overcome the good anymore". She also spoke of herself as beginning to possess some sense of her own identity, she was a place in which Barry and I could dwell. In terms of the theory, she was beginning to constellate a personal alchemical vessel.

Certain dimensions of the story stand out as particularly useful in the pursuance of psychotherapy. These include the containing effect

of the story itself for the psychotherapist, whereby the story establishes itself as a metavessel. It hereby provides a "faith" (which is the hopeless hope) which it sustains in the blackness of the nigredo. This faith is constituted through "a proper attitude that, however tentative and always unknowing, also retains a faith in a larger purpose" (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:141).

Other dimensions of cardinal importance are paradox, the coniunctio, the nigredo and refluxing. Especially through the coniunctio the relative unimportance of "knowing" as opposed to "relatedness" is highlighted.

The dimensions of paradox, coniunctio, nigredo and refluxing are stressed by Schwartz-Salant in his discussion of the coniunctio. He notes (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:140) that the coniunctio alone is introduced as a "vision" in the Rosarium philosophorum. He concludes that in this state we enter a liminal realm or dimension of our experience whose essence is relatedness. In this realm space and time are experienced differently and the categories of inside and outside are transcended. The coniunctio in these terms constellates and is constellated by a space which is allowing or containing of anything. This describes the alchemical vessel (in its paradoxicality) as it does Winnicott's realm of transitional phenomena (Samuels, 1986(1985):128-130). These liminal experiences are dangerous however (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:140-141). It is difficult to return from them to the usual experience of space and time. This entry into and emergence from the liminal realm is repetative i.e. is metaphorized by refluxing. There is torment in emerging from the liminal realm i.e. the nigredo.

These dimensions were all demonstrably present in the unfolding psychotherapy with Beni. Their presence was constituted in my relationship with her. This reiterates the centrality of the relationship. I often missed instances of transference and countertransference within the sessions themselves, and only discovered my lack of knowing in reviewing the session. The importance of the quality of "relatedness" has been stressed by

Schwartz-Salant, who is suspicious of reducing and decoding an interaction into unconscious messages. He does not deny the value of listening to unconscious messages, but seems to locate this value outside of the session. To reduce the interaction "is to destroy the potential for union as shared imaginal experience" (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:158-159). This has relevance for this study, for even in the metaphorizing in this study there is a tendency to suggest a removal from "relatedness" to "knowing". This is an implicit shortcoming and indicates the degree to which the study is not valid i.e. the degree to which it obscures the "relatedness".

I believe that it is important to make this criticism more specific. The state of knowing is implicitly present in the value attached to consciousness. Through the theoretical formulation of raising into consciousness, there is a betrayal of the lived praxis of psychotherapy as an activity in the imaginal realm. Beni recognized that we were acting in the imaginal realm, when she said that psychotherapy had started as secular but had become a spiritual activity. She recognized that we were working in the realm of the gods. This poses a theoretical dilemma, for the action of consciousness seems all-important for the progression of psychotherapy. Samuels (1986(1985):59) maintains that the symbol transforms stuckness into a choice and does not provide an answer. Such a situation requires consciousness to discriminate and hold the various choices. On the other hand, such a valuing of consciousness may lead to psychotherapy becoming more of a technique than an art. Such a valuing of technique or of "knowing", may well arise in a deep suspicion of the feminine of which even Jung was guilty (Hillman, 1981:35). I have stressed the death of the puella aeterna, but it is possible that what is needed more is a place in which she can be freed to overcome the, at least, two thousand years of repression by the patriarchal god. Maybe she needs to be freed towards her vital life, maybe the undeath of vampirism reflects the death of the feminine. "The dead Self of the borderline patient may thus be the dead Self of collective humanity, the Self that is dead to relatedness as essence" (Schwartz-Salant, 1987:158). There was very little technique in the psychotherapy with Beni and the theoretical formulations may well

conceal this fact. In that respect the validity suffers. Such a criticism does, however, suggest avenues for further research.

In attempting to portray the alchemical vessel as fully as possible as a metaphor, certain dimensions suffer. In the present instance this is largely due to the constraints of the study. In particular the paradoxical nature of the nigredo remains to be further explored. Although paradox is implicit to alchemical processes it can conceal areas which could be elucidated more. I feel that the issue of the nigredo is one such possible area. As the nigredo is observed to be so central to the psychotherapy of borderline conditions in this study, it may well be useful, for praxis, to explore and delineate the nature and composition of the nigredo further. This would probably necessitate a return to the alchemical texts per se. This criticism also suggests an avenue for further research.

In spite of these criticisms, the story of the alchemical vessel was an apposite metaphorizing of borderline conditions. It was useful in providing an "archetypal map" which gave the psychotherapist faith in dark times. It also guided me in the transformative process of the coniunctio and relieved me from the burden of "knowing". Being freed from "knowing", I was able to partake in "relatedness" and act in concert with Beni in the imaginal realm where we met and befriended the gods. For Beni this was, in the words of her much beloved St John of the Cross, to seek union "by the road of spiritual negation" whereafter she could:

From all endeavour ceasing:
And all my cares releasing
Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade.

(St John of the Cross, 1979:13)

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APPENDIX

The two alchemical works Rosarium philosophorum (Jung, 1983(1969)) (which is incomplete) and the Mutus Liber (Powell, 1971) are presented in the Appendix to provide a more graphic portrayal of the alchemical process. In particular the Mutus Liber demonstrates the iteration of refluxing whereas the Rosarium philosophorum gives some indication of the staging of the nigredo.

ROSARIUM PHILOSOPHORUM

ROSARIUM



Wyr sinde der metall anfang vnd erste natur /
 Die kunst mache durch vns die höchste tinctur -
 Reyn brunn noch wasser ist meyn gleych /
 Ich mach gesund arm vnd reich -
 Vnd bin doch jzund gystig vnd dßelich -

Succus

Figure 1

PHILOSOPHORVM.



Nota bene: In arte nostri magisterij nihil est ^{Secretum} celatū a Philosophis excepto secreto artis, quod ^{artis} non licet cuiquam reuelare, quod si fieret ille malediceretur, & indignationem domini incurreret, & apoplexia moreretur. # Quare omnis error in arte existit, ex eo, quod debitam

C ij

Figure 2

PHILOSOPHORVM.

seipsis secundum equalitatē inspissentur. Solus enim calor tēperatus est humiditatis inspissatius et mixtionis perfectius, et non super excedens. Nā generatiōes et procreationes rerū naturalū habent solū fieri per tēperatissimū calorē et equalē, vti est solus finus equinus humidus et calidus.

