

The Superman as salamander:

symbols of transformation or transformational symbols?

Abstract: Taking its cue from David Holt's discussion of Jung and Marx in relation to alchemy, Christianity, and the work against Nature, this paper discusses Goethe, Nietzsche, and Jung in relation to alchemy and the work on the self. It focuses on the idea of transformation as central to Jung's understanding of both Goethe's *Faust* and Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. And it argues that, in alchemical terms, the Superman becomes the salamander — while suggesting, in the hidden and unspoken part of its title, that the Superman does not just become a salamander, he becomes the philosophers' stone.

Keywords: aesthetics; alchemy; Goethe; Nietzsche; symbol; transformation.

[The Salamander] is caught and pierced
So that it dies, and yields up its life with its blood.
But this, too, happens for its good:
For from its blood it wins immortal life [...].
From [this blood] the Sages derive their science,
And through it they attain the Heavenly Gift,
Which is called the Philosophers' Stone,
Possessing the power of the whole world.¹

According to Jung, Goethe's *Faust* is 'an alchemical drama from beginning to end' (Jung, 1936, para. 85); it is nothing less than 'an alchemistic mystery story' (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 894). In a number of places in his voluminous collected works, and at considerable length, Jung works out an 'alchemical reading' of *Faust*. (It should be noted, however, that this reading is scattered and dispersed, not concentrated and contained in one place.) His interest in this iconic work of German literature goes back to the moment when his mother (or, as *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* puts it, 'her No. 2 personality') said, 'suddenly and without preamble', to her fifteen-year-old son: 'You really should read Goethe's *Faust* one of these days' (Jung and Jaffé 1962, p. 78). If we are to believe *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung was initially unsympathetic to the figure of Faust himself, but he was struck by the character of Mephistopheles, and by the extraordinary closing-scene (*Schlusszene*) in Act 5 of Part Two. Above all, he was fascinated by the scene in which Mephisto tells Faust how to visit the mysterious Mothers. (There is much to be said about this scene: about its deliberate, even parodic, mystification, as well as

about its influence — as much stylistic as anything else — on Jung’s thinking about the pleroma in his *Septem sermones ad mortuos* (Maillard, 1993).

In his conversation with Eckermann on 10 January 1830, Goethe mentioned Plutarch as one possible historical source of these maternal figures,² but there are plenty of other likely candidates — not least in the German Hermetic tradition. In cabbalistic thought, for example, three letters of the alphabet are known as ‘mothers’ and identified with the elements of fire, water, and earth;³ while in his *Von der Menschwerdung* [1620] (part 2, chapter 2, §4), Jakob Böhme speaks of God, as the original creator, bearing within him seven mothers, out of which the *prima materia* arises.⁴

In particular, Jung’s interest seems to have focused on the lines where Mephisto describes the activity of the Mothers:

Formation, transformation,

The eternal mind’s eternal recreation.

Enswathed in likenesses of manifold entity;

They see you not, for only wraiths they see.

Gestaltung, Umgestaltung,

Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung,

Umschwebt von Bildern aller Kreatur,

Sie sehn dich nicht, denn Schemen sehn sie nur.

(ll. 6287-6290; Goethe, 2001, p. 178)

In a letter to Freud written on 23 June 1911, Jung commented that ‘unconscious fantasy is an amazing witches’ kitchen’ (*die unbewußte Phantasie ist eine unglaubliche Hexenküche*), and he went on to cite these lines from *Faust*, Part Two, adding the comment: ‘This is the matrix of the mind, as the little great-grandfather correctly saw’ (*hier ist die Gebärmutter des Geistes, wie der Herr Urgroßvater richtig erkannt hat*) (Freud/Jung, 1988, p. 341).⁵ The importance of the Mothers Scene for Jung may be gauged from his later references to it. In a fantasy of 1914 transcribed in his *Red Book*, Jung imagines falling asleep and awaking in a mysterious kitchen, about which he asks in astonishment: ‘Is this really the realm of mothers?’ (*ist das wohl das reich der mütter?*) (Jung, 2009, p. 302). In 1958, Jung defined the anima as the personification of the collective unconscious, which he equated with ‘the “realm of the Mothers”’, with its ‘distinct tendency to influence the conscious conduct of life’ or ‘to irrupt violently into consciousness in order to confront it with strange and seemingly incomprehensible contents’ (Jung, 1958, para. 714). And in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, the lines ‘Formation, transformation, / Eternal mind’s eternal recreation’ (*Gestaltung, Umgestaltung, / Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung*) provide a definition of the mandala as an expression of the self, ‘the wholeness of the personality’ (Jung and Jaffé, p. 221).

A second seminal (and intimately related) influence on Jung was Nietzsche’s *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. In his third lecture (given in May 1934) in the series of seminars on this work, which was to run for a further five years (!), Jung refers to the Mothers Scene in connection with Zarathustra’s proclamation of the doctrine of the Superman to the people in the market-place. ‘When Nietzsche declares that God is dead, instantly he begins to transform’, Jung tells us, ‘he immediately gets into the process of th[e] archetype of rebirth, because those vital powers in us which we call

“God” are powers of self-renewal, powers of eternal change’ (Jung 1934-1939, vol. 1, p. 54). And he goes on: ‘Goethe felt th[is]: there is a beautiful verse in *Faust* about the kingdom of the mothers where everything is in a continuous state of self-renewal, a continuous rearrangement’ — or, in Faustian terms, there is ‘Formation, transformation, / The eternal mind’s eternal recreation’ (*Gestaltung, Umgestaltung, / Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung*) — while he explained, in terms redolent of Jakob Böhme, that ‘this kingdom of the mothers is the abyss of the deity; it is the darkness of the good, the *deus absconditus*, the *auctor rerum*, the dark father of created things [...] the original mother’ (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 1, p. 54).

