



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

Lesson Twelve : The Lion.

The lion is one of the most important symbols found in alchemical emblems. Following my method of exploring such symbols in this course, I am not here going to provide you with a simple linear interpretation of the lion. Instead we will have to try and experience its significance through looking at its appearance in a number of emblems. It is easy to say that the lion is the dissolving power or the corrosive acid, but it is much more important for us to find its significance through investigating how it appears in emblems.

The lion appears in a number of ways - a number of symbolic stances. Firstly, we have the lion attacking and devouring some other symbolic element in the emblem space. The obvious example which first comes to mind is from the *Rosary of the Philosophers*.



A second important symbolic stance is the lion vomiting or disgorging a stream of liquid. This is found in the thirteenth image in the Valentine Azoth series which we looked at in



a previous lesson.

A third way in which the lion appears is that of standing in the centre space of the emblem asserting its ownership over or guarding this space. Sometimes the lion gazes out as if challenging the viewer. The most well known must be the emblem 37 of the *Atalanta fugiens*.



These are the three main ways in which we will meet the lion in alchemical emblems. There are a few other rare or even unique appearances of the lion image. Just as an example, the lion sometimes appears having had its paws (the symbol of its aggressive strength) removed. This from the second woodcut in the *Pandora* series.



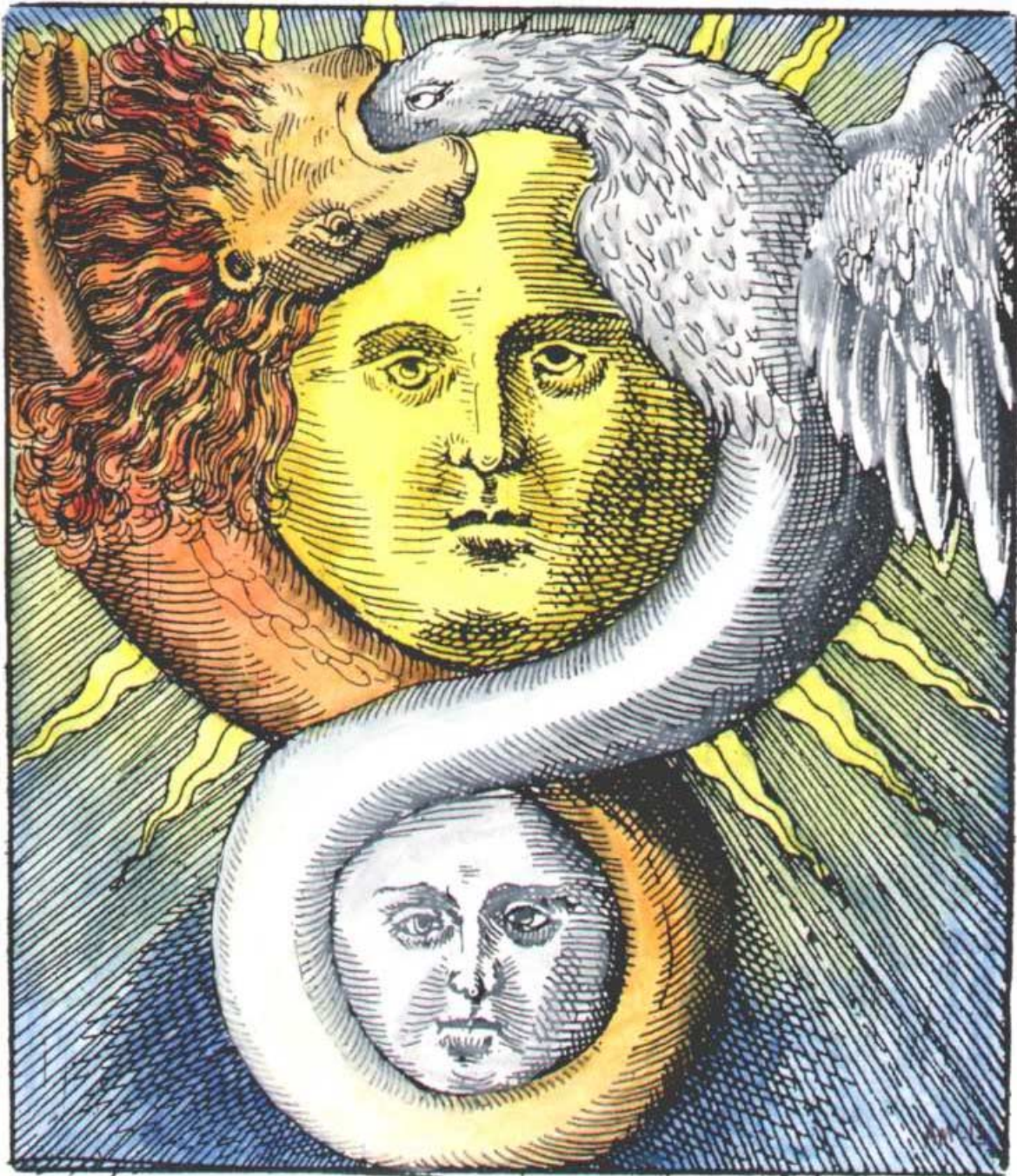
Another strange appearance of the lion, which seems to be unique amongst alchemical animals, is the lion with a single head and two bodies. Of course, in alchemical imagery we find two headed hermaphrodites, or double headed eagles, but I cannot recall ever seeing any double bodied creatures except for the lion.