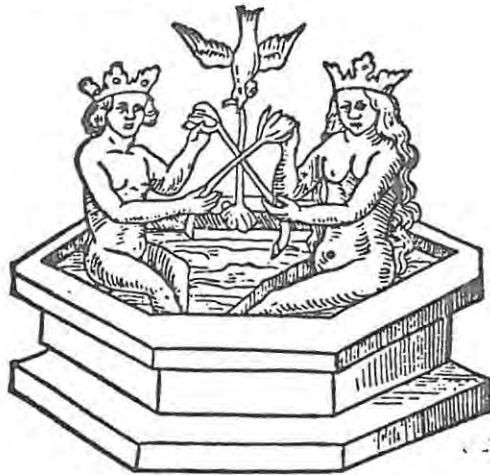


Figure 3

ROSARIVM

✍
 corrūpitur, neq̄ ex imperfecto penitus secundū
 artem aliquid fieri potest. Ratio est quia ars pri-
 mas dispositiones inducere non potest, sed lapis
 noster est res media inter perfecta & imperfecta
 corpora, & quod natura ipsa incepit hoc per ar-
 tem ad perfectionē dedu citur. Si in ipso Mercurio
 operari inceperis vbi natura reliquit imper-
 fectum, inuenies in eo perfectionē et gaudebis.

Perfectum non alteratur, sed corrumpitur.
 Sed imperfectum bene alteratur, ergo corrup-
 tio vnius est generatio alterius.



Specularum

Figure 4

CONIUNCTIO SIVE
Cortus.



O Luna durch meyn umbgeben/ vnd susse mynne/
 Wirstu schön/ starck/ vnd gewaltig als ich byn.
 O Sol/ du bist vber alle licht zu erkennen/
 So bedarffstu doch mein als der han der hennen.

ARISLEVS IN VISIONE.

Coniunge ergo filium tuum Gabricum dilec-
 tiorum tibi in omnibus filijs tuis cum sua sorore
 Beya

Figure 5

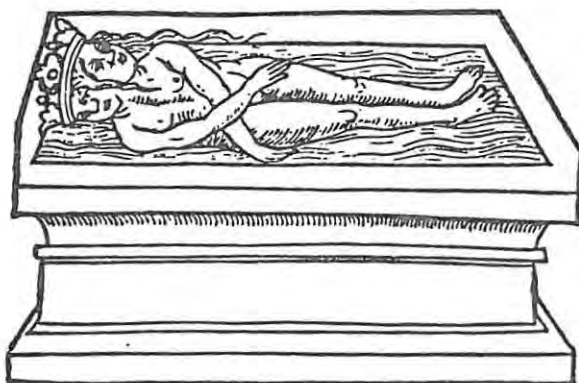
FERMENTATIO.



Die wird Sol aber verschlossen
Vnd mit Mercurio philosophorum vbergossen.

Figure 5a

PHILOSOPHORVM.
 CONCEPTIO SEV PVTRE
factio



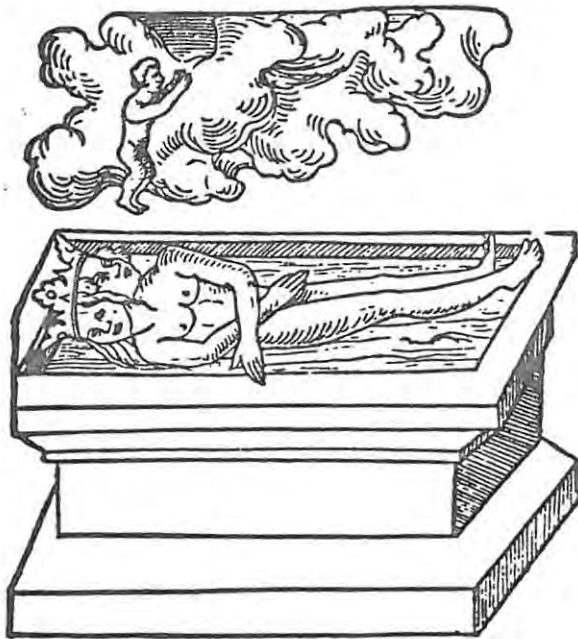
*Esze ligen könig vnd königin doe/
 Die selescheyde sich mit grosser not.*

ARISTOTELES REX ET
Philosophus.

NUnquam vidi aliquod animatum crescere
 sine putrefactione, nisi autem fiat putri-
 dum inuanum erit opus alchimicum.

Figure 6

ROSARIVM
ANIMÆ EXTRACTIO VEL
impregnatio,



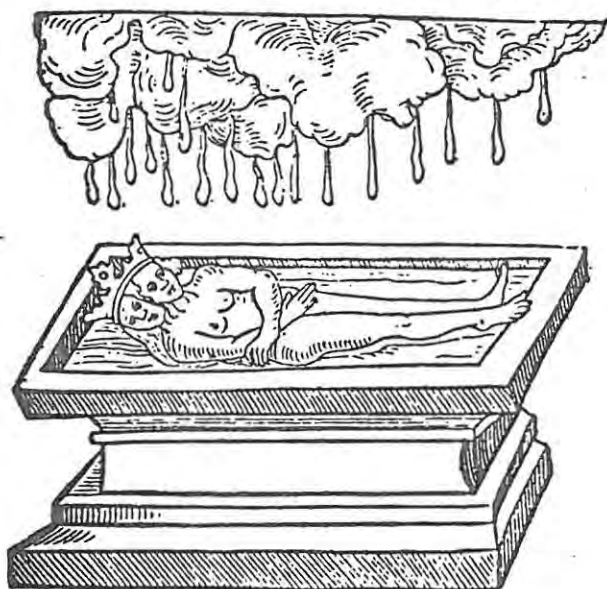
Wye teylen sich die vier element/
Aus dem leyb schreyde sich die selc behende.

De

Figure 7

PHILOSOPHORVM

ABLVATIO VEL
Mundificatio

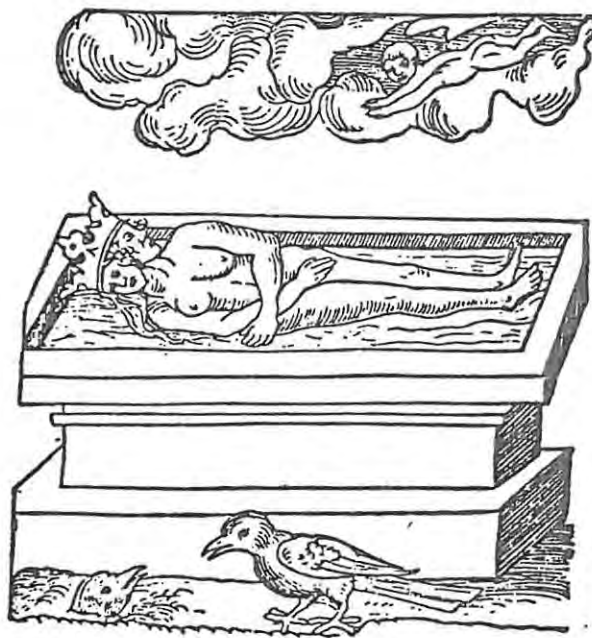


Wie ſelt der Tauw von Himmel herab/
Dind waſche den ſchwarzen leyb im grab ab-

K iſt

Figure 8

PHILOSOPHORVM
ANIMÆ IVBILATIO SEV
Ortus seu Sublimatio.