Jung’s approach has been enthusiastically taken up by some commentators, although it has also been subject to severe, even harsh, criticism. Initially, Jung’s interpretation was given a warm reception in the circles of *Germanistik*. In an article from 1954, Gustav F. Hartlaub, drawing on Jung’s work, examined the importance of alchemy for Goethe, with particular reference to *Faust* (Hartlaub, 1954). By 1962, however, Harold Jantz had written a highly perceptive and extremely critical article in *The German Quarterly*, highlighting some of the fallacies of Jung’s approach (Jantz, 1962). In the meantime, there have been several book-length treatments, including the short monograph by the analytical psychologist Edward F. Edinger (Edinger, 1990) and, about a decade ago, the extensive study in German by Irene Gerber-Münch (1997). (To judge by the descriptions and photographs of performances of *Faust* given at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Steiner-inspired readings — the only complete performances, until Peter Stein’s staging of the entire work in 2000 — place a heavy emphasis on its mystical aspects, although whether these draw on alchemical notions is hard to say.)

Now it is true that alchemical motifs do inform the plot of *Faust* in a number of scenes. For example, in the first of the scenes set in his study, we see Faust conjuring the spirits of the four alchemical elements, in an effort to uncover the identity of the poodle that has followed him home (in fact, Mephistopheles).

First, to defeat this beast,

I need the Spell of Four, at least.

Salamander, burn!

[*Salamander soll glühen*]

Water-nymph, twist and turn!

Sylph of the air, dissolve!

Goblin, dig and delve!

[...]

Salamander, in flame

Vanish as you came!

[*Verschwind' in Flammen,*

Salamander!]

Murmur and mingle,

Nymph of the sea-dingle,

Blaze like a meteor,

Sylph-like creature!

Serve in the house for us,

Incubus, incubus!

Come out of him, show yourself thus or thus!

(ll. 1271-76, 1283-91; Goethe, 1987, p. 40)

One of the spirits invoked by Faust is the salamander — a small, lizardlike amphibian which, in the iconographical tradition of alchemy, is able to resist fire, and lives in it (an ability attributed to it by Aristotle and Pliny the Elder; in this respect, the alchemical tradition serves to mediate classical ideas to the present). For example, in the *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618) of Michael Maier, we are told that ‘as the salamander lives in fire, so does the [alchemical] Stone’ (in **fig. 1**, we see the salamander frolicking in the flames in its ‘Fire Baptism’, a representation of ‘the fiery principle which conquers fire’; an image of how, according to the doctrine of Pseudo-Democritus, ‘nature overcomes nature’) (Fabricius, 1989, p. 76-77). And in *The Book of Lambspring* (1625) (see **fig. 2**), we see ‘the Blood-Bath of the Salamander’, not only ‘a salamander, liv[ing] in the fire, [...] impart[ing] to it a most glorious hue’, but a creature being torn apart in the flames by the philosophical alchemist, as part of the transformative process (Bryce [Ed.], 1987, p. 29).

Elsewhere in *Faust*, Part One, we find related alchemical motifs. In ‘Outside the City Gate’, for instance, we learn that Faust’s father had engaged in alchemical experiments, leading to a number of deaths — although this can hardly be said to constitute a positive representation of alchemy. In the ‘Witch’s Kitchen’ scene — the inspiration for Freud’s cry in ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ (1937) that we need the Witch Metapsychology (Freud, 1964, p. 225) — the witch performs the parodic ritual of the *Hexen-Einmaleins*, a magic spell, to prepare the draught that will attract Faust to Gretchen. And in Part Two, aside from the Paris-and-Helena scene and the Mothers scene, the ‘Laboratory’ scene in Act 2, where Wagner, surrounded by ‘elaborate clumsy apparatus for fantastic purposes’, is creating the Homunculus, a

'little man' (who is related in some mysterious way to Mephistopheles), is particularly rich in alchemical ideas.

Nor is it simply in *Faust* that alchemical imagery has been detected. It has been argued, for example, that the strong influence of 'alchemical and emblematic sources connected with the alchemical, neo-Platonic, and Pietistic interests of Goethe's youth' is evident in two famous poems, 'On the Lake' (*Auf dem See*) and 'Autumn Feeling' (*Herbstgefühl*) (both from 1775), giving rise to the speculation that Goethe must have come across the *Philosophia reformata* (1622) of Johann Mylius and Meier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (Sirc, 1992). And with reference to Goethe's own life, it is recognized that, during his period of crisis in Frankfurt from 1768 to 1770, when he was in his early Twenties (and had just spent his first year at university ...!), Goethe became intensely interested in alchemy (Gray, 1952). Indeed, Jack Herbert has suggested that 'Goethe's whole career' established itself as 'an alchemical life-pattern of which he became conscious', in which various illnesses and emotional crises, especially his collapse in 1768 and his subsequent engagement with alchemy, represented 'the first half of the famous alchemical formula — *solve et coagula* (dissolve and coagulate)' (Herbert, 2001, p. 29).⁶ Under the guidance of the intensely Pietistic Susanna von Klettenberg, we know that Goethe engaged with such figures as Paracelsus (1493-1541), Basilus Valentinus (c. 15. cent.), Georg von Welling (1652-1727), Johann Baptist van Helmont (1577-1644), and George Starkey (d. 1665). Looking back on this period in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe specifically mentions the *Aurea catena Homeri*, the 'Golden Chain of Homer' (Goethe, 1987, p. 256).⁷

Yet when, much later on in his life, Goethe turns to an explicit discussion of alchemy in his 'History of the Doctrine of Colour', part of his famous *Farbenlehre*, his discussion is much more reserved, even critical. Here Goethe talks about the lack

of originality among the alchemists, lamenting their ‘mystery-mongering’ (*Geheimniskrämerei*) and the ‘monotony’ of their writings (Goethe, 1960, pp. 78). In them he saw a ‘misuse of the noble and the true’, and in their ideals of gold, health, and longevity of life, a debased version of the three great religious ideas of God, virtue, and immortality (Goethe, 1960, pp. 78-79). In short: to alchemy, read as poetry, Goethe was sympathetic; interpreted as a process, however, it was a nonsense. So what are we to do with Goethe’s extensive use of alchemical motifs in *Faust*? Can Jung really be right when he describes the *whole* of *Faust* as an alchemical drama? And to what extent might *Zarathustra* be read in terms of alchemy?

