

THE ALCHEMICAL GREEN LION

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“There is this one green lion, which closes and opens the seven indissoluble seals of the seven metallic spirits which torments the bodies, until it has perfected them, by means of the artist’s long and resolute patience.” (Nouvelle Lumiere Chymique)

Over the course of this training program I have fallen twice and broken both feet. Recently I was rear-ended in an accident that totaled my car and left me with a mild concussion and deeply shaken body. Breaking both my ‘paws’ catapulted me deep into the jungle of my inner world, and as I studied *Mysterium*, the archetype of the alchemical green lion leapt into my psyche. With these accidents, my strong, competent and independent persona was shattered, and a vulnerable underbelly of awkwardness, anxiety, and foggy confusion was exposed. I reveled in indignation, consumed by a victim archetype that had hidden within my identification as a hero. A dark shadow of arrogance and greed, and an instinctual drive for power were ruthlessly exposed. This paper is about how these accidents have penetrated my soul and stimulated my psyche to examine my personal relationship to the green lion archetype that Jung talks about in *Mysterium*.

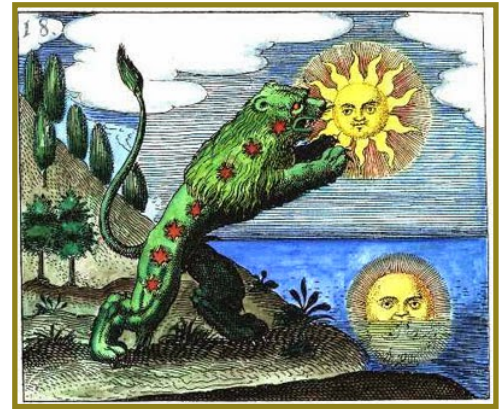


As king of beasts, lions move freely in the jungle using their paws to devour and consume whatever they need or want. Astrologically, my sun is in the house of Leo along with 5 other planets, and I have related to this powerful and commanding ‘king of the jungle’ my entire life. Like a devouring lion, I have grabbed hungrily and impulsively for new experiences and accomplishments. With a competitive

effort to succeed, I have moved through life identified as a psychotherapist, university instructor, sandplay consultant, author, spiritual director, yoga teacher, sign painter, graphic artist, musician,

parent and grandparent. Although the passionate energy of these activities fed an insecure and vulnerable ego, it also created a protective and unconscious defense from the emotional pain of more intimate personal relationships, and interfered with a deeper connection to my own soul.

The nature of a lion is to attack and eat what it wants and needs. Alchemically, it is pictured in the *Viridarium Chymicum* as consuming and digesting the solar energy of the sun itself (Roob, p.366). By ingesting the sun's light, the unconscious shadow of the lion's aggressive and destructive nature can become visible. As consciousness penetrates its inner world, the green lion cuts off its paws to restrain and

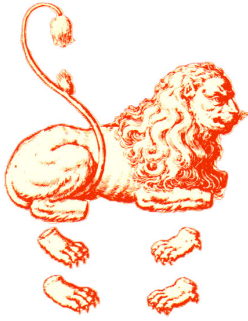


subdue its compulsive devouring behavior. In this way the lion begins to awaken the nature and wisdom of his true Self. For me, the accidents I experienced, that resulted in cutting off my paws, opened a much needed space for self-reflection and contemplation. They created a gateway into unexplored regions of my psyche where I have been able to recognize the aggressive and competitive nature of my own shadow.

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My first accident occurred 4 years ago, before the training program began. At the time, I reflected on how past ideas and attitudes were dying and dissolving, presumably to make room for a rebirth into something new. However, I ignored the call to slow down, and continued to focus my attention on the demands of the outer world. I drove weekly from San Diego to Los Angeles, maintained a full time private practice, and continued to accept teaching engagements and presentations while diligently pursuing the demands of the training program. Then I decided to move to Santa Monica and added the tasks of packing, downsizing, unpacking and reorganizing into an already crowded life. I valiantly persisted as a *massa confusa* infused my inner world.

Last summer I stumbled and cracked a bone in my other foot, and knew immediately I was being reminded again to slow down. I responded with mixed feelings of disappointment about stopping my stimulating outer activities, and relief that I now had time to settle into the spaciousness of my inner world. When I read about the green lion cutting off his paws in the ‘Rex and Regina’ chapter of *Mysterium* I couldn’t stop thinking about the psychological



meaning of loosing both my ‘paws,’ and the green lion’s insistence to pause and reflect. Breaking both my feet made me aware of an overpowering energy that needed to be tamed and redirected to assume my rightful place in the ‘jungle’ of my life. Additionally, being struck dramatically and unexpectedly by a car, led to an exploration of the green lion, who lives embedded in the blind spots of my own psyche.

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In *Mysterium*, Jung mentions the green lion in the section ‘The King as Anthropos.’ He says the anthropos is an expression of the “true man” or Christ in a new and direct form. He goes on to explain that this is not about making an effort to imitate Christ, but rather an involuntary experience of reality that occurs as a result of an alchemical process (14:490). “It [the ‘true man’] is the arcane substance that suffers those physical and moral tortures; it is the king who dies or is killed, is dead and buried and on the third day rises again. And it is not the adept who suffers all this, rather *it* suffers in him, *it* is tortured, *it* passes through death and rises again. All this happens not to the alchemist himself but to the ‘true man’ who he feels is near him and in him and at the same time in the retort. It is the real experience of a man who has got involved in the compensatory contents of the unconscious by investigating the unknown, seriously and to the point of self-sacrifice” (14:492).

