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Long, Nila Crozier

BALZAC AND ALCHEMY

City University of New York

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BALZAC AND ALCHEMY

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NILA C. LONG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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1983

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Apr 25 '83
date

Bettina Knapp
Chairman of Examining Committee

April 25,
date
1983

Hean Cai
Executive Officer

Bettina Knapp
Bettina Knapp
Henry Hornik
Henry Hornik
Rosette Lamont
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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To Dave

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/Nous sommes/ toujours forcés d'expliquer les mystères
de l'esprit par des comparaisons matérielles.

Honoré de Balzac

Alchemy is a framework through which to view the process of transformation. Alchemical philosophy is founded upon the concept of Nature's urge toward entelechy. More specifically, alchemy proposes that within the womb of the earth, minerals evolve toward perfection - toward becoming gold, the perfect metal. The natural process being slow, perhaps even hindered in one way or another, the alchemists sought to take the place of Time in Nature by perfecting the metals through a series of laboratory operations. These procedures hastened the passage of the ores as they moved through the various stages until gold was achieved

On a purely physical level, the alchemist was doomed to failure. Psychologically, however, his legacy of concepts and images is living proof that more went on in the laboratory than the attempt to transmute metals. Carl G. Jung has recognized that in the alchemists' efforts to thoroughly express each successive stage and operation of the opus (the name for the alchemical work), they revealed as much about themselves as about any scientific experiments they were carrying out. Their observations of what happened to a calcined metal, for example, were tinged with subjectivity: revelations of their largely unconscious identification of the metals with themselves. They thereby came to record psychological stages in the laboratory

of life.

For the alchemists, their work was both a physical and a spiritual process. The gold they sought was "not the common gold" but "philosophical gold."¹ The matter (substance) upon which they worked was but a physical expression of their current psychological states or of mental stages which they had experienced. The alchemists were following a deliberate method to study spiritual/psychological states and were using metallurgical terminology to explain the occult in concrete, comprehensible ways.

Titus Burckhardt has indicated that the alchemists recognized "the profound relationship between the natural order and the human soul."² So when they wrote in the Emerald Tablet, their hermetical bible, that "the little world is created according to the prototype of the great world,"³ what they were expressing was their belief that the invisible, spiritual realm of the human soul was reflected in the visible, material and natural world.

In alchemy, matter, in all its forms, symbolized the transcendental realm of experience. Consequently, the alchemists believed that a study of the concrete and material aspects of the universe would aid in understanding the abstract, the metaphysical domain. To examine the element gold, for example, was tantamount to analyzing the noble human spirit.

But how did the alchemist "study" the metals? There are seven alchemical operations which outline the effects of a variety of processes upon the various ores. By virtue of the various al-

chemical procedures, the ores undergo transformation into a higher form, that is, they gradually become gold.

In the process of charting the transmutation of the base metal, the alchemist was also recording another transformation: spiritual change. Because lead, for example, symbolized the impure spirit, then as that ore was transformed when subjected to the various treatments, likewise, would the "leaden" (i.e., corrupt) spirit be changed. As a result, every alchemical operation conveys a specific theme of metamorphosis both in terms of the activities of metals and of the human spirit.

There are seven main alchemical processes which describe the various aspects of the transmutation of metals: calcinatio, mortificatio, solutio, sublimatio, separatio, coniunctio, and coagulatio. Each operation highlights a particular idea: calcinatio deals with fire and burning; mortificatio with decomposition and death; solutio, the water operation, involves both purification (through cleansing) and also the "drowning" and dissolution of the metal; sublimatio corresponds to the refining of the ore through the distillation of its volatile elements or through its pulverization; separatio deals with the separation of component parts; coniunctio connotes a coming together of separated elements; finally, coagulatio underscores the theme of concretization, crystallization and fixation of the substance under examination.

When considered individually, each alchemical operation has association with several of the other processes. For example, the

sphere of "burning" (calcinatio) includes the separation of that which can be destroyed by fire from that which is unaffected by it (separatio); calcining also causes the evaporation of volatile elements (sublimatio); destruction (mortificatio) of contaminants is commonly associated with fire which also cleanses (solutio) the burning substance. Next, fire often crystallizes (coagulatio) the newly purified elements which have prevailed throughout the fiery trial.⁴

Not unlike the base metal, the characters in Balzac's novels also undergo change. Moreover, the progress of the protagonists' psychological transformations in La Peau de Chagrin and in Ursule Mirouët are paralleled in the mortificatio operation, while the transformation of the psyche in Louis Lambert and Séraphîta is reflected in the sublimatio procedure; in La Recherche de l'Absolu the calcinatio operation is expressed. The pattern of activities in each of these novels can be charted alchemically in relation to a specific theme of transformation: that of a protagonist's transcendence through close association with "fire" (i.e., passion), for example (the calcinatio theme). Consequently, as a character passes through the various stages of psychological "transmutation by fire," he or she is experiencing the different alchemical operations (separatio, sublimatio, mortificatio, etc.) associated with the calcining process.

An alchemical viewpoint provides a way in which to unify the elements of a novel within a cohesive structure which considers both the "material" and the "spiritual" aspects of an artistic endeavor. "Concrete" manifestations (plot development, characterizations, settings, symbols, etc.) are appreciated from a new dimension: they become reflections or projections of spiritual/psychological processes or states. The novel's content becomes a kind of Rorschach whereby the characters' needs, fears, desires, etc., can be analyzed dynamically, that is, within the framework of their ongoing transformation.

By way of introduction, and in order to lay the groundwork for a discussion of Balzac and alchemy, material on alchemical backgrounds, philosophy, and concepts has been included. To bridge the gap between the general and the specific, preliminary information on alchemy and literature precedes a section comparing Balzac's philosophy to that of the alchemist. This information is followed by five alchemical studies of Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin, Ursule Mirouët, Louis Lambert, Séraphîta, and La Recherche de L'Absolu. In the final part of this work, an examination of the rebirth theme employs alchemical symbolism of transcendence towards an understanding of the transformation of the protagonists discussed in each of the five works.

NOTES

¹Edward Edinger, Ego and Archetype (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 267.

²Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974). p. 13.

³Burckhardt, p. 197.

⁴Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978), p. 18.

PART I

ALCHEMY

CHAPTER ONE
THE ALCHEMICAL OUTLOOK

That there is an inward gold, or rather, that gold has an inward as well as an outward reality, was only logical for the contemplative way of looking at things, which spontaneously recognized the same 'essence' in both gold and the sun. It is here, and nowhere else, that the root of alchemy lies.

Titus Burckhardt
Alchemy

Alchemical symbols serve to articulate a particular vision of reality in which the Spirit of God figures importantly. Although it is not a religion, alchemy firmly acknowledges the Divine Creator as the means of grace which makes the alchemical work (opus) possible. Consequently, the opus is recognized by the alchemist to be one particular way to understand the meaning of the Eternal and to achieve the salvation he believes is available to all human beings.¹

Theoretical alchemy, because it is concerned with the realm of spiritual development, has been compared with mysticism. It is true that, like mysticism, alchemy seeks the spiritual mastery of the human state, but alchemical tradition differs from mysticism because the aim of the mystic is union with God which the alchemist does not attempt.² In trying to recover the original theomorphism of the Adamic state before the Fall, alchemy provides only the prerequisite to union with God. Once the original purity of our being is regained, then, humankind can be united with God. The spiritual goal of alchemy, the realization of the original nobility of human nature, stops short of the individual's reabsorption by the Eternal, but, as regaining the original state of innocence and purity is necessary to the ultimate goal of mysticism (which is union with God), alchemy can be considered a branch of mysticism.³

An ontology,⁴ alchemy seeks to transform the human being by leading the individual to higher states of spiritual awareness. It seems arrogant and presumptuous to assume that humans can overcome their own human nature, but the alchemists observed that in the phenomenological world, change was occurring on a regular and continual basis, so they decided to effect their own alterations on the human soul. The modifications which were constantly appearing in the natural domain demonstrated that nature is always in the process of transforming itself. If, as the Hermetic proverb states, "Nature can overcome Nature,"⁵ why couldn't the greatest of all God's creatures (or so the alchemists believed) achieve self-mastery?

Correspondingly, one of the basic tenets of alchemy concerns the entelechy of the natural world. The alchemists believed that all natural beings were in a state of evolution toward ultimate perfection. This idea applied to the mineral as well as to the human domains. The alchemical version of nature's entelechy was that metals grow within the earth and are its fruits as much as any other, but the essential difference between the mineral and the vegetable worlds is the time factor; for example, it takes much longer for lead to evolve into gold than for an acorn to become an oak tree. The alchemist believed that he could do the work of Time by following nature's processes, and sought to transmute base metals into gold (their perfected form) by speeding up the natural procedures it was believed the ores would undergo over eons of transformation within the earth.⁶

Consequently, in operational, or practical alchemy, there exists a series of operations for the treatment of metals in the laboratory. Briefly, and to name only a few, the burning of metals in order to purify

them is called calcination (calcinatio); solutio refers to the immersion (solution) of the ores in liquid and is another method for cleansing them; coagulatio means the solidifying (coagulating) of a metal which is in its liquid or gaseous form; sublimating the metal (sublimatio) constitutes its conversion into its gaseous state, leaving impurities behind; mortification (morto, i.e., death) expresses the demise of the impurities; separatio (separation) is the dividing of the component elements, the pure from the impure, for example. Finally, the mystery of coniunctio (the conjunction, joining) is the marriage of two "noble" or pure metals and leads to the birth of the finest mineral of all, the Philosopher's Stone or Philosophical Gold.

It is with the mysterium coniunctionis (the mystery of the conjunction) that operational alchemy reveals its connection to its other, the theoretical, approach. The Philosopher's Stone symbolizes a transcendent entity and it represents an ideal: that which is the finest, grandest, purest, noblest, and the quality of the Eternal in all things in the universe. Hermetic wisdom was to lead the alchemist to the discovery of this Elixir of Life, as Philosophical Gold was also called. The Elixir was believed to bestow "the power of all powers"⁷ upon whoever had knowledge of it, and would, consequently, allow the successful alchemist to attain mastery over his own soul.

The relationship between operational and theoretical alchemy underscores the belief that metallic substance could be perfected; in alchemical terms, this means transformed into its spiritual essence or value. The notion presupposes that at the outset of the alchemical work, there exists within the base metal a spiritual aspect that can, by virtue of the procedures, ultimately be revealed. Equally important, and on a

strictly material level, the evolution of the ore from a common and "corrupt" metal into a noble and golden essence (from lead into gold), simultaneously traces the spiritual transmutation of the human soul from a vile to a sublime state. In the final analysis, a discussion of the parallel between the operational and theoretical traditions in alchemy, reveals an issue which is central to alchemy: the nature of the link between matter and spirit. What is the foundation of this relationship, and where does this alliance fit into the alchemical outlook?

To begin, the transformation of a base metal into its utmost degree of perfection is the primary goal of operational alchemy. Physical gold, "common gold," was but a by-product of the procedure and a minor achievement for the true alchemist who, far from pursuing alchemy on account of the gold, was expected to transmute the elements in order to help the poor, or indeed, Nature itself.⁸ Accordingly, in the laboratory, ores would be first transmuted into gold, then into their spiritual counterpart, Philosophical Gold. The golden essence or the spiritual value of gold which was sought by the alchemists constituted the quintessence of that metal (i.e., gold): the quality that distinguishes it from the others, making it the noblest of them all. In addition, it is, to the alchemical way of thinking, that same quality which makes the sun the grandest planet; consequently, gold and the sun are synonyms in alchemical symbolism.

In fact, in the alchemical tradition, each planet is related to a particular metal so, in addition to gold being an earthly representation of the qualities found in the sun, silver corresponds to the moon, quicksilver to Mercury, copper to Venus, iron to Mars, tin to Jupiter, and lead to the dark planet, Saturn. There is an entire area of correspondence

between alchemy and astrology relating the characteristics of the various planets to the metallic qualities and demonstrating the tenet of the Emerald Tablet (Tabula Smaragdina), the "table of law" of alchemy: "Whatever is below is like that which is above."⁹ The heavenly hierarchy of the planets was represented in the metallic realm dwelling deep within the earth's crust.

In their search for the "inward" gold, that quality which made gold like the sun, the alchemists were seeking to define empirically that which they had already grasped at the intuitive level: there were correspondences between all things in the universe. Furthermore, the sun and gold were not the only phenomena sharing their particular inward essence; there were other examples as well. In fact, within the human being the inward essences of everything in the universe could be found.

In Mysterium Coniunctionis, Carl Jung quotes the Tractatus Micrericis:

Even so is man called the lesser world mundus minor, because in him is the figure of the heavens, of the earth, of the sun and moon, a visible figure upon earth and at the same time invisible, wherefore he is named the lesser world.¹⁰

If the macrocosm is represented, in the human being, what, then, characterizes the soul of "gold" or of "lead," "tin," or "copper," for that matter? If an individual were of a "leaden" nature, and, as the alchemists believed, subject to natural entelechy, could they (through the opus) possibly accelerate the course of one soul's evolution by changing a "base" nature into spiritual gold?

The answers to these questions are difficult to express in scientific terms, for the soul does not evolve in a test tube. As a scientist, the alchemist worked with beakers, retorts, fires and furnaces; carefully measuring and treating his materials, he toiled on the quantitative plane. He was, however, destined to supplement his findings with terminol-

ogy which, because of its symbolic nature, betokened his essentially intuitive, qualitative approach to being. The inner realities for which the alchemist searched could not be found out exclusively through a summary of outward characteristics.¹¹ Although science can clarify certain aspects of metallic properties such as mass, hardness, color, etc., thereby enabling a point of departure for discussion of the reality around us, psychic contents transcend the particulars of the concrete and the quantitative. Hence, the alchemists defined and supplemented their laboratory work with a complex network of symbols in recognition of their faith in a metaphysical reality which is accessible only by immediate and symbolic intuition.

That alchemy is considered an art as well as a science demonstrates the alchemists' acknowledgement that there are indeed two interconnected planes of reality. For the alchemist, analytical evidence and intuition are both necessary to provide a clear view of the phenomenological world.¹² Immediate intuition grasps the unconditioned, immutable, and invisible elements which make up the human condition.¹³ Scientific experience leads to theory and practical action: the 'method' of transforming the soul and of mastery over the human soul-state. What science catalogues and tabulates, art, with its knowledge of the ineffable, expresses in qualitative terms. For this reason, alchemical terminology is also alchemical symbolism.

Regarding the symbolic nature of the search for the "inward" gold, Jung elucidates the alchemists' attitude toward the operation, coniunctio:

. . . the adepts were ultimately concerned with a union of the substances - by whatever names these may have been called. By means of this union they hoped to attain the goal of the work: the production of the gold or a symbolical equivalent of it. Although the coniunctio is unquestionably the primordial image

of what we today would call chemical combination, it is hardly possible to prove beyond a doubt that the adept thought as concretely as the modern chemist. Even when he spoke of a union of the "natures," or of an "amalgam" of iron and copper, or of a compound of sulphur and mercury, he meant it at the same time as a symbol: iron was Mars and copper was Venus, and their fusion was at the same time a love-affair.¹⁴

As Jung has explained, the union of the "natures" was symbolical and philosophical. The physical aspects of the operations merely provided a vehicle of expression in the language of chemistry. Wherever chemical parlance failed to convey the concept, a symbolic form of expression was introduced.

Within the alchemical framework, the human being constituted the finest representation of God's creative capacity. As Titus Burckhardt writes in Alchemy:

In every domain there is what may be called a centre, that is to say, a qualitative high-point in which the prototype or cause, which governs the whole domain, reveals itself most immediately and fully. Such is gold amongst metals, the jewel amongst stones, the rose or the lotus amongst flowers, the lion amongst quadrupeds, the eagle amongst birds, and man amongst all living creatures on earth. In each case the 'central' manifestation is 'noble', because, as a symbol, it is as complete and integral as possible. Contrariwise, the 'peripheric' manifestations are more or less 'base', in so far as they express only incidental qualities or aspects of the one prototype.¹⁵

Humankind at its noblest would symbolize its original Prototype: God. As the qualitative high-point of the universe, the human individual is "endowed with every quality in which the splendour of the hidden deity can be revealed."¹⁶

The Spirit of God, only principally and potentially present at the outset of the alchemical work, is made manifest upon the completion of the opus, and through a very special conjunction: the perfect union of soul (psyche) and body, of mind and matter.

From the alchemical perspective, the spiritual (qualitative) reality of earthly creations is reflected by their material (quantitative) aspects. Through attention to outward manifestations, the inward being can be perceived. Far from separating matter from spirit, the alchemist believed that matter was the passive mirror through which God's various aspects were made manifest.¹⁷ Moreover, the alchemist considered his goal to be the revelation of God's Spirit, not only through nature (by transmuting base metals), but, more importantly, through the "transmutation" of the human soul which, in conjunction with the outward form (i.e., the body) would reveal the image of God, the divine in the human: the Spirit in Matter.

From the symbols which constitute the alchemical tradition, two representations are of fundamental importance to an understanding of the alchemical outlook. One is the symbolization for Matter, termed prima materia by the alchemists. The other, the prototypical Spirit, is called Mercurius. For the alchemists, these two factors lie at the base of our reality; they were present at the Beginning (the Creation), and they coexist in the final product (the phenomenological world). Consequently, in order to clarify what the alchemists meant when they spoke of Matter and Spirit, the next two chapters will treat each term separately.

NOTES

¹Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974) p. 21.

²Burckhardt, p. 25.

³Ibid., p. 26

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

⁵Ibid., p. 129.

⁶Mircea Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible, trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 45-47.

⁷J.F. Ruska, Tabula Smaragdina, quoted in Burckhardt, p. 197.

⁸Burckhardt, pp. 31-32.

⁹Burckhardt, p. 196.

¹⁰Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 386.

¹¹Burckhardt, pp. 42-43.

¹²Burckhardt, p. 42.

¹³Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴Jung, p. 457.

¹⁵Burckhardt, pp. 81-82.

¹⁶Jung, p. 307.

¹⁷Burckhardt p. 59.

CHAPTER TWO

PRIMA MATERIA

This thing is extracted from you,
for you are its mine.

Morienus

Until the prima materia was found, no alchemical work could begin, for the "first matter" was the fundamental ingredient in every alchemical recipe. It seemed easy enough to obtain since, according to the alchemists, it appeared everywhere and in everything, but, at the same time, they emphasized that it must be "found" as if the prima materia were somehow hidden from view. What, exactly, were the alchemists looking for?

The prima materia was a substance basic to every ore with which the alchemist worked. When a base metal was reduced to its original state, the alchemist would be looking at prima materia. Common to all ores, the materia, once revealed, was then transmuted into gold by virtue of the alchemical operations.

Since the alchemical quest was metaphysical as well as scientific, the concept of prima materia is best described as an abstraction. It was a theoretical premise of all alchemy that what was called the "first matter" of base ores was also the original substance from which everything in the world was made.

The notion of a First Matter common to everything in the universe is not unique to alchemy. In fact, on the subject of prima materia, western alchemical tradition reflects the influence of several sources. The pre-socratic thinkers, for example, viewed prima materia as an entity akin to the Chaos which existed prior to the Creation.¹ In the alchemical laboratory, prima materia was identified with the dark initial state of the metal, the massa confusa. Also called the "chaos," the massa confusa was teeming with elements which were believed to be in conflict

repelling one another.² An undifferentiated substance in which "all connections are dissolved,"³ like the Chaos, prima materia as massa confusa has the potential of taking on any form.

For both the alchemist and the early Greek philosophers (between about 400 and 350 B.C.),⁴ prima materia represented the Principle of Matter. Unformed and formless, it was devoid of meaning until Form had been imposed upon it. Aristotle attributed to prima materia the quality of Potential which was striving to actualize through its union with Pure Form.⁵ Influenced by Aristotle, the alchemists believed that the transmutation of prima materia, first into base metals and, ultimately, into gold, was made possible because of the great malleability of First Matter (i.e., Potential striving toward actualization).

In alchemy, prima materia was also "sea." In the classical and mythological sense, the oceans have long been associated with the beginning of the world. The sea has been conceived as the "matrix of all creatures."⁶ While the term "chaos" implies confusion and turmoil, the name "sea" indicates a life-producing quality. The alchemists were well aware of these two aspects of the prima materia which was at once the massa confusa upon which they worked so arduously to produce gold and the only source from which the precious metal could be derived.

The sixteenth century physician and alchemist, Paracelsus, was to add his definition of the prima materia to the already somewhat lengthy list. He saw it as an increatum, a being without beginning or end: coexistent and coeternal with God. Instead of being a creation of the Mind of God (as the alchemists had previously postulated), Prime Matter was henceforth viewed as unformed Potential existing alongside of God and which is formed by Him.⁷ The definition of Paracelsus made an im-

portant distinction. It separated Matter from God. Matter was no longer divine in and of itself, although it was capable of reflecting Divine inspiration.

In regard to this special relationship between God and Prime Matter, Paracelsus writes:

Everything is first created in its prima materia, its original stuff; whereupon . . . the art of alchemy develops it into its final substance.

God has created . . . a seed, in which the purpose of its use and function is inherent from the beginning. . . . Things are created and given into our hands, but not in the ultimate form that is proper to them.⁸

To bring forth its innate perfection, Matter (human as well as mineral) must undergo the alchemical operations. God's "seed" combines a flawless structure and the material necessary to reflect its essence (Form). In contrast to the perfect structure, the matter in which it is encased is inchoate. Through alchemy, that materia which is useful is separated from the useless, and is employed in shaping the final substance, or ultima materia. The perfect structure which God had imposed upon the "original stuff" will be embodied in the final product. In this way, Matter is brought to reflect the forms, abstractions, and designs of God.

"Chaos," "Potential," "sea," even "seed" of God: each term attempts to describe the elusive yet ubiquitous prima materia. Although they could postulate the reduction of every ore that existed in their laboratory to the one and only "first matter," the fact remains that the alchemists were in search of something that is unknowable in material terms. As unformed potential, the prima materia is imperceptible to the senses and has no independent existence aside from Form. The traditional concept of First Matter is that of an intangible element, a substratum, consti-

tuting the qualities of materiality in which all tangible, material things share,⁹ and is present as the opportunity for perfectibility inherent in raw material. In seeking to purify base metals and find the prima materia, the alchemists were in search of an entity that, although it did not exist as a physical reality, did, nevertheless, persist as an abstraction. It was the latent power of transformation within all matter.

In qualifying the concept of the alchemical prima materia in modern terms, psychological terminology proves most helpful. Jung, with reference to alchemy, has established a correspondence between the phases and operations in alchemy and human psychological development. In this regard, he has defined the unconscious in terms of prima materia. Another theoretical term for the "unknown," the unconscious has been postulated by Jung to be

. . . everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do; all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness: all this is the content of the unconscious.¹⁰

In addition to its (postulated) capacity to bear the imprint of all conscious perceptions as well as the seeds of things to come, the unconscious also provides the ground from which consciousness will eventually emerge. Such qualities are comparable to those of the prima materia which is the "original stuff" out of which the Creator brings forth the world and, because of its ability to bear a multiplicity of forms, is contained within all future entities. The unconscious is the human prima materia. It contains the germs of ideas yet to be developed by the

intellect. Like prima materia, the unconscious is found everywhere and in everything (psychological), for it lies at the root of all mental development.

The unconscious, like the prima materia, is akin to "chaos" and "sea." As "chaos," it has its dark and turbulent character which is manifested when its needs are denied or repressed. For example, a phobia, the result of the ego's desire to avoid confronting the real source of fear or anxiety, can become an extension of the unconscious. Sometimes what a person really fears are his own inner urges. To avoid facing the anxiety, the individual projects it onto external objects. The phobia, disorienting and disturbing, becomes a manifestation of the unconscious: prima materia in which the kernel of a deeper and more far-reaching problem is contained. As "sea," the unconscious functions as a matrix of consciousness and as such bears the seeds for all subsequent thoughts and ideas. Also, like sea water, the unconscious provides a healing function. Returning to the example of the phobia, it can be seen that within the projection itself lies the key to the individual's cure. If the fear is honestly confronted, the menacing phobia will reveal the anatomy of the real problem. Like prima materia, the unconscious and its manifestations can be ominous and forbidding while harboring great intrinsic value.

Jung has further postulated that, in assaying the base metals, the alchemists were applying their art to the human personality. He believed that the metals' attributes constituted projections of their (the alchemist's) own psyches. This means that parts of the individual's psyche were exteriorized onto the outer world; certain psychological states were identified with concrete objects. In alchemical terminology, the level

of "nobility" in the metal was analogous to the level of spiritual purity in the human being; the baser the metal, the more impure the spiritual state being depicted. Jung recognized that the alchemists' efforts to assay human mettle, by testing the "nobility" and strength of their own spiritual attitudes, were more important than any goldmaking experiments they may have carried out. The followers of alchemy were performing the alchemical work on a "substitute psyche" in the form of a base metal; they were experimenting on themselves, both in their cultivation of the personal fortitude exacted by the opus (the alchemical experimentation) and in patiently and courageously evaluating the materia as it was put through a variety of rigorous tests. For example, in alchemy, the calcination of external objects was considered to be analogous to the inner burning caused by mental fervor or emotional ardor. This relationship established, the alchemist was only one step away from determining exactly what the fires of passion would do to the spiritually pure in contrast to the spiritually corrupt individual. He merely had to answer the question: "What happens to gold as opposed to a base metal when each is burned?"

Even at the outset of the alchemical work, the parallel between the alchemist and the substance upon which he labors is evident. In order to be worthy of the quest, the alchemist, like the base metal, must be divested of "impurities" which will thwart his efforts to bring forth gold. His spiritual attitudes have been corrupted by temporal concerns. With feelings of guilt and shame over his lack of purity, he must then lift his heart to God for forgiveness. His merit (if he proved to have any) would be rewarded in the form of grace (or help) from God. This was the first step in the alchemical opus, for without the blessing of

of God, any attempt to search for the Philosophical Gold would be futile. The alchemist was advised: ". . . you must first of all cleanse your heart, lift it to Him alone, and ask of Him this gift in true earnest, and undoubting prayer. He alone can give and bestow it."¹¹ Ultimately, Divine inspiration would provide the answer to the enigma of transformation - whether it be that of a base metal into gold, or an impure spirit into a reflection of the Divine Spirit.

Even for the spiritually pure, the alchemical quest was a lonely and arduous one. There were no easy answers. As it is written in the Hermetic Museum: "Anyone who gives himself up to this search must . . . expect to meet with much vexation of spirit . . . The devil will do his utmost to frustrate your search. . . ."¹² The alchemical revelations were known solely to the alchemists who had performed the great work, for only those who had actually experienced the opus themselves were worthy of knowing its secrets. Furthermore, the character of each individual alchemist was the main ingredient in determining the success or failure of his quest. If he had faith in God and was spiritually courageous, his chances of discovering the Philosophical Gold were greatly increased. For, although the outward quest was for gold, the inward search was for spiritual understanding - a much more precious entity.

In alchemy, an ore must be reduced to its "first matter" before the opus can begin. In modern terms, the base metal represents the attitudes and values we harbor which may inhibit psychological growth. In this respect, Jung has postulated that an extremely rigid attitude indicates the presence of a personality trait or potentiality of which we are unaware or which, perhaps, we are seeking to reject. This trait is the psyche's prima materia (as massa confusa or "chaos"), and it

must be "found" before the work of psychic development can begin.¹³

It is the unknown or unwanted characteristic which is like the prima materia because it is both vile and glorious.¹⁴ It is "vile" because it doesn't fit in with the chosen conscious posture of the ego, and we therefore feel shame or guilt associated with it. That which we refuse to acknowledge about ourselves is also "glorious" because, after we have recognized its presence, our fixed and monolithic attitudes can begin to be loosened in an effort to redeem and incorporate the entire psyche, conscious and unconscious, into the values of the ego. The outlooks that result from psychic integration are psychological gold. Incorruptible and imperishable, they reflect the noble character of the human mind: the prima materia extracted and transformed.

NOTES

¹Edward Edinger, "Psychology and Alchemy: I. Introduction," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978) p. 12.

²Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 283.

³loc. cit.

⁴David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought, (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), pp. 3-4.

⁵Knowles, p. 13.

⁶Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 193.

⁷Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 537.

⁸Paracelsus, "Focus," Parabola, 3, No. 3 (August 1978), pp. 2-3.

⁹Knowles, p. 12.

¹⁰Carl G. Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 185.

¹¹Edinger, p. 9.

¹²Edinger, p. 8.

¹³Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 14.

CHAPTER THREE
MERCURIUS: THE SPIRIT IN MATTER

Let it be for you a great and high mystery
in the light of nature that a thing can
completely lose and forfeit its form and
shape, only to arise subsequently out of
nothing and become something whose potency
and virtue is far nobler than what it was
in the beginning.

Paracelsus

For the alchemists, Mercurius is symbolic of a powerful luminescence, an immanent guiding light, an emanation: the universal force which is of fundamental importance. There is one aspect of this figure which is of particular value to an alchemical interpretation of the work of Balzac, specifically, the role of Mercurius as the animating principle in physical nature and as the spiritual force of humankind.

The law of the natural world is one of constant and unremitting change: that which was growing, suddenly begins to deteriorate and a new form is born. As Paracelsus has written:

Decay is the beginning of all birth. It transforms shape and essence, the forces and virtue of nature. Decay is the midwife of very great things! It causes many things to rot, that a noble fruit may be born; for it is the reversal, the death and destruction of the original essence of all natural things. It brings about the birth and rebirth of forms a thousand times improved. And this is the highest and greatest mysterium of God, the deepest mystery and miracle that He has revealed to mortal man.¹

What Paracelsus is describing is the great theme of the cosmogonic cycle, the formula whereby the world is constantly coming to manifestation and then returning into the nonmanifest condition² only to arise anew, it is hoped, in nobler form. The endless rhythm of birth,

life, death, and rebirth of universal phenomena constitutes the structure and flux of the natural world.³

The mythologist, Joseph Campbell, in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, writes of the force which produces the natural cycle:

. . . all the visible structures of the world - all things and beings - are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise, which supports and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve. This is the power known to science as energy, to the Melanesians as mana, to the Sioux Indians as wakonda, the Hindus as shakti, and the Christians as the power of God.⁴

This cosmological wisdom which characterizes the life-force is reflected in alchemy in the symbol, Mercurius, but in a very particular way.⁵

Mercurius is often called the spirit of life (spiritus vegetativus)⁶, a "life-giving power like a glue, holding the world together and standing in the middle between body and spirit."⁷ The alchemist Avicenna defines Mercurius as "the spirit of the Lord which fills the whole world. . . ."⁸ Mercurius symbolizes the Creator's reflection in the physical world, the godhead entered upon the space-time continuum. As endlessly generating energy at work transforming nature, Mercurius represents the union of God with His Creation.

In order to further explore the significance and meaning of Mercurius, it is helpful to examine alchemical thought with regard to the origin of the spiritus vegetativus. Because the alchemist looked to the world of physical nature as well as to God for inspiration and guidance, it is not surprising to find that the mercurial essence is both material and spiritual, earthy and divine.

The world-generating spirit of God took on spatial form in Mercurius. It was believed that at the time of the Creation, the spirit of God, in the form of the anima mundi (world spirit), had descended into the earth and had been imprisoned within matter.⁹ This force in captivity has been described by the alchemists as "the light of nature," "the fiery spark of the soul of the world," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the image of God," and "the seed plot of a world to come."¹⁰ In each case, the alchemists were referring to a creative power which was still at work shaping the universe.

This force was able to work upon matter and to transform it. The continuous rhythm of disintegrations and formations taking place in nature were a testament to its power. As a form of energy able to transform matter, the anima mundi (Mercurius) was conceived by the alchemists as being a combination of substance and spirit. Its material side was considered to be an ether, the finest and most subtle substance known.¹¹ The alchemical ether, an invisible vapor and a radical moisture,¹² contained the fiery spark of the world-soul. Ether was the "body" and the scintilla (spark) was the spirit of Mercurius. Together they formed the life-force existing within matter.

The doctrine of the scintilla¹³ is fundamental to alchemy. Scintilla "is the fiery center of the earth, where the four elements /air, fire, earth, and water/ 'project their seed in ceaseless movement.' 'For all things have their origin in this source!'"¹⁴ In regard to the human being, the spiritual part of Mercurius has been described by Paracelsus as an inner star which "desireth to drive man toward great wisdom."¹⁵ As the fiery spirit within matter,¹⁶ Mercurius generates as well as transforms creation.

The idea behind the view of Mercurius as an invisible lucent body is an extension of the primitive conception of a universal power hidden in man and nature¹⁷ and through which the unfinished Creation can be completed; in many suppositions about the Creation, "the earth has not yet hardened; much remains to be done to make it habitable for future people."¹⁸ For Jung, Mercurius corresponds to "that part of God which, when he 'imagined' the world, was . . . left behind in his Creation."¹⁹ Once redeemed, the power of Mercurius could be used by the alchemist to transform nature, to transmute base metals into gold.

The alchemists viewed Mercurius as a luminosity, and since the only physical equivalent of light known to them was the flame, fire became the "Mercurius of the laboratory" and an important element in alchemy. Of fire and alchemy, Paracelsus writes: "alchemy is nothing but the art which makes the impure pure through fire."²⁰ In the alchemical tradition, Mercurius is understood to be the only fire in the work.²¹ It is the flame which purifies the prima materia for "it can separate the useful from the useless, and transmute it into its final substance and its ultimate essence."²² Just as the mysterious inner fire in nature was responsible for the creation of the new forms that were continually being manifested in the physical world, the alchemists believed that their use of fire would enable them to transmute and perfect metals, to modify matter from the outside.²³

Yet, the alchemist was well aware that the mercurial fire transforms more than just outward, physical forms. Indeed, the search for spiritual transformation is at the root of alchemy. As Jung has stated in Mysterium Coniunctionis:

. . . there can be no doubt that the chrysopoeia (goldmaking) was thought of as a psychic operation running parallel to the physical process and, as it were, independent of it. The moral and spiritual transformation was not only independent of the physical procedure but actually seemed to be its causa efficiens. This explains the high-flown language, which would be somewhat out of place in a merely chemical recipe.²⁴

In short, the same principle, symbolized by Mercurius, is at work at the heart of both physical and spiritual change.

Outwardly, human beings follow the cosmogonic cycle of birth, life, decay and death, as do other physical forms in nature. However, hidden deep within the human body as well as within the body of the earth, there exists a materia which is not readily visible to the human eye. Due to their chthonic natures, the metals of the earth and the human spirit were considered to be analogous. First, by taking the ores from within the body of the earth, the alchemists were imagining that a human soul had been removed from its physical dwelling place. The materia of that soul could be weak, strong, or any of the stages in between. The different metals would stand for the various phases of spiritual purity: from lead, tin, and iron, through to silver, and finally gold. Then, by using fire to transmute ores to gold, the alchemists examined (simultaneously) the possible effects of the mercurial flame upon the undeveloped soul.

But what in nature resembles this elusive fire in man? The earth's center spews forth flowing fire and, although Mercurius was not equated with the volcano, per se, the alchemists did use the volcano metaphorically when referring to nature's inner fire. In fact, they even called Vulcan the original alchemist. Paracelsus writes:

And he is an alchemist who carries what nature grows for the use of man to its destined end. God created iron but not that which is to be made of it. He enjoined fire, and Vulcan, who is the lord of fire, to do the rest. From this it follows that iron

must be cleansed of its dross before it can be forged. This process is alchemy; its founder is the smith Vulcan. What is accomplished by fire is alchemy - whether in the furnace or in the kitchen stove. And he who governs fire is Vulcan, even if he be a cook or a man who tends the stove.²⁵

The invisible flame in nature was no doubt postulated from the alchemists' own experiences: the human being, when heated by constant and unremitting emotion, often wears out his body during the process of building a monument to his passion. The alchemists observed a parallel between this human activity and the way that rock structures, for example, wear down in one place only to reappear, transformed, in another. Like human beings, nature is heated by an inner fire, and like nature, the individual, erupts forth, but in emotional outbursts, in a flow of psychic energy. The soul-stuff of the inner life is extracted, and the hard, sterile status quo²⁶ has been broken through in the bursting forth of the life-force.

Emotion was considered by the alchemists to be a manifestation of Mercurius. In the sense that emotion is uncontrollable, the alchemists recognized it as essentially bestial and used the animal form to connote emotion. Jung writes:

In alchemy the lion, the 'royal'beast, is a synonym for Mercurius, or, to be more accurate, for a stage in his transformation. He is the warm-blooded form of the devouring, predatory monster who first appears as the dragon. . . . the fiery lion is intended to express --the passionate emotionality that precedes the recognition of unconscious contents.²⁷

When taken over by his/her "animal or instinctual side, the individual is manifesting a primitive form of Mercurius. The would-be alchemist (of the psyche) must, like Vulcan, learn to master the fire within.

Alchemically speaking, Mercurius appears as "sparks of light" hidden within the body of the individual. Jung, giving a psychological interpretation of the phenomenon, has written that "Mercurius represents the unconscious, for this is to all appearances that 'spirit' which comes closest to organic matter and has all the paradoxical qualities attributed to Mercurius. In the unconscious are hidden those 'sparks of light' (scintillae), the archetypes, from which a higher meaning can be 'extracted'."²⁸

The "higher meaning" is brought forth in a very particular way. As the motivating dynamisms of the psyche,²⁹ archetypes (the "mercurial sparks") link the conscious and unconscious spheres by way of spontaneous invasion of ego-consciousness by the unconscious. Because the ego is often unprepared to recognize unconscious complexes, emotional outbursts express the psyche's surprise at the intrusion of "foreign" contents. Consequently, the recognition of emotional conflict as a signal that unconscious contents are seeking to be integrated into conscious patterns of behavior, is an important step toward psychic development.

Although experiencing the mercurial fire can involve both psychic and physical suffering, it is in this way that the imago Dei (image of God) hidden within matter can be redeemed, brought forth into the conscious attitudes. The unrecognized or rejected attitudes (the prima materia) can finally be transformed into psychological gold, i.e., reflections of the Divine Spirit in the human being. In Ego and Archetype, Edward Edinger remarks that Mercurius "can bring either passion, wrath, and fiery torment or salvation depending upon the attitude of the ego experiencing it."³⁰

For the alchemist, Mercurius represents a natural phenomenon by virtue of which the Divine Presence, in all its power and grandeur, is felt on earth, in the life of the individual. The continuous change which is part of the development in the physical and spiritual (psychological) worlds is, according to the alchemical tradition, attributable to the one animating principle, Mercurius, which glowing within the universe, makes manifest God's otherwise invisible Spirit. Every day of human life is heated by the ethereal spark, Mercurius, for the fire of alchemy is always at work upon the prima materia.