Hie schwingt sich die sele hernidder/
Vnd erquicket den gereinigten leychnam wider-

L ij

Figure 9

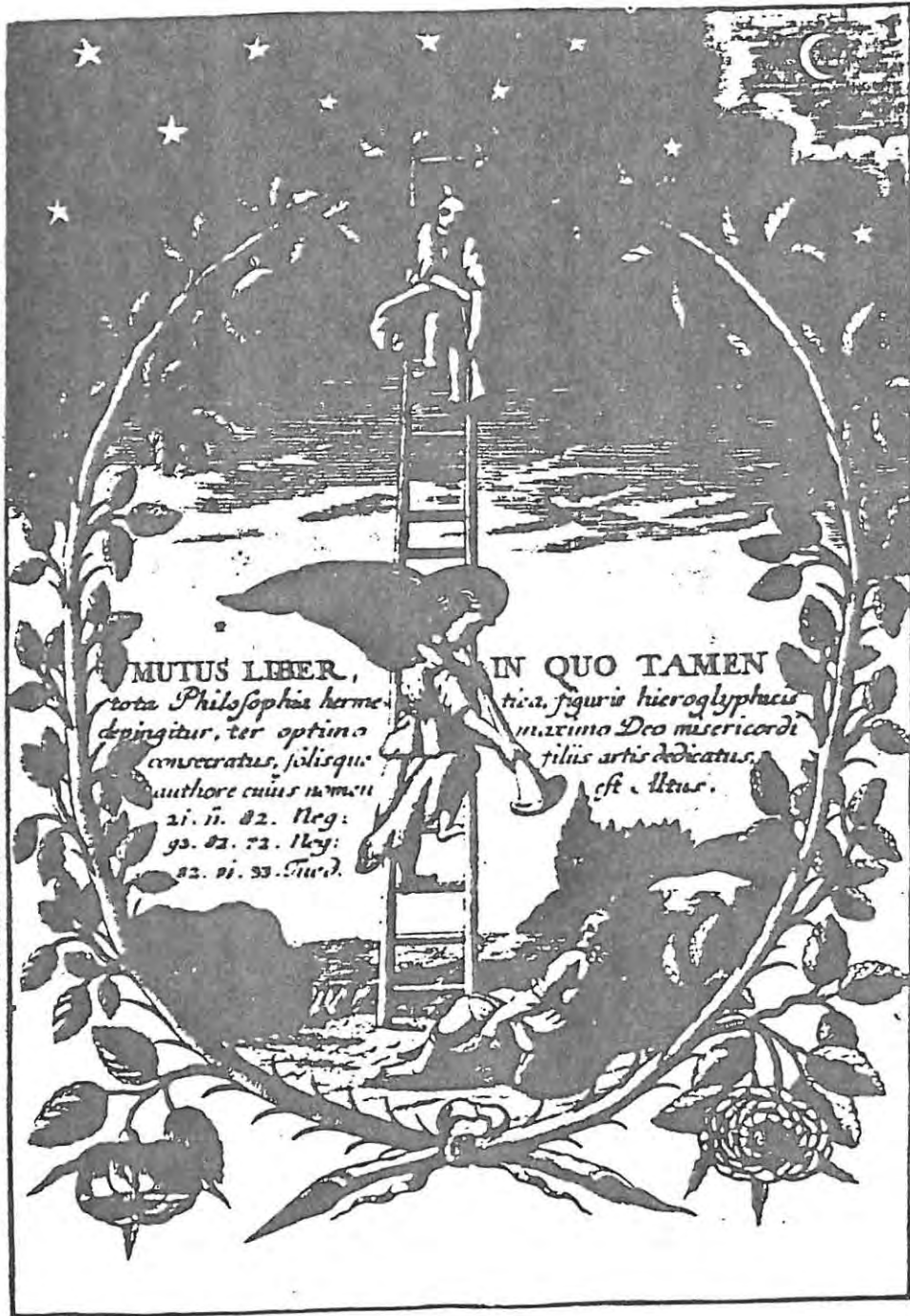
PHILOSOPHORVM.



Hie ist geboren die eddele Keyserin reich/
 Die maister nennen sie ihrer dochter gleich.
 Die vermeret sich/gebirt kinder ohn zal/
 San vnd selich rein/vmb ohn alles mahl:

Dis

Figure 10



MUTUS LIBER,
tota Philosophia herme-
depingitur, ter optima
consecratus, solisque
authore cuius nomen
21. ii. 82. Neg:
93. 82. 72. Neg:
82. 91. 93. Suid.

IN QUO TAMEN
tica, figuris hieroglyphicis
maximo Deo misericordi
filii artis dedicatus,
est. Itur.