From a historical perspective, Jung wants to argue, the alchemical tradition had reached in *Faust* ‘its final summit and with it the historical turning-point’ (Jung, 1937, para. 558). Now, in his letter of 18 January 1941 to the Hungarian philologist and mythologist Karl Kerényi (1897-1973), Jung makes, it seems to me, an important point when he suggests that the influence of esoteric sources on Goethe’s work had been, at least in part, an unconscious one. Writing in response to Kerényi’s commentary on the scene ‘Rocky Inlets of the Aegean Sea’, which brings the Classical *Walpurgisnacht* in *Faust*, Part Two, to a close, Jung speculated that Goethe himself had not been aware of ‘how profoundly’ he had been influenced by alchemy. What he had read at the instigation of Susanne von Klettenberg, Jung wrote, was not sufficient to explain the ‘deep impulses’ (*tiefe Anregungen*) he had received from alchemy (Jung, 1973-1975, vol. 1, p. 291). (Indeed, what Jung says here about the unconscious influence of alchemy on Goethe could also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the influence of Goethe on Jung himself.)

Now, it seems to me, that the real genius of Jung’s intuition — where he is truly *genial*, as the Germans say — lies in his application to these texts — to *Faust*,

to *Zarathustra* — of the ‘truth’ of alchemy. For the signal advantage of Jung’s approach is that it is helpful in exploring what critics have called the ‘diachronic’ as well as the ‘synchronic’ aspects of Goethe’s text.⁸ As a text that is very much aware of its historical position in the Western canon, as Harold Bloom has pointed out (Bloom, 1995, pp. 203-35), and of its indebtedness to other texts, literary and visual, as Ulrich Gaier’s massive commentary underscores (Gaier, 1992), *Faust* stands to gain considerably from a ‘morphological’ reading to which Jungian analysis, with its immense sense of intellectual and iconographic tradition, has much to contribute.⁹ In other words, Jung’s central intuition — of the importance of self-transformation through the symbol, and of its significance as an historico-intellectual source for Weimar classicism in general, and for *Faust* in particular — is not entirely wrong.

Read psychologically, Jung is telling us something important when, in *The Psychology of the Transference* (1946), he claims that, in *Faust*, Goethe is describing ‘the experience of the alchemist who discovers that what he has projected into the retort is his own darkness, his unredeemed state, his passion, his striving to reach the goal’ — the goal being ‘to become what he really is’ (which sounds very Nietzschean) or, in the language of alchemy, ‘to fulfil the purpose for which his mother bore him, and, after the peregrinations of a long life caught up in manifold errors, to become the *filius regius*, the son of the supreme mother’ (Jung, 1946, para. 407). What I have called here the *truth of alchemy* is the *transformation of the self*, an idea as central to Goethe’s *Faust* as it is to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

In his seminars, Jung makes frequent comparisons between Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and the transformative processes of alchemy. Although he claims that ‘Nietzsche knew nothing of alchemy’ (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 1, p. 106), indeed that ‘Nietzsche had no knowledge of Gnosticism nor of medieval philosophy’ (ibid., p.

229), he nevertheless insists that alchemy provides a framework for understanding Nietzsche's text.¹⁰ And, after all, what else is Zarathustra's teaching about the Superman, — and his cry: 'let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!' (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 42) —, other than a cry for radical self-transformation, as radical as the transmutation of base metal into gold? Hence it is not surprising that, in Nietzsche's writings, too, we find references to the notion of alchemical transformation.

Writing to Franz Overbeck on 25 December 1882 (at the end of a bad year for Nietzsche, not least because of atrociously poor health, and the collapse of his relationship with Lou von Salomé), Nietzsche says: 'If I cannot discover the alchemist's trick of turning this mud [or: this shit] into gold, then I am lost' (*Wenn ich nicht das Alchemisten-Kunststück erfinde, aus diesem — Kote **Gold** zu machen, so bin ich verloren*) (Nietzsche, 1975-1984, vol. 6, p. 312).¹¹ (Significantly, it's precisely at this time that Nietzsche begins his work on *Thus spoke Zarathustra ...*) Nietzsche's remark, echoed in Baudelaire's cry, *tu m'as donné ta boue, et j'en ai fait de l'or*,¹² reminds us that, in the alchemical tradition, filth is an alchemical substance and that, as Jung puts it, 'the substance that harbours the divine secret is everywhere [...]. It can be had for the asking and can be found anywhere, even in the most loathsome filth' (Jung, 1937, para. 421). For the alchemical process itself begins with the *massa confusa*, without which the transformation cannot take place.¹³

Once again, some (but not all) critics have been alert to these alchemical resonances. 'Beginning in 1882', Richard Perkins has observed, 'Nietzsche frequently and fairly insistently poses an inner alchemist, privately in euphoric notebook entries, confidentially in frantic letters to Franz Overbeck, and publicly in *Also sprach Zarathustra*', a work Perkins describes as 'a frankly chrysopoetic work culminating in

a golden nature won through transmutation’ (Perkins, 1987, p. 216). Similarly, and in greater detail, Graham Parkes has argued that *Zarathustra* is ‘a text that contains dozens of images that figure importantly in alchemy — and especially in alchemy understood as a symbol system for psychological transformation’, and he lists the following: ‘chaos; the stone, fire, sun, and moon; the dragon, eagle, lion, serpent, and ouroborous; the child; and of course, lead and gold’ (Parkes, 1994, p. 166). So, here too, we find confirmation of Jung’s intuition, voiced when he tells his audience in his Nietzsche seminars —in that uncannily casual tone that can make his remarks so unsettling — that ‘the man Nietzsche himself did not realize, when he said God was dead, that it meant that he would get into the mill, into the alchemical pot where he is cooked and transformed’ (Jung, 1934-1939, p. 54).