NOTES

- ¹Paracelsus, "Focus," Parabola, 3, No. 3 (August 1978), p. 3.
- ²Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973) p. 266.
- ³Campbell, p. 258.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 257.
- ⁵Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 138.
- ⁶Carl G. Jung, Alchemical Studies, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 213.
- ⁷Jung, Alchemical Studies, pp. 213-214.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 214.
- ⁹Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 537.
- ¹⁰Carl G. Jung, On the Nature of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 100-103.
- ¹¹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 322.
- ¹²Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 339.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 49.
- ¹⁴loc. cit.
- ¹⁵Jung, On the Nature of the Psyche, p. 103.
- ¹⁶Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 491.
- ¹⁷Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 95.
- ¹⁸Campbell, p. 289.
- ¹⁹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, pp. 490-491.
- ²⁰Paracelsus, p. 3.
- ²¹Jung, Alchemical Studies, p. 209.
- ²²Paracelsus, p. 3

²³Mircea Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible, trans. Stephen Corrin, (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 170.

²⁴Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 263.

²⁵Paracelsus, p. 2.

²⁶Edward Edinger, Ego and Archetype, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 234.

²⁷Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 295.

²⁸Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 491.

²⁹Edward Edinger, "An Outline of Analytical Psychology," Quadrant, No. 1 (rpt. 1968) p. 12.

³⁰Edinger, Ego and Archetype, p. 251.

PART II
ALCHEMY, LITERATURE, AND BALZAC

CHAPTER FOUR
SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN ALCHEMY AND LITERATURE

Aucun des sophismes de la folie, -- la folie qu'on
 enferme, -- n'a été oublié par moi: je pourrais les
 redire tous, je tiens le système.

Rimbaud, "Alchimie du verbe"

The parallel between alchemy and literature is a psychological one. The creative mind brings forth ideas which it clothes in everyday images, symbols, and terms: the trappings of what is, in actuality, mysterious, inexplicable, primordial imagery. The process of artistic creation is a journey toward discovery; the poet experiences self-illumination in enlightening the public at large. Likewise, the alchemist was on a road toward revelation; he, too, was giving consciousness a birth of new ideas derived from the eruptions of the unconscious portion of his psyche. Both the artist and the alchemist have attempted to place milestones along the way as they have sojourned through the thresholds of the mind. Their landmarks have become for the alchemist, the body of work making up the alchemical tradition, an exposé of the threads linking the unconscious to the conscious mind; for the artist, the painting, the musical composition, the play, the novel, the poem each represents the blending of the inner, spiritual, and arcane forces of the unconscious with the forms and order familiar to everyday existence.

The living process of development which is part of the artist's world is a result of his or her link with the unconscious. As K.G. Carus has written:

Strange are the ways by which genius is announced, for what distinguishes so supremely endowed a being is that, for all the freedom of his life and the clarity of his thought, he is everywhere hemmed round and prevailed upon by the Unconscious, the mysterious god within him; so that ideas flow to him--he knows not whence; he is driven to work and to create--he knows not to what end; and is mastered by an impulse for constant growth and development--he knows not whither.¹

The artist, driven by the power of unconscious imagery to create, projects that experience upon the work of art.

Likewise, in alchemy, the adept invests the metals upon which he works with characteristics which parallel and symbolize the essence of his ongoing inner development. Since the contents arising from the unconscious depths do not conform to the orderly structures of everyday life, alchemical symbolism is often difficult to understand. As Jung observes:

The displacement and overlapping of images are great in alchemy as in mythology and folklore. As these archetypal images are produced directly by the unconscious, it is not surprising that they exhibit its contamination of content to a very high degree. This is what makes it so difficult for us to understand alchemy. Here the dominant factor is not logic but the play of archetypal motifs, and although this is "illogical" in the formal sense, it nevertheless² obeys natural laws which we are far from having explained.

The melding of images also exists in literature where, in addition to the multivalence of metaphorical and symbolic allusion, there is expressed in certain works the actual melding of the occult and the commonplace which characterizes the experience of the artistic mind, par excellence, and the human psyche in general, for it is part of the human condition to feel the impact of the unconscious in the urgings, passions, and drives of daily life.

As a result of their mutual acknowledgement (if not recognition) that the unconscious "is the matrix of consciousness and has its own inborn structure"³ (a structure which appears in alchemy as the form of the opus and in literature as the shape of the work of art) the vision of the artist and the alchemist can be viewed as analogous.

Alchemical tradition expresses an initiatory process through which the adept is introduced to the essence of his own soul: revelation and subsequent spiritual transformation play a large role in alchemical procedures. The apocalyptic nature of alchemy, as expressed in its symbolism,⁴ is present in certain types of literature wherein the poet or protagonist, by virtue of the pain and suffering associated with a rite of passage, catches a glimpse of the sphere beyond consciousness. The "creative processes that can be truly grasped only by experience"⁵ are incarnated in the matter of both opus and oeuvre.

The reflection of the spiritual and the transcendental side of the human being was recognized by Arthur Rimbaud in his "Alchimie du verbe." The poet's encounter with the unconscious is charted in this poem which, when viewed alchemically, combines Rimbaud's alchemical transformation of his universe in words with his own alchemical transmutation through the act of writing down his visionary experience.

Rimbaud's poem is a history of his development as a poet; a saga teeming with alchemical imagery. At the same time, the motifs

presented overlap, transforming the every world of the reader, as art is wont to do. Here the artist and his imagery are one, just as the alchemist identifies with the metal upon which he projects his unconscious contents and, by virtue of opus and projection, evolves spiritually.

The poem, "Alchimie du verbe," linking as it does the alchemical and the artistic experience, the opus and the work of art, provides a particularly concrete example of the parallels between literature and alchemy. The work begins with a verbalization of Rimbaud's revolutionary attitudes concerning beauty. He seems to value everything considered second-rate, and, as for what is revered by ordinary man, he exclaims "je . . . trouvais dérisoires les célébrités de la peinture et de la poésie moderne."⁶ Nostalgic, a dreamer, a believer in witchcraft, Rimbaud sought escape from the pedestrian in every way, even in artistic expression: "je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens. / . . ./ Ce fut d'abord une étude. J'écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l'inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges."⁷

As a visionary and as a writer, Rimbaud is confronting the underlying human spirit. In his dream of other worlds, his treatment of "des silences" and "des nuits," Rimbaud encounters the timeless: the eternal chaos of the "primal beginnings of the human psyche"⁸ by which he is being deluged, bombarded, assailed. The unconscious is a domain which all have apprehended and of which

Rimbaud is portraying the experience in the initial paragraphs of his poem. These lines concern the event itself, as Jung describes it:

Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from timeless depths; glamorous, daemonic, and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos. . . . Is it a vision of other worlds, or of the darkness of the spirit, or of the primal beginnings of the human psyche? We cannot say that it is any or none of these.⁹

This mysterious chaos out of which the artistic transformation will occur is, in alchemy, the massa confusa, the tangled mass out of which the alchemical opus is born. Rimbaud is experiencing the reverberations steeped in mystery which emanate from the psychological "night-world"¹⁰ out of which his alchemical transfiguration will proceed.

Rimbaud eventually recognizes as sacred the disorder of his mind. ("Je finis par trouver sacré le désordre de mon esprit."¹¹). This acknowledgement serves to indicate his appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the unconscious which (as the alchemists sense to be true of the prima materia), is terrible while at the same time it is to be prized. For Rimbaud, in his quest for beauty, this disorder is his starting point; just as for the alchemist, in his quest for spiritual gold, the discovery of the prima materia means the beginning of the entire procedure.

Following his immersion in the psychic massa confusa, Rimbaud passes through a series of moods, sensations, and experiences which are reminiscent of several of the alchemical operations (the

procedures in alchemy paralleling the human developmental processes).

He presents images of fire, an evocation of the alchemical calcinatio wherein he "les yeux fermés" offers himself to the sun, "dieu de feu."¹² In words vividly suggestive of the flames of passion he writes "Emplis les boudoirs de poudre de rubis brûlante. . . ."¹³ The scorching, oxidizing and dissolving fires give way to a meditation in the poem entitled "Faim." Here Rimbaud approaches the alchemical sublimatio, the operation which among other things, describes the spiritualization of thought. He explains, "Je déjeune toujours d'air."¹⁴ Rimbaud's language is also alchemically oriented when he evokes the image of the alchemical serpent, the tail-eating uroborus which, as an expression of the simultaneously destructive and constructive (i.e., nurturing) aspects of the human spirit, is a variant of Mercurius; he writes, "Le loup criait sous les feuilles/En crachant les belles plumes/De son repas de volailles:/ Comme lui je me consume."¹⁵ The juxtaposition of the wolf, the feathers, and the self-consuming poet creates an overlapping of imagery which is present in alchemy: the wolf, the eagle (fowl), and the uroborus are all variants of Mercurius. In one alchemical recipe for calcinatio, the wolf which roams "savage with hunger"¹⁶ is a symbol of elemental desirousness¹⁷ which is cast into a great fire for purification.¹⁸ The eagle as a variant of the uroboros is said to consume its own feathers:¹⁹ the energy of meditation doubling back upon itself, causing mental distress if not imbalance.

The poet's ensuing images deal with water, alchemically, the

solutio operation which would purify and cleanse the individual.

There is a second juxtaposition here, one of fire and water when Rimbaud exclaims ". . . que je bouille. . . ." ²⁰ The purification process is followed by a recognition of a numinous presence:

"Enfin, ô bonheur, ô raison, j'écartais du ciel l'azur, qui est du noir, et je vécus, étincelle d'or de la lumière nature." ²¹

This expression of "la lumière nature" calls to mind the sparks of light, the scintillae that the alchemists refer to in connection with the spirit in matter, the light of nature, the anima mundi, Mercurius.

Rimbaud continues his poem with a commentary about the difficulties he has had (like any adept) in discovering this golden spark. He exhorts "Science et patience, le supplice est sûr." ²² He recognizes as well that an evolution is taking place (akin to the alchemical transmutation of metals). "A chaque être, plusieurs autres vies me semblaient dues." ²³ Rimbaud also understands that his experience constitutes a pattern, "je tiens le système." ²⁴

As part of the alchemical process, the substance under consideration must undergo a "killing" (mortificatio), for the old must be sloughed off to allow the new to emerge. Rimbaud at this stage of his transformation writes "J'étais mûr pour le trépas . . ." ²⁵ In connection with the mortificatio, the new substance to which it gives way must undergo a concretizing action if it is to be manifested. An idea, for example, or in the case of Rimbaud, an appreciation of beauty through the evolution of an esthetic sense, is the result

of initial confusion leading to conceptual development. The churning and whirling motion associated with confusion is an action which promotes the concretization (in alchemy, the coagulatio)²⁶ of an idea, "par une route de dangers ma faiblesse me menait aux confins du monde . . . patrie de l'ombre et des tourbillons."²⁷

Again, the solutio or purification operation appears when Rimbaud speaks of the sea which, during his experience, he loved "si elle eût dû me laver d'une souillure."²⁸ Cleansed of his dross, like the alchemical metal, he has completed his opus and the elixir is revealed: "Cela s'est passé. Je sais aujourd'hui saluer la beauté."²⁹

This brief examination of Rimbaud's poem serves as a point of departure for a discussion of the relationships between alchemy and literature for in "Alchimie du verbe," the poet has clearly delineated the alchemical pattern in regard to the poetic experience and in respect to the art of writing. There are three links between alchemy and literature which are revealed in this poem. They center around the concept of the word as an instrument of creation.

The word is akin to the alchemical lapis or Philosopher's Stone. For, like the miraculous Stone it is the "substance which is at once the transformer and the transformed."³⁰ As the transformer, the word acts in two ways. First, the artist who would express a vision must use words as agents of self-expression and the struggle and conflict which ensues in his or her efforts to manifest a concept in artistic form brings about a trans-

formation, of which the alchemical pattern in "Alchimie du verbe" is the testimony. Secondly, the poet's experience itself is transformed by words into art, elevating it from the realm of everyday life to a universally held Principle of Living, recognizable, in one form or another, to all. The imagery in Rimbaud's poem, as he speaks of frenzies, the god of fire, and whirlwinds, is a distillation of the original experience in a few salient and significant terms.

The word acts as the substance transformed when words, juxtaposed because of meaning, sound, or other sensory appeal, take on a life of their own upon the written page. Rimbaud was well aware of this aspect of the word for he writes: "je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens."³¹ As mediums of transition from life to page, words transform from signs to symbols and sounds; at times, by virtue of the human imagination they are invested with independent existence as art, an interpretation of life, comes to live of its own accord. The poetic experience reaches out from the pages to the reader who is stimulated and who does, indeed, undergo his or her own particular genre of transformation as a result of the reading of a work of art.

The alchemy of the word applies to theatre as well as to poetry. In Theatre and Alchemy, Bettina Knapp, using Antonin Artaud's comparison of the theater to alchemy (Artaud refers to "the theatrical operation of making gold")³² as her point of departure for a study exploring the alchemical imagery in theater. Knapp describes

playwriting as an alchemical process by which the author is transformed in distilling experience into a nobler form:

Play-writing is the dramatist's Philosopher's Stone: his spiritual gold, his created act, a decanted essence of himself. He is the process. It is his soma and psyche that he warms, nurtures, disciplines, and encourages to yield the miracle which is the play. During the rite of passage from the idea to the written word, the playwright learns how to purify his drama, to rid his work of extraneous elements which detract from the central theme. The dramatist's task is difficult as was that of the alchemist.³³

In theater as well as in poetry one is in the realm of the alchemy of the word. The travail of assembling the words to convey experience which, if one is successful, the words in turn transform, is a process worthy of and similar to the toil of the alchemist.

As the creator of an art form, the novelist undergoes a transformation as well. Likewise, the novel, with its lengthy explanations and descriptions, projects the trappings of the quotidian, places, things, even people onto figures in another, a timeless, realm; the alchemy of the word allows the reader many hours of escape from the humdrum of daily existence.

As so often is the case in the novelistic form, a character undergoes an evolution of some kind. Where this is true, the novel can be interpreted alchemically. As the character suffers, changes, and evolves, one is reminded of the base metal which undergoes the "tortures" of the various operations; the reader has entered the domain of alchemy. In light of the miracle of transformation taking place as the character develops, there is a sense of the trans-

cendental existing in the midst of reality. Suddenly daily activities are seen as comprising part of a larger actuality. The human action within the novel is pointing toward a culminating experience somewhere beyond the immediate events: a resolution, of course, but one in which the character(s), transformed, is different than at the beginning of the novel. The sense of destiny reigns and the feeling that one is indeed partaking in a revelation of the deeds of a transcendental force.

As the strivings of the characters are revealed the novel works upon the reader taking part in what Jung has termed a "participation mystique," of which he writes: "This re-immersion /into the depths of the collective psyche/ in the state of participation mystique is the secret of artistic creation and of the effect which great art has upon us, for at that level of experience it is no longer the weal or woe of the individual that counts, but the life of the collective. That is why every great work of art is objective and impersonal, and yet profoundly moving."³⁴ The alchemy of the word is transforming the reader's relationship to his or her own world through the experience of reading the novel. The transcendent reality becomes more real than ever and the sense of the force from beyond more acute. Out of an assemblage of words, sentences, and paragraphs the power and mystery of the ineffable emerges: the arcane and the ordinary exist side by side in literature as in alchemy.

One novelist whose work can be characterized by a mixture of the real and the fantastic is Honoré de Balzac. The novels of Balzac are characterized by mystery; in them, he includes apparitions, a magical talisman, clairvoyant characters, an incredible transfiguration of carbon into a diamond, angels, features which, by their arcane and enigmatic nature mystify the reader. Nevertheless, to indicate that it is these items alone which create the compelling mystery that marks the work of Balzac is to limit one's vision in regard to his oeuvre. Certainly these puzzling creations excite interest, but the force behind the novels wherein they appear is derived from another source.

A pattern of initiation prevails. A ritual of experience, a tribute to the purpose and meaning of the suffering and conflicts of daily life is present in many of Balzac's novels. Although he steeps the reader in details and economic figures, there arises from his close view, his minutely tailored descriptions, a quality that is larger than life. The reader views reality as under a magnifying glass. The characters and events take on a mythological dimension as they loom ever grander: titans devoted to their own magnificent obsessions.

Coupled with the realistic descriptions, the movement of Balzac's work is a closely charted rite of passage undertaken by the protagonist (willingly or unwillingly). It is in the initiatory journey of the character that the drama of alchemy is revealed. The pattern of spiritual development, as Jung has observed, is

projected onto the metallic substance by the alchemist. That experience of suffering for knowledge is universal, and Balzac has projected it into his characters in whom the reader recognizes it and his or her kinship to it. The mystery of the transformation, its fostering energy and its occurrence in the middle of Balzac's carefully constructed reality, endows his work with its fantastic and compelling quality. If the apparitions and angels only were being considered, in lieu of the enigmatic force driving the earthy protagonist, then Balzac's novels would cease to have such a stimulating effect upon the reader. It is the mystery inside and not outside humankind that holds our attention.

As the pattern of the procedure is universal, the metaphors used to reveal it are likewise universal. Consequently, the fires which connote passion, the darkness of confusion, the lightheartedness of spiritual buoyancy and the fixation associated with intransigence all have their counterparts in alchemy and in Balzac.

In Balzac, the alchemy of the word exists: the word is akin to the lapis here as in poetry and drama. The alchemic forces are at work transforming protagonist (an extension of the author himself), experience (that of novelist, character, and reader), and the word itself (the word becomes the purveyor of the compelling sense of the transcendental and as such, a medium of transition from sign to symbol; it is akin to the alchemist's Mercurius, the spirit in matter).

Raphael de Valentin (La Peau de Chagrin), Louis Lambert (Louis Lambert), Balthazar Claës (La Recherche de l'Absolu),

Minna and Wilfrid (Séraphita), and Ursule Mirouët, Dr. Minoret, and Minoret-Levrault (Ursule Mirouët) are all characters who undergo the alchemical opus. They are set into motion by forces beyond their control and are subsequently transformed. Those energies, powers, spirits, permeate the novel; transforming the human experience into a compelling enigma, they underlie the structure of Balzac's art. Yet, their strength and substance is curiously material for it is created from the alchemy of words.

NOTES

¹Carl G. Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 101-102.

²Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 293-294.

³Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, p. 97.

⁴Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 146.

⁵Carl G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 482.

⁶Wallace Fowlie, Rimbaud (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 192.

⁷loc. cit.

⁸Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, p. 91.

⁹Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 95.

¹¹Fowlie, Rimbaud, p. 194.

¹²Fowlie, Rimbaud, p. 196.

¹³loc. cit.

¹⁴loc. cit.

¹⁵loc. cit.

¹⁶Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978), p. 19.

¹⁷Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," p. 20.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 144, n. 266.

²⁰Fowlie, Rimbaud, p. 198.

²¹loc. cit.

²²loc. cit.

²³Ibid., p. 200.

²⁴loc. cit.

²⁵loc. cit.

²⁶Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio," Quadrant, 12, No. 1 (1979), pp. 27-28.

²⁷Fowlie, p. 200

²⁸loc. cit.

²⁹loc. cit.

³⁰Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 240.

³¹Fowlie, p. 192.

³²Bettina L. Knapp, Theatre and Alchemy, (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1980), p. 251.

³³loc. cit.

³⁴Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, p. 105.

CHAPTER FIVE
ALCHEMICAL PRINCIPLES IN BALZAC

Et la chair se fera le Verbe, elle
deviendra la Parole de Dieu.

Balzac, Louis Lambert

Thus the little world is created according to the prototype of the great world.

Tabula Smaragdina
(The Emerald Tablet)

I

The alchemist and Balzac share three important views. Both subscribe to a unitary vision of the world, that is, that the universe originated with one matter from which an infinite number of variations occurred. Secondly, there is in the work of Balzac as well as in alchemical tradition the belief that the external and physical world is a reflection of the inner, spiritual realm. Finally, the alchemist and Balzac support the concept that spirit (i.e., psyche, thought) has the power to prevail over matter.

In alchemy, the prima materia is considered to be the first matter from which everything else proceeds. As a result of one substance being at the root of all created things, every being in the world is linked, invisibly, if not visually. Consequently, when the materia prima is subjected to a variety of operations with the intention of bringing about its evolution into a higher state of being, implicit to this activity is the theory that, if the prime matter, the source of all things, can achieve perfection in the Philosopher's Stone, then everything in nature, including

human beings, can evolve as well. What holds true for the materia prima is also applicable to all of its various forms.

"La substance éthérée" is, in Balzac, comparable to the alchemists' prime matter. Balzac observes "Ici-bas, tout est le produit d'une substance éthérée . . . L'universalité des transmutations de cette Substance constitue ce que l'on appelle vulgairement La Matière."¹

Balzac's conception of the source of all matter is closer to the alchemists' than one might think at first, for in alchemy "ether" is also mentioned in connection with the prima materia. Burckhardt notes that although the four elements are believed to have originated with the prime matter, in reality, it is the first formation of the original materia from which fire, air, water, and land actually proceed:

The common basis of the four elements, when one looks at things in general and in a 'synthetic' manner, is none other than the materia prima of the world. Looking at things more exactly, however, the elements do not proceed directly from materia prima but from its first determination, ether, which fills all space equally. . . .²

In alchemy and in Balzac, not only do all things derive from one substance, but that substance is an ether, a rarefied medium combining the characteristics associated with the material and spiritual realm because of its "corporeality" as air and its invisibility, respectively.

Balzac's notions of the unity of all matter have their basis in some theories proffered by, among others, Buffon, Cuvier, and Saint-Hilaire: three naturalists whose ideas Balzac held in high regard,

The eighteenth century scientist and author, Buffon, was one of the first thinkers to espouse a theory of evolution in connection with the animal kingdom in which he saw a natural continuity whereby animals evolved from practically unformed masses to almost perfect creatures. Believing that nature was in a state of continual flux and change, Buffon would appear to have anticipated the nineteenth century concept of evolutionism.³

Cuvier, a zoologist and paleontologist, was able, by virtue of his theories concerning the correlation of forms, to miraculously determine the structure of an entire prehistoric animal from the examination of a few broken bones.⁴ It was due to his system, based upon the belief that the whole could be interpolated from the design of one small part, that Cuvier could reconstruct the outlines of extinct species.

Finally, Saint-Hilaire, a zoologist and anatomist, was also a teacher whose lectures Balzac attended. Saint-Hilaire's theory of the "unity of composition" interested Balzac. For Saint-Hilaire, nature has shaped all living things according to a single plan which has been varied in numerous ways in order to produce the different species. The germs of all organs exist in every animal but certain organs develop more in one environment than in another, bringing about the formation of different groups of animals; this would serve to explain the development of fins and tails on fishes as opposed to limbs on vertebrates, for example.⁵

Reasoning and drawing conclusions from the theories of these (and similar) thinkers, Balzac developed his own concept of unity

Each of these scientists based his theory upon a central idea: that everything comes from one matter and that through evolution the differences, the multiplicity develops.

In the entire spectrum of La Comédie Humaine one sees the many human forms which have evolved from the despicable and grotesque Goupil in Ursule Mirouët to the sublime Louis Lambert. Like the various animal forms, Balzac's characters demonstrate different characteristics, traits indigenous to their lifestyles. The more Balthazar Claës becomes engrossed in the idea of the absolute, the more he loses his patriarchal quality and takes on the appearance of a mad scientist. Raphael de Valentin, the consummate rake, is in a state of physical deterioration and putrefaction. As in Buffon, nature is constantly changing; life forms are continually adapting to their situations and the mutation, as in Saint-Hilaire, is formed according to need with the most essential characteristics becoming the most pronounced. Like Cuvier, Balzac aspired to the reconstruction of the whole from the understanding of a fragment: in the cast of characters presented in La Comédie Humaine, all of humanity can be viewed.

In developing his theory of unity, Balzac did not confine himself strictly to the scientific realm, however, Part materialist in his notions concerning the workings of the universe, Balzac was also part mystic: his "substance éthérée" represented the invisible, non-corporeal world as well as the material realm. Consequently, due to his interest in the invisible workings of

Nature, Swedenborg, the Swedish theologian and visionary, was an important contributor to Balzac's world theory.

In terms of Balzac's unitary vision of the cosmos, two of Swedenborg's ideas are important. First, Swedenborg believed that everything in the universe was linked, having all proceeded from the one, Almighty God,⁶ and all being formed from one matter.⁷

Swedenborg's notion of correspondences is explained in Séraphîta when Paster Becker discusses the ideas of the Swedish mystic:

Tous les objets des diverses créations étant émanés de Dieu comportent nécessairement un sens caché . . . Ce lien mystérieux entre les moindres parcelles de la matière et les cieux constitue ce que Swedenborg appelle un ARCANÉ CELESTE.⁸

For Balzac as for Swedenborg, everything was unified, having originated from the same source. The mysterious link between all substances, human and non-human (as well as human and divine), is represented in the relationship between the wild ass's skin and Raphael de Valentin in La Peau de Chagrin. Quite inexplicably, when Raphael has a wish, the peau de chagrin, in granting it, shrinks. In this story there is a correspondence established between a human being and the skin of an animal: in some arcane manner the two are united by a transcendental power the nature of which is unfathomable to Raphael, or to most of humankind. Surely Balzac is in the realm of Swedenborg's Celestial Arcanum in this feature of La Peau de Chagrin.

Within Balzac's unified vision of the cosmos the ideas of Buffon, Cuvier, Saint-Hilaire and Swedenborg are echoed. Taken together, in the unique way in which Balzac distilled them, alchemical principles prevail as well. Indeed, for Balzac (believing as he did that everything in the universe was mysteriously linked from the smallest atom to the largest star in the heavens), the multiplicity of forms was constantly and dynamically being derived from a common substance. Like the alchemist, he combined many ideas, the materialistic as well as the mystic views of experience. The conclusion of both was similar and can be expressed in alchemical terms: "In truth certainly and without doubt, whatever is below is like that which is above, and whatever is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing."⁹

A second area where the ideas of Balzac and the alchemists are analogous is the concept of each concerning the physical world as a reflection of the spiritual realm. In alchemy, the metals, with their different characteristics, merely represent, in material form, corresponding states of the soul. Consequently, the alchemists often speak of the metals as if they are actually undergoing torture or really dying (as in the "killing" operation, mortificatio). The inner, spiritual essence of the human being is the true object of transformation in alchemy; the transmutation of metals is merely an outward parallel which provides a vehicle through which to discuss spiritual states.

Likewise, for Balzac, the human being consists of two creatures: the inward and the outward individuals. Balzac also believes that the human spirit (the inward being) is visible in material form, that is, the outward shape (the body) bears the mark of the inward condition.

Once again, the ideas of Swedenborg are echoed in Balzac's beliefs. The Swedish mystic held that every man consisted of two men. The outward, physical being was subject to the laws of Nature and endured illness, aging, and death as part of the natural cycle. The inward man was in intuitive contact with the universe.¹⁰ He was not confined to the natural laws, but, like a spirit, could float freely between earthly and spiritual climes. Part of each domain, he was the individual's link between two worlds.

For Balzac and Swedenborg alike, the inner being was a source of great strength. In some people, the inward man could separate from the outward; the testimonies to this were apparitions, clairvoyance, and the mysterious ability of martyrs to undergo physical hardship without acknowledging or evincing any feeling of pain. In contrast to its alleviatory powers, the inner being could also sap the strength of the body. It is with this idea that Balzac melds the mystical with the material, for the inward man's psychic power which, of the same nature as a material force¹¹ (having derived from the material substance éthérée), was vitally, albeit mysteriously, linked to the outward man. The emanation of the inner being (i.e., desires, ideas,

thoughts) grew out of the life-promoting force of the inward man; so, an existence devoted to intense thought, in exhausting the reserves of the vital inner force, would simultaneously diminish the strength of the body just as much as if the individual were leading a life of debauchery. The effect that intense thought can have on the physical condition of an individual is illustrated in Louis Lambert for whom, as Maurois has stated, "the excessive richness of his inner life destroys the outward man . . . and he dies, 'a centenarian at twenty-five.'"12

Both Balzac and the alchemist believed that the material and spiritual worlds were intertwined to such a degree that the bond between spirit and matter was eminently apparent. In respect to additional origins of Balzac's thought concerning the relationship between the visible and the invisible domains, Johann Lavater and Franz Gall figured importantly. Lavater, the founder of physiognomics (the practice of judging a person's character or mental qualities by observing bodily, especially facial, features), believed in the visibility of the interactions of the body and the mind. As a theologian, he used his "science" to search for traces of the spirit upon people's faces.¹³ Drawing upon the ideas of Lavater, Balzac creates powerful images while showing the relationship which (as he believes) exists between an individual's outward and inward beings. One salient image which demonstrates Balzac's thoughts is found in a description of Balthazar Claës, the main character in La Recherche de

l'Absolu. Balthazar is obsessed with the idea of finding the one substance from which everything in the universe was made: he calls it the absolute. He thinks of nothing but making this discovery, and his entire being is completely absorbed by his quest. In Balzac's description, we see a man whose physical characteristics show the ravages of a spirit aflame with the desire of the absolute:

Sa peau se collait sur ses os, comme si quelque feu secret l'eût incessamment desséchée; puis, par moments quand il regardait dans l'espace comme pour y trouver la réalisation de ses espérances, on eût dit qu'il jetait par ses narines la flamme que dévorait son âme. . . . Les yeux profondément enfoncés dans leurs orbites paraissaient avoir été cernés uniquement par les veilles et par les terribles réactions d'un espoir toujours déçu, toujours renaissant. Le jaloux fanatisme qu'inspirent l'art ou la science se trahissait encore chez cet homme par une singulière et constante distraction dont témoignaient sa mise et son maintien, en accord avec la magnifique monstruosité de sa physionomie.¹⁴

Traces of the spirit on the flesh: the ideas of Lavater are echoed by this verbal portrait of Balthazar Claës.

Franz Gall was a pioneer in ascribing cerebral functions to specific areas of the brain. Although he was proven incorrect in his assumption that the shape of the skull held the key to the divination of the individual intellect and personality, he was not mistaken in his belief that cerebral functions were localized.

Paul Broca, a physician, later proved this hypothesis as part of a work leading to the discovery of the speech centers of the brain.¹⁵

Gall's phrenology, as it is called, gave further hope of the possibility of finding a direct relationship between personality and body shape (in this regard, the shape of the skull in particular). His

belief that the experience of an individual resulted in lasting physical changes in the brain¹⁶ is reflected in Balzac's theories concerning the material action of thought as well as in his general views concerning the correspondence existing between the physical and the intellectual sides of the human being. Again, a description of Balthazar Claës provides an example of how Balzac incorporated his vast reading into his philosophical theories.

Il avait une large poitrine, un buste carré; mais les parties inférieures de son corps étaient grêles, quoique nerveuses; et ce désaccord dans une organisation évidemment parfaite autrefois, intriguait l'esprit qui cherchait à expliquer par quelque singularité d'existence les raisons de cette forme fantastique. . . . Son large front offrait d'ailleurs les protubérances dans lesquelles Gall a placé les mondes poétiques. Ses yeux d'un bleu clair et riche avaient la vivacité brusque que l'on a remarqué chez les grands chercheurs de causes occultes.¹⁷

Balthazar's intellect and personality are revealed in his physical organization.

Through combining the ideas of Swedenborg, Lavater, and Gall, Balzac created his views regarding the evidence of the spiritual world that can be found in the physical realm. The relationship between soul (psyche, intellect, spirit, personality, etc.) and body is expressed both for the alchemist and Balzac in the words of the fourteenth century adept, Ruysbroek, who, in writing of the unity of the soul with the human being, observes:

It is in the body, and especially in the action of the heart that the soul possesses this unity from which all activities of the body and the five senses proceed. Here it bears its own name of soul, for it is the 'form' of the body which it animates, the body which it makes to live and keeps alive.¹⁸

Animating the body is not the only purpose of the inward being, however, at least not in the view of the alchemist, nor of Balzac. For both, the main task of the inner power is transformation, each believing in the capacity of spirit to prevail over matter.

The inner being in Balzac's theory is much like the alchemical Mercurius: an internal spirit which transforms its dwelling place, and which can be destructive as well as constructive. Both the inward man of Balzac's beliefs and Mercurius are manifested through emotion (feeling, fervor, and longing flow out from the inner man). Like Mercurius, the inward vitality (according to Balzac) is material and spiritual; it is therefore able to work upon the body and transform it. For Balzac, as for the alchemist, the energy of the spirit in matter could lead to salvation or extinction.

In respect to the redemptive capacity of the inner man and of Mercurius, the ideas in Balzac and in alchemy can be viewed against a broader background to further elucidate their significance. Redemption and transformation are two of the great and profound mysteries of human experience. Metamorphosis is necessary to the continuation of life, for that which remains static denies life's exigencies and therefore, the redemptive capacity of life itself: to survive means having garnered (redeemed) the chance to begin again. Consequently, transforming constantly, on all levels (spiritual, psychological, and physical), one continues to adapt to the environment. Adaptation usually requires a painful sloughing off of that which is old, static, rigid, concrete, un-

moving and repetitive in favor of development, change and improvement: the embrace of life, the redemption of the inner being.

Accordingly, many religions, in offering guidelines to human existence, do not forget to include the importance of pain and suffering in their teachings. In fact, initiatory rites in primitive and ancient religions sought to bring about the transformation of the candidate by means of a painful experience. In most rites of passage, for example, physical suffering is meant to function as a catalyst in the process of spiritual development. Torture creates the need to surpass one mode of being and to enter upon a mode that is more spiritually pure.¹⁹ Enforced suffering (physical and psychological), intense and artificially induced, shortens the amount of time it would otherwise take for the individual to transform from his or her present state into a new form of being. Just as the alchemist "tortured" the base metals in an effort to accelerate their natural evolution into gold (presumably into gold), so the priest or shaman includes torture in the initiation ritual in order to hasten the onset of spiritual maturity in the candidate.

An initiatory process only symbolizes what is, in reality, an internal procedure. The inward being, searching for expression, brings about emotional fervor; the term Balzac used was passion. In the works of Balzac, in the alchemical laboratory, and in religious rites of initiation, the mysteries of transformation and salvation occur. Balzac's protagonists are propelled by compulsion: to search for the absolute (Balthazar Claës in La Recherche de l'Absolu)

to seek revenge (Cousine Bette), to hoard money (Old Grandet in Eugénie Grandet), to push oneself to the limits of one's intellectual powers (Louis Lambert). Sometimes their inner force can bring about their ultimate demise, and sometimes it brings about their salvation. In either case their outward existence bears the mark of their spiritual disposition: transformation occurs in one form or another as the spirit prevails over matter.

In combination with thought, Balzac believed, the individual's inner force could influence the material world. He expresses his ideas through his character Raphael de Valentin who has developed a treatise on the power of the Will. Valentin explains his thoughts to Foedora, a young woman whom he is seeking to impress:

Elle parut s'amuser beaucoup en apprenant que la volonté humaine était une force matérielle semblable à la vapeur; que, dans le monde moral rien ne résistait à cette puissance quand un homme s'habitue à la concentrer, à en manier la somme, à diriger constamment sur les âmes la projection de cette masse fluide; que cet homme pouvait à son gré tout modifier relativement à l'humanité, même les lois absolues de la nature.

For Balzac, the human will was indeed a powerful force emanating from within and which could transform the physical world.

Valentin's treatise is reminiscent of an alchemical dictum concerning the power of the spirit: "This is the power of all powers, for it conquers everything subtle and penetrates everything solid."²¹ Burckhardt explains this saying in terms of the unison of bodily consciousness with spiritual states: "Through its union with the spirit bodily consciousness itself becomes a fine and penetrating power which can even have an effect outwardly."²² Consequently,

Balzac's material willpower is akin to the force which the alchemist believed was derived from the union of spirit with bodily consciousness, and both Balzac and the alchemist believed that such a force could bring about material transformation. What for the alchemist was the arcane, mercurial force that "understood" the secrets of matter, was for Balzac the source of the power of the Will by virtue of which an individual could actually penetrate the minds of other people and delve into their innermost thoughts.²³

Balzac's views regarding the power of the human psyche show the influence of Anton Mesmer, the first proponent of hypnosis. Mesmerism (the original term for hypnosis) was believed (by Mesmer) to be caused by a type of psychic magnetic force.²⁴ Correspondingly, Mesmer claimed that, by virtue of what he termed animal magnetism, he had the power to heal the sick.²⁵ He believed that universal forces could be transmitted from one person to another through the medium of a subtle, invisible fluid. Mesmer called the interpersonal force "animal magnetism."²⁶ If animal magnetism could serve to explain the power, the pull the attraction between two people, then, according to Balzac, it also provides an explanation for the power of the human will and the pervasive action of thought.

In a scene from La Peau de Chagrin, the impact of Mesmer upon the thought of Balzac is apparent. Raphael de Valentin finds himself forced to duel with one of the guests at Mont Dore, a spa region where he has gone to regain his health. When he is about to kill his adversary, Valentin's powers of concentration are at their peak:

Le marquis resta debout, immobile, sans perdre un instant de vue son adversaire qui, dominé par une puissance presque magique, était comme un oiseau devant un serpent: contraint de subir ce regard homicide, il le fuyait, il revenait sans cesse.

- Donne-moi de l'eau, j'ai soif, dit-il à son témoin.
- As-tu peur?
- Oui, répondit-il. L'oeil de cet homme est brûlant et me fascine.²⁷

This magnetism does not surface only between adversaries. It can appear in other circumstances as well. Balzac describes Pauline, the heroine of La Peau de Chagrin, as having a magnetic gaze: "ses terribles yeux fascinent." He also refers to her as a "fluide créature . . . un mot vainement cherché qui court dans la mémoire sans se laisser saisir."²⁸ Both descriptions of Pauline are reminiscent of the invisible, psychic magnetic fluid outlines in theory by Mesmer.