Plate 1



Plate 2

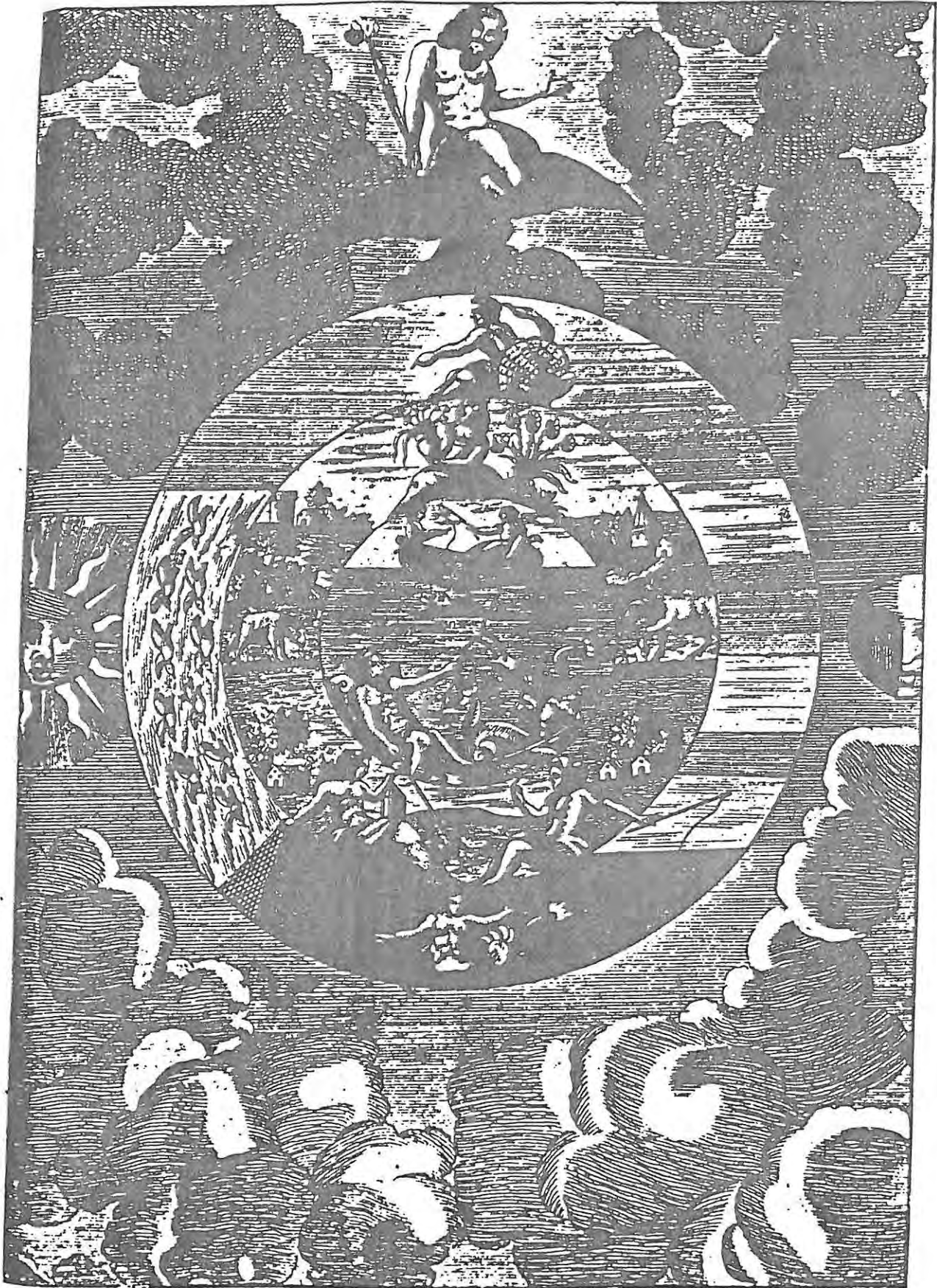


Plate 3

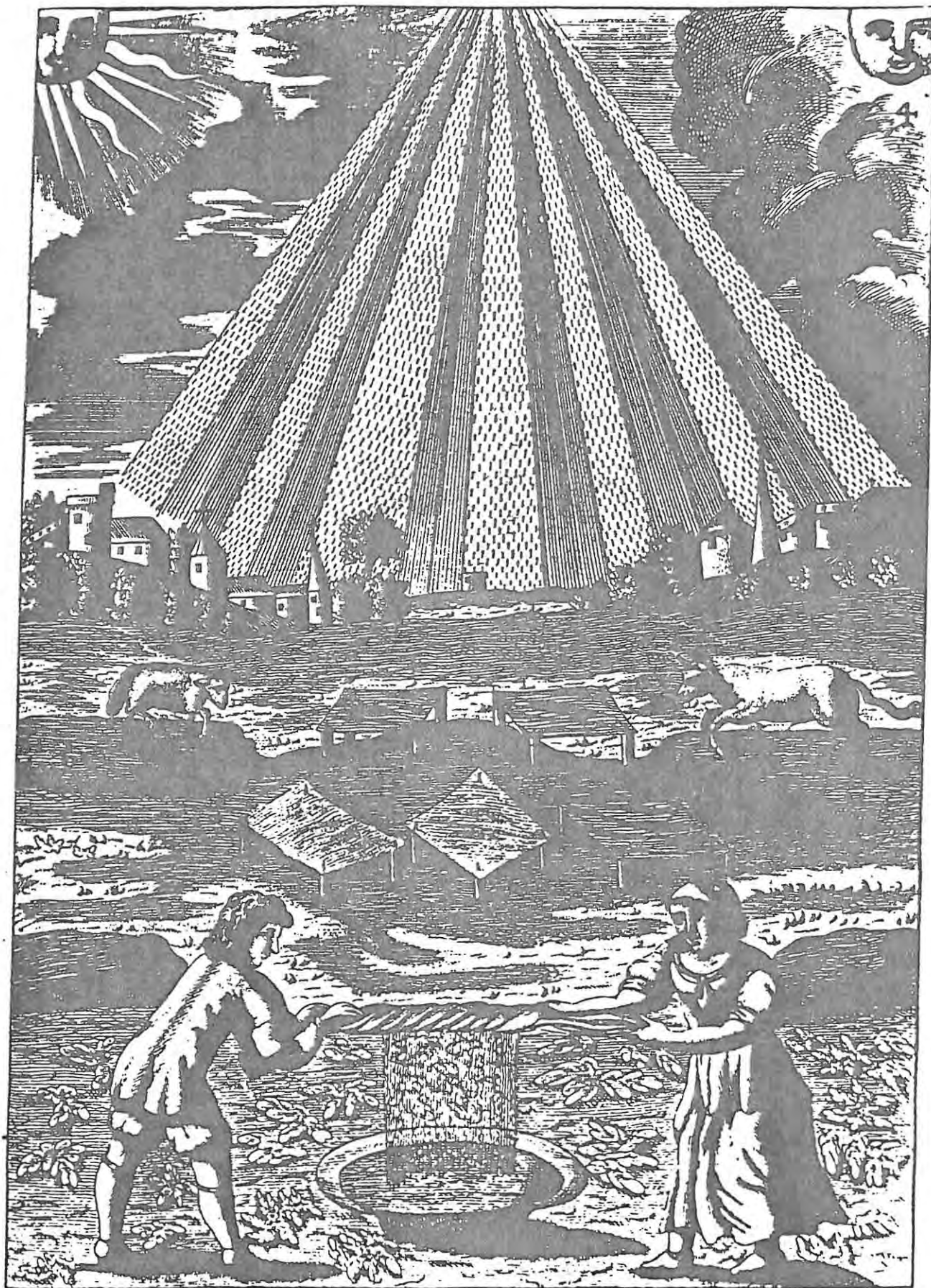