Apart from the few appearances where it is shown having its paws removed, the lion appears as an active transforming symbol, often in the central space of the emblem. It is sometimes shown as working upon some other symbol.

For the exercises, you will look at the examples of the lion and perhaps pay especial attention to the symbolic context in which the lion appears - what is it surrounded by, what it is working on or engaging with symbolically. Try and see if you can sense the differences between the three symbolic stances of the lion. See if you can detect any significance differences in the activity of the lion in the different emblems.

Example 1. The fourth image from the *Valentine Azoth* series.



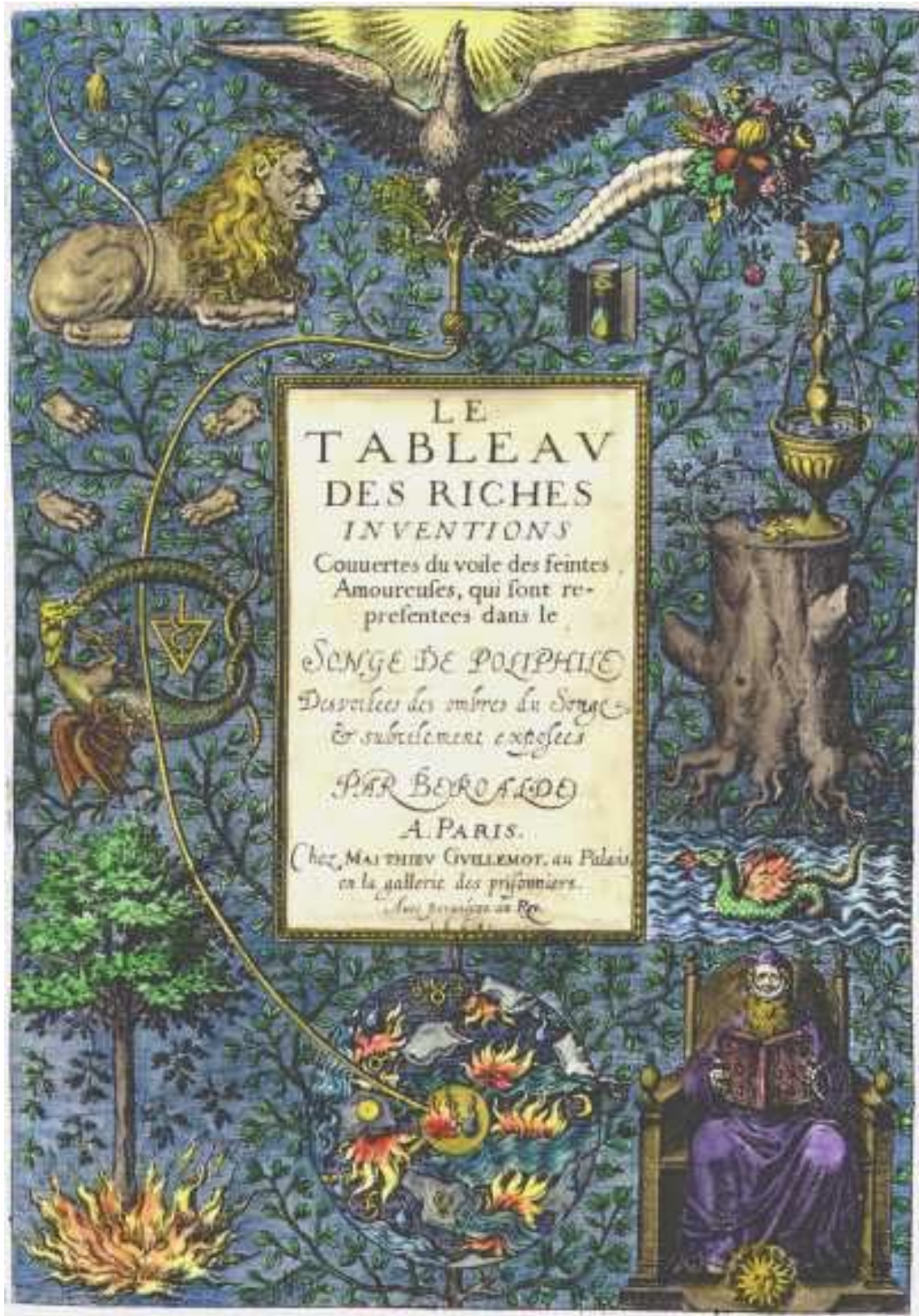
Example 2: The third engraving from the *Hermaphrodite child of the Sun and Moon*.



Example 3: The 12th Key of Basil Valentine.



Example 4. Frontispiece from Beroalde de Verville's *Le Tableau des riches inventions*.



Example 5. Emblem 15 from Mylius *Philosophia reformata* series.



Example 6. Emblem 17 from Mylius *Philosophia reformata* series.



Example 7. Pyramid of lions, from Andreas Libavius, *Alchymia*.