In the remainder of this article I wish to examine more closely how the theme of transformation — how symbols of transformation, and transformational symbols — can be found at the heart of the extraordinarily complex work that is *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. For my point is that these texts are not just ‘symbols of transformation’, but are, rather, ‘transformational symbols’; for symbols themselves are precisely the means whereby transformation is wrought.

In *The Psychology of the Transference*, Jung tells us that alchemy describes the same psychological phenomenology observed in the analysis of unconscious processes. These unconscious processes begin, when (what Jung calls) the ‘specious unity’ of the individual — ‘I want, I think’ — breaks down under the impact of the unconscious. If we can blame someone else for our difficulties, then some semblance of unity can be

saved; the function of blame, then, lies its desperate attempt to shore up this sense of unity. (Is this perhaps this is one of the reasons why, today, we have a culture of blame, not a culture of responsibility?) But once we realize we have a shadow (*einen Schatten*), and once we realize that our enemy is within our own heart, then the conflict begins — then ‘one becomes two’ (*Eins wird zu Zwei*) (Jung, 1946, para. 399). In other words, we have ‘the *Zarathustra* moment’ — that moment Nietzsche talks about in his little poem, ‘Sils-Maria’.¹⁴ In the ‘obfuscation of the light’, or the depotentiation of consciousness, the individual — in alchemy as in analysis — becomes at a loss to know where his or her personality begins or ends, and so, too (or so Jung tells us), does the analyst: ‘Often the analyst is in much the same position as the alchemist who no longer knew whether he was melting the mysterious amalgam in the crucible or whether he was the salamander glowing in the fire’ ... (Jung, 1946, para. 399). Now *Zarathustra* itself is a text that is precisely about the disintegration of the personality and its re-constellation, its contraction and its expansion —¹⁵ which explains why, in some many respects, it remains a deeply disturbing work.

And so, as with *Faust*, we can read *Zarathustra* as an alchemical text, inasmuch as it is a text about transformation. True, by no means all the imagery is alchemical: and that is the point — for the aim is to read Goethe, Nietzsche, and Jung, not as alchemists, but as thinkers interested, as the alchemists were, in the idea of transformation. These texts are not transformative because they are alchemical, but they are alchemical because they are transformative.

After the ‘Prologue’, *Zarathustra* tells us ‘Of the Three Transformations’, that is, the transformation of the spirit (*der Geist*) into a camel, then into a lion, and finally into a child.¹⁶ (Similarly, in his preface to *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche had spoken of the three-fold trajectory of the ‘free spirit’ (*freier Geist*): first, the

experience by the ‘fettered spirit’ of a ‘great liberation’; then, a feeling of ‘bird-like freedom, bird-like altitude, bird-like exuberance, and a third thing in which curiosity is united with a tender contempt’; and a final step in ‘convalescence’, in which ‘it grows warmer around [us] [...], feeling and feeling for others acquire depth, warm breezes of all kinds blow across [us]’, ‘as if [our] eyes are only now open to what is *close at hand*’ [Nietzsche, 1986, pp. 6-8].)¹⁷

In ‘Of Joys and Passions’, Zarathustra exhorts us to transform our passions into virtues, our devils into angels, the fierce dogs in our cellar into birds and sweet singers; we should transmute poison into balsam, and from the cow of affliction we should drink sweet milk from its udder... (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 64). And in ‘On the Way of the Creator’, Zarathustra urges us : ‘Create yourself a god from your seven devils’; and he invites us to become just like the phoenix – or perhaps the alchemical salamander? – as we burn in our own flames: ‘You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame: how could you become new, if you had not first become ashes?’ (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 90). The dangers of this self-transformative undertaking is emphasized by the dwarf-like Spirit of Gravity in ‘Of the Vision and the Riddle’, who addresses Zarathustra in alchemical terms as the philosophers’ stone, the ‘stone of wisdom’:

‘O Zarathustra, you stone of wisdom, you projectile, you star-destroyer!
You have thrown yourself thus high, but every stone that is thrown —
must fall!

[...] O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown your stone, but it will
fall back upon *you!*’ (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 177).

Later, when he is on the Blissful Islands, Zarathustra chooses a powerful image to express what he wants to say about creativity, destruction, and the will to create the Superman:

Ah, you men, I see an image sleeping in the stone, the image of my visions! Ah, that it must sleep in the hardest, ugliest stone!

Now my hammer rages fiercely against its prison. Fragments fly from the stone: what is that to me?

I will complete it: for a shadow [*ein Schatten*] came to me — the most silent, the lightest of all things once came to me!

The beauty of the Superman came to me as a shadow [*Des Übermenschen Schönheit kam zur mir als Schatten*]. Ah, my brothers! What are the gods to me now! (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 111-12).

Rightly, Jung describes this text as ‘one of those deeply symbolic passages in *Zarathustra*’ (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 943). In his Seminar, he placed the image of the soul sleeping in the stone in the context of alchemical tradition (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, pp. 944-945, 947-52), and in an Eranos lecture given in 1935 he developed this reading of the image (Jung, 1936, paras. 405-06). But Jung’s reference to an ancient alchemical authority, Ostanes, as cited in the third century by Zosimos, — and a text that begins:

‘Go to the waters of the Nile and there you will find a stone that has a spirit [*pneuma*]. Take this, divide it, thrust in your hand and draw out its heart: for its soul [*psyche*] is in its heart’,¹⁸

— forms only the beginning of his analysis, for, as Jung explains, the image in *Zarathustra* is, in effect, an inversion of alchemical principles.