Like the alchemist, Balzac believed in the union of spirit with matter. For Balzac, the human will, was a material, although intangible force that worked in visible ways and provided a link between the physical and spiritual (or, intellectual) aspects of the individual: between the inward and outward beings. Dual in essence, the Will was like a two-edged sword: if its power was carefully husbanded and prudently concentrated, the Will could benefit the individual, but in its savage, undeveloped form, as compulsion devoted to the realization of an obsessive idée fixe, the Will could bring about destruction and death.

In the same manner, the miraculous alchemical Mercurius is a subtle force, the hallmark of which is duplicity; in its

primitive forms it is represented by the dragon and the lion which correspond to the bestial levels of the human psyche (i.e., the energies of passion and of concupiscence).²⁹

For Balzac, the human Will that is trammled by the rigidity in thinking (l'idée fixe) which leads to excess in action and to mental imbalance must be liberated, redeemed, if an individual is to attain to self-mastery. It is, like Mercurius, an early form of the Philosopher's Gold which, hidden within the base metal, must be freed from bondage by the alchemist.

Accordingly, the work of Balzac and the alchemical opus express what could be called a rite of passage. It is the goal of each to demonstrate that from the massa confusa represented in the intertwining of the strands of matter and spirit a powerful elixir can be extracted: an imago Dei (Mercurius) for the alchemists, and the essence of the inner man (the human Will) for Balzac. The salvation of that potent force permeates the works of each, for it is Balzac's "chair qui se fera le Verbe"³⁰ and the alchemist's "little world . . . created according to the prototype of the great world "³¹: the divine in man, and the quintessential blend of spirit and matter.

II

Comparisons made between things observed in external reality and the conclusions that are subsequently drawn depend to a large degree upon an individual's feelings and attitudes. In alchemical tradition, the sun, gold, and human beings (at the height of spiritual purity) are believed to contain and reflect the same inward essence. The supposed "superior" or "noble" qualities shared by the sun, gold, and certain people reflect the alchemists' own views about the universe. From the alchemical hierarchy of metals, a particular attitude emerges: the world is an orderly place and humankind is an integral part of its order.

In the process of endowing their world with meaning, the alchemists projected their innermost sense of balance and proportion onto external reality. The system they discovered recognized quantitative, material entities as having qualitative, spiritual value. Consequently, the links they established between spirit and matter originated within their own psyches; the inward essence reflected by matter was the alchemists' own.

Similarly, in the work of Balzac, material reality is closely linked to the spiritual state of the main character. As one follows the protagonist throughout the novel, the manner in which his or her outer world is described reveals the character's inner, psychic reality. For the main character, the outer and inner realms are intertwined; those objects, events, persons, ideas, etc., to which

consciousness clings, serve to illuminate unconscious motivations and feelings, for the unconscious is in some way present in every consciously held attitude. Consequently the psyche of the protagonist is, throughout the novel, being constantly and variously projected onto Matter (i.e., external reality: persons, places, things) in the same manner in which the alchemists projected their soul-states onto the metals in the laboratory, faithfully reproducing the inner psychic situation in their descriptions of external objects and events.³² A process of change is charted by the projections; as the inward man rises to consciousness, the subsequent metamorphosis of conscious attitudes is reflected by the description of external reality.

The protagonists in La Peau de Chagrin, Louis Lambert, La Recherche de l'Absolu, Séraphîta, and Ursule Mirouët, for example, are experiencing an alchemical transformation in that their inner metamorphosis is expressed in the concrete, external realm. The alchemical relationship between spirit (psyche) and material reality is echoed in Balzac's particular understanding of the capacity of Matter to mirror thought (i.e., of visible reality to be the reflection of an invisible state). Against this philosophical background, environment becomes a key to the understanding of a personality in transition from one stage of psychological development to another.

The images, symbols, motifs, and metaphors of alchemy express psychological experience in spiritual terms. The alchemical cosmology provides a framework whereby the artistic

value and the philosophical depths of these five novels by Balzac can be plumbed without sacrificing the mysterious and fantastic qualities which make them so enjoyable to read. Like artistic creation, alchemy a "science of the soul" (as Burckhardt has termed it in his title to Alchemy), preserves the mystique of the ineffable while suggesting its myriad qualities. In Balzac, as in the alchemical tradition, the careful reader is offered a glimpse of the human soul in transition wherein is found the secret, elusive, and invisible order dwelling deep within the visible world.

NOTES

- ¹Honoré de Balzac, Louis Lambert, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 166.
- ²Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 67.
- ³André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, eds., XIX^e Siècle, V (Paris: Bordas, 1965), pp. 250-251.
- ⁴Claude Dubois, ed., Petit Larousse (Paris: Larousse, 1959), p. 1301.
- ⁵André Maurois, Prometheus: The Life of Balzac, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 47-48.
- ⁶Honoré de Balzac, Séraphîta (Paris: Edition Gallimard, 1950), X, p. 508.
- ⁷Bettina L. Knapp, The Prometheus Syndrome, (Troy, New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1979), p. 190.
- ⁸Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 508.
- ⁹Burckhardt, p. 196.
- ¹⁰Maurois, p. 200.
- ¹¹loc. cit.
- ¹²loc. cit.
- ¹³Encyclopedia Britannica: Ready Reference and Index, (1974), VI, p. 85.
- ¹⁴Honoré de Balzac, La Recherche de l'Absolu, (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 41-42.
- ¹⁵Encyclopedia Britannica: Ready Reference and Index, (1974), IV, p. 388.
- ¹⁶loc. cit.
- ¹⁷Balzac, La Recherche de l'Absolu, pp. 40-41.
- ¹⁸Burckhardt, p. 71.
- ¹⁹Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, trans. P. Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 208-209.

- ²⁰Honoré de Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), p. 158.
- ²¹Burckhardt, p. 200.
- ²²loc.cit.
- ²³Knapp, p. 185.
- ²⁴Ann Levine et al., Understanding Psychology, (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 153, caption, fig. 7.6.
- ²⁵Honoré de Balzac, Ursule Mirouët, (Paris: Editions Gallimard et Librairie Générale Française, 1968), p. 371, n. 32.
- ²⁶Encyclopedia Britannica: Ready Reference and Index (1974), VI, p. 816.
- ²⁷Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 293.
- ²⁸Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 314.
- ²⁹Edward Edinger, Ego and Archetype, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 251.
- ³⁰Balzac, Louis Lambert, p. 173.
- ³¹Burckhardt, p. 197.
- ³²Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, pp. 240-241.

CHAPTER SIX

MORTIFICATIO: LA PEAU DE CHAGRIN

If a man knows how to transmute things in the greater world . . . how much more shall he know how to do it in the microcosm, that is, in himself, the same that he is able to do outside himself, if he but know that the greatest treasure of man dwells within him and not outside him.

Gerard Dorn

It is with the "killing" operation, mortificatio, that La Peau de Chagrin can be viewed in alchemical terms. Images of destructiveness, deterioration, and defeat abound in this tale of the sufferings endured by a nineteenth century nobleman, Raphael de Valentin. Yet, in the alchemical mortificatio decay and death are considered prerequisites to rebirth: the base metal loses its impurities in order to be transmuted into gold. Likewise, Balzac's protagonist must slough off his poisonous and self-destructive tendencies in order to evolve toward spiritual renewal. Once freed of his baser attitudes, he is then prepared to acquire his measure of self-realization: his psychological gold.

At the outset of the novel, Raphael is entering a gambling den where he is about to lose his last few francs. Moments later, he is contemplating suicide by throwing himself into the Seine. Not wanting to have his body floating on the river in broad daylight, Raphael postpones his death until nightfall. Shortly after he makes this decision, Valentin enters an antique shop where he will receive a magical skin from a very old and mysterious antique dealer. These events introduce the reader to the realm of mortificatio which

permeates the world of the novel and, no less, the psychological domain of Raphael de Valentin whose reactions to external reality mirror his preoccupations and his spiritual state of being.

In alchemical theory, the macrocosm and the microcosm are mutual reflections: the world of matter (physis) is duplicated in the human soul (psyche). Accordingly, the invisible, inward essence in the human being has its counterpart in visible, external realities. A noble soul is of the same quality as a noble metal. Likewise, a corrupt and moribund spirit is represented, in the material realm, by images of disease and death, that is, by the alchemical operation known as the mortificatio.

In the scene of the gambling den with which the novel begins, the atmosphere of the alchemical mortificatio is apparent. The deathlike aura of the place is a reflection of the gloom of the protagonist (Raphael de Valentin) who is drawn to this chthonic dwelling of lost souls, perhaps in part because its nature corresponds so well to his own state of mind.

Mortificatio does not exist as a chemical process per se.

In Psychotherapy and Alchemy, Edinger has described the mortification operation in the following way:

Mortificatio has no chemical reference at all. Literally it means "killing" and hence will refer to the experience of death. As used in religious asceticism it means "subjection of the passions and appetites by penance, abstinence, or painful severities inflicted on the body." (Webster) To describe a chemical process as mortificatio is a complete projection of a psychological image. This did in fact happen. The material in the flask was personified, and the operations performed on it were thought of as torture.¹

When viewed as a process of projection, the mortification operation (indeed, each alchemical procedure) provides a conceptual vehicle whereby external reality can be used to portray the invisible, psychological landscape.

In La Peau de Chagrin, the gambling den is an externalization of the psyche undergoing mortificatio. The den is a place of jaded appetites and of soulless men who have forfeited their lives' forces to the game of Chance. Existing in a world dominated by luck, the gambler dwells at the fringes of life, within his own private chaos.

The gambling den is a place of torment masked as pleasure. The fear of defeat at the whim of Lady Luck is always in the offing. Sacrifices, first of gold, eventually of dreams, hopes, and plans, are made at the roulette wheel, the alter of a most fickle goddess.

It is into this environment that Raphael de Valentin is received like a blood-brother who, although still young in years, bears upon his face a "sale cachet"² which all the gamsters recognize. The aura of defeat surrounds him to such an extent that the gamblers, these calibans of the Spirit of Gaming, recognize in Raphael "un de leurs princes."³ These shadows of men, complete with "leurs regards hébétés," "leurs visages de plâtre," "des âmes blasées," "leurs plates figures," and their "coeurs glacés,"⁴ portray an image of the living dead. While others eat, sleep, work, and otherwise carry out the activities of living, the gambler dreams only of practicing his infernal vice. Driven relentlessly by their passions,

torture and tragedy make up the events of the gamblers' days. Consequently, the torment of failure and defeat has, in turn, left its seal upon the countenances of these habitués of the gaming tables.

The atmosphere of the den contains little in the way of spiritual nourishment for this temple of vice represents a vale of burnt offerings where time, opportunity, and talent are sacrificed to the vagaries of Chance. This is the realm of the Spirit of Gaming. It is the final resting place of many a dream and the scene of spiritual bankruptcy.

When Raphael enters this ghoulish graveyard, the undeniable claim of Death is reflected upon his features as well as upon those of the other gamsters. Balzac describes Raphael:

. . . ses jeunes traits étaient empreints d'une grâce nébuleuse, son regard attestait des efforts trahis, mille espérances trompées! La morne impassibilité du suicide donnait à ce front une pâleur mate et malade, un sourire amer dessinait de légers plis dans les coins de la bouche, et la physionomie exprimait une résignation qui faisait mal à voir.⁵

La verte vie de la jeunesse y luttait encore avec les ravages d'une impuissante lubricité. Les ténèbres et la lumière, le néant et l'existence s'y combattaient en produisant tout à la fois de la grâce et de l'horreur.⁶

When Raphael enters the gambling house, he is in, what the alchemists termed, a state of nigredo. Represented by the skull and the grave,⁷ the nigredo corresponds to the blackening, putrefaction and mortification ("killing") of the base mineral; in psychological projection, this phase represents the waning in importance of some critical value, (i.e., of a ruling principle of the

psyche).⁸ Jung has equated the nigredo to that sense of confusion and lostness, a chaotic state of mind, which often results in the feeling that human life is wicked and wretched.⁹

During this period of psychological darkness, the world, as a reflection of one's inner reality, is experienced as a nox profunda¹⁰ (a deep profound night). But, as Burckhardt indicates, the nigredo stage stands at the beginning of the alchemical experiment, just as a "night of initial chaos" stands at the starting point of every spiritual realization.¹¹

Raphael, who is enduring the sense of loss associated with the nigredo, is presented to the reader against a background (i.e., the gambling den) which, in essence, is "possessed of" the same quality of despair as that which Raphael is presently experiencing. Outward reality corresponds to an inward state of being in this scene of the gaming house.

Upon losing his last bit of money, Raphael leaves the dispirited gamblers to their occupations and emerges into daylight and the streets of Paris. Now the atmosphere of the city itself becomes a mirror of Raphael's psychological state. Balzac describes Valentin's reactions to his environment as reflections of a mood of despair. He (Balzac) writes that Raphael "levait les yeux au ciel: là, des nuages gris, des bouffées de vent chargées de tristesse, une atmosphère lourde, lui conseillaient encore de mourir."¹² Projecting his own feelings upon his environment, Raphael finds that Paris has taken on a threatening air; it mirrors his state of being, his

spiritual condition of melancholy and dismay:

Il marcha d'un pas mélancolique le long des magasins, en examinant sans beaucoup d'intérêt les échantillons de marchandises. Quand les boutiques lui manquèrent, il étudia le Louvre, l'Institut, les tours de Notre-Dame, celles du Palais, le Pont-des-Arts. Ces monuments paraissaient prendre une physionomie triste en reflétant les teintes grises du ciel dont les rares clartés prêtaient un air menaçant à Paris . . .¹³

In alchemy, the matter being worked upon takes on a liquid quality during the nigredo phase.¹⁴ In a state of dissolution and decomposition (putrefaction),¹⁵ the material has lost its shape and is now chaotic in form, a massa confusa.¹⁶ Raphael experiences this sensation of liquidity as he endures psychological nigredo. He loses his bearings and perceives the confusion which is a factor of spiritual chaos:

En proie à cette puissance malfaisante dont l'action dissolvante trouve un véhicule dans le fluide qui circule en nos nerfs, il sentait son organisme arriver insensiblement aux phénomènes de la fluidité. Les tourments de cette agonie lui imprimaient un mouvement semblable à celui des vagues, et lui faisaient voir les bâtiments, les hommes, à travers un brouillard où tout ondoyait.¹⁷

At the outset of La Peau de Chagrin, the world which Balzac creates around Raphael de Valentin is a carefully constructed replica of the latter's psychological state. His descriptions of deathlike figures in the gaming house, of austere and gloomy surroundings, of leaden skies and of black looks cast in the direction of the Seine, and, finally, Balzac's depiction of Raphael's reactions to his sudden sensations of fluidity, all convey the protagonist's (Valentin's) fear and depression. Using images drawn from

the material world, Balzac creates a series of tone-paintings. These tableaux permit the reader to appreciate the quality of the shadow which is, at present, cast over Raphael's invisible landscape, his spiritual and psychological reality. The blackened base metal (Valentin's immature ego and its concomitant value system) is ready to undergo the alchemical operation. It is with this phase, the nigredo, that the opus begins, and, in keeping with its alchemical pattern, so does the novel.

Wishing to escape the unpleasant sensations brought upon him by his present state of mind, Raphael enters an antique shop where he finds some extraordinary showrooms which possess their own special enchantment on this, his bleak, afternoon.

The galleries, a spectacle of grand-scale disorder, are also, like the gambling den, an externalization of Raphael's mental situation. In the half-light, Valentin can see all manner of relics mixed together. On the first floor, crafts and art objects are found, juxtaposed; no attempt has been made to arrange or categorize them. Different religions, countries, and epochs are likewise represented without any attempt at systematic display. The "fantasmagories de ce panorama du passé"¹⁸ reflect Raphaël's jumbled values, attitudes, and ideas. The antique shop is similar to an alchemical massa confusa, and it mirrors Raphael's disordered psyche.

In this extraordinary place, Raphael senses that he is leaving the real world¹⁹ and is walking "dans les enchantements d'un songe."²⁰

In a dreamlike state, he seems prepared for his encounter with the magical skin.

First, however, Raphael makes the acquaintance of a wizened old man, an antique dealer, from whom he is to receive the wild ass's skin. For Valentin, this elderly gentleman seems like an apparition in which there exists "quelque chose de magique."²¹ Emerging from the darkness within an envelope of bright light (in reality, the beam of a lamp), the antique dealer appears to possess a spectral quality. Raphael observes as well that the old man's countenance reflects an inward duality, and he notices that "un peintre aurait, avec deux expressions différentes et en deux coups de pinceau, fait de cette figure une belle image du Père Eternel ou le masque ricaneur du Méphistophélès."²²

The dualistic character which Raphael sees in the old man's face and the luminous quality of the antique dealer's overall appearance are both traits reminiscent of the alchemical Mercurius figure. Appearing from out of the shadows, this alien being represents (in projection) the dual-natured spark of light, the imago Dei, within Raphael. Possessed of destructive as well as creative powers, Mercurius (in the guise of the antique dealer) is an agent of change which is guiding Raphael toward spiritual development, and the tool of this impending evolution is the talisman, the magic skin.

Until he obtains the piece of shagreen, Raphael's life has been characterized by waste and corruption. Simply put, for

Raphael, society, its wealth, tinsel, flamboyance and luxuries, has been the object of great desire and his prime motivating influence. In order to acquire access to this exclusive realm, he has been misdirecting his time and life energies exclusively toward the demands of his ego and away from the needs of his inner being. As a result, he has been sacrificing self-realization in the act of self-exploitation. Before his appreciation of the powers of the skin, Raphael has been unmindful of this liquidation of his life forces. In a state of psychological confusion and spiritual decay, he is heading toward physical death. It is in this state that we find him at the beginning of the novel. His body poisoned with debauched living and his mind corrupted with the base values of envy and greed, the call of Death is the only summons he is accustomed to obeying.

Merely a wild ass's skin, this talisman is purported to gratify all the desires of its owner. A Faustian contract inscribed upon the magical piece of shagreen attracts as well as warns all prospective holders:

Si tu me possèdes, tu posséderas tout. Mais ta vie
m'appartiendra. Dieu l'a voulu ainsi. Désire, et tes
désirs seront accomplis. Mais règle tes souhaits sur
ta vie. Elle est là. A chaque vouloir je décroîtrai
comme tes jours. Me veux-tu? Prends. Dieu t'exaucera
Soit! ²³

The skin changes his orientation by making Raphael aware of the reciprocal relationship that exists between the fulfillment of desire and the expenditure of life force. Outwardly, of course, the talisman has the capacity of enabling Raphael to continue with his present

course by satisfying all of his desires. Inwardly, its value is quite different, for the skin's worth, in this respect, lies in its function as an agent of spiritual and psychological transformation: it forces Raphael to focus upon the cost (in terms of life and happiness) of wasted energy.

Alchemically, the talisman represents the prima materia. Just as the alchemical experiment goes nowhere without first reducing the base metal to its original condition, Raphael's spiritual transformation cannot be set into motion without his first recognizing one of the basic tenets of life: that there is an independent relationship between the exercise of the Will and the consumption of (life) energy. This "prime matter," this indispensable consideration, is symbolized by the skin. It takes the novel's duration for Raphael to evolve as a result of its (the talisman's) presence.

As prima materia, the piece of shagreen represents a portion of Raphael's unconscious; it represents one of the aspects of life he senses to be true, but which his ego wishes to deny (i.e., the reciprocity factor between lifespan and the use of willpower). As an aspect of the unconscious, the skin features the potential for change that exists within each human being and which, if it is brought to bear upon the ego, will transform unconscious contents into conscious thoughts, ideas, and actions.

The talisman, like prima materia, is vile and precious. It is soon odious to Raphael because it forces him to focus upon the

extent to which he consumes himself in the pursuit of fruitless passions. Its value lies in its functioning as "the bearer of an invisible influence,"²⁴ for like the alchemical Mercurius, it, too, is a 'ferment'²⁵ of transformation.

Nevertheless, the change does not occur rapidly. Although he is in possession of the capacity for restructuring his life, Raphael does not immediately benefit from this power. Once armed with the skin, his portable panacea, Valentin charges out of the antique store in search of some type of revelry: more of the same type of experience that has already nearly led to his perdition.

Raphael's wish is granted by the skin. Outside of the shop, he meets some friends who invite him to a Bacchanalian feast where moral decadence in the nineteenth century is clearly demonstrated. The general attitude of the diners can be summed up in the comment made by one of them who states that "Arts, sciences, monuments, tout est dévoré par un effroyable sentiment d'égoïsme, notre lèpre actuelle."²⁶ The exclusive pursuit of wealth and physical comfort seems to characterize the nineteenth century man in general and Raphael in particular. Although, at present, he seems to be enjoying his "found" evening of dissipation, Valentin, the recent candidate for suicide, is to find that one thing has indeed changed: he now possesses a terrible power (i.e., the magical skin) which will alter his outlook and his relationship to the egocentric society of which he is a part. Just as Raphael had begun to look at his past from a critical point of view, he shall soon be compelled to

do the same in regard to his present.

In the second section of the novel, entitled "La Femme Sans Coeur," Balzac gives the reader an idea of the life Raphael had led. While at the party, Valentin relates the story of his social, spiritual, and psychological deterioration to a friend. As Valentin's life has been one continual round of self-destruction, the mortificatio theme is greatly in evidence throughout his narration wherein alchemical motifs associated with death and dying are also present.

An alchemical figure which characterizes the earlier Valentin is the uroboros, or, the tail-eating serpent. During his uroboric stage, Raphael is intending to complete a Theory of the Will (Théorie de la volonté) by virtue of which he hopes to gain entrance into Parisian society. In order to accomplish the writing of his treatise, he has taken a room in a garret where he expects to be working for three years (as long as his money will last). At the end of this time, he plans to emerge as a respected author. Yet, all the while he is proceeding with his garret existence, Raphael is consumed by desire for a way of life that is presently beyond his reach. He observes:

Parfois mes goûts naturels se réveillaient comme un incendie longtemps couvé. Par une sorte de mirage ou de calenture, moi, veuf de toutes les femmes que je désirais, dénué de tout et logé dans une mansarde d'artiste, je me voyais alors entouré de maîtresses ravissantes! Je courais à travers les rues de Paris, couché sur les moelleux coussins d'un brillant équipage! J'étais rongé de vices, plongé dans la débauche, voulant tout, ayant tout; enfin ivre à jeun, comme saint Antoine dans sa tentation. Heureusement le sommeil finissait par éteindre ces visions dévorantes . . .27

Raphael epitomizes the self-destructive serpent.

Alchemically, the uroboros is a symbol associated with darkness and death (nigredo, mortificatio). The uroboros "devours itself and thus suffers no hunger; it . . . 'slays itself with its own dart. . . .'"²⁸ In Raphael's case, the weapon is passion.

Psychologically, Jung has suggested that the uroboros represents the elemental cravings within the unconscious. According to Jung, the "'old dragon' . . . a primeval creature dwelling in the caverns of the earth, is, psychologically, a personification of the instinctual psyche, generally symbolized by reptiles."²⁹ Jung quotes from Marcellin Berthelot's Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs when he calls the uroboros the "'serpent rejoicing in itself' . . . and 'which embraces itself,'"³⁰ thereby succoring the wounds of its unrequited needs. As uroboros, Raphael is liquidating his psychic energies in the service of daydreams and exhausting his physical resources in the self-devouring tension that comes from frustrated longings.

A fiery dragon, a variant of the uroboros, is also an alchemical symbol which corresponds to Raphael's mental state during the period in which he writes his treatise on the Will. Valentin experiences the sensation of burning from within; such "smoldering fires" are elements of his hellish existence. Calcinatio, the burning operation, is associated with the destructive "flames" of dammed up psychic energies. In Psychotherapy and Alchemy Edinger explains that "the calcinatio is performed on the primitive. . . side which

harbors hungry, instinctual desirousness . . ." and that the "fire for the process comes from the frustration of these instinctive desires themselves."³¹ The fiery dragon symbolizes Raphael's psychic ordeal wherein his concupiscence is being consumed, indeed, is consuming itself out of frustration. According to Edinger, the psychic energy directed toward primitive, egocentric demands must be transformed in order for psychic development to occur.³² But first, Raphael's primitively grounded wants must burn themselves out; they must undergo mortificatio.

The process of mortificatio takes on a second dimension when Valentin is introduced to Foedora, the "woman without a heart," and, according to Balzac, Society incarnate. Alchemically, Foedora has much in common with the dark planet, Saturn.

In Mysterium Coniunctionis, Jung describes the mystic peregrination of a seventeenth century alchemist, Michael Maier. Maier's journey, recounted by Jung, includes a visionary trip through the planetary houses. The first planet visited is Saturn, "the coldest, heaviest, and most distant of the planets, the maleficus and abode of evil. . . ."³³ Maier, Jung explains, relates the blackness of lead (as did most alchemists) "with the darkness, coldness, and malignity of the malefic Saturn."³⁴ The blackness of Saturn, according to Maier, corresponds to the nigredo where this planet reigns.³⁵ As Jung has written, "Grey and black correspond to Saturn and the evil world; they symbolize the beginning of darkness, in the melancholy, fear, wickedness, and wretchedness of ordinary human

life."³⁶ In the episode with Foedora, the "woman without a heart," Raphael enters the sign of Saturn.

When he first hears Foedora's name, Raphael's imagination is immediately awakened. He describes his reaction in this way:

Foedora. Mais ce nom, cette femme n'étaient-ils pas le symbole de tous mes désirs et le thème de ma vie? Le nom réveillait les poésies artificielles du monde, faisait briller les fêtes du haut Paris et les clinquants de la vanité. La femme m'apparaissait avec tous les problèmes de passion dont j'étais affolé. . . . La comtesse Foedora, riche et sans amant, résistant à des séductions parisiennes, n'était-ce pas l'incarnation de mes espérances, de mes visions?³⁷

For Foedora/Society, Valentin is willing to make great sacrifices. Instead of spending his money on basic necessities, he starts to purchase the proper clothing in which to visit Foedora. He hires cabs in order to appear the well-off young Parisian when arriving at her home. Although he has been warned that Foedora has no lovers and is only a coquette, Raphael refuses to believe that he will be unable to seduce her.

The personification of his erotic fantasies, Foedora is highly attractive to Raphael. His initial observations of Foedora are colored by infatuation and, consequently, Valentin sees nothing in her countenance that does not reveal reflections of "une belle âme dont les sentiments et les émanations communiquaient à sa physionomie ce charme qui nous subjugué et nous fascine, ascendant tout moral et d'autant plus puissant qu'il s'accorde avec les sympathies du désir."³⁸ Raphael views Foedora as the remedy for his woes: seducing her is the equivalent of conquering high society.

The alchemical operation called coagulatio corresponds to Foedora's effect upon Raphael's psyche. Edinger has given the following interpretation of this alchemical procedure:

In essence, coagulatio is the process which turns something into earth. "Earth" is thus one of the synonyms for the "coagulatio." It is heavy and permanent, of fixed position and shape. It doesn't disappear into the air by volatilizing nor pliantly adapt itself to the shape of any container as does water. Its form and location are fixed. Thus, for a psychic content to become earth means that it has been concretized in a particular localized form, i.e., it has become attached to an ego. ³⁹

Raphael's consciousness is now focused upon the domination of Foedora in whom he recognizes the qualities which he deems necessary for happiness and true love.

Since the coagulatio is associated with heavy matter, it is not surprising that lead (a weighty element) is the metal connected with this alchemical operation. Lead also corresponds to the planet Saturn to which, alchemically speaking, the qualities of depression and melancholy are related.

Foedora, solitary and hardened to the core, has a saturnine character. This side of her personality is demonstrated when Raphael, anxious to find out what she is really like, one day decides to hide in her bedroom and, after all her guests are gone, to peer at her from behind a curtain. What he discovers is that, her social mask removed, she is a sad and lonely woman for whom life is very empty. Without the brilliant society which surrounds her as luminous bands encircle Saturn, Foedora exhibits a bleakness akin to that of the cold "dark planet."

Foedora represents what Jung has called the negative anima.

Of the anima he writes:

Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. . . . Since this image is unconscious, it is always unconsciously projected upon the person of the beloved, and is one of the chief reasons for passionate attraction or aversion.⁴⁰

Jung has also postulated that the "anima has a predilection for everything that is unconscious, dark, equivocal, and unrelated in woman, and also for her vanity, frigidity, helplessness, and so forth."⁴¹ To fixate on the dark aspects of the anima is to be influenced by its destructiveness and negativity rather than by its positive qualities. As a creative force, the anima can act as a guide and mediator between the worlds of the ego and the Self. When projected consciously onto the right partner, the anima can inspire a man to follow a higher more spiritual route in life.⁴² Further on in the novel, it is in this latter capacity, as a personification of his positive anima, that Pauline functions with regard to Raphael.

The idea of Foedora, as a projection of Raphael's unconscious, is the embodiment (i.e., coagulation, "earth") of his negative anima. As "that which has become earth or flesh is subject to death and corruption,"⁴³ this fleshy manifestation of Raphael's inner being, this "Foedora," undergoes (psychological) mortificatio. As a ruling principle of Raphael's psyche (i.e., a guiding value), the world which Foedora stands for as well as Foedora herself are eventually

seen for what they really are: representations of pomp, vanity, artificiality and shallowness. In the process of trying to win her love, Raphael, far from seducing Foedora, was ensnared within her sphere. Eventually, he observes "Foedora m'avait communiqué la lèpre de sa vanité. En sondant mon âme, je la trouvais gangrenée et pourrie."⁴⁴ Putrefaction, the rotting of Raphael's soul by his association with Foedora, signals the presence of the mortificatio operation in Valentin's psychological life.

In alchemy, the first state of the opus comes under the sign of Saturn and "corresponds to 'blackening,' 'putrefaction,' and 'mortification.'"⁴⁵ The fifteenth century alchemist Basilus Valentinus describes this portion of the work as:

All flesh born of the earth, will be destroyed and given to the earth again, just as it has already been earth. Then the earthly salt will bring forth a new birth by means of the breath of heavenly life. For wherever earth is absent at the beginning, there can be no re-birth in our work. For the earth is the balm of nature and the salt of those who seek knowledge of all things.⁴⁶

Putrefactio, "rotting," is yet another alchemical process related to the mortificatio theme and is explained as follows:

Putrefactio is "rotting," the decomposition that breaks down dead organic bodies. It . . . is not a happening that would occur in the operations of inorganic chemistry with which the alchemists were largely concerned. However, to witness the putrefaction of a dead body, especially a human corpse, which was not an unusual experience in the Middle Ages, would have a powerful psychological impact. The effects of this experience might then be projected into the alchemical process.⁴⁷

The suffering, defeat, and humiliation associated with putrefactio

refer as well to the mortificatio operation for they are different aspects of the same alchemical (and psychological) action.⁴⁸

Decay (putrefactio) and death (mortificatio) are followed by rebirth.⁴⁹ Such is true in the case of Raphael de Valentin who has been "putrefying" his physical and psychological resources in a life of dissipation and in pursuit of a "heartless" woman. This activity has fostered the deterioration of Raphael's naive hopes of conquering Foedora and the high society she represents, but, equally important, is the destruction of his aspirations: Foedora is no longer the embodiment of his dreams and desires. Valentin's episode with this saturnine individual has lead to the death (mortificatio, "killing") of some of his false values concerning happiness. A tempter and an oppressor,⁵⁰ Saturn was considered a "supreme tester."⁵¹ While under the influence of Foedora, Raphael had his values assayed, and they were found wanting. Still, from out of the tribulations imposed by the dark planet, the alchemists believed that purity of spirit would be attained,⁵² and, although the mortificatio which Saturn causes⁵³ contains the unpleasant experiences of defeat, torture, humiliation, rotting and death, "these dark images," writes Edinger, "often lead over to highly positive ones--growth, resurrection, rebirth. . . ."⁵⁴

At the beginning of the novel, the reader encounters Raphael de Valentin in a state of devastation: he has just realized the impossibility of his ever capturing the heart of Foedora. Despondent over this knowledge, he is contemplating suicide. Raphael is not ready to die, however, as he postpones his death until later and starts

walking along the quay. Prepared to accept a new ruling principle and with it a new outlook, Raphael reacts to a fresh projection in the wild ass's skin. It is in "L'Agonie," the third and final part of the novel, that the skin's influence prevails and that the positive results of the mortificatio come into view.

The talisman's effect on Raphael is complemented by his passion for Pauline, the anima in its positive aspect. With the mortificatio experience, the dangerous, poisonous stage of Raphael's anima has been dismembered. Now the creative spirit can be released. As Valentin understands that Foedora is quite unattainable and negative in her influence upon him, he is free to accept and respond to the affection of Pauline.

In Aion, Jung has expressed this juncture in alchemical terms:

At the death of the individual, and also at his figurative death as a mystical experience, . . . two substances unmix themselves. This mystical experience is the divisio and separatio of the composite. . . . The separation or unmixing enables the alchemist to extract the anima or spiritus from the prima materia. . . . The result of the unmixing is that what was previously mixed up with the "other" is now drawn to "its own place" and to that which is "proper" or "akin" to it, "like iron to the magnet. . . ."55

The talisman makes Raphael focus upon the painful realities concerning the relationship between intense affect and the expenditure of life forces. It (the skin) thus has the fortuitous effect of causing Raphael to turn away from temporal satisfactions. By so doing, he is drawn toward spiritual values, specifically, the charms of his anima or spiritus (represented by Pauline). The unconscious contents reflected by Foedora and Pauline (heretofore confused) have now been

separated, unmixed. With the "proper" psychic configuration (constellation), that is, the positive anima, being drawn to "its own place," it is projected onto Pauline.

Eventually realizing that the skin does indeed possess a fatal power, Raphael observes that "Comme un voyageur au milieu du désert, il avait un peu d'eau pour la soif et devait mesurer sa vie au nombre des gorgées."⁵⁶ Afraid at the prospect of dying, Raphael decides to wish for nothing. In removing himself far from all temptations, he becomes a recluse. Similar to the gamblers at the beginning of the novel, he is like one of the living dead. Withdrawn and shrivelled both physically and psychologically (he will not allow himself the luxury of imaginative thinking for it may lead to a wish and to further shrinkage of his skin), Raphael physically resembles the piece of shagreen, which is, in turn, an exteriorization of his soul.

The atmosphere surrounding this newly-oriented Raphael further paves the way for decay and a deathlike state. Even his house, where he remains ensconced and sequestered, has become, in effect, his tomb. Now, instead of leading a life of dissipation, he is withering away, deteriorating within the confines of his own home. The situation in which Raphael finds himself represents an aspect of the putrefactio operation comparable to the alchemical state of "incubation." In addition to its connection with decay and rotting, putrefactio is also associated with pregnancy, for "the grain of wheat sown in the earth putrefies before it springs up into a new

growth or vegetation" in the same way that the prima materia "sown within the Philosophic Earth, dies and corrupts, that it may conceive itself anew."⁵⁷

Raphael's soul, besieged by the darkness of confusion, is in a state of putrefaction (i.e., of incubation) prior to the release of his spirit in projection upon Pauline. From out of this state another development will occur; Raphael will experience a renewed spiritual outlook and a revitalized ruling principle.

During the period of his self-imposed exile, Raphael has occasion to attend the theatre where he encounters, and subsequently falls in love with, Pauline. This experience reveals the extent of Raphael's spiritual and psychological development as a result of his tribulations with Foedora. As the daughter of the landlady of his garret apartment and as his steadfast friend during his attic-existence, Pauline is not unknown to him. She has always loved Valentin whose affections had been directed elsewhere, but now, in recognizing Pauline's true value, Raphael is like a blind man who is quite suddenly emerging from darkness into light. His love for Pauline signals the release of the creative, self-fulfilling force of his positive anima. With Pauline his psychological integrity will be realized.

Following the confusion of the nigredo and the decay (putrefactio) and death (mortificatio) of his false values, Raphael's expectations are coagulated anew when projected upon Pauline, the essence of spirituality. Balzac describes Pauline as "l'être incréée, tout

esprit, tout amour."⁵⁸ With Pauline's influence, Raphael's life takes on a different dimension: ". . . en ce moment, ton sourire angélique m'a pour ainsi dire purifié. Je crois commencer une nouvelle vie. Le passé cruel et mes tristes folies me semblent n'être plus que de mauvais songes. Je suis pur, près de toi. Je sens l'air du bonheur."⁵⁹ As his positive anima figure, Pauline has a beneficial effect on Raphael. She establishes a connection for Valentin between the outer and inner worlds, between his ego and the Self. She is a psychopomp, Raphael's guide to spiritual understanding.

Alchemically, Pauline personifies Mercurius with whom she has certain qualities in common. Mercurius' nature is both spiritual and material.⁶⁰ Pauline is a living woman of flesh and blood and yet, she is described by Balzac as a being that is "tout esprit." As "feu dans le feu" and the "fleur de la flamme,"⁶¹ Pauline is akin to the scintillae (sparks of light) that characterize Mercurius and which express its essential nature as the "'spirit' which comes closest to organic matter."⁶² Pauline/Mercurius represents (Raphael's) spirit incarnate.

Now wishing only to live for Pauline and her love, Raphael seeks to somehow nullify the power of the wild ass's skin. He consults a variety of scientists and physicians, but to no avail. The skin cannot be made larger, and Valentin is faced with the prospect of his impending death with which he must reconcile the deep and abiding love he feels for Pauline.

Upon witnessing his deteriorating health, one of the physicians whom he consults about the skin suggests that Raphael take a sojourn in the country; perhaps the natural wonders of Savoy would provide a cure. It is during this trip that Valentin experiences the al-chemical separatio, the dividing of certain (psychological) elements, for a second time. Having already identified the value of the spiritual outlook as greater than the sybaritic (represented by Pauline and Foedora, respectively), Raphael is soon to further appreciate the importance of that which is eternal over the transitory. This realization is engendered by Valentin's experiences during his stay in the country.

When it is associated with the theme of mortificatio, the separation operation is symbolically represented by wilderness and in the concepts of alienation and exile. While in Savoy, Raphael encounters more of the same petty vanities by which Society is characterized. Due to his curtness toward those who, like himself, are visiting the spa, and because of his reluctance to enjoy their companionship, Valentin is forced (the result of a series of unfortunate contingencies) to duel with one of the (members of the) clique. Having killed his adversary, Raphael must now flee Savoy and passes from a state of alienation to one of exile.