Plate 4

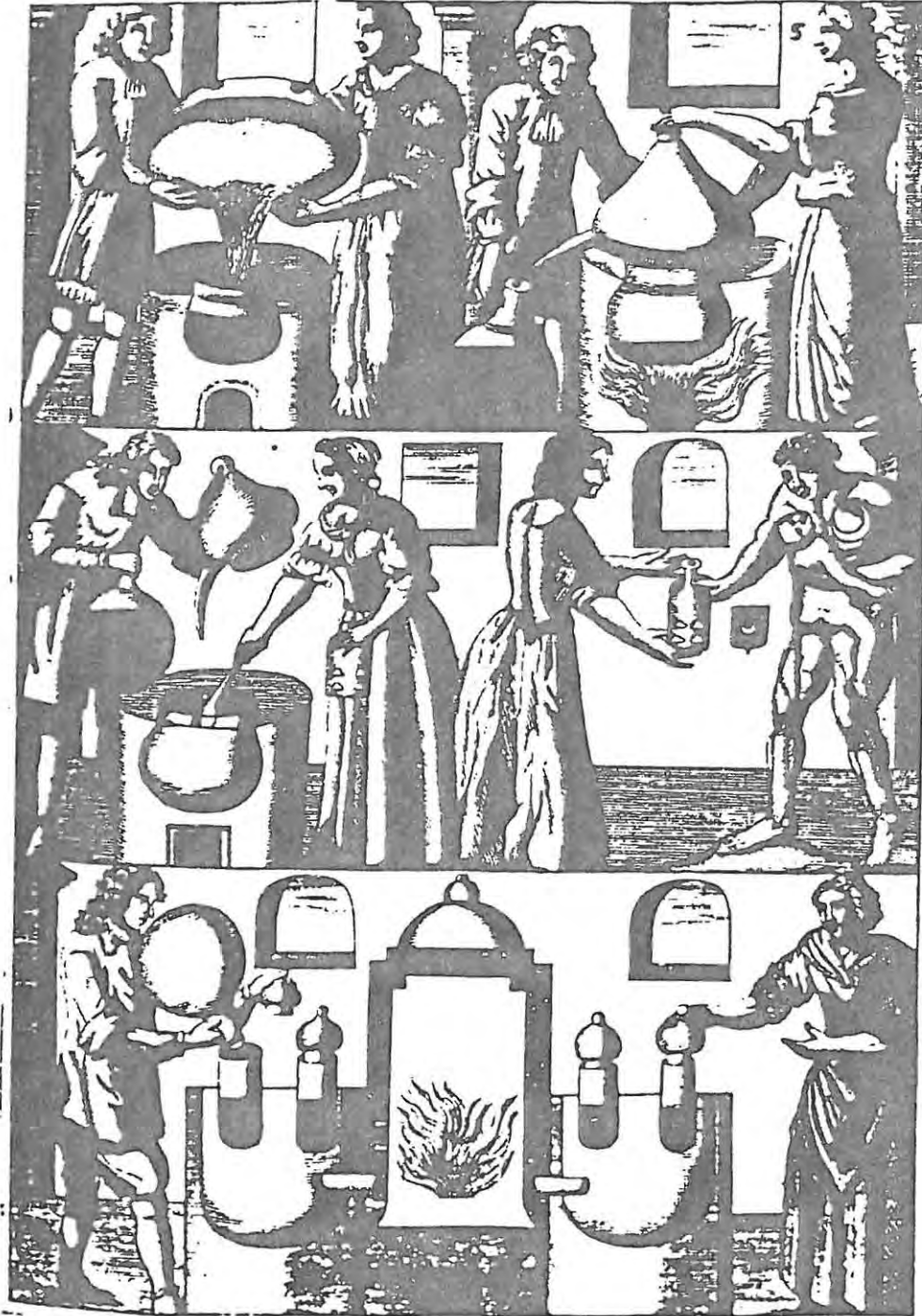


Plate 5

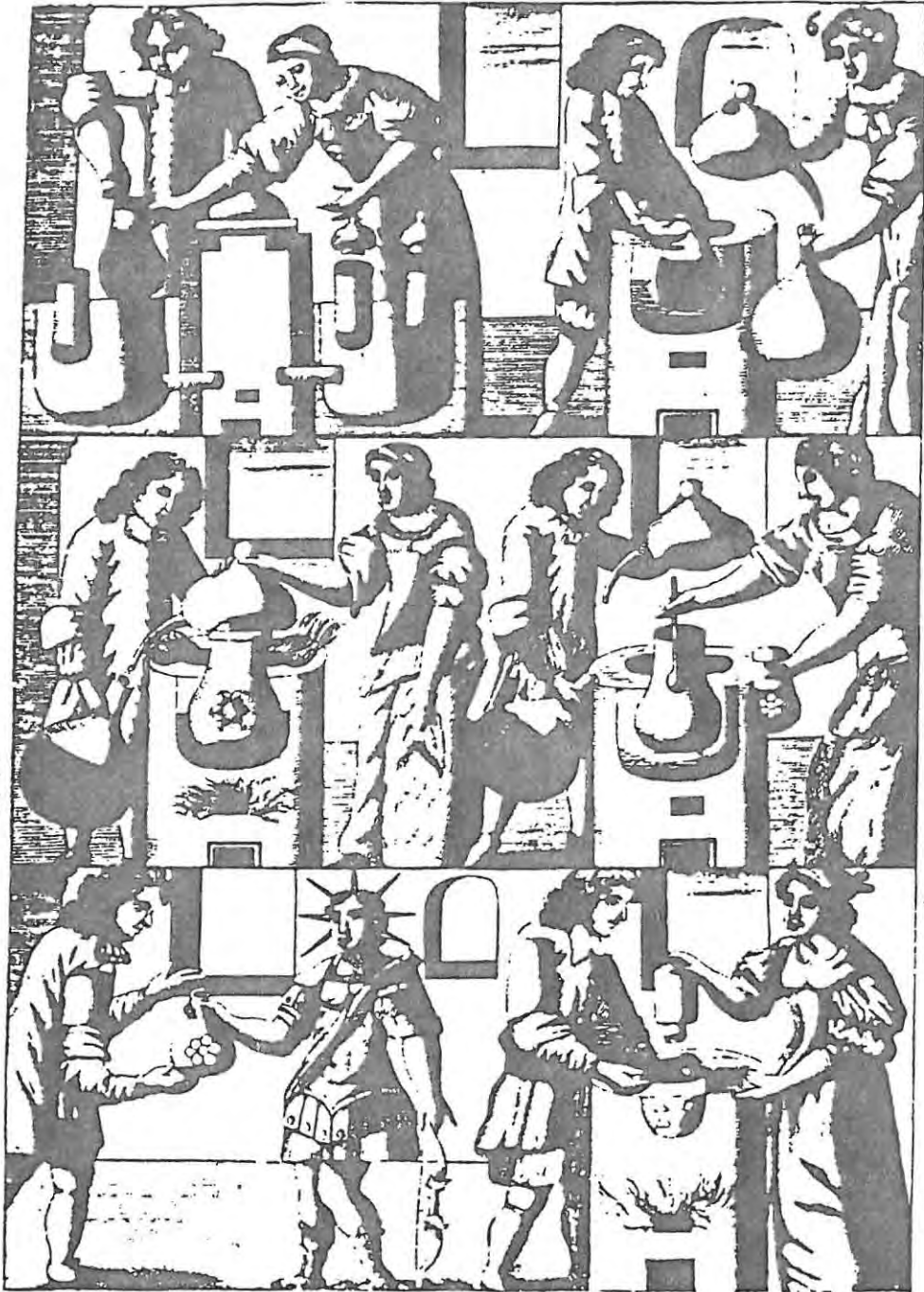