‘In antiquity’, Jung told his Eranos audience, “the material world was filled with the projection of a psychic secret, which from then on appeared as the secret of matter and remained so until the decay of alchemy in the eighteenth century’ (Jung, 1936, para. 406). Now the alchemists, according to Jung, were looking for ‘the marvellous stone that harboured a pneumatic essence in order to win from it the substance that penetrates all substances — since it is itself the stone-penetrating “spirit” — and transforms all base metals into noble ones by a process of coloration’ (Jung, 1936, para. 406). This ‘spirit-substance’, he continued, is ‘like quicksilver, which lurks unseen in the stone and must first be expelled if it is to be recovered *in substantia*’, and ‘the possessor of this penetrating Mercurius can “project” it into other substances and transform them from the imperfect into the perfect state’, so that ‘the imperfect state is like the sleeping state; substances lie in it like the “sleepers chained in Hades”^[19] and are awakened as from death to a new and more beautiful life [*zu neuem, schöneren Leben*] by the divine tincture extracted from the inspired stone’ (Jung, 1936, para. 406).

But in *Zarathustra*, he observed, the reverse is the case, inasmuch as Zarathustra’s metaphor, — ‘I see an image sleeping in the stone’, — says ‘much the same thing, but the other way round’ (Jung, 1936, para. 406). For Nietzsche — with his ‘ecstatic intuition’, as Jung puts it — tried ‘to wrest the secret of the superman from the stone in which it had long been slumbering’, and ‘it was in the likeness of this slumbering image that he wished to create the superman’ — the *Übermensch* who, ‘in the language of antiquity’, could be called ‘the divine man’ (*den göttlichen*

Menschen) (Jung, 1936, para. 406). In alchemy, the stone harbors the essence that will penetrate and transform the world; in Nietzsche, this new world must be released *from* the stone. (Nevertheless: common to both is the desire to create ‘a new, more beautiful life’ [*schönes, neueres Leben*] [Jung, 1936, para. 406], or to ‘make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us [*schön, anziehend, begehrenswert*] when they are not’).²⁰ Jung’s reading is remarkably deft, extraordinarily subtle, and this is just as true of his commentary on this passage offered a year or so later in his *Zarathustra* seminar.

Here Jung places the idea that ‘a wonderful image is sleeping in the stone’ (and that ‘within the stone there is something that is alive, but is dormant’) (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 944) in the alchemical tradition of the philosophers’ stone. And he speaks of it in terms that are at once remarkably pragmatic —

Nietzsche has an intuition that the material out of which the Superman will be formed is the thing that is ugly, cheap, of no use whatever, just the thing he has thrown away — which of course is the past and all the values of the past. That thing which has been rejected is the raw material; out of the stone rejected by the builders [²¹] must he work that precious image. In other words, just out of the anima, out of that feeling that seems to be a mere nuisance, a mere hindrance — to his creative will (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 945)²²

— and astonishingly lofty, when he argues that ‘God is dead but he reappears in the idea of the Superman’ (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 951); when he compares Zarathustra’s description of the Superman as ‘the most silent, the lightest of all things’

(Nietzsche, 1969, p. 111) with St. Athanasius' remarks on the life of the desert anchorites (who recognize, in a great noise, the work of the devil, but in stillness, the presence of the Holy Spirit);²³ and when he solemnly announces:

Nietzsche uses here language which shows something one could call the essential experience, and we can see from it what the Superman really means to him; it is the manifestation of God in man, God born out of man, and that is the mystery of transmutation or of transubstantiation: namely, God born and generated in the flesh. (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 952)²⁴

Yet Zarathustra's alchemical image of shattering the stone to release the image within is also an explicitly *aesthetic* image.

Like a sculptor,²⁵ Zarathustra — here an exponent, in the phrase that constitutes the subtitle of *Twilight of the Idols*, of 'how one philosophizes with the hammer' — engages in the necessary destructive work of hammering, chipping, working at the stone, in order to realize, not just the Superman, but the *beauty* of the Superman (*des Übermenschen Schönheit*); a beauty that comes to Zarathustra 'like a shadow', just as, in the words of his discourse 'On the Virtuous', we are told that 'the voice of beauty speaks softly: it steals into only the most awakened souls' (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 117).²⁶ In the use of the word *Schatten* here, Jung (in another deft and subtle reading) detects 'the idea of an unsubstantial image, as unsubstantial as a shadow, [thus] a foreshadowing, an anticipation', so that 'the beauty of the Superman appears [...] as a sort of anticipation, a shadow that falls upon his consciousness'; and as such, Jung mysteriously adds, 'this is very genuine, one of the most genuine things in *Zarathustra*' (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 955).