As the society (of the spa) is presently repugnant to him, Valentin finds great solace in the wilderness around Mont Dore. In fact, he is so enthralled with his natural surroundings and so spiritually nourished by the beauty he continually beholds, Raphael

has the impression, in his euphoria, that he is actually getting better. But, although his soul is being nourished, his body is still withering away. More attuned to his spirit and less conscious of his physical being, Valentin begins to acquire an appreciation of the natural world and its timeless order: qualities of the spirit rather than the transitory, the temporary, and the changeable. His increased perspective will lead him to the final step in the mortificatio process: the separation of the soul from the body, that is, death (mortificatio).⁶³ Raphael will soon be willing to die for he has learned, through his communion with the natural world, to value the continuous, the permanent and the eternal.

Upon his return home, Raphael at first attempts to prolong his life through passivity, like certain creatures in nature which he had observed (and envied!) during his stay at Mont Dore. He is however, and unknown to him merely carrying out the putrefying process:

Raphael demeura pendant quelques jours plongé dans le néant de son sommeil factice. Grâce à la puissance matérielle exercée par l'opium sur notre âme immatérielle, cet homme d'imagination si puissamment active s'abaissa jusqu'à la hauteur de ces animaux paresseux qui croupissent au sein des forêts, sous la forme d'une dépouille végétale, sans faire un pas pour saisir une proie facile. . . . Ses heures froides et ridées ne lui apportaient que de confuses images, des apparences, des clairs-obscurs sur un fond noir. Il s'était enseveli dans un profond silence, dans une négation de mouvement et d'intelligence.⁶⁴

Valentin is experiencing a state of incubation (also associated with putrefactio) prior to the release of his spirit from his body with physical death.

Raphael's death agony and his subsequent release from the bond-

age of his "skin of affliction," reaches dramatic moment because of Pauline's presence in his room. At first he begs her to leave, then Raphael at last yields to her magnetism and, with his one last wish remaining in the skin, desires to die in Pauline's arms. Her protests are to no avail; Raphael's wish is made in full awareness of the price he will pay for it: the talisman disappears.

The skin's dematerialization parallels the transmutation of the alchemical prima materia. At the end of an opus, the prima materia has been changed into philosophical gold. The peau de chagrin is an externalization of Valentin's self-devouring desirousness and, being material, it is vulnerable to its own force just as Raphael's body is overwhelmed and, eventually consumed, by the action of his mind (i.e., thoughts and ideas). A symbol of the inverse relationship between mind and body, the talisman (physically) disappears to re-emerge (incorporeally) as Pure Act in Raphael's willful embrace of love over life. Valentin's natural concupiscence is manifested, but, because of his willingness to give up the material world, his desirousness takes on a dimension of purity: prima materia has been transformed into philosophical (psychological) gold.

When Raphael leaps toward Pauline, his psyche is at last acting as "an integrated force"⁶⁵ wherein passion and intellect, love and the will of the ego are united. Alchemically, this state is known as the unio mentalis (mental union). The alchemist Gerard Dorn has written that when the unio mentalis occurs, the mind willingly separates itself from the body, and this is equivalent to voluntary

⁶⁶
 death. Mental oneness is, alchemically speaking, the result of the coniunctio, or joining, of the soul with the spirit which, as but a single entity, seeks freedom from the body's influence.⁶⁷

Coniunctio, when it is related to the mortificatio theme, leads to crucifixion and sacrifice. As such, Raphael forfeits his physical being: the means by which he can enjoy his material (and transitory) existence. Giving up his worldly attachment (bodily life), the mortificatio of Raphael's temporally oriented attitudes is complete. At the moment of his physical death, Valentin is clutching the object of his carnal and spiritual love. This man, now as always, driven by passion and presently knowing the cost of his cravings, has at last found a wish that is worth the price. In his embrace of the steadfastly adoring Pauline, this "figure supernaturelle . . . /qui/ vient du ciel,"⁶⁸ Raphael manifests his longing for spirituality and transcendence over the uroboric self-consummation caused by concern with the worldly. Valentin's parting gesture is made in acknowledgement and affirmation of his ineluctable fate, which is, to die for love.

NOTES

- ¹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," Quadrant, 14, No. 1 (1981), p. 25.
- ²Honoré de Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), p. 63.
- ³Balzac, p. 64.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 60, 62-63.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 63.
- ⁶Ibid. p. 64.
- ⁷Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 185.
- ⁸Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," pp. 25-26.
- ⁹Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 229.
- ¹⁰Burckhardt, p. 185.
- ¹¹Burckhardt, pp. 185-186.
- ¹²Balzac, p. 67.
- ¹³Balzac, p. 70.
- ¹⁴Bettina L. Knapp, Theatre and Alchemy, (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1980), p. 9.
- ¹⁵Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 507.
- ¹⁶Knapp, p. 9.
- ¹⁷Balzac, p. 70.
- ¹⁸Balzac, p. 79.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 73.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 76.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 80

- ²²Ibid., p. 81
- ²³Ibid., p. 88.
- ²⁴Burckhardt, p. 199.
- ²⁵loc. cit.
- ²⁶Balzac, p. 107.
- ²⁷Balzac, p. 147.
- ²⁸Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 60.
- ²⁹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 384.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 504.
- ³¹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calicinatio," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978), p. 22.
- ³²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 26.
- ³³Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 224.
- ³⁴Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 227.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 229., no. 585.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 229.
- ³⁷Balzac, pp. 154-155.
- ³⁸Balzac, p. 160.
- ³⁹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio," Quadrant, 12, No. 1 (1979), p. 25.
- ⁴⁰Carl G. Jung, The Development of Personality, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 198.
- ⁴¹Carl G. Jung, The Practice of Psychotherapy, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966) par. 521.
- ⁴²Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in Carl G. Jung, ed., Man and His Symbols, (New York: Dell, 1975) p. 193.

- ⁴³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 28.
- ⁴⁴Balzac, p. 214.
- ⁴⁵Burckhardt, p. 185.
- ⁴⁶Burckhardt, pp. 185-186.
- ⁴⁷Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 25.
- ⁴⁸loc. cit.
- ⁴⁹loc. cit.
- ⁵⁰Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 338.
- ⁵¹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 116, n.125.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 335, n. 288.
- ⁵³Burckhardt, p. 185.
- ⁵⁴Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 25.
- ⁵⁵Carl G. Jung, Aion, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 187.
- ⁵⁶Balzac, p. 222.
- ⁵⁷Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 31.
- ⁵⁸Balzac, p. 313.
- ⁵⁹Balzac, 246.
- ⁶⁰Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 490.
- ⁶¹Balzac, p. 313.
- ⁶²Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 491.
- ⁶³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," pp. 35-36.
- ⁶⁴Balzac, pp. 307-308.

⁶⁵Knapp, p. 14.

⁶⁶Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 471.

⁶⁷loc. cit.

⁶⁸Balzac, p. 313.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MORTIFICATIO: URSULE MIROUËT

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
 Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
 Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
 And this our life exempt from public haunt,
 Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
 Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

As You Like It, Shakespeare

The destruction, death, and decomposition which characterize the alchemical mortificatio lead on to regeneration: the ore loses its impurities in order to reappear in renewed form. Likewise, in Ursule Mirouët, three protagonists each experience different aspects of the alchemical mortificatio through their exposure to the "killing" of some element of their reality. As a result, these individuals undergo a "rebirth" in that their existence takes on renewed form.

Ursule Mirouët is a young orphan who has been taken in by Dr. Minoret, a wealthy, retired physician living in the provinces in the town of Nemours. The plot revolves around the plans of Dr. Minoret's relatives who, fearing that their rich uncle will leave all his money to Ursule, try their best to insure that she is disinherited. After the doctor dies, one of the relations, a postmaster named Minoret-Levrault, discovers the will and burns it, hoping in this way to guarantee his family's right to all of their uncle's fortune. Ursule is aided by supernatural intervention, however, when Dr. Minoret appears to Ursule, a spirit from beyond the grave, and reveals the truth concerning the missing will, what happened to it and the culprit involved. Armed

with this information, Ursule and her friend, Abbé Chaperon, are soon able to rectify the situation regarding the proper distribution of the inheritance.

Suffering, tragedy, defeat, humiliation, sacrifice, are all themes associated with the alchemical mortificatio. Destruction brings death; if not in a physical sense, the demise can be that of an attitude or a ruling principle of the ego.¹ Paradoxically, the mortificatio, by destroying the old, also fosters renewal. Consequently, sowing, germination, greenness, rebirth, and wisdom are also related to the "killing" operation. As one alchemical text explains:

Oh happy gate of blackness, cries the sage, which art the passage to this so glorious change. Study therefore, whosoever appliest thyself to this Art, only to know this secret, for to know this is to know all, but to be ignorant of this is to be ignorant of all. For putrefaction precedes the generation of every new form into existence.²

The new outlook which is born out of the death of the old is an indication that something has been redeemed, a thought, a mental capability that was "sleeping" has been resurrected. Jung has described the alchemical opus as the cause of the slumbering world soul which is awaiting its redemption in matter.³ The death of one type of existence, promotes the deliverance of the transcendental aspects of one's personality, and thereby carries out a redemptive process. The alchemical mortificatio, the death operation is also an agent of rescue and emancipation.

In Balzac's Ursule Mirouët, death is the gateway to a new world for Ursule, Dr. Minoret, and Minoret-Levrault. Although

the physical death of Dr. Minoret is important to the spiritual evolutions of both Ursule and Minoret-Levrault. the corporeal demise of the doctor is not the only form that death takes in the novel. When the relatives are attempting to ruin Ursule's chances of ever inheriting any of the doctor's money, they manage, for a time at least to destroy her reputation and, by keeping all funds out of her hands, they also contrive to dismantle her life-style. Before he dies, Minoret's spiritual transformation in the form of his conversion to catholicism lays waste his atheistic beliefs. In addition, his visit to a hypnotist forces him to abandon his life-long prejudice regarding the existence of extra-sensory powers. Finally, Minoret-Levrault's shock over the death of his son (caused by a freak accident which this father undoubtedly attributed to the hand of Providence punishing him for his actions in regard to Ursule) touched the postman so deeply that it brought about the disintegration of his greed and turned him into a God-fearing individual. Destruction, in one form or another, is a companion to renewal in the lives of the protagonists in this novel.

Ursule Mirouët is a work in which the alchemical mortificatio is taking place in various phases in the lives of three people. Each of the protagonists undergoes an aspect of the mortificatio process: Ursule is victimized by it, Minoret-Levrault prompts it, and the doctor makes use of death to triumph in the end. For Ursule Mirouët, the mortificatio process signifies a death

of innocence (i.e., naïveté) from which is born an increased consciousness of her immediate reality. Greatly pampered and protected by Dr. Minoret, Ursule understands little of the great influence that money has over the minds of human beings. Although this may seem a bit of information which one could well do without, Ursule's circumstances are about to force this knowledge upon her along with a comprehension of the cruelty and snobbery that can result from placing too much importance upon material wealth.

One of the images associated with the mortificatio is the slaying of the innocent. Edinger has indicated that the concepts of the "killing" operation lead "directly into the imagery of Christ's Passion -- his mocking, flagellation, torture, and death. The alchemists sometimes explicitly connected the treatment of the material in the vessel with the treatment Christ received."⁴ The "body" undergoing mortificatio was compared to Christ. This sacrifice of one who is pure is not unlike the situation in Ursule Mirouët when the young orphaned Ursule is economically distressed, being deprived of her inheritance, and cruelly treated by the doctor's relatives who attempt to ruin her reputation through a series of malicious tricks. Both Ursule's physical comfort and her reputation are being destroyed, sacrificed, to greed.

Ursule's unhappiness does not come solely from the machinations of the relatives of Dr. Minoret, however. The importance of material comfort generates another form of cruelty which has taken form in the snobbery of Madame de Portenduère. This aristocratic

lady, although having fallen upon hard times financially, nevertheless, will not allow her son, Savinien, a noble by birth, to marry a poor orphaned girl, no matter what her prospects of future wealth may be. Madame de Portenduère considered her family to be too honorable to include a parvenue and therefore she would not consent to a marriage taking place between her son and Ursule. Her son, Savinien, was quick to remind her that even the finest of families had included social newcomers, while indirectly indicating as well that her ideal of maintaining the aristocracy of the Portenduère line was, as it had always been, greatly dependent upon wealth. The old lady was as stubborn as she was hypocritical, however, and she continued to refuse the wishes of her son.

As a result of the repeated assaults on her sensibilities, that is, being deprived of any hope of marrying Savinien, bereft of material contentment, and witnessing the ruination of her good name, Ursule literally begins to die. Her world has been crumbling all around, and she is succumbing with it:

Depuis le jour où la plus infâme calomnie avait souillé sa vie, Ursule, en proie à l'une de ces maladies inexplicables dont le siège est dans l'âme, marchait rapidement à la mort. D'une pâleur mortelle, disant à de rares intervalles des paroles faibles et lentes, jetant des regards d'une douceur tiède, tout en elle même son front, trahissait une pensée dévorante. Elle la croyait tombée, cette idéale couronne de fleurs chastes que, de tout temps, les peuples on voulu voir sur la tête des vierges. Elle écoutait, dans le vide et dans le silence, les propos déshonorants, les commentaires malicieux, les rires de la petite ville. Cette charge était trop pesante pour elle, et son innocence avait trop de délicatesse pour survivre à une pareille meurtrissure.⁵

The alchemical mortificatio is in full force.

Ursule is akin to the embers, soon to be ash, resting at the bottom of the alchemist's alembic. Calcinatio, one of the processes associated with the mortificatio has occurred within Ursule who, having undergone great frustration at being so completely helpless to rectify her situation, has undergone spiritual destruction. One alchemical text explains this phenomenon and in relationship to Christ:

Again, as our chemical compound . . . is subject to the action of fire, and is decomposed, dissolved, and well digested, and as this process, before its consummation, exhibits various chromatic changes, so this Divine Man, and Human God, Jesus Christ, had, by the will of his heavenly Father, to pass through the furnace of affliction, that is, through many troubles, insults, and sufferings, in the course of which His outward aspect was grievously changed.⁶

Ursule is being consumed by anguish.

When she is about to lose her life for the sake of innocence and purity, Ursule's plight is brought to the notice of Madame de Portenduère (by her son, Savinien). Coming to console Ursule, the elderly aristocrat is moved as she witnesses the young girl's sorrow, and in calling Ursule, "ma fille," recognizes her as a future daughter-in-law. Ursule is heartened by Madame de Portenduère's consolations and is strengthened to take on what will be the task of recouping her losses. Ursule has forfeited her innocence in the sense that she is no longer oblivious to the cruelty that can be wrought in the name of greed, but she has not, as was almost the case, lost her life.

The destruction of innocence is referred to in an alchemical text and is akin to the killing of the Paschal lamb:

Take it fresh, pure, living white and clear,
Then bind firmly both hands and feet
With the very strongest cords,
That it suffocate and die,
In the closed house of Putrefaction.⁷

Edinger has indicated that the psychological idea behind this image is that "the childhood state of purity and innocence" is being sacrificed. He also remarks that in alchemy, this "corrupted" stage is followed by a triumphant one.⁸ As the alchemist Ruland has written: "Putrefactio or corruption takes place when a body becomes black. Then it stinks like dung and true solution follows. The elements are separated and destroyed. Many colors are afterwards developed, until victory is obtained and everything is reunited."⁹ For the alchemical material, and for Ursule, the mortificatio operation leads to rebirth: from innocence destroyed, will come an enlargement of consciousness and a strengthening of character from suffering.

Coniunctio is also associated with the mortificatio process for it is through the sacrifice of one ruling principle that other ideas can be brought into play and united within a new outlook, a unio mentalis, as the alchemists referred to the joining of operations of soul, mind, and body.¹⁰ For Ursule, her inner reality, one in which everything and everyone operates with the utmost honor and charity, has been in conflict with her outer situation in which she sees herself being subjected to the cruellest

trickery. Her illusions have been dissolved, the opposites of outer and inner realities have come into view and, in Edinger's words, "the ego must traverse the narrow edge between them."¹¹ Her strength coming from the certainty that she will no longer be denied the companionship (or love) of Savinien, Ursule is making her slow but steady recovery. It is during this period that she experiences the effects of the alchemical coniunctio which as well as being associated with the mortificatio process, also overlaps with the burning (calcinatio) operation by virtue of the form in which it (the coniunctio) is manifested.

Ursule's ego undergoes a frightening experience in its journey along the ledge between the conscious and the unconscious worlds. Edinger has written that "when the depth of the unconscious is open, 'circumstance' cracks open, synchronicities occur and transpersonal meanings shine through."¹² When Ursule has a dream which could be characterized as a supernatural vision, she, too, is witness to a break in time, a transcending of the spatio-temporal realm.

The spectre of Dr. Minoret appears to Ursule with the intention of informing her as to exactly what transpired the day of his death in regard to the will. The experience is one in which Ursule has the sensation of burning (the calcinatio) while at the same time being united (the coniunctio) with a great transpersonal power:

. . . Ursule eut une apparition qui se fit d'une façon étrange. . . . Il lui sembla que son lit était dans le cimetière de Nemours, et que la fosse de son oncle se trouvait au bas de son lit. . . . Elle jeta des cris perçants, mais le spectre du docteur se dressa lentement. Elle vit d'abord la tête jaune et les cheveux blancs qui brillaient environnées par une espèce d'aureole. Sous le front nu les yeux étaient comme deux rayons, et il se levait, comme attiré par une force supérieure. Ursule tremblait horriblement dans son enveloppe corporelle, sa chair était comme un vêtement brûlant, et il y avait, dit elle plus tard, comme une autre elle-même qui s'agitait au-dedans.¹³

Ursule is experiencing what Edinger has called "a state of identity with the transpersonal energies of the Self."¹⁴ Out of her experience of darkness and emptiness she has encountered an inner companion, the unconscious which, when integrated with the ego will bring about a strengthening of her character. From the crucifixion (mortificatio) of her former outlook on life (i.e., her innocence and purity of consciousness) a rebirth is taking place. The first signs of this renewal take place in the apparitions which Ursule has which indicate that she is undergoing a re-evaluation of her conscious attitudes or as Balzac puts it she was in "cet état de prostration corporelle qui laissait l'âme et l'esprit libres."¹⁵ Whether one chooses to believe that Ursule has traversed space and time and has really been in touch with the spirit of a dead man or that she has communed deep within herself and has clothed her inner urgings and feelings with familiar images, the phenomenon and the message remain the same: Ursule, by virtue of the anguish which she has experienced is undergoing a transformation; she is plumbing the depths of her

psyche for a resolution to the injustice to which she has been subjected.

Although she holds the solution to her problems, she is not yet ready to take the necessary steps in regard to the guilty party that would insure the restitution of her fortune. She leaves this task to Abbé Chaperon who, armed with the newly obtained information, frightens Minoret-Levrault into submission.

Ursule's story is one of the creation of consciousness through pain; it is, alchemically speaking, the revelation of philosophical gold from the mortification (mortificatio) of the contaminants in the base metal. Unlike most mortificatio processes wherein the prima materia starts out in the nigredo or blackened state, the matter is in a preliminary albedo, or pure (but undeveloped) state which must first be destroyed.¹⁶ Ursule's sacrifice marks the way to the redemption of unused portions of her psyche, helping her to better relate to the reality in which she is destined to live. Jung has explained the relationship between torment and the creation of consciousness in this way: "The problem of crucifixion is the beginning of individuation; there is the secret meaning of the Christian symbolism, a path of blood and suffering -- like any other step forward on the road of the evolution of human consciousness."¹⁷ For Ursule, mortificatio has meant life out of death.

Dr. Minoret, like Ursule, undergoes a transformation which leads to redemption and rebirth. For him, the mortificatio operation takes on the character of a separation (separatio) of old ideas from new and, literally, of body from soul in his physical death,

Due to his advanced age (he is over 80), Dr. Minoret is forced to reflect upon what will happen to Ursule after his death. He is especially concerned with insuring her continued economic well-being in light of the fact that his relatives are most anxious to deprive Ursule of her inheritance. Dr. Minoret fears his death, not because his physical existence will end, but rather for the danger which Ursule will be in because of the absence of her benefactor.

The elder physician is therefore quite interested in an idea presented to him by a colleague, Bouvard, who had, for forty-four years, been an advocate of the theories of Mesmer. A believer in hypnotism, Bouvard had been shunned by Dr. Minoret, a rationalist who classified extrasensory phenomena along with the sleight of hand tricks of magicians. Nevertheless, Bouvard, who feels he is about to die, writes to Minoret and tells him of his intention to prove, once and for all, that magnetism will be one of the major sciences. Minoret's hopes are raised: perhaps through telepathy or through similar means he will be able to overcome death and communicate with Ursule from beyond the grave. Although he says it jokingly, one of Minoret's first questions to Bouvard is "Le magnétisme empêche-t-il de mourir?"¹⁸

Minoret is to learn that hypnotism (also known as magnetism and mesmerism) enables the subject to delve, telepathically, into the mind of another. For the experiment, the psyche of Ursule is used: a hypnotized woman is able to read the young girl's thoughts.

Later, Dr. Minoret questions Ursule and finds, to his amazement that the magnetic powers of the mind do, in fact, exist.

Minoret becomes a convert to the theories of Anton Mesmer, who believed that universal forces could be transmitted from one person to another through the medium of a subtle, invisible fluid akin to electricity. He indicates the extent of his hope that he will be able to continue, through psychic powers, to protect Ursule after his death: "Quand je serai mort, si je me réconcilie avec Dieu, je le prierai de me laisser vous apparaître. . . ." and "Ursule, . . . si jamais un danger te menaçait, appelle-moi, je viendrai."¹⁹

Minoret's reflections on death have lead him toward an openness in regard to ideas to which he has long been opposed. A second conversion for Minoret is the one by which he hopes to become reconciled with God. A life-long atheist, the doctor is, toward the end of his life, transformed into a believer by Ursule in whom he sees the light of heaven and he is converted by her angelic nature "à la façon de saint Paul."²⁰ Particularly susceptible to the whole idea of a spiritual world that transcends and communicates with the material realm, Dr. Minoret is, consequently, a candidate for religious conversion.

Alchemically speaking, Minoret has undergone a mortificatio of his old attitudes. His scientific rationalism has succumbed to the belief that the supernatural can and does exist, and his atheism has dissolved under the influence of the celestial Ursule. Old beliefs have died, giving way to new; a moral-intellectual trans-

formation has occurred in Dr. Minoret which signals a separatio of the spiritual from its confines within the resolutely rational:

"Out of the gross and impure One there cometh an exceeding pure and subtile One."²¹ The alchemist Khunrath is here referring to the separation of the elements which must, of necessity, cause the death of the imperfect in favor of the birth of the spirit.

The separatio phase of the mortificatio operation is symbolized by a death head, that is a skull. Jung has indicated that the contemplation of a skull corresponds to the "consulting of one's wholeness for information beyond the vision of the ego."²² An emblem for the mortificatio, the skull has been viewed by Edinger as a point of departure: "It generates reflections on one's personal mortality and serves as a touchstone for true and false values."²³ Reflecting upon one's death separates the "cogitatio" or thinking mechanism from the body, and represents an effort of the psyche to come into existence as an entity apart from the body within which it is confined.²⁴

Minoret's contemplation of his own death leads him to separate his spiritual being from the "body" of old beliefs and attitudes. Before his death the elderly doctor experiences a spiritual rebirth. A witness to this occurrence, when Ursule is, herself, undergoing a mortificatio (of innocence, i.e., ignorance of the human capacity for malice and cruelty), she dons her unconscious urgings with familiar trappings: the head (i.e., skull) of Minoret is foremost in the apparition as it is separated from the confines of the tomb.

The yellow head, the shining hair within a halo, his eyes like rays of the sun all impart a luminescent (and a numinous) quality to the head (i.e., psyche) of Minoret. Just as the doctor's spirit was separated from his old beliefs prior to his physical death, Ursule's psyche is likewise undergoing a separatio of old outlook from new as she gains greater perspective of the extent of the evil existing in Nemours. Although she remains unconscious of the archetypal quality of her dream, its contents attest to the psychological parallel existing between the spiritual rebirth of Dr. Minoret and her own nascent renewal.

Minoret undergoes two instances of mortificatio/separatio. The first results in his psychological transformation, the redemption of his qualities of transcendence. The second death is literal, and leads to another type of transmutation; Minoret's physical death is responsible for Ursule's transcendence for it sets into motion the chain of events which will cause her to re-evaluate her perspective on life. Mortificatio is a signal of hope for Minoret and of regeneration for Ursule. As in alchemy, "the black death's head turns to gold."²⁵

There is, in Ursule Mirouët, a third character about whom one can speak in terms of the alchemical mortificatio. Minoret-Levrault, the spokesman for the greedy relatives, undergoes a transformation as well. At the end of the novel he has changed from a money-loving and unscrupulous knave into a God-fearing and pious churchwarden:

Si vous avez remarqué sur le bord des chemins, dans les pays où l'on étête le chêne, quelque vieil arbre blanchi et comme foudroyé, poussant encore des jets, les flancs ouverts et implorant la hache, vous aurez une idée du vieux maître de poste, en cheveux ne retrouvent rien de l'imbécile heureux que vous avez vu attendant son fils au commencement de cette histoire il ne prend plus son tabac de la même manière, il porte quelque chose de plus que son corps. Enfin, on sent en toute chose que le doigt de Dieu s'est appesanti sur cette figure pour en faire un exemple terrible.²⁶

It is the action of the mortificatio that has brought about this vast alteration in the attitude of Minoret-Levrault.

Formerly an exponent of the joys of the material over the spiritual aspects of life, Minoret-Levrault was the prime mover behind all the chicanery that made the life of Ursule Mirouët so miserable, for he sought, through trickery, to gain all of Dr. Minoret's fortune for himself and his relatives. The postmaster of Nemours is firmly rooted in his lust for gold which, considering the torment he is willing to inflict to obtain it, is unquestionably one of his main priorities. Alchemically speaking, Minoret-Levrault's attachment to earthly pleasures signifies a coagulatio, a concretization of that which pertains to the flesh, the material, the body, and which is, consequently, "subject to death and corruption."²⁷ As Edinger writes, "Earth signifies coagulatio" and, "coagulatio is followed sooner or later by mortificatio."²⁸ Minoret-Levrault's identity, his ego, is attached to the accumulation of wealth. His attitudes are solidified and his aims uni-dimensional. The postmaster's obdurate viewpoint is destined to disintegrate.

Despite his great love of money, there is something that is more important to Minoret-Levrault: the life of his son.

Providence snatches this treasure from him, and it is the death of Désiré (his son) that engenders the destruction of Minoret-Levrault's greed-oriented values. The son's death also fosters the deterioration both in mind (ego) and body of this "colosse" as Balzac frequently refers to the postmaster.

The earthy character of coagulatio is implied by Minoret-Levrault's physical size, his attachment to the material, and his substantial ego which makes him so fearless in his villany toward Ursule Mirouët and in his pursuit of wealth. This collection of characteristics is to undergo the erosion characteristic of the mortificatio.

Linked with the coagulatio, the coniunctio operation is a necessary adjunct to the effectuation of the mortificatio process. The alchemical coniunctio means a joining "of mercury with other metals," and "the formation of amalgams."²⁹ The only way for union to occur is through mortificatio. Alchemically speaking, each ore must "die" as an independent, individual entity in order for two metals to be fused. In psychological terms, the coniunctio can occur "whenever the ego identifies with contents emerging from the unconscious."³⁰ A portion of the ego dies in the process of its being united with the unconscious, and new attitudes evolve, being an amalgam of the ego values and unconscious feelings that have been brought to consciousness. Old attitudes must be sacrificed for new ones to be formed: the crucifixion of the coagulated, concretized belief is simultaneous with the redemption of both ego and unconscious in a newly formed union, a rebirth.

It is the coniunctio, as associated with sacrifice and crucifixion, that is the catalyst for Minoret-Levrault's transformation and eventual redemption. At the beginning of the novel, the reader learns of Minoret-Levrault's idolatry of his son Désiré. It is also made clear that this only child is an egoist wholly preoccupied with the satisfaction of his material whims, their gratification being made possible through the indulgence of his parents:

La mère . . . rivalisait de gâteries avec le père. Aucun naturel d'enfant n'aurait pu résister à cette idolâtrie. Aussi Désiré, qui connaissait l'étendue de son pouvoir, savait-il traire la cassette de sa mère et puiser dans la bourse de son père en faisant croire à chacun des auteurs de ses jours qu'il ne s'adressait qu'à lui.³¹

Désiré, the recipient of all of the material benefits which the parents so indiscriminately have bestowed upon him, is a reflection of the values of his parents: wealth must be gained at all costs, even dishonestly if necessary.

Toward the end of the novel (after Minoret-Levrault has fully demonstrated the extent to which he is prepared to go in the name of Wealth), Désiré is accidentally killed while traveling to Nemours. His death is the sacrifice that must be made to redeem the soul of Minoret-Levrault. This beloved son, the epitome and incarnation of the postmaster's perspectives on life, is subjected to a literal mortificatio. It is through this crucifixion that Minoret-Levrault acquires a new angle of vision: one portion of his ego (i.e., the importance he placed upon wealth and for which he believes he has been punished in the death of his son) "dies," forcing Minoret-Levrault to commit himself to a new way of life.

Through his son's death, two forms of the coniunctio occur: one is external, the other internal. In the act of joining (a coniunctio) the Church, Minoret-Levrault's energies are being directed toward the benefit of others, united with others, in lieu of being channelled solely in the direction of his own aggrandizement. In addition, by virtue of the death of his son, and the subsequent mortificatio of his own overly materialistic values, Minoret-Levrault has undergone an inner transformation which has brought about a re-coagulation of attitude, the new outlook being reflective of his unification (coniunctio) with "quelque chose de plus."³² God is closer to him than ever before.

Ursule Mirouët is, in alchemical terms, a novel in which through the mortificatio process a supreme value is redeemed from its imprisonment within the base metal. In the case of Ursule, out of her naïveté comes a realization of the lengths to which people will go to protect or promote their own interests. Dr. Minoret learns that if he is willing to relinquish old beliefs, love will direct him in the acquisition of new, self-liberating attitudes and perspectives. Finally, for Minoret-Levrault, the quintessence that is saved and delivered was the most fettered of all: Minoret-Levrault is most broken, his husk most shattered by his revelation. Whereas Ursule awakens to an awareness of concrete realities, and Dr. Minoret becomes conscious of the self-transcending power in love, the postmaster is destined to comprehend his own measure as a man; his utter vileness as a human being.

Ironically, it is this 180 degree shifting of his entire world, that demonstrates that Minoret-Levrault was redeemable, that the increatum, the uncreated, the prima materia was there to be extracted from him as well as from Ursule and Dr. Minoret, but at great expense, for as Thomas Gray has observed:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Await alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.³³

NOTES

¹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," Quadrant, 14, No. 1 (1981), p. 26.

²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 25.

³Edward Edinger, Ego and Archetype (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 103.

⁴Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortification," p. 40.

⁵Honoré de Balzac, Ursule Mirouët (Paris: Editions Gallimard et Librairie Générale Française, 1968), p. 270.

⁶Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 41.

⁷Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 29.

⁸loc. cit.

⁹loc. cit.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹¹Ibid., p. 39

¹²loc. cit.

¹³Balzac, p. 299.

¹⁴Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 40.

¹⁵Balzac, 283.

¹⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 29.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁸Balzac, p. 94.

¹⁹Balzac, p. 114.

²⁰Balzac, p. 115.

²¹Carl G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 124.

²²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 34.

²³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 35.

²⁴Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵Ibid., p. 38.

²⁶Balzac, pp. 322-323.

²⁷Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 28.

²⁸loc. cit.

²⁹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VIII. Coniunctio," Quadrant, 15, No. 1 (1982), p. 5.

³⁰Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VIII. Coniunctio," p. 10.

³¹Balzac, p. 20.

³²Balzac, p. 323.

³³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 37.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CALCINATIO: LA RECHERCHE DE L'ABSOLU

Everything young grows old, all beauty fades,
all heat cools, all brightness dims, and every
truth becomes stale and trite. . . . the vanish-
ing shapes are shaped anew, and a truth is valid
in the end only if it suffers change and bears
new witness in new images, in new tongues, like
a new wine that is put into new bottles.

Carl Jung, Symbols of Transformation

In La Recherche de l'Absolu, Balthazar Claës is obsessed with finding the absolute, a substance which he believes is common to all Creation. Although Claës' idée fixe brings great turmoil to his family, the ordeal does, in the end, have a positive effect upon the household. Like the alchemical fire that would cleanse and purify the base metal, while, at the same time destroying its shape and texture, Balthazar, in his intense search for the absolute, "incinerates" certain ingrained habits and sacrosanct values of the Claës family while what is vital, the familial character and integrity, is preserved, refined, and renewed.

Calcinatio is the alchemical fire operation during which a base metal is burned in order to rid it of its impurities as well as to cause those "constituents that will volatilize"¹ to be driven off. In alchemy, fire was considered a generative power.² On a metaphysical level, the role of the calcinatio operation corresponded to that of spiritual fire,³ the purpose of which, according to Paracelsus, was "to carry to its end something that has not yet been completed; to obtain the lead from the ore and to transform it into what it is made for."⁴

In regard to the Claëses, the calcinatio operation (around which cluster several other alchemical processes) begins with Balthazar's quest of the absolute. His burning desire starts a chain reaction that eventually transforms his entire family. La Recherche de l'Absolu is a demonstration of trial and transmutation by fire, an alchemical calcinatio.

By way of introduction to the Claës household, the novel begins with a family history, whereby it is learned that the Claëses arrived in France from Flanders during the sixteenth century; they were fleeing their native land as a result of Ghent's revolt against Charles V. This narration is followed by a detailed description of the Claës mansion in Douai, France.

Next, Balzac offers a portrait of Josephine Claës, the mother of the household. The tone of this portrayal is gloomy, and Madame Claës appears to be pensive and quite forlorn.

Her husband, Balthazar, enters upon the scene. He is in an extremely distracted state of mind and, as the description continues, it gradually becomes evident that Claës is a man being consumed by an obsession; his wife's apparent desolation now is understood.

Following this poignant revelation, Balzac relates the history of the relationship between Balthazar and Josephine, as well as the events leading up to their present estrangement.

As a young man, Balthazar had studied science in Paris under Lavoisier, and, although he had been passionately interested in his studies, the Parisian life did not suit him and he abandoned city

dwelling for the quiet existence at Douai. Shortly after his return to the family foyer, he was married to Mademoiselle Joséphine de Temnick.

The newlyweds had been very devoted to each other and lived happily for fifteen years. Four children were born to them, and the Claës household, prevailed in Douai as it had for many generations, the epitome of harmony and organization.

One day, a young Polish officer who was staying at the Claës home introduced Balthazar to the idea of the absolute. This gentleman, Adam de Wierzchownia, encouraged Claës to use his (Balthazar's) time and money to pursue the quest for the prime matter, the element common to all created things.

Wierzchownia's fateful visit marked the beginning of disaster for Joséphine, Balthazar, and their marriage. Like a madman, Claës became possessed by the thought of discovering the absolute. Oblivious to his family obligations, Balthazar remained in a world apart, dwelling within a realm dictated by his obsessive idée fixe.

Madame Claës did what she could to protect the children from knowing of their father's monomania. Her task became increasingly difficult for Balthazar was expending large sums of the family funds on chemicals and equipment for his experiments, leaving Joséphine to manage the entire household on ever-diminishing financial resources. Nevertheless, she tried to keep the children unaffected by the family's dire economic straits, thereby maintaining their sense of security as well as their respect for Balthazar who, without their knowledge, was mortgaging the future of his offspring.

The remainder of the novel relates a succession of family tragedies. Joséphine dies of frustration and grief over the loss of her husband to science; Balthazar consumes the family wealth in the quest of the absolute; Marguerite, the eldest of the Claës children, eventually re-establishes the family fortune, but only after insisting upon Balthazar's temporary exile from his beloved home in Douai; finally, in addition to the loss of their mother, the Claës family must suffer the death of Balthazar, yet another sacrifice to a tragic obsession.

Yet, from all the devastation, indeed, because of it, a new Claës outlook emerges. The renewal of the household is engineered by Marguerite as she strives for the survival of her family. Consequently, a story in which ruin is everywhere in evidence ends on a hopeful tone: the alchemy of calcinatio lies not only in what is destroyed but also in what is gained as a result of the operation: the Claës family is to reconstruct the entire fabric of its existence, and to improve in the process.

Basic to alchemy is the concept that the external form of a thing reflects its internal essence; the material mirrors the spiritual. For example, "Gold and silver . . . are the earthly reflections of sun and moon, and thus also of all the realities of spirit and soul which are related to the heavenly pair."⁵ In like manner, inward nature being reflected by outward "materia," the values and tastes (essentially Flemish in character) of the Claës family have found ex-

pression, throughout the centuries, in their house in Douai:

Il existe à Douai dans la rue de Paris une maison dont la physionomie, les dispositions intérieurs et les détails ont, plus que ceux d'aucun autre logis, gardé le caractère des vieilles constructions flamandes, si naïvement appropriées aux moeurs patriarcales de leur pays . . .⁶

The Claës family residence, exquisitely maintained, bespeaks the assiduous care of many generations: "Quoique le temps eût jeté sa teinte sur les travaux délicats de cette porte et de la lanterne, le soin extrême qu'en prenaient les gens du logis permettait aux passants d'en saisir tous les détails."⁷ The outside of the house is remarkably well preserved despite its being several generations old:

Depuis sa construction cette façade se nettoyait soigneusement deux fois par an. . . . Ce devant de maison n'offrait donc aucune trace de dégradation. Malgré les teintes foncées causees par la vétusté même de la brique, il était aussi bien conservé que peuvent l'être un vieux tableau, un vieux livre chéris par un amateur et qui seraient toujours neufs, s'ils ne subissaient, sous la cloche de notre atmosphère, l'influence des gaz dont la malignité nous menace nous-mêmes.⁸

There is in evidence a "propreté recherchée"⁹ about this building which reveals, in its "aspect sèchement honnête et déceimment estimable,"¹⁰ the flemish character of those dwelling inside, for "l'esprit de la vieille Flandre respirait tout entier dans cette habitation. . . ."¹¹

An "exquise propreté"¹² is duplicated throughout the interior of the house as well. An abundance of treasured family heirlooms graces the areas designated for entertaining guests and, in keeping with their extreme regard for the sanctity of the family foyer, the private living quarters contain the most exquisite art objects that the Claëses own:

Le logis de devant, destiné aux réceptions, et dont le second étage, contenait les appartements à donner aux étrangers, renfermait certes des objets d'art et de grandes richesses accumulées; mais rien ne pouvait égaler aux yeux des Claës, ni au jugement d'un connaisseur, les trésors qui ornaient cette pièce, où depuis deux siècles, s'était écoulée la vie de famille.¹³

The ancestral home of the Claës family reflects the cultivation of its former residents, whose legacy to the current generation has been a strong sense of family identity and permanence, wherein the past, present and future are intermingled.