Plate 6

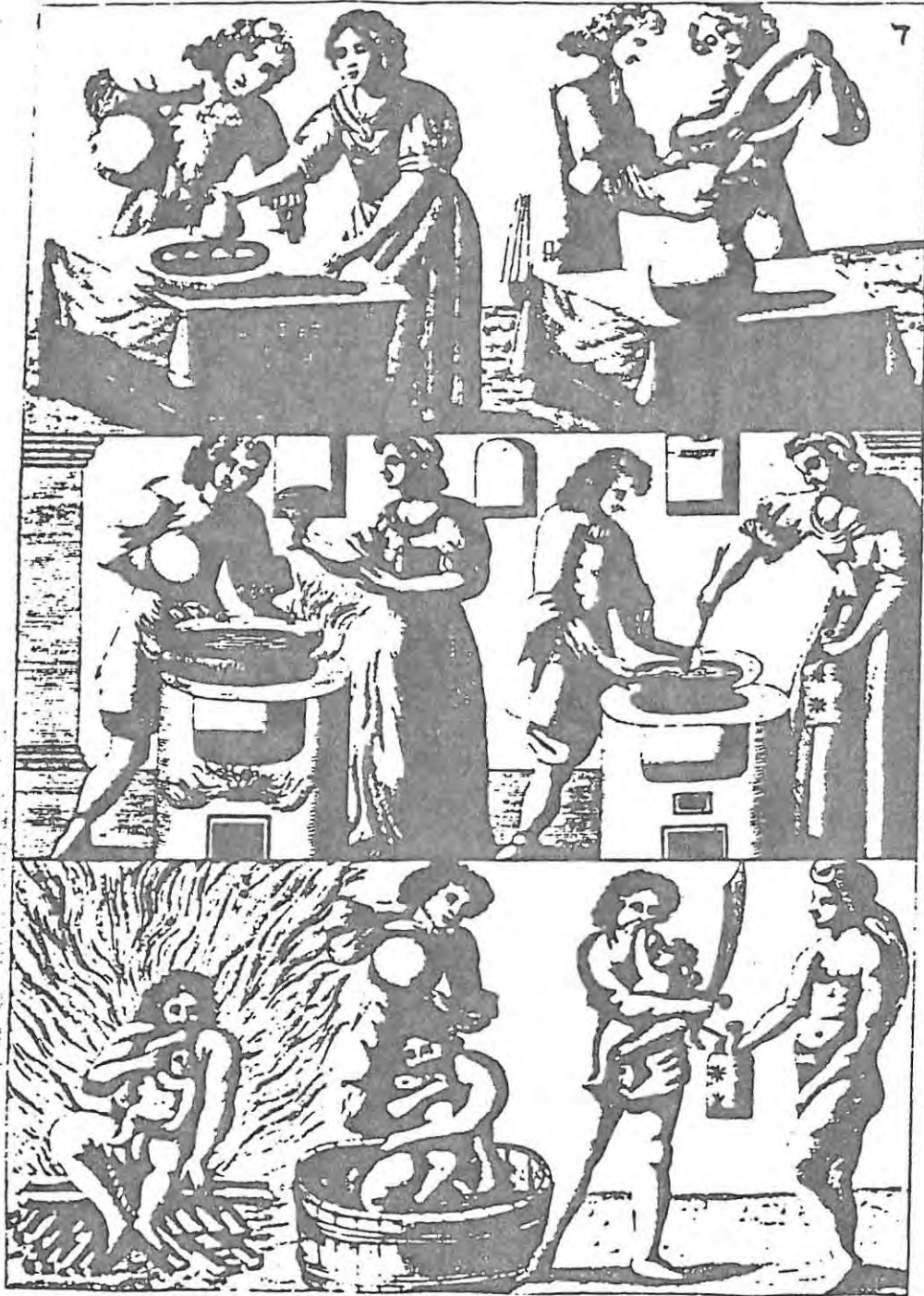


Plate 7



Plate 8

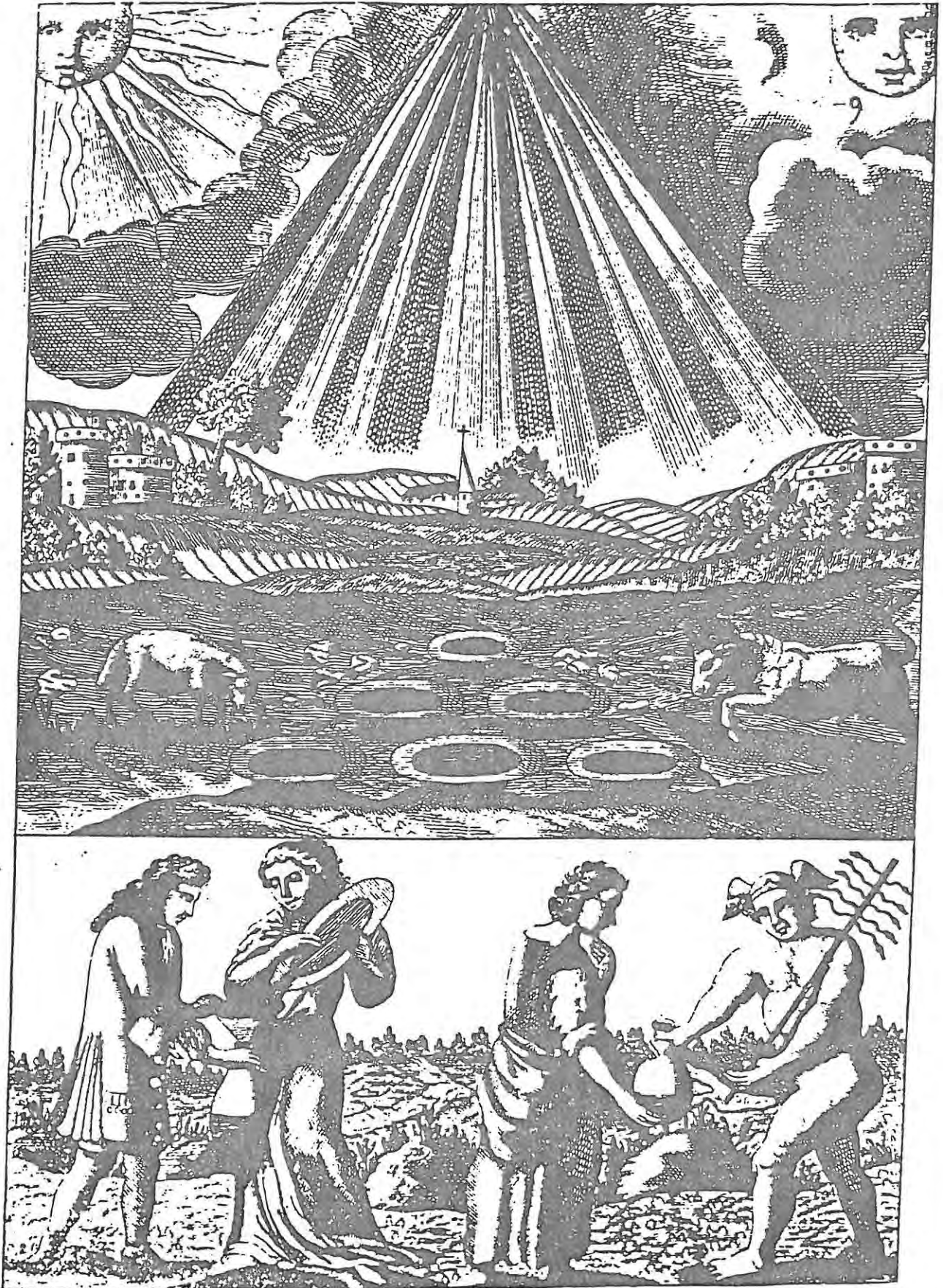