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche remarks on how, in the human being, ‘creature and creator are united’ — ‘in the human being there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in the human being there is also creator, form-giver, hammer-hardness, spectator-divinity, and seventh day’.²⁷ And looking back at the concluding passage of ‘On the Blissful Islands’ in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche comments that, for Zarathustra, what characterizes humankind is ‘formlessness, material, an ugly stone’ — a *massa confusa*, a *prima materia* — ‘which requires the sculptor’.²⁸ What Nietzsche is really proposing as a technique of existential self-sculpting is a form of aesthetic alchemy: to become the Superman, we must, like the salamander, endure the burning passion for form, and sculpt ourselves anew, so that we become our own philosophers’ stone. One must, as Nietzsche puts it, ‘become master of the chaos one is’ and ‘compel one’s chaos to become form’.²⁹

The philosophers’ stone is at once the goal and the instrument, the outcome and the means, of alchemical transformation. Similarly, Jung (in the context of a discussion of the conceptions of evil in Jakob Böhme and in Milton in his foreword to R.J. Zwi Werblowsky’s *Lucifer and Prometheus*) describes the alchemical stone as ‘nothing other than the *total man* [*den ganzen Menschen*]’ (Jung, 1952, para. 471), while in *The Psychology of the Transference* he reminds us of Theobald de Hoghelande’s adage in *De alchemiae difficultatibus liber*, ‘Ars requirit totum hominem’ (the art requires the whole man),³⁰ a dictum which is nowhere truer, he notes, than in psychotherapy. In other words, the analyst must, as he puts it, ‘go to the limits of his subjective possibilities’, otherwise the patient ‘will be unable to follow suit’ (Jung, 1946, para. 400). He emphasizes that psychotherapeutic work involves ‘a genuine process of purification where “all superfluities are”’ — like the salamander — “consumed in the fire” and the basic facts emerge’ (Jung, 1946, para. 400). For ‘is

there anything more fundamental', he asks, 'than the realization, "This is what I am? [*Das bin ich?*]"' (echoing Pindar's dictum, taken up by Nietzsche, 'become who you are') (Jung, 1946, para. 400). Thus is revealed, out of what is (or was) a diversity, an essential unity, i.e., out of the ego there emerges the self.

The truth of alchemy, Jung is telling us, is the truth of the symbol. What is a symbol? A symbol is something that opens up to us a world. And what is a world? A world is a *cosmos*, it is the world perceived as a locus of meaning, it is the world perceived (as Nietzsche says) not as 'in all eternity, chaos', as 'a lack of necessity [...] a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom', but as 'an astral order', as an order 'in which we live' (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 168); it is a place that is *alive*. The engagement with the symbol takes us beyond the salamander stage, when we glow in our own fire, and enables us truly to become 'who we really are', like a Superman, — that is to say, the *Übermensch*, the 'human-that-is-more-than-(merely)-human(-all-too-human)', — or the alchemical stone, — or like the kind of stone of which Nietzsche so movingly (and yet, in a way, also worryingly) writes in book 5 of *Daybreak* (§541):

How one ought to turn to stone.— Slowly, slowly to become hard like a precious stone — and at last to lie there, silent and a joy to eternity.

Wie man versteinern soll.— *Langsam, langsam hart werden wie ein Edelstein — und zuletzt still und zur Freude der Ewigkeit liegen bleiben.*

(Nietzsche, 1982, p. 541).

Jung understood well that the iconographical and rhetorical elaboration of the motif of transformation in the alchemical tradition was, in the end, underpinned by an existential imperative. In a letter written on 20 August 1945, when the rest of the world was largely occupied with other matters,³¹ Jung told Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn that ‘the opus consists of three parts: insight [*Einsicht*], endurance [*Ertragen*], and action [*Handeln*],’ and that ‘psychology is needed only in the first part, but in the second and third parts moral strength [*die Moral*] plays the predominant role’ (Jung, 1973-1975, vol. 1, p. 375). Echoing his point made in *The Psychology of the Transference* about the importance of conflict, he explained that ‘it is *conflicts of duty* that make endurance and action so difficult’:

There can be no resolution, only patient endurance of the opposites which ultimately springs from your own nature. You yourself are a conflict that rages in itself and against itself, in order to melt its incompatible substances, the male and the female, in the fire of suffering, and thus create that fixed and unalterable form which is the goal of life [*das Feste und Unveränderliche zu bilden, welches das Ziel des Lebens ist*]. Everyone goes through this mill,^[32] consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or forcibly. We are crucified between the opposites and delivered up to the torture until the “reconciling third” takes shape [*bis das Dritte Gestalt gewinnt*]. (Jung, 1973-1975, vol. 1, p. 375)³³

But, he reassured her, ‘the apparently unendurable conflict is proof of the rightness of your life’, and he concluded his letter with the following reflection: ‘A life without inner contradiction is either only half a life [*das halbe Leben*] or else a life in the

Beyond [*ein Leben im Jenseits*], which is destined only for the angels. But God loves human beings more than the angels' (Jung, 1973-1975, vol. 1, p. 375).

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Notes

¹ Bryce (Ed.), 1987, p. 28; compare with the commentary in Fabricius, 1989, p. 109.

² Eckermann, 1998, p. 342. See Plutarch, ‘Life of Marcellus’, §20; but compare also Plutarch, ‘The Obsolescence of Oracles’, §22.

³ See Agrippa, *Magische Werke*, vol. 1, p. 343; cited in Gaier, 1999, p. 640.

⁴ See F.C. Oetinger, *Swedenborgs irdische und himmlische Philosophie* [1858], p. 12; cited in Gaier, 1999, p. 640.

⁵ For further discussion of the significance of this scene for Jung, see Bishop, 2007-2008, vol. 1, pp. 63-70.

⁶ Reading Goethe’s account of his life in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* from an anthroposophical perspective, Albrecht Steffen suggested that Goethe’s life fell into a series of seven-year-long periods — from 1 to 7, 7 to 14, 14 to 21, and so on — corresponding to the following zodiacal signs: in Goethe’s youth, the moon, Mercury, and Venus; and, in the second half of his life, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn (Steffen, 1970); while, following Steffen’s suggestion, Friedrich Hiebel traced through the four books of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* the corresponding four stages of Goethe’s life, discovering in Goethe’s autobiography ‘the intensification [*Steigerung*] of his entelechy [*Entelechie*] through its metamorphoses in the play of polaristic forces’ (Hiebel, 1961, p. 49).