Moreover, the Claëses observe an eminently Flemish tradition: their respect for patriarchal authority. Their patriarchal outlook is ingrained and consists in the belief that family integrity is linked to the father's honor. The père de famille in turn, being the family guide, has complete freedom to do as he sees fit in order that the Claës reputation might be perpetuated. He is the sovereign ruler of the household, and his will and majesty are acknowledged.

The patriarchal style is successful for the present generation of Claëses until Balthazar gets involved in his search for the absolute. Unfortunately, the family's respect for the father's authority is so deeply rooted that it takes much time and great devastation before the household begins to take measures to extinguish the flame of Balthazar's idée fixe.

Alchemically, the Claës attitude toward patriarchal authority marks the effect of a coagulation operation. That which is coagulated is fixated, concretized, incarnated, embodied. Over time, the Claëses

have gradually solidified their belief in the sanctity of the patriarch to such a degree that their philosophy has now become burdensome. The family's tradition has become fixed and rigid, and the present generation, although threatened by Balthazar's mania, continues to perpetuate, in almost mechanical fashion, a custom which, given the circumstances, has no value. Like the heavy, leaden base metal, the household's stagnate and binding outlook must undergo transformation in the fires of calcinatio.

Psychologically, coagulatio is experienced as bondage because it can confine an individual, limiting his or her approach to living. As Edinger has written, embodied existence is akin to a prison or a tomb.¹⁴ The Claës point of view has evolved into a bondage to the past.

The alchemists theorized that in order for noble ores to be derived from base metals, the latter must, initially, be reduced to the prima materia. In spiritual terms, "the materia prima . . . is none other than their underlying 'fundamental substance', that is to say, the soul in its original state, as yet unconditioned by impressions and passions, and 'uncongealed' into any definite form."¹⁵ Prime Matter is the indestructible "raw material"¹⁶ of the metal which, through the burning operation (calcinatio), is extracted from the ore and purified.

It is Balthazar Claës, with his quest for the absolute, who will actuate the calcinatio process which will bring forth the first and fundamental "matter" of the Claës family: its strength and

and courage, and above all, its instinct for survival.

The household's calcinatio experience is fostered by a tradition which, until Balthazar's ascendancy, has (happily) augmented the prosperity of the Claës household. The custom was to allow each patriarch to indulge in a passion:

La maison Claës était si richement fournie en meubles, en tableaux, en objets d'art et de prix qu'il semblait difficile d'y ajouter des choses dignes de celles qui s'y trouvaient déjà. Le goût de cette famille y avait accumulé des trésors. Une génération s'était mise à la piste de beaux tableaux. . . . Une autre génération avait eu la fantaisie des services de porcelaine japonaise ou chinoise. Tel Claës s'était passionné pour les meubles, tel autre pour l'argenterie, enfin chacun d'eux avait eu sa manie, sa passion, l'un des traits les plus saillants du caractère flamand, le père de Balthazar, le dernier débris de la fameuse société hollandaise, avait laissé l'une des plus riches collections de tulipes connues.¹⁷

Without immediately evincing a "mania" of his own, Balthazar had continued his father's interest in tulips until he became impassioned by his quest for the absolute. Once ignited with the flame of scientific research, Claës' particular "interest" is made manifest. Unfortunately, it is the family's traditional respect of the patriarch's right to do his will, that causes the household, including its material possessions, the family's financial security, reputation, and lifestyle to be consumed in the "fires" of Balthazar's calcinating idée fixe.

The passion that has started with the patriarch eventually affects all of the residents in the house at Douai: "L'idée de l'absolu avait passé partout comme un incendie."¹⁸ Balthazar even liquidates the

family's paintings, silverware, and other material assets which had been with the Claëses for generations. His maneuvers to obtain funds for his experiments erode the family wealth to such an extent and in such a way that the "fire" of the absolute dissolves the very texture of the lives of his wife and children.

In the alchemical laboratory, when a base metal is set on fire, as it burns, the ore gives the appearance of being flooded by the flame. The raging fire takes on a flowing, liquid character as fiery "waves" encase the metal. This phenomenon, referred to as a "fire-bath,"¹⁹ demonstrates an overlapping of the calcinatio and solutio operations.

The solutio, or water operation deluges and dissolves. In its negative condition, psychologically speaking, this process leads to a loss of identity.²⁰ The Claëses experience the negative solutio. First, they lose their patriarchal guide (in Balthazar), then their financial security and the heirlooms which had always given them a link with their ancestral past; next, with the dissolution of their salubrious lifestyle and eventually, after suffering the loss of a former fine reputation, the Claës family identity is engulfed within the calcinatio-solutio fire-bath.

Yet, as Edinger has observed, the "solutio leads on to the emergence of a rejuvenated new form and when this aspect is emphasized the tone is positive."²¹ Dorn remarks as well, "Dissolution is knowledge."²² The Golden Treatise of Hermes affirms "when . . . the

composition is dissolved, it is the day of restoration; then darkness and Death fly away . . . and Wisdom proceeds."²³

In order for the new to emerge, however, the old must be annihilated and the solutio experience may, in this way, become a mortificatio (death-operation) as well.²⁴ It is here, in the image of the contaminant-dissolving flames, that an overlap between the calcinatio, solutio, and mortificatio operations occurs: the fire-bath destroys.

The mortificatio, by "killing" that which is impure in the base metal, reduces the ore to its fundamental substance. This operation thereby aides in the release of the prima materia (the first step toward the formation of a nobler metal). Because it destroys the bonds which encumber the first matter, mortificatio is, like solutio and calcinatio, prerequisite to transformation.

The Claës family's illusions concerning Balthazar-the-patriarch are to be abandoned along with their lifestyle of adherence to the past (to tradition). Until the calcinatio/solutio/mortificatio process, the Claëses are not "free," for their future is psychologically bound to a (presently destructive) hierarchical/patriarchal approach which permeates their family structure and which must be forsaken if they intend to regain their familial integrity.

In order to accomplish the latter, an alchemical mortificatio takes place. Attitudes fostering an authoritarian outlook undergo extinction in order for a "healing," restorative process to begin. For the Claës family, an alchemical mortificatio occurs upon the death of Madame Claës. As the perpetuator of the hierarchical order and

the defender of patriarchal authority, Joséphine inhibits the family's progress toward the re-establishment of its reputation and wealth.

Madame Claës reveres her husband as much (perhaps more) out of love as from any sense of obligation to the customary rules of the family. Emotionally, she cannot deny him his will, while intellectually, she feels it is her duty to uphold the Claës notion of patriarchal authority as it applies both to herself and to her children. A conflict arises between heart and mind, however, when Joséphine begins to realize that, while, as a woman in love, she can freely allow Claës to devastate his family fortune, as a mother, she is obliged to protect the interests of her offspring.

Like Balthazar, Joséphine "burns," but whereas her husband is consumed by an idea, Madame Claës is dissolved by her emotions. Joséphine is experiencing intense affect because of the guilt she feels at being incapable of making Balthazar cease his infernal experimentation:

Madame Claës entra . . . dans la vie ardente de son mari. L'avenir de ses enfants, la considération de leur père furent pour elle deux mobiles aussi puissants que l'était pour Claës la gloire et la science. . . . Elle voyait s'enfuir en fumée la fortune de ses enfants, mais elle sauvait la vie de leur père: n'était-ce pas son premier devoir de le rendre heureux? . . . Faible et sans défense contre les terribles prostrations de la pensée, cette femme succombait sous ces alternatives d'espoir et de désespérance qui, pour elle, s'alourdissaient des inquiétudes de la femme aimante et des anxiétés de la mère tremblant pour sa famille.²⁵

Joséphine is caught between her love for Balthazar and her affection for and sense of duty toward her children.

Finally, after enduring great strain, Madame Claës succumbs to the violence of her emotions, and her death, an alchemical mortificatio in "fire," releases the family from its bondage to Balthazar's mania; with the end of Joséphine's stagnating influence, the permissiveness of the others toward their father's dissolution of the Claës heritage will soon come to an end. Dying along with her, Joséphine's uxorious attitude toward her husband is gradually forsaken by her children. No longer bound to traditionally rigid ways, the Claësés are free to develop a new and family-saving outlook.

Without the guidance of mother or father, unformed and highly malleable, the family identity is in a state of flux of "pure potentiality," akin to prime matter.²⁶ The household, ready to create a new tradition and set of values, has been reduced to its fundamental substance, its prima materia: for the Claësés this is their sheer will to endure (as a family).

But the Claës strength and desire to survive are not enough; they must be accompanied by awareness, that is, a consciousness of how to go about rebuilding the family structure and identity. As Balzac has noted, patience and awareness are the hallmarks of the Flemish (therefore, the Claës) character ("Le caractère flamand est dans ces deux mots, patience et conscience."²⁷) While endurance and steadfast effort, the marks of patience, are traits of the family as a whole, Balthazar included (he never gives up his quest for the absolute), conscience in the sense of "insight" (the necessary com-

plement to perseverance is particularly striking in Marguerite (the eldest of the children) and makes her the savior of the family.

The source of the Claës "consciousness," Marguerite combines the courage of her ancestors with the acute realization that Balthazar will surely ruin the family if his activities are left unchecked. Moreover, this eldest offspring contains her own "fire," an aetherial flame, of a spiritual nature, which in alchemical parlance would be considered akin to a Mercurial fire, making Marguerite a Mercurial figure.

Mercurius, or "the spiritus mercurialis," represented "the soul . . . of matter freed from its fetters."²⁸ It also was the "scintilla, the little soul-spark"²⁹ and "the spirit in matter."³⁰ Mercurius symbolizes matter, prime matter, but in its most aetherial, volatile state.

Like the Mercurial essence, Marguerite represents the Claës prima materia (strength, courage, patience, etc.) freed from its bondage to tradition and wedded to a spiritual fire (i.e., awareness, consciousness, insight). As such, she reflects "none other than the first, immediate, and inward determination of the Divine Spirit."³¹ Marguerite manifests consciousness of the family situation united with the strength of character to remedy the problem of the Claës'es'. She has the perseverance to accomplish her goal and the power of insight to envision what steps must be taken.

For the alchemist, Mercurius was also a "medium of conjunction,"³² a mediator between opposing forces. Like Mercurius, Marguerite holds the middle position between the old order of the patriarchal authority and the new, more democratic family structure which she is about to be instrumental in creating.

When her mother dies, Marguerite's awareness of her task emerges quite suddenly, but intensely, nevertheless. It is ironic that in death Madame Claës does more than she could in life to stop the onslaught of her husband's idée fixe. Because of her mother's demise and the pain she feels at her loss, Marguerite is forced to focus upon the cause of the tragedy; she finds a natural enemy in Balthazar who quickly becomes conscious of his standing in her eyes:

Balthazar et Marguerite immobiles, elle au chevet, lui au pied du lit, ne pouvaient croire à la mort de cette femme dont toutes les vertus et l'inépuisable tendresse n'étaient connues que d'eux. Le père et la fille échangèrent un regard pesant de pensées: la fille jugeait son père, le père tremblait déjà de trouver dans sa fille l'instrument d'une vengeance.³³

The accusatory look that Marguerite casts in Balthazar's direction marks the advent of an alchemical separatio movement. As the Emerald Tablet explains: "Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the dense, gently and with great ingenuity."³⁴ Edinger has thus interpreted the separatio movement psychologically from these remarks: "the result of separatio by division into two is awareness of the opposites. This is a crucial feature of emerging consciousness."³⁵

In Marguerite's vengeful glance, she communicates her independence from any sense of obligation to further condone her father's actions, as well as her burgeoning resolve to oppose Balthazar's pursuit of the absolute. Her insight and objectivity, here manifested, will guide her in the transition which she is to effect and which will lead the Claës family into a new era.

Marguerite carries out her tacit and implied threat by countering her father's will. At first, she manifests her opposition with the request that he stop his experimentations, next, through intense confrontation, conflict, and argument, and finally, in action. When the family's funds are almost exhausted, Marguerite, by virtue of an agreement previously arrived at with her father, is given the authority to undertake the restoration of the household. As she believes Balthazar must cease his search for the absolute, her first act is meant to stop him in the only way she knows how: she exiles her father from his beloved house in Douai. This action signals a definitive separatio movement, for the family is thereupon physically separated from Balthazar (who in turn is severed from his patriarchal authority); the father's exile constitutes a concrete, phenomenological parallel to the emotional and psychological separation which Marguerite has felt since her mother's death.

Knapp writes of the alchemical separatio that it "requires the separation of the whole into its component parts."³⁶ She further states: "At this stage the undifferentiated becomes differentiated. The process of evaluation and discrimination is used to face problems."³⁷

By virtue of Balthazar's absence, the flames of the calcinatio are banked and the family experiences a "cooling off" period, not unlike the cooling of the prima materia after its separation from the burning ore. During this separatio process whereby the family has undergone a division of patriarch from offspring, of "fire" from prima materia, it is now time to assay the quality of what has endured the ordeal and, hopefully, to arrive at a solution to the problems facing the Claës household.

There is an alchemical dictum which states: "Sow your gold in white foliated earth." Edinger explains:

White earth corresponds to the ask which has survived calcinatio. It is a contradiction because earth is typically black . . . in alchemy, there arose the symbolic image of white earth, a purified materiality principle. Psychologically this means the possibility of a new and purified attitude toward materiality. It means the discovery of the transpersonal value of the ego.³⁸

The Claës patience and fortitude have survived calcinatio. This "white, foliated earth," will have the "seeds"/"gold" of Marguerite's insight "scattered" throughout it (i.e., in the minds of the family members, in their values and attitudes), as the Mercurial scintillae are dispersed throughout the world-soul ("There be . . . Scintillae Animae Mundi igneae, Luminis nimirum Naturae, fiery sparks of the world soul, i.e., of the light of nature . . . dispersed or sprinkled in and throughout the structure of the great world into all fruits of the elements everywhere.")³⁹ Marguerite will be the major influence on the family's thinking as it moves toward the renewal of

its identity through active reconstruction of its ego image.

The goal of the alchemical opus is the "embodying of the Spirit,"⁴⁰ or, in other words, to concretely realize a spiritual/psychological essence. Another term used by the alchemist to express this phenomenon is the "fixation of the volatile."⁴¹ It is the coagulatio operation which achieves the goal of consolidating the various elements into a form through which the spirit within the materia may be revealed, Coagulatio being the operation pertaining to "earth," that which is coagulated is part of concrete reality; it has become fixed in a particular shape, incarnated.⁴²

After insight and objectivity toward one's situation have been achieved, it is next necessary to reformulate a suitable approach to living. In the concretization of new attitudes and values, the renewed consciousness shines through and the "spirit" (i.e., consciousness) has been "embodied" (made manifest) in a recrystallized philosophy and in productive and fruitful action: a new ego-identity has been formed, coagulated.

During Balthazar's absence, the alchemical coagulatio occurs in the Claës household: the Claëses concretize a new forward-looking point of view. This "embodiment of the spirit" is constituted by a series of actions taken on the part of Marguerite, which, while they restore the Claës wealth and sense of well-being, they also redefine the family structure.

First, Marguerite uses some shrewd business acumen to restore

wealth to the household. She divides up the lands remaining to the Claëses and creates farms on the salvaged plots. From this procedure, she derives a satisfactory family income.

Next, she marries her sister to their cousin, the notary, Pierquin. Joséphine would never have sanctioned such a maneuver for she found Pierquin to be too self-centered. Necessity dictates, however, and Marguerite decides that the well-established and level-headed notary is to become the husband of Félicie. By this marriage, Marguerite secures financial stability for her sister and another good business mind enters the family. Félicie is very fond of Pierquin and is thrilled to be marrying him. Marguerite feels that the notary, essentially a good man, will become a better person under his new wife's influence, as she tells Félicie: "Peut-être ta chère âme changera-t-elle un peu la nature du cousin, il est égoïste, intéressé, mais c'est un honnête homme. . . ."43

As the new family structure continues to evolve, Gabriel, the eldest of the two sons of Joséphine and Balthazar, contributes his accomplishments to the Claës image. He has a vocation, having become a successful engineer. No longer is the man of the family allowed to stagnate as Balthazar had done, thereby increasing the possibility that some type of obsession would develop. Gabriel has an active, lucrative career and the beginning of a fine reputation upon which to start re-establishing the Claës family wealth and good name.

The youngest member of the group, Jean-Balthazar, now a successful student, will, it is expected, do his share to augment the family's

sense of security: "'Hé!" dit Félicie, 'nos frères nous feront une fortune. Jean est toujours le premier dans sa classe.'"44 Although this statement is made good-naturedly, it is nevertheless assumed that the brothers will devote a portion of their life's work to the worthy task of restoring the family position.

What is being "coagulated" is a much more democratic family whose attentions are aimed at the creation of a lifestyle to which everyone contributes in his or her own way.

In four years, Balthazar is permitted to return to his home in Douai, the family receiving him with great joy. The restoration of the household has been accomplished. Everyone is together once again; even several of the family's cherished paintings have been repurchased and returned to their former places. The transformation appears to be complete: the best of the old is retained and mingles with the new Claës outlook.

Upon the happy occasion of Balthazar's homecoming, a diamond, wrought by accident, is found in the laboratory. Although he tries to stay away from his experimentations, as a result of the discovery of the diamond, Claës succumbs once again to the lure of the absolute.

When Marguerite is compelled to travel to Spain in order to assist her husband, Emmanuel de Solis, in settling some questions concerning his estates, the "calcination" at the house in Douai recommences, becoming more intense than ever. Marguerite returns to find the house again divested of its trappings.

In a few days she restores the home, but this time the house reflects a different vision: "Marguerite paya les dettes de son père, et rendit, en quelques jours, à la maison Claës une splendeur moderne qui devait écarter toute idée de décadence."⁴⁵ The final calcinatio is followed by the swift re-establishment (re-coagulatio) of a totally new decor; this approach to restoration indicates a willingness to leave the accouterments of the former lifestyle to their places: in the past. By no longer seeking to buy their hier-looms back, there exists a subtle declaration that the true legacy of the Claës family is immaterial. The erstwhile possessions no longer form a part of the family's present identity and, in being "dissolved" in the final "conflagration," they will remain a portion of the past, with the other "débris": a new image is necessary to reflect a new order.

Still aflame with the intensity of his ideas, Balthazar himself undergoes mortificatio: death through calcination. Balthazar is the agent of the entire calcinatio process that the Claës family has endured and, as one alchemical text says of such agents, "calcinatio can take place only by means of the inward heat of the body."⁴⁶ Edinger has interpreted this as meaning that the substance causes calcination by way of "its own heat, by its own tendency to self-calcinatio."⁴⁷ Balthazar is, in the end, consumed by his own passion, his own psychological fire. His death is the last step (as Joséphine's was the first) in the "killing" of the components of the old family

order, the patriarchal style.

At the moment of death, Balthazar seems to believe that he has found the absolute. Whatever it is that he thinks he has discovered, the reader is not privy to the information. But, if anything is an "absolute" where the Claës are concerned, it is the patience and conscientiousness with which they have faced their problem with Balthazar and because of which the family has built a new future out of what would appear to be an identity reduced to ashes.

In physical (i.e., material) terms, the Claës family is exemplified by the house at Douai. A sturdy bulwark and stalwart fortress, La Maison Claës has survived the ordeal by fire. It is not unlikely that this structure, having stood for centuries past, will prevail for generations to come. As a testimony to strength and endurance, it reflects the spiritual essence of those dwelling within.

NOTES

¹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978), 17.

²Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 162.

³Burckhardt, p. 139.

⁴Paracelsus, "Focus," Parabola, 3, No. 3 (August 1978), p. 3.

⁵Burckhardt, p. 11.

⁶Honoré de Balzac, La Recherche de l'Absolu, (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 19.

⁷Balzac, p. 28.

⁸Ibid., p. 30.

⁹loc. cit.

¹⁰loc. cit.

¹¹Ibid., p. 28.

¹²Ibid., p. 31

¹³Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁴Edward Edinger "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio," Quadrant, 12, No. 1 (1979), p. 39.

¹⁵Burckhardt, p. 97.

¹⁶Burckhardt, p. 101.

¹⁷Balzac, pp. 60-61.

¹⁸Balzac, p. 292.

¹⁹Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," p. 33.

²⁰Bettina L. Knapp, Theatre and Alchemy, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), p. 11.

²¹Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: III. Solutio," Quadrant, 11, No. 2 (1978), p. 67.

- ²²Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C.Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 271.
- ²³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: III. Solutio," p. 67.
- ²⁴loc. cit.
- ²⁵Balzac, pp. 135-137.
- ²⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," p. 13.
- ²⁷Balzac, p. 22.
- ²⁸Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 491.
- ²⁹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 48.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 491.
- ³¹Burckhardt, p. 111.
- ³²Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 461.
- ³³Balzac, p. 176.
- ³⁴Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VII. Separatio," p. 46.
- ³⁵loc. cit.
- ³⁶Knapp, p. 11.
- ³⁷loc. cit.
- ³⁸Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio," p. 41.
- ³⁹Carl G. Jung, On the Nature of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 101-102.
- ⁴⁰Burckhardt, p. 189.
- ⁴¹loc. cit.
- ⁴²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio," p. 25.
- ⁴³Balzac, p. 262.
- ⁴⁴Balzac, p. 225.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 300.

⁴⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," p. 36.

⁴⁷loc. cit.

CHAPTER NINE

SUBLIMATIO: LOUIS LAMBERT

Oh for wings, devouring distance: I want
to see, to admire, I want to know love,
rapture, the fire of an embrace, I want
life in all its grandeur and richness.
But my earth-bound body drags me down.

Hector Berlioz, Mémoires

Louis Lambert recounts the tale of a young intellectual prodigy in isolation. Unable to communicate his ideas to others or to translate his thoughts into actions, Louis Lambert's abstractions remain a part of his own visionary climes, neitherto enrich the resources of human knowledge nor to ameliorate the condition of humankind. During the course of the novel, Louis' separation from external reality becomes continuously more acute until he finally succumbs to mental illness. The path of Lambert's developing psychological dissociation can be charted within the context of alchemy, for, at the novel's end, in the figure of the distracted and catatonic Louis Lambert, the results of the alchemical sublimatio process are in evidence.

Theoretically speaking, the goal of the sublimation operation was to transform certain components of the prima materia into air in an effort to obtain a more purified form of the substance under study. In order to do this, the material was placed in a retort and heated until all the volatile elements had evaporated from it (i.e., from the prime matter). The distillate, a vapor at the top of the alembic, was now separated from the sooty residue remaining at the bottom of the testing glass. In laboratory terms, highly volatile quicksilver was being extracted from a base metal.

But in the image of the inert and leftover materia, bereft of its mercurial essence, a parallel with the "abandoned" body of Louis Lambert can be seen. In contrast to this vestige of humanity, Louis' mind, swelling with questions, thoughts, ideas and abstractions, is akin to the expanding molecules of the distillate at the top of the retort. His inward being having forsaken its outward shell, Louis Lambert remains separated in mind and body.

Lambert's intellectual life can be divided into four segments, each serving as a milestone outlining the successive transformations which comprise his psychological sublimatio.

As a child, living at first with his parents and later with an uncle, Louis enjoys great freedom to study only that which he wishes to learn. Moreover, this time is largely his own.

When later, as an adolescent he is enrolled in the College of Vendôme, Louis sorely misses the unconfining atmosphere of his childhood days. In this new environment, Louis is subjected to rules and regulations, an existence to which he is quite unaccustomed and which is contrary to everything he has known.

Upon leaving Vendôme, Lambert spends some time in Paris where he becomes extremely disillusioned at seeing what he deems the lack of progress in science, politics, government, economics, diplomacy, etc.. He observes that although humankind is constantly renewing and re-evaluating its philosophies, the new systems which evolve are unresponsive to the needs of the people and are consequently as ineffective as the programs which they replace. In a letter to his uncle he concludes:

'Au spectacle de cette société sans cesse tourmentée dans ses bases comme dans ses effets, dans ses causes comme dans son action, chez laquelle la philanthropie est une magnifique erreur, et le progrès un non-sens, j'ai gagné la confirmation de cette vérité, que la vie est en nous et non au-dehors . . .'¹

Accordingly, Louis rejects the outside world, considering it absurd and nonsensical, until he meets Pauline de Villenoix with whom he falls passionately in love. It appears that this turn of events will establish a link between Lambert and the external reality he has abandoned in favor of the world of the mind.

The expectation is short-lived, however, for on the eve of his wedding day, the final break occurs between Louis and the outside world. Intensely in love with and enraptured by Pauline, Lambert is overwhelmed by affect. Extreme emotional turbulence engenders a mental breakdown which leaves Louis in a state of catatonia.

Before examining Louis Lambert's life from an alchemical perspective, a few preliminary remarks are necessary in order to distinguish the nature of the sublimatio in alchemy from the term, sublimation, as it was understood by Freud and as it is most frequently comprehended.

For the alchemist, the sublimation experience was symbolized in images of flying and upward movement for sublimation is the operation corresponding to the element air.² Edinger has expressed sublimatio in psychological terms by saying that it "corresponds to a way of dealing with a concrete problem. One gets 'above' it by seeing it objectively. We abstract a general meaning from it and see it as a particular example of a larger issue."³

Jung states of this operation:

Sublimatio is part of the royal art where the true gold is made. Of this Freud knows nothing, worse still, he barricades all the paths that could lead to the true sublimatio. This is just about the opposite of what Freud understands by sublimation. It is not a voluntary and forcible channeling of instinct into a spurious field of application, but an alchymical transformation 4 for which fire and the black prima materia are needed . . .

For Freud, sublimation constituted the re-directing of instinctual impulses into socially useful tasks.⁵ The distinction here is that the alchemical sublimatio represents the extraction or bringing to conscious awareness of timeless, eternally valuable concepts, ideas, imagery, hidden deep within the psyche, whereas Freud's "sublimation" seeks not to draw out psychological contents, but to direct those that do surface into paths that are agreeable to the needs and expectations of a specific society within an historical (i.e., given) time and place.

Matter which is sublimated is converted from concrete to refined form. Hammering, pulverizing, or grinding a material, each treatment can bring about the desired result: a smooth powder. One alchemical text notes: "If you do not make the bodies subtle, so that they may be impalpable to touch, you will not gain your end. If they have not been ground, repeat your operation, and see that they are ground and subtilized."⁶ This is one version of sublimatio for "Very fine powder approaches gas in its consistency."⁷

In Louis Lambert, words are the initial object of sublimation. They are examined minutely ("ground down" and "subtilized") by the child-genius, Louis. The narrator in the novel, a school friend of

Lambert, relates the nature of the young prodigy's meditations:

"L'analyse d'un mot, sa physionomie, son histoire étaient pour Lambert l'occasion d'une longue rêverie."⁸ Lambert is an alchemist of words. He breaks them into parts (i.e., examining their history, appearance, sonority, etc.) as the alchemist separates the elements of the prima materia. By virtue of "breaking down" words, Louis is, concurrently although undeliberately, examining, refining, and apprehending the nature of the human mind:

Souvent . . . j'ai accompli de délicieux voyages, embarqué sur un mot . . . Quel beau livre ne composerait-on pas en racontant la vie et les aventures d'un mot? Sans doute il a reçu diverses impressions des événements auxquelles il a servi selon les lieux, il a réveillé des idées différentes . . . La plupart des mots ne sont-ils pas teints de l'idée qu'ils représentent extérieurement? à quel génie sont-ils dus? L'assemblage des lettres, leurs formes, la figure qu'elles donnent à un mot, dessinent exactement, suivant le caractère de chaque peuple, des êtres inconnus dont le souvenir est en nous.⁹

To extract a word's essence, Louis must draw upon the contents of his psyche; through intense contemplation, Louis' mind naturally becomes a keener and more perfectly honed instrument. Starting with an examination of words and their origins has led Lambert to the "subtilization" of both his thoughts and mental processes.

Similarly, in the alchemical laboratory, psyche and prima materia were being studied at the same time, for, in describing the operations which the prime matter was undergoing, the alchemists were projecting their own psychisms upon the object of the examination. As Louis Lambert "sublimates" a word-image, his mind is simultaneously being transformed.

Enveloped within a world of words, thoughts, concepts, and ideas, Lambert dwells in a realm apart from other humans. Unfortunately, Louis never measures the validity of his conclusions by standards from the outside world. The narrator remarks that "Louis était à la hauteur de tout."¹⁰ Psychologically speaking:

Sublimatio is an ascent that raises one above the confining entanglements of immediate, earthly existence and its concrete, personal particulars. The higher one goes, the grander and more comprehensive is his perspective, but also the more remote he becomes from actual life and the less able he will be to have an effect on what he perceives. He becomes a magnificent but impotent spectator.¹¹

Louis' ever-increasing detachment from reality as well as his inability to relate (his ideas) to the world around him are put into focus during the second phase of this story when, at the College of Vendôme, he becomes separated from every aspect of his environment.

Louis' adolescence is characterized by the alchemical separatio and sublimatio operations. The relationship between the two processes has been explained: "One aspect of sublimatio overlaps with separatio symbolism, i.e., its use as an extraction procedure."¹² At the College of Vendôme, when he finds himself alienated (i.e., separated) from the other students, the schoolmasters, and the surroundings in general, Louis is in the midst of the sublimatio experience, the outcome or "distillate" of which will be a particular attitude about human existence and his (Lambert's) relationship to it.

The nature of the separatio that Louis undergoes during this period of his life and which coincides with the sublimatio process, has three aspects: social, psychological, and philosophical.

Lambert becomes a social outcast at Vendôme because he fails to fit into the mold prescribed for the students of his particular school. Having formerly enjoyed the freedom to pursue his studies in whatever way suited him at the college, Louis is unhappily confined to a rigorous homework and classroom schedule:

Accoutumé au grand air, à l'indépendance d'une éducation laissé au hasard, caressé par les tendres soins d'un veillard qui le chérissait, habitué à penser sous le soleil, il lui fut bien difficile de se plier à la règle du collège, de marcher dans le rang, de vivre entre les quatre murs d'une salle où quatre-vingts jeunes gens étaient silencieux, assis sur un banc de bois, chacun devant son pupitre. Ses sens possédaient une perfection qui leur donnait une exquise de délicatesse, et tout souffrait chez lui de cette vie en commun. . . . La privation de l'air pur et parfumé des campagnes dans lequel il avait jusqu'alors vécu, le changement de ses habitudes, la discipline, tout contrista Lambert.¹³

Moreover, Louis reacts to his situation with such disdain and disobedience that he is subjected to a great deal of punishment from the schoolmasters and eventually is shunned by the other students to whom he seems altogether indolent. The narrator, Lambert's sole companion at the school, describes their situation:

Nos maîtres nous méprisèrent, et nous tombâmes également dans le plus affreux discrédit auprès de nos camarades. . . . Cette double mésestime, injuste chez les Pères, était un sentiment naturel chez nos condisciples. Nous ne savions ni jouer à la balle, ni courir, ni monter sur les échasses. Aux jours d'ammistie, ou quand par hasard nous obtenions un instant de liberté, nous ne partagions aucun des plaisirs à la mode dans le collège. Etrangers aux jouissances de nos camarades, nous restions seuls, mélancoliquement assis sous quelque arbre de la cour.¹⁴

Dismayed by his predicament, Lambert seeks refuge in the world of the mind. He finds that "tout le contraignit d'abandonner son

enveloppe aux mille tyrannies du collège. Semblable aux martyrs qui souriaient au milieu des supplices, il se réfugia dans les ciex que lui entrouvait sa pensée."¹⁵ Lambert's separation thereby becomes psychological as well as social.

Louis' reflections regarding human nature become the issue ("distillate") of the alienation he experiences at Vendôme. As a result of his rupture with the academic community, Louis' orientation changes. His separation from external reality, already the natural result of his temperament and sensitivity, becomes a philosophical aim. His goal being the sublimation (i.e., refinement) of the intellect, Lambert further wishes to completely separate his psyche (or "interior being," as he terms it) from its outer encasement (the body).

Influenced by readings from the Scriptures, as well as by Boehm and Swedenborg, Lambert believed that human beings were comprised of two natures, one inward and the other, outward:

Il y aurait en nous deux créatures distinctes . . . l'ange serait l'individu chez lequel l'être intérieur réussit à triompher de l'être extérieur. Un homme veut-il obéir à sa vocation d'ange, dès que la pensée lui démontre sa double existence, il doit tendre à nourrir l'exquise nature de l'ange qui est en lui. . . . s'il substante son intérieur des essences qui lui sont propres, l'âme l'emporte sur la matière et tâche de s'en séparer.¹⁶

Louis felt that the perfection of his thought processes would strengthen the inner angelic being, an entity which drew its sustenance from the psyche. Once nourished upon the forces of the intellect, the inward and divine essence would then release itself from its imprisonment within the body.

The concentration of his mental powers had already enabled Lambert (by the age of 12) to lose consciousness of his physical being and to imagine in detail, for example, a scene about which he was reading:

'En lisant le récit de la bataille d'Austerlitz . . .
j'en ai vu tous les incidents. Les volées de canon, les
cris des combattants retentissaient mes oreilles et
m'agitaient les entrailles; je sentais la poudre,
j'admirais la plane où se heurtaient des nations armées,
come si j'eusse ete sur la hauteur du Santon. Ce
spectacle me semblait effrayant comme une page de l'Apo-
calypse.'¹⁷

Lambert wished to further his intellectual abilities so that his inner being might be freed from the body and travel through space. He could then sojourn anywhere with his mind alone. Louis' hopes in this direction increased when he had a déjà vu experience. Upon visiting Rochambeau castle during a school outing, Louis recognized the edifice as having already appeared in one of his dreams. Acknowledging that many people have witnessed similar phenomena, he nevertheless hoped that with his extraordinary mental abilities, he would be able to duplicate such an extraordinary occurrence.

Becoming continually more engrossed in his speculations and contemplations, it is not surprising to find that, upon leaving Vendôme, Louis again feels a stranger to his environment, this time, in Paris. Several letters written to his uncle at this time reveal Louis' deep distaste for this city where "le point de départ en tout est l'argent"¹⁸ and where he sees no progress in all the machinations of society. He feels that new systems in government, economy, foreign

policy, etc., are no better than the so-called out-dated ones, and, consequently, the actions of society merely amount to a frenzied danse macabre, leading nowhere.

Louis does not believe that human existence is purposeless; it only seems that way because of the lack of rapport between humankind and God. He tells his uncle: "L'action du monde n'est pas absurde, elle aboutit à une fin, et cette fin ne doit pas être une société constituée come l'est la nôtre. Il se rencontre une terrible lacune entre nous et le ciel."¹⁹ Lambert also recognizes that while he is poorly suited to live in the world as he sees it ("Je préfère la pensée à l'action, une idée à une affaire, la contemplation au mouvement"²⁰), he may yet be able to contribute to humankind by establishing the needed rapprochement between the telluric and the divine: "Ma pensée est de déterminer les rapports réels qui peuvent exister entre l'homme et Dieu. N'est-ce pas une nécessité de l'époque?"²¹ In undertaking this quest, Louis knows he is destined to dwell apart from other humans and from external reality, for the society he sees before him demands instant, tangible results to all effort and is impatient and skeptical when slow, arduous development is called for: "Ici tout doit avoir un résultat immédiat, réel; l'on s'y moque des essais d'abord infructueux qui peuvent mener aux plus grandes découvertes, et l'on n'y estime pas cette étude constante et profonde qui veut une longue concentration des forces."²² Consequently, to avoid being at odds with those he wishes to save, Louis must, of necessity, remove himself from their environs.

The opinions of society notwithstanding, Lambert expects that, by nourishing "l'exquise nature de l'ange qui est en lui,"²³ he will discover the mysterious quality which links the human to the Almighty; he aspires to distinguish the divine within the human. Beginning with himself and his own experience, Louis wishes to determine how to extricate the "sublime essence" of the angelic, inner being from its earth-bound shell. Likewise, the alchemist sought to extract the mercurial essence from the prima materia during the sublimatio operation.

During the third portion of his life, Lambert finds the spiritual purity (the divine within the human) for which he has been searching when he makes the acquaintance of Pauline de Villenoix: "Aussitôt que Lambert aperçut mademoiselle de Villenoix, il devina l'ange sous cette forme."²⁴ Heretofore, external (spatio-temporal) reality has held little attraction for Louis. Indeed, since childhood he has always recreated the outside world to suit his own tastes:

'Quand je le veux . . . je tire un voile sur mes yeux.
Soudain je rentre en moi-même, et j'y trouve une chambre
noire où les accidents de la nature viennent se reproduire
sous une forme plus pure que la forme sous laquelle ils
sont d'abord apparus à mes sens extérieurs.'²⁵

However, in Pauline, Louis encounters the concretization of an ideal which draws him back, at least temporarily, toward a more temporally oriented existence.

Louis' relationship with Pauline combines three alchemical processes, each of which is associated with the sublimatio operation: coagulatio, solutio, and calcinatio.

Coagulatio is the process by which a materia (later to be sublimated) is concretized, made solid; it is, for this reason, the procedure which corresponds to the element "earth."²⁶ In alchemy, "coagulatio is the process which turns something into earth."²⁷

Professor Knapp, in Theatre and Alchemy, has written that coagulatio occurs when "an adaptability between unconscious and conscious contents is experienced."²⁸ In the same vein, Edinger explains that dream images and the figures of active imagination, moods, and affects which whirl about in the psyche are coagulated when they are projected onto some form that is both visible and tangible.²⁹

When he falls in love with Pauline, Louis undergoes the alchemical coagulatio. For Lambert, Mademoiselle de Villenoix incarnates all that is spiritual and celestial. He writes: ". . . rien n'est plus beau que ton visage où se réfléchit ton âme divine,"³⁰ ". . . tu es une création d'une sphère plus élevée que celle où je vis . . . ," ". . . tu es un ange-femme."³¹ The object of his profound love, Pauline charms Lambert not only with her spiritual grace, but also with her physical beauty. As the embodiment of terrestrial and heavenly excellence, Pauline represents the coagulation or concretization of Louis' ideal of perfection.