Plate 10



Plate 11

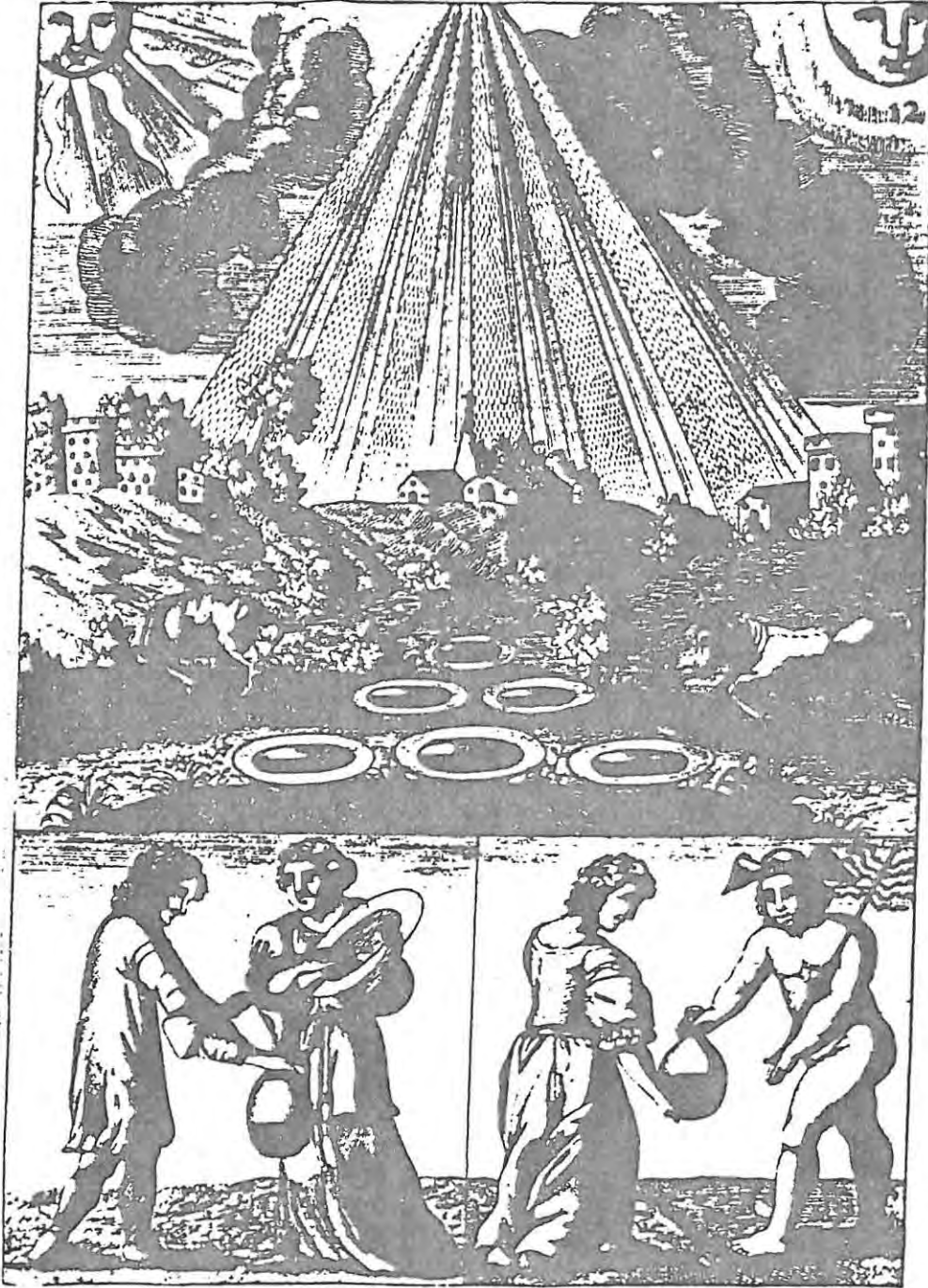


Plate 12