My accidents point to the ‘true man’ or Self within me, who has endured suffering to compensate for the unconscious and animus driven activities of my egoic life. Jung says “ From

inner necessity the dragon destroyed itself (*natura naturam vincit*) and changed into the lion, and the adept drawn involuntarily into the drama, then felt the need to cut off its paws” (14:493).

The symbolic sequence of death and renewal of the king is the basic image of the individuation process according to Edinger (p. 216). For me, the dissolution of my egoic and guarded defensiveness, and my disintegration into the dark negredo of death and dismemberment has been an integral aspect of training. I see these accidents now as stimulating a new phase of my individuation, and movement towards rebirth. As this process is unfolding, I have felt an urge to pause and reconnect with the lost and forgotten parts of myself. In the language of alchemy, the paws of the green lion have been cut, and I am beginning to drink his blood, the *aqua permanens* that feeds the Queen during her pregnancy (14:401). Of course, this now brings up my confusion around the Queen and all that represents for me, including my identity as a woman and my expression of the feminine especially as she relates to the king. It is definitely a topic for further exploration. According to Dorn, the lion has rose colored blood and is closely connected with Venus (14:419).

A Lyon Greene did in her Lapp reside
(The which an Eagle fed), and from his side
The Blood gush'd out: The Virgin drunck it upp,
While Mercuries Hand did th'Office of a Cupp.
(Ripley's "Cantilena," verse 32)

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The lion's blood is associated with the rubedo, and the red and white roses found in the rose garden of the alchemical process. I am reminded of the adept in Michael Maiers *Atlanta Fugiens*. He stands immobilized, without a key, before the closed gate of the philosopher's rose garden. His feet sinking into the earth force him to pause and reflect

before moving. There are numerous locks on the gate that must be opened in order to proceed. Perhaps my relationship with the green lion is one of the keys for opening that gate. Maier writes

“The Garden of the Wise o’erflows with flowers,
but ever is the gateway bolted shut:
A thing despicable’s the only key,
without which you will stumble, legless, on.
You’ll climb in vain Parnassus’ heights,
and scarcely keep upright on even ground”
(*Atalanta Fugiens*, Emblem 27).

I hesitate now before the rose garden gate, contemplating the puzzle pieces of my life and wondering what will emerge as I near the completion of training classes. Is the green lion, and all that he embodies, the despicable key without which I will stumble, legless. He has dropped into my life and demanded my attention, and stands with me at a crossroads where I slowly drink his blood, the *luna philosophorum* or vitriol that enlivens and restores vital life energy. For me the green lion is the *prima materia* that is transforming, in an alchemical process within me. He embodies a primitive, instinctual, mercurial energy, and is merging with the fiery, sulphuric energy of the sun to give birth to a new king. In Emblem 31 of the *Atalanta Fugiens*, Michael Maier notes

The King, whose crown is heavy on his head,
swims in the wide sea and cries aloud:
“Why don’t you rescue me? Rush forward, all
you, whom I can make happy when I’m saved!
If you are wise, then take me to my realm,
and poverty and sickness you’ll forget.





Like the Cowardly Lion, I tremble in fear and apprehension with the thought of rescuing the king and consciously assuming authority for the direction and unfolding of my life.

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In the process of preparing this paper I remembered a dream within a dream I had before applying to the training program. *I was in a classroom and the discussion was about the spiritual teachings of the dharma. The word cinnabar came up as a new concept and was written on the board in bold, red letters. It was a strange word for me, and I had no idea what it was about. Then I 'woke up' and walked to my car, talking to a friend about my dream of being in a classroom, and the strange word 'cinnabar.' As we talked, I walked past where I expected my car to be, and realized it must be in a different place than where I usually parked. I thought I must have forgotten where I had parked, and was unsure now where the car was located.*

According to Jung "cinnabar...is the most important quicksilver ore." (9i:537) In liquid form, it is the 'living silver' of mercury. I was fascinated to discover that Bohme used a symbol for 'spirit in the essence' that is identical to the symbol for cinnabar. It represents the rubedo stage of the alchemical process, where the final product of gold is 'colored fiery red like blood.' I find it interesting this symbol is an inverted image of the feminine as well as the planet Venus, and imagine how the rubedo stage of my individuation process is pointing towards an exploration of my femininity.



By forgetting the location of my car, the cinnabar dream symbolically suggests I have lost sight of my power and ability to move in the world. I associate this loss with the disconnected aspects of myself that need to be retrieved to find my 'spirit in essence,' the wholeness of my Self. The auto accident totaled my old car and led to the purchase of a new one, perhaps a

reflection and confirmation of the inner shifts are occurring as a result of my experiences in the training program.

Cinnabar is a stone of mercury, and Jung associates it to the uroboros dragon. It has 3 ears and 4 legs, and relates to the Axiom of Maria where the instinctual energies of the body unite with the spiritual dimensions of the spirit-soul (9i:537). I have circumambulated around the polarities of this dragon my whole life, searching for the treasure it so fiercely guards, and terrified of encountering its dark and powerful energy. The image of cinnabar suggests the key to finding the treasure within, is connecting more deeply to the lunar dimension or feminine aspects of my soul. For me, I visualize this now as an alchemical process of dissolution and coagulation, so the mercury that has been entombed in the stone of cinnabar embedded in my psyche can be liquified. It is as if the urge for training was a call to awaken and deepen into my body and soul. Pliny refers to cinnabar or mercury, as *sanguis draconis* or ‘dragon’s blood’, and I think of how the life force of that mercurial dragon-lion must be ingested and absorbed to recognize the gold within (9i:537).

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