Alchemically speaking, Pauline not only signifies "earth," she corresponds to "water" as well, for water can be viewed as an enveloping and cleansing factor; it is as an agent leading to his purification that Louis sees Pauline.

Formerly in lonely isolation, Lambert, after falling in love, experiences the desire for quite the opposite sensation: he wants to become totally absorbed within the existence of Pauline. He writes: " . . . je voudrais me glisser dans tous les actes de ta vie, être la substance même des tes pensées, je voudrais être toi-même."³² His preoccupation with Mademoiselle de Villenoix, whose charms fill his conscious hours (. . . des jouissances ineffables, des heures entières pleines de méditations voluptueuses en me rappelant un seul de tes gestes, ou l'accent d'une phrase"),³³ is akin to the alchemical solutio. Associated with the element water, the solutio operation signifies purification. The prima materia is washed in liquid in order to cleanse it of impurities. Louis believes that he is impure (compared with Pauline) and strives to become "cleansed" by his involvement with her. To Louis, Pauline is the means of his spiritual refinement and, as such, she represents an agent of the solutio process.

Following its purification, the materia is heated in order that the volatile elements within it may change into vapor or sublimate. This procedure, associated with the element, fire, is called calcinatio.

Louis is being calcined: he is burning in the flames of intense affect. Passionately in love with Pauline, Lambert, like the prime matter heated within the reflux flask, is in a continual state of calcinatio:

Chaque plaisir est comme une flèche ardente, il me perce et me brûle! Mon imagination te fait passer devant mes yeux ravis, éblouis, sous les innombrables et capricieuses figures qu'affecte la volupté. Enfin, toute notre vie est là, devant moi, avec ses torrents ses repos, ses joies; elle bouillonne, elle s'étale, elle dort; puis elle se réveille jeune, fraîche. . . . Peut-on vivre longtemps en dévorant ainsi sa vie à toute heure?³⁴

Lambert is being consumed by the flames of desire, but he is also a victim of, as he puts it, "la violence de mes pensées."³⁵ He contemplates everything in depth, even love. He meditates upon this new experience to the point of distraction when, overwhelmed by his visions, emotionally and intellectually "heated" to the extreme, Louis undergoes dissociation. Part of his mind breaks its connection with the body. Now, free to expand to infinity, Lambert's psyche is utterly engaged in the alchemical sublimatio.

During his final days, Louis receives a visit from his school friend (the narrator) who finds him ensconced in a darkened room and attended by the ever-faithful Pauline. Although Lambert is not yet dead, he gives the impression of a living corpse dwelling within a tomblike chamber:

. . . déjà ridé, déjà blanchi, enfin déjà plus de lumière dans ses yeux, devenus vitreux comme ceux d'un aveugle. Tous ses traits semblaient tirés par une convulsion vers le haut de sa tête. . . . C'était un débris arraché à la tombe, une espèce de conquête faite par la vie sur la mort, ou par la mort sur la vie.³⁶

Shortly after this visit, Louis dies, at 28, already an old man.

Residue remains at the bottom of the alchemist's alembic after the volatile substance within the prima materia has evaporated, departed. Mortificatio, also associated with sublimatio, represents the death or "killing" of an inferior material in an effort to transform its essence

into a superior form. In the case of Louis Lambert, his body, tied to the terrestrial (and for Louis, inferior) realm, was too weak to withstand the intensity of the genius' spiritual and psychological conflagration and underwent mortificatio.

On the other hand, Louis' psychological entity has "sublimated," separated itself from its earthly shell. But it is not only Lambert's inner identity that, once disengaged from its envelope, undergoes sublimatio. The products of Louis' mind, his thoughts and ideas are themselves refined to such an extent that they are comprehensible only to "certains esprits habitués à se pencher sur le bord des abîmes, dans l'espérance d'en apercevoir le fond."³⁷ Lambert's conclusions about the human condition are so purified, and abstract in nature, that they are similar to the vaporized substance that collects at the top of the test tube: both thought and gaseous material are, in their sublimated state, ungraspable.

Louis had hoped to determine "les rapports réels qui peuvent exister entre l'homme et Dieu."³⁸ He was greatly interested in reaching an understanding of the Divine Principle in the human being which would link humankind to God. Lambert felt that his discovery would bring a solution to the problem of the "terrible lacune entre nous et le ciel."³⁹

Lambert's legacy, a collection of highly abstract ideas, (which appears at the end of the novel), is hardly the realization of his goal. Louis was able to accomplish only the first portion of his

project; he was an alchemist who performed only the groundwork of the opus.

In alchemy, the initial steps of the work instruct the adept to refine the inferior substance, or to "spiritualize the body."⁴⁰ Sublimation is the process of spiritualizing the body, and it is the action achieved by Lambert. The second half of the alchemical task, the part leading to the "embodying of the spirit"⁴¹ is left unfinished.

Alchemically, the evaporated and refined substance had to be cooled down and re-coagulated, for in its solid state it would manifest a higher level of purity. Spiritually/Psychologically, an "inferior" or "base" attitude (i.e., one that is contaminated with unrealistic ego expectations, for example) becomes refined when the individual (as from a viewpoint on high) is able to objectively evaluate a situation.⁴² Ideally, the individual will then integrate his conclusions and his or her "re-solidified" point of view into daily living. The first movement (alchemically) is one of ascent, in that a judgment is divested of its contamination with "inferior," earth-bound considerations, while the second half of the opus represents a descent, or the re-introduction of the original prima materia (i.e., attitude) which is now purified and transformed.

Louis' genius contained a tragic flaw: although enabling him to formulate conclusions, it did not allow him to put his knowledge to practical use. Lambert was impelled to theorize ad infinitum. The ideas he left behind are too abstruse to shed significant light in

the direction of those who live in the world of the here-and-now. Perhaps, had he been able to hypothesize in more down-to-earth terms, Louis' achievement would have been considerable.

Nevertheless, within the unearthly quality of Louis Lambert, in the separating of his psyche from his physical existence (body and spatio-temporal reality), and, finally, in the eventual unchecked expansion of his consciousness, one finds the essence of the alchemical sublimatio. In exploring the vast reaches of his imagination, Lambert becomes increasingly disengaged from earthy and personal reality. An uncontrollable dynamism, his brilliance transcends the boundaries of the present and Louis' only reminder of the earthly realm is his miserable body, which he prefers to ignore.

In conclusion, Lambert approached everything in the same manner: he "sublimated" everything with which he came into contact. He analyzed, refined, and purified all experience, even love. Louis sought a world of perfection that was attainable only in the mind. Lambert's tragic quest for the ideal as well as his genius destined him to be separate from other human beings: he harbored a lifelong desire to escape the constraints of the outside world, and he suffered greatly from being physically bound to external reality. Louis' own words best describe his situation: ". . . je suis, comme l'ange exilé, conservant le sentiment des délices célestes, mais sans cesse attaché dans un monde de douleur . . ."43

"'A Dieu son génie!'"44

NOTES

- ¹Honoré de Balzac, Louis Lambert, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 116.
- ²Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," Quadrant, 13, No. 1 (1980), pp. 57, 59.
- ³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 58.
- ⁴loc. cit.
- ⁵Calvin Hall, A Primer of Freudian Psychology, (New York: Ne American Library, 1954). p. 83.
- ⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: Sublimatio," p. 60.
- ⁷loc. cit.
- ⁸Balzac, pp. 27-28.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 28.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 100.
- ¹¹Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 58.
- ¹²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 59.
- ¹³Balzac, pp. 51-52.
- ¹⁴Balzac, p. 60.
- ¹⁵loc. cit.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 65.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 32.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 109.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 118.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 110.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 118.
- ²²Ibid., p. 111.
- ²³Balzac, p. 65.

²⁴Balzac, p. 128.

²⁵Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio ," Quadrant, 12, No. 1 (1979), p. 25.

²⁷loc. cit.

²⁸Bettina L. Knapp, Theatre and Alchemy, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), p. 11.

²⁹Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: IV. Coagulatio ," p. 38.

³⁰Balzac, p. 143.

³²Ibid., p. 150.

³³Ibid., p. 145.

³⁴Ibid., p. 149.

³⁵loc.cit.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 162-163.

³⁷Ibid., p. 178.

³⁸Ibid., p. 118.

³⁹loc. cit.

⁴⁰Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), p. 189.

⁴¹loc. cit.

⁴²Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio ," p. 61.

⁴³Balzac, p. 132.

⁴⁴Balzac, p. 178.

CHAPTER TEN

SUBLIMATIO: SERAPHITA

Standing on what too long we bore
 With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
 We may discern - unseen before -
 A path to higher destinies.

Nor deem the irrevocable Past,
 As wholly wasted, wholly vain
 If, rising on its wrecks, at last
 To something nobler we attain.

"The Ladder of St. Augustine"
 Longfellow

An important alchemical symbol is present in Balzac's Séraphîta. It takes form in the person of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, an angel who comes to earth to transform the lives of two human beings, Minna and Wilfrid. A dual being, both male and female in nature, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs echoes the alchemical symbol Mercurius. Both Mercurius and Séraphîta purify and transform the material upon which they set to work. The activities of each lead into what in alchemy is called the experience of sublimatio.

There is little intrigue to the story which takes place in the mountains of Norway and recounts how two young people, Minna and Wilfrid, come to love each other. Its interest lies in the couple's very unusual love spawned by the angel Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs. This creature appears to each of them in a different form: to Minna the being is a strong and attractive young man with whom she immediately falls in love; for Wilfrid, Séraphîta is a seductively beautiful woman whom he desires to possess. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs discourages each of their affections and encourages them to love each other,

but, at first, Minna and Wilfrid are too enthralled with their own vision of the angel to be able to appreciate the being's advice. Later, and only after they come to better understand the nature of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, do Minna and Wilfrid fall in love and embark upon life's journey hand in hand.

The concept of a being which contains opposites is significant in alchemy as in the Hermetic tradition which fostered alchemical theory. The Kybalion, a guide to the seven principles of hermetic philosophy states "Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled."¹ Hermetic teachings reveal that although elements may seem to be diametrically opposed to one another, when seen in a broad, cosmological spectrum, they are part of a larger whole and as such not different in nature, but only in degree.² Once the polarity principle is established, it is a logical step for the student of hermeticism to envision, as did the alchemists, a figure encompassing and unifying opposites: a symbol in which man and woman, spirit and matter, the active and the passive, heat and cold, etc., are united. Mercurius, the spirit in matter, is the alchemical representation for the juncture of extremes.

The idea behind the paradox presented by Mercurius is that whether the physical or spiritual plane is being interpreted, the apparent differences between pairs of opposites is non-existent.

As stated in The Kybalion, "There is no absolute standard--all is a matter of degree. There is no place on the thermometer where heat ceases and cold begins. . . . The very terms "high" and "low," which we are compelled to use, are but poles of the same thing--the terms are relative."³ Cosmologically speaking the polarity principle represents Universal Nature and its mode of operation in which a continuous rhythm of formations and disintegrations, of generation and decay, and of birth and death creates each newly formed element, in due course, into its opposite.

In order to represent this pairing of contraries in a metaphysical fashion, the Christ-figure became the paradoxical figure of the Christians. Both human and divine, Christ took part at once in the spatio-temporal world of his disciples and the celestial realm of God, the Heavenly Father. This God-man was also considered to be androgynous. The sixteenth century alchemist, Jacob Boehme indicates Christ's male-female essence by calling Him a "virgin in mind."⁴ Boehme develops his image by explaining that "Where the 'Word' is, there is the virgin, for the 'Word' is in her."⁵ As Jung writes in Mysterium Coniunctionis, "In Boehme the virgin has the character of an anima, for 'she is given to be a companion to thee in thy soul.'"⁶ At the same time, Christ, the virgin, is also divine in wisdom and power and will be taken up to heaven by God as his "spouse."⁷

In psychological terms, the idea of a duality is evident in the juxtaposition existing between the conscious and the unconscious.

On a different plane, however, and on one more appropriate to the Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs image, Christ, Mercurius, and Universal Nature are all reflections of what Jung has termed the anima/animus feature of the human psyche: the animus being the masculine principle in woman, and the anima, the feminine principle in man. The anima/animus is believed by Jung to be contained in the first layer of the unconscious, which can and should be integrated into the conscious personality, or ego.⁸ For men and women, the anima and animus respectively represent their contrasexual elements and the projection of the anima/animus is responsible for the individual's falling in love.⁹

In Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs the functioning of the anima/animus can be seen. Séraphîta is the idealization of Wilfrid's notion of Woman, and Séraphîtüs is the personification of Minna's perfect Man. Of course the real world seldom presents individuals with the partner who will be the fulfillment of all of their fantasies, so Wilfrid and Minna must learn to integrate the contents of their unconscious, as symbolized by Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, and form realistic expectations. How this transformation of attitudes is accomplished is the story of the novel.

The angelic being influences and changes the ideas of Wilfrid and Minna. Like Universal Nature, it transforms a thing into its opposite: the apathy which Minna and Wilfrid feel for one another is transmuted into love. A Christ figure, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, half human, half divine, and an androgyne, is taken by God at the

end of the story. Finally, as an echo of the alchemical Mercurius, Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs is the mediator between the two human beings as well as the agent of their transformation. Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs is akin to Mercurius in several ways. An "Espirt caché sous une forme humaine,"¹⁰ as Minna's father Pastor Becker, terms this creature, Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs is, like Mercurius a spirit in matter.

Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs mediates between Minna and Wildrid, transforming their indifference toward each other into love. As if Minna and Wilfrid constituted the chaotic massa confusa, the prima materia before its various elements were united and integrated, the Mercurius-like Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs is the agent of change. As Dorn has written, "only through a medium can the transition take place."¹¹ Another commentator has added, "Mercurius is the medium of conjunction,"¹² and "the mediator between body and spirit."¹³ Both Mercurius and Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs have the capacity to unite opposites, male and female, spirit with body, mind with emotion; in so doing each becomes an instrument of transformation.

Androgyny is associated with Mercurius as it is with Séraphîta/Séraphîtûs. Dorn calls Mercurius "hermaphroditic."¹⁴ Venus, a symbol of love, is often identified with Mercurius in its feminine aspect; Adam is Mercurius' masculine side. The alchemist Valentinus says of Adam and Venus united in the bath: "So saith the Wise Man: Nough they be/Except the Double Mercurie!"¹⁵ As Mercurius is also referred to as the aqua permanens¹⁶ (the "perpetual water" and a divine, transformative substance), the image of Adam and Venus, united in the bath water encompasses Mercurial essence as a duality, in its capacity as an agent of change through

purification, and as a mediator between opposites. Likewise, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs combines male and female in one body, will serve to purify the attitudes of the two protagonists, Minna and Wilfrid, and, in the end, will prove to have been a powerful force in drawing the two closer together.

Another characteristic which Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs and Mercurius have in common is a protean quality. Mercurius is described as an elusive spirit, a "volatile essence,"¹⁷ which could change its shape readily. One alchemist wrote, "Mercurius is concocted by the highest sublimation."¹⁸ In general, the Mercurial quintessence is described as "the pureness floating to the top /of the alembic during the sublimatio operation/, transparent, shining, and of the colour of purest air. . . ."¹⁹ Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, is an ethereal being able to dwell only in the highest, most mountainous regions of the earth where the air is purest and most refined. He/She changes shape readily in traveling from higher to lower regions. Like Mercurius, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is an elusive creature, hard to comprehend. For Minna, he is a young man, strong and able, while for Wilfrid Séraphîta is a lovely young woman. Neither Minna nor Wilfrid sees both sides of this highly changeable creature.

There is an alchemical dictum which says "like nature rejoiceth in like nature."²⁰ In the alchemical sublimatio operation, it is the purpose of Mercurius (i.e., Quicksilver) to draw forth its own essence from the prima materia. The mercurial substance acts as a magnet would to extract quicksilver from the metal, carrying

it upwards with it, to the top of the retort. In spiritual terms, "a subtle power has been dissolved out of its coagulation in bodily consciousness and having been earth, so to say, now becomes water and air."²¹ This evaporation of the mercurial essence contained in the prima materia is called sublimation.

After the metal has been washed by the quicksilver, heated and its contents sublimated, the distilled essence is cooled down and resolidifies.²² Now it is ready once again to be applied toward the purification of yet another ore. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is representative of the mercurial quintessence in which the ores are dissolved and which draws forth their "subtle power." This angelic being is the agent for the purification of the souls of Minna and Wilfrid, for extracting their true feelings from out of their contamination with the ego, and for bringing about the spiritual sublimation (objectivity toward themselves and their sentiments regarding each other). The nature of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, being a symbol for the respective anima/animus features to be found in the unconscious, holds great attraction for Minna and Wilfrid: 'like nature rejoiceth in like nature.'

The alchemical sublimatio has several aspects. Included in its procedure are the operations solutio, calcinatio, coagulatio, separatio, and mortificatio. The imagery connoted by each of these techniques is present in Balzac's Séraphîta.

Coagulatio, or the solidification of the mercurial substance, can refer either to Mercurius, the distillate which will dissolve

and sublimate the metallic quintessence, or the metallic quintessence which is, itself, solidified within and contaminated by the prima materia (the ore upon which the operation is to be performed).

An essential aspect of sublimatio imagery resides in the idea that after the soul's contents are sublimated, they must be "resolidified." This concept is referred to in the alchemical saying: "Sublimate the body and coagulate the spirit."²³ In psychological terms, Edinger has interpreted this to mean that the objectivity of outlook which is achieved as a result of being able to view one's situation from "on high," so to speak, is only useful if the new viewpoint can be integrated into the daily routine of the individual.²⁴ As Edinger writes, "Ascent and descent are both needed."²⁵

In Séraphîta, the angelic Mercurius-figure, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs has undergone a sublimatio experience and has "descended" to earth to impart its knowledge to Minna and Wilfrid. The process of their sentimental education will constitute their spiritual sublimatio: the Mercurial essence is coagulated (has taken on form) in Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs who is extracting the living soul-substance from its coagulation in the erroneous attitudes held by Minna and Wilfrid. The distillate is drawing forth its own nature from the prima materia.

All of the various alchemical operations associated with the sublimatio are found within the novel, Séraphîta, and distributed throughout, contribute to the realization of this "air" operation.

In Part I of the work, Séraphîtüs appears to Minna and her reaction, one of utter submission to this angelic creature, is

reminiscent of the olutio operation, a pre-requisite to sublimatio.

Part II features Wilfrid's encounter with Séraphîta, and the intensity of his desire recalls the calcinatio or fire ordeal, also a necessary adjunct to the sublimation of the mercurial or soul-essence (i.e., the bringing to consciousness of unconscious feelings).

Part III and IV explain some of Balzac's ideas regarding the nature of angels (there is much on Swedenborg here) and of the relationship of God to Matter at the time of the Creation. Although much of these sections contain expository writing, a subtle evolution in the beliefs of Minna and Wilfrid does take place. A crystallization of ideas is achieved as the two protagonists come to realize that Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is, indeed, an angel, and that the nature of their love toward this creature must undergo re-evaluation as earthly passions do not define angelic love. Coagulatio, the operation which concretizes a substance, or the distilled essence derived from it, is the process involved in Parts III and IV where a solidification of attitude occurs.

Part V concerns a separation: the angel bids farewell to Minna and Wilfrid. Separatio, or the extracting of a mercurial essence from the prima materia is paralleled in this section where Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs manifests in words the differences which divide the angel from the human being and announces his/her imminent departure.

Before Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs' death (the departure formerly disclosed), he/she explains to Minna and Wilfrid that death is merely a gateway to another, nobler form of existence. Like the alchemical mortificatio, which is echoed in Part VI of the work, "death" must come to one form of being before a new shape can emerge. The angel speaks of several lives through which one must evolve in order to reach the highest level of existence. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is dying in order to be taken up into heaven in renewed form. Minna and Wilfrid, by changing their attitudes toward each other and toward earthly life and the limitation which it necessarily imposes, are also experiencing a mortificatio, in the "death" of old ideas which, like the ashes in the retort are left behind after the sublimation (i.e., distillation) of the essential substance.

Finally, Part VI brings about the actual sublimatio. Both Minna and Wilfrid undergo a spiritualization of the body in the sense that their former ideas about Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs have been altered so that they now understand their position in regard to this angelic being.

Having objectified their relationship to this numinous creature, Minna and Wilfrid have also clarified their relationship to their own unconscious which, symbolized by Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, has instructed them where to channel their love-energies (i.e., in each other's direction, outward, productively in the temporal realm in which they exist). To direct such feelings inward (i.e., toward

Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs) would not only be impractical but destructive as this would indicate a turning away from the spatio-temporal domain and an excess of introspection and an inordinate amount of preoccupation with unconscious urgings, feelings, and contents; such an imbalance between inward and outward concerns would leave the individual eminently unsuited to live in the realm of the here and now.

Sublimatio distills the mercurial essence, (useful content of the unconscious) in order for it to be applied to still other prima materia (the unconscious itself). By so doing, the essential substance (i.e., objectivity) gleaned is continuously useful to the alchemist. Likewise, in human development, the mind's ability to take stock of the human being's relationship to his/her surroundings is of value only if the ideas gained are reapplied to daily life. For Minna and Wilfrid, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs in leaving them behind (with their new-found attitudes), allows the two lovers to continue to function in the world for which they are presently intended. They are thereby enabled to apply their new outlook to the improvement and development of their human condition. First, however, the exact nature of their relationship with the angel needs clarification.

Séraphîta begins with a detailed description of the Norwegian landscape, the home of Minna and her father, Pastor Becker. Balzac sets the scene by creating the feeling of intense cold and inertia. A frozen state of suspended animation exists during the winter months

along the Norwegian coast and in the mountainous territories.

Balzac indicates that this winter of 1799-1800 is the hardest in the memory of Europe. In Jarvis, the town where the events in the story take place, the cold has settled in as well:

Là donc se rencontraient toutes les majestés du froid éternellement assis sur le pôle, et dont le principal caractère est le royal silence au sein duquel vivent les monarques absolus. Tout principe extrême porte en soi l'apparence d'une négation et les symptômes de la mort: la vie n'est-elle pas le combat de deux forces? Là, rien ne trahissait la vie. Une seule puissance, la force improductive de la glace régnait sans contradiction.²⁶

The dazzling mantle of whiteness is juxtaposed with the image of stagnation due to cold; reality is endowed with a fantastic quality. In this environment of crystallized snow and ice, Séraphitus appears, crossing the gulf and the shelves of the Falberg mountain with Minna. They are pursuing a path that, with the least false step, would mean certain death. Nevertheless, "ce couple glissait . . . avec l'effrante dextérité que possèdent les somnambules. . . ."27

Alchemically speaking, there are several solutio images within this scene. In general terms, sublimatio relates to heights and mountains for it describes the elevation of the evaporated, refined material. The sense of exaltation is in this setting where two figures, far away and barely visible can be seen fleeing along the Falberg. From the more general sublimatio image, the specific solutio connection can be witnessed, the latter is connoted in symbols of whiteness, purity, and in the white dove. Each of these images has a parallel in this mountainous vista: the purity of the

crystalline snow and the practically air-borne individuals, who "fly" birdlike along the Falberg, indicate that we are beholding a refined domain, both lofty and unpolluted.

In the words of one alchemist, "Solutio is the action of any body, which by certain laws of innate sympathy, assimilates anything of a lower class to its own essence."²⁸ Edinger has interpreted this comment psychologically to mean that "the dissolving agent will be a superior, more comprehensive viewpoint - one which can act as a containing vessel for the smaller thing."²⁹ Prior to the extraction of the mercurial essence from the ore, the metal is washed in quicksilver (mercury) in order to dissolve out its impurities. It is thereby contained within a larger body, a grander substance. Likewise, a "simpler personality," as Jung puts it, "is surrounded, if not actually swamped by . . . his more complex partner . . . It is an almost regular occurrence for a woman to be wholly contained, spiritually, in her husband. . . ."³⁰

Love, an agent of solutio, has caused Minna to be assimilated by the superior angelic being, Séraphîtus. Representative of her animus, Séraphîtus is the latent, love-oriented aspect of Minna's psyche which by "containing" her consciousness within this aetherial, fanciful realm, acts as a cleansing agent in the same way that mercury washes the ore in the laboratory: contaminants are dissolved, leaving behind the mercurial essence, the portion of value within the prima materia.

Once cleansed, the materia is refined, akin to purest snow. Like this crystalline entity, it is airy and delicate, and found, at its most undefiled, sweeping along the mountain peaks.

Minna, the reader learns, is being guided along the dangerous summits by Séraphîütüs. It is her trust, born of love for the angel, that has enabled her to "take flight" with him and to scale these perilous heights:

"Arrête moi, Séraphîütüs, dit une pâle jeune fille, et laisse-moi respirer. Je n'ai voulu regarder que toi en côtoyant les murailles de ce gouffre; autrement, que serais-je devenue?"

"Nous sommes déjà montés au tiers du Bonnet de glace, dit-elle en regardant le pic. . . . Je ne le crois pas encore."³¹

This passage seems to be underscoring Minna's exhaustion, but it is also possible that she is breathless as she contemplates her miraculous passage, albeit aided by Séraphîütüs, across such unfathomable depths.

Séraphîütüs discourages Minna from looking down into the dark abyss below. Greatly fascinated by the chasm, Minna does look down, however, and is terrified by the void which she beholds beneath her feet. She has the sensation that it is grabbing greedily at her, "L'horrible sentiment des abîmes l'avait envahie . . . Le Fiord, jaloux de sa pâture, avait une grande voix par laquelle il l'étourdissait . . . comme pour la dévorer. . . ." ³² She is too weak to resist its magnetic pull until Séraphîütüs blows softly on her brow and eyes: "Séraphîütüs lui souffla doucement sur le

front et sur les yeux. Tout à coup, semblable au voyageur délassé par un bain, Minna n'eût plus que la mémoire de ses vives douleurs, déjà dissipées par cette haleine caressante. . . ."33 The influence of Séraphîtus is like that of a soothing balsam which washes foreign elements away.

Until her encounter with Séraphîtus, Minna has been quite attached to the concrete world. Even when she tries to induce the angel to stay with her, as her companion, Minna's idea of an inducement is the material treasures which she can offer to the celestial being: "Je voudrais ne rien avoir à moi; je voudrais que mes richesses terrestres fussent à toi, comme à toi sont déjà les richesses de mon coeur."34

Once touched by the spiritual, Minna wishes to incorporate it into her life and is constantly imploring Séraphîtus to remain nearby and to let her love him. Minna has yet to recognize the spirituality inherent in loving another human being, and through this realization she will learn to appreciate the earthly treasure which lies within each individual. During her sojourn with Séraphîtus, however, she is desperate at the thought of his leaving her for she believes that the joy which she feels is only to be found with this angel; later, as a result of Séraphîtus' instruction, she will learn that her happiness lies with Wilfrid. Presently, however, the earth below seems to be a dark abyss in comparison to this fantastic realm of white, crystalline beauty. Minna's interests in the world of "concrete reality," of taking care of

her father and their little, comfortable cottage in Jarvis have been challenged by this aetherial creature, this seraph, who has introduced her to another, grander domain.

Psychologically, the ego which is all too often burdened with concerns of the outside world, can be drawn into an abyssmal state as it reaches farther and farther away from the inner world. At these times, if the mind will allow itself to re-establish contact with the inward life, to be reabsorbed somewhat by the unconscious, it is able to withdraw from its stance near the "abyss," (i.e. self-destruction, death). Like Séraphîtus, the unconscious is not enticed by the outside world and all of its artificialities. It can save the ego if it is allowed to function, if intuition, feelings, and inner urgings are heeded.

The alchemists recognized the redeeming capacity of the spirit and have incorporated it in their solutio imagery. One alchemist has written that "Solutio is the root of alchemy."³⁵ Another alchemical text says "Until all is made water, perform no operation."³⁶ These sayings establish the importance of initially reducing the material to its basic form, for "Water was thought of as a womb and solutio as a return to the womb for rebirth."³⁷ The alchemists believed "Bodies cannot be changed except by reduction into their first matter."³⁸ Solutio was the operation leading to such retrenchment.

By virtue of her contact with Séraphîtus, Minna is saved from engulfment by the "abyss," by becoming represented in the concerns and chores of her everyday life. The material world alone cannot

bring her happiness. She is revived and revitalized by Séraphîtüs who, like the mercurial essence, acts as a "dissolving water, which is familiar and friendly," and which reintegrates Minna's ego with her inner being, while at the same time reducing the "contaminating" dependency upon the ephemeral in comparison to the overwhelming influence and incorruptibility of the precious materia in the unconscious.

Following the episode on the cliff, Séraphîtüs explains Minna's terror to her: "nous sommes nés pour tendre au ciel."³⁹ The inner being (the unconscious) communicates to the ego, informing Minna that we are all seekers of heights, we all aspire toward God. Alchemically, by the immersion (solutio) of her ego consciousness within his being (ie., within the unconscious), Séraphîtüs is directing Minna toward sublimatio. At present, she is enveloped by the presence of an entity capable of raising her to great spiritual heights. Sublimatio, which separates the fine from the gross, serves to extract the purified mercurial liquid from the base metal. In Minna's case, her spiritual essence (love) is being drawn forth from the psyche. Psychologically, humankind seeks objectivity, elevation above the daily routine and the ability to see life clearly and not to get overburdened by all too real concrete and material aspects of living. Love can function as an aid in this endeavor for this soul-substance enables an individual to prioritize: life's exigencies become less imposing when one is in love. This powerful experience allows one to feel removed from the humdrum and the monotony of endless chores: he/she feels

special, separate, and free.

Love, the "solvent" melding two souls is an agent of the solutio, and as such, it purifies and ennobles; as an aspect of the sublimatio, as well, love succeeds in raising the individual above the quotidian; it promotes self-transcendence. Purification, clarification, refinement: these are the elements of the solutio operation in association with the sublimation of matter. Ascent, revelation, spirituality, characterize the sublimatio process itself. The result of her enfoldment within the being of Séraphîtus, Minna's loving nature is extracted; exalted, she descends the mountain with a strength and purity of spirit which, due to the influence of Séraphîtus, will become an integral part of her later transformation in outlook.

Part II of the novel is entitled "Séraphîta," and it reveals the relationship between Wilfrid and the angelic being. Whereas the setting for Minna's transcendental experience was a mountain-top, Wilfrid's association with Seraphita is confined to the valley where the town of Jarvis is situated: Minna's involvement with Séraphîtus is of a spiritual nature and thus is presented within an "unearthly" and aetherial setting; Wilfrid's attraction to Séraphîta in having the earthy, the sensual, the concupiscent as its foundation is introduced at ground-level.

Wilfrid's link with the celestial creature is strictly emotional at first. He perceives Séraphîta as highly desirable but unapproachable. This frustration makes Wilfrid endure a great deal of torment. Although he continually expresses his love for Séraphîta, to his

dismay, Wilfrid is informed that he does not understand the nature of his own feelings. Séraphîta tells him: "Vous me désirez et vous ne m'aimez pas."⁴⁰

Séraphîta further intensifies Wilfrid's sense of frustration by telling him that men place women upon too high a pedestal, as he has done to her and since no woman can live up to expectations, herself included, she has chosen to remain aloof. She advises Wilfrid that, in order to avoid disappointment, he should not devote himself to a feminine ideal:

Nous devons toujours vous plaire, vous délasser, être toujours gaies, et n'avoir que les caprices qui vous amusent. Que dois-je faire, mon ami? Voulez-vous que je chante, que je danse, quand la fatigue m'ôte l'usage de la voix et des jambes? Messieurs, fussions-nous à l'agonie, nous devons encore vous sourire!⁴¹

Séraphîta is demonstrating that if she were to display a measure of fallability (human weakness), Wilfrid would be discontent with her lack of "femininity." She is reminding him that men tend to reject women who are in need of the strength, the forbearance and assistance which men can and must give to them.

She insists, however, that, her staying at a distance, albeit at his expense and frustration, has been a redeeming experience for Wilfrid. The angel reassures him that "La douleur . . . est une lumière qui nous éclaire la vie."⁴² She adds: "Vous croyez que je ne vous aime point. . . . Vous vous trompez. Ecoutez-moi Wilfrid. Vous commencez à savoir beaucoup, vous avez beaucoup souffert. . . . Vous avez été dégradé, mais vous vous êtes épuré dans les feux du repentir."⁴³ Finally, Séraphîta promises that his association with her will be fruitful; she will teach him the

meaning and experience of true love which shall enable him to rise above the earthy and the mundane toward an appreciation of unadulterated human sentiment. Seeking to appeal to his imagination Séraphîta invokes fantasy: "Vole à travers les sphères brillantes et lumineuses. . . . vole, jouis un moment des ailes que tu conquerras, quand l'amour sera si complet en toi que tu n'auras plus de sens, que tu seras tout intelligence et tout amour!"⁴⁴ For Séraphîta, love brings the exaltation (sublimatio) of the soul: the means by which the human intersects with the Divine.

Séraphîta seeks to change Wilfrid's attitudes toward women and what he expects from a loving relationship. She wants Wilfrid to recognize that he has a responsibility to impart strength to a woman whom he also must love for herself and not as a figment of his imagination or a projection of his unconscious need for perfection on earth. Together, man and woman, Wilfrid and Minna, form a whole in which the former provides the strength and the latter, unselfish devotion, the province of the feminine: "Deux sentiments dominent les amours qui séduisent les femmes de la terre. Où elles se dévouent à des êtres souffrants, dégradés, criminels, qu'elles veulent consoler, relever, racheter; ou elles se donnent à des êtres supérieurs, sublimes, forts, qu'elles veulent adorer, comprendre, et par lesquels souvent elles sont écrasées,"⁴⁵

Nevertheless, when masculine compassion is coupled with female devotion, two united beings can soar to heights of ecstasy unknown to the unenlightened. To possess the secret of mutual understanding, Minna and Wilfrid have to change their attitudes toward each

other. In Minna's case, there is a need for her to recognize the spirituality existing in the material world, a realm to which she clings for the wrong reasons. Minna will then fall in love with Wilfrid for she will have discovered the capacity for the transcendent and the eternal existing within a world filled with the commonplace and the temporary. For Wilfrid, a transformation in his view of Woman is necessary: once he appreciates Minna's capacity for unselfish devotion, he will value Woman's true nature not a personal ideal which he has superimposed upon Her.

Just as Séraphîtus introduces Minna to an experience of the spiritual, the unearthly, in order for her to learn to recognize its presence in the material realm, likewise, Séraphîta tests Wilfrid's devotion so that he will appreciate and value it in Minna. Whereas Minna becomes engulfed by the angelic being (i.e., the unconscious) in order to learn her lesson, Wilfrid's experience is somewhat different. He, too, is enveloped, but Wilfrid's response to Séraphîta, is of an emotional nature in lieu of being like Minna's (she wishes to bestow a kiss "arraché plus à l'admiration qu'à l'amour").⁴⁶ Alchemically speaking, calcinatio, the fire operation, is at work in the relationship between Séraphîta and Wilfrid, for the latter is concupiscent and, wishing to possess Séraphîta, is immolated by the fires of frustration when she keeps herself at a distance, never satisfying the intense desire which she engenders. An encounter with Séraphîta leaves Wilfrid on fire and as, Balzac describes the young man's state of being, "Veillé-je?

Suis-je encore endormi? Ai-je gardé mes yeux de sommeil, ces yeux devant lesquels de lumineux espaces se reculent indéfiniment, et qui suivent les espaces? Malgré le froid de la nuit, ma tête est encore en feu."⁴⁷ Wilfrid's spiritual quintessence is in the process of being extracted by means of the fire of passion.

The burning operation which is occurring within the mind of Wilfrid is also referred to by Basil Valentinus in connection with alchemical theory which considers how time-spun nature

may be helped and perfected by resolution of itself; how every body may give forth from itself the good or evil venom or medicine, latent in it, how destruction and confection are to be handled, whereby, under a right proceeding without sophisticated deceits, the pure may be separated from the impure.⁴⁸

Basil goes on to say that the "separation is made and instituted by divers manual operations."⁴⁹ One of these is calcination, or burning.

When viewed within the context of sublimatio the calcinatio procedure is associated with the image of an aetherial fire and the concept of revelation. The fire that would release the mercurial essence is unearthly: "Take fire, or the quicklime of the sages, which is the vital fire of all trees, and therein doth God Himself burn by divine love."⁵⁰ In unveiling and releasing the incorporeal within the "body" the aetherial fire calls forth the celestial existing within the earthly, the spirit in matter.

Séraphîta's love is the unworldly "flame," the aetherial fire which ignites Wilfrid's soul. She causes him much consternation and suffering by refusing to let him possess her. Through his

frustration of mind and body, however, Wilfrid learns humility as well as to value Séraphîta's spirituality and by extension, he comes to cherish the inner beauty of womanhood: at one point he asks: "Séraphîta, suis-je digne d'appartenir à une femme?"⁵¹

As his positive anima figure, Séraphîta represents all of the qualities which Wilfrid wishes a woman to possess: beauty, poise, spirituality, intuition, etc.. He is to learn, however, through his contact with Séraphîta, that such grace is found within Minna who is a gateway to celestial love: for, as Séraphîta intones of the prospective union of Wilfrid and Minna, "le ciel vous a destinés l'un à l'autre."⁵²

The psychological fire-bath which Wilfrid endures has a refining effect; calcinatio, thus prepares the way for the sublimatio experience.⁵³ Wilfrid learns, because of his great pain and frustration to focus upon what is really valuable (and worthy) in Woman, i.e., her soul and the love she freely gives, in lieu of solely considering the physical beauty which she possesses or the lascivious pleasures which she can provide. Objectivity, the crux of the sublimatio procedure is thus achieved by virtue of Wilfrid's ordeal by fire (i.e., encounter with intense affect and unrequited physical desire). Wilfrid learns to value love over concupiscence.