⁷ In Homer's *Iliad*, Book 8, the classical reference-point for this topos, Zeus boasts that if a golden chain were attached to the sky, the combined strength of the gods and goddesses could drag Zeus down, whereas he could drag the earth, the sea, and all them up to him (*Iliad*, Book 8, ll.19-27). Both Plato (*Theaetetus*, 153 c) and Aristotle (*On the Motion of Animals*, Book 4, 699b 37 – 700 a 2) refer to this passage. A *catena patrum* was a chain or series of passages from Church Fathers, arranged to elucidate Scriptural texts; St Thomas Aquinas prepared a major work, the *Catena Aurea* (1470), at the request of Pope Urban IV. This reference to the *Aurea catena Homeri* (*The Golden Chain of Homer: Or, A Description of the Origin of Nature and Natural Things* (1723-1757), published by Anton Josef Kirchweger in Frankfurt and Leipzig), indexes Goethe's interest in the Hermetic tradition.

⁸ For further discussion of synchrony and diachrony in *Faust*, see Wilkinson, 1973; Lamport, 1984; and Stephenson, 2001.

⁹ For discussion of a morphological approach, see Willoughby, 1962.

¹⁰ For instance, Jung glosses Zarathustra's remark 'one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you still have chaos in you' (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 46), as follows: 'The unconscious is not synthesized; that is, there is still a sort of melting pot in [the people of our time] where the elements can be re-formed, where new figures or new orders can be created. The old alchemistic philosophy tried to do that. [...] So that idea of the chaos in everybody is to him like a speech metaphor, but

it is apt symbolism for the disordered condition of an unconscious that is not yet synthesized' (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 1, pp. 105-06).

¹¹ Nietzsche uses this alchemical image on more than one occasion. Compare with his comment in his letter, again to Overbeck, of 18 August 1884 ('to "transform" all the blows of fate "into gold" to the advantage of my task' [*alle meine Schicksale zu Gunsten meiner Aufgabe* "in Gold zu verwandeln"] (Nietzsche, 1975-1984, vol. 6, p. 520); his comment in the *Nachlass* for Spring-Summer 1888 (Nietzsche, 1967-1977; 1988, vol. 13, 16[43], p. 501); and in his letter to Georg Brandes of 23 May 1888 ('Basically the gold maker is the most useful kind of human being there is: I mean someone who, out of something of little worth, something despised, creates something of value, or even gold. Such a person creates *wealth*, all the others merely convert currency') (Nietzsche, 1975-1984, vol. 8, p. 318).

¹² 'Projet d'Épilogue pour la seconde édition des *Fleurs du mal*' (Baudelaire, 1961, p. 180).

¹³ In *The Psychology of the Transference*, Jung notes that 'an integral part of the work is the *umbra solis* or *sol niger* of the alchemists, the black shadow which everybody carries with him, the inferior and therefore hidden aspect of the personality, the weakness that goes with every strength, the night that follows every day, the evil in the good' (Jung, 1946, para. 420).

¹⁴ 'Sils-Maria':

Here I sat, waiting — not for anything —

Beyond Good and Evil, fancying
Now light, now shadows, all a game,
All lake, all noon, all time without aim.

Then, suddenly, [woman-]friend, one turned into two —
And Zarathustra walked into my view.

*Hier sass ich, wartend, wartend, — doch auf Nichts,
Jenseits von Gut und Böse, bald des Lichts
Geniessend, bald des Schattens, ganz nur Spiel,
Ganz See, ganz Mittag, ganz Zeit ohne Ziel.*

*Da, plötzlich, Freundin! wurde Eins zu Zwei —
— Und Zarathustra gieng an mir vorbei ...*

(Nietzsche, 1974, p. 371; Nietzsche, 1967-1977; 1988, vol. 3, p. 649).

¹⁵ In 'The Child with the Mirror' Zarathustra says to his eagle and his snake:

'I have become nothing but speech and the tumbling of a brook from high
rocks: I want to hurl my words down into the valleys.

And let my stream of love plunge into impassable and pathless places! How
should a stream not find its way to the sea at last!'

(Nietzsche, 1969, p. 108).

¹⁶ Michel Onfray has identified these transformations with three phases in Nietzsche's intellectual development: first, the Schopenhauerian camel symbolizes an Oedipal phase, up to the break with Wagner; second, the Epicurean lion stands for an Epicurean phase, until the end of the affair with Lou von Salomé; and third, the phase of the Nietzschean child, represents the advent of the Superman (Onfray 2009).

¹⁷ For further discussion, see Huskinson, 2009, p. 74.

¹⁸ Cited from Berthelot, 1888a, section III.vi, §5, pp. 121 and 129); cf. Jung, 1937, para. 405; cf. Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 949; cf. Jung, 1938/1940, para. 151; cf. Jung, 1942/1954, para. 355).

¹⁹ Cited from Berthelot, 1888b, section IV.xx, §8, pp. 292 and 281.

²⁰ *The Gay Science*, §299 (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 239). Compare with Nietzsche's ambition 'to make the thought of life a hundred times more appealing' (*The Gay Science*, §278 [Nietzsche, 1974, p. 225]), thus making 'new galaxies of joy flare up' (*The Gay Science*, §12 [Nietzsche, 1974, p. 86]), 'purple-glowing galaxies and whole Milky Ways of beauty!' (*Daybreak*, §551 [Nietzsche, 1982, p. 222]).