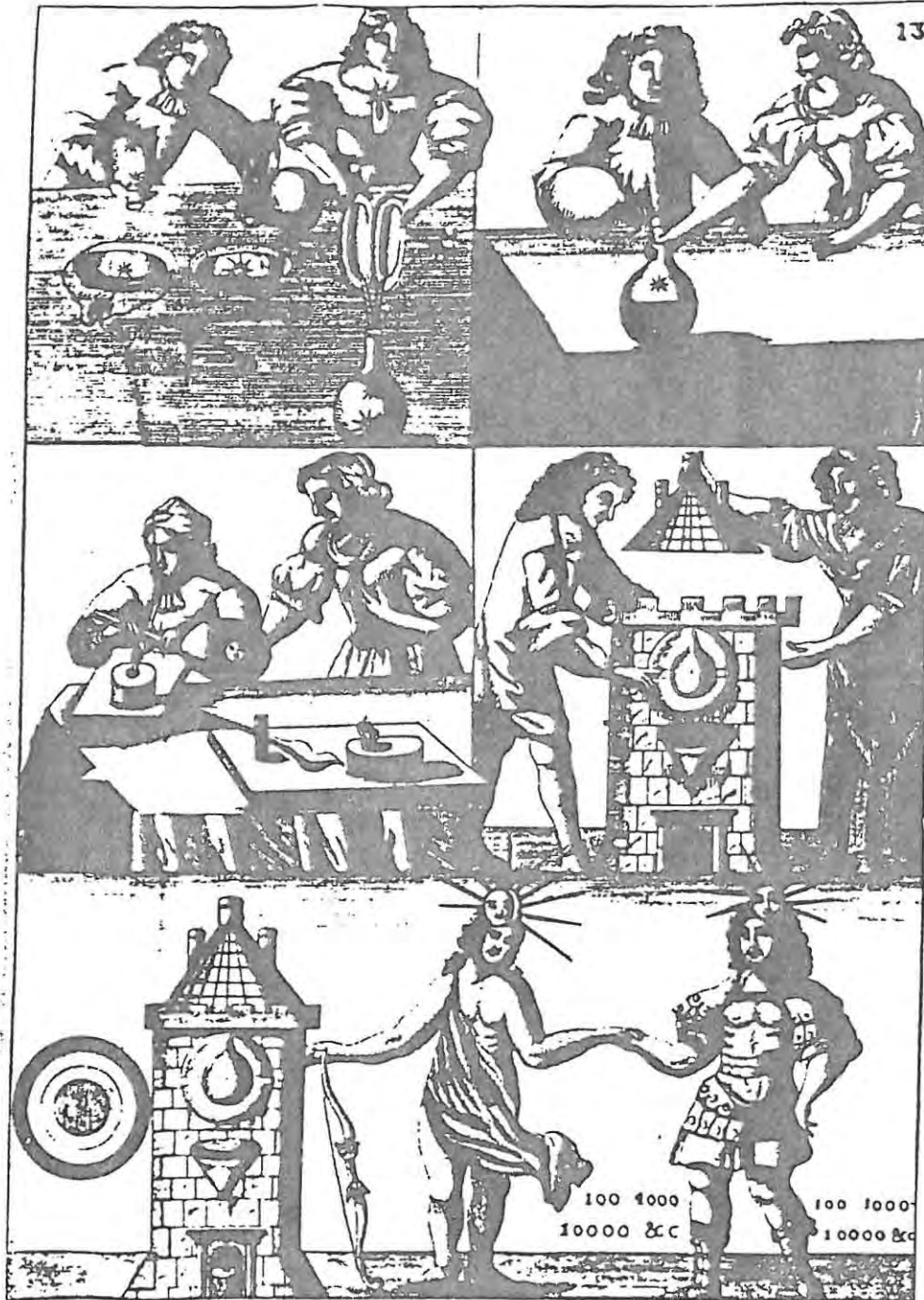


Plate 13

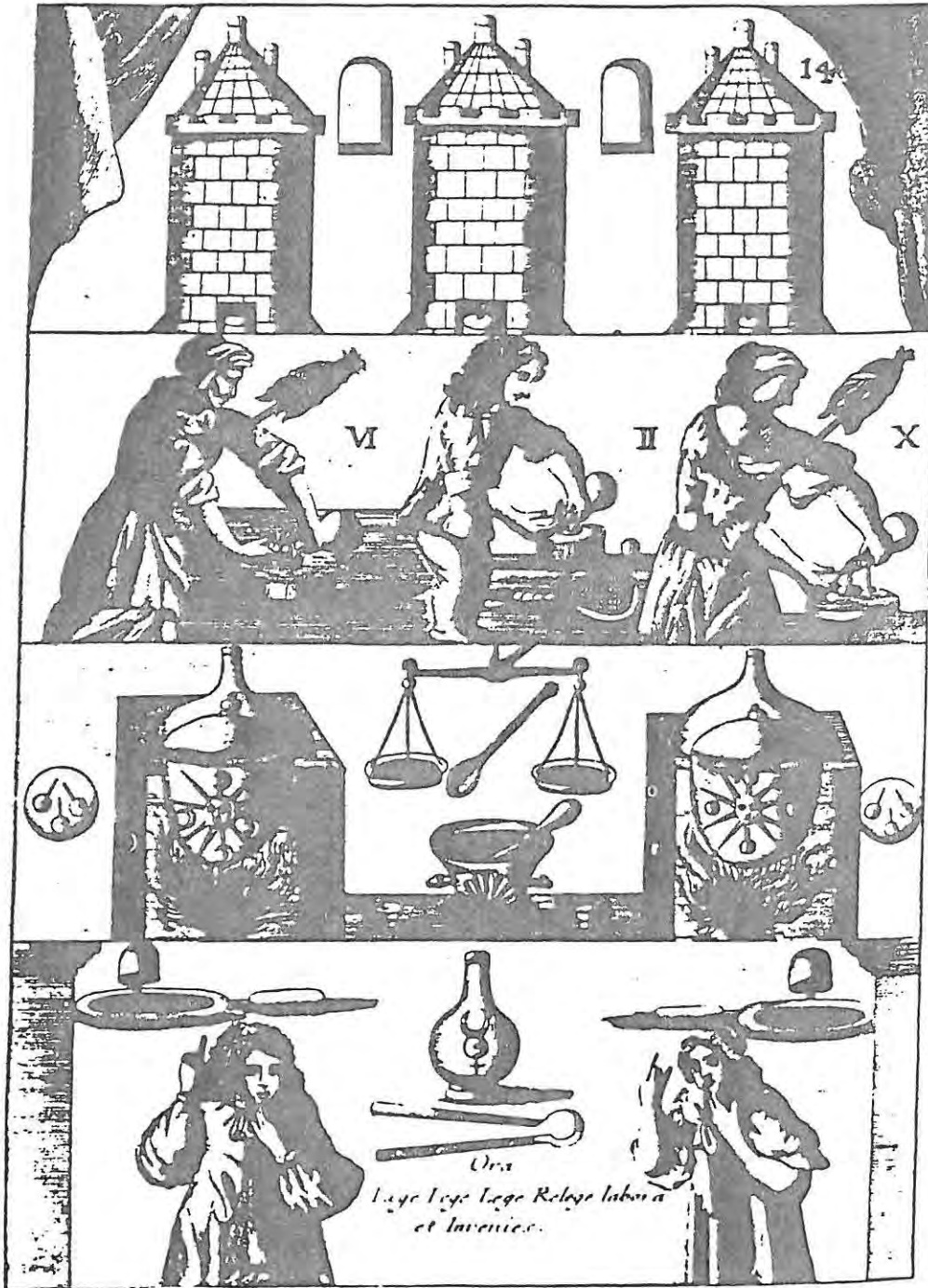


Plate 14



Plate 15