Each having been made aware of his/her shortcomings (Minna, her weakness for the worldly and Wilfrid, his prurient nature) the protagonists continue to be instructed by the angelic being with an aim toward their spiritual evolution. Just as in alchemy the

the ore contains the mercurial essence, likewise, the prima materia, as represented by the shortcomings of Minna and Wilfrid, possesses their means of transformation: Minna will gain spiritual strength through her love of Wilfrid, and Wilfrid's love will be ennobled owing to his recognition of Minna's true value. Now that Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs has taken care to reduce these "bodies" "into their first matter," the opus of transmutation can continue.

In Parts III and IV, entitled "Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs" and "Les Nuées du Sanctuaire," respectively, Swedenborg's theses and the philosophical ideas of Balzac abound. Greatly influenced by Swedenborg, Balzac uses the third section of his work to explain the Swedish mystic's ideas concerning the nature of angels. He goes to great lengths to discuss all the states in which angels are found and he describes the essential wisdom which they possess. Part IV exposes Balzac's view on the Creation which he considers and impossibility to define in finite terms. He believes humankind is powerless, due to the inadequacy of its mental faculties, to theorize regarding the means or manner whereby the universe was created. Although these portions of the novel are largely philosophical tracts, they do serve to crystallize the positions of Minna and Wilfrid regarding Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs and later to enable the two protagonists to further objectify their considerations of each other.

When an outlook becomes concretized, as is the situation for Minna and Wilfrid when they come to understand that Séraphîta/

Séraphîtüs is a divinity in harmony with the Infinite, the action corresponds to the alchemical coagulatio experience. This operation, when viewed within the range of the sublimatio, is characterized by the words "circulatio" and "descent." As The Emerald Tablet of Hermes states in regard to circulatio that the substance being sublimated "ascends from the earth to heaven, and descends again to the earth, and receives the power of the whole world. Therefore all darkness will flee from you."⁵⁴ In chemical terms, "circulatio refers to the process in which a substance is heated in a reflux flask. The vapors ascend and condense; then the condensed fluid is fed back into the belly of the flask where the cycle is repeated. Sublimatio and coagulatio are thus repeated alternately again and again."⁵⁵

The alternating ascent and descent is explained in psychological terms by Edinger: "circulatio is the repeated circuit of all aspects of one's being which gradually generates awareness of a transpersonal center uniting the conflicting factors."⁵⁶ When the coagulatio, or the manifestation of what Knapp describes as "a realistic point of view or ruling principle"⁵⁷ has occurred, the powers of "the above and the below" have been reconciled to the degree that the new attitude links the personal psyche (below) to the archetypal psyche (above).⁵⁸

In the cases of Wilfrid and Minna, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs symbolizes the archetypal anima/animus. The angel's purpose is to connect these two individuals to their inner being by first making them

recognize its existence through the love the creature generates within Minna and Wilfrid, and next to direct the two prospective lovers toward the fruitful application of this treasure from the unconscious i.e., to encourage them to transform the quality of their earthly lives through daily and mutual loving. In order to accomplish the latter task, the angel must establish an awareness of itself as outside of the spatio-temporal world, as a separate, transcendent entity which cannot be their lifelong companion in the sense of being their spouse. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is helped in this endeavor by Minna's father, Pastor Becker, who in explaining the theories of Swedenborg in regard to the existence of angels, lays the foundation for Minna and Wilfrid's understanding of their inferiority in comparison with Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs.

An alchemical "descent" akin to that found in the circulatio process has occurred in the arrival on earth of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs who, a sublimated being, has as its task (in order to become even further purified and closer to God) the refinement and transformation of the lives of two lesser beings. In Parts III and IV, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs takes on a new dimension for Minna and Wilfrid who are to experience a broadening of their outlook in regard to the angel. At the same time that the concept of the concretization of the aethereal (i.e., the existence of "Spirit-become form"⁵⁹ in the shape of the angel) is explained, the crystallizing, fixing, and solidifying of Minna and Wilfrid's understanding of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs takes place as a new attitude; the alchemical coagulatio is experienced.

The main subject of the third section of Balzac's work is angelic beings, their nature and Swedenborg's affirmation of their actuality. The Swedish mystic considers angels to be of a spiritual nature and beings who "connaissent . . . essentiellement les Correspondances qui relient au ciel chaque chose de la terre . . ."60 Swedenborg believed that the angelic spirit is internal, it sees and immediately understands for it recognizes the relationships existing between all things.⁶¹ For the Swedish philosopher, knowledge, will and wisdom are the three attributes of the divine spirit which is contained in "les êtres qui, dans ce monde, sont préparés pour le ciel, où ils deviennent Anges."⁶² Everywhere in Swedenborg's theories there is one unifying thesis. Pastor Becker affirms: "Dans ces écrits, il se trouve des milliers de propositions numérotées, dont aucune ne se contredit. Partout, l'exactitude, la méthode, la présence d'esprit, éclatent et découlent du même fait, l'existence des Anges."⁶³

Until the Swedenborgian concept of angelic spirits is revealed to them, Minna and Wilfrid have unrealistic expectations with regard to Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs. Each hopes to induce the being to become his/her life companion. Once they are aware of the possibility that Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs could be one of the divine creatures discussed by Swedenborg, their perspectives toward the angel are broadened and they are prepared to accept a new attitude regarding their relationship with this superior life-form. An event witnessed by Minna and Wilfrid causes the crystallization (the coagulatio)

of a more realistic viewpoint. They observe Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs at prayer. The being is suffering and Minna and Wilfrid are told by the angel's devoted servant when a mysterious battle with Satan is taking place. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is described in this scene as "debout, légèrement enveloppé d'un brouillard couleur d'opale qui s'échappait à une faible distance de ce corps presque phosphorique."⁶⁴ Both Minna and Wilfrid are greatly moved by this evidence of their friend's divinity and are convinced that Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is, indeed, an angel. The two humans have undergone an alchemical coagulatio in the concretization of a new attitude. Their outlook, one which takes into consideration not only their relationship with Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs on a one-to-one basis, is reflective of the nature of an alchemical sublimatio; Minna and Wilfrid now view this being against a cosmological background, seeing that they are in touch with something much more far-reaching than the spatio-temporal domain. They are bearing witness to the realm of the divine.

The fourth segment of the novel ("Les Nuées du Sanctuaire") is largely an exposition of various philosophical ideas about the Creation and the relationship existing between the natural and the supernatural worlds. The emphasis is on having faith in God's infinity which, humankind, despite all its elaborate calculations, cannot rationally understand, much less explain. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs advises another approach toward the Divine: "Croire . . . croire est un don! Croire, c'est sentir. Pour croire en Dieu, il faut sentir Dieu."⁶⁵ In addition, the creature explains that the relation-

ship of the human to the divine is a connection which must be based upon feeling alone, and that Minna and Wilfrid must yield in faith to divine wisdom. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs has continually counselled Minna and Wilfrid to love each other and to marry, and now the angel urges the two to follow this, the proper, path to happiness. The lure of love, its sweetness and pleasure-giving quality is what first promotes Minna and Wilfrid's interest in Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, and ultimately is why they accept the advice of this angelic creature. Their intense feeling leads them toward faith in the precepts of their divine friend.

The alchemical dictum, "Sublimate the body and coagulate the spirit"⁶⁶ applies to what transpires in Parts III and IV of this work. Not only must the individual's attitude be raised into objectivity, but out of an unbiased view, a specific form for manifesting the reborn outlook must take shape: a new operating principle has to emerge (along with the new ruling principle). The sublimated body (i.e., the refined concept) "descends", takes on form in practical usage when Minna and Wilfrid resolve to submit to the advice of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs. This decision to relinquish their own desire is a manifestation of faith: an operating principle born of insight and feeling.

The fourth century alchemist, Synesius, could well be describing the potentiality in faith when he writes of the opus, "Remember that we possess two very perfect bodies (gold and silver, spirit and soul, heart and brain), which are both filled with Quicksilver,

Extract our Quicksilver from them, for from it you will make the medicine called quintessence, because it possesses an enduring and ever-victorious power."⁶⁷ Faith in the divine, which has empowered Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, is about to permanently transform the lives of Minna and Wilfrid.

In order for the sublimatio operation to take place, a separation of the quintessence, or the mercurial essence (the quicksilver) from the base metal must occur. The Emerald Tablet states, "Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the dense, gently, with great ingenuity."⁶⁸ Edinger has interpreted this to mean psychologically the "awareness of opposites."⁶⁹ In terms of the experience of Minna and Wilfrid, Part V of the novel ("Les Adieux") concerns the imminent separation of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs from that being's earthly friends. With the angel's farewell comes a realization on the part of Minna and Wilfrid of the vastness of the gulf separating them, as creatures bound to earth, from Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs a being whose true home is the celestial sphere. Both Minna and Wilfrid entreat Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs to stay with them on earth, but the being refuses and brings forth an impassioned farewell to the earth and its creatures.

Psychologically, a separation of the ideal from the real must take place. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs represents the perfect woman/man to Minna and Wilfrid for the androgynous being is the anima/animus figure of the two prospective lovers. Before Minna and Wilfrid can take practical steps, can look at each other as potential companions,

a separation must occur between the objective and subjective components of their attitude toward the opposite sex. Edinger has applied the separation operation in alchemy to this intellectual requisite to discriminate the real and the ideal. When the alchemist advises to "Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the dense,"⁷⁰ Edinger has interpreted this to refer, psychologically, to the fact that "the concrete and the symbolic are two different levels of reality which need to be distinguished and considered separately."⁷¹ The departure of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is symbolic of the nascent differentiation, on the part of Minna and Wilfrid, that is occurring between what is humanly possible and the impossible, that which is, like being a companion to Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, beyond their grasp.

Since separation is also expressed in images of death (separation from loved ones, of soul from body), mortificatio, the operation referring to dying, is associated with the separatio procedure. Part VI ("Le Chemin pour aller au Ciel") represents the mortificatio as it overlaps with the separatio and as it is also viewed in context with the sublimation of the mercurial essence in alchemy.

The alchemists recognized that for something to be born in nature, it was necessary for something else to decay and die: the plant germinates as the seed pod decays. Likewise, for spiritual renewal to occur, the corrupted spirit must die. The new evolves out of the death of the old. In the sixth chapter of Balzac's work Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs explains that in order to attain to the spiritual

excellence of the angelic state, one must undergo several "deaths," and resurrections. The individual traverses seven phases in all, but many times a person must undergo more than one life at each stage until he or she is worthy to ascend to a higher level. Death is the gateway to rebirth and perhaps to reincarnation in nobler form. Likewise, alchemically, the ore must be rid of its impurities, it must leave them behind, if it is to be revealed in its purest form, its mercurial essence. As one alchemical text explains, "The whole Fundament of the Philosopher's Stone consists in bringing to a new birth the primary matter of metals--i.e., Mercurial Water. . . . Even as Christ says: "Except the seed fall into the earth and die, it shall not bear fruit.'"⁷² Mortificatio is followed by renaissance and is its prerequisite.

Having recognized the divine wisdom of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, Wilfrid and Minna are prepared to accept the challenges inherent in a journey to heaven. They have put their faith in the angel, avowing their intention to follow its direction:

'Conduisez-nous, Séraphîta! s'écria Wilfrid qui vint se joindre à Minna par un mouvement impétueux. Oui, tu as enfin donné soif de la Lumière et soif de la Parole; je suis altéré de l'amour que tu m'as mis au coeur, je conserverai ton âme en la mienne; jettes-y ton vouloir, je ferai ce que tu me diras de faire. Si je ne puis t'obtenir, je veux garder de toi tous les sentiments que tu me communiqueras! Si je ne puis m'unir à toi que par ma seule force, je m'y attacherai comme le feu s'attache à ce qu'il dévore.'⁷³

Accepting this avowal to follow "le chemin pour aller au ciel," Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs (having already passed through the many stages) is about to show them what will lie at the end of their journey as

in a flood of celestial light the angel is raised to heaven. Before doing so, however, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs must die: the creature must shed the mortal husk within which it has been existing and leave its earthly friends. In the same manner, Minna and Wilfrid will have to give up something in order to embark upon their journey toward the divine; Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs has instructed them to strip themselves of baseness, of the feelings and possessions of which humankind is so fond and to devote themselves entirely to their task at hand. The creature's dying words include a prayer which applies equally to Minna and Wilfrid and the enterprise which they are about to undertake: "Si je ne suis pas assez pur, replonge-moi dans la fournaise! Si je suis taillé en faux, fais de moi quelque Soc nourricier ou l'Epée victorieuse."⁷⁴ The soul must constantly be tempered and recast in nobler forms. The death of the angelic being is followed by the revelation of its celestial spirit and its assumption into heaven, just as the mortificatio of the ore yields the ascending, sublimating mercurial essence. Part VII, the final section of the work, "L'Assomption," corresponds to the sublimatio operation itself, for Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is literally elevated into heaven.

Spirit, air, feathers, wings, all images associated with angels, are also related to the alchemical sublimatio. In Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, as with the alchemical ore, the outward form gives way to a purer essence: "Le voile de chair qui le leur avait caché jusqu'alors s'évaporerait insensiblement et leur en laissait voir la divine

substance." 75

Bernardus Trevisanus could well have been referring to this evolution of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs instead of the transformation of a base metal into a nobler form when he wrote "What kind of nature can that be which, coming from a corruptible thing, nevertheless contains in itself a wholly celestial thing?"⁷⁶ Minna and Wilfrid are stunned at the sight of this evolving seraph and at the same time they are also aware of a change taking place, a transmutation generated by a mysterious force:

Soit que la force inconnue qui pesait sur les deux Voyants
eût momentanément anéanti leurs formes corporelles, soit
qu'elle eût fait surgir leur esprit au dehors, ils sentirent
en eux comme un partage du pur et de l'impur.

Les pleurs du Seraphin s'élevèrent autour d'eux sous la
forme d'une vapeur qui leur cacha les mondes inférieurs,
les enveloppa, les porta, leur communiqua l'oubli des
significations terrestres, et leur prêta la puissance de
comprendre le sens des choses divines.

Minna and Wilfrid are undergoing a sublimatio of their own for with their newfound understanding they are about to take their first step on the pathway toward a nobler life, one in which each figures as the companion of the other.

Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs, the mercurial spirit, the unconscious, the medium of transformation, has brought about change through suffering and understanding. Transcendence is a quality (and capability) of the spirit, whether that spirit be called the Philosophers' Stone, Mercurius, the human mind, or Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs. The alchemists recognized the unity at the bottom of all the variety of names for our power of transformation for they wrote: "One is the

stone, one the medicine, and therein lies the whole magistry."⁷⁸
The angelic being who touched the lives of Minna and Wilfrid was
such a quintessence, "a living light which illumines every soul
that has ever seen it. It is the knot and the bond of all elements
which are contained in it, just as it is also the spirit that
nourishes and animates all things."⁷⁹ This "celestial and glorious
soul,"⁸⁰ as Synesius refers to the alchemical quintessence, permeates
and illumines this work of Balzac in the body of the sublimated
and sublimating Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs.

NOTES

¹The Kybalion (Chicago, Illinois: Yogi Publishing Society, 1940), p. 149.

²The Kybalion, p. 150.

³Ibid., p. 151

⁴Carl G. Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 404.

⁵loc. cit.

⁶loc. cit.

⁷loc. cit.

⁸Edward Edinger, "An Outline of Analytical Psychology," Quadrant, No. 1 (rpt. 1968), p. 5.

⁹Edinger, "An Outline of Analytical Psychology," p. 5.

¹⁰Honore de Balzac, S raphita (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1950), X, p. 559.

¹¹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 461.

¹²loc. cit.

¹³loc. cit.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 491.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 522.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 479.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 478.

²⁰Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: III. Solutio," Quadrant, 11, No. 2 (1978), p. 65.

²¹Titus Burckhard, Alchemy, trans. William Stoddart (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974). p. 187.

²²Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," Quadrant, 13, No. 1 (1980), p. 57.

²³Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 72.

²⁴loc. cit.

²⁵loc. cit.

²⁶Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 463.

²⁷Balzac, Séraphîta, pp. 464-465.

²⁸Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: III. Solutio," p. 69.

²⁹loc. cit.

³⁰loc. cit.

³¹Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 465.

³²Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 466.

³³loc. cit.

³⁴Ibid., p. 471.

³⁵Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: III. Solutio," p. 63.

³⁶loc. cit.

³⁷loc. cit.

³⁸Ibid., p. 65.

³⁹Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 467.

⁴⁰Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 479.

⁴¹loc. cit.

⁴²Ibid., p. 478.

⁴³Ibid., p. 480.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 483-484.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 480.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 471.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 485.

⁴⁸Arthur Waite, Alchemists Through the Ages, (Blauvelt, New York: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1970), p. 19.

⁴⁹loc. cit.

⁵⁰Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," Quadrant, 11, No. 1 (1978) p. 17, n. 1.

⁵¹Balzac, S  raph  ta, p. 484.

⁵²Balzac, S  raph  ta, p. 482.

⁵³Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: II. Calcinatio," p. 33.

⁵⁴Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 73.

⁵⁵loc. cit.

⁵⁶loc. cit.

⁵⁷Bettina L. Knapp, Theatre and Alchemy, (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1980), p. 11.

⁵⁸Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 73.

⁵⁹Burckhardt, p. 190.

⁶⁰Balzac, S  raph  ta, p. 508.

⁶¹Balzac, S  raph  ta, p. 510.

⁶²Ibid., p. 505.

⁶³Ibid., p. 504.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 521.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 544.

⁶⁶Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: V. Sublimatio," p. 73.

⁶⁷Burckhardt, p. 146.

⁶⁸Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VII. Separatio," Quadrant, 14, No. 2 (1981), p. 46.

⁶⁹loc. cit.

⁷⁰Ibid. p. 47.

⁷¹loc. cit.

⁷²Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," Quadrant, 14, No. 1 (1981), p. 31

⁷³Balzac, Séraphîta, pp. 571-572.

⁷⁴Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 579.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 580.

⁷⁶Burckhardt, p. 188.

⁷⁷Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 583.

⁷⁸Jung, p. 501.

⁷⁹Burckhardt, p. 146.

⁸⁰loc. cit.

PART III

RENOVATIO

BALZAC AND ALCHEMICAL SYMBOLS OF TRANSCENDENCE

All flesh, born of the earth, will be destroyed
and given to the earth again, just as it has
already been earth. Then the earthly salt will
bring forth a new birth by means of the breath
of heavenly life.

Basilus Valentinus

In alchemical theory, renovatio or renewal, follows death and decay. For this reason, mortificatio, the "killing" operation, is not expressive of an end, a final point, but, on the contrary, the "death" of a metallic substance is simultaneous with its introduction into a nobler state. The movement in alchemy is, above all, a progression towards renewal, transformation, with death, whether it be that of the mineral or of a human body, representing the pre-requisite to achieving the goal of rebirth. In this regard, a striking parallel exists between the alchemical view of mortificatio as a means to renewal and the deaths experienced by Balzac's protagonists in La Peau de Chagrin, Louis Lambert, La Recherche de l'Absolu, Séraphîta, and Ursule Mirouët. The liquidation of a base metal and the passing of Raphael de Valentin, Louis Lambert, Balthazar Claës, Séraphîta/Séraphîtus, and Dr. Minoret represent a stage of renovatio whereby "death means a finale to the old condition and the birth of new combinations."¹ In Balzac and in alchemy, mortificatio is a prelude to renovatio.

The transcendence of death through rebirth, or, as Karl Kerényi has put it, "the eternal resurgence of life from death,"² is a theme which has existed in many cultures and is primarily

expressed in religious ritual. As Eliade has written in Rites and Symbols of Initiation, "All the rites of rebirth or resurrection, and the symbols that they imply, indicate that the novice has attained to another mode of existence, inaccessible to those who have not undergone the initiatory ordeals, who have not tasted death."³ By virtue of the annihilation of his or her present state, the initiate enters onto another plane of existence. Ritualistic death is "inextricably connected with germination, with embryology" and with "the beginning of spiritual life."⁴

In the puberty rites of the primitive tribes in Africa, North America and Oceania, the death ritual is performed in a variety of ways. The initiate may drink a potion which brings about the loss of consciousness, he may be circumcised, or buried in the ground (a symbolic death and "forgetting" of the past).⁵ After being "resurrected," he is tattooed and given a new name; having abandoned his former existence, he is now "dead" to childhood. The idea of this ritual death is the return to Chaos and the "end of a mode of being."⁶ The initiate temporarily transcends Time, theoretically making contact with his preformal, primordial state, the source of his regeneration and renewal.

The concept of burial leading to regeneration is a feature of the religion of ancient Egypt as well as that of primitive cultures. The Egyptian god, Osiris, is shown in his state of burial with stalks of grain germinating from his dead body.⁷ The ritual symbol of Osiris, is the new moon. For the Egyptians, mystical initiation was achieved through death; the death and renewal of Osiris is a

testimony of their belief in the existence of an analogy between death and initiation.⁸

Wisdom (i.e., transcendence of the intellect) is connected with death by Plato in the Phaedo. He writes:

. . . true philosophers make dying their profession . . . to them of all men death is least alarming. . . . a true lover of wisdom who has firmly grasped this same conviction--that he will never attain to wisdom worthy of the name elsewhere than in the next world--will he be grieved at dying? Will he not be glad to make that journey? . . . if he is a real philosopher . . . then he will be of the belief that he will never find wisdom in all its purity in any other place.⁹

For Plato, death was an initiation into another realm; dying was prerequisite to achieving understanding to its utmost degree, and to genesis on a higher plane of existence.

The Christian tradition also reflects the belief that death is followed by rebirth. A statement by Jesus advises, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it."¹⁰ Again, dying to this world is the gateway to regeneration and renewal in another domain.

In alchemy, as in the traditions of many cultures throughout the world, death is a means of rebirth. The Chinese, Indian, and Western alchemists all subscribed to the belief that dying meant a return to the amorphous condition, a reduction to the first matter in order to, out of the original Chaos, be born a second time. For the Chinese as for the Western alchemists, the "chaotic" state "should not," Eliade writes, "be understood merely as a pri-

mordial condition of the substance but also as an inner experience of the alchemist. The reduction of matter to its original condition of absolute indifferentiation, corresponds, on the plane of inner experience, to the regression to the pre-natal, embryonic state."¹¹ Indian alchemists characterize the death-rebirth process in different terms, but their goal, the transmutation of matter, is the same. They equate the alteration in the conscious state with the "fixation" of the "death" of mercury.¹² As Eliade has observed, "To reduce the fluidity of mercury is equivalent to the paradoxical transmutation of the psycho-mental flow in a 'static consciousness', without any modification and hence without 'becoming'."¹³ Although the metaphors differ, the concept obtains throughout each alchemical tradition that through cessation/regression (i.e., death of a present form) transcendence can be achieved. Through the experience of dying and subsequent resurrection, the initiate changes his/her mode of being.¹⁴

For the alchemist, the rebirth which followed the mortificatio procedure was, on a spiritual plane, tantamount to the "assumption to certain states of consciousness inaccessible to the uninitiated."¹⁵ Likewise, in Balzac, death is represented as an entry onto another level of existence whereby the initiate/protagonist acquires knowledge about another realm. In *Séraphîta*, for example, the angel's death leads him/her to union with God and to a greater awareness (we must surmise) of the Almighty.

Moreover, the alchemist and Balzac shared similar views regard-

ing the relationship existing between the material world and the spiritual domain which is attained by death. For the alchemist, the prima materia had to undergo numerous "deaths" and resurrections in order to evolve; life and death were partners, death constituting life's natural adjunct and both composing the warp and woof of the fabric of the universe. Likewise, as Maurois has observed, Balzac "believed in the unity of Nature, maintaining that the material and the spiritual were but different aspects of a single whole. He saw in all organic and spiritual life a related process subject to the mechanical laws governing the universe."¹⁶ The alchemist and Balzac alike considered the natural processes as serving to reveal the link between the material and spiritual worlds. Consequently, as in the initiatory ordeals wherein (mock) "death" leads to spiritual regeneration, there is a positive attitude toward dying implicit in alchemy and Balzac.

The drama of passion and death followed by the resurrection of a spiritual essence occurs both in the alchemical laboratory and in the work of Balzac. The torture and suffering which take place are akin to the initiatory function leading to transformation and to a transcendental mode of being.¹⁷ Mortificatio, the "killing" operation is invested with a forward-going character and death is dynamic instead of static in nature.

Morbidity, physical decay, stagnation, and inertia are component elements in a negative view of death. Despair, melancholia, and a sense of the tragic are hallmarks of the individual's (or, in this

case, the protagonist's) condition. There appears to be no saving grace, no mystical element present, no feeling that the individual in question will somehow be extricated from his or her situation. On the contrary, the person simply dissolves deeper into the psychological torpor to which he or she seems predisposed and predestined.

In contrast to this sense of being "buried alive" is the image of death as a gateway to another state. In this vision, decay, putrefaction, destruction and ruin are one portion of a continuum in which life and death are coterminous, and they are accepted as two facets of the individual's total reality. Such an acknowledgement of death is present in Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin, Louis Lambert, La Recherche de l'Absolu, Séraphîta, and Ursule Mirouët. When a protagonist dies (an occurrence in each of the novels), whether the passing takes place at the end of the work or in the middle, the reader, fully informed of the character's imminent demise (through detailed descriptions of his physical deterioration, for example), is prepared for the death well in advance. Nevertheless, despite graphic and sometimes unpleasant accounts of the impending event, when it does occur, death does not signify an end, rather, the reader has the feeling that in some way the dying individual is entering upon a higher and more glorious state than any he has ever experienced. There is every sense that death is part of a developmental process.

Perhaps this is so because the action throughout the work imparts a distinct impression: that of intentionality. In Balzac's work, there is a constant striving towards an ideal on the part of individuals of superhuman courage and enthusiasm. The dynamism and strength of Balzac's characters are aimed toward a condition beyond what they presently know, and death, if necessary to the process, becomes incorporated into their overall system. Even when Raphael de Valentin dies, a shrivelled form, a remnant like the peau de chagrin, but of human material, one does not lament this young man's demise as he leaps toward his fate. Indeed, in the act of dying, Raphael is more alive than ever as he exhibits strength and willpower: qualities generally associated with living.

The theologian, Paul Tillich, believes that courage, intentionality, and vitality are all linked. He writes:

Man's vitality is as great as his intentionality: they are interdependent. This makes man the most vital of all beings. He can transcend any given situation in any direction and this possibility drives him to create beyond himself. Vitality is the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself. The more power of creating beyond itself a being has the more vitality it has. The world of technical creations is the most conspicuous expression of man's vitality and its infinite superiority over animal vitality. Only man has complete vitality because he alone has complete intentionality. . . . If the correlation between vitality and intentionality is rightly understood one can accept the biological interpretation of courage within the limits of its validity.¹⁸

Due to their thrust forward, caused by the power of their inner drives (i.e., their vitality), Balzac's characters do not lose themselves in death. For his protagonists, death becomes a means toward achieving transcendence; it brings renewal, renovatio.

The alchemist also recognized the potential for growth inherent in death. This awareness is reflected not only in the mortificatio procedure itself, but it is also significant to the character of alchemical symbolism, the hallmark of which is the depiction of the human capacity for transcendence through evolution (i.e., the death of one form promotes the birth of the new). Many alchemical symbols express a variety of stages in the transformation of the prima materia. Psychologically speaking, these alchemical figures characterize the transcendent function: that aspect of the psyche responsible for the proddings and inner urges generated by the unconscious and eventually leading to change and/or individual development.

In Jungian theory, the symbols which represent the transcendent function are defined as archetypes of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is considered to be a repository for all the primordial images or archetypes of humankind. Its deposits derive from the (constantly repeated) experiences of humanity and are often related to the physical processes, that is, the human relationship to the laws of nature such as the rising and setting of the sun and the phases of the moon. These natural phenomena take shape in mythological variations throughout the universe and form the basis of human folklore and mythological heritage.¹⁹

Jung has emphasized, however, that the source of the archetypes is not exclusively the "subjective fantasy-ideas aroused by the physical process"²⁰ and he observes:

Not only are the archetypes, apparently, impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences, but, at the same time, they behave empirically like agents that tend towards the repetition of these same experiences. For when an archetype appears in a dream, in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain influence or power by virtue of which it either exercises a numinous or a fascinating effect, or impels to action.²¹

Archetypes serve a transcendent function in that they urge psychological development; they lead "to the revelation of the essential man."²² The unfolding of the original human being by virtue of the repeated urgings of archetypal energy has been termed by Jung, the individuation process.²³

As archetypal images, certain alchemical symbols express the transcendent function which leads toward individuation. In a process similar to that of a rite of initiation, the adept passes through the throes of emotion, torture and suffering as the death of one attitude occurs in order to, by dint of melding the unconscious urgings with consciously conceived expectations, achieve renewal (of outlook). As Jung has noted:

This remarkable capacity of the human psyche for change, expressed in the transcendent function, is the principal object of late medieval alchemical philosophy, where it was expressed in terms of alchemical symbolism. . . . The secret of alchemy was in fact the transcendent function, the transformation of personality through the blending and fusion of the noble with the base components, of the differentiated with the inferior functions, of the conscious with the unconscious.²⁴

For the alchemist and for Jung, the transcendent function is "synonymous with progressive development toward a new attitude."²⁵

In alchemy, Mercurius represents the transcendent function, the urging toward change, development and psychological evolution.

Just as the repeated urgings of the archetypal patterns take form in mythological tales, Mercurius is the "blueprint" for many variant images.

Among the shapes Mercurius takes and by which its character can be seen, the animal form is significant. The alchemical symbols such as the serpent, the lion, the eagle, and the unicorn, are all forms of Mercurius, the spirit in matter. They represent, in alchemical terms, the various forms of the mercurial essence at different levels of (psychological) development. The psychic disposition of an individual is described in terms of what animal he or she represents. Psychologically speaking, each stage corresponds to the degree to which the ego is (unknowingly) ruled by the unconscious: the lower the beast form, the lower the awareness that one's actions are being influenced by unconscious forces. Of course the ideal situation is for the conscious to be aware of the urgings of the unconscious and to be able to effectively integrate it into daily life. This is the state of the Philosopher's Stone, the ultimate form which Mercurius takes. Between the massa confusa and the lapis philosophale, however, there are many stages during which one can be held in the grip of a primitive unconscious force. Such is the case for the protagonists in Balzac.

The psychic disposition of Raphael de Valentin in La Peau de Chagrin, Louis Lambert in the novel by the same name, Balthazar Claës in La Recherche de l'Absolu, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs in Séraphîta, and Dr. Minoret in Ursule Mirouët can be represented in terms of alchemical symbols. Each protagonist is at a different level of

awareness; each is in a particular stage of psychological development. The quality of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious and the extent of integration between the inner self and the ego (the inward and outward beings for Balzac) is, of course, revealed in the thoughts and feelings of the character. Alchemically speaking, the mercurial essence is reflected in such highly individual activities. If Mercurius is at a primitive level (the lowest), the character's actions and reactions are reminiscent of certain attributes of the alchemical snake. Yet, if the nurturing and the liberation of the spirit comprises the inclinations of the protagonist, the alchemical eagle, representative of the spiritualization of thought, defines his or her basic nature.

In La Peau de Chagrin, Raphael de Valentin exhibits many of the characteristics associated with the serpens mercurii, the alchemical snake. Valentin seems predisposed to seeking out the most self-destructive situations: whether he is spending his last franc in a casino or participating in orgiastic debaucheries, Raphael is slowly committing suicide. Likewise, the spiritus mercurialis, in its capacity as a serpent, is self-annihilating: "he devours himself,"²⁶ and "swallows the nature to which he is joined."²⁷ All is not negative to this image of the alchemical snake, however, for in causing its nature to vanish,²⁸ this particular serpent leads the way to its own regeneration. It dies, but to rise once again.²⁹ It is considered by the alchemist to

obtain at the source of the experience of transmutation. As Jung has noted: "The snake symbolizes the numen of the transformative act as well as the transformative substance intself."³⁰ In alchemy the snake, also termed the uroboros, or tail-eating serpent, is representative of that nature which, in the process of self-destruction, indeed by virtue of it, recreates itself anew, for it is the instrument of its own renascence. For the alchemical serpent, death leads to renovatio.

Psychologically speaking, the image of the uroboros is "a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite."³¹ It symbolizes the unconscious in its "original totality and self-containment . . . prior to the birth of consciousness."³² This image also applies to the individual who, driven by primitive instincts and desires, is largely unaware of his psychological requirements, so constantly and irretrievably is he or she in the grip of the unconscious. Yet, from this apparent self-annihilation, this "swallowing up" by the unconscious, awareness, consciousness is born. This is why the serpens mercurii is referred to alchemically as a "chthonic god of revelation"³³ and is held to be "possessed of an 'informing power.'"³⁴ The uroboros' self-absorption is akin to dissolution with the unconscious, otherwise compared, in initiatory rites, with regression into the maternal womb for rebirth. The devouring is a beneficial and constructive act, and represents the positive aspect of the alchemical serpent. A revelation occurs. The psyche/serpent acquires

a treasure from the underworld: life. As Jung has written:

"It is himself new-born from the dark maternal cave of the unconscious where he was stranded by the introversion or regression of libido."³⁵

At the end of La Peau de Chagrin, Raphael de Valentin snatches his life, not that (life) associated with the wild ass's skin, from the chaos of his own psyche. Momentarily, he lives honestly, for the purest reasons: love. He had, until his dying day existed within a state of confusion, a massa confusa. The novel charts his self-destruction and eventual rebirth. In a variety of instances, Balzac shows Raphael, overpowered by infantile wishfulness and intoxicated by lust, a man with no autonomy, no control over his own destiny. In these scenes, he is a primitive creature, wormlike, and without dignity. Like the mercurial serpent, his self-containment leads to self-destruction. Finally, however, the positive side of this initiatory experience comes to light. Raphael, in death, grasps life, for, having exhausted all his powers, he finds the numen has guided him to the treasure: love, the one thing of value to him and a prize worth dying for. Imbued with this knowledge, Raphael is reborn at the moment of his death.

Prior to his renaissance, however, Valentin is, at several times and by various means, committing suicide. He is, like the serpens mercurii, devouring himself to rise again.³⁶ Raphael is drawn toward chthonic environments. At the beginning of the novel, he is entering a gambling den, a place which according to Balzac

is filled with vice and associated with lack of hope and imminent death. The author conjectures regarding the accursed purpose of the young protagonist who finds himself at the altar of Chance:

Ce jeune homme était probablement poussé là par la plus logique de toutes les éloquentes phrases de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, et dont voici, je crois la triste pensée: 'Oui, je conçois qu'un homme aille au jeu, mais c'est lorsque, entre lui et la mort, il ne voit plus que son dernier écu.³⁷

By casting his last piece of money on the gaming table, Raphael is symbolically throwing his life open to fate, relinquishing his last iota of control over his existence. It is as if he has entered Hades, the ultimate underworld, where (as Balzac terms the hat-checker) a "triste cerbère"³⁸ stands guard at the entrance. The gaming-house is a chthonic dwelling; a place for those who, like Raphael, are wont to destroy their lives.

A second "lower world" to which Raphael is attracted is the mysterious curiosity shop where he acquires the talisman. Darkness reigns here as well and a sense of suspended animation is evoked by the myriad of abandoned art objects which have, it appears, been carelessly piled next to one another and are suffering neglect at the hands of the enigmatic antique dealer. At the sight of so much human effort coming to such an end, Raphael is thrown into a melancholy, yet contemplative mood:

Nous nous demandons, écrasés que nous sommes sous tant d'univers en ruines, à quoi bon nos gloir es, nos haines, nos amours; et si, pour devenir un point intangible dans l'avenir, la peine de vivre doit s'accepter?³⁹

Les merveilles dont l'aspect venait de présenter au jeune homme toute la création connue mirent dans son âme l'abattement que produit chez le philosophe la vue scientifique des créations inconnues, il souhaita

plus vivement que jamais de mourir et tomba sur une
chaise curule en laissant errer ses regards à travers
les fantasmagories de ce panorama du passé.⁴⁰

Just as the alchemical serpent inhabits the underworld, likewise Raphael de Valentin is inexorably drawn to that which is chthonic: the dark and the earthbound.

Nevertheless, the alchemical uroboros is a symbol of re-generation as well as of self-destruction. Prior to rebirth, a period of regression occurs; this event is symbolized alchemically by the act of uroboric self-consumption. The regression signifies a return to the maternal womb which, in the case of Raphael de Valentin is represented in his adulation and dissolution in the realm of Foedora, who could be termed a queen of the underworld, or, at least, of her particular section of the social demimonde of Paris. By becoming associated with Foedora's world, Valentin is, in alchemical terms, undergoing a dissolution within the primordial matriarchal world of the unconscious from which eventually he will emerge with a renewed outlook. During his tenure with Foedora, Raphael is in a stage of reversal; he is backsliding, returning to his former, dissolute ways which, at the outset of the novel he had seemed to be regretting, as they had led him to contemplate suicide at the banks of the Seine.

Psychologically speaking, Raphael's mental state parallels the matriarchal phase which is largely associated with the alchemical tail-eating serpent in its implications:

Although beginning consciousness has appeared, it is yet only dim and fitful. The nascent ego is still largely passive and dependent on its uroboric matrix which now takes on the aspect of the great mother . . . Here, the ruling psychic entity is the great mother. The predominant concern will be to seek her nourishment and support and to avoid her destructive, devouring aspect . . . The ego has achieved only a precarious separation and is still dependent on the unconscious, which is personified as the great mother.⁴¹

Prior to the emergence of consciousness, or in Raphael's case, the recognition of his love of Pauline, and of a passion worth dying for, a return to the unconscious, a connection with the primordial urges and feelings must take place.

During his period with Foedora, Valentin does indeed seek out her approbation and support. In fact he does everything possible to win her love, but to no avail. The salvation he seeks is not to be found with Foedora, but, true to the "informing power" of the alchemical serpent, the uroboric reversal did prepare Raphael to make the transition from a life lived in the pursuit of hopeless and futile passions to an attitude whereby he is able to recognize the precious commodity of true love when it comes his way. He acknowledges his tragic folly when he says to Foedora: ". . . j'étais ambitieux, je voulais vivre coeur à coeur avec vous, avec vous qui n'avez pas de coeur. Je le sais maintenant."⁴² His awareness has cost him dearly, for as he observes ". . . je vivais dans un désert, creusant mon âme au lieu de creuser des rochers."⁴³ By delving deeply within his being however, Valentin has experienced the informing power

of the "chthonic god of revelation." He, the initiate, has been made ready for the next step in his journey toward transcendence: rebirth.