²¹ For this image, see Psalm 118: 22, 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head stone of the corner'; cited by Christ in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, and applied to Christ by St Peter in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7. For the messianic theme of the 'keystone' that becomes the 'stone of stumbling' (as the commentary in the Jerusalem Bible describes it), see Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16, Zechariah

3:9 and 4:7, cf. St Paul to the Romans 9:33, and 1 Peter 2:8. For the alchemical equivalent of the Petrine metaphor that ‘Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house’ (1 Peter 2:5), see Gerard Dorn’s injunction, ‘transform yourselves into living philosophical stones!’ (*transmutemini de lapidibus mortuis in vivos lapides philosophicos!*) (cited from Dorn’s *Speculativae philosophiae*, in *Theatrum chemicum* [1602], Johann Jacob Heilmann, Trans., 3rd edn (Argentorati [Strasbourg]: Zetzner, 1659), vol. 1, pp. 228-276 (p. 239); Jung, 1937, para. 378). For Jung’s interest in the motif of the cornerstone rejected by the builders (and in the related image of Christ as the *lapis angularis*), see the references in Forryan & Glover, 1979, p. 640; and see note 24 on the ‘shadow’ below.

²² Compare with Nietzsche’s remarks on the importance of ‘little things’ and the ‘casuistry of selfishness’ in *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I am So Clever’, §10 (Nietzsche, p. 36). For further discussion, see Domino, 1992; and Onfray’s analysis of Nietzsche on diet and nutrition (Onfray, 1989, pp. 95-109).

²³ Compare with a footnote in *Psychology and Religion* (Jung, 1938/1940, §32, fn. 12), citing St. Athanasius’ *The Life of St Anthony* (Budge [Ed.], vol. 1, pp. 33-34 and 47).

²⁴ Via a detour through the Patristic idea that Christ, the truth, is born of the Virgin Mary just as the wheat springs from the earth, Jung explains that ‘the old idea of the earth to us means the body; the savior is born from this body. To find out how the saviour could be produced from the earth in a miraculous way is the alchemistic

quest, for to them the philosopher's stone, the gold, or the child was really the saviour' (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 952).

²⁵ One might usefully compare this section of *Zarathustra* with the passages describing Michelangelo's artistic work in the biographical novel, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1961), by the American writer Irving Stone (*nomen est omen?*).

²⁶ For Jung, the word 'shadow' should initially be read in a way that pertains to psychological value: 'Nietzsche's idea of the Superman, which I would express by the term of *the self*, would naturally appear first under the cloak of the shadow, using the word this time as a psychological term. It appears in what has been rejected. The *lapis philosophorum*, the stone of greatest price, is at the same time the corner-stone first rejected by the builders; [thus] the matter out of which the stone is made or in which the precious stone is found is what is trodden underfoot or thrown onto dung heaps, cast out in the road. So psychologically it means that the thing which we think the least of, that part of ourselves which we repress perhaps the most, or which we despise, is just the part which contains the mystery. The test is: when you can accept yourself in your totality, then you have brought together the four elements — all the parts of yourself have come together from the four corners of the earth' (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, p. 953). Yet the term *Schatten* here, and its relation to (aesthetic) creativity, retains the sense that it has in Goethe's famous poem, *Selige Sehnsucht*, whose middle stanza reads:

Nicht mehr bleibest du umfangen,

You remain a prisoner no longer

In der Finsternis Beschattung,

In the shadowing darkness,

Und dich reißet neu Verlangen

And a new desire snatches you

Auf zu höherer Begattung.

Upwards to a higher union.

(Goethe, 1964, p. 240)

In this context the word *Beschattung* acquires an almost sexual connotation, as in the ‘overshadowing’ of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost at the incarnatory moment of Christ’s conception.

²⁷ *Beyond Good and Evil*, §225 (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 344).

²⁸ *Ecce Homo*, ‘Thus spoke Zarathustra’, §8 (Nietzsche, 1992, p. 80). As Nietzsche emphasizes, however, the line *Now my hammer rages fiercely against its prison* points to the fact that ‘[a]mong the decisive preconditions for a *dionysian* task is the hardness of the hammer, *joy even in destruction [die Lust selbst am Vernichten]*’, and ‘the imperative “become hard” [*werdet hart*], the deepest certainty *that all creators are hard*, is the actual mark of a *dionysian* nature’ (Nietzsche, 1992, p. 81). For Jung, ‘this word *raging* expresses a great deal of emotion; he tries to deal with this imprisoned image by a sort of rage’, and the flying fragments from the stone show that ‘it is a highly emotional condition, and [Nietzsche/Zarathustra] tries to get at it by hammer and tongs, *cum ira et vehementia*’ (as the sixth-century alchemical philosopher, Morienus Romanus, puts it) (Jung, 1934-1939, vol. 2, pp. 950-51; cf. Morienus, ‘Sermo de transmutatione metallorum’, in *Artis auriferae* [1593], vol. 2, pp. 7-54, p. 22; cited in Jung, 1937, para. 386). In his ‘Epilogue’ to *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung pointed out that in the final scene of *Faust*, Part Two, the figure of

Doctor Marianus (whom Jung goes so far as to identify with the ‘perfected figure’ of Faust) recalls name of Morienus the alchemist (Jung, 1937, para. 558).

²⁹ *The Will to Power*, §842 (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 444).

³⁰ See *Theatrum chemicum* [1602], Johann Jacob Heilmann, Trans., 3rd edn (Argentorati [Strasbourg]: Zetzner, 1659), vol. 1, pp. 109-191 (p. 126): *ars totum requirit hominem*.

³¹ On 6 August and on 9 August 1945, the USA had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima, then on Nagasaki; with the surrender of Japan, the Second World War had ended on 14 August 1945.

³² Compare with Jung’s remark on Nietzsche’s entrance into the ‘mill’ or the ‘alchemical pot’ (see above).

³³ In *The Psychology of the Transference*, Jung discussed the symbol of the crucifix, arguing that ‘nobody who finds himself on the road to wholeness can escape that characteristic suspension which is the meaning of crucifixion’ (Jung, 1946, para. 470); while, in the *Red Book*, he had explored its significance in *Liber secundus*, chapter 16, ‘Nox tertia’, and chapter 20, ‘The Way of the Cross’ (Jung, 2009, pp. 299-301, 309-11).