The revelation that precedes rebirth occurs for Valentin when he falls in love with Pauline. This is the stage whereby the alchemical serpent brings forth the prima materia, extracted and renewed, from its body. The fundamental substance of the soul, the prima materia breaks forth, laying waste all the corruptible matter which had heretofore imprisoned it. In this stage, the serpens mercurii becomes the prime matter; in this phase of his existence, from the matriarchal unconscious, the earthy, chthonic realm, Raphael extracts the capacity to embrace true love and to cause his dependency upon self-destructive and fruitless passion to disappear (just as its counterpart and concrete symbol, the wild ass's skin, disappears at the end of the novel). The psychology of the alchemist regarding the serpent as prima materia is quoted by Jung in Psychology and Alchemy:

The serpent is more cunning than all the beasts of the earth; . . . she forms herself in matter of a materia hypostatica, . . . she gathers together the virtues from the earth, which is her body. . . . and she causes the nature wherewith she is united to vanish.⁴⁴

From the tenebrous caverns of the unconscious, Raphael has brought forth a precious piece of knowledge. Through love he is restored.

The dark and the deadly are associated with the spiritus mercurialis, the transcendent function, in its capacity as uroboros. Nevertheless, because it is the spirit of Mercurius which is

generating the destruction, death can only be an illusion, for just behind it comes renewal. For Raphael de Valentin, the parallel existing between the shrinking of the wild ass's skin and his own lifespan was indeed but an illusion: how else could Raphael, upon the demise of the skin, find life at its most meaningful? Surely, from the moment Valentin acquired his "skin of affliction" his serpens mercurii was laboring toward its exuviation.

The transcendent function, the alchemical Mercurius, appears in a different aspect in the character of Louis Lambert. An individual who is in touch with his inward being (his unconscious urgings for transcendence through the thought process), Lambert's psychic disposition can be represented in terms of the alchemical eagle, the symbol of the spiritualization of matter.

Traditionally in alchemy, the eagle represents height,⁴⁵ therefore, the sublimation of the spirit. As Jung has noted:

The eagle . . . is a well-known alchemical symbol. Even the lapis . . . is often represented with wings, denoting intuition or spiritual (winged) potentiality. In the last resort . . . these symbols depict the consciousness-transcending fact we call the self. This visual impression is rather like a snapshot of an evolving process as it leads on to the next stage.

In alchemy the egg stands for the chaos apprehended by the artifex, the prima materia containing the captive world-soul. Out of the egg symbolized by the round cooking-vessel--will rise the eagle . . . , the liberated soul. . . .⁴⁶

As a winged creature, the eagle exemplifies the volatile aspect of the spirit Mercurius.⁴⁷ It signifies the capacity of the spiritus mercurialis to carry forth a transformation leading to the heights.⁴⁸

In numerous alchemical diagrams, the eagle is pictured as having two heads: one head bears the crown of the Pope, symbolizing its domain over the spiritual world, and the other is wearing an Emperor's crown, bearing witness to its rule over the temporal realm. The concept herein implied is that transformation to the heights, i.e., the sublimation of thought and its concomitant objectivity, allows one to integrate and pass freely between the divine and earthly kingdoms.

Nevertheless, the eagle is a beast of prey, and, as such, has its dangerous aspect.⁴⁹ It was said to devour its own wings, and, for this reason was considered a variant of the uroboros.⁵⁰ This self-destructive aspect of the eagle, resulting from a consciousness too corrupted by pride or concupiscence,⁵¹ results in the two-headed eagle dissolving into one, with one aspect, either the temporal or spiritual, being ascendant. If, on the other hand, the spiritual experience becomes too wondrous for the mind to effectively integrate into daily life, then the unconscious, the numinous aspect, dominates by engulfing the consciousness and creating insanity, as in the case of Louis Lambert.

As a child, Louis experiences the ecstasy of untrammelled meditation. His spiritual (psychological) liberty is reflected in his physical environment as well, for his parents and later his uncle leave him free to pursue his interests. During this stage in his life, Lambert is unaware of the existence of any temporal restrictions or obligations. Unfettered, he is permitted to "soar"

away from earthly bonds and duties. Like the alchemical eagle,

Louis manifests the liberation of the spirit:

Quand il employait . . . toutes ses forces dans une lecture, il perdait en quelque sorte la conscience de sa vie physique, . . . il laissait, suivant son expression, l'espace derrière lui. . . . cet homme qui transporta toute son action dans sa pensée, comme d'autres placent toute leur vie dans l'action.⁵²

Lambert, the child prodigy, begins his life unlike most, for from its outset he experiences a linking back with his unconscious world, with his transcendent function. Being so ineluctably drawn to "les choses du ciel,"⁵³ that is, "les ouvrages mystiques," it follows, psychologically speaking, that Louis will eventually come to forsake the quotidian for the eternal, the mundane for the marvelous.

Balzac, foreshadows Louis' insanity when, he has the narrator remark during the first pages of the novel that, regarding Lambert's penchant for the mystical, "Cette prédilection lui fut fatale. . . ."⁵⁴ Louis; impending doom is noted, but, in light of the alchemical concept that death leads on to renovatio, the second half of this observation takes on great significance: "Cette prédilection lui fut fatale, s'il est permis toutefois de juger sa vie selon les lois ordinaires, et de toiser le bonheur d'autrui avec la mesure du nôtre, ou d'après les préjugés sociaux."⁵⁵ For Louis the mysteries which he beholds are his life and to be able to ascend upon the wings of thought is his happiness.

During his tenure at Vendôme, Louis comes to crystallize some of his ideas concerning the thought processes. Heretofore,

meditation for its own sake has been his purpose; later on, he develops some concrete thoughts regarding the relationship between physical and spiritual forces. Lambert's conclusion mainly that "les forces matérielles ne prévaudront jamais contre la force des idées ou contre la Volonté de l'homme,"⁵⁶ brings him one step closer to his inevitable resolution, i.e., to split off from the reality of the here-and-now, to take flight in thought.

Upon his "initiatory" journey during which he is becoming ever increasingly removed from the temporal domain, Lambert encounters love, the one phenomena, the singular mystery that could motivate him to integrate his spiritual and physical existences. Unlike the dove which, once it has soared to the heights, descends toward earth, Louis having entered upon the fantastic realm of the imagination, is unable to leave that domain. If love can be integrated into Louis' world, then he and Pauline will live as one. This feat is not possible for either Pauline or for Louis. Neither can accede to the realm of the other; each is destined to suffer his and her own version of a platonic relationship.

For Lambert, love, like study, thought, and meditation, is a mystical experience. The rite of the marriage ceremony signifies a transformation whereby he will be united with an ange-femme, an "ange du ciel."⁵⁷ He is so disgusted at the thought that this purely mystical experience will be made corrupt by the "regards des autres"⁵⁸ that he is unable to make himself go through with

the sacrament. On the eve of his marriage and on the day he goes insane, Louis expresses his wishes concerning the nature of the marriage ceremony: Je voudrais qu'aucune créature ayant face humaine n'entrât dans le sanctuaire où tu seras à moi."⁵⁹ Ultimately, Louis gets his wish: in the sanctuary of his mind, only primordial imagery seems to prevail.

The alchemist, Maier, has described the eagle as a fugitive "which flies up to the clouds and receives the rays of the sun in his eyes."⁶⁰ Louis Lambert, like the eagle, is a fugitive from the earth. Taking flight in thought, he transcends the human condition as his spiritus mercurialis relentlessly directs him to do. Initiated from an early age into the mysteries beyond normal human imagination, Louis ascends far above the mists of the average psyche; he soars into unknown territory. The uninitiated are blind to what he sees; his message renders them mute and helpless with misapprehension. But undeterred, through the clouds the alchemical eagle ascends; finally, along the way he sheds his outward being, he transforms to transcend again. Louis had always been a spiritual being and his earthly life was merely an ordeal during which he gradually shed his earthly combrances thereby being initiated into a new mode of being. Death was the final step in his rite of passage toward spiritual transcendence and renewal.

Another state in the transformation of the spiritus mercurialis and one which is situated between the serpent and the eagle on the hierarchy of spiritual development is the alchemical lion.⁶¹ In

La Recherche de l'Absolu, Balthazar Claës has many characteristics in common with the fiery lion of the alchemists. Through his raging passion to discover the absolute, he consumes his family's wealth and, most important, his own physical existence. Nevertheless, like the alchemical lion, his death becomes but a stage in his transformation and is preliminary to renovatio.

Prior to renewal, however, the fiery alchemical lion carries out his destruction. A symbol of fierce heat,⁶² the lion is associated with the sun. The ravaging lion with the mane extending outward like the scorching rays of the sun, is a solar animal. Traditionally a symbol for the sun's greatest heat,⁶³ the lion, like the sun "burns" himself out, but does not die.⁶⁴ Psychologically speaking, Jung has interpreted the lion to represent the dangerous aspects of our sun-like (illuminating) consciousness.⁶⁵ The lion, a beast of prey, desecrates its victims just as unrestrained consciousness corrupts the individual who does not effect a balance between the desires of the ego and the demands of the unconscious.

A quadruped and an earthbound creature (unlike the soaring alchemical eagle), the lion represents the concerns and desires of the ego. Pride and concupiscence⁶⁶ are the corruptors of the alchemical king of beasts. Consequently, the fiery lion is an "affective animal."⁶⁷ He signifies the compulsions generated by raging desire and extreme emotionality. Strong, wild, and cruel at times,⁶⁸ the lion personifies alchemical Sulfur, "the inner

fire of Mercurius."⁶⁹ The lion therefore represents that which is negative as well as the positive aspects of intense emotion for Sulfur was considered to be both the "cause of imperfection in all metals"⁷⁰ and that force which gave Mercurius the "power to dissolve, kill, and bring metals to life."⁷¹ The wounding of the lion precedes the positive effects of passionate emotionality. He is sometimes shown pierced by a weapon⁷² or maimed, his paws cut off.⁷³ Either way, the injuring of this rapacious beast signifies the subjugation of passions.⁷⁴ The strength of the lion has been lessened through his mutilation; affect has been weakened by insight.⁷⁵

In La Recherche de l'Absolu, Balthazar Claës is dominated by affect. He is like the alchemical lion who ravages everything with which he comes into contact. Possessed by his all-consuming desire to discover the "absolute," what he believes to be the one matter which unites all nature and the ethereal substance of which everything is made. Claës devours days, weeks, years, the wealth of his family, and, in the end his own life. With his infernal scientific quest, Balthazar has literally sent his family's happiness up in smoke. In regard to what she terms his "oeuvre," Joséphine makes these remarks to her husband:

Oh! je ne la juge pas, je soufflerai tes fourneaux,
si tu le veux; mais ne réduis pas nos enfants à la
misère, tu ne peux plus les aimer, la science a dé-
voré ton coeur, ne leur lègue pas une vie malheureuse
en échange du bonheur que tu leur devais.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, this man who burns with "quelque feu secret,"⁷⁷

whose eyes sparkle and whose entire visage manifests a fire which seems "également accru par la chasteté que donne la tyrannie des idées, et par le foyer intérieur d'une vaste intelligence,"⁷⁸ this fiercely inquiring scientist continues his pursuit of the absolute. Like the alchemical lion, he destroys all that is on his path.

Devouring, Claës is also dangerous and predatory. These characteristics are revealed during an important conversation which Claës has with his daughter, Marguerite, after the death of his wife, Joséphine. Knowing that Balthazar has little interest in the financial welfare of their children and sensing that her death is imminent and that after her demise there will be no one to secure the solvency of the Claës family, Joséphine arranges for a certain sum of money to be given to Marguerite in the event that the family becomes destitute. With this income, Marguerite is to pay the debts and reinstate the family. Unfortunately, the Claëses do come into financial ruin, and Marguerite acquires the sum of money that is to alleviate the financial strain. Quite by accident, Balthazar, finds out where the money has been hidden, and the confrontation between father and daughter reveals how cunning Claës can be.

While removing the money from its hiding place, it is Marguerite's misfortune to drop several coins, thereby alerting Balthazar (who happens to be nearby at the time) that there is money in the house. Marguerite attempts in vain to communicate

to Claës that the gold is not to be used for his experiments, but is destined to pay the family's debts. Balthazar is determined to possess that gold, whether or not such an acquisition will lead to the family's ruin. As Balzac writes "'Quoi, cet or . . . reprit Balthazar en lançant des regards d'une épouvantable lucidité sur sa fille. . . .' . . . Combien y a-t-il? La passion avait rendu Balthazar plus rusé que ne l'eût été le plus adroit des intendants coquins; la somme allait être à lui."⁷⁹ Consequently, through various flatteries, pleadings, and one dramatic attempt at suicide, Balthazar's histrionics are successful: he acquires the gold.

Balthazar's confrontation with his daughter reveals that he will do anything for the money to continue with his experimentations. If it is necessary to trick his daughter out of the family's last sou, then, so be it: the sum shall belong to him. Dangerous because he is so cunning and predatory in his pursuit of the funds he deems necessary to his quest, Claës manifests "the circumspection proper to the jungle."⁸⁰ He lacks a sense of what is just and unjust, right or wrong for he is overpowered by his animal side and, akin to the alchemical lion, "expresses himself only in animal reactions, which are nothing but emotions."⁸¹ Uncontrolled emotionality, represented alchemically by the "king of beasts,"⁸² is the driving force within Claës; it is the power, which when coupled with his intelligence, is the "corrupter of perfection"⁸³ both in terms of Balthazar's own, previously estimable, character and the order, harmony, and unity of purpose enjoyed by the Claës family prior to their father's all-consuming quest for the absolute.

In psychological terms, Balthazar's search is motivated by concerns which are quite egotistical. He expects to become rich and famous through his discovery of the matière une. His attitude toward the absolute, far from being philosophical or religious in character, is dominated by the lust for wealth and renown. He is, like the alchemical lion, essentially "earthbound." Balthazar's purpose is not to contemplate and revere nature (to take flight in thought like the alchemical eagle), but to decompose the natural world and, godlike, to recreate it: he remains a victim of overweening pride, akin to the earthbound and arrogant alchemical lion.

The lion is wounded however and likewise, Balthazar Claës experiences injury. He is sent away by his daughter in order that, in his absence, the family's wealth may be reinstated. Just as the alchemical king of beasts has his paws cut off, likewise, Balthazar's personal wishes are curtailed; his affect and its effects are subjugated to the welfare of his family.

A second wounding occurs, and one that is much more crucial to Balthazar's imminent renewal. Shortly after Claës returns home from his exile from Douai, he experiences a stroke which paralyses him and renders him mute. The apoplexy is seemingly brought on by emotion: his anger at some small boys who are menacing him as he sits in the park. His reaction is too violent for his body to release, and thus it is directed inward, assimilated. The psychological counterpart to this physical absorption of affect is in-

sight, for just as intense affect arrests the body, likewise, sudden clearness of vision stuns the mind. Balthazar mysteriously experiences clear-sightedness at the exact moment he receives the blow from a stone cast at him by one of the boys and, inexplicably is rendered in one instant as physically helpless as he (now) is intellectually strong (i.e., aware):

Le coup était porté. Balthazar . . . devina, par un phénomène d'intussusception, le secret de cette scène; son corps décrépît ne soutint pas la réaction affreuse qu'il éprouva dans la haute région de ses sentiments, il tomba frappé d'une attaque de paralysie . . .⁸⁴

At the moment he reacts to the annoyance at hand, before he can actually do anything about the boys, he is stunned by his sudden awareness; perhaps he suddenly realizes how ridiculous he has been, or maybe he acquires an understanding of the absolute. Whatever his realization is it causes Claës to absorb his anger toward the young rascals: the psychological and physical reactions being brought about simultaneously by what Balzac terms "intussusception." According to Litttré, "intussusception" is "l'acte par lequel les matières nutritives sont introduites dans l'intérieur des corps organisés pour y être absorbées."⁸⁵ Combining an intellectual with a physical blow, Balzac represents thought as akin to a material substance by using a physiological term to describe what is, for Claës, a psychologically generated event.

The thrust of a weapon wounds the alchemical lion; psychologically, the alchemist was describing the effect of insight upon taming affect. The mysterious revelation experienced by

Balthazar brings on his injury and causes him to turn his affect inward, to absorb and assimilate it. Whether his insight cut through his egoism and pride, making him see them as motives for his intense emotionality (and pursuit of the absolute), or whether he suddenly sees the wonders of creation and the answer for which he has so tirelessly labored, the fact remains that Balthazar Claës is transformed and spiritually renewed at the end of his life.

For Claës, the stroke that brings death also brings transcendence. From the earthbound lion he transmutes into a sublime being:

Tout à coup le moribond se dressa sur ses deux poings,
jeta sur ses enfants effrayés un regard qui les atteignit
tous comme un éclair, les cheveux qui lui garnissaient
la nuque remuèrent, ses rides tressaillirent, son visage
s'anima d'un esprit de feu, un souffle passa sur cette
face et la rendit sublime, il leva une main crispée par
la rage, et cria d'une voix éclatante le fameux mot
d'Archimède: EUREKA! ⁸⁶

Did Claës discover the absolute? Perhaps his question was answered.

More important, however, was Balthazar's transcendence, his transformation from one who was possessed by the infernal fire of emotionality to a being spiritually sublimated by the mercurial flame of divine inspiration. From a fiery alchemical lion, self-consuming and moribund, Balthazar is renewed. Having endured his ordeal by fire, Claës is, at the moment of death, initiated into another realm wherein he experiences sublime revelation and, by virtue of it renovatio.

Another alchemical figure which brings rebirth is the unicorn. A fabulous, snow-white creature,⁸⁷ the unicorn was believed to dwell in out-of-the-way places and in the high mountains.⁸⁸ In Séraphîta, the reader is introduced to an equally fantastic and miraculous being in the character of the angel, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs. In many respects, this seraph in Balzac's novel is reminiscent of the unicorn in alchemy.

As a symbol of the transcendent function, Mercurius, the unicorn signifies "the spirit of life that leads the way to resurrection."⁸⁹ However, the renewal which the unicorn brings is not acquired without a struggle: the conflict between opposing forces is represented in the dual nature of the unicorn who, alchemically speaking, is a complexio-oppositorium.⁹⁰ The unicorn harbors within itself several contradictions which, as Jung has observed, make it "a singularly appropriate symbol of the monstrum hermaphroditum of alchemy."⁹¹

Endowed with an androgynous quality, the unicorn's hermaphroditism is conceived as a symbolic and spiritual representation of the tension within Mercurius,⁹² the conflict of opposing forces being a trait of the transcendent function within human beings. The interplay between opposites, which is characteristic of the unicorn's nature, defines the pattern of struggle inherent in the individual's movement toward spiritual regeneration.

As well as being considered both masculine and feminine, the unicorn is also described as being wild and tame, good and evil.

Possessing a fierce animality, the unicorn is depicted in his capacity as a wild beast as one who "contains an element of evil"⁹³ due to cruelty or lack of self-control. Nevertheless, the unicorn is also characterized as being tamed by a virgin in whose lap it rests its head.⁹⁴ It has, furthermore, been associated with goodness in the ability of its horn (carved into a cup and used to drink from) to guard against the evils of poison. In this respect, the unicorn contributed to an individual's health, strength, and life.⁹⁵ A sum of contradictions, the unicorn symbolizes the balance of opposites existing within the human spirit.

In Séraphîta, the angel Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is an androgynous being who, like the alchemical unicorn represents the conflict which exists within the human soul. A fabulous creature, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is found in a remote, snowbound Norwegian village, and, in its masculine form, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is revealed to Minna on a high mountain, a place where the unicorn would be found.

Like the unicorn, Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is also part earthly and part divine. The seraph's personal struggle originates with this dual quality. Although Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs has been sent to earth on a mission after which it is to depart to heaven, the angel becomes attached to the earth through the friendship which he/she develops with Minna and Wilfrid. The seraph's regret at leaving his/her two friends behind is expressed just as the assumption into heaven occurs. Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs speaks to the heavenly hosts:

Esprits purs, troupeau sacré, sortez des abîmes, volez sur la surface des ondes lumineuses! L'heure a sonné venez, rassemblez-vous! Chantons aux portes du Sanctuaire, nos chants dissiperont les dernières nuées. Unissons nos voix pour saluer l'aurore du Jour Eternel. Voici l'aube de la Vraie Lumière! Pourquoi ne puis-je emmener mes amis? Adieu, pauvre terre! adieu!⁹⁶

Here, the sadness which is expressed by Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs at leaving Minna and Wilfrid is balanced by the angel's great joy at being at last absorbed into the Almighty Being of God.

Another dual aspect to the nature of Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs is the interplay between the dangerous and cruel sides of the seraph and its beneficent qualities.

When Minna and the angel are alone upon the mountaintop, Séraphîtüs unwittingly holds her spellbound. She does not wish to return to the valley of Jarvis and wishes to spend all of her time with Séraphîtüs. The seraph's attraction is a dangerous one for Minna. This being is not of this earth, as he continually reminds her, and she must seek her love with her own kind, specifically with Wilfrid. Minna's complete adoration and deification of Séraphîtüs is dangerous for her psychological well-being, for, although love is a necessary complement to the human soul, one cannot allow oneself to become absorbed and thereby psychologically lost in one's love for another. Consequently, when Minna looks up to Séraphîtüs and timidly says: "Je ferai tout ce que tu voudras. . ."⁹⁷, Séraphîtüs replies that he cannot be her companion. For Minna, Séraphîtüs poses both a danger and a help: he nurtures her great capacity for adoration which, if

allowed to grow would possibly make her into his "shadow," an individual devoid of real personality, content to just follow him about; at the same time Séraphîtus is responsible for Minna's awakening to love, which by the end of the novel, she is taught, through his (Séraphîtus') advice, to direct toward a suitable earthly companion, Wilfrid.

Whereas Séraphîtus has a dangerous as well as beneficial influence over Minna, Séraphîta treats Wilfrid with cruelty while at the same time healing his pangs of loneliness. Wilfrid is passionately in love with Séraphîta; yet, she denies herself to him. To Wilfrid, this seems very capricious and cruel, and his immediate conclusion is Séraphîta does not love him. Séraphîta assures Wilfrid that she does love him, but that it is not she, but Minna, who is the suitable companion for him. Séraphîta understands that Wilfrid has been a lonely individual in need of a woman's love; unfortunately his approach to women has been physical in lieu of spiritual, and for this reason he has not yet found a proper partner nor the balsamic influence of love. As Balzac informs us: ". . . en parcourant le monde dont il s'était fait un cloître, Wilfrid n'avait trouvé nulle part de baume pour ses blessures; il n'avait vu nulle part de nature à laquelle il pût s'attacher."⁹⁸ Even though it seems that Séraphîta is adding to his pain, Wilfrid soon discovers that indeed, the angel is right: that Minna is the suitable companion and that through love his wounds, acquired in past experience with the world, will be healed.

Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs appears to Wilfrid and to Minna in two different forms. The angel also shows that being associated with her/him can be dangerous as well as beneficial, painful as well as curative. Just as, at the end of the novel, Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs ascends into heaven, its masculine and feminine sides united in the circle of love provided by the divine Emmanation, likewise, Minna and Wilfrid are united within a circle of love and thereby are set upon a road toward spiritual transcendence. Just as the unicorn is a "uniting symbol"⁹⁹ which expresses the bipolarity of the human soul likewise, Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs functions as a unifying force in the lives of Minna and Wilfrid. The fabulous unicorn leads the way to resurrection for it symbolizes the spirit of transcendence.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs, in leading Minna and Wilfrid to an understanding of "le chemin pour aller au ciel,"¹⁰¹ brings the message of spiritual transformation to two human beings in need of loving companionship: through love the two shall (spiritually) ascend.

The death of Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs lead to renovatio in two respects. For the seraph, it opens the way for his/her union with God, the fruition of all his/her efforts on earth. For Minna and Wilfrid, the death of Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs means a definite and final release from the emotional bonds which have held them in his/her thrall. Now, as they turn to one another, seeking companionship through their misery, they are able to appreciate each other more fully, Sérâphîta/Sérâphîtûs being but

a memory. In Séraphîta, the death of the seraph is the means by which all three, the angel, Minna and Wilfrid, accede to spiritual transformation and renewal.

The transcendent function, represented by Mercurius and in turn by the unicorn is paradoxical in many aspects. Just as the unicorn-Mercurius symbol can be destructive, it can also be constructive. In its very essence it is a contradiction, for it is, theoretically, composed of matter and spirit. The mercurial alchemical lion is also a paradoxical emblem. In Balthazar Claës, the lion's destructive aspects can be seen. There is another side to this creature, however, and this aspect can be viewed in the character of Dr. Minoret, an important protagonist in Balzac's Ursule Mirouët.

In addition to being the roaring lion who: "walketh about seeing whom he may devour,"¹⁰² this alchemical beast has yet another feature, and it is of a much different character than that of raging desire.¹⁰³ The lion is also termed "green," and as the alchemist associates this color with that which is procreative,¹⁰⁴ the green lion represents the life-promoting, nurturing quality of Mercurius.

Regarding the alchemical lion's trait as a nourishing and sustaining element, the green lion is equivalent to the anima vegetativa of Sulfur. The active principle in sulfur being the alchemical lion, each is recognized as having a virtuous aspect as "the source of illumination and of all knowledge"¹⁰⁵ as well as a power by which "it burns and consumes."¹⁰⁶

The green lion's spermatic quality also makes it synonymous with the alchemical aqua permanens, the spiritual water and the medium through which transformation can take place.¹⁰⁷ The blood of the green lion is considered to be a transformative substance.¹⁰⁸ In this respect, Jung has noted: "The drinking of the blood, the essence of the lion, is . . . like assimilating one's own affects."¹⁰⁹ Of course, in so doing, as the alchemists observe, one "consumes a great quantity of /one's/ own spirit," an activity which they attribute to the green lion.¹¹⁰ The alchemists further recognize that such an assimilation is akin to "self impregnation by one's own soul,"¹¹¹ and thus in their texts they refer to the queen (i.e., the soul) ingesting a quantity of green lion's blood during the term of her pregnancy. This image expresses the importance of the green lion's blood to the concept of rebirth and renewal in alchemy.¹¹² The demise and subsequent transformation of the green lion are echoed in Balzac's Ursule Mirouët in the character of Dr. Minoret. During the course of the novel, this elderly physician undergoes three transformations. Two of them take the form of his own spiritual and intellectual conversions and the third and most mysterious concerns his postmortem physical transmutation which is witnessed by his adopted daughter, Ursule Mirouët. The life-fostering, nurturing aspect of the green lion is present in Minoret's affection for and treatment of the orphaned Ursule. Having taken her in when she was but an infant, Minoret has provided for her for fifteen years. Now on the threshold of death, Minoret is concerned that his relatives will rob his daughter of her intended inheritance.

Just as the green lion acts as a source of knowledge and illumination, Dr. Minoret has provided Ursule with the benefit of his learning and has been the source of her sustenance: "il était à la fois le père, la mère et le médecin"¹¹³ of this young girl.

In addition to being her nutritive source in terms of both her physical and psychological well-being, Dr. Minoret encourages the development in Ursule of a strong spiritual life: she possesses great faith in God. The doctor himself is an atheist and not disposed to believing in miracles nor in a Creator. Akin to the alchemical green lion, Dr. Minoret, the aqua permanens (sustaining substance) of Ursule, becomes the medium through which his own, and later Ursule's, salvation takes place.

Dr. Minoret experiences his first conversion when a colleague and former friend, Bouvard, invites him to witness a demonstration of the powers of hypnotism. Years before, Minoret and Bouvard had been friends but there had come a time when the two had had a breach in friendship due to their divergent ideas concerning magnetism. Minoret did not believe that telepathy existed while Bouvard was a proponent of the theories of Anton Mesmer.

As a result of the demonstration, Minoret discovers that thoughts can travel through time and space. The lady under hypnosis reads the mind of Minoret's daughter, Ursule, and to his great surprise Minoret later confirms the reading by asking Ursule to relate her thoughts during a certain period of his absence. Astonished, Minoret finds that his "armor" is being pierced: like the wounded green lion, he is experiencing an insight which

causes him to assimilate his contempt for Bouvard and to reconcile with him. In addition to his conversion, Minoret has acquired a useful piece of information for he has determined a way, if life exists beyond the grave, to communicate with Ursule after his death. This is an important realization for the doctor and one that helps relieve his anxiety over the imminent prospect of his relatives' robbing Ursule of her inheritance.

Minoret's second conversion follows soon upon the first. When Ursule informs him that the wealth which he has provided for her will mean very little to her and that she intends to devote her life to the redemption of his transgressions (to enable her adoptive father to accede to heaven), Minoret is again shaken in his convictions:

Cette réponse, dite avec une candeur angélique, prononcée d'un accent plein de certitude, confondit l'erreur, et convertit Denis Minoret à la façon de saint Paul. Un rayon de lumière intérieure l'étourdit en même temps que cette tendresse, étendue sur sa vie à venir, lui fit venir les larmes aux yeux. Ce subit effet de la grâce eut quelque chose d'électrique. . . . Le vieillard se dressa comme si quelqu'un l'eût appelé, regarda dans l'espace comme s'il voyait une aurore; puis, il fléchit le genou sur son fauteuil, joignit les mains et baissa les yeux vers la terre en homme profondément humilié.¹¹⁴

Spiritually astonished and awakened, Minoret, again like the alchemists' green lion, experiences the piercing wound of insight by virtue of which he re-evaluates and renews his position toward the Almighty.

Upon his death, Minoret's relatives do indeed attempt to deprive Ursule of her inheritance. Due to a great deal of

chicanery, they succeed not only in impoverishing Ursule, but also in humiliating her by discrediting her reputation. When she is at her lowest state of despair, she has a series of visions in which Dr. Minoret appears to her and tells her how to resolve her problem. Having achieved spiritual salvation in life as well as a belief in the powers of telepathy, Dr. Minoret is, mysteriously, able to communicate with Ursule from beyond the grave: the alchemical green lion has been transformed into a golden essence, "les yeux étaient comme deux rayons, et il se levait, comme attiré par une force supérieur."¹¹⁵

Psychologically speaking, Minoret's miraculous transcendence signifies the union of intellect with the unconscious contents, and this coniunctio (as in the case of the queen's ingestion of the blood of the lion) brings forth from the source of psychic rebirth (the unconscious) a renewed outlook in addition to the assimilation of affect (now under control). The green lion's blood, the medium of transition (from the level of fierce animality to a state of self-control), represents the substance and content of the unconscious as it appears in contamination with the ego and forms the affective state. The green lion itself is an alchemical symbol for that active principle which, existing within Mercurius, promotes transcendence. The lion exemplifies the psychic energy that impels the individual toward self-actualization, transformation, and renovatio.

Through the assimilation of affect (the sacrifice of the green lion in his blood), the unconscious (the queen) brings forth a re-

newed outlook: the green lion is manifested as the golden lion, the aurum non vulgi of the alchemists, and a symbol of transcendence and spiritual development.¹¹⁶ As a result of the death of one admixture of unconscious and conscious contents (the death of the wounded green lion), a new combination of ego and unconscious can be born (the transformation of the green into the golden lion). Through his "wounding" by insight, Dr. Minoret, like the green lion, makes a sacrifice (the lion of his blood, the doctor of his convictions) and undergoes transformation. When he appears to Ursule, the evidence of his spiritual transcendence is made manifest and, as in alchemy, death proves a gateway to renewal.

In each of these novels, death is shown to be a stage in a continuing process of evolution. The individual undergoes pain and torture and, like the initiate in the primitives' rites of passage, the protagonist is ushered into a new mode of being. Death holds no sting, or, as the alchemists expressed it in the Turba philosophorum: "when this mortal shall put on immortality, and the corruption of the living shall put on incorruption, then indeed shall that word come to pass which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."¹¹⁷

NOTES

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- ³Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. xiii.
- ⁴Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. xiv.
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- ⁶Ibid., p. xiii.
- ⁷Edward Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," Quadrant, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1981), p. 32.
- ⁸Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1974), p. 176.
- ⁹Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 36.
- ¹⁰Edinger, "Psychotherapy and Alchemy: VI. Mortificatio," p. 41.
- ¹¹Mircea Eliade, "The Forge and the Crucible (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 119.
- ¹²Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible, p. 133.
- ¹³loc. cit.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 149.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 162.
- ¹⁶André Maurois, Prometheus: The Life of Balzac, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 240.
- ¹⁷Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible, p. 151.
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- ¹⁹Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 69.

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- ²¹Ibid., pp. 69-70.
- ²²Ibid., p. 110.
- ²³loc. cit.
- ²⁴Ibid., pp. 219-220.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 99.
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- ³⁰Carl Jung, Symbols of Transformation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 436.
- ³¹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 365.
- ³²Edward Edinger, "An Outline of Analytical Psychology," Quadrant, No. 1 (rpt. 1968), p. 8.
- ³³Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 65.
- ³⁴Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 252.
- ³⁵Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 374.
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- ³⁸loc. cit.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 79.
- ⁴⁰loc. cit.
- ⁴¹Edinger, "An Outline of Analytical Psychology," pp. 8-9.
- ⁴²Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 200.

- ⁴³Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 202.
- ⁴⁴Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 252.
- ⁴⁵Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 201.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 202.
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- ⁴⁹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 148.
- ⁵⁰Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 144, n. 266.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 148.
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p. 32.
- ⁵³Balzac, Louis Lambert, p. 33.
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- ⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 32-33.
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- ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 148.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 152.
- ⁵⁹loc. cit.
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- ⁶¹Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 144.
- ⁶²Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 386.
- ⁶³Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 431.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 386.
- ⁶⁵Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 148.
- ⁶⁶loc. cit.

- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 364.
- ⁶⁸ Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 437, n. 11.
- ⁶⁹ Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 117.
- ⁷⁰ Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 114.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 112-113.
- ⁷² Ibid., p. 364, n. 394.
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- ⁷⁷ Balzac, La Recherche de l'Absolu, p. 41.
- ⁷⁸ loc. cit.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 230.
- ⁸⁰ Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 297.
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- ⁸³ Ibid., p. 114.
- ⁸⁴ Balzac, La Recherche de l'Absolu, pp. 297-298.
- ⁸⁵ Balzac, La Recherche de L'Absolu, p. 375, n. 55.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 301-302.
- ⁸⁷ Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 436.
- ⁸⁸ Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 437, n. 12.
- ⁸⁹ loc. cit.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 447.

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- ¹⁰⁰Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 437.
- ¹⁰¹Balzac, Séraphîta, p. 570.
- ¹⁰²Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 338.
- ¹⁰³Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 431.
- ¹⁰⁴Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, p. 113.
- ¹⁰⁵Jung, Mysterium Coniunctionis, pp. 304, 114.
- ¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 114.
- ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 461.
- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 285.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 364, n. 394.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 296.
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- ¹¹²Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 409.
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- ¹¹⁴Balzac, Ursule Mirouët, pp. 114-115.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 299.

¹¹⁶Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, pp. 437, 284, Fig. 142.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 391.

CONCLUSION

Transformation being common to both alchemy and the novel, an alchemical interpretation of the genre is possible. As the characters or their situations change, develop or evolve, they parallel the activity of a base metal as it undergoes the various operations in the alchemical laboratory.

In La Peau de Chagrin, Raphael gradually yields to the logic of the situation in which he finds himself and which is predominantly of his own making. All the operations which cluster about the mortificatio are present in this novel wherein a young man gradually comes to realize that it is his destiny to self-destruct and to his benefit and dignity as a human being if he can integrate his will power with ineluctable Fate. In the end, Raphael accomplishes this task in making a willing sacrifice of himself to love. Raphael's gradual mortificatio has made possible the release of his spiritual essence, concretized in his final deed.

Ursule Mirouët expresses the mortificatio as a means to renewal for each of three protagonists. For Ursule, the death of her naïveté opens her mind toward the realization that evil (in addition to goodness) exists within human beings and that one must learn to protect oneself against it. The demise of Dr. Minoret's stubborn convictions leads to the end of his atheism and, consequently, prepares the way for his spiritual rebirth. Finally, for Minoret-Levrault, his son's death and the subsequent end of all his (Minoret-Levrault's) hopes and aspirations for Désiré (his son), brings about the postmaster's humility before Providence and a changed, more pious outlook on life.

In Louis Lambert the sublimation operation takes center stage as Louis seeks to refine his thinking to such an extent that he eventually loses touch with external reality. Lambert, like many geniuses, remains separated from the rest of humanity although he is desperately seeking to use his intelligence to aid humankind. The alchemical sublimatio elucidates the step by step transformation of Louis from a happy, though solitary, child into an isolated madman.

Séraphîta demonstrates the transformational capacity of love. The angel Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs brings about understanding and mutual appreciation between Minna and Wilfrid. Operating on that ethereal and sublime materia known as the human soul, the seraph acts as the medium in refining the attitudes of each protagonist (of Minna and Wilfrid) toward the other. The process continues until, in the end Minna and Wilfrid recognize their rightness for each other and bid the angel (who is also evolving toward perfection) a fond farewell as Séraphîta/Séraphîtüs ascends into heaven to be united with the Almighty in a state of eternal sublimity.

In La Recherche de l'Absolu, fire is the actuating force which brings about change in the Claës family. Balthazar is imbued with a burning desire to discover the prime matter at the base of all creation. In reality, what he reveals (although not to himself) is the prima materia of his own family: their conscientiousness and patience, the ubiquitous Claës quintessence, saves the family from annihilation. Calcinatio engenders the dis-

covery of an absolute much different than the one Balthazar had expected to find.

The close relationship between character, outward appearance, and milieu, a hallmark of Balzac's style, marks the parallel between his creations and the alchemical outlook. In Balzac, environment externalizes mental state. This feature is shown either through projection (as, for example, in Valentin's highly subjective interpretations of a Paris street scene) or through implicit comparison (Louis Lambert's "pulverizing" of words corresponds to the concomittant refinement of his intellect). Just as the alchemists demonstrated the unseen spirit with examples chosen from the natural, physical world, likewise Balzac has exteriorized the invisible psyche with metaphorical allusions which vivify the protagonists. The alchemical operations outlined the motion of the spirit by using concrete objects which could be grasped (both intellectually and physically); the structure of the novel defines the dynamics of a state of being by employing fictional characters which can in turn be objectively comprehended by the reader, although they (the characters) depict human aspects intangible, but not unknown, to every one of us. Matter is, in this way, wed to "spirit" in both alchemy and Balzac.

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